

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 33, No. 24

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2014



## 'The Chase' Continues...

*Class Of 2011 Hopes For Glory Without Miller*

JOSH WINSLOW

**TOUGH LOSS** – Ohio State senior quarterback Braxton Miller (5) reinjured his right shoulder during preseason camp and will miss the entire 2014 season because of surgery to repair a torn labrum.



KEVIN DYE

**NEW STARTER** – Redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett is in line to be Ohio State's starting quarterback for the Aug. 30 season opener vs. Navy.

By RYAN GINN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On Feb. 2, 2011, five members of Ohio State's 23-member football recruiting class gathered at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for a National Signing Day ceremony.

The quintet of early enrollees – quarterback Braxton Miller, tight end Jeff Heuerman, linebacker Ryan Shazier, defensive lineman Joel Hale and defensive back Jeremy Cash – sat in the front row of the team meeting room as head coach Jim Tressel grabbed the microphone and worked the room. Before he took questions from the media, Tressel displayed a pair of slides that let the newest Buckeyes know what they had to live up to.

The first showed that, at that time, Ohio State boasted the best Football Bowl Subdivision winning percentage (.73527) of any school since 1904, placing them atop Notre Dame and Michigan. The second slide noted that Ohio State was tied with USC for the most top-five seasons in the Associated Press top-25 poll over the past 10 years, with both programs notching seven such high finishes.

Unlike the "Brew Crew" of 2008, the players in the 2011 class made no bold proclamations that day

about any future success. Instead it was Tressel, clad in a white shirt, black sweater and black blazer, who brought up the high-profile expectations at Ohio State in a way that seemed to speak for the players.

"It is a challenge to which this group of young people is very interested to see if they can match up," Tressel said. "It is a tremendous challenge for anyone considering the football family and considering being a Buckeye."

Three seasons later, Tressel's final class has had one of the most up-and-down rides of any group in program history. Their coach was fired before most of them even enrolled, and they spent their first year in Columbus under the direction of interim coach Luke Fickell. With a bowl game still to play after a 6-6 regular season, Urban Meyer was officially introduced as the head coach that Nov. 28.

That mediocrity was followed by an unbeaten season, the first time since 1944 that an Ohio State team went undefeated after finishing with a losing record the previous year. The players experienced a school-record 24-game winning streak that included two straight perfect regular seasons before drop-

**BSB's 2014 FOOTBALL PREVIEW**

Continued On Page 10

OPINION

# Buckeyes Can Still Contend For Big Ten Title

No matter what the Negative Nellies and Debbie Downers might say, it's going to take a lot more than losing Braxton Miller to completely derail the 2014 season for the Ohio State football team.

A shot at playing for the national championship in the inaugural College Football Playoff? That might seem a bit ambitious for a team with an untested quarterback at the controls. But contending for the Big Ten title? I see no reason why they can't.

Anyone bemoaning the shoulder injury to Miller that will keep the two-time conference MVP on the sideline this season has forgotten that nearly every college coach in the country wanted J.T. Barrett when he was being recruited out of Rider High School in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 2012.

At the time, Scout.com gave Barrett a four-star rating and listed accuracy, consistency, poise and leadership, running ability and mobility among his numerous strengths. The only area in which recruiting analysts said he needed to improve was his size.

By way of comparison, when Miller signed with the Buckeyes in February 2011, he received a five-star rating from Scout, which listed his best attributes as arm strength, running ability, mobility and size. Among the facets of Miller's game that analysts believed he needed to improve upon were accuracy and consistency. Despite his many accolades as a three-year starter at QB for the Buckeyes, Miller often struggled with his accuracy as well as consistency in the passing game.

Meanwhile, Barrett spent most of last year rehabbing a knee injury that cost him more than half of his senior season in high school. While doing so, he added about 20 pounds of muscle in the weight room.

His hard work in that area, as well as more than a year spent poring over the voluminous Ohio State playbook, allowed Barrett to have a coming-out party of sorts in April when he led the Gray team to a 17-7 victory in the spring game. The redshirt freshman exhibited what appeared to be an easy throwing motion as he completed 17 of 33 pass attempts for 151 yards. He didn't throw for any touchdowns, but he didn't pitch any interceptions, either.

Barrett did take three sacks in the spring game, but it's difficult to hold that against him with the cobbled-together offensive line that was trying to protect him. A more relevant statistic might be the more than 2,000 rushing yards he had during his final season and a half in high school.

That is not to say Barrett will step in and effortlessly lead the Buckeyes to a third consecutive undefeated season. Let's not insult one another's intelligence. No one is suggesting that the Buckeyes will enjoy a seamless transition from a record-breaking quarterback to a player with zero college game experience.

But as long as Urban Meyer and Tom Herman devise a game plan that is a little more innovative than simply giving the ball to their quarterback and hoping he makes a play, Barrett doesn't have to be Braxton Miller. Being J.T. Barrett might just be enough.

Of course, it won't be easy. Among the hundreds of memorable quotations from Woody Hayes is this nugget: "Anything easy isn't worth a damn."

In addition to Miller, missing from this year's team will be a lot of the firepower that made the OSU offense the nation's third-highest scoring unit in 2013.

Just how good was Carlos Hyde? Good

enough to rush for 1,521 yards, the seventh-highest single-season total in program history. How good was Philly Brown? Good enough to catch 63 passes last year, the fifth-highest total for an OSU receiver in a single season. How good were Jack Mewhort, Corey Linsley, Andrew Norwell and Marcus Hall? Good enough that three of those offensive linemen earned All-Big Ten honors while Mewhort achieved first-team All-America status and was voted team MVP by his teammates.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

In addition to Miller, Hyde will be the most difficult offensive player to replace. His style of running was perfect for the Big Ten when the weather turned cold, and his average of 138.3 yards per game was the best since Eddie George averaged 148.2 on his way to winning the 1995 Heisman Trophy.

Still, even though Hyde is now wearing a San Francisco 49ers uniform, the Buckeyes are not without backfield depth.

Ezekiel Elliott, who will become the starting tailback when he fully recovers from a broken left wrist, probably won't make anyone forget Hyde because he's not the same type of power runner. But the sophomore is special in his own way. Let me put it this way: Meyer had to wait more than a decade before producing his first 1,000-yard running back as a head coach. He shouldn't have to wait long for his second.

Ohio State has plenty of other options at tailback in addition to Elliott, including sophomore Bri'onte Dunn, fifth-year senior Rod Smith and freshman Curtis Samuel. Dunn is eager to get back into the fight for playing time after redshirting in 2013, while it is obviously a now-or-never season for Smith, the former four-star prospect who rushed for more than 6,600 yards in high school. Samuel remains raw but he features breakout speed.

In the slot will be two young players with almost unlimited upside. Sophomore Dontre Wilson and redshirt freshman Jalin Marshall are itching to prove what they can do at the "H" position, a spot the Buckeyes underutilized last season. Each has run-away-from-you speed, and it will be interesting to see how much of a role the position plays in the OSU attack this fall.

Wilson and Marshall will also be vital components of the OSU passing attack, but in the absence of both Miller and Brown, senior wide receiver Devin Smith is going to have to become more engaged. After catching seven passes against Iowa and five the following week against Penn State last season, he had only nine receptions in the final six games combined. That included one catch for 11 yards against Michigan State in the Big Ten Championship Game and two catches for just 5 yards in the Orange Bowl against Clemson.

Simply put, Smith is going to have to step up on a weekly basis, and if he does not, he might see his playing time diminish as JUCO transfer Corey Smith and youngsters such as true freshman Johnnie Dixon try to elbow their way into the mix at wideout.

With Miller sidelined, it would seem only natural to get tight ends Jeff Heuerman and Nick Vannett more involved in the passing game as security blanket receivers for

Barrett. Since Ben Hartssock graduated more than a decade ago, I have wondered why the Buckeyes don't use their tight ends more. Perhaps that comes true this year out of necessity.

Up front, I'm apparently one of the few that worried about the offensive line despite the attrition from last year's unit. With veteran Taylor Decker anchoring the unit from the left tackle position this season, and a little bit of depth finally making for some spirited position battles, I think the offensive line will eventually become one of the team's strengths in 2014.

### Defense Remains Key

For all of his talents, Miller was not going to be the determining factor in the championship race for Ohio State in 2014. How much hardware the Buckeyes pick up for their trophy case is and always was going to be predicated on how much the defense has improved since last season.

Therefore, perhaps the best news for fans as they anticipate the beginning of the 2014 season is that the defense appears intact upon returning to its Silver Bullet roots.

The offseason acquisition of co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash as well as long-time Penn State defensive line coach Larry Johnson has signaled a new beginning for the Buckeyes as they search for ways to eliminate the myriad of back-end mistakes committed at the tail end of last season.

Any fans with lingering doubts about the defensive philosophy should know that Ash has produced a number of instructional videos, including a three-video series titled "Aggressive 4-3 Defense" that include individualized segments on shutting down the opposing team's passing game as well as stuffing the run.

That kind of staff mentality, coupled with an embarrassment of defensive line talent, should turn the Buckeyes from a read-and-react unit to a pack of swarming wolves. Michael Bennett and Joey Bosa are already preseason All-Americans, and Noah Spence — once he serves his two-game suspension — definitely has that kind of potential.

Speaking of potential, I don't see how you keep freshman middle linebacker Raekwon McMillan off the field. With all due respect to senior Curtis Grant, McMillan does not appear to have suffered any kind of problem transitioning to the college game. Besides, when people start mentioning your name in the same breath with Andy Katzenmoyer and Chris Spielman, you're likely looking at more than your fair share of playing time as a freshman.


McMillan is just one of several highly rated young linebackers at Ohio State, and the Buckeyes should also benefit from their bountiful defensive back harvests during the past couple of recruiting cycles as such players as Vonn Bell, Cam Burrows and Tyvis Powell take their place in the secondary alongside veterans Doran Grant and Armani Reeves.

Of course, most of the focus is going to be on Barrett and rightfully so.

How will the youngster respond to starting his college career on the road? How will he handle his first home game, a nighttime affair against a well-regarded Virginia Tech team? How will he handle the hostile crowds at Penn State and Michigan State, and how will he perform in his first-ever Ohio State-Michigan game?

No one knows for sure. But the last time the Buckeyes started a season with an inexperienced quarterback wearing jersey No. 16 was in 2002.

As I recall, that turned out pretty well.



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## COVER STORY

# Veterans To Continue OSU's Chase For Title

Continued From Page 1

ping the Big Ten title game and Orange Bowl to finish 12-2 in 2013.

With Shazier departed to the NFL and Cash now playing at Duke, only three of the five members of the 2011 class who went through spring practice with Tressel that spring are still left in Columbus.

"A few of us - Braxton, Joel and myself - we're kind of the last three left who went through the whole transition," Heuerman said. "All these other guys, they didn't come in until after spring ball. Us three, we were here and did our first spring under Coach Tressel and went through that whole transition and then went through the year with Coach Fickell.

"We've been through it all - the thick and the thin."

Because of the 2012 postseason ban and 2013 defeats, members of that class who didn't take a redshirt head into their senior year without having won a bowl game, conference championship or national title. Only the 2012 and '13 Leaders Division crowns have spared them from being completely shut out of hardware.

"Will it define them? I don't know," offensive coordinator Tom Herman said on Aug. 10. "That's for (the media) to figure out. It's a very unique situation to win 24 straight games, back-to-back undefeated regular seasons and say you've never won a championship."

The 2014 season was shaping up as the perfect chance for those veterans to continue what has become known as "The Chase" for those accomplishments, but now they'll have to undertake the quest without their leader. Less than two weeks before the season kicked off, Miller suffered a torn labrum in practice while throwing in a noncontact situation. He'll miss the entire 2014 season, although he said that he hopes to return in 2015 after taking a redshirt this fall.

The seniors are already trying to rally the team after the injury, a tall task given the

severity of Miller's injury and the implications that it might have on the team's success in their final season in Columbus.

"Coach (Meyer) came in the other day and talked to us about how when a guy drops his rifle, we have to pick it up and move forward," senior linebacker Curtis Grant said. "With losing Braxton, that's a big impact on the team. We just have to keep moving forward. We can't dwell on it because that's not going to make us any better."

Assessing the situation after Miller's injury, Heuerman was still optimistic about Ohio State's chances to bounce back from the loss of the two-time Big Ten MVP.

"There are things obviously that happened behind closed doors, but we've just got to keep moving forward," he said. "Obviously we know what happened, but you're not going to not play. I think we're in a very good situation even with the devastating injury. I think we'll be all right."

Even though the Buckeyes are doing their best to move forward, it's still evident that Miller's injury has had an effect on the classmates who have grown up with him over the past three years.

"The class of 2011, we're a very tight-knit group, so it hit me pretty hard, but you know we've got to step it up," senior cornerback Doran Grant said. "We have to."

They'll have help from the players who can't fully understand their journey, the younger players who were recruited by Meyer and didn't undergo the transition year in 2011 that was the program's first losing record since 1988 - before anyone currently on the roster was born.

The good news for them is that the younger Buckeyes are a particularly talented bunch. Each of Meyer's first three recruiting classes has finished in the top five of Scout's team rankings.

"I know one thing - we have a lot more playmakers this year than we have had in years past," Heuerman said. "We've probably got three, four, five more playmakers than we did in years past. We're going to rely on

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COVER STORY



JOSH WINSLOW

**SLIPPING AWAY – A Big Ten title game loss to Darqueze Dennard (right) and Michigan State last season prevented Devin Smith (9) and the Buckeyes from winning their first conference title since 2010.**

some of them to have to make some plays, and we're going to have to account for some of the things we're not going to have with Braxton out of there.

"It's no secret he's probably one of the most explosive players ever to play this game, especially at Ohio State. We're not naive to that. We're going to have to make up some ground, but I think we have the players and the coaching staff with which we can do that."

**Last Shot At Redemption**

The task at hand – avenging last year's imperfect end to a flawless regular season – will be a steep mountain to climb as the seniors wind down their careers at Ohio State. They'll have to do it without Miller, without rampant running back Carlos Hyde or the dominant offensive line that blocked for him. And while the defensive back seven had its struggles last year, three of its best performers – all of whom were NFL draft picks – are now gone.

On top of that, the seniors who made up Tressel's final class at Ohio State will have to deal with their failure from last season, knowing that this is the final chance they get. Three of their four seasons have been marred by circumstances beyond their control, from an interim coach to a postseason ban to Miller's injury – and the last of those removed one of the players who was chasing that goal alongside them.

Meyer has not shied away from poking the bear, saying at Big Ten Media Days in July that he used last season's losses as motivation for his players in the offseason.

"My anticipation is we'll be a very hungry team," he said.

When asked about the dichotomy of such a long run of success brought down so quickly by back-to-back losses, Heuerman acknowledged that there are still some holes in the résumés of the seniors.

"I can see where you're coming from on that," he said. "Twenty-four straight wins doesn't happen a whole lot. The two losses, you have to embrace them and take the positive from it. We do need to accomplish some things – our group of seniors, we don't have a Big Ten championship since we've been here and we don't have a bowl win since we've been here. Those are two things we need to accomplish our senior year, and we're going to do everything we can."

The two-year winning streak allowed Ohio State to taste success but ended without the Buckeyes reaching the pinnacle of the sport and hoisting the now-defunct crystal ball awarded to the BCS title winners.

Adding to the cruelty is the fact that Ohio State might have been granted a shot in 2012 had it not been ineligible and could have advanced to the BCS National Championship Game one year later had it not blown a fourth-quarter lead against the Spartans in Indianapolis.

"When we went 12-0 in the regular season, that felt great, but those are all steps to get you where you really want," senior defensive tackle Michael Bennett said. "We took the steps to the door and got kicked off the porch. We need to finish it now. We need to get through that door. I think that's the whole goal now this year is we know what it takes each and every single game, but when it finally matters to get to what we worked for, it's time to win."

Meyer, who holds a degree in psychology, may have pushed all the right buttons this winter when it came to creating motivation without having the constant reminder of the failure in the conference championship beat his players down. Heuerman said that the loss to the Spartans hit them particularly hard but now serves to only make them work harder.

"I think at this point it is more fuel," Heuerman said. "For a few weeks afterward, it was more lie in bed and be like, 'Oh, man ...,' but it was a new experience. We won 24 straight games with this coaching staff and never lost a game. We didn't know what losing was like until that Michigan State game."

That fuel was converted into the necessary work, as wide receiver Devin Smith said the frustration from past shortcomings has motivated the upperclassmen to work harder than ever to erase the sting that came with walking off the field in Miami last January.

"Especially with everything we've gone through with Coach Tress leaving and the awkward season we had my freshman year and all the things that have happened, I feel like it's time," Smith said. "We've put in the work ever since that game ended in Miami, and I'm just looking forward to it."

While the Buckeyes were criticized for the postseason losses, Smith said that they've tried to tune out anyone who said that the 24-game win streak was invalidated because of the defeats that followed.

"We really don't worry about what other people have to say. We stay in our lane, and we're about us," he said. "A lot of people want to talk but really don't know anything, and that right there just shows how tough we really are. We really don't worry about what people on the outside have to say. We just worry about us."

The goal of the senior class to leave Columbus with at least a championship of some kind is unmistakable, but Curtis Grant said that the prospect of falling short is something they've tried to block out of their minds.

As they try to break in a new quarterback and find the chemistry necessary to develop into one of the nation's best teams, they'll keep their minds focused only on the effort that it will take to get there.

"It's not a lot of pressure," Grant said. "You take it game by game. Whatever we're blessed with, that's what we're blessed with. You can't wish upon anything. All you can do is go out and give it your all between the hashes each and every play."

The group of kids that sat in the chairs in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center has a dozen regular-season games left as men to live up to the lofty numbers displayed by their former coach that winter day less than four years ago.

"Your senior year, you want to go out with a bang in whatever sport you're in," Heuerman said. "It's your last year to make an impact. That's definitely what we want to do, and we're working every day to try to accomplish that."

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## FOOTBALL PREVIEW: BRAXTON MILLER

## Shoulder Surgery Shelves Senior Quarterback

By RYAN GINN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Ohio State quarterback Braxton Miller was injured against Clemson in the Orange Bowl on Jan. 3, it wasn't enough to keep him out of the game. Initially, Ohio State also thought the injury wasn't severe enough to warrant a trip to the operating room.

With natural healing producing insufficient results, Miller went under the knife about seven weeks later on Feb. 21. In a press release, the university described the procedure as "minor, outpatient surgery on his right shoulder" and said that Miller would be limited during spring drills. The procedure, performed at the Ohio State University Medical Center, turned out to be more serious than the statement may have implied.

While the press release noted that Miller would be "limited in his activities" during spring practice, he ended up not taking a snap, instead spending his time reading defenses and taking mental reps for the fall.

When fall camp came around, he still wasn't taking the majority of the reps in practice, and Ohio State balked at having him throw on back-to-back days. Still, there was a general feeling both from Miller and the coaches that he'd be ready to take the first snap of the year Aug. 30 against Navy, optimism that lasted all the way until the afternoon practice held Aug. 18.

Almost six months to the date after his first surgery, the senior quarterback tore his labrum in practice on a routine throw with no contact, ending Miller's 2014 season before it began. Immediately, the quarterback said he planned to return for the 2015 campaign after what head coach Urban Meyer described as a rehab process of nine to 12 months.

"I love Ohio State and Buckeye Nation, and my goal is to come back from this injury stronger and better than ever," Miller said in a statement. "I am on course to graduate in December, and I want to attend graduate school and then return to lead the Buckeyes next season. In the meantime, I want to give all the support I can to my coaches and

teammates as they chase a championship this season."

Not only did the injury dampen Ohio State's national title hopes, it meant a tough and unfortunate road of rehab for one of the most popular players in college football and on the OSU team.

"I was with him when his shoulder was out of place, and I had never seen him like that," senior tight end Jeff Heuerman said. "He was in pain, so we kind of knew right away that it wasn't going to be good, but you know what, Braxton is a tough kid. Anyone that really knows him, he's been through injuries in the past, he's been through adversity in his life. I think if it's going to happen to anyone, he's probably the strongest one who can handle it and bounce back the best."

The devastating injury came as somewhat of a surprise, but it was clear from the start of training camp that Miller was struggling to rehab his shoulder more than anyone expected when he went under the knife.

In early August, as Ohio State opened fall camp, Miller stood and watched as sophomore Cardale Jones and redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett split reps in practice with the first team. When offensive line coach Ed Warinner met with reporters after a practice open to the media Aug. 6, he said that the limited reps for Miller were all part of Ohio State's post-injury plan.

"We haven't done much with him yet, but we're kind of bringing him along slowly," Warinner said. "I think we have a really good plan to get him where he needs to be Aug. 30, and we don't need to rush it. The guy's played for three years, so just bring him along like a pitcher in spring training – an inning, then two innings, then three innings and by the time Opening Day comes, can he pitch seven innings for you or eight innings or whatever you need? I think we're doing that the right way."

"His mind-set is awesome. His understanding of the game is great and his leadership has improved so we're just letting him come along."

Later that night, director of strength and conditioning Mickey Marotti echoed that



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SEE YOU NEXT YEAR? – Ohio State senior Braxton Miller could take a redshirt this season and return in 2015.**

sentiment, saying that Miller wouldn't be able to play a game that day but that the staff was on track to have him ready for the season opener against Navy.

"(Head athletic trainer) Doug Calland and his staff have a plan for him, and we're just controlling what he does this early," Marotti said. "It's practice three."

As Aug. 30 grew closer, though, Miller didn't show many signs of making strides with his muscle soreness, as Jones and Barrett continued to split snaps at open practices while Miller watched or threw some soft passes on the sideline. That didn't stop Miller from repeatedly insisting that he was 100 percent, but his coaches were much more cautious in issuing status updates.

In every instance where they were questioned, members of the Ohio State coaching staff admitted that Miller would not be able to make all the throws necessary if a game were held that day. At the same time, though, the staff still held onto the belief that the time frame for Miller's return to full strength had not been altered.

On the morning of Aug. 18, only a handful of hours before Miller's injury, Herman offered the first public acknowledgement that his star pupil's recovery had stopped going fully to plan.

"He had a little bit of a setback with some additional soreness that we weren't expecting, but I'm not ready to say 'concerned' is the right word," Herman said.

Later in the interview, he offered an interesting anecdote that suggested that Miller might not be fully ready for the rigors of college football even if he suited up.

Ohio State has its skill players take part in a seven-on-seven practice on Sundays after games in order to work out any lactic acid built up from the night before. Herman anticipated that, at least in the early stages of the season, Miller would forgo that practice in order to keep him from throwing on back-to-back days, especially after a game.

### What They're Missing

In losing Braxton Miller for the season, Ohio State will be without one of the top playmakers in college football. A list of his accomplishments from his first three seasons as Ohio State's quarterback follows:

- Two-time defending Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year and winner of the Silver Football, given to the league's MVP by the Chicago Tribune after a vote of Big Ten coaches
- Finished fifth in the Heisman Trophy voting in 2012
- Has compiled a 26-8 record as a starter
- Was responsible for a school-record 36 touchdowns (24 passing, 12 rushing) despite missing the better part of three games with a knee injury in 2013
- Rushed for 1,068 yards and 12 TDs in 2013 to go with 2,094 passing yards and 24 scores against just seven interceptions
- Ran for 1,271 yards and 13 touchdowns in 2012 while throwing for 2,039 yards, 15 TDs and six interceptions
- Is the school's all-time leading rusher as a quarterback with 3,054 yards, good for eighth on OSU's career list
- Has 52 career touchdown passes, good for fifth in school annals
- Increased his completion percentage from 54.1 as a freshman to 58.3 as a sophomore and 63.5 last year, and his career mark of 59.3 is fourth all-time at OSU
- His 8,346 total yards and 84 touchdowns responsible for are each second in school annals.

"I would imagine he would probably take Sundays off early in the season to rest that thing so he's not throwing on back-to-back days, knowing that Monday is their day off," Herman said. "That gives you over 48 hours of full recovery heading into Tuesday and Wednesday practice."

So what, if anything, went wrong with the initial procedure or recovery process? When asked if he had examined the timetable of Miller's rehab looking for clues on how a recurring injury could have been avoided, Meyer didn't hesitate.

"Oh, I second-guess everything," he said. It was a comment, Meyer intimated, that was not meant as a slam on team doctors but a reference to the fact that the program evaluates every setback to see what can be learned from it. He cited everything from player injuries to down-and-distance situations as aspects of his work that meet his full scrutiny. Medical situations, though, are not a situation where he's very hands-on.

"When I say second-guess, I just ask the questions because I'm not a doctor," Meyer said. "I don't know. But I've been around long enough – things happen and it's unfortunate. (True freshman linebacker) Kyle Berger had an ACL injury and tore the same one."

"I have great trust in our medical staff ... so I wouldn't say second-guess, just make sure with the evaluation we're doing the best we can."

Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, they'll have the chance to try the rehabilitation process again.



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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEPTH CHART BATTLES

# Players Continue To Wage Battles For Spots

By RYAN GINN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Under third-year head coach Urban Meyer, the Ohio State football team has enjoyed quite a successful run. Going 24-2 in Meyer's first two seasons, the Buckeyes relied a lot on the experience of upperclassmen during that span.

While the contributions of such NFL draft picks as linebacker Ryan Shazier, cornerback Bradley Roby, running back Carlos Hyde, left tackle Jack Mewhort, center Corey Linsley and safety Christian Bryant helped the Buckeyes to a school-record winning streak, their departures also left gaping holes in the Ohio State depth chart.

Heading into the 2014 offseason, Ohio State found itself needing to replace four offensive linemen, a running back, its leading wide receiver, an award-winning linebacker, three starters in the defensive secondary and a kicker – and that was before the loss of starting quarterback Braxton Miller in fall camp, which turned the backup QB competition into a fight for the starting role.

As the Buckeyes prepared to face Navy on Aug. 30 in Baltimore, some of those position battles were won in fall camp while others still lingered with less than 10 days to go before the season opener. The following is BSB's complete breakdown of the depth chart competitions.

## Quarterback

As the only quarterback on the roster outside of Miller who has taken a snap in an actual game, sophomore quarterback

Cardale Jones emerged in the spring as the leader for what was then the backup role. The Cleveland Glenville product didn't do much to distinguish himself in the spring game, completing 14 of 31 passes for 126 yards and no touchdowns or interceptions.

However, redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett also failed to gain any traction while splitting reps with Jones, and the upper hand heading into fall went to the slightly more experienced Jones.

At Big Ten media days in late July, Meyer again maintained that Jones would serve as the backup for Miller, and when offensive coordinator Tom Herman was asked at OSU media day Aug. 10, he hinted that Barrett was making strides but that Jones would come on first for Miller if Ohio State played that day.

The first mention of Barrett overtaking Jones came when Meyer met with reporters Aug. 16. Two days later, Herman offered a succinct line of reasoning for why the Texan had moved into the top backup role.

"The offense moves better when he's in there," Herman said. "He's probably completing more balls and making more of the right reads in the run game. But at the end of the day, the offense moves when he's in and sometimes it doesn't as much, not that Cardale is doing a bad job, but the offense moves more frequently when J.T. is the quarterback, and that's the sign of a good one."

At the same time, Herman was cautious when describing how both Barrett and Jones compared to former backup quarterback Kenny Guiton, who led the Buckeyes to wins against San Diego State, California



SONNY BROCKWAY

**DUAL QB SYSTEM?** – Ohio State sophomore Cardale Jones (12) could see snaps at quarterback despite being passed by redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett during the preseason.

and Florida A&M as a fifth-year senior in 2013.

"I wouldn't say (my confidence level in the backup spot) is where it was the previous two years, but close," Herman said. "By no stretch of the imagination are we where

we were at that position with Kenny Guiton, arguably the best backup quarterback in college football the last two years. To put those guys in that same category would be a little premature. I'm not worried."

Later that night, Barrett became the start-

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## FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEPTH CHART BATTLES

ing quarterback when Miller went down with a torn labrum. Meyer said he didn't anticipate any changes to the quarterback spot before the Navy game, but he also didn't rule out the possibility of bringing Jones into the game off the bench.

### Running Back

Having amassed 262 rushing yards on just 30 carries as a true freshman in 2013, sophomore Ezekiel Elliott entered the race to replace Carlos Hyde as the favorite. While fifth-year senior Rod Smith and sophomore Bri'onte Dunn have drawn praise from Meyer, neither appears to have done enough in fall camp to dethrone Elliott from the starting role.

The backfield picture has been muddled further by the emergence of true freshman Curtis Samuel, an early enrollee who was one of the first two true freshmen to lose his black stripe (signaling a player embodies the attributes the program desires) and who Meyer has said will play this year.

Furthermore, an injury to Elliott's wrist that required minor surgery briefly kept him out of fall camp. Although he returned, he was still not able to take contact in practice as of Aug. 20. His cast has been removed, though, and Meyer expects him to get the first carry when the Buckeyes take on the Midshipmen.

Whether he will be able to carry a full load early in the season remains to be seen, and the backs that Meyer uses to spell him will help to paint the full picture of the pecking order.

### Wide Receiver

With the departure of leading receiver Corey "Philly" Brown, the Buckeyes will be without their most dependable receiver from last fall.

Senior Devin Smith is penciled into a starting job after amassing 660 yards and eight touchdowns as a junior. Fellow senior Evan Spencer figures to be in the mix for a starting spot as a wideout after catching 22 passes for 216 yards last year. He's also valued at Ohio State for his blocking, a trait that Meyer has often praised by using him as an example. Junior Corey Smith and sophomore Michael Thomas are also in the mix and could be in line to earn starting jobs as the season goes on if either of the seniors slips up.

The hybrid "H" role was thought to belong to sophomore Dontre Wilson, but Meyer said during fall practice that redshirt freshman Jalin Marshall had narrowed the gap and will push Wilson for playing time.

All in all, the unit could be better than last year despite losing the dependability of Brown, whose 63 catches were the most by an OSU wideout in 15 years.

"I've been pleasantly surprised with that group," Herman said. "Corey Smith is a guy that if he continues on this trajectory is going to be really good. Devin Smith is a guy that has improved his game in the areas that he needed to. Mike Thomas is doing well. Evan Spencer is doing well. Dontre is learning how to play the position better and better every day. Jalin Marshall is another guy that has some quickness and speed in a pretty good, decent-sized frame, which is encouraging.

"There's certainly more quality depth in that meeting room than at any point in our first two years here, so that's encouraging."

### Offensive Line

As the only returning starter from last year's offensive line, Taylor Decker has been firmly slotted into the left tackle role since the clock hit zero in Ohio State's loss

to Clemson in the Orange Bowl. Sophomore Pat Elflein secured his spot at right guard in spring practice, but much of the work he did to earn that spot came when he filled in for Marcus Hall in the Michigan game and against Michigan State in the Big Ten title game last fall.

That left three spots open heading into fall, and only one of those vacancies was filled by Aug. 20. Fifth-year senior Darryl Baldwin emerged victorious over junior Chase Farris and redshirt freshman Evan Lisle at right tackle, with offensive line coach Ed Warinner saying he was impressed with how Baldwin has performed in August.

The center battle appears to have come down to fifth-year senior and Alabama transfer Chad Lindsay and junior Jacoby Boren, though Elflein was also taking snaps in case they eventually chose to move him inside should another guard emerge. With camp winding down, Warinner said that Boren held a slight lead as Lindsay worked to master the scheme and the tempo of a no-huddle offense while battling a shoulder injury.

Redshirt freshman Billy Price was initially in the center battle but has been moved over to left guard, where he is competing with senior Joel Hale and junior Antonio Underwood. With no decision made as the season nears, Warinner said that Price and Hale are neck-and-neck with Underwood fighting to catch up.

The benefit of the offensive line is that so many players are capable of playing in multiple spots, which allows Warinner to mold the lineup in different ways for specific situations.

"You've got to find the right combination," Price said. "Whether it's a quicker group or bigger group, stronger group, whatever the case may be, you've got to find the right balance. Whether it's me at center or Jacoby at center or Chad at left guard or whatever it may be, you've just got to find that balance."

Warinner, the third-year offensive line coach, also didn't rule out having players share time if the race is too close to call. In the past, he's implemented that by having players at a position rotate in and out every two series.

### Middle Linebacker

As a returning starter, senior linebacker Curtis Grant is in the unique position of fighting to keep his spot in the lineup. That's as much a testament to the ability of true freshman Raekwon McMillan as anything else, though. McMillan, a four-star recruit who enrolled early, has been hailed as one of the most college-ready freshmen in the country by recruiting analysts, and he fits a position of need at Ohio State.

Grant, by his own admission, hasn't performed up to expectations during his career, making for an interesting dynamic as a highly touted recruit showed up at his position. Further complicating things is the fact that Grant was assigned as McMillan's big brother, the person incoming freshmen room with at fall camp and use as a resource to make the adjustment to college football.

If Grant harbored any bitterness about mentoring a player who could replace him, though, he didn't show it.

"It's a great battle," Grant said. "He came in, and he motivates me to keep getting better every day. I do the same for him. We both know it's a big competition, but we don't let that get in between us. He helps me, and I help him. I kind of watch him because he has a lot of things that I didn't have when I first came in - a lot of good technique and stuff. He gets better off me, and I get better off him."

Grant appeared to be in line to start as



JOSH WINSLOW

**FIGHTING TO SEE THE FIELD - Ohio State redshirt freshman Gareon Conley is one of three Buckeyes battling to become a starting cornerback this fall.**

camp neared a close, as he was taking every snap with the first team in practice.

"It's just me right now (with the first team)," Grant said. "I don't know why, but I'm not going to question it. I'm just going to keep going, keep motivating him, and he'll keep motivating me and we'll have a great defense."

### Cornerback

As a returning starter, Doran Grant has had his starting spot at cornerback locked up well in advance. The battle for the second cornerback job, on the other hand, features a large cast of characters and showed no signs of a resolution as the opener approached.

Junior Armani Reeves and redshirt freshmen Eli Apple and Gareon Conley were the three names that Meyer mentioned Aug. 20

as possibilities for the starting job. When asked about the battle shortly after, Doran Grant added a fourth name into the mix by giving some praise to true freshman Damon Webb, a highly touted recruit out of Detroit Cass Tech.

"A lot of guys are playing hard for that spot," Grant said. "We have Eli Apple in there, Armani Reeves is there, Gareon Conley, even Damon Webb stepped up big time. It's a good, confident group. That's my unit and I take a lot of pride in that unit. I'm excited to see whoever gets it."

### Safety

One of the most experienced units at Ohio State a year ago, safety is now one of the biggest question marks thanks to the graduation of Bryant, C.J. Barnett and Corey "Pitt" Brown.

Entering fall camp, there were three primary players - sophomores Tyvis Powell, Vonn Bell and Cam Burrows - battling for the two open spots. Powell, the hero of the Michigan game one year ago, appears to have locked up one of those starting jobs.

The other is still undecided according to Meyer, but Bell has the experience edge after starting in the Orange Bowl. The Tennessee native isn't short on confidence, either.

"I probably have more confidence than anybody on the team so I feel like I'm ahead," he said Aug. 16.

True freshman Erick Smith, one of the three Cleveland Glenville prospects in the 2014 class, could also push for playing time as the season progresses.

### Kicker

True freshman Sean Nuernberger is the only scholarship player at kicker, but he still hadn't been slotted into the starting job 10 days before the season was set to start. His competition is fifth-year senior walk-on Kyle Clinton, who began his career at Ohio University and got his feet wet last year.

Meyer has shied away from naming an outright starter when asked about it but has consistently praised Nuernberger's strong leg in meetings with the media.

Nuernberger outperformed Clinton in the spring game, and he's been the first to kick in practices that reporters were allowed to watch, so it's hard to envision anyone else lining up next to the holder against Navy.

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## FOOTBALL PREVIEW: OFFENSIVE OVERVIEW

# Offense Looks To Life Without Hyde, Miller

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If it ain't broke, don't fix it, right?

College football coaches would probably love to live by that mantra, but two unavoidable aspects of the sport make change pretty much inevitable: health and rules against unlimited eligibility.

If there were any season to simply hit shuffle on the playlist and go again, the 2013 campaign for the Ohio State offense would be a strong candidate. After all, the Buckeyes set records for points (637), points per game (45.5), rushing yards (4,321), total yards per game (511.9), rushing yards per play (6.8), overall yards per play (7.1), first downs (361), touchdowns (87) and passing touchdowns (38). Backup quarterback Kenny Guiton even set the Ohio State record for longest touchdown pass (90 yards to Devin Smith) and most touchdown passes in a game (six) while Braxton Miller began a rewrite of the record books that was expected to continue this season.

But those big numbers were amassed with an offensive line that featured four seniors. Running back Carlos Hyde is out of eligibility, too, after he averaged 6.1 yards per carry in his career to break Archie Griffin's school record (6.0) in that category as well.

There is a stable of talented backs ready to replace Hyde, but rebuilding the offensive line could be another matter.

Those were realities Urban Meyer and his offensive coaching staff knew all offseason they would have to deal with. Losing Miller for the season because of a recurrence of a shoulder injury from January did not become a reality until less than two weeks remained until the season opener.

With the ultra-athletic Miller at the controls of Meyer's spread offense, all expectations were for another high-scoring unit again this season, but his absence might not mean all is lost.

The main men charged with putting back together the remaining ingredients and mixing in some new are head coach Meyer, offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Tom Herman and co-offensive coordinator

Ed Warinner, who also coaches the offensive line.

This is their third season together in Columbus, and they came from diverse backgrounds before joining Meyer's staff. All, however, have extensive experience in the spread offense, a term that has become nearly ubiquitous over the past decade, with multiple versions of the attack.

Meyer's is based around power football and the read option with some deep passes and perimeter runs mixed in for good measure.

Through two seasons, Hyde and the offensive line were the tip of the spear with Miller doing just about everything else needed to make the attack elite.

Hyde (3,198 career rushing yards) is gone and the line must be rebuilt, but the plan was already to make Miller's legs (3,054 yards the past three seasons) a smaller part of the equation.

How could that work? By spreading the wealth. This season, there is more hope than ever before that Ohio State has an embarrassment of riches in the playmaker department. One of those was Miller, meaning the onus on the rest grew in mid-August.

"The formations and personnels that we're in probably won't change very much," Herman said of potential offensive changes before Miller was hurt again. "What we're doing out of them might change a little bit here and there, but we're going to play with a tight end and one running back and three wide receivers most of the time.

"It's not going to be a drastic change to the naked eye, certainly, but there probably will be more of a conscious effort to put the ball into those athletes' hands."

## Making Tweaks

The 2014 offense might not look like it has during Meyer's two years at Ohio State, but that does not mean it will be completely new or unfamiliar to fans of college football.

The natural comparison is to the glory years he enjoyed at Florida, where he won 65 games and two national championships from 2005-10.

Miller and Tim Tebow, the Gators'



SONNY BROCKWAY

**STANDOUT SEASON AHEAD? – Ohio State "H" Dontre Wilson, seen here catching punts during a preseason practice, could be a big part of the Buckeye offense this fall.**

Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback, might not get things done the same way, but both are known first for their running ability. And the new supporting cast for the Buckeyes might resemble Tebow's this season.

That starts with Dontre Wilson, but the sophomore speedster from DeSoto, Texas, is only the beginning.

After putting on about 10 pounds in the offseason, the 5-10, 185-pound Wilson is expected to take his game to a new level as the starting "H" in Meyer's offense. He can do that by getting more consistent as a route runner and by showing the ability to run inside or out, a key attribute he lacked last season.

It is important to add unpredictability to the offense, and the coaching staff sounds very excited to show off what Wilson can do even if most of the team's preseason practices were closed to the media.

"I think you always recruit to a philosophy, there's no doubt, but I think at the end of the day we adhered to a philosophy pretty tightly the first two years anyway," Herman said. "We want to be a solid downhill running team, a solid play-action pass team. One thing that might have been missing a little bit was the limited perimeter run game aspect of it, and you might see a little bit more of that coming out."

Wilson has company as a potential playmaker in the slot, though. Jalin Marshall,

a redshirt freshman who was the No. 1 recruit in the state of Ohio in the class of 2013 but saw health issues prevent him from making an impact last season, has gotten rave reviews from many of his teammates throughout the offseason.

He was a quarterback at Middletown High School, but his No. 1 attribute was his running ability thanks to an impressive combination of explosiveness and speed. He'll push for playing time in an offense that Meyer likes to use to spread the ball around.

Devin Smith has company at receiver, too, as two more players who redshirted last season – Corey Smith and Michael Thomas – have had some impressive moments in the spring and the preseason. True freshman Johnnie Dixon also hopes to be in the mix along with senior Evan Spencer, who missed the spring while recovering from ankle surgery.

"We need Devin to have a consistent, good season," Herman said. "The neat thing is with the quality depth that there is in that position room now it is forcing him to compete on a daily basis, which is good because all those guys need it."

There is no shortage of candidates to replace Hyde at running back, either. Senior Rod Smith or sophomore Bronte Dunn could replicate his power running style while 225-pound sophomore Ezekiel Elliott brings

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**FOOTBALL PREVIEW: OFFENSIVE OVERVIEW**

a greater dimension of speed and elusiveness. Meyer also raved about true freshman Curtis Samuel, a 190-pounder from Brooklyn who could easily be mistaken for one of the smallest, speedy backs with which Meyer kept the Florida roster stocked.

The offensive line will not have anyone back at the position he started last year, but three players had been named starters by the middle of preseason camp in left tackle Taylor Decker, right tackle Darryl Baldwin and guard Pat Elflein.

Warinner's success molding the last group from a nondescript bunch into one of the best lines in school history also lends itself to a belief Ohio State will be at least solid up front on offense, but the loss of Hyde and Miller means the sheer dominance of the '13 group could be missed even more than expected.

Tight end has practically been an extension of the offensive line in the past decade or so at Ohio State, and that is still somewhat true in the Meyer era, but that is mostly in the sense that senior Jeff Heuerman is such a good blocker he could be mistaken for another tackle if it weren't for the No. 86 on his back.

Heuerman has also proved to be a reliable target in the passing game, and junior Nick Vannett brings many of the same skills to the position. In redshirt freshman Marcus Baugh, the tight end room has its own version of a player like Marshall. That is, Baugh is a potential playmaker who hasn't seen the field yet as a collegian but has impressed in practice.

Neither Baugh nor Marshall might be essential to Ohio State's success this season, but could they put the Buckeyes over the top? How many playmakers is too many? Meyer would probably say there is no answer to that question, but it can't hurt to have a plethora when having to change the way a team's bread is buttered.

"I think we have a lot of weapons on the perimeter," Warinner said. "We have weapons at tight end, we have weapons at wide receiver and we're gaining confidence in those guys that they're getting better and better. Our running backs are fast, so we have different ways to manufacture those yards. And, you know, we'll see how we can develop a passing game to go with the run game and we can be more diverse."

**Putting It Together**

Of course, to describe the 2013 offense as one without areas it needed to improve would be inaccurate. That would be true even with a healthy Miller around this fall.

The passing game, while much improved from 2012, still left something to be desired at times in terms of explosiveness and consistency last season.

There was hope among all involved that a fourth year as the starter and third year in the same offense would lead to a major jump in Miller's passing ability – from good to great – but that will have to wait to be seen.

Cardale Jones appeared in three games as a redshirt freshman last season and threw one pass. That is one more than J.T. Barrett, however, as the young Texan was redshirted last season.

The pair is regarded much differently when it comes to their talents as passers. While Jones possesses a very strong arm, that is considered Barrett's one significant weakness. Herman has previously praised Barrett's accuracy and decision-making, however, while noting those are the two most desirable attributes any quarterbacks coach wants in a player.

In the spring, Herman spoke of telling both players to worry about being them-

selves, not Braxton Miller, but he likely had no idea one or both would need to do so in place of Miller this fall.

"I tell J.T., 'You get paid (a scholarship) to make good decisions, get the ball out of your hand and be accurate. You're not going to grow. Your arm this year is not going to get a whole lot stronger. Be on time, be accurate and be right with what you do with the football,'" Herman said.

"Cardale is 6-5 and 250 pounds and can throw it through that wall. 'Use some of that, use the talents that you have and while we develop the portions of your game that need to be developed, we'll do that.'"

The timetable for that development accelerated in August, but Ohio State fans can take some solace in the fact the offense is not designed to rely solely on one or two players

– even though it largely has boiled down to a pair the past two seasons.

In fact, the hope is that such a deep roster of talent on the offensive side of the ball will allow the quarterback position to become more of a distributor than anything else.

"I think we've finally got some quality depth (at the skill positions) that has created competition, and we talk about it all the time," Herman said. "Now there's a legitimate fight for the football. You want to get on the field and touch the football, you're going to have to prove every day in practice that you deserve it and that you deserve it more than these 10 guys, where maybe last year it has been one or two guys that maybe deserve it."

Perhaps preparations to win without call-

ing on Miller's unique talents – specifically his running ability – will pay off this fall even if the offense is going to have to be even more diverse than anyone anticipated at the end of July.

"That's what training camp is for, to figure out who you are, figure out who's improved," Warinner said in early August. "What are we better at? What aren't we as good at? How do we want to get our yards? If you can't get some yards this way, can you get them another way?"

"And that's the beauty of our system on offense. We can do a lot of different things, so that's what we want to figure out here over the next few weeks. Once we get to the week before Navy, we can hone in on, 'This is who we're going to be,' and go with that."

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## FOOTBALL PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS

## Backup Battle Becomes Crucial With Miller Out

By JEFF SVOBODA  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

When Ohio State offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Tom Herman was discussing the battle between sophomore Cardale Jones and redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett to back up senior Braxton Miller early in training camp, he made it clear there would be no ceremony to declare which quarterback would earn the No. 2 job during the fall.

"Everybody envisions the little placards with your name on it and one guy is the No. 2 and one is the No. 3," Herman said Aug. 10, jokingly setting an imaginary depth chart in place with his hands. "I don't know that there's ever a day that you move the little placard (into place)."

But that's almost how it felt six days later when head coach Urban Meyer said that Barrett had passed Jones – who won a spring battle to be the backup quarterback while Miller rehabbed his right shoulder – to move slightly ahead in the No. 2 spot.

Two days later, the placard fell even more into place when Miller threw a pass at an afternoon practice and immediately felt pain coursing through his surgically repaired throwing shoulder. By the time it became known the next afternoon that Miller would be out for the season, it was widely accepted that Barrett would be the starting quarterback for the season opener vs. Navy.

But just as the saying goes it takes a village to raise a child, it might be all hands on deck for the Buckeyes as they head into a season for the first time since 2011 in which it wasn't sure that Miller would be the starting quarterback.

It might help that both Barrett and Jones, the two quarterbacks most likely to receive playing time over the fall, bring different skill sets to the table, and Meyer said he would consider using both quarterbacks in games this season.

Barrett has become known as "The Distributor" around the Ohio State program for his ability to get the ball out quickly to the open man, and he's also known as both a cerebral player and a leader. At 6-1, 225



KEVIN DYE

**'THE DISTRIBUTOR'** – Redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett (16), being defended during a preseason drill by quarterbacks coach Tom Herman (right), will likely be under center when the Buckeyes take the field Aug. 30 vs. Navy.

pounds, he's not the most imposing quarterback in the running game but does bring mobility to the table after rushing for more than 2,000 yards his last two seasons of high school ball despite missing the latter half of his senior year with a torn ACL.

Jones, meanwhile, is a physical specimen at 6-5, 250 pounds, and his long legs and imposing stature make him good at both chewing up yards and delivering blows to defenders trying to tackle him. He

also has probably the strongest arm on the team and throws a nice deep ball, giving him a different set of talents than Barrett.

How the team now chooses to take best advantage of those remains to be seen, and Meyer said that will be the goal as the days tick down toward the opening kickoff in the Charm City.

"Braxton has a very unique skill set," Meyer said. "He has one of the quickest releases I've ever seen. (Former backup Kenny Guiton) didn't have that quick release. Kenny was a full-field distributor, if that makes sense. We're still going through it with J.T. J.T. has a pretty good release and good skill level. Cardale has just a cannon. You add the element of, 'How do they stretch a play when things aren't working?' Both of them have the ability to do that."

"That's why we sit in a room and look at each other for 10 hours a day. You have to figure out what pieces you have."

Once the offensive staff figures out the best usage for each quarterback, it will have to go about making sure they're comfortable in an offense that will likely see its most complicated reads and dangerous throws left on the cutting room floor.

Still, Herman said he wasn't worried about what he had in his room, especially considering both Barrett and Jones were highly recruited players coming out of high school who bring talent to the equation. Neither was a five-star recruit like Miller or Terrelle Pryor before them, but both were steadily improving in the OSU offense throughout the spring and fall.

"I'm OK with where we're at right now," Herman said at media day. "We have two guys that are inexperienced, but I think the progression of where they are in their

## Projected Starter

## Quarterback

16 • J.T. Barrett

6-1 • 225 • R-Fr.

Wichita Falls (Texas) Rider

Redshirted last year and missed most of his senior high school season with a knee injury.

career is really at the end of the day where quarterbacks are supposed to be. You're not supposed to be thrown into the fire like Braxton Miller as a true freshman at quarterback. You're just not.

"You see it in the NFL, there's first-round draft picks at quarterback that aren't going to start for their NFL teams. Why? Because they need this seasoning, they need the experience, they need the maturity. These guys, the two in Cardale and J.T., have grown and will continue to grow, and they're right on track."

The right track just became the fast track, and time will tell just how ready those two players are to shoulder – no pun intended – the load.

## The Distributor

Barrett's initials stand for Joe Thomas, not Just Touchdowns, but the initials he's most compared to in the Ohio State program are K.G.

"This kid is kind of Guitonish," Meyer said Aug. 20. "He's a very calm, cool, collected guy. He has very good leadership skills. That's a term we use around here now is Guitonish."

Added cornerback Doran Grant, "J.T. does what K.G. did."

That's high praise around the Ohio State program given the impact Guiton had over the last two years. It's fair to say OSU wouldn't have been undefeated for the first two regular seasons of the Meyer era without Guiton, who performed miracles – think of the stunning 2012 comeback vs. Purdue – and set records – longest play from scrimmage and most touchdown passes in one game in 2013 – during his celebrated tenure.

Guiton also was chosen as a captain as a senior despite being a backup, and many of his best qualities – his ability to lead as well as his aptitude at getting the ball to the open man – seem to be found in Barrett.

"Some of the best quarterbacks are great distributors," Meyer said. "I watch Peyton Manning say, and I'm in awe of the way he distributes the ball around. I thought Kenny Guiton was one of the best guys I've been around as far as getting the ball out rather quickly and distributing to playmakers and letting them run with the ball and letting them make plays. My initial evaluation of J.T., he's very good at that."

As far as the leadership realm, Barrett seems to pass that test as well. In fact, he was the only freshman on the team's leadership committee upon arrival at OSU.

"I don't know if you can pick anyone better to step in and be the starting quarterback other than J.T. Barrett," senior tight end Jeff Heurman said. "Guys thought so highly of him and trusted him before this even happened."

Such praise shows exactly how far Barrett has come since being an early enrollee in January 2013. When he got to Ohio State, he faced continuing rehab on the knee he had injured the previous



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**FOOTBALL PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS**



KEVIN DYE

**STEPPING UP** – Ohio State quarterbacks J.T. Barrett (16) and Cardale Jones (12) will be called upon to try to replace the production of Braxton Miller (5).

October and stepped into a quarterbacks room that included Miller, Guiton and Jones, and looking back, Barrett admits it was a bit overwhelming at first.

“I probably would say I’ve improved most just with confidence because you come to play at a place like Ohio State, all of us being recruited, we were probably the man in high school, but you come here, it’s a whole different world because everybody is just like you or better than you,” he said. “When I first got here, I really didn’t have any confidence at all. Now I’m just being confident in my game and going out there and just playing, not thinking all the time and just reacting.”

He still couldn’t do much last fall, either, and showed rust in the spring, but this fall Barrett has shown the form that made him the No. 13-rated quarterback in his recruiting class according to Scout.com.

A dual-threat star, Barrett rushed for over 1,500 yards with nine touchdowns and passed for over 1,600 yards and 14 touchdowns as a junior at Wichita Falls (Texas) Rider and then accounted for 1,353 total yards and 12 scores before his knee gave way during his senior campaign.

In getting back those abilities, Barrett said he put in a lot of work over the offseason, including a trip out west to see Tom House, a former Major League Baseball pitcher who has worked with quarterbacks such as Drew Brees, Tom Brady and former Meyer signal caller Alex Smith.

“I feel like this is probably the best that I’ve thrown since I’ve been here,” Barrett said. “I did a lot of improvements since spring ball as far as throwing motion. Just going out to see Tom House in California, I saw him as far as tightening my arm, getting out there to the flats and things like that. I feel like I definitely made strides throwing the football.”

Now, the onus is on Barrett to keep improving and put his considerable skills to use in a stressful situation. Can he get it done? Time will tell, but the Buckeyes feel they have someone with the right intangibles to try to get the job done.

“He gets the ball out very quickly,”

Herman said. “He has a very efficient, smooth release – very accurate, extremely cerebral. He’s a very magnetic leader. I think the kids gravitate toward him.”

**Jonesing For Time**

It seems like being the underdog is the story of life for Jones, who has overcome a lot just to be where he is right now.

Not extended a scholarship until late in the recruiting process as a three-star prospect from Cleveland Glenville, Jones didn’t commit to Ohio State until National Signing Day in 2011, but he ended up having to go the prep school route at Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy.

He still ended up at OSU in time for the 2012 season, but his career almost ended before it began with his famous tweet a few games into Meyer’s tenure in which he said classes are pointless and that he didn’t attend Ohio State to “play school.”

But with a steady hand from the coaching staff, Jones has been able to mature into both a viable option for time at quarterback and someone who can represent the program in a positive light.

“It’s been more hard on the coaches than for me because they stuck with me and they believed in me and they kept pushing me,” Jones said. “They’ve basically stuck with me, and they kept riding me every day.”

Added Meyer, “He was a guy that couldn’t get out of his own way. You’re starting to see the progress in the classroom. You remember the famous tweet? It’s a different guy.”

It’s hard to predict exactly how much he’ll end up playing this year, but he has the only experience of the quarterbacks on the roster – 39 snaps in three games last season, including one completed pass for 3 yards and 17 rushes for 128 yards and a score.

He was inconsistent some in the spring and even into the fall, still throwing ill-advised passes up for grabs when pressured, but running skills, physical attributes and deep touch are all things the Buckeye coaching staff can likely exploit this fall.

**The Rest Of The Story**

Warming up under the watchful eye of Herman before an Aug. 9 practice, true freshman Stephen Collier uncorked a short pass to Barrett then turned around to hear his position coach say, “There you go, Steve, that’s what I want.”

Upon getting the ball back, Collier threw

it again, causing Herman to say even more loudly, “There you go, Steve!”

The Leesburg (Ga.) Lee County product shrugged and broke out in a big smile, one that looked almost more like relief than happiness after he spent both the spring and early fall getting used to the rigors and pressures of big-time college football.

Collier didn’t get much scrimmage time at all, in fact, in the spring while Barrett and Jones battled to earn what was at the time the backup job, and the Peach State native arrived for camp as the clear No. 4 quarterback on the roster and seemingly ticketed for a redshirt.

The Buckeyes surely would still prefer not to use Collier – a three-star signal caller and the nation’s No. 51 QB in the class of 2014 – if they can avoid doing so this year, but after appearing at the Elite 11 competition last summer and piling up big stats at the high school level last year, Collier brings both running and passing ability to the table.

The 6-3, 220-pounder passed for more than 4,000 yards, rushed for 1,500 yards and had 78 touchdowns (passing and rushing) during his prep career. He was especially good as a senior, earning regional player of the year honors in southwest Georgia after throwing for 2,291 yards, running for 1,021 more and accounting for 44 TDs.

The other quarterback on the roster is sophomore walk-on Luke Morgan, a native of Lebanon, Ohio. The 6-2, 225-pounder was the offensive player of the year in the high-level Greater Western Ohio Conference as a senior when he rushed and passed for a combined 3,077 yards and 39 touchdowns, earning him a scholarship offer from Bowling Green that he passed on in order to attend OSU.

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# Talk Over, Revamped Defense Set To Debut

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After three years of decline resulted in what could reasonably be called rock bottom at the end of last season, the Ohio State defense received a makeover this spring and summer.

There has been no shortage of talk since March about how the Buckeyes will be different this fall, but the rubber is about to meet the road Aug. 30 when the 2014 season kicks off against Navy.

While the Midshipmen's triple-option attack is an old-school offense, Ohio State's defensive changes have a certain back-to-the-future feel as well.

That's because almost two decades after the first edition of the Silver Bullets terrorized Big Ten defenses in 1996, a new version is set to be launched with schemes that will more resemble the Buckeye defenses of the late 1990s than the ones of the decade that followed.

Both types of attack proved effective in their own way at various times, but of course it's really only the present day that matters to coaches, players and fans.

The success of the new scheme will depend on many factors, some familiar and some not so much.

## Then And Now

Nobody has to tell Luke Fickell about the original Silver Bullets. He lived the last transition like this as a player, and now he is going through another as the team's defensive coordinator.

He admitted at the start of training camp in August this was the first time in his 13-year career as an assistant at Ohio State he has had a legitimate reason to feel bad about how the defense played at the end of the previous season.

Not every Buckeye defense started the season hot in the last decade-plus, but most of them got better as the season went and finished strong. He noted a possible excep-

tion in 2006, when a young unit was exposed late by a talented Michigan offense and struggled against poor field position in the BCS National Championship Game against Florida, but when asked if the offseason that followed 2013 felt something like the one after 1995, he had to stop and think for a minute.

Then he said yes. "You know what? Yeah. I didn't think about it because I hadn't felt bad about a year here probably since I was playing with the way we felt defensively - maybe '06," Fickell said. "Obviously it's hard to say when you lose a national championship, but you give up a lot of points in that Team Up North game and stuff, but it wasn't talked about as much because it was just a different time, but that would be a good comparison."

In 1995, the Buckeyes also gave up lots of points in the Michigan game - 31 to be exact - but the more memorable number had to do with yards. That would be 313, the total amassed on the ground by Wolverines running back Tim Biakabutuka, a record for The Game and a key part of Michigan's upset of the Buckeyes that ruined a perfect season.

Fast-forward to 2013 and it was Michigan quarterback Devin Gardner throwing for 451 yards against the Buckeyes in Ann Arbor but falling just short of handing Ohio State its first loss of the season. That would come a week later when Michigan State, largely on the strength of a 304-yard passing day by quarterback Connor Cook, upset Ohio State by a 34-24 score in the Big Ten Championship Game. As Biakabutuka had gashed the Buckeyes with long run after long run, Cook hit them with numerous long pass plays, finding holes in the Ohio State zone defense and exploiting blown coverages and lost matchups.

While the 1995 defense bounced back

to have a solid day in the rain against Peyton Manning and Tennessee in the 1996 Citrus Bowl, the '13 Ohio State defense was torched one last time in the Orange Bowl by quarterback Tajh Boyd and uber-talented wide receiver Sammy Watkins.

The consensus after both seasons? Some things had to change, and in both cases, the conclusion was the Buckeyes had to play with a different mind-set. Yes, X's and O's would need to be adjusted, but more important would be a new attitude.

In 1996, that came with the promotion of Fred Pagac Sr. from linebackers coach to defensive coordinator to replace Bill Young, who left for Oklahoma.

In 2014, Chris Ash was brought in to revamp the secondary and serve as co-defensive coordinator with Fickell after Everett Withers left to become head coach at James Madison.

"There are some schematic changes," Fickell said. "It's more philosophy changes in some ways, but I think the comparison being that there's a chip on the shoulder not just for the coaches but obviously the players we're training to do it. If we have the same kind of leadership we had from '95 to '96 with that senior crew, the sky's the limit for us."

Fickell was one of those seniors in 1996. So was Matt Finkes, an All-America defensive end who is now a radio host in Columbus.

Finkes told BSB about some of the similarities between the scheme of his senior year and the one that's on tap, but he also cautioned that playing more aggressively is easier said than done.

"Whether they were kind of stifling that in the style they played the last couple of years and now they're letting that out, if that's the case then you're in great shape," Finkes said. "If you're trying to manufacture that you're going to lose. That will be the true test."

What comes first, the aggressive play or the aggressive player? That figures to be an important question this season will answer for the Ohio State defense.

The message from Ash seems to be simplifying the scheme will turn players loose and let them play faster. It's a message often preached by Fickell and the previous Ohio State defensive coordinator, Jim Heacock, but one that seems to have gotten lost in translation the past couple of seasons.

Also joining the staff this year is Larry Johnson, the longtime successful defensive line coach at Penn State who has assumed that same role in Columbus.

He and the rest of the coaching staff - including head coach Urban Meyer - can surely agree the place any great defense begins is up front, and Johnson is stressing an attacking mind-set this year.

He also hopes to lessen the load on the starters, some of whom rarely came off the field last season under the direction of line coach Mike Vrabel, by playing 10 or more players regularly this fall.

Johnson's charges - he calls them "rush men" - are almost all highly recruited players, and most of them have already played a lot of college football - even sophomore Joey Bosa, who ended up starting 10 games last season.

Once Noah Spence's two-game suspension to start the year is up, the starting lineup is expected to consist of Spence and Bosa at end with Michael Bennett and Adolphus Washington back at the interior spots with plenty of talent ready to chip in behind them.

Johnson has brought some tweaks to how the front will play, though, with the ends no longer flipping sides to match the offensive formation's strength and the whole unit instructed to concentrate more on penetration.

"We're able to attack a little bit more, not as much gap control as we're able to penetrate a little bit, go make some plays in



Luke Fickell

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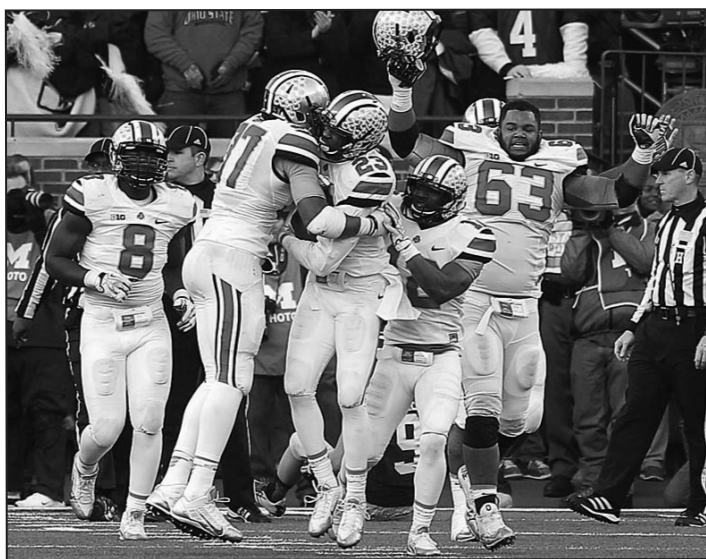
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**FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEFENSIVE OVERVIEW**



JOSH WINSLOW

**BIGGER ROLE – Michigan game hero Tyvis Powell (23) will likely be one of Ohio State's starting safeties this season.**

the backfield," said junior Tommy Schutt, who is trying to win a spot in the rotation at defensive tackle.

Linebacker, a position group coached by Fickell for eight of the last nine seasons, has been a problem spot for the past couple of years, but Meyer called it a strength in late July.

It will also have a new look both in personnel and alignment.

All-Big Ten performer Ryan Shazier is gone, and junior Joshua Perry has taken his place at Will linebacker. Perry started last season as the Sam linebacker, and at 250 pounds he will offer a different presence than the 230-pound Shazier.

The spot Perry vacated has a new look and alignment, too, as sophomore Darron Lee and redshirt freshman Chris Worley battle to replace Perry. They are also going to play more against spread offenses than Ohio State's third linebacker did in recent seasons, when their main job was to joust with tight ends and set the edge in the run game against pro-style offenses. Now they will line up farther out against slot receivers regularly.

It's being called the "walkout linebacker," and it bears some resemblance to the "Star" of Ohio State's old nickel defense – except now it is part of the base 4-3 alignment. The difference is somewhat a matter of semantics, but Lee (225 pounds) and Worley (218 pounds) are built more like small linebackers than the cornerbacks and safeties who usually played Star in the past, and that is no accident.

"It just helps you when you talk about bubble screens and No. 2 wide receivers going to cut back and block a nickel vs. a linebacker, it's a lot easier to block a nickel and get him knocked out of the run defense than it is a linebacker," Ash said. "Those guys are a little less likely to come up and block a Darron Lee or a Chris Worley the way they'll come snap you vs. a smaller nickel in there. In today's football I would prefer to have on first and second down a hybrid linebacker out there."

Another area the 2014 defense could be reminiscent of the '96 squad? Middle linebacker, though that remained to be determined as the season opener neared.

Back then, a major difference for the Ohio State defense was the playmaking presence of freshman Andy Katzenmoyer,

the national defensive player of the year as a senior at Westerville (Ohio) South. This time around another true freshman, Raekwon McMillan of Hinesville, Ga., has a chance to plug what has been a hole in the middle of the defense, though he'll have to beat out senior Curtis Grant. Dante Booker, the 2013 Ohio Mr. Football at Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary, could have a say in how playing time is divided up, too.

While Meyer has been pleased with the progress of the linebackers, the largest issues last year lay with the secondary.

That is Ash's specialty and where the new style of play will be most evident.

Instead of a combination of zone defenses, the Buckeyes will primarily play a pass coverage called Cover-4 or "quarters," the same base coverage Pagac went to when he took over coordinator duties in '96. It's something like a matchup zone in basketball, and Ash's version calls for the cornerbacks to press wide receivers at the line of scrimmage and safeties to play within 8-10 yards of the line, where they can pick up inside receivers or attack the run.

All of the players in the secondary will read the actions of different offensive players and react either to run or pass, hoping to be able to transition from run support to pass defense seamlessly from play to play and giving Ohio State more players to contend with any type of attack.

"We want to be a defense that challenges the offense and doesn't allow easy things to develop, run or pass," Ash said. "We're going to challenge the receivers on the outside and we're going to be able to get our safeties in the box to stop the run when needed. We're going to play extremely hard and play with good fundamentals."

The cornerbacks will be locked on outside receivers in one-on-one wars, something they have done at times in recent years with varying degrees of success. The coaching staff believes being fully committed to the more aggressive style will pay dividends, as will a year of seasoning for redshirt freshmen Gareon Conley and Eli Apple, who are pushing junior Armani Reeves for the starting spot opposite senior Doran Grant.

"This is the best defense for us," Grant said. "We have a lot of great athletes, so let our athletes be athletes."

At safety, the two players taking on the

new responsibilities of the position will be new, and Ash likes the athleticism of all of the candidates – sophomores Vonn Bell, Tyvis Powell and Cam Burrows.

While Bell was recruited as an exceptionally athletic safety, Powell and Burrows both began their careers as cornerbacks, something Ash was happy to see when he arrived because it should bode well for their ability to play up man coverage when necessary.

"If they can't run and cover, they can't play in this system and they can't do the things we need to do to stop spread offenses," Ash said. "You've got to have safeties that can play more man-to-man. The old days of having big, downhill, in-the-box safeties doesn't exist. We basically need to have four corners on the field that can run, play coverage and tackle because they're going to have to come downhill and tackle, too."

Powell, who started five games last season as the team's Star, says he feels comfortable at safety and is looking forward to an expanded role. He acknowledged the last line of defense has a lot of responsibility but expressed confidence in seeing it all properly executed.

"That's when you have to rely on your technique," Powell said. "The stuff the coaches teach is very key, but I feel like right now every safety is handling it very well. They do a good job of switching things up to keep the offense guessing. It is a lot of stress on the safeties, but with the players that we have I feel like we're confident in it."

In some ways, confidence could make a huge difference as the unit seemed to lack that last season, especially down the stretch as its play worsened. Communication will also be a major factor, something else the players and coaches have shared was lacking last season.

"I think it's just we've learned from our mistakes," Bennett said when asked about Ash's influence on the defense. "Coach Ash came in and he's really got a more aggressive defense going. Coach Johnson comes in and is more about togetherness and brotherhood and no cursing, no negativity."

"And then Coach Fickell changed his viewpoint and he said, 'I'm not going to blame anybody anymore. It's going to be the defense, and the defense is together.' So it's just all the coaches, and (cornerbacks coach Kerry) Coombs has been on board with that

through the whole thing. All the defensive coaches have said we're not fighting each other anymore."

**Back To Being Bullets?**

Some of the changes for this season are not in sync with the makeover Pagac gave the defense in 1996. More than anything, the first Silver Bullets were symbolized by the blitzing of Katzenmoyer and Ryan Miller and safeties Kelly and Damon Moore while veteran cornerbacks Shawn Springs and Ty Howard took away the opposing team's wide receivers.

Finkes explained those blitzers' jobs of getting to the quarterback were made easier by an adjustment in the front that called for the linemen to play "heavier" on the line, meaning they soaked up blockers to create more for the invading Buckeyes behind them. That also helps explain why Katzenmoyer had 12 sacks as a freshman while Vrabel and Finkes combined for 15 after totaling 41 in the previous two seasons.

So far, how much the new Ohio State defense will feature blitzes is unclear. Many of today's spread offenses, with their misdirection runs and quick passes, are built to beat an overly aggressive blitz by getting the ball to the perimeter quickly, so a defense's attacking has to be done with some care.

It sounds like the defensive line will not be playing as heavy as it has in the past. Johnson wants to get plenty of pressure with the front four to allow the back seven to react, a reality of facing spread offenses that didn't exist in the late '90s when most teams still lined up with two backs in the backfield and a tight end.

Whether they are blitzing regularly, the linebackers and the secondary are going to be expected to remain in an attack mode all the time, a welcome change from last season according to players such as Powell.

"I can't remember what game it was last season, we had a huge meeting with Coach Coombs and he presented us with the stats like the short passes are just killing us," Powell said. "I don't know why, but after he presented that fact to us, everybody still played conservative, not aggressive, so I don't know what that was about. I don't know what mentality we had, but now I know that it's definitely more aggressive."



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Ohio State Football Roster By Position And Eligibility					
POSITION	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES	REDSHIRT FRESHMEN	FRESHMEN
<b>QUARTERBACK</b>	5 Braxton Miller		12 Cardale Jones 15 Luke Morgan*	16 J.T. Barrett	13 Stephen Collier
<b>RUNNING BACK</b>	2 Rod Smith#	35 Jeffie Johnson*	15 Ezekiel Elliott 25 Bri'onte Dunn 26 Devonte Butler* 28 Warren Ball 29 Caleb Laps*		4 Curtis Samuel
<b>H-BACK</b>			1 Dontre Wilson	17 Jalin Marshall	
<b>WIDE RECEIVER</b>	6 Evan Spencer 9 Devin Smith 87 Peter Gwilym* 89 Jeff Greene*	18 Kato Mitchell* 84 Corey Smith	3 Michael Thomas 19 Joe Ramstetter* 20 Devlin McDaniel*	82 James Clark	1 Johnnie Dixon 21 Parris Campbell 23 Isaiah Williams* 80 Noah Brown 83 Terry McLaurin
<b>TIGHT END</b>	46 Devin Hill* 86 Jeff Heurman	44 Chris Rock 81 Nick Vannett		85 Marcus Baugh	24 Guy Ferrelli*
<b>OFFENSIVE TACKLE</b>	76 Darryl Baldwin#	57 Chase Farris 68 Taylor Decker	66 Kyle Dodson	75 Evan Lisle	71 Kyle Trout 74 Jamarco Jones 79 Brady Taylor
<b>OFFENSIVE GUARD</b>	51 Joel Hale	73 Antonio Underwood	61 Logan Gaskey* 65 Pat Elflein	54 Billy Price 75 Evan Lisle	62 R.J. Morris* 64 Marcelys Jones 69 Michael Pruni* 78 Demetrius Knox
<b>CENTER</b>	56 Chad Lindsay#	50 Jacoby Boren		54 Billy Price	
<b>LONG SNAPPER</b>	32 Russell Doup#*	41 Bryce Haynes	42 Aaron Mawhirter*		
<b>KICKER</b>	9 Tim Scott* 39 Kyle Clinton#*				96 Sean Nuernberger
<b>PUNTER</b>		14 Jake Russell*	95 Cameron Johnston*		
<b>DEFENSIVE TACKLE</b>	53 Kosta Karageorge* 63 Michael Bennett 98 John Holman*	72 Chris Carter 90 Tommy Schutt 92 Adolphus Washington		52 Donovan Munger 77 Michael Hill	
<b>DEFENSIVE END</b>	17 Rashad Frazier# 88 Steve Miller	8 Noah Spence	91 Aaron Parry* 97 Joey Bosa	59 Tyquan Lewis 93 Tracy Sprinkle	10 Jalyn Holmes 42 Darius Slade 94 Dylan Thompson
<b>LINEBACKER</b>	14 Curtis Grant	30 Devan Bogard 37 Joshua Perry 38 Craig Fada* 46 Nick Snyder* 48 Joe Burger* 55 Cam Williams	36 Trey Johnson 43 Darron Lee	35 Chris Worley	5 Raekwon McMillan 33 Dante Booker 44 Kyle Berger 49 Sam Hubbard
<b>CORNERBACK</b>	12 Doran Grant 18 Nik Sarac*	26 Armani Reeves		13 Eli Apple 19 Gareon Conley	2 Marshon Lattimore 7 Damon Webb
<b>SAFETY</b>		20 Ron Tanner 25 Kevin Niehoff*	3 Khaleed Franklin* 11 Vonn Bell 16 Cam Burrows 23 Tyvis Powell 28 Michael Cibene*		1 Erick Smith 24 Malik Hooker 29 Mike Maduko*

# – 5th-Year Senior • \* – Walk-on • Returning Starters In **BOLD**

## Ohio State Future Schedules

2015		2016		2017		2018	
Date	Opponent	Date	Opponent	Date	Opponent	Date	Opponent
Sept. 7	at Virginia Tech	Sept. 3	BOWLING GREEN	Sept. 2	at Indiana	Sept. 1	OREGON STATE
Sept. 12	HAWAII	Sept. 10	TULSA	Sept. 9	TBA	Sept. 8	RUTGERS
Sept. 19	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	Sept. 17	at Oklahoma	Sept. 16	OKLAHOMA	Sept. 15	at TCU
Sept. 26	WESTERN MICHIGAN	Oct. 1	RUTGERS	Sept. 23	UNLV	Sept. 22	TBA
Oct. 3	at Indiana	Oct. 8	INDIANA	Sept. 30	at Rutgers	Sept. 29	at Penn State
Oct. 10	MARYLAND	Oct. 15	at Wisconsin	Oct. 7	MARYLAND	Oct. 6	INDIANA
Oct. 17	PENN STATE	Oct. 22	at Penn State	Oct. 14	at Nebraska	Oct. 13	MINNESOTA
Oct. 24	at Rutgers	Oct. 29	NORTHWESTERN	Oct. 28	PENN STATE	Oct. 20	at Purdue
Nov. 7	MINNESOTA	Nov. 5	NEBRASKA	Nov. 4	at Iowa	Nov. 3	NEBRASKA
Nov. 14	at Illinois	Nov. 12	at Maryland	Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	Nov. 10	at Michigan State
Nov. 21	MICHIGAN STATE	Nov. 19	at Michigan State	Nov. 18	ILLINOIS	Nov. 17	at Maryland
Nov. 28	at Michigan	Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	Nov. 25	at Michigan	Nov. 24	MICHIGAN
Dec. 5	Big Ten Title (Indianapolis)	Dec. 3	Big Ten Title (Indianapolis)	Dec. 2	Big Ten Title (Indianapolis)	Dec. 1	Big Ten Title (Indianapolis)

# Ash, Johnson Bring New Look To Defense

By KANE ANDERSON  
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Since Urban Meyer became the head coach of Ohio State in 2012, his mantra for filling out his staff has always been finding excellent position coaches to give his team nine units firing at full potential.

For his first two years on the sidelines he had the same staff, but after this past season there has been a little turnover. Gone are safeties coach and co-defensive coordinator Everett Withers and defensive line coach and Buckeye legend Mike Vrabel. Withers took the head coaching job at James Madison while Vrabel made the jump back to the NFL, joining Bill O'Brien's staff as the Houston Texans' linebackers coach.

Seeing Vrabel spurn his alma mater may have been tough to swallow, but Meyer made up for it quickly by pulling an ironic move only five days later. In the aftermath of O'Brien leaving Penn State for the Texans, Meyer was able to secure the Nittany Lions' longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson to join his staff at the same position.

The move was met with great response as the staff not only gained someone with plenty of Big Ten experience but also with plenty of recruiting background as well, something Meyer demands.

A few weeks later Meyer completed his nine with the hire of Chris Ash as the new safeties coach and co-defensive coordinator. After spending the past four years under familiar foe Bret Bielema at Wisconsin and Arkansas, Ash is another coach who has firsthand experience in the Big Ten.

His defenses at Wisconsin ranked toward the top nationally in passing yardage, scoring defense and total defense, impressive credentials as he tries to fix one of the worst pass defenses in Buckeye history.

With fall camp under way, the transition for both coaches has already begun. According to the players they're tutoring, it seems the two coaches are the exact opposite of whom they are replacing – something the players said they needed.

"Coach Vrabel was more aggressive, and he's coming right out of the league as a linebacker," senior defensive tackle Michael Bennett said. "He was a lot more aggressive, a lot more in our face about stuff. (Johnson) is a lot less negative. He brought a lot of trust. I think guys trust him a lot, and he's brought a lot of energy and positive energy and just trying to make the D-line a lot closer instead of blaming each other and getting mad when people mess up."

Johnson's coaching philosophy has always been that he is more of an educator than a coach. He began his career as a successful high school coach in Maryland and Virginia before moving on to Happy Valley. During his time at Penn State he coached

some of the best defensive linemen in the Big Ten for 18 years. After seeing six of his players drafted in the first round of the NFL draft and seven attain first-team All-America status, his methods seem extremely effective at bringing the best out of student-athletes.

"I was a good teacher," Johnson said about his coaching style. "Football is essentially the classroom. It really is. If you can teach in the classroom, you can teach on the field. My philosophy has always been if you can teach you've got a chance to take a classroom onto the football field and you can develop that skill set."

Ash, meanwhile, seems to be more demanding of his players so far in camp. After the secondary finished 110th nationally and 11th in the Big Ten in passing yards allowed last year, that could be the coaching style needed to right the ship.

"Coach Withers was more of a film guy," sophomore safety Tyvis Powell said. "Ash wants things done right then and there. Coach Ash is more aggressive. He's come in and made huge changes to the defense, and he's going to get it right. He's going to make sure everything is right before the first game."

Ash has a bit of a tougher job lined up than Johnson, as he also has the task of having to work together with linebackers coach and fellow defensive coordinator Luke Fickell to right the ship. The arrangement

could have been further complicated by the fact that Ash hadn't met a single member of the defensive staff before his hiring, but that hasn't proved to be a stumbling block.

"I had never met any of the three other coaches," said Ash, who admitted he was nervous at first. "I don't think Larry Johnson had met any of the coaches. And for the four of us to come together the way we've been able to come together and be able to work the way we've been able to work together and accomplish what we've been able to accomplish in a short amount of time, I'm extremely excited about it."

Both coaches have the support of their players now and the transition has been smooth, but there are still things each is learning about what it means to coach at Ohio State. Although they both have been in the Big Ten for many years, they still were

shocked by the magnitude of the rivalry with Michigan.

"I think that was something when I walked in I was like, 'Wow. This is kind of real,'" Johnson said. "You see it from afar and you can't appreciate it until you're here in the building and you hear people talk about it. I didn't know that it was a rivalry that goes this deep."

So the nine coaches are in place, and Meyer has described his staff and its alignment as great at the moment. They still have yet to face adversity and play a game, but the members of the staff know they are on a mission. With Meyer at the helm, the coaches see the direction in which to lead their players and how to achieve greatness.

"We need nine strong," Ash said. "Meyer talks about that all the time. That's his job as a head coach is to make sure there's nine strong. I think you have a staff here that embraces the culture here and embraces Coach Meyer. They know that you're going to be successful when you're with him."



Larry Johnson



KEVIN DYE

**SWITCHING SIDES – New Ohio State co-defensive coordinator/safeties coach Chris Ash comes to Columbus after a tenure at Wisconsin, as well as a stop at Arkansas.**

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## FOOTBALL PREVIEW: PLAYOFFS

# Playoff Set To Crown Best College Squad

By BEN AXELROD  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since 1998, the Bowl Championship Series has determined the sport's top two teams at the end of the regular season and pitted them against one another in the national title game. Unsurprisingly, controversy ensued, as it was up to a combination of human eyes and computer-generated rankings to determine who would play for college football's crystal ball at the end of each season.

How do you decide between multiple teams with the same record? What role does strength of schedule play? Does it matter when you lose more than to whom you lose? Should only conference champions be allowed in? What about teams outside the BCS conferences? These were all questions asked on a somewhat regular basis throughout the past 16 years, attaching a negative stigma – fair or not – to the BCS system.

Not all of these questions will go away, but the hope is that some of them will, as 2014 will mark the first year that the sport's national champion will be determined by the new College Football Playoff. Announced in 2012 but not installed until the upcoming season, college football's new postseason of choice will place four teams into a January tournament which will now determine the sport's champion.

## Determining Teams

Gone is the mathematical formula that previously determined college football's national title matchup through a combination of human polls and computer-generated rankings. And for all intents and purposes, neither the Associated Press nor coaches' poll will matter – at least not when it comes to the national title picture.

Rather, it will be a 13-person selection committee choosing which four teams will



FILE PHOTO

**TOUGH TASK AHEAD – Wisconsin athletics director Barry Alvarez is on the inaugural College Football Playoff selection committee.**

be competing in each annual playoff, with all five major conferences being represented by an athletics director.

Arkansas athletics director Jeff Long will serve as the chairman of the inaugural committee, which will also include Wisconsin AD Barry Alvarez, former Air Force Academy superintendent Michael C. Gould, Southern California AD Pat Haden, former NCAA executive vice president Tom Jernstedt, West Virginia AD Oliver Luck, former Ole Miss quarterback Archie Manning, former Nebraska coach and AD Tom Osborne, Clemson AD Dan Radakovich, former U.S. Secretary of State and Stanford provost Condoleezza Rice, former Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese, former USA Today reporter Steve Wieberg and former Stanford, Notre Dame and Washington coach Tyrone Willingham.

When assembling the committee, the goal



## COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

was for it to be balanced from both a conference and geographical standpoint. Beginning Oct. 28, the committee will release its top 25 rankings on a weekly basis, with each list being made public on Tuesday.

The committee's final rankings of the year will come out Dec. 7, the date the committee will select and seed the four teams who will take part in the playoff. From there, they will also choose the pairings of the four remaining high-profile "contract" bowl games but will be subject to certain restrictions and tie-ins.

As far as what the committee will be looking for, its criteria for selecting which teams will take part in the playoff includes win-loss records, strength of schedule, conference championships won, head-to-head results and results against common opponents. Other factors including injuries and weather will also be taken into consideration.

"Lots and lots of criteria that will go into it, a lot of evaluation," College Football Playoff chief operating officer Michael Kelly said. "(They will be) really focusing on strength of schedule, on championships won, on the head-to-head competition, and on parity analysis of similar opponents. All those things are keenly important, and we'll say it over and over again."

## Working Logistics

Once this season's quartet of playoff teams is chosen, the No. 1 seed will play the No. 4 seed and the second seed will square

off with the third seed in a pair of semifinal matchups on New Year's Day. This year's semifinals matchups will take place at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., and the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, La.

Kelly pointed to the reestablishment of Jan. 1 as a college football holiday as one of the unique benefits of the new system.

"We are excited about bringing college football back to a real focus and emphasis on the New Year's holiday," he said. "It's a real New Year's spectacle."

After that, the two winners will face off at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Jan. 12. Already announced future national title game sites include University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, in 2016 and Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Fla., in 2017.

As far as the semifinals are concerned, they will rotate between the Rose Bowl, Sugar Bowl, Orange Bowl, Peach Bowl and Cotton Bowl. Location will be taken into consideration when it comes to seeding the semifinals, and the committee will attempt to place the top seed in the most advantageous environment.

## Any Complaints?

Aside from the human element of the selection committee and concerns with adding an extra bowl game to an already rigorous college football season, Buckeyes head coach Urban Meyer's main complaint with the playoff format deals with how players' families will deal with the travel costs – a fact the NCAA hopes to address eventually but something it won't be able to get to before this year's inaugural event.

"If I am (OSU senior defensive lineman) Michael Bennett's family and we go on a nice run, you can plan on spending \$20,000 going to the Big Ten Championship Game, going to the semifinal game and going to the championship game," Meyer said. "How is that family going to not go watch their kid play? If I was on that committee I would have addressed that first."

According to Meyer, that only opens a Pandora's box across the college football landscape, where players may go to extra – and improper – lengths to ensure that their families can attend their postseason games.

"Conservatively, it's \$20,000 cash," Meyer said on ESPN's "Mike & Mike" radio show July 31. "That's got to come from somewhere. It opens the floodgates for someone making the wrong decision and taking money from someone."

Other than that, Meyer – who was once skeptical of the playoff – appears to now be in support of it. The controversy may not be fully eliminated, but it appears to have been lessened, as a new day and age of college football is officially upon us.

"I think it's great," Meyer said of the playoff. "It's a great conversation. Our fans wanted it."



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# Time For Rare Prediction: Defense Will Be Better

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I know you figured I would be writing about Braxton Miller, and I'll get to him.

But I had an idea of what I wanted to do in this space before the news broke of the star quarterback's season-ending injury, and I'm going to stick with that idea because I think it becomes even more relevant now.

Those of you who read this column regularly, have been at functions where I have been the speaker or who have just bumped into me at a tavern or on the street know that when it comes to Ohio State football, I don't like to make predictions. You don't see me participating in the various prediction stories that abound in our paper this time of year, stories that many staff members love and look forward to.

Rather than trying to predict what is going to happen, I prefer to sit back and watch the games and seasons unfold. Then I will comment.

Besides, if you are overly optimistic about the Buckeyes, people accuse you of being a "homer." And if you are pessimistic, they say that you are, as former Buckeye coach John Cooper used to say, "too dang negative."

However, I am going to go ahead and break tradition to make a prediction.

I am going to predict that Ohio State's defense will be better this season than it was last. Pretty bold, huh?

But important.

Even before the loss of Miller, I thought an improved defense was going to be critical. I figured the offense, minus Carlos Hyde and four parts of one of the best offensive lines in the country, would not be quite as productive as it was in the record-setting 2013 campaign. But I figured any loss of production on that side of the ball would be made up for with better defense.

A lights-out defense is even more imperative now with the loss of Miller. Defense still wins championships. Ask the people in East Lansing.

As we watched Ohio State close the 2013 season being ripped apart by Michigan, Michigan State and Clemson, I thought to myself that if it was so painful for you and me to watch, think of how painful it must have been for the intense, highly competitive Urban Meyer. Change was going to come. Of that I was certain (another prediction!).

It seemed like the Buckeyes were playing an extremely soft defense in 2013, trying not to get beat long. That's not particularly my favorite defense, and I doubt that it's a favorite of Meyer, who seems to favor an aggressive, relentless style of football.

I got to the point where anytime a Buckeye Sports Bulletin writer referred to the OSU defense as the "Silver Bullets" in a story, I edited it out. To me, Silver Bullets is a style of play – 11 players flying to the ball, not simply a synonym for the Ohio State defense.

These were no Silver Bullets.

And not only, by playing soft, were they not flying to the football, but the defense wasn't even achieving what presumably was its goal – not getting beat deep. The Buckeyes gave up passes of 24 yards or more in 11 of 14 games, with only San Diego State, Florida A&M and Purdue failing to tally such a yard against Ohio State. Those teams are hardly a murderers' row.

But it gets worse.

Ohio State gave up passes of 40 yards or more in eight games, 60 yards or more in seven games and 70 yards or more in three games including an 84-yard pass in the Michigan game and an 85-yarder against Iowa.

Something had to give and it was appar-

ently co-defensive coordinator and safeties coach Everett Withers, off to James Madison to be the head man there.

Enter Chris Ash, fresh off building more aggressive pass defenses at Arkansas and, before that, at Big Ten rival Wisconsin. Don't look for the Buckeye secondary to be hanging back, way off the ball and allowing receivers plenty of room to operate. It should be in-your-face pass defense from the opening whistle.

Elsewhere in this issue, cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs calls it a "high-risk, high-reward" style of defense.

"You've got to be on your game every single play," Coombs said. "There's not a snap you can take a deep breath and take a play off. If you do, the guy's going to run past you."

I'm confident it will beat the low-risk, low-reward defense we saw last season.

While much of the attention among fans, when it comes to defense, has centered on Ash, I think the pickup of Larry Johnson from Penn State to coach the defensive line will prove equally important.

Johnson is a college football coach. He knows what it takes to turn young, raw athletes into men. Though we have heard nothing but good things from such people as Meyer himself when it comes to the coaching of Buckeye great Mike Vrabel, whom Johnson replaced, I am not sure Vrabel had the patience to be a college coach.

"Coach Vrabel was more aggressive, and he's coming right out of the league as a linebacker," senior defensive tackle Michael Bennett said. "He was a lot more aggressive, a lot more in our face about stuff. (Johnson) is a lot less negative. He brought a lot of trust. I think guys trust him a lot, and he's brought a lot of energy and positive energy and just trying to make the D-line a lot closer instead of blaming each other and getting mad when people mess up."

Being fresh from the NFL, as Bennett pointed out, it's easy to see why Vrabel strayed from what had been a tried and true success formula for the Buckeyes and the Silver Bullets, especially under former coordinator Jim Heacock, of rotating defensive linemen throughout the game, keeping the guys in the trenches fresh. Vrabel preferred to keep the best four out there, more a pro philosophy where, if you are paying a guy millions, you are going to play him rather than rotate in his backup.

Many felt that the Buckeye line tired as the season progressed. Ohio State recorded just three total sacks in its final two games against Michigan State and Clemson after 39 in the regular season.

Johnson recognizes that he has plenty of talent on the line to work with, and he appears ready to go back to the traditional rotation.

"There's not a first group or a second group," Johnson said of his charges. "There's a group of guys trying to work together to get better, and I've sold them on the idea there are going to be eight or nine guys playing, so they have to compete to get into the game. It's not the guy who started the game, it's the guy who finishes the game that's going to make a difference, and I think they've bought into that."

Rotating linemen should keep the Buckeyes fresher, which should be important because Johnson, like Ash, plans to attack.

Sometimes we blame a leaky pass defense solely on the secondary when the best way to keep the secondary from being burned is to not allow the opposing quarterback time to find his receivers.

"We want to be an attack front, not be a read front," Johnson explained. "You can play gap football and read it, but I want to be a gap defense where we're attacking the gap. So we're going to get off the ball, attack the gap at full speed and react."

Not only have the Buckeyes brought in two seemingly outstanding coaches to join Coombs and Luke Fickell on that side of the ball, they should also be starting to see the fruits of three years of recruiting by Meyer and his staff, the recruiting of a specific type of athlete to help take Ohio State to the next level. It's doubtful that Ash has ever had the type of athletes he will now be working with in Columbus, so the sky's the limit.

Hopefully, the influx of talent will especially show itself at linebacker, where the talent pool has been so thin in the early Meyer years that the coach had to convert fullback Zach Boren to the position in 2012 to salvage the corps and perhaps the undefeated season.

Now there seems talent aplenty, and perhaps the challenge presented by gifted freshman Raekwon McMillan will even push senior middle linebacker Curtis Grant – who is probably sick of seeing the words "five-star" perpetually linked to his name, generally in the context of unfulfilled promise – to have a memorable final season. Maybe he will be a player who thrives in a more aggressive defense.

Ash said that the players in his secondary "were hungry to get back to that Silver Bullet reputation that Ohio State had for so many years. There's been such a great tradition of defensive backs here, and I think these guys want to be mentioned with some of those great ones and they're willing to do anything to make that happen."

Sophomore safety Vonn Bell, a prototypical Meyer-era recruit, backed up his coach on that sentiment.

"The Silver Bullets," he said. "They'll return. Get ready for it."

I honestly believe that all these coaches and players can add up to a key element to help mitigate the loss of Miller.

I seem to be one of the few who is not writing off the season because of Miller's injury. Maybe a slot in the first College Football Playoff is a long shot, but the loss of any player at any time is always a possibility. That's why coaches recruit. "Next man up!"

Miller has brought a tremendous amount of excitement and success to the program, but he was going to be gone at some point. It just came a little sooner than we expected, though I have to admit that there were warning signs throughout camp that Miller's recovery from shoulder surgery was not coming along as well as the quarterback and his coaches were letting on.

J. T. Barrett was another of the specific type of player that Meyer and staff have been recruiting. Obviously, they saw the potential in Barrett to run their offense. With the benefit of a redshirt year, he's actually taking control of the team with more experience than Miller had when he took charge as a true freshman.

The past two seasons, the Ohio State

offense had been almost completely dependent on Miller and Hyde. With Hyde but another in a long line of what I would call "traditional" Ohio State running backs, we have yet to really see the offense that we were promised with the arrival of Meyer and his chief offensive lieutenant, Tom Herman.

Yet we have seen, to repeat it again, the staff recruit what they believe to be game-breaking players – the next (Florida great) Percy Harvin, as Meyer always promises. With Miller and Hyde gone, maybe we'll start to see some of the razzle-dazzle Buckeye fans – who have lived with the offenses of Woody Hayes, Earle Bruce and Jim Tressel to name a few – have been waiting for.

Instead of lamenting the loss of one of the best quarterbacks to ever don the scarlet and gray, fans should enjoy what the season brings and look for the next Miller, Hyde or even Harvin to step up and lead the way. Maybe it will even be a pre-Meyer recruit such as Rod Smith.

To think that a season is lost because of the loss of one player is to not understand the team nature of football. I think there will be plenty of excitement and some surprises along the way.

Other than that, I am only going to predict that the Ohio State defense will be better this year.

### Friday Newsletters Return

The start of football season marks the return of our electronic Friday newsletters. These newsletters will feature any OSU sports news that breaks after the publication of the print issue of BSB, as well as the popular staff predictions for that week's game. The predictions are sure to be livelier this season with the loss of Miller. No longer will the predictors be able to simply choose Ohio State.

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### Bennett On The Money

I loved Bennett's response when asked about the changes in NCAA rules that will increase the value of a college athlete's scholarship. He was thoughtful in his response and certainly shed a light on the increase that you wouldn't expect from someone who is in the group that stands to benefit from any increases.

"That's a funny question because it's kind of like me asking if you think you deserve a bonus," Bennett replied when asked about the increased compensation. "Obviously every college athlete is going to want more money."

"I don't know if we need more money. I think that's worth more investigation on how we spend our money, what kind of money we're getting, how much cost of living is and all that stuff and what we base our stipends on."

"But I think it's kind of hard to say, 'They need more money,' because then you have to say, 'Well, for what?' That's when you start getting into details and stuff."

"Yes, I would like more money, who wouldn't?"