

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 42, No. 7

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 29, 2022

## Ohio State Forces Six Turnovers In Win Over Iowa

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

With Iowa coming into Ohio Stadium on Oct. 22 to face Ohio State, it was hard not to recall – or recoil at, perhaps – the thought of the last time the Buckeyes and Hawkeyes faced off. The final score – a 55-24 upset at Kinnick Stadium on Nov. 4, 2017 – was among the most surprising results in program history, as then-sixth-ranked Ohio State was blown out by un-ranked Iowa, ending any hope of the Buckeyes making their third appearance in the College Football Playoff in the four seasons since the postseason tournament's inception.

It was – and still is – the most points given up by Ohio State since a 63-14 loss to Penn State in 1994, and it remains the fifth-most points allowed in program history. Of course, the game got out of hand quickly when quarterback J.T. Barrett – under the tutelage of Ryan Day, who was in his first season at Ohio State as co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach – had his first pass attempt intercepted and returned for a touchdown on the Buckeyes' very first play.

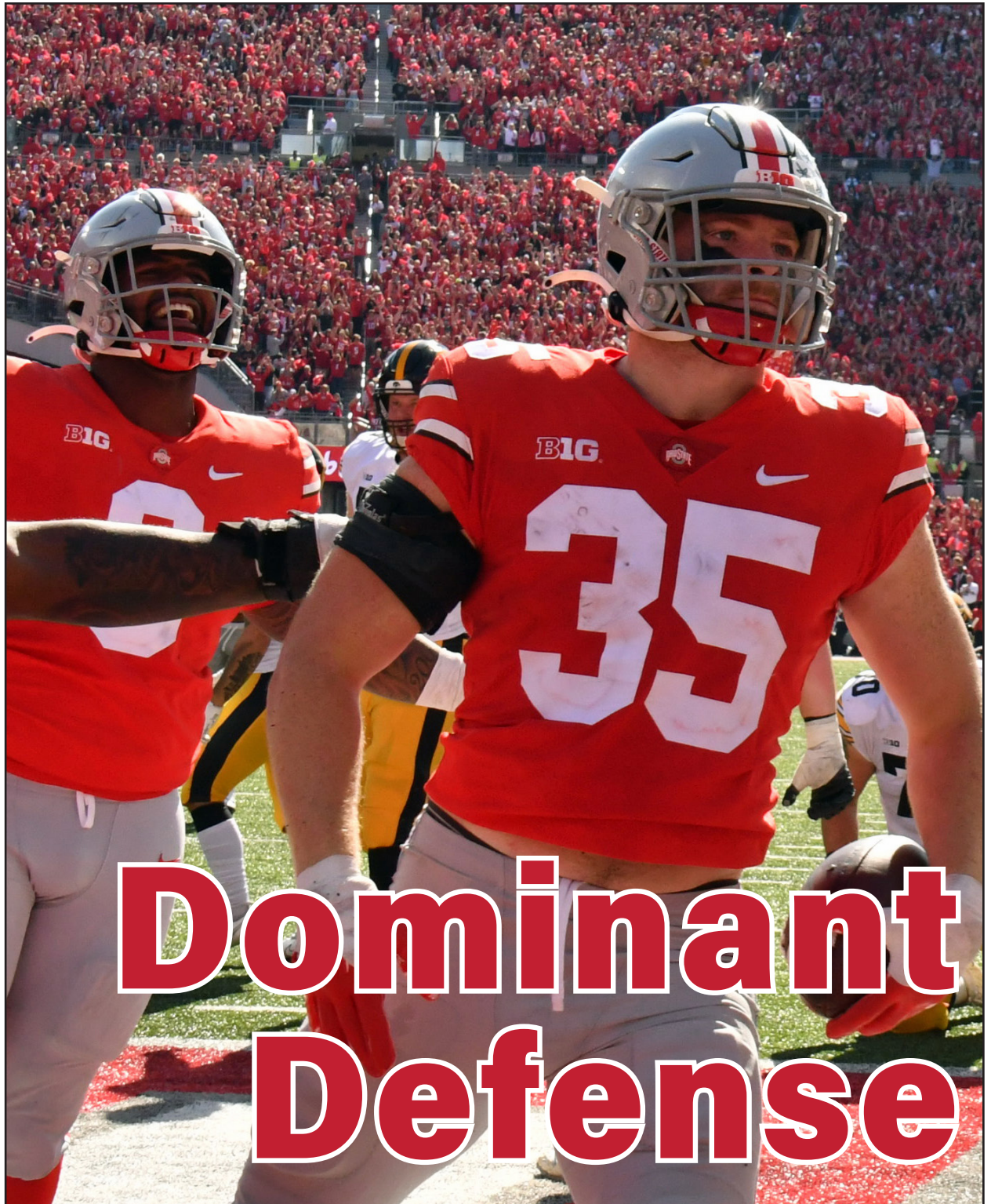
"That's a scar that doesn't go away," said Day, now Ohio State's head coach, on Oct. 18. "And yeah, I've felt it this week for sure. That week in particular, we were just coming off the Penn State win, which was an emotional win, going into Kinnick (Stadium), which is a very difficult place to play, and we turned the ball over. First play of the game was a pick-six, and then we fought ourselves back but then turned the ball over too many times. That was a tough day for all of us.

"This team is always difficult to beat," he said of Iowa. "It doesn't matter what year it was, or what year it is. And that year was no different than it is this year."

There were parallels to that game in the early stages of this year's edition with Ohio State safety Tanner McCalister intercepting Iowa quarterback Spencer Petras on the first play from scrimmage. McCalister was not able to return it for a score, though, and the Buckeyes were left with a 3-0 lead following a 46-yard field goal by kicker Noah Ruggles after the offense gained just a yard in three plays.

The Buckeyes forced a Hawkeye three-and-out on Iowa's ensuing drive, and after receiving the ball at their own 24-yard line, it was time for the Ohio State defense to go to work against the nation's No. 3 scoring defense entering the contest.

It didn't take long, though, for the Hawkeyes to establish why they had allowed just 9.8 points and 265.0 yards per game. Iowa defensive end Joe Evans sacked



# Dominant Defense

SONNY BROCKWAY

**OFFENSE ON DEFENSE — Linebacker Tommy Eichenberg (35) had a 15-yard interception return for a touchdown in Ohio State's 54-10 win over Iowa, one of six turnovers forced by the Buckeye defense. The defense limited the Hawkeye offense to just three points and 158 total yards on the afternoon at Ohio Stadium.**

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud for a 13-yard loss and stripped him of the ball in the process, returning it 11 yards for a defensive score – the third of the season for Iowa – to give the Hawkeyes a 7-3 lead.

"They get their hands on balls," Day said. "We had the one sack-fumble early on. But we overcame it, and we kept pushing through, and we know that we're playing against good defenses. Things like that happen. But we can't continue to let those things happen. We have to learn from them and grow. But I

think it was healthy for us to get a good challenge today."

Ohio State was able to briefly settle some of the 104,848 anxious fans at Ohio Stadium with a 10-play, 75-yard drive, utilizing running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams to establish the run (28 yards, six carries on the drive) before Williams landed in the end zone on a 2-yard score. The defense, wanting to keep the energy going following McCalister's

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## From The Message Board

### Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State opened the second half of its season with a 54-10 drubbing of Iowa at Ohio Stadium on Oct. 22. Several key players helped the Buckeyes to another dominant victory, and we asked the BSB staff and readers, alike, to award Buckeye Leaves to the most deserving players.

**Andy Anders, BSB:** I'm going with the Ohio State player who scored the most points Saturday.

It wasn't any of its receivers, even with third-year Jaxon Smith-Njigba seeing the field again. It wasn't Miyan Williams or TreVeyon Henderson at running back. No, it was graduate kicker Noah Ruggles.

Questions lingered about Ruggles maintaining his 20-of-21 consistency from last year after he missed spring practice and a 39-yard field goal against Notre Dame, but he looked automatic against Iowa. Ruggles hit all four of his field-goal tries with a long of 46 yards. He added a 6-for-6 mark on extra points.

**Jack Emerson, BSB:** It was a big day for the Ohio State defense, but nobody set the tone like Zach Harrison.

Harrison was all over the field against the Hawkeyes, creating tons of pressure on quarterbacks Spencer Petras and Alex Padilla throughout the afternoon. He keyed several turnovers, including a forced fumble on Petras, which was recovered by safety Lathan Ransom.

On Padilla's first throw of the game, Harrison hurried him into an errant decision, which resulted in an interception by Tanner McCalister. Harrison finished the afternoon with two tackles, both for losses, and a sack, alongside his forced fumble, hurry and pass breakup.

**Braden Moles, BSB:** There are any number of defensive players that one could offer a Buckeye Leaf to after the win over Iowa, but with just one selection available, I'll go with safety Tanner McCalister, who helped set the tone early with an interception and added another one later on.

McCalister has been a welcome addition to Ohio State's defense this season after transferring in from Oklahoma State, and that was best on display against Iowa when he accounted for two of Ohio State's six turnovers. He sniffed out Iowa quarterback Spencer Petras on his first passing attempt of the game, and later, with the Buckeyes leading 26-10 out of the half, he intercepted Hawkeye signal caller Alex Padilla, who had since replaced Petras.

One could certainly go with linebacker Tommy Eichenberg or safety Lathan Ransom, who either directly had or assisted with several turnovers on the day, but I'll give some props

to McCalister for being a calming force for the defense.

#### BSB Subscribers

**Anthony Buckeye:** Zach Harrison for coming out with fire and causing sacks and turnovers. Tanner McCalister for the interceptions and for being at the right place all the time. Lathan Ransom for speedily being always around the ball and for all the tackles. Tommy Eichenberg for his now usual superlative play and pick-six. Jerron Cage, Cody Simon and Caden Curry for excellent outings. Julian Fleming for another of his long TD catches. Marvin Harrison Jr. for another Marvin-type TD Catch. Mitch Rossi for being an unsung hero on this team and his sneak-TDs and Emeka Egbuka for so many catches against the stingy Hawkeye defense. The entire D-line and the Buckeye D for playing better than the celebrated Hawkeye D. And last, but not least, the ultra-reliable kicker Noah Ruggles.

**BuckeyeScott:** Our defensive guys only gave up 3 points! That's as close as it may get to a shutout this year. Our special teams were excellent, not only in the made field goals by Noah Ruggles, but also in the kick-off coverage. Give everybody on the Silver Bullets and special teams some Buckeye Leaves.

**Bstu9:** My Buckeye leaf goes to Zach Harrison. He created chaos as he seemed to be living in the Iowa backfield all day.

**Poster That Harley Built:** It's hard to not honor everyone on the defense but I am going with Zach Harrison, because everyone else always seems to get the recognition and because he has taken the criticism through the years like a man and just kept on getting better.

**Mcarr:** Everyone is going to go defense so I will suggest Julian Fleming on offense. He only had two catches but he averaged over 50 yards on them. He is going to be very important now that it seems JSN's availability is at the least questionable.

**John Lanning:** I give leaves to Ruggles for his 4 field goals and points after. Tommy Eichenberg gets one for his consistent pressure on Iowa and interception. One each for Fleming, Egbuka, and Harrison for another great game. And can't forget McCalister for his picks. Nice job.

**PeyoteBuck:** I have to say Noah Ruggles. When the red-zone terror strikes the Bucks, there is always Noah to rely on.

**Tiffin Buckeye:** The man who had all the talent and put it all together on Saturday: Zach Harrison.

**Ohio State's defense led the Buckeyes to a 54-10 win over Iowa behind six takeaways, including a pick-six by linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, while allowing just 158 yards of total offense to the Hawkeyes. As the Buckeyes showcased their defensive prowess against the Hawkeyes, BSB asked readers to let us know their thoughts on the defense and what the ceiling might be with five games remaining in the regular season.**

#### Here are some of the responses:

"Ceiling I'd say is a 14 ppg average for 12 games."

– Terrier Buck

"The D-line and linebacker play has become superlative, probably as good as any in recent memory. The safeties – Tanner McCalister, Ronnie Hickman and Lathan Ransom – may be the best trio in the Big Ten. Coach (Jim) Knowles and the defensive coaching staff get another salute for another second-half shut-out. That the defense can help the Buckeyes win when the offense struggles a little bit is heartwarming. I think that this Buckeye D has a very high ceiling. It can be the best in America. Hopefully, they rise to the ceiling."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"Iowa's defense probably feels it played a solid game against the Ohio State offense, even if the Buckeyes scored 54 points. It could have been 66 or 70 had they scored TDs instead of field goals. They got no help from their offense. The Buckeyes still have work to do to be their best. They know they can't get complacent. The defense and special teams played a great game. Players are stepping up. The team is winning by 25-to-44 points per game. Not many teams can say that. Can the team stay focused, fix the problems and beat Michigan on Nov. 26? The goal was to beat Iowa and they did that. The focus now is to beat Penn State on the road. That's all that should matter. Enjoy the ride Buckeye Nation ... it is a great time to be a Buckeye."

– BYRON MCNUTT

"I still have 'The Buckeye High' that goes with the defense getting five sacks and six turnovers! I can't remember the last time we saw a defensive performance like that from the Silver Bullets. However, I have to temper my enthusiasm somewhat after remembering that the Iowa offense was dead last in major college football in 'total offense' out of 131 teams. That's a little sobering. I do think the future for our defense is very bright. We did what we were supposed to do against an inferior team. Now it's time for the Buckeye defense to do what it needs to do, to win the B1G."

– BuckeyeScott

"I'll tell you the ceiling of the defense at around 3:30 on Nov. 26 ..."

– bstu9

"I actually thought it was a great game. We don't seem sharp coming off bye weeks. This game showed great defense and a problem-solving offense. This team had a lesson in handling adversity, namely a stout Iowa defense. It will pay dividends later in the season. It's a 60-minute game and each group did its part to win big. On to Happy Valley ... and win number 8!"

– John Lanning

"The ceiling is high enough that no team should be able to outscore Ohio State's high-flying offense. That should be high enough."

– Mcarr

"Ceiling? What ceiling?"

– PeyoteBuck

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Championship Caliber?

I am a longtime Ohio State fan. A die hard. I have been around some of the most biased, unrealistic, devoted, crazed SEC fans that you would ever want to see or not see for that matter. I was in Georgia, Louisiana, Florida and it was horrible.

Still, I defended our beloved team tooth and nail. They call our league and team a Pop Warner, Pee Wee league football. I will say that I have noticed the improvement in toughness as far as the way we play defense and run the ball on offense. The coach fi-

nally realizes that we have top talent at RB and he can rely on it in certain situations. Wish he would have in the Clemson game (in 2019) up double digits in the second half with JK (Dobbins) instead of slinging it around the field like a lunatic. He cost us a championship.

Still, I concede I have not seen the hunger, ferocity, and violence I see in the top SEC teams when it comes down to championship play. I just don't see it. There is good and elite and then there is that other room in the back within the elite. We are not in that room yet. We need more dawgs on de-

fense from SEC country ...

**Michael Ellens**  
Youngstown, Ohio

### The OSU Secondary

In the recent "The View From 15th & High" article by Mr. Moskowitz (BSB, Oct. 22), he referred to the secondary as a "struggling nature" and "secondary woes." Granted, as Jim Knowles pointed out, there's more work to be done. Last year, OSU was 97th in the country in pass defense. Through six games this year, Ohio State was eighth. If Mr. Moskowitz was asked preseason if he would be pleased with eighth through six games, even he would probably say yes.

This is my 74th OSU team to follow.

Many years ago, I realized that perfection is not possible. My overall comparison is positive vs. negatives. In all my years, I've found this comparison to be no contest!

**Jim Chesney**  
Bluffton, S.C.

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



# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Ohio State Stays At No. 2 In AP Poll

Ohio State kicked off the back half of its schedule with a 54-10 win over Iowa, though the Buckeyes didn't see any movement in the most recent AP poll.

The Buckeyes remained slotted in at No. 2 behind No. 1 Georgia – which enjoyed an off week – but Ohio State did pick up an additional first-place vote from the prior poll, rising to 18 first-place selections. There was no movement in the top five, which was rounded out by No. 3 Tennessee, No. 4 Michigan and No. 5 Clemson. Alabama (6-1) is the highest-ranked team with a loss, sitting at No. 6 ahead of No. 7 TCU, No. 8 Oregon and No. 9 Oklahoma State while USC and Wake Forest tied for No. 10.

Outside of Ohio State and Michigan, the Big Ten is represented by No. 13 Penn State – the Buckeyes' upcoming opponent – and No. 17 Illinois. Maryland is the only other team in the conference to receive votes, earning eight.

Penn State and Wake Forest both registered the highest rise, with each moving up three spots. Mississippi endured the largest

fall, dropping eight spots after a 45-20 loss to LSU.

## Smith-Njigba, Hancock Return Against Iowa

The Ohio State offense finally regained the services of star wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who had not played since the Buckeyes' 77-21 win over Toledo on Sept. 17. The Rockwall, Texas, native was active against Iowa. He corralled one catch for 7 yards against the Hawkeyes' secondary on Oct. 22 before exiting the game during the second quarter.

Head coach Ryan Day said that Smith-Njigba had reached his "pitch count" in terms of snaps and that's why he did not return, though he did come off the field with a noticeable limp.

While Smith-Njigba – assuming he is healthy – will aid Ohio State's efforts in the air, the Buckeyes also had both of their key running backs, TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams, each who had missed time previously, available against the Hawkeyes. Henderson finished with 38 yards on 11 carries, while Williams had 19 yards on 10 totes.

Although the offense returned several key members, the unit was without wide receivers Kamryn Babb – who has yet to play this season – and Corban Cleveland, running backs T.C. Caffey and Evan Pryor and tight end Joe Royer.

The Buckeyes received mixed news at cornerback. Sophomore Jordan Hancock was active for the first time this season after missing all six of Ohio State's games prior to the off week. However, Ohio State was without Cameron Brown, who had missed the Buckeyes' games against Wisconsin and Rutgers but returned against Michigan State prior to

## 2022 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 3	NOTRE DAME	W, 21-10	ABC	4-3, 44-21 win over UNLV
Sept. 10	ARKANSAS STATE	W, 45-12	BTN	2-6, 38-18 loss to Louisiana
Sept. 17	TOLEDO	W, 77-21	FOX	5-3, 34-27 loss to Buffalo
Sept. 24	WISCONSIN	W, 52-21	ABC	4-4, 35-24 win over Purdue
Oct. 1	RUTGERS	W, 49-10	BTN	4-3, 24-17 win over Indiana
Oct. 8	at Michigan State	W, 49-20	ABC	3-4, idle
Oct. 22	IOWA	W, 54-10	FOX	3-4, 54-10 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 29	at Penn State	12 p.m.	FOX	6-1, 45-17 win over Minnesota
Nov. 5	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	1-6, 31-24 loss to Maryland
Nov. 12	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	3-5, 24-17 loss to Rutgers
Nov. 19	at Maryland	TBA	TBA	6-2, 31-24 win over Northwestern
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	12 p.m.	FOX	7-0, idle

the off week.

The Buckeyes were also without team captain and safety Kourt Williams. Day noted that Williams is dealing with a long-term injury and is unsure when he'll be able to return.

Alongside the losses of Brown and Williams, Ohio State's defense did not have the services of defensive ends Omari Abor and Tyler Friday, defensive tackle Bryce Prater, cornerback Lloyd McFarquhar and linebackers Mitchell Melton, Teradja Mitchell and Jalen Pace.

## Ohio State-Penn State To Kick Off At Noon On Oct. 29

Ohio State's road trip to Penn State on Oct. 29 will be a noon kickoff, set to be broadcast on FOX as part of the network's "Big Noon Kickoff" show. This will be the first day kickoff for Ohio State at Penn State since a 3:30 p.m. kickoff in 2009 and the first noon kickoff at Beaver Stadium for the Buckeyes since 2001.

The Buckeyes have mostly played in the afternoon or evening this season, with a pair of noon kickoffs, a 3:30 p.m. kickoff and three evening kickoffs at Ohio Stadium, as well as a 4 p.m. kickoff at Michigan State – so far the Buckeyes' only road game of the season – before the off week.

The Buckeyes are looking for their sixth consecutive win against the Nittany Lions since a 24-21 loss at Beaver Stadium in 2016. Overall, Ohio State is 9-1 over the last 10 games between these teams.

## OSU MBB Earns Commitment From 2024 Four-Star Guard

Ohio State men's basketball earned its first commitment from the 2024 class on Oct. 16, landing the services of Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star point guard John Mobley Jr. (6-0, 150).

Mobley ranks as the No. 7 point guard and No. 43 overall player in the class, according



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## THANKS A MILLION

## Men's Basketball Captain, National Champ Roberts Passes At 86

Former Ohio State men's basketball captain and national champion Joe Roberts passed away at the age of 86 on Oct. 10 following a battle with cancer.

Roberts (6-6, 235) averaged 11.0 points per game at forward for the Buckeyes' 1960 national championship team, capping a three-year career in Columbus. He was a letter winner all three years.

Roberts was co-captain alongside forward Dick Furry for the national title-winning team that featured the likes of Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek and Bobby Knight, serving as veteran leaders for a team boasting five sophomores under head coach Fred Taylor.

"(As co-captains) Joe and I were probably, and Bobby Knight kind of confirms this, he thought that Joe and I were really nice to, and good guys to, the young guys coming in," Furry told BSB.

Prior to their time as co-captains, Roberts and Furry competed on rival teams in high school, and Furry expressed joy that he didn't have to compete against Roberts once they arrived at Ohio State.

"He went to East (High School in Columbus) and I went to West. We beat on each other for two years in high school," Furry said. "I was so happy when we got to Ohio State that we didn't have to beat on each other again. We were in the same group. Basically, it was such during most of our career that we didn't even play each other in scrimmages."

Roberts earned his bachelor's degree in biologi-

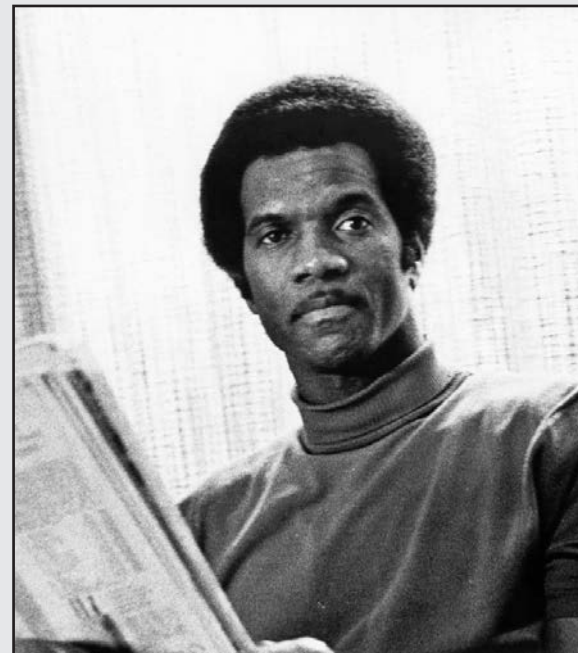
cal studies and physical education from Ohio State in 1960 before completing three separate master's programs at Western Michigan and Cal State-East Bay.

He was drafted in the third round of the 1960 NBA draft by the Syracuse Nationals – now the Philadelphia 76ers – where he played three seasons. Roberts spent five more years in the professional ranks split across three leagues: the EPBL, NABL and ABA. He averaged 5.8 points and 4.9 rebounds per game during his NBA and ABA career. After his playing career, Roberts became an assistant coach at the collegiate and NBA level, even coaching the Golden State Warriors to a win in the 1975 NBA Finals after coach Al Attles was ejected from the game.

While Roberts and Furry's career paths went in opposite directions, the duo remained close friends well beyond their playing days at Ohio State.

"We were very good friends. We probably talked every other week, something like that, even until this time," Furry said. "We've been friends for a long time. I went to his surprise 80th birthday, he came to my 80th birthday party. We've just been good friends."

Roberts is survived by his wife, Celia, of 65 years, in addition to three daughters – Lori Casey, Kimberly Roberts and Jodi Jones – as well as a grandson and a great granddaughter.



**LEADER OF CHAMPIONS — Former Ohio State forward Joe Roberts, who served as a team captain on the Buckeyes' 1960 national championship team, passed away at 86 years old on Oct. 10 after a battle with cancer.**

to 247Sports' composite score. He chose the Buckeyes over LSU, Xavier, USC, Arizona State and Creighton, where he took an official visit to on Sept. 6. Mobley took an official visit to Ohio State's campus on Oct. 2 in which he took photos in the Buckeyes' uniforms and took in the OSU-Rutgers football game.

He is primarily known for his shooting ability and offensive prowess. He pointed to head coach Chris Holtmann's ability to develop NBA-caliber players as one of his primary draws to Columbus.

"The relationship with (head coach Chris Holtmann) and the coach's experience with NBA players," Mobley told 247Sports prior to his commitment to Ohio State. "My goal is to come in and for them to teach me everything to get me to the next level, and I feel like I can do really good at that."

With the addition of Mobley, Ohio State's 2024 class jumped into the 247Sports rankings, slotting in at No. 2 in the nation.

### AD Smith Open To Selling Stadium Naming Rights

After Ohio State sold the naming rights to Ohio Stadium's playing surface to Columbus-based auto glass company Safelite on Aug. 26, questions circulated among the Buckeye fan base as to whether the university would take it a step further and change the name of Ohio Stadium as a whole.

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith told The Columbus Dispatch the university's athletic department would consider changing Ohio Stadium's name at some point in the future.

"In today's world, the way costs are, we'll evaluate that," Smith said. "We dipped our toe with a great partner in Safelite with the field."

Despite this claim, Smith also noted that the university has made no headway on a naming rights deal and has no current plan in motion to change the name.

"There's nothing happening," he added. "There's no effort to do that now. I'm just saying the answer to your question is, 'Sure.' That

could be five years or 10 years or 15 years (away). But to say we'd never do it, that's just not the truth. The truth is, at some point the university may do that."

### Cornerback Play Under Microscope During Off Week

Although Ohio State's defense has shown dramatic strides from a season ago, there were still several question marks surrounding the unit as the Buckeyes entered their off week.

The most notable quandary lies in the play and health of the cornerbacks, a unit that has just six scholarship players. Despite the uncertainty around the position, the Buckeyes still rank No. 3 in the nation in passing yards allowed, giving up just 149.0 yards per game following the win over Iowa. Day feels the cornerbacks are close to reaching their potential but need to focus on finishing each play.

"When you're identifying, in all three phases, what needs to improve, the things we've done well, the things we need to improve on, I don't think it's any mystery that one of the things we have to do is finish some plays out at corner," Day said. "We're right there, we just haven't quite finished some of them."

"We have to learn to finish, especially in one-on-one situations because we know that's going to keep coming our way until we can prove that we can. That will be a huge emphasis this week."

As the Buckeyes had a week to refine their abilities, as well as improve health-wise, Day said he planned to test the unit in practice during the off week.

"I just think the more and more times that we put them in those situations, the more comfortable they're going to feel and the better they'll be," Day said. "It's our job as coaches to continually put them in those positions and give them an opportunity to learn from it and grow and get better, so that's what we're going to do."

Second-year cornerback Denzel Burke has come under the microscope for his play

to this point in the season after his standout freshman campaign a year ago. Burke led the Buckeyes with 13 pass breakups last season but has seen his production dwindle during the first half of the season, tallying four thus far this year with just 11 tackles on the season.

Burke has also shown a newfound penchant for allowing big plays this season, with his most notable lapse coming against Arkansas State wide receiver Champ Flemings, who stands 5-5. Flemings blew past Burke for a 58-yard gain during the teams' meeting earlier this year.

Despite Burke's early-season struggles, Day noted that he's seen him make strides as the season has worn on and that he registered one of his better performances against Michigan State.

"I think Denzel played better in this game,

probably his best game to date," Day said. "He didn't get the ball thrown his way a ton, but I thought he played his best game."

The group received a boost with the return of Hancock against Iowa, and in their first game back from the off week, the Buckeye secondary allowed just 81 passing yards to Hawkeye quarterbacks Spencer Petras and Alex Padilla while registering three interceptions – two from safety Tanner McCalister and Eichenberg's pick-six.

### Day Balances McCord Snaps With 'Respect Of The Game'

With the way C.J. Stroud has been cooking this season, there's been little attention given to his backup in Kyle McCord.

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## 2022 Buckeye Road Trips

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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

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Stroud has played late – at least midway through the third quarter – in all of Ohio State's games, all of which have ended in blow-out fashion other than the season-opening 21-10 win over Notre Dame. He's accounted for 28 passing touchdowns and 2,023 passing yards through seven games.

This has left little opportunity for McCord to see action, appearing in six games with limited responsibilities this season. Through the Iowa game, McCord was 14 of 18 passing for 165 yards and one passing touchdown, and he had rushed three times for 4 yards. The majority of his contribution, though, has been handing the ball off to the likes of Dallan Hayden or TC Caffey once the first-team offense has left the field.

Day said that the lack of passing reps for McCord – the presumed starter next season once Stroud is off to the NFL – simply has to do with the sanctity of the game.

"It's obviously a good problem to have, don't get me wrong," Day said. "But it's something

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For those unable to pay for the upgrade, the complete edition of each issue is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for readers having continuing mail problems. There is also immediate coverage after each game, and readers can discuss the game on the Fan Forum, including "The Official Game Thread" with real-time comments from BSB staff members and readers throughout the game.

"We know that reading the paper online is not optimum, but it does allow you to read time-sensitive stories, including recruiting coverage, while waiting for your paper," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said.

There are also additional electronic stories throughout the week, including coverage of Ryan Day's weekly press conference, as well as news from any other press availabilities leading up to the next game.

Football recruiting is a 365-day-a-year process these days, and the BSB staff has stepped up its coverage of Ohio State's quest for

prep talent. We have also upped our basketball recruiting coverage, so be sure to check in regularly at BuckeyeSports.com.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the previously mentioned Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day. Staffers and readers alike have also been reacting to recruiting efforts on the Forum's football and basketball recruiting threads.

We remind you again, 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. Your copy of the paper will still arrive in your mailbox at the usual time.

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that you want to make sure you respect the game. But at the same time, you want to get him going a little bit. You start to get inside of five or six minutes in the fourth quarter when you're up in a lopsided game, I just want to make sure I respect the game in that area."

Day said that the coaches want to get McCord in the game "at the end of the third quarter or early fourth quarter," but those oppor-

tunities are dwindling with the likes of Penn State and Michigan still on the schedule for the latter half of the regular season.

Even if McCord isn't throwing the ball, though, Day still sees those snaps as valuable for the former five-star quarterback.

"It's good to get (McCord) in the game and get whoever in the game, whether it's the quarterback or anybody else," Day said. "Getting those game reps under your belt, it's different than in practice. But that's just the way I have always believed the game should be played. When you're rolling and you're in the third quarter and beginning of the fourth quarter, go play.

"But when you start to get toward the end of those games and they get a little lopsided, I just think that's the way to respect the game."

McCord took over the Ohio State offense in garbage time against the Hawkeyes, entering the game with 5:36 remaining in the fourth quarter. He completed both of his pass

attempts for 8 yards, connecting on passes to tight end Gee Scott Jr. and wide receiver Kaleb Brown.

## Johnson Hints Expansion Of 'Jack' Position

Dating back to the first defensive series of the season for Ohio State, it became clear that defensive end Jack Sawyer would be a problem for opposing offenses.

He showed versatility not seen on Ohio State's defense of late, lining up at several spots across the field as part of the "Jack" – a hybrid defensive end/linebacker – and generally causing confusion as to where he may attack from. That's led to some success early in the season for Sawyer, who has two sacks and four tackles for loss through seven games.

"I'm just trying to wreak havoc," he said earlier this season. "Depending on what the play call is, I'm trying to fly around and disrupt stuff in the backfield."

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Seven games are just a sample size, though, of what Ohio State is expecting from the position. Knowles' previous "Jack" starters saw impressive sack and tackle for loss totals at Oklahoma State while accounting for the majority of the statistics on the defensive line.

That's not been the case so far for Ohio State, with the linebackers as well as defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. dominating, but it's a work in progress as the "Jack" contributors get accustomed to the position.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson – who coaches defensive ends, while defensive coordinator Jim Knowles handles the "Jack" position as well as the linebackers – said that Sawyer and Javontae Jean-Baptiste, who have received the majority of snaps at the "Jack," are still learning.

"There's still a lot on the table there that we still haven't done yet in the 'Jack' package, so we have to teach (Jack)," Johnson said. "Him and Javontae's been our two guys that we've been training for the 'Jack,' but they also have to learn how to play defensive end, and so it's kind of like double duty."

Johnson said that he and his fellow coaches have to be careful to not overload them since they're receiving snaps at both defensive end and the "Jack."

"Even though they are similar, they have different techniques to go over," he said. "Progressively, we're move forward in it, but we still have some things that we can do in the 'Jack' package."

### Doss Honored With On-Campus Salute

Former Ohio State safety Mike Doss is set to enter the College Football Hall of Fame on Dec. 6, and the Buckeyes honored the 2002 national champion during their win over Iowa

on Oct. 22 as part of The National Football Foundation's On-Campus Salute series.

Doss was a first-team All-American during his final three seasons at Ohio State, earning a unanimous nod in 2002 after leading the Buckeyes with 107 tackles and as a team captain. Doss earned Defensive MVP honors for his role in Ohio State's 31-24 double-overtime win over Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl to claim the 2002 BCS National Championship by amassing nine tackles and a key interception.

Doss' 331 career tackles are the most of any defensive back in Ohio State history, while his 228 solos rank fifth in the program ranks. As part of the salute, Doss received a Hall of Fame plaque as well as an ovation from the Ohio State faithful.

### Stroud Earns Big Ten Player Of The Week Nod Against MSU

Following his six-touchdown outing against Michigan State on Oct. 8, Stroud earned Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week honors. He decimated the Spartans for 361 yards while completing 80.8 percent of passes.

This was Stroud's second time picking up the Player of the Week this season, the first coming after his performance against Toledo on Sept. 17. He was the fourth Buckeye this season to be honored by the conference, joining wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. (Sept. 10 vs. Arkansas State), linebacker Tommy Eichenberg (Sept. 24 vs. Wisconsin) and running back Miyan Williams (Oct. 1 vs. Rutgers).

Stroud became the first quarterback in Big Ten history to throw for six touchdowns on three separate occasions, doing so against Michigan State last season, Utah in the Rose

Continued On Page 8

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# BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 54, Iowa 10

**Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on the offense starting slowly:** "Iowa does a very, very good job up front, and they take away so many things in the middle and force you to throw the ball. We didn't do as good of a job executing, running the ball early on. We knew that it was going to take time to crack. It's just the way they are (on defense). I thought we played really good football in the second half, got a good balance going a little bit."

**Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz on his offense's struggles this season:** "If I had that answer, you'd have probably seen something today. Part of the credit goes to our opponent today. They're a really good defensive football team, much improved statistically. They're a good defensive football team – we felt that coming in, watching their tape – and feel that way now after seeing them in person."

**Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud on the offense finding a groove in the second half:** "It just felt like we were back. We got a little swagger back, and I felt like we were just clicking again. You take three, four bad plays out of the first half, including my interception, which I count as a bad play, you take those plays away I think we had a decent day."

**Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Emeka Egbuka on Stroud's ability to bounce back after bad plays:** "I feel like C.J.'s best attribute is his mental fortitude. Like, nothing really gets to him. Sure, he's upset that he threw that pick and he had a moment for a second, but then he got right back like it never happened. So just being able to bounce back like that is something I've never seen personally. That's something that I've struggled with. I know a lot of guys have struggled with it in the past. C.J. is just in a league of his own in that aspect."

**Stroud on third-year wide receiver Julian Fleming:** "His hard work that he's put in, the sacrifices that he's made to cut off distractions in his life – it just shows you that it pays off in the long run. I'm super proud of him."

**Day on having to burn timeouts in**

**the red zone on offense:** "I get frustrated with myself, first. There's just so many scenarios you go through down there, and we had a bunch of at-bats down there, and it's hard. They do a great job (defensively) in the red zone. Historically, they've done a great job. You try to get exactly the right call based on the hash, based on where it is, and certainly in the first half, I think sometimes those timeouts are a little over-rated. Typically you don't need them as much as you do in the second half."

**Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles on what he liked from his defense:** "We're in the right place, we're able to do some things with multiplicity and guys understand. They know where the ball is going to go, and they show up. So it starts there with the run fits to me. Then I thought some of our disguises were better, some of our reads on routes, as you saw, that resulted in interceptions."

**Ohio State safety Tanner McCalister on his first interception:** "Being able to get that turnover, being able to get the crowd into it early, that's huge. That kind of excels the game, especially on the defensive end, because now we know that they're kind of rattled. We know that they're not as confident now coming back out after they just had a turnover on the first play of the game. That gives us confidence."

**Knowles on whether it was good to see his defense dominate a lower-rated offense:** "We don't discriminate. It's whoever you're going up against, that's who you have to stop. It is definitely a mentality that I've been preaching to the guys and they've been buying in. It doesn't matter what the score is (or) who we're playing. We are going to operate with the mentality of going out there and stopping them every time."

**Ohio State linebacker Tommy Eichenberg on defensive end Zach Harrison:** "He's great really. He leads the defense, leads the D-line. He was solid all day today, just pressuring the quarterback and also runs that go to him. He helps out everyone and makes everyone's job easier."



SONNY BROCKWAY

**ZACH ATTACK** – Defensive lineman Zach Harrison was all over the field against Iowa, taking down Hawkeye quarterback Spencer Petras and forcing a fumble as well as knocking down a pass attempt on a critical third down.

**Harrison on if he's playing the best football of his career:** "I don't know about my career, but I definitely played well today. I just have to keep stacking days. I have to keep practicing well, and just keep improving."

**Harrison on hyping the crowd up before some critical plays against Iowa:** "I've honestly just got to enjoy the moment. I've only got so many times left in the 'Shoe. I'm just enjoying every single one of them, enjoying playing at Ohio State and enjoying playing with my brothers, because it's not for everyone. Someday I'm not going to be wearing a scarlet uniform anymore and I'm going to look back on these times. I wanted to make the most of them, and I'm glad that I'm doing that."

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# Several Buckeyes Have Takeaways In Win

Continued From Page 1

interception, forced a fumble on Iowa's next drive courtesy of defensive end Zach Harrison (recovered by safety Lathan Ransom) that resulted in another Ohio State field goal to take a 13-7 lead.

As it turns out, this would be the score to beat for the Buckeyes, as Iowa would produce just one more score – a field goal early in the second quarter – with Ohio State going on to force six turnovers and finish the game with a 54-10 margin to move to 7-0 (4-0 Big Ten) on the season. It was the most points given up during the 24-year tenure of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz, and the most given up by the Hawkeyes since a 56-35 loss to Ohio State in 1995.

"I guess not what we're used to here, but that's the reality of it," Day said. "Certainly the fact that there were (54) points on the board, a big part of that was the defense today. When you're playing against a really good defense, a top-10 defense, it's not going to happen all at once. It's not going to be fireworks every series.

"I give Noah credit – we were able to put points on the board and keep that momentum going – but we felt like our defense was playing well and we felt if we had scored a few of those touchdowns down there in the red zone it would have been a different first half," he continued. "But that's OK. A lot to learn from there and grow."

After the turnovers forced by McCalister

and Harrison, the next came late in the second quarter. With the Hawkeyes backed up to their own 13-yard line, Petras stepped up and rifled a pass between two receivers that wound up in the hands of Ohio State linebacker Tommy Eichenberg. It was just the second interception of his three-year career with the Buckeyes, but he looked like a natural with the ball in his hands, weaving in and out of traffic to return the ill-fated pass 15 yards for a touchdown, the first defensive score of the season for Ohio State.

The score, which gave the Buckeyes a 26-10 lead going into the half, essentially busted the game open given Iowa's deficiencies on offense. The Hawkeyes finished with just 158 total yards of offense, averaging 2.7 yards per play. Petras was just 6 of 14 for 49 and a pair of interceptions, while his backup, Alex Padilla, entered the game in the second half and was 5 of 10 for 32 yards and a pick.

While Eichenberg's return directly put points on the board on behalf of Ohio State's defense, it wasn't the first or last time that the Buckeye offense was a beneficiary of the defense.

The game was a microcosm of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' idea of playing "offense on defense," in which the defense makes plays to disrupt opposing teams' offenses and put Ohio State's offense in position to succeed. Of the Buckeyes' six defensive turnovers, four led to a combined 20 points by setting Ohio State up in Iowa territory.

"We had a great week of practice," Knowles

said. "I thought the guys were fresh, they were fast and opportunistic. We've been training for this. That's what I tell them. It's one series at a time, and we expect these good things to happen by the way we've trained and we've played, and I know it has a great effect on the whole team. Everybody feels confident when the defense is playing well, and the turnovers help a lot in terms of field position and winning the ballgame."

It was the first time Ohio State forced six turnovers in a game since Sept. 10, 2016, against Tulsa (four interceptions, two fumble recoveries), and the Buckeyes – who had just six turnovers entering the Iowa game – were able to double their current season number in just one afternoon.

"I feel like everybody bought into the defense," said McCalister, who played under Knowles at Oklahoma State. "I feel like each week you guys can see that. Guys are learning more about the defense, learning the ins and outs. I think that's why you're seeing more turnovers as well because guys are now starting to understand the defense."

The defensive performance took on extra importance given the relative struggles of the offense throughout the first half. Despite starting four drives inside the Iowa 35 in the first half, Ohio State was forced to settle for four field goals courtesy of Ruggles, and the offense wound up with just 133 total yards and was 2 of 8 on third down in the first 30 minutes.

While most would appreciate having so many chances in the red zone, Day said a partial reason for Ohio State settling for field goals was having to work within the confines of the short field.

"I think we had to just get in a rhythm on offense," he said. "When you game plan, you pretty much start your mind-set on (your own) 25-yard line, and you have plays that you work and then you get yourself in the red zone.

"It was weird because we were (in) plus-territory all day, or early on, and it just never got into a rhythm of just throwing things because the field was getting a little compressed. When we had moved the ball down the field, we were a little bit better."

But that outing from the defense to kick off the second half of the season – one that afforded time for the Buckeye offense to finally take off in the second half to the tune of four touchdowns and 227 total yards – made a statement that Ohio State's defense is here to play.

"We want to show every week that we're tough," McCalister said. "We're a tough defense. It's just not easy to get points on us. It's not easy to get yards on us. If it's third-and-1, we're going to defend that 1 (yard). We're not going to let you get the 1 yard. Offensive coordinators and offenses are really going to have to fight for everything, and that's what we plan to prove every week."

## Stroud Shines In Second Half

It was an up-and-down outing for Stroud, who was just as integral to Ohio State's first-half struggles as he was the offensive explosion in the second half. He was just 10 of 17 passing for 105 yards across the first two quarters, missing a number of throws (and getting stripped of the ball, leading to Iowa's lone touchdown) while mostly working with a short field.

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**TURNOVER PARTY — Ohio State defensive tackle Taron Vincent (6) recovered one of Iowa's three fumbles as the Buckeye defense forced the most turnovers it had caused in a game since 2016.**

"The first half was kind of weird," he said. "It's tough starting with the ball at like the 30, 40 (yard line) and it's hard to build a rhythm right there. First half, we've just got to execute better. It's good to get that under our belt though, because the second half of the season is very tough and you can have games like that where you're not really clicking early on and

you've got to get it going. Once we got going, I feel like we became the dynamic offense that we know."

After an interception on the first play of the second half — one that was immediately negated by an Iowa fumble, giving the ball back to Ohio State — Stroud appeared apprehensive. Facing a third-and-5 from the 50-yard line, Stroud searched downfield

and found no available receivers, though there was plenty of space in front of him to potentially take off with the ball. He stayed put instead, and he was collapsed in on by Iowa's defense and brought down for no gain, leading to a punt.

Ohio State's defense did not take that sitting down, though. McCalister intercepted his second pass of the game on Iowa's second play of the ensuing drive. From that point forward, Stroud looked settled in for the offense. He hit wide receiver Emeka Egbuka for a 4-yard gain to begin the drive, and three plays later, he hit wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. for a 6-yard touchdown pass, his first of the game.

That was the first of four consecutive touchdown drives for Ohio State, all of which were capped off by a Stroud touchdown pass, and Egbuka said the offense was able to put the first half behind them.

"We knew those plays in the first half were done," Egbuka said. "There's nothing we can do about them. We came out in the second half with an expectation to have a higher level than we did, and I think we did do that. C.J. really turned it up. So did the rest of the offense. Blocking got tighter, the routes were crisper, cleaner. Catching was better. So just overall, being able to flip that switch is something that we've been working on, and it's something that can be a great attribute to have."

Stroud connected with Egbuka for a 13-yard score on their next drive, and early in the fourth quarter, he hit wide receiver Julian Fleming for a 79-yard touchdown pass. a ca-

reer long for both players.

"He ran a great route on that big boy post," Stroud said of Fleming. "I tried to just give him a chance and let him go get it. That's high execution right there, and we've got to bottle that up and do that again. I'm super proud of him."

After receiving yet another short field after Ohio State's defense held the Hawkeyes on a fourth-and-1 from their own 40-yard line, Stroud connected with tight end Cade Stover for a 20-yard gain and finished his afternoon with a 3-yard flip to tight end Mitch Rossi for Stroud's fourth touchdown of the day, totaling 286 yards on 20-of-30 passing. It was his 12th game with at least four passing touchdowns — an Ohio State record, passing Barrett's previous mark of 11 — and the fifth time he's done so in seven games this season.

While his performance against Rutgers earlier this season and even the first half against Iowa might have soured some on Stroud's potential Heisman hopes after he entered the season as the presumed favorite, Egbuka said the outside noise is nothing compared to the expectations Stroud places on himself.

"He has super high expectations," Egbuka said. "That's what makes him so great. He's a perfectionist, and he's always been that way. No matter what the expectations people have for him, he's always going to hold himself to a higher standard. He knows what type of day he had. I still personally think he's the front-runner for the Heisman. I don't see a guy topping him. C.I.'s just a one-of-a-kind player."

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# Harrison Headlines Big Day For OSU Defense

As Ohio State's defense imposed its will against an overmatched Iowa offense, it was defensive end Zach Harrison who set the tone for the unit.

Harrison keyed several big plays, including a pair of turnovers, during Ohio State's 54-10 win over Iowa at Ohio Stadium on Oct. 22. The Lewis Center, Ohio, native finished the afternoon with two tackles, both of which resulted in a loss, a sack, a forced fumble and a pass breakup. Harrison attributed his big day to the work he put in during the week, pointing to his use of technique.

"I had a good week of practice," Harrison said. "I was rushing well on Tuesday, rushing well on Wednesday, and it translated to the game. That's something that I've learned throughout my career here, that you don't just make plays on game day. There's no such thing as a game-time player. You've got to make the plays in practice and it shows up in the game. Some of those plays that I made in the game, I did the same thing in practice on Wednesdays and Tuesdays."

Harrison's playmaking ability first popped up during Iowa's third offensive series. With the Hawkeyes facing third-and-5 from their own 31-yard line, offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz opted to put the ball in quarterback Spencer Petras' hands. As Petras took the shotgun snap, Harrison beat his man inside and found a direct lane to the quarterback, wrapping him up and twisting him while the ball popped loose. Safety Lathan Ransom dived on the ball, and the

## GAME NOTEBOOK Jack Emerson

Buckeyes took over at the Hawkeye 27.

Harrison said that he and Ransom recognized the play from film sessions and worked in unison to force the turnover.

"Football is fun when you're making plays," Harrison said. "I just felt like I was having fun and providing energy to the defense."

"I talked to Lathan about the strip sack. He said we actually watched it on film together earlier this week and he told me this was going to happen. I knew I was going to go get the rush, and he had stopped the slant they ran and gave me an extra second and I got the sack. Things like that just bring energy."

Harrison continued his dominant first quarter by stuffing Iowa running back Arland Bruce IV on a third-and-3 for a loss of 3 yards, which helped key a fourth-down stop when Iowa punter Tory Taylor called his own number and was taken down 2 yards short of the line to gain by freshman defensive end Caden Curry.

With Iowa backed up at its own 3-yard line and trailing 16-10 with 6:55 to go in the second quarter, Harrison showcased his value in pass defense, as well. As Petras looked to make something happen on third-

and-9, he panicked into a throw thanks to the pressure caused by the entire defensive line. As the ball left Petras' hand, Harrison stretched his arm up and batted it down to force the Iowa punt.

Harrison also assisted on a failed fourth-down conversion with his pass-rushing mettle, pressuring Iowa backup quarterback Alex Padilla into an incompleteness on fourth-and-5 from the Ohio State 45-yard line during the third quarter.

Although Harrison has faced criticism during his Ohio State career for performing below the expectations placed on him by the Buckeye fan base, he noted that he's always stayed the course and acknowledged that every player must forge his own path during his playing days.

"I feel like I've definitely come into myself more as a man, person and as a player," Harrison said. "From the kid who came in here as a freshman, 16-17 years old in the winter, I feel like I've definitely matured a bunch, and that's just part of a trend of realizing that everybody's journey is different. Not everybody comes to college and is three-and-out and goes No. 2 overall. That's not common. So I just put one foot in front of the other and just keep playing."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day echoed that sentiment when asked about Harrison and emphasized that Harrison has come into his own as a player this season.

"He came in highly recruited, but when you look at Zach, he's got long leverage. He's really tall. He started growing into the position, growing into his body, and that doesn't just happen," Day said. "It takes time. I know everybody wants him to come in and be an All-American as a freshman, but everybody has their own journey. And he's been on that journey. I think he's made a lot of sacrifices. He's worked through some tough times, and you're seeing the best version of him right now."

### McCalister Makes Several Key Plays

While Harrison provided the Buckeyes with stout play from the Buckeye defensive front, safety Tanner McCalister was the difference-maker in the secondary.

On Iowa's very first play from scrimmage, Petras rolled to his left before lofting the ball in the direction of tight end Sam LaPorta. However, LaPorta wasn't there. Instead, McCalister was the beneficiary of a poor throw from Petras, and the ball hit him directly in the numbers for a no-doubt interception.

"The first play, they ran a sprint out, so the whole line's blocking for the quarterback in front of him, so he doesn't see me," McCalister said. "He thought he had free access to the flat. He wanted to throw the stop to (LaPorta). But he couldn't see me, so he thought he had free access to it, and I'm standing right in the throwing window. That was film study."

McCalister wasn't done there, however, as he took advantage of Iowa backup Padilla during the third quarter. With the Hawkeyes backed up at their own 7-yard line, Padilla took the snap in the shotgun and scanned quickly to his right before uncorking a pass to LaPorta. But Padilla floated the ball a little too far, and it tipped off of the outstretched hands of the tight end into the

arms of McCalister.

McCalister registered interceptions on both of Petras and Padilla's first attempts of the afternoon. Both of his picks also gave the Buckeyes advantageous field position, starting Ohio State's drives at the Iowa 29 and 15-yard line, respectively.

"Anytime you give the offense decent field position – I mean, you could probably put the ball at the opposite (1-yard line) and they'll still drop 99 yards – but anytime you get them in the red zone, I think they've had a very successful percentage this season. We know that as a defense," McCalister said. "We know if we get a stop or if we get off the field on third down, nine times out of 10, those guys are going to score, and if they don't, we're going to go out and do it again. That's kind of been our mind-set. We definitely take pride in our defense and know what we have on the other side of the ball on offense and take advantage of it."

McCalister registered his second and third interceptions of the season against the Hawkeyes, surpassing his Oklahoma State career total of one. McCalister followed defensive coordinator Jim Knowles to Ohio State from Oklahoma State, and Knowles noted that he's seen growth from the safety since their time in Stillwater, Okla.

"He's always been a very heads-up player, always very coachable in terms of understanding the game plan and the scheme we're going to face," Knowles said. "But I saw him really take off last year in terms of playing with confidence, because it takes a lot of confidence to do some of the things that he does. Then the fact that he came here, he showed me he wanted to elevate his game even more. It's great to see him making plays. He understands the scheme and he knows what to do, and he's talented."

### Eichenberg Playing Offense On Defense

A staple of Knowles' approach to defensive coaching is that he aims to "play offense on defense" as he has said at various times.

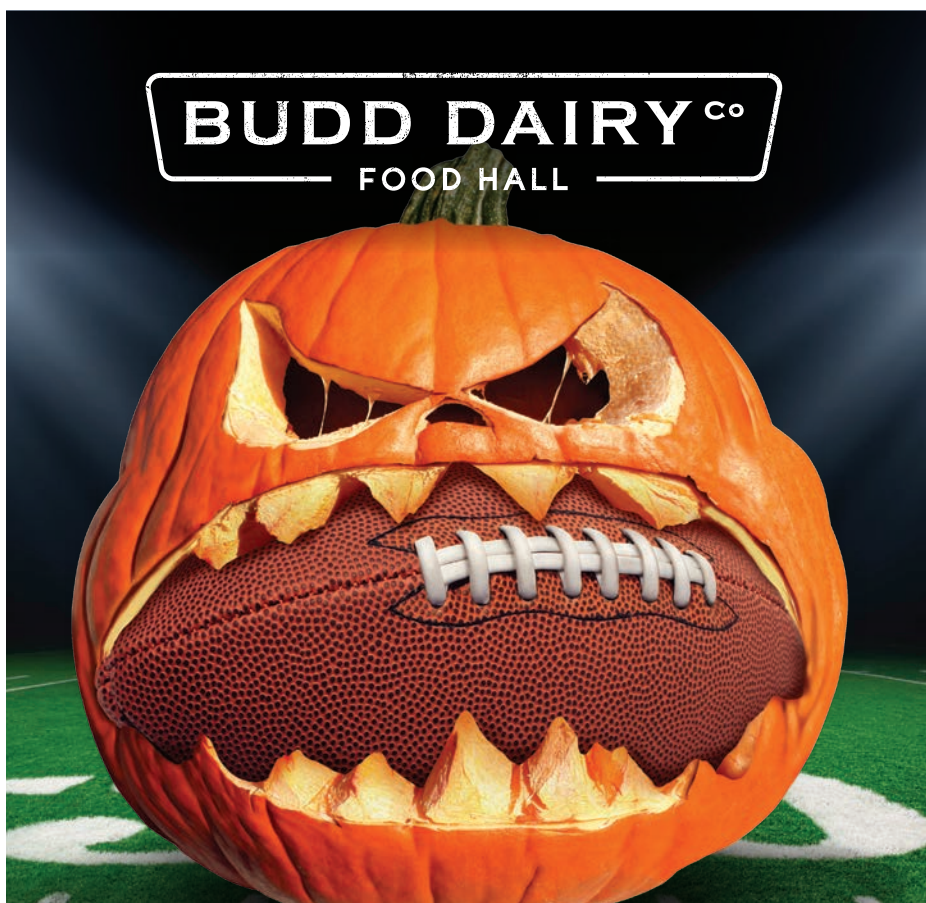
Linebacker Tommy Eichenberg did just that during the second quarter. While the Buckeye offense was struggling to move the ball in the first half, Eichenberg took it upon himself to get some points on the board.

Just 13 seconds after Ohio State extended its lead to multiple possessions with a field goal to make it 19-10 Buckeyes, Petras took the shotgun snap from his own 13-yard line and surveyed the field. As Ohio State's coverage held up well, Petras set his sights on his checkdown target in running back Leshon Williams. While Williams appeared to have a few yards of separation on Eichenberg, the linebacker flashed into position before corralling an errant throw from Petras. From there, Eichenberg weaved through pursuing Hawkeyes before plowing into the end zone for a 15-yard pick-six.

"I just know the D-line was pressuring him really well, so he was unsure in the pocket," Eichenberg said. "The ball just came right to me."

"I don't even remember the last time I scored a touchdown."

In addition to his interception, Eichenberg added seven tackles, including one for loss. While Eichenberg typically gets recognition for his play against the run, Harrison



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# Game Analysis

## What Worked Well

Ohio State's defense doubled its turnover output for the season against Iowa, attacking the Hawkeyes on all fronts and ensuring they lived up to their billing as the worst offense – at least in terms of total yardage – in college football. The Buckeyes finished the game with six forced turnovers, bringing their season total to 12 – seven interceptions and five fumbles.

Safety Tanner McCalister got the takeaway party started on Iowa's first play from scrimmage. Iowa fourth-year quarterback Spencer Petras stared down the Oklahoma State transfer and threw the ball directly to his chest, perhaps on a miscommunication between him and one of his receivers.

McCalister collected a second interception in the third quarter, with defensive end Zach Harrison smashing into third-year quarterback Alex Padilla as he released the football that forced the pass just outside the reach of tight end Sam LaPorta. Both of McCalister's picks set up Ohio State's offense inside the Iowa 30-yard line.

That was far from the only play Harrison made. His strip of Petras forced another turnover in the first quarter, one of two tackles for loss he collected in addition to a batted pass on a third-down play in the second quarter, and it was recovered by safety Lathan Ransom, who added a team-high eight tackles. Defensive tackle Taron Vincent recovered another fumble in the second half on a botched snap, and the defense added three turnovers on downs.

Ohio State's backups got in on the action, too, with freshman safety Kye Stokes forcing a fumble recovered by linebacker Palaie Gaoteote IV in the fourth quarter. None of the takeaways were as big as fourth-year linebacker Tommy Eichenberg's second-quarter pick-six, though. More on that to follow.

## What Didn't Work

Ohio State's offense sputtered out of the gate, particularly against compressed defenses on short fields. On four first-half possessions that started inside Iowa's 35-yard line, the Buckeyes

couldn't manage a touchdown, kicking four field goals instead.

McCalister's first interception led to an offensive drive of four plays totaling just 1 yard, and the Buckeyes settled for a 46-yard field goal from Noah Ruggles. Iowa took its only lead of the day on a scoop-and-score fumble recovery off a sack of quarterback C.J. Stroud. Harrison's forced fumble led to another drive that lasted just four plays, this time gaining 4 yards, with a field goal by Ruggles before the first quarter closed.

Ohio State gained just 133 of its total 360 yards in the first half, with a pedestrian 44 yards in the second quarter. Its rushing efforts lacked consistency throughout the contest, with 66 team rushing yards at a clip of just 2.2 yards per carry. Even so, running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams still managed to combine for three runs that went at least 9 yards, all coming in the first quarter.

Stroud threw an interception into triple coverage on his first pass of the third quarter, and after an Iowa fumble on the next play, Ohio State's offense went three-and-out after getting the ball back. But the offense finally took off on its ensuing possession, capping the first of four consecutive touchdown drives with a 6-yard touchdown pass on fourth-and-1 to second-year wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.

## Play Of The Game

With the offense struggling to move the ball in the first half, Ohio State's defense took matters into its own hands.

Petras dropped back for a pass late in the second quarter. He fired an errant pass intended for second-year running back Leshon Williams, and Ohio State linebacker Tommy Eichenberg leapt up to snag the ball above his helmet.

Eichenberg weaved his way 15 yards for a pick-six, tripping forward into the end zone and rebounding to his feet for a well-earned celebration. The interception return extended Ohio State's lead to a 26-10 margin with 3:25 left before halftime.

— Andy Anders

emphasized that he's more well-rounded than people think.

"Tommy is a dog in coverage, rush, all of that," Harrison said. "It's good to have him as a linebacker behind us."

## Running Game Sputters

After running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams each missed one of Ohio State's two games leading into the off week, both were available to play against the Hawkeyes. However, the results weren't up to the standard that the duo is used to producing. Iowa's running defense was the primary reason for the Buckeyes' struggles on the ground, as the Hawkeyes entered the game allowing just 111.0 rushing yards per game, good for 24th in the nation and eighth in the Big Ten.

Ohio State was held to just 66 yards on the ground, with Henderson and Williams rushing for 38 and 19 yards, respectively, and Henderson's 3.5 yards per carry and Williams' 1.9 yards per carry both served as career lows. The Buckeyes posted their worst yards per carry average since their 42-27 loss to Michigan last season, churning out just 2.2 per attempt as a team against the Hawkeyes.

With the game in hand, Day also turned to freshman Dallan Hayden and third-year Chip Trayanum, who played running back at Arizona State before transferring to Ohio State and flipping over to linebacker. Hayden added 5 yards on two carries while Trayanum took his only attempt – Ohio State's last play of the game – for 9 yards.

Wide receiver Emeka Egbuka noted that getting the running game going against Iowa was key, and although the Buckeyes struggled in that area, the blame shouldn't fall solely on the running backs.

"When they're kind of playing deep safeties and not letting you have the deep passes like we're used to, you've got to really run it, get the safeties down low and weak," Egbuka said. "You've got to execute on the perimeter. We didn't do an amazing job of blocking on the perimeter as wide receivers today, so that's something we're going to look forward to improving on – just being able to stay on schedule and not get frustrated and pressed for big plays."

## Woes On Third-Down And In Iowa Territory

The Buckeyes entered their game against the Hawkeyes as one of the best teams in the country in third-down and red-zone situations. Ohio State ranked second in the country with a 58.0 percent third-down conversion rate, while joining Clemson and Tennessee as the only teams that were perfect in the red zone.

Although Ohio State remained perfect in the red zone, scoring on all eight trips inside the Iowa 20-yard line (including Eichenberg's pick-six), it left much to be desired while operating in plus-territory. The Buckeyes scored five touchdowns on their eight red-zone trips but saw each of their first four drives that started in Iowa territory result in field goals.

While the Buckeyes still completed drives with scores, Day noted that his squad places an emphasis on finding the end zone when in plus territory.

"Touchdowns. That's it, that's all we focus on," Day said. "Now, we can get field goals. Certainly we need to get points and those were important to get. I'm going to

wish we had calls back, going to wish we had plays back, but the one goal is to score touchdowns in the red zone. That's a huge part of our plan to win. We've been good at that in the past, not as good today."

Ohio State also saw its worst third-down efficiency this season, converting on just three of its 13 attempts. However, the Buckeyes got several of their failed third-down attempts back on fourth down, going a perfect 3 for 3 without registering a turnover on downs.

The Buckeyes' adverse day on third down against the Hawkeyes dropped them to eighth in the country on third-down efficiency as their success rate diminished to 52.4 percent.

## Smith-Njigba's Return Cut Short

Prior to taking the field against Iowa, Ohio State received some encouraging news on the injury front. Star wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who had missed four of Ohio State's first six games and played sparingly against Notre Dame and Toledo, was set to return for the Buckeyes.

However, the good feelings were short-lived.

Quarterback C.J. Stroud sent three passes toward Smith-Njigba, of which he hauled in just one for a 7-yard gain. After Smith-Njigba's final target of the afternoon, a misfire on second-and-5 near the 10-minute mark of the second quarter, the Rockwall, Texas, native limped along the sideline and did not return after that play.

Even though Smith-Njigba displayed a noticeable limp, Day said that the Buckeyes had planned to play the receiver in a limited role against the Hawkeyes and that he reached the maximum number of snaps that was set for him prior to the game.

"He was on a pitch count today, and once he got to a certain number we decided to shut him down," Day said.

Though Smith-Njigba played for only a quarter and change, Day said they got enough on film to analyze his inclusion in the offense against the Hawkeyes.

"I think we'll be able to evaluate it," Day said. "We'll watch the film and see. I think he had about 20 plays. He was right in that range. Then once he got to that number on that drive, that was it."

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# Media, Coaches Take Stock Of OSU's Receivers

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The first half of the season has provided an interesting mix of intel on the wide receivers who currently reside on Ohio State's roster.

Third-year Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who in 2021 set the school record for single-season receptions and receiving yards despite sharing the field with two first-round draft picks at his position, has played approximately two quarters of meaningful football. Fellow third-year Julian Fleming, the No. 1 wide receiver recruit in the 2020 class, missed the first two games of the season and has been limited at times.

Meanwhile, second-year targets Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka have emerged as bountiful weapons for third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud. Egbuka holds team highs in both receptions and yards with 41 and 735, respectively, while Harrison has hauled in 38 balls for 598 yards and a team-high 10 touchdowns, which lands him second nationally only to Jalin Hyatt of Tennessee, who has 12. Then there's former walk-on Xavier Johnson, who made a critical touchdown catch against Notre Dame and has even carried the ball out of the backfield three times.

"I think right now, the whole receiving corps is outstanding," former Ohio State assistant coach Bill Conley told BSB. "There can be no Division 1 school in the nation that has this much depth at the wide receiver

er position. We have five guys that average over 10 yards per reception. They're all explosive players, and they all have great hands and the ability to make yards after the catch."

With such ebbs and flow in the Buckeyes' receiver usage, BSB took stock of how Ohio State reporters and Conley, a former coach, believe they stack up against one another.

Despite the fact that he played all of two series against Notre Dame and less than one half against Toledo after getting injured against the Fighting Irish, Smith-Njigba is still viewed as the top Buckeye pass catcher by most around the program.

"I feel like, until one of the other guys goes and breaks the receiving yards record for Ohio State, Jaxon Smith-Njigba has got to be No. 1 on that list," said Eleven Warriors football writer Dan Hope. "You think back to that Rose Bowl game from last year, the last time we've really seen him play a full game, that was literally the greatest game an Ohio State receiver has ever had. So to me, JSN is still the No. 1 guy."

Buckeye Huddle writer Kevin Noon is among those who consider Smith-Njigba tops at the position on the roster, but questions have entered his mind as the Texas native has missed time to open the year.

"I still think that you have to look at JSN, based on his history, as the No. 1 guy," Noon said. "But how long does it take him to get back into game shape? That's going to be the question there. But it's a good problem to have, when you sit there and you're like,

'Who's really the No. 1?' And you have three guys that could really fill that role."

Smith-Njigba made his return against Iowa but played a limited number of snaps while he was subject to what Day termed a "pitch count." He reeled in one reception for 7 yards.

With his return to the lineup, the more interesting question, per Dayton Daily News writer Marcus Hartman, is what the rotation looks like with Smith-Njigba back in tow. Smith-Njigba, Harrison, Egbuka and Fleming are all likely to split reps, he believes.

"You've got two guys that can play the slot and go outside. Then the other two guys are mostly outside guys," Hartman said. "Then they're still doing more two-tight end stuff too, so that changes it a little bit. I would assume that, if he's 100 percent and it's not (an injury) they're worried about re-aggravating with Jaxon, maybe he'll get a few more reps than he would have gotten if he'd just been healthy all year. Or maybe not, maybe they'll try to protect him a little bit."

There's disagreement on whether Harrison or Egbuka ranks second behind Smith-Njigba, however. Egbuka's explosiveness and versatility to play in the slot or outside give him a narrow edge in the eyes of Hartman and Noon.

"Marvin is, as far as we know, just a receiver," Hartman said. "We've seen that the other guys can carry the ball and play in the slot and kind of do everything. Since they've had Egbuka, they've handed him the ball, gotten him the ball in a couple different ways. He's got some physicality to him."

Meanwhile, Harrison's length, technical skills as a route runner – hence the nickname "Route Man Marv" – and ability to make contested catches cause Hope to lean his way.

"I've got to go with Marvin," Hope said. "Just some of the spectacular things we've seen him do, he's had three three-touchdown games in the last seven games. He has 12 touchdowns overall dating back to last year's Rose Bowl. One thing I do over the course of the year is I compile a list of the top plays for Ohio State for an article that I do at the end of the year, and I think about half of those plays right now are Marvin Harrison Jr. catches."

Noon gives Egbuka a slight advantage due to how he's used at Ohio State but believes Harrison will project higher on NFL draft boards. He notes there's very little separation between the two players overall, however.

"It's the body type (for Harrison), and I think he just fits the NFL receiver mold a little bit more," Noon said. "He's a little bit more unique based on his body and based on what his abilities are. And once again, Emeka is proving to be a tremendous asset with what he's able to do. It's funny when you look back to last year, the receivers they had, and the guys that were waiting in the wings, how many potential first-rounders were sitting in that room."

Fleming, who had four receptions for 81 yards and a touchdown against Michigan State, lands as the unanimous No. 4 wideout on the team. Noon and Hartman believe he'll still factor into the rotation as Smith-Njigba

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL



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**BIG PLAY POTENTIAL** — Wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. (center) helped get Ohio State's offense going with quarterback C.J. Stroud's first touchdown pass of the game, and he later hauled in an impressive diving catch.

works back into a full-time role.

"I've been really impressed with his physicality," Noon said. "I know everybody wants a receiver to catch passes, but he gets out there, he's a ferocious blocker, he finishes blocks. I think he's very appreciative of the opportunity, having had football taken away from him for a while. But I think that he's got strong hands, I think that he makes smart decisions out there."

Following the top four, it's Johnson who factors in next. The graduate announced his presence on the scene by seeing time in the slot in the opener when Fleming and Smith-Njigba were both sidelined. He caught a go-ahead 24-yard touchdown pass to put Ohio State up 14-10 in a game it eventually won 21-10.

Ohio State unveiled a new role for Johnson against Michigan State, motioning him from the slot to the backfield to run the ball, something he was comfortable with as he played running back previously in Columbus. On the season he has five receptions for 48 yards and a touchdown, with three carries for 23 yards.

"I think Xavier is a guy who's really earned their trust with all the playing time that he's had over the years on special teams," Hope said. "He's their fifth receiver, and he might be their fourth running back now, too. I think Xavier will continue to have a role on the offense. It won't be as big if the top four are healthy, but I do think there's going to be some snaps for him along the way."

While Hope and Noon both view Johnson as the No. 5 receiver on this year's team, both said second-year Jayden Ballard has more upside. Against Toledo, Ballard had a 72-yard catch-and-run up the left sideline for a touchdown courtesy of backup quarterback Kyle McCord, the longest touchdown reception of the season for Ohio State prior to Fleming's 79-yarder against Iowa. Ballard and Johnson have been the two main backups for the Buckeyes this season, with Ballard totaling seven catches for 131 yards and a score.

"It might be (Xavier) just based on the amount of time he's been out there, but I think the ceiling is probably higher on Jayden," Noon said. "Once again, we're talking about another bigger type of receiver and what he's capable of doing for the team."

"It seems to be 50/50 (between Johnson and Ballard)," Hartman said. "They're leaning more on Xavier, and then they worked him in at running back as well, so I'm sure

that's a factor. They both seem to be guys you can rely on. They obviously know what they're getting out of Johnson, so if it comes down to it, maybe they know for sure, absolutely, that that guy is going to do his job."

Conley, for his part, stated he couldn't perceive any separation between Ohio State's wideouts. He feels they're all so well-rounded and dynamic that he can't rank one ahead of the other.

"I can't pick a No. 1 guy," Conley said. "They all have their own talents."

Graduate Kamryn Babb, a player who missed the 2018, 2019 and 2021 seasons with knee injuries and has yet to make an appearance this season, is the lone remaining player with multiple years of tutelage under wide receivers coach Brian Hartline. Babb was a top-100 prospect coming out of high school in 2018, but he has yet to catch a pass in an Ohio State uniform, though he was named a team captain the past two seasons.

Four freshmen round out the depth of Ohio State's roster, with Kyion Grayes the only to make a reception thus far, a 2-yard pickup. Kaleb Brown is an interesting piece for the future as a true slot receiver, Hartman said, and Caleb Burton is an intriguing four-star prospect from the same high school as former Ohio State and current New York Jets wideout Garrett Wilson.

Along with Kojo Antwi, all four were ranked in the top 160 nationally, though none of them has produced much collegiate film to be watched at this point.

"We really have not seen any run from (the freshmen) at this point," Noon said. "Coming out of high school, I was a big Kojo Antwi fan. We'll have to see how well that translates at this point, but for me, it's an impossible question to answer without seeing them in that situation. The last time I saw them play football, they were all seniors in high school."

Regardless of exactly how they all stack up, the level of talent across the Buckeyes' receiver room is a testament to Hartline's coaching acumen, according to Conley, and it provides a game-changing arsenal for Stroud to throw to.

"You've got a guy that's been there (to the NFL), where they want to be," Conley said. "He does a great job coaching; he does a great job recruiting too. Their recruiting is probably the No. 1 reason why we have such depth at that receiver position. How do you double-team anybody? They're all good enough to make a big play at any time."



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# Offense Holds High Marks At Midway Point

By JACK EMERSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After a 2021 campaign in which Ohio State led the nation with averages of 45.7 points and 561.5 yards per game, it might have seemed optimistic to think the Buckeyes would produce an even better output in 2022. However, Ohio State did just that during its first six games.

The Buckeyes didn't necessarily get off to a fast start, scoring a season-low 21 points in their win over Notre Dame in their opener. After that, Ohio State outpaced opponents by scoring more than 40 points, including two games over the 50-point mark, in its next five games. OSU has torn through its opponents this season, producing 48.8 points per game, the best mark in the country prior to its game against Iowa on Oct. 22.

## Rating The Offense

Here is where the OSU offense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Michigan State game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Offense	228.0	14th	2nd
Passing Offense	315.7	14th	1st
Total Offense	543.7	2nd	1st
Scoring Offense	48.8	1st	1st
Turnovers Lost	5	T-18th	2nd
Third-Down Conv.	.580	2nd	2nd

Although the Buckeyes put up gaudy scoring numbers during the first half of the season, head coach Ryan Day emphasized there are still several areas for improvement within the unit.

"There's a whole bunch that we have to get better at," Day said on Oct. 18. "I think our guys know that, and that's why we come in every

day hungry to get better. We know the issues are there, and we have to identify those and be introspective enough to recognize those and get them fixed after a game, even if we've had a lot of success.

"The other thing is just staying disciplined enough to not to think that you've arrived or that you have a really good offense," he continued. "We have to bring it every single week, and that's why practice is so critically important, taking pride in your execution, playing with great pad level, understanding how important the ball is, playing really good in situational football. All of these don't just happen because we've done it in the past or that we've had good players."

Not only has Ohio State's offense exceeded the lofty expectations placed upon it, but the Buckeyes have also struck a greater balance between the running and passing attack than

last season. Through six games, the Buckeyes amassed an average of 543.7 total yards (second in the country behind Tennessee), broken down into 315.7 yards through the air and 228.0 yards on the ground, both 14th in the nation. Last season, OSU largely relied on its passing attack as it could not get a consistent rhythm rolling with its ground game, with the Buckeyes producing 380.9 passing yards compared to 180.6 rushing yards per game.

The Buckeyes have also seen stark improvements in third-down situations and in the red zone. Ohio State converted on third downs at a 58.0 percent rate, up from 52.3 percent last season. OSU's success in the red zone has been even more eye-popping, as the Buckeyes went a perfect 29 for 29 in the red zone – 27 touchdowns and two field goals – during the season's first six games.

Day emphasized that the Buckeyes' increased attention to playing with offensive balance has only aided the unit in third-down and red-zone situations.

"I think we've had good balance," he said. "We've been able to run the football down there when we've needed to, but also we've thrown the ball well. That's going to be important in the second half of the season. Just because we've done it leading up to this point doesn't mean it's going to happen again."

It is also important to note that the offensive unit has not been whole for much of the season. Star wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who led the Buckeyes in receptions and yards last season, sustained an injury during the first half of the Notre Dame game and had only corralled four receptions for 36 yards on the season. Fellow wideout Julian Fleming did not make his season debut until the third week of the season against Toledo, and Ohio State has also seen running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams rotate in and out of the lineup in recent weeks. However, the Buckeyes have clearly not allowed those injuries to impact their offensive efficiency.

BSB graded each offensive position based on its effectiveness in the first six games. All statistics are through the Michigan State game.

## Quarterbacks

After posting a Heisman Trophy-caliber season in 2021, quarterback C.J. Stroud has elevated his game even further in his second campaign as the Buckeyes' signal caller. Through six games, Stroud cemented himself as a Heisman finalist for the second straight year, and he may be the favorite to earn the award given to college football's best player.

Day mentioned that Ohio State's pair of losses last year galvanized the quarterback's drive to improve this season.

"When you look at the two losses, I don't think he played that bad in those two games," Day said at Big Ten Media Days in July. "I don't think C.J. Stroud was the problem. For him to take on those losses says a lot about who he is as a leader. That's the way he is, though, he's very driven. He wants it really bad, and he's very competitive. But he's a very good leader."

"I don't think he ever felt like he could do it on his own, but I think he maybe recognized and has a different perspective that it takes everybody. That comes with maturity, and he's done an excellent job of that."

In contrast to his first season as the starter, Stroud hit the ground running from the



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## MIDTERM EXAMS: OFFENSE

opening whistle of the season opener against Notre Dame. His ability to perform in clutch moments was also put to the test in that game, and Stroud greatly exceeded expectations in those scenarios.

With the Buckeyes trailing 10-7 late in the third quarter, and in desperate need of a spark, Stroud marched the offense 70 yards down the field in 10 plays while completing passes to four different receivers before capping off the drive with a 24-yard go-ahead touchdown strike to former walk-on receiver Xavier Johnson with 17 seconds remaining in the frame. That moment proved to be the first highlight of a long list of outstanding plays made by Stroud in the season's first half.

While Stroud was able to showcase his prowess in clutch situations against Notre Dame, he hasn't been necessarily challenged since that game, primarily because he has helped the Buckeyes jump out on teams early in contests. Of his 24 touchdowns through the first half of the season, the Inland Empire, Calif., native tossed eight in the first quarter while Ohio State has outscored opponents 98-27 in the opening frame this season.

Stroud has posted gaudy numbers, including a 70.6 completion percentage – which sat at 12th in the nation – while tossing for 1,737 yards, also ranking 12th. Stroud registered four games with four or more touchdowns, including a six-touchdown outing against Michigan State which marked the third six-touchdown performance of his career, making him the only quarterback in Big Ten history to reach that mark three times.

Although Stroud's numbers have jumped off the page this season, he also posted one of the worst outings of his career to this point during the Buckeyes' 49-10 win over Rutgers on Oct. 1. He completed a career-worst 59.1 percent of passes while throwing for just 154 yards – his lowest mark since taking the reins as the starter last season. However, Stroud still finished with two TDs to one interception against the Scarlet Knights and had just three interceptions through the first six games. Stroud made it clear that stats are not his priority.

"From my perspective, we won," Stroud said. "I don't really care. I think their goal as a defense was to not let our pass game win, and so we ran the ball. Early in the season, I said I was cool with that.

"It's not just about me. It's about getting wins and about other people eating, so when it's time for me to shine and do my thing, I feel like we'll do that."

Ohio State has also seen glimpses of its depth at the position during its blowout wins in the first half of the season. Second-year backup Kyle McCord has looked sharp in his limited snaps, completing 12 of 16 passes, including a 72-yard touchdown pass to Jayden Ballard during the Buckeyes' 77-21 drubbing of Toledo. Although he has yet to attempt a pass, first-year Devin Brown has also been in on 15 snaps, according to Pro Football Focus.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A**

### Running Backs

Ohio State switched its approach to its running game following last season in which then-freshman Henderson carried the load for the Buckeyes. Day and running backs coach Tony Alford have instead opted to employ a committee-style backfield with Henderson and third-year back Williams.

As Henderson is known for his break-away speed and athleticism, Williams serves

as more of a bruising, power rusher for the Buckeyes. The duo thrived in their respective committee roles during the season's first six games, and Alford noted that he feels the pair complement each other well with their differing running styles.

"I look at it as that we have two starters," Alford said. "We have two guys that are capable of being starters here. We have two guys that are capable of playing championship-level football, we believe. And we're going to use them according to how we need to use them to help win games."

As the lightning to Williams' thunder, Henderson has showcased his prowess for gaining chunk yardage through the first half of the season. Despite sustaining some nicks and bruises – including missing the Buckeyes' win over Rutgers – Henderson still racked up 436 rushing yards and 6.3 yards per attempt while finding the end zone four times.

Williams has greatly built on his 2021 campaign, also showcasing his ability to pick up yards in chunks. Despite carrying the ball five fewer times than Henderson, Williams led the Buckeyes with 497 rushing yards and eight rushing touchdowns. Williams' 7.8 yards per attempt ranked second in the country behind only Alabama's Jahmyr Gibbs, who had 8.3 yards per rush.

Although the Buckeyes have largely utilized a committee in the backfield, both Williams and Henderson also got the opportunity to play the role of the bell cow. With Henderson out against Rutgers, Williams etched his name into the Ohio State history books with a career-best 189 yards and five touchdowns, tying Keith Byars and Pete Johnson for the OSU program record in scores. A week later, Williams was held out of Ohio State's 49-20 over Michigan State, which allowed Henderson to churn out 118 yards and a touchdown as the team's primary ball carrier.

Ohio State has also seen promising things out of freshmen Dallan Hayden and T.C. Caffey, a walk-on, who have been able to shine in the absence of sophomore Evan Pryor, who will miss the season with a knee injury. Hayden has carried the rock 52 times for 250 yards and a touchdown, while Caffey became a household name with a highlight-reel touchdown run against Toledo in which he bounced off several defenders en route to a 49-yard score.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A**

### Wide Receivers

Ohio State's receiving corps was expected to take a step back following the losses of Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson to the NFL. Concerns that the unit would further regress popped up after Smith-Njigba sustained an injury during the first quarter of the Notre Dame game and third-year Fleming missed a pair of games to start the season.

Although Smith-Njigba has been limited, missing four games and playing sparingly against Notre Dame and Toledo, the Buckeye receiving corps has not skipped a beat. Sophomores Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka have stepped into the voids left by Olave and Wilson while a committee of depth pieces has helped make up the production left by Smith-Njigba.

Despite being without his favorite target in Smith-Njigba, Stroud noted that he feels that he has built a great connection with his younger receivers.

"I think we built that chemistry with (tight end) Cade (Stover), Emeka and Marvin, and

really everybody who touched the ball (has done) a great job," Stroud said. "But we built that chemistry in the offseason."

Harrison showcased his overwhelming athletic ability during the season's first half, making several highlight-reel plays en route to 31 catches, 536 yards and an NCAA-best nine touchdowns. He has already registered a pair of three-touchdown outings, completing the feat against Arkansas State and Michigan State while becoming the only Buckeye in program history to haul in three scores on three separate occasions, with his first time coming in the Rose Bowl against Utah last season.

Egbuka has served as a solid complement to Harrison, utilizing stellar route-running skills to free himself up for Stroud. The Steilacoom, Wash., native led the Buckeyes with 35 receptions and 655 yards, which sat at fourth in the country. Egbuka added six receiving touchdowns as well.

Despite missing the first two games, Fleming stepped into his increased role with ease. Although injuries largely derailed his first two seasons with the Buckeyes, Fleming has showcased his potential by snagging 15 catches for 222 yards and five scores.

Ballard and Xavier Johnson have also manned Smith-Njigba's position in the slot at various points this season. Johnson's touchdown against Notre Dame served as the highlight of his season in the first half, and he registered five catches for 48 yards. Ballard, who has played largely in relief of the starters, added seven receptions for 131 yards.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A+**

### Tight Ends

Typically in the Ohio State offense, the tight end position is reserved primarily as an extra blocker on the field in running situations. However, with the injury to Smith-Njigba, the tight end has become an integral part of the Buckeyes' passing attack.

The primary beneficiary of the tight end receiving renaissance has been the fourth-year Stover, who has bounced between defensive end, linebacker and tight end during his time with the Buckeyes. Despite the near-constant switching between positions during his first three seasons with the Buckeyes, Stover has emerged as one of Stroud's top targets, hauling in 16 catches for 206 yards and two scores. Stover posted an 83-yard outing against Toledo, the most by an Ohio State tight end since Jeff Heurman produced 116 yards against Purdue in 2013.

"I'm just trying to do whatever comes to me and make a play if a ball comes my way," Stover said. "We've got so many great players around us, it's a blessing."

Third-year depth piece Gee Scott Jr. has also added three catches for 9 yards, including his first career touchdown reception against Michigan State.

Although the tight ends have seen increased opportunities in the passing game, that doesn't mean they've slowed down in their blocking responsibilities. Stover, as well as fullback/tight end Mitch Rossi, have been key in springing the Ohio State running game, displaying their abilities on kick-out blocks as well as on the perimeter. Ohio State's confidence in Stover and Rossi has been clear by the Buckeyes utilizing 12 personnel – which places two tight ends on the field at the same time – as well as the I-formation in short-yardage rush-

ing situations, most notably in the red zone, with Rossi as the fullback.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A**

### Offensive Line

While much of the attention is focused on the unit's skill players, it has been the contributions of the offensive line that allowed the Buckeyes' offense to hum at the rate it did in the first half of the season.

After experimenting with its unit last season by playing several linemen out of their natural positions, Ohio State has gone back to its roots during the first season under offensive line coach Justin Frye and has seen success across its first six games this year. The Buckeyes allowed just four sacks and opened countless holes for Williams and Henderson to run through.

Frye pointed to the collective work ethic as one of the primary reasons that he's seen success from the unit.

"Every week, we're coming in and finding something on film that we need to attack, something that maybe wasn't as clean as we wanted and they're looking for that," Frye said. "If you continue to do that, and as (Coach Day) talks every week, it's a new challenge and new game and you can't rest on what you've done. You have to work your details, fundamentals and technique and these guys are looking for that every week.

"On Mondays, they show up and they've watched the tape, they've taken notes and they want to know what we can improve on and what we've got to work on that week, and then we attack that."

Third-year tackle Paris Johnson Jr., who spent last season out of position at guard, has emerged as one of the nation's best players at the position after garnering Associated Press midseason All-American honors. Johnson has not allowed a sack yet this season.

Johnson, alongside fellow tackle Dawand Jones, guards Donovan Jackson and Matt Jones and center Luke Wypler, helped the Buckeyes' rushing attack to 6.0 yards per attempt, which ranked sixth in the nation.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A**

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Paris Johnson Jr.

# DC Knowles' Defense A Knockout Thus Far

By **ANDY ANDERS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At the midway point of this season, Ryan Day's call for Ohio State to boast a top-10 defense has mostly been answered, though not many were expecting it to be.

New defensive coordinator Jim Knowles came in following a season at Oklahoma State in which he finished as a finalist for the Broyles Award, given annually to the top assistant coach in college football, but the situation he entered didn't give high hopes for a top-10 defense.

Last year, Ohio State finished 59th nationally in total defense (372.9), with a dismal 97th-place finish in pass defense (246.2). Michigan gouged the Buckeyes for 297 rushing yards en route to a win to prevent OSU from an appearance in the Big Ten Championship Game, and likely the College Football Playoff. All of it was made only more disappointing by the fact that the Buckeyes had the No. 1 scoring and total offense in the sport.

The program then underwent a shift, as defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, defensive backs coach Matt Barnes and linebackers coach Al Washington all received their walking papers or conveniently found positions in other programs. Knowles came in and implemented a brand-new scheme, a 4-2-5 look with three safety positions and a versatile defensive end/linebacker hybrid called the "Jack." The attack focused on playing "offense on defense," Knowles said.

Six games into Ohio State's season, the defense ranked No. 15 nationally in scoring defense, No. 7 in total defense, No. 8 in pass defense and No. 15 in rush defense.

"We can be better, but I'm just pleased with the way we're fitting things and the way that we're playing fast," Knowles said. "Guys seem to know the scheme and where they fit and where the ball's going to come out."

The following are BSB's midterm grades for each position group defensively through the first six games of the 2022 season.

## Defensive Line

When a defense excels in both passing and rushing yards allowed, it typically starts with quality play up front, and Ohio State's defensive line has been creating chaos this season.

The Buckeyes roll through a variety of fronts, employ a variety of stunts and constantly keep offensive lines and coordinators guessing. Much of that comes down to Knowles' schematics, but the emergence of several key contributors, particularly from the 2021 recruiting class, has fueled a bit of

a resurgence for OSU's defensive line.

The biggest storyline to date on the defensive line is second-year defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. One season after redshirting, Hall was Ohio State's sack leader with 4½ quarterback takedowns, and he recorded 2½ at Michigan State in just seven snaps. His 7½ tackles for loss were also a team high despite missing a game.

"We just thought it would be a good idea to ease him back into the lineup, someplace where he could just be aggressive and play fast," Knowles said of his low snap count against the Spartans. "His production, for seven plays, is exceptional. We'd like to play him more, and he will as he gets healthier."

Hall played several positions on the defensive line throughout the first half of the season, seeing time at one-technique, three-technique and five-technique. He's been utilized in some of his more versatile ways on definite passing downs and has been one of the Buckeyes' most threatening pass rushers.

On the whole, Ohio State's sack production was tied for 39th in college football through six contests, with 14 on the season. Opposing quarterbacks have been getting the ball out with some difficulty, averaging just 6.3 yards per pass attempt, and the Buckeyes have shown an ability to pressure with 65 quarterback hurries.

"I say, 'Coverage and rush.' Defense responds, 'Working together.' So it's a group effort," Knowles said. "Our front is productive and strong and attacking and confident. That's helping the coverage."

Fourth-year defensive end Zach Harrison is leading the linemen in total quarterback hurries with 11. He's slid inside to three-technique defensive tackle on certain passing downs, using his length and speed to create mismatches with offensive guards. He helped force two turnovers against Rutgers, knocking a fumble loose and tipping a pass that was intercepted by linebacker Steele Chambers

A pair of second-years have been the most stalwart edge defenders for Ohio State, however. Jack Sawyer, fittingly, has taken a confident step into the "Jack" position and picked up 11 tackles – four for loss – and two sacks.

J.T. Tuimolouau hasn't recorded a sack yet but has drawn multiple flags for holding

and always seems on the verge of making big plays. He's second behind Harrison with nine quarterback hurries.

"J.T. is a combination of get-off, quickness and strength," Knowles said. "Like Mike has on the inside, I think J.T. has that on the outside. He's being accounted for and uses up a lot of blocks. He makes initial penetration a lot in the pass rush. That draws holding calls, or woulda, shoulda, coulda been a holding call. He's one of those guys that makes things happen initially at the play."

Rounding out the starting unit is fifth-year defensive tackle Taron Vincent, a former five-star recruit much like Harrison, Sawyer and Tuimolouau. Hindered by injuries throughout previous seasons, he's finally taken a step onto the scene as a powerful, block-eating, run-stuffing interior defensive tackle.

"That's the heart of our defense right there," fourth-year linebacker Tommy Eichenberg said of Vincent. "If you're watching tape, he's taking on double-teams, sometimes triple-teams. He sacrifices and is the ultimate team player. I wouldn't get a tackle if it weren't for him. For anyone on defense, it really starts with Taron."

Graduate defensive end Javontae Jean-Baptiste has been the most productive of the next wave of defensive linemen, gathering 11 tackles and 2½ TFL, and fifth-year defensive end Tyler Friday and freshman edge rusher Caden Curry have also seen meaningful reps on the edge. Second-year Tyleik Williams, graduate Jerron Cage and third-year Ty Hamilton have done the same on the interior.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson has made frequent use of his depth pieces, with nine defensive linemen logging at least 90 snaps thus far this season – not including Friday, who missed time with injury.

The issue, if there has been one, is that there's been some drop-off in production when the backups hit the field. Notre Dame put together only one touchdown drive against the Buckeyes, and it came against a hodge-podge of second-team OSU defensive linemen. Some of those declines from the second unit and the raw numbers of sacks are among the few criticisms one can loft at the defensive line at this point.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A-**

## Linebackers

In moving from the defensive line to the linebackers, one moves from the position group with the most players to evaluate for Ohio State to the one with the least. Only three linebackers have seen the field when it matters for the Buckeyes this season, but perhaps it's all they've needed.

Eichenberg is the centerpiece to it all. The tone-setting middle linebacker came fresh off a 17-tackle performance in the Rose Bowl to close last season and carried that momentum through to the first half of

this year, racking up a team-high 50 tackles – six for loss – and 2½ sacks. After Ohio State's win over Michigan State to close the first half of the season, he was added to the watchlist for the Bednarik Award, which goes to the best defensive player in all of college football.

"Tommy's a dog," third-year safety Lathan Ransom said. "He's the best linebacker in the country to me. He jumps out on the film every time. He'll be flying around and not afraid of anyone. You'll feel him. Tommy will make you feel him for sure."

According to Knowles, it's Eichenberg's study of the game, knowledge of the scheme and play recognition skills that have allowed him to excel. Eichenberg announced his presence in an emphatic way in the opener against the Fighting Irish, collecting nine tackles with three tackles for loss and two sacks.

His running mate on the second level is Chambers, who's emerged as a more athletic across-the-field type of defender. The win against Rutgers provided the best showcase of this ability from Chambers, who collected 11 tackles (two for loss) and an interception.

"Steele is, like, sideline-to-sideline," Harrison said. "That's Steele's strength, and Steele is good in pass coverage. He's a great, great linebacker and asset for us."

Chambers lands second on the team behind Eichenberg in total tackles, having collected 31 to this point with four tackles for

loss and one sack. Now in his second season at linebacker after converting from running back, Chambers' increased confidence has helped him excel under Knowles.

"I think they feel comfortable in the scheme," Day said of the starting linebackers. "I think they really have a good relationship with Jim Knowles, who they meet every day, and he's their position coach.

I think he gives (Chambers) really good perspective on how he fits into the run, but also in the pass game, and that's huge."

Third-year linebacker Cody Simon has seen some spot duty, either in brief relief of Chambers or in three-linebacker packages on rare instances when Knowles deviates from his 4-2-5 look. In his limited time, Simon had 20 tackles, fifth most on the squad.

Should something happen to any of those players, veteran options await in fifth-year Palaie Gaoteote IV, third-year Chip Traynum and graduate Teradja Mitchell, all of whom have been contributors on special teams. Freshman C.J. Hicks, a five-star recruit, is a surefire player to watch in the future.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A**

## Safeties

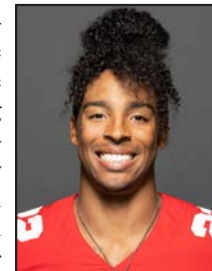
Knowles has described his defense on numerous occasions as "safety driven," with three featured on the field at a time. It gives his scheme much of its versatility in pass coverage, with players moving and changing the picture for opposing quarterbacks pre- and post-snap.

Thus far, the safeties haven't disappointed, as opponents are avoiding testing Ohio State's secondary over the middle. Through the first six games, only five passes were

## Rating The Defense

Here is where the OSU defense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Michigan State game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Defense	93.2	15th	6th
Passing Defense	160.3	8th	3rd
Total Defense	253.5	7th	4th
Scoring Defense	15.7	T-15th	6th
Sacks/Game	2.33	T-46th	T-5th
Third-Down Def.	.272	8th	3rd



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SONNY BROCKWAY

**SILVER BULLETS** — After a disastrous campaign from the Ohio State defense in 2021, the Buckeyes, led by Ronnie Hickman (14) and Tommy Eichenberg (35), have bounced back as one of the better units in the Big Ten this season.

attempted 20 or more yards downfield between the numbers against the Buckeyes.

Toledo quarterback Dequan Finn completed two deep touchdown passes to that area, but both were on extended scramble plays and completed to receivers covered by an Ohio State cornerback, not a safety. Michigan State had the only other deep pass completion between the numbers, though Ransom also intercepted a ball thrown deep over the middle by the Spartans.

On passes of 10 to 20 yards inside the numbers, starting quarterbacks fare even worse, just 4 for 10 for 51 yards with no touchdowns and one interception.

Fourth-year Ronnie Hickman is the centerpiece of the operation, playing the “Adjuster” role, more of a free safety type of position. He generated the first turnover of the season for Ohio State, intercepting a pass from Finn after jumping a route he stated he saw on film. He’s third on the Buckeyes with 23 tackles.

“The thing I love about Ronnie is he’s really stepped up his game off the field in preparation,” safeties coach Perry Eliano said. “His mentality, studying the game, understanding what to look for. Obviously you can tell, because he’s playing extremely fast. I love the young man because he’s put in a lot of time and effort to really, really home in on the things that he knew he needed to do going into this season.”

Alongside Hickman, Ransom has emerged at the “Bandit,” or boundary safety position, as one of the breakout stars on Ohio State’s defense.

Ransom missed spring practices and entered OSU’s first contest of the year against Notre Dame as a backup. Graduate Josh Proctor – the starter entering the game – missed a tackle to give up a big play early against the Fighting Irish, so Knowles rolled with Ransom the next drive.

Ransom made his presence felt immediately,

stonewalling star Notre Dame tight end Michael Mayer short of a first down on a key third-and-7 the following drive. Ransom finished that game with seven tackles and ultimately had 21 takedowns through the first six contests, fourth most on the team, and the interception.

“We’ve been bullish on Lathan from the time he first showed up in practice, because he was hurt (from the Rose Bowl),” Knowles said. “He just gets better every week. He can now play multiple positions. He’s just helping the defense more and more as he continues to learn.”

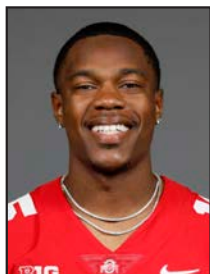
Nickel safety Tanner McCalister rounds out the starting trio. McCalister transferred to Ohio State from Oklahoma State in the offseason, providing his teammates with needed experience in Knowles’ scheme. He’s been the definition of dependability in the spot, allowing just 4.3 yards per target.

The crown-jewel performance of his first half of the season came against Wisconsin. McCalister intercepted a pass from quarterback Graham Mertz in the first quarter then broke up a potential last-second touchdown pass before halftime, flying over from his deep zone to dislodge a ball from wide receiver Skyler Bell at the last second.

“I was vertical to it, so I got to watch the whole thing and I was literally like, ‘What a play,’” Hickman said of the deflection. “I knew (McCalister) was battling his groin a little bit so it was going to take a little bit extra for him to do that.”

“That was one of the better plays I’ve seen live, on the field, in-game, definitely.”

McCalister has dealt with injuries at points this season and missed some time,



Tanner McCalister

but third-year Cameron Martinez hasn’t missed a step when called upon. He recorded 10 tackles in the first six contests for the Buckeyes.

Proctor, to his credit, has still managed to start a few games and rotate in for some spot duty, collecting 14 tackles with two pass breakups. Team captain Kourt Williams II gave Ohio State an additional depth option at the adjuster or bandit position, though Day announced Oct. 20 that he’s out long term with an injury.

“The thing I love about the room is they all want to be coached,” Eliano said. “They want real feedback. They don’t want to hear how great they were. ‘Coach, what can I do to be better?’ And when you have something like that, that’s special.”

Knowles has hinted that there’s still more to come from the safety position as well.

“We have not blitzed them a whole lot,” Knowles said. “We haven’t had to, so I think there’s more that can be done there at that position.”

Five-star freshman safety Sonny Styles waits in the wings, as does freshman Kye Stokes, who made a name for himself with nine tackles and two pass breakups in the spring game. The starters, depth and future at safety have turned a position of weakness last season to one of strength this year.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A**

### Cornerbacks

In a surprise to few who have followed the team, cornerback is the lone position where Ohio State isn’t receiving high marks on BSB’s midterms grades.

No two players in the Buckeye secondary allowed more passing yards in the first half of the season than second-year corner Denzel Burke and graduate corner Cameron Brown despite the fact that Burke missed one game with injury and Brown missed two.

“I don’t think it’s any mystery that one of the things we’ve got to do (heading into the off week) is finish some plays out at corner,” Day said Oct. 11. “We’re right there. We just haven’t quite finished some of them. I did think Denzel played better (against Michigan State), probably his best game to date.”

Burke had a breakout freshman season in 2021, a rare bright spot for that year’s pass defense, logging 12 pass breakups and an interception. In the first half of this season, Burke was targeted a team-high 19 times, allowing 11 receptions for 236 yards. That’s 12.4 yards per target, up from 5.4 last season. In his limited action, Brown has surrendered 11.1 yards per target, with just one pass breakup.

“Ultimately their production on game day is my responsibility,” Knowles said. “If we’re taking shots at that position, I have to look at myself too, and say, ‘Well, are we showing our hand too much? Am I giving those guys every chance to be successful through disguise and coverage variation?’”

There’s one big unknown when it comes to Ohio State’s cornerbacks, and that’s the impact second-year Jordan Hancock can have upon his return to the field. Hancock didn’t play a snap in the first half of the season, suffering an injury prior to the opener, but was drawing rave reviews in fall camp and graded out as a top-100 national recruit in 2021. He’d emerged as the third corner on OSU’s depth chart before going down.

“Jordan can be a great help,” Knowles said. “I really like the way he performed before the injury. His attitude, his calmness, his demeanor – I think he’s got a lot of the things you look for in a corner. So having him back in the mix will be helpful to the whole group and the defense. Those kinds of things can really change calls and make an impact behind the scenes.”

Second-year JK Johnson was also a top-100 cornerback prospect in Hancock’s class and has started for the Buckeyes both times Brown had to miss action. Johnson also stepped in for Burke in games where his fellow sophomore’s struggles demanded a breather and recorded 11 tackles in total.

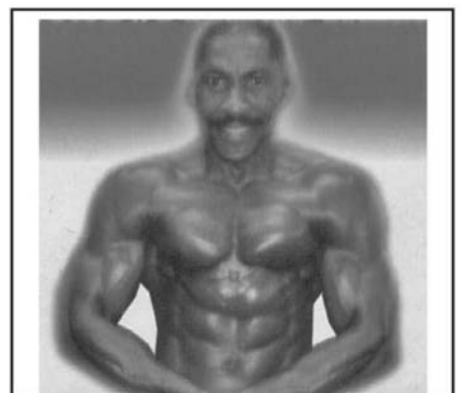
One of Johnson’s starts came against Wisconsin, a contest in which a star-alignment of injuries left Burke, Brown and Hancock all unavailable. Johnson started alongside freshman Jyaire Brown that night. With that duo and freshman Ryan Turner, the Buckeyes were down to three total active scholarship corners.

Mertz still finished 11 of 20 for a season-low 94 yards, one touchdown and one interception. Jyaire Brown finished the contest with a tackle and a pass breakup, and Johnson collected four tackles of his own.

“They stepped up big time,” McCalister said after the game. “Obviously, when you’ve got Cam Brown and Denzel down, going into preparation it’s kind of scary a little bit just because those guys haven’t played much. But they came in comfortable, willing to listen.”

Grading this group as below average may feel a touch harsh given that the defense still ranked No. 8 against the pass halfway through the season. But there’s room to improve – especially given the injuries – and as Day has said in the past, OSU holds its program to a national championship standard. Thus far, cornerback has been the only consistent hole on the team, offensively or defensively. Only having six on scholarship isn’t helping the outlook, either.

**BSB Midterm Grade: C-**



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# Special Teams Not That Special For OSU

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

What does it say about the Ohio State special teams that the most notable play was an unplanned fake punt?

On the one hand, it could mean there was little to fault with the unit and that no news is good news. Much like offensive linemen, you usually never hear the names of special teamers until something goes wrong.

The other thought is there has been nothing that stands out among the punting, place kicking and return squads that merit mention, and the Buckeyes have been lucky that a game has not been lost because of their lack of significant plays.

An answer may lie somewhere in between, but the truth is for being one of the top programs in the country, the special teams have not been so special midway through this season.

Despite a 6-0 record entering the off week, No. 2 Ohio State ranked among the worst nationally in kick/punt returns and kick/punt return defense. Those are the cold, hard numbers that don't include the fielding miscues on punts and kickoffs that so far haven't led to catastrophe.

Yet, with an outrageous number of four- and five-star recruits at the skill positions, it could be only a matter of time before the lackluster statistics improve in the second half of the season. After all, if one player doesn't get the job done, someone else will step in.

"I think all competition is good competition," special teams coach Parker Fleming said in May. "Our job here is to make sure that we get the best out of our players every day and that you fight to be the best version of yourself every day."

"Sometimes competition against yourself is really good. Sometimes competition against other people brings the best out of everybody. That's kind of our mind-set around here."

What follows is an evaluation by BSB on each aspect of the special teams with a cor-

responding midterm grade. Statistics are through six games.

## Kicking Game

The chirping of Ohio State fans probably began the moment kicker Noah Ruggles missed his first field goal, a 39-yarder late in the second quarter of the season opener against Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

The North Carolina transfer entered his second season with the Buckeyes coming off a spectacular first year in which he made 20 of 21 field-goal attempts, including a 19-yarder with nine seconds left to give Ohio State a 48-45 win against Utah in the Rose Bowl.

He could have left for an opportunity in the NFL but decided to return, only to take time off during spring football. His misfire against the Fighting Irish left many wondering if he had lost his touch.

The Buckeyes' powerful offense gave him just two opportunities for redemption over the remainder of that game and the next five. Fortunately, he made both tries – a 24-yarder against Arkansas State the next game and a 25-yard boot against Wisconsin two games later – but his services have largely been neutralized given that Ohio State has scored touchdowns on 27 of 29 red-zone trips.

As for kickoffs, freshman Jayden Fielding was given that responsibility and has struggled. He put three kicks out of bounds, and when he did manage to keep the ball between the white lines through the first six games, opponents averaged 21.8 yards per return to rank the Buckeyes 90th of 131 teams and 13th among the 14 Big Ten schools.

Unlike Ruggles, Fielding gets a lot of work as was the case with 12 kickoffs in the 77-21 win over Toledo. Still, if he continues to give the opposition good field position, head coach Ryan Day may turn to Southern Cal transfer Parker Lewis, who was finally granted eligibility by the NCAA on Sept. 27 and had touchbacks on 27 of 34 kickoffs last season. Of Fielding's 49 kickoffs, only 21 have gone for touchbacks.

**BSB Midterm Grade: C+**

## Rating The Specialists

Here is where the OSU specialists ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Michigan State game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Net Punting	40.53	40th	8th
Punt Return Avg.	6.12	88th	10th
KO Return Avg.	10.80	130th	14th
Punt Return Def.	9.00	T-81st	13th
KO Return Def.	21.81	90th	13th

## Punting Game

Jesse Mirco will not be remembered in Buckeye history for his pinpoint placement or his cannon shots when a long punt is needed. No, Mirco's legacy is his opting to take advantage of the green space in front of him as he rolled out to avoid the Rutgers rush and took off for a 22-yard gain before being belted by Aron Cruickshank, who drew a personal foul penalty and was ejected for his out-of-bounds hit.

The Buckeyes were winning 49-10 in the fourth quarter at the time, and that play led to a heated face-to-face exchange between Day and Rutgers head coach – and former OSU defensive coordinator – Greg Schiano before cooler heads prevailed.

Ohio State had a net punting average of 40.5 yards to rank 40th in the country and eighth in the Big Ten, and the Buckeyes were allowing 9.0 yards on punt returns, tied for 81st in the country and 11th in the conference. Mirco has punted 18 times for a 44.8 average with a long of 55. He's had opponents make seven fair catches while there's been two touchbacks. Mirco has also dropped 10 punts inside the 20. Michael O'Shaughnessy has one punt for 41 yards and a touchback.

Day has trust in Mirco to be another tool in the battle for field position. For example, facing a fourth-and-3 from the Notre Dame 40-yard line in the second quarter, Mirco put the Irish in the hole with his punt to the 5-yard line. Day said Oct. 17 that his decisions whether to punt or go for it depend on the situation.

"If you're in a matchup game, go back and forth, low-scoring field-position game, then absolutely you can be backed up on the 5-yard line and the No. 1 goal is to get first downs and get that thing towards midfield and then allow our punter to get out there to flip the field. I think you saw us do that a little bit in the Notre Dame game," he said.

"But there's other games where it's kind of back and forth and you really can't afford to punt because the scores are coming fast and furious," he continued. "So I think a big part of it when we talk about analytics, I think that comes into play, but also there's just a feel for how your team is doing and the way the game is flowing. The punt can be a huge weapon for you."

**BSB Midterm Grade: B**

## Return Game

Ohio State has not had a punt return for a touchdown since Jalin Marshall's 54 yarder vs. Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014. It's been nearly two decades since the Buckeyes had two punt returns for scores when Michael Jenkins and Donte Whitner pulled it off against Iowa on Oct. 18, 2003.

The closest the Buckeyes came this season

was a 78-yard return by Emeka Egbuka against Arkansas State that was nullified when Teradja Mitchell was called for leaping over the Red Wolves' punt shield. Ohio State was also called for a block in the back on the play.

Ohio State's 6.1 yards per punt return was 88th nationally and 10th in the Big Ten. Egbuka led the team with six returns for 35 yards (5.8).

Egbuka fumbled a Rutgers punt that helped give the Scarlet Knights a 7-0 lead, and against Michigan State, he made a fair catch at the 10-yard line when he probably would have been better off grabbing it and running because he had space. The Buckeyes also had a late turnover against Arkansas State when a bouncing punt hit JK Johnson in the leg.

Day continues to express confidence in Egbuka despite the returner's penchant for trying over-the-shoulder catches on punts that appear headed over him.

"He's been reliable for us, and he'll continue to be reliable for us," Day said on Oct. 6. "I know he wishes he had that play back (vs. Rutgers). Nobody wanted to make the play more than Emeka Egbuka. Nobody cares more than him. So he'll take a look at it, try to figure out how maybe he could work on that a little better. We'll get some punts up there on windy days and keep working through it. But we have all the confidence in the world that he'll catch the ball when it's in the air."

Day prefers Egbuka catch the punts than allow them to roll, especially on the bouncy new turf in Ohio Stadium. Notre Dame had a 75-yard punt after Egbuka let it hit the ground.

"When it bounces and rolls, it rolls forever," Day said. "So it can cost you 30-40 yards. If you go too far back and it takes that big hop and rolls 30 yards, that's three first downs."

Added Egbuka, "You especially don't want that thing kicking around and taking weird hops. It could take a weird bounce and hit one of your teammates and then that ball is live. So it's definitely a big emphasis to catch every ball and be aggressive to them. That's something that we really emphasize."

Arizona State transfer Chip Trayanum, a former running back converted to a line-backer, has been given the kickoff return duties. He has three returns for 29 yards (9.7) with a long of 17. Egbuka's one return went for 25 yards, and Jayden Ballard got no yards on his one try. In total, the Buckeyes had just 54 yards for a 10.8 average to rank 130th in the nation – ahead of only Georgia State, which had one kickoff return for zero yards through Oct. 8 – and last in the Big Ten.


There have been penalties to nullify returns and mishandled kickoffs by Trayanum against Michigan State and Wisconsin, although he recovered each.

"We've got to do a better job of fielding the ball," Day said. "I think if we do that then we feel a little bit better about all of it. We've got to make sure we field the ball better. That's a good time right now to look at that and figure out if we have the right personnel in all groupings, and certainly in special teams as well."

Combined, the Buckeyes have just 103 yards in punt and kickoff returns in 13 attempts (7.9).

The last OSU kickoff return for a touchdown was Jordan Hall going 85 yards vs. Michigan on Nov. 27, 2010.

**BSB Midterm Grade: D**



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# Ohio State at Penn State

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## Projected Depth Charts

## How We See It

### OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. PENN STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Ohio State knew Iowa's rugged defense would present problems, but the way the Hawkeyes were able to control the line should be disconcerting when the Buckeyes play Penn State. While the Nittany Lions aren't as stingy as Iowa, they are middle of the pack nationally against the rush – 62nd of 131 teams with an average of 140.1 yards allowed per game. In a 45-17 home win against Minnesota on Oct. 22, they allowed 165 yards on 46 attempts (3.6 yards per carry). The Buckeyes netted just 66 yards on 30 attempts for a 2.2 average vs. the Hawkeyes. TreVeyon Henderson had 38 yards on 11 carries (3.5 per carry), and Miyan Williams rushed for 19 yards on 10 attempts (1.9), and each had 7 yards in losses. One way to quiet the roar at Beaver Stadium will be to establish the run. **EDGE: EVEN**

### PENN STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Yes, Iowa has one of the worst offenses to grace the Ohio Stadium field in years, but that should not diminish the work of the Buckeye defense, which limited Iowa to 77 yards on 35 carries for a 2.2 average. Ohio State is tied for eighth nationally in rush defense (90.9) while Penn State ran for 175 yards (5.1 per carry) in the Minnesota game. Freshmen Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton are a solid one-two punch, and Penn State is the only FBS school with two true freshmen who have rushed for 100 yards in a game this season. They have combined to average 136.7 yards per game with 11 touchdowns. Singleton gained 79 yards on 13 runs and Allen carried 15 times for 77 yards against Minnesota. **EDGE: EVEN**

### OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. PENN STATE PASS DEFENSE

It doesn't get any easier for quarterback C.J. Stroud and friends after struggling through the first half against Iowa with 105 passing yards and no touchdowns. Stroud finished 20 of 30 for 286 yards with four touchdowns and an interception. He also lost a fumble while being sacked that led to Iowa's only touchdown in the first quarter. It was not a grand performance, but the highlight was a late 79-yard score to Julian Fleming, who had 105 yards on two catches. Still, Stroud made some poor decisions that against Penn State could prove costly. In the fourth quarter from the Iowa 11-yard line, he tried to force a throw to Marvin Harrison Jr. at the back of the end zone and was almost intercepted. He was picked off on the next play but offsetting penalties negated the pick, and five plays later Stroud found tight end Mitch Rossi for a 3-yard score. If receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba is healthy again, the Buckeyes become even more dangerous. The PSU pass defense ranks third in the nation in lowest completion percentage (50.7), allowing six TDs while picking off seven. However, the Nittany Lions rank 79th in yards allowed (232.9). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

### PENN STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Sean Clifford seems like he has been quarterbacking the Nittany Lions since J.T. Barrett took the Buckeyes to an overtime win during the 2014 national championship season. Clifford, the 24-year-old sixth-year senior, was booed during pregame introductions before the Minnesota game for a poor performance the previous game against Michigan in a 41-17 loss. He rebounded to go 23 of 31 for 295 yards and four touchdowns against the Golden Gophers. Yet many fans are clamoring for freshman five-star recruit Drew Allar. The Buckeyes have made at least one interception in five straight games. Against Iowa, Tanner McCalister had two and Tommy Eichenberg added a pick-six. The secondary wasn't tested against a terrible Iowa offense, but that won't be the case in Happy Valley. In the win over Minnesota, Parker Washington recorded seven catches for 70 yards and a touchdown, and Theo Johnson had 75 yards and a touchdown off five catches. Ohio State sacked Iowa quarterbacks five times and will need that type of pressure against the Nittany Lions. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

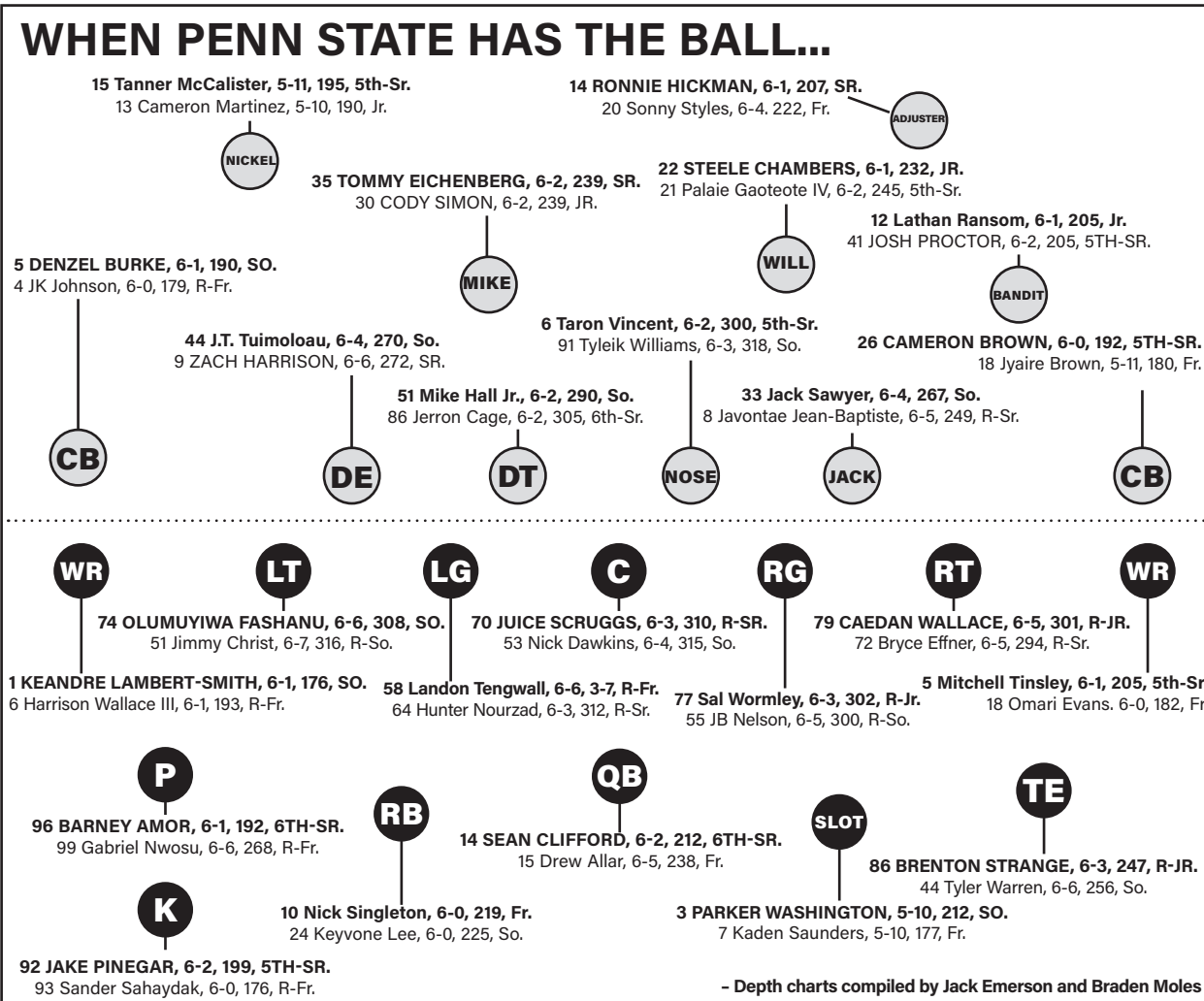
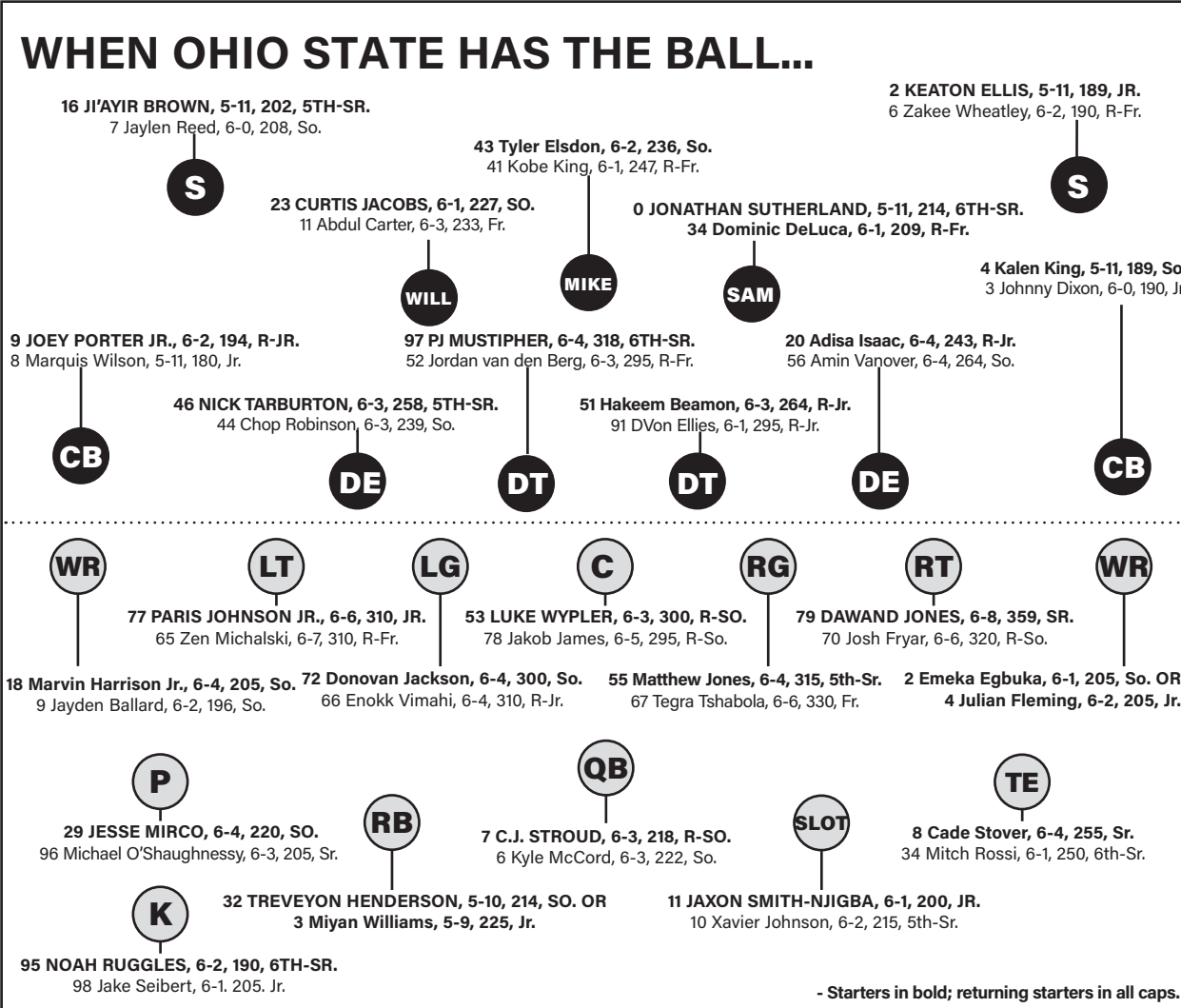
Noah Ruggles re-emerged from trying three field goals in six games to make all four attempts in the first half against Iowa. The kickoff unit was penalized for taunting and for being offside. Penn State is among the top 10 nationally in net punting while OSU's Jesse Mirco dropped another punt inside the 5-yard line. **EDGE: EVEN**

### INTANGIBLES

It won't be a prime-time White Out, but the Nittany Lions' atmosphere will be the most daunting the Buckeyes have faced since the Michigan game last season. We all know how that ended. **EDGE: PENN STATE**

### STAFF PREDICTION

If the Buckeyes settle for field goals over touchdowns, it could be a long afternoon. This has the feel of another classic. **OHIO STATE 34, PENN STATE 30**



# Titles, Brutus, ‘Sloopy’ All Part Of Swinging ‘60s

Throughout the 2022 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* is publishing stories commemorating the 100th anniversary of Ohio Stadium. This week, BSB looks at the Horseshoe’s fifth decade (1962-71) that included some of the most memorable players, teams and moments in stadium history.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

From classic games, generational players and national championships to the first appearances of a signature song and a popular mascot, Ohio Stadium’s fifth decade of existence was perhaps one of its most iconic.

Most of the rest of the country was morphing out of the staid 1950s with the emergence of the baby boomer generation and flinging itself headlong into the “Swinging Sixties,” noted for its revolution in music, drugs, dress, sexuality, formality and civil rights. But while the advent of the so-called counterculture was taking over elsewhere, the Ohio State football team during the early part of the 1960s was still very much the conservative product of head coach Woody Hayes.

Known almost as much for his penchant for wearing short-sleeved white shirts and matching white socks as he was for his three-yards-and-a-cloud-of-dust offense, the 48-year-old Hayes entered his 12th season with the Buckeyes in the fall of 1962 with a

team populated by crewcuts, neatly trimmed sideburns and freshly shaved faces.

“Squeaky clean is what you might call it,” team co-captain Gary Moeller once said. “That’s what Woody wanted, and that’s exactly what we were.”

Hayes was still smarting about the university faculty council’s vote against allowing the Buckeyes to play in the Rose Bowl the previous January, and he took it out on the team’s season-opening opponent in 1962. Senior halfback Paul Warfield electrified an Ohio Stadium-record crowd of 84,009 with two touchdowns – including a 42-yard, over-the-shoulder catch of a pass from quarterback John Mummey – as Ohio State rolled to a 41-7 victory against North Carolina. It was the largest margin of victory for the Buckeyes in a season opener in 27 years.

It was the beginning of an up-and-down season with three losses in nine games, but things were somewhat smoothed by a 28-0 throttling of Michigan, an impressive victory that underscored Hayes’ affinity for a dominating ground attack. On the cool, crisp afternoon of Nov. 24, some 82,349 fans crowded into the Horseshoe to watch the senior fullback trio of Dave Francis, Bob Butts and Dave Katterhenrich combine for 260 yards and four touchdowns against the Wolverines.

Francis carried 31 times for a career-best 186 yards, at the time the third-highest single-game total in program history. It was



FILE PHOTO

**BIG MAN ON CAMPUS** – Ohio State’s lovable mascot, Brutus Buckeye, made his debut during OSU’s 11-10 homecoming game win against Minnesota in 1965.

also the highest rushing total for an OSU player against Michigan until Chris “Beanie” Wells ran for 222 yards during a 14-3 victory in Ann Arbor in 2007.

The Buckeyes set another stadium attendance record in 1963 when 84,712 showed up for an Oct. 12 homecoming contest against Illinois. Ohio State scored a pair of touchdowns in the third quarter to take a 17-7 lead, but the Fighting Illini stormed back to grab a 20-17 advantage with 7:22 remaining in the game. The Buckeyes ultimately came back to tie the score on a 49-yard field goal from Dick VanRaaphorst with 1:53 to go, and the game ended in a 20-20 tie.

VanRaaphorst’s field goal set a new Big Ten record, and it remained the longest field goal at Ohio Stadium by an Ohio State kicker until Bob Atha nailed a 50-yarder during a 16-7 win against Northwestern in 1979.

Despite losing a 10-0 decision to Michigan during the 1964 season finale, a loss that knocked them out of the Big Ten championship race, the Buckeyes continued to set home attendance records. It marked the first season during which more than 500,000 fans had filed through the massive Horseshoe’s turnstiles, and the average of 83,391 for seven games was a new Ohio Stadium record.

That average dipped only slightly to 83,256 in 1965, but members of Buckeye Nation were treated to a pair of new sights that quickly became as much gameday stadium traditions as Block “O” and “Script Ohio.”

## Brutus, ‘Sloopy’ Debut

It might sound strange to the current generation of Buckeye fans, but the university did not have an official mascot until the mid-1960s. Not that Ohio State and its students didn’t try.

Several possibilities were suggested as early as the 1890s, including a ram, an elk, a moose and a male deer (a buck, to be exact). However, due to the skittish nature of real deer, the idea of a mascot was tabled

until January 1941, when “Chris,” a German police dog owned by a cheerleader, made an appearance at a basketball game. The dog seemed to be the university’s de facto mascot for a few years, but OSU remained without anything official in terms of a mascot until 1965.

During the homecoming game against Minnesota that season – an eventual 11-10 win for Ohio State thanks to a late fourth-quarter field goal from Bob Funk – a smiling buckeye nut with furry eyebrows and human legs made its debut, much to the delight of the 84,359 fans in attendance.

It wasn’t until nearly three weeks later that the new mascot received his name. A campus-wide contest to determine the moniker settled on Brutus Buckeye, an entry submitted by OSU student Kerry Reed.

Brutus remained pretty much unchanged for the next decade until September 1975 when he received a makeover that slimmed him down and put a crown on his head. The makeover was not well-received, however, as students, alumni and fans criticized the new version’s squinting eyes and seemingly vicious sneer. The university quickly scrapped the new Brutus and the friendly looking nut was resurrected.

Two years later, Brutus received another face-lift. The new version retained the happy face and added a ballcap on top of his head.

That model remained until the early 1980s, when Brutus received another makeover. The cumbersome head, which weighed nearly 80 pounds, was replaced by smaller, plush headgear that fit on the wearer’s shoulders. For the first time, the mascot donned a scarlet and gray striped shirt with “Brutus” on the front and “00” on the back. His pants were scarlet, with the words “Ohio State” embroidered on the sides.

That’s the way Brutus stayed until just before the 1998 season, when he returned in the fall with an updated look that included a more buff appearance and new facial features.

Three weeks before Brutus made his debut in 1965, the strains of a relatively ob-

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score pop song were heard for the first time in Ohio Stadium.

"My Girl Sloopy" was a song written in the early 1960s by Wes Farrell and Bert Russell as a tribute to jazz singer Dorothy Sloop, who went by the stage name "Sloopy." The song was a modest hit in 1964 for the Vibrations, but it didn't reach the top of the charts until a year later when the McCoy's recorded it and changed the title of the song to "Hang On Sloopy."

That fall, Ohio State marching band member John Tatgenhorst convinced band director Dr. Charles L. Spohn that the song would be a crowd-pleaser at football games. Tatgenhorst put together a hasty arrangement for the all-brass band, and TBDBITL first played it Oct. 9 during a 28-14 win against Illinois. It was not an immediate sensation, however. Crowd response was mediocre at best because the band was not allowed to take the field because of heavy rains.

The next home game was a different story. It was the homecoming win against Minnesota, and when the band played the song, the crowd went crazy, yelling "Sloopy! Sloopy! Sloopy!" They began to sing along with the offbeat lyrics, and "Hang On Sloopy" has been a part of Ohio State home football Saturdays ever since.

Unfortunately, the entertainment value provided by a new mascot and catchy pop tune were not being matched by the product on the field. The Buckeyes finished with a 4-5 record in 1966 – their first losing season since 1959 – and home attendance figures began to sag.

Things didn't appear to be getting any better at the beginning of the 1967 season when the team lost three of its first five games. All three losses came at the Horseshoe, the first time the program had lost three in a row at home since the stadium's inaugural season in 1922.

But things were about to change, and in a big way.

### Welcome 'Super Sophs'

Ohio State rallied from its 2-3 start in 1967 to win each of its final four games, capping the season with a 24-14 win at Michigan. That string of victories, along with the infusion of one of the most talented recruiting classes in college football history, served as the springboard for a magical three-year run.

A country reeling from the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April and U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in June, along with widespread campus unrest due to the ongoing war in Vietnam, likely conspired to keep attendance down for the first game of the 1968 season. A crowd of only 73,855 – the smallest for a home opener since 1954 – showed up to watch a sophomore-dominated lineup roll to a 35-14 victory against SMU.

By the time that lineup was finished with the 1968 season, however, they had engineered a perfect season, won a consensus national championship and forever cemented their legacy as the "Super Sophomores."

Most fans remember the way that season ended with a 50-14 pounding of Michigan and 27-16 Rose Bowl win against defending national champion USC. But the real coming-out party for the 1968 team occurred in mid-October against top-ranked Purdue.

Ohio State had waited an entire year



FILE PHOTO

**TIME FOR WAR — The 1969 meeting between Ohio State and Michigan served as the first of many battles coached by OSU's Woody Hayes (above) and U-M's Bo Schembechler, which would become known as the "The Ten-Year War."**

to exact its measure of revenge for an embarrassing 41-6 loss to the Boilermakers in 1967, and when the Buckeyes got their chance, they made the most of it. Nearly one year to the day after absorbing the demoralizing loss, OSU upset the country's No. 1 team by a 13-0 score in front of 84,834 fans, at the time the largest crowd ever to watch a game at Ohio Stadium.

The game was not as close as the final score might indicate. The Buckeyes' offense piled up 411 total yards against the Boilermakers while OSU limited Purdue's high-powered offense to only 186 yards. Three times the Buckeyes turned their opponent away inside the 20-yard line to preserve the shutout.

"We have thought and talked about this game ever since last year," Hayes told reporters after the game. "They embarrassed us last year, and we wanted to see to it that it didn't happen again. The assistant coaches and the players have talked all year about winning this game. They deserve a lot of credit."

Much of that credit deservedly went to OSU defensive coordinator Lou McCullough and defensive assistants Bill Mallory and Lou Holtz. The Buckeyes not only shut out the Boilermakers, they held Heisman Trophy candidate Leroy Keyes to only 19 yards rushing. Additionally, the OSU defense pressured Purdue quarterback Mike Phipps into completing just 10 of 28 passes for 106 yards while sacking him four times.

While the Boilermakers were stymied all day long, OSU's backfield accounted for 281 yards in total offense. Sophomore quarterback Rex Kern led the Buckeyes to their third straight victory by rushing for 45 yards on 11 carries and completing 8 of 16 passes for 78 more yards.

Junior fullback Jim Otis was the workhorse for the Buckeyes, carrying 29 times for 144 yards. Sophomore John Brockington added 69 yards on 10 carries, and junior halfback Dave Brungard chipped in with 41

yards on 10 carries.

"Let's give credit where credit is due," Purdue head coach Jack Mollenkopf said. "Ohio State came here with an excellent game plan. For that, you have to credit Coach Hayes. But the players made that game plan pay off, and for that you have to credit them."

"There was no question which team was the best team out there today. I would like to stand here and say that wasn't the case, but there's no sense in that. They beat us, and that's that."

The Buckeyes dominated throughout the first half, but three missed field-goal attempts left the game in a scoreless tie as the teams headed to the locker rooms for intermission. But on the fourth play of the third quarter, junior defensive back Ted Provost stepped in front of a Phipps pass at the Purdue 34 and ran untouched into the end zone. As Provost crossed the goal line, he heaved the football far into the south stands as the stadium went wild.

The frenzied Ohio Stadium crowd was almost too delirious to notice that struggling kicker Dick Merryman, who had missed two of the field-goal tries in the first half, misfired to the right on the extra point, leaving the score at 6-0 in favor of the Buckeyes.

Later in the third period, sophomore middle guard Jim Stillwagon picked off a Phipps pass meant for split end Bob Dillingham, giving Ohio State possession at the Purdue 26. Otis carried three straight times for 18 yards, and on the next play Kern raced outside on a keeper. The QB was thrown for a 6-yard loss and left the field after being shaken up. Senior quarterback Bill Long entered the game, and on his first play faded back to pass. Seeing no open receivers, Long tucked the ball under his arm and bolted ahead 14 yards for a touchdown.

The Buckeyes' third kicker of the game, Nick Roman, proved to be the charm as he tacked on the PAT for a 13-0 Ohio State lead.

Long's touchdown seemed to demoralize Purdue. The Boilermakers never got their offense going again until late in the fourth quarter when they pounced on an Otis fumble

at the OSU 34.

Don Kiepert relieved Phipps at quarterback and moved Purdue to a first-and-goal at the Ohio State 8. But after Williams got only 1 yard on first down, Kiepert threw incomplete on each of the next three plays, preserving the victory and the shutout for the Buckeyes.

"That is still, at least in my opinion, one of the greatest victories in Ohio State football history," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "I don't think many people remember just how good that Purdue team was. They were the No. 1-ranked team in the nation at the time and were solid 13-point favorites. That game, and the way Ohio State dominated Purdue throughout, was the first hint of the kind of powerhouse team Woody Hayes had in 1968."

The win jumped Ohio State to No. 2 in the national polls, and they remained there for the rest of the season until knocking off top-ranked USC in the Rose Bowl to sew up an undefeated season and the 1968 national championship.

"After that Purdue game, we knew we could play with anybody," Kern told BSB. "We already thought we could, but that game proved it. We went into every game after that with super confidence. I guess we were too young to know any better."

### The 'War' Begins

It's amazing what a national title will do for a program at the box office. After averaging "only" 80,427 fans during the 1968 season, that number ticked up a full 7.3 percent to 86,235 in 1969. That season began with an Ohio Stadium-record crowd of 86,412 on hand to watch a 62-0 blowout of TCU, a game during which the Buckeyes ran a program-record 101 plays from scrimmage and enjoyed a 565-196 advantage in total offense.

Ohio State flexed its considerable muscle throughout the season, beating its first eight opponents by an average margin of nearly 38 points. And then came one of the greatest upsets in college football history.

Despite the fact his team entered the

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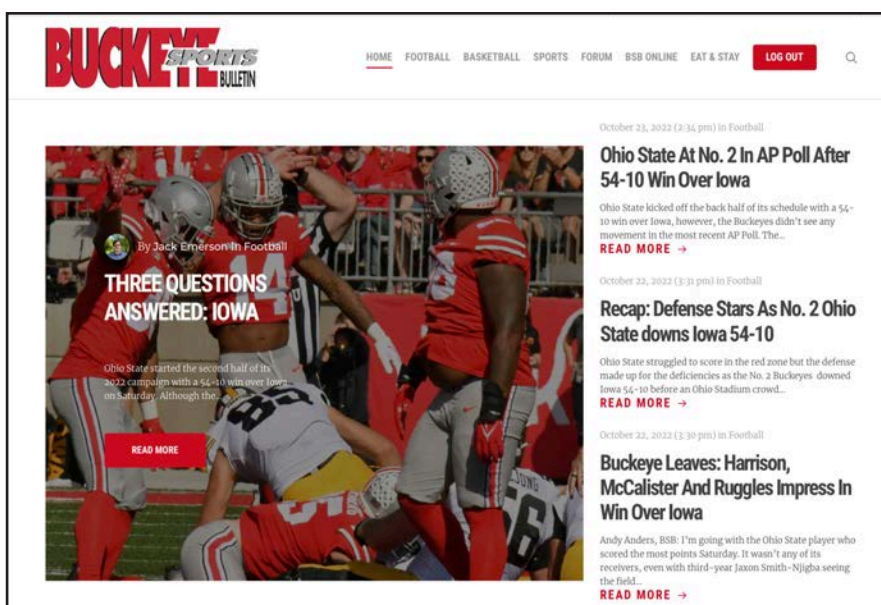


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## OHIO STADIUM

Continued From Page 27

game as 17-point underdogs, first-year Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler was well-schooled in the tendencies of a Woody Hayes team after spending five years on Hayes' staff at Ohio State from 1958-62. As a result, the Wolverines virtually shut off the Buckeyes' vaunted option play, forcing OSU to throw the ball. That played right into Schembechler's hands, and his team picked off six interceptions to aid in a 24-12 victory.

The game was a nip-and-tuck affair with the lead changing hands three times in the first half as the Wolverines clung to a 14-12 lead. But after Barry Pierson returned a punt 60 yards for Michigan midway through the second quarter to set up another touchdown, the Wolverines never looked back. The Buckeyes moved past midfield only once in the second half as the U-M defense was stifling. In addition to his big punt return, Pierson was also the defensive star of the game, grabbing three of his team's six interceptions.

The contest was the opening salvo in what became known as "The Ten-Year War" between Schembechler and Hayes, a decade that only increased the intensity of an Ohio State head coach already obsessed with beating what he called "That School Up North."

To say Hayes was singularly focused on beating Michigan in 1970 would be like saying the Grand Canyon is a hole in the ground. Hayes had a huge rug made with the 1969 score woven into it and had it installed just outside the Buckeyes' locker room. Every day beginning with spring practice, Ohio State players and coaches had "Michigan 24, Ohio State 12" staring them in the face.

By the time the two teams met on Nov. 21, 1970, emotions were at a fever pitch. The Buckeyes were undefeated again, dispatching eight opponents by an average of three touchdowns per game, while the Wolverines were No. 4 in the national rankings with an unblemished 9-0 record.

In front of a nationwide television audience and another Ohio Stadium-record crowd of 87,331, the teams traded field goals for a 3-3 tie early in the second quarter before Kern hit split end Bruce Jankowski for a 26-yard touchdown, giving the Buckeyes a 10-3 advantage at the half.

Michigan threatened to tie the game after a third-quarter touchdown pass from Don Moorhead to Paul Staroba made it 10-9, but Ohio State defender Tim Anderson blocked the extra point and that was as close as the Wolverines got.

Fred Schram booted a 27-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter to widen Ohio State's lead to 13-9, and then linebacker Stan White intercepted Moorhead deep in Michigan territory, setting up a 4-yard touchdown run by tailback Leo Hayden.

Hayden rushed for 117 yards in the game, leading the Buckeyes' offensive attack that ground out 329 total yards. The Wolverines committed three turnovers and were limited to 155 yards in the 20-9 Buckeye win.

The victory put the finishing touches on a perfect 9-0 regular season for Ohio State and served as the final home game for the "Super Sophs," who finished their careers with an unblemished 16-0 record in Ohio Stadium. The 1970 season ended with a 27-17 upset loss to Stanford in the Rose Bowl,

but the Buckeyes still earned national championship honors from the National Football Foundation.

### Tough Act To Follow

With Kern, Brockington, Jankowski and such defensive stalwarts as Stillwagon, Jack Tatum and Mike Sensibaugh exhausting their college eligibilities following the 1970 season, it only stood to reason the Buckeyes would take a step back in 1971, and they did. The season ended in a tie for third place in the Big Ten standings, and the team lost three conference games for the first time in five years.

Former OSU assistant coach and recruiting coordinator Bill Conley, who was a back-up offensive lineman on the 1971 team, told BSB last year that the poor showing wasn't due to a lack of talent.

"We'd had so much success the previous couple of years with those Super Sophs, but we'd lost all those guys to graduation," Conley said. "It wasn't that we didn't still have good players – we certainly did – but those guys had played so much ahead of us the previous three years, we didn't have much experience at a couple of key positions."

"We still had a pretty good season, though. Not up to the standards of what came before us or after us, of course, but none of our losses were by more than seven points. It wasn't like we were getting blown out. The football just didn't bounce our way at times."

Still, the 1971 campaign provided its share of thrills, including the season opener against Iowa on a chilly, rainy afternoon that held down the home crowd to 75,596. Senior Don Lamka had won a four-man preseason battle to succeed Kern as starting quarterback for the Buckeyes, and led the team to a 52-21 victory, the most points scored by OSU against the Hawkeyes since an 83-21 win in 1950.

The team rushed for 402 yards behind fullback John Bledsoe and Lamka, who did their best to make fans forget about Brockington and Kern. Bledsoe carried 27 times for 151 yards and two touchdowns while Lamka had exactly 100 yards and scored four times on 15 attempts. The four rushing touchdowns by Lamka represented a new single-game record for OSU quarterbacks, a mark that remains on the books more than 50 years later.

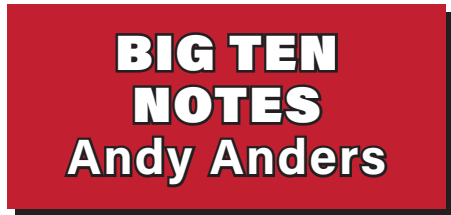
The 1971 season also marked a change in the Ohio Stadium playing surface, a change made possible through a donation from former OSU player Lou Fischer in dedication to teammate Joe Campanella. After playing together for the Buckeyes in the early 1950s, Fischer and Campanella became business partners, sharing ownership in a number of successful drive-in restaurants.

After Campanella died in 1967 at the age of 37 from a heart attack, Fischer promised he would do something to honor his old teammate. He contacted Ohio State officials and donated the funds necessary to change the stadium's surface from grass to Astro-Turf with a plaque in Campanella's memory placed on the southeast corner of the stadium wall.

And although the Buckeyes had dipped to a 6-4 overall record in 1971, their Ohio Stadium crowd average of 84,450 allowed the program to lead the nation in home attendance for the 14th consecutive year.

# Warren Talks Expansion At Basketball Media Days

Big Ten Basketball Media Days took place in Minneapolis on Oct. 11 and 12, and Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren opened up the proceedings by further discussing the conference's addition of UCLA and USC.



Asked about further expansion for the conference, Warren said the biggest thing for the Big Ten right now is the conference's "can't-miss priorities" in regard to adding UCLA and USC.

"One of them is to make sure we flawlessly integrate our new media partners, but the other one is to make sure we flawlessly integrate USC and UCLA into the Big Ten Conference," he said. "In the climate we're in right now in college athletics, you also have to be mindful of expansion. But our priority is just to make sure that we take care of our 14 member institutions now from a basketball standpoint, from a conference standpoint, and that we do everything that we possibly can to make sure we flawlessly integrate UCLA and USC."

The is the first time that Big Ten Basketball Media Days have taken place in Minneapolis, and the conference will return to the city for the upcoming Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament and the following season for the Big Ten Men's Basketball Tournament.

Warren said the conference might also consider hosting these events in Los Angeles moving forward with the Big Ten's expansion into the West Coast.

"Regarding the basketball tournaments, quite naturally we have to look at how that works. We have individuals in our organization now who are working with what those potential tournaments will look like," he said. "I know one thing – they'll be exciting. Now we have the flexibility to have them really anywhere across the country."

Warren also briefly touched on divisions in football and said the conference is still looking at ways to handle it with UCLA and USC set to join the Big Ten.

"We're having meetings on that right now," he said. "The good thing about it we're in this what we're calling an integration phase. We have members of our organization – Kerry Kenny is leading one group, and Diana Sabau, Chad Hawley, Anil Gollahalli – are working on integration. We're being very thoughtful."

## Tuttle To Transfer, Brown Dismissed From Wisconsin

Indiana fifth-year quarterback and team captain Jack Tuttle announced Oct. 18 that he plans to enter the transfer portal. In an unprecedented move, however, coach Tom Allen said he will play the rest of the season for the Hoosiers before using his last year of eligibility elsewhere.

Tuttle – who played at Utah for one season in 2018 before transferring to Indiana – could never emerge as the No. 1 option under cen-

ter for the Hoosiers, and to date in his career in Bloomington he's completed 55.9 percent of his passes (95 of 170) for 819 yards, four touchdowns and six interceptions. He did register four career starts when starters went down with injuries, including one against Ohio State in 2021 after Michael Penix Jr. separated his shoulder. Tuttle finished just 4 of 7 for 41 yards and a touchdown. Tuttle has yet to appear in a game this season.

"(Tuttle) came to me, and we talked it through," Allen said. "We're not used to this kind of thought process necessarily collegiately, but I do think moving forward you will see more of this. It's kind of the reality of the new world we're in with college sports."

Meanwhile, Wisconsin faced its own bit of roster movement after offensive tackle Logan Brown was dismissed from the team Oct. 13 after making three starts this season for the Badgers. Specific details on the grounds for his dismissal have not been made public.

"The reality of what happened is there was an internal incident here within the program and Logan Brown was dismissed from the program," interim Wisconsin coach Jim Leonhard said. "It was not a choice. He was dismissed from our program."

Brown, a five-star recruit in 2019, was the third-highest rated prospect Wisconsin has ever signed according to 247Sports. Prior to the announcement of his dismissal from the team, he tweeted Oct. 12 that he had entered the transfer portal.

## Michigan State Wins Women's Soccer Title

Michigan State's women's soccer team clinched a share of the regular-season Big Ten championship on Oct. 20 by beating Ohio State 1-0, and Northwestern's 2-1 loss to Iowa that same day secured an outright conference title for the Spartans, the first in program history.

Michigan State scored its lone goal with 1:37 remaining in the first half against Ohio State courtesy of forward Lauren DeBeau, who leads the team with 10 goals and also has three assists on the season.

"I'm not sure what to feel," said Spartan head coach Jeff Hosler. "You know, it's certainly surreal. In year one, I thought we did everything and got every possible result that we could. We stacked up 10 wins in our first year here, and to turn that into this, it's unbelievable. This team has stacked up 13 wins with only one loss on the season and won an outright Big Ten title. It's just surreal. I'm proud. I have so much joy for this group. So much love for this group."

"To be able to do something like this in my hometown, to come home and coach at Michigan State, a place that was always a dream for me, it's incredible."

A 1-0 win over Rutgers on Oct. 23 then completed the unbeaten conference season for the Spartans (14-1-3, 9-0-1), who will enter the Big Ten Women's Soccer Tournament as the No. 1 seed. Michigan State will host Minnesota (8-7-3, 4-4-2) in East Lansing on Oct. 30 in one of four quarterfinal games set to be played. The semifinals and finals will be played Nov. 3 and 6, respectively, at Lower.com Field in Columbus.

## Nebraska Volleyball On 11-Game Win Streak

The Nebraska women's volleyball team has been unstoppable over the past month. As BSB went to press, the Cornhuskers had not dropped a match since Sept. 13 and have since rattled off 11 straight victories through Oct. 22 to improve their record to 18-1 (10-1 in Big Ten) on the season.

Five ranked wins are scattered among the 11 victories, with Nebraska knocking off then-No. 7 Ohio State, No. 12 Purdue, No. 13 Kentucky, No. 14 Penn State and No. 24 Michigan. Perhaps equally impressive is that the Cornhuskers haven't lost a set since their match against Maryland on Oct. 2, winning 19 in a row since dropping their third set against the Terrapins during a 3-1 match victory.

Following his team's 10th straight win, Nebraska coach John Cook was still critical of his team's performance. The Cornhuskers still hold just a one-match lead over Ohio State (13-5, 9-1) and Wisconsin (15-3, 9-1) in the Big Ten volleyball standings.

"We won 3-0 at Purdue (on Oct. 19) but we had several breakdowns," Cook said. "(Our video session) was showing them several great plays that they made, but also showing them here is about six points that we just gave away. We've got to be better as we go down the stretch here."

Setter Nicklin Hames broke the school's career mark for assists during Nebraska's match against Illinois on Oct. 22, picking up 20 during the action to put her total at 4,835 during a five-year career in Lincoln. The previous record was 4,824, held by Fiona Nepo.

## Boeheim Takes Shot At Big Ten Basketball

Syracuse men's basketball coach Jim Boeheim, who's been at the helm of the Orange since 1976, had some critical words for the Big Ten conference while talking about his own team's goal to return to the NCAA Tournament after missing the dance last season.

"You can say what you want about the Big Ten. They sucked in the tournament," Boeheim said Oct. 14. "To me, that's what they did. All of their wins were in their league. If you can't play in the (NCAA) tournament, then you're not good."

The ACC, the home of Syracuse as well as several other basketball powerhouses, produced two Final Four teams in Duke and North Carolina last season, and Miami (Fla.) also made the Elite Eight. Not one of the nine Big Ten teams in last year's tournament made it out of the Sweet 16, with Michigan and Purdue losing in that round. Purdue, a three-seed, fell victim to 15th-seeded St. Peter's.

# BIG 2022 Standings

East Division	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	4	0	1.000	7	0	1.000
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>
Penn State	3	1	0.750	6	1	0.857
Maryland	3	2	0.600	6	2	0.750
Rutgers	1	3	0.250	4	3	0.571
Michigan State	1	3	0.250	3	4	0.429
Indiana	1	4	0.200	3	5	0.375

West Division	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Illinois	3	1	0.750	6	1	0.857
Purdue	3	2	0.600	5	3	0.625
Nebraska	2	2	0.500	3	4	0.429
Wisconsin	2	3	0.400	4	4	0.500
Minnesota	1	3	0.250	4	3	0.571
Iowa	1	3	0.250	3	4	0.429
Northwestern	1	3	0.250	1	6	0.143

**Oct. 15 Games**  
 Purdue 43, Nebraska 37  
 Michigan State 34, Wisconsin 28 (2OT)  
 Michigan 41, Penn State 17  
 Illinois 26, Minnesota 14  
 Maryland 38, Indiana 33

**Oct. 22 Games**  
**Ohio State 54**, Iowa 10  
 Rutgers 24, Indiana 17  
 Wisconsin 35, Purdue 24  
 Maryland 31, Northwestern 24  
 Penn State 45, Minnesota 17

**Oct. 29 Games**  
**Ohio State** at Penn State, noon  
 Rutgers at Minnesota, 2:30 p.m.  
 Illinois at Nebraska, 3:30 p.m.  
 Northwestern at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.  
 Michigan State at Michigan, 7:30 p.m.

Michigan did go farther than any ACC team in the 2021 NCAA Tournament, making an Elite Eight run, though the Wolverines were the only Big Ten squad to reach the Sweet 16 that season. Syracuse and Florida State both made it to that round that year, losing to Houston and Michigan, respectively.

The Big Ten and ACC compete yearly in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge during the regular season. One team from each conference matches up with an opponent from the other, and the conference with the best record from those matchups wins the challenge. Held since 1999, it's the longest-running inter-conference series in college basketball—the ACC holds a 12-8-3 overall edge, the Big Ten has won each of the past three seasons.

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# OSU Offers Recruits In 2023 And Beyond

Continued From Page 31

rushing offenses in college.

"The Buckeyes also have a great coaching staff that build and develop players to be successful in all areas."

Peoples joins several targets at running back for Ohio State in 2024, including Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star Stacy Gage (5-11, 200) and Cincinnati Moeller four-star Jordan Marshall (5-11, 195), among others.

Taumua hasn't received much national attention, holding offers from only Arizona, Nebraska, Oregon and Utah in addition to Ohio State, but his profile will likely begin rising in the coming weeks and months.

"Impressed at this past summer's ESPN 300 Hawaii Camp, earning Top Performers honors," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Brandon Huffman. "Now, seeing him in pads, you see every bit the elite prospect that he is. He's got tremendous agility and flexibility, a natural knee bender with great body control. (Does) a great job of getting to the second level consistently and opening up holes for his backs. He's also a plus pass-blocker, keeping his quarterback clean during the game."

Taumua – the No. 1 prospect out of Hawaii,

according to 247Sports – has already taken an unofficial visit to Oregon.

Toure, the final 2024 offer, is the No. 201 overall prospect and No. 17 safety in the class, and he holds additional offers from Alabama, Florida State, Kentucky, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Ole Miss, Rutgers and Wisconsin, among others, and he's already taken several unofficial visits to the Scarlet Knights, as well as a trip to the Buckeyes for their 54-10 win over Iowa.

He's a versatile player for Irvington, lining up in the secondary as well as near the line of scrimmage. He has success in coverage due to his range and is also excellent tackling in the open field, and he often finds himself near the ball as well. He's one of several safeties already offered by Ohio State in the class, including Buford, Ga., five-star KJ Bolden; Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star Peyton Woodyard (6-2, 188); Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star Zaquan Patterson (6-0, 185); and Rockledge, Fla., four-star Jaylen Heyward (6-0, 180), among others.

The final offer sent out by Ohio State was to Leesburg (Ga.) Lee County running back Ousmane Kromah (5-11, 180), a 2025 prospect. Kromah does not have a star rating yet but holds offers from Alabama, Florida State, Georgia,

Kentucky, Michigan State, South Carolina and Tennessee, among others.

In six games this season for Lee County, Kromah rushed for 1,055 yards and 14 touchdowns on 103 carries, averaging 10.2 yards per attempt and 175.8 yards per game. He is also a threat in the passing game, hauling in 12 receptions for 129 yards and two touchdowns. Ohio State's other running back targets in 2025 include Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Jordan Davison (5-11, 210), Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Donovan Johnson (6-0, 190) and Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy's Gideon Davidson (6-0, 193).

## Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State hosted several uncommitted visitors against Iowa, including Texas receiver Hudson in 2023; Mount Pleasant, Mich., three-star offensive lineman Andrew Dennis (6-5, 255), Belle Vernon, Pa., five-star athlete Quinton Martin (6-2, 180), Laguna Beach, Calif., three-star tight end Ryner Swanson (6-4, 230), Garrett Stover and Toure in 2024; and Clayton (Ohio) Northmont four-star wide receiver Dorian Brew (6-2, 175), Buford, Ga., linebacker Mantrez Walker (6-0, 210) and Lewis Center (Ohio) Olen-

tangy athlete Jackson Wiley (6-0, 165) in 2025; and Pickerington (Ohio) North athlete Malachi Taylor (6-1, 165) in 2026, among others.

- In addition to Dijon Johnson, Florida picked up a commitment on Oct. 13 from Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton three-star safety Bryce Thornton (5-10, 185). Thornton is the brother of Ohio State men's basketball freshman point guard Bruce Thornton, though the Buckeyes had not offered Bryce.

- Michigan added a commitment on Oct. 17 from Kansas City (Mo.) Park Hill three-star athlete Kendrick Bell (6-3, 180), who is the younger brother of current Wolverine wide receiver Ronnie Bell. The younger Bell had offers from only UMass, Michigan and Northern Iowa.

- At time of press, Ohio State had the No. 5 recruiting class in 2023, according to the 247Sports Composite. The Buckeyes have a team score of 285.20, trailing No. 4 Oklahoma (285.70), No. 3 Notre Dame (289.34), No. 2 Georgia (292.84) and No. 1 Alabama (310.10).

*For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers daily.*

## ASK AN ANALYST

With Garrick Hodge of Eleven Warriors

**How much does the commitment from 2024 New Palestine, Ind., four-star offensive lineman Ian Moore (6-5, 295) help first-year offensive line coach Justin Frye build momentum on the recruiting trail?**

"It definitely gives him a feather in the cap, for sure, landing a big fish. One of the criticisms, fair or otherwise, of his predecessor (Greg Studrawa) was that he couldn't land a top-100 offensive lineman very often unless they were from the state of Ohio. Ian Moore, obviously, is not that far away, being from Indiana. But, nevertheless, he landed a big fish pretty quickly in his tenure here without even completing his first season as an offensive line coach.

"The other commitments he landed, Findlay, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Luke Montgomery (6-5, 280) and Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East four-star interior offensive lineman Austin Siereveld (6-5, 320), are obviously great guys to get, and it was good that he connected with them so quickly but, again, they are also guys that are right in your back yard.

"Then his third commitment before Moore, Greenwich, Conn., three-star offensive tackle Miles Walker (6-6, 285), I think he's going to turn into a pretty good player, but he's also one of those guys that are very undervalued at the moment and is kind of what some might call a developmental project, especially because of how much he's seen his body transform over the last nine months or so. If (Studrawa), for lack of a better term, would have landed him, fans might have been like, 'Oh, great, another developmental project.'

"But Ian Moore is a legit prospect that is probably going to stay in the top 100 throughout his entire high school career in the recruiting rankings. Another thing that Frye's predecessor lacked was recruiting true tackles. I think Moore can definitely play tackle if needed."

**Philadelphia Roman Catholic four-star wide receiver Tyseer Denmark (5-11, 180) will announce his college decision on Nov. 24. Where does Ohio State stand with Denmark, and how important would his addition be to the 2024 class?**

"Obviously, he kind of set the six schools that were standing out to him when he made his announcement that he was going to commit on his mom's birthday, Nov. 24. But of those six, I probably tend to think that Ohio State and Penn State are probably in the best position here.

"I talked to Tyseer a couple of times in the summer, and the

guy just lights up every time he talked about Ohio State. He said that he really wants to come up for the Michigan game, but that is two days after his commitment. I'm just going to go out on a limb and say he will be there if he's committed to Ohio State and he will not if he doesn't. He has been to Penn State more than he's been anywhere else, and I think that's just more of a proximity-to-home thing than anything else because he's a Philly guy. But he's visited Ohio State, both in April and June. Even if he doesn't take a gameday visit this fall, I don't think that's an indicator that Ohio State's out.

"It will probably come down to a combination of what his comfort level is with Ohio State, going maybe a little further from home than he would at Penn State, and if Brian Hartline really envisions Tyseer as a guy that he needs for this class, because obviously they have a lot of other options even though they have no commitments on the board, but they're in the hunt for some pretty big fish.

"Of course, Hartline thinks the world of Tyseer. Otherwise he wouldn't have given him an offer. But they've offered more receivers than they can take at the moment, so you've got to be selective somewhere. It will be up to Ohio State to find what wide receivers they want to add to this class. If they view Tyseer as one of them, I think they have a great shot of getting them in the class, but we'll see how it plays out."

**Ohio State recently offered Irvington (N.J.) four-star safety Adon Shuler (6-0, 197), who is committed to Notre Dame, and has continued to recruit Alabama commit and Hoschton, Ga., five-star safety Caleb Downs. How likely are the Buckeyes to flip either of them, and how committed are they to getting another safety in the 2023 class?**

"I think they'd like another one, for sure. They've always wanted four. I guess it's that nice number. I don't think they would have offered (Shuler) if they don't think they had at least a puncher's chance of flipping him. From what I can tell, at least, he's making the rounds and saying that he's locked in with Notre Dame, which, of course, what else are you going to say? So who knows entirely? I think if he ends up visiting in the next couple of weeks, that will be a pretty big indicator of how highly he's considering Ohio State's offer.

"They are still very much trying to get Caleb Downs to flip. Will that be successful? The betting favorite would say no at the moment, but you can't rule it out. Ryan Day and Perry Eliano did

go to that big-time Mill Creek-Buford game in Georgia (on Oct. 14). But Downs wasn't the only guy they were there to see – there were probably 10 other players on that field that were Ohio State caliber. There were a lot of evaluations and a lot of due diligence going on that night in addition to Caleb. But I know that they're for sure trying to get him on campus for the Michigan game. Will it happen? Who knows? But if it does, they've at least got a shot. But again, the betting favorites? Probably not at the moment.

"Going back to betting lines, I would say that the favorite is that they don't come to Ohio State. But Ohio State does have a chance with both of them, absolutely."

**Recruits have been able to take in half a season of Jim Knowles' defense for Ohio State. What has been the reaction to the defense and to Knowles from prospects you've spoken to?**

"They definitely take Ohio State a lot more seriously, that's for sure. Jim Knowles is involved with recruiting, but he's also not in an interesting way. When a recruit comes to campus, and if it's a priority recruit, of course he's going to meet Jim Knowles. And Jim Knowles takes some visits out on the recruiting trail – he took a couple last week on the off week and will make some in the spring and will zero in on the prospects he really wants to see – but a lot of linebackers, they'll start communicating with Ohio State through the graduate assistants, the analysts and all that stuff. So Jim Knowles will be a little less hands-on than typical other assistant coaches would be for Ohio State in regards to recruiting.

"But from a schematic standpoint, especially if you're a safety, I think it's impossible to not notice how effective that system is for you. I won't say exactly who, but there was one recruit that told me privately that he was considering Ohio State a lot more this year than he ever did last year because the scheme is just so much more structured.

"Jim Knowles is a 'mad scientist,' as some people call him. Ryan Day touched on it on (Oct. 18) too. It's not just my words – I think that they're hearing greater feedback from the recruits themselves that were a little skeptical of what this defense could be especially given the on-field production over the last couple of years under different regimes. But, so far, being ranked as a top-10 defense statistically, I think they've kind of put their money where their mouth is, and it's definitely made their lives a lot easier on the recruiting trail."



# Nonconference Slate Offers Early Challenge

Over the last several seasons, the non-conference schedule for the Ohio State women's basketball team has provided little in the way of challenge for the Buckeyes. Since an 11-point loss to Connecticut on Nov. 24, 2019, the highlights of Ohio State's nonleague slate have been Cincinnati, San Diego State and Syracuse – all unranked opponents – who were all on last season's schedule.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

That changes this year. Ohio State begins the season at home against Tennessee and then will take to the road to face Boston College and Louisville before participating in the San Diego Invitational at the end of December, with the chance to take on South Florida as well as either Arkansas or Oregon.

Out of those teams, several – including No. 5 Tennessee, No. 7 Louisville and No. 20 Oregon – were in the preseason AP top 25, signaling a return to a potentially challenging early part of the season for the Buckeyes.

"We really ramped up the nonconference schedule," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "It's as challenging as it's been in several years. Traditionally, over the course of my tenure here, we have played difficult nonconference schedules but really kind of got back to it this year."

"I believe in the team, and I wanted to challenge them as much as we could in the nonconference to really find out where we are and prepare ourselves for the Big Ten. Also, you look at – hopefully we do enough to be in postseason play – the positive ramifications of playing a schedule like this, which hopefully pays dividends when you come to March."

That schedule begins with the home opener against the Volunteers, set for 8:30 p.m. on the Big Ten Network on Nov. 8. Tennessee finished 25-9 last season, third in the SEC behind LSU (25-5), which Ohio State knocked out in the round of 32 in last season's NCAA tournament, and South Carolina (29-2), which went on to win the national championship.

McGuff said that the quality of opponent to open the season puts an emphasis on the team's preparation to begin the season.

"When we get a little closer, I do think that it will take on a bit of a life of its own in terms of the sense of urgency in making sure that we're prepared for such a formidable opponent on day one," he said. "Hopefully with enough people back that we will be prepared, and we have a long way to go for that."

"That's going to be a huge challenge because they're one of the most talented teams in the country and they play really hard and they're well coached. But I do think it will ramp up the urgency when you get a bit closer to it."

Senior guard Jacy Sheldon said the

game against the Volunteers helps to build anticipation for the beginning of the season.

"Our focus is always the same here in these first couple of weeks: get better every day, go at it every day," she said. "Obviously it's a big game, so that just builds excitement there."

The contest could also be a boon for Ohio State's attendance, which was just seventh in the conference last season (and 29th nationally) with 3,274 fans per game, though this statistic includes Ohio State's lone game at the Covelli Center that drew 2,315 fans. That average trails Michigan (3,676), Michigan State (3,755), Nebraska (4,489), Indiana (4,726), Maryland (5,083) and Iowa (8,224) in the conference. The national leader was South Carolina, which averaged 12,268 fans per contest, the only team in the country to average more than 10,000 fans per game.

"I would challenge anybody in Columbus that, if you enjoy basketball – I'm not going to make any predictions on a score or anything like that – but I think if you're going to come out, you're going to enjoy the game," McGuff said. "It's going to be two really good teams with a lot of talent trying to start their seasons the right way. It should be a very exciting game."

"I think that we owe it to the young women in our program and at Tennessee to make sure we have a great environment here and put on a great show."

## Ohio State 14th In AP Top 25 Poll

After earning a share of the Big Ten regular-season title and making a trip to the Sweet 16 last season, Ohio State was held in high regard by The Associated Press in its preseason poll.

The Buckeyes slotted in as the No. 14 team in the country according to the AP, the same ranking as the final poll for last season. It's the ninth consecutive appearance for Ohio State in the AP top 25, dating back

## OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2023 who have verbally committed to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the ESPN rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Faith Carson	C	6-4	NA	Buchanan, Mich.
Diana Collins	PG	5-9	★★★★	Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood

to the poll released Jan. 24.

Ohio State was one of six Big Ten teams in the initial rankings, landing on the poll alongside No. 4 Iowa – which it shared the conference title with last season – No. 11 Indiana, No. 17 Maryland, No. 22 Nebraska and No. 25 Michigan. The Big Ten had the most teams in the poll with six, followed by the ACC with five, the Big 12 with four and the Pac-12 and SEC with three each.

The defending national champions in South Carolina were voted the unanimous No. 1 team in the country after holding the top spot for all of last season. No. 2 Stanford, No. 3 Texas, No. 4 Iowa and No. 5 Tennessee round out the top five, with No. 6 Connecticut, No. 7 Louisville, No. 8 Iowa State, No. 9 Notre Dame and No. 10 North Carolina State filling out the top 10.

Ohio State also received high marks from the preseason conference polls, with the coaches picking the Buckeyes to finish second in the conference and the media voting Ohio State third.

## Mikesell Named To Preseason Watch List

Senior guard Taylor Mikesell was named to the preseason watch list for the Ann Meyers-Drysdale Award that recognizes the top shooting guard in women's college basketball. She was one of 20 players recognized, including Sara Scalia (Indiana), Diamond Miller (Maryland), Leigha Brown (Michigan) and Jaz Shelley (Nebraska), among others.

Mikesell was one of five finalists for the award last season after she averaged 18.6 points per game on 48.2-percent shooting from the field, including 47.5 percent from

beyond the arc, which ranked second in the country and first among Power Five players.

This recognition is in addition to preseason honors from the Big Ten. Mikesell was a unanimous choice to the preseason All-Big Ten team by the coaches and was also selected to the media's preseason team.

## McGuff, Players Appear At BIG Media Days

McGuff, Mikesell and Sheldon were Ohio State's representatives at Big Ten Basketball Media Days in Minneapolis from Oct. 11-12 to offer a brief preview of the upcoming season, especially as it relates to conference play.

"The Big Ten Conference is going to be, once again, one of the best conferences in the country for women's basketball," McGuff said. "With the amount of great players that have returned as well as the coaching, it will be as competitive as ever. I think it will be one of the most exciting years in history."

Sheldon echoed McGuff's comments and said the Big Ten is "a really great conference" but that Ohio State has the ability to compete and defend the regular-season conference title.

"There are a lot of great teams, but I think what makes us a little different, a little special, is that we have a lot of guards who can do a lot of different things and are very versatile," she said. "I think every player on our roster can shoot it a little bit. We have a great connection between our guards and definitely have a four-guard look – no secret there. That works in our benefit, especially with the pace we want to play at."



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## 2022-23 Ohio State Men's Basketball Projected Starting Lineup

<p><b>2 • Bruce Thornton • G</b> Ht./Wt.: 6-2, 215 • Class: Fr.</p>  <p>Thornton made the Georgia All-State team each of the last three years. He was named the Gatorade Player of the Year in the state following his senior season.</p>	<p><b>4 • Sean McNeil • G</b> Ht./Wt.: 6-4, 205 • Class: GR-Sr.</p>  <p>McNeil served as West Virginia's primary scoring option on the perimeter the last three seasons, hitting 36.8 percent of threes as a Mountaineer.</p>	<p><b>13 • Isaac Likekele • G</b> Ht./Wt.: 6-5, 215 • Class: GR-Sr.</p>  <p>Likekele was a versatile presence for Oklahoma State, becoming the only player in program history to register at least 1,000 points, 600 rebounds and 400 assists.</p>	<p><b>14 • Justice Sueing • F</b> Ht./Wt.: 6-6, 210 • Class: R-Sr.</p>  <p>Sueing missed all but two games last season due to an abdominal injury. He produced 10.7 points and 5.5 rebounds for the Buckeyes in 2020-21.</p>	<p><b>23 • Zed Key • F</b> Ht./Wt.: 6-8, 255 • Class: Jr.</p>  <p>Key played in 29 games for the Buckeyes last season, leading the team in field goal percentage (min. 50 field goal attempts).</p>
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**game last season)** – As one of the Buckeyes' four returners to the roster, the pressure is on for Key to produce on the court and as a leader for Ohio State in 2022-23.

Key played a significant role in Ohio State's run to the second round last season, serving as a dominant low-post presence for the Buckeyes while complementing the more versatile Liddell and Young in the frontcourt. With Liddell and Young now out of the picture, Key slots in as Ohio State's most reliable presence in the frontcourt while placing an increased focus on emulating the versatility that Liddell and Young showed during their Buckeye careers.

According to Holtmann and Key himself, the native of Bay Shore, N.Y., has worked on his playmaking abilities while also seeking to expand his offensive range to include a reliable midrange and three-point jumper. Key has also placed attention on his conditioning in order to remain available for the Buckeyes in longer stretches this season.

"It has been a big change," Key said. "I'm just working on (conditioning) every day with the coaches and in the weight room, so that's what I've mainly been working on."

While Key is seeking to provide the Buckeyes with more versatility this season, he will also be greatly relied on as a leader for the team. At Big Ten Media Day, Holtmann noted that Key will be a captain for Ohio State this season alongside Sueing and Likekele. In addition to the strides made on the floor, Key emphasized that his leadership qualities will also be imperative for the Buckeyes this season.

"It was tough at first," Key said. "We were an older team last year. Now we have a whole bunch of younger guys coming in that don't really know how college is. They don't really know the ins and outs of the program so they're coming to me and asking questions. I've definitely embraced it and I'm loving it."

According to Holtmann, Key brings an excitable vibe to the locker room and has grown in his leadership role since last season.

"Zed is one of the most likable kids you'll ever be around," Holtmann said. "He spent his first two years kind of being this young kid who's a little bit gregarious and has a lot of fun. Now, he's moving into a role where he's going to have to bring a mature approach every day in order to lead effectively."

**Brice Sensabaugh, 6-6, 235, Fr.** – Although the Buckeyes lost plenty of scoring from the wing after Branham left for the NBA, Holtmann may have seamlessly replaced that loss with another dynamic scorer in freshman Brice Sensabaugh.

Sensabaugh's offensive versatility was on display for Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep during his senior season, in which he produced 25.1 points, 7.2 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game for the Highlanders while helping them to the Florida state semifinals. Sensabaugh's dominant senior campaign allowed him to pick up Florida Gatorade Player

of the Year and Mr. Basketball honors.

Sensabaugh joined the Buckeyes as the No. 19 small forward and No. 65 overall player in the 2022 class.

"He is a natural-born scorer of the ball – he just is – and can do it at an elite level," Holtmann said. "He has to continue to work on other aspects of his game, including his fitness and conditioning, but he has some really natural gifts offensively."

Holtmann has noted throughout the off-season that the freshmen are going to be contributors for the Buckeyes this season, and Sensabaugh echoed that sentiment and said that he's ready for the bright lights of college basketball.

"I'm just ready to do the right thing, and I'm a big listener," he said. "I feel like listening is a skill, and I like to listen a lot and just hear what the coaches have to say and play the game the right way. Wherever that takes me, I'm ready to play wherever. Whatever my role is, I'm looking to fulfill that."

**Owen Spencer, 6-9, 215, Jr. (20 points and 41 rebounds in two seasons at the Citadel)** – After spending the last two seasons playing a deep-bench role for the Citadel, walk-on transfer Owen Spencer joined Ohio State during the summer.

Prior to playing for the Citadel, Spencer was a centerpiece for Cincinnati Turpin High School, becoming a three-time varsity letter winner and serving as a team captain his senior season. In his senior season, Spencer produced 11.0 points, 6.7 rebounds, 1.6 blocks and 1.0 assists for the Spartans.

Now with the Buckeyes, a team that was in need of frontcourt depth, Spencer knows he needs to be ready at any moment to contribute on the court.

"I knew they only had two big men, so I knew it was important that I would always just have to be ready," Spencer said. "A lot of preparation just goes into always staying ready for any opportunity that comes up."

**Justice Sueing, 6-6, 210, R-Sr. (10.7 points per game, 5.5 rebounds per game and 1.5 assists per game in 2020-21)** – A key member of Ohio State's 2020-21 campaign, in which it earned a second seed in the NCAA Tournament, Sueing was sidelined for much of last season while nursing an abdominal injury.

Although he appeared in each of Ohio State's first two games in 2021-22, it was clear that Sueing wasn't at 100 percent when he registered just 12 total points while shooting 38.5 percent from the field and missing all four of his three-point attempts. Now Sueing is back to full health and looking to return to his role as one of the more impactful players for the Buckeyes this season.

"Health-wise, I'm 100 percent," Sueing said at Big Ten Media Day. "I feel better than ever. I feel like nothing was ever wrong with me in the first place."

"As far as conditioning and skill set-wise,

I'm always looking to improve that. There's always things that you can sharpen, tinker with, and get better."

Sueing provides the Buckeyes with a versatile presence both offensively and defensively. The Honolulu native was relied upon in a primary ball-handler and play-making role during the 2020-21 campaign, when Ohio State lacked guard depth due to injury, and also boasts the ability to defend multiple positions when called upon.

Sueing emphasized that he leaned heavily on his support system to get through the tough times of injury rehab.

"It was a dark time, tough time, but during those times I look to God and my family to really help me push through those hurdles in life," Sueing said. "I look at it as a testament to me, just overcoming something that needed to be overcome so that I can get to my end goal."

"Regardless of how long it took, I knew I was going to get back and healthy. I knew I was going to be able to help this team win."

## GUARDS

**Colby Baumann, 6-3, 185, Fr.** – After injuries derailed his senior season of high school basketball, freshman Colby Baumann elected to take a postgraduate year at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy in order to have another season to refine his abilities before entering the college ranks.

Following his prolonged high school career, Baumann opted to join Ohio State as a walk-on on June 13. Baumann's game is aided by tight ball-handling skills, as well as a penchant for the midrange jumper. He also carries a solid catch-and-shoot game, particularly from beyond the arc.

**Eugene Brown III, 6-7, 195, Jr. (3.5 points per game and 2.4 rebounds per game last season)** – After playing a limited role for the Buckeyes in his freshman season, Brown saw his opportunities greatly increase in his sophomore campaign.

Brown's average minutes played per game jumped from 6.2 as a freshman to 17.0 as a sophomore, while he also cracked the starting rotation on 10 occasions during his second season in the program. Although Brown's statistics don't jump off the page, the Conyers, Ga., native provides the Buckeyes with defensive versatility. He can defend both guards and forwards if need be.

"Defense is what I do, it's what I bank on," Brown said. "I feel like expanding that offensive role is going to be a big step for me to help the team out."

Like Key and Sueing, Brown will also be relied on as a leader, primarily due to his experience in the Ohio State program. Brown noted that he's enjoyed being in the newfound leadership role, especially with a young team.

"I love helping others," Brown said. "That's just what I like to do. Always being there for someone is just something I'll do forever."

**Roddy Gayle Jr., 6-4, 205, Fr.** – Slotting in as the most highly-rated prospect among the 2022 freshman class is two-guard Roddy Gayle Jr.

Gayle burst onto the national scene during his first two high school seasons, emerging as one of the best players in New York while at Youngstown (N.Y.) Lewiston-Porter. As a freshman, Gayle scored 22.0 points per game while adding 8.9 rebounds and 3.7 assists. Gayle

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# Transfers Looking For Immediate Impact

Continued From Page 35

pped the ante during his sophomore campaign, producing 25.8 points, 9.0 rebounds, 3.0 assists and 2.3 steals per game. For his efforts across his first two seasons, Gayle was awarded a pair of All-State selections.

Following his two seasons with Lewiston-Porter, Gayle opted to transfer to the nationally-recognized Wasatch Academy in Mt. Pleasant, Utah, during the middle of the 2020-21 season. While there, Gayle took a step back offensively, ceding more output to his teammates – while also enduring a groin injury during his senior season. Despite his injury, Gayle finished his high school career as the No. 2 shooting guard and No. 46 player in the class.

Gayle's unorthodox high school career led him to Columbus, and he said that he's looking to help the Buckeyes in whatever areas he can during his freshman season.

"As a freshman, I just want my role to be whatever the coaches want me to do, honestly," Gayle said. "I feel like I'm versatile enough to be able to do whatever they want offensively and defensively. That's really all I can do, just control what I can control."

**Bowen Hardman, 6-3, 175, Fr.** – Though Ohio State lost its sharpshooter in Ahrens during the offseason, freshman Bowen Hardman is expected to pick up that moniker during his Buckeye career.

However, Hardman's career will be on pause this season as the Cincinnati native is expected to redshirt. While with Cincinnati Princeton High School, Hardman elevated himself to a three-star recruit and ranked as the No. 310 player in the country.

As a senior, Hardman averaged 10.5 points while shooting 35.0 percent in 10 games while hampered by injury.

**Tanner Holden, 6-6, 200, Sr. (20.1 points per game, 7.1 rebounds per game and 2.6 assists per game in 2021-22 with Wright State)** – After the Buckeyes lost their top two scorers in Liddell and Branham during the

offseason, Holtmann turned to the transfer portal in order to fill scoring holes within his team.

In Holden, Holtmann got one of the nation's best scorers from a season ago. His 20.1 points per game was tied for 14th in the country. Holden shot 49.7 percent from the field and 34.1 from beyond the arc, while also showcasing his ability to get to the foul line, shooting the second-most free throws in the country last season. The biggest moment of his Wright State career came in the First Four of the 2022 NCAA Tournament, when he produced 37 points and 11 rebounds en route to a win over Bryant.

Although Holden has built up a reputation as a scorer, he noted that he'll play a much different role for the Buckeyes.

"I'm not going to score 20 a game," Holden said. "I was happy to do it last year. That was a big accomplishment for me. Overall, I knew I wasn't going to be able to just step into that role and just score 20 a game. Not a lot of people can do that. E.J. (Liddell) was able to score 19 a game last year, and he's a great player."

"We have a lot of great players here this year," he continued. "We're going to be able to spread the wealth, and a lot of people are going to be able to have good games and show out this season."

Holden also provides the Buckeyes with durability. He did not miss a single game during his Wright State career, appearing in 92 contests for the Raiders. Holden recognizes the importance that his time at Wright State had on his basketball career as a whole.

"I feel like I needed that next level of competition," Holden said. "The Horizon League, Wright State, they helped me advance my game. It's crazy how much I evolved from my freshman year to my junior year. That's all credit to (Wright State head coach Scott Nagy), (assistant coach Clint Sargent), and all the players there for helping me out."

"When I entered my name in the portal, there were a lot of things that went into it. I went back for a whole week and talked to my

family about it. Overall, I just felt that this was the best decision for me, and being able to land at Ohio State was awesome."

**Isaac Likekele, 6-5, 215, Grad. (7.1 points per game, 5.5 rebounds per game, 3.4 assists per game in 2021-22 with Oklahoma State)** – While Holtmann has emphasized that this version of the Buckeyes carries plenty of versatility, Likekele may just be the most versatile member of the bunch.

During his four-year career at Oklahoma State, Likekele emerged as the only player in program history to produce more than 1,000 points, 600 rebounds and 400 assists for the Cowboys. Likekele posted averages of 8.9 points, 5.5 rebounds, 3.9 assists and 1.4 steals per game in the Orange and Black.

Standing 6-5, Likekele also gives the Buckeyes some length on the perimeter and positional versatility. Holtmann noted that he believes Likekele can defend 1-5, in certain situations, and may even be used as a frontcourt player in small-ball lineups. When it comes to where he thinks he'll slot in for the Buckeyes on the court, Likekele noted that it doesn't matter to him as long as Ohio State succeeds.

"Off the ball or on the ball, I don't really care," Likekele said. "Honestly, I just like winning. I know at different times, it's going to be more on the ball or off the ball just based on how the flow of the game is going and how I'm playing, different things like that. You never know, each night, for a guy like me. But I completely trust the staff to make the right decisions in how this team is going to best use me in order for us to win."

Although Likekele has been with the Buckeyes only since the summer, he has already left an impression on his teammates. As Holtmann mentioned at Big Ten Media Day, Likekele was the only non-returning player to be named a team captain. His fellow captain Key noted that Likekele was a natural leader from the moment he arrived in Columbus.

"It definitely helps because we have Isaac, who's vocal in practice and guys go to him," Kev said. "Even though he hasn't been here,

he's definitely a leader. You just see it in the way he presents himself"

**Sean McNeil, 6-4, 205, Grad. (12.2 points per game, 2.5 rebounds per game, 1.4 assists per game in 2021-22 with West Virginia)** – While the addition of Hardman was the more long-term solution for the loss of Ahrens, McNeil is expected to carry the sharpshooting role for the Buckeyes in 2022-23.

A native of Union, Ky., McNeil opted to attend Sinclair Community College in Dayton out of high school, where he blossomed as one of the best junior college players in the country. During his one season at Sinclair, McNeil produced a nation-best 29.7 points per game while hitting 4.3 threes per game.

After his time at Sinclair, McNeil transferred to West Virginia and moved directly into the sharpshooting role for the Mountaineers. McNeil registered a career three-point percentage of 36.8 during his West Virginia career while hitting 1.7 threes per game. Although McNeil is known as a shooter, Holtmann believes he can carry a bigger role for this team this season.

"Sean is a different player than the guys we've had," Holtmann said. "I think he's looking to expand part of his game, but he also understands that his greatest strength is going to be the fact that he has to be guarded almost all over the floor."

"He's got a game that I think is a little bigger than even what people think," Holtmann said.

As much is made about the toughness of the Big Ten, McNeil learned from the best in that regard: West Virginia head coach Bob Huggins. McNeil said that Huggins instilled a rugged mentality in him that he has been able to carry over to Ohio State.

"I think the biggest thing I bring here is toughness," McNeil said. "That's kind of what Bob Huggins is known for, and that's what I'm excited to bring to this team."

**Bruce Thornton, 6-2, 215, Fr.** – While Holtmann has noted that all four available freshmen are expected to play big roles for the Buckeyes this season, point guard Bruce Thornton may hold the most value as one of the team's primary ball-handlers and playmakers.

Thornton was one of the best high school players in Georgia during his three varsity seasons for Alpharetta Milton. As a sophomore, Thornton was recognized by MaxPreps as a sophomore All-American behind per-game averages of 23.0 points, 7.5 rebounds and 6.1 assists. Thornton's success carried over into his junior season, in which he produced 17.0 points, 9.0 assists and 7.0 rebounds while leading the Eagles to a state championship appearance. As a senior, Thornton was crowned Georgia's Gatorade Player of the Year after averaging 17.2 points, 7.7 rebounds and 7.5 assists.

Even though Thornton is a freshman this season, Holtmann feels that he is ready to take the reins as a key piece for the Buckeyes at point guard.

"I don't know if I've seen a point guard as ready as him," Holtmann said. "He came from a great program and was extremely well-coached. He's got really good habits right now. He's used to winning. I think Bruce is going to be able to help us right away, as much as any freshmen we've coached."



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# Brickey Building On First Season With OSU

After failing to nab Scooter Brickey the first time he was recruited, the Ohio State men's hockey team didn't squander a second chance to add the defenseman to the program. Brickey, a senior from Burtchville, Mich., joined the Buckeyes through the transfer portal this offseason after three seasons at Western Michigan.

"We followed him before he went to college and then, obviously, when he went to the

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

portal we had some background," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik. "We're not sure how things transpired where he was at, but when we talked to him, we knew we were getting a good kid that we wanted."

"We're getting a kid that wanted to play, wanted to develop and was really excited about the opportunity here, and he spent his whole summer going to school here and working out. He showed his commitment to becoming a better player."

Brickey (6-4, 215) played 59 games over three seasons for Western Michigan, getting 10 points (three goals, seven assists). He played only 10 games last season, scoring once under first-year coach Pat Ferschweiler. Brickey decided after the season he needed a change in scenery from Kalamazoo, Mich.

"It wasn't working out, a new coach there," he said. "Whatever happens happens. I was very fortunate to be able to get in (the portal) and get some looks from teams, and I heard about Ohio State. It's pretty close to home. The facilities are like no other in the country, and they did really well here last season. We're going to have a big year, and I wanted to be a part of it."

Brickey has four assists through the first eight games for the No. 16 Buckeyes (6-1-1), but he wasn't brought in for his offense.

"He's just an all-around solid player," Rohlik said. "I don't think he excels in one aspect or another. He's physical. He can skate. He's got skill and he's involved. He's one of those 200-foot defensemen that could give you a lot of minutes."

With his size, Brickey knows he must play physical.

"I'm a two-way player as well," he said. "I like to join the rush, but my main point is blocking shots, getting the puck out of the zone, following up quick on loose pucks and getting my shots through."

Brickey first caught the attention of the

Ohio State staff when he was playing junior hockey in the United State Hockey League.

"We saw him play a lot," Rohlik said. "He goes to Western (Michigan) and all of a sudden you kind of lose track of him. Then you look in the portal and you pull up the notes, 'Here's a kid I liked four years ago,' and so that's kind of how it works."

In choosing where to go, it helped Brickey that Ohio State junior forward Patrick Guzzo is from his hometown.

"He was telling me about Ohio State," Brickey said. "He said the opportunity was like no other so it definitely weighed in my decision to come here."

"It was a tough choice to leave being there for three years. I had great roommates and it was close to home. It was a tough decision, but it was the right one if I want to further my hockey career, which is what I want to do."

He's been a key addition, said sophomore defenseman Cole McWard.

"Our D corps needed a guy to come in and play some big minutes and just be solid on the back end," McWard said. "He's done great so far. We're excited to have him and excited to utilize what he can bring."

The Brickey family has a history of college athletics. His father, Scott, won a hockey national championship at North Dakota and was drafted by the NHL's St. Louis Blues in 1985. His sister, Sydney, was an accomplished hockey player as well but switched sports to play golf at Northern Illinois.

"My sister played defense, and I watched her for many years so I thought I can jump back there," he said. "I ended up doing really well back there. My coach loved having me there. I stayed there the next year and went to juniors and the rest is history."

And, finally, about that first name. Hint: it's not really Scooter.

"My real name is Ronald. I was named after my grandpa," he said. "My middle name is Scott, the same as my dad's. When I was born, my sister – she's five years older than me – was like, 'We can't have two of the same names in the same family,' so she called me Scooter. I've been called Scooter ever since."

He said even his mother, Paige, doesn't call him by his given name as mothers are prone to do when their child does something wrong.

"The only one that's ever called me Ron is my grandpa actually," Brickey said. "He'd call me Ronnie every now and again, but no one else has called me Ron in my life."

### Buckeye Bounce Back

Ohio State went 2-1-1 since the last issue of BSB.

The Buckeyes played an epic scoreless opener at Connecticut on Oct. 14 but fell from

the unbeaten ranks the next night when the Buckeyes lost 6-1 at the No. 17 Huskies to conclude the series at the XL Center in Hartford, Conn.

The Buckeyes returned home Oct. 20 and 21 to down Bentley 9-2 and 3-1 to exact a measure of revenge. A loss at Bentley in last season's first game was critical in the Buckeyes barely missing qualifying for the NCAA tournament based on the PairWise rankings parameters.

At UConn, the first game between unbeaten ended officially in a tie, but the teams at the end held an exhibition shootout that OSU won 1-0 in three rounds. Travis Treloar scored in the second round and sophomore Jakub Dobeš stopped all three shots before 2,850 fans.

That was no surprise because Dobeš made 20 saves in the "real" game for his fourth career shutout. The scoreless tie was the second in Ohio State history and the first since Feb. 27, 2010, vs. Miami (Ohio).

In the rematch, it was 1-1 in the second period, but the Huskies (5-0-1) scored twice in the second to make it 3-1 and added three more in the third in front of a turnout of 2,735. Kamil Sadlocha scored for the Buckeyes.

"We kind of got away from our game and couldn't get it back," Rohlik said. "You can't do that against a top team on the road and expect to get results,"

Sadlocha said he was surprised that the Buckeyes didn't stick to their identity.

"It was a little shocking," he admitted. "I

mean, we have an older team so there's no excuse. When we were down 3-1, everyone wanted to be the hero and we got away from our systems. That can't happen again."

Sadlocha backed his words by leading the Buckeyes with five points (three goals, two assists) in the sweep of Bentley (1-4-0).

It was a true team effort in squashing the Falcons in the series opener as 15 players registered points, including multiple points from seven players. Sadlocha and Jake Wise each scored twice, and Ohio State led 2-0 after the first period and 5-0 midway through the second.

"We're built to score by committee," Rohlik said. "We're going to have success when all four lines are going."

It was more evenly contested in the rematch. The score was tied 1-1 in the third before Guzzo gave Ohio State the lead at 5:48 and Sadlocha's team-best fifth goal of the season made it 3-1 at 17:49.

"Credit to our guys for sticking to it," Rohlik said.

### Next

The Buckeyes return to Big Ten play to complete a four-game homestand by facing top-ranked Minnesota on Oct. 28 (6:30 p.m.) and 29 (5 p.m.).

For a complete recap of the Connecticut and Bentley series, go to the [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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# Ohio State Faces First Test Against Iowa

This was the game the naysayers were waiting for. The game where Ohio State's high-powered offense would meet an impenetrable force in Iowa's defense.

**THE FACTS  
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They remember what happened last time the two teams played, in 2017. Ohio State was riding high, ranked sixth, and fresh off an exhilarating comeback victory over Penn State that wasn't settled until the final moments. They went into Iowa City, ready to take names, and instead got taken to the woodshed. Iowa walked off the field that day exuberant, handing the Buckeyes a 55-24 beating that made Ohio State head coach Ryan Day – then co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach – recall during his most recent meeting with the press denizens, “It's a scar that hasn't gone away. I think about it a lot.”

After feasting on what doubters believe has been a steady diet of so many cupcakes that Hostess would be proud, the Buckeyes were finally going to go up against a defense with teeth. That same defense took Michigan out of its comfort zone and held the Wolverines to 27 points, their lowest total of the season to this point.

Lo and behold, some of that came true.

The normally machine-like Ohio State offense appeared to have a few gears stuck, settling for red-zone field goals instead of touchdowns. Ohio State came into the game as the nation's most proficient red-zone scoring team, finishing 100 percent of its trips inside the 20-yard line with points. Most of those had been touchdowns – 27 of 29 journeys – so getting stoned three times was out of character and possibly reason to worry.

Clinging to just a 19-10 lead with time winding down before half, the Buckeyes looked to indeed be in a fight that was going to go to the end. Then a funny thing happened – their own defense made a play that turned the game around, and Iowa was left wondering about the license plate number of the truck it was run over by.

Ohio State's defense ended the day with six takeaways, five sacks and a third-down conversion rate by Iowa that was so small you need a magnifying glass to read it – just 1 of 13. Add to that its success rate on fourth-down conversions and the Hawkeyes were a pathetic 2 of 17 on plays to convert a first down.

Tommy Eichenberg's 13-yard pick-six changed momentum and gave Ohio State a 26-10 lead into the locker room and fueled a third quarter that saw the Buckeyes score a pair of touchdowns in the manner to which they are more accustomed – with efficient offense.

The Buckeyes finished with a season-low 360 yards of offense, though some of that can be chalked up to having minimal real estate to navigate. Ohio State had possessions that began at Iowa's 29-, 27-, 34-, 32-, 15- and 40-yard lines. There were another

couple of drives that opened at OSU's 45-yard line and one that started at its own 44-yard line, too. So the big explosive plays from long field position that are normally available just weren't there in abundance against the Hawkeyes.

Ohio State did throw in a big play, just for kicks, when quarterback C.J. Stroud hit wideout Julian Fleming in stride on a pretty deep pass, resulting in a 79-yard touchdown.

It was an odd game, with very little flow early on. But once the Buckeyes found their higher gears, they never took their foot off the accelerator.

“It's an interesting game when you start off with the ball in plus territory,” Day said. “When you look up at the end of the game, you'd think the score would be different, but it was a very, very good job up front to take away so many things in the middle and force you to really throw the ball. We didn't do as good of a job of executing running the ball early on, but we knew that it was going to take time to crack it with just the way that they are. I thought we played really good football there in the second half and got a good balance going.”

Day touched on the problems in the ground game, and they were enough to give the coaching staff plenty to work on as the Buckeyes get ready for a trip to Happy Valley to face a defensive-minded Penn State squad.

Ohio State had just 66 rushing yards on 30 carries, with a long run of just 13 yards. Some of it was subpar play from the Buckeyes' usually stellar offensive line, some of it was Iowa's attention to detail and some of it was just guys making plays.

“We have to go figure out how to run the ball better,” Day said.

Whatever it was, it will need to be fixed because even though Iowa plays its scheme as well as any team in America, it is a notch below the Buckeyes when it comes to athletes. That's not the case for Penn State, which recruits toe-to-toe with Ohio State and wins its share of battles. The Nittany Lions have one of the league's best secondaries and like to play aggressive with their front seven.

So Ohio State could be up for another test, but it won't be as fortunate next time around if the offense stagnates, because Penn State has some actual offensive playmakers. Day knows there's work to be done, and he hopes the Buckeyes can put this one in the memory bank and look forward to the next test.

“The challenges are going to get bigger and bigger,” he said. “We need to be balanced across the board. We need complementary football, we need special teams, we need everything. There's still a lot to improve on and a lot to grow from.”

Some national talking heads said that Ohio State “struggled” with the Hawkeyes. If they did, it was only momentary. And it speaks to just how good the Buckeyes are that a “struggle” results in a 44-point victory and the most points ever put on a Kirk Ferentz-coached team.

## Iowa Offense A Blast From Past

To call Iowa's offense pedestrian would be an affront to all walkers. It's slower than that, and less effective.

The Hawkeyes entered the game scoring just 14.7 per contest and four times this season had scored 14 points or fewer in a game. It's not just that Iowa isn't scoring – it barely moves the football.

Whether play design, poor execution or subpar athletes, the Iowa offense has been bad going on nearly three years now. It finished 121st in yards per play last year (4.7) and is even worse this season, checking in at 130th (3.9) out of 131 teams. The last time Iowa finished in the national top 60 in yards per play was 2015. Since then it has finished below 100th four times –most of those coming, maybe not coincidentally, while Brian Ferentz was coordinating the offense.

There has been a ton of talk-radio chatter in Iowa City and surrounding areas about whether the younger Ferentz is failing the program and his father, as his ideas seem predicated on straight-ahead, vanilla, smash-mouth football in an era where motion and schemes and formations make all the difference.

The problems were brought up in Kirk's weekly press meeting, and he got a bit defensive about it – understandable since people have been piling on his son.

“Nobody does everything perfect,” the head coach said. “I've never been in that situation. Certainly, you don't always play perfect or coach perfect, but I think we have a good offensive staff, we've got good leadership and we're going to keep pushing forward.”

Kirk Ferentz has no doubt forgotten more about football than most people will know and has had Iowa to a level that no one outside of Hayden Fry could reach consistently. So he has earned some leeway.

However, you have to wonder what might happen to the Hawkeye program if Kirk sits by idly while his son continues to have difficulty putting together an offense that looks remotely modern or effective.

“I answered that question two weeks ago,” Kirk said. “I've never done that (replaced a coordinator midseason) in my career, and I don't plan on starting right now. Our approach has always been to address what's out there and see what we can do to improve, and it's been pretty consistent for almost 24 years now. That's the plan moving forward. It's been fairly successful.”

Maybe if you take out the last seven or so years, Kirk. For their part, Ohio State doesn't care how lethal or anemic the opposing offense might be.

“We don't discriminate,” coordinator Jim Knowles said. “It's whoever you're going up against, that's who you have to stop. It's definitely a mentality that I've been preaching to the guys and they're buying in. It doesn't matter what the score is, who we're playing. Are we going to operate with a mentality of going out there and stopping them every time? If we're playing with that kind of mentality and their offense is struggling, you see us rise up. The time's going to come when we're going to need that mentality when the game is close.”

## Better Late Than Never

A number of Ohio State fans have labeled senior defensive end Zach Harrison a bust. He came to Ohio State as a five-star product from nearby Olentangy Orange High School in 2019 but has not yet reached the

heights of celebrated pass rushers Joey and Nick Bosa or Chase Young. He has flashed ability at times but never consistently put it together.

So it was nice to see him making an impact against the Hawkeyes in a spotlight game. His stat line didn't jump off the page – two tackles, both for loss, a sack and a hurry – but look a little deeper and you'll see that he forced a fumble and tipped a pass, and he was a general nuisance to Iowa's under-achieving offensive line.

Harrison is a favorite with the coaching staff, and with good reason. He was one of the first players Day recruited upon being hired, and one event made him believe that Harrison was never going to set foot on campus.

“Zach was one of the first recruits for me, and Larry (Johnson), we went into the home and I'll tell a quick funny story about that,” Day recounted. “I wasn't sure how it was going to go in recruiting – I'd just been named the head coach and Larry and I went into the home. Tracy and the (Harrison) family were there and (we) went through the home visit and I gave him a Buckeye at the end. And I said, ‘This is a Buckeye, I want you to have this.’ And he looks at me, looks at it, he says, ‘You know, Buckeyes are poisonous, Coach.’ I walked out, and I said to Larry, ‘We ain't getting Zach, Larry.’”

## Dandy Dozen

We've reached the point in the football season when there is little margin for error, when even a narrow loss can put a team behind the eight ball in its quest for a College Football Playoff berth. The committee will unveil its first set of rankings very soon (Nov. 2, to be precise), which will give us a decent starting point for which teams will make it in.

Until that time, the best rankings to depend on are mine. So without any further delay, here is the latest version of the Dandy Dozen. These rankings are a combination of on-field play and résumé, so they won't necessarily look only like the computer models or only like the AP poll.

1. Ohio State (7-0)
2. Tennessee (7-0)
3. Georgia (7-0)
4. Michigan (7-0)
5. Clemson (8-0)
6. Alabama (7-1)
7. TCU (7-0)
8. Oregon (6-1)
9. USC (6-1)
10. Oklahoma State (6-1)
11. LSU (6-2)
12. Penn State (6-1)

A number of big games are coming up, including one of Georgia or Tennessee falling from the unbeaten ranks on Nov. 5 and Ohio State and Michigan facing off for Big Ten supremacy on Nov. 26.

We are hitting the homestretch of the season, when the calendar changes and the weather gets a bit cooler. It's my favorite time of the year, and this stretch run is my favorite time of the season. Where Ohio State will eventually fit in is anyone's guess, but based on what is known at this moment it's a good bet the Buckeyes will have a seat at the College Football Playoff table.



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