

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 39, No. 18

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 21, 2020

## Uncharted Territory

## Buckeyes Can Only Wonder What Might Have Been

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There have been instances throughout the history of Ohio State athletics of "what if" situations that leave fans pondering what the outcome would have been under different circumstances.

What if wide receiver Chris Olave hadn't broken his route and instead caught a touchdown pass from quarterback Justin Fields in the waning seconds of the College Football Playoff semifinal against Clemson on Dec. 28? Maybe the Buckeyes would have gone on to win the national title.

What if the 2012 football team, the first coached by Urban Meyer, hadn't played under a school-imposed postseason ban for violations under former coach Jim Tressel? OSU went 12-0 that season but never had a chance to compete for the Big Ten or national championships.

There certainly have been others significant examples over the years, but a new entry that would rank near the top was added March 12 when the NCAA men's basketball tournament was canceled before it could even start because of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic that caused an almost universal suspension or cancellation of sporting events.

There would be no third straight NCAA Tournament for third-year coach Chris Holtmann. No opportunity to advance past the second round, where Ohio State had been knocked out the past two seasons.

"You think about the schools that are in it the first time or the first time in a while, Rutgers in our league was going to be in the tournament for the first time in a while," Holtmann said. "You think about all the small schools, whether it's a Robert Morris that clinched their berth. You'd love to be able to see those teams play in what I think is the most suspenseful, greatest sporting event around."

There was no chance to win the Big Ten tournament, which had been scuttled hours before the NCAA's blanket stoppage that covered all winter and spring cham-



Chris Holtmann



ANDREW LIND

**WAITING GAME** – Despite welcoming 14 early enrollees, including five-star wide receiver Julian Fleming (4), Ohio State head coach Ryan Day will be unable to conduct spring practice until at least April 6 amid the coronavirus outbreak.

## Ohio State's Spring Practice Impacted By Coronavirus

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ryan Day has been through a lot during his tenure as offensive coordinator or head coach at Ohio State.

He's navigated numerous quarterback battles, filled in for and replaced one of the greatest college football coaches of all time, and led the Buckeyes to a Big Ten title and the College Football Playoff in his first season at the helm. But this spring, he faces a unique and unprecedented challenge – leading the program through a pandemic.

Ohio State held just three practices in early March before the coronavirus outbreak forced the Big Ten to suspend all organized team activities through at least April 6. The

Buckeyes also canceled their annual spring game, scheduled for April 11, and closed all athletic facilities in an attempt to help prevent the spread of the virus leading to respiratory disease.

It's unclear how long it will be before the team is allowed to return to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for workouts or if they will be able to conduct another spring practice.

Athletic director Gene Smith indicated the WHAC and other facilities would need to be "disease-bombed," i.e. disinfected and fumigated. But every program in the country is dealing with the same situation.

And when things get back to normal, Smith is confident Day and his staff will have the team prepared for the Sept. 5 season opener against Bowling Green – even if getting



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## OPINION

## Lack Of Sports Underscores Their Importance

My father, God rest his soul, was the smartest man I have ever met. And that wasn't just because he was a schoolteacher by trade. My dad was a salt-of-the-earth man, raised by salt-of-the-earth parents, who had a common-sense approach to even the most complex of problems.

My dad also had a way of putting most things into simple perspective.

One day, when I brought home a newspaper and asked him to read a column of which I was particularly proud, he quickly obliged. After reading the column, he nodded and then, without saying a word, turned the page.

"Well?" I asked after a couple of minutes. "What did you think?"

He folded the newspaper, put it in his lap and replied, "It was good."

"Good? That's it? Just good?"

I then proceeded to pontificate on the importance of good sports journalism and how this particular column would stimulate thought, introspection and discussion among my readers – how the lessons I enumerated and pointed out so carefully might parallel life itself and contribute to a greater good amongst my fellow man.

My dad looked at me as he sometimes did when his youngest son got a little too full of himself, breathed a small sigh, and said, "We're talking about sports here. It's nothing more than entertainment. It's like the movies or television. It's a pleasant little diversion – no more, no less."

With that, he got up from his chair and walked away, leaving me with my mouth agape in wonderment about how my father could be so out of touch with reality. In time, of course, I realized he was right.

I have had the great fortune to spend most of my life as a chronicler of games – something Webster describes as "an activity engaged in for diversion or amusement" – as well as the people who play those games. But ever since that encounter with my father all those many years ago, I try not to take myself or what I do too seriously.

That said, I also realize the importance of the role that sports plays in the lives of people as well as the void those people feel when sports are taken away.

In the immediate wake of the cancellation of Ohio high school winter sports tournaments as well as the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, stories were plentiful regarding players whose prep or college careers were going to abruptly end with no chance to experience what the marketing wizards of March Madness have always called "One Shining Moment."

No blowouts, no buzzer-beaters, no Cinderellas. No glorious jubilation from the winners, no bitter tears from the ones who fall just short.

Then again, who really cares? It's just entertainment, right?

Regarding the universal shutdown of sports in the country, I have had some people ask me, "What does it matter?"

Ask that question to my friends in Dayton, who have now received a double gut-punch over the past eight months. Led by dunking machine Obi Toppin, the third-ranked Flyers had a 29-2 record, were on a 20-game winning streak, and seemed almost a lock to make this year's Final Four for the first time since finishing as tournament runners-up in 1967. What a needed catharsis that would have been for a city still grieving for the victims of a mass shooting in August in its popular downtown Oregon District.

Who cares, indeed.

Perhaps sports is as Webster says – just

a pleasant "diversion or amusement." But I would contend that we, as a society in 2020, need diversion and amusement. And the more pleasant the diversion and amusement, the better.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK  
Mark Rea

As I write this, there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel in which we suddenly find ourselves. So, while we adjust to life without sports, and wonder how long that adjustment will last, maybe it's finally time to focus upon what brings us together – Ohio State athletics, as an example – rather than what divides us.

## Other Pleasant Diversions

In the temporary absence of live sports available to watch, I compiled a list (in no particular order) of my favorite sports movies. If there are any on this list you haven't seen, check them out. For the ones you have seen, they're worth watching again.

• "The Greatest Game Ever Played" (2005) – The main story is about 20-year-old golfer Francis Ouimet winning the 1913 U.S. Open as an amateur. But the backstories are plentiful, and there is a scene near the end of the movie with Ouimet and his no-nonsense father that ... well, let's just say you might want to have a tissue or two on hand. Fun fact: The film was directed by actor Bill Paxton.

• "A League Of Their Own" (1992) – Directed by Penny Marshall, it's a love letter to the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League that played from 1943 to 1954. Unlike many baseball movies, it is loaded with fully developed characters, including drunken manager Jimmy Dugan, played by Tom Hanks, who utters one of the most famous movie lines in history: "There's no crying in baseball."

• "Caddyshack" (1980) – Perhaps the most quotable sports movie in history. Chevy Chase was supposed to be the star, but the improvisation of Bill Murray and Rodney Dangerfield steals the show while Ted Knight, who tried his best to play it straight, makes for the perfect comic foil.

• "Major League" (1989) – Almost as many quotable lines as "Caddyshack." Yeah, it has a bunch of cartoonish characters and some of the lamest crowd shots in the history of sports cinema. But it has gravel-voiced James Gammon as manager Lou Brown and Bob Uecker essentially playing Bob Uecker. It doesn't get much better than that.

• "Rudy" (1993) – I know, I know. It's predictable, over-the-top sappy in spots, and it glorifies Notre Dame football. But it's the classic underdog story, and that stuff always resonates with me. Another plus for the movie is its musical score, provided by Jerry Goldsmith, the same guy who scored such other films as "Patton" and most of the original "Star Trek" and "Star Trek: The Next Generation" series.

• "Cinderella Man" (2005) – Another underdog story although this one is a riches-to-rags-back-to-riches type story. The acting is brilliant, and even though director Ron Howard took huge liberties with the characters, the final heavyweight championship fight keeps you on the edge of your seat.

• "Seabiscuit" (2003) – The magnificent book written by Laura Hillenbrand was turned into an equally magnificent movie about a grieving owner, an eccentric trainer, a broken-down jockey and an ill-tempered horse,

and how that horse somehow became a hero during the Great Depression. Also, if you like the background music in "Seabiscuit," thank Goldsmith. He scored this one, too.

• "Rocky" (1976) – I'm sure everyone has their favorite from the franchise, but I went with the original since it was fresh at the time and introduced the world to everybody's favorite palooka. Special dispensation to "Rocky III" because Mr. T as Clubber Lang is provided with one of the franchise's best lines. Asked for a prediction regarding his upcoming fight with Rocky, Lang looks directly into the camera and replies, "Prediction? Pain."

• "Creed" (2015) – I was totally prepared to hate this movie when it came out, mostly because I thought every last drop had been squeezed from the "Rocky" franchise. Boy, was I wrong. It's great storytelling by writer/director Ryan Coogler, and the acting is fresh and faithful to the original backstory. And as unbelievable as this might sound, the fact that Sylvester Stallone didn't win an Oscar for best supporting actor is a travesty. Go back and watch when Rocky is told he has cancer. No words are spoken by the character, but we understand the devastation of the diagnosis. To witness that snippet of raw emotion is one of the reasons I go to the movies in the first place.

• "Field Of Dreams" (1989) – With full understanding of its many flaws, this is far and away the best of Kevin Costner's baseball trilogy that includes the enjoyable-but-uneven "Bull Durham" and the insufferable "For Love of the Game." If you don't know the premise by now, I won't spoil it for you. I'll just sum it up this way: Dads and baseball. Tough to improve on that.

• "Hoosiers" (1986) – Perhaps the perfect sports movie. It's supposed to be a story about overachieving underdogs, but at the core, it's a story of redemption. Gene Hackman is great, but Dennis Hopper is even greater in a supporting role. (Extra credit if you know Shooter's real first name is Wilbur.) One reviewer wrote, "This film's very lack of surprise and sophistication accounts for a lot of its considerable charm." Couldn't have said it any better myself. One more note: Goldsmith also provided the score for "Hoosiers."

## Not Making The Cut

No doubt, you have noticed some iconic sports films that are missing from my list. That is because cinematic art, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

I confess that I liked "The Pride of the Yankees" (1942) the first few times I watched it, but after several viewings, and having read several Lou Gehrig biographies, I can't get past the fact that the film is such a sanitized version of Gehrig's life. Add a stiff and stilted performance from a 41-year-old Gary Cooper, and it defies logic how "Pride" could have garnered 11 Oscar nominations.

The same holds true for "The Natural" (1984), which received four Academy Award nominations. Robert Redford is one of my favorite actors, and I would watch Robert Duvall read the back of a cereal box, but this movie takes so long to get to the climax (which is completely different from the book from which it was adapted) that I no longer care whether Roy Hobbs hits a home run or strikes out.

Additionally, I don't care for movies featuring an unsympathetic main character who needs to be hit in the back of the head with a shovel. Therefore, you won't find films such as "Tin Cup," "Cobb," "Foxcatcher," "For Love of the Game" or "Raging Bull" anywhere on my list.

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COVER STORY

# Spring Practices Typically Reserved For Youth

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back to normal takes some time.

"Ryan's extremely talented, and he's got an experienced staff," Smith said on a 42-minute conference call with reporters on March 13. "We will have to come up with a strategy – particularly when we're allowed – to have team activities in the strength and conditioning space to make sure that we help our young men get back to where they were."

"Fortunately, we do have very mature players that know how to work out on their own and know the proper training techniques. I think at the end of the day, we will be able to get our guys back up on track and be competitive in the fall."

Additionally, the university's decision to suspend in-person classes for the remainder of spring semester means players will return home – whether that's to an off-campus apartment or several states away – and that poses a significant challenge for the Buckeye coaching staff, which now has to develop and evaluate players from afar.

"They'll continue to communicate with their student-athletes on a daily basis to make sure that they're all right," Smith said. "I think Ryan and his staff, like all of our coaches, will spend a great deal of time talking to our student-athletes digitally, trying to make sure they stay on track."

Rather than look too far into the future, Smith is taking everything day-by-day at this point. But if Ohio State is ultimately allowed to resume organized team activities after April 6, the Buckeyes will fall into another unexpected predicament.

NCAA rules stipulate all 15 spring practices must occur within a 34-day window, not including spring break, which would leave Ohio State just five days of practice time. But given the uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus, it could be months before Ohio State – or any college football team in the country, for that matter – hits the practice field.

"Obviously, this is uncharted territory for us as an institution, let alone an athletic department," Smith said. "I just want to make sure everyone understands that all the measures that are being implemented are to, hopefully, prevent a significant community burden on our healthcare system."

"Typically, we always think of a disease as it relates to an individual. What we need to do is think of it from a community perspective. This is a unique case."

### Buckeyes Motivated By Loss

It had been 65 days since Ohio State's loss to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl when the Buckeyes opened spring practice in March 2, yet it was abundantly clear that heartbreaking loss remains a motivating factor for Day, his staff and his players.

"Our program is built on fighting and competing every single day to be the best version of yourself, the best version of your unit and the best version of your team," Day said. "We know what the expectations are here. That's part of this thing. When you wake up every day, you know what it is. And we're hungry. We felt like we got a good foundation set underneath us this past season, but we didn't reach all our goals, so there's still a lot of work to be done."



JOSH WINSLOW

**EARLY IMPACT** – Former five-star offensive tackle Paris Johnson, right, hopes to become the next freshman to start along the offensive line at Ohio State.

Ohio State must replace 13 starters from last year's squad, which finished one

game short of playing for a national title, including running back J.K. Dobbins, defensive end Chase Young and cornerback Jeff Okudah, who each opted to forgo their final season of eligibility to enter the NFL draft.

But the Buckeyes also return a number of talented players – most notably quarterback Justin Fields, wide receiver Chris Olave, defensive end Jonathon Cooper and cornerback Shaun Wade – whom Day expects to take on leadership roles this season.

"Every year is a new journey," Day said. "In college football, you have a new coaching staff, you have a new group of leaders and you have a new group of seniors, so that dynamic is different year-in and year-out."

"I think this time last year, when you look at Jeff and Chase and J.K., they were young players. But they had such an impact on the field and they became good leaders. I think there will be some guys like that this spring, as well."

Ohio State also welcomed 14 talented early enrollees in January, including five-star offensive tackle Paris Johnson; five-star wide receivers Julian Fleming and Jaxon Smith-Njigba; and four-star quarterbacks Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud.

Day acknowledged the spring is about getting those youngsters up to speed as the program looks to reload for another shot at the Tigers, or whatever team the College Football Playoff might put in its path.

"They're talented," Day said of the early enrollees. "They really have a chance to play and be successful. Now they have a long way to go. But for day one, better than expected."

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COVER STORY

# OSU Seemed Poised To Make Deep NCAA Run

Continued From Page 1

pionships and effectively wiped out the seasons of thousands of student-athletes in numerous sports.

Of course, the men's basketball team is not alone in its pain and disappointment. The women's hockey team won its first Western College Hockey Association tournament and was gearing up to make a run at its second Frozen Four in three seasons. The men's hockey team was ready to play a Big Ten semifinal vs. Michigan and was poised to earn a fourth straight NCAA bid for the first time in program history.

Women's basketball made it to the Big Ten title game and was peaking at the right time.

Wrestlers, fencers, gymnasts, swimmers and divers were among those winter sports athletes whose seasons and, in some cases careers, came to an abrupt halt.

"Obviously this is uncharted territory for us as an institution, let alone as an athletic department," Ohio State athletics director Gene Smith said on March 13.

The sudden ending of the sporting life as we know it leaves time to consider what the men's basketball team might have done in the NCAA Tournament.

OSU (21-10) finished seventh in the conference with an 11-9 record and was set to face Purdue in the Big Ten tourney on March 12 with the winner playing Michigan State the following day.

Exemplifying the strength of the conference, many projections had the Buckeyes as a No. 5 seed in the NCAA Tournament. ESPN's Joe Lunardi placed Ohio State in the South Region with a first-round matchup in Tampa against Stephen F. Austin. The winner would meet Louisville or Vermont.

We'll never know, but after a top-sy-turvy season the Buckeyes seemed to be hitting their stride, regardless of losing the regular-season finale at Michigan State on March 8.

The 80-69 setback ended a four-game winning streak and was fueled by an emotionally charged Senior Day crowd in East Lansing, the type of unbridled partisanship that the Buckeyes would likely not face at neutral-site tournament games.

Still, it left in question how Ohio State would fare away from Value City

Arena, where it was 16-2 this season. The Buckeyes were 4-7 on the road and split two neutral-site games - beating then-No. 6 Kentucky 71-65 on Dec. 21 and losing 67-59 to No. 22 West Virginia eight days later in Cleveland.

How would the Buckeyes manage the tournament games?

"I think that's the question about us," Holtmann said on March 5. "That's a question we'll put in front of us, as a group. We've got to own that we've not always been good on the road. We've not always been tough-minded on the road."

That the Buckeyes started the season ranked 18th in the Associated Press poll and were 19th in the most recent one (March 9) would suggest a steady, even-keeled season.

Far from it. OSU skyrocketed to No. 2 nationally with an 11-1 record before the West Virginia loss with notable wins over Cincinnati, Villanova and North Carolina in addition to Kentucky. The Buckeyes then were 2-6 in conference play before defeating Northwestern 71-59 on Jan. 26 to spark a 9-3 run to end the season.

Senior forward Andre Wesson liked the direction the team was headed.

"I just think we stay committed," he said. "You're obviously going to have ups and downs during the season. I think the biggest thing is how you handle those downs, and I think we've handled it well in just keeping that confidence."

Unfortunately, the Michigan State game was likely his last unless the NCAA allows seniors in winter sports an extra season and he takes advantage of the waiver.

"It's just disappointing that we don't get to write that last chapter," Holtmann told Columbus station WBNS-FM on March 13.

The Buckeyes were optimistic of a long postseason based on the likely return of junior forward Kyle Young from an ankle sprain, the growth of freshman E.J. Liddell in Young's absence and the development of junior C.J. Walker after freshman guard D.J. Carton's personal leave since Jan. 30 to address mental health issues.

Young sat out the final four games, and his energy, toughness and play around

the rim were missed. He probably could have played against Purdue and certainly would have been ready for the NCAA Tournament.

"Everybody knows what Kyle brings to this team, whether it's offensively or defensively," Walker said prior to the scheduled game with the Boilermakers. "His effort is contagious. Everybody just kind of follows him when it comes to the effort type of things, so it would mean a lot having him back and be able to give us extra plays, whether it's on offense, defensive rebounding, no second-chance points, finishes around the rim, things like that."

Liddell's adjustment to college was no different from many first-year players, but getting added minutes and responsibilities with Young gone forced him to mature more quickly. He had a career-high five blocks against Nebraska in the first game without Young, and against Illinois he scored 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds.

"I think he's done a great job kind of seizing that opportunity that's been there," Holtmann said.

Walker was running the offense after sitting a season following his transfer from Florida State. Like Liddell, he's taken advantage of the chance given to him with Carton sidelined indefinitely.

"I think maybe I underestimated some

of the transition period that was going to take place just in terms of understanding expectations and roles," Holtmann said of Walker. "But he's really embraced what we feel is really important to that position. And it helps that he's a really high-character kid."

Andre Wesson and his brother, junior post Kaleb, each made major contributions down the stretch, and sophomore guards Luther Muhammad and Duane Washington Jr. settled into their roles with more consistency.

There were still unanswered questions when the season was canceled, such as could Young stay healthy and, if the Buckeyes played long enough, would Carton return?

"Obviously we know where the season is going in terms of what's left of the season, a matter of weeks," Holtmann said when asked about Carton before the shutdown. "I'll let you draw your own conclusions, but I wouldn't want to definitely say one way or the other right now."

What is clear is that a worldwide crisis has shattered the dreams of athletes everywhere.

"Being a champion, that's what we play for and what we work so hard for," Walker said. "You want to have a ring and end a season the right way, which I feel like we could have done with this team."

"We had a good February. Going into March, I feel like we were playing really well. That's what you prepare for. You want to be champions this time of year."

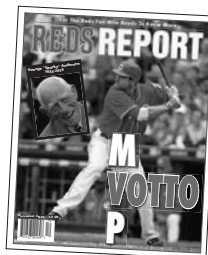


Kyle Young

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

# NCAA Halts Recruiting Through April 15

In an effort to help prevent the spread of coronavirus, the NCAA on March 13 suspended on- and off-campus recruiting activities for all Division I sports through April 15. Contact between coaches and prospective student-athletes is still permitted through phone calls, text messages and written correspondence, however.

The football recruiting calendar is currently in a quiet period, which means prospects are normally allowed to take

unknowns when it comes to the virus, including how long it will impact the football program's recruiting efforts or the recruiting calendar as a whole. Some coaches and members of the media have suggested flipping the June 22-July 24 dead period into a new quiet period to make up for lost time.

The lack of on-campus visits over the next month would also suggest prospects who intended to make their college decisions throughout the spring and summer may hold off a little bit longer, thus creating a ripple effect that may impact the early signing period in December and add a little more intrigue to National Signing Day in February.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

unofficial visits but coaches cannot make any contact off campus. That has changed, of course, as have the rules that would allow juniors to take official visits beginning on April 1.

If the suspension is lifted on April 15, the football recruiting calendar would go into an evaluation period as planned, when coaches can travel off campus to conduct in-person evaluations and schools can once again host official and unofficial visits.

Both the Dick's Sporting Goods Combine and Under Armour Camp Series have been postponed indefinitely, as well. The combine-style events host hundreds of the nation's top-rated prospects annually in multiple cities across the country, with a handful of players who attend ultimately selected to participate in The Opening Finals and Under Armour All-America Game, respectively.

"We cannot in good conscience bring together hundreds of kids from hundreds of different cities and school districts in a setting with shared equipment, exchanging high-fives and handshakes with bodies coming together and/or in close contact at this time," said Student Sports president Brian Stumpf, whose organization runs several camps including the Dick's Sporting Goods Combine and The Opening Finals. "(We) still believe we are doing what's best for the kids and their future well-being."

Ohio State and Michigan, meanwhile, were among the first football programs to take precautionary recruiting measures when they announced on March 11 that they were halting all official and unofficial visits to campus and canceling their respective spring games.

Head coach Ryan Day said on Twitter the Buckeyes' policy will run through April 20, while the Wolverines announced theirs will run through April 21. While a handful of programs and conferences – including the ACC, Big Ten, Pac-12 and SEC – followed suit in the days thereafter, the NCAA undoubtedly stepped in with its ruling to maintain a balanced playing field on the recruiting trail.

If no further action is taken by the NCAA and the evaluation period begins on April 15 as planned, it appears Ohio State will lose five days of recruiting opportunities compared to other programs who may hit the road or welcome prospects to campus as soon as the ban is lifted.

It goes without saying there are many

### Four-Star Cornerback Commits To Ohio State

Despite the undeniable challenges associated with the NCAA-mandated recruiting dead period, Ohio State landed a commitment on March 15 from St. Louis DeSmet Jesuit four-star cornerback Jakailin Johnson.

The 6-0, 168-pound Johnson is considered the fourth-best cornerback and No. 59 prospect overall in the class of 2021, after recording 42 tackles and seven interceptions to help the Spartans to their second state title in school history. He picked the Buckeyes over finalists Clemson, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma and USC.

Johnson – the cousin of Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Jameson Williams – landed an offer from the Buckeyes' last May and has made two trips to Columbus in the meantime, including the program's inaugural Buckeye Bash and BBQ in late June and the 34-10 win over Michigan State in early October. He was considered a heavy Notre Dame lean, however, until the sudden departure of cornerbacks coach Todd Light in December.

That allowed Ohio State to get back in the picture with Johnson, and the subsequent hiring of defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs seemingly pushed the Buckeyes to the forefront of his recruitment.

Coombs, wide receivers coach/area recruiter Brian Hartline and assistant secondary/special teams coach Matt Barnes each visited Johnson during the evaluation period in late January, and he then included Ohio State among his final schools in mid-February.

Johnson was set to visit Ohio State for the annual spring game on April 11, and most prognosticators expected him to commit that weekend or shortly thereafter. But with visits on hold for now, he instead chose his 17th birthday for his commitment date.

This marks the fourth consecutive cycle Ohio State has pulled a prospect from the St. Louis area, with Johnson joining Christian Brothers College four-star wide receivers Kamryn Babb and Cameron Brown in 2018, Cardinal Ritter College four-star wide receiver Williams in 2019 and Maryland Heights Pattonville Senior four-star Mookie Cooper in 2020.

### Buckeyes Add Another Cornerback To Haul

Ohio State landed its second commitment in as many days when Cincinnati La Salle three-star cornerback Devonta Smith pledged his services to the Buckeyes on March 16.



COURTESY OF EVAN PRYOR

**BIG-TIME BACK** – After missing out on several top-rated running backs last cycle, Ohio State landed a commitment on March 16 from 2021 Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star Evan Pryor.

### OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2021 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jayden Ballard	WR	6-3	175	★★★★	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Reid Carrico	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Ironton, Ohio
Ben Christman	OT	6-6	299	★★★★	Richfield (Ohio) Revere
Michael Hall	DT	6-3	290	★★★★	Streetsboro, Ohio
Marvin Harrison	WR	6-4	184	★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
Sam Hart	TE	6-5	225	★★★	Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail
Donovan Jackson	OT	6-4	308	★★★★	Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal
Jakailin Johnson	CB	6-0	168	★★★★	St. Louis De Smet Jesuit
Jaylen Johnson	S	6-1	205	★★★★	Cincinnati La Salle
Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	204	★★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	190	★★★★	Cornelius (N.C.) W.A. Hough
Jack Sawyer	DE	6-5	220	★★★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North
Devonta Smith	CB	6-0	185	★★★	Cincinnati La Salle

The 6-0, 185-pound Smith – the cousin and teammate of four-star safety commit Jaylen Johnson – is considered the 32nd-best cornerback and No. 428 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He recorded 92 total tackles, five interceptions and two forced fumbles to be named third-team all-state last season. He also returned six punts for touchdowns to help the Lancers to the state title.

Smith landed an offer from Coombs on March 12, which was a little earlier than expected since his scheduled March 28 unofficial visit was canceled amid the coronavirus concerns, though it's likely he would have committed during that visit.

Smith picked Ohio State over offers from Alabama, Cincinnati, Notre Dame, Michigan State, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Virginia Tech and West Virginia. He became the 12th member of the Buckeyes' 2021 recruiting class, joining the above-mentioned Jakailin Johnson at the cornerback position.

Ohio State is looking to add at least one more player at the position this cycle, with Marcus Williamson set to graduate and Shaun Wade, Sevyn Banks and Cameron Brown all eligible to enter the NFL draft following the 2020 season. Other notable targets include Virginia Beach (Va.)

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Lettermen Row's Jeremy Birmingham

How does Ohio State's decision (which has since been mandated nationwide by the NCAA) to halt its recruiting efforts during the spring impact the staff's pursuit of several of the nation's top-rated prospects?

"I think it could impact things in two very different ways depending on where individual prospects are in their recruiting process. The guys that were making preliminary visits around the country in March and April are still going to have to make those visits at some point, but maybe it won't be until after their high school seasons. It could make the traditional National Signing Day in February much more interesting in 2021 than it has been in the last two years.

"For kids who have been close to a decision and likely know what they want to do in regards to picking a school, I imagine you'll see them end up pulling the trigger on commitments a bit earlier than before just to make sure they have the spot they want in their desired class amid the upcoming uncertainty."

On the other hand, could the decision have

any positive effects on the recruiting trail, whether with a specific prospect who visited recently or in the fact that the program and university were proactive in their efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus?

"The way that Ryan Day and Ohio State responded to the coronavirus pandemic was yet another sign of Day's advanced-for-his-years maturity and leadership ability. There's no doubt that kids around the country and - more importantly - their parents recognize that. If the program is able to put that on display while maintaining relationships with top recruits despite the lack of visits, there's no reason the Buckeyes' program should be at a detriment."

Do you believe there will be any adjustments to the college football recruiting calendar to make up for the lack of spring contact between coaches and prospects?

"Fortunately, the NCAA didn't allow for much dillydallying and quickly responded by instituting a nationwide dead period through April 15. Whether

or not they'll adjust the calendar to make up for that lost time remains to be seen, but there is a currently scheduled July dead period, which would make sense for an outright swap if the member schools wanted to do that. Coaches aren't going to be entirely thrilled to give up that last opportunity to be with their families before the season begins, however."

Ohio State had long been considered the favorite for Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock, but he committed to Clemson on March 11. Do the Buckeyes still have a shot or has that ship now sailed?

"Clemson rarely loses a player once they've issued a commitment so the odds of Hancock, one of the top overall targets on the Buckeyes' recruiting board in 2021, flipping seem low. That said, the Ohio State staff has made it clear to him and his family that they're not going anywhere and will continue to grow their relationship as best they can and still hope to have Hancock on campus for an official visit in June, as previously planned."

Princess Anne five-star Tony Grimes; Nashville Ensworth four-star Andre Turrentine; and IMG Academy four-star Kamar Wilcoxson, a two-time Florida commit who is set to take an official visit to Ohio State on June 12-14.

Pryor becomes the 13th member of Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class, which extended its lead over Clemson for the nation's top-rated class with his commitment.

with early enrollees such as quarterback C.J. Stroud, wide receivers Julian Fleming and Gee Scott, and offensive tackle Paris Johnson, and he even met with former cornerback Jeff Okudah, who was in the weight room preparing for Ohio State's March 25 Pro Day (which has since been postponed).

Buckeyes may consider adding another player through the transfer portal for depth purposes.

A player to keep in mind is Oklahoma running back Trey Sermon, who on March 14 announced his intention to transfer.

Ohio State recruited Sermon as a four-star prospect from Marietta (Ga.) Sprayberry before landing a commitment from La Grange, Texas, four-star J.K. Dobbins. Sermon pledged his services to Oklahoma one month later.

In three seasons with the Sooners, Sermon rushed for 2,076 yards and 22 touchdowns. His junior season was cut short by a late-season knee injury, and he was supplanted in the starting lineup by junior Kennedy Brooks as a result.

If Sermon does choose to become a Buckeye, it won't be his first time in Ohio Stadium. He rushed for a team-leading 62 yards and pulled down a 10-yard touchdown pass in the Sooners' 31-16 win in 2017.

### Carolina Running Back Picks The Buckeyes

Ohio State's run of commitments continued when Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor announced his decision just hours after Smith.

The 5-10, 190-pound Pryor - who is considered the sixth-best running back and No. 85 prospect overall in the class of 2021, having amassed 3,674 yards and 42 total touchdowns in his three-year varsity career - picked Ohio State over finalists Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Penn State and USC.

The Buckeyes are expected to take at least two running backs this cycle, and Pryor has been among the staff's top targets at the position since he landed an offer from assistant coach Tony Alford last February. The two worked together during an instructional camp in Columbus in mid-June and then caught up again when Pryor returned to campus for an unofficial visit for the 28-17 win over the Nittany Lions on Nov. 23.

Alford, Hartline and offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson also stopped by Pryor's high school on separate occasions during the January contact period, and those visits ended up being more significant than expected given Pryor's unofficial visit, set for March 18-20, was canceled due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Ohio State also overcame a late push from the Tar Heels, as Pryor took several unofficial visits to Chapel Hill in the last few months given the campus' proximity to his hometown.

Moving forward, the staff will look to pair Pryor with either Garland (Texas) Lakeview Centennial five-star Camar Wheaton; Hopewell, Va., five-star TreVeyon Henderson; Matthews (N.C.) Weddington five-star Will Shipley; West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star Donovan Edwards; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Lovasea Carroll; Lilburn (Ga.) Parkview four-star Cody Brown; or Cincinnati Roger Bacon four-star Corey Kiner.

### Michigan Running Back Among Final Spring Visitors

Ohio State hosted Edwards for a two-day unofficial visit on March 6-8.

While the 5-11, 190-pound Edwards - who is considered the third-best running back and No. 38 prospect overall in the class of 2021 - left Columbus without pledging his services to the Buckeyes, sources close to the program have shared their confidence in landing his pledge with Buckeye Sports Bulletin given his strong relationship with Day and Alford.

There's still a long way to go in Edwards' recruitment, as he plans to visit Georgia, LSU, Michigan and Oklahoma in the near future before making a decision over the summer, but the Buckeyes certainly rolled out the red carpet for him during this visit. He spent a considerable amount of time

Edwards - who was joined on the trip by West Bloomfield head coach Ron Bellamy and 2022 running back Dillon Tatum - planned to return to campus with his father for the spring game, but that has obviously been canceled. The hope now is to welcome them back for an official visit once the recruiting restrictions are no longer in effect.

### Oklahoma Running Back Enters Transfer Portal

With Ohio State sophomore running back Master Teague and Marcus Crowley out indefinitely with undisclosed injuries and only one healthy scholarship running back on the roster this spring in redshirt freshman Steele Chambers, the

Continued On Page 18

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

# Heated Recruiting Battles With Clemson Continue

Continued From Page 17

## Top Cornerback Target Commits To Clemson

Although he'd long been considered an Ohio State lean, Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock committed to Clemson on March 11.

The 6-0, 170-pound Hancock is considered the sixth-best cornerback and No. 83 prospect overall in the class of 2021 and was arguably the Buckeyes' top target at the position heading into the spring. The Tigers surged following his unofficial visit for the program's Junior Day on March 7, though. He cited their proximity to home and overall focus on faith.

Hancock was expected to take an official visit to Ohio State in the coming months, and that trip is more than likely canceled following his announcement. But that won't stop Day, Coombs and linebackers coach/area recruiter Al Washington from trying their hardest to flip him from his pledge.

The Buckeyes are also heavily involved with Hancock's teammate, four-star linebacker Barrett Carter.

## Four-Star Receiver Trims List To Two

Ohio State and Clemson are battling for several of the nation's top-rated prospects, including Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Cardinal Gibbons four-star wide receiver Troy Stellato, who listed the Buckeyes and Tigers as his final two schools on March 15.

The 6-0, 172-pound Stellato is considered the 25th-best wide receiver and No. 141 prospect overall in the class of 2021, having hauled in 42 catches for 727 yards and nine touchdowns for the Chiefs last season. He's one of the most sought-after prospects in the country, with 42 scholarship offers from programs such as Alabama, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M, UCLA, USC, West Virginia and Wisconsin, among a long list of others.

Stellato has a strong relationship with Day, Hartline and offensive quality control coach Keenan Bailey, who is also a south Florida native. He's visited campus three times in the last year, including the previously mentioned win over Michigan State, and plans to make his decision in either June or July.

The Buckeyes already hold a pair of commitments at wide receiver in Philadelphia St. Joseph's four-star Marvin Harrison and Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star Jayden Ballard. The plan is to bring on a total of four players at the position, with Stellato and Steliacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka at the top of the priority chart.

## Florida Linebacker Includes OSU Among Top Schools

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star linebacker Dallas Turner included Ohio State in his top 10 on March 3 alongside Alabama, Florida, Florida State,

Georgia, Miami, Michigan, Oregon, Penn State and South Carolina.

The 6-4, 235-pound Turner is considered the 14th-best outside linebacker and No. 165 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He recorded 74 tackles, 18 tackles for loss and 15 sacks to help Fort Lauderdale American Heritage to the regional finals last fall. He transferred to St. Thomas Aquinas in January, joining a program that won the Class 7A state title and GEICO national championship one season ago.

The Buckeyes already hold a commitment from Ironton, Ohio, four-star linebacker Reid Carrico, while Jaylen Johnson is someone who could potentially develop into the Bullet position in the future, as well.

That allows the staff to be very selective if it chooses to bring on another player at the position, with Turner and the previously mentioned Carter, a four star out of Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett, at the top of the list.

Ohio State also views Turner as someone who could develop into a defensive end at the next level, which is why defensive line coach Larry Johnson is working hand in hand with Washington in his recruitment. Turner attended the Buckeyes' 73-14 win over Maryland last November and then landed an offer from Washington during the January contract period.

## In-State Running Back Remains High On OSU

The aforementioned Kiner included Ohio State in his top 10 on March 6 alongside Cincinnati, Florida, Georgia, Louisville, LSU, Michigan, Penn State, Purdue and Texas A&M.

The 5-10, 205-pound Kiner is considered the 10th-best running back and No. 160 prospect overall in the class of 2021, after he rushed for 2,298 yards and 40 touchdowns to lead the Spartans to the regional semifinals last season. He also added nine receptions for 122 yards and another score, as well as 523 yards and three touchdowns as a punt and kick returner.

Alford extended a scholarship offer to Kiner last May, a few weeks after his unofficial visit for the annual spring game, while Day has also been involved in his recruitment in the months since. Both assistants stopped by Roger Bacon during the January contact period, at which time they explained the need for the Buckeyes to bring on two running backs in the current cycle.

Kiner does not appear to be close to making his college decision and will instead focus most of his attention this spring on track and field rather than recruiting. He's expected to return to campus for a game in the fall.

Kiner recently had a bit of fun with the recruiting process by revealing a list of his top five restaurants on Twitter before announcing his commitment to eat at Skyline Chili that evening.

## Buckeyes Add In-State Walk-On

Glouster (Ohio) Trimble quarterback/defensive back Cameron Kittle announced on March 6 he has accepted a preferred walk-on opportunity at Ohio State.

The 6-0, 175-pound Kittle was a three-time all-state quarterback who led the Tomcats to the state playoffs in each of his three seasons as a starter. The Buckeyes already have seven quarterbacks on the roster, though, including starter Justin Fields; fifth-year senior Gunnar Hoak; early enrollees Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud; and walk-ons J.P. Andrade, Jagger LaRoe and Danny Vanatsky, so Kittle will begin his college career as a defensive back.

Kittle's relationship with the Ohio State staff dates back to last May when he was hosted on an unofficial visit by assistant director of player personnel Justin Perez, director of high school relations Ed Terwilliger and executive director for football relations Tim Hinton. He then returned for another unofficial visit for the Buckeyes' 42-0 win over Cincinnati in early September.

Other prospects set to join Ohio State

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1985

Ohio State fans expressed trepidation about Gahanna, Ohio, linebacker Karl Coles, a lineman who signed with the Buckeyes in the 1985 class. Without major recognition coming to Ohio State, Coles was buried a bit in Ohio State's class, but his high school coach warned against counting him out.

"He is the best we've ever coached at that position," Gahanna line coach Steve Morrison told BSB. "And the most impressive thing is that he hasn't reached his potential yet. I feel his better playing days are still ahead."

One characteristic that was not overlooked by recruiters from Michigan State, West Virginia, Kentucky and OSU was Coles' size. At 6-4 and 233 pounds, he had the physical attributes to play on both sides of the line.

"The OSU recruiters were telling me that I would play defensive tackle, but then some of the offensive people were telling me offense," Coles said. "I did play some offense in high school, and if they want me to play there I'll be happy. I just want to help out where I can."

30 Years Ago – 1990

Berwick (Pa.) High School's Sean Carden, recruited by Ohio State to play on the defensive line, was a throwback to the early days of football – from his crew cut right down to his black cleats.

Carden, who also played offensive tackle for the 14-1 Bulldogs, made no bones about what he liked to do on the football field.

"You put out the punishment more on defense," he told BSB after signing with the Buckeyes in February. "It's more aggressive. You're more laid-back as an offensive lineman."

The 6-2, 262-pound nose guard, a load for opposing offensive linemen his senior year, registered 68 tackles, seven quarterback sacks, one fumble recovery and a blocked punt despite being double- and triple-teamed throughout the season. He might have had even more tackles had he not missed two games due to a sprained ankle.

25 Years Ago – 1995

Eric "Big House" Smith was marked as a potential replacement for left tackle Korey Stringer following Stringer's decision to enter the NFL draft.

Smith, a 6-5, 310-pound, All-Ohio second-team offensive tackle out of Columbus Walnut Ridge High School, opted to stay close to home and spend his college years as a Buckeye.

Before committing to Ohio State, Smith considered Florida, Illinois, Minnesota and Kansas.

"Ohio State is very family-oriented, and I feel like I can succeed there both athletically and academically," Smith said shortly after signing with Ohio State. "I had my eyes on Florida

for a while, but I thought if I left here I would be the only one from Columbus on the team and I wouldn't be able to relate to anybody."

National recruiting expert Tom Lemming described Smith as a "big, massive offensive lineman with unusually quick feet for someone his size" and said that Smith had the chance to become a dominant player.

20 Years Ago – 2000

Ohio State accepted its third verbal commitment for the class of 2001 when Dayton Chaminade-Julienne junior defensive lineman Brandon McKinney committed to the Buckeyes on Feb. 28.

McKinney (6-4, 300) was considered one of Ohio's top 10 junior prospects. He joined two other Ohioans – Ironton linebacker Reggie Arden and Dublin Coffman center Adam Olds – in the burgeoning class.

"I was really honored that Ohio State offered me a scholarship this early," McKinney said. "I have always wanted to go to Ohio State. I've been to their camp the last three years, so I already know quite a bit about the school."

"I have a cousin, Christopher Perry, who lived with Michael Wiley and Mike told me a lot about it too."

15 Years Ago – 2005

Ever since taking over the helm of the Ohio State football team, Jim Tressel had made it known that his primary recruiting goal was to keep Ohio's top talent within the state's borders. Sometimes, though, his team's needs had to supersede his wishes.

Take the 2006 class, for instance. With three starting linebackers exhausting their eligibility following the 2005 season, Ohio State was in the market for linebackers, but Ohio's class wasn't especially deep at the position.

Ohio State had already landed a pledge from the state's top linebacker, Ross Homan of Coldwater. That meant that Tressel would have to look outside of the state, at players such as A.J. Edds of Greenwood, Ind. Edds included Ohio State along with Indiana, Michigan, Notre Dame, Purdue and Tennessee in his list of suitors and was eyeing a visit to Columbus.

"They're one of my top schools," Edds told BSB. "I get little handwritten notes from Coach Tressel once a week just checking in, and I'll call and e-mail him periodically to talk a little bit and keep the communication and the relationship going. I'd say for the most part they've been recruiting me pretty hard."

10 Years Ago – 2010

Ohio State broke a four-month dry spell for verbal commitments in the class of 2011 in mid-March when Ohio offensive linemen Chris Carter of Cleveland John F. Kennedy and

Antonio Underwood of Shaker Heights, Ohio, became the third and fourth members of the Buckeyes' recruiting class.

Both issued verbal commitments March 15 after taking unofficial visits to the OSU campus.

The 6-4, 325-pound Carter issued his commitment to Tressel in person and in the process received a surprise.

"I think he was the only person that was happier than me," Carter told BSB. "It was a great moment."

Five Years Ago – 2015

Ohio State's class of 2016 continued its pursuit of a No. 1 recruiting ranking with the addition of Washington (D.C.) St. John's College four-star defensive end Terrell Hall (6-5, 225 pounds).

The nation's No. 33 defensive end and No. 270 overall prospect made his announcement the evening of March 2 on Twitter. He said the other schools chasing him – a list that included Clemson, Iowa, Kentucky, LSU, Maryland, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, Tennessee and UCLA – couldn't compare to the Buckeyes.

"I always had Ohio State at the top in my mind, but I wasn't sure how it would compare to other schools," Hall told Scout. "I started looking at other schools and they were telling me what they can do for me, and it wouldn't match up to what Ohio State can provide."

"It is basically the combination of what Ohio State offers on and off the field. It's not only on the field with what they can do for you, but what they can do for you if you don't make it to the next level. They can help provide you with a job and get your career moving."

One Year Ago – 2019

Three days after Ohio State offered Trey Leroux, the offensive tackle from Norwalk, Ohio, pulled the trigger.

The 6-8, 320-pounder picked up an offer March 8 from the Buckeyes during an unofficial visit for the team's second practice of spring camp. On March 11, Leroux took to Twitter as he announced his commitment to OSU.

"I am proud to announce that I have decided to continue my academic and athletic career at The Ohio State University," he said in a tweet. "Thank you Coach (Ryan) Day and staff for the opportunity."

Leroux was the seventh member of the 2020 recruiting class. He was the Buckeyes' fourth offensive lineman and the third from Ohio. He joined Cincinnati Xavier five-star offensive tackle Paris Johnson (6-7, 285), Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional four-star offensive guard Luke Wypler (6-3, 285) and Cincinnati Elder offensive tackle Jakob James (6-5, 275) in the group.

this summer as preferred walk-ons include New Albany, Ohio, tight end Andrew Gurd; Austintown (Ohio) Fitch offensive tackle Kyle Moore; Lancaster, Ohio, offensive guard Quinton Burke; and Cleveland Heights, Ohio, cornerback Andrew Moore.

Recruiting Notes From Around The Country

Ohio State five-star defensive end commit Jack Sawyer was seen warming up without restrictions prior to Pickerington (Ohio) North's Division I district basketball finals on March 7. He did not play a single game for the Panthers this season

after tearing his MCL in the state football playoffs last fall.

Four-star defensive tackle commit Michael Hall announced on March 12 that he will play in the Under Armour All-America Game, which will take place in January 2021. Hall, who hails from Streetsboro, Ohio, pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Feb. 1.

Ohio State extended a scholarship offer on March 4 to Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren four-star athlete Jantzen Dunn. The Buckeyes have since picked up a pair of 247Sports crystal ball predictions for Dunn, who projects as a defensive back

in college.

Grimes, the nation's top-rated cornerback, will announce his college decision on Dec. 1. He has narrowed his list of offers to Alabama, Clemson, LSU, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Penn State, South Carolina, Texas, Texas A&M, Virginia and Virginia Tech.

Egbuka told 247Sports reporter Brandon Huffman on March 10 that he's in the process of setting up official visits to Clemson, LSU, Ohio State and Oklahoma and an unofficial visit to Washington. The Huskies hold 50 percent of 247Sports' crys-

tal ball predictions, while the Buckeyes hold 25 percent. The other 25 percent is currently undecided.

Wheaton, the running back out of Texas, took unofficial visits to Oklahoma and Texas on March 9 and 10, respectively. Ohio State has yet to receive a visit, though it's worth noting Day dropped by Wheaton's high school in late January.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com), free to all BSB print subscribers, daily.

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

# Tournament Momentum Ends To Coronavirus

Ohio State was set on building on its impressive run through the Big Ten tournament and making an upset path through the NCAA tournament, where it was projected to be a six seed by ESPN.

The Buckeyes were winners of 10 of

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Grosher

their last 13 games and made it all the way to the tournament final before losing to Maryland, which was projected to be an NCAA tournament one seed, and was doing it all with the youngest team in the conference and one of the youngest rosters in the country.

"I don't think a lot of people projected us to get this far, especially in the Big Ten tournament," sophomore guard Janai Crooms said after the loss to the Terrapins on March 8. "Getting this far with a young team, we can do a lot of big things in the NCAA tournament. If we just stay together, keep our mind-set all on the same page, we could do some great things."

But this team doesn't get its chance to do those great things, at least not this season.

Due to the growing concerns about the coronavirus, the NCAA women's tournament was canceled, and Ohio State was forced to look to the future.

"It was shocking to many of us - to everyone," sophomore forward Dorka Juhasz said. "It's kind of heartbreaking because I feel like our team played the best basketball of the whole season in the past few weeks. Obviously the Big Ten tournament, we made a great run so we were really excited to play and see where we can get there with that performance

with this young team.

"It is sad because everybody was so excited and we worked so hard this season. Obviously, every team did. We were really excited to play."

Though the players were stunned by the news, after days of continued suspensions and cancellations from various other sports at multiple levels, head coach Kevin McGuff could see the writing on the wall.

"Certainly, I was kind of preparing for this just based on the events of these past couple days and how quickly things seem to have changed," McGuff said. "And certainly, I feel like people made the right decisions in this case. And putting the safety of the student-athletes and the people that would have been involved at the tournament, had it gone on, putting that first and foremost was the most important thing."

"It was certainly the right decision. Unfortunate. Disappointed. Our kids played so well at the end of the year. I really wanted to see what we could accomplish in the NCAA tournament because I really loved how we were playing and all the progress that we had made. But you know, sometimes things like this happen that we can't control."

Ohio State finished the season with a 21-12 record, an 11-7 record in the Big Ten and three wins against teams that finished the season in the top 25. It was a team destined for the Big Dance despite having just one upperclassman who received significant minutes and having five freshmen in its regular rotation.

But is it too soon to reflect on a season that was a clear leg up on expectations, and one that shows plenty of optimism for the future?

"I was talking to my coaches, about this season and everything, but it's just kind of hard to reflect right now," Juhasz said. "You know, I kind of feel empty without finishing it, obviously. We did a great job at the Big Ten tournament, even if we couldn't get the win against Maryland, but



SONNY BROCKWAY

**MISSED OPPORTUNITY** - Ohio State and junior guard Braxtin Miller will have to wait another season to prove their talents in the NCAA tournament.

with this young team, I feel like we just improved so much.

"It needs a little more time for me to just reflect on how we played and everything, but it was definitely a great season and obviously with so many young freshmen and sophomores, it's just really exciting to see the next year."

The Buckeyes lose just one senior,

forward Savitha Jayaraman, heading into next season. Jayaraman played only one minute this season, the final minute of senior night against Northwestern, but was a strong leadership figure for a team that was in need of experience.

But moving forward, Ohio State is set to return 100 percent of its scoring from this season and is bringing in a pair of local three-star commits in guard Anyssa Jones and forward Gabby Hutcherson, as well as five-star point guard Kateri Poole, all of which could help in extending the

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

2019-20 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

21-12 Overall (11-7 Big Ten)  
Statistics through games of March 8

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
Dorka Juhasz	31-31	942-30.4	160-336	.476	40-101	.396	50-94	.532	95-197	292-9.4	51-1	33	49	38	38	410-13.2
Kierstan Bell	30-10	630-21.0	125-317	.394	56-176	.318	20-30	.667	25-106	131-4.4	52-1	49	60	27	36	326-10.9
Jacy Sheldon	33-24	902-27.3	117-242	.483	44-127	.346	39-49	.796	27-65	92-2.8	63-0	48	45	3	45	317-9.6
Braxtin Miller	33-32	1039-31.5	94-288	.326	26-104	.250	55-75	.733	21-87	108-3.3	56-0	114	46	8	59	269-8.2
Aaliyah Patty	33-31	686-20.8	106-218	.486	17-59	.288	29-46	.630	44-135	179-5.4	93-2	31	54	33	30	258-7.8
Madison Greene	33-21	817-24.8	77-185	.416	23-67	.343	76-96	.792	23-45	68-2.1	65-1	82	50	8	34	253-7.7
Rebeka Mikulaskova	29-1	476-16.4	80-159	.503	25-54	.463	37-45	.822	26-58	84-2.9	49-1	17	46	10	9	222-7.7
Janai Crooms	32-10	758-23.7	91-195	.467	10-48	.208	27-53	.509	26-98	124-3.9	65-1	107	89	29	31	219-6.8
Kaelynn Satterfield	18-0	145-8.1	16-43	.372	2-11	.182	10-11	.909	10-22	32-1.8	16-0	5	21	0	3	44-2.4
Aixa Wone	28-5	254-9.1	17-50	.340	2-16	.125	7-11	.636	15-22	37-1.3	33-1	17	26	1	8	43-1.5
Savitha Javaraman	1-0	1-1.0	0-1	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0-0.0
TEAM									51-55	106				17		
Total.....	33	6650	883-2034	.434	245-764	.321	350-510	.686	363-890	1253-38.0	543-8	503	503	157	293	2361-71.5
Opponents.....	33	6650	779-1997	.390	201-670	.300	415-587	.707	387-845	1232-37.3	481	420	530	88	237	2174-65.9

bench and truly setting the team up for a big tournament run.

There was an opportunity to shock the world that was lost due to things that were out of the Buckeyes' control. But next season, Ohio State has all the pieces to be a dangerous team, one with the experience to match its talent.

"It's just good that we still have that dangerousness that it's pretty hard to prepare for our team because literally you never know which game who's going to show up," Juhasz said. "It's awesome that everybody's going to be sophomores and juniors. So it's really exciting for next year, and obviously, all my teammates are in the same mind-set too."

**Bell, Juhasz Earn Conference Awards**

Ohio State's two leading scorers earned conference awards for their strong regular-season performances.

Juhasz landed on the All-Big Ten first team, the only Buckeye to make it on the first or second team. The sophomore forward finished the season averaging 13.2 points and 9.4 rebounds per game, both of which were team highs.

She was also efficient on the floor, shooting 47.6 percent (160 of 336) from the field and 39.6 percent (40 of 101) from three, good for fourth and second on the team, respectively.

**OSU Women's Basketball Signees**

Players in the class of 2020 who have signed letters of intent to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the ESPNW rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Gabby Hutcherson	F	6-2	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) South
Anysa Jones	G	5-9	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) South
Kateri Poole	G	5-8	★★★★★	Bronx (N.Y.) South Shore

Freshman guard Kierstan Bell also earned some recognition, making it on the Big Ten All-Freshman Team. Bell was the only other double-digit scorer for the Buckeyes, averaging 10.9 points per game while also finishing No. 3 on the team with 4.4 rebounds per game.

Bell finished the year with 56 three-point makes, the most on the team, and shot 39.4 percent from the field and 31.8 percent from deep. She was also selected as an honorable mention for the All-Big Ten teams.

**Juhasz Makes Conference All-Tournament Team**

Despite not having the final that it wanted, Ohio State did not go home completely empty-handed, with Juhasz earning a spot on the Big Ten All-Tournament Team.

Juhasz was joined by Michigan forward Naz Hillmon, Maryland forward Stephanie Jones, Maryland guard Ashley Owusu and

Indiana guard Ali Patberg, with Owusu taking the award for most outstanding player in the tournament.

In four games, the most by any team in the tournament, Juhasz averaged 12.8 points and 11.5 rebounds per game while shooting 42.9 percent from the floor and 43.8 percent from three.

**BIG Women's Basketball**

	Conf.			Overall		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Maryland	16	2	.889	28	4	.875
Northwestern	16	2	.889	26	4	.867
Iowa	14	4	.778	23	7	.767
Indiana	13	5	.722	24	8	.750
Rutgers	11	7	.611	22	9	.710
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>.611</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>.636</b>
Michigan	10	8	.556	21	11	.656
Michigan State	9	9	.500	16	14	.533
Purdue	8	10	.444	18	14	.563
Nebraska	7	11	.389	17	13	.567
Minnesota	5	13	.278	16	15	.516
Wisconsin	3	15	.167	12	19	.387
Illinois	2	16	.111	11	19	.367
Penn State	1	17	.056	7	23	.233

**March 4 Scores**

Wisconsin 71, Illinois 55

Minnesota 85, Penn State 65

**March 5 Scores**

Purdue 72, Michigan State 63

Rutgers 63, Wisconsin 55

Michigan 81, Nebraska 75

**Ohio State 77, Minnesota 56**

**March 6 Scores**

Maryland 74, Purdue 62

Indiana 78, Rutgers 60

Michigan 67, Northwestern 59

**Ohio State 87, Iowa 66**

**March 7 Scores**

Maryland 66, Indiana 51

**Ohio State 66, Michigan 60**

**March 8 Score**

Maryland 82, Ohio State 65

She also stepped up in the final against Maryland, leading Ohio State with 20 points on 8-of-18 shooting and hitting 4 of 6 triples while adding five rebounds in the loss.



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OHIO STATE BASEBALL

# Coronavirus Concerns End Season For Buckeyes

Ohio State's baseball season is over before it ever really got started. As part of the precautions that Ohio State and the NCAA at large are taking in response to the coronavirus disease, all spring championships have been canceled, along with all spring sports, many of which just opened. Baseball is obviously included in that list, and after 14 games, Ohio State is now officially back into the offseason.

**FROM THE STRETCH**  
Patrick Mayhorn

In addition to the cancellation of the season, which was effective immediately as of March 11, all organized team activities have been suspended until April 6. Ohio State baseball players were expected to clear their lockers by 5 p.m. March 16 and have until March 22 to move out of their residence halls. All athletic facilities will be closed, though players are still able to work with athletic training staff elsewhere.

In a statement from the Big Ten, which came to the decision before the NCAA, the reasoning for the decision is laid out.

"All of these decisions are in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and are in line with the priorities of health, safety and wellness for student-athletes, students, coaches, administrators, fans, media, campus and community populations," the statement says.

"The main priority of the Big Ten Conference continues to be the health, safety and wellness of our student-athletes, coaches, administrators, fans and media as we continue to monitor all developing and relevant information on the COVID-19 virus."

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith spoke in favor of the steps that the Big Ten took, noting that this is "uncharted territory for us as an institution, let alone as an athletic department." He also explained that while it's "disheartening and extremely painful" to end seasons, he has no doubts that it was the correct decision for the sake of the public good.

The cancellation does bring up questions of eligibility for seniors, of which the baseball team has six: pitchers Joe Gahn, Patrick Murphy and Jake Vance; and infielders Matt Carpenter, Conner Pohl and Noah West. The NCAA was quick to address those concerns, announcing in a statement on March 13 that spring athletes will receive an extra year of eligibility.

"Council leadership agreed that eligi-

bility relief is appropriate for all Division I student-athletes who participated in spring sports," the NCAA's Division I coordination committee said. "Details of eligibility relief will be finalized at a later time. Additional issues with NCAA rules must be addressed, and appropriate governance bodies will work through those in the coming days and weeks."

With the season coming to an abrupt end, Ohio State's reflection on those first 14 games will be complicated. The Buckeyes' final record sits at 6-8, a disappointing total for a team that came into the year hot off of a surprise NCAA tournament run. Entering the year, head coach Greg Beals hoped that the experience of the previous season could propel Ohio State, despite a young roster.

"The fact that we have been in the national tournament three of the last four years, we have a great understanding and a realization of what that expectation is, and it has given our guys a clearer vision," Beals said before the season.

Carpenter echoed the sentiment.

"We may have a younger core, but just going out there and experiencing big moments - guys know what it feels like, and guys are hungry to get back there because they know just how special it is," Carpenter said.

Despite that experience, and the return of the entire starting pitching rotation, led by star sophomore Seth Lonsway, Ohio State struggled with finding its identity. Because the season is ending prematurely, the Buckeyes will never really get the chance to grow into the potential they had.

"The identity is always evolving during the season, and we haven't gotten to the point where we have been able to really trench that identity," Beals said on March 6 following a 3-6 start.

The players also knew that they hadn't hit their stride yet.

"We definitely have not played the way we know we are capable of, but we are making adjustments and we are going to keep going and getting better," pitcher Mitch Milheim said after a 9-1 loss to Stetson. "We have had spurts of playing really, really well."

After that rough start, Ohio State actually did start to show signs of life in the last few weeks. It won three straight games against Harvard (13-1 on March 7), Fairfield (8-3 on March 8) and North Florida (10-2 on March 10), the latter of which inspired some optimism from Beals.

"I liked how everybody played tonight as a team," Beals said after the victory. "We got good pitching and rolled a couple double-play balls. Our defense was solid, playing without any errors. This was probably the best game we played so far this year, but we have to keep it rolling tomorrow and into the weekend."

A loss to North Florida a day later, 9-5, was the last of the season. Ohio State was set to enter a three-game weekend series with Liberty that the Buckeyes were hoping to sweep and take some momentum.

Although the season is lost, there are some positives for Ohio State to take moving forward. First, Beals snatched his 300th win at Ohio State against Lipscomb on Feb. 28, making him the fourth coach in school history to reach the milestone.

Additionally, Ohio State appears to have at least two legitimate All-America caliber players entering next season in junior catcher Dillon Dingler and Lonsway, along with very strong contributors in sophomore infielder Nick Erwin, sophomore outfielder Nolan Clegg, true freshman outfielder Mitchell Okuley and junior pitcher Griffan Smith.

Dingler was already a second-team All-Big Ten selection as a sophomore and started this year with an outstanding .340 batting average while slugging a team-high .760, with an on-base percentage of .404. He also

easily led the team in RBI with 14.

Erwin (.368 batting average, .526 slugging percentage and .364 on-base percentage), Clegg (.333/.515/.395) and Okuley (.300/.450/.440) all sat atop the stat sheets and provided consistent offense for a team that was lacking it more often than not.

Lonsway was masterful in his 18 innings on the mound, even if he finished the year with just a 1-2 record. He struck out 42 batters, put up a 3.00 ERA and allowed just 11 hits on the year. Smith was less overpowering, striking out 16 in 16 1/3 innings of work while allowing 18 hits, but he was harder to score on (.276 ERA).

With each of those players expected back next season, along with the return of those seniors who were previously going to depart after the season, Ohio State could be looking to make a serious run at the Big Ten title and another NCAA berth. Until then, however, the Buckeyes will have to do what everyone else in college sports is doing right now: sit at home.

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## BIG TEN NOTES

# Big Ten Suspends All Team Athletic Activities

The Big Ten announced that all organized team activities have been suspended until April 6 in response to concerns regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19), with plans to re-evaluate at that time.

Following the cancellation of the men's basketball tournament, the Big Ten also announced the cancellation of all conference and nonconference competitions through the end of the academic year, including spring sports that compete beyond the academic year, and participation in all NCAA tournaments and competitions.

## BIG TEN NOTES

### Joe Dempsey

Additionally, the conference also announced a moratorium on all on- and off-campus recruiting activities for the foreseeable future.

The conference plans to use this time to work with medical experts and institutional leadership to determine next steps for moving forward in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Big Ten, the main priority of the conference continues to be the health, safety and wellness of the student-athletes, coaches, administrators, fans and media as the conference continues to monitor all developing and relevant information on the COVID-19 virus.

### Big Ten Schools Suspend In-Person Classes

When the University of Nebraska-Lincoln announced on March 12 that it was suspending in-person classes in an effort to prevent further spread of the coronavirus, it became the last Big Ten school to do so.

"I appreciate that dealing with the impact of this pandemic has been challenging in many ways," Nebraska chancellor Ronnie Green wrote. "We are, and will be, working through unprecedented changes in how we meet our education, research and engagement missions."

The Cornhuskers followed the other 13 conference schools by having all the school's in-person classes transitioned into online courses to be taught remotely.

### Indiana QB Peyton Ramsey Transfers To Northwestern

The nation's worst passing offense added a quarterback from within the conference when Northwestern brought in Indiana's Peyton Ramsey through the transfer portal. As a graduate transfer, Ramsey will be eligible to play in 2020, with one season of eligibility remaining.

"Sometimes the road to realizing your dreams can take you in a different direction than you expected," Ramsey posted on his Twitter account. "With that being said, I would like to announce my decision to continue my playing career at Northwestern University. I am grateful to Coach Fitz (Pat Fitzgerald) and his entire staff for this opportunity. I can't wait to get started."

Ramsey started all 12 games for the Hoosiers in 2018 after starting four games



BIG TEN CONFERENCE/TWITTER

**DIFFICULT DECISION** – First-year commissioner Kevin Warren made the decision to cancel the Big Ten men's basketball tournament just minutes before the first scheduled game on March 12.

as a redshirt freshman in 2017. The Cincinnati Elder product lost his starting job to Michael Penix Jr. prior to the 2019 campaign but started Indiana's final seven games following an injury to Penix.

For his career, Ramsey has completed 66.5 percent of his passes (633 of 952) for 6,581 yards with 42 touchdowns and 23 interceptions. The former three-star recruit from Cincinnati has also shown the ability to run the ball, gaining 832 career rushing yards and scoring 14 touchdowns on 300 attempts.

At Northwestern, 2019 was a forgettable year, particularly for the team's passing offense. Hunter Johnson, Aidan Smith and Andrew Marty all started at quarterback for the Wildcats at various times. Northwestern's passing efficiency rating was 84.53, which ranked last among the 130 Football Bowl Subdivision teams and more than 15 points lower than No. 129 Old Dominion.

Combining for 15 interceptions and only six touchdown passes, Northwestern quarterbacks led the team to a 3-9 record.

Fitzgerald fired longtime offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Mick McCall the day after the conclusion of the season, replacing him with former Boston College offensive coordinator Mike Bajakian.

Johnson, Smith and Marty all return at quarterback, as well as T.J. Green, whom the NCAA granted a sixth season of eligibility after he suffered a season-ending foot injury in the Wildcats' season opener. After the passing woes in Evanston in 2019, Ramsey is expected to seize the reins of Bajakian's offense.

### Maryland Women's Basketball Wins Big Ten Tournament

For the fourth time in the six years since Maryland joined the Big Ten, its women's basketball team won the conference tournament. The Terrapins defeated Ohio State 82-65 at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis on March 8.

Maryland boasted five double-digit scorers against the Buckeyes, with senior Stephanie Jones leading the way with 18 points and freshman Ashley Owusu adding 17 off the bench. Shakira Austin (14 points), Taylor Mikesell (12 points) and Blair Watson (11 points) all contributed to the balanced attack from the Terrapins.

The Terps (27-4) entered the post-season ranked No. 6 nationally in the Associated Press top 25 poll and were expected to be a top contender in the NCAA tournament before it was canceled.

Maryland head coach Brenda Frese has led her team to at least a share of the Big Ten regular-season title five times in six seasons. The Terrapins have played in the Big Ten tournament championship game all six years they have been in the conference. After losing in the past two Big Ten title games, Maryland brought the trophy back to College Park.

### Conference Cancels Big Ten Men's Basketball Tournament

The Big Ten men's basketball tournament was canceled due to concerns regarding the coronavirus, just minutes before the first scheduled game of the day on March 12.

"The Big Ten Conference announced

today that it will be canceling the remainder of the Big Ten men's basketball tournament, effective immediately," the Big Ten released in a statement. "The Big Ten Conference will use this time to work with the appropriate medical experts and institutional leadership to determine next steps for moving forward in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic."

The cancellation did not come as a shock, especially following a March 11 incident at the tourney when Nebraska coach Fred Hoiberg had to be rushed to the hospital. He tested negative for the coronavirus but positive for the flu virus, influenza A.

The timing of the cancellation came as a surprise, however, with Michigan and Rutgers players getting the news while warming up in preparation for a 12 p.m. ET tipoff.

"The final decision was made about 11:40 Eastern time, and these are not easy decisions because they impact so many people," said Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren. "But I said from my first day with the Big Ten, the players will always be my first priority in every decision that gets made."

"Yesterday was an emotional day, not only here but at other conferences and other sports as well. Nothing really changed from last night, I just needed some clarity. At the end of the day, this is about our student-athletes and I want to make sure we never put them in a position that's not best for them. I feel good that we did the right thing. If it turns out we overreacted, I'm comfortable with that."

# Pandemic Puts OSU And Sports World On Hold

Things have changed so rapidly around the world, and particularly in this country, in just the past few days that I wonder what we will be doing or how we will be feeling by the time you read this, just days from my writing.

I had someone recently speculate to me that all the hubbub concerning the coronavirus would prove to be overblown. My response to that was that if this proved to be overblown, that would be the best outcome.

We should all pray for that result.

But the truth is we are traveling in uncharted territory. No one knows what the ultimate effects on our health, the health of our loved ones, the economy, our health system and so many other things will be. Far down the list is what is going to happen on the sports scene.

If anything, Americans were a little slow to react to what has now been deemed a pandemic. Thus, the whirlwind action as we quickly try to make up for lost time.

Am I happy that virtually every athletic event in the foreseeable future has been canceled? Of course not. Sports provide a diversion for nearly every American and people around the globe, and as a follower of amateur athletics by trade, I am deeply saddened for the athletes at Ohio State and everywhere who have had their pursuits – pursuits that they have worked and trained for nearly all their lives – halted.

Do I think canceling the events was the right decision? As I have learned more and more about the coronavirus and its spread, of course.

The curtailment of sporting events and other forms of entertainment is in the best interests of the participants and those who watch them. By acting decisively now, one hopes we can get the spread under control quickly and be back in the stands watching our favorite teams and players, sooner rather than later.

If it has to be later, so be it. Our health, the health of our loved ones and the health of our community are paramount.

Now if someone could just explain to me the run on toilet paper. That's America at its best, isn't it?

## Tinkering With The BSB Print Schedule

With little Buckeye sports news to report on and little news expected soon on when there will be Buckeye sports news to report, we will not be publishing the Buckeye Sports Bulletin scheduled to be mailed on March 31.

We are scheduled to return with the April 18 issue, set to be mailed on April 14. If we have to, we will fill it with recruiting news, historical pieces, columns and, with any luck, news on when there will be athletic news.

In the meantime, we urge you to follow us daily on the electronic BuckeyeSports.com. We will be ramping up our recruiting coverage, coming up with some creative ideas for stories, running more reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives and, of course, keeping you current on the latest health-related developments. You can discuss all of these things with BSB staff members and other readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum. I will be there each day, as I generally am, to answer any of your questions about the Buckeyes or BSB.

You can also call us at (614) 486-2202 with any queries.

## The Greatest OSU Football Teams

I was so busy washing my hands regularly, that I forgot to post the list of USA Today's top 150 college football teams of all time on BuckeyeSports.com, as I promised in this space last issue. I will get that corrected in the next day or two so that you can see for yourself the 150

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

teams, including six Buckeye squads, that were deemed better than the 1968 Buckeyes.

While I analyzed that list and Ohio State's presence there in the last issue, I also discussed in this space staff writer Wyatt Crosher's efforts to determine the greatest Ohio State football team to not win a national championship.

I have had some thoughts about that quest since we last went to press.

As we were discussing the article in the office in preparation for doing the research and writing the story, the young guys kept mentioning the 2015 team as one of the best to not win the national crown. That was a team that I would not have necessarily considered when drawing up a list of potential contenders for that title. Maybe my recollection of that team was affected by the dismal way they lost to Michigan State at home in the rain that season.

With so much fanfare from our staff, I decided to revisit the 2015 Buckeyes. And I must say, that team was stacked. This was future NFL central.

The offensive line featured Jacoby Boren at center, future Rimington award winners Billy Price and Pat Elflein at guards and Taylor Decker and Chase Farris at the tackles. Future pro Nick Vannett held down the tight end spot.

At the receivers, you had Michael Thomas, who has proved to be an even greater pro than he was a collegian, Braxton Miller, Jalyn Marshall and Curtis Samuel, and reserves such as future stars Parris Campbell and Terry McLaurin.

And if that weren't enough, you had college and pro running back great Ezekiel Elliott to carry the mail.

And running all of that was J.T. Barrett, though I believe his growth was stunted that year by the early-season decision to rotate him with Cardale Jones. Still, that's a lot of depth at quarterback between the two guys who had led the Buckeyes to the inaugural CFP title the year before.

On defense, the line was anchored by a pair of Big Ten defensive linemen of the year in Joey Bosa and Tyquan Lewis, with Jalyn Holmes and Sam Hubbard in reserve. The interior featured a rotation of Tommy Schutt, Joel Hale and Michael Hill.

With all the hand-wringing over the current set of Buckeye linebackers, how would you like to start Joshua Perry, Raekwon McMillan and Darron Lee?

Gareon Conley and Eli Apple started at cornerback with Marshon Lattimore and Damon Webb rounding out the two-deep, and Tyvis Powell and Vonn Bell were at the safeties, with Malik Hooker in reserve.

Wow! This was the culmination of the first four years of Urban Meyer recruiting.

Give the ball to Zeke 30 times in the rain against the Spartans and maybe this column is completely different.

Personally, I did not get to Columbus until 1976, which means I missed the Super Sophs' junior and senior years of 1969 and '70, as well as the Archie Griffin years from 1972-75, which means I missed all those great teams that were unable to win the title. For people like me, the 1998 team is the poster child for a Buckeye team that should have won the national championship but didn't.

The cover of BSB's football preview issue that year had a banner headline that read, "The Year of the Buckeye." Here's what I wrote in this

space heading into that 1998 season:

"It seems like the entire John Cooper tenure at Ohio State has been building up to this 1998 season. Throughout Cooper's stay in Columbus, there have been hints of that magical season which all football fans live for. Unfortunately, that type of season has eluded the Buckeyes for 30 years.

"Now it seems that the players are in place, the coaching staff is in place, the schedule is favorable, and – maybe – the stars are properly aligned for a run at the national championship. Virtually every pollster in the country seems to agree, as the Buckeyes are a solid preseason No. 1."

Again, it was Michigan State, coached by Nick Saban, that spoiled the championship party, leaving Ohio State fans to have to wait another four years before their beloved Buckeyes finally won their first crown since 1968.

Although looking back at the 2015 OSU team was enlightening for me in the positive, in revisiting the '98 team with more than 20 years of hindsight, maybe that team wasn't quite as strong as advertised and remembered.

They were led by one of Ohio State's great quarterbacks in Joe Germaine, who finally had the position to himself after rotating with Stan Jackson in 1996 and 1997. He had a great receiver in David Boston and a solid one in Dee Miller. But while Michael Wiley was a fine running back, he is not generally listed in the pantheon of Ohio State backs. He had Matt Keller at fullback to block for him.

The offensive line, from left to right, of Tyson Walter, Rob Murphy, Kurt Murphy, Ben Gilbert and Brooks Burris was solid, but not spectacular, as was tight end John Lumpkin.

The defensive line of Joe Brown and Ryan Pickett on the interior flanked by Brent Johnson and Rodney Bailey at the ends was hardly up to the standards of Ohio State lines we expect under coach Larry Johnson today.

Where this team was really strong, in my book, was the back seven. The linebackers were Nail Diggins, Andy Katzenmoyer and Jerry Rudzinski, backed by a great secondary of cornerbacks Antoine Winfield and Ahmed Plummer, with Nate Clements in reserve, and safeties Damon Moore and Gary Berry.

It was a team that could have won the national championship but didn't. But do I consider it one of the best among Ohio State teams to not grab the brass ring? Not as much as previously.

When we considered great teams at Ohio State that didn't win it all, it was generally teams that had one critical loss or tie. For a great team based on talent alone to not win the title, how about a team with three losses – the 1984 Buckeyes.

If you rate a team on future NFL careers, consider '84 team members Keith Byars (13 NFL seasons played), Cris Carter (16), Rory Graves (4), Thomas "Pepper" Johnson (13), Eric Kumerow (3), Jim Lachey (10), Kirk Lowdermilk (12), Chris Spielman (10), Mike Tomczak (15), Tom Tupa (16), Jeff Uhlenhake (9) and William White (11). That's 132 combined years in the NFL right there.

And there was plenty of other talent on that team with such players as White's mates in the defensive secondary, Greg Rogan, Sonny Gordon and Terry White; flanker Mike Lanese; running back John Wooldridge; defensive tackle Dave Morrill; and many, many more.

The Buckeyes still finished 9-3 but beat

Michigan, were Big Ten champions and went to the Rose Bowl, though they lost to a subpar USC team. But if you like star power, this team had it!

And one last note on the top 150 college teams of all time.

I mentioned last issue that Meyer had two of the teams among the greatest, his 2008 Florida team (No. 52) and the 2014 Ohio State national champions (No. 126). Cooper, who is in the College Football Hall of Fame but not generally considered in the same regard as Meyer, also had two teams among the best: the 1996 (No. 32) and 1998 Buckeyes (No. 89). Coop actually fared a little better than Urban on this list. Woody Hayes trumped them both with his 1973 and 1954 Buckeyes, ranked Nos. 18 and 66, respectively.

## My Favorite Buckeye To The Hall Of Fame

Mentioning Byars and the 1984 Buckeyes is a nice way to segue into congratulating Byars for his selection to the College Football Hall of Fame. I've never made it a secret that Byars is my all-time favorite Buckeye.

You've got to love a guy whose second-most famous game might be one in which he didn't even play. In addition to his dominant and colorful performance against Illinois in '84 (see Rich Exner's column on page 38), he played a key part in Ohio State's famous upset of top-ranked Iowa in 1985, even though he was forced to sit out due to a bum foot.

According to the Nov. 9, 1985, issue of BSB recapping that 22-13 victory over the Hawkeyes, Byars spurred the team on with an impassioned speech before the game.

"It was really something else," fullback George Cooper said after the win. "Keith never loses his composure. I guess because he knew he wasn't playing, he didn't want to lose this game. He didn't want us to lose.

"He kind of got upset. He kicked a few things around. That kind of showed us this game meant something. That fired us up a lot. Keith never gets upset, and he got upset. A glass here, a table there. A tray."

Added Lanese: "I hadn't seen Keith so emotional since I've been here. I can't speak for the other guys, but it sure got me fired up."

This and other BSB stories about Byars were posted as part of BuckeyeSports.com's Reprint Thursday on March 12.

## Hummer Shines On Senior Day

It's tradition in college basketball to send seldom-used seniors and senior walk-ons into the game on Senior Day, even if only for a few seconds. It is the tradition of Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann to start his seldom-used seniors.

Senior Buckeye walk-on Danny Hummer took his Senior Day start against Illinois on March 5 and ran with it.

The 6-foot Upper Arlington product scored the game's first basket, just 24 seconds into the contest. Still in the first minute, he came up with a steal, and he later fed E.J. Liddell for a bucket to tie the score at six with 16:20 to play in the half before being removed from the game at the 15:32 mark.

Good for you, Danny. You took your moment and shone, scoring a victory for all the athletes who toil in anonymity in hopes of minutes on the court or field like yours. There was a turnover in there, but I am erasing that from my mental scoreboard.

Hummer, who transferred from Air Force before the 2017-18 season, finishes his Ohio State career after appearing in 22 games. He scored 13 points, pulled down four rebounds and dished out seven assists.