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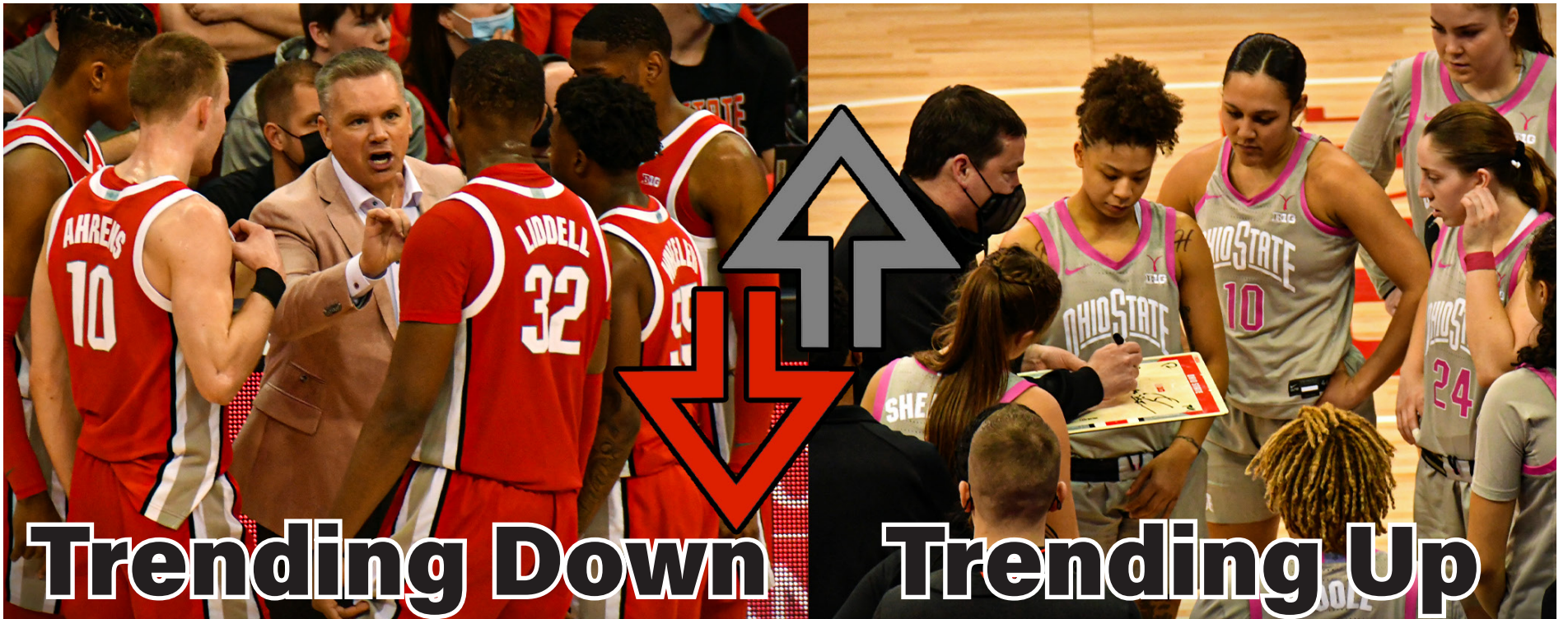


Vol. 41, No. 18

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 19, 2022

Marching Ahead



Trending Down

Trending Up

SONNY BROCKWAY

SONNY BROCKWAY

SEEKING ANSWERS — Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann (center) is hoping to right the ship in the NCAA Tournament after his team lost four of its last five games.

BACK AGAIN — After three seasons without a berth, Ohio State women's basketball head coach Kevin McGuff (center) is heading to his fifth NCAA Tournament with the Buckeyes.

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By PATRICK MAYHORN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann didn't have much to offer in the way of answers when asked after his team's fourth loss in five games — this one at the hands of Penn State to eliminate the Buckeyes from the Big Ten tournament in a game they led by as many as 11 points.

E.J. Liddell, Holtmann's star forward whose next game in the scarlet and gray will be his last if the Buckeyes lose, took three or four beats of silence when asked about another blown lead against a team that, if the records are any indication, Ohio State should have beaten.

He exhaled, looked at the table between him and the gathered media perhaps in hopes that a suitable answer might have been scrawled onto it and gathered himself as well as he could, saying that he didn't know what has happened to his Buckeyes but that he would certainly love to address it if he did.

"I wish I could tell you what happened. I wish I could address it," Liddell said. "If I knew, I would address it with the team, and we'd try to fix it. But I don't know."

It's been that kind of stretch for Ohio State. Only a few weeks

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By BRADEN MOLES

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The pain of previous seasons has been evident throughout the Ohio State women's basketball program's approach to this current campaign. Several factors out of their control — a pandemic causing the cancellation of the 2020 NCAA tournament, which they almost certainly would have qualified for, and a self-imposed postseason ban last year after former assistant coach Patrick Klein violated Ohio State's sexual harassment policy — combined to make it one of the most challenging two-year stretches in program history. The Buckeyes had nothing to play for at the end of these past two seasons other than each other.

The message heading into this season was clear: just give them a chance. Let the Buckeyes, with a 21-12 record in 2019-20 and a 12-2 start to the 2020-21 campaign before the weight of no postseason collapsed on Ohio State, show what they can do in March — something they haven't had the opportunity to do since Kelsey Mitchell last suited up for the Scarlet and Gray back in 2018.

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said as much before this season began, agreeing that the team had a chip on its shoulder after experiencing the disappointment of these recent years.

"This team, they really like each other," he said. "They've done a great job developing chemistry that I think can really be an important part of the fabric of this group this year. They're motivated. They know we didn't get a chance to be in the tournament for the last couple of years, and that's something they want to do. We have a long way to go between

Continued On Page 10

From The Message Board

Before the men's and women's basketball teams head to their respective NCAA Tournaments, we took to the BuckeyeSports.com message boards to ask readers what they think about each program's potential for a deep run at the Big Dance. The men's team earned the No. 7 seed in the South Regional, and the women's team took the No. 6 seed at the Spokane Regional.

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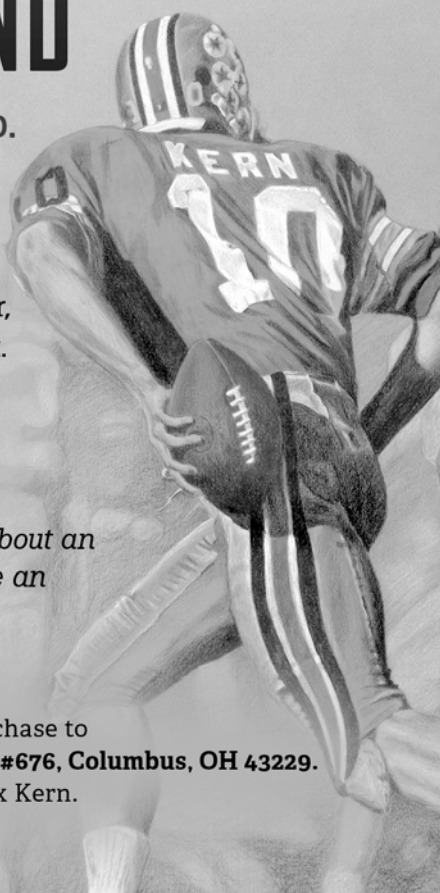
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"What the men's basketball team needs is some semblance of health from Zed Key and Kyle Young. I would be surprised if the men's basketball team wins more than two games in the NCAA tournament. Put it this way, at their best, the men's team is around the 16th-best team in the country, which translates to two wins. That's probably their ceiling.

"Without knowing much about Loyola, I would generalize and say almost any team the men could face in the NCAA tournament would be better than the last four teams they lost to in Maryland, Nebraska, Michigan and Penn State. Any NCAA tournament opponent might be better than Michigan State, but that's iffy."

– **Terrier Buck**

"Well, Terrier is more optimistic than I am. Unless Key and Young are back in some semblance of good health, I don't think the Buckeyes can win more than a game, and I wouldn't bet on one. This team has completely quit playing defense. They don't even seem to be trying. I have seen no one has commented on this, but E. J. Liddell looked livid after the Penn State loss and muttered something about things needing to change. I hope he lights a fire under his teammates, but I am not optimistic."

– **Michael Bauer**

"If Young and Key were 100% healthy, and the men played their A-game, they have shown they can beat anyone. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and this team is fading, not ascending. Just wondering, since Young's departure at halftime with his latest concussion, he has disappeared. The Bucks will have a tough opening weekend as a seven seed. I'm afraid they will not survive if their opponents play their best, which is likely.

"As for the women's team, it depends on their bracket draw. Mikesell and Sheldon are an exciting duo, but they will need a great effort from

their teammates. This team needs to make their bunnies and layups. They are good outside shooters, but they can't finish around the basket. An opponent with a dominant post player will hurt them. They are almost all guards. They might win one game but will probably not make it to the Sweet 16. Give these women credit. They were Big Ten co-champions. If Mikesell returns next season, they will be a strong conference contender."

– **Byron McNutt**

"Depends on who shows up for the men's and women's teams. I see improvement with the Lady Bucks' defense lately. Barring any injuries, they may make the Sweet 16. They were good enough to get McGuff an extension, how's that? As for the men, too many key players are out for much of a run but as a Chinese proverb says, if you are riding the tiger you need to stay on top. I think the men fell off."

– **Peyote Buck**

"The men's team will lose in the first round. They have too many injuries to overcome. I feel even less optimistic knowing their opponent is Loyola Chicago. The Ramblers can shoot the three-ball, so that's not a great matchup for the Buckeyes. The women's team will win their first game and lose their second, falling short of the Sweet 16 again. They can score with anyone but play poor defense."

– **bstu9**

"Sadly, I'm guessing neither team makes it past the first weekend. If the men make it past Loyola, beating Villanova would seem a stretch unless the Buckeyes are at full strength and play really well. As for the women, McGuff's post-season track record is not the best, even when he had Kelsey Mitchell. Can Sheldon and Mikesell equal or better Mitchell?"

– **Mcarr**



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2021-22 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 41)

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No. 2	Sept. 18	No. 14	Jan. 15
No. 3	Sept. 25	No. 15	Jan. 29
No. 4	Oct. 2	No. 16	Feb. 12
No. 5	Oct. 9	No. 17	March 5
No. 6	Oct. 23	No. 18	March 19
No. 7	Oct. 30	No. 19	April 2
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No. 10	Nov. 20	No. 22	June
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No. 12	Dec. 4	No. 24	August

The next issue (April 2 cover date) will be mailed on March 29.

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To Tackle Or How To Tackle Is The Question

Call me old-school if you want (trust me, I've been called much worse), but I wasn't exactly enamored by the Tackling 101 demonstration offered in early March by new Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

During an explanation detailing his philosophy toward tackling – something at which the Buckeyes didn't exactly excel in 2021 – Knowles extolled the virtues of technique and timing, adding that he is OK with missed tackles as long as his players use the proper technique. I'm not quite sure how a tackle is missed if the proper technique is exactly utilized, but I digress.

To the defensive coach's way of thinking, wrapping up an opponent and wrestling him to the ground should go the way of the leather helmet. Knowles prefers what he terms as "owning the hip," a technique in which potential tacklers target the ball-carrier's hips as a safer and more effective way to end the play.

"You don't have to practice bringing guys to the ground," Knowles said. "You can't. We're trying to save bodies. The amount of blows a guy takes is really important to us. ... Tackling is all about technique and timing, so what I'm looking for out there is what I call 'owning your hip.' ... You don't really ever have to tackle anybody. If you're in the right position, and you teach them that it's OK to miss tackles if you're in the right position ... if you see a guy fly by and miss, but he's on the right angle, you're not going to pay much attention to it because there's going to be another guy in position to make the tackle.

"If you look at the teams I've had in the past, we were great tacklers but we never tackled in practice. We just worked and harped all the time on position ... If you're going to miss, let them miss. It's OK if they miss aggressively on the proper side of the runner."

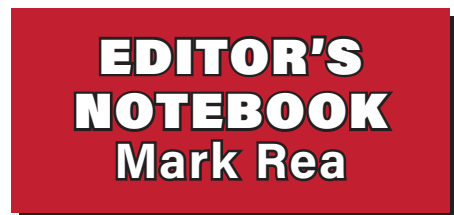
Knowles is a proponent of the so-called rugby style of tackling, often seen in the NFL when smaller defensive backs hurl themselves at the hips (and sometimes knees) of bigger, stronger running backs and tight ends. The coach's philosophy is rooted in today's game that seeks to reduce the number of head-on collisions and subsequent concussions. It's even more personal for Knowles, who said the widow of a close friend from his Cornell days was among the first to donate her husband's brain for CTE research.

Full disclosure: The very next game I coach at the college level will be my first, and the 56-year-old Knowles has been a coach continuously for the past 34 years. He came to Ohio State from Oklahoma State, where Knowles served as defensive coordinator for four years and presided last season over a unit that ranked No. 5 nationally in total defense. (The Buckeyes finished tied for 59th in that category.) Therefore, Knowles obviously knows his craft, and I will be giving him every benefit of the doubt.

Still, I'm mystified by the concept of the coach being OK with missed tackles as long as proper technique is being applied. What happens during open-field situations in which the defender is the last impediment between the opposing ball-carrier and the goal line? And while the college game has tried to legislate against using the helmet as a weapon through the targeting rule, are we now not in danger of creating a new generation of football players with debilitating knee and hip injuries?

The proof will be in the pudding on whether Knowles and his cerebral approach to tackling can be absorbed by his new team. It will be interesting to watch the different techniques on opposite sides of the ball when the

Buckeyes kick off their 2022 season against Notre Dame, a team now coached by Marcus Freeman, the former Ohio State linebacker who played in back-to-back national championship games and led the team in solo tackles in 2007.



My memory gets fuzzier by the day, but I don't remember Freeman doing a whole lot of rugby tackling.

Hot, Cold, Hot, Cold

To say the Ohio State men's basketball team ran hot and cold this season would be understating the obvious. Who or what is to blame for that? Lingering COVID issues that forced postponements, creating a start-stop vibe for much of the season? Key injuries to key players at key junctures? Chris Holtmann, whose star has been dimming (at least in the eyes of Buckeye fans) ever since last year's NCAA Tournament loss to 15-seed Oral Roberts?

The Buckeyes won eight of their first 10 games this year, including a 71-66 victory against Duke when the Blue Devils were the top-ranked team in the nation. OSU used that win to move as high as No. 15 in the polls, but that turned out to be the high-water mark for the season.

January was a roller-coaster month with lowly Nebraska taking Ohio State to overtime and then the Buckeyes getting blown out by 16 points by a mediocre Indiana team. They were parked at No. 16 for several weeks, but when the calendar turned to February, the ups and downs continued.

Still, Ohio State was sitting with an 18-7 record following an 86-83 road win Feb. 24 at Illinois. Then, the Buckeyes got blown out by Maryland, a team they had wiped the floor with just three weeks earlier, and followed that by getting outplayed at home by Nebraska, which entered the game with only two conference wins.

The last decent performance came on March 3 at Value City Arena with an 80-69 win against Michigan State after which long-time Spartans head coach Tom Izzo voiced his disappointment at the atmosphere inside the cavernous Schottenstein Center. "I was disappointed in their fans," Izzo said. "I thought the way (Holtmann's) team has played and how hard they play, this place should be rocking and packed."

That was followed by the regular season-ending loss at home to Michigan – never a pleasant experience, but even more so since the Wolverines were without suspended head coach Juwan Howard and star center Hunter Dickinson, who was a late scratch because of a stomach bug – and the one-and-done Big Ten tournament loss to Penn State, a team the Buckeyes had beaten six of the last seven times they played. Just to add a little salt in the open wound, OSU blew a second-half lead of 11 points in that one.

Dating back to the latter stages of the Thad Matta era, hot and cold has been the basketball Buckeyes' modus operandi for many years. They seem unbeatable for a stretch, then go into a funk, then come out of it, then go back into it. It's a maddening trend that has

manifested itself since 2013. That's the last time Ohio State advanced past the first weekend of the NCAA Tournament.

Should that trend continue this year – and the selection committee did the Buckeyes no favors by slotting them against everyone's lovable scrappers from Loyola Chicago – that will mean the talented careers of such Buckeye standouts as D'Angelo Russell, Jae'Sean Tate, Keita Bates-Diop, Kaleb Wesson and E.J. Liddell will have passed without so much as ever advancing as far as the Sweet 16.

Oldest Living Buckeye

When Cy Souders passed away in August at the age of 100, he had been the oldest living former Ohio State football player. Souders' career with the Buckeyes was something of an odyssey, starting in 1939 as a member of the freshman team. He left school to get married, but returned in 1942 when he received a letter from head coach Paul Brown, encouraging Souders to come back and play football.

His career was interrupted again by service in the U.S. Navy in World War II, but he was back in 1945 and earned All-America status in 1946.

Souders' death meant the mantle of oldest living Buckeye football player passed to Chuck Csuri, another member of the 1942 national title team. Csuri also served in World War II, receiving the Bronze Star in 1945 for heroism at the Battle of the Bulge, and returned home to become one of the world's pioneers in digital art and computer animation.

Sadly, Csuri died Feb. 27 at the age of 99, leading those of us who track these sorts of things to ponder who now is the oldest living Ohio State football player. Researching such a project isn't as easy as one might think, but a little digging revealed that it might be Dick Brubaker, who turned 90 in January. Brubaker served as a co-captain on the 1954 national championship team, played three seasons of professional football and then began a long and successful law career in northeast Ohio.

The gap in ages between Csuri and Brubaker covers nine years, meaning there might be a former Buckeye out there who is older than Brubaker. If you know of one, drop us a line or shoot us an email and let us know.

And Finally

- If you haven't read former Ohio State center Harry Miller's heart-wrenching explanation about why he is stepping away from the sport, do yourself a favor. Find it online and read it. Meanwhile, give a few thanks to Ryan Day, who continues to prove there is much more to the coaching business than X's and O's. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, educate yourself regarding the initiatives Day and his wife, Nina, have made with regard to mental wellness and discover how they most likely and literally saved young Mr. Miller's life.

- From the sublime to the ridiculous. Did you hear longtime Syracuse head coach Jim Boeheim summarily dismissing the punch his son, Buddy, threw to the midsection of an opponent during an ACC tournament game? The younger Boeheim drew a one-game suspension while his father sparred with a reporter during the postgame press conference, insisting he saw the incident a different way, ending with, "I just gave you my version of what I saw, OK? Can we disagree? I don't have to agree with you, right?" Not sure about you, but I'm long past disgusted about being told that what I actually saw and heard didn't really happen.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

OL Miller Medically Retiring

Ohio State offensive lineman Harry Miller announced on March 10 that he would medically retire from football.

Miller released a statement on Twitter that outlined his decision, saying, "I would not usually share such information. However, because I have played football, I am no longer afforded the privilege of privacy, so I will share my story briefly before more articles continue to ask, 'What is wrong with Harry Miller?' That is a good question. It is a good enough question for me not to know the answer, though I have asked it often."

Miller explained that before the 2021-22 season, he informed head coach Ryan Day of his intention to take his own life and that he was immediately put in touch with doctors at Ohio State who helped to support him.

"After a few weeks, I tried my luck at football again, with scars on my wrists and throat," his statement read. "Maybe the scars were hard to see with my wrists

taped up. Maybe it was hard to see the scars through the bright colors of the television. Maybe the scars were hard to hear through all the talk shows and interviews. They are hard to see, and they are easy to hide, but they sure do hurt. There was a dead man on the television set, but nobody knew it."

Miller further explained his struggles with his mental health and said he hopes to vouch for people who are hurt but are not taken seriously.

"A person like me, who supposedly has the entire world in front of them, can be fully prepared to give up the world entirely," he continued. "This is not an issue reserved for the far and away. It is in our homes. It is in our conversations. It is in the people we love."

He went on to say he was thankful for "the infrastructure Coach Day has put in place at Ohio State, and I am grateful that he is letting me find a new way to help others in the program. I hope athletic departments around the country do the same. If not for him and the staff, my words would not be a reflection. They would be evidence in a post-mortem. God bless those who love. God bless those who weep. And God bless those who hurt and only know how to share their hurt by anger, for they are learning to love with me. I am okay."

A five-star recruit out of high school, Miller played briefly in his first year in 2019 before starting all of the pandemic-shortened 2020 season. He was expected to start this past season, but he was not in Ohio State's lineup to begin the season at Minnesota and missed the majority of early-season snaps before being ruled out for the season in November.

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

Stroud, QBs Leaders In Spring

When spring practices started last year, Ohio State didn't have a surefire replacement for Heisman Trophy candidate Justin Fields, whom the Chicago Bears selected with their first-round pick in the 2021 NFL draft.

Three scholarship quarterbacks suited up for the first session, including redshirt freshmen C.J. Stroud and Jack Miller and freshman Kyle McCord. However, none of them had worthwhile collegiate experience from the previous year. Stroud and Miller scarcely played in the Buckeyes' eight-game season, while McCord's last snaps were against high school athletes.

It appeared that Day had his hands full. Buckeye fans weren't expecting another Fields, but he needed to make the right decision – one that would keep his program in national-title contention in the future. Southlake, Texas, five-star Quinn Ewers didn't help the head coach's dilemma when he chose to reclassify and attend Ohio State a year ahead of schedule.

Stroud separated himself from his teammates in the months before fall camp, earning Day's trust and working with the No. 1 offense throughout fall camp. Despite the smoke that Day might choose Miller, McCord or Ewers – a cloud the head coach created with comments claiming the team would need all four quarterbacks to win – he stuck to his gut and chose Stroud as the starting quarterback.

The Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., native helped Ohio State lead the nation in total offense (561.5 ypg) and scoring offense (45.7 ppg). He also powered the Buckeyes' third-ranked passing offense with over 380 yards passing per contest. Stroud won the Big Ten's Offensive Player of the Year, Quarterback of the Year and Freshman of the Year awards and was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy.

On March 8, Day reflected on Stroud's progress in the last year, claiming that the rising redshirt sophomore took tremendous strides in his first season under center.

"At this time last year, he had not thrown a college pass," Day said. "Now, he's got a whole year under his belt. You're learning what to do. Now you're kind of learning why you do it. There is a deeper understanding of things."

Day said Stroud spent January and February learning new schemes and plays that Ohio State will look to implement this fall, which can open up new possibilities for an offense returning six starters from last season.

"There is a little bit of a Rolodex of plays under his belt," Day said. "We will look at some new concepts, too, and some things he can handle and maybe put a little more on his plate with what he can do at the line of scrimmage."

In 2017, Day arrived at Ohio State to coach the quarterbacks and run the offense with coordinator Kevin Wilson. Since then, the program has experienced high positional turnover with its signal-callers. J.T. Barrett (2017), Dwayne Haskins (2018), Fields (2019-20) and Stroud all started in Day's five years in Columbus. Stroud will join Fields as the second quarterback in Day's tenure to start more than one season.

"When you think about guys who have played in the NFL for 15 or 20 years at quarterback, this is just year two for him (as the starter), and it feels great," Day said. "You feel like you've got a guy who has been around for a long time. We've only had that one other time with Justin. It is exciting going into the season with a guy who has played a whole season under his belt."

McCord returns after becoming Stroud's primary backup last year. Miller and Ewers have transferred – the former to Florida and the latter to Texas. Day said he felt encouraged by McCord's performance in the team's first spring practice, claiming the rising sophomore didn't skip a beat after two months off the field.

"I was impressed with how Kyle came in today," Day said. "I thought he had a good seven-on-seven session. He had a good approach. He picked up from where he left off in the Rose Bowl practice, which was great."

Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon four-star Devin Brown will accompany Stroud and McCord in the Ohio State quarterback room this season. Brown lacks the collegiate experience of his counterparts, but Day said he has a competitive edge and a desire to improve.

In February, Brown said that the Buckeye coaching staff has encouraged him to embrace a "next-man-up" philosophy toward playing quarterback next season. He said quarterback coach Corey Dennis 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," Brown 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."

Through the first practice, Day said Brown would need to learn the process of being a collegiate quarterback. It's a simple formula for any freshman. The more reps



COURTESY OF HARRY MILLER

STEPPING AWAY — Ohio State center Harry Miller (left) announced March 10 that he will be medically retiring after facing a mental health crisis in 2021.



SONNY BROCKWAY

LEADING THE WAY — Ohio State center Luke Wypler (53) and left tackle Paris Johnson Jr. (77) have become the veteran leaders on Ohio State's offensive line, along with right tackle Dawand Jones, as the three returning starters up front for the Buckeyes.

O-Line Forming In Offseason

Ohio State's offensive line will look very different in 2022 – both in personnel and scheme. The Buckeyes return three starters from last season, including Paris Johnson Jr., Dawand Jones and Luke Wypler, with two new linemen set to join the mix.

Johnson opened spring practice as the team's starting left tackle after starting at right guard last fall, while Jones and Wypler remained in their positions as right tackle and center, respectively. Rounding out the five spots were Matthew Jones and Donovan Jackson, who appear to be front-runners for the vacated guard positions.

According to Day, Josh Fryar will be unavailable for the entire spring, which will leave them at a disadvantage in positional competitions that began March 8 and will continue until the program hosts Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

While the Buckeyes' offensive line struggled last season under Greg Studrawa, Day and his staff have expressed confidence in new coach Justin Frye, who joined the team in January following Ohio State's Rose Bowl victory over Utah.

Johnson will lead the unit after earning second-team All-Big Ten honors in his first year as a starter. He was initially recruited as a tackle, coming in as the No. 9 overall prospect in the 2020 class.

"We recruited him as a tackle, we always felt like he was a tackle," Day said. "To his credit, he wanted to get on the field last year

Continued On Page 6

one receives, the better they will become.

"Devin, it was his first day out here, and I thought he handled it pretty well," Day said. "It was his first day and there was a lot going on his first day. You're doing everything for the first time. The more reps we can get those guys, the better they're going to be."

If McCord and Brown can continue to progress behind Stroud, Ohio State can feel comfortable about its offense producing at a high level this season and beyond. Day said having a backup quarterback with meaningful in-game experience – in

this case, McCord – is something he's not yet experienced as head coach of the program.

"We have not had that (in the past)," Day said. "We haven't had a starter with experience going into last year. To actually have a backup who has been on the field and played in games and has a year under his belt, that's a big deal. You can't substitute experience.

"Just being through it and through a whole year should pay dividends. That should be something we can use to our advantage. I think Kyle had a good offseason. I think if he can continue to grow as

the spring goes on, that would be huge for us."

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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and really learned a lot playing last year at guard. Just pad level, understanding calls, it's really going to pay dividends for him down the road. But now making the transition to tackle, he's played it his whole life other than last year, so it's not like it's new to him, but this will be his first time starting there and he's got to grab onto it and own it.

"His approach every day, his work ethic, all those things are really off the charts. And I know he's already started a great relationship with Justin, so this is just a start to it. And we'll kind of get an idea of where we are about midway through (spring), but he has high aspirations, and he's a high achiever, so when he sets his mind to something, it usually happens."

Wilson said he anticipates Johnson will earn his spot at left tackle and make Stroud comfortable knowing that his blind side will be protected from opposing pass rushers.

"Left tackle is the quarterback's blind spot, and so you need someone's that going to be very dependable," Wilson said. "He's a tremendous athlete with tremendous upside. I know Justin (Frye) will do a great job with him, but we'll need a consistent player out there. Between Paris, Dawand or Zen (Michalski) or even Donovan Jackson – the most consistent player will probably be at left tackle. Right now, Paris is starting there with the opportunity to prove he's going to be that guy. You would expect him to. The ball's in his court."

Don't Miss BSB's March Madness Coverage

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is scheduled to be mailed on March 29. However, the Ohio State men's and women's basketball teams will both be in action the first weekend of March Madness. There is no reason to miss any of the Buckeye basketball action, as the BSB staff will be reporting all the latest tourney news at our BuckeyeSports.com website both before and after each game.

We will be posting spring football news and the latest recruiting news as well. The men's and women's hockey teams are also still alive, and the wrestling team is heading to nationals. Follow all the news of the day as it happens at BuckeyeSports.com, 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.

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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.

Wilson said that Matthew Jones would fit the mold for a starting guard and claimed he would be the second-string center if Wypler sustains an injury or ailment. He also offered high praise for Jackson, who appears to have the inside edge toward the other starting guard position.

"He's got some skills that are like, 'Wow, that's not an O-line skill. That's an athletic skill,'" Wilson said of Jackson. "I expect him as a first-year potential starter right now to be a guy that plays at a very high level. He is a very gifted, talented player and not just physically. He's got some stuff in his heart. And he's got a chance to be a special player."

Still, the Ohio State offensive line might be tested by its depth. Behind Johnson, Matthew Jones, Wypler, Jackson and Dawand Jones – the assumed but not confirmed starting offensive line – the coaching staff is

looking for players to separate themselves. Wilson seemed impressed with Michalski and Jakob James, who could be carving themselves roles as primary backups.

"I think Zen's coming along nicely. Jakob James has had an outstanding offseason which gives us some good depth inside. But there's probably a little bit of separation between the five based on experience and talent," Wilson said. "If (the other offensive linemen) can be here every day, practice every day, get better every day, they'll have chances to be our main guys. Time's going to tell."

Former OT Csuri Passes At 99

Charles "Chuck" Csuri, a three-year letterman at Ohio State, national title winner and world-renowned artist, passed away at 99 years old on Feb. 27 in his Lakewood

Ranch, Fla. home, an Ohio State statement confirmed March 3.

"The Ohio State University mourns the loss of a world-renowned artist, longtime faculty member and pioneer of digital art Charles 'Chuck' Csuri, who passed peacefully in Lakewood Ranch, Florida, on Sunday at the age of 99," the school shared on its news page. "Csuri is remembered as a true renaissance man whose lifetime of achievement epitomized the American Dream."

Csuri made a name for himself in Columbus first as a football player, helping lead the Buckeyes to a national title in 1942 and earning praise as the "perfect tackle" from head coach Paul Brown. He was an All-American in 1942 and served as Ohio State's captain in 1943. His efforts were rewarded when the Chicago Cardinals drafted him in 1944. Still, he declined the professional level so that he could serve the United States in World War II, joining the Army in 1943 and serving through 1946 while earning a Bronze Star for heroism.

But it was his career after his time at Ohio State and in the military that earned him international acclaim. He returned to Columbus to obtain a master's degree in fine art, sticking around for the next 40 years as a professor of art education. While serving in that role, Csuri worked to form the Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design (ACCAD), co-founding the Ohio Supercomputer Center and one of the world's first computer animation companies, Cranston/Csuri Productions.

"Professor Csuri was a visionary. His work placed Ohio State at the center of the development of the field of computer graphics," said Maria Palazzi, professor of design and director of ACCAD. "He created unimaginable opportunities and experiences in the field for his students. Most impressively, Chuck conceived of and created a truly collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to making computer graphics, centering the artist alongside the scientist. This is the community he built for his students at CGRG (Computer Graphics Research Group) and later at ACCAD, and that they



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have taken out into the world.”

His work in digital art is considered groundbreaking and foundational for digital art, but his influence stretched far beyond that. He's been dubbed the father of computer art by the Smithsonian and a pioneer for modern computer technology. His works are displayed in the Museum of Modern Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art.

“Professor Csuri was a pillar in the Ohio State community and truly epitomized the Greatest Generation,” said OSU President Kristina M. Johnson. “From his time as a football captain and national champion to his groundbreaking work as a professor, he exemplified the Buckeye spirit of innovation and excellence. I admired him greatly. He led an incredibly full life, and his prolific accomplishments have been, and will continue to be, a source of endless inspiration for inventors, artists and leaders around the world.”

He received the Ohio Governor's Award for the Arts in 2000 and Ohio State's Joseph Sullivant Medal. He received the Award for Lifetime Achievement in Digital Art by ACM SIGGRAPH, the Association for Computing Machinery in 2011, and the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award from the Ohio State College of Arts and Sciences in 2014.

“The College of Arts and Sciences joins in celebrating the remarkable life of Chuck Csuri,” said David Horn, the interim executive dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. “His pioneering research established ACCAD as a national leader in integrating art, design and technology, and made career-defining experiences possible for generations of faculty and students. The communities in which he worked will miss his creative spark.”

Csuri is survived by daughter Caroline and granddaughters Hannah and Emily Reagh. His wife of 70 years, artist Lee Csuri, passed in 2019, as did their son Steven in 2018.

Former OL Olivea Dies At 40

Shane Olivea – who started on Ohio State's national title-winning offensive line in 2002 and lettered for the Buckeyes from 2000-2003 – died on March 2, several former teammates confirmed. He was 40 years old.

Former Ohio State linebacker and current 97.1 radio host Bobby Carpenter announced Olivea's passing on Twitter, saying that he'll “never forget the kindness he showed to a young freshman who was clueless and didn't know anything about anything.”

Many of his former teammates shared similar sentiments online. Linebacker Cie Grant said that he's “saddened by the news

Now Is The Time To Become A Brutus Level VIP

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 buckeye-sports.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.

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of the passing of Shane Olivea.”

“Shane was an absolute beast on the gridiron,” Grant continued. “A super cool soul during our time at Ohio State. Life is precious, and this news hurts my soul on many levels. Prayers to his family, friends and loved ones. Rest up, Champ.”

A three-year starter for the Buckeyes, Olivea earned second-team All-Big Ten honors on two occasions. He spent four seasons in the NFL but had his career derailed by an addiction to painkillers, asking out of his contract in 2008 so that he could enroll in a rehab program. He signed with the New York Giants upon his return but suffered a back injury in preseason camp that all but ended his professional career.

He opened up about his addiction in an interview with The Columbus Dispatch in 2016 and spoke about his hopes of helping to educate other athletes about the dangers of painkillers. Earlier that year, he had graduated from Ohio State with a degree in sport industry after re-enrolling the year prior.

Lawmakers Urge Review Of 'Tattoogate'

Ohio lawmakers have introduced a resolution urging the NCAA to restore Ohio State's vacated wins stemming from the “Tattoogate” scandal.

The resolution, introduced by State Representative Brian Stewart (R-Ashville) and co-sponsored by seven others, argues that with the introduction of laws and policies allowing student-athletes to receive compensation for their name, image and likeness, the NCAA should re-evaluate the wins vacated by Ohio State.

“This resolution does not say anything about the sanctions,” Stewart told The Columbus Dispatch. “This resolution says enough is enough. The NCAA's view of what is permissible for players has changed drastically in the last twelve years.”

The wins were vacated from the 2010 season following an investigation into five Ohio State players – Mike Adams, Daniel

“Boom” Herron, DeVier Posey, Terrelle Pryor and Solomon Thomas – who sold memorabilia in exchange for tattoos, and they were suspended for the first five games of the 2011-12 season. The scandal also cost head coach Jim Tressel his job before the season began.

With recent changes to NIL rules, the five players implicated in the investigation released a statement last July arguing that Ohio State's 12 wins from that season be reinstated. The NCAA responded weeks later, saying that previous penalties will not be re-evaluated under the new rules.

However, even under the new rules, “Tattoogate” would not have been allowed, as Ohio State's current NIL guidelines do not permit student-athletes to sell team-issued equipment or apparel until their eligibility is exhausted. The resolution had its second hearing on March 1 and is currently in the house committee.

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.

The show is free for everyone. To find it, go to your favorite podcast app or website and type in “Buckeye Sports

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Holtmann Has No Defense For Buckeye Defense

Continued From Page 1

removed from serious contention for a regular-season Big Ten title after an 86-83 victory on the road over eventual shared title-winner Illinois on Feb. 24, the sixth-seeded Buckeyes headed home from Indianapolis after just one game, adding a loss to No. 11 seed Penn State onto a stack of surprising league defeats that started with Maryland on Feb. 27, continued on March 1 against Nebraska and concluded the regular season on March 6 against Michigan.

Now, as the Buckeyes lick their wounds and look ahead to NCAA Tournament play, finding solutions to the problems that delivered those losses has become the focus for a team and a staff desperate to stop their skid.

None loom larger than those on the defensive side of the ball, which shifted from bad to worse in the last month of the season and again doomed the Buckeyes against those Nittany Lions.

When Holtmann arrived at Ohio State, he hammered the importance of strong team defense at every chance he had. He'd used a dynamic, athletic defense to great effect in three years at Butler – in 2015, the Bulldogs had the nation's No. 6 group for adjusted defensive efficiency at Barttorvik.com. They built that unit around long athletes capable of covering multiple positions and swapping between man and zone coverage looks at will to disrupt the offensive flow and create turnovers.

His first three teams in Columbus boasted similar strengths. The 2017-18 group, leaning heavily on Keita Bates-Diop and Jae'Sean Tate, finished No. 16 in that same metric and was just about impossible to game-plan for because of the number of looks it could cohesively deploy during a game. The 2018-19 team took a slight step back to No. 29 nationally, but the Buckeyes returned to form in 2019-20, checking in at No. 22 in defensive efficiency to help build – to this point – Holtmann's most statistically balanced team in Columbus (that group was

12th in offensive efficiency).

That balance has all but collapsed in the two seasons since as the defense has faltered, boiling over with the 78-70 loss to Nebraska on March 1 that garnered serious criticism of the defensive effort from within and without the program.

"I think bottom line, we have to defend way better than what we're defending right now," Holtmann said after the Nebraska game. "It comes back to that. We've got to be way more connected on the defensive end, and then I thought we really pressed offensively once we got down a little bit. We had some unique lineups in there obviously, and we just pressed too much."

The Buckeyes surrendered 76.0 points per contest in their last five games of the regular season, falling to two of the Big Ten's worst teams in the Cornhuskers and Maryland in the process. Their defensive efficiency dipped to No. 123 nationally at the time (it's now at No. 127) – Holtmann's lowest since his days at Gardner-Webb and the worst by a large margin for the Buckeyes since Barttorvik began tracking data back in 2008. Only two teams, the 2016-17 bunch that closed Thad Matta's tenure and the 2020-21 Buckeyes, come even close, at 85th and 79th, respectively.

In fact, OSU finished the Nebraska game with a 121.0 adjusted defensive efficiency score, its worst of the season and the lowest since Jan. 25, 2018, when Penn State put 82 points on the Buckeyes and claimed a road victory with a buzzer-beating three-pointer. OSU finished that game with a 125.4 score.

As the Buckeyes entered postseason play, Holtmann said that performances like that on the defensive end would spell doom for his squad.

"There are very few teams that defend the way we defend right now and even really advance in the NCAA Tournament. That's the reality," Holtmann said. "And those numbers, we've talked about those numbers as a



SONNY BROCKWAY

ALL ALONE – Ohio State star forward E.J. Liddell (32) often has found himself as the last line of the Buckeye defense in the final months of the season, telling media that if he knew why the unit was struggling so much, he'd be the first to address it with the team. He's averaging 2.6 blocks per game on the season.

group. That's the reality. Obviously, we have to get healthy, that's a big component. We have to get healthy and stay healthy. But if we don't defend and rebound, we'll be terminal.

"I think the greater issue is our lack of ability to stop people right now and our lack of just connection on the defensive and offensive end. And again, it's my fault. We don't have that right now. It's not like we have an unbelievable defensive group, but we can

play way more connected than what we are on both ends. That's the biggest thing in front of me right now."

Those defensive problems arrived again in Big Ten tournament play, as the Buckeyes surrendered 47 second half points in their opening matchup against the Nittany Lions.

As the OSU defense faltered, both down the stretch run of the season and in tournament play, questions turned from situational to structural: Was the Buckeye head coach pleased with Ohio State's efforts in recruiting defensively? Does he feel the makeup of his roster lends itself to elite defense?

"No," Holtmann said. "For two years now, it's been this. In two of our first three years, we were really good on defense, top 20, top 25. I think there's a lot to consider there, and obviously we have to figure out a way to coach it better. And there are some personnel things. Clearly, it's something we have addressed, and we addressed it because it's kind of been an issue for a year. And we need to continue to address it.

"I don't want to put it all on that," he continued. "We have to do a better job across the board, in every way. I don't want to say that it's just personnel-related, but we're seeing something where we have to get a little more length, more positional versatility and more defensive versatility than we've had. And some of that is that it takes time to construct the roster, but we've been intentional about that in our recruiting and I think it's heading in that direction. But again, it's not all that. We have to coach it better."

For Holtmann and many of his detractors, that's the concern as the Buckeyes move for-



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SONNY BROCKWAY

GROWING UP FAST — Guard Malaki Branham (22) has emerged as a top option for OSU as a true freshman.

ward. There's a fear, as Ohio State moves further from those elite defensive efforts of Holtmann's early tenure and into back-to-back low-water-mark seasons, that OSU is simply without the kind of players needed to compete defensively against the league's best teams when the games matter most.

"I don't think this team was constructed in a way to be even an average defensive team," The Athletic's Bill Landis told BSB. "I think they're a pretty bad defensive team for the high-major level. And I think they've been able to mask that some with how good they can be on certain nights offensively. But maintaining that kind of consistency offensively over the course of the season was pretty difficult, and over the course of encountering some challenges, their defensive issues have just come more to the forefront. They're just not a team that's really built to get stops, at least consistently.

"Jamari Wheeler and Cedric Russell are not physically imposing players. Justin Ahrens when he plays guard is a little bit longer, but I don't think he uses that length to his advantage much at all. Malaki Branham has a decently high defensive upside, he's just not there yet, and he also has to carry a lot on the offensive side. I think you're asking too much of a freshman to be your best perimeter offensive and defensive player.

"Keita Bates-Diop, he was a really long, versatile, switchable forward. They don't really have that. Kyle Young can be that sometimes, and they definitely miss him, but they don't really have a guy like that. Eugene Brown has not become that yet. They had some guys that could guard three or four positions in the past that I think really upped

their overall level defensively that they're missing now."

Health Still An Issue

Ohio State's defensive struggles can't be explained in full – nor can its season writ large – without looking at the injury picture. It's been a constant battle throughout the season for Holtmann's squad.

No such problems have been more damaging than the now season-long issues that have held wings Justice Sueing and Seth Towns out of play, but the Buckeyes have seen more than their fair share of minor dings as well. Young missed the first few games of the season with vertigo and the last three with a concussion. Meechie Johnson Jr. missed a good chunk of January after suffering a facial fracture. The team missed 22 days in December because of COVID issues within the program. Brown, Zed Key and Wheeler have each faced minor issues.

When considering Sueing and Towns, the Buckeyes haven't played a full-strength game all season, and even when excluding those two, complete lineups have been rare.

For some, including Holtmann at times, therein lies the core issue causing a lot of Ohio State's problems.

"I think it's probably the forward play and the injuries in the frontcourt (causing these late issues)," Lettermen Row's Spencer Holbrook told BSB. "With Kyle Young being out, like last year, that's a piece that you normally rely on that you just don't have in March the last couple years. Zed Key rolling his ankle and then reinjuring it doesn't help either. When they play against the bigger teams in the league, against talented teams in the league, they have trouble because their lineups just can't be what they should be.

"Whether that's recruiting or whether that's the way that they're playing or coaching, I don't really know who to blame. But the injuries have piled up, and when you expect to have Justice Sueing all year and you don't, that's a problem. When you expect to have Kyle Young full strength in March and don't, that's a problem."

Ohio State can't control its own health and will just have to hope that Key and Young have had enough time to recover ahead of national play.

"I think we need rest, but we also need to get better in some areas," Holtmann said. "Rest and health are critical. But there are issues that we've got to continue to improve in."

The Slides Of March

Despite its late-season struggles, Ohio State did still slide easily into the NCAA Tournament for the fourth time in five seasons (and what would have been the fifth time, if not for the cancellation of the 2020 rendition), drawing a spot on the No. 7-seed line and a first-round date with No. 10 seed Loyola Chicago on March 18 in Pittsburgh.

"Guys are excited about this opportunity and excited about celebrating the position they've been able to put themselves in. Certainly, we would've liked to finish the season better than what we did, playing better and healthier, for sure," Holtmann said. "But this is obviously, it's a new season, it's the postseason, and I think our guys are looking

forward to the opportunity to compete on Friday."

In that matchup, Ohio State has the chance both to reverse its extremely recent history and perhaps to turn the tide on a growing narrative around Holtmann's tenure with regard to the most important part of the season – be it fair or not.

Holtmann actively acknowledged before heading out to Indianapolis for the Big Ten tournament that the piece of the season most teams are remembered for was yet to come.

"There's a reality that the NCAA Tournament is what is most remembered about your season," Holtmann remarked. "Maybe there are a few games that people remember, but the tournament is what people really reflect on. We've had three opportunities since we've been here, and I think we performed well in two of them, and in some cases it's a matchup thing."

Holtmann seemed attuned to concerns rising around his program's recent March results. Last season's first-round loss to Oral Roberts doesn't seem likely to wash out of the public memory anytime soon, but as the head coach was quick to note, his squads in Columbus haven't always had those rough showings in this tournament.

In his first season, the Buckeyes lived up to their seeding, claiming a first-round victory as the No. 5 seed over No. 12 South Dakota State before falling to the No. 4-seeded Gonzaga Bulldogs in a hotly contested battle, 90-84. A year later, with a team that earned only an 11-seed, the Buckeyes pulled off an upset over sixth-seeded Iowa State and nearly did the same against No. 3 Hous-

ton in the next round before the Cougars pulled away late.

"If you think about their first two tournament trips under Chris Holtmann, in year one, they were the No. 5 seed, they played South Dakota State and everyone thought they'd get upset because of (SDSU forward) Mike Daum," Landis said. "They beat them and then they gave Gonzaga a game. The year after that, they beat an Iowa State team with three NBA players and gave Houston a game. It's frustrating they haven't advanced. I understand that. But I also think they've been to the tournament three times and only one time has been an abject failure – last year.

"His record in March is not great. But when things are going tough, as they are now, things tend to get lumped together in a way that's not necessarily fair. I do think they've had some pretty good performances at this point in the season. It's just not mentioned."

Whether Ohio State can change its narrative this season with a tournament run of some sort won't be determined until it takes the court again. And that starts, as Holtmann has stressed for weeks, with improving on defense and fielding a healthier team.

After the loss to Penn State, he said that the Buckeyes are "just not where we need to be defensively" and noted again the importance of players such as Key and Young, both of whom missed the game.

With one week to get where Holtmann feels his team's defense and health need to be, the race is on for the Buckeyes.



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OSU's Return To NCAA Tournament Is First Step

Continued From Page 1

now and then, so we won't really talk much about that. It will be more like the process of how we're going to get better and be the team that we're capable of being."

There were roster issues as well, as a number of transfers – including Kierstan Bell, Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty – and a season-ending injury to guard Madison Greene shortly before the season began left the Buckeyes short on depth. Even so, with the incoming transfer of guard Taylor Mike-sell, Ohio State was still projected to finish among the top half of the conference.

Former Ohio State women's basketball player Kristin Watt, a four-year letter winner from 1981-85 and current radio analyst with the Ohio State Sports Network, told Buckeye Sports Bulletin that many thought the Buckeyes might struggle this season.

"I think they were picked to be fifth in the conference, so I think everyone saw some holes, particularly in the inside game with a couple of the transfers of inside players," she said. "I think that was only enforced further when your starting point guard – a highly recognized starting point guard – went down pre-season."

Beyond the players getting a chance to get back to the tournament, this was also an important season for McGuff, who entered the season with just one more year on his contract and facing the school's longest NCAA tournament drought since the early

2000s.

Since the NCAA began recognizing women's basketball in the 1981-82 season, Ohio State had never gone more than three seasons without reaching the tournament. Beth Burns' Ohio State squads missed in three straight seasons from 1999-2001, and McGuff – through no fault of his own because of the pandemic and the postseason ban – faced the prospect of a fourth consecutive year with no tournament if Ohio State did not make the dance this season.

"(This season) definitely was big because I think a lot of people were having that same feeling of, 'Yeah, he's consistently getting good teams, but where's the ceiling with Kevin McGuff?'" said BSB alum Wyatt Crosher, who covered the team from 2019-21 and now writes the "Hoopla" newsletter, which covers Big Ten women's basketball. "I feel like it's a lot of what you're hearing around Chris Holtmann right now from Ohio State fans. They're good teams, they're going to make the tournament with McGuff, but what are your real expectations?"

With the table set, the Buckeyes then embarked on a somewhat improbable regular-season run, finishing with a 22-5 record and securing a share of the Big Ten regular-season championship (with Iowa), the program's first since the 2017-18 season, and earning the No. 1 seed at the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament.

Ohio State won the games it was supposed to along the way – the lone excep-



SONNY BROCKWAY

SPLIT RESULTS – Ohio State went 1-1 in the Big Ten women's basketball tournament, defeating Michigan State in the quarterfinals, 74-58, before falling to Indiana in the semifinals, 70-62. It was Ohio State's second loss of the season to the Hoosiers, who fell in the finals to Iowa. The Buckeyes toppled the Hawkeyes in their lone matchup of the season.

tion a surprising loss to Syracuse, which finished the season with an 11-18 record – and had a pair of upsets over Maryland and Iowa, which went on to win the conference tournament.

Ohio State, participating in its first conference tournament game in two years, defeated Michigan State in the quarterfinals, 74-58, before falling to Indiana in the semifinals, 70-62. The Buckeyes had lost to the Hoosiers earlier in the season, falling 86-66 in a December matchup.

"I was proud of them in terms of the season (and) where we started to where we are now," McGuff said after the team's most recent loss to Indiana. "We made significant progress, which is a real credit to our players, especially our upperclassmen, our leaders. They really have shown the way to

the young people, and we had a lot of people make significant progress and we have as a team because of that leadership."

The leadership and chemistry McGuff speaks of dates back to the current junior class – including forward Rebeka Mikulasikova, Greene and guard Jacy Sheldon – and has formed as Ohio State experienced those struggles in recent seasons, and it's been one of the main reasons the team was able to come together this year and win a Big Ten title.

"I think last year and this year it's been really important to us to have that team chemistry with all the adversity that we faced," senior guard Braxtin Miller said before the season began. "We still have a lot of people that came back this year, so we kind of just carried it along. It's been really good and it's a lot of competitiveness on the floor, and then after we're still able to hang out and be friends. I think that we've kept the chemistry really well, and it's been exciting to watch us be able to be such close friends on and off the court."

With the proverbial monkey off their back with a conference championship and a win in the conference tournament, the focus now shifts to the NCAA tournament, where McGuff and Ohio State need to begin making some noise. Despite the talent level on those Mitchell-led squads, the Buckeyes made just two Sweet 16 appearances, and the most recent tournament appearance in 2018 ended with Ohio State, the No. 3 seed, being upset on its home court by No. 11 Central Michigan, 95-78.

The Mitchell years are long gone, and with the struggles of recent seasons behind Ohio State now, it's time to move forward and make a statement.

"If he has a team that can make a Sweet 16, you might start having to not talk about the Kelsey Mitchell years," Crosher said. "I think he just needs more postseason success. Even a regular-season title helps with that. Jacy Sheldon is certainly a very, very

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SHARPSHOOTER — Transfer guard Taylor Mikesell (24) has played a major role in Ohio State's offensive attack this season on the strength of her 46.7 percent hit rate from three-point range on 7.8 shots per game from deep, both of which are among the nation's best. She's averaging 18.8 points per game.

good player. Taylor Mikesell has been so good this year that maybe if Mikesell comes back with Sheldon here for a senior year, you could maybe start to have a team that seems like you could start talking about this era (instead of Mitchell), but they do need to win.

"I don't think he loses his job if they get bounced first round this year, but there would be calls because you've seen how talented the group is. They've been very consistent against lesser competition. This is a team that should at least win one tournament game – it's got to happen in these two years. You can't have Jacy Sheldon, Madison Greene – you should have the talent (next year), and this year you already do. It's got to be in these two years, and if not, then you might start to see some real calls for something different."

And with a return to the tournament, it calls into question what the expectations should be for a program like Ohio State – not one among the sport's leaders or blue bloods like Notre Dame, Stanford or UConn, but one that continually checks in as a top-25 program.

Ohio State women's basketball has 25 NCAA tournament appearances (soon to be 26), with 11 of those extending to the Sweet 16 and just three moving on to the Elite Eight. The Buckeyes have just one Final Four appearance in 1993, when Ohio State and head coach Nancy Darsch defeated Iowa in the semifinals before falling to Texas Tech in the title game. On average, this calls for an appearance in the Sweet 16 every four years or so, meaning McGuff and the Buckeyes are due.

"I think for any Ohio State team, the expectations are to compete for your conference championship and to make the NCAA tournament and to go a couple games deep into that as a minimum," Watt said. "I think that's the minimum expectation of any Ohio

State team, including women's basketball."

A run to the Sweet 16 – or even just getting a win in the tournament – would help Ohio State move into a new era. McGuff's tenure with the Buckeyes, which is in its ninth season, can be bisected into two distinct periods – with Mitchell, and post-Mitchell. The team has struggled to find an identity since her departure, but finding some postseason success could go a long way toward the program as a whole moving on.

"When those Kelsey Mitchell years were happening, I think the expectations for this program were raised," Crosher said.

"They've made one final ever in their program history, but then you saw what those teams could do and everyone thought, 'This team could at least go to an Elite Eight, maybe a Final Four, and then who knows what happens from there.' I don't think Ohio State fans are expecting that every year, but I think if you can have those runs once in a while, or at least make a Sweet 16 every couple of years, that should be the expectation.

"(An Elite Eight or beyond) would be really nice, but you've got to get to the Sweet 16, which his Kelsey Mitchell teams struggled with. That should be the more attainable goal, and it should happen more often than it has."

Sixth-Seeded Bucks Preparing For First Four Opponent

Although the Buckeyes are entering the tournament off a loss to the Hoosiers, they still finished the regular season and conference tournament playing their best basketball of the season.

Ohio State was 8-2 in the final 10 games of the season, scoring 72.5 points and allowing just 63.9 points per game. The Buckeyes held opposing teams to just 35.4 percent shooting from the field in those games while averaging over 17 turnovers per contest. For as much as they struggled on defense early in the season, including giving up 97 points to Syracuse and 90 points to Michigan in losses, the press worked wonders during the second half as the stingy Buckeyes made life difficult for opposing teams trying to get down the court.

The Buckeyes will now take that energy into the NCAA tournament as a No. 6 seed, set to take on either No. 11 Florida State or No. 11 Missouri State in the Spokane region, who will play each other on March 17 as part of the First Four games in the newly expanded tournament. The winner will go on to face the Buckeyes on March 19 in Baton Rouge, La., with tip-off times still to be determined.

Missouri State finished the season 24-7 and 14-4 in the Missouri Valley Conference, while the Seminoles were 17-13 with a 10-8

clip in the ACC. The Bears are one of the better defensive teams in the country, giving up only 53.7 points per game, though they struggle from the field, shooting just 37.0 percent.

"I'm happy that they expanded to 68," McGuff said. "I think it was the right thing to do for women's basketball. It just does make it a little bit awkward for us not knowing who we're going to play when most people at least know who they're going to play at this point."

Elsewhere in the region, the top seeds are No. 1 Stanford, No. 2 Texas and No. 3 LSU, who will get the winner of Ohio State vs. Florida State/Missouri State. The Buckeyes could also get a rubber match with Maryland in the Elite Eight, after the Terrapins earned the No. 4 seed in the region.

The tournament is uncharted territory for the majority of the roster. Mikesell is the only player with any experience, having made it in her freshman season at Maryland, but the team has veteran leadership with her, Miller, Sheldon and graduate forward Tanaya Beacham, and Ohio State has the playmakers to make a potential run.

"Their ceiling is very high because of how offensively talented they are," Crosher said. "If they get hot, they could probably beat most teams because of their shooting. I think that as a six seed, they should win their first game. Their offense is so dynamic and has so many good shooters that they could make a run."

Even if there's a night that Mikesell or Sheldon is off, Watt feels the team will be able to rally due to its chemistry that's been built and the team ball they've played as the season progressed.

"I think they're playing for each other right now," she said. "I think they'll do fine in the tournament. Obviously, having a week off to maybe rest some legs and let some of the bruises heal up will be to their benefit as other teams are playing as late as this week. I'm actually looking forward to seeing how they're going to play because I'm excited about the potential, and the way they're playing right now, they have the potential to go deeper than they have in recent years."



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Position Battles Spring To Life For Buckeyes

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As Ohio State prepares for the start of the 2022 season, there are more answers than questions when it comes to the starters and backups.

Remember a year ago when there was a battle to determine the quarterback to replace Justin Fields? Well, C.J. Stroud left no doubt that he not only will lead the Buckeyes but may be the best QB in college football.

The fact there are so few open spots is a good thing, but that doesn't mean competition will be lacking at several spots leading to the April 16 spring game in Ohio Stadium.

Even after that scrimmage, a position or two could be up for grabs when camp resumes in August leading to the Sept. 3 opener vs. Notre Dame.

Here's a look at a few key spots that need answers:

Wide Receiver

OK, let's get it out of the way: Nobody is starting over Jaxon-Smith Njigba.

With Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson headed to the NFL after the draft in April, each possibly going in the first round, Smith-Njigba is the "air" apparent and may even prove better than both.

Last season as a sophomore he set school season records for receptions (95), yards (1,606), receptions per game

(7.3) and yards per game (123.5) while catching nine touchdown passes.

He also established the program record for receptions in a game (15 vs. Nebraska) and matched that number when he set the FBS bowl record for most receiving yards in a bowl game with 347, including three TDs, in the Rose Bowl win against Utah.

Marvin Harrison Jr. (6-3, 205) is the leading candidate to be the No. 2 receiver ahead of junior Julian Fleming (6-2, 207) and fellow sophomore Emeka Egbuka (6-1, 205).

Harrison had three TD catches in the Rose Bowl. He entered the game with five career catches and no TDs.

The big question is where will they line up?

Smith-Njigba (6-0, 198) could be the slot receiver as he was for most of 2021 with Fleming and Harrison outside. However, if Egbuka beats out Fleming, he is more comfortable as the slot, which then puts Smith-Njigba and Harrison outside.

"I think I'll be mixing it up this year," Smith-Njigba said. "I think I'll be moving around a lot. Mostly inside, but outside (some) for sure. I'm definitely excited."

"I feel comfortable doing what's best for the team whether that's outside or inside. I'm sure I'll do a little bit of both."

Offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson said Smith-Njigba will spend time outside.

Receivers coach Brian Hartline has assembled a deep and talented group that includes often injured graduate Kamryn



SONNY BROCKWAY

READY TO SHINE — Wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba (11) told media that he's ready to take over as Ohio State's star out wide as Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson depart. He's expected to spend the majority of his time in the slot receiver role, but both he and offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson alluded to playing time on the outside for the junior as well.

Babb (6-0, 205) and redshirt freshman Jayden Ballard (6-2, 195), whose only catch in four games last season was a 4-yarder against Akron.

"When you look at the receiver room, the biggest growth from last year to this year is definitely Jayden Ballard," Harrison said. "We all know he has the speed — and he can run probably the fastest on the team right now — but the route-running ability he's improved on since last year."

Freshmen Kojo Antwi (6-0, 190), Kaleb Brown (5-11, 195), Caleb Burton (5-11, 169) and Kyion Grayes (6-0, 175) could all start for many schools but will have to bide their time, much like Harrison did.

Brown and Grayes could be backups in the slot while the other two would be outside receivers.

Still, the focus will be on Smith-Njigba. "I'm sure more eyes will be on me," he said. "But when guys leave, new guys come in, and we have great guys. You've got to prepare for Marvin Harrison Jr., Julian Fleming, Emeka and Kam Babb, all those guys. I feel we have the advantage every week."

Nickel

Jim Knowles was poached from Oklahoma State to be the defensive coordinator

and turn around a leaky unit. His ability to fit a round peg into a round hole will go a long way in deciding the fate of the 2022 Buckeyes.

Finding the right personnel for the cover safety, or "nickel" to Knowles, is key.

Fortunately, Tanner McCalister followed Knowles from Stillwater, Okla., to Columbus, and the graduate transfer was immediately besieged by his new teammates eager to learn the new scheme.

"They were kind of like, 'Hey, what's Coach Knowles like? What's his defense like?'" McCalister said. "And I was like, 'I can show you. I can explain it.'"

That comes as no surprise to Knowles. "He was already a coach on the field (at Oklahoma State), and he'll be more so here at Ohio State because he's been with me, we've been through the wars together, he understands me," Knowles said. "He can talk to the other guys, and he can talk about my style to them. But he can also explain the defense to them in a way that coaches can't or someone my age can't."

McCalister (5-11, 192) clearly has experience and familiarity in his favor, but he will still have to earn the starting role where sophomore Cameron Martinez (5-10, 190), junior Lathan Ransom (6-1, 205), redshirt freshman Andre Turrentine (5-11,

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NICKEL PICKLE — Cameron Martinez (10), Oklahoma State transfer Tanner McCalister, Lathan Ransom, Andre Turrentine and Kurt Williams are all considered to be contenders to take over the starting job at nickel in Jim Knowles' new defense.

195) and sophomore Kurt Williams (6-1, 220) have been mentioned as candidates.

Martinez had a 61-yard pick-six vs. Tulsa while Williams recorded 21 solo and six assists for 27 tackles for the 2021 season.

Ransom fractured his leg in the Rose Bowl and was unavailable for spring practices. He had 38 tackles (21 solo) and a sack last season.

Freshman Sonny Styles (6-14, 215), the top-ranked safety nationally in the class of 2022 from Pickerington (Ohio) Central, is one to watch if Knowles decides nickel is best suited for him.

Right Guard

Ohio State has its starting right guard from last season in Paris Johnson Jr., but he so happens to be the new starting left tackle.

With Luke Wypler pegged as the first-team center and Dawand Jones manning the right tackle position, the guards remain somewhat in question.

Matthew Jones seems to fit anywhere on the line but he will likely be at left guard, enabling sophomore Donovan Jackson (6-4, 300) to vie for the right guard spot.

The Buckeyes are deep and have experience but not as much as expected following the retirement of redshirt junior Harry Miller due to medical reasons and mental health challenges. In a post on his Twitter account he revealed he tried to commit suicide last season.

Miller was limited to two games last season because of injuries but was likely going to be Jackson's backup.

It will be a different look on the line and sideline as head coach Ryan Day opted not to retain offensive line coach Greg Studrawa after six seasons and brought in former UCLA offensive coordinator and offensive line

coach Justin Frye as his OL line replacement.

Frye had a rather unique way of describing how he wants his offensive line to be "felt" by the opponents.

"When the offensive line position is felt, that's when you're cooking," he said. "When my daughter's in the 10th row of the stadium and it's third-and-2 and she's like, 'Daddy's going to run it to the right,' and everybody in the stadium knows it, and you still go do it, that's when you have people feel you."

No one may have more "felt" than Jackson, according to Wilson.

"He's got some skills that are like, 'Wow, like that's not an O-line skill. That's an athletic skill,' " the coach said. "He showed up with skill. He showed up with a lot of maturity. He doesn't practice like a first-year guy. He doesn't practice like a guy that just got here out of high school. He's not practicing now in the spring like this is my first spring. He's a very mature kid, very, very smart."

"I expect him as a first-year potential starter right now to be a guy that plays at a very high level. He is a very gifted, talented player and not just physically. He's got some stuff in his heart. And he's got a chance to be a special player."

Sophomore Trey Leroux (6-7, 315) will be in the mix at right guard as will redshirt freshman Zen Michalski (6-7, 305), sophomore Jakob James (6-4, 295) and junior Enokk Vimahi (6-4, 310). Freshman Carson Hinzman (6-4, 280), a four-star from Hammond (Wis.) Saint Croix Central, is also joining the roster.

"I think Zen's coming along nicely. Jakob James has had an outstanding offseason, gives us some good depth inside," Wilson said. "But there's probably a little bit of separation between the five (projected starters) based on experience and talent."

Also, sophomore Josh Fryar (6-6, 315) can play either guard or tackle, but he was not available for spring practice for an undisclosed reason.

Defensive Tackle

There's a good amount of experience, but Knowles and defensive line coach Larry Johnson are searching for the right combinations to improve the defensive front that allowed 523 rushing yards in the final two games of the season.

Graduate Jerron Cage, who opted to use his sixth season of eligibility, and fifth-year senior Taron Vincent (6-2, 305) could vie for a tackle spot, but underclassmen Mike Hall (redshirt freshman, 6-2, 292), Ty Hamilton (sophomore, 6-3, 290), Tyleik Williams (sophomore, 6-3, 315) and junior Jaden McKenzie (6-2, 290) are among those who saw playing time last season.

Cage (6-2, 310) had a scoop-and-score against Penn State last season, and Vincent was in on 23 tackles (12 solo) and is emerging from a series of injuries to be reckoned with.

The bottom line is that Johnson coaches his players to be able to play multiple positions up front, i.e. nose guard or three-technique.

Expect Cage to be at nose and Vincent at three-technique, but there could be heavy rotation until Johnson finds permanent starters and backups, if that's possible.

As talented as OSU is, it will be hard to keep players off the field.

Hall is one of those who should push to be on the field. The redshirt freshman played four games last season and had two tackles, one for a loss, but big things are expected of him.

Knowles promises the defense will have lots of movement to disrupt the offenses.

From his vantage on the other side of the ball during spring practices, Wilson has noticed.

"It appears early that it's a lot of multiple looks, which I think really great defenses do," Wilson said. "They have the ability to be gap sound, stop the run, but they make the offensive line and quarterback work every play, so there's a lot of movement."

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Wilson and Olave Headline NFL Draft Hopefuls

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Former Ohio State wide receivers Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson arrived in Indianapolis in the first week of March eager to prove themselves at the NFL Combine. They were one of the most feared pass-catching duos in college football the last few years, creating matchup nightmares for opposing defenses.

While still friends, Wilson and Olave will now compete against each other to become the first receiver selected in Las Vegas on April 28.

Wilson said the competition isn't new for them – they battled each other for three years in practice, pushing one another to be the best teammate and wide receiver possible.

"We're always pushing each other to be better and be the best," Wilson said. "We've had a great friendship. Coming in as a freshman and having him as a sophomore, he had done everything I was hoping to do, so it was awesome seeing that."

Olave agreed that he and Wilson wanted to see each other succeed. He even averred that the competition between the athletes in Indianapolis is more beneficial than problematic, claiming that he looks forward to hearing his former teammate's name called on draft night.

"There's no competition between us," Olave said before the event. "We're both

happy for each other. He's a talent and one of those natural freaks. I can't wait to see him perform and see the crazy numbers he's going to put up."

Wilson stood 6-0 tall and weighed 183 pounds at the combine. He recorded a 36-inch vertical jump, a 10-3 broad jump and a 4.36 20-yard shuffle. His most impressive event was the 40-yard dash, where he showed next-level speed with a 4.38-second run. The Austin, Texas, native outperformed Olave with his 40 times – a surprising fact since many considered Olave the faster player in college.

Olave finished the sprint in 4.39 seconds, no failure by any stretch. Both athletes were some of the fastest runners in Indianapolis, finishing as the eighth- and ninth-quickest receivers at the 2022 NFL Combine.

The duo finished behind Baylor's Tyquan Thornton (4.28), Tennessee's Velus Jones Jr. (4.31), Memphis' Calvin Austin III (4.32), SMU's Danny Gray (4.33), Cincinnati's Alec Pierce (4.33), Rutgers' Bo Melton (4.34) and North Dakota State's Christian Watson (4.36).

Wilson and Olave became the second pair of wide receiver teammates since 2006 to run sub-4.4-second 40-yard dashes at the same combine. The first pair was former Buckeyes Parris Campbell and Terry McLaurin in 2019. Campbell went to Indianapolis with the 59th pick, and McLaurin landed in Washington with the 76th pick.



SONNY BROCKWAY

WHO GOES FIRST? – Garrett Wilson (5) and Chris Olave are two of the top receivers in the 2022 NFL draft, and both players are projected as first-round picks. Experts are split, though, on which one will be drafted first, with Wilson claiming a slight edge in popularity.

Olave also recorded a 32-inch vertical jump and 10-4 broad jump at the event. He declined to participate in the bench press, three-cone drill and 20-yard shuffle.

According to multiple NFL mock drafts – from The Athletic's Dane Brugler to ESPN's Todd McShay – many organizations need wide receivers this season, meaning that Wilson and Olave likely won't be available where Campbell and McLaurin were three years ago.

Both Brugler and McShay put Wilson and Olave in the top 20 picks of their most recent mock drafts, with the analysts concurring that an NFL team will want to choose the former before the latter.

"Aside from his average size and the occasional focus drop, there aren't many reasons not to be excited about Wilson at the next level," Brugler said of Wilson. "He has the special body control to make acrobatic adjustments on the football or leverage coverage with his routes. His footwork and body twitch allow him to win at the line of scrimmage and create separation before and after the catch. He also has the natural ball instincts to win the catch point."

Brugler made a similar assessment of Olave, whom he had as a late first-round pick in last year's mock drafts. While not quite as explosive as his counterpart, Brugler believes Olave's route-running and speed will help him find consistent success in the NFL.

"Olave is a smooth route-runner with the deep speed and tracking instincts to consistently win down the field," Brugler said. "He has an average body size and doesn't consistently create after the catch, but he knows how to create spacing and shows a feel for leveraging coverage. Olave is a polished pass-catcher with NFL-ready skills."

Olave recognized that he and Wilson could make a significant impact at the next level, and he is looking forward to hearing his friend's name announced in Las Vegas. Still, Olave made it clear that he wants to receive a phone call early draft night, claiming that he is one of the best prospects in this year's class. He believes that his time in Columbus has prepared him for life in the NFL and that hours spent with wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and former Buckeye wideouts have developed him into an elite route-runner with next-level speed.

"When you go to a place like Ohio State, you compete with the best every day," Olave said. "You play with the best every day, so you're going against the best every day. I competed with myself in the weight room, on the field and in the classroom. I feel like I've prepared for this for a couple of years."

"I developed my route running going into my freshman year. My first year playing receiver in high school was my senior year. Playing for the best receiver coach in

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Chris Olave	WR	6-0 ³ / ₈	187	32 ¹ / ₈	9 ¹ / ₂	4.39	DNP	32	10-4	DNP	DNP	DNP
Garrett Wilson	WR	5-11 ³ / ₄	183	32 ¹ / ₄	9 ⁷ / ₈	4.36	DNP	36	10-3	DNP	4.36	DNP
Jeremy Ruckert	TE	6-5	250	32 ³ / ₄	10 ¹ / ₈	DNP	19	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Haskell Garrett	DL	6-1	298	32 ¹ / ₄	9 ⁷ / ₈	5.07	DNP	24	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
Tyreke Smith	DL	6-3	254	33 ¹ / ₄	10 ¹ / ₄	4.86	DNP	34	9-9	DNP	DNP	DNP
Thayer Munford	OL	6-6	328	35 ¹ / ₈	10 ¹ / ₈	5.39	DNP	22	8-8	DNP	DNP	DNP
Nicholas Petit-Frere	OL	6-5	316	33 ⁵ / ₈	10 ³ / ₄	5.14	DNP	24.5	8-7	DNP	DNP	DNP

the country in Coach Hartline, developing under him and seeing guys like Terry McLaurin, Parris Campbell, Johnnie Dixon and C.J. Saunders in front of me – I learned from them. I took stuff from their game and tried to put it into mine.”

Ruckert Waiting For Pro Day

Former Ohio State tight end Jeremy Ruckert rose up draft boards after his Reese’s Senior Bowl performance. Still, he could not finish the week’s events because of a plantar fasciitis injury in his foot.

Ruckert did not participate in workouts at the NFL Combine that required using his legs. He did, however, measure in at 6-5 and 250 pounds and revealed his upper-body strength with 19 reps in the bench press. Ruckert also spent time with gathered reporters, indicating that he would be full-go for the Buckeyes’ pro day on March 23, where he will perform every activity.

While disappointed he could not perform at the professional showcase, Ruckert reflected on how far he’s come from the first time he stepped on Ohio State’s campus in 2018.

“I’m proud of where I came from,” Ruckert said. “I’m proud of my family life and my journey at Ohio State. I’m proud of who I’ve become as a football player and as a person and just being able to talk about that. The biggest thing with these interviews is you’re learning stuff. You’re learning from some of the best coaches in the world at what they do. You’re learning football and life lessons.

“I’m just trying to soak it all in and just be myself. I don’t want to put on an act because once you get there it might not be the best fit. I just need to show them who I am and show them that when I get to the locker room, what I’m going to be like.”

Ruckert said he has maintained a

grounded approach in the months leading to the NFL draft. He’s seen where his name falls on most mock drafts – anywhere from the second to fourth rounds – to several different teams. However, the former Buckeye isn’t worried where he’ll end up in late April.

“I’m not trying to get caught up in when I get picked or where I end up,” Ruckert said. “The biggest thing for me is whatever team picks me, they’re picking me for a reason. I’m going to try and go there and give them everything I have. The biggest thing for me as a rookie is to try and gain the trust and confidence of my teammates first and then the coaching staff. Then, be me and take off. The biggest thing for me is to be grateful. No matter where I go, anybody would trade to be where I am right now.”

Garrett Enters Draft Healthy

Former Ohio State defensive tackle Haskell Garrett played the second half of the regular season battling through an ankle sprain he had suffered against Maryland on Oct. 9, 2021. His injury worsened enough that team doctors told him he needed to sit out the Buckeyes’ penultimate game with Michigan State.

“The doctors told me to rest and you need to heal, but I had a sense of urgency and I needed to be there for my teammates,” Garrett said. “I made that promise at the beginning of the season that we were going to make this run, and I wanted to be there and help as best as possible.”

He explained that being with his teammates in the final two regular-season games was his primary motivation for enduring ankle pain. Garrett said his team was chasing something bigger than themselves – a Big Ten title and College Football Playoff championship. However, when Ohio State lost to Michigan, 42-27, in Ann Arbor, Garrett shifted his focus to the NFL draft and chose to

sit out the Rose Bowl.

“It was really hard,” Garrett said. “I was torn. I really wanted to finish the season and be with my brothers in that bowl game and say farewell in a good way. But I had to really take care of my health and get ready for the next step.”

Garrett used his time off to rehabilitate his ankle and rest his body. When he felt comfortable enough to compete, the Las Vegas native entered the Reese’s Senior Bowl, where he suffered another injury – this time to his shoulder. Michigan guard Andrew Steuber drove Garrett to the turf in a mid-

week practice, causing Garrett’s shoulder to tighten and bruise. However, he didn’t let his pain keep him from competing in the event’s four-quarter game.

“It was a dream of mine to play in the Reese’s Bowl,” Garrett said. “I wanted to stay there and finish because it was a goal of mine, something I dreamed about as a kid.”

One month later, Garrett competed at the NFL Combine, where he measured 6-1 and 298 pounds. He ran in the 40-yard dash, clocking in at 5.07, and participated in the vertical jump, where he elevated 24 inches from the ground.



SONNY BROCKWAY

LIVING THE DREAM – Haskell Garrett (92) lived out his dream of playing in the Reese’s Senior Bowl. His next dream is to be drafted to the NFL, and with late-round projections, that seems likely.

Top Safety Target Downs Sets Spring Visit

Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs (6-0, 185) is beginning to plan his spring visits, and Ohio State will be among those getting a visit from the top safety in 2023. Beyond his status as the top safety in his class, Downs is the No. 13 prospect in 2023 and the No. 1 recruit out of Georgia.

Ohio State, which will see Downs from

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

April 3-4, is one of six schools getting a visit along with Georgia (March 1), North Carolina (March 5), Oklahoma (March 26), Alabama (April 2) and Notre Dame (April 23), according to 247Sports.

Although Downs has not released an official list of top schools, his visits indicate what schools he is focusing on. Downs also told 247Sports that Ohio State is currently recruiting him the hardest, though Alabama and Georgia are doing the best job of convincing his family.

"(Ohio State) tells me about the tradition of defensive back play there," he said. "How many defensive backs they put in the league, how their guys have been playing."

"With Alabama, it is about the standard that they are setting and their desire to win, which my family relates to. With Georgia, everyone on the staff is sharing the same message that they want me to come there and they want my family to be a part of the program."

Downs said he is likely to make a de-

cision by the end of the summer but does not know when he'll announce.

"He's the type of prospect that checks off all the right boxes," 247Sports recruiting analyst Andrew Ivins said. "He always looks to be one step ahead of others and is athletic enough to get across the field and erase a touchdown, but also physical enough to come downhill and meet a running back in the A or B gaps.

"He has experience working out of a variety of different coverages and has shown that he can be rather effective as a slot defender in certain situations. He'll provide immediate special teams value at the next level and likely isn't going to need much time to get adjusted to the speed of the game on Saturdays. He has the make-up of a future star for a College Football Playoff contender."

While Downs' recruitment is national, he has roots in North Carolina where his brother Josh is entering his junior year at UNC, and his uncle Dre Bly – now an assistant for the Tar Heels – played in the 1990s. Additionally, Caleb's father, Gary, played at N.C. State and in the NFL for nine seasons.

Aguero Has OSU In Top Seven

If Ohio State can't pull in the top safety prospect in the class, shifting focus to the No. 2 safety in the class – Lynn (Mass.) St. John's Prep four-star Joenel Aguero – would not be a bad pivot for the Buckeyes.

Aguero (6-0, 195) is considering Ohio State as one of his top seven schools, along with Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.) and Texas A&M. He's the No. 49 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 2 recruit from Massachusetts this cycle behind Brockton (Mass.) Thayer

OSU Football 2023 Commitments

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Cedrick Hawkins	SAF	6-0	165	★★★★	Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa
Ty Lockwood	TE	6-5	225	★★★★	Thompson's Stn. (Tenn.) Independence
Luke Montgomery	OT	6-5	270	★★★★	Findlay, Ohio
Joshua Padilla	OG	6-4	265	★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne
Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-3	260	★★★	Dublin (Ohio) Coffman

Academy five-star offensive tackle Samson Okunlola, whom Ohio State is also targeting.

"Me and (Ryan Day) have a close relationship especially since he's a Northeastern guy," he told On3 Sports. "There are not too many times he gets to recruit a guy from his area. We're building a great relationship, and he has a great relationship with my mom."

There was concern with the changes on Ohio State's coaching staff over the off-season, but the new staffers have already made significant strides with several prospects.

"Coach (Perry) Eliano, I keep in touch with him every day," he said. "I would say it's better than with the last Ohio State staff."

Aguero will also be on campus soon enough, as he told On3 Sports that he's planning a visit with his parents on March 25.

"I'm looking at where I feel most comfortable," he said. "I know no matter where I go, I'll get my reps in, but good relationships with coaches (matter) – coaches that are going to be there during the time I'm in college."

Aguero and Downs, along with West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford (6-3, 175), who visited Ohio State on March 10, are the top safety targets for the Buckeyes in this cycle.

Ohio State, which is looking to take up to three safeties in this class, already has one in the fold with Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa four-star Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 165), who rang in the new year with a commitment to the Buckeyes during the Rose Bowl.

CB Harris Planning Spring Visit

Things have cooled off between Ohio State and Phenix City (Ala.) Central five-star cornerback AJ Harris (6-1, 180), but the Buckeyes are not out of this one yet. Harris' father, Daniel, indicated to 247Sports that Ohio State will receive a visit in early April from one of the classes' top cornerback prospects.

"Ohio State is definitely a wild card," Daniel said. "Coach (Tim) Walton is doing a good job establishing a good rapport. AJ already knew the school has a lot to offer and after Coach (Kerry) Coombs left he was ready to write them off, but he's very intrigued again."

Harris and Ohio State were linked early in his recruitment due to his relationship with Coombs, but the Buckeyes seemed to have fallen out of the running once Coombs and Ohio State parted ways. Immediately after it was announced that Coombs would be joining Luke Fickell's staff at Cincinnati, Harris tweeted out that the Bearcats were among his top schools.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1987

Tyrone Harrison of Highland Park High in New Jersey signed a national letter of intent hoping to follow in the footsteps of great OSU fullbacks such as John Brockington, Champ Henson and Pete Johnson, just as the man who recruited him envisioned.

"He's a big, raw, talented football player, which is what we wanted," OSU assistant coach Chuck Heater told BSB. "He's really the big fullback we were looking for."

25 Years Ago – 1997

Ken-Yon Rambo was probably not in much of a singing mood over the weekend of March 7-8, but he was probably in a pretty good mood nonetheless.

Rambo, the prep All-America wide receiver from Long Beach (Calif.) Poly, spent the weekend competing at a national high school invitational indoor track meet in the Boston area. While he was gone, though, his family received his Feb. 8 ACT score in the mail, and according to his father, Cedric Rambo, he was qualified.

"He has what he needs," Cedric said. "He received a good test score, although he may take it again. His GPA is pretty decent, but he'd like to get his test score up to 19."

20 Years Ago – 2002

Cleveland Glenville defensive back Donte Whitner (5-11, 177) was considered one of Ohio's top five junior prospects. He attended Junior Day with three of his Glenville teammates – defensive end Michael Hearn, wide receiver/cornerback Dareus Hiley and sophomore defensive back Theodore Ginn Jr.

"I really like the coaching staff at Ohio State," Whitner said. "I had a meeting with (Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel). He was telling me how much he wanted me to come there. He said I could play there. They offered me a while ago, probably a month-and-a-half ago. I really like Ohio State."

Whitner said he liked what he heard from the OSU coaches.

"They said they are about to build a new weight facility room. It's

even going to have a swimming pool. That's another thing that attracted me to Ohio State."

15 Years Ago – 2007

A big recruiting weekend for the Buckeyes resulted in a big verbal commitment from one of the biggest prospects around.

With several high-profile high school prospects in attendance for the weekend of Ohio State's Pro Day, local product Mike Adams of Dublin (Ohio) Coffman finally let the worst-kept recruiting secret out of the bag while at dinner on March 10.

With high school teammate Jake Stoneburner and Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater offensive lineman Michael Brewster – both of whom had offers from the Buckeyes – on hand, as well as Tressel, tight ends coach and recruiting coordinator John Peterson and offensive coordinator Jim Bollman, Adams announced his plans to enroll at OSU in 2008.

"I just figured I didn't need to wait any longer," Adams told BSB. "I like everything about Ohio State, the coaches and the players. And I think there is a great opportunity for me to go in and get some early playing time."

10 Years Ago – 2012

Mentor, Ohio, quarterback Mitch Trubisky had only three offers from in-state programs before he picked up a big one from Alabama in early March that looked like it could change the landscape of his recruitment.

Trubisky had three other offers – from Cincinnati, Ohio State and Toledo – so it was not surprising Alabama immediately jumped to the top of the prep quarterback's list.

"I like Alabama a lot and they are one of my top schools right now," he said. "They run a pro-style offense, and I like how they run their team. They have won more games than any school in the past four years. That's very impressive to me."

"Right now, I really like Alabama, Ohio State and Cincinnati. But I don't have any time frame for a decision."

Five Years Ago – 2017

Highly sought-after high school prospect Jaelen Gill was perhaps the most coveted recruit to come out of Westerville (Ohio) South since Andy Katzenmoyer. When Gill took off a black hoodie to reveal a blue UCLA shirt March 1, many people were stunned.

For about 20 seconds.

A video announcement that featured Gill's teammates wearing shirts of the different schools he was considering appeared to end when Gill revealed his UCLA shirt on screen and showed off the same UCLA shirt in person, on South's auditorium stage.

The packed auditorium seemed shocked and gave a less than enthusiastic cheer until the screen faded to an image of Gill walking across the turf at Ohio Stadium and tearing off his UCLA shirt to reveal a black Ohio State T-shirt, sending the audience into a frenzy. At the same time, Gill removed his UCLA shirt on stage to officially confirm his commitment to Ohio State.

One Year Ago – 2021

Hoping to make his college decision before the start of his senior season, Memphis (Tenn.) Christian Brothers four-star running back Dallan Hayden took a self-guided visit to Ohio State on March 17.

The 5-11, 195-pound Hayden – who was considered the 22nd-best running back and No. 208 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – made the trip with his father, Aaron, a former Tennessee running back who played professionally for the then-San Diego Chargers, Green Bay Packers and Philadelphia Eagles. They were unable to meet with coaches or check out the Woody Hayes Athletic Center due to the dead period but did stop at Ohio Stadium and the Ohio Union and roamed around campus.

It was also a homecoming of sorts for younger Hayden, who lived in Columbus as a small child but hadn't been back since. He then followed that up with a trip to Notre Dame on March 18. The Buckeyes and Fighting Irish were two of his three finalists, with the home-state Volunteers also in the race to land his services.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Kurelic of 247Sports

With Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs (6-0, 185) and Lynn (Mass.) St. John's Prep four-star safety Joanel Agüero (6-0, 195) planning spring visits, how do you see the safety position playing out in 2023?

"They've got Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa four-star safety Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 165) already. I think another really important visit is on (March 10): West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford (6-3, 175) is visiting. He's the guy they really want. Agüero, he's visiting at the end of March and he's a top target. Then the other one, Downs, I think those are kind of the big four right now when you include Hawkins is already committed. I think if they can get three of those four, they would take them. I mean, those guys aren't guys you are going to pass up."

Ohio State had dozens of visits scheduled as of March 8. Who do you view as the most important, and who do

the Buckeyes need to get on campus in the spring?

"Many (La.) four-star linebacker Tackett Curtis (6-2, 218) visiting (on March 8) would probably rank as my No. 1 guy from the current list. I would say (getting) another linebacker (on campus) is really important. Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit four-star linebacker Troy Bowles (6-1, 205) could be back sometime here in the next two months. I'm pretty certain he's going to make it back for an official visit. Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior five-star running back Richard Young (5-11, 200) is kind of in the same boat. He's working on another visit back in the spring, so that would be another very important one."

With the recruiting dead period ending on Feb. 28 and visits beginning to ramp up, who is your prediction for Ohio State's next commitment for 2023?

"That's hard to say because most of these guys want to wait and take official visits. But I don't think it's out of the question that Hartford could decide, 'I don't want to wait it

out.' Another guy I think is not out of the question to make a decision sooner or later is four-star offensive lineman Austin Siereveld (6-5, 315) from Lakota East High School."

Ohio State has made some recent additions to its recruiting staff with Nick Murphy as the new director of recruiting strategy and Zach Grant as director of player personnel, which is the former title of Mark Pantoni, who is now the assistant athletic director of player personnel and lists himself as a "general manager" on Twitter. How do you see Pantoni's role developing as his staff grows?

"His role, no matter what his title is, is super important. He's as good as it gets at what he does. He was a director of player personnel and now is a general manager. I think Mark Pantoni has a little bit more management, so to speak, because he has a little bit of a bigger staff now. But I think his importance hasn't changed one bit. He's still the guy at the very top and the guy that makes things happen."

Complicating things further was the communication between Harris and Ohio State's new staff earlier this year. Daniel told a number of outlets that the new staff – specifically calling out defensive coordinator Jim Knowles – had not reached out to Harris to reaffirm their interest.

"I look at you kind of sideways when you've been in the building for 10 days, the next class is your class and you haven't reached out to someone who's supposed to be a priority," Daniel told Eleven Warriors in January.

Things appear to be smoothed over now, with Ohio State in the running along with Clemson, Florida and Georgia, which are also likely to receive spring visits.

"You know, Kerry Coombs was a big reason why I was interested in Ohio State," Harris told 247Sports. "But the fact that they brought in a pro guy, someone that tells me what I need to work on rather than telling me what I want to hear, is big for me. Tim Walton, I sent him some of my workout clips and just asked him to critique me. He does a great job with that and telling me what I need to work on."

Pantoni Adds Two To Recruiting Staff

Ohio State is hiring Nick Murphy for the position of director of recruiting strategy under Mark Pantoni, Murphy confirmed on his Twitter account on Feb. 28.



Mark Pantoni

"So excited to join the staff at THE Ohio State University!" Murphy said on Twitter. "Can't wait to carry on the excellence and winning tradition of this flagship university!"

The position opened earlier this offseason when assistant director of player personnel Weston Zernechel departed for a larger role at USC under new head coach Lincoln Riley. Murphy comes to Ohio State by way of Charlotte, where he served as director of player personnel for 2021, helping to sign the No. 107 class nationally and the No. 9 group in Conference USA, headlined by Mansfield, Ohio, three-star safety Aveon Grose.

This past stint was his second with the 49ers, serving originally as a defensive graduate assistant for the 2019 season before accepting the director of on-campus recruiting role at Minnesota, in which he served from January 2020 through July 2021.

He was an offensive assistant at USF in 2018, working under Charlie Strong – whom Pantoni worked with at Florida. Murphy also was a recruiting specialist at Texas from January 2016 through September 2017 while he earned his master's degree and an intern at Coastal Carolina, his undergraduate alma mater, from February 2014 through December 2015.

Pantoni also hired former Western Kentucky recruiting staffer Zach Grant to his department on Feb. 28 as the school's director of player personnel. Grant most recently served as a general manager for the Hilltoppers after five years as their director of player personnel.

Grant assisted in the recruitment of several high-profile players, including quarterback Bailey Zappe, who last season set NCAA single-season passing records with 5,967 yards and 62 passing touchdowns. He oversaw a major shift in recruiting strategy a season ago with the Hilltoppers to fill out a roster largely devoid of veteran talent, securing a class built almost entirely around players out of the transfer portal – none more important than Zappe and wide receiver Jerreth Sterns, both of whom came from Houston Baptist.

Behind that infusion of talent, Western Kentucky improved from 5-7 to 9-5 with a berth in the Conference USA title game and a victory in the Boca Raton Bowl over Appalachian State, 59-38. The Zappe-led offense finished second in the nation in points per game with 44.2.

OSU A Leader For Washington

Chandler, Ariz. four-star defensive lineman A'mauri Washington (6-4, 295), one of the nation's top prospects on the defensive line, has Ohio State among his top schools. He has not released a formal list but told On3 Sports that LSU, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon and Texas are the ones recruiting him the hardest.

"I wouldn't say those are my final five

schools, but some other schools would have to step and recruit me harder to change it," he said. "I still have to take visits and fill in a lot of blanks, but I feel good about these five schools."

Washington is the No. 136 overall prospect and No. 19 defensive lineman in 2023, and there's currently one 247Sports crystal ball prediction for him to land at Ohio State from Bucknuts recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic.

Chandler High School is also the home

of Ohio State wide receiver Kyion Grayes, who recently arrived on campus for the Buckeyes as an early enrollee. Washington said Grayes is trying to convince him to join Ohio State.

"I grew up in Detroit, and Ohio State was one of my favorite schools," Washington said. "I have liked them since middle school, and I have been talking a lot more with them recently. Coach (Ryan) Day is recruiting me hard, Kyion just straight up

Continued On Page 18

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Spring Dance Card Full For Ohio State

Continued From Page 17

tells me to come there, and I am going to get up there soon.”

DL Overton Still In Contact With OSU

Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton five-star defensive lineman Lebbeus Overton (6-4, 265), one of the top remaining prospects in 2022's class, is still considering Ohio State among his final schools.

Originally a 2023 prospect, Overton's window shifted when he announced his reclassification to 2022 just after National Signing Day in February. Along with his reclassification, he announced a top five of Georgia, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon and Texas A&M, all of which will receive an official visit this spring.

He visited Oregon on March 12 and will visit Georgia on March 20, Texas A&M on March 25, Ohio State on April 16 for the spring game and Oklahoma on April 23 for the Sooners' spring game.

“It was all based off of communication,” Overton told On3 Sports of why Ohio State is a finalist, “the vibes with the coaches. Every college is going to have what you need, but it's where I'll be living the next three, four years. It's about having that best feeling to it.”

This will be the second visit for Overton to Ohio State. He also made an unofficial trip last summer.

“It was great,” he said. “Just sitting there talking to (defensive line coach Larry Johnson), I could tell he's a great guy all-around. I loved being a part of that. He's always communicating with me, every day. Coach Johnson makes sure he sends me what they do, so I can see who they are. He's clear about the role I'd have there.”

Overton, who said he plans to commit in April, has family connections with a couple of his top schools, including Oklahoma, where his father, Milton, played on

the offensive line from 1991-94, and Texas A&M, where Milton was the associate athletic director from 1999-2009. Though Overton's crystal ball predictions are split between Oklahoma and Texas A&M, the most recent from Georgia insider Rusty Mansell on Feb. 3 has Overton going to the Aggies.

Overton will be joined on his visits by his brother, Micaiah (6-5, 225), a transfer tight end from the 2019 class who spent the last three seasons at Liberty and entered the transfer portal on Feb. 10.

More Visits Lined Up For Spring

The recruiting calendar is beginning to heat up, and prospects are continuing to line up visits to Ohio State in the coming months. Buckeye Sports Bulletin highlighted over 20 recruits with visits planned in our last issue, and since we last went to press, several prospects have made plans to visit the Buckeyes over the next few weeks, with the most up-to-date information below.

Beginning with 2023 prospects, the highlight is Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson five-star cornerback Cormani McClain, the nation's top cornerback in 2023. He will visit Ohio State on April 2, according to 247Sports. McClain, the No. 3 overall prospect in the class, has offers from Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Florida State, Oklahoma Penn State, Michigan and Texas A&M, among others.

Also during that weekend, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225) will make a visit to Ohio State. He is the No. 137 overall prospect in the class and the No. 8 running back. Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood four-star quarterback Dylan Lonergan (6-2, 215) will then stop by on April 8.

The next big date for 2023 recruits will be the spring game on April 16, where the

Buckeyes will host a number of prospects, including Cleveland Glenville three-star linebacker Arvell Reese (6-3, 212), who also visited Ohio State and was offered on March 8, and Rolesville, N.C., four-star wide receiver Noah Rogers (6-1, 180).

Moving to 2024, Chillicothe, Ohio, tight end Tayvion Galloway (6-6, 215) will visit on March 22. On March 24, Pickerington (Ohio) North quarterback Landon O'Connell (6-3, 190) will visit. Dorchester (S.C.) Woodland offensive tackle Kam Pringle (6-6, 295) is set to visit from March 25-27. Avon, Ohio, running back Jakorian Caffey (5-11, 190) will also visit on those dates, with a return trip planned for April 1-3. None of those players has picked up an Ohio State offer to this point.

Caffey will be followed on April 1-3 by Chandler, Ariz. five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 210), and the Buckeyes will also welcome Richmond (Va.) Benedictine tight end Luca Puccinelli (6-7, 225) on April 2.

The spring game will then play host to a number of 2024 prospects, including King George, Va., athlete Mekhai White (6-3, 182), whom Ohio State is recruiting as a wide receiver. He does not hold an OSU offer but has been offered by Maryland, North Carolina, Pitt, Penn State and Rutgers, among others.

Buford, Ga. five-star wide receiver KJ Bolden (6-0, 180) will visit for Ohio State's spring game, according to Eleven Warriors. Bolden is listed as the No. 9 overall prospect in 2024 and the No. 1 athlete, though his composite rating of .9938 would make him the second-highest rated receiver in the class.

Also visiting on that date will be Melissa, Texas, five-star defensive lineman Nigel Smith II (6-5, 260) and Cleveland Glenville cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177), who also visited Ohio State on March 8. Following West's visit in March, a crystal ball prediction was put in by 247Sports recruiting analyst Allen Trieu for the Buckeyes. Rome, Ga. quarterback Reece Fountain (6-0, 167) will also be on-site for the game.

There were also some visits that were announced and took place since we last published, including linebacker Kendrick Council (6-2, 210) and defensive end

Obinna Onwuka (6-3, 220) in 2024, both from Charles Herbert Flowers High in Springdale, Md., on March 5.

On March 8, Ohio State welcomed Glenville's Reese and West, as well as defensive lineman Jerod Smith (6-3, 240) and defensive end Jacob Smith (6-5, 225), a pair of four-star brothers in 2024 from The Loomis Chaffee School in Windsor, Conn.

Ohio State also welcomed visitors on March 10, including Birmingham (Ala.) Briarwood Christian four-star quarterback Christopher Vizzina (6-4, 207) for 2023 and Atlanta Woodward Academy safety CJ Heard (6-0, 200) for 2024.

Another notable visit will be 2025 of in-state Westerville North, who is expected to visit on April 2 and for the spring game.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State added a pair of in-state walk-on commitments in 2022 with wide receivers David Adolph and Blaize Exline. Adolph comes from Dublin Jerome, which finished 7-5 last season, while Exline hauled in 125 passes for 1,425 yards and 28 touchdowns for Salem High School, which is about 25 miles southwest of Youngstown.

- The Buckeyes are no longer in the running for Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep School four-star linebacker Josiah Trotter (6-2, 230), who left Ohio State off his most recent top five on Feb. 25. Ohio State, Notre Dame and Texas A&M – all on Trotter's top eight back in early January – missed the cut, while Clemson, Penn State, South Carolina, Virginia Tech and West Virginia were in his top five. Trotter is the No. 273 overall prospect and No. 23 linebacker in the class.

- New Bern, N.C. four-star defensive lineman Keith Sampson Jr. (6-3, 285) committed to Florida State on March 5 during a visit with the Seminoles. Ohio State had been involved with Sampson and was in his most recent top five released on Feb. 25 that included Clemson, Florida State, Ohio State, N.C. State and South Carolina. Sampson is the No. 201 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 28 defensive lineman.

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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 (19-11, 12-8)

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, L 64-66; **12** at Michigan, 68-57; **15** MINNESOTA, W 70-45; **19** IOWA, L 62-75; **21** INDIANA, W 80-69; **24** at Illinois, W 86-83; **24** at Maryland, L 75-60.

March 1 NEBRASKA; **3** MICHIGAN STATE; **6** MICHIGAN; **9-13** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis, Penn State, L 68-71; **18** NCAA Tournament at Pittsburgh, Pa., vs. Loyola-Chicago, 12:15 p.m.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (23-6, 14-4)

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, W 61-57; **10** NEBRASKA, W 80-70; **14** at Illinois, W 86-67; **17** at Maryland, L 72-77; **20** WISCONSIN, W 59-42; **24** PENN STATE, W 78-55; **27** at Michigan State, W 61-55.

March 2-6 Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis, Michigan State, W 74-58; Indiana, L 62-70 **19** NCAA Tournament at Baton Rouge, La., vs. Missouri State/Florida State, 2:30 p.m.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS

Jan. 15 Windy City Invite, Chicago, Ill.; 2nd/7th (387.7.500); **22** New York Alliance, W 399.150-280.300.

Feb. 5 at (6) Illinois, L 400.750-394.500; **12** (4) Michigan, W 403.600-398.100 **19** (10) Army, W 393.950-374.850 **19** (12) William & Mary, W 393.950-364.550

March 5 at Penn State, W 397.200-393.900; **12** at Oklahoma, L 408.400-399.050; **20** NEBRASKA, 1 p.m.;

April 1-2 Big Ten Championships at State College, PA; **15** NCAA Qualifier at Norman, Okla.; **16** NCAA Championships at Norman, Okla.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS

Jan. 7 at Arkansas, L 195.450-195.025; **15** Denver, L 196.600-195.750; **22** Penn State, W 196.450-196.425; **30** Rutgers, W 196.025-195.750.

Feb. 7 NEBRASKA, W 196.675-196.350; **12** at Minnesota, L 197.575-195.775; **18** Big Five Meet at Toledo, Ohio, 2nd/5; **26** MICHIGAN ST., W 197.075-196.850

March 4 All-Ohio Meet, 1st/3; **6** at Kent State, W 197.525-196.550; Eastern Michigan at Kent State, W 197.525-194.575 **11** CAL/PITT, 1st/3; **19** Big Ten Championships at TBA

April 4 NCAA Regional First Round; **5** NCAA Regional Second Round; **6** NCAA Regional Final; **19** NCAA Semifinals at Fort Worth, Texas; **20** NCAA Championships at Fort Worth, Texas.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (22-13-2, 13-9-2)

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; **28-29** at Penn State, T 2-2, W 6-0

Feb. 4-5 WISCONSIN, W 4-3 OT, W 6-2; **11-12** MINNESOTA, L 2-3; L 1-5; **18-19** at Michigan, L 3-5; L 0-3;

March 4-6 Big Ten Quarterfinals, Penn State, W 4-3, L 2-3, L 1-2.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (30-6-0, 21-6-0)

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. 4-5 at Minnesota State, W 5-0, W 7-1; **Feb 8** at St. Cloud State, W 6-2 **11-12** at

Bemidji State, L 3-2; W 8-1; **18** WISCONSIN, W 5-1, W; **19** WISCONSIN, 2-1; **25-27** WCHA Quarterfinals, St. Cloud State, W 6-0; W, 3-0 **MARCH 5-6** WCHA Championships., Wisconsin, W 2-1; Minnesota, W 3-2 OT **12** NCAA Quarterfinals, Quinnipiac, W 4-3 **20T** **18** Frozen Four Semifinals at State College, Pa., vs. Yale, 7 p.m.

SWIMMING & DIVING

Oct. 30 Indiana, Men: L 230-123; Women: L 209-142; Virginia Tech, Men: W 207-146; Women: W 225-128; vs. Penn State Men: W 250-100.50; 30 Indiana Women: W 225-163

Nov. 11 Akron, Women: W 228-91 **Nov. 12** DENISON, Men: W 184-104; Women: W 183.5-104.5; **18-20** OHIO STATE INVITATIONAL, Men: 2nd/10; Women: 1st/10.

Jan. 21-22 Shamrock Invitational at Notre Dame, Ind., Men: 1st/2; Women: 3rd/3. **28** MICHIGAN, Men: 189-111; Women: 152.5-147.5 **29** Cleveland State, Men: W 159-78

Feb. 11-13 WINTER INVITATIONAL; **16-19** Women's Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wisc.; 1st/8. **23-26** Men's Big Ten Championships at West Lafayette, Ind., 2nd/8.

March 6 LAST CHANCE MEET (men and women); **7-9** Zone Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **10-12** CSCAA National Invitational at Cleveland, Men: 2nd/30; Women: 1st/43; NCAA Zone Diving at West Lafayette, Ind.; **16-19** Women's NCAA Championships at Austin, Texas; **23-26** Men's NCAA Championships at Atlanta, Georgia.

MEN'S TENNIS (14-1)

Jan. 19 TOLEDO, W 7-0; **19** XAVIER, W

6-1, W 4-0; **22** Illinois, W 4-0; **29** Arizona State, W 4-0 **30** (17) North Carolina W 4-0.

Feb. 4 (1) TENNESSEE, W 4-0; **6** (6) Virginia, W 4-0; **11** (10) KENTUCKY, W 4-0; **13** (6) WAKE FOREST, W 7-0; **18** ITA National Indoor Team Championships at Chicago; Washington, W 4-1; **19** (6) Wake Forest, W 4-0 **20** (4) TCU, L 3-4.; **25** UCF, W 4-0 **27**

March 12 at Texas, W, 4-3.; **15** at Texas A&M, 7 p.m.; **18** at Michigan, 5 p.m.; **25** ILLINOIS, 6 p.m.; **27** NORTHWESTERN, Noon;

April 1 at Indiana, 3 p.m.; **3** at Purdue, Noon; **9** at Penn State, 12 p.m.; **15** MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; **17** MICHIGAN STATE, 12 p.m.; **22** Wisconsin, 4 p.m; **24** Nebraska, 1 p.m

29 Big Ten Tournament at Madison, Wisc.

May 6 NCAA First & Second Round; **14** NCAA Regional; **19** NCAA Championships at TBA

WOMEN'S TENNIS (8-3)

Jan. 21 Duke, L 3-4; **23** NC State, 3-4; **29** ITA Kickoff vs. OKLAHOMA STATE, W 4-1; **30** ITA Kickoff vs. TENNESSEE, W 4-0.

Feb. 11 North Carolina, L 1-4; **12** Florida, W 4-3; **13** Auburn, W 4-3; **18** Kentucky, W 5-2 **27** PEPPERDINE, W 5-2

March 4 Penn State, W 7-0; **13** XAVIER, W 6-1; **18** Iowa, 6 p.m; **20** at Nebraska, 12 p.m.; **27** Arizona State, 2p.m.

April 1 MICHIGAN, 4 p.m.; **3** MICHIGAN STATE, Noon; **8** NORTHWESTERN, 4 p.m.; **10** at Purdue, Noon; **15** at Minnesota, 4:30 p.m.; **17** at Wisconsin, Noon. **22** MARYLAND, 6 p.m.; **24** RUTGERS, 12 p.m.; **27** Big Ten Tournament at Iowa, TBA.

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Buckeyes Celebrate Seven On Senior Day

Ohio State recognized seven players in its senior day festivities on March 6 before taking on Michigan, including one fifth-year senior, one true senior, one junior and four players who transferred to Ohio State to close their collegiate careers.

In the latter group, center Joey Brunk and guards Cedric Russell, Jimmy Sotos and Jamari Wheeler all played their final

COURT REPORT Patrick Mayhorn

home game for the Buckeyes, with forward Kyle Young serving as the lone fifth-year senior to spend all five years with Ohio State. Winger Justin Ahrens is finishing his career as a true senior, and forward E.J. Liddell earned the full senior day experience as a junior, as head coach Chris Holtmann confirmed that he will be declaring for the NBA draft without any intention to return to Ohio State upon the completion of this season.

It's a rare class for Holtmann and for the Buckeyes. The head coach has seen this many players departing from one team only three times in his career as a head coach – twice at Gardner-Webb in 2010-11 and 2011-12 and once in Columbus, when seven players departed from the 2017-18 team.

If another player – perhaps freshman guard Malaki Branham – were to declare early, that would create more turnover from one year to the next than Holtmann has ever experienced as a head coach, excluding first seasons in town in which he was inheriting someone else's roster. If Branham does leave early, the Buckeyes would lose all five of their leaders for minutes per game. That would be a first in Holtmann's career, and hasn't happened at Ohio State since at least 1974-75, which is as far back as Sports Reference's tracking of minutes played goes.



SONNY BROCKWAY

BUCKEYES HONORED – Ohio State recognized seven players on senior day, including four graduate transfers, one fifth-year senior, one true senior and one junior. From left to right, the Buckeyes recognized Kyle Young (25), E.J. Liddell (32), Justin Ahrens (10), Jimmy Sotos (1), Jamari Wheeler (55), Cedric Russell (2) and Joey Brunk (50).

To extend that string of logic briefly, a Branham departure would leave Ohio State with 23.9 percent of its minutes played from this regular season returning for 2022-23. That would be the lowest in the program since 1994-95, when it returned 23.7 percent of its minutes played. That group, with only one member of the top five in minutes from the season prior (Rickey Dudley), went 6-22.

Although Branham has yet to make any decision on that front (and has said that he hasn't given it any consideration in either direction yet and won't anytime soon), Holtmann acknowledged that this was a unique

season for him, due in no small part to the proliferation of the transfer portal. The annals of Ohio State's basketball history have plenty of unique circumstances, but none have occurred in an era of player movement on this level. Ohio State is trying its best to adapt its senior day traditions to the times, just as it has adapted its recruiting to absorb the kind of losses that come with the transfer portal era by accepting more transfers of its own – as it will likely need to do as this class departs.

"This is a unique one, and I think it's becoming more and more unique with the number of post-grad players," Holtmann said. "What we try to do is honor everybody. With a guy like Justin, he's been in our program for four years and he hasn't had a senior day, so it's important for me that he feels and that all of our guys feel honored. Kyle Young had senior day last year, but he hadn't had one in front of fans and he's been with us now five years. E.J. has been with us three years and while he's not graduating, we know this is his last game in the Schottenstein Center."

As for where that may be headed down the road, the Buckeye head coach does not beat around the bush. Gone, he thinks, are the days of multi-year classes that stick together throughout a tenure and create a senior class that fans watched in the scarlet and gray for their entire careers.

"The days where you have a three- or four-man class and they stay together for three or four years (seem to be over)," Holtmann said. "It's such a different look today when it comes to senior day. We could probably even change the title of the day because technically it's not senior day. It's about honoring guys who will be playing at home for the last time."

"Those guys I mentioned along with the transfers who are being honored, I'm grate-

ful for the kind of people they've been in our program, and we've enjoyed every day coaching them. There's no question they've made an impact. I think fondly of a guy like Keyshawn Woods who was here for only one year but made a significant impact and considers himself a Buckeye to this day."

Notably, however, there are three omissions from the festivities, two of whom who could factor significantly into Ohio State's plans next season. Forwards Harrison Hookfin, Justice Sueing and Seth Towns – the latter two of whom missed the regular season with injuries – did not participate and could all decide to return thanks to the extra season of eligibility extended by the NCAA as an answer to COVID wiping out seasons early in 2020. That they didn't participate does not automatically signal a return, but Holtmann did allude to that as a conversation the Buckeyes are still having.

"We gave Justice and Seth the option, and they didn't want to choose this particular time for senior day," Holtmann said. "We have constant conversations with those two on if they want to return and if it's best for them. Obviously, we love both guys and have really missed them this year. It's something they're seriously considering, but we'll have more of those conversations after the season."

Sueing was a consistent starter in 2020-21, and Towns was a frequent contributor off the bench. A return to those roles next season could help to blunt the damage of those departures for which the Buckeyes are preparing. Hookfin has served only in mop-up duty as a Buckeye and was first granted a scholarship after several years as a walk-on earlier this season.

Branham, Liddell Earn BIG Honors

Branham and Liddell were honored

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March 8 as the Big Ten released its end-of-season all-conference teams and its picks for player, rookie, sixth man, defender and coach of the year by both the coaches and media.

Liddell wasn't able to claim Player of the Year honors – those instead went to Wisconsin's Johnny Davis – but he did earn a nod on both first teams and was picked by the coaches to the All-Defensive team. He was joined on the coaches' and media first team by Illinois big man Kofi Cockburn, Davis, Purdue guard Jaden Ivey and Iowa forward Keegan Murray. Cockburn and Murray were unanimous picks among both groups, and Davis was a unanimous pick by the coaches but not the media.

The defensive team features Liddell, Illinois guard Trent Frazier, Purdue's Eric Hunter Jr., Indiana's Trayce Jackson-Davis and Caleb McConnell of Rutgers. Defender of the Year honors went to McConnell.

Liddell finished the regular season averaging 19.4 points, 7.9 rebounds, 2.6 assists and 2.6 blocks per contest.

"It's been the kind of season you would hope someone would have when they decide to return to school," Holtmann said. "It doesn't always work out like that, you don't always improve your stock by coming back – I could rattle off 20 cases like that. It's happened with him, and it's a credit to his work and his buy-in to what we've been challenging him with.

"We made a commitment to E.J. and his family that he would play and defend on the perimeter, and there have been times where that's been an adjustment for all of us but it's something we've committed to and it's really been good for him and his growth and it's also helped people see him in a good way. But almost every aspect of his game has improved, and that's what you want from a guy coming back. That's a byproduct of E.J. being E.J., and I'm really happy for him."

Branham was selected to the third team by both the coaches and media, earned a nod on the All-Freshman team and claimed the honors as the Big Ten's Freshman of the Year on both batches of ballots, beating out Nebraska's Bryce McGowens – who was selected to the All-Freshman team alongside Branham, Michigan State's Max Christie, Michigan's Moussa Diabate and Wisconsin's Chucky Hepburn.

The media and coaches agreed on Branham, McGowens, Illinois' Alfonso Plummer and Purdue's Trevion Williams – also the Sixth Man of the Year – as third-team picks, with Brad Davison of Wisconsin on the media ballot and Geo Baker of Rutgers and Gabe Brown of Michigan State rounding out the coaches' group (the sixth player was due to a tie).



Ryan Pedon

The freshman out of Akron finished the regular season with 13.2 points, 3.6 rebounds and 1.9 assists per game, breaking through into a starring role in the back half of the season. In 20 games since the turn of the calendar, Branham

has averaged 16.9 points, shooting 52.1 percent from the field and 44.6 percent from three-point range, playing himself into NBA draft talk – though he has yet to make any

2021-22 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

19-11 Overall (12-8 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 10

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. Liddell	30-30	991-33.1	193-392	.492	44-117	.376	158-206	.767	70-168	238-7.9	75-2	76	71	78	15	588-19.6
Malaki Branham	30-29	881-29.4	145-295	.492	34-80	.425	76-92	.826	24-83	107-3.6	50-1	58	47	9	19	400-13.3
Kyle Young	25-2	550-22.0	70-135	.519	15-46	.326	51-64	.797	33-89	122-4.9	46-1	32	25	13	12	206-8.2
Zed Key	27-23	545-20.2	93-163	.571	0-0	.000	34-58	.586	50-95	145-5.4	64-0	15	27	24	6	220-8.1
Jamari Wheeler	29-29	850-29.3	74-158	.468	37-93	.398	29-33	.879	15-74	89-3.1	71-1	87	49	2	37	214-7.4
Justice Sueing	2-0	30-15.2	5-13	.385	0-4	.000	2-2	1.000	1-6	7-3.5	3-0	0	2	0	1	12-6.0
Justin Ahrens	30-19	629-21.0	46-131	.351	45-125	.360	18-24	.750	5-69	74-2.5	42-1	26	22	1	8	155-5.2
Meechie Johnson Jr.	24-5	430-17.9	35-115	.304	25-79	.316	14-19	.737	6-31	37-1.5	36-0	30	34	3	17	109-4.5
Cedric Russell	28-0	371-13.3	46-104	.442	29-66	.439	4-7	.571	0-19	19-0.7	22-0	13	14	0	4	125-4.5
Eugene Brown III	24-8	395-16.5	30-68	.441	8-31	.258	13-21	.619	19-42	61-2.5	36-0	13	12	6	5	81-3.4
Joey Brunk	27-5	213-7.9	29-45	.644	0-0	.000	10-13	.769	6-38	44-1.6	28-0	6	10	6	6	68-2.5
Jimmy Sotos	18-0	146-8.1	10-19	.526	6-10	.600	8-10	.800	1-12	13-0.7	17-0	25	6	2	2	34-1.9
Harrison Hookfin	6-0	13-2.2	1-2	.500	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	1-0	1-0.2	1-0	2	0	0	1	2-0.3
Team									34-40	74			10			
Total	30	6050	777-1640	.474	243-651	.373	417-549	.760	265-766	1031-34.4	491-6	383	329	144	133	2214-73.8
Opponents	30	6050	734-1752	.419	210-618	.340	376-512	.734	307-654	961-32.0	518-11	348	302	77	182	2054-68.5

decisions on that front.

"He's really worked, he's grown in confidence, and the game has slowed down for him," Holtmann said of his first-year guard. "When a game slows down for an athlete, they think less and play more on reaction. That's been the case for Malaki, and it's been fun for all of us to see his development and growth in a short amount of time. It's been really exciting for Buckeye Nation too to see someone grow like that in front of their eyes."

No other Buckeyes were included on any All-Big Ten teams, but Ahrens was picked as Ohio State's Sportsmanship Award Honoree.

Wisconsin's Greg Gard was the Coach of the Year.

Pedon Headed To Illinois State

Ohio State assistant coach Ryan Pedon, the last remaining member of Holtmann's first coaching staff in Columbus, will be the next head coach at Illinois State. The Redbirds closed their season on March 4 with

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

a conference tournament loss to Northern Iowa shortly before news broke of Pedon's impending hiring.

Pedon, who coordinates Ohio State's offense, will stay with the team for the remainder of the season and take over at Illinois State once the Buckeyes have played their final game. He'll succeed Dan Muller, who spent 10 seasons at the helm and racked up a 167-150 record with one regular-season Missouri Valley Conference title and no NCAA tournament appearances. The program has six tournament berths, six reg-

ular-season titles and four conference-tournament titles to its name.

"I'm thrilled for Ryan and his family," Holtmann said. "This is a really good job. People who may not follow college basketball as closely might not understand that, but it's in a really good league and it's a very good gig in that league. Anybody in the industry would tell you that it's a great first job. I'm really happy for him.

"I've been saying for the past couple of

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BIG Men's Basketball Tournament

March 9-13, 2022 • Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis

MARCH 9	MARCH 10	MARCH 11	MARCH 12	MARCH 13	All Times ET
No. 13 Nebraska Gm. 1 • 6:00 pm • BTN	No. 9 Indiana Gm. 3 • 11:30 am • BTN	No. 9 Indiana Gm. 7 • 11:30 am • BTN	No. 9 Indiana	No. 5 Iowa	
No. 12 Northwestern Gm. 2 • 25 min after Gm. 1 • BTN	No. 8 Michigan Gm. 4 • 25 min. after Gm. 3 • BTN	No. 1 Illinois Gm. 8 • 25 min. after Gm. 7 • BTN	No. 5 Iowa	No. 5 Iowa	
No. 10 Maryland Gm. 5 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	No. 5 Iowa Gm. 5 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	No. 4 Rutgers Gm. 9 • 6:30 p.m. • BTN	No. 5 Iowa	No. 5 Iowa	
No. 7 Michigan State Gm. 6 • 25 min after Gm. 5 • BTN	No. 12 Northwestern Gm. 6 • 25 min. after Gm. 5 • BTN	No. 7 Michigan State Gm. 10 • 25 min. after Gm. 9 • BTN	No. 7 Michigan State	No. 7 Michigan State	
No. 14 Minnesota Gm. 7 • 25 min after Gm. 1 • BTN	No. 10 Maryland Gm. 7 • 25 min after Gm. 1 • BTN	No. 2 Wisconsin Gm. 11 • 25 min after Gm. 10 • BTN	No. 2 Wisconsin	No. 2 Wisconsin	
No. 11 Penn State Gm. 8 • 25 min after Gm. 1 • BTN	No. 11 Penn State Gm. 8 • 25 min after Gm. 1 • BTN	No. 11 Penn State Gm. 12 • 25 min after Gm. 11 • CBS	No. 11 Penn State	No. 11 Penn State	
No. 6 Ohio State Gm. 9 • 25 min after Gm. 1 • BTN	No. 6 Ohio State Gm. 9 • 25 min after Gm. 1 • BTN	No. 3 Purdue Gm. 13 • 4 pm • CBS	No. 3 Purdue	No. 3 Purdue	
				No. 5 Iowa	TOURNAMENT CHAMPION

Diebler To Take Over Offense From Pedon

Continued From Page 21

years that we could lose Ryan to a head coaching job, and I think here in these next few years we're going to have more of our guys get head coaching jobs. That's a really exciting thing when you're in my position to see guys like Mike Schrage and now Ryan (get these jobs). It's a lot of fun. This is a great opportunity for him. He's a special person, he's had a huge influence, recruited some of the most impactful guys in our program right now and I'm excited to follow his

career."

A former assistant of Holtmann's at Butler, Pedon traveled with him to Ohio State as part of Holtmann's inaugural staff, along with Terry Johnson and Schrage. Johnson departed after last season to become an assistant at Purdue, while Schrage left after the 2018-19 season for the head coaching position at Elon, where he's currently 33-51.

"Anytime your assistant gets a head coaching job, it's something he's dreamed about forever," Holtmann said. "I think if

we're successful, we're going to lose assistants. That's the bottom line. If we're successful and you're at Ohio State, you're going to lose assistant coaches. It's what they dream of.

"(Assistant) Jake Diebler will be a head coach here before long, (assistant) Tony Skinn, (special assistant to the head coach) Mike Netti, those guys all (too). I'm not sure what I'm going to do with the position yet at this point. Jake will eventually assume Ryan's responsibilities, and then we'll figure out where to go with hiring an

assistant."

Before heading to Butler, Pedon worked under Holtmann's longtime friend and college teammate John Groce at Illinois.

Earlier this season, Holtmann told media that he didn't expect to have Pedon around much longer. After the 2020-21 season, he was a finalist for the opening at Cincinnati.

"Ryan's fantastic," he said on Feb. 24. "I think he's one of the terrific young up-and-coming assistant coaches that's going to be a head coach real soon. He's turned down a couple of coaching jobs, and I'm forever grateful for what Ryan's done, but unfortunately, I don't think I can hang onto him much longer."

A graduate of Wooster and later Miami (Ohio), Pedon is an Ohio native who has spent his entire career in the Midwest. At Illinois State, he'll hope to deliver a tournament berth for the first time since 1998, when Kevin Stallings – most recently the head coach at Pitt – led the Redbirds to the second round after upsetting Tennessee in the first round. The Redbirds were 13-19 in 2021-22, their third straight losing season – the most consecutive losing seasons for the program since 1950.

"My vision for this program is to become a consistent standard of excellence, on the court and off, in the Missouri Valley Conference," Pedon said during his introductory press conference. "And in doing that, becoming a player on the national stage once again. We have a lot of hard work ahead of us in the days, weeks and months ahead, but I know it can be done here."

His departure makes Diebler the elder statesman on Ohio State's staff. He was hired to replace Schrage, while Skinn took over for Johnson this season.

Diebler, as the most experienced assistant, will slide into Pedon's offensive coordinator role down the road, while Skinn will remain as an advanced scout and game planner, meaning the Buckeyes will be looking more for a defensive coordinator when it comes to looking for Pedon's replacement.

"Jake will kind of move into that role and he'll take a lot of Ryan's offensive responsibilities, offensive game plan, he'll take that over," Holtmann said. "Tony will continue to be in his role of scouting – he scouts every team's personnel. And then we'll figure out what to do next with the other areas. But again, that will wait until after the season. I'm not in a hurry to make any of those decisions right now. We're going to obviously coach our team right now, Ryan's staying through the end of the season, and then we'll figure it out from there."

As for who may be on the short list, Holtmann has no shortage of candidates.

"That's what I'm doing right now," the coach said. "I'm getting a ton of calls. There's a ton of interest for Ryan's position. I've given it some thought, but it will be something that we'll look at after the season."



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Former Buckeyes Hitting Their Strides In NBA

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The paths of five current NBA players took them through Columbus, but they all have their unique stories of how they have survived, and in some cases, thrived following their successful careers at Ohio State.

For Jae'Sean Tate of the Houston Rockets and the Indiana Pacers' Duane Washington Jr., their journeys to the best basketball league in the world came with the challenge of being undrafted.

Meanwhile, Mike Conley Jr. was the fourth overall pick in the 2007 NBA draft by Memphis and had a lengthy career with the Grizzlies before being traded to Utah in 2019.

D'Angelo Russell entered the NBA as the second overall pick by the Los Angeles Lakers in 2015, but after several stops along the way he seems to be a fit with the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Keita Bates-Diop heard his name called on draft day in 2018 – No. 48 to Minnesota – but he's still trying to earn minutes for the San Antonio Spurs.

A look at the five in order of their draft years:

Elder Statesman

Conley, 34, played for the Buckeyes in the 2006-07 season and along with Greg Oden helped OSU to the national championship game, where they lost to Florida. In 39 games, he averaged 11.3 points, 3.4 rebounds and 6.1 assists.

A native of Indianapolis, Conley (6-1, 175) was the fourth pick in the 2007 NBA draft by the Memphis Grizzlies and played there 12 seasons. The point guard led the franchise to six playoff appearances, averaging 16.6 points and 6.7 assists in 56 career postseason games for the Grizzlies.

On March 28, 2019, he passed Marc Gasol to become the team's all-time leading scorer.

Conley won the NBA Sportsmanship Award three times (2014, 2016 and 2019), and he also was named the 2019 NBA Teammate of the Year Award.

He was traded to the Utah Jazz on July 6, 2019, and in 2021 he was named to the NBA All-Star Game for the first time in his career as a reserve, replacing the injured Devin Booker. Conley had three points, one rebound and two assists in 12 minutes.

As of press time, he was averaging 13.2 points, 3.1 rebounds and 5.2 assists in 59 games this season. In 945 NBA games he has a stat line of 14.8, 3.0, 5.6.

Northern Light

After wandering his way through three NBA teams, Russell has steadily developed into a reliable and impactful force for the Timberwolves since his arrival in a trade with the Golden State Warriors on Feb. 6, 2020.

He was averaging 18.8 points, 3.4 rebounds and 7.2 assists in his first 54 games this season but more importantly had fired up a fan base that has seen the T-Wolves make the playoffs nine times in their 32-year history. Minnesota is on pace to make the postseason for the second time since 2003-04.

Russell thought a home-court advantage was lacking and in February called out the "quiet-ass fans" to stand and cheer until the Timberwolves scored their first points of the game at the Target Center.

"I thought it was the right time," Russell said. "As an organization trying to gain our re-

spect around the league and from our peers, we're going to need our fans to do that."

The fans responded positively, for the most part, to him and his request. It helps that he's bringing out the best in his friend, star center Karl-Anthony Towns, who vouched for Russell when the T-Wolves were considering acquiring him in the trade that sent Andrew Wiggins to the Warriors.

Jim Souhan of the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune said March 4 that Russell is developing into the player the Timberwolves had hoped for. "All Russell had to do to succeed as a Timberwolf was outperform Andrew Wiggins and the draft picks that the Wolves traded to procure him – score, pass, defend, lead, bond with his teammates and win.

"Tainted by playing for four teams in his first six seasons in the league, Russell had to cleanse his reputation while playing for the NBA franchise that is almost always the most in need of a good power washing.

"Russell has become the Wolves' epoxy player, able to score, willing to share and, at certain times and in certain deployments, able to rise above his reputation as a poor defender."

Though Russell was at Ohio State only for the 2014-15 season, he left his mark for coach Thad Matta.

In a 79-60 win over Rutgers, Russell had 23 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists to become the first Buckeye freshman to record a triple-double.

He was named a first-team All-American and Big Ten Freshman of the Year after averaging 19.3 points, 5.7 rebounds and 5.0 assists. He declared for the NBA draft following the season, and in his first year with the Lakers he earned a spot on the NBA All-Rookie second team.

Russell (6-4, 193) was traded to the Brooklyn Nets in 2017 and was named to the 2019 NBA All-Star Team. He eventually landed with the Golden State Warriors before making his way to his new home.

He's been on top of his game this season and on Feb. 22 scored a season-high 37 points and dished nine assists in a 119-114 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies.

"D'Angelo has been incredible," Minnesota coach Chris Finch said. "He's really playing extremely well since the All-Star break. He's a huge driver of our success right now.

"Love the skill. The talent level is high. He's been very engaged from the get-go. The effort and intensity have been there. He's really super smart, and we've been able to use him as a quarterback on defense at times. He's been way better than advertised, for me."

Spur Of The Moment

Since leaving Ohio State following the 2017-18 season in which he was named the Big Ten Player of the Year (19.8 points, 8.7 rebounds), it's been an inconsistent NBA career for Bates-Diop.

But on Dec. 23, 2021, he had a performance for the ages when the Spurs downed the Los Angeles Lakers 138-110.

He poured in 30 points, surpassing his previous best of 22 for the Timberwolves in November 2019. How Bates-Diop (6-8, 229) reached that number was historic.

He was 11 for 11 from the floor in 27 minutes to become the fifth player in the NBA since 2000 to score 30 points on 100 percent shooting, joining Thomas Bryant, Dwight Howard, Nikola Jokic and Domantas Sabonis.

The always succinct Spurs coach Gregg Popovich summed up what he witnessed,

"Keita was ridiculous."

Bates-Diop is not unlike Russell in having a journeyman's career before finding a spot with the Spurs. He was traded by Minnesota to Denver on Feb. 5, 2020, but was waived nine months later before signing with the Spurs on Nov. 29, 2020.

"You never know what's going to happen," he said to the San Antonio Express "It's, 'Will I start? Will I come off the bench?' It's been that way my whole career. I've played, didn't play, been traded away. ... whatever it is.

"I feel comfortable here. It's the longest I've been in one place, so it's starting to feel like home. That's half the battle in the NBA, finding where you are comfortable."

As BSB went to press, Bates-Diop was averaging 5.3 points and 3.9 rebounds in 51 games while making 50.9 percent of his field goals.

"He is just trying to find a place in the NBA, find a home and have a career," Popovich said. "He has been given some minutes and opportunities and has taken advantage of it and tried to show he can be a good player at both ends of the court."

Three days before his epic performance vs. the Lakers, he played just four minutes and scored two points against the Los Angeles Clippers. So goes his up-and-down career.

"I've tried to be even-keeled throughout it all, just trusting the work without getting too emotional, too high or too low," Bates-Diop said. "It's all about acceptance. Accepting the things that happen, the things you can and can't control. That was a big thing for me, separating the two."

His positive attitude has made him a popular teammate

"Some games he starts, some games he doesn't play, but he's always the same," Spurs guard Derrick White told the San Antonio Express. "He comes in with the same attitude, same mind-set. When he plays, he does good things for us. It's a testament to who he is and his character."

No Problem With Houston

Tate is an example of perseverance, having not being selected in the 2018 NBA draft after a solid but not spectacular OSU career from 2014-18.

After two seasons abroad, he's in his second season with the Rockets and on Feb. 18 played in the NBA Rising Stars tournament during the All-Star Weekend in Cleveland.

After being named to the NBA Rookie first team for 2020-21, he's continued his ascension this season by averaging 12.3 points, 5.5 rebounds and 3.0 assists in 64 games.

Tate (6-4, 230) earlier this season became the second player in franchise history to record a stat line of at least 30 points (he scored 32), 10 rebounds, seven assists and five blocks in a game. The other player was Hakeem Olajuwon.

While Tate is known for his defense and toughness, he's happy to contribute offensively.

"That's not my primary role. I think everybody knows that," he said. "But I'm very confident in what I bring to the table offensively. Not only scoring-wise but just seeing the floor and being able to make decisions in space. That kind of helps me when they overlook the scouting report."

His play does not go unnoticed by the Rockets staff.

"Winners win. He's won forever," assistant coach Will Weaver told ESPN. "The kinds of things that he brings to a team in Belgium are the same things he brings in Australia or here.

"He plays more often than not on the best

opposition offensive player. That has been a huge part of his value here, just the way he straps up on that end and competes and limits the great players from scoring as many as they're used to.

"J.T. has found ways to impact winning despite that sometimes, but the strides he's made has made it harder for teams to completely ignore him," Weaver added. "He might not be our leading scorer but he's going to be picked by coaches 10 times out of 10 if they have the choice of choosing who they want to impact winning."

Tate played at Pickerington Central High School in suburban Columbus and followed his father to Ohio State. Jermaine Tate played two seasons for the Buckeyes from 1995-97 before transferring to Cincinnati.

The younger Tate was a Big Ten All-Freshman Team selection and an all-conference honorable mention as a sophomore and junior for Matta. In his senior season for Chris Holtmann, he was named to the All-Big Ten second team.

Following the draft, he was invited to join the Milwaukee Bucks' summer league team in 2018, but he was unable to play due to a fractured finger.

He played in Belgium in 2018-19 and with the Sydney Kings of the Australian National Basketball League the following season.

Tate signed with the Rockets on Nov. 26, 2020, and made his NBA debut a month later.

On Pace

Washington finished his Ohio State career last season as a third-team All-Big selection when he averaged 16.4 points, 3.4 rebounds and 2.9 assists. That wasn't enough to get him drafted, but he signed a two-way contract with the Pacers, splitting time with their G League affiliate in Fort Wayne, Ind.

His highlight so far with the Pacers is hitting seven three-pointers for 21 points against New Orleans, setting the team record for triples by a rookie.

"I just had a good rhythm coming into the game and had a good warmup," Washington said. "My guys believe in me to make shots, and they put me in some great positions tonight to make a lot. It's just being confident in myself, and the coaches and players believing in me as well. Credit to them just as much as me believing in my abilities."

In 37 games, he's put up 9.4 points per game, grabbed 1.7 rebounds and dished 1.8 assists.

He's grateful that the Pacers took a chance on him.

"I'm just blessed to be in this opportunity," Washington told the Indianapolis Star. "I love it here with this organization and have learned a lot so far in my first year and would love to continue doing so and learning more in the next couple years. We'll see what happens.

"I knew I was supposed to be here. I knew I was supposed to make it to this point and even further."

Confidence has never been lacking for Washington (6-3, 210).

"Obviously, I definitely think I can help the team out," Washington said. "Just with my shooting ability, being able to space the floor, being able to move and just being an active guy and having a lot of energy is something that I try to bring every time I step on the floor and just make the right play.

"When my day comes to play 20-30 minutes, I'll be ready."

Men's Cagers' Late-Season Skid Continues

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The final stretch run of the season was not kind to Ohio State. After an upset of Illinois in Champaign that seemed to push the Buckeyes fully into the Big Ten title conversation, Ohio State dropped three of its final four regular-season games, and that skid continued into Big Ten postseason play. In its lone matchup of the tournament, the Buckeyes – who fell into the No. 6 seed – surrendered an 11-point second-half lead and fell to 11th-seeded Penn State.

Although the Buckeyes opened this drought with a 75-60 loss to Maryland on Feb. 27, they absorbed the brunt of the damage since BSB last published, as detailed in this edition's recaps.

Buckeyes Stunned By Nebraska

Even at its best, Ohio State has been defined by streaks all season. The Buckeyes have rallied for major victories by stringing together scoring runs. On Feb. 24, a 20-2 run against Illinois helped to lift Ohio State on the road. The signature win of the season for the Buckeyes, a 71-66 victory over Duke on Nov. 30, came about only because of a 12-0 Buckeye run to close the game.

That has cut in both directions for the Buckeyes, though. Nearly six minutes without a basket doomed them against Rutgers on Feb. 9, as did a sparse final four minutes against Maryland on Feb. 27. Though OSU managed to hold on against Indiana on Feb. 21, it knocked down just one field goal in 14 second-half minutes and needed an E.J. Liddell dunk with only seconds remaining to send the game to an extra period.

The Buckeyes showed no interest in turning away from that on March 1, even as they hosted the Big Ten's worst team, Nebraska (9-21, 3-16) – the loser in 16 of its first 18 league games. Limited by a stop-and-start offense and a defense that couldn't stop a whole lot of anything, Ohio State fell 78-70 to the bottom-dwelling Cornhuskers in Value City Arena, throwing open the door for another Big Ten team to claim the No. 4 seed in the Big Ten tournament and the double-bye that came with it.

"I think confidence is a pretty tenuous thing, and it wasn't too long ago that we performed well here," Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann, whose team began the season 11-0 at home, said after the game. "We're obviously really struggling right now, that's no secret. We'll see if this group has the ability to gain a little trust in each other and confidence. We've got a really good group. We've got really good guys. I think we're searching a little bit, and I think we're pressing too much right now, certainly on the offensive end."

It was all erratic, all game for OSU. The Buckeyes hit only four of their first 12 shots before rattling off seven of their next eight, leaping out to a 26-19 lead with 9:28 left in the first. Seemingly unaffected by their sudden hot streak, they scored only four points in the next 5:08, dropping from seven points ahead to three behind, 33-30.

A Malaki Branham jumper served as the only made shot for the Buckeyes between the cap of that 26-19 edge and a Branham three-pointer with 10 seconds remaining in the half – one field goal in more than nine minutes of game time.

Nebraska could generate only a seven-point lead of its own during the drought, meaning that the Branham three-pointer to end the half sent the Buckeyes into the break trailing by only four points, 43-39.

Liddell opened the second half with two free throws, followed promptly by a 10-2 Nebraska flurry that provided the Cornhuskers with the largest lead to that point for either side, 53-43.

Unable to find any answers defensively for the brothers McGowens – Bryce and Trey, who scored 14 and seven points respectively in the second half, shooting a combined 8 of 12 from the floor – and relying almost entirely on Liddell on the other end, the Buckeyes struggled to make gains on their guests. It seemed that every time Ohio State (18-9, 11-7) came within striking distance, Nebraska answered with points of its own. In fact, the Buckeyes didn't generate more than five unanswered points until a 7-0 run that culminated with a pair of Branham free throws at the 55 second mark, leaving the Buckeyes trailing 73-69.

But it was the Cornhuskers who pulled through in the end, converting on all but one of six free-throw tries in the final 51 seconds while the Buckeyes came up with only one more point, to fall by eight points before the home crowd of 12,268.

"I think bottom line, we have to defend way better than how we're defending right now," Holtmann said. "It comes back to that. We've got to be way more connected on the defensive end, and then I thought we really pressed offensively once we got down a little bit. We had some unique lineups in there obviously and we just pressed too much."

Ohio State shot just 38.6 percent (22 of 57) from the field and 29.2 percent from three-point range. Liddell scored 27 points with 14 rebounds and Branham added 16 points, but the two were only 12 of 28 shooting. No other Buck-

eye hit double digits for points, though Jimmy Sotos, who played nearly 23 minutes, chipped in eight points and a pair of assists.

The younger McGowens, Bryce, scored 26 points to seven from his brother, with 15 points from C.J. Wilcher and 13 points from Alonzo Verge Jr., who also had 11 assists. The Cornhuskers had only four turnovers in the game.

Brunk, Wheeler Shine Against MSU

Ohio State entered its matchup against Michigan State (19-11, 10-9) March 3 with tired legs and in desperate need of a victory. With losses to Nebraska and Maryland in the rear-view mirror and their backs against the wall in the fight for the coveted double-bye in the Big Ten tournament, the Buckeyes knew they would have to dig deep and refocus on both sides of the ball to claim that much-needed win.

But it's hard to imagine that even those players and coaches inside the home locker room at Value City Arena knew that they could dig as deep as they did in an 80-69 win over the Spartans that kept alive hopes of securing the No. 4 seed in league tournament play heading into the regular-season finale against Michigan.

With starting center Zed Key sidelined and in a walking boot and do-it-all forward Kyle Young unavailable because of an unspecified illness, the Buckeyes turned to seldom-used Indiana transfer Joey Brunk down low, relying on him for a season-high 33 minutes. They slotted winger Eugene Brown III into power-forward minutes when Liddell needed a breather.

And above all else, Holtmann challenged his role players to step into the limelight and offer some relief for Ohio State's stars, Branham and Liddell, who had been running themselves ragged to keep the Buckeyes afloat offensively for much of February as many of those role players struggled with putting the ball in the basket.

It wasn't a breakthrough for all of them. Ohio State's bench contributed only three points, all from Cedric Russell, with two combined points from the trio of Justin Ahrens, Brown (who started) and Meechie Johnson Jr. among other members of the supporting cast.

But in one of the finest games in his collegiate career, Brunk pitched in 18 points, much to the delight of the partisan crowd of 14,951. He had scored two points in the previous seven games and had finished with double-digit points in only 17 of his 116 previous collegiate showings. At point guard, Jamari Wheeler knocked down four first-half three-pointers and 16 overall points. When the Buckeyes needed their supporting cast most, they delivered an Oscar-worthy performance.

"I never thought in a million years (it would be) Joey Brunk," Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo said after the game. "I recruited Joey, great kid. I know he's been through injuries and everything, but to get 18 points and tear us up like he did, I guess you could say it's my fault for not doubling him. But boy, if you have to double him, he averaged 1.1 points or something like that. Shame on our guys."

Holtmann wasn't buying the shock routine. "Tom's aware of him. Tom's probably saying, 'I don't know what Holt's doing not playing him, what an idiot.' That's probably what Tom's thinking," Holtmann said. "I don't know how surprised he was. He might have been surprised how much we went to him."

Of course, a supporting cast still needs its stars, and though they weren't the main attraction of the evening, Branham and Liddell still offered more than enough star power to lift the

Ohio State 80, Michigan State 69

March 3, 2022
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio.

	1	2	F
Michigan St. (19-11, 10-9)	33	36	69
Ohio State (19-9, 12-7)	43	37	80

Michigan St.	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Hall	21	1-4	2-4	2-1	0	0	4			
Marble	12	1-3	1-2	2-1	0	2	3			
Brown	31	5-9	0-0	1-1	2	0	13			
Christie	28	3-8	0-0	0-3	2	0	7			
Hoggard	18	3-5	0-1	1-2	1	2	6			
Walker	27	2-6	2-2	0-2	6	3	7			
Akins	17	1-4	3-4	0-2	0	1	6			
Hauser	22	3-7	2-2	0-3	0	3	9			
Bingham Jr.	17	4-6	1-2	2-3	0	3	11			
Sissoko	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Brooks	4	1-1	1-1	0-0	0	0	3			
Totals	200	24-53	12-18	10-20	11	15	69			

Percentages: FG: 45.3%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-18 (Brown 3-4, Bingham Jr. 2-2, Walker 1-1, Akins 1-2, Christie 1-3, Hauser 1-3, Hoggard 0-1, Hall 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Akins, Bingham Jr., Marble). **Turnovers:** 13 (Hall 3, Brown 2, Christie 2, Hoggard 2, Walker 2, Hauser, Marble). **Steals:** 3 (Brown, Hoggard, Marble).

Ohio State	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Liddell	33	6-12	4-5	1-7	3	2	19			
Brunk	33	7-10	4-5	0-6	0	4	18			
Brown III	29	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	3	2			
Branham	36	9-16	3-4	2-2	4	0	22			
Wheeler	34	5-11	2-2	0-2	1	4	16			
Ahrens	10	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	2	0			
Russell	12	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	3			
Johnson Jr.	14	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	1	0			
Totals	200	29-53	13-16	5-21	9	17	80			

Percentages: FG: 54.7%. FT: 81.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-20 (Wheeler 4-8, Liddell 3-6, Russell 1-1, Branham 1-3, Brown III 0-1, Johnson Jr. 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Brown III, Liddell). **Turnovers:** 10 (Liddell 3, Brunk 2, Johnson Jr. 2, Brown III, Russell, Wheeler). **Steals:** 7 (Branham 2, Brunk 2, Johnson Jr. 2, Wheeler). **Officials:** Green, Dorsey, Kueneman. Attendance: 14,951.

Buckeyes above the Spartans. Liddell pitched in a quiet 19 points with eight rebounds, helping Ohio State finish the game competitive on the boards, trailing 30-26, which has been a major concern for Holtmann all season.

Branham led the Buckeyes in the box score with 22 points and put the first exclamation point on a superlative performance with 4:00 to play, beating his defender to the hoop and throwing down a left-handed dunk over two Spartans to put Ohio State ahead by 14 points into the final media break of the game, 74-60. For good measure, after a pair of MSU free throws, Brunk threw another exclamation point on the game with a slam of his own at the 1:52 mark.

Even though the nonpareil pair bolstered the box score and opened the floor for their teammates, they ceded the spotlight to Brunk in the postgame press conference.

"(It felt) pretty damn good if you want the honest answer," Brunk said when asked how he felt about his performance. "It just felt good to go out and compete and play in front of that crowd. We knew we needed to get back on track."

A series of Buckeye free throws from Branham and Wheeler wrapped up the win – wire-to-wire domination of a perennial conference contender that had opened with an 11-0 run and closed with gusto by a podium game from the player whom many least expected.

The Buckeyes led by as many as 14 twice in the first five minutes before the Spartans closed to 27-25 on a Gabe Brown basket. Ohio State (19-9, 12-7) then responded with a 12-2 run capped by a Wheeler shot from beyond the arc.

Ohio State led 43-33 at the break, and the

Nebraska 78, Ohio State 70							
March 1, 2022 Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio.							
	1	2	F				
Nebraska (9-21, 3-16)	43	35	78				
Ohio State (18-9, 11-7)	39	31	70				
Nebraska	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Mayen	26	1-4	3-4	0-2	0	3	6
Walker	13	2-2	0-1	1-4	0	4	4
Verge Jr.	35	5-14	2-2	0-5	11	1	13
T. McGowens	32	3-5	0-0	1-5	0	5	7
B. McGowens	37	8-15	8-9	0-4	0	1	26
Wilcher	33	6-11	0-0	1-1	0	2	15
Webster	15	1-3	2-2	0-1	1	1	5
Andre	9	1-1	0-0	1-2	0	3	2
Totals	200	27-55	15-18	4-24	12	20	78
Percentages: FG: 49.1%. FT: 83.3%. Three-point field goals: 9-23 (Wilcher 3-5, B. McGowens 2-7, T. McGowens 1-2, Verge Jr. 1-2, Webster 1-3, Mayen 1-4). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 1 (Mayen). Turnovers: 4 (B. McGowens 2, Verge Jr., Wilcher). Steals: 5 (T. McGowens 4, Wilcher).							
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
Young	8	1-3	0-0	1-1	0	2	2
Liddell	39	7-17	11-13	5-9	1	3	27
Brown III	26	2-5	2-2	3-1	3	1	6
Branham	33	5-11	4-6	0-2	2	5	16
Wheeler	31	3-5	0-0	1-3	0	2	6
Sotos	23	2-3	2-2	0-2	2	1	8
Ahrens	21	1-4	0-0	1-2	2	2	3
Brunk	4	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Russell	10	1-5	0-1	0-1	0	0	2
Johnson Jr.	3	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Hookfin	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	22-57	19-24	14-25	10	17	70
Percentages: FG: 38.6%. FT: 79.2%. Three-point field goals: 7-24 (Sotos 2-2, Branham 2-4, Liddell 2-6). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 7 (Liddell 6, Young). Turnovers: 8 (Branham 3, Liddell 2, Wheeler 2, Young). Steals: 2 (Liddell, Sotos). Officials: Carstensen, Boroski, McNutt. Attendance: 12,268.							

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Mikesell, Sheldon Named To All-B10 Team

After a 7-1 run to end the season en route to a 22-5 finish to the regular season, the star guard duo of Taylor Mikesell and Jacy Sheldon were both recognized as

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

first-team All-Big Ten players on both the media and coaches' ballots, with Sheldon, who was also picked to the all-defense team, earning unanimous honors among the coaches. They were the lone Buckeyes selected for the postseason all-conference teams.

Mikesell and Sheldon are joined on the media ballot by Indiana's Grace Berger, Northwestern's Veronica Burton, Caitlin Clark and Monika Czinano of Iowa, Michigan State's Nia Clouden, Michigan's Naz Hillmon, Penn State's Makenna Marisa and Angel Reese of Maryland. Clark and Hillmon were the lone unanimous picks.

The coaches' poll is identical but lists Burton, Clark, Clouden, Hillmon and Sheldon as unanimous picks. Braxtin Miller is the only Buckeye included among the honorable mentions, getting the nod there from the media. Rikki Harris was the OSU pick for the Sportsmanship Award Honoree.

During the regular season, Mikesell averaged 19.1 points per game on 49.1 percent shooting from the field (47.1 percent from three-point range, which led the league) with 3.4 rebounds and 2.0 assists, while Sheldon – who assumed point guard duties in the middle of the season – led the team in points (19.4), assists (4.0) and steals (1.8) per game, shooting 50.7 percent from the field and 39.4 percent from deep. Mikesell is also one of 10 national finalists for the Ann Myers-Drysdale Award, which goes to the best shooting guard.

Clark – for her 27.5 points, 8.3 assists and 7.9 rebounds per game – was selected by both the media and coaches as the league's Player of the Year. Burton was picked as the league's Defensive Player of

the Year for the third consecutive season, collecting 4.1 steals and 0.9 blocks per contest. Nebraska's Alexis Markowski, a second-team pick in both polls, earned Freshman of the Year honors after averaging 13.0 points and 7.9 rebounds per game.

Michigan's Kim Barnes Arico is the Coach of the Year, leading her bunch to a 22-5 record in the regular season.

Sheldon was also named to the Big Ten All-Tournament Team after scoring 19 against Michigan State and 22 against Indiana, shooting 15 of 32 (46.9 percent) for the two games. She was joined on the team by Indiana's Berger and guard Nicole Cardano-Hillary, and Iowa's Czinano and Clark, who was named Tournament MVP. Sheldon was the only player named to the All-Tournament Team who was not in the finals.

McGuff Earns Extension By Winning Title

Not only did Ohio State earn a share of the conference title on Feb. 27 by defeating Michigan State, but it also secured an additional season for head coach Kevin McGuff, whose contract would now run through the 2023-24 season according to the terms of his agreement. The university has 60 days from the championship win to make his one-year extension official.

McGuff's original contract began with the 2013-14 season and ran through the end of the 2020-21 season, but his contract allows additional years to be added if his teams meet certain achievements, including being awarded the title of Big Ten champion or co-champion in the regular season, winning the Big Ten tournament or reaching the "Elite Eight" round of the NCAA tournament.

Though McGuff's original contract length has already expired, he had two years added to his contract after winning (or sharing) the regular-season title in the 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons. A maximum of one year can be added to McGuff's contract per season even if he meets multiple achievements, so even though the Buckeyes also won the conference tournament in 2018, only one year was added to his contract after that season.

Following the conclusion to Ohio State's regular season, McGuff is 190-89 in nine

seasons with the Buckeyes, with a 104-49 mark in conference play. For his career, which also spans 11 seasons at Xavier (nine seasons) and Washington (two seasons), McGuff is 444-188.

McGuff is the third-longest tenured women's basketball coach in Ohio State history, trailing Jim Foster (11 years, 2002-13) and Nancy Darsch (12 years, 1985-97). In nine seasons, McGuff has five NCAA tournament appearances, including this year's tournament.

Among Big Ten coaches, he trails Barnes Arico at Michigan (10 seasons), Joe McKeown at Northwestern (14 seasons), Suzy Merchant at Michigan State (15 seasons), Brenda Frese at Maryland (20 seasons), Lisa Bluder at Iowa (22 seasons) and C. Vivian Stringer at Rutgers (27 seasons).

2023 Center Carson Commits To OSU

Presence in the paint has been an issue for the Buckeyes all season, but the newest commitment for Ohio State could look to buck that trend once she arrives on campus. McGuff received his first commitment in 2023 from Buchanan (Mich.) four-star center Faith Carson, a 6-4 prospect who is the top-rated recruit from Michigan, according to Prep Girls Hoops.

"I knew Ohio State was the right choice as soon as I experienced the environment," she told Prep Girls Hoops. "It was upbeat and great to be around. The team was so inviting, I could tell there was a real family."

Carson led the Bucks – from Buchanan, that is – to a 13-1 record and a district final in 2020, averaging 15.3 points, 10.5 rebounds and 3.7 blocked shots per game. This past season, Carson was sidelined with an ankle injury she sustained early in the season, but she returned for the school's district finals against Watervliet on March 5, scoring 15 points and pulling down 10 rebounds in a 44-30 win for the school's second consecutive district title.

"I've seen a lot of maturity this summer from Faith," Buchanan head coach Gabe Miller told the South Bend (Ind.) Tribune before this season. "She has more of a focus on the game and on her diet and staying in shape. Even during the volleyball season, she was coming in and shoot-



COURTESY OF FAITH CARSON
INCOMING – Center Faith Carson, a 6-4 prospect from Michigan, will look to add some height to OSU's lineup in 2023.

ing and working on extending her range so people don't consistently beat her up in the paint. Besides her size, one of her strengths is good foot movement. And she has a good feel for the game. It makes her a handful to defend."

Carson held offers from Michigan State, Ole Miss, Pitt and Xavier – schools in her top five along with Ohio State – as well as Western Michigan, Penn and George Mason, among others.

At 6-4, Carson would be tied for the tallest player on the current Ohio State roster alongside junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova. The Buckeyes have just four at 6-0 or taller – graduate forward Tanaya Beacham (6-1), junior guard Heyvynne Bristow (6-1), sophomore forward Gabby Hutcherson (6-2) and Mikulasikova – with forward Cotie McMahon (6-0) joining the Buckeyes next season in the 2022 class.

2021-22 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

23-6 Overall (14-4 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 5

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	29-29	967-33.4	202-401	.504	37-101	.366	125-145	.862	29-75	104-3.6	60-0	117	85	9	50	566-19.5
Taylor Mikesell	29-29	983-33.9	199-412	.483	105-225	.467	42-46	.913	11-91	102-3.5	33-0	57	45	5	27	545-18.8
Rebeka Mikulasikova	29-29	588-20.3	115-248	.464	18-66	.273	32-40	.800	29-122	151-5.2	58-1	25	48	5	13	280-9.7
Rikki Harris	29-16	739-25.5	74-184	.402	31-88	.352	34-64	.531	39-87	126-4.3	59-1	78	28	17	49	213-7.3
Tanaya Beacham	28-0	518-18.5	87-161	.540	2-8	.250	29-43	.674	43-80	123-4.4	85-2	21	40	9	21	205-7.3
Braxtin Miller	28-28	844-30.2	56-165	.339	25-72	.347	48-68	.706	26-79	105-3.8	57-1	87	44	10	38	185-6.6
Kateri Poole	22-13	384-17.5	39-100	.390	15-44	.341	27-48	.563	9-52	61-2.8	45-1	60	55	2	23	120-5.5
Gabby Hutcherson	18-0	183-10.2	23-59	.390	9-30	.300	5-8	.625	5-36	41-2.3	10-0	6	9	12	4	60-3.3
Heyvynne Bristow	11-1	97-8.8	11-30	.367	1-3	.333	12-16	.750	11-15	26-2.4	9-0	4	12	6	3	35-3.2
Taylor Thierry	27-0	393-14.6	31-53	.585	1-5	.200	13-23	.565	41-50	91-3.4	49-0	24	13	25	27	76-2.8
Anyssa Jones	8-0	39-4.9	2-8	.250	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	1-4	5-0.6	3-0	2	0	0	0	5-0.6
Kaitlyn Costner	11-0	59-5.4	3-11	.273	0-4	.000	0-0	.000	1-10	11-1.0	6-0	5	4	0	2	6-0.5
Team									36-71	107				6		
Total	29	5800	842-1832	.460	244-646	.378	368-503	.732	281-772	1053-36.3	474-6	486	389	100	257	2296-79.2
Opponents	29	5800	702-1736	.404	165-537	.307	343-467	.734	315-768	1083-37.3	488-10	387	537	73	148	1912-65.9

Ohio State Goes 1-1 In B1G Tournament

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After a postseason ban kept Ohio State out of last season's Big Ten women's basketball tournament, the Buckeyes were excited for their return at Gainbridge Fieldhouse as the No. 1 seed.

Ohio State carried that momentum into its first game against No. 8 Michigan State on March 4, handing the Spartans a 74-58 loss in the quarterfinals, but could not carry that fire into the semifinals on March 5 against No. 5 Indiana, which dashed Ohio State's conference tournament hopes in a 70-62 win over the Buckeyes.

OSU Holds On Late Against Spartans

For the second time in as many games, Ohio State (23-5) was locked in a battle late with Michigan State (15-15), taking the Spartans on in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten women's basketball tournament on March 4. On Feb. 27, the Buckeyes were fighting for a share of the Big Ten regular-season championship, and in the most recent matchup, these teams went to war to keep their conference postseason flame burning.

As Ohio State has done several times this season, including in its previous matchups with the Spartans, it pulled out a late win, capitalizing on a 10-0 run in the game's final 2:52 to secure the 74-58 win and move on to the semifinals.

"We've just been focused on discipline and keeping ourselves together, not worrying about any outside sources and just keep-

ing ourselves focused on the task at hand," forward Tanaya Beacham said of the team's success late in games.

The Buckeyes – who have been known this season for their prowess on offense but stepped up their defensive play as the regular season came to a close – jumped out to a 22-8 lead after the first quarter, forcing nine turnovers by the Spartans in the first 10 minutes.

Sophomore guard Rikki Harris, who donned a face mask after taking some bumps in Ohio State's win over Michigan State on Feb. 27, led the Buckeyes in the first with eight points on 3-of-5 shooting and pulled down two offensive rebounds.

Michigan State had an easier time getting to the basket in the second quarter, connecting on half of its shots from the field (9 of 18) and turning the ball over just twice. However, Spartan forward Nia Clouden, who had 27 and 19 points in their previous matchups, was held to just two first-half points on 1-of-6 shooting, and the Spartans could never get closer than 14 in the second quarter despite scoring 21 points.

Though the Buckeyes let up on the defensive end, they still shot 53.3 percent from the field and scored 22 points in the second frame – 11 of which came from senior guard Taylor Mikesell on 3-of-4 shooting from deep and 4-of-5 overall – to lead 44-29 heading into the half.

Ohio State then ran into trouble early in the third quarter. After a layup from junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova on Ohio State's first possession of the quarter, the Buckeyes were held without a basket for over four minutes as the Spartans took off on a 10-2 run.

Junior guard Jacy Sheldon snapped the drought with a jumper to make it 50-39 with 4:59 remaining, but the Spartans outscored Ohio State 9-7 for the remainder of the quarter to trail by single digits, 57-48, heading into the fourth. The lead might have been smaller if not for Beacham, who knocked down a pair of long twos and added three free throws in the frame.

Sheldon boosted the Buckeyes back to a double-digit lead to start off the fourth, completing an and-one play to give Ohio State a 60-48 advantage. Spartan guard Matilda Ekh helped keep Michigan State in the contest, responding to Sheldon's basket with a jumper of her own and later hitting a triple – she finished 5 of 11 from beyond the arc – to make it a nine-point game, 62-53, with 7:00 remaining.

After a pair of free throws from Ekh to make it 64-56, Michigan State guard DeeDee Hagemann weaved through the entire Ohio State defense to score at the basket, cutting the deficit to just six points, 64-58, forcing Buckeye head coach Kevin McGuff to call a timeout with 4:10 remaining.

"Just stay together, don't panic, make sure we continue to execute at a high level," McGuff said of the message during the timeout. "And I think from that point on we were getting pretty good shots. We got great shots, they made the right people get the shots and that's how it went."

Ohio State put things out of reach after the timeout by scoring on three of its next four possessions – including three-pointers



SONNY BROCKWAY

AMONG THE BEST – Ohio State junior guard Jacy Sheldon (4) was named to the Big Ten women's basketball All-Tournament team despite playing in only two games. She scored 19 points and racked up four assists in Ohio State's 74-58 win over Michigan State and another 22 points with four rebounds in a 70-62 loss to Indiana.

from Harris and Mikesell – to set the final margin.

Sheldon led Buckeye scorers with 19 points on 5-of-13 shooting. She was perfect on nine shots from the line. Mikesell (18), Beacham (15) and Harris (14) were also in double figures. Beacham pulled down a team-high eight rebounds, and both Harris and senior guard Braxtin Miller dished out five assists. Ekh led the Spartans with 21 points, while Clouden was held to just seven points.

"We're going to have to (rely on rebounding and defense)," McGuff said. "We've gotten better, but still the teams in this league and especially at the top put so much pressure on your defense to get stops because they're so gifted and so well-coached offensively."

"It's always an awkward preparation (with) no time in between the games, quite frankly, but making sure we get prepared – and I do think we have improved with our overall defense, and hopefully where (other teams) don't have a lot of time to scout (us) and put in different game plans, that can hopefully carry the day for us."

Bucks Neutralized From Deep In Loss To IU

No. 1-seeded Ohio State's tournament run came to an end on March 5 as the Buckeyes fell to No. 5 Indiana (22-7) in the con-

ference semifinals, 70-62.

Ohio State (23-6) was just 4 of 21 (19.0 percent) from deep – its second-lowest mark of the season behind a 16.7 percent performance against Wisconsin on Feb. 20 – and surrendered 14 points off 10 turnovers to the Hoosiers, who essentially played in front of a home crowd at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in the heart of Indianapolis.

"Obviously it didn't turn out the way we wanted to," Miller said. "I think that we gave a lot of fight and effort and hard work and sometimes those things happen, but I don't think it was because we didn't work as hard as we want to and fight back... Sometimes shots just didn't fall for us, but that will happen. But I was really proud of the way that we pushed today."

The contest was advertised as a battle between two of the best that the Big Ten has to offer, and it lived up to the hype in the opening stages as the teams combined to hit 12 of their first 21 shots from the field.

As the intricate chess match unfolded, it required creativity from both teams to weave through the opposing defense, and the Hoosiers eventually held a 15-12 lead with 4:28 remaining in the first quarter after a triple from Indiana guard Ali Patberg.

After the Hoosiers' strong start to the game on the offensive end, McGuff made a quick adjustment to bring in Taylor Thierry, but she picked up two fouls within a min-

Ohio State 74, Michigan State 58

March 4, 2022 Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis						
	1	2	3	4	F	
Mich. State (15-15, 8-9)	8	21	19	10	58	
Ohio State (23-5, 14-4)	22	22	13	17	74	
Mich. State	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Smith	25	4-10	0-0	2-5	0	4 8
Hagemann	30	3-8	1-4	0-1	2	3 9
Farquhar	36	3-6	0-0	0-6	2	2 6
Ekh	37	7-13	2-2	0-7	1	2 21
Clouden	39	3-11	1-2	1-5	8	2 7
Parks	22	2-7	1-2	3-5	1	1 5
James	10	0-2	0-0	0-0	2	2 0
Alexander	3	1-1	0-2	1-0	0	1 2
Totals	200	23-58	5-12	8-29	16	17 58

Percentages: FG: 39.7%. FT: 41.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-16 (Ekh 5-11, Hagemann 2-5). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Clouden, Ekh). **Turnovers:** 17 (Farquhar 4, Clouden 3, Ekh 2, Smith 2, Hagemann, James, Parks). **Steals:** 5 (Clouden, Farquhar, Hagemann, Parks, Smith).

Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Mikulasikova	16	2-6	0-0	1-4	1	1 4
Harris	31	5-13	1-1	4-3	5	1 14
Sheldon	37	5-13	9-9	0-2	4	3 19
Miller	31	1-9	1-4	0-0	5	0 4
Mikesell	40	7-15	0-0	1-5	3	1 18
Thierry	16	0-0	0-0	1-4	0	4 0
Beacham	24	5-6	5-6	2-6	1	3 15
Poole	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1 0
Totals	200	25-62	16-20	10-28	19	14 74

Percentages: FG: 40.3%. FT: 80.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-23 (Mikesell 4-8, Harris 3-8, Miller 1-4, Mikulasikova 0-1, Sheldon 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Sheldon 2, Beacham, Mikesell). **Turnovers:** 11 (Sheldon 7, Beacham 3, Miller). **Steals:** 10 (Miller 4, Mikesell 3, Harris 2, Sheldon).

Officials: Inouye, Morris, Tieman. **Attendance:** N/A.

Indiana 70, Ohio State 62

March 5, 2022
Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis

	1	2	3	4	F
Indiana (22-7, 11-5)	21	17	19	13	70
Ohio State (23-6, 14-4)	17	13	18	14	62

Indiana	Total	FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		M-A	M-A	O-D	A			
Holmes	28	5-10	2-2	0-3	2	0	12	
Cardano-Hillary	37	5-12	5-7	3-8	5	2	16	
Patberg	38	6-12	0-0	1-2	3	1	15	
Moore-McNeil	38	3-5	4-6	0-3	2	3	11	
Berger	39	3-10	4-6	0-6	7	2	10	
Wisne	5	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	0	0	
Waggoner	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0	
Gulbe	14	2-4	2-2	0-0	1	0	6	
Totals	200	24-53	17-23	7-30	20	9	70	

Percentages: FG: 45.3%. FT: 73.9%. Three-point field goals: 5-10 (Patberg 3-7, Cardano-Hillary 1-2, Moore-McNeil 1-1). Team rebounds: 8. Blocked shots: 3 (Holmes, Patberg, Wisne). Turnovers: 11 (Moore-McNeil 4, Berger 2, Cardano-Hillary 2, Patberg 2, Team). Steals: 2 (Cardano-Hillary, Patberg).

Ohio State	Total	FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		M-A	M-A	O-D	A			
Mikulasikova	24	3-7	0-0	0-4	3	4	6	
Harris	23	2-3	0-0	0-6	2	0	4	
Sheldon	40	10-19	2-2	1-3	4	2	22	
Miller	34	4-8	2-2	1-2	1	2	12	
Mikesell	40	5-16	0-0	1-3	1	1	12	
Thierry	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0	
Beacham	15	1-5	0-0	1-2	0	5	2	
Poole	17	2-6	0-0	1-5	3	4	4	
Totals	200	27-64	4-4	5-25	14	20	62	

Percentages: FG: 42.2%. FT: 100.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-21 (Mikesell 2-7, Miller 2-4, Harris 0-1, Mikulasikova 0-3, Poole 0-1, Sheldon 0-5). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 5 (Beacham, Harris, Miller, Sheldon, Thierry). Turnovers: 10 (Mikulasikova 3, Poole 2, Beacham, Mikesell, Miller, Sheldon, Team). Steals: 7 (Harris 2, Miller 2, Mikulasikova, Poole, Thierry).

Officials: McConnell, Krommenhoek, Camy.
Attendance: N/A.

ute of entering the game and was relegated back to the bench until the third quarter.

After a jumper from Hoosier guard Nicole Cardano-Hillary, who had 17 in her previous game against the Buckeyes, Indiana took a 19-14 lead with 1:47 to play in the quarter. But Mikesell responded with a triple on the other end, before Indiana guard Grace Berger drove in for a layup to make it 21-17 heading into the second.

The Hoosiers continued applying pressure with their quality play in the second frame, increasing their lead to eight, 29-21 at 5:09 in the second as Ohio State missed five of its first seven shots in the quarter. Sheldon helped keep the Buckeyes close, completing a three-point play and scoring on the next possession to make it a three-point game, 29-26 less than a minute later, but Indiana closed the quarter on a 9-4 run to lead 38-30 at the half.

Thierry was not the only Buckeye to get in foul trouble in the first half. Beacham, Mikulasikova and sophomore guard Kateri Poole each picked up two fouls through the first 20 minutes.

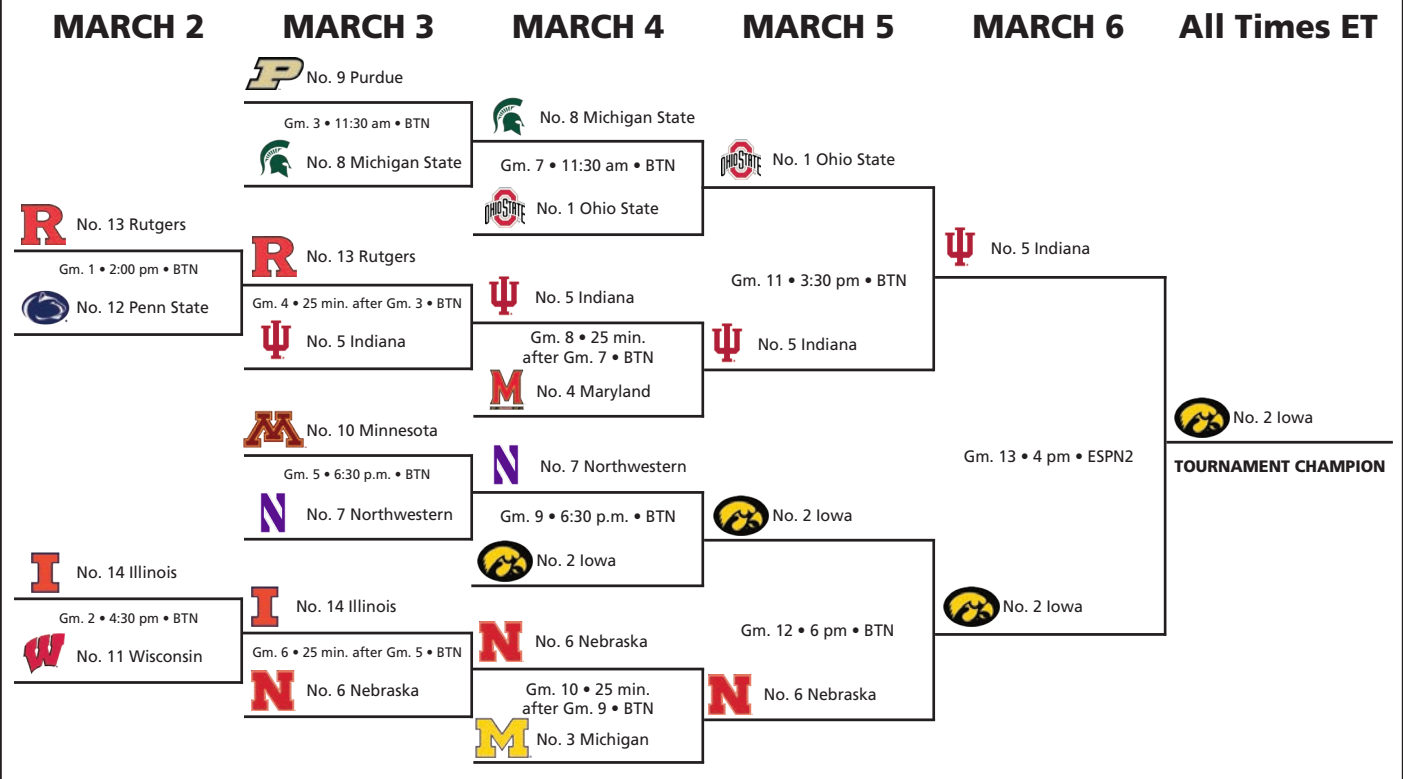
"Certainly, it was a problem for us today, and I think it kind of hurt (us) trying to get into a good rhythm," McGuff said of the fouls.

Mistakes continued compounding for the Buckeyes in the third quarter. Mikulasikova had two turnovers and a foul in just over three minutes, and the Hoosiers jumped out to a 46-34 lead with 6:51 remaining in the frame.

Ohio State began making up some ground after a three-pointer from Mike-sell, a block from Beacham and an ensuing

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score on the other end from Miller cut the deficit to just five points, 49-44. The momentum was brief, however. The Hoosiers scored the next six points and finished the quarter on an 8-4 run to lead 57-48 going into the final frame.

Ohio State struggled to score through the first six minutes of the fourth, with just five points – all from Sheldon – and Indiana increased its lead to 66-53 with 4:55 remaining after a pair of free throws from Berger. But following those points, the Hoosiers scored just two points in 4:37, and Ohio State had a chance to get back in it.

The Buckeyes closed the deficit to just six points, 68-62, and had a chance to make it a real game after an IU turnover with under 20 seconds remaining, but following a

miss from Poole near the basket, the Hoosiers closed things out at the free-throw line for the final margin.

"That kind of sums up the day because it's just missed opportunities," McGuff said. "Indiana's a great team and a great defensive team, but even with that, I thought we got enough opportunities, but we didn't capitalize and they made the most of their chances more so than we did."

Ohio State shot just 30.0 percent from the field (6 of 20) in the fourth quarter, including 1 of 8 from beyond the arc.

Sheldon led the Buckeyes with 22 points on 10-of-19 shooting but was 0 for 5 from deep. Mikesell and Miller were also in double figures with 12 each. Harris and Poole had a team-high six rebounds. Cardano-Hil-

lary led the Hoosiers with 16 points and had 11 rebounds to help IU to a 37-30 edge on the boards.

Indiana took only 10 shots from downtown during the game but outproduced the Buckeyes by connecting on five of them. Indiana had a huge advantage from the charity stripe, connecting on 17 of 23 (73.9 percent), while Ohio State had just four attempts, hitting all of them.

The Buckeyes made their return to the conference tournament and will also make their first appearance in the NCAA tournament since 2018 as a No. 6 seed, set to take on Missouri State or Florida State on March 18 at 2:30 p.m. in Baton Rouge, La.

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Rutgers Extends Head Coach Steve Pikiell

With the men's basketball program earning back-to-back NCAA Tournament berths for the first time in more than 40 years, Rutgers agreed to a four-year contract extension with head coach Steve Pikiell.

Pikiell's new deal ties him to the Scarlet Knights through the 2029-30 season, and the head coach is set to earn an additional \$16 million, including performance and retention bonuses.

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

Rutgers fell to 18-13 on the season after dropping an 84-74 contest to Iowa in the Big Ten tournament quarterfinals March 11. The Scarlet Knights were selected for the NCAA Tournament as a No. 11 seed but were included in the First Four games, with a matchup against Notre Dame set in Dayton for March 16.

It's the first time the program has been to consecutive NCAA Tournaments since 1976, which was a Final Four run. Last season, Rutgers ended a 30-year tourney drought and defeated seventh-seeded Clemson as a No. 10 seed before losing to Final Four-bound Houston in the round of 32.

"I love it here," Pikiell said in a statement. "Rutgers has embraced me and my family since day one, and there is no other place I want to be. (Athletic director) Pat Hobbs and President (Jonathan) Holloway share in my vision to make this a program that everyone can be proud of, and I am thankful for their leadership. It is an honor to be the head coach at Rutgers and to do it in the toughest conference in college basketball. I look forward to continuing the hard work to bring RU a national championship."

Rutgers went on a historic run this Feb-

ruary, becoming the first unranked program in NCAA history to knock off four straight ranked opponents, defeating then-No. 13 Michigan State, then-No. 16 Ohio State, No. 12 Wisconsin, and then-No. 12 Illinois in February.

Pikiell's scrappy Scarlet Knights defeated a No. 1-ranked team for the first time in program history, beating Purdue on a buzzer-beater at Jersey Mike's Arena in December.

The 2021-22 Scarlet Knights won 12 conference contests, marking their most since joining the Big Ten. The program has posted three winning seasons in a row for the first time since 1988-91, when the team played in the Atlantic 10.

With another successful season, Rutgers has improved to 98-90 under Pikiell, who previously coached at Stony Brook for 11 seasons, where he led the program to its first NCAA tourney.

PSU's Pickett To Return

Penn State men's basketball guard Jalen Pickett will return to the Nittany Lions for his fifth college season.

Following Penn State's 69-61 loss to top-ranked Purdue in the Big Ten tournament quarterfinals, Pickett confirmed that he will take advantage of the NCAA waiver granting athletes an extra season of eligibility because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Yeah, I'm coming back next year," Pickett said during the postgame news conference.

Pickett had told the Centre Daily Times earlier in March that he would likely use his extra season of eligibility, so the announcement was not a complete surprise. However, his return is viewed as a significant boost for the future of the program, particularly with Micah Shrewsbury entering his second season as head coach and a highly touted five-man freshman class coming to Happy Valley.

Pickett transferred to Penn State last year after three seasons at Siena, where he was the MAAC Player of the Year, the MAAC Rookie of the Year and a two-time All-MAAC first-team selection.

"I think it was a great decision," Pickett said. "Coach Shrewsbury and this year was really special. The guys were really good."

The Siena transfer was one of two Penn State players to start all 31 games during the 2021-22 season, along with standout forward John Harrar. After a few games, Pickett quickly adjusted to his new team and became a staple of the Penn State rotation, averaging 13.2 points, 4.3 rebounds and 4.3 assists in 37.2 minutes per game entering March 11.

Pickett is one of three Nittany Lion seniors who is eligible to return for another season, along with guards Sam Sessoms and Myles Dread. Sessoms and Dread have not made any public statements about their futures at Penn State.

Huskers Discipline Coach, Player

Amid a stellar season on the hardwood, the Nebraska women's basketball team suspended associate head coach Chuck Love and removed starter Ashley Scoggin from its roster.

First, Nebraska's athletic department announced that it had suspended Love with pay – his salary is \$175,270 per year – for what it

called "a personnel matter." Five hours later, a school spokesperson confirmed Scoggin's removal from the team.

Nebraska declined any further comment on the potential connection of Love's suspension and Scoggin's removal.

Scoggin, a 23-year-old sophomore, averaged 8.4 points and 1.6 rebounds in the 2021-22 campaign before her removal from the team. Scoggin made 42.0 percent of her three-pointers on the season, marking the best on the team.

Although Scoggin's collegiate career had been derailed by knee injuries at previous stops, including one that delayed her enrollment into college, she had not missed a game at Nebraska prior to a road game at Penn State when she was listed as "not available" before being removed from the team.

Scoggin was replaced in the starting lineup by Husker freshman Allison Weidner, who stepped up her play in conference action, averaging 7.4 points and 3.3 rebounds per game in Big Ten contests.

Love has been an assistant coach under head coach Amy Williams for a decade, including the past six seasons at Nebraska after four at South Dakota. He became the Huskers' associate head coach this season and oversees the program's player development.

Minnesota Extends Lindsay Whalen

Lindsay Whalen will remain in charge of the Minnesota women's basketball program, with the school announcing an extension for the head coach through the 2024-25 season. The former Golden Gophers standout joined the coaching staff at her alma mater in 2018 following a professional career where she won four WNBA championships.

Whalen, who was nominated to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame Class of 2022, also won two Olympic gold medals before becoming the Minnesota head coach.

The Golden Gophers have gone 59-55 under Whalen's tutelage, with one trip to the WNIT in 2018-19. Minnesota's 2022 signing class ranks among the top 10 in the nation, according to ESPN.

As a player at Minnesota, Whalen became the program's all-time points leader and ended her collegiate career second in assists and third in steals.

After college, Whalen played her first five seasons with the Connecticut Sun before finishing her 15-year career with the Minnesota Lynx, where she won WNBA championships (2011, 2013, 2015, 2017). She ended her WNBA career with the most wins in league history with 323 and finished third all-time for assists.

Badgers Turn To Portal

The Wisconsin football program turned to the transfer portal to replace several key contributors from its 2021 team. Three of the six incoming transfers are cornerbacks, who should bolster a group that is facing significant turnover.

Faion Hicks and Caesar Williams, who were the Badgers' starting corners, both declared for the NFL draft, and Dean Ingram has been reported to be switching to wide

receiver.

Cedrick Dort, a Kentucky transfer, is expected to help fill the void in the secondary in his final year of eligibility, having played 44 games at Kentucky including 25 starts. During his sophomore season, Dort started 12 games at cornerback and did not allow a single touchdown all season. Overall, Dort recorded 51 tackles, seven pass breakups and one forced fumble in four seasons as a Wildcat.

Head coach Paul Chryst also targeted Jay Shaw as another highly anticipated cornerback transfer for the Badger secondary. Shaw played in 43 games for UCLA, posting six interceptions in his career, with three of them coming in his second-team all-conference campaign this past season.

Justin Clark, a Toledo transfer, provides more depth at corner in his final year of eligibility as well. In 47 career games for the Rockets, he tallied 115 total tackles, four interceptions and 16 pass deflections.

The Badgers also added a transfer from UCLA on the offensive side of the ball in wide receiver Keontez Lewis. A former three-star recruit, Lewis will receive an opportunity with the Badgers given the void left by the departures of Danny Davis and Cedric Pryor, as he is expected to be one of the Badgers' top-three wideouts with Markus Allen and Chimere Dike.

Wisconsin also added Bryce Carey from Northern Illinois, who signed to play quarterback for the Huskies in 2019 but will transition to safety for defensive coordinator Jim Leonhard.

Additionally, Wisconsin brought in kicker Vito Calvaruso from Arkansas, where he was a kickoff specialist. Calvaruso may get his first opportunity to kick field goals, because the placekicker he was intended to be paired with – Collin Larsh – has recently been contemplating a pro career.

Illini's Nancy Fahey Retires

Nancy Fahey retired after five seasons at the helm of the Illinois women's basketball program. Assistant coach Corry Irvin was named interim coach, and the Illini will commence the search for a replacement.

Fahey, a Women's Basketball Hall of Fame coach who won five NCAA Division-III championships in three decades at Washington University in St. Louis, did not enjoy the same success in the stout Big Ten. During her tenure, Illinois posted a 42-99 (.293) record and a 7-77 (.083) mark in conference action.

The Fighting Illini finished last in the Big Ten in three of her five seasons in Campaign, including the 2021-22 season, and finished second-to-last in the other two seasons. During the 2021-22 campaign, Illinois was outscored by an average of 17.2 points per game in Big Ten play.

"I want to thank all the coaches and staff members I've worked with for the past 40 years, from Johnsbury High School and Washington University to the University of Illinois," Fahey said. "A special thanks to all my players who will always have a special place in my heart. I wish Illinois women's basketball the very best in the future. I'm ready for the next chapter in my life."

Illinois athletics director Josh Whitman, who in June acknowledged the school's



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struggles to improve the women's basketball program, spoke highly of Fahey.

"I first met Nancy in the spring of 2014, and I have been proud to work alongside her for seven seasons at two different institutions. Her competitive fire is matched only by the standard of excellence she has set for herself and those around her – a combination that has produced one of the most decorated coaching careers in the history of college basketball," Whitman said.

"Although we were not able to win as many games at Illinois as any of us had hoped, I will always be grateful to Nancy for providing a steady, experienced hand

at a time when our program needed stability and integrity. Her leadership during a tumultuous period in our history, both upon her arrival and, more recently, throughout the pandemic, will forever be remembered and is much appreciated."

The Illini have not reached the post-season since Matt Bollant led the program to the WNIT Elite Eight in his first season back in 2012-13, and they last made the NCAA tournament in 2002-03 under Teresa Greutz. Illinois has finished in the top-half of the conference only once (2012-13) during the tenures of its last three head coaches in Fahey, Bollant and Jolette Law.

MSU's Clouden Declares For Draft

Michigan State women's basketball standout Nia Clouden announced she will enter the WNBA draft. The Spartan senior averaged 20.0 points, 4.2 assists, 4.2 rebounds and 1.2 steals in 30 games to earn first-team All-Big Ten honors.

Clouden, who could have used the COVID-19 exception to return, finishes her career in green and white as the second-leading scorer in program history with 1,882 points. The 5-8 guard from Owings Mills, Md., set the program single-game scoring record with a 50-point performance against Florida Gulf Coast in December.

"I think the one thing you fall in love with always is watching kids live their dreams and challenging themselves to be the best they can be," Michigan State head coach Suzy Merchant said of Clouden during her senior day. "Watching Nia over four years continually get better and to always know that that dream of being a draft pick and playing in the WNBA is something that has been a dream of hers forever – to watch her put herself in position to be (drafted is great)."

Clouden has an opportunity to be the first Michigan State women's basketball player selected in the WNBA draft since Tori Jankoska was chosen ninth overall by the Chicago Sky in 2017.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1982

According to Ohio State players and coaches, how well the Buckeyes played defense would determine how well they would do in the NCAA Tournament. With a tourney bid secured, some of the Buckeyes were also ready to admit that they thought the team would be in the national shootout from the beginning.

"We have to play better defensively," OSU coach Eldon Miller said of what his team must do to be a factor in the tournament. "I don't think our goals have been high enough. I think we've been selling ourselves short defensively. I think we can do a better job, no matter who's on the other end."

The prospect of having to face North Carolina if the eighth-seeded Buckeyes could get past James Madison in their NCAA opener March 11 seemed to not be on Miller's mind.

"We're excited about being in the tournament. We could care less, at least I could, about the pairing. I think the pairings, at this point in time, really don't mean anything. I think we just have to go in and play."

35 Years Ago - 1987

They said it couldn't be done.

Before the season, skeptics said the Ohio State men's basketball team would be lucky to finish with a .500 record. Any thought of the Buckeyes qualifying for postseason play was merely wishful thinking.

But as they had all year, the Buckeyes were making believers out of those same skeptics. Ohio State, which finished the regular season with a 19-12 record, was picked for the NCAA Tournament and was to open play in Atlanta's Omni against Kentucky.

Although OSU coach Gary Williams had said all year that he thought 18 wins would get his team invited to the party, he wasn't so sure. Williams had spent a sleepless night after his Buckeyes dropped a 90-81 decision to Indiana to wrap up the regular schedule on March 7.

"I haven't slept very much in the last 24 hours," said Williams, shortly after it was announced that OSU had been seeded ninth in the Southeast regional and would be meeting eighth-seeded Kentucky on March 13. "Until I heard it, I wasn't sure if we were in. You always have doubts. But I knew if we were good enough to get in, we'd go."

30 Years Ago - 1992

Ohio State's players heaped praise on the St. John Arena crowd, which had consistently filled the arena through the 1991-92 season and helped to play a major role in Ohio State's 77-66 win over Michigan on March 3, star guard Jim Jackson believed.

"I definitely think the crowd helped us in that game," Jackson said. "It helps us out a lot because it's like a sixth person out there on the floor."

"Being out there, when you dive on the floor and get a steal, they really get into the game and that helps motivate us. It gets real loud in here, and that can rattle a team a little bit."

Against the Wolverines, the arena erupted with such force that Michigan was forced to call a timeout after a Lawrence Funderburke breakaway basket capped a 31-second period that saw him, Mark Baker and Jackson convert steals into points on the other end, turning a three-point OSU deficit into a three-point lead.

Although Ohio State had not yet picked up quite the reputation for a jarring home environment, it was approaching that territory with a 41-3 home record in its past three seasons, easily the best in the Big Ten during that period.

"I don't think our crowd gets the recognition it deserves," said senior captain Jamaal Brown. "Ask other guys who come in here to play. Ask Indiana or Michigan. They'll tell you that St. John is the loudest arena in the Big Ten."

25 Years Ago - 1997

March 10, 1997, would go down in the annals of Ohio State University athletic history as "Black Monday."

In an unprecedented move, OSU athletic director Andy Geiger fired both men's basketball coach Randy Ayers and wom-

en's coach Nancy Darsch, ending rampant speculation about both coaches' future at the school.

"I thought it was the right thing to do rather than one today and one next week," Geiger said of the double firing at a hastily called St. John Arena news conference. "Let's have one bad day and do it all at once."

Ayers was dismissed after eight years at the helm and 14 overall at OSU, while Darsch spent 12 years as the Buckeyes' head coach.

According to Geiger, he established firm criteria with both coaches after the 1996 season. He challenged both programs to finish in the upper half of the Big Ten. Neither did.

Ayers was fired after a second consecutive 10-17 season and a ninth-place Big Ten finish, while Darsch's team went 12-16 and finished a school-worst 10th in the conference.

20 Years Ago - 2002

In the five years of the Big Ten men's basketball tournament, Ohio State had been forced to deal with a swing of emotions.

In three of the four years the tournament was held in Chicago, the Buckeyes were able to get over the disappointment of a quicker-than-expected exit by gathering back in Columbus and looking forward to the excitement of the NCAA Tournament.

But as the tournament shifted to Indianapolis for 2002, things changed for OSU. Despite facing three teams that were playing their best basketball of the season, the Buckeyes won the whole tournament, hoisting the championship trophy high in the air and cutting down the nets in Conseco Fieldhouse after routing Iowa in the March 10 final.

Then, in a simple twist of fate, the Buckeyes' giddy huddle-up for CBS' NCAA selection show turned out to be more like watching "60 Minutes." They had to wait most of the program to find out they were shipped to the West Region and faced a March 14 date with Davidson in Albuquerque, N.M.

"I don't know what consideration was given to us winning this tournament," said OSU head coach Jim O'Brien, who also used the terms "bizarre" and "wacky" to describe his team's NCAA fate.

"Nevertheless, I don't think it's anything for us to dwell on. Our biggest thing is how we're going to play against Davidson now. It does reinforce the confusion and a lot of the questions that are out there regarding how this whole new supposed seeding, bracketing is working. I still don't understand it"

15 Years Ago - 2007

The Buckeyes wiped out tournament foes Michigan, Purdue and Wisconsin – the latter two NCAA Tournament qualifiers as well – to earn the right to cut down the nets and see their school name connected to a No. 1 seed in the South Region of the Big Dance.

That seemed like the least the tournament committee could do considering Ohio State (30-3) had gone to Chicago as the nation's top-ranked team and outright Big Ten champion of the regular season and left with its top ranking in each major poll intact, the same spot in the RPI ratings, a victory total equal to the best in the nation, a 17-game win streak and another hefty piece of hardware.

Plus, the Buckeyes returned from Chicago seemingly a more together and more dangerous team than when they left, routing No. 2 Wisconsin 66-49 for the Big Ten crown despite being down star center Greg Oden for much of the first half with foul trouble.

"I think it was a statement," said point guard Mike Conley Jr., who starred down the stretch and would help lead the Buckeyes into a first-round date with No. 16 seed Central Connecticut State on March 15 in Lexington, Ky.

"Three games in three days is a tough thing to do, and for our guys to come out and play defense for 40 minutes – even with Greg out of the game – and to stay in a defensive stance and do those little things that help the team win, that goes to show how far we've come as a team."

10 Years Ago - 2012

The Buckeyes dropped the Big Ten title matchup with Michigan State 68-64 in a game that featured the intensity of an NCAA Tournament regional final. Had Ohio State won, it would have served as the perfect ending to a rather imperfect six-week stretch that, at its lowest, had seen head coach Thad Matta dismiss his players from a practice that he didn't feel they were taking seriously.

"It was a tough-fought game and it was an NCAA-type game," power forward Jared Sullinger said. "It was a very tough battle, and I think we can learn from it. Hopefully these guys understand that we can't dwell on this loss and we just have to keep moving forward."

Forward happened very quickly for the Buckeyes, as their NCAA Tournament fate was learned not even an hour after suffering the heartbreaking loss.

Had they beaten Michigan State, they likely would have replaced the Spartans as the No. 1 seed in the West Region in Phoenix. Instead, the Buckeyes were awarded the No. 2 seed in the East Region behind top-seeded Syracuse and would open the NCAA Tournament on March 15 in Pittsburgh against No. 15-seed Loyola (Md.).

Five Years Ago - 2017

Pat Forde of Yahoo Sports reported on March 6, just ahead of the Big Ten tournament, that Matta would be back as the team's coach, despite health concerns.

"Thad Matta will return at Ohio State, sources told Yahoo Sports," Forde's report began. "There had been speculation that health issues might persuade him to step down."

This news was brought to Matta's attention the next day in a press conference that had been scheduled prior to the report coming out.

"I'd like to know who said it, in all seriousness," Matta said while wearing a sweatshirt that was soaked in sweat from a workout he had just completed. "Who said that? Or where did it come from would be my question. I'll be honest with you, I feel really good. I shed a few (pounds) but I feel pretty good."

Athletic director Gene Smith offered his support of the head coach too, saying that while Ohio State was not "where (it) aspires to be with (the) performance on the court," he felt that "Thad understands better than anyone that component has to improve." Only two days later, however, Ohio State saw its season ended by a 66-57 loss to 14th-seeded Rutgers in the first round of the Big Ten tournament.

One Year Ago - 2021

When it was announced on Dec. 22 that Ohio State women's basketball would not have postseason play following the regular season due to a self-imposed ban, there was plenty of reason for the team to pack it in and just wait until its next season. Even without the ban, the Buckeyes faced a handful of cancellations and postponements due to COVID-19 struggles both outside and within their program.

Still, throughout all of that, Ohio State finished its season, and did so with a respectable 13-7 record. It was a record that was worsened with a four-game losing streak to end the season that took the team from bordering on top 10 to hanging on the fringes of the top 25 in the country.

Following the team's final game of the season, a 71-63 loss to Rutgers, head coach Kevin McGuff was nothing but happy about the effort his team showed throughout what could have been a completely lost season of basketball.

"We faced a lot this year with COVID and the postseason ban, so I'm very proud of the team for them really fighting through," McGuff said. "There were a lot of times throughout the year they could have mailed it in, but they didn't. They kept fighting, they kept playing really hard."

"We showed how good we can be. Now we just have to figure out what are the steps that can allow us to be that team consistently and head into next year with the chance to be really special."

Buckeyes Hope To Rely On Veterans In 2022

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Though the coronavirus deserves no praise, Ohio State baseball can thank the pandemic for the title of defending Big Ten tournament champions.

When COVID-19 hit the United States in full, back in March of 2020, Ohio State lost its regular season after 14 games. In 2021, the program participated in a historic 42-game all-Big Ten schedule, resulting in a 22-20 record. The Big Ten did not hold a postseason tournament in either season, making the Buckeyes the last winner of a postseason conference title by virtue of their 2019 title run.

Three seasons after players, coaches and staff dogpiled on the Charles Schwab Field (formerly TD Ameritrade Park) pitcher's mound in Omaha, Neb., the aspirations to relive those feelings ripple throughout Bill Davis Stadium in Columbus. First, for the Big Ten tournament. Then, for the College World Series.

To achieve those goals, Ohio State will rely on three fundamental baseball ideologies – pitching to contact, timely hitting and making routine plays in the field. Buckeye Sports Bulletin sat down with head coach Greg Beals to discuss what he wants to see from his pitchers, hitters and fielders this season and how each position will play an integral role in helping Ohio State live up to its internal expectations ahead of a critical season in Columbus. All career statistics reflect only seasons prior to the 2022 campaign, which is still in its infancy.

On The Bump

Ohio State will feature a new-look pitching staff after Seth Lonsway, Garrett Burhenn and Jack Neely were drafted to the MLB. The San Francisco Giants selected Lonsway in the sixth round, the Detroit Tigers picked Burhenn in the ninth, and Neely went to the New York Yankees in the

11th round.

While the program lost three essential contributors to the 2021 rotation, this year's starters will not lack experience, with two-time captain Griffan Smith returning to the roster for his fifth season. Beals will expect much out of the Cincinnati native, but he thinks Smith is willing to embrace the challenge.

"Griffan Smith is a veteran," Beals said. "Griffan has pitched in the Big Ten tournament championship, and he's pitched in the NCAA regionals. He's got that experience, and he's got that calmness about him. He's got a four-pitch mix that he can go with. He's a leader of the team and someone we have a lot of confidence in."

Four other Buckeye pitchers will compete for a consistent spot in the starting rotation, including sophomores Isaiah Coupet and Nate Haberthier, senior Will Pfennig and graduate transfer Aaron Funk.

Coupet appeared in nine games for Ohio State as a freshman in 2021. The southpaw recorded one save over 17 1/3 innings of work and finished with a 3.63 earned run average. Beals said that Coupet improved significantly in the offseason from working with pitching coach Dan DeLucia and hitting the weight room.

"He's got a curveball and slider that are really, really good," Beals said. "He's going to be at 89 to 92 miles per hour, which isn't overpowering stuff, but it's a quick arm with some ball movement on the fastball. The breaking balls are elite."

Haberthier made six appearances last season as a freshman, including a start in the season finale against Northwestern. He finished the season 0-1 with a 14.04 ERA in 8 1/3 innings. This year, the 6-5, 245-pound hurler will look to become a more reliable option for Beals, making his pitching as intimidating as his physical presence.

Pfennig has pitched in many meaningful innings in his three seasons at Ohio State. He made 38 appearances and nine starts in



FILE PHOTO

HIGH HOPES — Ohio State skipper Greg Beals (9) is optimistic about his team's outlook this season, thanks to a veteran infield and rising stars throughout the roster, including sophomore center fielder Kade Kern and freshman shortstop Josh McAlister.

his first three seasons, collecting 91 strikeouts over 98 2/3 innings since his arrival in 2018. The senior will look to carve out a recurring role in the starting rotation while also becoming a dependable long-relief arm out of the bullpen while the season progresses.

Like Haberthier, Funk possesses a rare physical stature on the mound. The 6-5, 225-pound righthander spent his first four seasons at Arkansas Little Rock, where he was a staple of the team's starting rotation. He brings 47 appearances, 33 starts and 185 strikeouts to the Ohio State rotation and was Beals' most significant transfer addition in the offseason.

"Aaron Funk is a guy we brought in here out of the transfer portal, and what attracted us to him is that he took the ball and started every weekend for three years in his collegiate career," Beals said. "He ate up innings, and he threw strikes. He's got a four-pitch mix and a good overhand curveball."

"It's been fun to watch Aaron connect with the other guys. He loves Buckeye Nation. He loves being here. We talked about the brotherhood of our team, and he's coming in with that attitude. The locker room has accepted him. His transition for a mid-year transfer has been smoother than I could have imagined."

Beyond the starting lineup, Ohio State's pitching strength will come from its bullpen this season. The relievers will be powered by 2022 preseason All-American TJ Brock, who returns to Columbus with a fastball that pushes triple digits.

"If you're talking about the strength of the pitching staff being the bullpen, you've got to start with TJ Brock," Beals said. "TJ is a guy who we expect to get the ball on the back end of games and finish games for us. He has dynamic stuff. The fastball and the slider are electric. His fastball goes up to 99 miles per hour, and the slider is in the 90-mile per hour range. That puts a lot of pressure on opposing hitters."

"TJ has grown not just as a pitcher but as a man. I'm excited about TJ and seeing his evolution and how that plays out on the field."

Brock appeared in 19 games last season, recording nine saves and a team-leading 2.08 ERA. He touched 100 miles per hour on the radar gun this past offseason, which will likely help increase his already-impressive two strikeouts per inning average.

Ethan Hammerberg will be Brock's setup man this year. His 6-5, 250-pound frame helps his fastball reach 96 miles per hour while featuring a put-out slider capable of buckling the opposition's knees. He

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received the nickname “Hammer” from his teammates after the Columbus native closed the door in several appearances last season.

Hammerberg continued his dominant stretch in the Northwoods League – a summer developmental college baseball league played in Canada, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin. He appeared in 15 games for the Duluth Huskies, posting a 2.12 ERA with a 2-2 record, three saves, 28 strikeouts and 10 walks.

“Ethan Hammerberg had a great summer and then a great fall and has really developed,” Beals said. “His success has built confidence, and his stuff has really grown. Ethan is a big, strong young man. He’s the strongest guy on our team and throws a very heavy fastball that gets into the mid-90s, and he has a really good breaking ball as well. I’m excited for Ethan and his role and how it complements our ballclub. He and TJ in the back end of our bullpen is going to be a pretty tough 1-2 combination.”

Outside of Brock and Hammerberg, Ohio State has four left-handed relievers and eight right-handed relievers on the roster. Among the lefthanders, the Buckeyes will look to senior Mitch Milheim, a local product from Olentangy Liberty High School, to carry a heavy workload. Milheim made 23 appearances in his first three seasons, recording 32 strikeouts and 16 walks while allowing 22 earned runs.

Redshirt freshman Garrett Peters and

freshmen Drew Bachman and Gavin Bruni will make their collegiate debuts this season. Beals said that he looks forward to all three making a consistent contribution to the team, but he admits he’s most excited about seeing Bruni on the mound.

“He’s going to come in and power the baseball,” Beals said. “There’s a great deal of talent in Gavin, and I’m looking forward to seeing him evolve as a pitcher. He’s got the stuff to be a starter someday.”

The Ohio State staff rounds out with the right-handed pitchers – an inexperienced but talented group of throwers. The foremost example is Wyatt Loncar, who didn’t receive many opportunities in his first two seasons as a Buckeye and made only seven career appearances before this year. However, his mid-90s fastball and a tight curveball will provide several chances for the Pacific Palisades, Calif., native, to establish himself.

Tyler Kean has battled through several injuries in his Ohio State career. However, the junior from Springboro, Ohio, has pitched well in a limited role. Kean made seven appearances through his first two seasons, allowing only one earned run through 10 1/3 innings. Junior Nate Karaffa will make his debut on the mound after two years as a utility player in the infield. Beals said he will be an intriguing option for the Buckeyes to use in spots.

Sophomore Trent Jones is the only other right-handed pitcher to see action at the collegiate level and made four appearances

last year as a freshman, while junior Casey Maniglia, redshirt freshman Tim Baird and freshmen Jacob Gehring and Jace Middleton will make their debuts in 2022.

Behind The Dish

Ohio State will utilize two familiar faces at catcher this season after Brent Todys and Archer Brookman decided to return with an extra year of COVID-19 eligibility.

Todys backed up former catcher Dillon Dinger for two seasons before the Detroit Tigers selected Dinger in the second round of the 2020 MLB draft. He stepped into the starting role last year and will reclaim his spot calling pitches. The now sixth-year senior appeared in 105 games before 2022, recording a .260/.365/.413 slash line with 11 home runs and 66 RBI.

Brookman also enters his fifth year in the program this season and will split time with Todys behind the plate. He will frequently fill a spot in the batting order as a designated hitter, where his bat will provide Ohio State with much-needed offense. Brookman started in 22 games in 2021, reaching base 36 times with four home runs and 11 walks.

“I love our catchers,” Beals said. “These guys have been with us for a while now. They’re (fifth and sixth) year guys and great leaders. They are great managers of the game and of the pitching staff. Both of them do just a fabulous job behind the plate.”

Beals signed freshman Trey Pancake in the 2021 class – a key piece for Ohio State’s

roster after Todys and Brookman leave the program. The 12th-year head coach feels hopeful that Pancake can acclimate to college baseball in a short time.

“Trey Pancake is a freshman who is learning the ropes, and he’s in a really good spot because he gets to see Todys and Brookman work on a daily basis,” he said. “Trey’s got a great arm, and I’m excited about him.”

Beals said a significant focus for Ohio State’s catchers will be holding runners and keeping them from stealing bases. He believes the Buckeyes have struggled in that area in past years and will need to improve their caught-stealing numbers if they want to succeed.

“We’ve worked on our throwing game,” Beals said. “If you look at last year, we gave up more stolen bases than we certainly would like to. We’ve worked and certainly improved on the throwing game. I’m excited about these two guys – about what they mean to this team, and I really like what they do behind home plate.”

In The Dirt

According to Beals, Ohio State’s most important returning asset is shortstop Zach Dezenzo, an MLB draft hopeful who reached the century mark in career games in 2021. Dezenzo, a team captain, slashed .302/.382/.550 last season with nine home runs. He accounted for 19 home runs and

Continued On Page 34

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Kern A Star For The Buckeyes In Center Field

Continued From Page 33

75 RBI in three seasons with the Buckeyes, making him the most productive returner in the batting order.

"We're so fortunate to have Zach Dezenzo back here for his senior year," Beals said. "I'm just really impressed with how he's attacked this year. It didn't take him long to get over the disappointment of not being in last year's professional draft. He has really gone to work and is a significantly better baseball player this year than he was last year. He continues to grow offensively, defensively and in his leadership skills. I'm really excited about Zach, and I feel like he's in a position to have a (Big Ten and NCAA) Player of the Year type of season."

Nick Erwin will hold down third base as a senior. He's made 81 career starts at the position and brings a veteran presence to the hot corner. His superior glove work beside Dezenzo will give the Buckeyes a solid defensive presence on the left side of the infield.

"Nick's a great defender over at third base and gives you tough quality at bats at the plate," Beals said. "He's a Gold Glove type defender and just kind of a dirtball player who complements the rest of our team and really complements Dezenzo on the left side."

Freshman shortstop Josh McAlister will likely wait a season to play his natural position upon Dezenzo's departure. The Illinois product could fill a utility role behind Dezenzo and Erwin while also pushing for playing time at second base.

"Backing up in the infield is a true freshman Josh McAlister, who is a great defender shortstop and someone we see as the future here in our program," Beals said. "He is an elite athlete with elite baseball skills. He's going to be fun to watch grow up. He gets to sit there at shortstop and work out behind Dezenzo every day, which is a great growing opportunity for him. Josh is going

to be ready for his turn whenever it happens."

Freshman second baseman Tyler Pettorini broke out during fall scrimmages, using his glove and bat to impress the Ohio State coaching staff. The Buckeyes will turn to redshirt sophomores Caden Kaiser and Blayne Robinson to man first base. Kaiser appeared in 14 games last season, collecting four hits in 28 at bats, while Robinson didn't see the field in his first two years.

Sophomore transfer Hank Thomas could also be a contributor at first this season. He spent the 2021 season at Georgia Tech and appeared in 10 games. The Oxford, Ohio, native was the No. 3 Ohio player in 2020 and could have signed with the Buckeyes but chose to join the Yellow Jackets. Two years later, he will make his debut in his home state wearing scarlet and gray.

In The Grass

Sophomore Kade Kern and junior Mitchell Okuley return as two significant pieces of the Ohio State roster this season. Kern started in center field last year as a freshman, collecting a team-leading 52 hits, .391 on-base percentage and nine stolen bases. He earned second-team All-Big Ten and Big Ten All-Freshman Team honors. The Archbold, Ohio, native also won a Collegiate Baseball Freshman All-American award.

"Kade Kern is our anchor in center field," Beals said. "He's the man at that position, and he continues to grow as a player. Defensively, he plays a great center field and offensively, he's going to be in the middle of our order. He was a freshman All-American, and I'm not really concerned about the so-called 'sophomore jinx.' I think the biggest thing with Kade is how he genuinely cares, and he takes himself seriously."

"But we have to manage that expectation level. It's not fair to think he'll automatically duplicate the year he had last year. Still, he works hard, and I'm not worried about Kade at all."

Okuley returns after starting 39 games last season. He converted all 80 of his put-out attempts without committing an error in the field. Beals said he is looking for more out of Okuley this year, claiming the coaching staff will expect a lot out of his bat.

"I love Mitch's defense and the competitor that he is," Beals said. "He's going to play his tail off and play a great right field. He's moving in the batting order, and we see him starting out hitting in the middle of the order with Dezenzo and Kern."

Freshman Trey Lipsy impressed during fall scrimmages, and he might have the inside track toward an everyday starting position in left field. Ohio State will hold a competition for playing time in left field behind Lipsy throughout non-conference competitions, and redshirt sophomore Joey Aden and senior Nolan Clegg will be in the mix.

Aden has not seen the field as a Buckeye. He suffered a season-ending knee injury before last season and rehabilitated during the spring. Clegg had made 24 career starts in three seasons with a .294/.384/.459 slash. Beals said he looks forward to the

2022 Ohio State Baseball Roster

No.	Name	Position	Year	Height	Weight	B/T	Hometown
1	Joey Aden	OF	R-So.	6-1	200	R/R	Bentonville, Ark.
2	Marcus Ernst	INF	Sr.	6-1	195	R/R	Dublin, Ohio
3	Colton Bauer	INF	Sr.	6-1	190	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
4	Zach Dezenzo	INF	Sr.	6-4	220	R/R	Alliance, Ohio
5	Nick Erwin	INF	Sr.	6-0	175	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
6	Drew Reckart	INF	Sr.	5-11	200	R/R	Hamilton, Ohio
7	Kade Kern	OF	So.	6-0	197	R/R	Archbold, Ohio
8	Josh McAlister	INF	Fr.	6-2	185	R/R	Flossmoor, Ill.
10	Gavin Bruni	LHP	Fr.	6-3	205	L/L	Alliance, Ohio
11	Trent Jones	RHP	So.	6-3	190	R/R	Massillon, Ohio
12	Brent Todys	C	R-Sr.	5-9	185	L/L	Westerville, Ohio
14	Nate Karaffa	P/INF	Jr.	6-0	175	L/R	Toronto, Ohio
15	Trey Kean	RHP	Jr.	6-2	205	R/R	Springboro, Ohio
16	Wyatt Loncar	RHP	Jr.	6-6	230	R/R	Pacific Palisades, CA.
17	TJ Brock	RHP	Sr.	6-1	200	R/R	Cincinnati, Ohio
19	Tim Baird	RHP	R-Fr	6-2	195	L/R	North Royalton, Ohio
20	Nolan Clegg	OF	Sr.	6-2	195	R/R	Toronto, Ohio
21	Caden Kaiser	OF/1B	R-So.	6-1	196	L/R	Lewis Center, Ohio
24	Mitchell Okuley	OF	Jr.	6-1	197	L/L	Powell, Ohio
25	Aaron Funk	RHP	Grad.	6-5	225	R/R	Lawrence, Kan.
26	Nate Haberthier	RHP	So.	6-5	245	R/R	West Chester, Ohio
28	Trey Lipsy	OF	Fr.	6-2	185	R/R	Southfield, Mich
29	Archer Brookman	C	Sr.	6-1	200	L/L	Pointe-Claire, Quebec
31	Will Pfennig	RHP	Sr.	6-0	190	R/R	Mason, Ohio
32	Trey Pancake	C	Fr.	5-9	165	L/L	Negley, Ohio
34	Isaiah Coupet	LHP	So.	6-1	200	R/R	Flossmoor, Ill.
36	Mitch Milheim	LHP	Sr.	6-0	205	L/L	Powell, Ohio
37	Griffan Smith	LHP	Sr.	6-2	215	R/R	Cincinnati, Ohio
38	Blayne Robinson	1B	R-So.	6-5	220	L/L	Defiance, Ohio
39	Jacob Gehring	RHP	Fr.	6-1	225	R/R	Canfield, Ohio
42	Tyler Pettorini	INF	Fr.	5-11	175	L/R	Wooster, Ohio
43	Jake Johnson	P/INF	Fr.	5-11	200	R/L	Medina, Ohio
44	Casey Maniglia	RHP	R-Jr.	6-2	210	R/R	Solon, Ohio
45	Jace Middleton	RHP	Fr.	6-4	208	L/R	Lewis Center, Ohio
50	Ethan Hammerberg	RHP	Jr.	6-5	250	L/L	Upper Arlington, Ohio
53	Garrett Peters	LHP	R-Fr.	6-0	190	L/L	Springfield, Ohio
54	Drew Bachman	LHP	Fr.	6-3	190	L/L	West Chester, Ohio
55	Hank Thomas	OF/1B	R-Fr.	6-4	200	R/R	Oxford, Ohio

Head Coach – Greg Beals (Kent State). **Assistant Coach** – Matt Angle (Ohio State). **Assistant Coach** – Dan Delucia (Ohio State). **Director of Baseball Operations** – Blair Everhart (Ohio State). **Director of Pitching Development** – Brad Goldberg (Ohio State). **Strength and Conditioning Coach** – Dean Hansen (Mount Marty College). **Volunteer Assistant Coach** – Matt Carpenter. **Baseball Analytics** – Danny Matejczyk.

2022 Schedule

Feb 18 Marshall at Port Charlotte, FL., W 15-4; **19** Indiana State at Port Charlotte, FL., W 9-3; **20** Indiana State at Port Charlotte, FL., W 9-8; **21** BYU at Port Charlotte, FL., L 9-6; **25** at Texas State, L 9-1 **26** at Texas State, L 8-5; **27** at Texas State, L 6-4;

March 2 at Cincinnati, L 4-5; **4** Campbell at Fayetteville, N.C., L 7-2; **5** Pitt at Fayetteville, N.C., L 5-6; **6** Army at Fayetteville, N.C., W 12-7 **11** Doubleheader at West Virginia, W 10-4, L 6-7 **16** at UNC Wilmington, 6 p.m. **18-20** at UNC Wilmington, 6 p.m., 4 p.m., 1 p.m. **22** WRIGHT STATE **25-27** at Purdue, 4 p.m., 2 p.m., 1 p.m. **30** TOLEDO, 6:05 p.m.

April 1 NEBRASKA, 6:05 p.m.; **2** NEBRASKA, 3:05 p.m.; **3** NEBRASKA, 1:05 p.m.; **5** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, 6:05 p.m.; **8-10** MICHIGAN STATE, 6:05 p.m., 3:05 p.m., 1:05 p.m.; **12** at Dayton, 7:00 p.m.; **14** MARSHALL, 4:05 p.m.; **15-17** at Maryland, 6:30 p.m., 2 p.m., 1 p.m.; **19** MARSHALL, 6:05 p.m.; **22-24** at Michigan, 6:00 p.m., 2 p.m., 1 p.m.; **29-30** RUTGERS, 6:05 p.m., 3:05 p.m.

May 1 RUTGERS, 1:05 p.m.; **4** at Kent State, 1:05 p.m.; **6-8** Northwestern, 4 p.m., 3 p.m., 2 p.m.; **10-11** CAMPBELL, 6:05 p.m., 3:05; **13-15** PENN STATE, 6:05 p.m., 3:05 p.m., 1:05 p.m.; **17** CINCINNATI, 6:05 p.m.; **19-21** USC Upstate, 6:05 p.m., 6:05 p.m., 1:05 p.m.; **25** Big Ten Tournament

the opening weeks.

"Aden is a veteran who's been in our program now for three years," Beals said. "He's a plus defender who I could see being a defensive replacement. His bat continues to grow and he's going to continue to put himself in a competitive situation as he climbs the ladder in the outfield. Nolan Clegg is a senior who's been around the block. He's a guy that we certainly trust to play the game and put Ohio State baseball in a position to succeed."

Beals doubled down that Lipsy will be

undoubtedly spur on others around him – a quality Beals said is rare among college players, especially freshmen.

"We're looking at the leading candidate right now being a true freshman in Trey Lipsy," Beals said. "He is an incredibly talented young man, left-handed hitter who runs extremely well and is probably the fastest guy we have on our team. He's a dynamic offensive player, there's juice in his bat and he can really run. He can steal a base, and he's going to create some versatility in our in our lineup."



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Icers Need Help To Make NCAA Tournament

On thin ice. The bubble could burst. Hanging by a thread.

The cliches are corny but appropriate as Ohio State men's hockey clings to its hope of qualifying for the NCAA tournament after being upset in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten tournament by Penn State.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

A 2-1 loss in the deciding game of the best-of-three series March 6 at Value City Arena, combined with losing the final four games of the regular season leaves the Buckeyes 15th in the PairWise rankings, the mathematic formula the NCAA selection committee uses to select the 16-team field.

There are six automatic qualifiers for the conference tournament champions, leaving 10 at-large bids. However, because the winner of the Atlantic Hockey Association tourney is slotted as the 16th seed due to it being the weakest of the conferences, the Buckeyes (22-13-2) are the ultimate bubble team with little wiggle room.

It comes down to this: If any team ranked below 15th in the PairWise wins its respective tournament in the ECAC, Hockey East or CCHA, the Buckeyes likely will not qualify.

The tournaments continue March 18, in some cases with semifinals, with all finals on March 19. The NCAA selection show is the next day.

"It's certainly a different situation, but you've got to have everything fall in line to give yourself a chance," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik. "From what the mathematics people are telling me, we just need all the favorites to win."

The College Hockey News' Probability Matrix puts OSU's chances of gaining an at-large bid at 41 percent thru March 13, up 7 percent from the previous week.

Here are the tournaments and what they mean to the Buckeyes with PairWise rankings in parentheses:

CCHA

Final: Bemidji State (29) vs. Minnesota State (1).

Bottom Line: It's Minnesota State or bust for the Buckeyes.

ECAC

Semifinals: Colgate (31) vs. Quinnipiac (7); Clarkson (16) vs. Harvard (23).

Bottom line: Anything other than a Quinnipiac title spells doom. OSU's season could end March 18 if the Bobcats don't advance to the final.

Hockey East

Semifinals: Connecticut (19) vs. Northeastern (14); UMass Lowell (13) vs. Massachusetts (11).

Bottom line: Ohio State needs anyone but Connecticut to win the championship, although it would help the Buckeyes if the Huskies beat Northeastern in the semifinal.

The other three conference tournaments don't matter to the Buckeyes.

Atlantic Hockey

Semifinals: Mercyhurst (39) vs. American International (22); Air Force (45) vs. Rensselaer (41).

Bottom Line: With the winner earning the final NCAA spot, the Buckeyes don't need to be worried about being pushed out.

Big Ten

Final: Minnesota (4) vs. Michigan (2).

Bottom line: Nothing changes for the Buckeyes since both teams are assured of being in the NCAAs.

NCHC

Semifinals: Minnesota Duluth (9) vs. Denver (3); North Dakota (6) vs. Western Michigan (5).

Bottom line: It means nothing to the Buckeyes since all the teams are guaranteed to move on.

Rohlik remains optimistic, noting that OSU assistant coach Steve Miller was in a similar predicament as an assistant for Providence in the 2014-15 season.

"He was saying that they had something like a 4 percent chance to get in on the last day," Rohlik said. "Everything had to go their way. It did and they went on to win the national championship."

Of course, the Buckeyes wouldn't be on the brink if they had finished stronger. In the final four games of the regular season, they were swept at home by Minnesota and on the road by Michigan to fall from first place to fourth in the Big Ten.

It's not an excuse but a fact that standout freshman defenseman Mason Lohrei was injured in the first period of the opener vs. the Golden Gophers.

Including that game, OSU went 1-6-0 without him. Picking up just a point against Minnesota and Michigan might have given the Buckeyes enough of a cushion to avoid the bubble.

"We have good players, but you certainly can't replace a player of his caliber," Rohlik said of Lohrei. "He was leading the country in defensemen scoring at the time. It's disappointing, especially for a guy who has that much impact."

He said it would be questionable if Lohrei would be available if the Buckeyes make the NCAA tournament.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes have continued practicing since the Penn State series to be ready just in case.

Downfall

Penn State defeated Ohio State 2-1 on March 6 to win the final two games of the best-of-three Big Ten quarterfinal series.

Dylan Lugris broke a 1-1 tie at 13:07 of the third period, and the No. 5 seed Nittany Lions (17-19-1) completed the upset of the fourth-seeded Buckeyes, who had won the March 4 opener 4-3 but lost 3-2 the next night.

"When you lose a game like that, a playoff series, it's disappointing," Rohlik said. "I take things personal, as far as my job. I felt we were ready, and we just weren't quite good

enough. They got a couple one-goal wins when they needed them, and we didn't have enough firepower to get it done."

Penn State entered the playoffs knowing its only path to the NCAA tournament was earning the automatic qualifier by winning the Big Ten tourney.

"Sometimes you get so caught up in a moment, what's today and the next day, you don't have time to think about what these guys have accomplished," Rohlik said. "No one gave us a chance. That was pretty evident where the coaches in this league put us – dead last, no chance. I think we proved we're a pretty good hockey team. These guys have banded together to say we're going to show, we're going to compete, and we won a lot of games."

The series started as if the Buckeyes might make quick work of the visitors, but to the credit of the pesky Nittany Lions, they hung tough in the first game and likely gained a ton of confidence despite the setback before a turnout of 2,039.

OSU built a 3-0 lead by the early stages of the third period before Penn State made it interesting and forced the Buckeyes to hold on.

Standout freshman Georgii Merkulov opened the scoring at the 16:00 mark of the second period on the first of his two break-aways. It took Eric Cooley just 73 seconds to make it 2-0. He tipped a shot by Patrick Guzzo. Quinn Preston extended the lead to 3-0 at 2:19 of the third period.

Back came the Nittany Lions as Tyler Paquette at 7:53 and Connor McMenamin at 9:56 made it 3-2.

But Merkulov scored what proved to be the winner when he gathered a loose puck and skated in alone for his 20th goal of the season at 16:52 to make it 4-2. His seven game-winners lead the NCAA.

However, Kenny Johnson cut the deficit to 4-3 only 18 seconds later.

It was nery time from there as PSU played the final 2:17 with an empty net but freshman Jakub Dobeš, who made 49 saves, withstood the challenge.

Preston was not surprised that the Nittany Lions kept coming at them.

"I just think it's the playoffs," he said. "Everyone wants to play harder and win every battle. It's just playoff hockey."

In a must-win situation the following night, the Nittany Lions got mission accomplished, taking the lead three times as 2,198 watched.

Penn State went ahead 1-0 on a goal by Lugris with 29 seconds left in the first period. Michael Gildon potted a power-play goal

BIG		Men's Hockey				
	Pts.	W	L	T	OTL	
Minnesota	54	18	6	0	0	
Michigan	48	16	8	0	0	
Notre Dame	44	16	6	0	0	
Ohio State	43	13	9	2	1	
Penn State	18	6	17	1	0	
Michigan State	18	6	18	0	0	
Wisconsin	18	6	17	1	0	

at 13:55 in the second to make it 1-1.

Kevin Wall put PSU up 2-1 at 17:12 of the second, but in the third period Cole McWard scored from the point at 9:33 to tie it 2-2.

After a Buckeye power play ended at 17:08 of the third period, Ryan Kirwan netted the winning goal for the Nittany Lions 11 seconds later.

OSU had an extra attacker on for the final 75 seconds but could not get the equalizer.

Dobeš made 43 saves while Liam Souliere made 33 for PSU.

In the third game, Kirwan put PSU up 1-0 at 13:30 of the second period before a small and quiet turnout of 1,188. Tate Singleton got the equalizer at 18:52 of the second, but Lugris potted the winner in the third.

Penn State was eliminated after a 3-2 loss at Minnesota on March 12.

Women Headed To Frozen Four

Nadine Muzerall's side is headed to the Frozen Four – again. For the third time in five seasons, the Ohio State women's hockey team will be among the four semifinalists in the hunt for the NCAA women's hockey crown, and this time, the WCHA-winning Buckeyes are the unquestioned favorite.

Muzerall's top-seeded Buckeyes rode an oppressive power-play unit to topple Quinnipiac in the quarterfinals at a sold-out OSU Ice Rink, claiming a 4-3 victory on a Clair DeGeorge game-winner in double overtime.

The Buckeyes will head next to the Frozen Four in Pennsylvania at Penn State, where they'll square off with No. 5 seed Yale, which beat Colgate 2-1 in overtime. That game is scheduled for March 18. On the other end of the bracket, No. 3 Northeastern toppled Wisconsin, 4-2 and will face off with unseeded Minnesota Duluth, which upset No. 2 Minnesota to advance.

For a full recap of the Penn State series, the women's team's win over Quinnipiac and news on the NCAA tournament, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Ohio State To Push For Team Title At NCAAs

The Ohio State wrestling team finished fourth behind Michigan, Penn State and Iowa at the 2022 Big Ten championships, qualifying eight of 10 wrestlers for the NCAA championships March 17-19 in Detroit.

ON THE MAT Chase Brown

While Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan wanted all 10 starters to qualify for the national tournament, he recognized the unique challenge of competing in the Big Ten, a conference he described weeks ago as “the third-toughest country in wrestling” behind Russia and Iran. He pointed to extra COVID-19 eligibility for student-athletes as another significant factor that made winning the competition more difficult.

For reference, the average age for the 10 starters in Michigan’s starting lineup was over 23 years old. Their youngest wrestler was 20 years old, and their oldest was 26. Iowa had a similar turnout, with their average age above 23; the youngest wrestler was 19, and the oldest was 26.

To put that in perspective, former Buckeyes who are now 26 years old include Olympic gold medalist Kyle Snyder and world champion Joey McKenna. There’s also 25-year-old Myles Martin or 24-year-old Kollin Moore. Ohio State would likely be an unstoppable force if the program had a similar makeup this season.

“It’s a tough, tough tournament,” Ryan said. “It’s probably the toughest this tournament has been in a while because of the COVID-19 guidelines. The NCAA allowed more scholarships in the tournament than in the last 20 years. All the seniors from last year got an extra year and scholarship

money to allow more people to stay. It was a tough tournament. We wrestled well at some weights. There were some moments of brilliance, and there were some tough moments. We’re on to the next thing.”

Malik Heinselman (125 pounds), Dylan D’Emilio (141), Sammy Sasso (149), Carson Kharchla (165), Ethan Smith (174), Kaleb Romero (184), Gavin Hoffman (197) and Tate Orndorff (285) will represent the Buckeyes on the national stage.

“Every wrestler in our program chases mastery,” Ryan said. “We saw a lot of great things from those (eight) wrestlers late in the season, and their work is paying off for them. We learned some things that we can grow from at the conference tournament, and we know what environment we will be in at the NCAAs. The Big Ten was packed, and this NCAA championship will be the same.”

“We’ve had 10 wrestlers compete many times at nationals, but we didn’t get 10 this year. But the guys we do have the fight and know that we will need more fight our next time out. There’s even less margin for error at nationals. It’s so competitive, which means we need to put seven really good minutes on the mat. These guys are ready to do that.”

Heinselman qualified for his fourth consecutive NCAA championships after taking fifth in the Big Ten. He claimed the No. 12 seed at the national tournament and will face No. 21 Taylor LaMont of Utah Valley State in the first round.

The Castle Rock, Colo., native went 20-5 this year and featured a 73-34 record in his four collegiate seasons. Heinselman has a 2-4 mark at the NCAA championships after finishing 1-2 in both appearances. The 2020 tournament did not take place because of the pandemic.

D’Emilio will make his second NCAA championship appearance this season after finishing fifth at the Big Ten championships. He is the No. 17 seed at 141 pounds and will face No. 16 Quinn Kinner of Rider

in the first round. Buckeye fans might remember Kinner from his time in the scarlet and gray prior to his transfer after the 2019-20 season.

Through two seasons, D’Emilio is 30-17 in a Buckeye uniform. He went 20-9 this season after starting the year as a backup to Jordan Decatur. In last year’s national tournament, D’Emilio impressed as the No. 30 seed, claiming a 2-2 record in four matches.

Sasso will make his third NCAA championships appearance after a runner-up finish in the Big Ten last weekend. The Nazareth, Penn., native failed to defend his 149-pound title against Wisconsin’s Austin Gomez, who claims the No. 3 seed at the national tournament. Sasso, who posted a 21-2 record this season, is the No. 4 seed this season with a first-round draw of No. 29-seed John Arceri of Buffalo.

He was the No. 3 seed at the 2020 NCAA championships before they were canceled due to the pandemic and claimed the No. 1 seed last year, finishing second behind North Carolina’s Austin O’Connor. This match ended with a controversial no-takedown call for Sasso in the final seconds.

“Sammy has learned a lot in the last two seasons,” Ryan said. “Every guy on our team writes a self-assessment after their performance. They write about things they did well and can do to improve. Sometimes they write about their mind-set during the most challenging points in the match. It’s a powerful tool for our wrestlers to use, and our coaching staff learns a lot from those self-assessments.”

“He had very little room for error, and we saw a couple of things in his match that weren’t perfect. Sammy will learn from that. It’s really about having him lock in this week and getting him feeling better. He doesn’t need to be told that he can win this thing. He knows that well. Sammy can take the learning experience, correct a few things and get ready for five tough matches

at the national championship.”

Kharchla will make his first NCAA championships appearance this season after missing all of 2021 with a knee injury.

OSU NCAA Seeds

125: No. 12 Malik Heinselman
133: Did Not Qualify
141: No. 17 Dylan D’Emilio
149: No. 4 Sammy Sasso
157: Did Not Qualify
165: No. 7 Carson Kharchla
174: No. 7 Ethan Smith
184: No. 7 Kaleb Romero
197: No. 21 Gavin Hoffman
285: No. 13 Tate Orndorff

He qualified for the tournament after finishing fourth last weekend in the Big Ten.

This year, Kharchla went 21-3 and claimed the No. 1 seed at the conference championships. He lost two matches in sudden victory, including a third-place bout to Wisconsin’s Dean Himiti. His performance earned him the No. 7 seed in the NCAA tournament, where he will face No. 26 seed Lucas Revano of Penn State in the first round.

“Carson’s been in some major events,” Ryan said. “I think the biggest thing is a culture in the program. There’s a high expectation for him. He’s around guys that have won multiple championships, and he’s trained alongside guys that have won it as a freshman. All he needs to do is believe in himself. It’s about making sure that his spirits are high, and he knows he has the capacity. If he strings a series of tough matches together, he can win the NCAAs.”

“He was the only (Buckeye) with an attack in the Big Ten semifinals, and he didn’t connect. Carson lost those sudden victories because he put himself in a vulnerable position with an attack. I like the aggression, which is why I’m confident in his chances next time out, but I don’t know if it was the best time for him to shoot in those matches. Eight out of 10 times when he’s the aggressor, he’ll connect, but he didn’t that time. Carson will learn and turn it around.”

Smith qualified for his fourth NCAA championships this season with a third-place finish at the Big Ten tournament. He will compete for the second time at 174 pounds in the NCAAs after wrestling at 165 last year. He claimed a 2-2 mark the last time he qualified at his current weight in 2019.

Smith, a two-time All-American, qualified at 165 during the 2020 tournament and again in that class the following season, finishing with a 4-1 record as the No. 7 seed. This year, he claims the same ranking at 174 and will face No. 26 seed Tyler Eischens of Stanford in the opening round.

“I think I had a good mind-set in the Big Ten,” Smith said. “There were some small victories that I took away from the weekend because I wrestled everyone close. I had a heater with (Nebraska wrestler) Mikey Labriola, but that one was a little

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personal. It boosted my confidence and made me feel confident about my ability to perform in Detroit. I'm riding the wave from that big win, and I'll be rocking at nationals."

Ryan agreed that Smith performed well at the Big Ten championships. He admired the redshirt senior's tenacity in his matches and is looking forward to seeing Smith earn another chance to prove himself on the national stage this season.

"Ethan was wrestling at Big Tens like it was for an Olympic gold medal," Ryan said, "because it was for him. That's who he is, and that's why he's one of the great leaders in this program. That kind of energy from him matters. He got beat a couple of times and fell short of his goals, but he had a great tournament. He's wrestling so well that even though he got third, we feel excited about his performance and how he's competing."

After a fourth-place finish at the Big Tens, Romero will make his third NCAA championship appearance. It will be his first time qualifying at 184 pounds.

In last season's national tournament, Romero was the No. 7 seed at 174 pounds, earning a 2-2 record. Once again the seventh seed, the Mechanicsburg, Ohio, native, will face No. 26 seed Donnell Washington of Indiana this year. The two wrestlers did not meet on the mat when the Buckeyes squared off with the Hoosiers on Feb. 13. Romero instead battled Sean Grim, whom he pinned in 2:25.

"I didn't finish where I wanted to at the Big Tens," Romero said. "I know that's the case for a lot of guys in our program. Guys like Sammy, Carson and Ethan wanted to win it all, and I did, too. The great thing about this program is that we all have each other's backs. We expect a lot from each other, and I think that's a good thing, but we all understand that the person next to us knows what they need to do better to improve."

Romero admitted the Big Ten championships were a struggle for him partially due to his conditioning. The redshirt senior missed significant action in the middle of the season as he recovered from an unspecified ailment. Romero said he would have appreciated more time on the mat this year to gain a feel for the opponents. Still, he also understands the brutality of collegiate wrestling, recognizing that even the fittest wrestlers can sustain injuries.

"This sport demands a lot out of you," Romero said. "I wanted to be out there with my guys, but I needed to give myself the proper time to recover so I could compete at the Big Tens and then at nationals. I know a lot of our guys wrestled tough last time out, and they could use the time to recover, too. We'll get right and then look to bounce back at the NCAAs."

Ryan thinks the decision to rest Romero in the regular season paid dividends for him and should continue to bear fruit for him at the NCAA tournament. He was impressed with Romero's performance at the conference championships and claimed that Romero was one move away from a championship run.

"In the semifinals, Romero had (Michigan wrestler Myles) Amine's leg in the air, and he didn't finish. They had a single leg

open on the edge of the mat, and he made a technical mistake. He knew he made a mistake and was supposed to use a different technique there. Kaleb chose to use a different move which cost him. That's the difference, though. Kaleb understands that, and he will get right before nationals."

Hoffman finished eighth at the Big Ten championships to qualify for his first career NCAA tournament. In the first round, he will open as the No. 21 seed and face No. 12 Tanner Sloan of South Dakota.

The Montoursville, Pa., native took over the 197-pound division during the second half of the regular season. This season, he went 13-10 with a 6-5 (4-4 Big Ten) dual record, recording two major decisions and one technical fall.

"Gavin's been around the program for a long time, but this will be his first nationals," Ryan said. "He belonged there last year. You get many blessings from the Big Ten opponents you face during the season because it's a real challenge. In the Big Ten, we are beating each other up so you can qualify guys that might not have as impressive records. Each weekend you face the top-ranked wrestlers, so losing close isn't that bad in the committee's eyes.

"For Gavin, he had a lot of challenges this year with how his class formed at the top seeds. Gavin had the No. 1 seed (Max Dean) in a position where he could win. For some reason, the ref stopped it, and we didn't get the call. He probably had a 90 percent chance to get two points, but the ref called it potentially dangerous. Gavin will have to win some tough, gritty matches at nationals, but we feel confident he can do that. We're excited for him and the work he's put in."

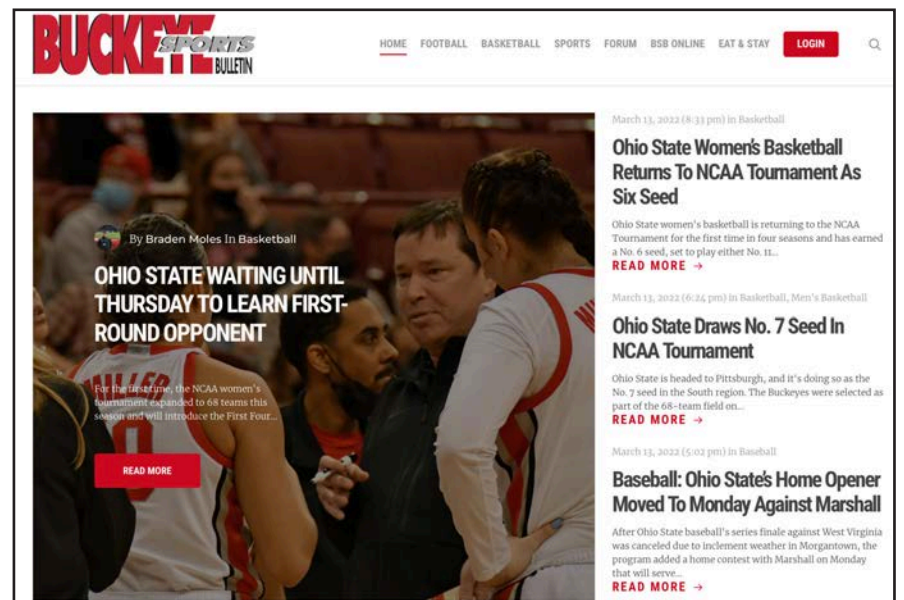
Orndorff will make his fourth NCAA championship appearance this season and second as a Buckeye. Last year, he was an All-American with an eighth-place finish as the No. 21 seed. At Utah Valley State, Orndorff went 2-2 in 2019 and was the No. 8 seed at the 2020 tournament.

After a 16-9 record in the regular season, he will be the No. 13-seed and wrestle No. 20 Joe Doyle (16-9) of Binghamton in the first round. Orndorff looks poised to make another deep run at NCAAs after he faced several top-ranked opponents at the Big Ten tournament, including Minnesota's Gable Stevenson – the eventual heavyweight champion and a national favorite at 285 pounds. Orndorff will be battle-tested and ready to compete after taking eighth in Lincoln, Neb.

"We will battle for a team trophy," Ryan said. "If we can overturn some of the matches we lost at the Big Tens, we'll fight with Michigan, Penn State and Iowa. Then you got Arizona State, Missouri, Cornell and North Carolina State fighting for trophies. We will battle all of them there at nationals. Those teams fill the first few spots, but we will be in the hunt for a team championship.

"We never want to start focusing on next year too early, but we are also excited about what we have returning after this season. We are looking for some guys to take individual titles and make a run at a team championship. Ohio State wrestling will look similar next year and that's exciting. It's been a fun and exciting year for us, and it will be going forward."

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Wilson A Rare Athlete At Wide Receiver

Garrett Wilson is about to make a lot of money and, I predict, begin a successful NFL career.

He wasn't the fastest receiver at the recent NFL Combine. He was about a step short of that, but he did clock in at a plen-



ty-fast-enough 4.38 seconds, sixth fastest among receivers. Wilson didn't jump the highest. His 34-inch vertical leap was the 17th best among receivers.

And at 183 pounds he was hardly the biggest.

But he did well enough to not cast a shadow over the talent he showed on the field at Ohio State.

When it comes to receivers at Ohio State over the 41 seasons we've been publishing Buckeye Sports Bulletin, Wilson to me jumps out as one of the very few who nearly from day one demonstrated the skills that would land him in the NFL.

Set aside the initial stats. They came later, just as they did for some other OSU players.

He passed the "look" test instantly. For that, I put him in the select class of Cris Carter, David Boston and Michael Thomas.

Wilson was on the receiving end of just 30 passes his freshman year, but the athletic ability he showed almost immediately in going high for the tough-to-get throws in traffic clearly said NFL.

Used more later in his career, he wrapped up with a 70-catch, 12-TD season in just 11 games last year.

I put Wilson in the category of Carter, Boston and Thomas because of the spe-

cial things he showed at first glance. All of these players gave that instant impression.

Dipping into the wayback machine, memories remain on how Carter as a freshman in 1984 did something uncommon for his day, going back toward the quarterback to catch the ball hands-only (not in his chest) and going high to make sure he'd get to the ball before anyone else.

After three seasons at Ohio State and 16 seasons in the NFL (1,101 catches and 130 TDs in the pros), Carter was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2013.

Thomas appeared like he could one day join Carter in the hall until an ankle injury sidelined him for much of the 2020 season and all of 2021. He led the league in receptions in 2018, and he set an NFL record for most receptions during his first five seasons in the league.

Thomas, like Wilson, didn't break on the scene at Ohio State in a big way, making just three catches as a freshman in 2012 and then redshirting in 2013. But it was clear once we got a glimpse of Thomas that he was something special.

Big, at 6-3, he ran precise routes and caught with sure hands like the guys who play on Sundays. He collected 54 and 56 catches in his next two seasons at OSU yet was still underrated, lasting until the second round of the draft.

The other guy I put in this special group is Boston.

He was the first really big, dominating receiver I recall at Ohio State (listed at 6-3, 215 as a junior at OSU, 240 pounds by the end of his NFL career).

The idea that he was talented, not just big, was immediate as a freshman in 1996, and he was a key part of some of John Cooper's best teams, catching 158 passes over his final two seasons.

Boston was the eighth pick of the 1999

NFL draft and had some big seasons in a short pro career, perhaps cut short by his multiple run-ins with law during and after his playing days. The stat line in his Pro Bowl season of 2001 included 98 catches for 1,598 yards.

This is not to minimize what Wilson's fellow Buckeye receiver in this year's draft – Chris Olave – did at Ohio State and what he may end up doing as a pro.

This is just to take note of how first impressions really can be telling. And for Wilson I feel as confident of his NFL success as I did the first time I saw him catching the ball for Ohio State.

For the Browns fans among us (me included), wouldn't it be nice if he ended up staying in Ohio? He could be the best player on the board when the Browns pick 13th, if he lasts that long.

Buckeyes in the NBA

Five Buckeyes have showed up on the NBA court on a regular basis this year, not only a large contingent but also a productive one.

Here's a rundown (with statistics through March 9) as the NBA season heads into its final weeks.

Mike Conley Jr.

Like the Energizer Bunny, Mike Conley keeps going, and going, and going. This is now his 15th NBA season, the first 12 with the Memphis Grizzlies and the last three with the Utah Jazz.

As BSB went to press, Conley had 14,007 points and 5,325 assists, averaging 14.8 points and 5.6 assists in his 944 NBA games.

This year through 58 games, Conley was averaging 13.3 points and 5.2 assists.

Conley was the fourth overall pick by the Grizzlies in the 2007 NBA draft, going after No. 1 Greg Oden (his high school and college teammate), No. 2 Kevin Durant and No. 3 Al Horford.

In that same draft, OSU's Daequan Cook went 21st to the Philadelphia 76ers.

D'Angelo Russell

D'Angelo Russell, the second overall pick in the 2015 NBA draft by the Los Angeles Lakers (after Karl-Anthony Towns was chosen first), is with his fourth team in seven seasons.

Russell was averaging 18.9 points in 53 games for the Minnesota Timberwolves.

During a career that has included stints with the Lakers, Brooklyn Nets, Golden State Warriors and Timberwolves, Russell is averaging 17.8 points in 412 games.

Jae'Sean Tate

Jae'Sean Tate is having his second solid season for the Houston Rockets, averaging 12.3 points in 63 games, after posting an 11.3-point-per-game average in 70 games as a rookie.

As he did at OSU, Tate is doing a little of everything, contributing 5.5 rebounds and 2.8 assists per game during his career.

All this for a guy who went undrafted

in 2018 then spent time in Belgium (Antwerp Giants, 2018-19) and Australia (Sydney Kings, 2019-20) before getting a crack at the NBA.

Duane Washington Jr.

Like Tate, Washington was undrafted. Unlike Tate, Washington got an NBA opportunity right away, signing on with the Indiana Pacers after finishing up with the Buckeyes.

Washington has appeared in 36 games for the Pacers, averaging 9.1 points a game.

Like Tate, that's impressive stuff for the early part of a career for an undrafted player.

Keita Bates-Diop

Keita Bates-Diop is now in his fourth NBA season, playing for his third team, the San Antonio Spurs. In 50 games this season, he was averaging 5.4 points and 3.9 rebounds.

That's close to his career average of 5.4 points and 2.9 rebounds in 154 games for the Timberwolves, Denver Nuggets and the Spurs.

Bates-Diop was a second-round pick (48th overall) by the Timberwolves in 2018.

Micah Potter

A sixth player in the state line this season is Micah Potter, who started his career at Ohio State and finished at Wisconsin. He has appeared in three games this year for the Detroit Pistons, scoring 12 points.

Originally signed Sept. 10 last year by the Miami Heat, he was cut on Oct. 16 and picked up by the Pistons on Dec. 29.

Bucks In The NBA/ABA All-Time

The stats listed above are from the great sports statistics website, basketball-reference.com, which lists 50 former Ohio State players who have played in the NBA or ABA.

Conley, by the time this paper reaches your mailbox, likely will be the second-leading scorer all-time among former Buckeyes, moving ahead of Jerry Lucas.

Here are the seven OSU players who have reached 10,000 points, according to the website:

- John Havlicek (1963-78), 26,395 points
- Jerry Lucas (1964-74), 14,053 points
- Conley (2008-22), 14,007 points through March 9
- Jim Jackson (1993-2006), 12,690 points
- Michael Redd (2001-12), 11,972 points
- Herb Williams (1982-99), 11,944 points
- Neil Johnston (1952-59), 10,023 points

The NBA lists Havlicek 17th all-time. No. 3 LeBron James (36,743) is closing in on Karl Malone (36,928 points) and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (38,387 points) for the top spot.

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Mother's Lessons Leave Lifelong Impressions

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Several years ago in his Editor's Notebook column in BSB, Mark Rea eloquently summed up the life of his mother and his relationship with her upon her passing. I remember thinking at the time (and it is hard to believe that Dixie Rea has been gone nearly 13 years) that at some point I would be faced with the same challenge.

That time has come, as my mother, the noted writer and educator Faye Moskowitz, passed away peacefully at home Feb. 21. Mark's eloquence in his own column is relevant here because I can tell the world that my mother always preferred his column to mine. It became kind of a standing gag between the three of us, but unless Mark wants to eulogize my mother, I guess it is up to me to tell you, dear readers, about her life and times.

I could start with her younger years, explaining how she navigated her way through the various union members and leaders (mostly male) and became a force in the Oakland County (Mich.) Democratic Party in the 1950s, culminating in her selection as a delegate to the 1960 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. There, while most were jumping on the John F. Kennedy bandwagon, she cast her vote for Adlai Stevenson. If she ever told me why she voted for a candidate who had already lost the presidential election twice, I have long since forgotten the answer.

I could tell you how, using more charm and communication skills than musical ability, she taught hundreds of people how to play folk guitar during the folk craze of the early '60s. There are probably still all sorts of people out there who can play "(Hang Down Your Head) Tom Dooley," the first song she always taught. She sent you home after that first class with a song already in your repertoire.

By this time, we had moved to Washington, D.C., and I could tell you how she put up several marchers from the South who came to D.C. for the 1963 March on Washington. There was no social media back then, so how those marchers found Faye and our house remains a mystery, but their presence left a lasting impression on an 11-year-old boy, long before any of us understood the significance of the march and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech.

Those marchers were probably the first of what would become an endless stream of protesters, tourists, job-seekers, homeless people and even a future Congressman who stayed at our house. Sometimes, depending on the event, there were 20 people or more at a time bunked in beds, on floors, couches or wherever they could rest their heads. There was my mother, ladling bowl after bowl of chili in the evening and flipping dozens of pancakes the following morning.

One of my mother's great regrets in later life was that she didn't keep a guest book.

I could talk so much about "Faye: The Early Years."

But my mother was always about setting an example and teaching life's lessons. So I wanted to concentrate on the second phase of her life to make a point.

My mother went back to school in her late 30s – to George Washington University, to be exact. Upon attaining her undergraduate degree, she became the first director of the Edmund Burke School in D.C. In her 12 years there, she made a big enough impact that there is a room at the independent college prep school named after her.

She continued to pursue her graduate studies at GW, and she ultimately left Burke to teach literature and creative writing at her

alma mater. Somewhere along the way, she started submitting stories for publication, and her essays appeared in *The Washington Post*, and after that, she had a several-installment run in the "Hers" column in *The New York Times*. She might have been best-known at the time for her frequent oral essays on the popular "All Things Considered" program on National Public Radio.

She published her first book of essays, "A Leak in the Heart: Tales From a Woman's Life" in 1985. *New York Times* columnist Russell Baker called it "a lovely book, beautifully written, the kind that makes you want to grab your friends, say hey, listen to this, and start reading aloud."

Faye would go on to write four more books of her own and edit several others.

In 1987, *Woman's Day* magazine sent her to Charlotte, N.C., hammer in hand, to help with and write about building 14 Habitat for Humanity homes in a week with former President Jimmy Carter.

"Can a left-handed klutz who has difficulty hanging a picture straight really make a contribution to this project?" she wrote of her first day on the project. "You're here, I tell myself; make the best of it. I put on my gray-green 'Jimmy Carter Work Project '87' T-shirt, work pants and heavy shoes, grab my hammer and go."

The article is accompanied by a photo of Faye, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter putting up drywall, and by the end of the project she was putting up vinyl siding with the best of them.

"I feel quite professional now," she wrote, "plucking siding nails from my carpenter's apron, my hammer employed at last."

But not all the media types at the project were working on houses like my mother. Some were just there to chronicle the exploits of the former president, who she wrote was quite skilled in construction, which led to one of my mother's favorite stories, one that she told over and over through the years.

"No sooner is a doorframe finished than a photographer pokes his camera through it," she recalled. "TV crews haunt the open windows with their mini-cams. One persistent photographer sets up his tripod in the room where the former president labors. Clearly irked at the interruption, Mr. Carter shouts for his press secretary. 'Nancy,' he yells. 'I need protection here. I need protection from these media people!'"

Faye loved that story and would always yell "Nancy, I need protection here," in a decent Jimmy Carter imitation.

Yours truly would make an occasional appearance in one of Faye's stories or articles. One day I received a call from Carole Miller, whom many of you might remember as the longtime administrator of Buckeye Boosters. Carole had been reading a story in *AARP The Magazine*, unaware of who had written it, and suddenly realized that she was reading about me. Carole looked back to the top of the story and saw that my mother was the author.

I recall the passage, as it was a true story.

I had been taking a walk one evening, and as I passed various houses there were families sitting on blankets in their yards. It took me several houses to realize that the families, most with young children, were waiting to view a lunar eclipse, and it reminded me of how my parents would wake us up as children at all hours of the night to view similar eclipses. I was quite

moved by the memory, and when I got home I immediately phoned Faye to let her know of the fond recollection.

I don't recall how she weaved that anecdote into the *AARP* story, but it was those types of tales, ones that many could relate to, that were the backbone of her writings.

At some point during her time at GW, the position of chairman of the English department came open, and there was a bitter fight between two not particularly popular professors to assume the position. The powers-that-be wound up settling on my mother to take the position as the "compromise candidate." Of course, I was proud she got the job, but I was always even more proud of the fact that she was the compromise candidate. She was someone on whom the entire department could agree. She served several terms, and I think really loved that job.

All along, she kept on teaching. In 2013, *Time* magazine called a spot in one of her classes among the 20 "hottest seats" in the country. Her only comment at the time that I recall was she was unhappy that they referred to her as an "octogenarian." She kept right on teaching well into her mid-80s, when failing hearing and eyesight caused her to retire.

As one of her former students who attended her final class shared upon her passing, "Faye was certainly a 'campus celebrity,' as *Time* magazine describes her – with her bright turquoise manicures, chunky jewelry and post-class cigarette breaks. The world may have lost a 91-year-old spitfire, but she lives on in the pens and hearts of her students. May her memory be a blessing."

The lesson I promised that we should take from all of this?

It's that Faye accomplished all of this after the age of 40. None of her success would have happened if she hadn't decided to go back to school, if she hadn't decided to submit that first story. It's never too late to pursue your dream, and she was living proof.

In addition to her success after 40, she was a wonderful wife, mother and grandmother (and just before passing, great-grandmother). She was a tremendous listener, which I think helped make her such a good storyteller. She could relate to rich and poor, intellectuals and the man and woman on the street, Democrats and Republicans – she not only listened, but heard and remembered.

To justify me taking up so much space in column, let me also say she was a tremendous friend to *Buckeye Sports Bulletin*. With little interest in sports (in high school she once showed up for gym class in a pair of her father's golf shoes), she still would watch every Ohio State football game with my father, frequently sneaking off for a cigarette if the Buckeyes were struggling. While I have a feeling that she only read Mark's column and mine (I don't think a nonleague basketball game against Akron interested her that much), she claimed to read every issue.

She was extremely interested in how business was, enjoying hearing about the day's "take" right up until her death. When it came to business, she knew what a good day in February was and what a bad day in the heart of football season was.

And those of you who feel overwhelmed by the number of renewal cards we send, you can

blame Faye. When I was in my very early teens, I once asked her why she received so many letters and I didn't receive any.

"Frankie (and she was the only one allowed to call me that), you've got to send a letter to get a letter," she famously said.

Early on in my time at BSB, I realized that even some of our most loyal readers don't renew unless you stay after them. So we adopted the philosophy that "you've got to send a letter to get a letter." It's a saying that you hear often around here and that affable BSB staffer Dave Breithaupt, one of Faye's favorites, is convinced she never really said. Shortly before her death, she was going to assure him that she did, indeed, say that but sadly she passed away before we could arrange the call.

Mark Rea closed his note about his mother – a respected educator in her own right – and her passing with these words: "Emerson once wrote, 'The only true gift is a portion of thyself to others.' If that is the case, my mom was the most giving person I'll likely ever know."

I can say the same about me and my own mother, Mark. And I can see why she always thought you were the better writer.

Csuri Also Passes

Ohio State football 1942 national champion and legendary computer graphic pioneer Charles Csuri also passed away recently. We did a lengthy interview with Csuri in our 2018 Interview Issue, and I found it one of the most significant interviews in this very popular series, primarily because of Csuri's candor.

To link this back to my mother, one of the reasons her writing was so popular was that so many people could identify with what she wrote – things like being a mother, a wife, but frequently writing about being the child of immigrant parents. For so many of a certain age, regardless of ethnic background and including Csuri and my mother and father, this was something they all shared. Maybe that's why I love this story, and Csuri readily admitted it was one of his favorites as well.

"This is one of my treasured stories," Csuri told BSB. "Les Horvath's father and Gene Fekete's father and my father were all Hungarians. They came from Hungary and all spoke Hungarian. My brother arranged for my father to attend an Ohio State-Pittsburgh football game in 1942. They seated our fathers on the sidelines.

"At one point in the game, we were close to them – somewhere on the 20-, 25-yard line – and (former fullback/linebacker) Gene Fekete in Hungarian yells to his father, 'Hey, Pop. Watch this play.' Here are these Hungarians – my father had never seen a football game in his entire life. He had no idea what the hell was going on. He was sitting there smoking cigars – all three of them were smoking the cigars – and Fekete yells and says to watch him. Dammit, he runs for one of the longest plays from the line of scrimmage for a touchdown (89 yards, the longest OSU play from scrimmage until Kenny Guiton connected with Devin Smith for a 90-yard touchdown in 2013). You couldn't have written a better script. It was just fantastic. I just treasure that story, that experience."

What a wonder it must have been for those immigrant parents to come from the old country and see their children have so much success in this great land of opportunity. My mother and father would have loved that story, too.

We reprinted the complete Charles Csuri interview as part of Reprint Thursday on March 3 at BuckeyeSports.com. The interview is archived for your enjoyment.



FOR ATHLETES

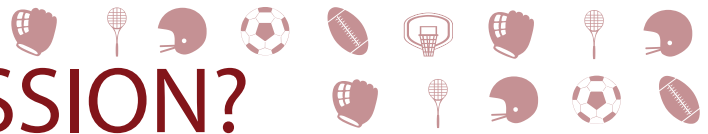
HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

- 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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