

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 41, No. 16

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Feb. 12, 2022

Late Additions Help Bolster Ohio State's 2022 Class

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Looking at the final recruiting rankings, things appear to be business as usual for Ohio State regarding the class of 2022. Finishing fourth in the nation behind top-ranked Texas A&M, Alabama and Georgia gives the Buckeyes their third straight top-five finish and their sixth in the last seven recruiting cycles.

Ohio State's average player rating of .9405 is also among the nation's best, third behind Alabama and Texas A&M, which signed the highest-rated class in modern recruiting history, dating back to 2000.

But look further back in the cycle and you'll see that Ohio State's class was not always in its usual pole position among the recruiting rankings. In fact, up until the early signing period and ensuing race to National Signing Day, it appeared that head coach Ryan Day was looking at his first letdown heading into his third class with the Buckeyes.

After quarterback Devin Brown's commitment Dec. 1, just two weeks before the start of the early period when most classes are generally formed now, Ohio State held just 17 commitments in the class, and later 18 after safety Sonny Styles' reclassification Dec. 12.

Ohio State expected to take only one quarterback in the class, so Brown filled that role, but with time ticking away, other positions were in serious need of additional numbers, including on the defensive line where coach Larry Johnson and defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. had to have felt lonely. Jackson was Ohio State's only commitment on the defensive line after an unusually quiet cycle for the now ninth-year coach with the Buckeyes.

Jackson is an elite talent in his own right, having been named Florida's Gatorade Player of the Year following his senior season in which he recorded 65 tackles, 15 sacks, 17 tackles for loss and 15 quarterback hurries at Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep, but one player does not a position group make.

Fortunately, things were trending in the right direction with defensive lineman Caden



SONNY BROCKWAY

NEW FACES — Ohio State head coach Ryan Day signed a 21-man recruiting class that ranks fourth in the country and first in the Big Ten for total points at 247Sports. The Buckeyes finished with a pair of in-state five-star defenders in linebacker C.J. Hicks and safety Sonny Styles, 17 four-stars and two three-stars to earn a 94.05 average recruit rating. Only Alabama (95.19) and Texas A&M (94.77) finished with higher averages.

Curry, who later committed to the Buckeyes Dec. 14, the night before the early period began.

"He said, 'Coach, I kind of knew I was going there all along.'" Day said Dec. 15. "I said, 'Well, you could have saved us a bunch of sleepless nights by just telling us a bit sooner than just the other day,'"

"He is a very talented young man," he continued on the four-star Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove product. "He's very productive on the field. He comes from a really good program with back-to-back state championships. He is a tough player and somebody we targeted early on. It was a lot of hard work to get him in the boat. He's going to have a tremendous career here."

Ohio State brought in stars on defense with linebacker C.J. Hicks and Styles, but after cornerback Terrance Brooks'

flip to Texas on the first day of the early period, other misses in the secondary with Zion Branch, Xavier Nwankpa and Jahiem Singletary and the small haul on the defensive line, there was reason for concern with Day's class that looked smaller than expected as most recruits were signing their national letters of intent.

"You look at the guys we've signed here on defense, it's a good class," Day said. "There was a little bit of uncertainty mixed in during the first two weeks of December. But to sign the class we have is really impressive."

At the time, questions swirled concerning the status of Johnson, who's remaining with the Buckeyes, as well as

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Missed Anniversary

I was very surprised (and disappointed) to see that BSB's Jan. 15 issue did not contain a single word about the 50th anniversary of the most terrible, devastating event in Ohio State basketball history: the day in January of 1972 when the University of Minnesota basketball team physically assaulted the Ohio State team. The team and the injured players never recovered from that criminal incident. Neither did Fred Taylor. It soured him on the game, and he was never the same after that.

To this day, I can clearly remember watching that game on television. The entire game was very intense and physical, and you got the sense that sooner or later, things were going to get out of hand. Sure enough, they did.

The Ohio State players were pummeled mercilessly by Minnesota players and fans alike. I recall seeing a Minnesota player stomp on Luke Witte's head while Luke was on the floor. It was frightening to watch. It was a mob running amok. The game was called with time still remaining, and Ohio State (which was leading at the time) was awarded the victory, but it in no way compensated for the beating they took.

In my opinion, the University of Minnesota, its players and coaches were never adequately punished for their heinous actions that day. I could be wrong, but I think they were even permitted to claim at least a share of the Big Ten championship. Their coach, Bill Musselman, was not fired as he should have been, and

several of their players went on to play pro ball with nary a hint of scandal following them. Good heavens, Dave Winfield even went on to become a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame! I guess what goes around doesn't always come around. As Clarence Darrow said, "There is no such thing as justice."

If there has been a more horrific on-court incident in the entire history of college basketball, I don't know what it is. And yet it received no coverage in the BSB. That disappoints me, and it makes me wonder why. Maybe you could explain that to your readers.

**Terry Walrath
Hinckley, Ohio**

(BSB has covered this incident many times through the years, and several of those stories were reprinted at our BuckeyeSports.com website as part of Reprint Thursday on Jan. 27. Additionally, there was a lively discussion about the brawl on the Forum, with a link to a film clip of the melee. Ed.)

If you would like to express an opinion concerning Ohio State University sports, please send your letter to BSB Letters, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212, or email it to bsb@buckeyesports.com. Letters must be signed and include the writer's hometown and a daytime telephone number for verification. Publication priority will be given to those letters that are brief, and we reserve the right to edit letters for publication.



From The Message Board

After Ohio State wrapped up its 2022 recruiting class with National Signing Day on Feb. 2, we asked the readers of BuckeyeSports.com and members of the staff about which incoming freshmen they are most excited to see take the field. Here are some of their answers:

"Short-term, Sonny Styles. Long-term, Devin Brown. It's difficult to project when the top players in this class might contribute, partly because there's young talent already on the roster. And, of course, the better players will be gone in three years.

"I will say I'm most intrigued by Devin Brown. I wonder if he will be a better player than (Penn State signee) Drew Allar? Will he even be better than Kyle McCord? I would only be slightly surprised if Brown beat out McCord in 2023. I'd be more surprised if both McCord and Brown are not future pros. There are a lot of intriguing players in this class."

– Terrier Buck

"C.J. Hicks. Primarily because the linebacker play at Ohio State has been awful, and I'm interested to see how much playing time he gets. I think he offers upside because he hasn't received the crappy Ohio State linebacker coaching yet."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Sonny Styles. I've bought into the hype. He has good bloodlines and he seems like a good fit for Jim Knowles (I've bought into his hype, too). And I like Sonny's name."

– Poster That Harley Built

"Devin Brown becoming a Buckeye excites me. He will help maintain high-quality competition in the QB room. My wish list is to see three successive championships from C.J. Stroud, Kyle McCord and Devin Brown!"

– AnthonyBuck

"I may have to wait for a couple of years to see how he pans out, but I'll go with Devin Brown because his recruitment was so unexpected and much needed after the Quinn Ewers fiasco."

– Mcarr

"Gabe Powers because he is local, and the Buckeyes need help at linebacker.

"Sonny Styles for the same reasons, though I don't know what position he will end up playing."

– Frank Moskowitz, BSB

"I'm high on Devin Brown. We'll have to wait and see about his performance at the collegiate level, but he oozes confidence in interviews and claims he isn't afraid of competition with other quarterbacks.

"I'm eager to see the 2023 battle between him and McCord."

– Chase Brown, BSB

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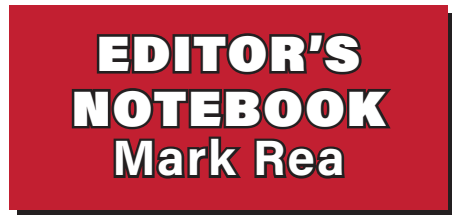
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Tidbits Left Over From Previous Columns

Then the losses began to mount. The Buckeyes compiled only a 4-3-1 record in 1938 and suffered their first defeat against Michigan after



four straight victories. Losses to the Wolverines would follow during the next two seasons, including a 40-0 loss to Michigan that completed a four-loss campaign in 1940.

The Columbus rumor mill produced countless reports that the university was ready to fire the coach, but Schmidt continued to enjoy the support of key allies within Ohio State's athletic department, most notably director of athletics Lynn St. John. Nevertheless, Schmidt's nature wouldn't allow him to wait until things blew over. He offered a hastily written letter of resignation to the university athletic board and then hoped the board would reject it.

On Dec. 16, however, the board unanimously voted to accept Schmidt's resignation despite an overall seven-year record of 39-16-1. Five weeks later, the Buckeyes announced Paul Brown as Schmidt's successor.

Schmidt's demise in Columbus signified the beginning of the end of what had been a superlative career. He resurfaced at the University of Idaho during the spring of 1941 but posted two losing seasons before the Vandals suspended their football program for the duration of World War II.

Years of neglecting his health in favor of his coaching career finally began to take its toll, and Schmidt was hospitalized in Spokane, Wash., in early September 1944. Less than three weeks later, he was dead at the age of 58. The official cause of death was a brain tumor, but a contributing factor was most likely a broken heart. Schmidt never wanted to leave Ohio State, and when he did, he was never the same.

Eight decades after Schmidt left Ohio State, the university finally got around to recognizing his accomplishments by inducting him into its athletics hall of fame. But during formal induction ceremonies, held during the weekend of the home opener against Oregon, no one came forward to accept the honor on Schmidt's behalf. No distant relatives, no friends – no one.

Francis Schmidt gave his heart and soul to the Ohio State football program for seven years, and when he was finally honored for that contribution nearly 80 years after his death, no one bothered to show up to accept the honor on his behalf. If that is not the very definition of sad, I'd like to know what is.

Passing Fancy

When C.J. Stroud threw for 294 yards against Minnesota during his collegiate debut, I think it's safe to say no one could envision the upward trajectory about to be undertaken by the red-shirt freshman from Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. Stroud finished the 2021 season with 4,435 yards and 44 touchdowns through air, and he eclipsed the 300-yard mark in a single game nine times, topped 400 yards on five occasions, and finished the year with an OSU- and Rose Bowl-record 573 yards.

That opening-game total of 294 yards marked only the ninth time in program history that an Ohio State quarterback had thrown for at least 200 yards in his first start. The others are Dwayne Haskins (313 vs. Oregon State in 2018), Kenny Guiton (276 vs. Cal in 2013), Cardale Jones (257 vs. Wisconsin in the 2014 Big Ten Championship Game), Steve Bellisari (243

vs. Ohio in 1999), Justin Fields (234 vs. Florida Atlantic in 2019), J.T. Barrett (226 vs. Navy in 2014), Todd Boeckman (225 vs. Youngstown State in 2007) and Justin Zwick (213 vs. Cincinnati in 2004).

Then, I did some more digging to find out just how some of the other quarterbacks over the past 50-some-odd years fared during their first career starts.

Despite throwing five interceptions, a single-game program record that still stands, Art Schlichter managed to throw for 182 yards against Penn State in 1978. Also cracking the century mark were Kirk Herbstreit (180 vs. Louisville in 1992), Jim Karsatos (170 vs. Michigan State in 1983), Craig Krenzel (164 vs. Illinois in 2001), Joe Bauserman (163 vs. Akron in 2011), Troy Smith (161 vs. Indiana in 2004), Ron Maciejowski (153 vs. Wisconsin in 1968), Stan Jackson (151 vs. Rice in 1996), Tom Tupa (150 vs. West Virginia in 1987), Joe Germaine (148 vs. Michigan in 1996), Bobby Hoying (144 vs. Rice in 1993), Greg Frey (141 vs. Syracuse in 1988), Brent Offenbacher (141 vs. Wisconsin in 1982), Rex Kern (139 vs. SMU in 1968), Terrelle Pryor (139 vs. Troy in 2008), Kent Graham (124 vs. Arizona in 1991) and Austin Moherman (107 vs. Miami (Fla.) in 1999).

A little less productive were Mike Tomczak (93 vs. Baylor in 1982), Braxton Miller (83 vs. Colorado in 2011) and Scott McMullen (42 vs. Illinois in 2001). Meanwhile, Cornelius Greene, one of the most dynamic and athletic quarterbacks of his era, was hamstrung a bit by the fact he played in the same backfield as Archie Griffin and his head coach didn't think much of the forward pass. Greene threw for only 10 yards against Minnesota in 1973.

What Might Have Been

When OSU head coach Ryan Day announced two days before the Akron game that Stroud would rest his sore shoulder, giving way to Kyle McCord and Jack Miller, my mind drifted back to 2013 and the magical three-game run turned in by Kenny Guiton in relief of Braxton Miller.

Early in the first quarter against San Diego State in game two of that season, Miller was injured and Guiton rode to the rescue. He finished off that 42-7 win and then started subsequent victories at Cal and at home against Florida A&M. Guiton's line after those three games – 64 for 94 (68.1 percent) for 643 yards and 12 touchdowns against only two interceptions.

The following week, Guiton took a seat back on the bench and watched Miller throw for four touchdowns during a 31-24 win against Wisconsin.

My point is not that Guiton should have continued to start after Miller was healthy again, or even that McCord or Miller should have gotten another shot at starting.

I was thinking more about poor Kenny Guiton and about how he was born about eight years too soon. If the new Name, Image and Likeness legislation had been in place in 2013, Kenny G would likely have cashed in big-time on his brief fling with greatness. I mean, if Quinn Ewers was worth \$1.5 million before he ever walked onto a college football field, how much would Guiton have been worth?

And then that got me to thinking about Maurice Clarett. Had the NIL been available in 2002, would Clarett have even thought about a too-early exit to the NFL? I have always maintained that Ohio State would have won another national championship in 2003 had Clarett stayed.

And then had Clarett stayed, and the Buckeyes won back-to-back titles, would the university have been so quick to cut loose a two-time national champion head coach in the spring of 2011? Makes you wonder.

After a one-year sabbatical, it's time for the return of my "Column of Leftovers" in which I share some of the material that was trimmed from columns written during the most recent Ohio State football season.

Here is what wound up on the cutting room floor over the past couple of months.

Tale Of Two Coaches

The same week I was doing research for a BSB story on the 1941 Ohio State football team, the program held its annual celebratory week-end during which outstanding athletes from the past are formally inducted into the Varsity "O" Hall of Fame.

Among the names in the 2021 class of inductees was Francis A. Schmidt, who coached the Buckeyes from 1934 to 1940. To be honest, it was borderline unbelievable that the colorful Schmidt, who began the Gold Pants Club tradition and was the first OSU head coach to defeat Michigan in each of his first four tries, wasn't elected to the Hall of Fame years ago.

Equal parts innovator, absent-minded professor and paranoid monomaniac, Francis Albert Schmidt was the product of the dust-blown Kansas plain who became one of the most unusual personalities in the history of the Ohio State football program.

Schmidt earned a law degree but never practiced law. He dressed like a captain of industry, yet peppered his speech with enough profanity to make a longshoreman blush. He laughed and partied with his players and was apt to be seen strumming his banjo in a fraternity house late on a Saturday night.

After winning a pair of conference championships in only three seasons at tiny Kendall College (which later became the University of Tulsa), Schmidt's coaching career skyrocketed. Seven years at Arkansas were followed by five seasons – and two more titles – at TCU before he really hit the big time.

Ohio State had dismissed head coach Sam Willaman following the 1933 season and settled upon Schmidt as the man to replace him. Still, many in the Columbus community were skeptical about the tall, angular man who came north armed with little more than a bow tie and a distinctive Southern drawl.

The day the coach was formally hired by the university, he sat through a battery of questions from Columbus newspapermen until the inevitable was asked.

"Michigan is pretty tough," a reporter offered. "How concerned are you about them?"

"How concerned should I be?" Schmidt replied slowly, flashing a wry smile. "Don't forget they put their trousers on one leg at a time just the same as anyone else."

No one knew it at the time, especially since the coach was simply repeating an old Texas aphorism. But somewhere along the line "trousers" were substituted for "pants," and the genesis of one of Ohio State's oldest and most cherished traditions – the Gold Pants Club – was born.

Not only did the new coach lead his team to victory over archrival Michigan later that fall, but Ohio State defeated its archrivals in each of Schmidt's first four seasons in Columbus – a feat unmatched in program history until Urban Meyer went undefeated in seven tries against the Wolverines.

While victories against the Wolverines seemed to come easily, each of Schmidt's first two seasons with the Buckeyes was marred by a single defeat, losses that were roundly criticized due to coaching blunders. As a result, Schmidt became more and more paranoid, convinced everyone from university officials to his assistant coaches and even his own players were out to sabotage his program.



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The next issue (March 5 cover date) will be mailed on March 1.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Day To Run Offense In 2022

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day is one of college football's most respected offensive minds. As Ohio State's head coach, he doesn't have to create a scheme or call plays, but he chose to bear that responsibility for the past three seasons.

Despite offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson entering his sixth season and Tony Alford and Brian Hartline earning promotions to the running game and passing game coordinators, respectively, Day confirmed Jan. 31 that he would lead the unit again in 2022.

"I'm going to run the offense," Day said. "When this thing's running well, there's a head coach of the defense, there's a head coach of recruiting, there's a head coach of the special teams, and then I'm heavily involved with the offense. If those things aren't happening and it takes me away from the offense, then the way that this structure's built isn't being optimized."

Any combination of Alford, offensive line

coach Justin Frye, Hartline or Wilson could run the offense should Day want to delegate the role. However, it appears Day believes he is still the man for the job. His offense led the nation in points per game and yards per game last season.

Frye supported Day's decision, claiming that he would carry out whatever the head coach asked.

"I'm not hung up on titles, I'm hung up on winning and losing," Frye said. "And anything I can do to help these guys, make sure that we win here, that's really what I'm focused on and all about. What they've done here, the offense is pretty damn good. I don't need to come in and revamp or change a bunch of things. I'm here to enhance and make those things better."

Day said the titles changes for Alford and Hartline reflect their increased responsibility in play-calling and scheme creation. Still, he will ultimately have the final decision in Ohio State's offensive direction before, during and after games.

"I think when you've had the success that we've had on offense, there's a lot of guys who get poached by other programs. They're highly marketable. And Brian and Tony are two of them," Day said. "So with the success that we've had, we're giving them more responsibility. We're giving them a bump (in pay). We're doing a lot of things to make sure that they feel like they're being compensated for what they've done."

Frye said he isn't worried about any coach displaying frustration because of a lack of involvement or input. In his short time on campus, he has been impressed with the coaching staff's willingness to

2022 Ohio State Football Schedule

| Date | Opponent | Result/Time (ET) | TV | 2021 Record |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|-----|-------------|
| Sept. 3 | NOTRE DAME | TBA | TBA | 11-2 |
| Sept. 10 | ARKANSAS STATE | TBA | TBA | 2-10 |
| Sept. 17 | TOLEDO | TBA | TBA | 7-6 |
| Sept. 24 | WISCONSIN | TBA | TBA | 9-4 |
| Oct. 1 | RUTGERS | TBA | TBA | 5-8 |
| Oct. 8 | at Michigan State | TBA | TBA | 11-2 |
| Oct. 22 | IOWA | TBA | TBA | 10-4 |
| Oct. 29 | at Penn State | TBA | TBA | 7-6 |
| Nov. 5 | at Northwestern | TBA | TBA | 3-9 |
| Nov. 12 | INDIANA | TBA | TBA | 2-10 |
| Nov. 19 | at Maryland | TBA | TBA | 7-6 |
| Nov. 26 | MICHIGAN | TBA | TBA | 12-2 |

serve the greater good of the program rather than worry about personal gain.

"No one's wearing a shirt that has their title on it," Frye said. "If you want it to be a challenge, it could be, but with these guys here, it's not going to be because, at the end of the day, we're all just the offensive coaches in that unit. We're just trying to get our guys better."

Day agreed, explaining that he believes his decision offers Ohio State's offense an opportunity to experience continuity and comfortability before regular-season games begin in September.

"When you look again at the structure, the way things are built here, every staff is different across the country," Day said. "The head coach is involved with different things. Mine is with the offense, so I think this gives us the best chance."

Cage, Gaoteote, Mitchell Returning

Day confirmed on Jan. 31 that super seniors Jerron Cage, Palaie Gaoteote and Teradja Mitchell are all coming back for the Buckeyes next season.

Cage started at defensive tackle last season alongside Haskell Garrett, racking up four tackles for loss and a sack while recovering two fumbles. Cage is in line to start this upcoming season along with Taron Vincent, though Tyleik Williams could push for a starting nod.

He also provided one of the highlights of the 2021 season, returning a fumble 57 yards for a touchdown, helping to push Ohio State to a 33-24 win over Penn State.

Gaoteote and Mitchell – the latter a team captain in 2021 – saw less of an impact at linebacker.

Gaoteote never found his footing after gaining late clearance to play, and Mitchell saw his snap count decrease throughout the season after losing his starting job. The duo combined for 54 tackles, 5½ for loss and half a sack, and they will figure into the rotation in new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme. Both contributed significant snaps on special teams as well.

CB Banks Enters Portal

After Day said on Jan. 31 that cornerback Sevyn Banks would be "moving on" from the Buckeyes, the rising redshirt senior revealed that he would enter the transfer portal and return to college football for another season elsewhere.

Banks played four seasons at Ohio State and still has a year of pandemic-related eligibility to use at another school. With the program currently holding seven scholar-

ship players above the 85-man limit (not including Banks) and with several young cornerbacks claiming playing time over him in 2021, Banks will test the transfer portal waters.

He started every game at cornerback two years ago, leaving high expectations for his return in 2021. However, Banks suffered multiple injuries and ailments during the regular season that kept him from becoming a consistent part of the rotation. Cameron Brown and Denzel Burke took over the top two spots and will likely retain their roles as starters, which would have dropped Banks on the depth chart.

With Banks' departure, Ohio State now has seven scholarship cornerbacks on its 2022 roster, including Brown, Burke, redshirt sophomore Lejond Cavazos, redshirt freshmen Jordan Hancock and Jakailin Johnson, and true freshmen Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner.

Former WR Jordan Joins Staff

Ohio State is adding another coach to its growing staff of quality control and graduate assistants. Former Buckeye receiver Devin Jordan announced on Jan. 31 that he will be returning to Columbus as an offensive staffer, likely under Hartline, whom he worked with briefly as a student assistant at Ohio State. He described Hartline as the best wide receivers coach in America in an interview with The Columbus Dispatch in 2021.

Jordan was a class of 2003 signee for the Buckeyes out of Massillon (Ohio) Washington and played briefly for the Buckeyes before a practice injury in 2004 all but ended his playing career. Then-head coach Jim Tressel encouraged him to stay around the program as a student assistant, which he did until his graduation in 2007. From Ohio State, he jumped to Wittenberg as an assistant for one year, Otterbein for three years as wide receivers coach, Walsh for six seasons as wide receivers coach and recruiting coordinator, and Malone for one year as passing game coordinator.

In July 2019 he joined Youngstown State as a quality control assistant for one year before a move to Akron in a similar role in June 2020, where he remained until Ohio State extended an offer to join its staff. He will not be one of Ohio State's 10 on-field coaches.

Jordan also works as a motivational speaker with the Ohio State alumni association and is the president of Beyond The Game, a nonprofit he founded in 2016 that helps "kids understand that sports are a platform to achieving a higher education and reaching their potential as adults,"

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Podcast Back To Weekly Schedule

The BSB podcast, hosted by associate editors Wyatt Crosher and Patrick Mayhorn, with occasional guest spots from Chase Brown and Braden Moles, publishes every Friday morning, covering the stories of the week in Ohio State athletics.

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which offers free summer camps and youth mentoring programs.

Analyst Rhoads Leaving OSU

Ohio State defensive analyst Paul Rhoads will not return to Columbus in 2022. Instead, the former Buckeye staffer will be a defensive coordinator at Gulf Shores (Ala.) High School next fall.

Rhoads worked at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, assisting Ohio State's defensive coaching staff during the 2021 regular season, and he continued his responsibilities after the Rose Bowl. Knowles said that Rhoads helped him understand each player's strengths and weaknesses to understand the person better.

This offseason, the Buckeyes hired several defensive support staff members, including senior advisor Matt Guerrieri, quality control coaches Koy McFarland and Sam McGrath. Ohio State also brought in Brent Zdebski for an undisclosed role.

Rhoads has been coaching football since 1989. He was Iowa State's head coach for six years from 2009-15 before becoming the defensive backs coach and coordinator for Arkansas (2016-17), a defensive backs coach for UCLA (2018-19) and a coordinator for Arizona (2020).

Now, though, Rhoads is heading to Gulf Shores, where he joins a high school coaching staff led by former Austin Peay and Louisiana head coach Mark Hudspeth.

OSU Adds Zdebski To Defensive Staff

Ohio State hired another staffer who worked under Knowles on Jan. 30, adding former Oklahoma State defensive quality control coach Zdebski to its staff directory.

Zdebski is the fourth new member of Ohio State's support staff who previously worked under Knowles after Guerrieri, McFarland and McGrath were hired in recent weeks. Guerrieri will be a senior advisor, McFarland will operate in an off-field role and McGrath will be a program assistant.

Another former Oklahoma State staffer who was expected to join the Buckeyes' staff, Michael Hunter, did not come to Columbus and has instead remained with Oklahoma State as an assistant defensive backs coach.

Zdebski comes to Ohio State following one year at Oklahoma State. After spending three years at Wisconsin (2018-20) as a graduate assistant, he will return to the Big Ten. Zdebski worked as a quality control coach at Central Michigan and Eastern Michigan after graduating from UMass, where he worked with the quarterbacks and wide receivers as a student assistant coach.

Burrow Reflects On Time At OSU

Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow is an MVP candidate in his second NFL season, leading his team into the Super Bowl against the Los Angeles Rams only two years removed from a 2-14 season, which landed Burrow in Cincinnati by way of the first pick in the 2020 NFL draft.

Now the Bengals are one win away from a Super Bowl. Before his time at LSU and in Cincinnati, Burrow spent three years in Columbus as a Buckeye. On Feb. 2, he reflected on a time in his life that he said defined him, that being his time as a backup at Ohio State.

"I wouldn't be the same player that I am today without those trials and tribulations that I went through there," Burrow said. "I loved my time there. I stay in contact with a lot of people from Ohio State, and as I said, I wouldn't be the same player. I think I am who I am because of the difficult times I went through in my career."

Burrow, an Athens, Ohio native, red-shirted for the Buckeyes in 2015 and spent the next two seasons as a backup to J.T. Barrett. He competed with Dwayne Haskins for the starting quarterback position in 2018 but fell behind his counterpart because of a hand injury he suffered in spring practice.

After Haskins won the competition, Burrow transferred to LSU. In 2019, he threw for 5,671 yards and 60 touchdowns and won both the Heisman Trophy and the national title – becoming one of just eight quarterbacks to achieve that in the same season.

OSU Reopens Game-Day Concessions

Beginning with the men's basketball team's contest against Maryland on Feb. 6, concessions opened again at all Ohio State athletic events.

Concessions were closed beginning Jan. 4 as part of the university's updated health and safety protocols, and fans were not allowed to bring in food or water. However, the latter was made available at stands throughout the Schottenstein Center.

"We appreciate everyone's patience as we have worked to respond to health and safety needs while providing the on-campus experiences our community desires," senior vice president for student life Melissa Shivers and athletic director Gene Smith said in a statement. "We appreciate fans' commitment to mask-wearing and ask that you keep up the good work."

Concessions returning is a work in progress.

Continued On Page 6

Buckeyes In The Super Bowl

| Super Bowl (Year) | Player | Position | Team |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------------------|
| I (1967) | Jim Tyrer | OT | Kansas City Chiefs |
| III (1969) | Tom Matte | RB | Baltimore Colts |
| | Matt Snell | RB | New York Jets |
| | Bob Vogel | OT | Baltimore Colts |
| IV (1970) | Jim Marshall | DE | Minnesota Vikings |
| | Jim Tyrer | OT | Kansas City Chiefs |
| V (1971) | Bob Vogel | OT | Baltimore Colts |
| VI (1972), VII (1973) | Paul Warfield | WR | Miami Dolphins |
| VIII (1974) | Jim Marshall | DE | Minnesota Vikings |
| | Paul Warfield | WR | Miami Dolphins |
| IX (1975) | Jim Marshall | DE | Minnesota Vikings |
| XI (1977) | Morris Bradshaw | WR | Oakland Raiders |
| | Neal Colzie | DB | Oakland Raiders |
| | Jim Marshall | DE | Minnesota Vikings |
| | Jack Tatum | S | Oakland Raiders |
| | Lenny Willis | WR | Minnesota Vikings |
| XII (1978) | Randy Gradishar | LB | Denver Broncos |
| XIV (1980) | Bob Brudzinski | LB | Los Angeles Rams |
| | Doug France | OT | Los Angeles Rams |
| XV (1981) | Morris Bradshaw | WR | Oakland Raiders |
| XVI (1982) | Archie Griffin | RB | Cincinnati Bengals |
| | Pete Johnson | RB | Cincinnati Bengals |
| | Ray Griffin | DB | Cincinnati Bengals |
| XVII (1983) | Bob Brudzinski | LB | Miami Dolphins |
| | Tom Orosz | P | Miami Dolphins |
| XIX (1985) | Bob Brudzinski | LB | Miami Dolphins |
| | John Frank | TE | San Francisco 49ers |
| | Pete Johnson | RB | Miami Dolphins |
| XX (1986) | Shaun Gayle | DB | Chicago Bears |
| | Mike Tomczak | QB | Chicago Bears |
| XXI (1987) | Pepper Johnson | LB | New York Giants |
| | Williams Roberts | OG | New York Giants |
| XXIII (1989) | John Frank | TE | San Francisco 49ers |
| XXV (1991) | Pepper Johnson | LB | New York Giants |
| | Williams Roberts | OG | New York Giants |
| XXVI (1992) | Jim Lachey | OT | Washington Redskins |
| | Joe Staysniak | OT | Buffalo Bills |
| XXX (1996) | Mike Tomczak | QB | Pittsburgh Steelers |
| XXXI (1997) | Keith Byars | FB | New England Patriots |
| | Terry Glenn | WR | New England Patriots |
| | William Roberts | OG | New England Patriots |
| | Tom Tupa | P | New England Patriots |
| XXXIII (1999) | Tito Paul | DB | Denver Broncos |
| | William White | DB | Atlanta Falcons |
| XXXIV (2000) | Eddie George | RB | Tennessee Titans |
| | Joe Germaine | QB | St. Louis Rams |
| | Orlando Pace | OT | St. Louis Rams |
| | Chris Sanders | WR | Tennessee Titans |
| | Lorenzo Styles | LB | St. Louis Rams |
| XXXV (2001) | Joe Montgomery | RB | New York Giants |
| XXXVI (2002) | Orlando Pace | OT | St. Louis Rams |
| | Ryan Pickett | DT | St. Louis Rams |
| | Mike Vrabel | LB | New England Patriots |
| XXXVII (2003) | Rickey Dudley | TE | Tampa Bay Buccaneers |
| | Tom Tupa | P | Tampa Bay Buccaneers |
| XXXVIII (2004) | Mike Vrabel | LB | New England Patriots |
| | Nick Goings | RB | Carolina Panthers |
| XXXIX (2005) | Mike Vrabel | LB | New England Patriots |
| XLII (2008) | Mike Vrabel | LB | New England Patriots |
| XLIII (2009) | Santonio Holmes (MVP) | WR | Pittsburgh Steelers |
| XLIV (2010) | Malcolm Jenkins | CB | New Orleans Saints |
| | Will Smith | DE | New Orleans Saints |
| XLV (2011) | Will Allen | DB | Pittsburgh Steelers |
| | A.J. Hawk | LB | Green Bay Packers |
| | Ryan Pickett | DT | Green Bay Packers |
| | Matt Wilhelm | LB | Green Bay Packers |
| XLVI (2012) | Jake Ballard | TE | New York Giants |
| | Jim Cordle | C | New York Giants |
| XLVII (2013) | Alex Boone | OT | San Francisco 49ers |
| | Larry Grant | LB | San Francisco 49ers |
| | Ted Ginn Jr. | WR | San Francisco 49ers |
| | Donte Whitner | S | San Francisco 49ers |
| XLIX (2015) | Nate Ebner | DB | New England Patriots |
| 50 (2016) | Corey "Philly" Brown | WR | Carolina Panthers |
| | Kurt Coleman | S | Carolina Panthers |
| | Ted Ginn Jr. | WR | Carolina Panthers |
| | Andrew Norwell | OG | Carolina Panthers |
| | Bradley Roby | CB | Denver Broncos |
| LI (2017) | Nate Ebner | DB | New England Patriots |
| LII (2018) | Malcolm Jenkins | DB | Philadelphia Eagles |
| LIII (2019) | Jake McQuaid | LS | Los Angeles Rams |
| | Nate Ebner | DB | New England Patriots |
| | John Simon | DE | New England Patriots |
| LIV (2020) | Nick Bosa | DE | San Francisco 49ers |
| | Darron Lee | LB | Kansas City Chiefs |
| LVI (2022) | Eli Apple | DB | Cincinnati Bengals |
| | Vonn Bell | DB | Cincinnati Bengals |
| | Joe Burrow | QB | Cincinnati Bengals |
| | Sam Hubbard | DL | Cincinnati Bengals |
| | Isaiah Prince | OL | Cincinnati Bengals |
| | Jordan Fuller | DB | Los Angeles Rams |

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

ress, and full menus will not be available until later in February.

Buckeyes Play In Senior Bowl

Former Ohio State defensive linemen Haskell Garrett and Tyreke Smith helped lead the National Team to a 20-10 win over the American Team in the Reese's Senior Bowl on Feb. 5.

Garrett recorded three pressures, while Smith sacked former Liberty quarterback Malik Willis in the first quarter for his only statistic of the day. Garrett, who came off the bench in addition to Smith, participated in the game after suffering a shoulder injury earlier in the week.

Tight end Jeremy Ruckert was also present throughout the week during practice but missed the game following a minor foot injury he suffered earlier in the week as well as a death in the family.

Notable former Ohio State players entering the 2022 NFL draft include Garrett, defensive tackle Antwaun Jackson, offensive tackle Thayer Munford, wide receiver Chris Olave, offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere, Ruckert, Smith, running back Master Teague III and wide receiver Garrett Wilson.

The next step for these potential draftees is the NFL Combine, which will take place in Indianapolis from March 1-7. Ohio State will then host a pro day sometime between the combine and the NFL draft, set to begin on April 28.

Brutus Level VIPs To Be Recognized

If you have wanted to show your support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program but are unable to participate at the Scarlet or Elite level, now is the time to sign up at the Brutus level for just \$50. Brutus level VIPs are recognized in BSB twice a year, and we will be running the complete list of Brutus VIPs during spring football season. VIP donors help Buckeye Sports Bulletin stay alive and vibrant.

"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 40 years and what we plan to do in the future."

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

VIP subscribers enjoy a 20 percent discount at Conrads College Gifts at Easton. VIP subscribers also enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint," as well as a card good for \$10 off your next food purchase at Rusty Bucket, where your neighborhood eats, drinks and laughs, or any Cameron Mitchell Restaurant, based on availability at the time of upgrade.

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

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

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

Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant

publisher Karen Wachsman): Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

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Scarlet VIPs: Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, Ohio; Joseph Huber, Walpole, Mass.; Alan Lord, Reynoldsburg, Ohio; Lawrence Romanoff, Powell, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; William Torok, Girard, Ohio; J.D. Wientjes, Peoria, Ill.; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Norwalk.

Former QB Barrett Signs With Elks

The Canadian Football League's Edmonton Elks announced on Jan. 29 the signing of former Ohio State quarterback Barrett.

Barrett redshirted his freshman season before earning the starting nod in 2014,

helping lead Ohio State to an 11-1 regular season before suffering a season-ending injury, and the Buckeyes would go on to win the national championship with Cardale Jones under center.

In his redshirt sophomore year, Barrett battled with Jones throughout the season for the starting job, eventually securing it for the remainder of his career at Ohio State.

In addition to being a three-time All-Big Ten selection and three-time Big Ten Quarterback of the Year winner, he holds school and conference records for touchdowns responsible for in a career.

In four seasons at Ohio State, Barrett passed for 9,434 yards and 104 touchdowns in addition to rushing for 3,263 yards and 43 touchdowns. He finished 38-6 as a starter and was a three-time captain for the Buckeyes.

Barrett went undrafted in the 2018 NFL draft but was later picked up by the New Orleans Saints, spending time between the active roster and practice squad.

He was waived by the Saints on Aug. 1, 2019, and, following brief stints with the Seattle Seahawks and the Saints (a second time), he landed with the Pittsburgh Steelers, where he spent nearly a year with the organization before being waived Aug. 2, 2020.

Former CB Arnette Arrested

Former Ohio State cornerback Damon Arnette has been released by the Kansas

City Chiefs following his arrest on Jan. 29 after allegedly threatening a valet with a gun, according to a report from TMZ.

Arnette allegedly threatened a valet at the Park MGM Las Vegas hotel and casino with a gun after attempting to retrieve his vehicle without a valet ticket.

He was charged with two counts of assault with a deadly weapon, two counts of illegal drug possession and one count of carrying a concealed weapon without a permit.

Arnette played for the Buckeyes from 2015-19 and was a first-round pick by the Las Vegas Raiders in the 2020 NFL draft. He was released from the Raiders this past November following a video of him brandishing a gun and making death threats.

He also faced lawsuits surrounding a hit-and-run accident and an interaction with a valet worker in Las Vegas in which he reportedly spat on the worker and poked him in the chest.

After his release from the Raiders, Arnette spent time on the Miami Dolphins' practice squad and later signed a reserves contract with the Chiefs this past week before his release.

Big Ten Divisions On The Way Out?

Ohio State's revised 2022 schedule was released in January, and while that is set in stone, there could be changes on the horizon for 2023 and beyond.

According to a report from The Athletic, Iowa athletic director Gary Barta said



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the conference could eliminate divisions or change the number of conference games depending on the future format of the College Football Playoff.

The Big Ten has its 14 teams split between the East and West divisions. Each team plays a nine-game conference season that features each team in their division and three crossover games.

Since the East and West divisions were introduced in 2014, the East has dominated, with Ohio State, Penn State, Michigan and Michigan State among the conference's top teams. The East is also undefeated in the Big Ten Conference Championship Game, with an 8-0 record and an average margin of victory of 20 points.

According to the report, Big Ten administrators have discussed dropping the number of conference games down to eight, allowing the opportunity to schedule more games with fellow members of "The Alliance" with the ACC and Pac-12.

Also, part of the discussion is ending divisional play entirely, instead opting for teams to play three set opponents each year and cycling through the remaining 10 conference teams over two years.

"We've had several conversations," Barta said. "One of the things that we're watching is whether it's related to The Alliance, which

No BSB Print Issue For Three Weeks

In accordance with an annual scheduling quirk designed to spread BSB's 24 print issues out properly over the course of the publishing year, the next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, dated March 5, is scheduled to be mailed on March 1.

There is no reason to miss any of the Buckeye sports action in the interim, however, as the BSB staff will be reporting all the latest news at our BuckeyeSports.com website.

We will be posting all the latest recruiting news, as well as news of the men's and women's basketball teams, the hockey and wrestling teams and any other news of the day as it happens, and BuckeyeSports.com is free to all subscribers.

Along with the daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day.

Please note that recent developments with the mail service have us concerned about delivery time for BSB. We remind you the complete print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted at BuckeyeSports.com at the time the issue is mailed

and is available to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site.

If you are not already taking advantage of BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's 24/7 website, simply email your name, address and preferred email address to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com, and we will send back easy instructions on how to access the site. Don't forget, subscriptions@buckeyesports.com is our email address, not the website. We will send you directions on how to access the site.

If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access.

As mentioned, readers who have been experiencing postal delivery problems can read the complete edition of each issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin online at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion. Your copy of the paper will still arrive in your mailbox at the usual time.

If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com or your mail service, feel free to call us at the above number.

we're talking through and/or, what gives us the best opportunity to have the most success in the College Football Playoff format?

"We're wondering if we're going to know what the format is before we have to make that decision. So, we're kind of waiting to

see where that lands. But we have had active conversations about the schedule beyond 2022."

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1982

Ohio State's Art Schlichter found himself having to pay his own way in school after accepting money and other valuable inducements to participate in the Olympia Gold Bowl in San Diego.

It had been reported that Schlichter - who received a winner's share for playing in the game and two new cars, one for being named most valuable and the other for just showing up - had put the winnings in a trust fund so as not to lose his scholarship. But NCAA rules dictated that Schlichter became a professional for accepting anything of that nature.

35 Years Ago - 1987

Host Illinois, which entered the game as the 20th-ranked team in the nation, gave the Ohio State women's basketball team a scare on Feb. 1, but the Buckeyes managed to complete the first half of their Big Ten slate with a perfect 9-0 record.

The two teams were knotted at 55 with just over six minutes to play before the Bucks (16-3, 9-0) rallied for the victory.

"Illinois is a very fine team," said OSU coach Nancy Darsch, "and I think they realized that in order to have a shot at sharing the Big Ten championship they had to have a strong game in order to defeat us.

"They tried to mix up their defenses some. They played man-to-man, 2-3 and 1-3-1 (zone defenses). They took it at us. They played pretty aggressively offensively and really rebounded well."

However, Ohio State hit on 71 percent of its first-half shots and rode a balanced attack with Tracey Hall (14), Niki Lowry (14), Geneva Sanford (13) and Lisa Cline (10) all in double figures to avoid the upset bid, 68-64.

30 Years Ago - 1992

Ohio State senior guard Jamaal Brown became the 32nd player in school history to eclipse the 1,000-point mark for his career, scoring 10 points against Minnesota Jan. 22. With 12 points against Illinois Jan. 30 and six points against Michigan Feb. 2, Brown hit 1,020 points and needed only 54 more to break into the Buckeyes' all-time top 30.

Seniors Chris Jent and Mark Baker were both nearing the 800-point plateau on the same team. Through Feb. 2, Baker had 788 points in his career and Jent had 781. However, they would have to average nearly 19 points per game for the remainder of the season to reach 1,000 and join Brown.

25 Years Ago - 1997

Nearly one-fourth of the way through his team's struggle with Ohio State Feb. 8, Indiana coach Bob Knight decided to take a stroll. He left his usual province of stalking and barking and turned for the exit before eventually returning to cheers from the 17,147 in Bloomington's Assembly Hall. The abrasive and often entertaining Knight later explained he was hoping this circus side-show masquerading as a Big Ten basketball game would suddenly change its course.

Knight, of course, was showing disgust even though his team

held an early eight-point lead but hit only four of its first 16 shots while OSU was 7 of 13.

Ohio State head coach Randy Ayers was frustrated too, though not by the game-play so much as the lack of it. His Buckeyes were tagged with 34 fouls and four technical fouls, giving the Hoosiers 52 free throws on their way to a 93-76 win. Two of those technical went to Ayers, as he was tossed from the game with 13:10 to play when he stormed onto the court after an exchange between OSU's Damon Stringer and IU reserve Richard Mandeville.

"I deserved my first technical, but I didn't think I deserved the second one because I was looking to protect one of my kids," Ayers said.

20 Years Ago - 2002

Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger was non-committal in an interview with Buckeye Sports Bulletin on the status of women's basketball coach Beth Burns moving forward. Burns, whose team sat at 11-13 after a win over Michigan on Feb. 10, was in the final year of her initial five-year contract and held only a 78-63 record in Columbus.

In the previous four seasons, OSU had appeared in one NCAA tournament and won the 2001 Women's NIT.

"They've had a real string of bad luck," Geiger said. "The injuries have been real unfortunate. As for the future, we'll talk with Coach Burns about that at the end of the season.

"We must sit down and talk. We meet from time to time, but we'll talk about the future after the season is over."

15 Years Ago - 2007

Kelci Stringer, the widow of former Ohio State and Minnesota Vikings tackle Korey Stringer, would be allowed to proceed with her lawsuit against the NFL and equipment maker Riddell Inc. claiming negligence in her husband's heat-related death in 2001, a federal judge ruled.

The 27-year-old Korey Stringer died of heatstroke at the Vikings' training camp after practicing in extreme heat and humidity.

His widow later sued the Vikings for wrongful death, claiming three team trainers failed to properly treat her husband, but that case was thrown out by a Hennepin County district judge, and the decision was upheld by the Minnesota Supreme Court in November 2005.

Stringer's new suit charged that the league and Riddell did not do enough to ensure equipment protected players from unsafe conditions created by practicing in extreme weather by allowing the use of helmets and shoulder pads that too readily retain heat and prevent evaporation of perspiration.

10 Years Ago - 2012

Jim Tressel's time away from the world of higher education lasted only eight months. On Feb. 2 the University of Akron hired the former Ohio State head coach to the newly created position

of vice president for strategic engagement.

According to the university, Tressel's job would include identifying, recommending and supporting strategies and efforts that promoted success in all facets of student life.

University of Akron president Dr. Luis M. Proenza praised Tressel for having touched thousands of lives in positive ways during a coaching career that started with four seasons at Akron from 1975-78 as a graduate assistant on Jim Dennison's football staff.

"He has incredible energy and demonstrates leadership passion and compassion for students," Proenza said of Tressel. "We feel fortunate that he has decided to bring that dedication here to the University of Akron. Our students will be the beneficiaries."

Five Years Ago - 2017

With the likes of Joe Burrow, Dwayne Haskins and early enrollee Tate Martell on the quarterback depth chart behind J.T. Barrett, there were rumors that Barrett, who had graduated in December, might declare for the NFL draft or transfer to another school for his final year of eligibility in 2017.

The Wichita Falls, Texas, native decided to remain in Columbus, though, something Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer never doubted.

"I never thought he would leave," Meyer said on National Signing Day Feb. 1. "I don't know how close that was. Only J.T. knows. I'm very close with him. But I think he's an Ohio State Buckeye and will always be an Ohio State Buckeye."

The rumors began after Ohio State's 31-0 loss to Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal on Dec. 31 when Barrett did not decisively confirm that he was going to come back in 2017.

"My main focus was to focus on this year," Barrett said after the game. "I didn't really give it that much thought, but it will be really hard for me to walk away when we just lost 31-0."

One Year Ago - 2021

Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington, one of Ryan Day's first hires when he took over as the head coach at Ohio State in 2019, was the subject of potential coaching vacancy rumors on Feb. 7.

FootballScoop reported that new Tennessee head coach Josh Heupel was focusing in on the Buckeye coach, entering his third year in Columbus, as the primary target for Tennessee's open spot at defensive coordinator.

"Tennessee's pursuit of a defensive coordinator has extended into the Big Ten Conference," the report said. "Multiple sources on (Feb. 7) tell FootballScoop that the Vols' search for Josh Heupel's first defensive coordinator is centering on popular Ohio State assistant coach Al Washington.

"Sources told FootballScoop over the past 48 to 72 hours that Tennessee's search had included Zooms and additional interviews with multiple sources, including some that advanced to the stage of Tennessee discussing a three-year contract with at least one candidate."

Abor, Hinzman Wrap Up Class For OSU

Continued From Page 1

since-departed defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, which Day acknowledged may have led to the slow start.

"(The prospects) obviously want to know who will be here year in and year out," he said. "The guys who recruit them, they have relationships."

Despite Day's optimism, he knew as well as anyone that the two-man defensive line class would not cut it, confirming Ohio State would still be on the prowl beyond the early period.

"It's important. We've got to get it done," he said. "It will get done one way or another. We will find somebody to fit those roles. We need to have eight defensive tackles and eight defensive ends. We've got to do it. We feel pretty good about a couple of them."

As it turns out, Day was participating in some sleight of hand, as defensive tackle Hero Kanu had silently committed during the early period. He later announced his commitment at the Army All-American Bowl Jan. 8, but his silent verbal gave Ohio State three commitments on the defensive line.

"Hero's personality is excellent, his work ethic is excellent, he's never had a bad day," Day said Jan. 31. "He's a joy to work with in that way, but I also think he was a little bit raw because he was still learning the position, so when you see his gifts and his background, it's just exciting to think about the potential he has."

Curry, Jackson and Kanu would have been an incredible defensive line class for most schools, yet Johnson saved his best work for last, as defensive end Omari Abor held off committing until the Under Armour All-American Game Jan. 2, at which he announced he'd be attending Ohio State.

It was not a done deal, however, with a month to go until National Signing Day. Abor had previously stated he'd continue taking official visits, with his other top schools including Alabama, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

Johnson not only held onto Abor, who signed with the Buckeyes on National Signing Day, but Abor never ended up taking any more visits.

"I don't think he did," Ohio State recruiting analyst Bill Greene told BSB. "He didn't take all five (official visits) that I was aware of, and I think all he visited was Ohio State, Alabama and LSU. He had those two lingering that looked like it was going to be maybe Miami (Fla.) or something, and I don't think he ever took them."

The early period had passed, meanwhile, without an addition for since-departed offensive line coach Greg Studrawa since Avery Henry committed Oct. 20, 2021.

The three offensive line commits at the time were George Fitzpatrick, Henry and Tegra Tshabola, all projected at tackle at the college level, leaving Ohio State with both a small and lopsided group in terms of position in the trenches.

"We will see as we get into the next year," Day said Dec. 15. "We will see how these guys have done. If they can get on the field in the next year, then we've done a good job. If they haven't, then we have swung and missed. But I think the proof will be in the pudding over the next year."

Interior lineman Carson Hinzman, a native of Hammond, Wis., was initially set to commit to either Ohio State or Wisconsin on Dec. 17, the final day of the early period, but he pushed his timeline back indefinitely, meaning the Buckeyes might have been left with just a three-man class on the offensive line if he elected to stay at home with the Badgers.

Ohio State was given a gift in his recruitment, however, when Wisconsin offensive line coach Joe Rudolph departed for the same job at Virginia Tech on Jan. 3, and Hinzman committed to the Buckeyes the following day.

Studrawa would be out in the coming week, though, resulting in an unfortunate finish to Hinzman's recruitment in which he lost both potential future position coaches in a matter of days. Despite that, Hinzman reaffirmed his commitment to Ohio State, saying he was committing to the school, not one coach.

Even with Brooks' flip, the late push for recruits on the offensive and defensive lines resulted in a 21-man class for Day and company that checks in as one of the top groups in recent Ohio State history.

Despite the fewest number of signees

among Day's three classes at the helm, the average player rating of .9405 is the fourth highest for Ohio State since 2012, trailing only 2021 (.9498), 2017 (.9459) and 2018 (.9429).

It will take time before Ohio State's 2022 class begins paying dividends, but the signees are off to an early start with 11 early enrollees already clocking in for the upcoming season.

"We went through every early enrollee and transfer today with (strength and conditioning director Mickey Marotti) and got some really good feedback on all of them," Day said Jan. 31. "It's a good class. I do think the two (transfers) coming in, Tanner (McCalister) and (DeaMonte 'Chip' Trayanum) have brought us some veteran leadership, but there's also some leadership already being created there in the early enrollees. So far, the feedback we've gotten has been great, and now these guys have a chance in the next seven weeks to really work on their bodies as they head into spring practice."

Johnson Impresses With Back-To-Back Hauls

All in all, Johnson ended things with an impressive group on the defensive line. Kanu was the 19th-rated defensive lineman in the class, while Abor, Curry and Jackson, all designated as defensive ends, were all ranked in the top 13 in their position group.

"I always thought that they were going to end up with a great D-line class," Greene



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said. "I think they always felt good about Camden Curry. They always felt good about Hero Kanu. Kenyatta Jackson was someone they always felt like they were in good with. They really never wavered on the fact that their D-line class with Larry Johnson was going to be really good this year."

Alabama, with five-star defensive ends Jeremiah Alexander and Jihaad Campbell, and Texas A&M, with four-stars Enai White and Malick Syla, joined Ohio State as the only teams to sign two top-10 defensive ends this cycle, with Jackson at No. 5 and Abor at No. 6. Including Curry at No. 13, the Buckeyes were the only team with three top-20 prospects at the position.

This is the type of group that could build the foundation of the defense for many college football programs, but it's just another day at the office for Johnson, who's signed a program-altering defensive line class in back-to-back years.

"We've always felt like we've been able to recruit really good defensive linemen here, and Larry has done such a great job of that," Day said. "We want to start with four down linemen. In 2019 I thought we did a really good job of going through and putting the one-high safety defense together, and that year was excellent. Then over the last couple of years, we've had some issues here and there, but when it came to making this decision moving forward, we still wanted to start with that foundation, but at the end of the day, the goal is to put our guys in position to be successful."

This cycle's haul comes on the heels of the 2021 class, in which the Buckeyes signed defensive ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau, as well as defensive tackles Mike Hall and Tyleik Williams.

Tuimoloau and Sawyer were the No. 2 and 3 defensive linemen in the class, respectively, trailing Korey Foreman, who committed to USC. The Buckeyes again

signed not just two top-10 players on the defensive line, but Sawyer and Tuimoloau were top-five overall prospects in the class.

Hall came in at No. 12 and Williams at No. 36, meaning Ohio State was one of just two teams, along with LSU, to sign four top-40 defensive linemen in the class.

Sawyer and Tuimoloau's roles are somewhat unclear for this upcoming season with defensive end Zach Harrison returning for a final season at Ohio State, but it's likely at least one will earn a starting nod while the other will see increased snaps relative to last season.

Hall didn't make much of an impact in his freshman year, appearing in just four games, but Williams saw consistent snaps throughout the season and is in line to be one of Ohio State's biggest contributors at defensive tackle next season alongside Jeron Cage and Taron Vincent.

In back-to-back years, this establishes a surplus of talent for Ohio State to put on the field in 2022 and beyond.

"That 2020 class when they took Darrion Henry-Young, Jacobbe Cowan and Ty Hamilton, it was like, 'Is he starting to slip a little bit?' Not that those aren't good players, but they weren't elite Alabama- or Georgia-type players," Greene said. "You started to think at that point, maybe he's winding things down, maybe he's not going to recruit as hard as what they needed him to do. Then you follow it up with Sawyer, Hall, J.T. and Tyleik, and then the group he landed this year, and it's like, 'No, he's back. No worries with him.'"

Hicks, Styles Lead The Charge In Ohio

Ohio State will continue to expand its reach to other states in recruiting – especially so in 2023 given a questionable number of top players from Ohio – but for 2022, the Buckeyes were able to stay home and find plenty of talent.

Day pulled from 12 states for recruits in the most recent cycle, but Ohio State stayed home for six of its signees, including its top two players in the class in Hicks and Styles, rated the No. 7 and 12 prospects in 2022,

respectively.

Hicks and Styles being the top two recruits in the class also marks a shift for Ohio State, as it's the first time since signing Chase Young and Jeff Okudah in 2017 that the Buckeyes' top two recruits were on the defensive side of the ball.

"When you've had quality classes with good people like we have here with (21) guys, the quality of the guys is as good as any in the country," Day said Dec. 15. "A lot of that has to do with C.J. He jumped in early and recruited a lot of guys. He built that relationship."

Hicks, who has earned the moniker "Captain Buckeye" for his work spreading the Ohio State gospel to fellow 2022 recruits, has been a leader for the class ever since he committed back in 2020. When not tearing up the field for Kettering Alter, he could often be found tweeting at prospects or accosting visitors at Ohio State games, at which he made numerous appearances after his commitment given that he lived just over an hour from Ohio Stadium.

"There were some good guys along the way who were good football players. But they just didn't fit what Ohio State is all about and our culture," Day said of finding good fits. "These guys are able to see (each other) at the camps, the Rivals events, The Opening and all these different things they go to, and they spend time together. We don't get a chance as coaches to see them.

They do, and C.J. was a big part of that. His mom, Tiffane, was great. They spearheaded this thing."

The other key cog on defense for Ohio State's class was Styles, who was expected to be a member in 2023 until his reclassification just days before the early period began.

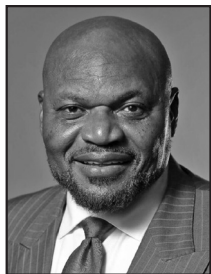
"It was right after he committed (in November)," Day said of Styles' decision to reclassify. "It was a home game, and we were over at the Blackwell. He shared he was going to commit and then quickly said, 'We are thinking about reclassifying,' and then he went about the business of finding out that information."

Styles homed in on the linebacker and safety positions at Pickerington Central, but Ohio State lists him as a safety on the roster.

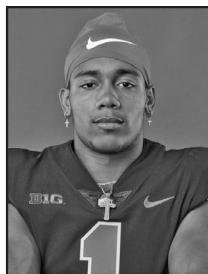
"We will use him everywhere we can," Day said. "He can do a lot of things. He can cover, he can blitz, he can play zone and he can play man. He's like a Swiss army knife out there. Our guys on defense will be excited to have him as he builds roles."

Beyond Hicks and Styles, the class is rounded out in Ohio by cornerback Jyaire Brown, linebacker Gabe Powers and Tshabola, all top-300 prospects, as well as Henry. Even as the Buckeyes continue expanding their recruiting footprint to stay among the top schools, Ohio will continue to serve as the focus of Ohio State's recruiting strategy.

"I said that was going to be an emphasis and it is," Day said of keeping Ohio kids home shortly after taking over as head coach. "That's from when we wake up in the morning until we go to bed at night. That's not going to change."



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Block O Boosts New Assistants On Recruiting Trail

Ohio State coaches were on the recruiting trail over the past month, but it was a different group than recruits have gotten used to seeing over the past few years.

Gone were Matt Barnes, Kerry Coombs, Greg Studrawa and Al Washington. Enter Perry Eliano, Justin Frye, Jim Knowles and Tim Walton, all new assistant coaches for the Buckeyes who have spent more time on the road than in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center since their hirings and were introduced to the media for the first time on Jan. 31.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

These assistants have spent time at several different schools in different parts of the country, including Boston College, Cincinnati, Duke, Oklahoma State and UCLA, but none of their prior stops brought with them the prestige of Ohio State and the Block O logo displayed proudly as they visit prospects.

"There's a different response," Eliano said about recruiting at Ohio State. "Cincinnati is great, but there's a different response when you have the Block O on your chest. People say we are a national brand from New York to California to everywhere in between. There was a different response from (recruits) because I had a Block O on my chest, but those relationships had been built. And then I've developed new relationships with schools I had never been in. At the end of the day, it's exciting because it's all about players, but it's about the right type of players.

"I think (recruiting) starts with you as an individual coach," Eliano continued. "Guys want to play for coaches and establish relationships with coaches that they feel good about. It's got to start there. Now with the logo on my chest, it doesn't hurt because it

gets you in doors and gets you opportunities. Just like we want to coach at the highest level, young men want to play at the very best and highest level and play for national championships. It works hand in hand."

Head coach Ryan Day echoed those thoughts, explaining that relationship building is at the foundation of the work these new assistants are doing.

"The first thing is relationship building, when you look at all of these new coaches and ask around, you ask about the people that they've worked with in coaches, players who have played for them, areas they've recruited in the past, you just ask those questions," he said. "And when you get feedback on that, you get a feel for who they are, and that was the first thing, how is their relationship building? And then the second thing is development, and all of those guys across the board have developed at a high level. When you combine those two things, usually you're going to have a pretty good coach, and that's where we start."

Frye has been as busy as anyone over the past few weeks, and he's noticed a tangible effect from the new logo he's wearing.

"It doesn't hurt, the Block O when you walk into the front door of a school," he said. "People see that. There's a little bit of logo greed, or whatever you want to say."

While the logo and the pedigree of Ohio State is an easy pitch to recruits, Frye said he is big on keeping things basic, and that comes back to building relationships.

"You've got to identify the kids you know can play for you and uphold the standards you have here, and then how do you go get those guys? For me, it's not with cool Instagram edits or dancing or music," he said. "You've got to go in and hit the ground running with the high school coach, the parents, the mentors, with whoever's helping that kid with that decision. Does this logo help? Absolutely. You're going after a higher-caliber kid. But at the end of the day, he's still a kid you've got to go build the right way and try to get him to want to choose here."

OSU Football 2023 Commitments

Players in the class of 2023 who have signed or issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

| Player | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | High School |
|-----------------|------|-----|-----|-------|---------------------------------------|
| Cedrick Hawkins | SAF | | | ★★★★ | Cocoa, Fla. |
| Ty Lockwood | TE | | | ★★★★ | Thompson's Strn. (Tenn.) Independence |
| Joshua Padilla | OT | | | ★★★★ | Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne |
| Will Smith Jr. | DT | | | ★★★ | Dublin (Ohio) Coffman |

DL Miller Signs With Georgia

The last domino to fall for Ohio State on National Signing Day was Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star defensive tackle Christen Miller, and he elected to take his talents to Georgia, signing with the Bulldogs Feb. 2.

Miller is rated the No. 103 overall prospect in 2022 and the No. 15 defensive lineman. He took official visits to his top schools – Florida A&M, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Ohio State and Oregon.

Despite some social media flirtation with Ohio State, including with former defensive tackle Antwan Jackson, who attended the same high school as Miller, Georgia was long viewed as the pick for Miller, and he's decided to stay home for college.

"First of all, I want to say I picked Georgia just because of the coaches," Miller said during his signing ceremony. "You definitely can't get any better coaching than at Georgia – better coaching, better teammates. Those boys, they grind every day. They won a national championship, all of the boys there right now. I've been working with them for a long time."

2023 DL Overton Reclassifies To 2022

Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton five-star defensive lineman Lebbeus Overton (6-4, 265) was one of the top prospects in 2023, but he's now one of the top remaining prospects in 2022, having reclassified Feb. 3.

"NIL is always going to be there, but I'm looking at the bigger picture," Overton told

On3 Sports. "Playing high school ball, you're getting double-teamed, and triple-teamed on every play. It's not too fun. I feel like going to college earlier and getting that experience as early as I can will help me develop more in the next year rather than staying in high school."

Along with his reclassification, he announced a top five of Georgia, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon and Texas A&M.

"Ever since I stepped on campus with (defensive line coach Larry) Johnson, he's been that top guy," he said. "He's had people like the Bosa brothers and Chase Young drafted in the first round. Seeing the success he's had is big. Building that relationship with coach Johnson and coach Ryan Day and talking about the scheme of things has helped out."

Overton is now the No. 18 prospect in 2022 and the No. 5 defensive lineman in his new class. He was offered as a dual-sport athlete (basketball being the other sport) by Ohio State on Feb. 18, 2021, and made a trip to Columbus this past summer.

Overton has not announced a timeline yet, as he expects to take official visits to each of his top schools.

While Ohio State's class seemed set in stone following National Signing Day, there's no doubt the Buckeyes would find room for someone like Overton who would instantly become one of the top players in the class.

OSU Among Top Schools For 2023 Prospects

With the offensive line a focus in the upcoming class for Ohio State and new offensive line coach Frye, the Buckeyes are making early progress with one of the top offensive line targets in 2023, among others.

Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep four-star offensive tackle Chase Bisontis (6-5, 290) narrowed his list of top schools down – at least somewhat – to 15 final contenders.

The list stretches far and wide, including Alabama, Boston College, Clemson, Kentucky, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Penn State, Rutgers, Texas, Texas A&M and West Virginia, though Bisontis told Eleven Warriors that Ohio State, Michigan State, Notre Dame and Rutgers are on top.

He's rated the No. 4 offensive tackle and the No. 52 overall prospect in 2023. He took an unofficial visit to Ohio State on June 15, 2021, and has also made several unofficial visits to in-state Rutgers. The Buckeyes offered Bisontis on Dec. 20, 2020.

Though the coach who offered Bisontis – former offensive line coach Studrawa – is gone, Bisontis has had positive conversations with Frye.

"It was an introduction of who he is, his background, how he develops guys, then he



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ASK AN ANALYST

With BuckeyeScoop's Bill Greene

Other than quarterback, which head coach Ryan Day has said he wants at least one every recruiting cycle, what is the position of need in the 2023 class?

"In terms of quantity and quality, you've got to look at O-line. There's a reason that they made a change at coach. I think they need to bring in five minimum, and I would maybe go to six depending on who you can get. They've already offered three Ohio kids. You've got one in (Josh) Padilla, then you've got (Austin) Sierveld out there and then Luke Montgomery. It's not out of the realm, I think you could get all three of them.

"Then you've got all those other guys, those national guys they are chasing, like (Kady) Procter and (Payton) Kirkland, (Samson) Okunlola, TJ Shanahan, Chase Bisontis, Olaus Alinen - there are a million guys, so it's hard to believe that you would take three Ohio guys and then limit yourself to just two of these national guys, so I think they're going to go to six if they can get the right six."

Ohio State has already issued more offers in 2023 than it did the entire 2022 cycle. Do you take anything away from this?

"No, I don't at all. I mean, so many offers are really just for get-

ting acquainted, icebreakers - they're camp invitations for the most part. They're, 'Hey, come to campus.' You're not going to get a kid from Florida to come visit you either in the spring or in the summer if he doesn't have an offer. That is not going to happen. So I view offers just with a grain of salt in the last few years. They don't mean what they used to mean.

"Jim Tressel used to offer 40 kids and take 25, and every offer they put out there was a committable offer. In fact, the term committable offer wasn't even viable nine or 10 years ago. No one ever used it. I don't even really look at offers that much anymore. A lot of them are phony baloney, 'Come to camp, we'd love to see you.' It's hard to place much value in offers anymore until you see the kid visit and you see Ohio State go visit him when they're on the road. If they go six states over to visit a kid, I know they're interested in that kid."

Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior five-star running back Richard Young has long been a focus of Ohio State and running backs coach Tony Alford in 2023. In addition to the Buckeyes, he's had recent visits from Alabama, Clemson, Florida and

Georgia. Where does Ohio State stand in this national recruitment?

"He's going to be an everyone recruit, for sure. They got in early, which is always huge. They got him on campus last summer. He and running backs coach Tony Alford really bonded well. There's a great relationship there, so they laid all the early groundwork. They got the kid up to campus, which was huge for camp. They got to work with him in camp, they got to take him on a tour of everything, and now you should just fight it out. When you're going against Alabama and Clemson and those guys, you're in deepest water with all the sharks.

"They've got to get him back up here one more time. If he shows up on his own dime for spring football or he comes back to campus this summer and then plans a return official visit in the fall, then you're serious. If you don't see Richard Young again for a while or don't hear (from him), no visits planned, that's not going to be a good sign. But I think they're in good shape, and I think they're in there with Alabama. I would think Ohio State's in the top two or three."

started asking me about my personal life," Bisontis told Eleven Warriors of his first conversation with Frye. "He started talking about my goals, and then he started saying that he's going to have two first-round draft pick tackles next season, so he needs me to come in and replace them. He told me that I'm one of his top priorities right now."

Bisontis said he'd like to wrap his recruitment before his senior year begins, indicating that June 10 - his 18th birthday - is the latest he'd like to pull the trigger on a school, though if he feels comfortable he might com-

mit before then.

The Buckeyes are also in on Windsor, Conn., four-star offensive tackle Olaus Alinen, one of the nation's top offensive line targets.

He's rated the No. 124 overall prospect and No. 12 offensive tackle in the class and holds over 30 Power Five offers.

Alinen has not released a list of his top schools, though he said that Ohio State is among his leaders.

"(The offer) was something I had been waiting for and something that was mean-

ingful to me because it was a school I had interest in for a long time," he said. "For that to happen, it was an honor to me and a great feeling. I figure that I'm a player who can play and succeed in premier programs and play for a team that can win games and compete for championships. Ohio State is usually one of those teams, so it sparked my interest."

The Buckeyes have an uphill battle for Alinen, however, as Alabama is expected to be the favorite. He told 247Sports that Alabama was a "dream offer."

Ohio State is also among the top schools

for Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep School four-star linebacker Josiah Trotter (6-2, 230).

He's rated the No. 24 linebacker and No. 264 overall prospect in 2023, and he listed Ohio State along with Clemson, Notre Dame, Penn State, South Carolina, Texas A&M, Virginia Tech and West Virginia.

His father, Jeremiah, was a 1998 NFL draft pick with the Philadelphia Eagles who went on to play 12 seasons in the NFL. Josiah's brother, Jeremiah Trotter Jr., is a linebacker at Clemson.

Continued On Page 12

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Continued From Page 11

Knowles Homes In On Top 2023 Linebacker

Many, La., four-star linebacker Tackett Curtis (6-2, 218) was one of Ohio State defensive coordinator Knowles' first offers since joining the Buckeyes, and he's made Curtis a considerable priority in the ensuing weeks.

Knowles offered Curtis on Jan. 18 after visiting him at his high school and has since made a second visit to Curtis on Jan. 28.

Curtis' father and coach, Jess, made his appreciation known on Twitter, saying, "We appreciate (Knowles) for flying back to Many High School today! We appreciate him for making time to get back to our school and recruiting our kids!"

Curtis is ranked the No. 5 linebacker in 2023 and the No. 64 overall prospect in his class. He holds other offers from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State and Notre Dame, all of which had coaches stop by Many in recent weeks.

"They're all trying to see if I will visit in the spring," Curtis told 247Sports. "Just about every team is trying to get me to come."

DL Hoffer Enjoys Second Visit To OSU

Ohio State has been viewed as the team to beat for Atlanta Woodward Academy defensive lineman AJ Hoffer (6-5, 245), and his

second visit with the Buckeyes reaffirmed that they're on top for the four-star prospect.

Hoffer was offered during a visit to Ohio State for its win over Michigan State in November, and he returned over the weekend of Jan. 21 for an unofficial visit.

The No. 39 defensive lineman in 2023 told On3 Sports that the visit went great and that his mom loved it.

"She said it surpassed her expectations," Hoffer said. "She liked the coaches a lot. We did a tour of campus and the facilities. Now she can see the bond I have with (Johnson) and she likes that a lot, too."

Hoffer has said he would like to commit by his birthday in August. 247Sports' Steve Wiltfong has a crystal ball prediction in for Hoffer to Ohio State.

2023 WR Williams Gets Offer Following Text Scam

You've heard of phone scams involving the IRS, bank fraud and your car's extended warranty, but the new craze appears to be unsolicited texts from people claiming to be Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

An article published by Eleven Warriors detailed how a scammer attempted to contact one of their staff members to ask for gift cards by posing as Hartline, and shortly after that article was released, it became apparent that this is a widespread issue, as it also happened to Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Stranahan four-star wide receiver Hykeem Williams (6-

Final 2022 247Sports Composite Ohio Rankings

| Rank | Name | Position | High School | College |
|------|-----------------|----------|----------------------|------------|
| 1. | C.J. Hicks | LB | Archbishop Alter | Ohio State |
| 2. | Sonny Styles | S | Pickerington Central | Ohio State |
| 3. | Drew Allar | QB | Medina | Penn State |
| 4. | Kaden Saunders | WR | Westerville South | Penn State |
| 5. | Gabe Powers | LB | Marysville | Ohio State |
| 6. | Tegra Tshabola | OT | Lakota West | Ohio State |
| 7. | Aamil Wagner | OT | Wayne | Notre Dame |
| 8. | Jyaire Brown | CB | Lakota West | Ohio State |
| 9. | Blake Miller | OT | Strongsville | Clemson |
| 10. | Gi'Bran Payne | RB | LaSalle | Indiana |
| 11. | Alex Afari | ATH | Lakota West | Kentucky |
| 12. | Elijah Brown | TE | Wayne | Alabama |
| 13. | Ryan Baer | OT | North | Pittsburgh |
| 14. | Derrick Shepard | DL | Archbishop Alter | Cincinnati |
| 15. | Kaleb Johnson | RB | Hamilton | Iowa |
| 16. | Brody Foley | TE | Anderson | Indiana |
| 17. | Kentrell Marks | RB | Valley Forge | Purdue |
| 18. | Stephan Byrd | RB | Canal Winchester | Cincinnati |
| 19. | Carter Smith | OT | Olentangy Liberty | Indiana |
| 20. | Kwabena Asamoah | IOL | Pickerington Central | Rutgers |

3, 195).

Williams received a text from somebody claiming to be Hartline but was skeptical that it was Hartline reaching out to him.

"I guess someone was trying to pull a prank on me or whatever," Williams told Eleven Warriors. "(Someone) texted my phone and acted like it was him. So I texted him on Twitter to see if it was him, and it wasn't. Apparently, Coach had been trying to text me, but he was texting my old phone number."

After Williams and Hartline got in contact – for real – they stayed in touch, and he was eventually offered by Ohio State on Jan. 28.

He's rated the No. 59 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 11 wide receiver in the class. He holds additional offers from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma and Texas A&M, among others.

"It would be awesome," Williams said of potentially playing in Ohio State's offense. "They produce great receivers. Just knowing you're on an offense like that would be awesome."

Safety Target Washington II Commits To Alabama

The Crimson Tide gained their first commitment in 2023 from Venice, Fla., four-star safety Elliot Washington II (6-1, 188), who committed to Alabama on Jan. 31 over Ohio State, Georgia, Penn State and Michigan State.

The Buckeyes were in Washington's top five released on Nov. 17 following an unofficial visit to Ohio State on Oct. 30.

Alabama got Washington on campus over the weekend of Jan. 28, however, and he committed days later. Washington is the No. 194 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 18 safety in the class.

Washington's father, Elliot Sr., played basketball for Alabama, though the younger Elliot said his father's connection would have no bearing on his decision.

Though the Buckeyes missed out on Washington, they are still in on other safeties in 2023, including Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star Caleb Downs (6-0, 185) and Danvers (Mass.) St. John's Prep four-star Joenel Aguerro (6-0, 195). Ohio State already has a safety committed in Cocoa, Fla., four-star Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 165).

Ohio State Picks Up PWO Commitments

The Buckeyes earned a series of preferred walk-on commitments for 2022 from Steubenville, Ohio, defensive back/wide receiver Brenten "Inky" Jones; Avon, Ohio, defensive back Colin Kaufmann; Dublin (Ohio) Coffman quarterback Mason Maggs; and Cincinnati Princeton linebacker Jaylon Stoker.

Jones and Kaufmann are both former track athletes at their respective schools, while Maggs, who committed to Ohio State Jan. 29 over a preferred walk-on offer at Ohio University, is the son of former Ohio State

Superlatives For Ohio State's 2022 Recruiting Class

Most Likely To Succeed: He'll be arriving at Ohio State a year ahead of schedule to get a head start on learning the playbook and developing his body, and by the time he is ready to go, it's hard to imagine that Pickerington (Ohio) Central five-star safety Sonny Styles will be anything other than a star.

The reclassifying 6-4 safety played just about every position in high school and Ohio State sees him playing a similar role in new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' defense.

"Everywhere. We will use him everywhere we can," head coach Ryan Day said of Styles' position. "He can do a lot of things. He can cover, he can blitz, he can play zone and he can play man. He's like a Swiss army knife out there. Our guys on defense will be excited to have him as he builds roles."

Future Captain: He's already earned the "Captain Buckeye" nickname, so it would be difficult to pick against Kettering (Ohio) Alter five-star linebacker C.J. Hicks. One of the first pledges in the class, Hicks took the point on several recruitments in helping out Ohio State's staff.

"When you've had quality classes with good people like we have here with (21 players), the quality of the guys are as good as any in the country," Day said. "A lot of that has to do with C.J. He jumped in early and recruited a lot of guys. He built that relationship."

"There were some good guys along the way who were good football players. But they just didn't fit what Ohio State is all about and our culture. These guys are able to see them at the camps, the Rivals events, The Opening and all these different things they go to and they spend time together. We don't get a chance as coaches to see them. They do and C.J. was a big part of that. His mom, Tiffane, was great. They spearheaded this thing. He is a big part of our class and our future."

First To The Field: Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star tight end Bennett Christian is one of the lower-ranked players in this Buckeye class and may qualify for the underrated category as well, but he's entering a position of need with a skill set that Ohio State desperately desires. With Jeremy Ruckert departing and Cade Stover eyeing a move to linebacker, Christian is joining an already sparse room and might be the best blocking tight end on the team from day one.

"Certainly there are guys on the defensive side that you get excited about and think, 'I bet that guy can make an impact early.' I'm not going to be shocked if Bennett Christian does because they're losing Jeremy Ruckert." The Athletic's Bill Landis told BSB. "If Cade Stover is going to stay on the defensive side of the ball, there's no real heir apparent there at tight end, and Bennett Christian is coming in, I think probably as ready as any of their incoming tight ends have been to handle the blocking portion of the position, which is really what they recruit these players for in the first place anyway."

Fan Favorite: Ohio State has a rich history of elite pass rushers at defensive end and looks to have the next in that long line coming in with

the 2022 class in the form of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr.

The Gatorade Player of the Year in Florida, Jackson led his high school team to an 11-1 record and a Class 3A state title behind his 65 tackles, 17 tackles for loss and 15 sacks. He finished his high school career with 34 sacks and will head to Ohio State as one of the nation's best pure edge rushers. It may not be fair to anoint him the next Bosa or Young, but he certainly has the production to support the hype that has risen around him.

Biggest Recruiting Win: One of the final pickups in the class, and a critical one at that, Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon four-star quarterback Devin Brown takes the cake as Ohio State's biggest recruiting win, and perhaps its most surprising in the cycle as well. The Buckeyes looked all set at quarterback in 2022 when they landed Quinn Ewers in 2020, but his surprise reclassification and eventual transfer in December of 2021 – as well as the move of Jack Miller III – left Ohio State with only two returning scholarship quarterbacks before landing Brown's commitment over longtime leaders in his recruitment Ole Miss and USC, which he had previously been committed to.

"We want to bring in a quarterback every year for a lot of reasons," Day said. "When Quinn decided to reclassify, we went about the business of finding a quarterback in that class. We weren't going to force it. We had to find somebody we thought fit. We looked really at only two or three guys."

"Devin stuck out. He just did. I was sold when I watched his film and then got him on the phone. Then he showed me a video of him windmill dunking. That put me over the top. I said, 'Look at this guy.' He has a tremendous personality. He is very competitive, very gifted very intelligent, but also very athletic. I'm excited to see his energy come into this building pretty soon."

Underrated (For Now): He doesn't come to Ohio State with the same acclaim as some of its recent wide receiver signees, but Austin (Texas) Lake Travis four-star Caleb Burton drew wide receiver coach Brian Hartline's eye early in the process for a reason. Burton was at one point the top receiver in his class and one of the nation's top 10 players after he hauled in 82 passes for 1,515 yards and 18 touchdowns during his freshman and sophomore seasons with Del Valle High School, but a knee injury that ended his junior season cut short his surge to the top of the rankings.

Add in a senior season at Lake Travis that saw Burton again limited by injuries, and his final ranking at No. 131 nationally makes sense. However, the Buckeyes feel that if they can rehab Burton back to his pre-injury self, they've secured one of the best wide receivers in the class for the fourth consecutive recruiting cycle, going back to Garrett Wilson – who happened to play his high school ball at Lake Travis as well – in the class of 2019. That one worked out pretty well.

– Patrick Mayhorn

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1982

Linebacking appeared to be the strong suit in the Buckeye grid deck, with no fewer than six future OSU players having excelled at that position in high school.

In addition to landing Columbus stars Mike Kee, Byron Lee and Mark Pfister, coach Earle Bruce also secured the services of Dennis Hueston, John Hutchinson, and Tom Johnson.

Hutchinson hailed from Atwater High School in Waterloo, Ohio, stood 6-3 and weighed 218 pounds. A punter and the starting quarterback for his team, Hutchinson was the school's all-time leading scorer.

35 Years Ago - 1987

Extensive digging and probing by Buckeye Sports Bulletin turned up 18 prep seniors who had made verbal commitments to sign with Ohio State.

Heading the list was Cincinnati CAPE standout Carlos Snow. Snow, a 5-10, 200-pound back, who was regarded by just about every major scouting service as one of the top 10 running backs available.

"I've always dreamed of being a Buckeye, and I already feel like I am one," Snow, who rushed for 7,856 yards and scored 108 touchdowns in his illustrious prep career, told a newspaper in his hometown. "I've followed Ohio State for years and have been an Archie Griffin and Keith Byars fan. I'm really excited about next season."

30 Years Ago - 1992

Thanks to some creative thinking and provisions in the NCAA rules, it appeared Ohio State would be able to sign all 27 football players who had verbally committed to become Buckeyes.

Running backs Eddie George of Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy and Travis McGuire of Massillon, Ohio, would sign their letters of intent and then enroll at Ohio State for spring quarter.

"I think it will give us a certain edge," George told BSB. "We're going to be able to go through a couple of weeks of spring ball working with the veterans. That has to give us the edge over the other first-year guys who won't be coming in until the fall."

25 Years Ago - 1997

Despite a Spartan-like effort from Michigan State, the Buckeyes were able to land one of the top defensive linemen in the state of Ohio for the recruiting season.

Heath Queen, a 6-5, 270-pound defensive tackle from Lodi, Ohio, originally committed to Michigan State because of his respect for Spartans coach Nick Saban.

But after hearing constant rumors about Saban's imminent departure for the NFL and watching both teams play in the bowl games, Queen had second thoughts.

"I kept hearing the rumor that Coach Saban might leave to go

to the pros," Queen said. "Even though he didn't leave this season, I wouldn't want to go there and have him leave during my sophomore or junior season. He was the reason I wanted to go to Michigan State."

20 Years Ago - 2002

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel was free and clear to sing the praises of one of his signees who had made overtures to several high school prospects to join him at Ohio State.

That player, of course, was Massillon (Ohio) Washington quarterback Justin Zwick, who picked Ohio State over Michigan on May 30.

"In this day and age with the Internet and e-mail and so many of these camps, these guys know each other," Tressel said. "They carry their cell phones around and their pagers. They communicate so much more than they did in the past."

"A guy like Justin made a commitment early and said, 'Hey, this is where I want to be.' Justin's a pretty smart guy. It made sense to him that these guys he has met and made relationships with, he was saying, 'Hey, I noticed you at this camp. Why don't you come along with me?'"

"I don't know how much that meant. But as I read and listened and heard these kids talk, they felt like they knew him, and comfort is important when you make decisions."

15 Years Ago - 2007

After appearing to be on the verge of breaking his commitment to Ohio State, Immokalee, Fla., linebacker Brian Rolle needed just one key realization: that he had already given his word to a potential school.

"I did some thinking that I made some commitments to those guys and there's no sense in me backing off because I'm a man of my word and I want to stick to it," he said. "I look at it as if I do decommit and go somewhere else, it's not only going to look bad for me but for our program and coaches and that will probably hurt Ohio State's chances of recruiting our school. I just did it and stuck with it."

That decision came in spite of the fact that Florida reaffirmed its official offer to him on Feb. 5.

"Florida offered me again, but I kind of look at it as, 'I'm not going to disrespect Ohio State,' so I told all of the guys that," he said. "I'm going to sign with Ohio State. There's nothing to worry about. It's solid."

10 Years Ago - 2012

While coaches waited for their 2012 classes to fax in their signed letters, Fort Wayne (Ind.) Bishop Luers four-star linebacker Jaylon Smith was receiving phone calls from some of the top coaches in the nation stressing to the linebacker that he was a top

priority for next year's class.

Smith, the younger brother of Ohio State running back Rod Smith, heard from both Michigan's Brady Hoke and Notre Dame head coach Brian Kelly that day, both of whom communicated to the linebacker that he was their top target for next year.

Because he had a close relationship with his older brother, Smith already had a visit scheduled to Ohio State for Feb. 18 after members of the Buckeyes' coaching staff came to visit him at his high school recently.

"Coach (Mike) Vrabel came to the school a couple of weeks ago watching my film, and he has been communicating with me on a basic level," he said. "The Patriots are actually my favorite team, and he was my favorite linebacker when he was playing."

Five Years Ago - 2017

Ohio State brought Lakeland (Fla.) Senior four-star wide receiver James Robinson (6-3, 190) to campus the weekend of Jan. 20, but things didn't go as planned. Court records showed that Robinson was cited near campus on a drug possession charge during his visit in a report filed Jan. 23.

After the incident, Robinson returned to Florida, but court records show that he was set for a court hearing back in Columbus on March 1. The citation led to Ohio State pulling its offer, though Robinson was quick to respond to reports of his arrest via Twitter.

"I was never arrested!!" Robinson tweeted Jan. 28. He later posted a comment directed at Ohio State players that was later deleted, and he apologized for the entire incident.

"I want to apologize for embarrassing myself, family, teammates, school community and those that support me," Robinson wrote.

One Year Ago - 2021

Though Ohio State already held a commitment from quarterback Quinn Ewers, there was a chance the Buckeyes were going to take players at the position in 2022.

One player under consideration for that spot was Medina, Ohio, three-star signal-caller Drew Allar, whose recruitment had gone national in recent weeks. He picked up offers from Kentucky, Michigan, Penn State, Texas A&M and Washington in a six-day stretch from Jan. 30 through Feb. 4.

There was a thought that Allar - who was listed as the 24th-best pro-style quarterback and No. 514 prospect overall in the class of 2022 - would fly under the radar for much of the cycle to the point where the Buckeyes could add him to the class late. But it was clear schools were paying attention to his strong junior season, when he threw for 2,962 yards and 26 touchdowns while leading the Battling Bees to the regional final of the state playoffs.

and NFL offensive lineman Bob Maggs. In his recent senior season, Maggs threw for 1,786 yards and rushed for 861 yards, scoring 30 total touchdowns.

"I just felt like there was no better opportunity for me than becoming a Buckeye," Maggs told 247Sports. "With my dad having played and growing up in Columbus, it was what I've always dreamt of, and I couldn't be more excited about it."

Stoker committed to Ohio State on Jan. 31. In his senior year, he finished with 75 tackles while forcing two fumbles. He visited the Buckeyes in November and was offered by former linebackers coach Al Washington in December.

Ohio State's newest preferred walk-ons are joined by Hubbard, Ohio, running back T.C. Caffey and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy kicker Jayden Fielding in the class.

**OSU Issues
Plenty Of Offers**

With the focus now firmly on 2023 and beyond, Ohio State has continued issuing offers for the upcoming recruiting cycles over the last few weeks.

Breaking down every offer would almost certainly fill the pages of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, so with that in mind, we'll break down the top prospects who have been given offers by the Buckeyes since BSB last went to print, as well as list the rest of the top prospects who have been offered.

- West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West

four-star athlete Malik Hartford (6-3, 175) received an offer from the Buckeyes on Jan. 22. He's rated the No. 215 overall prospect and No. 17 athlete in the class, though he was offered as a safety by Ohio State. He holds additional offers from Boston College, Duke, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State and Notre Dame, among others.

- Sarasota (Fla.) Riverview four-star cornerback Charles Lester III (6-2, 171) received an offer from Ohio State on Jan. 25. 247Sports ranks him the No. 30 prospect in 2024 and the No. 4 cornerback, and he holds additional offers from Alabama, Florida State, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Michigan State and South Carolina, among others.

- Ohio State offered Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic four-star defensive lineman Jason Moore (6-6, 255) on Jan. 26. He's the No. 43 overall prospect and No. 6 defensive lineman in 2023 and holds additional offers from Alabama, Florida, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Penn State and Texas A&M, among others.

- Venice (Fla.) four-star defensive end Damon Wilson (6-4, 230) was offered by Ohio State on Jan. 25. He is the No. 102 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 8 defensive end in the class. He holds additional offers from Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Penn State and USC, among others.

Also in 2023: Winter Garden (Fla.) West Orange safety Jordan Castell (No. 379 NA, No. 32 S), Suwanee (Ga.) Collins Hill tight end Ethan Davis (No. 111 NA, No. 7 TE -

committed to Tennessee), Cambridge (Mass.) Buckingham Browne & Nichols School wide receiver Ronan Hanafin (No. 331 NA, No. 44 WR), Tampa (Fla.) Wharton cornerback Dijon Johnson (No. 405 NA, No. 41 CB) and Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch wide receiver Bryson Rodgers (No. 294 NA, No. 40 WR).

Also in 2024: Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior athlete Kelton Henderson, McKinney (Texas) running back Bryan Jackson, West Roxbury (Mass.) Catholic Memorial offensive tackle Guerby Lambert and Upper Marlboro (Md.) Charles Hebert Flowers cornerback Braydon Lee.

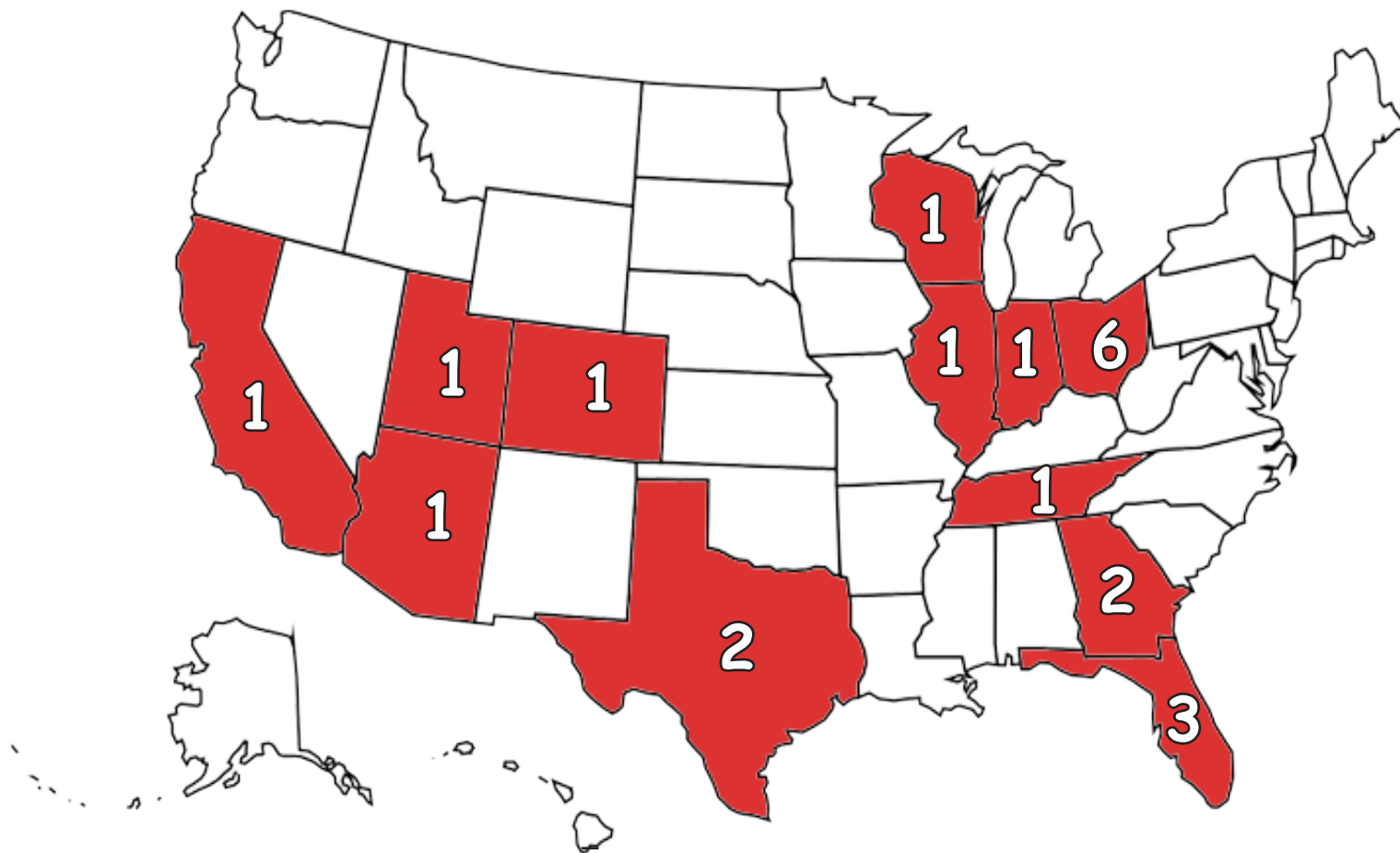



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OSU's Class Of 2022



All rankings from the 247Sports composite. All statistics provided by Ohio State and MaxPreps.



OMARI ABOR

DE • 6-4 • 240
Duncanville, Texas
Rank: DE 6, Overall 63, TX 9



ACCOLADES: Abor was named the Texas District 8-6A Defensive Newcomer of the Year as a sophomore and then was a Texas District 11-6A first-team selection as a junior.

ABOR SAYS: "The main reason (I picked Ohio State) is Larry Johnson. Just the way he coaches his players, I just really feel like it (will) be a great experience. (We're) close, real close. He called me after every game, like, 'Yo, you messed up on this. You messed up on that.' He was picking out the little details, and I'm just looking at them like, 'Wow, this dude really changes how I play the game of football.'"

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's a natural pass rusher with impressive edge-bending athleticism and the flexibility to get under tackles and run the arc. He faced outstanding competition in practice and games, and his athletic background includes basketball and track and field earlier in high school. He looked like one of the nation's top defensive prospects in the 2022 class through his junior year, but a good-not-great senior year caused some hesitancy. Nevertheless, he still projects as a high-major impact player with long-term potential to reach the high rounds of the NFL draft." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Abor's Duncanville Panthers made four consecutive appearances in the Texas 6A state playoff semifinals and made it to the title game in 2018-19 and 2021, falling in all three championship-game appearances. He is the son of RoRo and Randy Abor.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 2, 2022



KOJO ANTWI

WR • 6-0 • 190
Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert
Rank: WR 25, Overall 149, GA 16



ACCOLADES: Antwi was named to the Touchdown Club of Atlanta's preseason team, which honors the top players in Georgia, prior to his senior season. In his career at Lambert, he hauled in 121 receptions for 1,839 yards and 20 touchdown receptions, averaging 15.2 yards per catch.

ANTWI SAYS: "Coach (Brian) Hartline loves to talk ball, and that's what I like about him. He was straight up with me, and he also wants to get to know me as a person and not many coaches do that. He is a really cool dude. You can talk to him about anything. Coach (Ryan) Day I feel like is a really good coach. I've seen some of the hype videos for the games and stuff, and the speeches get you fired up. I think Coach Day is a great guy. I like talking to him. He's pretty cool."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's an athletically built receiver with good size and mass, plus space to add more. He gets off the line quickly, is on top of corners and shows good top-end vertical play speed. He is a high-floor receiver who fits various offensive attacks and plays the position like a natural and projects to the high-major level as a potential multi-year impact starter with an NFL draft ceiling." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Antwi competed in track and field as a sophomore, running an 11.88 100-meter dash, and also participated in the 4x100 relay for Lambert. He is the son of Martha and Paul Antwi.

COMMIT DATE: July 5, 2021



DEVIN BROWN

QB • 6-3 • 190
Draper (Utah)
Corner Canyon
Rank: QB 6, Overall 43, UT 1



ACCOLADES: In his senior season at Corner Canyon, Brown threw for 4,881 yards and 57 touchdowns, leading the Chargers to the state championship game. In his high school career, he amassed nearly 8,000 yards and 85 touchdown passes in 31 games.

BROWN SAYS: "With my decision, a big thing was being a competitor. Growing up, my dad would always bring up other quarterbacks and tell me they were better than me. That just made me work harder, and my whole life I've been working to be the best. I love that underdog mentality. I want to go up against the best in every moment, and I want to go compete against the best in college. That's why I'm going to be a Buckeye."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's a dynamic quarterback with a basketball background. He shows very good arm strength and zip on his passes and flashes ability to make off-platform throws without losing velocity. He distributes to all levels of the field and looks extremely comfortable rolling out to space. He displays good timing and anticipation over the middle and is mechanically sound and quick to release the football. He is a potential multi-year starter at the elite Power Five level and has a second-day NFL draft projection." – Blair Angulo, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Brown played his first three seasons at Queen Creek High School in Arizona, where he was coached by former Ohio State quarterback Joe Germaine. He is the son of Tammy and Andrew Brown.

COMMIT DATE: Dec. 1, 2021



JYAIRE BROWN

CB • 6-0 • 178
West Chester (Ohio)
Lakota West
Rank: CB 24, Overall 201, OH 8



ACCOLADES: Brown was named the Southwest District Division I football defensive player of the year by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association. In his senior year, he led the Greater Miami Conference with five interceptions to go with a fumble recovery and a punt return for a touchdown. He also started at wide receiver, finishing with 26 receptions for 416 yards and four touchdowns.

BROWN SAYS: "When I get (to Ohio State), (I'm) mainly listening with open ears. Just picking from everybody's game, getting myself better and learning from all them older dudes and the dudes that have been there a year before me, just learning from their game and putting it into my game."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Brown is a natural cover corner with an encouraging frame relative to his position. He has good height and is long and lean with a wiry, athletic build and should add some bulk with continued physical development. He displays promising turn-and-run ability and speed to stay with receivers in the vertical game. He looks fairly fluid for a young, taller corner and is disruptive at the catch point. This is a high-major corner with good anticipation and functional athleticism with long-term NFL draft upside." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Originally from Cincinnati, Brown transferred to Lakota West for his junior and senior seasons after two years at Warren Easton High School in New Orleans. He's the son of the late Lonnell Brown Sr.

COMMIT DATE: April 22, 2020



KALEB BROWN

WR • 5-11 • 195
Chicago St. Rita
Rank: WR 13, Overall 79, IL 2



ACCOLADES: Brown's St. Rita Mustangs finished 11-3 this past season, advancing to the Illinois 7A state title game, where Brown had eight receptions for 128 yards. In his junior year, he had 790 all-purpose yards, and he is also the first player to win the Chicago Catholic League's East Suburban Catholic Conference Player of the Year award twice.

BROWN SAYS: "That is the beauty of (competition). Just making guys better. That is one thing that I love about football – the competition. I plan to go down there and grind. Make it to the top. Get my spot, earn my spot. That's my mind-set. Go down there and do what I've got to do. Everything will follow."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Brown has played a lot of tail-back in high school but projects as a slot receiver or outside receiver in college. He has good straight-line speed, maybe not quite elite in that area, but he can break away and make big plays in the open field. He has a quickness and a short-area burst that allows him to create separation, and he shows strength after the catch as well, though he does not have the catch radius of other top receivers. He is a competitive player who can be used in a variety of ways, and that versatility helps him project as a future draft pick." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: In addition to playing receiver, Brown played running back at St. Rita. In the Mustangs' first game of his senior season, he suffered a left leg injury that kept him out until the playoffs. He is the son of Alori Brown.

COMMIT DATE: June 7, 2021



CALEB BURTON

WR • 6-0 • 165
Austin (Texas) Lake Travis
Rank: WR 21, Overall 132, TX 22



ACCOLADES: Burton caught 82 passes for 1,515 yards and 18 touchdowns during his freshman and sophomore seasons at Del Valle High School before missing his junior year with a knee injury. He was named to the SI All-American watch list before his senior season at Lake Travis, in which he finished with 49 receptions for 845 yards and 15 touchdowns.

BURTON SAYS: "The success Coach (Brian) Hartline has had in the past, being a former NFL wide receiver, that's a lot he's been through with the whole process, so I know he can help teach me and mentor me and get me where I want to go."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Burton has a lean, athletic build that can play outside or in the slot. He shows consistently impressive timing and high-pointing ability on contested throws and meets the ball at the apex. He adjusts well with encouraging body control and gets off the line quickly. He missed virtually his entire junior season with a knee injury suffered in the season opener. Still, he remains among the top prospects in Texas for the 2022 class. He possesses all-conference potential with an early-round NFL draft ceiling." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Burton attended Lake Travis High School his senior year, which is also the home of former Ohio State wide receiver Garrett Wilson. He is the son of Nicole and Charles Burton.

COMMIT DATE: Nov. 23, 2020



BENNETT CHRISTIAN

TE • 6-6 • 240
Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona
Rank: TE 20, Overall 413, GA 40



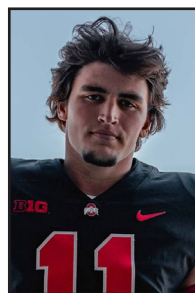
ACCOLADES: Christian was named to the Georgia Preseason 6A all-state team by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution before his senior season and was named to the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association all-state team after his junior season in which he caught 20 passes for 250 yards. He is the highest-rated prospect in Allatoona High School history.

CHRISTIAN SAYS: "Some people say Ohio State doesn't use the tight end like they should. But Ohio State has the best wide receivers, the best running backs, and they shouldn't single out one position. They use them all. And Coach (Kevin) Wilson is the best coach to develop tight ends."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "If there's an Ohio State comparison to be made for Christian, it's probably Jake Hausmann, whose big body made him a matchup nightmare in high school. That's a similar problem for defenses trying to defend Bennett Christian. At 6-6 and almost 235 pounds, Christian isn't afraid to mix it up in the run game as an aggressive blocker – something that Ohio State always requires of its tight ends. But he's more than capable of stretching the field in the passing game when his offense requires it of him." – On3 Sports' Jeremy Birmingham.

PERSONAL: He is the son of Sandi and Bill Christian. Bill played for the University of Tennessee under the late Johnny Majors. Bennett was offered by the Volunteers, who finished in his top three schools along with the Buckeyes and Penn State.

COMMIT DATE: Sept. 1, 2020



CADEN CURRY

DE • 6-3 • 250
Greenwood (Ind.)
Center Grove
Rank: DE 13, Overall 123, IN 3



ACCOLADES: Curry is the No. 3 defender in the state of Indiana in 2022, trailing only Kentucky signee Kiyanta Goodwin and former Ohio State commitment and Indiana signee Dasan McCullough, who ranks No. 75 nationally. He was named Mr. Football on the defensive line by the Indiana Football Coaches Association after he racked up 65 tackles, 24 for a loss and seven sacks for Center Grove, which won the Class 6A title.

CURRY SAYS: "I just felt like the coaches (made the difference). Coach (Larry) Johnson was the best fit for me and Coach (Ryan) Day showed me the most love. They see me fitting well in their program, and I feel they can help me the most. Right off the bat, (Ohio State) was one of the more exciting offers I got, and creating the relationship with Coach Johnson made me feel good about going there and safe in making a smart decision and not regretting it."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Curry comes across as more compact than his listed size. He's a very productive, disruptive player. Even when he is not the one making the play, he is consistently affecting offenses with his penetration. He seems to have an extremely high floor because of the way he plays and because of his production against good competition in high school. He could play end in an odd front or tackle in an even front." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: He is the son of Chris and Maria Curry. His mother's family is from Ohio originally and traveled to watch the Buckeyes in the Rose Bowl against Utah.

COMMIT DATE: Dec. 14, 2021



GEORGE FITZPATRICK

OT • 6-6 • 285
Englewood (Colo.)
Cherry Creek
Rank: OT 19, Overall 259, CO 2



ACCOLADES: Fitzpatrick suited up in the All-American Bowl and was a first-team All-Centennial League selection as a senior. Cherry Creek scored 32.6 points per game and ran for over 160 yards per contest on the way to a fourth consecutive state title appearance.

FITZPATRICK SAYS: "It's been awesome to be committed and watch the games, knowing guys on that team and just getting myself prepared for that level. The loss against Oregon early in the season was obviously tough and we've seen a few teams lose their first game and then the wheels fall off. But Coach Day and the other coaches on the staff have done a great job of pulling in the guys and get everyone to play as a family despite that first loss. It says a lot about the coaching staff there."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Fitzpatrick excels playing forward in space, getting off the ball quickly and arriving at the second level ahead of schedule. He shows foot quickness and the lateral range to consistently initiate engagement of second-level targets. He played right tackle as a sophomore and junior and could stay there or possibly develop into a left tackle in college. Overall, Fitzpatrick is an intriguing offensive tackle prospect who likely possesses both a high floor and a high ceiling in the long term." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Son of Mark Fitzpatrick and Sara Dunlap. His father was very involved with the recruitment and accompanied George on all visits, which he said Ohio State encouraged him to take before committing anywhere.

COMMIT DATE: July 9, 2021



KYION GRAYES

WR • 6-0 • 175
Chandler, Ariz.
Rank: WR 14, Overall 88, AZ 2



ACCOLADES: Grayes missed the first half of his senior season with an injury but played in the final five games, catching 21 passes for 388 yards and four TDs. He hauled in 28 balls for 562 yards and 10 scores during an undefeated state title-winning season in 2020.

GRAYES SAYS: "The one thing I love about Coach (Brian) Hartline and the whole coaching staff, they never promised me a thing. That's what I want. I want a coach to be real with me. I don't want them to tell me that I'm going to come in and play for them right away, blah, blah, all this, all that extra stuff. I want to know the real behind it – how hard it's going to be, all that. He told me it's not easy. Boom, there we go. That's all I need to know."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "I think he's absolutely a guy that can play inside or outside. In 7-on-7 stuff he's always inside because that's where the matchups you want are, but he can and does play both spots for us. Anybody can run routes if the guy covering you is 7 yards off the ball. What about when they have that Division I physical ability on their side as well? Do you know how to get where you're supposed to get to? Kyion does." – Grayes' high school head coach, Rick Garretson.

PERSONAL: Grayes also ran track and field and trains in a boxing gym. He ran an 11.35-second 100-meter dash in 2020 and set a long jump personal record of 21-feet, 7-inches. He's the son of Joanna and Kyion Grayes Sr.

COMMIT DATE: Feb. 28, 2021



DALLAN HAYDEN

RB • 5-11 • 195
Memphis (Tenn.)
Christian Brothers
Rank: RB 26, Overall 295, TN 9



ACCOLADES: Hayden was a two-time finalist for Tennessee's Mr. Football award after gaining 4,012 yards and scoring 57 touchdowns during his junior and senior seasons in 23 games. He ran for more than 2,000 yards in each season. He was named the offensive player of the year for Division 2-AAA West as a senior.

HAYDEN SAYS: "History speaks for itself – Big Ten championships, national championships, the number of NFL players that came from The Ohio State University and all the first-rounders they have had. I really started watching them probably like when I was 10, when Braxton Miller and all of them were there. I don't know why, but I always liked watching Ohio State. Every time they would play Michigan, I'd watch that game."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Physically he's very gifted – he's big, strong, fast, runs very aggressively and with a chip on his shoulder. He's got wide vision, a big lens so to speak. He can see the whole field and cut it back in a split second, and sometimes he can make things right when they're not perfect. As he continues to see more reps, I just think you're going to see his numbers continue to get even bigger." – Hayden's high school head coach, Thom McDaniel.

PERSONAL: Hayden is a National Honor Society member and comes from a family of running backs. His father, Aaron, played running back at Tennessee while his older brother Chase is a junior at Illinois who carried the ball five times for 18 yards in 2021. His mother is ChaToya Hayden.

COMMIT DATE: June 22, 2021



AVERY HENRY

OT • 6-6 • 305
St. Clairsville, Ohio
Rank: OT 56, Overall 705, OH 20



ACCOLADES: Henry led St. Clairsville to a 13-2 record in 2021 and a berth in the Division IV regional finals, which ranks among the finest seasons in program history. The Red Devils scored 38.8 points per game and scored more than 50 points on five occasions.

HENRY SAYS: "Being that my mom's a single mom, she can't make that distance (to Iowa State, where Henry was once committed) all the time. We always talked about what if Ohio State offered. I told my mom I was going to take it if it came. It was unbelievable when I first got it. I didn't realize for the first day or so. Literally, the day I committed, I had 20, 40 kids come right up to me and said, 'Hey, that's Avery Henry, the Ohio State commit.'"

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Henry has a (huge) body and worked hard to reshape himself going into his senior year, dropping significant weight and leaning out. He'll have to continue polishing up his technique and will have to adjust to seeing better competition in college, as he did not see as many Power Five edge guys in high school. His developmental ceiling is high – he could need some time to get there – but he's already shown he will work away from the game as far as strength and conditioning." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Henry lost 70 pounds to earn his Ohio State offer after the Buckeye coaching staff challenged him to prove his dedication to the sport. He played both ways for his high school and also suited up at center for the basketball team. He's the son of Matt Henry and Tiffani Pabian.

COMMIT DATE: Oct. 20, 2021



C.J. HICKS

LB • 6-3 • 215
Kettering (Ohio) Alter
Rank: LB 1, Overall 7, OH 1



ACCOLADES: Hicks was a semifinalist for the Maxwell Club's National High School Defensive Player of the Year award after recording 84 tackles, 18 tackles for loss and two interceptions as a senior. He was also named Ohio's Division III Defensive Player of the Year, though he lined up at running back and as a special teams returner along with linebacker and safety. He's one of only three Ohio prospects to finish within the top 10 of the national rankings since 2011. All three signed with Ohio State (Paris Johnson Jr. in 2020, Jack Sawyer in 2021).

HICKS SAYS: "I feel like I always have something to prove. I feel like I make us all play as one. I make everybody play for each other, not for themselves, and try my best to lead by example. People don't really talk about Ohio State's linebackers as much as they used to. I'm trying to bring that back."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "I saw Hicks as a freshman playing corner in the playoffs for Alter. Then he moved to safety and then he made the move to linebacker. I don't think he will move down any farther. He will be an extremely athletic outside linebacker type. He is someone you could blitz at the quarterback and bring him off the edge. He is so long and athletic, he brings a skill set that is truly rare. He is the true five-star in Ohio." – Mark Porter, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Hicks earned the moniker "Captain Buckeye" during his recruitment because of his propensity for recruiting other prospects to join him in Columbus. He's the son of Tiffane Hardin.

COMMIT DATE: May 1, 2020



CARSON HINZMAN

IOL • 6-4 • 280
Hammond (Wis.)
Saint Croix Central
Rank: IOL 9, Overall 173, WI 3



ACCOLADES: Hinzman was selected to the All-American Bowl, where he practiced as both a guard and a long snapper. He was a four-year starter on both sides of the ball in high school and helped lead Saint Croix Central to a state title berth as a freshman.

HINZMAN SAYS: "It was (Ohio State's) culture. I love how they have that championship-winning culture. They have a great chance to further their players and make you better. The competition there is absolutely insane. They're pulling in the best defensive linemen, and if you want to be the best offensive lineman, you have to beat the best defensive linemen. I love the consistency, it's huge for me, and they've been consistently great."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Hinzman has experience at every position on the line but projects to guard or center in college. He's lean, has some room to put on weight and will need to do that in college, but our in-person evaluation showed him to be taller and longer than he appears on film. He's nimble for his size and gets into the second level with balance and fluidity. He needs more experience and reps against top-level defensive linemen, but he's technically sound, works and plays hard, is versatile and has good agility" – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Hinzman was raised in Wisconsin and cheered for the home-state Badgers. He was long considered a heavy lean toward UW, but the departure of offensive line coach Joe Rudolph helped to sway him in Ohio State's direction. He's the son of Jon and Tera Hinzman and grew up on his family's 200-acre farm.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 4, 2022



KENYATTA JACKSON JR

DE • 6-5 • 235
Hollywood (Fla.)
Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Rank: DE 5, Overall 60, FL 11



ACCOLADES: Jackson was named Florida's Gatorade Player of the Year after a dominant senior season in which he recorded 65 tackles, 15 sacks, 17 tackles for loss and 15 quarterback hurries. He was a two-time all-county honoree at Chaminade-Madonna Prep and helped his team to an 11-1 record and a Class 3A state title in 2021.

JACKSON SAYS: "It's the Ohio State University. It's just the relationship I have with Coach (Larry) Johnson, the history behind him, how much defensive ends they have produced over the years and things like that. My family loves him. He's a Christian-based person, just like my family. It was just the connection with my family and I, building that relationship."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Jackson is a long-limbed pass rusher that can get after the quarterback. He is built like an action figure with his thick neck, broad shoulders and round biceps. He has spent the past few years working primarily on the edge as a stand-up pass rusher in a 3-4 defense for one of Florida's top programs. He likes to use his heavy hands to displace blockers and slide past them. He will likely need to add more mass to his frame and develop some go-to passing moves but should be ready to face college-sized linemen after a year or two on campus. He has NFL upside." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Jackson is the teammate of fellow signee cornerback Ryan Turner. He is the son of Dawnedra and Kenyatta Jackson Sr.

COMMIT DATE: Oct. 19, 2021



HERO KANU

DL • 6-5 • 293
Rancho Santo Margarita (Calif.)
Santa Margarita Catholic
Rank: DL 19, Overall 129, CA 7



ACCOLADES: Kanu was named first-team All-Trinity League in 2021 after recording 19 tackles for loss and nine sacks as a senior. He has only been playing football for two years, and previously played soccer while growing up in Geltendorf, Germany.

KANU SAYS: "I love the coaching staff, and I love how well they develop defensive linemen. That was always huge for me in my decision. I'm still really new to football and have only played for a couple of years so I wanted to pick a school that I know will help me get better and maximize potential. I had a chance to work with Larry Johnson at the summer camp, and that was awesome. I learned so much from him, and he has a reputation as the best defensive line coach in the country. I love his coaching style. He's so detailed and passionate, and we clicked really well."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Kanu is cat-quick out of his stance and works as a grunt inside and outside on Friday nights. He is as athletic, pound-for-pound, as anybody in the country. He plays a controlled game and can really stress his blockers at the point of attack." – Sports Illustrated's John Garcia.

PERSONAL: Kanu moved to the United States in October 2020 with hopes of landing a scholarship offer from a major-college program. He caught the attention of defensive line coach Larry Johnson at Premier Prospects International's "DreamChasers Tour," which takes European recruits to camps across the country, when it visited Columbus.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 8, 2022



GABE POWERS

LB • 6-4 • 230
Marysville, Ohio
Rank: LB 8, Overall 101, OH 5



ACCOLADES: Powers was named the Ohio Gatorade Player of the Year after recording 90 tackles, 17 tackles for loss and six sacks in 2021. He led the Monarchs to a 12-1 record and the Division I, Region 2 championship game. In 2020, Powers had 61 tackles, four forced fumbles and an interception in eight games.

POWERS SAYS: "Since I was a little kid growing up, I just wanted to play Ohio State football, and once I got that (offer), I started tearing up a little bit. I called my grandma, and my grandma was crying, so it was a big moment for us. We've always been diehard Buckeye fans forever. I set my expectations as high as I can. I want to be there, and freshman year, I want to be the starter. I set them high, and for myself I expect to achieve those."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Powers is a taller linebacker with a relatively streamline build. He has room on his frame to continue filling out. He developed into a strong all-around linebacker on defense, works on the outside of the defense, creating consistent disruption as a rusher and blitzer off the edge. Powers is a Power Five starter with the upside to develop into an NFL draft pick." – Charles Power, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Powers played high school football in Marysville – an exurb 30 minutes northwest of Ohio State's Columbus campus. His parents are Erin and Mike Powers. His great-grandfather Sam earned a tryout with the Green Bay Packers and father Mike was a Division II All-American at Findlay before earning a tryout with the Dallas Cowboys.

COMMIT DATE: Aug. 1, 2020



KYE STOKES

SAF • 6-2 • 185
Seffner (Fla.) Armwood
Rank: ATH 16, Overall 357, FL 43



ACCOLADES: Stokes was a two-way player at Armwood High School, contributing at both wide receiver and safety. He had 25 tackles, two interceptions and six passes defended as a senior. Stokes picked off five passes and added 34 tackles, one fumble recovery and two tackles for loss in an eight-game junior season.

STOKES SAYS: "How Ohio State approached the process, it just felt different. They kept their promises. I have to go make an impact early and show them that it wasn't a fluke, that they made a great choice when they decided to offer me. I feel like I can be successful at playing corner, playing safety, cover safety, what have you. I can play fast, play physical. I am very passionate about the game of football, so I bring a lot of energy."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He flashes track speed in the open field, and he can cover ground in a hurry. That's the type of athlete the Buckeyes need in their deep safety. The speed is there, and now it is on Stokes to continue adding muscle and strength in order to be prepared to walk into the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and compete among some of the Big Ten's best at the position." – Letterman Row's Zack Carpenter.

PERSONAL: Stokes also ran track in high school, specializing in the 100-meter dash and clocking a 10.8-second personal best in 2021. He is the son of Saraque and Kerwin Stokes.

COMMIT DATE: May 2, 2021



SONNY STYLES

SAF • 6-4 • 215
Pickerington (Ohio) Central
Rank: SAF 1, Overall 12, OH 2



ACCOLADES: Styles reclassified from 2023 to 2022 and plans to enroll at Ohio State this summer. He had 55 total tackles, two interceptions, two passes defended, a blocked punt and a forced fumble in 11 games in 2021. Styles had a team-best four picks as a sophomore and 33 tackles in just seven games.

STYLES SAYS: "With Ohio State offering me after my first high school game, the relationship was built even before that and I think that was the strongest relationship that I have. Ohio State grants me a unique opportunity to do it at home. The environment in Columbus is great. It feels like home. Being surrounded by elite athletes, students, competing for national championships; what is there not to like about Ohio State?"

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Styles is a physical prototype with height, length and already well into his physical development. He has a strong lower body and changes direction well for a player of his size. He is smooth in his transitions and is capable of playing in space and even covering man-to-man at 210 pounds. He will be a unique athlete at the next level and can play different roles. The possibilities for him are numerous because of his rare skill set and measurables." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Styles is the son of Laverna and Lorenzo Styles, who played for the Buckeyes from 1992-95 before a six-year NFL career with the Atlanta Falcons and St. Louis Rams. His older brother, Lorenzo Styles Jr., just completed his freshman year at Notre Dame.

COMMIT DATE: Nov. 13, 2021



TEGRA TSHABOLA

OL • 6-6 • 320
West Chester (Ohio)
Lakota West
Rank: OT 10, Overall 104, OH 6



ACCOLADES: Tshabola was named to the Southwest District Division I all-district first team after his senior season. He was a three-time first-team All-Ohio selection out of Lakota West High School and played in the 2022 All-American Bowl on Jan. 8 in San Antonio.

TSHABOLA SAYS: "As I've gotten older, I've decided that I wanted to go to a school that also takes care of its players and really cared about them. Ohio State is really hands-on with their players. For a school to be that big and still be caring about their players like that, that's basically what I was looking for. This coaching staff is one of the most caring staffs I've ever spoken to."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Tshabola is an offensive lineman with immense size. He is tall, broad and long. He has a two-sport athletic profile that includes shot put and discus – the former being his strength. He has an angry field demeanor and ratcheted up the violence during his senior season. He is a mauler in the run game who relishes finishing blocks to the ground. He will project to be a multi-year starter and could develop into a high-round NFL draft prospect." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports.

PERSONAL: Tshabola moved to the United States from the Democratic Republic of Congo at a young age. He is fluent in French – the official language of the DRC – and he is the son of Angel and John Tshabola.

COMMIT DATE: April 23, 2020



RYAN TURNER

CB • 6-0 • 180
Hollywood (Fla.)
Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Rank: CB 36, Overall 347, FL 40



ACCOLADES: Turner had 103 tackles in 33 high school games at Chaminade-Madonna Prep. He earned second-team all-state honors after his junior season. He and teammate Kenyatta Jackson, a fellow Ohio State signee, led their school to a 3A state championship in 2021.

TURNER SAYS: "Every coach I've talked to, they talk about my technique. They say my technique always stands out on my film compared to other high school kids. They say other high school players play strictly off talent, really no coaching basically. But with me, I play off my technique, and I make my job way easier because I'm not running with my guy. I'm jamming them off the line, and that makes my job way easier."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "The biggest thing that stands out is that he's a guy who can cover. Man-press, man off, not too many high school kids can play off. His film stands out. He can do multiple things, and college coaches are looking for smart players. He's probably a top-two cornerback in the country in doing that stuff. Not many can. He reminds me of Pat Surtain, and we played together. Ryan is that kind of guy. He jumps off the screen because he's a kid you don't need to develop. He becomes a coach on the field." – Turner's personal trainer and former NFL CB Arturo Freeman.

PERSONAL: Turner was a sprinter on the Chaminade-Prep track team. He was timed at 4.5 seconds in the 40-yard dash and 10.9 seconds in the 100-meter dash. Turner is the son of Rennina and Reggie Turner.

COMMIT DATE: May 5, 2021

Houston Flare, Football Pedigree Helped Build Burton

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State freshman wide receiver Caleb Burton wears his influences on his sleeve, literally.

The recent graduate of Lake Travis in Austin, Texas, took a seat to speak publicly for the first time as a Buckeye on Feb. 2 donning the same standard-issue gray Nike workout shirt with "Ohio State Football" emblazoned across the chest – the new era's answer to the "Ohio State Athletic Dept." shirt that Woody Hayes and many of his assistants wore in the 1950s – as many of his teammates did.

The new Buckeyes are not entirely uniform, though. Gone are the days of team-mandated haircuts or anything of the sort. Players are encouraged to express themselves however they see fit, be it with sweatshirts, sneakers or anything else. Their team-made nameplates include social media tags as Ohio State looks to keep pace in the new world of NIL, which several players say they've already been contacted about.

For Burton, his form of self-expression peeks out from underneath his right sleeve in the form of some new ink, which he picked up after the summer of 2021 and before his final season of high school football and which can provide nearly all the background needed to understand the path that Ohio State's latest Texas wide receiver took to Columbus.

His larger piece depicts clouds, crosses and scripture, while right next door, "832" runs down his upper arm. It's his childhood area code and one of four in Houston, which Burton still considers his hometown despite his family moving two hours west to Austin

before he was even a teenager.

It's Houston where Burton feels most at home. He beams when speaking about the culture of the town, reminiscing about family recipes (his mom's turkey legs get a special mention) and Houston's underground rap scene, which populates a large part of his current musical taste. He explains how proud he is to be from Houston and what it means to him to be the latest Texas product to make the trek north to Columbus.

"There have been a lot of Texas kids coming out here and doing really well," Burton said of Columbus. "I saw that a lot, and personally I thought I could fit into this program really well with the offense and what we do with the wide receivers. That's why I came, and hopefully, we can get some more from Texas."

The motivation behind the family's move is critical in understanding Ohio State's newest wideout, too. The Burtons packed up and headed to Austin not on a whim, but to follow the house patriarch, Charles, who accepted the football head coaching position at Del Valle just outside of Austin in 2013. Just as his son does now, Charles used to strap on the pads back in his day, building quite the career first as a linebacker at Syracuse and then in NFL Europe after graduating in 2001.

It's that football pedigree and the guidance of an experienced high school coach that helped shape Burton into the player he is today, both in substance and style. He impressed scouts in high school with his quickness and fluidity out of his slight 6-0, 165-pound frame, but he lacked the same flash that many of his counterparts at wide receiver in the 2022 class possessed.

Though he was born and raised in the state that plays more 7-on-7 football than any other, Burton stayed away from it at the behest of his dad – high school coaches are not particularly fond of 7-on-7, generally speaking – and his skill set followed suit, as did a natural relationship with Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline. Like the Burton family, Hartline has spoken before about the importance of real football experience for wide receivers above camp settings. Seeing eye to eye on that was critical in developing the relationship that would eventually lead to Burton's pledge to Ohio State.

"It was about building a relationship," he said. "What stood out to me was that most coaches will call and offer you on the first day, not even trying to talk to you again because of the name of the program. But with Coach Hartline it wasn't like that. He got to know me for a couple of months before he got to offering me, and that really stood out.

"He called and checked in with me weekly. He'd talk to my parents, my sister and built an overall good relationship with everyone who supports me and everyone

that's around me."

It certainly didn't hurt that Burton's parents are staunch proponents of growing through difficult experiences, advising him to do what they did and head north for school.

"My dad is from Houston and he played his college ball at Syracuse, so he was pretty far from home and my parents wanted me to go pretty far," Burton explained. "It's a learning thing, not having parents to go run to if I was at Texas, 15 minutes away from the house. I like to move, being far away. My dad said that going far away is an easy way to mature and learn, an easy way to grow up."

On the field, Burton and Hartline were a perfect fit too. Rather than catching eyes with one-handed snags or complicated releases to shake free of cornerbacks, Burton just went to work, finding his groove at wideout as he entered high school and developing immediately into Del Valle's most lethal weapon. He snared 82 passes for 1,515 yards and 18 touchdowns in his first two varsity seasons before a knee injury in the first game of his junior year ended his Del Valle tenure.

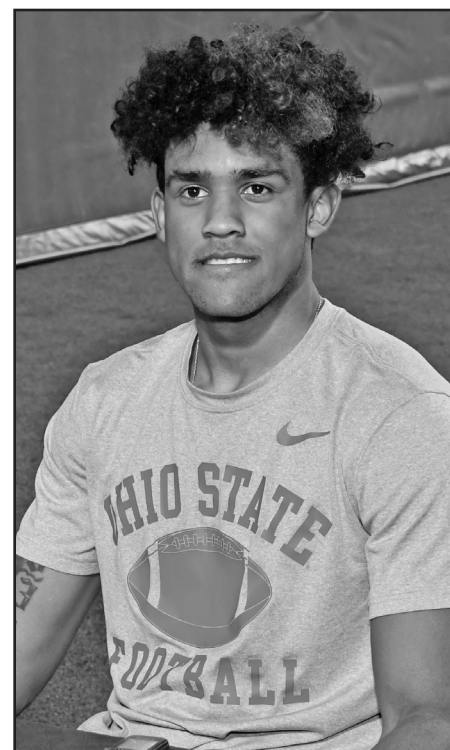
His recruiting rankings dipped with the injury limiting his film and exposure at recruiting camps, but for what he put on the field in those first two seasons, Burton rose to the top of his class at wide receiver, drawing comparisons to such college stars as Alabama's Jerry Jeudy and Oklahoma State's Tylan Wallace, as well as landing one that would only grow with his next stop: Ohio State's Garrett Wilson.

The comparison was natural for a highly touted, route-running technician committed to Ohio State, but it almost became too easy when the elder Burton accepted a job at Lake Travis before the 2021 season, where Wilson had cut his teeth three years prior. And though Burton's injury has dampened the hype around his arrival at Ohio State, the comparison is still intact to the coach who has watched him more than anyone.

"Garrett's career, it's not a bad model to follow," Charles Burton told The Athletic last March. "You have somebody who has succeeded with someone who is very comparable to you. It's good to see that it actually works. Sometimes you have to envision it without having it in front of your face. But we have it right in front of your face. That obviously helps. The proof is in the pudding.

"Even this year, I saw Garrett run a route for a touchdown early last year and my wife was walking around and I said, 'Babe, who does that look like?' It was a skinny slant for a touchdown and the movement was so similar. It is good to see that because you can envision what Caleb's career is going to look like. And that vision is pretty incredible."

That playing style, knee injury or not,



SONNY BROCKWAY

JOINING THE CLUB – Lake Travis wide receiver Caleb Burton is the latest in a growing pipeline of Texas products to join Brian Hartline's wide receivers room, following Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

has stuck with Burton – it's essentially ingrained at this point. He didn't have a great senior season with Lake Travis as he continued to bounce back from the MCL tear that had sidelined him, but he feels that he's returned to full strength as he checks in for his first offseason in Columbus. That means a return to work.

Burton would like to add some weight before he dons the scarlet and gray for the first time after seeing the guys in the program, but that's far from his only goal for 2022. Leadership, athletic ability, route running and everything in between are on the menu for the Texan as he hopes to be the next Buckeye great from the Lone Star State at wide receiver.

"I got here and saw how big some of the receivers are and realized that I need to gain about 10 pounds," Burton joked. "I saw Gee Scott Jr., Julian Fleming, Marvin Harrison, so I'm trying to get my weight up, get up to about 175 pounds. That's the main thing for me right now. I'm trying to eat a lot, get a lot of protein.

"I'm working on (leadership). I've never been an outgoing person or leader, but coming here, I know I'm going to have to change that.

"We're looking at route running too, and at what I can do after the catch. I'm working on my vertical jump right now. Hopefully I'll be jumping out of the building. (Coach Hartline says to) win every day, become the best version of yourself every day. Take coaching and apply it. I want to work every day, get strong, faster and do whatever I can in my first year."

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QB Brown Eager For Competition In First Year

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State football made its early-enrolling freshmen available to the media on Feb. 2, college football's National Signing Day. It would traditionally be a day when the Buckeye coaching staff waits eagerly to see if the talented high school players they've recruited will choose to continue their academic and athletic careers in Columbus officially.

However, since the NCAA allowed for an additional signing day in December five years ago, the February edition of the event has lost a significant amount of luster. Still, 11 freshmen and two incoming transfers spoke with reporters about their recruiting experience and detailed their perception of Ohio State football through their first few weeks on campus.

Former five-star and four-star recruits flooded the Woody Hayes Athletic Center football field to answer questions and tell their stories. But one player – quarterback Devin Brown – drew more attention than any other first-year player who sat at their respective tables.

The 6-3, 198-pound Brown was initially committed to USC, but he reopened his college search after head coach Clay Helton was fired. Brown explored several options, eventually committing to Ohio State on Dec. 1, 2021. He signed as the nation's No. 42 overall prospect and No. 6 quarterback in 247Sports' composite rankings.

In his first weeks on campus, Brown said he's dealt with some growing pains regarding time management while transitioning from high school to college.

"Honestly, I think for a lot of guys, the toughest part is being away from their family," said Brown, who started his prep career in Arizona. "I know some guys are struggling with that and being homesick. I lived in Utah really by myself for this whole season, so it has not affected me that much. The biggest thing is time structure. We're not sitting around all day. We go from meetings and right into practices. It hasn't been too bad for me."

Brown earned a surprising mark from On3's updated recruiting rankings between meetings, practices and workouts with his new teammates. The website announced that the Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon High School product was the No. 1 overall prospect and No. 1 quarterback in the 2022 class – an honor Brown appreciates but claims doesn't affect his mind-set at Ohio State.

"It was a shock, a real big shock," Brown said. "I was actually meeting with (Ohio State offensive analyst Todd) Fitch going over the playbook, trying to get some things done. I got out and my phone was just blowing up. My dad was calling me. Everyone was calling me. I didn't expect it, to be honest."

"It's such a blessing. I can't even fathom being named the No. 1 player in the nation. But you get here, and it means nothing really. Obviously, it's a big deal to be named a five-



SONNY BROCKWAY

NO BACKING DOWN – After deciding to sign with Ohio State late in the recruiting cycle, quarterback Devin Brown told media on Feb. 2 that he wants to embrace Ohio State's "next man up" philosophy.

star. But when you get here, you have no stars. You are low on the totem pole, and you have to get after it. It's a pat on the back and that's it."

Brown spoke confidently about his ability to quarterback an offense. Still, he wants to keep an underdog mentality in his first season in Columbus, keeping a chip on his shoulder to remain humble and hungry. When he announced his commitment to Ohio State, Brown tweeted a short clip from the high-stakes poker movie, "Rounders," where Matt Damon's character shoves a mound of colored chips into the green felt and stoically says, "I'm all in."

When asked where his confidence comes from, Brown had a thoughtful response reflecting on his time spent in the Beehive State.

"I think a lot of it came with me moving up to Utah," Brown said of his confidence. "I think a lot of people doubted I would even play this year. Just having that underdog mentality. At the end of the day, no matter where you're at, everybody can throw it. It's all mental. It's knowing the playbook, knowing coverages and knowing fronts."

"You have to get those things done. I just believed in myself, and if I want to go and do the biggest things, I have to have the best players around me."

He also claims those who surrounded him in middle school and high school helped him get where he wanted to go. That includes former Ohio State quarterback Joe Germaine, who coached Brown while he lived in Arizona.

Brown said Germaine encouraged him to enter prospect camps to help him measure how he stacked up against the nation's best high school quarterbacks. The camps would also offer a unique opportunity to play seven-on-seven football against top defensive back and linebacker recruits.

"I think just going to all of these camps, I think through the years I built that confidence that, 'Yeah, I can stand and throw with these guys,'" Brown said. "Just throwing with my quarterback coach – I realized it isn't about the arm strength. It's about getting out and knowing the playbook. Once I knew I could throw with those guys, the confidence took off and I realized I have to do the other things right if I really want to take off."

When Brown returned from the showcases, Germaine worked with him and helped him improve his accuracy and arm strength. The legendary Buckeye also taught him another important lesson – that his mind will take him farther than his body.

"Coach Germaine, I would not be here without him," Brown said. "The three years I had with him – I wouldn't trade it for anything. He taught me so much and was an overall great person. His knowledge for the game was incredible."

After adopting that approach, Brown received offers from some of college football's best programs. He caught the attention of schools such as Arizona, Ole Miss, Southern California, Texas and Wisconsin. The Buckeyes were among the last schools to pursue Brown, offering him on Oct. 12, 2021, and he visited in an official capacity on Nov. 20.

Shortly after Ohio State contacted Brown, he discussed his future with family and loved ones, ultimately choosing the Buckeyes over the other top schools.

"It was a hard decision," he said. "There were a lot of great options. I just knew this was right for me. Just to see all the talent and (Ohio State) making all of those plays, it's so fun to watch. I could just see myself playing in that offense and thriving in that offense."

With Ewers no longer on the roster, and

Jack Miller now with Florida, Brown comes to Ohio State as the No. 3 quarterback behind Heisman Trophy finalist C.J. Stroud and former five-star Kyle McCord.

"I think things worked out," Brown said. "Everything is how it's supposed to be. I was committed to USC for a long time. I think things worked out for the better. This is where I'm supposed to be. I was already committed before (Ewers) left. I wanted to come in and compete with him. I competed with him at the Elite 11, and I have nothing but respect for him."

In his first month at Ohio State, Brown has had only a few opportunities to compete with Stroud and McCord. They haven't taken reps with the entire team, but each of them has battled each other in the weight room and throwing on the practice field after workouts.

Brown said he's seen McCord more than Stroud in recent weeks – primarily because Stroud is in a different workout group. Still, he feels a special relationship developing with the 2021 starting quarterback.

"C.J. is a great guy. Both he and Kyle are great guys," he said. "I have been throwing out with Kyle. We've been throwing like three times a week. I met with C.J. twice. It's hard because we work out at different times, so I've only worked out with him once. They're really good dudes. They want the best for everybody, including me. Nobody is too cool or anything like that. It's a really cool environment."

Brown said Day has encouraged him to embrace a "next-man-up" philosophy toward playing quarterback at Ohio State next season. He said quarterback coach Corey Dennis has told him to embrace being a backup but to be ready whenever his name is called.

"Really, you're only one snap away from getting in," he said. "Kyle got into some games this past year. Depending on where I'm at in spring ball, I could be one play away from getting into the game. I have to attack it with that mentality that I have to be ready to play."

Brown admitted it will be difficult for him to sit behind another quarterback and watch the game from the sideline, but he understands that college football is a business. If he pays his dues, eventually he will have his time to shine in a Buckeye uniform.

He bluntly stated that he would never consider transferring from Ohio State, claiming that he thrives with his back against the wall and that he wants to compete with whoever stands across him in the quarterback room.

For the next six months, Brown will put his head down and get to work, hoping to learn as much as he can from Day, Dennis, Stroud and McCord. He is looking forward to the spring game as a litmus test for his development and is eager to hear his name called whenever the Buckeyes request his services.

"Your team will want to get after it if you want to get after it – you have to show your team that you're really about it," Brown said. "This team has the swagger and mentality to be special, and I want to be a part of it."

Ohio State Finishes Fourth In Consensus Poll

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After what appeared to be a shaky class for Ohio State as the early signing period approached, head coach Ryan Day turned things around with some important commitments in the final weeks of the cycle to give the Buckeyes the fourth-best class in the 2022 edition of the Buckeye Sports Bulletin consensus poll.

The top five were all unanimous among the four major ranking services included in our consensus poll and consisted of Texas A&M, Alabama, Georgia, Ohio State and Texas.

Ohio State checks in at No. 4 after signing a 21-man class, by far the fewest among the top five schools. Texas A&M and Georgia each signed 29 recruits, while Texas signed 28 and Alabama earned 25 signatures.

Of the Buckeyes' 21 commits, two are five-stars with linebacker C.J. Hicks and safety Sonny Styles, who respectively rank as the No. 7 and No. 12 overall prospects in the class according to the 247Sports player composite.

Ohio State also got its quarterback of the future in Devin Brown, rated the No. 6 signal-caller in the class, and secured an impressive grouping on the defensive line with defensive ends Omari Abor, Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr., in addition to defensive tackle Hero Kanu.

The Buckeyes and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline also pulled in another strong bunch of wideouts, with two – Kaleb Brown and Kyion Grayes – among the top 100 recruits in the class.

Ohio State signed seven top-100 prospects (all seven being listed above, minus Curry and Kanu), five of whom were in the top 10 of their respective positions (eight members of the class overall checked in among the top 10 positionally).

Unfortunately for Ohio State, despite a solid class, it might appear as though the SEC schools are playing a different sport on the trail when comparing these classes.

The Aggies signed the highest-rated class in modern recruiting history, surpassing Alabama's 2021 haul with 330.51 points in the 247Sports team composite. It's a class that is filled to the brim with talent, as not only is it an enormous class, but it has an average player rating of .9477, second best in the nation behind Alabama's .9519 rating.

Seven of those commits are five-star prospects, all of whom rank among the top 25 prospects in the class. Texas A&M also signed 19 four-star prospects, which is more players than North Carolina, which checks in at No. 10 in the consensus poll, signed in its entire class.

Alabama, meanwhile, in perhaps a sign of the times, somehow had just the No. 2 class in our poll despite signing three five-star prospects and 15 of the top-100 recruits.

The top prospect for the Crimson Tide

was defensive end Jeremiah Alexander, who is the No. 17 player in the class and the top recruit from Alabama. They even went into Ohio for a prospect, nabbing four-star tight end Elijah Brown out of Wayne High School in Huber Heights.

Brown was not the only recruit this cycle to come out of Wayne. Four-star offensive tackle Aamil Wagner left the state to sign with Notre Dame over Kentucky and Ohio State, his other top schools.

Georgia was the other top-three finisher, signing five five-stars and 15 four-star prospects in the class. The Bulldogs' class is somewhat inflated compared to the other top schools, as Georgia signed nine three-star prospects, more than Alabama, Ohio State and Texas A&M combined.

Ohio State and Georgia went head-to-head for a number of prospects in 2022, including offensive lineman Earnest Greene, defensive tackle Christen Miller and cornerback Jaheim Singletary who all committed to the Bulldogs.

Singletary had originally committed to Ohio State on Jan. 2, 2021, and remained in the class for nearly seven months while continuing to visit other schools. He decommitted from the Buckeyes on Aug. 1 and committed to the Bulldogs in November before signing during the early period.

Rounding out the top five is Texas, that despite a disastrous first season on the field for head coach Steve Sarkisian, pulled in one of its top classes in years.

The Longhorns earned commitments from two five-star prospects – offensive lineman Devon Campbell and offensive tackle Kelvin Banks, ranked the No. 10 and 33 respective players in the class – in addition to 19 four-star prospects.

One of the four-stars is cornerback Terrence Brooks, who was committed to Ohio State but flipped to Texas on the first day of the early signing period.

Beyond these top five classes, quality begins to dip – relatively speaking, at least – throughout the top 10 and as the consensus poll dips into the teens and 20s. This imbalance in the rankings can likely be attributed to one key factor.

Alabama, Georgia, Ohio State and Texas A&M combined to earn commitments from 55 of the top 100 recruits in the class, meaning half of the top players are headed to just four schools.

Penn State, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Michigan and North Carolina close out the top 10 classes in the consensus poll, with all except Oklahoma bringing in at least one five-star prospect. To be fair to the Sooners, however, some attrition can be attributed to former head coach Lincoln Riley taking off for USC and not-so-quietly convincing Oklahoma staff members and recruits to join him.

Clemson and LSU, both national champions within the last four seasons, find themselves outside of the top 10 at No. 11 and 12, respectively, while two SEC schools – Ken-

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BSB Consensus Poll

| Rk. | Team | Pts. |
|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Texas A&M (4) | 100 |
| 2. | Alabama | 96 |
| 3. | Georgia | 92 |
| 4. | Ohio State | 88 |
| 5. | Texas | 84 |
| 6. | Penn State | 79 |
| 7. | Notre Dame | 77 |
| 8. | Oklahoma | 71 |
| 9. | Michigan | 69 |
| 10. | North Carolina | 63 |
| 11. | Clemson | 56 |
| 12. | LSU | 53 |
| 13. | Kentucky | 49 |
| 14. | Missouri | 47 |
| 15. | Tennessee | 38 |
| 16. | Miami (Fla.) | 33 |
| 17. | Auburn | 32 |
| 18. | Stanford | 32 |
| 19. | Florida State | 25 |
| 20. | Michigan State | 20 |
| 21. | Indiana | 18 |
| 22. | Mississippi State | 13 |
| 23. | Ole Miss | 11 |
| 24. | Oregon | 10 |
| 25. | Florida | 10 |

Teams received points based on their placement in four top-25 polls. Points assigned to teams are in inverse proportion to their placement in a poll (25 points for first, 24 for second, etc.). First-place votes are in parentheses. Tie-breakers were decided using the 247Sports average player rating metric.

Also receiving votes in the poll were Arizona (10), South Carolina (10), Oklahoma State (9) and Arkansas (5).

tucky at No. 13 and Missouri at No. 14 – find themselves in uncharted territory, with each school signing one of the top classes in its history.

While the Wildcats built up their class through four-star recruits, of whom head coach Mark Stoops took 10 in this cycle, the Tigers jumped up the rankings with a singular big splash, signing five-star wide receiver Luther Burden, the top receiver and the No. 3 prospect in the class.

Schools like Tennessee (No. 15), Miami (Fla.) (No. 16), Auburn (No. 17), Florida State (No. 19) and Michigan State (No. 20) are all ones you would expect to see on the consensus poll, but a pair of surprises near those schools is Stanford, at No. 18, and Indiana,

National Recruiting Experts' Rankings

247SPORTS

1. Texas A&M
2. Alabama
3. Georgia
- 4. Ohio State**
5. Texas
6. Penn State
7. Notre Dame
8. Oklahoma
9. Michigan
10. North Carolina

RIVALS

1. Texas A&M
2. Alabama
3. Georgia
- 4. Ohio State**
5. Texas
6. Penn State
7. Notre Dame
8. Oklahoma
9. Michigan
10. Clemson

ON3 SPORTS

1. Texas A&M
2. Alabama
3. Georgia
- 4. Ohio State**
5. Texas
6. Notre Dame
7. Penn State
8. Oklahoma
9. Michigan
10. North Carolina

ESPN

1. Texas A&M
2. Alabama
3. Georgia
- 4. Ohio State**
5. Texas
6. Penn State
7. Notre Dame
8. Michigan
9. Oklahoma
10. North Carolina

which checked in at No. 21.

The Cardinal, who have been ranked in our consensus poll just twice in the last four years (No. 23 in 2019 and 2020), jumped into this year's poll out of nowhere, signing seven four-star prospects to finish with the top class in the Pac-12 this cycle. The class was highlighted by four-star defensive end David Bailey, ranked the No. 65 player in the class. Stanford tied with Auburn for total points, but its 87.86 average player rating in the 247Sports composite checked in nearly two points behind Auburn's 89.12, breaking the tie in Auburn's favor.

The Hoosiers had been even worse off, not having been ranked (or even receiving votes) in the last four consensus polls, but they signed five four-star prospects in this class, including defensive end Dasan McCullough and defensive lineman Dominick James, both of whom Ohio State was involved with before they committed to Indiana.

The consensus poll is rounded out by some usual suspects, including Mississippi State (No. 22), Ole Miss (No. 23), Oregon (No. 24) and Florida (No. 25).

Arizona and South Carolina both finished with 10 points like the Ducks and Gators, but the average player rating broke against them. Oregon, with a 15-man class, pulled in an average rating of 89.82, followed by 88.64 for Florida's 17-player class to close out the top 25. Arizona checked in with 87.14, South Carolina logged an 87.45 average rating.

Most of the top-100 recruits are encapsulated within the classes of Alabama, Georgia, Ohio State and Texas A&M as previously mentioned, but of the top 100 players, only 11 went to schools not found in our consensus poll.

Of note, four went to USC, with safety Zion Branch, running back Raleek Brown, cornerback Domani Jackson and wide receiver C.J. Williams electing to play for Riley.

Iowa, TCU, Utah and Wisconsin also picked up one top-100 recruit each, but perhaps the biggest surprise of the entire cycle was Jackson State University, an FCS school

coached by Deion Sanders, which had two top-100 recruits in the class, including the No. 1 overall prospect, cornerback Travis Hunter.

While Jackson State won't be found in our consensus poll, it's notable that it finished ahead of a number of FBS schools in the team composite at No. 114, including one Power Five school: Kansas.

Consensus Poll Fast Facts

- The SEC continued its stranglehold over college football, with 11 teams among the top 25. The only conference schools not included are Arkansas and Vanderbilt, though the Razorbacks received votes in our poll. The Commodores were No. 31 in the composite rankings.

- The Big Ten had the second-most schools with five, including three – Ohio State, Penn State and Michigan – that finished in the top 10, tied with the SEC for the most schools in the top 10. All five schools reside within the East Division of the conference.

- The ACC came in third with four schools, of which North Carolina at No. 10 was the only one in the top 10. At No. 11, Clemson fell seven spots from last year's poll. Miami (No. 16) and Florida State (No. 19) were the only other conference schools to make an appearance.

- Oregon at No. 24 is not a shocking inclusion to the list, as the Ducks are the standard Pac-12 representative in the consensus

poll, but the conference also had Stanford (checking in at No. 18).

- Like last year, the Big 12 finished last among the Power Five conferences in our poll. It was represented in the consensus poll by two teams that will check in for another conference in a matter of years – Texas (No. 5), which moved up 11 spots from last year, and Oklahoma (No. 8), which moved up five spots. Oklahoma State fell just short in our poll, receiving nine votes.

- Notre Dame was the lone non-Power Five team in our poll, checking in at No. 7. The Fighting Irish were No. 9 last season.

- Texas (No. 5), Penn State (No. 6), Oklahoma (No. 8) and North Carolina (No. 10) were newcomers to the top 10 this year, replacing Clemson, LSU, Oregon and USC.

- Teams that made last year's consensus poll but were not in this year's poll are California, Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, Wisconsin and USC, of which the Trojans saw the biggest fall from grace, ranked eighth last year.

- Auburn, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan State, Missouri and Stanford are in this year's poll after not appearing last year. Kentucky saw the biggest jump, going from unranked to the 13th-ranked recruiting class.

- Of the teams in both the 2021 and 2022 consensus polls, Oregon saw the biggest decline, falling from No. 7 in 2021 to barely in the poll this year at No. 24. The biggest jump was from Penn State, which went from tied at No. 23 last year to No. 6 in the most recent poll.

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All 14 B1G Schools Rank Top 50 In Recruiting

By **JOE DEMPSEY**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Although they did not win the Big Ten for the first time since 2016, the Buckeyes topped the conference in recruiting rankings for the third straight season. Overall, the conference's programs improved on the trail in 2022.

In addition to all 14 Big Ten teams ranking in the top 50 in the 247Sports composite team rankings, five of the programs finished in the top 25: Ohio State (No. 4), Penn State (6), Michigan (9), Indiana (21), and Michigan State (23).

The rest of the conference did not fall far behind with Iowa ranking No. 30 nationally, ahead of Maryland (31), Rutgers (33), Purdue (37), Nebraska (41), Wisconsin (44), Illinois (46), Minnesota (48) and Northwestern (50).

In terms of average signee rating, Penn State (.9079) finished second in the conference behind only Ohio State (.9405). Following the Nittany Lions are Michigan (.9015), Iowa (.8781), Indiana (.8758), Michigan State (.8737), Wisconsin (.8728), Rutgers (.8704), Maryland (.8693), Northwestern (.8675), Nebraska (.8668), Purdue (.8639), Minnesota (.8578), and Illinois (.8509).

What follows is a rundown of each Big Ten team's recruiting class – excluding Ohio State and Michigan (a recap of the Wolverines' haul can be found below) – listed in order of final team ranking. Each program's number of commits is listed in parentheses.

No. 6 Penn State (25)

Head coach James Franklin returned to

form as one of the nation's top recruiters with the sixth-best class in the country for 2022. Franklin and his staff secured commitments from three of the top four prospects in Pennsylvania, including the state's top recruit in Reading (Pa.) Governor Mifflin five-star tailback Nicholas Singleton.

Penn State also signed the top two offensive prospects in Ohio in Medina five-star quarterback Drew Allar and Westerville South four-star wideout Kaden Saunders. Additionally, the Nittany Lions beat out Alabama, Georgia, and Maryland for highly touted Owings Mills (Md.) McDonough School five-star defensive lineman Dani Dennis-Sutton.

Overall, the Lions locked up signatures from three five-star commits, 13 four-star prospects, and nine three-star recruits. Franklin and his staff turned to the junior-college market to bring in Scranton (Pa.) Lackawanna C.C. four-star offensive tackle J.B. Nelson, who is the No. 1 JUCO offensive lineman and No. 2 overall JUCO prospect nationally.

The Lions looked to bolster their defense through the 2022 class, adding Glenside (Pa.) La Salle College four-star linebacker Abdul Carter, Argyle (Texas) Liberty Christian four-star safety Cristian Driver, who is the son of four-time NFL Pro Bowl wideout Donald Driver, Orlando (Fla.) Lake Nona four-star defensive lineman Zane Durant, Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy four-star cornerback Cam Miller, Philadelphia Northeast four-star edge rusher Ken Talley and Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic four-star safety K.J. Winston.

On the offensive side of the ball, Penn

State also added Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star tailback Kaytron Allen; Milwaukee King four-star tight end Jerry Cross; Lancaster, Pa., four-star wide receiver Anthony Ivey; and Downingtown, Pa., four-star offensive tackle Drew Shelton.

Mehki Flowers, a four-star athlete from Harrisburg (Pa.) Central Dauphin East, is a prized piece of Penn State's 2022 class. Before transferring to CD East, Flowers led Steelton (Pa.) Highsphere to a 10-0 record and the Class A state title as a junior. Flowers was named the Class A Player of the Year, reeling in 60 receptions for 1,006 yards and 15 touchdowns and adding 36 tackles with five interceptions and 10 pass breakups. Flowers, who is the ninth-rated athlete and No. 179 overall recruit for 2022, expressed his desire to play both ways in college.

No. 21 Indiana (22)

After finishing 12th in the Big Ten in recruiting in the 2021 cycle, Indiana elevated its game to finish fourth in the conference and No. 21 in the nation for the 2022 class. Tom Allen's Hoosiers hauled in five four-star prospects and 17 three-star recruits.

The top get for Indiana is Dasan McCullough, a four-star edge from Bloomington (Ind.) South who flipped from Ohio State in May. McCullough's father, former NFL tailback Deland McCullough, left his role as Indiana's associate head coach and running backs coach to become the running backs coach at Notre Dame on Jan. 31.

The Hoosiers headed to Florida for defensive reinforcements, securing signatures from Bradenton, Fla., four-star defensive line-

man Dominick James and Pompano Beach (Fla.) Coconut Creek four-star cornerback Trevell Mullen, who is the brother of Indiana corner Tiawan Mullen and Raiders corner Trayvon Mullen.

Allen and his staff snatched a pair of four-star prospects on offense in Indianapolis Lawrence North wide receiver Omar Cooper and Cincinnati LaSalle running back Gi'Bran Payne. Cooper is the No. 32 wideout and No. 314 overall prospect in the country, and Payne is the No. 22 tailback and No. 276 overall recruit nationally.

Indiana targeted other talented Ohio prospects with some success, adding four three-star recruits to join Payne. The Hoosiers signed Cincinnati Anderson three-star tight end Brody Foley, London three-star linebacker Isaiah Jones, Chagrin Falls Kenston three-star tight end Ryan Miller and Powell Olentangy Liberty three-star offensive tackle Carter Smith from the Buckeye State

Beyond high school recruits, Indiana brought in the nation's top JUCO wide receiver in Athens (Texas) Trinity Valley C.C. stand-out Cam Camper.

No. 23 Michigan State (23)

Following a 10th-place finish in his first Big Ten recruiting cycle, Michigan State second-year head coach Mel Tucker signed the fifth-best class in the conference, ranking No. 23 nationally.

Six four-star signees highlight the Spartans' 2022 class, including Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star quarterback Katin Houser, who is the nation's No. 15 signal caller and No. 226 overall recruit.

In addition to Houser, the Spartans added offensive firepower in a pair of four-star wide receivers. Germie Bernard joined the Green and White from Henderson (Nev.) Liberty, and Antonio Gates Jr. came from Dearborn (Mich.) Fordson. Gates is the son of Antonio Gates, who holds the NFL record for most touchdowns by a tight end.

Essexville (Mich.) Garber four-star defensive lineman Alex VanSumeren is the highest rated member of Michigan State's class, ranking third in the state and No. 195 in the country. Tucker also added a pair of four-star in-state athletes to his class in Jaden Mangham from Franklin Wylie E. Groves and Dillon Tatum from West Bloomfield.

No. 30 Iowa (18)

The Hawkeyes' 2022 class may lack the depth boasted by Big Ten foes, but head coach Kirk Ferentz found well-rounded talent across the board as well as a couple of standouts.

The most important recruiting wins for Iowa came in its back yard, securing signatures from the top two targets in the state. Ferentz fended off the nation's best to keep Des Moines Southeast Polk four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa, who is the fifth-ranked safety and No. 53 overall prospect in the country. The Hawkeyes also locked up Gowrie Southeast Valley four-star defensive lineman Aaron Graves, who is the No. 18 defensive lineman and No. 128 overall recruit nationally.

The Hawkeyes' third-highest ranked signee came from Ohio in Hamilton native Kaleb Johnson. A three-star prospect, Johnson is the country's No. 35 tailback and No. 437 overall recruit.

U-M Finishes With Nation's Ninth-Best Class

Following a stellar 12-2 season when Michigan went to both its first Big Ten Championship Game and first College Football Playoff semifinal, the Wolverines continued their success on the recruiting trail.

Jim Harbaugh secured 22 signatures for 2022, including one five-star prospect, nine four-stars and 12 three-stars. Michigan ranks third in the conference and ninth in the nation for 2022 recruiting.

Headlining the Wolverines' talented slew of recruits is Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South cornerback Will Johnson, who is the third-ranked corner and No. 14 overall prospect in the nation. Johnson's father, Deon, played defensive back for Michigan from 1991-94.

The Wolverines did an excellent job of adding talented defensive players in the 2022 class beyond Johnson, with six of their nine four-star signees expected to line up on that side of the ball and seven of the top 10 players in the class.

Two big wins came in signing Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star defensive lineman Derrick Moore, who is the nation's eighth-ranked player at his position and No. 49 overall, and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star safety Keon Sabb, who is the ninth-ranked safety and No. 84 overall recruit.

Michigan also added Concord (Calif.) De La Salle four-star safety Zeke Berry, Anaheim (Calif.) Servite four-star defensive lineman Mason Graham, Germantown, Tenn., four-star athlete Kody Jones, who is expected to play defensive back, and Chicago Marist linebacker Jimmy Rolder.

On offense, Harbaugh signed two highly touted wide receivers and a tight end to help give the Wolverines more pass-catching firepower.

At receiver, Michigan signed Portland (Ore.) Westview four-star wide receiver Darius Clemons and La Grange Park (Ill.)

Nazareth Academy four-star wide receiver Tyler Morris. Clemons ranks No. 24 and No. 143, respectively, and Morris ranks No. 22 among receivers and No. 133 among overall prospects across the country. Gooding, Idaho, four-star tight end Colston Loveland, who is the No. 15 tight end nationally and No. 317 overall recruit, also gives the Wolverines another pass-catching option.

Harbaugh and his staff also secured commitments from a pair of three-star quarterbacks in Apple Valley, Calif., quarterback Jayden Denegal and Sachse, Texas, signal caller Alex Orji, who rank No. 457 and No. 442 in the nation, respectively.

Along with the quarterbacks, Michigan signed a slew of three-star prospects to provide depth on offense and push for future playing time, including Rabun Gap (Ga.) Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School tight end Marlin Klein, Monument (Colo.) Palmer Ridge offensive tackle Connor Jones, Windsor (Conn.) The Loomis Chaffee School offensive tackle Alessandro Lorenzetti, Columbia (S.C.) Hammond School tailback C.J. Stokes and Ponchatoula, La., wideout Amorion Walker.

Defensively, the Wolverines signed a handful of under-the-radar recruits who have the potential to blossom into contributors for the Maize and Blue. Michigan's three-star defensive signees include Jacksonville (Fla.) Terry Parker safety Damani Dent; Merrillville, Ind., defensive lineman Kenneth Grant; Brentwood (Tenn.) Ravenwood cornerback Myles Pollard; Jacksonville (Fla.) Bartram Trail linebacker Micah Pollard; and Madison (Ala.) Academy linebacker Deuce Spurlock.

Micah Pollard is the son of 14-year NFL veteran tight end Marcus Pollard and the nephew of former Michigan wide receiver Braylon Edwards, who won the Biletnikoff Award for the Wolverines as the nation's top receiver in 2004.

- Joe Dempsey

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: BIG TEN WRAP-UP

Big Ten Team Rankings

| Rk. | Team | Signees |
|-----|---------------------|---------|
| 4. | Ohio State..... | 21 |
| 6. | Penn State | 25 |
| 9. | Michigan..... | 22 |
| 21. | Indiana..... | 22 |
| 23. | Michigan State..... | 23 |
| 30. | Iowa | 18 |
| 31. | Maryland | 21 |
| 33. | Rutgers | 19 |
| 37. | Purdue..... | 20 |
| 41. | Nebraska..... | 18 |
| 44. | Wisconsin | 15 |
| 46. | Illinois..... | 26 |
| 48. | Minnesota..... | 18 |
| 50. | Northwestern..... | 16 |

*247Sports composite rankings

Iowa went to Jones, Okla., to find its future quarterback in three-star signal caller Carson May. May ranks No. 31 among quarterbacks and No. 521 among all players for the 2022 class.

No. 31 Maryland (21)

Mike Locksley once again had success attracting top-tier talent to Maryland, signing four four-star prospects to the No. 31 recruiting class in the nation.

Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star linebacker Jaishawn Barham is the 10th-ranked linebacker and the No. 119 overall recruit in America, as well as the third-rated player in Maryland.

The Terrapins reeled in Monroe, N.C., four-star wideout Shaleak Knotts to team up with two-time All-Big Ten receiver Rakim Jarrett. Knotts is the No. 30 wideout and No. 215 overall recruit nationally.

Maryland also brought in Midlothian (Va.) Manchester four-star tailback Ramon Brown, who is the nation's No. 19 running back and No. 231 overall prospect.

Burtonsville (Md.) Paint Branch four-star athlete Octavian Smith Jr. rounds out the Terps' four-star signees, ranking No. 15 among athletes and No. 341 overall.

No. 33 Rutgers (19)

Before Greg Schiano returned to Rutgers, the program struggled to secure commitments from prospects ranked in the top 400. However, the Scarlet Knights ranked No. 33 in the nation in the 2022 class, securing commitments from four four-star recruits.

Schiano's top signee for 2022 is Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall four-star linebacker Moses Walker. Walker is the No. 17 linebacker and No. 174 overall prospect nationally as well as the No. 1 recruit in New York.

In addition to reeling in Walker, Rutgers had success in the greater New Jersey area. The Scarlet Knights signed Princeton (N.J.) Hun School four-star interior offensive lineman Jacob Allen, who is the No. 11 recruit at his position and No. 210 overall prospect nationally, as well as the second-ranked recruit in New Jersey.

Schiano and his staff also secured a pair of four-star commitments from Pennsylvania in Philadelphia Neumann Goretta linebacker Anthony Johnson and Glenside La Salle College four-star tailback Samuel Brown.

No. 37 Purdue (20)

After finishing dead last in the Big Ten in recruiting for the 2021 cycle, Jeff Brohm and his staff bounced back in a big way with a top-40 class nationally.

The Boilermakers locked up three four-star signees, including one of the biggest

gets in the entire conference in Fort Branch (Ind.) Gibson Southern four-star quarterback Brady Allen. The signal caller is the 10th-ranked quarterback and No. 170 overall recruit in the country.

With the need to replace three-time All-Big Ten defensive lineman George Karlaftis, Purdue signed a pair of highly touted stalwarts for its future defensive line. Bryan, Texas, four-star defensive lineman Nic Caraway is the No. 28 defensive lineman and No. 214 overall recruit nationally, and Indianapolis Brebeuf Jesuit four-star defensive lineman Joe Strickland ranks No. 33 and No. 256, respectively.

Additionally, Purdue signed four prospects from Ohio, including Cleveland Valley Forge three-star tailback Kentrell Marks, who ranks No. 41 among running backs and No. 508 among all recruits nationally. The Boilermakers also added Middletown Lakota East three-star tight end Charlie Kenrich, Cincinnati St. Xavier tight end Max Klare and Youngstown Boardman athlete Terence Thomas.

No. 41 Nebraska (18)

After boasting a stellar 2021 class that ranked fifth in the conference and 20th nationally, Nebraska took a step back in 2022. The Cornhuskers rank 10th in the Big Ten and No. 41 nationally, and they have only two signees with more than three stars.

Nebraska's top signee is Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jaeden Gould, who is the nation's No. 30 corner and No. 251 overall recruit.

On the other side of the ball, the Huskers hauled in Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star wideout Janiran Bonner, who ranks No. 49 among wide receivers and No. 330 overall nationally.

Nebraska head coach Scott Frost continued to have success as a JUCO recruiter, bringing in three top-tier prospects from that level. Roswell (N.M.) Military Institute three-star tailback Anthony Grant signed with the Huskers as the No. 1 JUCO running back and No. 9 overall JUCO prospect in the nation.

Frost also signed a pair of stellar JUCO safeties in Garden City (Kan.) C.C. three-star safety Javier Morton and Hutchinson (Kan.) C.C. three-star safety Deshon Singleton. Morton ranks fifth among JUCO safeties and No. 22 among all JUCO prospects, while Singleton ranks sixth and No. 29, respectively.

Additionally, Shreveport (La.) Green Oaks three-star wideout Decoldest Crawford and Monroe (La.) Neville three-star tailback Ajay Allen are projected to provide the Nebraska offense with a pair of talented playmakers from Louisiana.

No. 44 Wisconsin (15)

No team in the Big Ten fell off on the recruiting front more than Wisconsin since last year. The Badgers finished third in the conference and No. 16 in the nation in 2021, but they dropped to No. 11 and No. 44, respectively, for the 2022 cycle.

The crown jewel of Paul Chryst's 2022 class is Milwaukee Whitefish Bay four-star offensive tackle Joe Brunner, who ranks ninth among tackles and No. 85 among all prospects.

The only other four-star signee for the Badgers is Sun Prairie, Wis., defensive lineman Isaac Hamm, who is the No. 45 defensive lineman and No. 359 overall recruit nationally.

Even though they are not as highly touted

as some of their counterparts, the Badgers are excited about the three-star signees they added on defense. Wisconsin signed Johnston City, Ill., safety Austin Brown; Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic cornerback AKhoury Lyde; Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro linebacker Tristan Monday; and Walled Lake (Mich.) Western three-star linebacker Aidan Vaughan to bolster its defense.

On offense, Wisconsin also added Louisville (Ky.) Male three-star wide receiver Vinny Anthony; Franklin, Wis., three-star quarterback Myles Burkett; Dewitt, Mich., three-star wideout Tommy McIntosh; and Stoughton, Wis., three-star offensive tackle Barrett Nelson.

No. 46 Illinois (26)

In Bret Bielema's first year at the helm at Illinois, he helped the Fighting Illini ascend on the recruiting trail from No. 72 nationally to No. 46.

Although Bielema and his staff did not add top-tier talent, they brought in considerable depth with 26 three-star signees.

Seven of Bielema's 26 signees rank within the nation's top 1,000 high school prospects, including Oswego (Ill.) East linebacker Jared Badie, Gibson City (Ill.) GCMS athlete Aidan Laughery, offensive tackle Magnus Moller from Denmark, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy wide receiver Shawn Miller, Hartland (Wis.) Arrowhead interior offensive lineman Joey Okla and Oak Park (Ill.) Fenwick wide receiver Eian Pugh.

Bielema and his staff also turned to the JUCO market for a pair of physically imposing offensive linemen, signing Garden City (Kan.) C.C. offensive tackle Isaiah Adams and Perkinson (Miss.) Gulf Coast C.C. interior offensive lineman Zy Crisler. Adams ranks fourth among JUCO tackles and No. 26 overall while Crisler ranks No. 2 among JUCO interior linemen and No. 23 overall.

No. 48 Minnesota (18)

The Golden Gophers finished eighth in the Big Ten in recruiting in 2021, but they dropped all the way to No. 13 in 2022.

Only half of P.J. Fleck's 18 signees rank within the nation's top 1,000 high school prospects. However, the Gophers secured a

pair of commitments from four-star defensive linemen in Trey Bixby from Eden Prairie, Minn., and Anthony Smith from Shippensburg, Pa.

Minnesota's third-highest rated signee is Rockwall (Texas) Heath three-star tailback Zach Evans, who is the No. 55 running back and No. 662 overall prospect nationally.

The Gophers' other top-1,000 signees include Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior athlete Aidan Gousby; Alexandria (Minn.) Area wide-out Kristen Hoskins; Harrisburg, S.D., quarterback Jacob Knuth; Choctaw, Okla., interior offensive lineman Cade McConnell; Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School defensive lineman Hayden Schwartz; and Baltimore St. Frances Academy wide receiver Ike White.

No. 50 Northwestern (16)

Northwestern rounds out the Big Ten recruiting rankings with the lowest total points, which is affected by securing only 16 signees. Despite finishing last in total points, the Wildcats ranked 10th in the conference in average recruit rating at 86.75, ahead of Nebraska, Purdue, Minnesota and Illinois.

Though Pat Fitzgerald's 2022 haul lacks the depth of some of his peers, he added some quality players to his program.

Naperville (Ill.) Central four-star wide receiver Reggie Fleurima and Towson (Md.) Loyola Blakefield four-star edge Anto Saka are the standouts of Northwestern's class. Fleurima ranks No. 36 among wideouts and No. 236 among all prospects nationally, while Saka is the No. 24 edge and No. 266 overall recruit.

Although Northwestern has signed only 16 players for the 2022 class, 10 of those prospects are ranked within the nation's top 800, signifying Fitzgerald's quality over quantity approach. The Wildcat commits ranked in the top 800 include Glendora, Calif., athlete Braydon Brus; Niceville, Fla., defensive lineman Austin Firestone; Dallas Jesuit safety Robert Fitzgerald; Stillwell (Kan.) Blue Valley offensive tackle Nick Herzog; Little Rock (Ark.) Pulaski Academy tailback Joseph Himon II; Chicago Marist offensive tackle Danny McGuire; Park Ridge (Ill.) Maine South tight end Chris Petrucci; and Avon (Conn.) Old Farms linebacker Kenny Soares.

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Ohio State Looking South For Talent In 2023

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

National Signing Day has come and gone, which means the focus now shifts to the next crop of recruits in 2023.

Ohio State currently has four commits in 2023, the most recent of which was Dublin (Ohio) Coffman three-star defensive tackle Will Smith Jr., the son of the late Ohio State and NFL defensive end Will Smith, who committed to play for the Buckeyes Jan. 23.

Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star tight end Ty Lockwood was the first commit in the class, issuing a verbal to Ohio State on Aug. 19, 2021. After nearly a three-month drought, Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive tackle Joshua Padilla then committed on Nov. 4, 2021, and Cocoa, Fla., four-star safety Cedrick Hawkins was the Buckeyes' first commit of the new year, committing during the Rose Bowl.

Ohio State's four-man class currently ranks as the No. 8 overall class in 2023 and the No. 3 class in the Big Ten behind Penn State and Michigan.

The class is still continuing to come together as Ohio State issues offers to prospects – 118 in 2023 at time of press – but there will be some clear needs for head coach Ryan Day in the upcoming cycle, including at running back, in the secondary and in the trenches, where Ohio State has had smaller groups in recent years.

Here's a look at some top-100 national recruits to keep an eye on whom the Buckeyes will be involved with over the coming months. All rankings come from the 247Sports composite.

**Troy Bowles, LB
Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit**

Bowles (6-1, 205) is one of the top linebackers in 2023, rated the fourth best, as well as the No. 42 prospect in the country. He holds over 30 Power Five offers, in-

Class Of 2023 National Prospects

Ten of the top players OSU is pursuing in the 2022 class from around the nation, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

| Overall Rk. | Player | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | High School | Top Colleges |
|-------------|---------------------|------|------|-----|-------|--|---------------------|
| 5. | Kadyn Proctor | OT | 6-7 | 330 | ***** | Des Moines (Iowa) Southeast Polk | ALA, UGA, UM, OSU |
| 8. | Brandon Inniss | WR | 6-0 | 190 | ***** | Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage | ALA, OSU, USC |
| 15. | Richard Young | RB | 5-11 | 200 | ***** | Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior | ALA, CLE, OSU |
| 16. | Nicholaus lamaleava | QB | 6-5 | 195 | ***** | Downey (Calif.) Warren | ALA, OSU, ORE, UCLA |
| 17. | AJ Harris | CB | 6-1 | 180 | ***** | Phenix City (Ala.) Central | CLE, UC, UGA, OSU |
| 18. | Matayo Uiagelelei | DE | 6-4 | 255 | ***** | Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco | ALA, CLE, UGA, OSU |
| 29. | Carnell Tate | WR | 6-2 | 185 | ***** | Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy | ND, OSU |
| 42. | Troy Bowles | LB | 6-1 | 205 | **** | Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit | UGA, OSU |
| 46. | Justice Haynes | RB | 5-10 | 200 | **** | Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic | UGA, OSU |
| 83. | Derrick LeBlanc | DL | 6-4 | 270 | **** | Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola | CLE, UF, OSU |

cluding Clemson, Georgia, Michigan and Ohio State, but the battle appears to be coming down to the Buckeyes and Bulldogs, with four 247Sports crystal ball predictions split between the two schools.

His father is current Tampa Bay Buccaneers defensive coordinator Todd Bowles, and his brother, Todd Bowles Jr., is a walk-on at Rutgers.

**AJ Harris, CB
Phenix City (Ala.) Central**

Harris (6-1, 180) is Ohio State's top cornerback target in the class, though that relationship has taken a hit since former defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs departed for Cincinnati.

The Buckeyes are largely back to square one with the No. 17 overall prospect in the class and the No. 3 cornerback, but there's no reason to expect that Ohio State will stop trying to win Harris' services.

He released a previous top seven of Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, LSU, North Carolina, Notre Dame and Ohio State, though the Bearcats are now expected to be heavily involved in his recruitment.

247Sports national recruiting analyst Cooper Petagna scouted Harris, saying that he displays good athletic ability in all three phases of the game.

"He will see the majority of his snaps at the safety position but exhibits some ability as a man defender at the corner position,"

Petagna said. "Although he possesses the physical traits to play the corner position, you can see a natural progression to a nickel or deep safety role. He will need to continue to develop as a man-to-man defender in the deep part of the field but has a good feel for playing in coverage underneath."

**Justice Haynes, RB
Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity**

Ohio State is expected to take two running backs in 2023, and Haynes (5-10, 200) is one running backs coach Tony Alford would love to bring in.

Haynes is rated the No. 3 running back and the No. 46 overall prospect in the class. Like Bowles, this will likely come down to Georgia and Ohio State, with one crystal ball prediction in for Haynes to the Bulldogs.

In three seasons at Blessed Trinity Catholic, Haynes has rushed for 5,873 yards on 656 carries, good for nearly nine yards per carry, and scored 72 rushing touchdowns. He also hauled in 19 receptions for 260 yards and four touchdowns and has thrown for a touchdown on four passing attempts.

**Nicholaus lamaleava, QB
Downey (Calif.) Warren**

After picking up quarterbacks C.J. Stroud, Kyle McCord and Devin Brown in consecutive years, 2023 is a year that Ohio State could conceivably take a step back from recruiting quarterbacks.

However, Day has made it clear that he intends to bring in a high school quarterback in every class, and lamaleava (6-5, 195) is one whom the Buckeyes have keyed in on. He's rated the No. 16 overall prospect and the No. 4 quarterback in the class behind Detroit Martin Luther King five-star Dante Moore, who is likely to stay in-state, and Los Alamitos, Calif., five-star Malachi Nelson, who is committed to USC.

He also trails New Orleans (La.) Isidore Newman five-star Arch Manning, who has said Ohio State is involved in his recruitment but will almost certainly end up at an SEC school, following the path set by his father, Cooper (Ole Miss, prior to his injury retirement), uncles Eli (Ole Miss) and Peyton (Tennessee), and grandfather Archie (Ole Miss).

lamaleava's most recent top schools include Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon, Notre Dame and UCLA, among others.

**Brandon Inniss, WR
Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Heritage**

Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline has shown the ability to pull essentially any wide receiver he wants from

anywhere in the country, but nabbing Inniss (6-0, 190) would represent an unmatched conquest for Hartline entering his seventh season with the Buckeyes.

A previous Oklahoma commit, Inniss checks in as the top receiver in 2023 and the No. 8 overall prospect in the class. He decommitted from the Sooners following then-head coach Lincoln Riley's departure for USC.

While USC is the natural favorite if he decides to follow the coach, Alabama, Miami (Fla.) and Ohio State are all considered to be among his leaders.

247 Southeast recruiting analyst Andrew Ivins called Inniss one of the most college-ready wide receivers to come out of the high school ranks in recent years.

"He's an elite route runner with a competitive edge that can take over games and beat double coverage. He was initially mistaken by one Power Five assistant coach for a high school senior when he was just an eighth-grader because of his polish," Ivins said. "He could get a little bit more explosive and add a true extra gear, but he doesn't have many issues creating separation and is more than capable of pulling away from defenses. He should be viewed as a high-floor type of prospect and someone that is going to be able to contribute very early on for a top-25 program. He'll likely have a voice in the locker room given his dog-eat-dog mentality, and he has NFL upside."

**Derrick Leblanc, DL
Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola**

Though Leblanc (6-4, 270) spent most of last fall visiting ACC and SEC schools, Ohio State could still be in a strong position for the top-100 defensive line prospect.

He's rated the No. 83 overall prospect in the class and the No. 12 defensive lineman, and he's been connected with the Buckeyes ever since he was offered on July 29, 2021, following a series of visits over the summer. Steve Wiltfong of 247Sports issued a crystal ball prediction the next day for Leblanc to join Ohio State.

Ohio State is among Leblanc's top schools, along with Clemson, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma, Penn State and UCF.

**Kadyn Proctor, OT
Des Moines (Iowa) SE Polk**

New offensive line coach Justin Frye could be off to an impressive start with the Buckeyes if he can get Ohio State involved with the recruitment of Proctor (6-7, 330), the nation's top offensive tackle in 2023.

In addition to being the No. 5 overall prospect, he's the top recruit out of Iowa.

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RECRUITING WRAP-UP: LOOKING AHEAD

Southeast Polk is also the home of safety Xavier Nwankpa, who stayed home and committed to the Hawkeyes over Notre Dame and Ohio State in the 2022 class.

Proctor has done little to narrow down his list of schools yet, with a top 12 of Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Iowa State, LSU, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Texas and Texas A&M, meaning the Buckeyes could be in the race if Frye can connect with Proctor.

247Sports national recruiting analyst Allen Trieu said Proctor projects as a left tackle at the collegiate level.

"He's a good natural athlete and shows explosiveness off the ball, twitch and quickness for a big man," Trieu said. "He gets out of his stance quickly in pass protection and has strength and a powerful punch. He can run and get out in front of plays to make blocks in space and shows few glaring weaknesses but can still tweak his technique and steadily improve on testing numbers. He is a high-end prospect who can play for any school in the country and has the upside and work ethic to play beyond that."

Carnell Tate, WR Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

If Hartline can't pull Inniss, Tate (6-2, 185) would certainly fill in as the face of the class at wide receiver. He's the third-best receiver in 2023 and the No. 19 overall prospect and holds over 30 offers from Power Five schools.

Tate appears to be deciding between Notre Dame and Ohio State, with no clear indication as to whom he's favoring. Wiltfong entered a crystal ball prediction for Tate to the Buckeyes, while Notre Dame insider Tom Loy entered one in for the Fighting Irish.

Ivins said Tate's ability to shake defenders and generate big plays will have him on the radar of NFL scouts.

"He's the type of wide receiver that always seems to be open," Ivins said. "He creates plenty of separation at the line of scrimmage and is able to beat both zone and man coverage once under way. He has superb body control and large 10-inch hands that allow him to make extremely difficult catches look relatively easy. He has experience working both inside and outside."

Matayo Uiagelelei Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco

Ohio State is in on the No. 1 wide receiver, offensive tackle and running back in the class, so no reason to not get involved with the top defensive end in the class in Uiagelelei (6-4, 255).

He's also the No. 18 prospect in the class, and he holds offers from the usual powerhouses, including Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State. He meant to visit the Buckeyes this past fall for their game against Oregon, but he missed his flight and the game.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson has made a strong impression on Uiagelelei, so he could once again try to work his magic on one of the top players in 2023. Matayo is also the younger brother of current Clemson quarterback DJ Uiagelelei.

Richard Young, RB Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior

Along with Haynes, Young (5-11, 200) is

Class Of 2023 In-State Prospects

The top 10 players in the state of Ohio for the 2023 class, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

| Overall Rk. | Player | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | High School | Top Colleges |
|-------------|------------------|------|------|-----|-------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 61. | Brenan Vernon | DL | 6-5 | 245 | **** | Mentor | Committed to Notre Dame |
| 62. | Luke Montgomery | OT | 6-5 | 260 | **** | Findlay | UM, ND, OSU |
| 125. | Joshua Padilla | OT | 6-4 | 265 | **** | Wayne | Committed to Ohio State |
| 215. | Malik Hartford | ATH | 6-3 | 175 | **** | Lakota West | UM, ND, OSU |
| 278. | Anthony Brown | WR | 5-10 | 170 | **** | Springfield | BC, UC, UW |
| 284. | Trevor Carter | LB | 6-2 | 205 | **** | Ironton | Committed to Cincinnati |
| 320. | Austin Siereveld | OL | 6-5 | 315 | **** | Lakota East | ALA, UM, OSU |
| 407. | Tanner Lemaster | TE | 6-6 | 235 | *** | Washington Court House | UC, IU, UK |
| 450. | Breon Ishmaels | ATH | 6-5 | 200 | *** | Hamilton | ISU, TENN, WV |
| 461. | A.J. Salley | OT | 6-5 | 260 | *** | Miamisburg | Committed to Cincinnati |

one of Ohio State's top running back targets in the class, if not the top target for Alford.

He's rated the top running back in his class and the No. 15 overall prospect, having rushed for over 3,500 yards in three seasons at Lehigh Senior to go along with 33 rushing touchdowns.

Ohio State is among the top schools for Young, along with the usual suspects of Alabama and Clemson, having received over 40 Power Five offers.

Ivins said that Young is one of the most coveted prospects to come out of southwest Florida in recent memory.

"He's a one-cut-and-go type of running back that's powerful enough to get it done in between the tackles. He has excellent vision and overall feel for the position allows him to get up field in a hurry and attack holes," Ivins said. "He catches the ball well and should be able to move the chains via the screen game if those types of plays are on the call sheet."

2023 A Down Cycle For Ohio

Ohio State's focus in 2023 will be outside the Buckeye State, and for good reason. Ohio has just two top-100 recruits in the class, and one is already committed to Notre Dame. In total, only 11 top-500 recruits are hailing from Ohio, and five have already committed to a school. Padilla is the lone Ohio State commit in that grouping.

The top player in the state is Mentor five-star defensive lineman Brenan Vernon, who's been committed to the Fighting Irish since last June and did not waver in his commitment despite head coach Brian Kelly's move to LSU. It would be the first time Ohio State did not sign the top prospect in Ohio since Jackson Carman signed with Clemson in 2018.

While the Buckeyes won't stop kicking the tires on Vernon until he officially signs with Notre Dame, there are a number of other talented prospects in the state whom Ohio State can key in on over the next year. Here is a look at some of the top uncommitted Ohio recruits in 2023:

Anthony Brown, WR Springfield

Brown (5-10, 170) had been off the table for a few months, having been committed to Minnesota since Sept. 4, but the four-star receiver and No. 278 prospect is back on the market after decommitting from the Gophers on Feb. 7.

He's the No. 5 player in Ohio and the No. 36 receiver in the class, and with Minnesota out of the picture, Brown will be looking at Boston College, Cincinnati, Michigan, Penn State and Wisconsin as some of his top schools.

Though Ohio State has yet to offer Brown, it's expected that an offer from the Buckeyes could flip his recruitment on its head.

Ohio State currently has offers out to 15 wide receivers in 2023, three of which are ranked lower than Brown in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Malik Hartford, ATH West Chester Lakota West

Hartford (6-3, 175) was one of Ohio State's most recent offer recipients on Jan. 22, and he should immediately be considered a Buckeye lean moving forward.

Ohio State offered him as a safety, but he's rated the No. 17 athlete in 2023 and the No. 215 overall prospect in the class.

He's a rising star, having received recent offers from Michigan, Notre Dame and Tennessee within the last couple of weeks, but Ohio State put itself in a good position by getting involved early with Hartford's recruitment.

Luke Montgomery, OT Findlay

The other top-100 recruit in the state, Montgomery (6-5, 260), is the belle of the Midwest ball, so to speak. He has a top six of Clemson, Michigan, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Oklahoma and Penn State, but like Tate, Montgomery's commitment will likely come down to Notre Dame and Ohio State.

The Buckeyes could have a built-in advantage given that the Fighting Irish had been recruiting Montgomery as a defensive lineman and he's recently said his preference would be to play on the offensive line, where Ohio State projects him.

He's ranked the No. 62 recruit in his class and the No. 6 offensive tackle. Luke's brother, Ryan, is a quarterback in the 2025 class.

Ohio State recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic has a crystal ball prediction in for Montgomery to Ohio State. He's slated to commit on Feb. 17.

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Holmes' Catch Highlights Super Bowl Buckeyes

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Joe Burrow has a chance for as epic a performance as any former* Ohio State player when the Cincinnati Bengals face the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl LVI (56) on Feb. 13 in Los Angeles.

Of course, the asterisk is there because Burrow, while holding a degree in consumer and financial services from the school, has "LSU" next to his name on the official Bengals roster.

He transferred to Louisiana State in the spring of 2018 after Dwayne Haskins was named the Buckeye starter for the upcoming season. Burrow in 2019 won the Heisman Trophy as the Tigers won the College Football Playoff, leading him to become the first overall pick of the 2020 NFL draft.

Yet Burrow, who in his second NFL season has taken the Bengals to their first Super Bowl since 1989, is considered "one of us" among many Buckeye faithful.

There are even Cleveland Browns/Ohio State fans who are rooting for Burrow, although not as ardently for the Bengals, to win the Super Bowl.

Cincinnati's active roster is home to four players who spent their entire collegiate careers playing for the Buckeyes: cornerback Eli Apple, safety Vonn Bell, defensive end Sam Hubbard and offensive tackle Isaiah Prince.

Linebacker Keandre Jones also played for Ohio State from 2016-18 before transferring to Maryland for the 2019 season, as did practice squad defensive end Noah Spence, who entered the NFL from Eastern Kentucky after a stint with the Buckeyes. Both check in with the Bengals as well.

"I think it's exciting for the whole state of Ohio to have the Bengals in the Super Bowl," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said Jan. 31. "Certainly, the story of where they've been, where they were last year and even this year, they feel like the underdogs the whole way and now here they are in the Super Bowl. I'm so excited for that whole organization and all of the guys who have played here, in particular Joe with all of the things he's been through. He's been tremendous to watch and cheer on.

"And then Sam Hubbard, Vonn Bell, Eli Apple, there are a whole bunch of guys on that team who have played really well," he continued. "How exciting to come back to your home state and bring your team to a Super Bowl. I'm thrilled for them, and the next couple of weeks will be great in preparation, and I think they have a real chance to win that game. They've been underdogs the whole way, and I'm pulling for them."

Yes, the Bengals have a heavy Ohio State influence, more so than the Rams, whose lone ex-Buckeye is safety Jordan Fuller (2016-19). His L.A. teammates think so highly of him he was voted captain in his second NFL season.

However, the team's leading tackler won't play in the Super Bowl because he sustained an ankle injury in the regular-season finale against San Francisco on Jan. 9.

There is a Buckeye State connection for the Rams in head coach Sean McVay, a Day-



FILE PHOTO

STILL A BUCKEYE — Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow (right) finished his college career with LSU and was drafted as a Tiger, but he graduated from Ohio State. He'll be the first former Buckeye to start at quarterback in the Super Bowl when the Bengals play the Rams on Feb. 13.

ton native and Miami of Ohio graduate.

Stealing A Super Bowl

All eyes, though, will be on Burrow, who at age 25 can become one of the youngest QBs to win a Super Bowl behind Ben Roethlisberger (23), Patrick Mahomes (24) and Tom Brady (24).

In 2021, Burrow set the Bengals' season record for passing yards (4,616), touchdowns (34) and passer rating (108.3). He also led the NFL in completion percentage (70.4).

Growing up in The Plains, Ohio, where his father, Jimmy, was a defensive coordinator at nearby Ohio University, the younger Burrow loved watching the Super Bowl with his family.

Burrow told reporters Feb. 3 of his most vivid memory, and it so happens to be the greatest play by an Ohio State player in Super Bowl history.

"The one that I really remember was when the Cardinals were playing the Steelers and Big Ben made that amazing throw on the back pylon," he said.

The "Big Ben" in question is Roethlisberger, and the pass came in Super Bowl XLIII on Feb. 1, 2009, when he connected with former OSU wide receiver Santonio Holmes for a 6-yard TD pass with 35 seconds remaining to give the Steelers a 27-23 victory over the Arizona Cardinals.

It was a dramatic turnaround after Larry Fitzgerald's TD reception from Kurt Warner had put the Cardinals ahead 23-20 with 2:37 left.

After returning the kickoff to the Pittsburgh 22, the Steelers had 78 yards and 2:30 to regain the lead. During the drive, Holmes had three catches for 67 yards to put the ball into the red zone.

Roethlisberger went back to Holmes in the left corner on first down from the 6, but the pass was incomplete. On second down,

they went to the opposite sideline, and Holmes was able to tap both feet in — though many Cardinal players and fans to this day swear he had one foot touching the out-of-bounds line — for the winning score.

The play enabled Holmes to become the only OSU player to be named Super Bowl MVP. For the game he caught nine passes off 12 targets for 131 yards with his longest reception being 40 yards.

Coincidentally, Holmes was a footnote to another controversial play that decided a championship. He was a redshirt freshman when Ohio State won the 2002-03 national championship game in double overtime against the University of Miami, aided by what Hurricane followers believe was a late and wrong pass-interference call by field judge Terry Porter that kept the game alive in the first OT and allowed the Buckeyes to tie the score.

Holmes, in an interview with Jeremy Fowler of ESPN 10 years after his epic catch, recalled what he offered to Roethlisberger at the beginning of the drive.

"I said, '(No.) 7, I want the ball right now. No disrespect to the other guys. I want the ball,' " Holmes said. "He never said anything. He just threw it to me."

He had a calmness as the series unfolded.

"Millions are watching you. What are you going to do now?" was Holmes' thought. "You didn't ask God to put you in this place for you not to do what you were supposed to do. This won't break me. This will make me. Legends never die."

He was right about the TV audience. The game on NBC averaged 98.7 million viewers, making it the most watched Super Bowl in history at the time.

Holmes will be forever linked with that play. "I would consider that the biggest throw in (Roethlisberger's) career," Holmes told Fowler.

Of Holmes' catch, Nate Davis wrote in USA Today's top 56 Super Bowl players: "What was better, QB Ben Roethlisberger's precision strike to the back corner of the end zone — rifled through three Arizona Cardinals — or WR Santonio Holmes' ability to snatch it while keeping his toes down as he fell out of bounds with 35 seconds on the clock? Beautifully executed all the way around, and it gave the Pittsburgh Steelers a record sixth Lombardi Trophy as they rallied for a 27-23 victory in Super Bowl 43."

No. 12 on the list of greatest moments was No. 12, Joe Namath, who led the New York Jets to a stunning 16-7 victory over the Baltimore Colts Jan. 12, 1969: "Joe Namath's raised index finger as he jogged off the Orange Bowl field after the New York Jets' monumental upset of the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl 3 said it all, especially after the MVP's famous pregame guarantee that the 18-point underdogs would prevail."

The established NFL had won the first two NFL-AFL championship games easily as the Green Bay Packers defeated the Kansas City Chiefs (ex-Buckeye Jim Tyrer was the starting left tackle for the Chiefs) and Oakland Raiders.

Two former Buckeyes played prominent roles in the Colts-Jets matchup.

Matt Snell of the Jets and the Colts' Tom Matte became the first and only players from the same school to rush for more than 100 yards each.

Snell had 121 yards and a 4-yard TD to open the scoring on 30 carries. He had four catches for 40 yards.

Matte, who died on Nov. 2 at age 82, had 116 yards, including a 58-yarder, on 11 rushes and added 30 yards on two catches. Many of Matte's runs were aided by ex-OSU left tackle Bob Vogel.

They each had great games, but linebacker Mike Vrabel and special teams player/defensive back Nate Ebner are the only Buckeyes to win three Super Bowls. Each did it for the New England Patriots and coach Bill Belichick.

Vrabel, the current head coach of the Tennessee Titans, was victorious in Super Bowls 2002, 2004 and 2005. In 2004, he caught a 1-yard TD pass from Brady and the following Super Bowl had another scoring catch from 2 yards.

His exploits earned him the No. 45 spot on Davis' list: "A consummate Patriot, he played in four Super Bowls and wound up with three rings. He also racked up 16 tackles, three sacks, a forced fumble ... and two TDs on two receptions while lining up as a tight end in goal-line packages. Not bad."

He is the only former Buckeye on the list.

Ebner's most recent title came in 2019 in Super Bowl LIII when the Patriots downed the Los Angeles Rams (and Buckeye long snapper Jake McQuaid) 13-3. Former OSU defensive end John Simon was also a member of the Patriots.

Ebner was a champion after Super Bowl wins in 2015 (28-24 over the Seattle Seahawks) and 2017 (34-28 vs. the Atlanta Falcons). He also had a 41-33 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles in 2018.

OSU Beat Members Reflect On 2021 Season

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Ohio State started the 2021 season, head coach Ryan Day had his eyes fixed on hoisting a trophy. He made that evident in the weeks leading up to the Buckeyes' season-opening game at Minnesota.

Day said flatly in preseason press conferences that his job is to win every game. Fair or unfair, it is the reality of coaching at Ohio State. Each season, the expectation is that the Buckeyes go undefeated, beat the Big Ten West representative in Indianapolis and contend for a national title.

In some ways, Day's tenure raised the bar even further, with his first two teams reaching the playoff. Ohio State lost the 2019 Fiesta Bowl to Clemson, 29-23 – a game they controlled for most of the contest but let slip away in the second half. The Buckeyes earned a rematch with the Tigers the following year, defeating Dabo Swinney and company, 49-28, before suffering a blowout 52-24 loss to Alabama.

The Buckeyes' loss to the Crimson Tide wasn't expected, Day said. His team felt "exposed" by Nick Saban's high-powered team full of future NFL talent on both sides of the ball.

Still, Ohio State entered 2021 with championship-level expectations. It returned several talented players such as Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson, Zach Harrison and Haskell Garrett while introducing exciting weapons such as C.J. Stroud, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, J.T. Tuimoloau and Denzel Burke.

However, things fell apart the following week against then-No.12 Oregon at home. The Buckeyes lost 35-28 to the Ducks, looking outmatched in almost every facet of the game. In the postgame press conference, Day's face told the entire story. He was dumbfounded, surprised that an opponent could come to Ohio Stadium and defeat his team on its turf.

"I'm disappointed," he said. "I hate losing with a passion. You don't come to Ohio State to get beat in the Horseshoe. Everything that happens on Saturday that could happen better is going to be my responsibility.

"There's going to be a lot of second-guessing after today. There always is after a loss. But if we do a better job of executing, there'll be less second-guessing."

Ohio State course-corrected after Day's first regular-season loss as head coach. It went on an eight-game win streak, defeating three ranked opponents in Penn State, Purdue and Michigan State. Things looked like they were heading in the right direction – that the Buckeyes had fixed their obvious issues and would be a well-oiled machine running into their third consecutive playoff.

But Jim Harbaugh had other plans. On a cold and snowy day in Ann Arbor, Mich., the Wolverines dominated the Buckeyes, grinding the defense down into a fine paste and keeping the nation's best offense from finding any momentum. Instead of Ohio State winning the Big Ten East and facing Iowa in the conference title with a shot at the playoff, Michigan usurped the Buckeyes, claiming the spot for itself.

"When you work this game 365 days out

of the year and you come up short, it's a failure," Day after the loss. "It hurts. It hurts a lot."

Ohio State took the No. 6 spot in the final rankings, earning a bid to the Rose Bowl against Pac-12 Champion Utah. Despite opt-outs from Olave, Wilson, Garrett and Nicholas Petit-Frere, the Buckeyes won a 48-45 thriller over the Utes in Pasadena, Calif., closing out the 2021 season with a victory.

All was well that ended well for Ohio State. But was the season a success?

"I don't think so," Eleven Warriors team writer Griffin Strom told BSB. "There will always be a hierarchy for Ohio State football: beat Michigan, win the Big Ten title, make the playoff and win a national championship. They didn't accomplish any of those goals, so I think by those standards, you can't really consider this season a success."

Steve Helwagen of 247Sports agreed that the season couldn't be viewed as successful according to Ohio State's previously established standards. However, he thinks the Buckeyes' Rose Bowl win over Utah softens the blow of the team's regular-season shortcomings.

"A lot of things didn't go as planned, but a win in the Rose Bowl is a great accomplishment," Helwagen said. "It's obviously better to beat Michigan, win the conference and get to the College Football Playoff, but if you can't have those things, it's hard to be upset with winning a bowl game in Pasadena."

Day seemed pleased with his team's performance in "The Granddaddy of Them All," using each opportunity to praise his players for their resilience in a back-and-forth game with a talented Utah team.

But Day understands that his program's excitement must be short-lived. He made significant changes to the coaching staff, letting go of secondary coach Matt Barnes, defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and linebackers coach Al Washington. He replaced them with Cincinnati's Perry Eliano, UCLA's Josh Frye, Oklahoma State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and Tim Walton of the Jacksonville Jaguars.

"Ryan Day made all of these moves, proving that he is not afraid to make decisions that are for the betterment of the program," said Jeff Logan, a former Ohio State running back (1974-77) and current 610-WTVN Best Buckeye Coverage radio commentator. "In his opinion, he's the head coach, and it's his responsibility. With all the changes that have gone on, now all the pressure is on the Buckeyes to succeed. It's his staff. He chose them. I think that Day is telling you what he thinks of this team with these changes – that they can win a championship right now."

The three reporters unanimously agreed that Day's decision indicates that Ohio State's roster is in "win-now mode" and that it should continue to have its eyes fixed on hoisting a trophy in 2022.

With Stroud and Smith-Njigba developing strong chemistry in the passing game, running back TreVeyon Henderson displaying a home-run hitting ability and a defense with promising young talent, Helwagen said there's no reason the Buckeyes can't compete for a championship.

"Day knows he has a potential champi-

onship roster on his hands, particularly at quarterback and receiver," Helwagen said. "The moves he's made are ones where he is pushing the chips all in and doing what he figures, in my mind, are upgrades across the board on his coaching staff.

"I think Stroud could have one of the best seasons any Ohio State quarterback has ever had next season. I don't know if he'll throw for 50 touchdowns like Dwayne Haskins, but this offense will put up a ton of points. Opposing teams will have to score 40 points to beat this team, and if the defense is improved, I'm not sure that's going to happen very much."

According to Strom, the only teams capable of creating offensive production to match Ohio State or possessing a defense strong enough to stop them would be Alabama and Georgia – the two teams who competed in the 2021 national championship game.

"There's a gap that exists still between Ohio State and those teams," Strom said. "I don't know how big the gap will be next season, but it was clear that those teams were on a different level in 2021. They had NFL talent flying around all over the field on their defenses, but Ohio State had that kind of talent on its offense. If not for the defense falling short, the Buckeyes could have been right there with them."

"The defense ultimately let Ryan Day down this year, which is another reason this year isn't exactly a success. If the defense can adapt next season, they will close the gap with Alabama and Georgia and contend for a title. With all the coaching staff changes and everything like that, I wouldn't put it past Ohio State to get to that level."

If Day continues putting together recruiting classes capable of competing at that level, partnered with energizing staff hires, the Buckeyes will have a great chance at a title soon. In the 2022 class, Ohio State finished fourth behind Texas A&M, Alabama and Georgia with 21 total commits – two five stars, 17 four stars and two three stars.

The two five-star recruits, linebacker C.J. Hicks and safety Sonny Styles, could make an immediate impact for Ohio State's defense next season. In fact, Logan said they could be the reason the Buckeyes are named undisputed champions in January 2023.

"The future landscape for Ohio State football is to embrace the youth," Logan said. "There are a few guys near the top of the class that chose to play for Ryan Day and wear the scarlet and gray. They chose to invest in Ryan Day, Jim Knowles and, in some ways, Stroud and Smith-Njigba. Recruits understand that this is a place ready to return to the top of college football. If this team wants to improve, they may have to involve the young talent immediately."

Logan pointed to Day's offensive game plan as another area where Ohio State might look to help with defensive shortcomings. While he agreed with Helwagen that Stroud will have a career year in the offense, he thinks the Buckeyes should embrace a more balanced scheme, choosing to pass and run the football with a balanced approach.

"You can't criticize anyone on Ohio State's offensive staff for the way they played this season except in maybe one category," Logan said. "The Buckeyes couldn't run the football well against good teams. They averaged over

500 yards and scored more than 40 points a game, but they threw for almost 5,000 yards and only rushed for a little over 2,300 yards. That's not the balance that Day wants to have.

"I don't think they felt that they could comfortably run the football at any point last season. Clearly the defense needs to improve in a lot of ways, but I think the unit might benefit from the offensive line improving and therefore the running game getting better. If Ohio State can run the football, they can control the game with better pace and give the defense some time to rest and recover, which could lead to a better output."

The decision would likely decrease Stroud's chance at a Heisman Trophy, but Logan claims it would significantly increase the team's chance at winning a national championship against teams with equal or greater talent. However, his suggestions will remain theory until Ohio State plays its spring game in April.

When Team Scarlet matches up against Team Gray, the players, coaches and fans will understand better the improvements the team can make before the regular season begins.

The program's second litmus test will be when it hosts Notre Dame on Sept. 3 in Columbus. The Fighting Irish finished their 2021 season 11-2 after falling to Oklahoma State, 37-35, in the Fiesta Bowl. Former Buckeye linebacker Marcus Freeman was named the program's head coach before the bowl game and will have spring ball, summer workouts and fall camp to prepare for his alma mater.

After the opening-week showdown, Ohio State's schedule continues with four consecutive home games against Arkansas State, Toledo, Wisconsin and Rutgers. The team's first road contest will be in East Lansing against Michigan State on Oct. 8.

"We will learn a lot about Ohio State's new identity in the first few weeks," Strom said. "They'll get a tough first game against Marcus Freeman and Notre Dame, but they will have that game at home. That's a good thing about the new schedule change for Day and everyone – they have their first five games in front of a home crowd. The second-toughest opponent (in that stretch) is Wisconsin, but other than that, the Buckeyes should have great opportunities to improve in different areas."

Arkansas State, Toledo and Rutgers will possess neither the same offensive firepower as future Big Ten opponents nor the defensive talent to stop Ohio State's high-powered offense, but the Buckeyes can still develop the disciplines necessary to win games against teams like Michigan State, Iowa, Penn State and Michigan.

Added Helwagen, "It's important that Ohio State look good in the games it is supposed to win. Day has done a great job of that in his career. At least up until the Michigan game, he won the games he was supposed to win. His teams haven't had any slip-ups yet, which is encouraging. If they shore up a lot of the question marks early, they could be in for a great year.

"It will only be a matter of time until we see for certain."

Return For Sueing, Towns Becoming Question

In the months since forward Justice Sueing aggravated a lower-body injury that has held him out of all but two games this season, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann had targeted late January as the hoped-for time frame for a return. The senior has been steadfast in his rehabilitation efforts, but as the Buckeyes roll through January and into February, it appears that the chances of a return to full strength this season are dwindling.

COURT REPORT Patrick Mayhorn

For fellow veteran forward Seth Towns, who has missed the entire season after an offseason back surgery, the story is the same. Holtmann told media Jan. 31 that he has no real updates on either player.

"Some of us (in college basketball) have had some key not-yet-season-ending injuries, guys like Justice and Seth," Holtmann said. "There's still not necessarily any update on those guys."

More troubling for the Buckeyes is that in speaking, Holtmann revealed that the plan for a late-January return had been seemingly on track until new roadblocks arose as the two began to work more into the typical routine.

"They're still, I don't want to say they're in a holding pattern because they're doing everything they can to get back," Holtmann continued. "To be honest with you, they went through – at least in Justice's case – some practices. He's not done any full practice or contact. He experienced some discomfort that slowed him down a little bit."

"I thought they would be back by now, but I'm done putting a date on it because I don't want to get everybody's hopes up. We'll welcome them back when they're healthy enough and ready to come back."

Super senior point guard Jamari Wheeler and sophomore point guard Meechie Johnson

2021-22 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

14-5 Overall (7-3 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Feb. 6

| 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. | | | | | | |
| E.J. Lidell | 19-19 | 593-31.2 | 128-245 | .522 | 29-72 | .403 | 93-126 | .738 | 48-98 | 146-7.7 | 50-2 | 57 | 49 | 49 | 9 | 378-19.9 |
| Malaki Branham | 19-18 | 506-26.6 | 73-165 | .442 | 20-49 | .408 | 33-40 | .825 | 14-57 | 71-3.7 | 28-0 | 35 | 26 | 4 | 12 | 199-10.5 |
| Zed Key | 19-16 | 407-21.4 | 76-124 | .613 | 0-0 | .000 | 25-43 | .581 | 34-72 | 106-5.6 | 43-0 | 11 | 18 | 17 | 2 | 177-9.3 |
| Kyle Young | 17-1 | 366-21.5 | 50-95 | .526 | 12-38 | .316 | 36-43 | .837 | 18-69 | 87-5.1 | 27-1 | 26 | 17 | 8 | 10 | 148-8.7 |
| Jamari Wheeler | 18-18 | 532-29.5 | 44-91 | .484 | 18-52 | .346 | 17-19 | .895 | 11-48 | 59-3.3 | 41-1 | 66 | 34 | 1 | 30 | 123-6.8 |
| Justin Ahrens | 19-17 | 475-25.0 | 38-106 | .358 | 37-103 | .359 | 16-22 | .727 | 3-54 | 57-3.0 | 29-1 | 21 | 16 | 1 | 7 | 129-6.8 |
| Meechie Johnson Jr. | 16-4 | 330-20.6 | 32-94 | .340 | 23-62 | .371 | 12-16 | .750 | 5-26 | 31-1.9 | 30-0 | 26 | 28 | 2 | 13 | 99-6.2 |
| Justice Sueing | 2-0 | 30-15.2 | 5-1 | .385 | 0-4 | .000 | 2-2 | 1.000 | 1-6 | 7-3.5 | 3-0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 12-6.0 |
| Cedric Russell | 17-0 | 192-11.3 | 24-55 | .436 | 17-40 | .425 | 3-4 | .750 | 0-9 | 9-0.5 | 11-0 | 10 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 68-4.0 |
| Eugene Brown III | 14-0 | 171-12.2 | 17-35 | .486 | 5-18 | .278 | 9-12 | .750 | 13-15 | 28-2.0 | 20-0 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 48-3.4 |
| Jimmy Sotos | 12-0 | 108-9.0 | 8-14 | .571 | 4-7 | .571 | 4-6 | .667 | 1-9 | 10-0.8 | 14-0 | 23 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 24-2.0 |
| Joey Brunk | 17-2 | 105-6.2 | 12-16 | .750 | 0-0 | .000 | 6-8 | .750 | 4-18 | 22-1.3 | 16-0 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 30-1.8 |
| Harrison Hookfin | 4-0 | 9-2.3 | 1-2 | .500 | 0-0 | .000 | 0-0 | .000 | 1-0 | 1-0.3 | 1-0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2-0.5 |
| Team | | | | | | | | | 21-25 | 46 | | | 5 | | | |
| Total | 19 | 3825 | 508-1055 | .482 | 165-445 | .371 | 256-341 | .751 | 174-506 | 680-35.8 | 313-5 | 288 | 216 | 91 | 91 | 1437-75.6 |
| Opponents | 19 | 3825 | 460-1118 | .411 | 131-400 | .328 | 240-331 | .725 | 195-412 | 607-31.9 | 332-7 | 218 | 202 | 47 | 118 | 1291-67.9 |

Jr. have had more luck in their recent forays to the injury report and appear to be cleared fully moving forward. Johnson has been playing with a medical mask to protect his jaw, while Wheeler – who was seen in a walking boot on Feb. 2 but did suit up to play for the Buckeyes against Iowa on Feb. 3 – has been dealing with turf toe but is not expected to miss any time beyond his one game out against Minnesota.

"It was great getting them back," Holtmann said. "Meechie was out for a while, and I think he's still getting into a rhythm. He was out 2½ weeks. Jamari, he's not 100 percent. He's got a little turf toe. It will get better and better as time goes on."

Nebraska Likely For Late February

Ohio State has yet to nail down a specific date for its rescheduled home matchup with Nebraska – which was originally slated for Jan. 22 – but the matchup will be played and the two sides appear to be homing in on a date. The Buckeyes have five days off between a home bout with Indiana on Feb. 19 and a road trip to Illinois on Feb. 24, and Holtmann indicated that the two sides may try to split

OSU Men's Basketball Signees

Players in the class of 2022 who have signed to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite rankings.)

| Player | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | High School |
|------------------|------|------|-----|-------|-----------------------------------|
| Roddy Gayle | SG | 6-4 | 195 | ★★★★ | Youngstown (N.Y.) Lewiston Porter |
| Bowen Hardman | SG | 6-3 | 160 | ★★★ | Cincinnati Princeton |
| Felix Okpara | C | 6-11 | 210 | ★★★★ | Branson (Mo.) Link Academy |
| Brice Sensabaugh | F | 6-6 | 240 | ★★★★ | Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep |
| Bruce Thornton | PG | 6-2 | 205 | ★★★★ | Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton |

that difference.

"I think they're looking either before or after the Indiana game," Holtmann said. "It will be a lot. We want to make sure we're getting in all our Big Ten games. The league wants to do that too. It will happen. They've talked about the 21st as a possibility."

If the 21st is the date the Big Ten settles on, Ohio State would have three games in five days to deal with – though Nebraska's burden would be even larger. The Cornhuskers have a home match with Maryland scheduled for Feb. 18 and a road trip set to Northwestern for Feb. 22. There's no date through the end of the season that would not see at least one of the two teams involved forced to play on back-to-back nights.

A season ago, as the conference faced numerous COVID-related postponements and cancellations, Big Ten assistant commissioner for public affairs Kerry Kenny told The Washington Post that such games were on the table if needed, but that both programs would need to agree to it ahead of time. Another option is to bump a future game back by a day, avoiding consecutive nights of basketball but forcing the kind of three-games-in-five-days situation that Ohio State may find itself in.

"When we get deeper into February," Kenny said, "there is going to be less opportunity for letting perfect get in the way of good."

Ahrens Breaks Slump Against Terrapins

In his second game since losing his starting job for the Buckeyes, senior winger Justin Ahrens found his rhythm against Maryland on Feb. 6, knocking down four three-pointers in a 14-point performance that marked his highest scoring total since Dec. 8.

Ahrens' shooting provided a spark for the Ohio State offense in the Buckeyes' 82-67 win over the Terrapins, which is a significant

storyline following his two-month-long slump endured through virus-related pauses and a demanding Big Ten schedule.

"Obviously I'm a shooter, so when I'm not making shots, I feel like I'm almost useless out there," Ahrens said after the game. "The coaches told me I'm one guy that can be out on the court and not hit shots and still have a positive impact on the game with a bunch of different things: my communication, rebounding, talking on defense, just the little things that some guys don't bring to the floor. Just staying with it each and every day was the main thing for me to get through that stretch."

Ahrens was the fourth player off the bench behind Cedric Russell, Kyle Young and Joey Brunk against Maryland. In the previous nine games, Ahrens averaged only 3.7 points per game, down from 9.1 in Ohio State's nine games before that. Before that fateful game with Wisconsin on Dec. 11, he was shooting 44.4 percent from three-point range, a number that had dropped to 21.4 percent since the Buckeyes beat the Badgers.

"For me, it was just one day at a time, just being an everyday guy like I've been all four years here," Ahrens said.

Holtmann said Ahrens' attitude deserves credit. He believes Ahrens' leadership and professionalism have done wonders for the Buckeyes during his recent struggles.

"You would never have noticed any difference in Justin Ahrens the next time we came to practice," Holtmann said. "He was the loudest, the most energized, the best talker in practice, and that is a mature kid. When I talk about a pro's pro, that's exactly what it looks like. Most kids, when they have a bad game – and if you lose – they come in and they don't have the same spirit that Justin had. His spirit has not waned through this stretch."

Even if Ahrens didn't show it in practices, Holtmann said the Versailles, Ohio, native was going through an internal struggle as a result of



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his on-court performance over the past several weeks.

"When a guy's as prolific as he's been – he's been one of the best shooters we've had, consistently, for four years – he's never had a stretch like this. I think he got really frustrated," Holtmann said. "But again, he's too good a shooter to shoot like this the rest of the year."

Ahrens understands his shot will eventually fall, and his performance against the Terrapins is proof that patience can be a much-needed virtue.

For Ahrens, finally seeing some shots go in provided a spark to knock down more. Now he's hoping that carries beyond just the match-up with the Terrapins.

"When you hit two or three in a row, you definitely get a rhythm and start to feel yourself. I've learned the last two weeks just to brush it off," Ahrens said. "There's a lot more games to play. The game's fast. You can't just sit back and dwell on every mistake you make. If you do that, you're just going to keep making more mistakes. One thing I really learned was just to keep pushing, keep doing you, keep playing hard. Impact the game any way you can."

Liddell Is 60th 1,000-Point Scorer

E.J. Liddell's 23 points against Minnesota on Jan. 27 were more than enough to boost the Buckeyes to their first win in Minneapolis in seven years and to launch him onto the same list as many of Ohio State's most important players in recent memory. In just the last decade, Ohio State has seen 13 players finish their careers with four digits in the scoring department before Liddell reached the milestone.

"I don't usually keep track of my points during the game, but I was aware a little bit this game," Liddell said. "When I got it, I just pointed to the sky and thanked God for everything."

Liddell is likely the only Buckeye to join that group this season. Young has 798 career points and would need to average more than 20 points per game for the rest of the regular season to crack 1,000, and he's the only one that's remotely close. So the focus on Liddell's accomplishment can shift instead to the recent standouts he's joined and his potential for climbing higher in the scoring list.

Just against the Golden Gophers, Liddell surpassed Nos. 60 and 59 on the 1,000-point scorer list, finishing the game with 1,011 points – enough to topple Sam Thompson's 1,001 and Chris Jent's 1,007. A pair of recent Buckeyes, Lenzelle Smith Jr. (1,014) and C.J. Jackson (1,016) are next on the list for Liddell to pass. With a few more games like the one he put up against Minnesota, Liddell will edge out his former teammate Duane Washington (1,073) to join the top 50.

If Liddell keeps his current pace of 19.9 points per game in Ohio State's final 10 regular season games (including yet-to-be-rescheduled matchups with Iowa and Nebraska), he'll end the year with 1,254 points, which would slot him in at No. 35, just ahead of Kaleb Wesson (1,240) and behind Keita Bates-Diop (1,272), a pair of Chris Holtmann products. Jared Sullinger and his 1,282 points in just two seasons would be within reach as well.

With a few postseason games, Liddell could break the top 30, needing to top Aaron Craft's 1,314 points. Anything beyond that would likely require Liddell to return for his senior season. Jim Clemons holds the No. 29 spot at 1,335, Marc Loving is at 1,338 and Brent Darby is 30 points away from that.

If Liddell did return, he could approach 2,000-point territory with an excellent season, which would put him behind only Dennis Hop-

son (2,096) and Herb Williams (2,011). William Buford (1,990) and Jerry Lucas (1,990) are the only other Buckeyes to ever come within striking distance of 2,000. Buford, Deshaun Thomas (1,630), and Jae'Sean Tate (1,512) are the only Buckeyes in the last decade to finish above 1,500 points.

Holtmann Earns 100th OSU Win

Ohio State's win against Minnesota also earned Holtmann admittance to one of the most exclusive clubs that the program has, as it made him just the seventh person to win 100 games as an Ohio State men's basketball head coach.

He joins program leader Thad Matta (337), national champion Fred Taylor (297), Harold

Olsen (255), Eldon Miller (174), Jim O'Brien (133) and Randy Ayers (124). He's the fourth straight Buckeye coach to earn the distinction and the sixth within the last seven hires the program has made, split only by Gary Williams (59), who spent only three years in town.

"I think any coach will tell you that their success is directly tied to their ability to recruit good players and players who also embrace what that coach and coaching staff preaches," Holtmann said. "I think that's so important. It's not just good players, but it's players that embrace and communicate that to the other players, what's important to the coaching staff, our program's culture."

Reaching the mark in 148 games, Holtmann is the third fastest to 100, trailing only Taylor (120) and Matta (134). Ayers did it in

155, O'Brien in 156, Miller in 172 and Olsen in at least 186 (schedule information is not readily available for 1933-34, when he broke 100).

His 67.6 percent winning percentage is the second best of any member of the group, behind only Matta's 73.3 percent, which is easily the highest of any Buckeye coach who stayed in Columbus for more than two seasons. Thomas Kibler leads the way at 91.7 overall but coached only 24 games from 1908-10.

Despite the quick start, Holtmann thinks that his program is on the precipice of another leap forward with its incoming top-10 recruiting class and the young talent on the roster.

"It's also very exciting about what's on the cusp here for us here, both with our young guys growing into new roles as well as the incoming talent," Holtmann said. "It really is."

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Buckeyes Nearly Sweep Conference Trio

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Despite a pair of league wins that kept the Buckeyes in the top half of the Big Ten standings and improved their home-court record to a perfect 10-0, Ohio State likely has to feel a little disappointed that it didn't get more out of the games that it played since BSB last went to press.

Ohio State toppled Minnesota in Minneapolis for the first time in seven years and took down Maryland at home, but a ferocious comeback effort against Purdue came up just short by way of a Boilermaker buzzer beater, and the Buckeyes missed out on another chance at a league win when weather issues kept Iowa from making its planned trip to Columbus.

Still, the Buckeyes enter their final stretch of the regular season with a 14-5 record, a place within the AP top 20 (No. 16) and seven wins to only three losses in arguably the nation's most competitive conference.

OSU Snaps Losing Streak In The Barn

E.J. Liddell's layup through contact and his free throw that followed it less than a minute into the second half proved one of the most important sequences of Ohio State's 75-64 win over Minnesota Jan. 27 in a game played before 10,179 in Williams Arena. It pushed Ohio State's lead to eight points – six straight to open the second half – at 38-30 and drew a second foul on Treyton Thompson, who worked as one of Liddell's lone Gopher adversaries for rebounds.

It also gave Liddell 1,000 points as a Buckeye, making him the 60th player to don the scarlet and gray to break into four digits and the first since Kaleb Wesson in 2020, C.J. Jackson and Jae'Sean Tate in 2019 and Keita Bates-Diop in 2018.

"This milestone means a lot, honestly," Liddell said. "Coming here, making a big impact for the team – I think I saw I would be

like the 60th player in the history to do that and that's just a pretty cool experience, just knowing I have my name in the record books and whatnot."

But for as good as Liddell has been at filling it up this season, it was his fellow inside who kept the Buckeyes on top after he knocked down that three-point play.

Center Zed Key snapped a 1:44 drought for Ohio State's next basket, forward Kyle Young scored eight points on his own and Key knocked in four more buckets with another Liddell layup sprinkled in, giving Ohio State 23 of its first 26 points in the second half exclusively from the bigs in the paint or as a direct result of play in it.

The Buckeyes (13-4, 6-2) finally went back outside after a Sean Sutherlin three-point cut Ohio State's lead to nine points, but it was the 1,000-point man knocking down that triple to give Ohio State a 12-point lead at 61-49, equaling its largest of the contest to that point, with 8:01 to play.

Ohio State's dominance in the paint was the defining story of the game if Liddell's scoring milestone didn't claim it for itself. Minnesota's undersized lineup was bullied down low, losing the rebounding battle 48-22 and surrendering 40 points in the paint – including 24 in the second half alone.

It was that excellence in the frontcourt that helped Ohio State to its first win on Minnesota's raised floor in The Barn since Jan. 6, 2015, when D'Angelo Russell's 27 points lifted the Buckeyes in overtime, 74-72. Ohio State had dropped its last three in Minneapolis, all by double digits.

Ohio State's success in the paint continued and kept the Golden Gophers at arm's length, never drawing closer than nine points, 66-57 with 4:44 left. Right before Liddell responded with a pair of free throws, Chris Holtmann, perhaps inspired by his team's effort in cleaning the boards, extended a timeout slightly by working with OSU managers to clean up the floor near the Buckeye bench. As it turned out, Holtmann

had lost a piece of gum to the hardwood.

It was Holtmann's lone loss of the evening, as he claimed his 100th win as Ohio State's head coach.

The teams battled tightly in the first half, with Malaki Branham giving the Buckeyes the largest lead for either team in the period at 11-6 with 14:50 before the break. Ohio State lead 32-30 heading into the locker room. Branham led the Buckeyes with 11 points in the first 20 minutes.

Liddell led the Buckeyes in scoring with 23 points and 15 rebounds, trailed by Young's 14 points and four boards. Key added in 12 points and eight rebounds of his own. Jamison Battle led Minnesota (11-6, 2-6) in scoring with 15 points and rebounds with six.

Buckeyes Fall In Top-20 Battle

There are few venues in the Big Ten that present a larger challenge for visiting foes than Purdue's Mackey Arena. The Boilermakers had suffered only two home losses in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 seasons prior to Ohio State's visit on Jan. 30, falling to Michigan a year ago and Wisconsin earlier this season.

Ohio State's success in West Lafayette has been similarly stunted. The Buckeyes last toppled Purdue on the road in 2018 when Keita Bates-Diop followed a Jae'Sean Tate miss with a put-back to secure a 64-63 win, and they entered this most recent matchup with a 1-4 record in their last five trips. Even when Purdue isn't there, Mackey Arena has proven unfriendly to the Buckeyes – this served as Ohio State's first trip back since its shocking loss to 15th-seeded Oral Roberts in the first round of the 2021 NCAA Tournament.

And in that return trip, No. 16 Ohio State was unable to shake free of its recent history, falling again to the Boilermakers, 81-78, and dropping to 13-5 on the year and 6-3 in league play, while No. 6 Purdue improved to

Ohio State 75, Minnesota 64

Jan. 27, 2022
Williams Arena • Minneapolis, Minn.

| | 1 | 2 | F | | | |
|------------------------|----|----|----|--|--|--|
| Ohio State (14-4, 6-2) | 32 | 43 | 75 | | | |
| Minnesota (11-6, 2-6) | 30 | 34 | 64 | | | |

| Ohio State | Total | FG | | | FT | | | Reb. | | |
|---------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|--|--|
| | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | |
| Johnson Jr. | 30 | 1-7 | 0-0 | 0-5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | | | |
| Ahrens | 15 | 1-5 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | | | |
| Branham | 33 | 5-14 | 0-0 | 4-2 | 3 | 1 | 11 | | | |
| Key | 19 | 6-9 | 0-0 | 3-5 | 0 | 2 | 12 | | | |
| Liddell | 35 | 9-14 | 3-3 | 8-7 | 5 | 4 | 23 | | | |
| Sotos | 7 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| Russell | 20 | 3-7 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 1 | 8 | | | |
| Brown III | 16 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| Young | 23 | 5-7 | 4-4 | 2-2 | 4 | 2 | 14 | | | |
| Brunk | 2 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 1-0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 30-66 | 8-9 | 20-28 | 20 | 16 | 75 | | | |

Percentages: FG: 45.5%. FT: 88.9%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-27 (Liddell 2-3, Russell 2-6, Branham 1-4, Ahrens 1-5, Johnson Jr. 1-6, Brown III 0-1, Young 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Branham, Johnson Jr., Key, Liddell, Young). **Turnovers:** 6 (Liddell 3, Johnson, Key, Russell). **Steals:** 1 (Liddell).

| Minnesota | Total | FG | | | FT | | | Reb. | | |
|---------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|--|--|
| | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | |
| Willis | 38 | 5-9 | 1-2 | 0-3 | 7 | 1 | 12 | | | |
| Battle | 40 | 5-18 | 2-2 | 0-6 | 1 | 2 | 15 | | | |
| Loewe | 28 | 5-8 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 3 | 11 | | | |
| Daniels | 12 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 1-0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | | | |
| Stephens | 33 | 1-5 | 2-2 | 1-2 | 3 | 0 | 5 | | | |
| Ogele | 5 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 1-0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | | | |
| Sutherlin | 26 | 4-8 | 3-5 | 1-3 | 1 | 1 | 12 | | | |
| Thompson | 17 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 2-2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 24-55 | 8-11 | 6-16 | 16 | 12 | 64 | | | |

Percentages: FG: 43.6%. FT: 72.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-24 (Battle 3-10, Sutherlin 1-1, Thompson 1-1, Stephens 1-3, Loewe 1-4, Willis 1-5). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Daniels, Thompson, Willis). **Turnovers:** 2 (Daniels 2). **Steals:** 1 (Willis). **Officials:** Kimble, Walton, Wells. Attendance: 10,179.

18-3 and 7-3 before 14,804 fans.

A big reason for Purdue's recent success at home has been the trio of center Zach Edey, point guard Jaden Ivey and center Trevion Williams, and all three proved critical again in this battle.

Edey's 7-4 frame went without an answer from the Buckeyes for much of the game and put any OSU player who attempted to match up with him into a tricky spot.

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Purdue 81, Ohio State 78

Jan. 30, 2022

Mackey Arena • West Lafayette, Ind.

| | | | |
|------------------------|----|----|----|
| | 1 | 2 | F |
| Ohio State (14-5, 6-3) | 30 | 48 | 78 |
| Purdue (18-3, 7-3) | 39 | 42 | 81 |

| | Ohio State | Total | FG | | | FT | | | Reb. | | | A | PF | Pts. |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|------|--|--|---|----|------|
| | | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Johnson Jr. | 21 | 1-5 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| Branham | 31 | 7-10 | 4-5 | 0-7 | 1 | 3 | 20 | | | | | | | |
| Key | 12 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 1-0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Liddell | 36 | 7-16 | 4-5 | 1-2 | 3 | 4 | 20 | | | | | | | |
| Wheeler | 24 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Russell | 14 | 4-8 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 2 | 1 | 9 | | | | | | | |
| Brown III | 20 | 3-5 | 2-2 | 2-1 | 2 | 2 | 9 | | | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 12 | 1-4 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| Young | 19 | 3-10 | 0-0 | 2-0 | 2 | 3 | 7 | | | | | | | |
| Brunk | 13 | 2-2 | 0-0 | 2-1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | | | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 29-63 | 11-14 | 12-20 | 15 | 22 | 78 | | | | | | | |

Percentages: FG: 46.0%. FT: 78.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-29 (Branham 2-3, Liddell 2-7, Johnson Jr. 1-2, Brown III 1-3, Ahrens 1-4, Young 1-4, Russell 1-5, Wheeler 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Brunk 2, Liddell 2). **Turnovers:** 6 (Johnson Jr. 2, Wheeler 2, Ahrens, Key). **Steals:** 6 (Wheeler 2, Branham, Johnson Jr. Liddell, Russell).

| | Purdue | Total | FG | | | FT | | | Reb. | | | A | PF | Pts. |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|------|--|--|---|----|------|
| | | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Gillis | 28 | 2-5 | 2-2 | 5-6 | 2 | 1 | 7 | | | | | | | |
| Hunter Jr. | 30 | 4-7 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 5 | 1 | 10 | | | | | | | |
| Thompson | 18 | 0-3 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Edey | 21 | 7-9 | 6-11 | 3-0 | 0 | 3 | 20 | | | | | | | |
| Stefanovic | 31 | 3-7 | 3-3 | 0-3 | 4 | 1 | 11 | | | | | | | |
| Furst | 12 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Ivey | 32 | 8-20 | 2-3 | 1-2 | 2 | 1 | 21 | | | | | | | |
| Morton | 10 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| Williams | 19 | 4-8 | 1-5 | 2-6 | 3 | 1 | 9 | | | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 29-60 | 15-26 | 15-23 | 17 | 10 | 81 | | | | | | | |

Percentages: FG: 48.3%. FT: 57.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-17 (Ivey 3-6, Stefanovic 2-5, Hunter Jr. 1-1, Morton 1-1, Gillis 1-3, Thompson 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Williams 2, Edey, Ivey). **Turnovers:** 10 (Gillis 2, Hunter Jr. 2, Ivey 2, Stefanovic, Williams). **Steals:** 4 (Williams 2, Gillis, Hunter Jr.). **Officials:** Boroski, Carstensen, Szec. Attendance: 14,804.

Key drew the first assignment and spent nearly the entire first half on the bench after he was whistled for two fouls within the first three minutes of the game. Joey Brunk took over for Key and was largely able to stay out of foul trouble but didn't offer much resistance to his opponent – Edey scored seven points in the first half and 20 in the game, with three rebounds.

Ivey, who sank the Buckeyes with a game-winning three-pointer in Columbus last season, kept the pace he's been on all season offensively. Even with Jamari Wheeler – one of the Big Ten's best guard defenders – back from a one-game injury break and on his case, Ivey powered the Boilermaker offense as its primary ball-handler, racking up 21 points and two assists on 8-of-20 shooting from the field.

And it was Ivey who again knocked down the ultimate dagger to secure Purdue's win in this matchup, taking the ball on the final possession and knocking down a contested three-pointer without any time remaining on the clock to lift the Boilermakers above Ohio State.

The Buckeyes looked to be cruising to a blowout defeat for much of the game, trailing 52-32 at the 14:35 mark of the second half after a brutal start to the game from Liddell and from deep, with the former scoring only six points in the first 20 minutes and the latter yielding only two makes in 13 tries before the break.

But both entities came alive in the final 10 minutes of the game. Ohio State knocked down five three-pointers and Liddell chipped in 14 points to whittle Purdue's lead away completely, tying the game at 78 with only 25 seconds to play on a Liddle make from

Ohio State 82, Maryland 67

Feb. 6, 2022

Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio.

| | | | |
|------------------------|----|----|----|
| | 1 | 2 | F |
| Maryland (11-12, 3-9) | 29 | 38 | 67 |
| Ohio State (14-5, 7-3) | 42 | 40 | 82 |

| | Maryland | Total | FG | | | FT | | | Reb. | | | A | PF | Pts. |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|------|--|--|---|----|------|
| | | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Russell | 33 | 5-15 | 1-2 | 0-6 | 5 | 2 | 12 | | | | | | | |
| Ayala | 32 | 2-9 | 2-3 | 0-5 | 4 | 1 | 8 | | | | | | | |
| Hart | 34 | 2-7 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | | | | | | | |
| Scott | 36 | 8-13 | 4-6 | 2-4 | 1 | 2 | 25 | | | | | | | |
| Wahab | 20 | 4-7 | 2-2 | 2-1 | 1 | 3 | 10 | | | | | | | |
| Dockery | 1 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Reese | 16 | 2-4 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 0 | 3 | 6 | | | | | | | |
| Green | 13 | 0-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Dziuba | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Wright | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Martinez | 11 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 23-59 | 11-16 | 9-24 | 13 | 13 | 67 | | | | | | | |

Percentages: FG: 39.0%. FT: 68.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-29 (Scott 5-8, Hart 2-4, Ayala 2-7, Russell 1-6, Dockery 0-1, Reese 0-1, Green 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 9 (Ayala 3, Reese 2, Russell 2, Scott, Wahab). **Steals:** 5 (Ayala 2, Hart 2, Russell).

| | Ohio State | Total | FG | | | FT | | | Reb. | | | A | PF | Pts. |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|------|--|--|---|----|------|
| | | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Johnson Jr. | 23 | 2-6 | 2-2 | 0-2 | 4 | 2 | 7 | | | | | | | |
| Branham | 32 | 3-12 | 0-0 | 0-4 | 1 | 0 | 8 | | | | | | | |
| Key | 22 | 6-7 | 2-4 | 2-5 | 0 | 2 | 14 | | | | | | | |
| Liddell | 32 | 9-14 | 4-6 | 3-8 | 5 | 2 | 24 | | | | | | | |
| Wheeler | 32 | 3-5 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 4 | 4 | 8 | | | | | | | |
| Russell | 10 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 21 | 4-7 | 2-3 | 0-3 | 0 | 0 | 14 | | | | | | | |
| Young | 18 | 2-6 | 1-2 | 2-2 | 3 | 1 | 5 | | | | | | | |
| Hookfin | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Brunk | 7 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 30-59 | 11-17 | 7-29 | 17 | 13 | 82 | | | | | | | |

Percentages: FG: 50.8%. FT: 64.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-26 (Ahrens 4-7, Branham 2-4, Liddell 2-4, Wheeler 2-4, Johnson Jr. 1-4, Russell 0-1, Young 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Liddell). **Turnovers:** 6 (Branham 2, Johnson Jr. 2, Wheeler 2). **Steals:** 2 (Russell, Young). **Officials:** Sciroto, Kimble, Ayers. Attendance: 15,912

deep, capping a 17-5 run from the 3:37-mark orchestrated entirely by Liddell (eight points) and Branham (nine).

Ivey's shot put an end to the incredible surge, though, knocking down a fading three-pointer from the elbow with a hand in his face to win the game for the home team.

Purdue led for much of the first half. Branham tied the game at 11 on a three-pointer with 11:19 before the break, but the Boilermakers would lead the rest of the stanza, building their lead to as much as 11. The hosts took a 39-30 lead into the intermission.

Branham and Liddell led Ohio State in scoring for the game with 20 points each, while Cedric Russell and Eugene Brown III contributed nine points apiece off the bench. Branham added a team-high seven rebounds. Wheeler returned to the court with eight points after one game away.

OSU Tears Through Maryland At Home

Coming off an unexpected break after inclement weather in Columbus forced Ohio State to postpone its Feb. 3 matchup with Iowa, the Buckeyes (14-5, 7-3) looked rested and prepared in hosting Maryland on Feb. 6, shredding the Terrapins (11-12, 3-9) in the early minutes of the game to generate a lead that they would never look back from on the way to an 82-67 win played before 15,912 in Value City Arena.

Ohio State rode a hot shooting start to a double-digit lead within the first six minutes of the game, hitting seven of its first 10 attempts from the field to claim an 18-7 lead with 13:15 to play after a Liddell free throw.

Maryland responded with a quick five points before a timeout to cut the deficit to six, but Ohio State responded in a big way, claiming its largest lead yet at 30-16. The run started with a Young hook and a Brunk layup surrounding a critical Ahrens triple to provide some momentum. The Buckeyes have been desperate to get Ahrens back into a groove after a month of slumping from deep. Donta Scott chipped in a quick four points for Maryland, but an arching Johnson jumper and a Liddell slam gave the Buckeyes that 14-point edge with 7:05 to play in the half.

It was Ahrens again who pushed the lead to 15 points with his second triple of the afternoon, knocking one down on a fastbreak with 1:12 on the clock to put Ohio State ahead 42-27, giving him multiple makes from deep for the first time since he hit a pair against Indiana on Jan. 6. Maryland answered with a bucket to send both sides to their locker rooms with the scoreboard reading 42-29.

After recognizing 15 former captains – Aaron Craft earned the loudest round of applause – it was the current Buckeye veterans who led Ohio State into the final 20 minutes.

Along with a pair of Key layups, Wheeler knocked down a three-pointer and Liddell finished a tough transition layup to extend Ohio State's lead to its largest margin to that point at 51-32 with 16:27 on the clock.

Scott knocked down his fourth three-pointer of the game to answer, though his make did not go without a response. It didn't quite count as a made shot from deep, but Ahrens drew a foul from the corner on Ohio State's following possession and hit two of three free throws, giving him eight points and securing his largest output in the scoring department since his 16-point day

against Towson on Dec. 8. He finished the game with 14 points.

"It's frustrating because it feels like the whole fan base is against you when you're not doing what you normally do," Ahrens said after the game. "To be honest, I didn't really change anything the last two weeks. I was working as hard as I always have, practiced as hard as I have."

Just under three minutes later, Ahrens connected from deep for the third time to put the Buckeyes up 61-40.

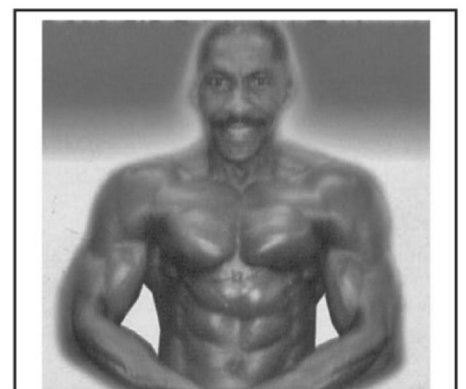
A stretch of strong shooting for Maryland cut Ohio State's lead down to 14 points on two separate occasions at 66-52 and 69-55 with 7:57 to play, but Ohio State found answers with a Liddell deep ball the first time and a Key putback the next to keep the Terrapins at bay.

Maryland popped a layup in coming out of the under-eight-minute media timeout to extend its hot stretch hitting 6 of 7, before the previously scorching Scott missed a three-pointer. Eric Ayala kept Maryland's efforts on track with a banked three-pointer (he also drew a foul but missed the free throw), though Maryland couldn't keep Liddell from a momentum-killing and-one layup to put the Buckeyes back up 14 points, 74-60, with 5:22 left in the game.

Ayala narrowly missed a three that would have cut the deficit to just nine a few possessions later after a Scott dunk that cut the lead to 12 on the possession prior, and Liddell took his opportunity, doing what Ayala couldn't and knocking down a shot from deep to put Ohio State back up by 15, 77-62, into the final media timeout of the afternoon.

Maryland's final big punch was foiled by Ahrens on both ends of the court. He deflected what looked to be an easy breakaway dunk at the rim after a Wheeler turnover and then knocked down his fourth three-pointer to push the Buckeyes lead up to 80-64. Branham added to the lead with a strong one-handed dunk before Maryland scored the game's final three points.

Liddell led Ohio State with 24 points and 11 rebounds, going blow for blow with Scott's 25 points. Ahrens finished 4 of 7 from beyond the arc.



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Michigan, Iowa Games Provide Chance For Reset

Heading into the Ohio State women's basketball team's game against Michigan on Jan. 27, the Buckeyes were riding a six-game winning streak, their longest since they won seven straight to begin the 2020-21 season.

Ohio State beat the teams it was supposed to during the streak, defeating Illinois, Northwestern, Michigan State, Minnesota and Rutgers, and the Buckeyes pulled off an upset of then-No. 12 Maryland.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

The win over the Terrapins on Jan. 20 was Ohio State's biggest win of the season to date and signaled that the team could stay competitive down the stretch and into the Big Ten tournament in early March.

However, the streak – as well as the idea that Ohio State would hang with the top teams in the conference – fell apart as the Buckeyes were blown out by the Wolverines on their home court, 77-58, in a game that was not as close as the final score indicated.

Michigan forward Naz Hillmon was unable to repeat her 50-point performance from the last time she was on the court at Value City Arena, but she still finished with a respectable 20 points on 7-of-10 shooting, and actually got the

2021-22 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

16-4 Overall (8-3 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Jan. 31

| 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. | | | | | | |
| Jacy Sheldon | 20-20 | 655-32.8 | 149-283 | .527 | 33-76 | .434 | 87-101 | .861 | 21-50 | 71-3.6 | 40-0 | 75 | 58 | 2 | 39 | 418-20.9 |
| Taylor Mikesell | 20-20 | 660-33.0 | 135-274 | .493 | 76-156 | .487 | 37-40 | .925 | 9-58 | 67-3.4 | 22-0 | 34 | 38 | 3 | 18 | 383-19.2 |
| Rebeka Mikulasikova | 20-20 | 416-20.8 | 85-172 | .494 | 12-39 | .308 | 26-33 | .788 | 23-93 | 116-5.8 | 38-1 | 14 | 38 | 5 | 8 | 208-10.4 |
| Tanaya Beacham | 19-0 | 335-17.6 | 58-102 | .569 | 2-7 | .286 | 17-23 | .739 | 30-48 | 78-4.1 | 55-1 | 15 | 24 | 5 | 15 | 135-7.1 |
| Rikki Harris | 20-7 | 492-24.6 | 48-111 | .432 | 20-54 | .370 | 24-50 | .480 | 26-53 | 79-4.0 | 47-1 | 54 | 20 | 13 | 36 | 140-7.0 |
| Braxtin Miller | 19-19 | 562-29.6 | 41-107 | .383 | 16-44 | .364 | 31-46 | .674 | 21-51 | 72-3.8 | 42-0 | 60 | 28 | 5 | 20 | 129-6.8 |
| Kateri Poole | 15-13 | 306-20.4 | 33-83 | .398 | 12-37 | .324 | 23-44 | .523 | 6-40 | 46-3.1 | 33-1 | 50 | 49 | 2 | 19 | 101-6.7 |
| Gabby Hutcherson | 15-0 | 162-10.8 | 22-52 | .423 | 9-27 | .333 | 4-6 | .667 | 4-28 | 32-2.1 | 9-0 | 4 | 6 | 12 | 4 | 57-3.8 |
| Hevynne Bristow | 8-1 | 86-10.8 | 9-25 | .360 | 1-3 | .333 | 11-14 | .786 | 10-12 | 22-2.8 | 8-0 | 3 | 10 | 6 | 3 | 30-3.8 |
| Taylor Thierry | 18-0 | 234-13.0 | 21-34 | .618 | 1-4 | .250 | 8-17 | .471 | 27-23 | 50-2.8 | 30-0 | 17 | 4 | 13 | 14 | 51-2.8 |
| Anysa Jones | 7-0 | 37-5.3 | 2-7 | .286 | 0-0 | .000 | 1-2 | .500 | 1-4 | 5-0.7 | 3-0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5-0.7 |
| Kaitlyn Costner | 9-0 | 55-6.1 | 3-11 | .273 | 0-4 | .000 | 0-0 | .000 | 1-9 | 10-1.1 | 6-0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 6-0.7 |
| Team | | | | | | | | | 24-55 | 79 | | 5 | | | | |
| Total | 20 | 4000 | 606-1261 | .481 | 182-451 | .404 | 269-376 | .715 | 203-524 | 727-36.4 | 333-4 | 333 | 284 | 66 | 178 | 1663-83.2 |
| Opponents | 20 | 4000 | 506-1196 | .423 | 116-385 | .301 | 233-316 | .737 | 204-496 | 700-35.0 | 354-7 | 267 | 379 | 44 | 110 | 1361-68.1 |

win this time.

While Ohio State keyed in on Hillmon with varying degrees of success, the Wolverines' other top scorers in forward Emily Kiser and guards Maddie Nolan and Leigha Brown combined for 39 points on 15-of-26 shooting.

"Energy," graduate forward Tanaya Beacham said of what makes Michigan tough to defend. "They always want to run their stuff no matter what the defense is like, so we've got to make sure we keep our energy and intensity up to guard them."

The loss meant Ohio State was swept in a two-game season series against Michigan for the first time since 2010-11, and the most re-

cent loss caused Ohio State to take a step back and see what can be done down the stretch to improve.

"The first Michigan loss was a little bit of a kick-start for us, and then I think the one we just took this last Thursday is going to be another big kick-start for us," senior guard Taylor Mikesell said. "I think it's a good wake-up call. There's going to be adversity throughout the season. It's more about how you bounce back."

To the Buckeyes' credit, they bounced back in a big way just four days later, heading into Iowa City to knock off then-No. 21 Iowa, 92-88, for Ohio State's second ranked win of the season.

"Coming off of a loss to the team up north, I thought in that game – not in a selfish way – but we got really out of what we do," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after the Iowa win. "We tried to make a lot of individual plays (on) offense and defense, which resulted in bad shots and being out of place on defense. Today, we really stayed together and stayed within the offense when we had to, especially when we got down by nine."

It was one of the most hostile environments the Buckeyes have played in this season, with over 6,000 fans in attendance for one of the most exciting games either team has played in this year.

Despite an outstanding performance from Iowa sophomore guard Caitlin Clark in which she went for 43 points on 16-of-28 shooting, the Buckeyes pulled out the win with some late-game heroics for their first ranked road win since taking down then-No. 15 Indiana, 78-70, on Jan. 28, 2021.

McGuff said the way the team stuck together made him proud in the win over the Hawkeyes.

"We got down nine points in a hostile environment against a great team, and we stayed together," he said. "We fought, we scratched, and we did all the little things down the stretch to put us in position to win."

With just a handful of games remaining, a reality check against Michigan and a potential preview of things to come against Iowa are exactly what a team like Ohio State, which has struggled at points this season developing an identity beyond a high-scoring offense, needed down the stretch.

As it stands, Ohio State holds an 8-3 record in the Big Ten (16-4 overall) that puts them fourth in the conference standings behind Iowa (14-5, 8-2), Indiana (14-3, 6-1) and Michigan (19-2, 10-1) and ahead of Maryland (15-6, 7-3) and

Michigan State (12-8, 6-4).

Of those teams, the only two left on the schedule for the Buckeyes are the Terrapins, whom Ohio State will visit on Feb. 17, and Michigan State, whom the Buckeyes will travel to on Feb. 27 for their final game of the regular season.

OSU-Iowa Breaks Viewership Record

Ohio State's 92-88 win over Iowa on Jan. 31 was the most-watched regular-season women's basketball game in Big Ten Network history, averaging 164,000 viewers.

The game, which saw two of the game's highest-scoring teams, started fast with the Buckeyes taking a 28-27 lead after the first quarter, and it went down to the wire with Ohio State eventually earning the win.

It's the second-most watched women's game in Big Ten Network history behind a 2017 Big Ten tournament game between Maryland and Michigan State, which averaged 198,000 viewers. This season, women's basketball coverage on the Big Ten Network is up 59 percent from 2020-21 and 14 percent from the 2019-20 season.

Sheldon Is January's Lady Buck Of The Month

Ohio State went 7-1 in January, and while you can point to either junior guard Jacy Sheldon or senior guard Taylor Mikesell as the reason for the Buckeyes' success, it is Sheldon who is recognized for her outstanding performance in those eight games to begin the new year.

Sheldon was on the court for over 37 minutes per game, averaging 23.4 points, 3.8 rebounds and 5.4 assists per game as she stepped into a ball-handling role with sophomore guard Kateri Poole on the mend due to a shoulder injury.

Her highlight was a career-high 33 points in an 89-83 win over Michigan State on Jan. 12 in which she finished 12 of 15 from the floor while pulling down six rebounds and dishing out six assists. It was one of her three 30-point games in January.

She also surpassed 1,000 career points in January, becoming the 35th player in Ohio State history to surpass that mark. If she continues her average of 20.9 points per game, she'd be on pace to finish the regular season with 1,214 points (with tournament games to play), which would put her in Ohio State's top 25 all-time scorers.

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YOU'RE A BUCKEYE FOR LIFE

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'Dub Chain' Provides Boost For Ohio State

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's been called many things over the years – the turnover chain at Miami (Fla.), the turnover backpack at Florida State, the turnover chainsaw at Oregon State, and yes, the turnover trash can at Tennessee.

The Hurricanes were the first to debut the celebratory item in the 2017 college football season, meant to single out an individual for an impressive performance – be it on a single play or throughout the whole game. Teams and fans took to it immediately, and it spread throughout the sport to where the majority of teams had one creative gimmick or another.

Now that same congratulatory bling has been brought to women's college basketball, courtesy of Ohio State and the "dub chain."

Believed to be one of the first of its kind in women's college basketball, the dub chain was introduced following Ohio State's 89-83 win over Michigan State Jan. 12.

"We've got a new thing we're going to do," head coach Kevin McGuff said post-game in a video shared on Twitter.

He singled out redshirt sophomore guard Rikki Harris to join him in front of the team, and she hesitantly walked up to stand near him, unaware of why – in fact, nobody other than the coaching staff had been made aware it was happening.

"We're going to have, basically, a player of the game when we win," McGuff said. "If we lose we aren't going to do this."

He then asked Ohio State video coordinator Ryan Murray to bring in "the football." In other contexts, "the football" likely references a briefcase that operates as a mobile command center in case the president of the United States needs to authorize a nuclear attack, but here, McGuff was talking about a burdensome briefcase carried into the room by Murray.

The briefcase was then opened up to unveil not launch codes, but a large gold chain with an Ohio State logo made out of foam board and Czech glass rhinestones hanging from it. McGuff placed the chain on Harris, who was mobbed by her teammates.

"It's been amazing," Harris said. "When he first did it was kind of nerve-racking because we didn't know what was happening. He called me up, I'm like, 'Uhh...' But after that it was nice. After every game we're excited for whoever wins it. It's a great feeling."

The process has since been repeated five times, with graduate forward Tanaya Beacham, Harris, senior guard Taylor Mikesell, junior guard Jacy Sheldon and freshman forward/guard Taylor Thierry each receiving the chain, only to then be surrounded by their teammates (as well as a jovial McGuff) to celebrate the win.

The idea came from assistant coach Jalen Powell, who is in her first season with Ohio State.

"With football, they have turnover chains and it gets everyone hyped, gets everyone riled up and brings a sense of togetherness," she told BSB. "Everyone gets happy for each other when someone makes a big play. I just like the togetherness of it and how it lifts everybody up. It brings energy. It brings hype."

The chain helped provide a boost for a team that, despite a successful season thus far, has recently had some challenging seasons due to missing out on the NCAA women's tournament and numerous games being canceled due to the pandemic.

That boost has been provided, as Ohio State is 5-1 since the chain was introduced after the win against the Spartans.

"I had been thinking about some type of an award that will keep the girls motivated throughout the season," Powell said. "Finally, I was just like, 'Well, you know what, maybe we could bring what football does and make it our own.' So then, I ordered this chain, I got it in 48 hours, right in time for Michigan State, and we ended up winning and it was great. Rikki was the first person to receive it. I just liked it because it was such a sweet moment to see everyone get excited for Rikki to have it. I just wanted something for the girls to have to make their own and something that they could look forward to after a win."

McGuff was the first to admit that the idea came from the younger members of the coaching staff, but he let them run with it.

"Yeah, let's go for it," McGuff said of the idea. "I don't want to be the grouchy old coach."

And since it was introduced, the positive response has been overwhelming from players, coaches and social media alike.

"It's just super exciting," sophomore forward Gabby Hutcherson said. "It's fun. It's new. No women's basketball team has ever done this before. It's not what we were expecting at all. When he whipped that out, we were all like, 'Oh, well, OK, all right.'"

"But it was exciting," she continued. "It's fun. I love this team and we're all super fun. The coaches started to join in on the jokes and antics as well, so it's been a really fun year."

The chain itself was made by Alyssa Lot Poe, who's been making team-branded chains for over three years and selling them on Etsy.

"The logos themselves are made out of foam board and Czech glass rhinestones," she told BSB. "The chains are metal gold or silver plate. When someone wants to order a custom chain, they'll either send me a picture of the logo they'd like made or I make them a custom logo from the details they provide me for one. I place each stone by hand one by one to make each chain a blinged-out piece of art fans and teams can rep with pride."

Of the triple-digit number of chains made by Poe, ranging from NFL-branded



COURTESY OF ALYSSA LOT POE

NEW BLING — Ohio State's new Dub Chain is made of foam board and Czech glass rhinestones. The Buckeyes are 5-1 since the introduction of the new tradition, which head coach Kevin McGuff unveiled on Jan. 12 after an 89-83 win over Michigan State.

pieces to custom logos that customers can request, this is the first she's made for a women's college basketball team, and the opportunity to do so and become part of Ohio State's new tradition was exciting.

"It's incredibly exciting to see my creations on the big stage of women's Division 1 NCAA basketball," she said. "I grew up playing ball and would always tell people that I'd be playing in the WNBA one day. I have a deep love and respect for these talented women athletes."

If Ohio State's dub chain does start a trend after applying its own spin to the concept, Powell is excited to see where

other teams go with the idea. In the meantime, the Buckeyes will keep on celebrating as the gold is placed around someone's neck following each win.

"It's not a turnover chain for us," she said. "It's honoring the player of the game, whoever we feel is flying around, doing all the small things, all the big things – you know, whatever the feel of that game is, but I'm curious to see if other schools do it and what they use it to honor. Everyone has different things, different beliefs, practices, all those different things. I'm just curious to see if other schools do it and if they do what they will do it for."



Rikki Harris

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Bucks Fall To Michigan, Take Down Iowa

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Following No. 21 Ohio State women's basketball's win over Rutgers Jan. 23, the Buckeyes were riding a six-game winning streak and set to face then-No. 7 Michigan at home.

Despite playing their best basketball of the season during the streak, the Buckeyes were overmatched against the Wolverines, falling 77-58 and losing the season series against Michigan.

Just days later, with another top Big Ten team on tap in Iowa and star sophomore guard Caitlin Clark, Ohio State outlasted the Hawkeyes for a 92-88 win on the road to move to 16-4 overall with an 8-3 conference record that keeps the Buckeyes fourth in the conference standings.

OSU Goes Cold In Loss To U-M

After a pair of missed layups in the first five minutes, it became clear it might just be one of those nights for Ohio State.

The Buckeyes (15-4, 7-3 Big Ten) came out flat, giving visiting Michigan (18-2, 9-1) an early lead that the Wolverines never relinquished, taking a 77-58 win home to Ann Arbor on Jan. 27 in one of Ohio State's worst shooting performances of the season.

Ohio State's red-hot offense took a step back early in the contest, starting just 1 of 8 from the field as Michigan jumped out to a 13-2 lead less than five minutes into the

game, played before 4,293 at Value City Arena.

A pair of three-pointers from senior guard Taylor Mikesell helped close the gap, 15-8, but the Wolverines went on to lead 21-10. This sparked a 6-2 run by the Buckeyes to end the quarter, capped off with a basket from graduate forward Tanaya Beacham to make it 23-16.

Michigan then increased its lead to 29-16, holding Ohio State scoreless for over four minutes to begin the second.

"I thought the energy was OK," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "First of all, give them credit. They played really well. We didn't play very well against them. We hit a little bit of adversity, we got too many people trying to do their own thing instead of staying together and collectively punching back."

Junior guard Jacy Sheldon broke through with a basket at 5:48, but it began a combined scoring drought of over two minutes before Michigan forward Emily Kiser connected on a basket and Sheldon responded with a triple to make it 31-21 with 3:10 remaining in the half.

The Wolverines began to put things out of reach late in the half, however, knocking down a pair of free throws and connecting on their last two shots in the final 35 seconds to lead 38-23 at the break. In the first half, Ohio State was held to just 26.7 percent (8 of 30) from the field while turning the ball over six times, compared to just five assists.

Ohio State's woes continued in the sec-

ond half. The Wolverines forced four turnovers in just 1:20 of play to begin the third quarter as Michigan increased its lead to 42-23 courtesy of some impressive execution in transition. The Buckeyes finished the game with 16 turnovers, their sixth most this season.

In total, Michigan held Ohio State to just 13 points in the third frame, increasing its lead to 63-36 by the end of the quarter as the Buckeyes could do little to stop the Wolverines or respond on the other end.

The Buckeyes outscored the Wolverines 22-14 in the last 10 minutes, a period in which Michigan led by as many as 34 points. Beacham scored six points in a 10-2 Buckeye run in the last 1:55 to bring the final margin down to 19.

"We've got to learn from it," McGuff said. "Every season has inevitable ups and downs, and that's the thing about college athletics – you get excited about a win, you've got to get to the next day, learn from it and turn the page and get on to the next game. Same thing with a tough loss."

Sheldon led the Buckeyes with 15 points and six rebounds, and Beacham added 14. Sophomore guard Rikki Harris added a game-high six assists. Naz Hillmon led the Wolverines with 20 points on 7-of-10 shooting and pulled down 12 rebounds for a double-double.

The Wolverines shot 26 of 53 (49.1 percent) from the field while holding Ohio State to its third-worst shooting percentage of the season at 37.3 percent (22 of 59). The Buckeyes hit just six three-pointers, their second fewest of the season, on 22 shots from distance.

Ohio State Upsets Iowa On The Road

When two teams who boast top-five offenses and bottom-third defenses in the country meet, sparks are bound to fly, and they most certainly did in then-No. 23 Ohio State's (16-4, 8-3) 92-88 win over then-No. 21 Iowa (14-5, 8-2) on Jan. 31.

Late in this high-scoring contest, Ohio State led 88-87 following a jumper from Beacham, and the Hawkeyes called a timeout with just 34 seconds remaining.

Out of the timeout, it was Clark with the ball in her hands for Iowa, already with 43 points on 16-of-26 shooting at that point, but her shot was off, and Harris collected the rebound. Mikesell knocked down two free throws, another Clark attempt missed and the Hawkeyes

| Michigan 77, Ohio State 58 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Jan. 27, 2022 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Value City Arena, Columbus, Ohio | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F | | | | | | | |
| Michigan (18-2, 9-1) | 23 | 15 | 25 | 14 | 77 | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (15-4, 7-3) | 16 | 7 | 13 | 22 | 58 | | | | | | | |
| Michigan | Total | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Hillmon | 26 | 7-10 | 6-8 | 6-6 | 3 | 2 | 20 | | | | | |
| Kiser | 28 | 4-8 | 2-2 | 0-7 | 2 | 2 | 10 | | | | | |
| Nolan | 24 | 5-8 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 2 | 13 | | | | | |
| Rauch | 31 | 2-3 | 2-4 | 0-7 | 5 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Brown | 24 | 6-10 | 2-2 | 0-3 | 2 | 1 | 16 | | | | | |
| Williams | 10 | 0-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Dilk | 18 | 1-3 | 3-3 | 1-2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | | | | | |
| Phelia | 17 | 0-4 | 2-2 | 0-3 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Stuck | 12 | 0-0 | 3-4 | 1-3 | 0 | 2 | 3 | | | | | |
| Sidor | 4 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Varejao | 4 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Hobbs | 2 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 26-53 | 20-25 | 9-34 | 13 | 19 | 77 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 49.1%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-16 (Nolan 3-6, Brown 2-5, Dilk 0-1, Hobbs 0-1, Phelia 0-1, Rauch 0-1, Sidor 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 1 (Kiser). Turnovers: 17 (Hillmon 4, Brown 3, Phelia 3, Dilk 2, Nolan 2, Kiser, Stuck, Team). Steals: 7 (Brown 2, Hillmon 2, Nolan, Phelia, Rauch). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Mikulasikova | 9 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 1-1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Harris | 29 | 3-6 | 0-1 | 0-2 | 6 | 3 | 7 | | | | | |
| Sheldon | 34 | 5-14 | 4-4 | 0-6 | 3 | 1 | 15 | | | | | |
| Miller | 29 | 2-6 | 3-3 | 1-2 | 1 | 3 | 8 | | | | | |
| Mikesell | 31 | 2-10 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Beacham | 27 | 7-12 | 0-2 | 2-4 | 1 | 4 | 14 | | | | | |
| Thierry | 22 | 1-1 | 1-4 | 3-2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | | | | | |
| Poole | 10 | 0-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Hutcherson | 7 | 1-5 | 0-0 | 1-1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 22-59 | 8-14 | 8-20 | 13 | 21 | 58 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 37.3%. FT: 57.1%. Three-point field goals: 6-22 (Mikesell 2-6, Harris 1-3, Hutcherson 1-4, Miller 1-4, Sheldon 1-4, Poole 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (Mikesell, Miller). Turnovers: 16 (Mikesell 5, Sheldon 4, Mikulasikova 3, Beacham, Harris, Mikesell, Poole). Steals: 7 (Harris 2, Mikesell 2, Beacham, Miller, Poole). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Officials: Dickerson, Kent, Tieman. Attendance: 4,293. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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Ohio State 92, Iowa 88

Jan. 31, 2022

Carver-Hawkeye Arena • Iowa City, Iowa

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
|------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Ohio State (16-4, 8-3) | 28 | 16 | 22 | 26 | 92 |
| Iowa (14-5, 8-2) | 27 | 21 | 20 | 20 | 88 |

| | Ohio State | Total | | | | A | PF | Pts. |
|---------------|------------|--------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|
| | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | | | |
| Mikulasikova | 21 | 6-9 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 3 | 17 | |
| Harris | 31 | 4-9 | 1-4 | 2-4 | 4 | 2 | 9 | |
| Sheldon | 40 | 8-15 | 2-2 | 0-2 | 4 | 3 | 20 | |
| Miller | 37 | 4-10 | 0-0 | 1-4 | 4 | 2 | 10 | |
| Mikesell | 38 | 10-16 | 2-2 | 1-4 | 2 | 3 | 24 | |
| Thierry | 14 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | |
| Beacham | 19 | 4-6 | 0-0 | 2-4 | 1 | 3 | 8 | |
| Totals | 200 | 38-68 | 5-8 | 7-21 | 17 | 20 | 92 | |

Percentages: FG: 55.9%. FT: 62.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-24 (Mikulasikova 5-6, Mikesell 2-3, Miller 2-3, Sheldon 2-5, Beacham 0-1, Harris 0-3, Thierry 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 7 (Miller 3, Mikesell 2, Mikulasikova, Sheldon). **Steals:** 9 (Harris 3, Sheldon 2, Beacham, Mikesell, Miller, Thierry).

| | Iowa | Total | | | | A | PF | Pts. |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|
| | | Min | M-A | M-A | O-D | | | |
| Warnock | 34 | 2-5 | 0-0 | 1-4 | 4 | 1 | 5 | |
| Czinano | 34 | 11-13 | 1-3 | 2-7 | 0 | 0 | 23 | |
| Martin | 35 | 2-6 | 3-4 | 0-4 | 4 | 5 | 8 | |
| Clark | 36 | 16-28 | 4-6 | 0-4 | 7 | 3 | 43 | |
| Marshall | 29 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | |
| Taiwo | 16 | 1-1 | 2-2 | 0-2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | |
| Feuerbach | 10 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | |
| O'Grady | 6 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | |
| Totals | 200 | 34-56 | 10-15 | 5-25 | 16 | 14 | 88 | |

Percentages: FG: 60.7%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-20 (Clark 7-14, Marshall 1-1, Martin 1-2, Warnock 1-3). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 14 (Clark 7, Martin 3, O'Grady 2, Czinano, Taiwo). **Steals:** 4 (Marshall 2, Feuerbach, Taiwo).

Officials: Bantner, McConnell, Suffren. **Attendance:** 6,185.

Iowa later led 57-48 with 6:29 remaining, but another triple from Mikulasikova kicked off a 9-4 stretch by the Buckeyes to make it 61-57 with 2:59 to go in the period. Ohio State was then foiled by Clark, who connected on a three-pointer to make it 64-57.

The Buckeyes continued to fight, however, keeping the deficit close before Mikesell knocked her second three-pointer of the game to make it 68-66 Hawkeyes heading into the fourth.

Ohio State then took its first lead since early in the second quarter, going up 71-68 after a triple from Sheldon and layup from Harris. Ohio State led 79-76 when Iowa took off on a 7-0 run to make it 83-79 with

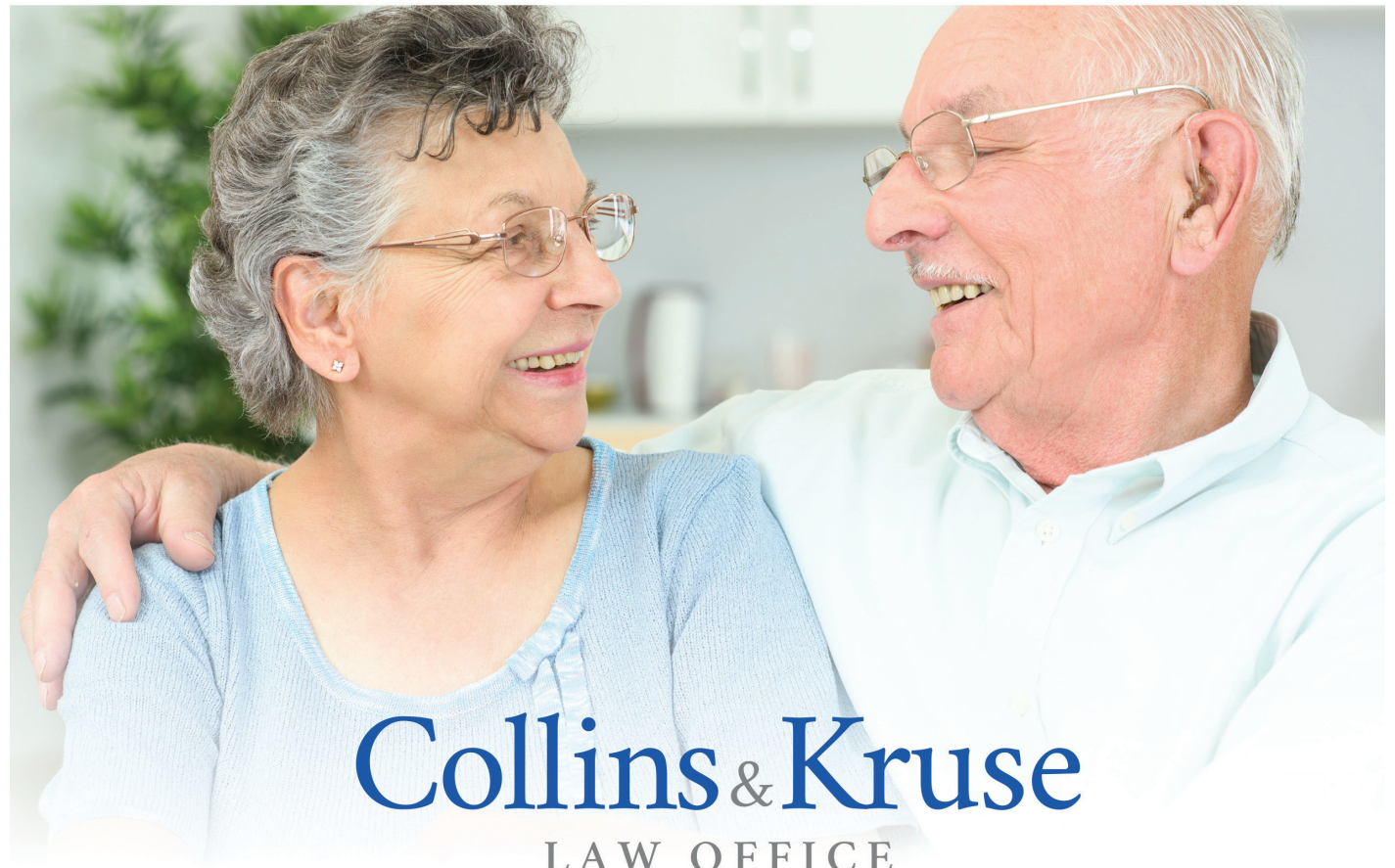
5:04 remaining.

After a pair of free throws by Iowa's Kate Martin with 4:31 remaining to make it 85-82 Iowa, the teams combined for a scoring drought that lasted 2:34 that was broken by a layup from Mikesell, and after a turnover by Clark, Sheldon scored in transition to give the Buckeyes an 86-85 lead. Clark responded with a jumper to give Iowa its last lead of the game at the 1:19 mark.

Mikesell was the leading scorer for the Buckeyes with 24 points. Sheldon had 20 and Mikulasikova added 17 including 5 of 6 from downtown. Clark led Iowa with her 43 points, including 7 of 14 from beyond the arc, and Czinano finished with 23 points on 11-of-13 shooting.

"Clark's such a great player and she forces you to make some hard decisions about who you're going to have guard or how you're going to guard," McGuff said. "I thought she was spectacular tonight. Rikki came up with some tough defensive plays down the stretch to help give us a chance to win."

Ohio State will play six games by the time Buckeye Sports Bulletin goes to press again, including a two-game homestand against Rutgers (Feb. 7) and Nebraska (Feb. 10) and a pair of games at Illinois (Feb. 14) and Maryland (Feb. 17) before returning home to face Wisconsin (Feb. 20) and then finishing the regular season at Michigan State (Feb. 27).



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but it was junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova who helped lead the Buckeyes in the first frame.

She had 14 points on perfect 5-of-5 shooting in the opening quarter, with four of those shots coming from beyond the arc, surpassing her previous career high of three triples in just 5:34 of play.

Though Mikulasikova was an assassin from deep, Iowa had its own sharpshooter in Clark, who finished with 13 points in the first quarter on 5-of-9 shooting. The two went back and forth before a layup from freshman forward/guard Taylor Thierry gave the Buckeyes a 28-27 lead as the quarter came to a close.

The Hawkeyes knocked down their first two shots of the second to take a 31-30 lead, and the teams then combined for a nearly two-minute-long scoring drought that was broken by Iowa's Monika Czinano with 6:58 remaining in the half to make it 33-30. Mikesell responded with a triple on Ohio State's ensuing possession to tie things up at 33-all.

Minutes later, down 38-37, the Buckeyes had the chance to take the lead after Harris was fouled on a three-pointer, but she connected on just one of her free-throw attempts, and Clark knocked down a triple at the other end to make it 41-38. The Hawkeyes would go on to lead 48-44 at the half.

In the second frame, Clark and Czinano combined for 16 points on 7-of-8 shooting, while Mikesell led the Buckeyes with nine points on 4-of-5 shooting.

Clark continued to produce for Iowa in the third, either scoring or assisting on every point of the Hawkeyes' 7-2 run to open the second half and take a 55-46 lead.

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Hoffman's Motor A Gift For Buckeye Grapplers

If you ask anyone on the Ohio State wrestling coaching staff about redshirt junior Gavin Hoffman, they'd say he has one of the highest motors on the team.

ON THE MAT Chase Brown

It's a great quality to possess in wrestling. The sport tests the physical and mental strength of an athlete in a three-period match. For seven minutes, a wrestler's primary goal is to outmatch his opponent with athleticism and strength, working tirelessly to finish the match with a higher point total than the person who stands across from him.

In the war of attrition, Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan thinks the 197-pound Hoff-

man could be the Buckeyes' most important asset.

"His tenacity and relentlessness to continue fighting, regardless of who stands in front of him, inspires our locker room," Ryan told BSB. "There are small, small things that decide whether a wrestler wins or loses a match. Hoffman didn't have things fall in his favor against Iowa and Penn State, but, man, did he fight hard."

Hoffman faced then No. 4 Jacob Warner of Iowa on Jan. 21, losing a hard-fought decision to the Hawkeye All-American. Warner took an early lead with a takedown before receiving a stalling call, which awarded Hoffman his first point. The wrestlers traded takedowns and escapes heading into the final two minutes. However, Warner had racked up significant riding time, allowing him to stall in the closing period to secure a 6-5 win.

Two weeks later, the Ohio State coaches called Hoffman's name again – this time to face No. 2 Max Dean of Penn State. Dean collected nearly two minutes of riding time ap-

proaching the end of the second period before Hoffman scored the match's first point with an escape. Both wrestlers earned reversals in the third, and Dean took the riding time point to take the bout to sudden victory.

Dean and Hoffman traded shots in the extra period, with the former securing a 5-3 victory from a takedown. Despite the loss, Ryan was encouraged to see Hoffman continue battling until the referee raised his hand to award Dean the match's final two points.

"You could see the look in his eyes," Ryan said of Hoffman's effort. "He wanted to win. The best of the best find a way to win those close matches, and I think Hoffman is starting to understand that, but Dean took the match this time. It was another learning experience."

On Feb. 5, Hoffman earned another start in Piscataway, N.J., against No. 6 Greg Bulsak of Rutgers. Ryan said he didn't think twice about sending Hoffman out to wrestle his third consecutive top-10 opponent.

Hoffman scored first with a reversal in the second period after starting on the bottom. He allowed Bulsak to escape, bringing the match to 2-1 after five minutes. Bulsak tied it with an escape in what would be the final point of regulation. For the second straight bout, Hoffman was headed to sudden victory.

In enemy territory, Hoffman dug deep and secured a match-winning takedown in the extra period to take a 4-2 decision against one of the nation's best at 197 pounds. At long last, Hoffman was rewarded for his hard work and Ryan was rewarded for his faithfulness.

"We're proud of him," Ryan said. "He keeps working. He has earned everything that came to him, and everything that will come to him will be a product of his hard work. He works his butt off. He's competitive, and he shows incredible sportsmanship and humility in the face of failure. Ask anyone in the locker room and they will tell you about this guy's integrity. I couldn't be more proud of him."

Sasso Returns Home Against Penn State

Ohio State redshirt junior Sammy Sasso grew up in Nazareth, Penn., a small borough of Northampton County on the state's eastern border. It is part of Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley region and has a population of roughly 5,700 people.

According to Sasso, everyone in Nazareth wrestles – it's a part of the culture and a significant part of the town's identity. Like many of his friends, he discovered his love for the sport at a young age. Still, Sasso possessed something his peers did not – the skill to become a Big Ten champion and NCAA runner-up.

"You had to make the decision early whether or not you wanted to wrestle," Sasso said. "Luckily, I found out that I loved it, and that I was pretty good at wrestling, too."

Sasso was a two-time Pennsylvania AAA state champion at Nazareth High School, placing in the top three of his weight class in all four seasons. He went 180-11 overall in those four years, claiming Ironman, Super 32 and Flo Nationals and Fargo titles along the way, helping him become a top-five national recruit for 2018 according to FloWrestling.

Despite Sasso's numerous accolades and a campus less than three hours away, Penn State didn't recruit him, which allowed Ohio State an opportunity to steal a talented recruit from the Nittany Lions' back yard.

Ryan said he couldn't help but smile when

Sasso signed his letter of intent to wrestle for the Buckeyes, giving his program what he thought could be an All-American in the making.

"He loved wrestling, plain and simple," Ryan said. "He was a Pennsylvania boy, and Penn State didn't recruit him, and I think he felt wronged by that. There's some animosity there. It was like he was a man coming out of high school. He would tell you that he made a few mistakes here and there, but we believed in him. We landed a really special guy and special leader."

When the Buckeyes traveled to State College, Pa., to face the top-ranked Nittany Lions on Feb. 4, Sasso returned to his home state the No. 2 wrestler at 149 pounds. His opponent was No. 18 Beau Bartlett, whom he had defeated in a 5-3 decision in Columbus last season.

Sasso scored the match's first point with an escape early in the second period and led 1-0 with two minutes to go. Bartlett scored a reversal in the third to take a 2-1 lead. With less than a minute remaining, Sasso escaped Bartlett's grasp before securing a takedown with four seconds left to win the bout 4-2.

"We couldn't ask for a better wrestler than Sammy," Ryan said. "He truly is a special leader and special person. He battles the whole time. He is someone you can look to because in close matches he finds a way to win. His opponents fear him because he will always be right there waiting to pounce at an opportunity. He's smart, and he always capitalizes. We look forward to seeing what he can accomplish this season."

Schierl Named Latest 'Black Shirt'

Fritz Schierl is a longtime Buckeye. The sixth-year senior has wrestled for Ohio State since 2016-17 in the 174-pound weight division.

On Jan. 26, Schierl became the program's 10th "black shirt," which honors Ohio State wrestlers who display elite discipline, grit, selflessness and excellence. Black shirt wrestlers also help the team become more conscious of making decisions that will help the team reach its goal of winning a national championship.

"If the coaches feel that a wrestler is deserving of a black shirt, we will send a message to all the black shirts and ask for a vote," Ryan said. "If it is a unanimous vote, then that wrestler becomes a black shirt. That wrestler must be in the community making a difference. They must be doing well in school, and all those things matter."

"This is a great team of people, but there is this extra little thing where every day I look in practice and I see who they are training with, and I am so confident that whoever they wrestle with will be pushed. He was down to weight (against Maryland), wrestled great, got tough, never gets tired, keeps fighting, and you know who it is – it's the redhead from Wisconsin – it's Fritz Schierl."

Schierl joins Dylan D'Emilio, Malik Heinselman, Carson Kharchla, Tate Orndorff, Kaleb Romero, Sasso and Ethan Smith as the team's eight current black shirts. Two former Buckeyes – Kollin Moore and Luke Pletcher – are the other two Ohio State wrestlers who were awarded the prestigious honor. Moore was a four-time All-American at 197 pounds, and Pletcher was a three-time All-American at 133 and 141 pounds. Both graduated from the university in 2020.

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Confident Icers Move Atop Big Ten Standings

Success has come more readily for the Ohio State men's hockey program than recognition.

For years the national perspective is that the school doesn't care about hockey as many pointed to the bandbox OSU Ice Rink, which was the Buckeyes' home until Value City Arena opened during the 1998-99 season.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Then critics noted the Buckeyes had to play in that cavernous arena with a 17,500-seat hockey capacity instead of its own rink like most elite programs, although it hasn't hurt Wisconsin's image skating in the Kohl Center (15,359 for hockey).

Each time Ohio State has made a clamor over the years, its place in the hockey hierarchy seems to come as a surprise. It shouldn't. Coach Steve Rohlik in his ninth season has built a program that consistently contends for the Big Ten championship and reaches the NCAA tournament.

Still, when the Buckeyes struggled to a 7-19-1 record in the COVID-19 shortened 2020-21 season, many assumed the Buckeyes would disappear from the national scene.

Remember that 2018 Frozen Four appearance, only the second in program history (the other being in 1998)? Fluke. Making three straight NCAA tournaments and on the verge of a school-record fourth when the 2019-20 season was cancelled due to the pandemic? Fluke.

Four straight 20-plus win seasons from 2017-20? OK, but most of those players graduated and last season's results were not pretty and more indicative of what the program is all about.

Well, guess what? The Buckeyes are back, and the reality is that last season was the fluke.

With a Feb. 4 and 5 home sweep of Wisconsin (technically the Buckeyes took five of six conference points because of an overtime win in the opener), OSU surpassed 20 wins again (21-7-2, 13-5-2-1 Big Ten) and has taken the conference lead while cementing its chances for another NCAA berth.

"My freshman year we had confidence, and I think we have it now," junior forward Tate Singleton said. "It's a fun time of the year. Everyone wants to win, and everyone wants to win the Big Ten and I think we have the team to do it."

Ohio State's hold on the top spot is tenuous considering the three teams chasing it have played two fewer games and the Buckeyes will be idle the final weekend of the regular season (Feb. 18-19) while the others play.

The Buckeyes have 42 points with four games left. Michigan is second with 39, followed by Minnesota at 37 and Notre Dame as a long shot with 32 points. OSU hosts Minnesota on Feb. 11 (6:30 p.m.) and 12 (6 p.m.). Both games are on the Big Ten Network.

The seniors will be honored prior to the second game in the regular-season home finale, but the Buckeyes have clinched a top-four spot, assuring them of hosting a best-of-three

quarterfinal series March 3-5.

"I think every single day we're getting more confident," senior defenseman Ryan O'Connell said. "As every weekend goes on, we've proved that we know as a team we can really do successful things and get the job done."

The Buckeyes end the regular season Feb. 18 and 19 at Michigan. Both the Wolverines and Minnesota are missing several of their top players while they participate in the Beijing Olympics because the NHL pulled its players for COVID-19 reasons.

Looking at the big picture, OSU is tied with St. Cloud State for 10th in the PairWise rankings that attempts to mimic the selection committee criteria for the 16-team NCAA field.

With Michigan ranked first and Minnesota eighth in the PairWise, the Buckeyes have a chance over the next four games to solidify their position.

Three For All

The Buckeyes continued a familiar pattern to defeat Wisconsin on Feb 4, rallying from a 3-1 third-period deficit and winning in overtime when freshman sensation Georgii Merkulov scored a highlight goal for the 4-3 win.

OSU stayed strong in the rematch and led 2-1 after the first period for a 6-2 victory.

The Buckeyes have won three times this season after being down 3-0 and have outscored opponents 53-17 in the third period, and 3-1 in overtime. In the first period, the Buckeyes have scored 22 and allowed 23. OSU holds a 34-22 advantage in the second period.

"The boys never give up," sophomore forward Michael Gildon said. "They always want to win. We'll do anything to win. We always support each other and push each other every day in practice, and it shows on the ice, and then in the third period we work teams over and score and come back."

Revenge Is Sweet

The Buckeyes, 12-1-2 in their past 15 games, have shown an ability to come back not only in games but in series.

They lost 3-2 in overtime to Notre Dame on Jan. 14 but won the next night 4-1. A loss in a shootout at Penn State on Jan. 28 was followed the next game by a 6-0 win vs. the Nittany Lions when freshman Jakub Dobeš made a career-high 51 saves. He stopped 97 of 99 shots in the series.

"I think every team comes out hard," Singleton said. "They want to beat us. I mean, we're one of the top teams in the Big Ten right now so Friday night's a big night for them. I think it needs to be a bigger night for us too because our Saturdays are unstoppable right now."

It's all in the attitude, Dobeš said: "That's just our mentality. We take it personally when someone beats us. We kind of need to win both of those games, or at least one, every single weekend to have a chance to win the Big Ten."

Target Practice

If there is a fault with the Buckeyes, besides their slow starts, it's allowing so many shots on goal.

Wisconsin had 46 shots in the opener, marking the fourth straight game that Dobeš

made 40-plus saves and the ninth game in a row he faced at least 30.

There was progress as the Badgers had one shot the final 8:47 of regulation and one in OT.

The next night Wisconsin's last shot, its 28th, came with just over seven minutes left in the game. Reducing the number of shots was a focus going into the second game of the series.

"We talked about it," Rohlik said postgame. "We've kind of maybe gotten away from that a little bit, and you can't get away from your identity. You can't get away from your structure. Good defense always leads to good offense. You start giving up shots in the 30s and 40s, certainly at some point bad things will happen, but I thought tonight was a good response."

Dobeš isn't concerned about the number of shots.

"If I have five saves or I have 50 it doesn't matter how many as long we win and we get better as a team," he said. "That's the most important thing for me."

Rohlik senses his team is on a special journey that could lead to a return to the national tournament.

"I'm all in with this group," he said. "I love this group. I love that they all come to work every day. I love their belief. They want to do it for one another and no matter what the score is, they still believe that we can be there at the end if we continue to play a 60-minute game."

Olympic Moment

Former OSU goalie Matt Tomkins (2013-17) was named to the Canadian Olympic Team. Tomkins, from Edmonton, Alberta, plays for Frölunda HC in the Swedish Hockey League after several seasons in the minor leagues in North America.

He is the third Buckeye men's player to be on an Olympic roster, joining Ryan Kesler (United States, 2010) and Andre Signoretti (Italy, 2006).

Tomkins played 67 career games for the Buckeyes with 58 starts and had a 3.03 goals-

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|----------------|------|--------------|----|---|-----|--|
| | Pts. | W | L | T | OTL | |
| Ohio State | 42 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 1 | |
| Michigan | 39 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 3 | |
| Minnesota | 37 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 2 | |
| Notre Dame | 32 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 1 | |
| Wisconsin | 17 | 5 | 14 | 1 | 2 | |
| Penn State | 17 | 5 | 14 | 1 | 1 | |
| Michigan State | 14 | 5 | 13 | 0 | 0 | |

against average and .898 save percentage. As a senior in 2016-17 he had a 12-5-3 record, with a 2.48 goals-against average and .909 save percentage.

This And Data

Merkulov had three goals in the series. His 18 goals are fifth nationally. There are four players with 19. He had two game-winning goals vs. the Badgers, and his five for the season are tops in the nation. ... Merkulov is also second in the nation in freshman scoring with 31 points. Defenseman Mason Lohrei has 29 points to rank third among freshmen. He is the third nationally overall with 25 assists. ... Cam Thiesing's 24 points (eight goals, 16 assists) put him 10th among freshmen, and defenseman Cole McWard is 50th (2-11-13). ... Dobeš is 20-6-2. His 2.01 goals-against average is 10th nationally, and his .938 save percentage is third. ... The Buckeyes are sixth in scoring (3.73 goals per game) and seventh in goals against (2.16).

Cam The Man

Thiesing is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for January.

He led the Buckeyes during the month with 11 points (4-7) as Ohio State posted a 6-1-2 record. He had a point in all but one game, with three two-point outings, and ended January on a five-game point streak.

For full recaps of the Penn State and Wisconsin series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all BSB subscribers.

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For January



Cam Thiesing
Freshman Forward
Nashville, Tenn.

OSU Sends Six Women's Icers To 2022 Olympics

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State women's ice hockey head coach Nadine Muzerall always looks for elite talent to build her team. She needs the best players to wear scarlet and gray if the Buckeyes are to compete at a high level in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association.

Throughout Muzerall's five-year career coaching the Buckeyes, her 25-person roster has been full of next-level skaters. Still, some stand out above the rest, receiving recognition as players able to compete among the world's best.

This winter, Andrea Braendli, Jincy Dunne, Emma Maltais, Natalie Spooner, Minttu Tuominen and Sofie Lundin will compete at the 2022 Beijing Olympics, marking the first time in history that at least six current or former Ohio State women's hockey players will skate in the Winter Games.

In 2021-22, the Buckeyes are the No. 2 team in the nation behind Minnesota. They have endured the brutal WCHA schedule, including three other teams ranked in the United States' Collegiate Hockey Online (USCHO) top 10. Ohio State is a solid all-around program this season, but the Buckeyes' most significant star might be at goaltender, where Braendli makes her home between the posts.

A finalist for the 2021 WCHA Goalie of the Year award, Braendli is the winningest goaltender in Ohio State's history with 56 victories and owns the single-season wins record with 20. Braendli will make her second trip to the Olympics, representing Switzerland in the 2022 Beijing Games.

"It's a huge honor to be named the starting goalie on the Swiss national team and to be able to represent my country on the Olympic stage for the second time," Braend-



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS
SEASONED VETERAN — Former Buckeye skater Minttu Tuominen is competing in her fourth Olympic games for Finland, the second most for any Buckeye behind Emma (Laaksonen) Terho, who also represented Finland. She already owns two bronze medals (2010 and 2018)



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

BETWEEN THE PIPES — Ohio State's Andrea Braendli is returning to the Olympics as the starting net-minder for Switzerland after serving as the team's backup at the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics.

li said. "It's every athlete's dream to participate in the Olympics, and even though I had the chance in 2018, it still feels like the first time."

At the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics, Braendli made her Olympic debut as the backup goaltender for Switzerland. Four years later, she will take a step forward and lead her team from the puck drop until the final horn. While Braendli will take on more responsibility this time around, she feels more comfortable with the task at hand.

"The excitement, the thrill and the happiness are the same," Braendli said. "I feel like, every time you get to play at the Olympics, it is an honor. This time I am a little more nervous because of the COVID situation that surrounds the games, but I am still really excited to go again and to play and compete on this level."

Braendli said her joy had increased ever since she received a call from Team Switzerland head coach Colin Muller and officially received a roster spot. However, Braendli did admit that she missed Muller's initial call because she was sleeping.

"He called me on New Year's Day, and it was amazing for me to start the year that way," Braendli explained, "but I was at home and had just woken up when I saw my coach had called me. He called me in the middle of the night (for my time zone), but it was the middle of the day for him. It was funny. I'm glad it wasn't an issue that I missed the call."

This season for Ohio State, the native of Zurich, Switzerland, has played in 12 games and boasts a .924 save percentage. She has backstopped the team to nine wins, including the Buckeyes' sweep of then-No. 4-ranked Minnesota when she collected 62 saves.

Braendli said representing Ohio State at the Olympics is a great honor for her family. She thanked teammates — especially fellow goaltenders Raygan Kirk, Quinn Kuntz

and Amanda Thiele — for supporting her throughout the process.

"Being selected means the world to me," she said. "I want to show who I am as a Buckeye and as a Swiss national team member. I grew a lot in the last four years, and I feel like coming here was the best decision I could ever make. I want to let everyone know how proud I am to be a Buckeye."

Muzerall agreed that Braendli had improved significantly in the last four seasons, claiming that the goaltender might be the best at her position in women's collegiate hockey because of her natural ability and skill.

"Andrea is an incredibly talented player and has made her mark in collegiate hockey, being arguably one of the best in the NCAA," Muzerall said. "Her elite status is driven by her experience both internationally and in playing for Ohio State and in the WCHA. When she came back from the 2021 World Championships, she was on fire, so we are excited to see what she accomplishes at the Olympics."

Last summer at the 2021 IIHF Women's World Championships, Braendli led all goaltenders with 181 saves on 200 shots faced. She played in all seven games of the tournament for the Swiss team and put on a 55-save performance in the team's opening game against the United States.

Dunne earned a spot on the United States national team to become one of eight first-time Olympians on the roster. The Ohio State graduate is two years removed from becoming OSU's Female Athlete of the Year and receiving the Big Ten Medal of Honor in 2020.

"I am very happy for Jincy and the entire Dunne family," Muzerall said. "It's been a long time coming for her, and I'm proud of how she stuck with it, continued to persevere and committed to making her dream come true. Even after hearing 'no' so many

times, she kept after it because she believed in herself and she believed in her dream."

Dunne's career with the U.S. national team started in 2012 at the Four Nations Cup, where she helped the team to a gold-medal finish. Dunne continued in youth championships and tournaments for the next nine years. She recently competed in the 2021 IIHF Women's World Championships, earning a silver medal.

"I am so happy for Jincy on making the Olympic roster," said Ohio State senior defenseman Sophie Jaques. "I know this is something she's been dreaming about her whole life, and with all the work she's put in over the years on and off the ice, she deserves it more than anyone I know."

In five seasons, she was a four-time captain, two-time WCHA Defensive Player of the Year and Ohio State's only two-time American Collegiate Hockey Association first-team All-American. Dunne is tied for third in the Ohio State record book with 99 career points as a defenseman.

"Jincy is arguably one of the better defensemen in the world with her vision," Muzerall said. "She is not only a solid defender, but she can be very influential and game-changing on the power play."

According to Jaques, Dunne's influence extends beyond the ice. She claims Dunne always chose to be selfless at Ohio State, engaging with her teammates in a personable and relatable manner.

"Jincy was a great leader, very reliable and could be counted on in any situation," said Jaques. "She is a great teammate, and she supported everyone. She was always happier for everyone else's success above her own. She was always checking in and would go out of her way to make sure everyone on the team knew they were supported and got through any tough times."

The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics mark the fourth consecutive Olympic Games that will see a Buckeye on the Team Canada roster and the first time two Buckeyes will play on the team.

Maltais and Spooner will be teammates on the Canadian national team's 23-player roster. Maltais is making her first trip to the Olympics, while Spooner will appear in the Winter Games for the third time in her decorated career.

"It still does not feel real that I will be headed to the Olympic Games," Maltais said. "I am so honored to be selected to this team, and I am really excited I get to share this moment with an amazing group of people. I would not be anywhere close to this point if it weren't for The Ohio State University and my OSU family. I am so grateful to be a Buckeye and so excited that my dream of being an Olympian has come true."

The Burlington, Ontario, native still has one year of eligibility remaining and plans to return to Ohio State for the 2022-23 season. She has centralized with the Canadian national team since July 2021, ahead of the IIHF Women's World Championships — forgoing this collegiate season to do so. Maltais made her first appearance at the world championships with the country's senior national team that summer, skating in five tournament games and helping the team to a gold-medal finish.



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

CANADIAN DUO – Two of the best forwards in program history, Emma Maltais (left) and Natalie Spooner (right) will represent the Buckeyes for Team Canada. This is Maltais' first trip to the Olympics, while Spooner claimed a gold medal with Canada in 2014 and silver in 2018.

"Emma is arguably one of the best 200-foot hockey players," Muzerall said. "She is very, very annoying to play against, and she is very tough to play against. She doesn't quit, and she just keeps coming after you. She is very instrumental on the penalty kill as she blocks shots, pressures hard and makes you make mistakes. I hope she enjoys the ride. She is one of the top players in the world and now has the opportunity to represent her country's colors on the biggest stage for women's hockey."

Maltais is a two-time finalist for the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award, which honors the best female college ice hockey player in the United States. She has also garnered USCHO and AHCA All-American honors. Maltais owns the Ohio State record for single-season points (59) and assists (40), setting both marks during the 2019-20 season.

Maltais and teammate Liz Schepers combined for 102 points that year, creating one of the more fearsome forward duos in collegiate hockey. The pair developed great chemistry, consistently feeding off one another for scoring opportunities. Schepers led the team in goals scored that season (22), many of them coming after a Maltais pass near the crease.

"I'm so proud of Emma for making the Olympic roster and couldn't be happier for her," Schepers said. "I've been so lucky to have her as a friend and teammate and be able to see firsthand how hard she works every day to be the best."

Schepers also praised Maltais for her presence beyond the ice, claiming that she has been one of the most attentive and charismatic people to enter the Ohio State locker room in her first three years in Columbus.

"She has great energy, the ability to make everyone around her better, and has grown into an incredible leader both on

and off the ice," Schepers said. "Emma has meant so much to this program and our culture, so it's awesome to see her dedication get rewarded at the highest level."

Spooner already has two Olympic medals to her name, winning gold at the 2014 Sochi Olympics and silver at the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics. The 2012 Ohio State graduate is a two-time world champion and eight-time world medalist.

The Scarborough, Toronto, native, has been with the Canadian national team since 2007 and recorded her 100th point for Canada at the 2021 IIHF Women's World Championships. She was the first Canadian to compete for the national team, national women's U-22 Team and the national women's U-18 Team.

Spooner recorded 163 points at Ohio State on 100 goals and 63 assists. She became the first Buckeye to score 100 goals and still holds the program record for career goals scored. She also holds the record for single-season goals with 31. Spooner was a 2012 Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award finalist and an AHCA All-American and later became an Ohio State Hall of Fame inductee in 2019.

Tuominen will compete for the Finnish national team at the Olympics. She will make her fourth consecutive appearance at the Winter Games – the second most trips for an Ohio State product behind Emma (Laaksonen) Terho, who played in five Olympics for Team Finland during her career.

The Helsinki, Finland, native, will compete in China already possessing two Olympic medals after winning bronze in 2010 and 2018. In PyeongChang, Tuominen scored one goal and added two assists to tie for fourth among defensemen in scoring.

"Minttu's selection to her fourth Olympic team shows just how hard she works,"

Muzerall said. "She is an incredible player, and we are so proud to have her representing Ohio State at the Olympics. Minttu has been a role model for many of our players, being an example for what they can achieve if they're willing to work for it."

Tuominen is proof that a player can impact beyond the box score. She didn't stuff the stat sheet during her Ohio State career and doesn't contribute eye-popping production for the Finnish national team. Still, she is a relentless defender who causes headaches for opposing skaters.

Tuominen played in 124 games and recorded 16 goals and 33 assists at Ohio State from 2009-2013 and was an alternate captain during her senior season. Off the ice, she was a four-time OSU Scholar-Athlete, three-time WCHA All-Academic Team honoree and two-time WCHA Scholar-Athlete.

The final Buckeye to earn a spot in the Olympics hasn't yet received an opportunity to wear a scarlet and gray uniform. Lundin will play for Team Sweden at the 2022 Winter Games before coming to Columbus in the fall. She signed her national letter of intent in November 2021.

"We are so proud of Sofie for making Sweden's Olympic team," Muzerall said. "I have been watching her grow for the last



| | Pts. | W | L | T | OTL |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Minnesota | 56 | 17 | 6 | 1 | 3 |
| Ohio State | 51 | 17 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| Wisconsin | 51 | 16 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| Minnesota Duluth | 45 | 15 | 8 | 0 | 1 |
| Minnesota State | 26 | 8 | 15 | 1 | 1 |
| Bemidji State | 22 | 7 | 15 | 2 | 0 |
| St. Cloud State | 12 | 3 | 15 | 2 | 1 |
| St. Thomas | 10 | 3 | 18 | 1 | 0 |

five years into such a mature player with so much natural talent. She has played with some of the best players not only in Sweden, but in the world, and will represent her country well. This has been a lifelong dream of hers."

Lundin helped the Swedes qualify for the Olympics – their first top-level event in three years. She played in all three of Sweden's qualifying matches and scored one goal. Lundin finished the tournament with a plus-6 on-ice rating, which was good for the second best among all skaters.

The native of Helsingborg, Sweden, played the last six seasons for Djurgarden Stockholm, a professional team in her home country. Though this year is her first Olympics at the senior level, Lundin skated on Sweden's 2016 Youth Olympic Games gold-medal team. She also competed at the 2019 IIHF Women's World Championships and the 2017 and 2018 U18 Women's Worlds.

Muzerall said that she is looking forward to watching each of the former, current and future Buckeyes compete on the world stage and believes they will represent the program well.

"It's a special thing that we have so many Olympians," Muzerall said. "We want the best of the best to skate in Columbus, and to have six compete this year – the most we've ever had – is proof that we are doing something right as a coaching staff and these players are doing things right on the ice. It's time to keep working, and it's time to keep building."



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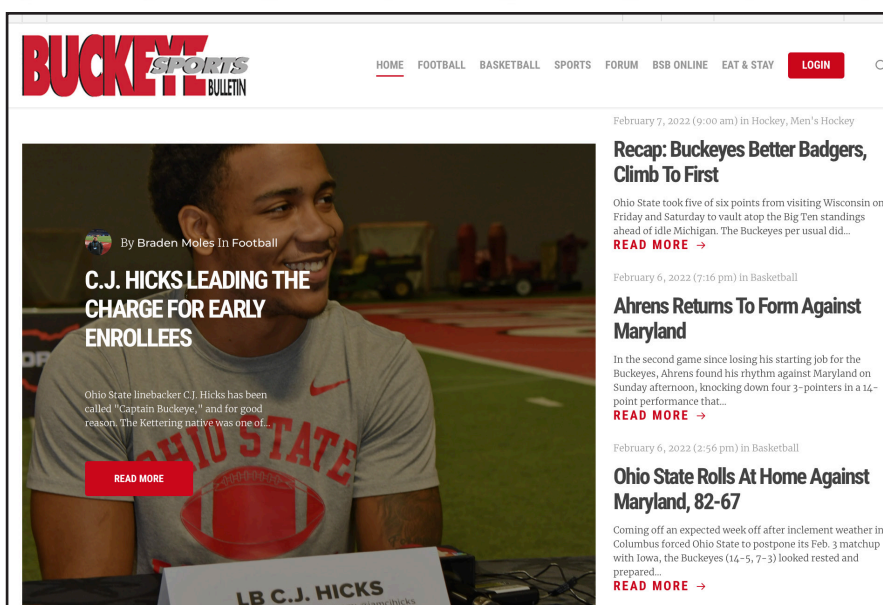


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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2021 FOOTBALL (11-2, 8-1)
Sept. 2 at Minnesota, W 45-31; **11** OREGON, L 35-28; **18** TULSA, W 41-20; **25** AKRON, W 59-7.
Oct. 2 at Rutgers, W 52-13; **9** MARYLAND, W 66-17; **23** at Indiana, W 54-7; **30** PENN STATE, W 33-24.
Nov. 6 at Nebraska, W 26-17; **13** PURDUE, W 59-31; **20** MICHIGAN STATE, W 56-7; **27** at Michigan, L 42-27.
Jan. 1 vs. Utah in Rose Bowl, W 48-45.

2022 FOOTBALL
Sept. 3 NOTRE DAME; **10** ARKANSAS STATE; **17** TOLEDO; **24** WISCONSIN.
Oct. 1 RUTGERS; **8** at Michigan State; **22** IOWA; **29** at Penn State.
Nov. 5 at Northwestern; **12** INDIANA; **19** at Maryland; **26** MICHIGAN.

2023 FOOTBALL
Sept. 2 at Indiana; **9** SAN JOSE STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.
Oct. 7 MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.
MEN'S BASKETBALL (12-4, 5-2)
Nov. 1 INDIANAPOLIS (EXH.), W 82-46; **9** AKRON, W 67-66; **12** NIAGARA, W 84-74; **15** BOWLING GREEN, W 89-58; **18** at Xavier, L 71-65
22 at Seton Hall, W 79-76; **24** at Florida, L 71-68; **30** DUKE, W 71-66.

Dec. 5 at Penn State, W 76-64; **8** TOWSON, W 85-74; **11** WISCONSIN, W 73-55; **18** at Kentucky, Canceled; **21** TENNESSEE MARTIN, Canceled; **28** NEW ORLEANS, Canceled.

Jan. 2 at Nebraska, W 87-79 (OT); **6** at Indiana, L 67-51; **9** NORTHWESTERN, W 95-87; **13** at Wisconsin, L 78-68; **16** PENN STATE, W 61-56; **18** IUPUI, W 83-37; **22** NEBRASKA, Postponed; **27** at Minnesota, W 75-64; **30** at Purdue, L 78-81

Feb. 3 IOWA, Postponed; **6** MARYLAND, W 82-67; **9** at Rutgers; **12** at Michigan; **15** MINNESOTA; **19** INDIANA; **24** at Illinois; **27** at Maryland.

March 3 MICHIGAN STATE; **6** MICHIGAN; **9-13** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (15-3, 7-2)
Nov. 3 SLIPPERY ROCK (EXH.), W 96-48; **10** BUCKNELL, W 71-48; **14** NORFOLK STATE, W 86-48; **17** BOWLING GREEN, W 94-63; **23** BELLARMINE, W 110-58; **27** CINCINNATI, W 86-50.

Dec. 1 at Syracuse, L 97-91; **5** at Purdue, W 70-53; **7** MOUNT ST. MARY'S, W 94-50; **12** INDIANA L 86-66; **15** ALABAMA STATE, W 97-51; **19** at UCLA, Canceled; **21** at San Diego State, W 66-54; **31** at Michigan, L 90-71.

Jan. 3 PENN STATE, Postponed; **6** ILLINOIS, W 90-69; **9** at Northwestern, W 74-61; **12** MICHIGAN STATE, W 89-83; **15** at Minnesota, W 83-75; **20**

MARYLAND, W 95-89; **23** at Rutgers W 80-71; **27** MICHIGAN, L 58-77 **31** at Iowa, W 92-88

Feb. 7 RUTGERS; **10** NEBRASKA; **14** at Illinois; **17** at Maryland; **20** WISCONSIN; **24** PENN STATE; **27** at Michigan State.

March 3-6 Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (18-7-1, 10-5-1)
Oct. 8 at Bentley, L 2-1; **9** at Bentley, W 7-1; **15** UCONN, W 4-3 (OT); **16** UCONN, W 3-0; **29-30** MICHIGAN STATE, L 2-1, W 5-1.

Nov. 5 PENN STATE, W 5-2; **6** PENN STATE, W 4-1; **12** at Minnesota, W 4-3; **13** at Minnesota, L 2-0; **26** Mercyhurst, L 5-4; **27** MERCYHURST, W 3-2.

Dec. 3 at Notre Dame, W 4-2; **4** at Notre Dame, L 5-1; **10** MICHIGAN, L 5-2; **11** MICHIGAN, W 6-1; **16** BOWLING GREEN, W 4-3 (OT); **17** at Bowling Green, W 3-2; **31** LIU, W 6-0

Jan. 1, LIU, W 7-2. **8** at Wisconsin, W 5-3; **9** at Wisconsin, T 2-2 OT (SW); **14** NOTRE DAME, L 3-2 (OT); **15** NOTRE DAME, W 4-1; **21** at Michigan State, W 4-1; **22** at Michigan State, W 3-2; **28** at Penn State, T 2-2, **29** at Penn State, W 6-0.

Feb. 4 WISCONSIN, W 4-3 OT, 5 WISCONSIN, W 6-2; **11-12** MINNESOTA, 6:30 p.m., 6 p.m.; **18-19** at Michigan, 7:30 p.m.; 8:30 p.m.

March 4-6 Big Ten Quarterfinals; **12** Big Ten Semifinal; **19** Big Ten Championship.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (18-4-0, 14-4-0)
Sept. 24 ST. THOMAS, W 6-0; **25** ST. THOMAS, W 4-1

Oct. 1 at Minnesota, W 4-2; **2** at Minnesota, W 4-1 **15** BEMIDJI STATE, W 7-0, **16** BEMIDJI STATE, W 3-1; **23** at Wisconsin, L 3-1; **24** at Wisconsin, L 2-1 (OT); **29** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-2; **30** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 10-1.

Nov. 5 at St. Thomas, W 8-1, **6** at St. Thomas, W 6-2; **19** MINNESOTA STATE, W 6-3; **20** MINNESOTA STATE, W 9-0; **26** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. St. Lawrence, W 5-2; **27** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. Penn State, W 4-2.

Dec. 3 at Minnesota Duluth, L 5-2; **4** at Minnesota Duluth, W 6-2.

Jan. 7 LINDENWOOD, W 8-2; **8** LINDENWOOD, W 10-0; **14-15** at St. Cloud State, canceled; **21** MINNESOTA DULUTH, L 1-0.; **22** MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 3-1; **28** MINNESOTA, W 2-1; **29** MINNESOTA, L 5-3

Feb. 4 at Minnesota State, W 5-0, **5** at Minnesota State, W 7-1; **Feb 8** at St. Cloud State 4 p.m. **11-12** at Bemidji State, TBA; **18** WISCONSIN, 6 p.m.; **19** WISCONSIN, 3 p.m.; **25-27** WCHA Quarterfinals, TBA

MARCH 5-6 WCHA Championships.



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Burrow Offers Major Hinge Point At Ohio State

This is a column about Joe Burrow and what ifs.

What if Urban Meyer picked Burrow over Dwayne Haskins as his starting quarterback for the 2018 season?



What if Burrow had stuck around OSU after Meyer decided Haskins was better?

What if Burrow had opted for the University of Cincinnati instead of LSU for his postgraduate college football career?

And that's just a start as Super Bowl LVI approaches, a matchup between two No. 1 overall picks, though 11 drafts apart – Matthew Stafford from the 2009 draft and Burrow from the 2020 draft.

Burrow is the first quarterback to go from No. 1 pick to the Super Bowl in just two seasons.

He's also the first OSU transfer who went on to lead another school (LSU) to a national championship or win the Heisman Trophy along the way.

The Super Bowl part might have happened if Meyer saw the upside and picked Burrow over Haskins back in 2018. We don't know that. What we do know is that

the LSU part wouldn't have happened.

Was Meyer right? We'll never know.

Haskins did set a slew of OSU records in 2018 before then heading to the NFL, where his career basically has gone nowhere. In 13 starts – the last coming on Dec. 27, 2020, for the Washington Redskins – Haskins is 3-10. He was signed by the Steelers in 2021 but never played.

But what if Burrow stayed at OSU as Haskins' backup?

At best, Burrow would have been a one-year starter at OSU. But at the time, it was possible that he never would have had a chance – had Haskins stuck around as a starter for at least two seasons, instead of leaving early.

Ohio State did go 13-1 in the record-breaking season for Haskins in 2018, wrapping with a Rose Bowl win over Washington.

Burrow was just 10-3 that same season for LSU. After losing to Florida, Alabama and Texas A&M, the Tigers drew a favorable bowl matchup and beat Central Florida in the Fiesta Bowl.

But a year later, in 2019, Haskins was trying his luck in the NFL and Burrow led LSU to an undefeated national championship season.

Pretty hard to argue with those results. Burrow was the winner. But wait a minute; it's not so easy.

If Burrow had been in Columbus finishing his fifth and final season for the Buck-

eyes, it's certain that Justin Fields would not have been there.

Fields, I would argue, was the most talented quarterback in Ohio State history. And he lost only twice in two seasons (vs. three losses by Burrow).

One of those losses came to Clemson in the 2019 semifinals. A win in that game would have pitted Fields against Burrow for the national title. The other loss for Fields came in the 2020-21 national title game. Fields never lost outside of the playoffs.

My appreciation of Burrow's game is not new. I made that known in these pages of Buckeye Sports Bulletin after witnessing his play vs. the play of Haskins in OSU spring games. My choice, with those limited viewing options, was Burrow.

So maybe this isn't a surprise. As impressive as Fields and even Haskins were at Ohio State, my gut tells me OSU would have had a better shot at the title in 2018 and maybe as good a shot in 2019 with Burrow.

I can't prove that. That's just my thought. An interesting "what if" question, nonetheless.

But now take on this "what if" question.

What if Burrow had stuck at OSU and left after one year as a starter for the 2019 draft (or for that matter done the same at LSU)?

For starters, he wouldn't have been the No. 1 pick. He benefited from another, fifth year in college.

Meanwhile, the top two picks in 2019 were Oklahoma quarterback Kyler Murray and OSU defensive end Nick Bosa. The next quarterback taken was Daniel Jones, sixth overall to the Giants (not a good situation). After that, Haskins went 15th to the Redskins (also not a good situation).

The Bengals in 2019 picked 11th. Their pick was guard Jonah Williams out of Alabama.

Things really fell into place for Burrow after another year at LSU.

The Bengals were sitting at No. 1 in the draft in 2020 and in dire need of a quarterback. The nearly-hometown kid was the natural pick, not because he was from Ohio, but because Burrow grew into a quarterback ready to plug in and play in the NFL.

Then, one year later, his college teammate and ultra-talented receiver was available. The Bengals grabbed Ja'Marr Chase with the fifth pick overall last spring. There's one thing better than an ultra-talented receiver. That's an ultra-talented receiver with a history with the quarterback. Bingo.

Fields in that 2021 draft went six picks after Chase to the Bears, becoming the fourth QB taken in the draft. The jury is out on Fields. I like what I saw. The Bears seemed to like what they saw.

Fields was 2-8 as a starter his rookie season, injured some. Burrow was 2-7-1 as a starter his rookie season, injured plenty. By the way, the first three picks in the 2021 draft were all QBs – Trevor Lawrence to the Jaguars, Zach Wilson to the Jets and Trey Lance to the 49ers.

Fields won't go to the Super Bowl in year two, or at least he's very unlikely to do so. But I wouldn't be surprised to see Fields go on to a very successful NFL career. Most people would already say they expect that of Burrow.

So, what if? What if Burrow doesn't leave OSU in 2018? Fields doesn't arrive, instead landing somewhere else after deciding to get out of Georgia.

One thing both quarterbacks had was the chance to be developed under Ryan Day. In Burrow's case, as an undergraduate at OSU, Day was an assistant coach. For Fields, Day was the head coach.

Ahead of Day at Ohio State was Urban Meyer in his fourth coaching stop. Both Burrow and Fields have turned out better at the next level than any previous quarterback under Urban since Alex Smith.

Smith, a two-year starter under Meyer at Utah, went on to a long NFL career after being the first overall pick in the 2005 draft. He was an impressive 99-67-1 for the 49ers, Chiefs and Redskins, missing all of the 2019 season because of a nasty leg injury before retiring after the 2020 season.

I wouldn't be surprised if both Burrow and Fields go on to such careers.

What if that happens? A series of events means Ohio State was part of the path for both.

Good luck, Joe Burrow. Maybe you'll even have the 740 T-shirt under your pads on Super Bowl Sunday, the one you wore as a shout-out to Ohio – the south-east Ohio 740 area code in particular – on draft night in 2020.

OSU Super Bowl notes

- Burrow is the first Ohio State quarterback (yes, I count him as he is an OSU graduate) to start a Super Bowl
- When Burrow and Fields played against each other on Sept. 19, 2021, it was the first and only time in the history of the NFL that OSU quarterbacks were on the field for opposing teams, the best I can tell after extensive research.
- The Bengals roster is deep with Ohio State ties – Burrow, cornerback Eli Apple (first round, 2016 draft), safety Vonn Bell (second round, 2016), defensive end Sam Hubbard (third round, 2018) and offensive tackle Isaiah Prince (sixth round, 2019).
- The Rams have one Buckeye, safety and captain Jordan Fuller (sixth round, 2020), who is out for the season with an ankle injury.
- Steelers wide receiver Santonio Holmes is the only OSU player named MVP of the Super Bowl, which dates back to 1967. Holmes' game-winning TD reception with 35 seconds left highlighted a four-catch, 73-yard day in 2009 against the Cardinals.
- The first Ohio high school product to win the Super Bowl MVP was Len Dawson, out of Alliance High School, who led the Chiefs to a victory over the Vikings in Super Bowl IV in 1970. (Of note if Burrow has a big day, he, of course, played at Plains High School outside Athens.)

Earle Bruce's Coaching Tree Remains Strong Today

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Trivia time again. For the second issue in a row, the question involves an Ohio State defensive backfield coach.

Who replaced Nick Saban as the Buckeye secondary coach in 1982 after Saban was fired following the previous season? The assistant is also the answer to an interesting NFL coaching trivia question. I asked this question on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum and, at least to this point, no one has answered the question correctly, though we have had some interesting responses. In full disclosure, I banned Mark Rea from answering this question to give the readers a chance, and I don't know if he knows it or not. I would not have gotten it myself unless I stumbled across it, which I did. The answer to follow.

Somewhere in the discussion of all the changes on the current Ohio State staff, I got to thinking about Saban and Bruce and Bruce's many assistants during his nine-year stay as head man in Columbus.

Bruce made a legitimate run at college football's national championship in his first year at the OSU helm, after taking over from his mentor, Woody Hayes. Ohio State came within one point of the Buckeyes' first crown since 1968 when they fell to USC in the Rose Bowl, 17-16, following that 1979 season.

Sadly, though Bruce had many exciting wins and several Big Ten championships during his tenure at Ohio State, he never really challenged for the top spot again. While he never smoked the ultimate cigar, Bruce could be considered the Godfather of national championship coaches, starting with Saban. Saban, of course, has won seven of them.

Though they ultimately had an unfortunate parting of the ways, Bruce spotted Saban very early on in the future great's coaching career, though the soon to be 29-year-old already had five years of full-time coaching experience when Bruce plucked him from West Virginia after previous stops at Syracuse and Kent State, his alma mater. Bruce's first contact with Saban came in 1972, when the Alabama coach played in the Tangerine Bowl with the Golden Flashers and the opposition was Tampa, coached by Bruce.

Bruce spotted some other championship coaches at even younger ages than Saban. He hired Urban Meyer as a graduate assistant at the tender age of 22, after a year of coaching in the high school ranks. Meyer, of course, would go on to win three national championships – two at Florida and one at Ohio State.

Pete Carroll was a graduate assistant himself, under the legendary Lou Holtz at Arkansas, when Bruce tabbed him for his first full-time job at Iowa State in 1978 at the age of 27. A year later, Carroll moved with Bruce to Ohio State, before leaving after one season to become defensive coordinator at North Carolina State. Carroll would go on to win two AP national championships as head coach at USC and also won Super Bowl XLVIII with the Seattle Seahawks.

Jim Tressel was a little more seasoned than Meyer or Carroll when Bruce hired him. The future Buckeye head man had been a full-time assistant at Miami (Ohio) and Syracuse for a combined four seasons before joining Bruce as quarterbacks coach in 1983 at the age of 31. He stayed through 1985 before leaving for Youngstown State, where he won four Division I-AA titles. He then took over at Ohio State, where he won the BCS national championship in 2002.

By my count, using all of my fingers and toes and then some, that's 13 national championships, plus Tressel's four at YSU, from former Bruce assistants.

But there were plenty of other Bruce assis-

tants who went on to be college football head coaches.

Glen Mason, who played at Ohio State when Bruce was an assistant under Hayes and coached under both Woody and Earle at Iowa State and Ohio State, went on to a lengthy head coaching career at Kent State, Kansas and Minnesota. Other Bruce assistants to take head coaching jobs included Gary Blackney at Bowling Green, Tom Lichtenberg at Maine and Ohio University, and BSB's own Bill Conley, who was head coach at Ohio Dominican University for six seasons.

Another former Bruce assistant who had an interesting career was Randy Hart. He was an offensive lineman on the '68 national champions while Bruce was an assistant, working with the offensive line. Hart served as a graduate assistant at OSU in 1970 and 1971 before going with Bruce to serve as an assistant at Tampa and then moving on to Iowa State with Bruce, where he was an assistant from 1973-76 before leaving for a five-year tour at Purdue. Hart returned to Columbus under Bruce in 1982, and when the coach was fired, Hart started a lengthy tenure at Washington from 1988-2008, winning a national championship under Don James in 1991, thus winning a title as both a player and an assistant coach.

Which brings us back to our trivia question. One of the guesses as to who replaced Saban was Chuck Heater. While incorrect, I thought it was a really good guess. Heater joined the Buckeyes as secondary coach in 1985 (Blackney handled the DBs in 1984, replacing our trivia answer).

The thing I remember most about Heater was that he was a star running back at Michigan and it was a really big deal at the time that he came to work for Bruce at OSU. He had coached at Northern Arizona and Toledo before Bruce hired the Tiffin (Ohio) Columbian product after a three-year stint at Wisconsin. Heater coached the Buckeye backs until Bruce's termination in 1987.

The thing that stunned me about Heater is that he was still coaching as of last season.

He went to Notre Dame when Bruce was canned before rejoining his former OSU head coach at Colorado State in 1991 and 1992 as defensive coordinator. There he was on staff with Meyer. After stints at Colorado and Washington, Heater joined Meyer's staff at Utah in 2004 and moved with him to Florida, where he remained for Meyer's entire stay in Gainesville and both national championships (more national title credit for Bruce).

After Meyer's "retirement" following the 2010 season, Heater had stops at Temple, Marshall and Maryland (he was the safeties coach against Meyer in the 2018 debacle against the Terps) before returning to Colorado State in 2020 and 2021 under Steve Addazio.

Which brings us to the trivia answer. It is another coach who I was surprised to see was still active.

Bruce replaced Saban with Dom Capers, who had been defensive backfield coach at Tennessee, with previous stints in the secondary at Hawaii, San Jose State and California. He stayed in Columbus for the 1982 and '83 seasons before embarking on a lengthy professional career that has continued through this past season, when he served as senior defensive assistant for the Detroit Lions.

The piece of NFL trivia that Capers is a part of is that he is the only person to serve as head

coach of two expansion franchises in their first years. Capers was the first head coach of the Carolina Panthers (1995) and the Houston Texans (2002).

Capers got off to a remarkable start with Carolina. After going 7-9 in their inaugural season, the Panthers went 12-4 in 1996, making it all the way to the NFC championship game, where they lost to Green Bay. Capers garnered AP Coach of the Year honors for his efforts. Ironically, Capers would have his longest tenure with an NFL club when he served as the Packers' defensive coordinator from 2009-17, coaching with the Super Bowl XLV champions (chalk another one up for Earle).

Capers has also had NFL stops at New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Jacksonville, Miami, New England and Minnesota.

Wow. Almost a full column on Earle Bruce assistant coaches and their many successes. And yet for Ohio State fans, however beloved Bruce ended up being, he will always be remembered as "Ol' 9-3 Earle."

Looking Back At Recruiting

Regular readers of this column know that I love our dual features "From the Pages of BSB" and "A Look Back at Recruiting From the Pages of BSB." I found this issue's look back at recruiting through the years, which can be found on page 13, especially entertaining.

Forty years ago, BSB was touting the group of linebackers that Bruce had secured in his 1982 class.

"In addition to landing Columbus stars Mike Kee, Byron Lee and Mark Pfister, coach Earle Bruce also secured the services of Dennis Hueston, John Hutchinson, and Tom Johnson," BSB reported in the Feb. 13, 1982, issue.

It did prove to be a solid group of linebackers. Kee, Lee, Pfister, Hueston and Hutchinson all ended up lettering for the Buckeyes, with Lee becoming a two-year starter. But it was this "Tom Johnson" who pushed the group over the top.

Tom Johnson proved to be Thomas "Pepper" Johnson, who earned All-America honors for the Buckeyes as a senior in 1985 and was a second-round draft choice of the New York Giants, embarking on a 13-year professional career, earning All-Pro honors in 1990. He was a two-time Super Bowl champion (XXI and XXV) with the Giants, where he established a relationship with New York assistant coach Bill Belichick.

After his playing days – which included stops in Cleveland (under head coach Belichick), Detroit and with the New York Jets – were over, he was on Belichick's staff in New England from 2000-13, winning three more Super Bowls (XXXVI, XXXVIII and XXXIX).

Speaking of recruiting, Johnson is currently the head coach at the famed IMG Academy. Hopefully, he'll send some recruits Ohio State's way.

Fifteen years later, defensive tackle prospect Heath Queen flipped his commitment from Michigan State to Ohio State. Queen, a 6-5, 270-pound defensive tackle from Lodi, Ohio, originally committed to the Spartans because he wanted to play for then-MSU coach Saban. But after continuing rumors about Saban's imminent departure for the NFL, Queen had second thoughts.

"I kept hearing the rumor that Coach Saban might leave to go to the pros," Queen said. "Even though he didn't leave this season, I

wouldn't want to go there and have him leave during my sophomore or junior season. He was the reason I wanted to go to Michigan State."

Saban stayed in East Lansing until 1999, long enough to inflict a devastating defeat on the Buckeyes in 1998.

But doesn't the plight of Queen and Saban remind you of the recent exploits of another coach at a school in "That State Up North"?

And finally, 15 years ago in 2007, we have the tale of a player who did not flip his commitment.

Brian Rolle, a linebacker out of Immokalee, Fla., had given his pledge to Jim Tressel and the Buckeyes, but there were reports that he might be wavering under intense pressure from home-state Florida (guess who the head coach putting on the pressure was). But Rolle ultimately stuck to his promise to the Buckeyes.

"I did some thinking that I made some commitments to those guys and there's no sense in me backing off because I'm a man of my word and I want to stick to it," Rolle said. "I look at it as if I do decommit and go somewhere else, it's not only going to look bad for me but for our program and coaches and that will probably hurt Ohio State's chances of recruiting our school. I just did it and stuck with it."

In today's cutthroat recruiting world, I just found that so refreshing.

Not surprisingly, Rolle went on to a solid career with the Buckeyes, being selected as a captain in 2010.

Odds And Ends In My Research

I came across some interesting – or irrelevant – stuff in researching this column.

For instance, did you know that Queen, who lettered three times for the Buckeyes (1998-2000) is the only football letterman in OSU history whose last name starts with the letter Q?

Or that when Carroll was a graduate assistant at Pacific (1973-76) he coached with future Buckeye assistants Jim Colletto and Walt Harris? Like Carroll, Harris is a Pacific alum.

Do you recall that when Bruce fired Saban, he also fired Dennis Fryzel and Steve Szabo? Bruce must not have held grudges because he hired Szabo to coach under him at Northern Iowa in 1988 and then took him to Colorado State the following year. Maybe he should have hired back Saban.

And finally, speaking of Ohio State's national championship-killing loss to Saban and Michigan State in 1998, did you know that one outlet declared Ohio State the champion in 1998? Jeff Sagarin, with his mathematical equations, had the Buckeyes (11-1) as the best team in the country that year, followed by Tennessee (13-0), Florida State (11-2), Kansas State (10-2) and Florida (10-2). Needless to say, every major outlet had the Volunteers, under Phillip Fulmer, as national champions.

No BSB For Three Weeks

In accordance with an annual scheduling quirk designed to spread BSB's 24 print issues out properly over the course of the publishing year, the next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, dated March 5, is scheduled to be mailed on March 1.

There is no reason to miss any of the Buckeye sports action in the interim, however, as the BSB staff will be reporting all the latest news at our BuckeyeSports.com website. The staff will also be interacting with readers on BuckeyeSports.com's Forum.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call us at (614) 486-2202. And remember, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin printing schedule is always listed on page 3 of each issue.



FOR ATHLETES

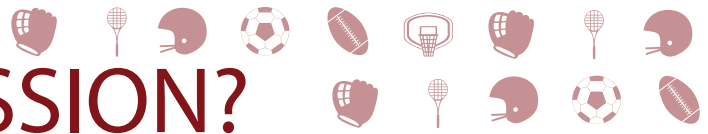
HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

- CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS**
- Headache, nausea, vomiting, balance problems, dizziness, double or blurred vision, sensitivity to light or noise, feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy, just not "feeling right" or "feeling down," memory problems, confusion, and trouble sleeping.

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that causes your brain to rapidly move inside your skull.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make it harder to do everyday activities, such as concentrating at school. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH AND PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON



<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>

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