

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 43, No. 22

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

June 2024

## A TIME LIKE NO OTHER

### Future Of College Athletics Unclear As Transfer Portal Rolls On

By **PATRICK ENGELS & GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writers

Just nine days after suffering a gut-wrenching third straight loss to Michigan that all but knocked the program out of College Football Playoff contention and catapulted the Wolverines to an eventual national title, Ohio State and its fans woke up to yet another significant body blow.

Unlike The Game, however, this loss did not come by way of the gridiron. Instead, it derived from an online database, which allowed last season's starting Buckeye quarterback, Kyle McCord, to enter the transfer portal in the early hours of Dec. 4, 2023, and continue his collegiate career elsewhere after three seasons with the program.

McCord's sudden transfer sent shockwaves through the college football landscape that day, with many left wondering how the starting quarterback of a major college football powerhouse could leave for another opportunity just over a week after battling it out with his teammates in the biggest game of the season.

But for McCord himself, the decision to leave was clear. After some blunt conversations with Buckeye brass, he felt he would be better off ending his three-year relationship with the Scarlet and Gray and playing for another team in 2024.

It was a potentially life-changing decision for McCord that was made possible due to current NCAA transfer rules that allow players to enter the portal as soon as the window opens – this offseason's fall/winter window beginning on Dec. 4 – and be granted immediate eligibility once they commit to another program.

"We lost The Game, and we were kind of in the same situation we were in (last year),"



Will Howard



Quinshon Judkins



Caleb Downs



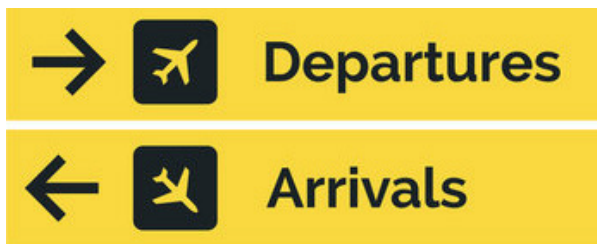
Julian Fleming



Kyle McCord



Chip Trayanum



### The Transfer Portal Issue

- Top Football Transfers – page 14
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- Top Men's Basketball Transfers – page 24

**FUTURE IS NOW** – With the implementation of relaxed rules regarding the transfer portal, Ohio State has welcomed valuable additions such as Will Howard, Quinshon Judkins and Caleb Downs – who are all expected to contribute this year in their first season with the Buckeyes – while bidding farewell to such impactful Buckeyes such as Kyle McCord, Chip Trayanum and Julian Fleming.

McCord said earlier this spring. "We didn't get into the playoff, and then we started quickly having conversations about what the future was going to look like. That's just the reality

of college football now, is everything moves so fast with the transfer portal window opening right after the season."

McCord's sudden transfer is just one of several in the sport and across college athletics this year that helped define arguably the most chaotic year of player movement in the transfer portal's short three-year history.

At Ohio State alone, a combined 25 players transferred away during the fall/winter and spring portal windows, including a pair of key 2023 offensive contributors – wide receiver Julian Fleming and running back Chip Trayanum – who both left the program within the first two days of the winter window. Conversely, the Buckeyes brought in seven

incoming transfers this offseason, a group headlined by probable starters in safety Caleb Downs, quarterback Will Howard and running back Quinshon Judkins, who all had success in other high-profile schools last season before committing to the Scarlet and Gray.

Ohio State was not the only Power Five program to see several transfers come and go this offseason. The four College Football Playoff teams this past year – Alabama, Michigan, Texas and Washington – had a combined 112 players leave their respective powerhouse programs for other schools, while they also brought in a combined 64 players through the

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## From The Message Board

***Since college athletes were granted movement in the transfer portal without sitting out a year in 2021, the transfer portal has become an increasingly important factor in college athletics.***

***With the topic of this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin being the transfer portal, we asked readers and staff writers on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum to offer their thoughts on the portal as a whole, along with who they think are some of the best transfers Ohio State has brought in since 2021, the major losses the Buckeyes have endured and any other suggestions they may have to make the portal better. Here are some of the responses:***

"I think the transfer portal is awful. I see athletes running away from competition which would build both their skills and their character. I also see existing players working hard and waiting for their opportunity to play being trumped by an incoming transfer. What I don't see is the deep bond and allegiance to a school built

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by staying in one place."

**- R1TBDBITL**

"I see the day in the not too distant future when pro-students (formerly known as student-athletes) as contracted employees of universities will be subject to transfer fees similar to international soccer: 'Syracuse, you want our starting QB? How about \$100,000?' "

**- Craig Merz, BSB**

"On the whole, I think the transfer portal is a positive thing for athletes but quite a negative thing for sports. Men's basketball next year will probably start Bruce Thornton and four transfers. The situation is chaotic now. Best transfer? Justin Fields. Worst loss? Jameson Williams. I foresee the day when students sign a contract to play at the school for three or four years and they're paid by some combination of NIL and revenue sharing."

**- Terrier Buck**

"I think transferring once without sitting out is great, but there has to be some rules with it so that there isn't total anarchy (multiple transfers in the

same year). Best addition I would say is Davison Igbinosun or Caleb Downs. Worst loss? I guess Jameson Williams."

**- Tiffin Buckeye**

"The portal will be such a norm in a few years that people won't be able to think of a time before it. It will be second nature for the coaches to handle. I was impressed that we picked up Caleb Downs – as far as losses, if a player wants to leave for whatever reason, then so be it and good luck. Not a loss if a player does not want to be here."

**- PeyoteBuck**

"Lost in all this hoopla about the portal is the fact that athletes could always transfer. They just had to sit out a year. A year to acclimate to a new school and an extra year to concentrate on the books and take another step toward graduation is not the worst thing. Who is the best portal addition at Ohio State? That's hard to say because up until now the Buckeyes haven't been very good at it. I predict the best transfer will come from this year's class, which has yet to play a game for Ohio State."

**- Poster That Harley Built**



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No. 2	Sept. 16	No. 14	Jan. 13
No. 3	Sept. 23	No. 15	Jan. 27
No. 4	Oct. 7	No. 16	Feb. 17
No. 5	Oct. 14	No. 17	March 2
No. 6	Oct. 21	No. 18	March 16
No. 7	Oct. 28	No. 19	April 6
No. 8	Nov. 4	No. 20	April 20
No. 9	Nov. 11	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 18	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 25	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 2	No. 24	August

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# Unfettered Portal Ruining College Game

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Those of us hoping the NCAA would suddenly discover its spine and begin to install a minimal set of guardrails for college football and basketball free agency (also known as the transfer portal), well, we can give up on that dream.

The NCAA on May 30 offered total and complete capitulation to an antitrust lawsuit spearheaded by the U.S. Department of Justice, and announced it would no longer pose any restrictions regarding any student-athlete's eligibility with regard to transferring from school to school.

The settlement of the case, filed last December and joined by the DOJ in January, effectively eliminates the NCAA requirement that athletes who transfer more than once must sit out a year of competition.

If you thought the floodgates were already open, think again. Not only can athletes transfer an unlimited number of times without penalty, the NCAA must restore a year of eligibility for current athletes who missed a year of competition since the 2019-20 academic year because of the old policy.

Politicians who should stick to what most politicians do best these days – hurl insults at their opponents during three-minute TV sound bites – fell all over themselves in self-congratulatory comments that were tone-deaf to the death knell they were ringing for college sports.

In a statement, Jonathan Kanter, an assistant attorney general in the U.S. Department of Justice's antitrust division, said, "Free from anticompetitive rules that unfairly limit their mobility, Division I college athletes will now be able to choose the institutions that best meet their academic, personal and professional needs."

I would contend that all Kanter and his ilk have accomplished is further establishment of college football as the NFL 2.0. And if anyone believes this country wants more professional football, I suggest you check the attendance figures and television ratings for the hybrid known as the UFL. (Hint: They're not that good.)

Kanter and others would have us believe they have joined other high-minded individuals with the best interests of the student-athlete in mind when they don't appear to have the slightest idea what they're talking about.

It's the same line of bull the NCAA used to unload when it stormed into a college town to investigate a volleyball player for washing her car with water from the university reservoir. It's the same yada yada we got from former Ohio State president Kristina Johnson in June 2022 when she described the Big Ten additions of USC and UCLA as "the best thing for our student-athletes" as well as "the best thing for our conference" without ever acknowledging the student-athletes and coaches in every sport except for football who will be traveling ridiculous distances on unworkable schedules.

Unless you haven't been paying attention to this column for the past year and a half, let me make myself clear with regard to the transfer portal. Unfettered transfers – as well as bottomless pockets where NIL money is concerned – will be the ruination of college football.

Thanks to long-term contracts, at least NFL coaches know from year to year the composition of the majority of their rosters. College coaches will not be afforded that luxury. Essentially, all college players are independent contractors working on one-year handshake agreements. And taken to the extreme, maybe those agreements won't even last that long.

What's now to stop a student-athlete from transferring from Michigan to Ohio State or vice versa during halftime of The Game?

carries.

The following season, George was still third-string, this time behind Raymont Harris (1,344 yards, 12 TDs) and Butler By'not'e (474 yards, four TDs). It seems doubtful that in this day and age George would have stayed around Columbus long enough to win the 1995 Heisman.

The same goes for Troy Smith, an extremely gifted athlete who began his Ohio State career as a kickoff return man. Smith originally secured the starting quarterback position only because Justin Zwick was injured midway through a 33-7 embarrassment at Iowa in 2004.

But Smith might have already been long gone by then, which means Zwick would have likely been replaced in Iowa by true freshman Todd Boeckman. And then when Boeckman was eventually replaced in 2008 by freshman Terrelle Pryor ... well, we could play a guessing game of revisionist history all day.

### Root Of All Evil

While we're on the subject of the ruination of college football, you might have missed another May announcement that went against the NCAA.

In settling another antitrust case, the NCAA and members of the Power Five conferences agreed to pay \$2.8 billion in back pay to a class of athletes for denied compensation for use of their name, image and likeness. The settlement still needs to be approved by a judge in northern California, and precisely which athletes will be compensated and how much they will receive has yet to be decided.

If that all sounds like legal mumbo jumbo, it simply means that the century-old tradition (illusion) of amateurism in college sports has ended, and athletes will receive pay directly from the colleges and universities for whom they play. In other words, student-athletes are now university employees.

I have no problem with athletes getting a cut from the financial windfalls their universities receive each year. But like the transfer portal, unregulated NIL money is a slippery slope headed for disaster.

Remember five-star quarterback prospect Jaden Rashada from a couple of years back? He played at three different high schools before college programs entered a bidding war for his services.

Rashada originally committed to Miami (Fla.) after the school promised him an NIL package worth approximately \$9.5 million. That apparently wasn't enough because Rashada de-committed from Miami when the University of Florida came calling with a package reportedly worth \$13.8 million.

He signed with the Gators during the early signing period of the 2023 recruiting season but soon learned that the \$13.8 million deal had fallen through, Rashada asked Florida to be released from his national letter of intent, something universities rarely ever do. Except in this case. He was granted his release, and then Rashada signed with Arizona State.

Now, Rashada has sued Florida as well as Gators head coach Billy Napier and others for renegeing on the deal that reportedly included a \$500,000 signing bonus, one of the few things still against NCAA rules. The youngster and his attorneys are seeking punitive damages of an undisclosed amount.

And, oh, by the way. Rashada has transferred again. After appearing in mop-up duty three times at Arizona State last season, he is currently listed third on the quarterback depth chart at Georgia.

### What If?

What if the transfer portal had always been part of college football? I would hazard to say the rich history of the game would have been much, much different, especially for such legendary coaches as Bud Wilkinson, Darryl K. Royal, Duffy Daugherty and Tom Osborne, who notoriously stockpiled players on their limitless rosters – sometimes to prevent those players from showing up on the opposing sidelines.

Until the early 1970s, the only limits on how many scholarship players any college program could have was how many that program could afford. As a result, roster totals sometimes numbered as many as 150 or more. Those numbers came down a bit in 1973 when the NCAA set the football scholarship limit at 105, a total that has been whittled over the years to its present number of 85.

Woody Hayes never publicly admitted to signing players to prevent them from playing against the Buckeyes, but a little research indicates that he probably did.

With regard to the 1968 national championship team – hailed by many as the finest array of talent ever to wear scarlet and gray – there are 53 player biographies contained in the official media guide, and 69 names on the official roster. Another 40 players won freshman team awards that season, and there were an estimated 30 to 40 others who served as scout-team players. Simple math puts the 1968 Ohio State football roster at nearly 150.

Junior fullback Jim Otis led the Buckeyes that season in rushing with 985 yards and 17 touchdowns, totals that represented nearly one-third of the team's entire rushing total and exactly half of OSU's rushing touchdowns in 1968. Imagine what might have been going through the mind of sophomore John Brockington had today's transfer portal been available more than a half-century ago.

Brockington, the highly-decorated and much-in-demand prospect from Brooklyn, N.Y., was limited to just 187 yards and one touchdown on 45 carries in 1968. The following season, when Otis was becoming the first 1,000-yard rusher in OSU program history, Brockington was made to settle for just 334 yards on 72 carries – 153 fewer attempts than Otis.

Brockington finally got his chance to be the starter in 1970, and he responded with a program-record 1,142 yards on his way to first-team All-America status. But does anyone believe with today's transfer rules in place that Brockington would have waited his turn for two years, especially with a serious offer from Syracuse to make him the next Jim Brown, Ernie Davis or Floyd Little?

The transfer portal might also have cost the Buckeyes their two most recent Heisman Trophy winners.

During the fifth game of his freshman season in 1992, Eddie George fumbled twice during an 18-16 home loss to Illinois. His first fumble came near the goal line on OSU's first possession of the game and was returned by Fighting Illini safety Jeff Arneson 96 yards for a touchdown. The second fumble also came near the goal line, this time early in the fourth quarter, and resulted in George getting buried on the running back depth chart.

His rushing totals for the final six games of the 1992 season totaled 18 yards on three



# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Four Buckeyes Enter Transfer Portal

Ohio State suffered four roster losses via the transfer portal since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, with safety Ja'Had Carter, linebacker Nigel Glover, wide receiver Kyion Grayes and offensive lineman Enokk Vimahi all departing the program.

The first of the four to leave the program was Carter, who entered the portal on April 28 after just one season with the Buckeyes. He has since committed to N.C. State, joining his hometown Wolfpack on May 14.

Carter, a Raleigh, N.C., native, was in the thick of the starting free safety competition during fall camp last year but struggled to see the field during the season, appearing mostly on special teams and recording just five tackles in eight appearances. He was expected to be a reserve again this season behind expected starters Caleb Downs and Lathan Ransom.

Carter will look to revitalize his career in the ACC this fall, a conference in which he had great success while playing at Syracuse

from 2020-23. He started 28 of 31 games for the Orange in those three seasons, racking up 138 tackles, five interceptions, 12 pass breakups, two fumble recoveries, a defensive touchdown and a forced fumble while earning an honorable-mention All-ACC honor in 2022.

Glover, Grayes and Vimahi all entered the transfer portal on April 30 – the final day of the spring transfer window – after one, two and five seasons with the program, respectively. Grayes and Vimahi have since found new homes, committing to Cal and Washington on May 8 and 5, respectively, while Glover had not signed with a team as BSB went to press.

Vimahi, a former four-star prospect out of Kahuku, Hawaii, appeared in 35 games and made just two starts for the Buckeyes, those starts coming in Ohio State's 2023 Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri and 2022 home loss to Michigan.

He lined up primarily at left and right guard at Ohio State, often sitting behind two-year starters Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones on the depth chart. Vimahi was once again slotted to be a reserve this season at right guard behind projected starter Josh Fryar, a reality that prompted him to leave the program and join the Huskies for his final collegiate season.

Grayes, a former four-star recruit out of Chandler, Ariz., appeared in just two games with the Buckeyes and had one reception, all of which occurred during his freshman season while he took a redshirt. He did not see the field last season while recovering from an injury that caused him to use a

## 2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2023 Record, Bowl Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	3:30	CBS	2-10, not eligible
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	7:30	BTN	4-8, not eligible
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	TBA	TBA	6-7, 35-17 loss to UTSA (Frisco)
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Oct. 5	IOWA	TBA	TBA	10-4, 35-0 loss to Tennessee (Citrus)
Oct. 12	at Oregon	TBA	TBA	12-2, 45-6 win over Liberty (Fiesta)
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 2	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	10-3, 38-25 loss to Ole Miss (Peach)
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	4-8, not eligible
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	8-5, 14-7 win over Utah (Las Vegas)
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	3-9, not eligible
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	15-0, 34-13 win over Washington (CFP Champ.)

walking boot for most of the season.

Despite two catches in the spring game, even a rotational role seemed unlikely for Grayes this season with Emeka Egbuka, Brandon Inniss, Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate all expected to be top contributors at wideout this season.

Glover arrived at Ohio State last August after transferring in from Northwestern ahead of his freshman campaign following the firing of former Wildcats head coach Pat Fitzgerald.

Glover, a four-star prospect out of Clayton (Ohio) Northmont, did not appear in a game last season for Ohio State, buried behind the likes of Steele Chambers, Tommy Eichenberg, Cody Simon, C.J. Hicks and Gabe Powers at linebacker. With Simon and either Hicks or Sonny Styles expected to be the two starting linebackers this year, he was not likely to play a significant role this season.

The Buckeyes suffered six total losses in the spring transfer window – which opened on April 16 and closed on May 1 – those being the four listed above along with running back Dallan Hayden, who committed to Colorado, and safety Cedric Hawkins, who pledged to UCF.

## Nelson Jr. Commits To OSU Via Portal

Ohio State suffered two losses at safety through the portal, but it worked to rebuild its secondary depth on May 17 when it secured a transfer commitment from former South Carolina defensive back Keenan Nelson Jr.

Nelson (6-1, 195) who has three years of collegiate eligibility remaining, played in 15 games for the Gamecocks in his two seasons with the program, totaling 13 tackles (one for loss) and one pass defended, making three starts last season. He also played on special teams for South Carolina, blocking a punt in its win over Vanderbilt last season and returning it 18 yards for a touchdown.

Nelson is a former four-star prospect out of Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep, a school that is familiar to the Buckeyes and their fans. It is the alma mater of former Buckeyes Marvin Harrison Jr. and Kyle McCord, who both signed with the program after thriving with the Hawks as part of the Buckeyes' 2021 recruiting class.

Nelson left St. Joseph's as the nation's 221st-best player, 17th-best safety and sixth-best player out of Pennsylvania.

With loads of talent and depth in the Buckeyes' secondary, Nelson won't slot into a significant role this season, but with

several draft-eligible players likely hearing their names called in the 2025 NFL draft, he could play his way into a bigger role next year and beyond if he puts together good tape in practice and on special teams.

## OSU Adds Former Buffalo Punter Venneri

Ohio State also dipped into the transfer portal to find some special teams depth on May 11 when it secured a commitment from former Buffalo punter Anthony Venneri as a preferred walk-on.

Venneri, a Hamilton, Ontario, native who entered the transfer portal on April 30, comes to Columbus after serving as the Bulls' starting punter for his first two collegiate seasons. He attempted 95 punts from 2022-23 that went for 4,131 yards, good for a 43.5-yard average. His longest punt went 64 yards, and he had 24 punts that went at least 50 yards and 27 that landed inside the 20-yard line.

Venneri averaged a school-record 43.96 yards per punt last season, good for 30th in the FBS, just ahead of former Ohio State punter Jesse Mirco, who transferred to Vanderbilt in January, at 31st (43.7). That record eclipsed his freshman year in 2022 when he averaged 43.0 yards per punt, a mark that earned him FWAA All-American honors.

Venneri, who has two years of collegiate eligibility remaining, enters an Ohio State program that has two other punters on its roster, redshirt freshman Joe McGuire and incoming 6-7 freshman Nick McLarty. McLarty committed to the Buckeyes in March after spending time in the Australian Football League.

While McLarty is the only scholarship punter on the roster, Venneri will have the opportunity to earn the starting role this fall because the Buckeyes are expected to hold an open competition at the position.

Venneri is not the only walk-on to join Ohio State's roster since BSB last went to press. The program also landed a commitment from former Presbyterian College wide receiver and punt/kick returner Shawn Lodge on May 10, while former Ohio State Club Football player Zach Hayes earned an invite to join Day's squad on May 3.

Lodge, an Akron native, caught 20 passes for 244 yards during the last two seasons with FCS Presbyterian, while he also tacked on 616 kickoff and punt return yards.

Hayes started all eight games for the club football Buckeyes on both sides of the ball in 2023, leading the National Club Football Association with 43 receptions while ranking third in the league with 550 receiving yards.

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For a limited time, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is offering a discount on the cost of a subscription upgrade to first-class mail during football season or through football recruiting season in February. The first-class upgrade for football season, regularly \$30, will be just \$25, and the upgrade through the traditional National Signing Day in February will be just \$35, down from \$40.

"We think we can offset the cost of this discount with a reduction in the number of replacement papers we have to send out and a reduction in the number of subscriptions we have been losing because of untimely delivery,"

BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said.

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## Jordan No Longer On Staff

Ohio State pass rush specialist Brandon Jordan has left the program after spending just under three months in the position, according to a May 15 report from Letterman Row.

Jordan, 35, was hired by Ohio State on Feb. 22 after working in the same role at Michigan State and with the NFL's Seattle Seahawks the past two seasons. He spent his brief time with Ohio State working alongside defensive line coach and associate head coach Larry Johnson, providing guidance to the Buckeye rushmen during spring practices.

Jordan came to Ohio State with some pedigree, having served as a football coach at the high school, college and professional levels since 2012. Aside from his roles with the Seahawks and Spartans, he also served as a graduate assistant at McKendree University in 2013 and a defensive line coach at Austin Peay from 2014-15, among other roles.

He is also the CEO of Brandon Jordan Trench Performance, a football training program that has welcomed more than 200 NFL players, including defensive linemen Jadeveon Clowney, former Buckeye Cameron Hayward, Chandler Jones, Von Miller and T.J. Watt, among others.

It was unclear as BSB went to press if Ohio State would hire another assistant to fill the now vacant role left by Jordan. The Buckeye defensive line is still led by Johnson, but graduate assistant LaAllan Clark, who is entering his second season with the program, could also potentially take on a larger role if called upon.

## Day Doesn't Want QB Competition To Draw Out

Ohio State is in the midst of a starting quarterback competition for the second off-season in as many years, with redshirt sophomore Devin Brown, fifth-year senior Will Howard and true freshman Julian Sayin all duking it out for the position.

Unlike last season when the battle between Brown and McCord spilled into the first two weeks of the regular season, head coach Ryan Day wants to find the right guy sooner rather than later.

"I think the way things turned out last year, it kind of went into the first couple

games of the season," Day said during an appearance on 97.1 The Fan's "Bishop and Friends" on May 15. "That's not ideal. I wouldn't like to do that again this year. But it's going to come down to playing the best players."

While Day did not comment on who is currently in the lead for the starting role, he said that one way to facilitate a quicker decision-making process at quarterback this off-season is to be more intentional and strategic with how reps are distributed throughout fall camp.

"There have been conversations about it for sure, and we're going to have to be creative," Day said. "We've done some things. (Last fall camp we) had two fields going to make sure we're getting enough reps for everybody involved. But we're going to have to be really good and execute a good plan."

Despite the efforts to speed up the process, Day still does not want to put a strict deadline on when he wants a decision to be made. Instead, he wants to let the process play out throughout the summer to see which quarterback can rise to the top before making a decision, one which he acknowledged can go a long way in determining the direction of the season.

"(Quarterback play) is going to be a huge part of our season," he said. "We know that. We're not shying away from that. The defense is going to be strong and how well they play late in the season is going to be critical, but it always comes down to the quarterback."

"It's going to come down to playing the best players. And I say that all the time. We don't have time to not play the best players. So they'll be in competitive situations, and may the best man win."

## Smith Helped Keep Walton On Staff

Ohio State secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton has made his presence felt since joining the Buckeye staff in 2022, helping transform the Scarlet and Gray secondary into one of the nation's best while also securing commitments from some of the more highly-touted high school cornerbacks in the 2024 and 2025 classes.

Walton's rapid success has turned the heads of those around the sport, including those in the professional ranks, who, according to Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, showed significant interest in luring

the former NFL cornerback back into an assistant role in the league this off-season.

Smith told Cleveland.com in May that he and his staff worked hard to keep interested NFL teams from luring the 53-year-old Walton – who spent 11 seasons as an assistant in the league for the Detroit Lions (2009-12), St. Louis Rams (2013), New York Giants (2014-16) and Jacksonville Jaguars (2019-21) – away from Columbus. To achieve that, Ohio State gave the former Buckeye defensive back a \$400,000 raise, a two-year contract extension and a promotion to assistant head coach, a program-wide effort that the athletic director said contributed to Walton staying put in his current role.

"I think we have six coaches over a million (dollars)," Smith said. "I never would've done that (in the past). Some of them, I probably would have tried to negotiate something."

"Tim Walton, great example. The pros are after him big-time. We just jumped him. I had presidential support on that."

Walton's extended \$1.4 million contract, which runs until the 2026 season, is tied for third highest among Buckeye assistants along with Johnson, trailing offensive coordinator Chip Kelly and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles at \$2 million and co-offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline at \$1.6 million.

His contract was worth \$700,000 when he arrived in Columbus in 2022.

## Smith Thinks U-M Wins Should Carry Asterisk

Smith is set to retire from his position on June 30, 2024, after 19 years with the university, but his imminent departure did not stop him from speaking his mind on Ohio State's archrival football program on his way out.

Appearing on WOSU Public Media's "All Sides with Anna Staver," on May 9, Smith said that Michigan's three-game winning streak against Ohio State from 2021-23 should carry an asterisk due to the program's alleged participation in an elaborate sign-stealing scandal, one which he thinks created an unfair advantage for the Wolverines that went against the integrity of the sport.

"Yeah, of course I do," Smith said when asked by Staver if the Buckeyes' three-game losing streak to Michigan should have an asterisk. "The rules are in place to protect the integrity of the game and try your best to create a level playing field, and when those rules are violated, then it affects those principles. And so, we have to keep that in perspective."

Michigan has been under investigation by the NCAA since last fall over allegations that the program created a multilevel sign-stealing scheme led by now-former staffer Connor Stalions that included him and others using illegal in-person scouting to steal the signals of numerous opponents, mostly Big Ten and potential College Football Playoff teams, dating back to the 2021 season.

The NCAA reportedly told the Big Ten in November that it "knew and could prove" that Michigan violated in-person scouting rules, which later resulted in the resignation of Stalions on Nov. 3 and the suspension of head coach Jim Harbaugh for the final three games of the 2023 regular season.

Smith declined to say if he felt these pun-

ishments were enough for his liking, but he did admit that he thinks the potential sanctions put on the Wolverines after the NCAA investigation ends may not be as severe as people think.

"I think people's expectations of what the NCAA might do relative to penalties were probably too high," he said. "because everyone was upset and there were just visceral comments around it. I won't comment too much about what I feel, because I don't want to disparage. But at the end of the day, violations occurred and penalties have been levied and will be levied, and we just have to live with them."

From 2021-23, Michigan defeated Ohio State three times and boasted a 40-3 overall record and a 27-1 mark in the Big Ten. It won three straight Big Ten titles and made the College Football Playoff in all three of those seasons, culminating in a national championship win over Washington in January.

Despite this success from Ohio State's archrival which occurred under the shadow of an ongoing NCAA investigation, Smith said that he has chosen to forget the past and instead focus on how the Buckeyes can win The Game next fall for the first time in five years.

"I'm not one that looks back," Smith said. "I think what's important for us is to look forward. And we host That Team Up North this fall. We need to make sure we pack that place and we're ready to roll early. Be in your seats early. Don't wait until the kickoff."

Ohio State's matchup with the Wolverines is set for a noon kickoff on Nov. 30 at Ohio Stadium, with the game slated to air on FOX.

## NCAA Approves Revenue-Sharing Model

The NCAA and Power Five conferences officially approved a multi-billion-dollar settlement that will allow colleges to directly pay student-athletes through revenue sharing for the first time in history.

The groundbreaking decision was voted

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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

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on during the week of May 20 by the NCAA's Board of Governors and each of the five major Division I conferences – the Big Ten, SEC, ACC, Big 12 and Pac-12 – with current Pac-12 members voting with the conference despite leaving in July. The settlement will pay \$2.78 billion to former college athletes to resolve three antitrust lawsuits against the NCAA, House v. NCAA being the most notable one.

“The five autonomy conferences and the NCAA agreeing to settlement terms is an important step in the continuing reform of college sports that will provide benefits to student-athletes and provide clarity in college athletics for years to come,” a joint statement from the NCAA and the conferences read. “This settlement is also a road map for college sports leaders and Congress to ensure this uniquely American institution can continue to provide unmatched opportunity for millions of students.”

According to a May 23 ESPN report from Pete Thamel and Dan Murphy, all Division I athletes dating back to 2016 are able to receive a share of the settlement, but athletes who do opt in to receive part of the settlement aren't able to sue the NCAA for other potential antitrust violations.

As part of this settlement, the NCAA has also allowed schools to share revenue directly with athletes for the first time, a monumental change for college athletics that is expected to go into effect starting in the 2025-26 academic year.

The settlement permits schools – not requires them – to share revenue with athletes up to a cap of 22 percent of the average revenue for power conference schools. Ross Dellenger of Yahoo Sports reported that number is expected to start at about \$22 million, though that could change.

While the settlement has been approved by the NCAA and each of the conferences, it still needs to be approved by a judge, a process that could take several months to finalize.

“For the first time in history, we will now have a fair and just economic system for college athletes,” House lead attorney Jeffrey Kessler told CBS Sports. “I could not be more delighted. But no celebrations until the system is in place.”

## OSU Opens As Favorite Over U-M

Speaking of The Game, several major sportsbooks feel confident that Ohio State can flip the script in the rivalry and handily defeat the Wolverines this fall.

Ohio State opened in late May as a 10-point favorite over Michigan on BetMGM and DraftKings and a 9.5-point favorite on Bet365 and FanDuel, a strong showing of belief from oddsmakers that the veteran-led

## The Last Print Issue Of BSB Until July 2

The next print issue of BSB, the popular Interview Issue, is set to be mailed on July 2. However, in this ever-changing college sports landscape, there is bound to be plenty of news between now and when the next issue hits the mail.

There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting or transfer portal activity. June means recruiting camps, and the BSB staff will be there. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff mans BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on the breaking stories, plus posting additional features.

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 Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively.

We want to remind readers that the complete edition of each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for

readers having continuing mail problems. This electronic service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stop-gap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is free to subscribers. BSB is also offering special savings on upgrading your subscription to first class mail. See the box on page 5.

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If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access. If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com, our print schedule, or your mail service, feel free to call us at the above number.

Remember, the BSB mailing schedule is always listed in the credit box on page 3 of each issue.

Buckeyes can end their three-game losing streak to the Wolverines and defeat their rival for the first time since the 2019 season.

Ohio State has dropped its last three games to the Wolverines in gut-wrenching fashion, with two of those defeats coming by 15 or more points and the latest loss coming by just six points on the road last November. But the Buckeyes could be in better shape to defeat their rivals in 2024.

Michigan is entering the season under new leadership with the program losing Harbaugh and several high-impact players from its national championship-winning team to the NFL this offseason.

Conversely, Ohio State has retained double-digit starters from last season's roster with many of them deciding to return for their respective senior seasons, while it has also added some high-level transfers such as safety Caleb Downs, quarterback Will Howard and running back Quinshon Judkins, among others.

Aside from The Game, the Buckeyes are also favored to defeat the majority of their 2024 opponents, with many of those games projected to be won in convincing fashion. Ohio State opened as at least a 20-point favorite on DraftKings in three contests, including its season opener against Akron on Aug. 31 (-50.5), its home contest against Iowa on Oct. 5 (-24), and its home game against Nebraska on Oct. 26 (-25.5).

The Buckeyes opened as just a three-point favorite on the road against Penn State on Nov. 2.

The only game Ohio State is not favored in is its Oct. 12 road contest against Oregon. The Ducks, who are coming off a successful 12-2 season and have brought in the second-best transfer class of the offseason, are currently slotted as a one-point favorite against the Buckeyes at home by both DraftKings and Bet365. Ohio State is a slight favorite to defeat Oregon on BetMGM (-1.5) and FanDuel (-1.5), however.

According to DraftKings, the Buckeyes have the second-best odds to win the national championship (+425) behind only Georgia (+320), while they have the best odds to win the Big Ten at +160 along with -600 odds to make the College Football Playoff.

## Ohio State To Play 'Cats At Wrigley Field

Ohio State will get the chance to compete in one of America's most iconic sports venues this season. Northwestern confirmed that the Buckeyes' game against the Wildcats on Nov. 16 will take place at Chicago's historic Wrigley Field, a 110-year-old ballpark that serves as the home stadium for Major League Baseball's Chicago Cubs.

Reports of the two teams potentially squaring off at Wrigley Field first surfaced in January, around the same time the school demolished the Wildcats' Ryan Field so that it could undergo an \$800 million renovation.

The demolition will require the Wildcats program to play its home games elsewhere for the next two seasons. The school announced that most of its games will take place at its practice facility, but for bigger crowds, they decided the games had to be held elsewhere since the practice facility will more than likely not be able to seat more than 20,000 fans according to multiple reports.

The school reportedly considered playing the Buckeyes this season at Soldier Field to accommodate the larger Ohio State fan base, but the two teams will instead square off at the 41,649-seat venue.

Northwestern will also play its final game of the regular season against Illinois at Wrigley Field.

According to a Big Ten release, kickoff for the game will either be at noon or 3:30 p.m., with the network carrier still to be determined.

## Akron, WMU Kickoff Times Announced

Kickoff times and television carriers for Ohio State's first two games of the 2024 season were announced on May 30, with the Buckeyes slated to open the year at home against Akron at 3:30 p.m. on Aug. 31 on CBS and then face Western Michigan at Ohio Stadium at 7:30 p.m. on the Big Ten Network.

The Buckeyes' mid-afternoon battle with Akron is part of a seven-year deal between the Big Ten and CBS that has the network

airing a Big Ten game in its traditional 3:30 p.m. slot, a time that previously was occupied by the SEC. The contract, which runs through 2029-30, started last year but included only a select few Big Ten games. Ohio State played two games in the 3:30 slot on CBS last season, those coming in its season opener against Indiana and its early November matchup with Rutgers.

Ohio State's matchup with Western Michigan marks the first nonconference home primetime game since the 2022 season when the Buckeyes hosted Toledo for a 7:00 kickoff time.

The Buckeyes also inched closer to finding out the kickoff times and networks of their Oct. 26 home matchup with Nebraska. According to a release, the game will kick off at either noon, 3:30 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. with the network carrier still to be determined.

## No Fox Football Friday For Ohio State In 2024

Ohio State will play each of its 12 regular-season games this season on fall Saturdays, as the Buckeyes were not included on the FOX College Football Friday schedule released on May 22.

The FOX slate of games includes teams from the Big Ten, Big 12 and Mountain West conferences. The Big Ten teams that will play on Friday this year are Illinois at Nebraska on Sept. 20, Washington at Rutgers on Sept. 27, Michigan State at Oregon on Oct. 4, Northwestern at Maryland on Oct. 11, Oregon at Purdue on Oct. 18, Rutgers at USC on Oct. 25, Iowa at UCLA on Nov. 8, UCLA at Washington on Nov. 15 and Purdue at Michigan State on Nov. 22.

Ohio State is one of six Big Ten teams who were left off the Fox College Football Friday slate, joining Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Penn State and Wisconsin.

FOX will air three non-Big Ten games on Friday this season, those being Arizona at Kansas State on Sept. 13, Utah at UCF on Nov. 29 and the Mountain West Championship Game on Dec. 6.

## Meyer Calls NIL "Cheating"

The proliferation of name, image and



likeness in college football has sparked massive debate among those involved with the sport since its installation in 2021, and that talk has even reached one of the most successful head coaches in Ohio State history.

Appearing on the “Lou Holtz Podcast” with the former longtime Notre Dame head coach on May 9, former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said that while NIL is beneficial for college sports at its core, the way it is being used today – specifically with the way teams are using it to gain an extra hand in the world of recruiting and the transfer portal – is “cheating.”

“I think NIL – and I sat in those committees for many, many years – I think it’s great,” Meyer said. “I think if it’s capitalism, for example, if a great player like (former Ohio State wide receiver) Marvin Harrison Jr. and some car dealership in town wants to hire him, they want to put his name on a billboard and pay him money, sign autographs, he wants to put something on an Instagram or they sell that, (that is acceptable). But that’s not what’s happened. What’s happened is it’s cheating.

“America is built on name and likeness. That’s great. But to have a 17-year-old demand money for a visit, to pay these players a lot of money to go visit a charity for 20 minutes and they write a check for \$50,000 – that’s cheating. That’s not what this is all about. I’m very disappointed in where it went.”

Meyer, who has been a staunch supporter of student-athletes being able to profit off their name, image and likeness, continued to criticize the current state of college athletics during his 38-minute conversation with Holtz. The three-time national championship-winning coach said that the blame for this development should not be placed on the players, but instead on each school’s collectives, who he thinks are corrupting the game by turning high school and transfer portal recruiting into a pro-style “arms race.”

“If you’re a women’s basketball player like (former Iowa guard Caitlin Clark) and they want to put her on a billboard and pay her, they should be able to do that,” he said. “But that’s not what happened. What’s happened is the arms race of collecting money from donors and the donors are simply paying players. That’s what I understand is happening, and I don’t like that.”

Meyer is listed as a board member of Ohio State’s top NIL collective, The Foundation. Co-founded by former Meyer disciple and 2014 national champion Cardale Jones, The Foundation was reportedly instrumental in the Buckeyes’ offseason success in both player retention and the transfer portal by providing rich financial support to the program and its players.

### Harrison Signs With Cards Amid Fanatics Dispute

Former Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. officially became a member of the NFL on May 23 when he signed a four-year, \$35.37 million guaranteed rookie deal with the Arizona Cardinals. The contract includes a \$22.5 million signing bonus with a team option for a fifth season in 2028.

Harrison, who was drafted by the franchise with the fourth overall pick of the 2024 NFL draft in April, joining former Buckeye teammate and 2023 first-round draft pick Paris Johnson Jr., said he is excited for the

opportunity to officially get to work.

“All the guys around, offense and defense, have done a great job welcoming me,” Harrison said on the Cardinals’ official website. “I’m excited to go out there, earn the trust of my teammates, and earn a role any way I can.”

Harrison’s new deal comes amid an ongoing dispute between the rookie wide receiver and the sports merchandise and retail company Fanatics, which filed a lawsuit against Harrison on May 18 in the New York Supreme Court for breaching a contract he signed with the company in May 2023.

According to an ESPN Report from Josh Weinfuss and Adam Scheffer, Fanatics claimed that Harrison refused to fulfill his obligations to the contract, which, according to the lawsuit, was agreed upon by Harrison and his father, Pro Football Hall of Famer Marvin Harrison Sr., in 2023 when Harrison Jr. was still with the Buckeyes, while he also “publicly asserted” that the contract does not exist.

The report stated that the suit cites “The Official Harrison Collection LLC,” where Harrison sells signed memorabilia, as a defendant. The website states on its homepage that it is “the only website to purchase signed Harrison memorabilia.”

The specifics of the deal were not listed in the suit, but a source told ESPN earlier in May that the agreement was for at least \$1 million and included stipulations related to autographs, signed trading cards, game-worn apparel and other marketing opportu-

nities.

Harrison Jr. has also yet to sign the NFL Players Association’s group licensing agreement, which would allow the union to market his name, image and likeness to 85 companies.

Regardless of the lawsuit, Harrison Jr. was the first of the top five picks in the draft to sign his rookie contract and the third of the Ohio State players drafted to do so, joining Eichenberg, who was taken in the fifth round by the Las Vegas Raiders (four years, \$4.36 million) and Cade Stover with the Houston Texans after he was selected in the fourth round (four years, \$4.76 million). Defensive end Mike Hall Jr. still has yet to sign his deal with the Cleveland Browns.

### Stroud Wins PFWA’s Good Guy Award

Former Ohio State and current Houston Texans quarterback C.J. Stroud continued to rack up the accolades on May 29, following his stellar rookie season when he was named the winner of the Pro Football Writers of America’s Good Guy Award, which recognizes the NFL player who best possesses the qualities and professional style that help pro football writers do their jobs.

“Stroud is the Good Guy Award winner because of his professionalism and openness with both the national and local media,” said PFWA Houston chapter co-vice president Jonathan Alexander. “He is always available during the week and after games, win or lose. He understands the media has

a job to do and answers each question thoroughly.

“He is also active in the Houston community without seeking attention, recently volunteering to remove trees and clean up debris from yards in underserved communities after a storm left many residents without power for several days.”

Stroud is the 20th-ever PFWA Good Guy Award winner and the first Texans player to earn the honor. He won the award over Cleveland Browns guard Joel Bitonio, Buffalo Bills offensive tackle Dion Dawkins, Philadelphia Eagles defensive end Brandon Graham and Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott.

“It’s a blessing to be recognized as the PFWA Good Guy Award winner, and it stands out to me because it’s more of an award that embodies someone’s character rather than the stats they compile on the field,” Stroud said. “I appreciate the job the media has and thank them for choosing me as someone who is deserving of this honor. A special shoutout to the other very deserving players who were nominated and those that won before me.”

This is just one of several accolades Stroud has received since leading the Texans to an AFC South Division title and divisional-round playoff berth while throwing for an impressive 4,108 yards and 23 touchdowns in his rookie season.

The former Buckeye, who was selected by the franchise with the second overall

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## BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

Now is the time for loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers to show their support through our VIP subscription program as we struggle through these times of high inflation, which have affected all small businesses. As most of you know, the newspaper business these days is challenging in even the best of times.

“We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program,” BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. “It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 42 years and what we plan to do in the future.”

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

VIP subscribers enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the “Fun, Casual Joint,” as well as a card good for \$10 off your next food purchase at any Cameron Mitchell Restaurant.

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And those who donate more than \$125 will have their names listed as Elite-Plus VIPs.

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pick of the 2023 NFL draft, was the winner of both the AP and PFWA NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year Awards and also earned an NFL Pro Bowl selection.

## QB Miller To Be Inducted Into OSU HOF

Former Ohio State quarterback Braxton Miller announced May 31 that he will be inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame class of 2024 this coming fall. The university has yet to announce other further inductees for the class.

“Blessed to be selected for the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2024,” Miller wrote on Twitter. “Buckeye Nation, I’ll love y’all forever.”

Miller, a five-star prospect out of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne, is one of the more successful dual-threat quarterbacks in Ohio State history. His 3,314 career rushing yards rank sixth all-time and first among quarterbacks in program history, while his 5,295 career passing yards and 52 touchdowns rank 12th and seventh all-time, respectively.

Joining the program in 2011 as the No. 1 overall player in Ohio and No. 2 dual-threat quarterback in the nation, he made an instant impact on a team that was then reeling from the resignation of Jim Tressel and the

hiring of Luke Fickell as interim head coach. He started 10 games for the Buckeyes that season and completed 85 of his 157 passes for 1,159 yards and 13 touchdowns to four interceptions, while also tacking on another 715 rushing yards and seven touchdowns.

Miller’s dual-threat ability hit its climax during his sophomore and junior seasons. Serving as the full-time starter for the Buckeyes in 2012 and 2013, he combined to throw for 4,133 yards and 39 touchdowns to 13 interceptions while rushing for 2,339 yards and 25 touchdowns. Those stats helped Ohio State secure a 12-0 record in 2012 – a year in which the program could not participate in postseason play due to “Tattoo Gate” – and a 12-2 mark in 2013, while also earning him consecutive Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year honors.

The back end of Miller’s Ohio State career was marred by injuries, first a shoulder ailment at the end of the 2013 campaign that required surgery and then a torn labrum on the same shoulder during a practice in 2014 that forced him to miss that entire season.

With fellow quarterbacks J.T. Barrett and Cardale Jones assuming control of the room and leading the Buckeyes to a national championship-winning season in 2014, Miller switched positions to wide receiver in 2015. He found success in this new position during his fifth and final season with the program, catching 25 passes for 340 yards and three touchdowns and rushing for another 261 yards and a score as Ohio State secured a 12-1 record.

Miller’s success at wide receiver piqued the interest of NFL organizations, causing the Ohio native to be selected with the 85th overall pick in the third round of the 2016 NFL draft by the Houston Texans. He spent just two seasons in Houston, bringing in 34 receptions for 261 yards and two touchdowns to finish his football career.

## Williamson Charged In Bank Robbery Spree

Former Ohio State defensive back Marcus Williamson was charged on May 2 with 23 felony counts stemming from a series of bank robberies he allegedly committed throughout March and April. He faces 17 counts of robbery, six counts of felony theft and one count of misdemeanor theft, according to the Franklin County grand jury indictment.

According to police and court records, Williamson, 25, was cited for nine bank robberies that took place on March 7, March 15, March 21, March 29, April 3, April 8, April 10 and April 24. Each incident included the suspect showing a note to a bank teller that demanded that he or she empty the drawer of all its \$20, \$50 or \$100 bills, all while also informing the teller that he was armed.

Williamson was arrested for his ninth and final bank robbery on April 24, which occurred at First Merchants Bank on High Street at around 10:40 a.m. Columbus police officers observed him commit the crime and took him into custody shortly after he fled the scene, and he was held in the Franklin County jail up until the ruling.

Detectives had been closely monitoring Williamson prior to his arrest and even secured a search warrant to put a tracking device on his vehicle as he traveled throughout Franklin County.

Williamson played at Ohio State from

## OSU's Spring Commencement

Due to space limitations, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is unable to publish the complete list of spring graduating athletes in this issue. We will post the complete list on BuckeyeSports.com and we will run the list in the July print issue of BSB.

2017-21 and was the team’s starting safety from 2020-21.

Williamson is not the only former Buckeye to get in trouble with the law since BSB last went to print. Former Ohio State wide receiver Corey Smith Jr. was arrested and taken into custody by the U.S. Marshals Service’s Fugitive Apprehension Team in Columbus on May 22 after violating his parole.

The 31-year-old Smith, who played for the Buckeyes from 2013-16 and was a part of the 2014 team that won a national championship, was wanted for a federal probation violation in West Virginia and failure to appear in court for a 2018 aggravated robbery charge, according to a spokesperson for the marshal’s service.

According to the spokesperson, Smith initially answered the door at a house in Columbus but then closed it on the officers before allegedly running up into the attic. He was arrested in the attic and taken into custody.

Like Williamson, this is not the first time Smith has faced legal trouble in his post-football life. He was previously sentenced to 57 months in prison in March of 2021 for his role in a drug distribution ring with ties to both Ohio and West Virginia, a crime that caused him to plead guilty to one count of aiding and abetting possession with intent to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine.

## Price Medically Retires From Football After Blood Clot

Former Ohio State All-American center Billy Price announced his retirement from the NFL on May 25 just over one month after experiencing a “terrifying” saddle blood clot that could cause further complications.

“In the blink of an eye, everything can be taken away,” Price wrote on Instagram. “On April 24th I had emergency pulmonary embolism surgery to remove a saddle clot that was entering both of my lungs. As a healthy 29-year-old, an unprovoked pulmonary embolism with no further medical explanation is terrifying. I am truly thankful to be alive today.

“Unfortunately, I will be retiring from the NFL as the risk of an internal bleed while on blood thinners creates tremendous risk.”

Price last played in the NFL with the Arizona Cardinals in 2022, starting 11 games for the franchise at center. Prior to his time in Arizona, Price spent four additional seasons in the NFL with the Cincinnati Bengals (2018-20) – who drafted him with the 21st overall pick of the 2018 NFL draft out of Ohio State – and New York Giants (2021).

He also spent a brief time with the Las Vegas Raiders and New Orleans Saints and was on the Dallas Cowboys’ practice squad last season. In total, Price played 69 games in the league and made 45 starts at center, earning a Pro Football Writers Association All-Rookie Team selection in 2018.

Price, an Austintown, Ohio, native, had a standout three-year career with the Buckeyes. He helped Ohio State win a national championship in 2014 and became a stalwart on a formidable Buckeyes offensive

line at both center and right guard, earning consecutive All-America selections in 2016 and 2017 and the Rimington Trophy and Rimington-Pace Offensive Lineman of the Year award in 2017.

## Owens Plaque Unveiled In Ann Arbor

A new plaque honoring former Ohio State runner and legendary Olympian Jesse Owens was unveiled at the University of Michigan on May 11, commemorating his record-breaking performance at the 1935 Big Ten Outdoor Track and Field Championships held at Michigan’s Ferry Field in Ann Arbor.

The plaque – which was organized by World Athletics, formerly known as the International Amateur Foundation – honors the site where Owens broke or tied four world records on May 25, 1935. In a span of just 45 minutes, the 21-year-old sophomore Owens tied the world record in the 100-yard dash (9.4 seconds) and set three world records in the long jump (8.13 meters), 220 yards (20.3 seconds) and 220-yard low hurdle (22.6).

This performance, later dubbed “Day of Days,” catapulted Owens to the national spotlight and helped him earn an invitation to the 1936 Berlin Summer Olympics, where – amidst heavy racial discrimination from Nazi Germany – he won four medals in the 100m, 200m, 4x100m relay and long jump.

The new plaque was unveiled one day before the Big Ten Track and Field Championships at U-M Track & Field Stadium, the first time the university has hosted the event since 1988. Marlene Dortch, the granddaughter of Owens, along with representatives of both the Ohio State and Michigan track & field teams helped reveal the plaque, which replaces the one given by World Athletics in 2018.

“This goes beyond the rivalry,” Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said. “That’s what I want people to understand. This is about history. It’s about what Jesse Owens did, not only in the Big Ten but for our country.”

“We are appreciative that everyone here can recognize that this is someone who has left a legacy beyond the rivalry and really what it means to be able to promote our sport, promote what Jesse Owens has done for the sport of track and field and continue to live out that legacy,” said Ohio State head track & field coach Rosalind Joseph.

Owens, whose lone Olympic appearance was in the Berlin Games, won a record eight individual NCAA championships at Ohio State, four each in 1935 and 1936. He was given the United States Medal of Freedom from President Gerald Ford in 1976 and was inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame in 1983 as part of the inaugural class.

## Muzerall Signs Five-Year Extension With OSU

Ohio State women’s hockey coach Nadine Muzerall has turned the program into a national powerhouse in her eight years at

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the helm, and she was rewarded for her efforts on May 20 when she signed a five-year contract extension that will keep her in Columbus through the 2028-29 season.

"It's truly an honor to get to lead this program, and I want to thank Janine Oman and Gene Smith for trusting me with that responsibility," Muzerall said. "I am proud of what we've built here over the last eight seasons but know that there is still much for us to achieve as a program. I look forward to continuing to develop our program into one of the nation's elite."

Muzerall joined the program in 2016 and has since turned Ohio State into a team that competes for the national championship every season, winning it in 2022 and 2024 and losing to Wisconsin in the 2023 title game.

Muzerall has also led the Buckeyes to back-to-back Western Collegiate Hockey Association regular season conference titles, including the team's first conference crown in program history in 2023.

"We are thrilled to extend Nadine's contract and have her continue to lead our women's hockey program," said Oman, Ohio State senior deputy director of athletics

and SWA. "She has set a new standard for women's hockey at Ohio State and in a short time shaped this program into a perennial national title contender."

Muzerall, a five-time WCHA Coach of the Year recipient, has also excelled as an elite player developer. She has coached nine All-Americans and 33 All-WCHA players during her time with the Buckeyes and produced the program's first-ever Patty Kazmaier Award recipient for the top female college hockey player when former Ohio State defenseman Sophie Jaques took home the honor in 2023.

When the 2024-25 season starts, Muzerall and the Buckeyes will be looking to make their fifth straight Frozen Four appearance. Her 195-73-19 overall record already makes her the winningest head coach in Ohio State women's hockey history.

### Ohio State Softball Fires HC Schoenly

Ohio State announced on May 13 that it had fired head softball coach Kelly Kovach Schoenly after 12 seasons leading the Buckeyes.

"On behalf of the department, I want to thank Kelly for her leadership of the program and for the positive impact, both on and off the field, on the many student-athletes who wore the scarlet and gray during her tenure," said Mike Penner, executive associate director of athletics.

Schoenly, who had one year remaining on her current contract, joined the program in 2013 after spending six seasons as head softball coach at Miami (Ohio). She accumulated a 367-226-1 record (155-113-1 in Big Ten) during her time leading the Buckeyes and helped the program advance to five NCAA Regionals, the latest occurring in the 2022 season.

Ohio State failed to reach the NCAA tournament in the last two seasons, a stretch in which it accumulated a 64-40 overall record and a 24-22 mark in the Big Ten. The Buckeyes finished eighth in the Big Ten regular-season standings this season and finished the year with a season-ending 5-1 loss to Wisconsin in the first round of the Big Ten tournament.

Schoenly leaves Columbus as the second-winningest coach in Ohio State softball

program history, trailing only her predecessor Linda Kalafatis (1997-2012), who finished with a 538-358 record.

Ohio State said a search for the program's ninth-ever head coach has already begun.

The Ohio State softball team is not the only Buckeyes program to undergo a change in leadership since BSB last went to press. Ohio State rowing head coach Kate Sweeney announced on May 29 that she is resigning from her role after four seasons leading the program.

Sweeney, a former Buckeye rower and 2012 Ohio State graduate, led her team to the NCAA championships in each of her four years at the helm while helping the Buckeyes secure their 10th-ever Big Ten title in 2022 as well as runner-up finishes in 2021 and 2023. She was named Big Ten Coach of the Year in 2022.

Sweeney finished out the season at the NCAA championship regatta held at Lake Bethel, Ohio, from May 31-June 2, where the Buckeyes finished 12th

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1984

The search for a new athletic director ended May 16, when Ohio State President Edward H. Jennings surprised most guessers in announcing that Rick Bay would be the university's next athletic director, effective with the June 30 retirement of Hugh Hindman.

Bay was not one of the names often mentioned in rumors during the nationwide search, and he became the first non-Ohio-educated athletic director at Ohio State. Bay, who was the athletic director at Oregon, followed L.W. St. John (1912-46), Dick Larkins (1947-69), J. Edward Weaver (1970-76) and Hindman (1977-1984) as Ohio State's fifth athletic director.

Bay, a former Michigan quarterback, received a \$74,500 a year salary, \$12,000 more than Hindman's and \$20,000 more than Bay received at Oregon.

### 35 Years Ago — 1989

Nearly two decades after installing artificial turf in Ohio Stadium, Ohio State was set to return to natural grass for the 1990 season. Athletic director Jim Jones announced the official decision June 1 after months of speculation that the university would indeed replace the surface in the stadium with natural turf.

However, with the Buckeyes' 1989 home opener on Sept. 16 against Oklahoma State just three months away, Jones said the present artificial surface would remain until after the upcoming season.

"We will begin work the day after the state high school football playoffs are over," Jones said. "It's our intention to have the finest playing field in the country when we open the 1990 football season."

### 30 Years Ago — 1994

Perhaps you had heard the latest rumor. The one that had certain unnamed Ohio State power brokers in contact with Bob Huggins, lining him up as the next head coach of the Buckeye men's basketball team.

When someone asked Huggins about it, he looked incredulous and replied, "What kind of question is that? Last time I looked, I already had a job and Ohio State already had a coach. Pretty good one, too, in my estimation."

Whether Huggins had been contacted or not, or whether the Cincinnati head coach would even be interested or not, he had a point. Randy Ayers continued to be head coach of the Buckeyes. But that didn't stop the speculation that his situation could change quickly if his program's fortunes did not recover from their present tailspin.

### 25 Years Ago — 1999

A year ago at this time, the only thing Bobby Hoying had to worry about was an appendectomy that kept him out of minicamp with the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles.

Hoying, OSU's starting quarterback from 1993-95, cleared that minor hurdle easily and returned well in time to open the 1998 season as the Eagles' starting quarterback.

But the team's dismal 3-13 showing led to the firing of coach Ray Rhodes. Hoying, with little support around him, never threw a touchdown pass despite attempting a team-high 224 passes. He was intercepted nine times.

The Eagles hired Andy Reid as their new coach in the offseason and then drafted Syracuse quarterback Donovan McNabb with the second overall choice in the NFL draft. The signing of Doug Pederson, projected to start until McNabb was ready, left Hoying on the outside looking in.

"It's frustrating to go from where I was 365 days ago to where I am now, with all the things that have transpired," Hoying said after the team's minicamp. "The toughest thing, with Andy Reid coming in, is that I'm not his guy. He didn't draft me. (Former Eagles offensive coordinator) Jon Gruden drafted me."

### 20 Years Ago — 2004

Andy Geiger celebrated a decade as director of athletics at Ohio State and said he thought 10 years was just about long enough.

"I'm going to step down soon," he told BSB during an exclusive interview in his St. John Arena office. "I don't know when. A year maybe, two at the outside. I really enjoy what I'm doing, but this job is pretty relentless. And it's probably time. I want to be able to enjoy my family."

In May 1994, Geiger was named just the seventh Ohio State director of athletics in history, succeeding Jim Jones, who retired. Geiger had been an athletic director since 1971, when he took over the athletic department at Brown University at the age of 32.

Now at the age of 65, with his two sons ready to graduate from high school, Geiger was looking forward to something other than the daily grind of overseeing 35 intercollegiate sports with an annual budget of \$85 million.

"There are a lot of things I want to do, most of them having to do with family," he said with a smile. "But I have other interests, and I'm eager to pursue those."

### 15 Years Ago — 2009

The season was not yet two months old, but Nick Swisher's introduction to being a full-time resident of New York City was hardly routine.

The former Ohio State baseball standout rang the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street, did a flying leap toward fans above the outfield wall in new Yankee Stadium, dealt with a minor elbow injury and even pitched one inning in mop-up duty.

Not bad for a Big Apple debut.

"Playing with the Yankees, you get to do some cool stuff," said Swisher, who was single, lived in Manhattan and peppered most of his sentences with "dude."

In addition to all of the "cool stuff," more important was the early-season offense he provided to his new team as the Yankees played until May 8 without injured third baseman Alex Rodriguez.

"It has just been a lot of fun," Swisher said. "New York kind of fits my personality a little bit. It's an awesome town. The fans are great, and it's a great place to play."

### 10 Years Ago — 2014

Former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel rose to prominence at Youngstown State University, where he directed the Penguins to four national championships in 15 seasons on the gridiron. Now, he was ready for a chance to lead on the academic side as the university president.

Tressel - who was among the final three candidates for the same job at the University of Akron - was offered the YSU job Jan. 7 after interviewing one week earlier. Tressel, whose candidacy was supported by four unions on campus including the faculty union, beat out UNC Wilmington chancellor Gary L. Miller and Southern Oregon president Mary Cullinan.

"After fully examining each and every candidate and reviewing the input from hundreds of individuals across the campus and the community, the board of trustees believes Mr. Tressel is the right individual at the right time to lead Youngstown State University," board of trustees chair Sudershan Garg said. "Mr. Tressel has the personality and leadership skills, in addition to widespread community support, to dramatically raise YSU's profile and prominence across Ohio and the nation."

### Five Years Ago — 2019

Since he announced his declaration for the 2019 NFL draft Jan. 7, Dwayne Haskins appeared destined to join the New York Giants. On paper, it almost made too much sense for the Giants to take the former Ohio State quarterback.

Haskins grew up in Highland Park, N.J., just over 30 miles from New York's stadium in East Rutherford, and rooted for the Giants from Pop Warner through high school while developing the pure pocket-passing presence necessary for an NFL offense.

But instead of going with Haskins with the No. 6 overall pick in the first round April 25, quarterback-needy New York selected Duke's Daniel Jones, a stunner until Giants general manager Dave Gettleman revealed after the draft that he and his front-office staffers targeted the former Blue Devil early in the process, according to ESPN's Jordan Raanan.

"Jones and Missouri's Drew Lock were the headliners in Mobile, Ala.," said Raanan, who referenced the Jan. 26 Senior Bowl. "Lock was right behind Jones on the Giants' board. The Senior Bowl would be Gettleman's first exposure to them in a game environment. He had seen Ohio State's Dwayne Haskins play in the Big Ten Championship and Oklahoma's Kyler Murray and West Virginia's Will Grier when they met in a Thanksgiving weekend matchup."

### One Year Ago — 2023

There was extensive competition during spring camp, but Ohio State was unable to name a successor to quarterback C.J. Stroud.

Junior Kyle McCord and redshirt freshman Devin Brown competed for a majority of spring camp until an injury to Brown's throwing hand held him out of the final few practices of camp and the annual spring game. With an inconclusive finish to spring camp, head coach Ryan Day, co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis opted to allow the contest to bleed into the fall.

"I still think we're in the process where - I know everyone wants to talk about the quarterback competition - but we're still in the process of worrying about yourself and getting better," Dennis said on May 30. "When you worry about yourself and you maximize who you can become, the other stuff takes care of itself."



# Elimination Of Sit-Out Requirement A Game-Changer

Continued From Page 1

portal.

In this spring window and spring, there were 3,843 names in the FBS transfer portal, a number that eclipsed the previous record of 3,502 set in the 2022-23 cycle.

It's an unprecedented amount of player movement that, according to Eleven Warriors' Dan Hope and Buckeye Scoop's Bill Greene, has created a chaotic time in college football that has many fans concerned about the direction the sport is taking for the future.

"I mean, it's free agency without contracts," Hope said. "It's almost more crazy than free agency because in the NFL, you sign a contract that binds you to a team for a certain number of years before you can become a free agent. Whereas in college, there are no contracts. You can leave after any period of time and become a free agent. And I think that's a frustrating thing for a lot of people."

"It's a different game," Greene added. "It's the NFL 2.0. I know some people have a hard time with that. The amateurism has been gone for a while, but it's totally gone now."

## The Ever Evolving Transfer Portal

Before the transfer portal became a significant part of the college game, it was merely used as an organizational tool to help student-athletes more effectively find new homes in their respective sports.

During the pre-portal days in college athletics, athletes who wished to test the transfer waters had to directly contact schools themselves and hope for a response back from a coach. That all changed in 2018 when the transfer portal was launched by the NCAA, allowing players to enter their names into an online database that could be seen by college coaches throughout the nation.

Hope said this change allowed for a more uniform and organized structure when it came to players transferring, which he saw as a positive thing for both schools and student-athletes.

"Transferring has been a thing, but the portal just kind of more formalized that process," Hope said. "In terms of there being one database where players entered that portal, and coaches would be able to know immediately, 'OK, this guy's in the portal and here's his contact information if we want to contact him.'"

"So I think that's really the biggest thing it did for players. It just streamlined that process. Rather than a player having to reach out to schools and say, 'Hey, I'm transferring, are you looking for me?' Or parents, other people having to kind of put the word out there for them. The portal created a one-stop shop for schools to be able to look at, 'OK, these are all the players who are looking to transfer right now.'"

Even with this more uniform process, however, there were still some early limitations with the system that deterred players from transferring. During the first three years of the portal's existence, players who entered their names in the database were required to sit out a season – unless granted an exemption by the NCAA – before they could play for their new teams.

This, according to 247Sports' Steve Helwagen, made several student-athletes believe it was not worth the risk to enter the portal due to fears that doing so would stunt their development on the field.

"I think for underclassmen, it was a situation where, yeah, you could transfer, but you also had to sit out that year in residence," Helwagen said. "That deterred a lot of people from transferring because they didn't want to have to sit out. It stalled their progression toward possibly becoming a professional athlete. So you really had to think twice and decide, 'Is this really worth it for me if I make this transfer?'"

Helwagen added that the negative ramifications behind those eligibility rules put public pressure on the NCAA to make some changes to the way the portal was constructed. These criticisms, which, according to Helwagen, had been around long before the portal started, touched on the unfair nature



FILE PHOTO

**NIGHT AND DAY** – Head coach Ryan Day may have gotten off to a slow start with NIL and the transfer portal, but he now appears to be making up for lost time by bringing a number of quality additions to the program.

of student-athletes being required to sit out a year before playing their respective sport, while on the other hand, coaches – along with their non-athlete classmates – could switch schools without penalty.

"There was always this sentiment from national columnists and people to be sympathetic toward the athletes who did not have the same ability as their coaches to go from one school to another," he said, "or the same ability as the person they're sitting next to in economics class. That person, at the end of the semester, could pick up and go to Toledo, or go to Purdue or go to Ohio University, and insert right into their course of studies.

"Athletes were this special select group of people who could go to another college, but there are ramifications to that. (It was), 'We're going to take away your sport for a year. You're not able to play.' And it puts your playing career on pause. And the coaches, who recruited them to come there, can put this song and dance sales pitch on to get them there and then leave them high and dry for a better contract at another school. So to me, that's been part and parcel of why we are where we're at today."

Facing decades-long public pressure, the NCAA stepped in again and continued to evolve the portal, this time granting transferring student-athletes immediate eligibility at their new schools starting in the fall of 2021, regardless of whether they had switched schools previously.

With student-athletes no longer required to sit out a year, there was an immediate increase in transfers in most revenue sports. This was especially apparent in college football, where 950 undergraduates transferred during the first offseason after the new rule was put into place.

This immediate rise in transfers was exactly what Ari Wasserman of The Athletic expected to see once players were able to change schools without restrictions.

"Once you allow people to move with impunity, people are going to move with impunity," Wasserman told BSB. "Does that mean everyone makes the right decisions or there aren't people who try to take the easy way out? Absolutely not. But once they cracked the door open to allow this to happen, you had to expect the floodgates to open, and that's what's happened here."

While the portal was already very lively after the 2021 season, the floodgates were opened even wider due to the increasing usage of name, image and likeness in transfer recruitment.

Elite players in the portal are likely to have teams from all over the country reach out to them, and when they have several options, it can come down to who emerges as the highest bidder for their talents. This phenomenon, which has only gained more traction with the increasing influence of NIL collectives, is something that Greene believes could lead to teams trying to gain an unfair advantage.

"The tampering that goes on now is crazy," Greene said. "(Coaches) are going to backups at Georgia and other schools and saying, 'Do you like being the fifth defensive end? Come to our school and we'll pay you \$150,000 next year and you'll be the starting right-side defensive end.' The Georgia kid in that situation will transfer to Tulane or Mississippi State, where you never used to see that."

Not only has the portal changed the game for players, but it has also altered the way programs construct a roster. For many schools, the portal has become a quick fix for teams to fill a positional need during the offseason without having to spend time on player development.

This is evidenced by schools like Colorado, which made 42 transfer additions over the offseason this cycle after losing 41 to the portal.

It has yet to be seen whether the teams that use the portal the way Colorado does will be able to sustain success over a long period



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of time, but Wasserman doesn't think that's going to be possible.

"I don't think that teams that try to build through the portal every year are doing something wrong or can't be good," Wasserman said. "My question always is about consistency and foundations of programs. And if you're one of those teams that needs the portal to hit in order to be functional, that's a very scary place to be, because the portal is inconsistent.

"Recruitments are very brief. You never know who's going to be available and if they play a position of need. There are a lot of bad players who get to go to really good schools because their position is scarce. Operating on that level from a portal-to-portal window basis seems like a very scary and fragile way to run a football program."

While the Buffaloes and head coach Deion Sanders are outliers with their active approach, Helwagen said teams taking advantage of the transfer portal to immediately reshape their roster has become commonplace in college football, with high-profile Power Five teams such as Ohio State devoting extensive time and resources to finding the right transfers each offseason.

"There are thousands of people in that portal every year, and somewhere in there there's a fit," Helwagen said. "You just have to find it. It's like finding a needle in a haystack. Just imagine the number of hours that somebody behind the scenes at Ohio State is using to watch videotape of – I don't know if they're watching every guy in the transfer portal, but they're probably watching half of them. They're looking to see, 'Is there a fit there? Does this guy have skill? Does this guy have the ability to play at our level?'"

"The only way to do that is to scout them and watch them on videotape in the database. That's what they have to do. So it's become an industry of itself."

**Ohio State Changes Tune On Portal**

As Helwagen mentioned, the increasing usage of the transfer portal to revamp rosters in college football has reached the Woody Hayes Athletic Center at Ohio State, especially during this offseason.

During the early stages of its installation, Ohio State and Ryan Day were rather passive in their approach to the portal, relying more on in-house player development and high school recruiting rather than plucking a large crop of players from other schools. From 2021-22, for example, the Buckeyes brought in a total of five players through the portal, a group largely led by kicker Noah Ruggles and Traynum.

According to Hope, this lack of transfer interest by Ohio State was a result of the program being too tentative regarding name, image and likeness, a mentality that he said put it behind the eight ball in the world of the portal during its early stages.

"Early on in NIL – and I think (Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith) would admit this, he has admitted this when he's talked before – Ohio State initially was too conservative," Hope said. "During the first year or two, they were too fearful of NCAA violations. And they didn't use NIL to their full advantage. You had schools like Tennessee and Oregon and Florida who were out there and very blatantly using NIL in recruiting, and really nothing ever happened to them. And Ohio State

wasn't really doing that, and I think that hurt Ohio State because it just wasn't being as aggressive as it could be."

While the Buckeyes did take a larger dip into the transfer portal in 2023 with nine commitments – albeit only two players from that class, cornerback Davison Igbinosun and offensive lineman Josh Simmons, making any serious impact on the team – they changed course this past offseason, opting to tackle the portal with a much more aggressive approach.

Utilizing the influence of The Foundation, Ohio State football's top NIL collective, Day and the Buckeyes brought in a significant transfer portal haul this offseason, securing seven commitments as BSB went to press. Perhaps more importantly, this class included many players who could emerge as significant contributors for the Scarlet and Gray both this season and beyond, such as Downs, Howard, Judkins, true freshman quarterback Julian Sayin and center Seth McLaughlin – each of whom likely had lucrative offers from other notable Power Five schools but instead opted to play for the Buckeyes.

"Ohio State was masterful, I thought, with their handling of the transfer portal for football," Helwagen said. "They needed a quarterback, they got Will Howard. They probably needed offensive line help, they got Seth McLaughlin. They needed a safety, they got Caleb Downs. They needed a running back, they got Quinshon Judkins.

"They basically took a sniper approach and went after guys in positions that they needed and vetted them as best as they could on the short notice that they had, got them in for visits and pulled the trigger on all those guys. They filled any number of questionable

positions, and they are going to be much better for it."

Greene said that Ohio State's busy portal activity this offseason was a stark contrast from how the Buckeyes utilized it in years prior. He thinks the program realized that their previously tentative mentality toward the portal was putting them at risk of falling behind their main Power Five competitors, which forced them to operate with more urgency to stay atop the college football ranks.

"They finally (embraced the portal)," Greene said. "I thought they were slow to embrace NIL and the portal. They almost felt like it was wrong. But it's legal. (Clemson head football coach) Dabo Swinney, right now, is destroying his program and his legacy because he doesn't like the portal, he doesn't like NIL. Well that's all well and good. You can hold to your principles. But instead of winning national championships, you're going to start going 8-4, 9-3, and teams are going to pass you by.

"I think there was a little bit of that with Ohio State in the beginning. I don't think they really embraced it. I didn't think they really knew where they wanted to go with NIL. And then this year, we saw exactly where they wanted to go. They're going to pay kids to come back. They're going to pay recruits. They're going to pay in the portal. And it sure seems like they have the money and are willing to spend it. If you have that attitude, and you're at a power program like Ohio State, you're going to have a super roster."

Hope pointed to another factor that may have led to this change in approach, that being the team's recent losing skid to rival Michigan.

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# Wolverines' Success Pushes OSU To Go All-In

Continued From Page 11

He said the Wolverines' national championship game victory this season and their third straight win over Ohio State in November may have served as a wake-up call for Day and Ohio State to improve their roster moving forward by any means necessary, even if that means using the influence of NIL collectives to bring in top-tier transfer talent.

"There's probably some connection that they got aggressive right after they saw Michigan win a national championship," Hope said. "When you see your rival win the national title, when you have lost to your rival and failed to achieve your major goals three years in a row, I think that forces you to be more aggressive and try to do more than what you've already been doing to achieve their goals. So I think that certainly was a motivating factor to it."

Ohio State's effective usage of the transfer portal puts it in prime position to compete for a national championship in 2024, but some still have questions regarding how the program will continue to benefit from it moving forward. While Greene previously indicated that the Buckeyes may be poised to spend even more money in the portal next season and beyond, he still was left wondering if they have exhausted most of their NIL resources this offseason in order to win a national title, potentially leaving little money left to spend for the future.

"What's left in the bucket right now?" Greene said. "Did they deplete the bucket? Was this an 'all-in' type thing where they shot it all? A teenage girl goes to the mall, she has \$100 in her pocket. She ain't saving some for the next trip to the mall. She's spending it all. Was that what Ohio State just did? Or is the money flowing? Is this the way it's going to be? We have to see how it goes."

## For The Good Of The Game

Ohio State – like many other teams – was forced to adapt to the new landscape of college football, but just because bringing in transfers is a good way to get an advantage on the field, that doesn't mean it's an entirely positive thing for the game.

According to Wasserman, the transfer portal and all of the other changes that have taken place over the past few years haven't been good for the health of the sport from a spectator standpoint.

"The problem with college football is that there is nobody in charge. There is no singular person that can be the commissioner of college football that makes unilateral decisions for the health of the sport," Wasserman said. "It's very interesting to me that there are 900 cooks in the kitchen that helped guide the sport where it's going. And as a result, none of the decisions are made for the health of the sport."

"There's a lot of things happening in the sport that are making it less fun, less identifiable and there's less connectivity. My hope is that one day, this evolution, this growth will stop and we'll get to a baseline place where we can make decisions about the sport and it will become less turbulent."

A similar sentiment was expressed by Helwagen. He said that the chaotic nature of the transfer portal across college athletics has caused fans to grow tired of the college game



SONNY BROCKWAY

**RIVAL FORCES ACTION** – Some observers believe the Buckeyes' third straight loss to Michigan last November may have been the impetus for Ohio State's change of heart in embracing NIL and the transfer portal.

due to the constant player movement, which he thinks strips fans' ability to build a personal connection with players and their teams.

"One of the things that I hate to talk about is the fan fatigue from all of this," he said. "In the 'old days,' you were assured that you could watch a lot of guys play for three or four years and know that they were going to be there and watch them grow and develop. Well now, if somebody doesn't get where they want to be in one year, they leave. And you have a whole new crop of guys coming in every year."

"Is there going to be fatigue from the fans – when you have a bad year in the portal, and you only win 60 percent of your games, you're going to play in front of a half-empty stadium or arena because you didn't go out and buy enough good players. It's kind of professionalized college sports to a level it's never been at before."

But as Wasserman said, the health of the sport isn't the only thing that goes into the decisions that are made about the transfer portal. He pointed out that the legality of the old rules the NCAA had in place became a problem, which was one of the major reasons immediate eligibility became allowed in 2021.

"Do you think it's good or bad for the sport – that's an interesting thought, but it's just what has to happen," Wasserman said.

While the portal may mark a disappointing period for fans, many see these changes as a positive development for the student-athletes, who have long been stripped of their ability to move freely without restriction and profit off their own worth. This is a belief expressed by Wasserman, who said he doesn't blame the players for looking for new opportunities when they aren't satisfied with how things are going at their current schools.

"The reason for transferring has always

been interesting because everybody always viewed it as a weakness, or you don't want to stay and compete, or you're not loyal to your team," he said. "But everybody in the professional world leaves for better jobs that pay more, or wants to relocate to places that they want to live in more. What's right for you one year might not be what's right for you the next year. I think giving them the opportunity to pursue what they want is the right thing to do on a human level."

One of the many reasons players use the portal is so that they can get on the field and be seen by scouts. Greene said that the portal has been a big help for student-athletes looking to move past the college football level and play in the NFL, because it allows them to find schools that can give them extended playing time rather than staying at one school as a backup for their entire careers.

"Look at the draft this year," Greene said. "There was a corner drafted in the first round out of Toledo. So isn't it better to be a starter at Toledo than a backup at Ohio State? No backups at Ohio State get drafted. It isn't going to happen. I think kids now can see that where maybe 10-15 years ago the prestige of being an Ohio State football player – especially to in-state kids – was really strong. Today it's all about getting to the NFL."

## Looking Into The Future

Putting opinions on the current state of the portal aside, there may be a possible solution to these apparent problems in the future after the NCAA agreed that schools could share revenue with student-athletes starting at the beginning of the 2025-26 academic year.

According to Hope, the new model – which will permit schools, not require them,

to share revenue with athletes up to a cap of 22 percent of the average revenue for power conference programs – could open the door for institutions to hand out NFL-like contracts that require a multiple-year commitment from players who receive a portion of the revenue. This is a significant change that he thinks could limit the amount of player movement we see in today's hectic transfer portal era.

"Can they get to a point where they could require some type of commitment from players, and say, 'Hey, if you're going to get a cut of a revenue, you have to commit to staying at this school for a certain number of years'? I think the only way that's going to get accomplished now is through collective bargaining," Hope said.

"My feeling is that will happen at some point. I don't think it's going to happen this year or next year, but my feeling is that at some point there will be some type of players union, some kind of collective bargaining between players and schools. That feels inevitable. If it gets to that point, there would be a push from the schools' end for players to have to make some kind of commitment to their schools in order to receive revenue, to try and cut down on the transfer portal."

Helwagen offered a similar solution to this issue. He said that turning student-athletes into employees who can bargain with their schools can allow programs to place certain regulations that limit the movement of players once they commit to a school. This, according to the 247Sports reporter, could include re-installing the previous transfer eligibility rule that forces players to sit out a year before playing for another team.

"What has to happen is the stakeholders – the presidents, the commissioners, the athletic directors – have to look at it and say, 'Our industry is being damaged by the transient nature of this transfer portal,' " Helwagen said. "So when we collectively bargain with these athletes and make them employees, we're going to put protections and guardrails in there for the schools. It could very well go back to 'OK, you're now an employee. If you want to leave Ohio State and go to Purdue, you are going to sit out a year. We're going to put that back in.'

"And now you have to think twice about, 'Do I really want to spend five full years doing this? Can I get my degree here and move on?' There will be some trepidation and some pause before they take such a huge jump."

"They're going to have to collectively bargain with the athletes, if they feel (the transfer portal) is a problem. If the stakeholders don't feel like it's a problem, and there's still record profits and record ratings and whatever else despite all this transient nature, then so be it."

Regardless of the direction the NCAA might take in the future to improve the transfer portal, those who follow college athletics and college football know a solution to this issue will not come easy.

"I think there's going to be a lot of turbulence in the next five years," Wasserman said, "and when that dust settles, my hope is that consistency and functionality become prevalent again."

"I think this is going to be an ever-evolving beast," Hope added. "I don't know if we've quite seen the final form of what the transfer portal is going to look like."





MARCH/APRIL						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					29 @STP 7:37	30 @STP 3:07
<b>HOME OPENING NIGHT</b>						
31 @STP 3:07	2 OMA 6:15	3 OMA 6:15	4 OMA 6:15	5 OMA 6:15	6 OMA 2:05	
7 OMA 1:05	9 @LOU 6:05	10 @LOU 11:05AM	11 @LOU 6:35	12 @LOU 7:15	13 @LOU 7:15	
14 @LOU 1:05	16 BUF 6:15	17 BUF 12:05	18 BUF 6:15	19 BUF 6:15	20 BUF 4:05	
21 BUF 1:05	23 @SYR 6:35	24 @SYR 6:35	25 @SYR 6:35	26 @SYR 6:35	27 @SYR 1:05	
28 @SYR 1:05	30 TOL 6:15					

JUNE						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1 LHV 5:05
2 LHV 1:05		4 @IND 7:05	5 @IND 1:35	6 @IND 7:05	7 @IND 7:05	8 @IND 7:05
9 @IND 1:35	11 @IOW 7:05	12 @IOW 12:05	13 @IOW 7:05	14 @IOW 7:05	15 @IOW 7:05	
16 @IOW 1:05	18 @WOR 6:45	19 @WOR 6:45	20 @WOR 6:45	21 @WOR 6:45	22 @WOR 4:05	
23 @WOR 1:05	25 OMA 7:05	26 OMA 7:05	27 OMA 12:05	28 OMA 7:05	29 OMA 7:05	
30 OMA 1:05						

AUGUST						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 SYR 7:05	2 SYR 7:05	3 SYR 7:05
4 SYR 1:05	6 @STP 8:07	7 @STP 2:07	8 @STP 8:07	9 @STP 8:07	10 @STP 7:37	
11 @STP 3:07	13 @IOW 7:38	14 @IOW 1:08	15 @IOW 7:38	16 @IOW 8:08	17 @IOW 7:08	
18 @IOW 2:08	20 IND 6:15	21 IND 12:05	22 IND 6:15	23 IND 7:05	24 IND 7:05	
25 IND 1:05	27 @GWN 7:05	28 @GWN 7:05	29 @GWN 7:05	30 @GWN 7:05	31 @GWN 6:05	

MAY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1 TOL 6:35	2 TOL 6:15	3 TOL 7:05	4 TOL 4:05
5 TOL 1:05		7 @IOW 7:38	8 @IOW 1:08	9 @IOW 1:08	10 @IOW 8:08	11 @IOW 7:08
12 @IOW 2:08		14 LOU 7:05	15 LOU 12:05	16 LOU 12:05	17 LOU 7:05	18 LOU 7:05
19 LOU 1:05		21 @OMA 7:35	22 @OMA 7:35	23 @OMA 7:35	24 @OMA 7:35	25 @OMA 7:05
26 @OMA 3:05		28 LHV 7:05	29 LHV 6:35	30 LHV 7:05	LHV 7:05	

JULY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 @TOL 7:05	2 @TOL 7:05	3 @TOL 7:05	4 TOL 4:05	5 TOL 7:05	6 TOL 5:05
		9 @IND 7:05	10 @IND 1:35	11 @IND 7:05	12 @IND 7:05	13 @IND 7:05
14 @IND 1:35					19 @LOU 7:15	20 @LOU 7:15
21 @LOU 6:05		23 MEM 5:05	24 MEM 12:05	25 MEM 7:05	26 MEM 7:05	27 MEM 7:05
28 MEM 1:05		30 SYR 7:05	31 SYR 12:05			

SEPTEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 @GWN 1:05	2 DUR 6:15	3 DUR 6:15		5 DUR 6:35	6 DUR 7:05	7 DUR 7:05
8 DUR 1:05		10 STP 6:15	11 STP 6:15	12 STP 6:15	13 STP 7:05	14 STP 7:05
15 STP 1:05		17 @TOL 6:35	18 @TOL 12:05	19 @TOL 6:35	20 @TOL 7:05	21 @TOL 5:05
22 @TOL 2:05						

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# Kicker Ruggles Tops Football Transfers

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State and Ryan Day have been able to turn to the transfer portal this offseason as a way to add some talent that was immediately needed for the 2024 team, being more active than ever before after losing 25 players to the portal.

Despite it being open since 2021 with the rules that are in place now, this is the first time Day has been so active in bringing in transfer talent, although there have been transfers who have made an impact nonetheless.

Since 2021, the Buckeyes haven't been extremely active in the portal, relying on their recruiting and development of players to fill in roster needs. But this offseason, they seemed to adjust to the new world of college football, something Buckeye Scoop analyst Bill Greene thinks is necessary to remain relevant in the hunt for a national championship.

"From now on, these are the rules of the game, and they're going to play by the rules," Greene told BSB. "If you're a big-time fan of Ohio State, you have to love it. If you're a fan of Clemson, I think you have to be concerned. Dabo Swinney got you two national titles in a short period of time, that's amazing. But if I were a Clemson fan right now, I would be concerned about the direction of the program. If I were an Ohio State fan, I'd be ecstatic."

Now that the spring portal has closed, BSB looked back at all of the transfers Ohio State has brought in since 2018 when the portal was just a database and ranked any who have had a significant impact on the football program while they were a Buckeye. Not ranked are those in the current class who have yet to play for the Buckeyes.

Among those are Caleb Downs, who as a freshman at Alabama played his way to an All-America selection while starting at safety for the entire 2023 season. He projects to possibly be the best portal transfer the Buckeyes have ever landed if he plays up to his potential with the Scarlet and Gray.

With quarterbacks Will Howard and Julian Sayin, running back Quinshon Judkins, offensive lineman Seth McLaughlin, tight end Will Kacmarek and safety Keenan Nelson Jr. joining Ohio State this offseason, they all have an opportunity to join this list along with Downs after this season.

## Honorable Mentions

The best player the Buckeyes ever got from the transfer portal was before 2021, when the NCAA enforced the rule that required players to sit out a season if they transferred to another school. Justin Fields, who played at Georgia as a freshman, was able to play due to a waiver that was granted by the NCAA, and he ended up as one of the best quarterbacks to go through Ohio State.

He was the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year in both 2019 and 2020, finishing his two seasons with 5,373 passing yards, 63 touchdowns and nine interceptions along with 867 yards rushing and 15 touchdowns on the ground.

Since Fields left for the NFL, the Buckeyes haven't had another quarterback even



FILE PHOTO

**JUST-IN TIME —** Quarterback Justin Fields was acquired through the transfer portal in 2019 and quickly became one of the best quarterbacks in Ohio State history, winning Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year honors in both 2019 and 2020.

close to what he was as a threat with his legs. He had the ability to win a game on the ground but also had a cannon of an arm with solid accuracy to go with it. There's a reason he was taken with the No. 11 overall pick in the 2021 NFL draft by the Chicago Bears.

His performance got him to third in Heisman voting in 2019, and he was in the top 10 in the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season, leading the Buckeyes to the championship game against Alabama that year. He had a 20-2 record at Ohio State with both losses coming in the playoffs, and he is still the most recent Ohio State quarterback to come out of a game against Michigan with a win.

Another transfer who came to Columbus the same year as Fields was Jonah Jackson, who transferred from Rutgers as a graduate student, giving him the ability to play immediately. While he was there for only one season, he was great as the Buckeyes' left guard, starting all 13 games at the position that year and earning first-team All-Big Ten honors. He was part of a unit that paved the way for the program's first-ever 2,000-yard rusher, J.K. Dobbins, and the team ranked fifth in the country in rushing offense at 266.8 yards per game.

"When they got that kid from Rutgers, Jonah Jackson," Greene recalled, "he was an impact dude for sure — a big-time impact dude."

Jackson has gone on to an NFL career where he played four seasons with the Detroit Lions, starting in 57 games, and he

was signed by the Los Angeles Rams over the offseason.

Running back Trey Sermon also deserves to be mentioned here, even though he transferred to Ohio State from Oklahoma before the 2021 portal rules were put into place.

He didn't contribute much for most of the season until the Buckeyes needed it most. In four games to start the season, he had 239 rushing yards and no touchdowns, but a switch flipped and he became a dominant runner.

On the ground in three games following that, Sermon totaled 636 yards rushing and four touchdowns. Against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 19, 2020, he ran for a program-record 331 yards on 29 carries — eclipsing Eddie George's previous single-game record of 314 set in 1995 — and tacked on two touchdowns in the win.

He continued that performance when the Buckeyes got into the College Football Playoff and rushed for 193 yards and a touchdown against Clemson.

In the championship game, he was injured early on and taken to the hospital, totaling just one carry for 2 yards, but he was able to be a part of the team that took the Buckeyes to their most recent national championship game with Fields.

## 5. Josh Simmons (2023-Present)

Simmons has been with the Buckeyes for only one season so far and is returning

for the 2024 season, likely to be the starting left tackle again. He was tasked with a tough job, taking over the protection of Kyle McCord's blind side as the replacement for Paris Johnson Jr., who had been taken with the sixth overall pick in the 2023 NFL draft by the Arizona Cardinals.

When Simmons came to Columbus from San Diego State, there were concerns about his penalties since he had 17 of them in 2022 with the Aztecs. He also had to learn a completely new offense and at a different position than he had played the year before, moving from right tackle.

In the first half of the season with Ohio State, the trend seemed to continue, and he committed eight penalties through the month of October. But over time he was able to clean his game up, and he ended up going the entire month of November without having a flag thrown against him. He said playing in big, close games made him realize he had to fix how he approached the game mentally.

"Physically, obviously you have to be ready, but mentally that's where you have to start tightening up a little bit," Simmons said on April 3. "You start playing in those Notre Dame games, those Penn State games and you realize a penalty can literally destroy the whole game. Once you look at it through that lens, you know those are a no-no. That can't happen."

He has played only one year with the Buckeyes now, but he has already been much better than expected when he first came over from the Aztecs. And if he can continue his late-season performance moving forward, he could end up moving even higher on a list like this.

Simmons thinks he can take the improvements he made into next year and continue to work over the offseason to put together a great 2024 season.

"In terms of physical attributes, I can move and I'm strong, but there's a lot more to it that I need to work on to come close to me being able to help the team," Simmons said. "Technique, awareness, communication. That's the biggest thing when you're in those big games, you have to be able to call out if a pressure might come. Just awareness of ball."

## 4. Tanner McCalister (2022-23)

When defensive coordinator Jim Knowles was hired at Ohio State for the 2022 season, he brought with him graduate safety Tanner McCalister from Oklahoma State. He had played four seasons with the Cowboys under Knowles and started 23 games from 2020-21, recording 83 tackles (three for loss), 11 pass deflections and one interception in those final two years.

He found his way onto the field with the Buckeyes since he already knew the defensive scheme that Knowles brought to Ohio State, and in his one season he had 24 tackles, one pass broken up and three interceptions. Two of his interceptions came in the Buckeyes' win over Iowa on Oct. 22, 2022.

He was one of the few bright spots in a Buckeye secondary that got beat deep often in the latter half of the season.

He found a home in Columbus as the nickel safety, which Knowles likes to





SONNY BROCKWAY

**ON TARGET —** After his transfer from North Carolina, kicker Noah Ruggles set a program record for career field-goal percentage at 90.2 (37 of 41) and was nearly automatic on PATs, hitting 148 of 149.

use as much as he can in what he calls a “safety-driven defense.” In his one season with the Buckeyes, even after the final few games, he was part of a defense that gave up less than 5 yards per play.

**3. Chip Trayanum (2022-23)**

When Chip Trayanum transferred to Ohio State from Arizona State, he entered the program as a linebacker. But when the running backs room fell apart with injuries in the 2022 season, Trayanum was able to step into the role using the experience he had in the position from high school and as a Sun Devil.

That season he played only one full game at running back, albeit an important one, rushing for 83 yards on 14 attempts and hauling in one catch for 14 yards in the Buckeyes’ home loss to Michigan. After he proved he was capable of filling the role, he went into the 2023 season as the backup to TreVeyon Henderson.

He finished the 2023 season with 85 attempts for 373 yards and three rushing touchdowns along with nine catches for 53 yards. No play he was involved in was bigger than the touchdown he scored against Notre Dame at the end of the game.

McCord was able to take the Buckeyes 64 yards in 82 seconds, with long fourth-down completions to keep the game going,

but Ohio State was stuck at the Fighting Irish 1-yard line with three seconds left on the clock and one play left to try to win the game.

They elected to hand the ball off to Trayanum, who drove to the left side and dived for the end zone, clearing the ball over the goal line by under a foot to win the game and keep an undefeated record. The Buckeyes didn’t make the playoffs because of a loss to Michigan later in the year, but Trayanum’s touchdown goes down as one of the more exciting plays in Ohio State football history.

“I knew I was definitely in,” Trayanum said about his run after the game. “It was close, but as a running back you live for the nitty gritty runs where you fight with your body to stay up and make sure nothing touches (the ground).”

**2. Davison Igbinosun (2023-present)**

Another player still with Ohio State currently is cornerback Davison Igbinosun, who transferred to Columbus after his freshman season at Ole Miss. He might have had the chance to play for only one year so far, like multiple other players on this list, but he was on the field as a part of a Buckeyes defense that was top three in the country.

Ohio State was third in yards allowed per game (265.4), second in points allowed per game (11.2) and near the top of many oth-

er defensive categories as well. A big part of that was getting the secondary that had been allowing long plays in check, which Igbinosun was a part of.

He finished the 2023 season with 59 tackles, 1½ for a loss, five pass breakups and two fumble recoveries. Receivers he went up against recorded 36 receptions on 71 targets with five touchdowns. He shone in the Cotton Bowl despite the loss, recording a season-high seven tackles.

“(Igbinosun) was a heck of a transfer,” Greene said. “I would place him above Jonah Jackson. He really took that secondary and elevated it.”

Now, Igbinosun is coming back for at least one more year with the Buckeyes as part of what looks like it could be an even more stacked defense under Knowles, giving himself the chance to move up the list with another good season.

**1. Noah Ruggles (2021-22)**

A kicker at the top of the list isn’t the most exciting choice, but the argument could be made that for the two years he was in Co-

lumbus, Noah Ruggles, who transferred from North Carolina, was the best kicker who has ever come through Ohio State.

Ruggles had one main problem that left a bad taste in the mouths of Buckeyes fans. He missed a 50-yard field goal in the College Football Playoff against No. 1 Georgia that would have sent OSU to the championship game against TCU. And he really missed it. The kick went more than 10 yards wide left and never even looked like it had a chance, and that was the last fans saw of him.

But for two seasons, Ruggles made 37 field goals – sixth in Ohio State history – in 41 tries, including the kick against the Bulldogs. That 90.2 percent success rate was the highest in program history. In 2021, he made 20 of 21 field goals for a 95.2 success rate, which is 5.2 percent higher than any other single-season field-goal percentage in Ohio State history. He was also automatic on extra-point kicks, making 148 out of 149 attempts, the lone miss being a blocked kick against Maryland in 2022.

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# Transfer Portal Not An Option In Bygone Era

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It was a time long ago when Ohio State football games aired on numerous radio stations in Columbus because there was no exclusivity clause.

You could walk down a street and hear the play-by-play(s) from transistors on the porches as neighbors enjoyed a fall Saturday afternoon.

Other than a rare national TV broadcast on ABC, the Buckeyes were sometimes on the local PBS station (WOSU), if one was lucky enough to have a UHF receiver and antenna. And color TV was still cost prohibitive for many, forcing them to miss sporting events that were “live and in living color.”

In 1968, the U.S. was inching closer to putting the first man on the moon while simultaneously trying to repair scars from the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy.

For college athletes 56 years ago, there were limited options if they wanted to move past their original choices of schools, unlike the unprecedented freedom to transfer and immediately play today.

Ron Maciejowski, a backup quarterback to Rex Kern for three seasons at Ohio State, including winning the 1968 national championship team as part of the fabled “Super Sophomores,” is unsure if he would have explored the liberal transfer rules if they were available then.

“I guess it would be different for me today, looking back at my situation, but I hope not,” he told Buckeye Sports Bulletin of possibly transferring.

In reality, he didn't really have much of a choice other than to stick it out. He and OSU basketball player Dick Furry were glad they did.

In the ensuing two seasons with the Buckeyes, Maciejowski had to endure the painful upset loss to Michigan and first-year coach Bo Schembechler in 1969. But the Buckeyes avenged the defeat the next season for an undefeated regular season to be crowned national champion by the National Football Foundation (its final poll was before the bowl games). Unfortunately, OSU lost to Stanford in the Rose Bowl to finish fifth in the AP poll.

Furry would have had a decision to make as well if the current transfer regulations were in place before the 1959-60 season. Similar to the 1968 sophomore-dominated football team, the basketball Buckeyes had an outstanding incoming sophomore class of Gary Gearhart, John Havlicek, Bobby Knight, Jerry Lucas and Mel Nowell who were ready to challenge the likes of Furry, who was a starter the previous season as a junior.

Furry lost his starting spot to Havlicek but still played a key role in helping the program to its only national title. Furry said transferring never entered his mind because he was so close to graduating.

“When we started basketball that season, I only had two quarters left,” he said.

He explained he was an early enrollee in his freshmen year, entering Ohio State for the spring quarter of what should have been his final months of high school.

## No Stay, No Play

Transfer talk was minimal in his and Maciejowski's era due mainly to several limitations: Freshmen were ineligible to play varsity (the rule was eliminated in 1972), costing them one season, and transfers had to sit one season before becoming eligible at their new program. Plus, there were no monetary incentives such as today's name, image and likeness (NIL).

“Well, it was very different back then because there wasn't the money to go everywhere and things like this,” Maciejowski said. “So it was more about you like where you are, and you really liked the guys that you're playing with. And back then if you did transfer, you had to sit out a year, and that was a year of eligibility.”

“So you had to make the decision pretty quick, like right after your sophomore year. You win the national championship and you go, ‘Oh, wait a minute, I played a lot, too, so do I really want to do this?’ and then the answer ended up being no. It wasn't even really much of a thought back then.”

But one player bucked the trend, so to speak. Kern recalled how junior tailback Dave Brungard went from one rushing and one receiving touchdown in the 1968 season opener vs. SMU to falling deep down the depth chart.

“(Brungard) was a runner that if he got up to the line of scrimmage and the hole was closed, it wasn't like what Woody wanted him to be. He wanted him to be his own blocker and just blast through there,” Kern said. “But Brunnie had enough speed that he could bounce outside and outrun everybody. So, he did that.”

“And as the season progressed, Brunnie started losing reps in the starting offense, and by the end of the year, he wasn't starting at all. So, once we get back from the Rose Bowl, Brunnie went in, and he talked to Woody and said, ‘Coach, I'd like to transfer.’”

Brungard told Hayes he wanted to go to Alabama.

“Woody was most shocked and he goes, ‘Hold on a minute,’ ” Kern said. “He picked up the phone and called Bear Bryant, ‘I've got a kid here lost in the depth chart and he'd like to come down and play for you.’ Brunnie did. Of course, he had to sit a year.”

Kern said he has an original note Bryant sent to Hayes a few months later thanking him for sending a copy of Hayes' book “Hotline to Victory” and he added, “I want to thank you for sending Dave Brungard down here. We're getting ready for spring practice, and he looks like a good one.”

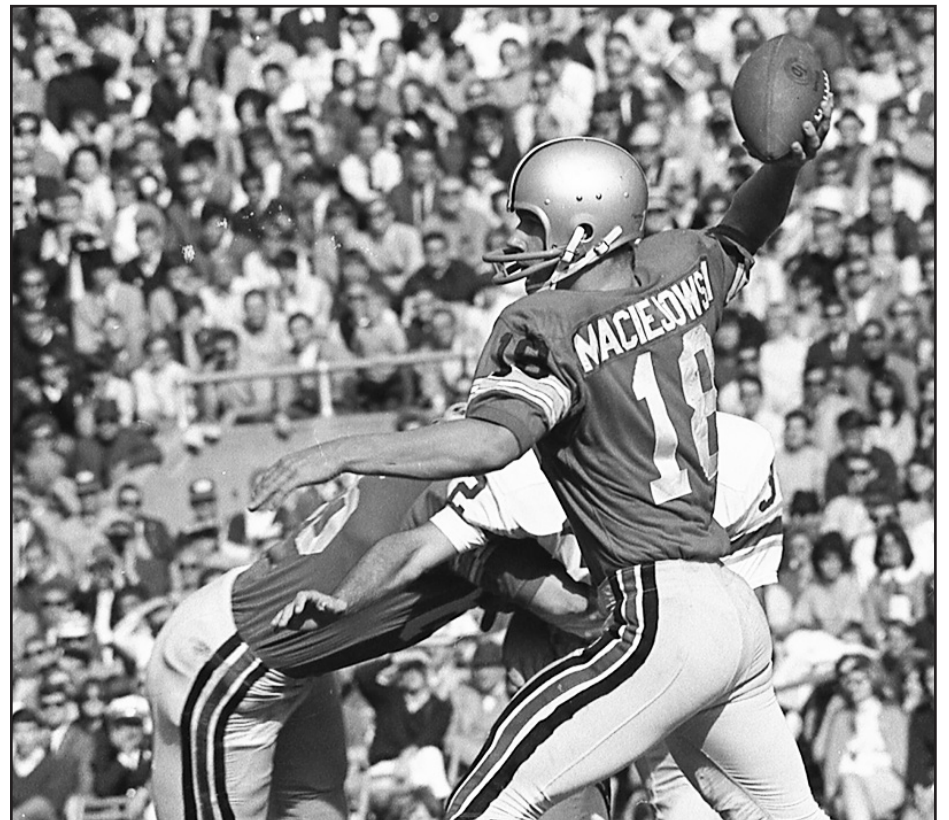
As a sidenote, Kern said anytime he met Crimson Tide fans he'd ask them if they knew who was the only player that started for both Hayes and Bryant.

“If I was betting money, I'd have a lot of money,” Kern joked.

But he finally met his match at a Rose Bowl Hall of Fame function when he queried a person from Alabama.

“I asked the question and the guy goes without hesitation, ‘Dave Brungard,’ ” Kern said. “I said, ‘How did you know that?’ He said, ‘Well, I was the manager on the team that year.’ Oh, wow. I think I picked the wrong guy.”

Furry was never in the doghouse like



FILE PHOTO

**PATIENCE PAID OFF** — When Ron Maciejowski played for the Buckeyes from 1968-70, student-athletes who chose to transfer had to sit out a year. He stayed and became a valuable piece of a national championship-winning team and doesn't regret his decision.

Brungard but still found himself in the unfamiliar role of coming off the bench in his senior season. Maybe it was inevitable that Havlicek, the future Hall of Famer, would take his spot, but Furry was in the lineup at the beginning of the season.

“I had started the first game,” Furry said. “I had Havlicek beat out, and I got cut over the eye and it got infected. My timing was off the first game and John took over.”

Furry was asked if he would have been the season-long starter if not for the injury.

“I don't know about that. I had him beat out at the time,” he said. “And as it turns out, I've always felt — and Bobby Knight and I talked about this a lot because we spent time together afterwards — I thought we were better off at the time having me playing as the sixth man rather than John because John, even though he was still pretty good at the time, he improved a lot as the year went along.”

## New Not Better?

Call him old-school or an old-timer, but Maciejowski sees the portal as an excuse in many cases, or as an opportunity to run away from competing for a position.

“Our freshman year, because you can think you can tell right away after 10 practices as a freshman where everybody sits, or where coaches think they sit, and some of the guys were saying, ‘I'm going to transfer to West Virginia, they wanted me really bad,’ ” he said.

“It was funny because some of the guys ended up being All-Americans or two-time All-Big Ten guys. They just didn't understand that it takes more than 10 practices to figure out who can really play.”

“You know, today if anybody gets a hair

up their hind end, they say I'm jumping into the portal and I'm going somewhere else,” Kern agreed.

It should be noted that it wasn't a two-way battle to be the starter in 1968 as Kern unseated senior Bill Long.

“Competition. That's what makes it great,” Kern said. “You go out, you work your hardest, and if there's the guy that's playing in front of you, we always felt that you went out on the field and do your best and if you fall a little short, you fall short.”

That might have been the case in 1968 where the present transfer portal would have been a benefit.

“It's probably the only position that really warrants that kind of movement,” Maciejowski said of the quarterback. “Because everybody else, you played three running backs, you play 10 offensive linemen, 10 defensive linemen. You play all these other guys a lot if they're good enough, but a quarterback, even if you're good enough, you're not playing if you're the second guy. It's just the way it works.”

Former BSB writer Marcus Hartman, now of the Dayton Daily News, wonders how the transfer portal would have affected the coaching style of an earlier era.

Jim Foster, who coached the Ohio State women's basketball team from 2002-13, was a brilliant coach with a no-nonsense approach.

“He had starters who played early (in their careers) that maybe in this era would have been like, ‘I don't want to deal with (his sternness),’ ” Hartman said. “Or, especially since he was more old-school, it might have been where it seemed that he'd likely run off a player or two when they're a freshman and





FILE PHOTO

**NET RESULT — Despite losing his starting spot to future Hall-of-Famer John Havlicek, Dick Furry chose to stay at Ohio State and complete his degree while playing a key role in helping the men's basketball team to its only national title.**

they're not ready to deal with it, but they're the type of player by the time they're a senior they're like, 'Oh, man, I'm so thankful for all the discipline and everything.' ”

NIL comes into play nowadays as well with cash inducements being a valuable tool to entice a player to leave one school for another. It's hard for Furry to comprehend the breadth of changes in college athletics, including the recent decision to have schools directly pay their athletes.

Furry said he spent his first two years at Ohio State on an academic scholarship because athletic scholarships weren't available. He held a university-issued job to help pay expenses.

“Well, it was a year before they started the (athletic) scholarship. I was the mail boy for the athletic department,” he said. “My instructions were to have Woody's mail on his desk on time. I don't remember what the time was. Now it's been awhile. But the funny thing was all my teammates and my brother, who was playing baseball, they thought it was great to sub for me and get paid for it. And I had no idea what I was getting paid at that time.

“So I'm not understanding everything about this new paying people idea. I'm not very fond of that. But I don't think anybody cares what I think about it or not.”

He would be in the minority for sure among current athletes in his thoughts on the portal.

“I think they've got to do something to settle that,” he said. “Originally, you had to lay out a year unless you had already graduated, then you could transfer right away. But I think they ought to go back to making people lay out a year. I'm not sure how many people are going to agree with me on that.”

It hits home for him with his beloved basketball program, noting that five Buckeyes

transferred out (four came in) after this past season despite assistant coach Jake Diebler taking over in February for the fired Chris Holtmann.

“I was surprised,” Furry said, “because my impression was that Diebler had a real good relationship with the kids he had recruited, and now a couple of them have decided to leave.”

It's not only football and basketball players from decades past who stayed their entire careers despite facing adversity.

Paul Caponigri, a member of the Buckeyes' 2004 Central Collegiate Hockey Association tournament championship team and an analyst for the Big Ten Network, nominated Daymen Bencharski (now Rycroft) as a likely candidate to transfer back then if the current rules applied.

“His sophomore year he had 15 goals playing on a line with R.J.,” Caponigri said of R.J. Umberger, who would go on to score 180 goals in 779 NHL games. “Then by his senior year when we won the league he was not playing (three goals in 25 games). He was a healthy scratch in the playoffs. You can fall in and out.

“If you're in pro sports you can be traded. In college, before now you could be stuck if you didn't want to sit out a year. It's easy to get buried in college, and then you don't have the options or the option was harder to do. He had a really nice pro career.”

Bencharski played nine seasons in the minor leagues, eight at the Double-A level and the final one overseas.

Caponigri is in favor of the transfer portal if it can be regulated but has empathy for coaches trying to maintain a roster.

“I think things are always fluid,” he said. “I guess that's a good way to put it. Back in the day 20 years ago, it's kind of you're here for four years, you're not transferring most

likely, or most guys aren't leaving early for the pros.

“Now, I think literally every player is a fluid year-to-year situation. That's just the way the world is now, especially with NIL because that's another recruiting chip for some of the teams that have money to spend on that.”

### Rewarded

Kern for one is glad his backup stuck around. Maciejowski played in 24 games over three seasons and earned the title of “Super Sub” when he took over for the injured Kern on numerous occasions, such as leading the Buckeyes to a victory over Illinois in 1968 to keep the dream season alive.

“Mace could have gone anywhere and played,” Kern said. “But thank God, he didn't. He saved us so many times. I put him in too many predicaments. But he didn't pull a rabbit out. He just knew how to do it.”

Maciejowski said there is something magical about going through a college career with the same teammates compared to doing a fly-by season, hopping from team to team.

In separate interviews six hours apart, he and Kern, who remain close friends, told almost verbatim the same story about Hayes.

“He came in and addressed all of us as freshmen,” Maciejowski said. “He said, ‘I want you to look around the room.’ And of course, everybody's still staring at him. ‘God dammit, look around the room.’ So, we start looking around the room. He says, ‘I want

to tell you something right now. These will be the best friends you ever have for the rest of your life.’

“I don't even know these guys. But he was right. And they are my best friends. And we're that close. We follow each other, we talk with each other, certainly when bad things happen.

“I lost two great friends, teammates, in the last year. (John) Brockington, who was probably my closest friend on the team, and Ralph Halloway was a defensive tackle for us from Oberlin, Ohio.”

“We were so fortunate just coming in at the right time with a group of super sophomores and upperclassmen,” Kern added. “What was really unique about that was the upperclassmen could have been a little, maybe jealous of all the ink that we were getting at that time. But they embraced us and we had great leadership.”

Ohio State men's hockey coach Steve Rohlik knows the feeling. He won an NCAA title as a senior at Wisconsin in 1990 and couldn't imagine having transferred during his time there.

“We would never have the bond that we have now with our group and winning a national championship,” he said. “I tell people, we won a national championship, but what I really won is the bond that I have with all those guys. We send out a text message and within 30 minutes there's 15 messages from 15 different guys.

“If I would have just walked away, who knows what would have happened. I don't know.”

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# Ohio State Prepares For Full Summer Slate

While the summer might not seem like a very busy time for football, it can get to be at the college level since June is the month when official visits will be taking place every weekend.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

The month of May is spent traveling around the country to visit some top targets and secure official visits or even commitments from players, but the work coaches put in doesn't stop when the calendar flips to June.

Head coach Ryan Day talked recently about how the month of June can be a tough one to handle for a football program.

"Oh, it's a lot. It's a lot," Day said during a recent appearance on 97.1 The Fan's "The Morning Juice." "Picture someone hosts a wedding for three, four hours. Do that for 48 hours with 70 people. Because when families come in – 13, 14 families – and they bring in their parents and they bring in three or four other people, you've got to get them in the hotel, you've got the restaurants, you've got all these different events that are going on. It's a lot of work.

(General manager, player personnel)

Mark Pantoni certainly does a great job with that," Day continued. "Erin Dunston, who does our on-campus recruiting, is tremendous. I mean, she is constantly moving. But it takes everybody. It takes a village. It takes everybody involved in the (Woody Hayes Athletic Center). We have former players that help out. We have all kinds of different things that are going on. But it's an opportunity to open up our doors and allow these folks to come in and see what it's all about and put Columbus on display."

Since the NCAA made June the month to take official visits, it has become easier for schools to navigate the month as they can focus solely on the recruits. With coaches prohibited from holding any practices, they can put all of their attention into the prospects.

Official visits during the season might not hold the same experience for a high school recruit. They will get to see the game atmosphere for schools, but if they want to talk to the coaches, they might be understandably distracted since their main goal that day is to win a game.

"Once they made official visits available in June, which just happened a couple of years ago, this became the window because it's a little quieter," Day said. "When you come for an official visit during the season, the coaches are distracted with the games. It's a little bit more difficult. This is a great opportunity to really spend 48 hours with the family, get our own family

around them, get the players around some of them so they can see that. And so it's been a good thing for us."

Of course, the Buckeyes will still have recruits visit during the season, but June official visits allow them to build an even better relationship with the players.

Not only are official visits over the weekends, but the Buckeyes are also hosting one-day camps on June 5, 6, 11, 13 and 17. They will also have high school 7-on-7 camps on June 12 and 18.

As BSB went to press, Ohio State had already hosted some recruits on official visits the weekend of May 31-June 2. The recruits who were already committed to Ohio State who visited that weekend were Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) and Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star safety DeShawn Stewart (6-2, 185).

As for uncommitted prospects who made a stop in Columbus that weekend, that list included the No. 3 ranked player in the 2025 class, Duncanville, Texas, five-star wide receiver Dakorien Moore (5-11, 175); McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 205); Orlando (Fla.) Jones four-star wide receiver Vernell Brown III (5-11, 170); Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star defensive end Justin Hill (6-3, 220); Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-0, 205); Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star wide receiver Daylan McCutcheon (5-11,

175); Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley three-star interior offensive lineman Henry Fenuku (6-4, 295); and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star offensive lineman Kaden Strayhorn (6-3, 295).

Prospects scheduled to visit Ohio State the weekend of June 7-9 included Olney (Md.) Our Lady Good Counsel four-star safety Faheem Delane (6-3, 195); Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star wide receiver Quincy Porter (6-3, 190); Indianapolis Warren Central four-star defensive end Damien Shanklin (6-4, 230); Carmel, Calif., four-star offensive tackle Jackson Lloyd (6-7, 290); Matthews (N.C.) Weddington four-star defensive lineman Trajen Odom (6-5, 275); Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist three-star interior offensive lineman Jayvon McFadden (6-5, 300); and Roswell, Ga., three-star interior offensive lineman Andrew Stargel (6-4, 284).

Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts (6-4, 235), Wayne (N.J.) four-star wide receiver De'zie Jones (6-0, 180) and Akron Archbishop Hoban four-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 215) will be the three Ohio State commits on campus that weekend.

From June 14-16, the Buckeyes will host their busiest weekend of the month. The only Ohio State commit on campus will be Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive lineman London Merritt (6-3, 250).

The recruits who aren't committed to

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# OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

## OSU Football 2025 Commitments

Players in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Tarvos Alford	LB	6-2	210	★★★★	Vero Beach, Fla.
De'zie Jones	WR	6-0	180	★★★★	Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic
Eli Lee	LB	6-3	215	★★★	Akron Hoban
Cody Haddad	SF	6-1	175	★★★	Cleveland St. Ignatius
Carter Lowe	OT	6-5	290	★★★★	Toledo Whitmer
Zahir Mathis	DL	6-6	225	★★★★	Philadelphia Imhotep Institute
London Merritt	DL	6-3	250	★★★★	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
Na'eem Offord	CB	6-1	185	★★★★★	Birmingham (Ala.) Parker
Nate Roberts	TE	6-4	235	★★★★	Washington, Okla.,
Devin Sanchez	CB	6-2	170	★★★★★	Houston North Shore
Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	210	★★★★★	Bellefontaine, Ohio
DeShawn Stewart	SF	6-2	185	★★★★	Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic

## OSU Football 2026 Commitment

Player(s) in the class of 2026 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Chris Henry Jr.	WR	6-5	185	★★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei

Ohio State who were set to be in Columbus that weekend include Roswell (Ga.) Fellowship Christian School four-star offensive tackle Josh Petty (6-5, 262); San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) J Serra Catholic four-star linebacker Madden Faraimo (6-3, 210); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star linebacker Nathaniel Owusu-Boateng (6-1, 205); Mobile (Ala.) Vigor four-star offensive tackle Micah DeBose (6-5, 315); Mission Viejo, Calif., four-star wide receiver Phillip Bell (6-2, 195); Elkhart, Ind., four-star defensive end Mariyon Dye (6-5, 255); Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star defensive lineman Maxwell Roy (6-3, 270); Newport News (Va.) Warwick four-star safety Messiah Delhomme (6-1, 196); Princeton (N.J.) Hun School three-star defensive lineman Kole Briehler (6-2, 265); and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep School three-star running back Isaiah West (5-11, 208).

Then what might be the most important weekend of the month will be June 21-23. The committed visitors will include Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170), Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord

(6-1, 185) and Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225).

There will also be many big-time targets Ohio State is hoping to earn a commitment from after that weekend, including Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 270); Conroe, Texas, five-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-2, 185); Enterprise, Ala., four-star defensive end Zion Grady (6-4, 235); Geneva (Ill.) Geneva Community four-star wide receiver Talyn Taylor (6-1, 173); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star running back Jordon Davison (5-11, 203); Opelika, Ala., four-star defensive lineman Malik Autry (6-6, 320) and Baltimore Dunbar four-star interior offensive lineman Joshua Blackston (6-4, 275).

### OL Recruiting Heats Up

It's no secret that recruiting on the offensive line hasn't been up to Ohio State's standards over the past few seasons. The last five-star offensive lineman who joined the Buckeyes out of high school was Donovan Jackson in the class of 2021.

While they have been in the running for

multiple different highly-ranked players on the line, the Buckeyes haven't been able to finish the job, such as with 2024 recruits Jordan Seaton, who ended up at Colorado, and Brandon Baker, who chose Texas over Ohio State.

The Buckeyes currently have just one commitment on the offensive line in the 2025 class, but it is from a very good one in Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290). He is currently ranked the 50th-best player in the country and the No. 7 offensive tackle.

Whether the Buckeyes and offensive line coach Justin Frye will be able to capitalize on that commitment and add more talent at the position is yet to be seen, but they have been trying hard by sending out many offers in the month of May.

Three offers have been sent to 2025 offensive line prospects since BSB last went to press, going out to Lloyd, De Kalb (Miss.) Kemper County four-star interior offensive lineman Mario Nash Jr. (6-4, 270); and Riverview (Fla.) Sumner High four-star offensive tackle Ziyare Addison (6-5, 290).

Lloyd is the 19th-best offensive tackle in the country and the No. 186 player overall. Addison is the 206th, and Nash is ranked the 299th-best recruit in the country.

But the Buckeyes' No. 1 recruiting target remains to be Sanders, who is visiting Columbus in late June. He is the No. 2 overall player in the nation and the No. 1 offensive lineman.

Ohio State's chances at landing Sanders seemed slim with Clemson as the favorite to earn his commitment, but when Sanders

took a second visit to Columbus from May 3-5, he showed that he has real interest in the school and that the Buckeyes are a real contender for his talents.

Sanders has already made official visits to South Carolina and Nebraska, and he has more planned, visiting Clemson, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama and Ohio State in that order over the month of June.

On the offensive line, Ohio State is also after Stargel, Strayhorn, DeBose, Blackston, Fenuku, McFadden and Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star Douglas Utu (6-5, 300).

### CB Woodby Decommits From Ohio State

Ohio State suffered a loss to its 2025 recruiting class on May 16 when Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star cornerback Blake Woodby (5-11, 175) decommitted from Ohio State.

Woodby, who is the nation's 74th-best overall prospect, seventh-best cornerback and No. 2 player in Maryland, originally committed to Ohio State on Oct. 14, 2023. Since then, the Buckeyes have received commitments from Sanchez and Offord, who are the No. 1 and 2 corners in the class of 2025.

Woodby's decommitment leaves the Buckeyes with just Offord and Sanchez at cornerback, but Ohio State is also continuing to pursue Brew, who is the No. 27 player in the country and the No. 5 cornerback.

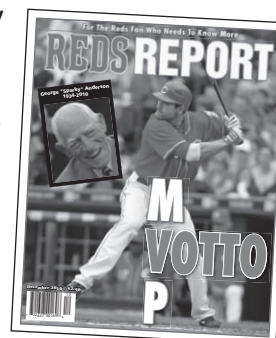
Other finalists for Woodby before he

Continued On Page 20

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# New OSU RB Coach Eyes Top Prospects

Continued From Page 19

committed to Ohio State were Alabama, Clemson, Oregon and Tennessee, so those schools could come back into the mix.

## OSU Makes Cut For Top RB Targets

When Ohio State running backs coach Carlos Locklyn stepped into his role at Ohio State, there was a question of whether he would continue recruiting the players that Tony Alford was after for the class of 2025, or if he would want to offer his own guys.

Locklyn has kept in contact with at least Jackson and Davison since he came to Columbus. Both running backs are among Ohio State's top targets at the position, and each narrowed down the list of schools they are considering early in May.

Jackson is down to a decision between Alabama, Georgia and Ohio State according to a report from Eleven Warriors, while Davison is choosing between the Buckeyes, Alabama, Michigan and Oregon.

Jackson said he already had a good relationship with Locklyn because he was recruited by the coach while he was at Oregon, and that has only continued into his tenure with the Buckeyes.

"We've been talking probably every other day," Jackson said about Locklyn on April 28 after he performed at the Under Armor Next Camp. "It's a nice relationship right now. We just talk casually, and he wants to know what I've got going on."

Jackson, the nation's 81st-best prospect, will have an official visit to all three of his top schools this summer, already having gone to Georgia May 17-19, visiting Ohio State May 31-June 2 and finishing with Alabama from June 7-9. He said he wants to commit to a school before the beginning of his senior season, so that could be coming after his visits.

Davison, the nation's 96th-best prospect and sixth-best running back, said he will also be making a decision by the end of the summer, and he will visit Columbus at some point in the next couple of months before he makes that choice. Locklyn made a trip to Santa Ana, Calif., to visit Davison on May 8 to try to maintain the close relationship he has built with the running back.

It's likely that Ohio State will end up with only two running backs in the 2025 class, and the Buckeyes are currently viewed as the favorites to land both Jackson and Davison. But another option who was originally offered by Alford is Louis – the nation's 212th-best prospect and 14th-

best tailback – who is making an official visit to Ohio State June 14-16.

West is also a possibility after he decommitted from Kentucky on May 13 immediately after visiting Columbus. He is the No. 518 overall player in the country and the 45th-best running back. He will also make an official visit to Ohio State June 14-16.

## Kelly Offers 2026 QB Brandon

Ohio State seems to have a 2025 quarterback in St. Clair which has allowed the Buckeyes to shift focus to securing a commitment from a 2026 signal caller.

When offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly went to visit Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley four-star Faizon Brandon (6-4, 195) at his school to watch him throw in early May, he liked the signal caller enough to extend him an offer that same day.

According to the 247Sports composite ranking, Brandon is the fourth-ranked quarterback in the 2026 class and the 46th-best player in the country. However, 247Sports' standard ranking has him as the No. 1 overall player in the entire class.

As BSB went to press, Brandon had more than 20 Division I offers after a sophomore season in which he completed 191

of 277 passes for 3,026 yards, 36 touchdowns and just three interceptions while adding 528 rushing yards and nine touchdowns with his legs.

Brandon was going to visit Ohio State on June 9, but that was delayed to a date he hasn't yet decided, and he will visit Florida State that day instead. He has said he wants to get back to Columbus at some point this summer. His first time visiting Ohio State was during a spring practice in 2023.

## Moore Decommits From LSU

Moore, the top wide receiver in the 2025 class, decommitted from LSU on May 16 and canceled his official visit with the Tigers that was supposed to take place in June. He had been committed to LSU since August of 2023.

"After careful and extensive consideration, my family and I have decided that it is in my best interest to decommit from LSU," Moore wrote on Twitter. "I want to emphasize that despite this decision, I will not be considering any recruitment offers."

At this point, it seems to be a race between three teams with Oregon and Texas both in the running along with Ohio State. As a Texas recruit, the Longhorns are cur-

## A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

### 35 Years Ago – 1989

Ohio State football coach John Cooper had received plenty of good news recently regarding his 1989 class of recruits.

Defensive back Chico Nelson of Sarasota, Fla., and linebacker Alonzo Spellman of Mount Holly, N.J., had passed their college entrance exams, satisfying Proposition 48 requirements and achieving freshman eligibility.

Meanwhile, linebacker Tyrone Morrison of San Diego failed to pass his latest Scholastic Aptitude Test and took the exam again June 2. He was the only member of the 1989 recruiting class who had not satisfied his Prop 48 requirement.

"I've already taken it again, and I'm praying I pass it this time," Morrison told BSB. "It may be the last time I can take it, so I'm really hoping I passed it this time."

### 25 Years Ago – 1999

Ohio State's latest verbal commitment, Berea, Ohio, offensive lineman Alex Stepanovich, said he weighed all of his choices but came back to the same thing every time.

"The offers from a bunch of schools, including Ohio State, had been on the table for a while. I sat down with my parents and discussed it," said Stepanovich, who committed to OSU over Michigan and Michigan State on May 9.

"Last year, (Ohio State) had wanted me to commit early. We had talked about this being the right time to do it. We were sitting at the dinner table and my dad wanted to know what I thought of all the schools.

"I looked at all the pluses and minuses of all the schools. Ohio State just had so many more pluses than all the other schools. I just felt like that was the best place to go. I was excited to have a chance to go there with the rich tradition they have.

Stepanovich (6-5, 270, 5.0) was rated among Ohio's top 10 prospects by both The Ohio Football Recruiting News and Ohio's Future Stars. He was TOFRN's No. 3 choice, while OFS listed him as the state's sixth-best junior.

### 20 Years Ago – 2004

Tallahassee (Fla.) Lincoln quarterback Joe Bauserman had committed to the Ohio State football team the previous summer, but he did not sign a letter of intent to officially join the 2004 recruiting class in February.

He had good reason. Also a standout hurler at Lincoln, Bauserman was one of the more highly regarded high school pitchers in the nation. In fact, on June 7, he was drafted in the fourth round (112th overall) of the Major League Baseball first-year player draft by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Listed at 6-2 and 220 pounds on Lincoln's baseball roster, Bauserman helped his team become District 4A champions that year. The Trojans finished the season 16-10, with Bauserman compiling a record of 5-3. In the team's final game of the season – a 2-0

loss to Ocala Forest – Bauserman started and pitched six innings, allowing just two hits and striking out eight.

His draft selection ensured he would be well-compensated immediately if he opted to pursue baseball right out of high school, but he still wasn't sure if he would do that or enroll at OSU in January and be a grayshirt quarterback.

"At this point I have no clue," Bauserman told BSB.

### 15 Years Ago – 2009

A new quarterback had emerged on Ohio State's radar, but that did not mean Nick Montana was no longer interested in becoming a Buckeye.

The son of Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Montana received a scholarship offer from OSU on Feb. 4 and was told that the Buckeyes would not offer another quarterback for the class of 2010 until they heard a final decision from him.

On May 24, Cincinnati Moeller quarterback Andrew Hendrix was speaking with OSU head coach Jim Tressel via telephone when he learned that the Buckeyes were issuing him a scholarship offer.

Putting two and two together led to a conclusion that Montana had told the OSU coaches that he was no longer considering their school, but the four-star signal caller told BSB that was not the case.

"I know there's a lot of speculation and everything that they're dropping (on my list) because they offered another quarterback, but they're not at all," said Montana, who attended Westlake Village (Calif.) Oaks Christian. "I talked to Coach Tressel about it. He stressed to me the importance of getting a quarterback this year for them."

### 10 Years Ago – 2014

Ohio State football director of player personnel Mark Pantoni took to Twitter on May 27 to deliver a message that Buckeye fans had been waiting more than three months to see.

"BOOOOOOOOMMMMM!" Pantoni posted emphatically. The message may have been indirect – per NCAA rules, it couldn't have been anything more than that – but its target was clear. Just moments earlier, The Plains (Ohio) Athens class of 2015 quarterback Joey Burrow had taken to the same social media service to announce his intention to spend his college career at Ohio State, and Pantoni could hardly wait to confirm the four-star signal caller's commitment.

If Pantoni's Twitter presence had seemed to be lacking in recent months, it was for good reason. It had been since Feb. 11 that the Buckeye recruiting guru had last posted his signature post-commitment tweet, one which followed the since rescinded pledge of Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian safety Ben Edwards. Fans and analysts alike began to question the direction of Ohio State's 2015 class, which went nearly the entire spring without

adding a commitment before Burrow issued his verbal.

### Five Years Ago – 2019

BSB went to press with OSU's 2020 class at nine commitments with three from the Buckeye state – all along the offensive line.

Cincinnati St. Xavier five-star tackle Paris Johnson (6-7½, 295) had headlined the list as an in-state commitment since June 28, 2018, but two more local tackles joined him after Ryan Day took over. Cincinnati Elder three-star Jakob James (6-5, 275) and Norwalk, Ohio, three-star Trey Leroux (6-8, 355) committed, both almost immediately after Day and fourth-year offensive line coach Greg Studrawa extended the offers.

James and Leroux had been on Ohio State's radar since the summer of 2018. Each camped last June and visited for multiple game days in the fall, and they were kept abreast of the Buckeyes' 2020 recruiting efforts as the 2019 class filled itself out first.

Former head coach Urban Meyer had recruited both project tackles, but Day made the executive decision in the spring to offer both – and avoid potentially missing out on them down the road.

"When I was here for the (early) signing day (Dec. 19), I think the question was asked about Ohio offensive linemen," Day said. "I said that was going to be an emphasis and it is. We're all over that. I mean that's from when we wake up in the morning until we go to bed at night. That's not going to change."

### One Year Ago – 2023

Jeremiah Smith had been committed to Ohio State since December, but it hadn't stopped other schools from continuing to recruit the standout receiver. Such was life as the No. 2 overall prospect and top-ranked wideout in 2024.

The programs most active in trying to pull Smith away from Ohio State had been Florida and Georgia. Smith took official visits to both schools, visiting Georgia the weekend of May 19 and Florida the weekend of June 2.

"Georgia is the school I'm watching in the Jeremiah Smith sweepstakes after Ohio State," wrote 247Sports recruiting analyst Steve Wiltfong, "with what Georgia has done on the field with two straight national championships."

Smith was a peer recruiting target of (Dylan) Raiola, who initially helped to sway Smith to Ohio State prior to Raiola's decommitment. But Smith insisted that he was steadfast in his commitment to the Buckeyes, utilizing his official visits as a means of enjoying the recruiting process that comes with being a five-star receiver.

"Ohio State, you all don't have any concern right now," Smith told BuckeyeHuddle on May 15. "I am locked in until anything happens with any of the coaches like Coach (Brian) Hartline or Coach (Ryan) Day, but I doubt that happens. I am pretty much locked in. I am not going anywhere."



# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Bill Greene of BuckeyeScoop

**Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 270) took a second visit to Ohio State in May, and he is coming back for an official visit in June, showing he has real interest. Do the Buckeyes have a real shot at landing him?**

"Absolutely they have a real shot. You're in the first quarter of a basketball game and you've got a five-point lead. There's a long way to go. NIL is going to be gigantic for this guy. He can come out of this with life-changing money. If my son had been a recruit and someone would have promised him \$20,000 a year for four years – you pay that for a backup punter now – it would have changed his life. Now you start talking David Sanders money, do you realize what that kind of money does for these guys, for their families? When people speak negatively about, 'This kid's only in it for the money,' it's like, I know why I get up and go to work every day. So NIL is important, and the good thing is Ohio State has shown in the past year they're a player. I don't know when the money runs out, I don't know what the bucket looks like, but it sure seems like they've got as much money as anyone.

"Then once you get past the money, nobody's going to go to Minnesota over Ohio State if Minnesota is offering a little bit more than Ohio State. So the comfort, the relationships, the program, the NFL development, that's all still important. But David Sanders doesn't pick Ohio State if they're offering him a pittance and these great schools that he's already interested in are offering him a ton. The NIL has to be factored in right now, and the good thing for Ohio State is they put people in the NFL at a high rate, and they do pay. So to me, that absolutely puts them in the David Sanders derby."

**Along with Sanders, Ohio State has offered a lot more scholarships to offensive linemen during this recruiting cycle than offensive line coach Justin Frye has in the past. Have you noticed a change in approach from Frye this year?**

"I don't know. I look at this offensive line and Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290) is a great place to start. But then who are you surrounding him with? Are you going to take Roswell, Ga., three-star interior offensive lineman Andrew Stargel (6-4, 284) and Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist three-star Jayvon McFadden (6-5, 300), or are you taking Carter Lowe and surrounding

him with David Sanders and Carmel, Calif., four-star offensive tackle Jackson Lloyd (6-7, 290)? There are a lot of offers out there, but they don't mean anything to me. All I care about is who are you getting? You pop David Sanders, you pop Jackson Lloyd, that's a big difference.

"To me, there's a gap among all of these O-linemen that they've offered. If you get the high end of that group, it's an amazing haul for Justin Frye. You get the back end of that group, then it's just what he does every year. You hope to get one guy then you get four projects and they don't turn out very good, so you have to go to the portal. I think this is a big year for Justin Frye. Ryan Day has shown he's not scared to fire coaches. So this is a big year for Justin Frye in both who's going to sign and what they show on the field. They've got to be better on the field than they were last year. It was terrible for a team that wants to be a national champion.

"They've got a chance here to have just an amazing O-line haul. I wish I could be more specific on who I thought they were going to get, but it's up to Justin Frye and the NIL people. Do they prioritize the offensive line? I would really spend the NIL money right now on the line to go crazy on Sanders and Jackson Lloyd. I wouldn't lose those guys because my offer was low and I got beat by money. For me, it's the most important area other than quarterback on the field. Maybe I overrate the O-line, but I would give back (Jeremiah) Smith to get David Sanders. Ideally you want both, but my priority would be O-line."

**On the other side of the ball in the trenches, Ohio State is hosting official visits for both Opelika, Ala., four-star defensive lineman Malik Autry (6-6, 320), who is committed to Auburn, and Warner Robins, Ga., four-star defensive end Isaiah Gibson (6-4, 245), who is committed to USC. What are the Buckeyes' chances at flipping them?**

"That's interesting. I don't know. Gibson is a tough one for me to get a read on. He's a Georgia kid, and he can definitely get the passer and (Ohio State) needs sack guys. They need sack guys really bad. Look at last year, JT Tuimoloau, Jack Sawyer, Tyleik Williams, Mike Hall Jr., those guys were dudes. They don't sack the quarterback. I would prioritize Isaiah Gibson like crazy. But he's a Warner Robins, Ga., kid. How the hell does he ever get out of Georgia? And I know he's commit-

ted to USC. We'll see how that goes. I just can't see (Georgia head coach Kirby Smart) letting that guy get away."

**With official visits taking place every weekend in June, is there anything you're watching closer for Ohio State while recruiting picks up?**

"I'm going to watch David Sanders no matter what. If he's in study hall I'm going to watch him. But the wide receiver and running back stuff – which are usually positions that go quicker and guys seem to want to lock up their spots – not this year. Right now with running backs, I think they want three. They'll take two, but they might take three. I do think they're going to flip Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star running back Isaiah West (5-11, 208). If they want him, they're going to get him. But Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star running back Jordan Davison (5-11, 203) and Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-0, 205), I had both of those guys in the class about six weeks ago. Today, I don't know. Cleveland Heights four-star running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 210), it looks like he's out, but I could see him coming back in. Then you have Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School's Shekai Mills-Knight (6-1, 217). I think they get West if they want him, then flip the coins.

"Then wide receiver, I have Orlando Jones four-star Vernell Brown III (5-11, 170) and Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star Jaime Ffrench (6-1, 185) in the class. I feel strongly about that right now. Jaime Ffrench has been pretty public with the NIL offers he's been getting and it's unbelievable. Texas offered him some unbelievable car. Then Duncanville, Texas, five-star Dakorien Moore (5-11, 175), he's 100 percent going to the best power school that gives him the best NIL offer. Then you're down to Geneva (Ill.) Geneva Community four-star Tallyn Taylor (6-1, 173) and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star Quincy Porter (6-3, 190). There's something to watch for the wide receivers.

"The linebacker I would take, if I could take just one, is Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Nathaniel Owusu-Boateng (6-1, 205). That guy's the closest thing to Ryan Shazier. To me, nobody is Ryan Shazier, he's at the top and nobody's close. This guy is Ryan Shazier-ish. So I would kill to get Owusu-Boateng."

rently viewed as a favorite to land the five-star when signing day comes around, but OSU wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline has won recruiting battles for top talents like this before.

Moore's visit to Columbus during the weekend of May 31 wasn't his first time on campus. He attended a practice earlier this spring and came to Columbus again after spring football concluded.

In his junior season, Moore recorded 71 catches for 1,523 yards and 18 touchdowns.

### 2027 Recruiting Heats Up

When the month of May began, Ohio State had offered only two 2027 recruits, but as BSB went to press, there were a total of 11 offers sent out to prospects who will be sophomores in high school for the upcoming season.

Locklyn has been the most active on the recruiting trail, which has been consistent since he was brought on as the running backs coach. He has offered four 2027 recruits in Richmond (Texas) Randle running back Landen Williams-Callis (5-7, 165), Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood running back Brayden Tyson (6-0, 215), Atlanta Woodward Academy Amarri Irvin (6-0, 195) and Jackson, Ala., Ezavier Crowell (5-11, 205).

None of the recruits in the class have been ranked yet, but they have each gotten more offers from many other competitive

Division I schools.

Other 2027 prospects who have received an offer from the Buckeyes so far are Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei tight end Mark Bowman (6-5, 220); Mobile (Ala.) Williamson linebacker Ellis McGaskin (6-1, 190); Arlington (Texas) Lamar linebacker Braylon Williams (6-0, 205); Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett linebacker Jake Godfree (6-0, 200); Jefferson, Ga., athlete Max Brown (5-11, 175); Irvine (Calif.) Crean Lutheran athlete Caden Jones (6-2, 165); and Tyrone (Ga.) Sandy Creek athlete Corey Hadley Jr. (6-1, 180).

There is still awhile to go before the Buckeyes need to have their 2027 class set, and commitments aren't expected this summer from that class. Ohio State still had only one 2026 commitment as BSB went to press from Santa Ana (Calif.) five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), but it is getting a head start on what looks to be some of the best recruits in the country.

### Hartline Offers 2028 WR McFarland

Hartline went one step further than a 2027 prospect and made an offer to a 2028 recruit on May 13.

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy wide receiver Eric McFarland (5-8, 170) hasn't played a single snap of high school football yet, but Hartline had seen enough without watching him in a game and he was offered a scholarship, the first from his class to re-

ceive an offer from Ohio State.

Before the Buckeyes extended an offer, he had received others from Arizona State and UNLV while Florida State and Washington offered McFarland the same day that Ohio State did. Since then, he has also received offers from Arizona, Georgia and UCF.

McFarland is the first prospect to pick up an offer from the Buckeyes as an eighth-grader since Loganville (Ga.) Grayson five-star linebacker Tyler Atkinson (6-2, 205) did as a 2026 recruit. Atkinson hasn't committed anywhere to this point but does have offers from 48 different schools.

McFarland will play his freshman season at IMG Academy this fall, but he has already been very active playing 7-on-7, which is where schools have been able to see his talent early on.

### Other Notes And Tidbits

- Franklin (Mich.) Wylie E. Groves four-star interior offensive lineman Avery Gach (6-5, 290), who had Ohio State in his top four schools, decided to stay in his home state and committed to Michigan on May 3, continuing the Buckeyes' recruiting struggles on the offensive line.

- McKinney, Texas, four-star 2025 linebacker Pettijohn has narrowed down his list of schools to Ohio State, Texas A&M, Texas and USC. He will make official visits to all four schools. He had 120 tackles, 10 for loss and an interception in his junior

season.

- Ohio State has made the top four for Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star defensive end Justin Hill (6-3, 220), who visited Columbus on May 31. His four schools are Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon and USC, and he plans to announce his commitment on July 3 after he has made all of his official visits. Hill grew up as an Ohio State fan, and the Buckeyes are currently viewed as a favorite for the Ohio prospect.

- Odom, who is visiting Ohio State the weekend of June 7-9, has narrowed his list down to the Buckeyes, Oregon and USC, though he told 247Sports that his mother likes Ohio State and Oregon the best. He will announce his decision in late June. He is the No. 282 overall prospect in the 2025 class and the 31st-best defensive lineman.

- Owusu-Boateng, who narrowed his list of schools down to 13 last month, has cut his list even further, choosing a top four that he will take official visits to in June. His four are USC (May 31-June 2 visit date), Notre Dame (June 7-9), Ohio State (June 14-16) and Michigan (June 21-23). He checks in as the No. 75 overall recruit in the nation and the ninth-best linebacker.

- Cleveland Heights four-star running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 210), who had been offered by Tony Alford at both Ohio State and Michigan, committed to Kentucky on May 1. Davis is the nation's 167th-best prospect and 11th-best running back.



# Bucks Add Former Five-Star Forward Stewart

Ohio State and Jake Diebler added another significant piece to their 2024-25 roster through the transfer portal on May 3 when they secured a commitment from former Duke forward Sean Stewart. He chose to play for the Buckeyes over Cincinnati and Georgetown and has three years of eligibility remaining.

## COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Stewart (6-8, 225) entered the transfer portal on April 19 after just one season at Duke, one of a school-record seven players to depart from the program this offseason. He struggled to make much of an impact in his lone season in Durham, N.C., registering 2.6 points and 3.2 rebounds while logging just 8.4 minutes per game in his 33 appearances.

His best outing occurred in his fifth-ever collegiate game against La Salle in November when he recorded a career-high 16 points and 10 rebounds on an efficient 7-of-9 shooting from the field.

Stewart did make his mark at Duke in the record books, however. He broke the program's all-time record for standing vertical jump at 36 inches, eclipsing the previous mark of 35.5 inches held by former Blue Devils freshman phenom and current New Orleans Pelicans forward Zion Williamson.

Stewart's athleticism also allowed him to enter college as one of the nation's top interior prospects, where he was tabbed as the nation's 17th-best prospect, fifth-best forward and a 2023 McDonald's All-American at basketball powerhouse Montverde (Fla.) Academy. He played just one season at Montverde, helping lead the Eagles to a 24-3 overall record as a senior by posting 8.5 points, 5.5 rebounds, 1.0 assists and 0.9 blocks per game.

Stewart's success his senior season – along with his strong three-year stint at Windermere, Fla. – piqued the interest of many Division I teams, including Ohio State, who offered him a scholarship and hosted him on a visit in 2021. The Buckeyes were then led by former head coach and current DePaul leader Chris Holtmann, but it was Diebler who was Stewart's primary recruiter, a relationship that picked back up when Stewart entered the portal this April.

"(Diebler) was honest, straightforward, direct, but at the same time encouraging," Michael Stewart, Sean's father, told Eleven Warriors. "He poured a lot of confidence into Sean, just continuing to reiterate the belief that he had in him."

Stewart joins an Ohio State program that lost its top interior player from last year, Felix Okpara, to Tennessee but added 7-1 center Aaron Bradshaw from Kentucky in April. Stewart is expected to be an important piece for the Buckeyes in the frontcourt alongside Bradshaw and sophomore forward Devin Royal, making for a potentially formidable three-man lineup inside if the Buckeyes decide to play big.

He is also one of four transfers brought

in by Ohio State this offseason, joining Bradshaw, former South Carolina guard Meechie Johnson and former San Diego State wing Micah Parrish.

Ohio State had **just one scholarship** roster spot remaining as BSB went to print.

### Bucks Add Nash As Preferred Walk-On

Ohio State continued to fill out its roster on May 9 when New Albany, Ohio, freshman guard Braylen Nash (6-4) announced he would join the Buckeyes as a preferred freshman walk-on next season.

Nash enters the program after leading New Albany to a 20-5 record and the Ohio Capital Conference Ohio Division championship his senior season while averaging 17.1 points and 3.8 rebounds per game. His efforts allowed him to be named the OCC Ohio Player of the Year and a Division I All-Ohio honorable mention.

He also eclipsed the 1,000-point mark in his last season, becoming just the second player in New Albany boys' basketball history to reach that total, and was one of 724 senior nominees nationally for the McDonald's All-American games.

Nash, who also played wide receiver and quarterback on the Eagles' football team, is the third walk-on featured on Ohio State's roster, joining sophomore guard Colby Baumann and senior forward Owen Spencer. Those walk-ons scored a combined five points in 12 minutes of action last season.

### Okpara Sheds Light On Transfer Decision

Former Ohio State center Okpara shocked many when he announced he was entering the transfer portal on April 21, less than a week after initially pledging his allegiance to the Buckeyes for the 2024-25 season.

While many people who closely follow the program thought Okpara – who committed to Tennessee on April 25 – changed his tune because of concerns over more limited playing time next season following Ohio State's transfer portal addition of Bradshaw, the Lagos, Nigeria, native made it clear that Bradshaw played no part in his decision to leave.

Instead, it was the sudden losses of his now-former teammates that compelled him to find what he thought was a better opportunity to elevate his career elsewhere.

"I decided to come back then, then guys started leaving," Okpara told The Columbus Dispatch, his first comments made since the transfer. "At that point, I didn't feel like I really made the best decision for myself. I was going off what other people were doing. My family, we talked a lot and they're like, 'We've got to do what's best for you. You have two more years of college basketball. You have to make the best of it.'"

"Bradshaw didn't really have anything to do with this," he added. "When I committed to come back, then when everyone started leaving I started questioning. That had been going on for like a week before Bradshaw even committed."

Okpara's first comment alludes to the significant roster overhaul the Buckeyes experienced since their impressive 8-3 end to the 2023-24 season, a stretch that included the

program hiring Diebler as head coach and the team reaching the NIT quarterfinals.

While Ohio State began the offseason with a bang – securing a transfer-portal commitment from Johnson along with in-house commitments from key 2023-24 contributors Bruce Thornton, Royal and Okpara – they followed that with significant roster losses, with starting guard Roddy Gayle Jr. along with role players Bowen Hardman, Zed Key and Scotty Middleton all entering the portal and finding new homes in April.

"The main rundown is I want to do what's best for me, and I felt Ohio State wasn't best for me at that point because the last two years weren't the best," he said. "My family felt I needed a change, and I kind of felt I needed a change, too."

Okpara, who averaged 5.3 points, 5.0 rebounds and 1.8 blocks as a Buckeye, did express his gratitude to the program that recruited him, most notably lauding Diebler's coaching efforts over the last 11 games of the season. He also said that he felt more comfortable leaving the Buckeyes knowing that Bradshaw was joining the team.

But the 6-11 center is now entirely focused on taking his career to new heights at Tennessee next season. Okpara, who is now playing at a school roughly 110 miles northeast of his parent's home in Chattanooga, Tenn., said he is looking forward to playing closer to his family and finishing his career strong for a Rick Barnes-led program that he feels has established a culture that matches his identity as a player.

"They're a really good defensive team," Okpara said. "They've had success. The last five years they've been top-five defensively in the country, and I'm a defensive player. I feel I can come in and produce right away. They have a really good coach, Rick Barnes. I feel like I can learn a lot from him."

"I was thinking of my last two years playing college basketball and how I want to make it better and at least win and go to the (NCAA) Tournament. I was at a point where I had to decide what's going to be best for me. It's been really tough, these last two years at Ohio State, basketball-wise. It was a personal decision."

### Diebler Hires Northwestern's Battle As Final Assistant

Diebler filled out his 2024-25 coaching staff on June 3 when he hired Northwestern assistant coach Talor Battle as his fifth and final assistant coach.

Battle, 35, has spent the last four seasons in coaching after a record-setting playing career at Penn State, where he became the program's all-time leading scorer at 2,213 career points from 2008-11.

"Talor has great experience in the Big Ten both as a player and as a coach, and I'm excited to welcome him to the Buckeye family," Diebler said. "He is elite at player development which is evident by the success Northwestern has had the past couple of seasons. He has the ability to recruit at a high level and knows what it takes to be successful in this conference. I've known Talor for quite a while, and I'm looking forward to working alongside him as we take the next step as a program."

Battle served as an assistant on head



SONNY BROCKWAY  
**FOR THE RECORD — Former Buckeye center Felix Okpara (34) surprised observers when he announced on April 21 his intention to enter the transfer portal. Okpara has since denied that his decision was influenced by an influx of competition through the portal.**

coach Chirs Collins' staff at Northwestern from 2021-24, helping the Wildcats to a 22-12 record (12-8 in Big Ten) and a second-round appearance in the NCAA Tournament in consecutive seasons from 2022-24. He was also integral in the development and success of two of the Wildcats' top backcourt performers during this period, guards Chase Audige and Battle's younger brother, Boo Buie.

Audige was named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year as a fifth-year senior in 2022-23 – the first Wildcat to win the award since 1994 – while also earning All-Big Ten honors, while Buie was named first-team All-Big Ten the past two seasons and became the program's all-time leading scorer at 2,187 career points.

Before his stint at Northwestern, Battle spent one season as an assistant at his alma mater Penn State in 2020-21, helping the Nittany Lions.

Battle made perhaps his biggest mark at Penn State as a player, however. He averaged 16.5 points per game on 40.3 percent shooting as a guard for the Nittany Lions while



also tacking on 4.7 rebounds, 3.9 assists and 1.1 steals per game. Battle earned an honorable-mention All-American honor in 2011 and two All-Big Ten nods in 2009 and 2010, and he helped the Nittany Lions secure an NIT championship in 2009.

Battle, who also played professionally overseas for seven seasons before returning to Penn State, now fills out a versatile and experienced Ohio State staff that includes associate head coach Dave Dickerson along with assistants Joel Justus, Luke Simons and Jamall Walker, each of whom was hired by Diebler earlier this spring.

### B1G Schedule Set For Bucks

The Big Ten announced on May 1 the full slate of conference opponents for the upcoming 2024-25 men's basketball season, which will feature a 20-game conference schedule that has each team in the Big Ten playing each other at least once.

With the addition of Oregon, UCLA, USC and Washington to the Big Ten beginning this upcoming season, the conference's schedule was adjusted to account for each of the four new members, with all 18 Big Ten teams having seven home and seven away games and three home-and-away series.

Ohio State's home-and-away series will be against Indiana, Maryland and Nebraska. It will then host Iowa, former Buckeye Gayle and Michigan, Michigan State, Northwestern, Oregon, Rutgers and Washington while traveling to face Illinois, Minnesota, Penn State, Purdue, UCLA, USC and Wisconsin.

The Buckeyes have extensive experience with most of the traditional Big Ten opponents but will be entering mostly new territory against the soon-to-be former Pac-12 programs. Ohio State holds a 12-12 record all-time against the four incoming teams, with the most games played against UCLA. The Bruins hold a 6-4 advantage in the series.

Ohio State's most recent game against either of those four teams occurred last December against the Bruins, a 67-60 victory for the Buckeyes in the CBS Sports Classic.

Ohio State will begin its 2024-25 season in Las Vegas with a matchup against Texas on Nov. 4, while the Buckeyes also have non-conference games set against Texas A&M at home and Kentucky on Dec. 21 as part of the CBS Sports Classic, which, per the The Field of 68's Jeff Goodman, will likely be held at Madison Square Garden.

Times and television information for all these games will be announced at a later date.

### OSU Still In Mix For Five-Star Peterson

Ohio State has landed three current or former five-stars since Diebler assumed head-coaching duties in March, and it appears the program is not done trying to bring in top-level talent.

According to a May 9 report from On3's Joe Tipton, the Buckeyes are one of several high-profile Power Six teams who are still "in the hunt" to land Huntington (W.V.) Prep five-star shooting guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195), the nation's third-best prospect and top shooting guard in the 2025 class.

The Buckeyes have some stiff competition in the recruitment of Peterson, with blue bloods Kansas, Kentucky and North Carolina along with Arkansas and USC, among

other programs still in the mix. But the Canton, Ohio, native, who had initially placed Ohio State in his top eight in January before reopening his recruitment on April 29 due to the recent coaching carousel at schools such as Arkansas and Kentucky, said the way Diebler and the Buckeyes have operated lately has caught his eye.

"They've been getting guys," he told On3 Sports. "With Coach Diebler being the head coach now, that's who I've been talking to the most. He's been recruiting me since I was young. The relationship is there. I'm feeling them too, I'm feeling them a lot."

As Peterson alluded to, he is no stranger to Diebler and the program. The Buckeyes, then led by Holtmann, first offered the shooting guard a scholarship when he was a freshman at Cuyahoga Valley (Ohio) Christian Academy in August of 2021 and have since hosted him on two unofficial visits in September of 2022 and last October.

Peterson has not visited Columbus since Holtmann's firing – he reportedly had his first official visit to Ohio State canceled this season after the February coaching change – but the now-Diebler-led program reoffered him a scholarship in April. He has also received new offers from two other schools that have changed head coaches this offseason in Kentucky and Arkansas, who are now led by Mark Pope and former Wildcats head coach John Calipari, respectively.

Peterson, who plans on visiting the Wildcats and Razorbacks along with Michigan and North Carolina, is coming off his first season with Huntington Prep after spending his first two seasons at Cuyahoga Valley. He also continues to compete at the AAU level for Phenom United, which is led by Darryl Peterson, Darryn's father.

Peterson is in no rush to make a decision on his future, according to On3.

### Conley Named NBA Teammate Of The Year

On May 1, former Ohio State guard Mike Conley was named the NBA's Twyman-Stokes Teammate of the Year, which recognizes the league's best teammate based on selfless play, on-and-off court leadership as mentor and role model to other NBA players and commitment and dedication to team.

Conley, who just finished his 17th NBA season and second with the Minnesota Timberwolves, is one of the more well-respected veterans in the league. He is a four-time NBA Sportsmanship Award winner, most recently taking home the honor last season with Minnesota and also earning the award with the Memphis Grizzlies in 2013-14, 2015-16 and 2018-19.

"I tell my teammates all the time, just like I tell my kids, I don't want people to remember me for basketball," Conley said on a May 1 appearance on NBATV. "I want them to tell stories about what kind of guy I was, what kind of person I was, the interaction (people) had with me, at an airport or a gas station or something like that. That's way more important to me than anything."

Conley has also carved out a strong career on the court as one of the league's best facilitators. Playing for the Memphis Grizzlies (2007-19), Utah Jazz (2019-22) and Timberwolves (2022-present), he has averaged 14.4 points, 3.0 rebounds, 5.7 assists and 1.4 steals per game on 43.9 percent shooting, earning one All-Star nod with the Jazz in 2020-21.

Conley still produced in year 17, serving as the starting point guard on a Timberwolves team that advanced to the Western Conference Finals. He averaged 11.6 points and 5.7 assists per game in the playoffs, right on par with his 11.4 points and 5.9 assists per game on the season. Conley, 36, played just one season at Ohio State in 2006-07, averaging 11.3 points, 3.4 rebounds, 6.1 assists and 2.2 steals per game on 51.8 percent shooting while taking home All-Big Ten and All-Big Ten Freshman honors.

He was a key catalyst in Ohio State's run to its first national title game appearance in 45 years, averaging 16.0 points, 4.8 rebounds and 5.0 assists in the team's six NCAA Tournament games en route to an All-Tournament team nod.

### Former OSU Target James Cleared For NBA Play

Former USC guard Bronny James, the son of NBA legend LeBron James who listed Ohio State as one of his final three schools in his high school recruitment and suffered cardiac arrest last July, was medically cleared to play in the NBA on May 13 and will likely stay in the 2024 NBA draft.

James suffered cardiac arrest during a USC team practice on July 24, 2023. The incident – which likely occurred due to an undiagnosed congenital heart defect – hospitalized him for three days and forced him to miss the first seven games of his freshman season. Despite making the speedy return to the court, James struggled to consistently produce in his lone season with the Trojans, averaging 4.8 points and 2.8 rebounds in

19.6 minutes per game. He entered the 2024 NBA Draft on April 5 while maintaining his collegiate eligibility and also entering the transfer portal.

James was heavily recruited by Ohio State and even hosted him – along with LeBron and Savannah James – on a recruiting visit during the Buckeye football team's 2023 home opener against Notre Dame. The Buckeyes also hosted his younger brother, Los Angeles Sierra Canyon four-star shooting guard Bryce James (6-4, 180), on a visit last October.

While Bronny James expressed interest in Ohio State during his high school recruitment – listing the Buckeyes in his final three along with USC and Oregon – that same interest did not appear to be there this off-season.

Instead, he has begun his preparation for the draft, participating in the NBA Scouting Combine held in Chicago from May 12-19.

According to ESPN's Brian Windhorst, the Los Angeles Lakers – the franchise LeBron James has played for since the 2018-19 season – will likely select Bronny James if they have the opportunity to do so, either with the 55th overall pick in the second round or with another pick acquired via trade.

The 2024 NBA draft will be held from June 26-27 in New York City, with the first round being held at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., and the second round taking place at ESPN's Seaport District Studios. Both events will air on ABC and ESPN.

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# Battle Leads Way For Men's Hoops Transfers

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State and first-year head coach Jake Diebler have hauled in an impressive group of transfers this offseason, securing commitments from former 2023 McDonald's Americans and five-star prospects Aaron Bradshaw (Kentucky) and Sean Stewart (Duke), former South Carolina guard and Buckeye recruit Meechie Johnson and former San Diego State wing Micah Parrish – each of whom can make significant impacts on the team both this upcoming season and beyond.

While Ohio State has had an aggressive approach so far this spring, this is not the first time the program has been active in the transfer portal.

Not counting the 2024 haul, the Buckeyes have secured nine transfer commitments since the NCAA allowed student-athletes to change schools without sitting out a season in 2021. Conversely, Ohio State has seen eight players – Toronto Raptors guard D.J. Carton and former San Diego State standout forward Jaedon LeDee topping that list – depart Columbus after entering their names in the portal.

Ohio State also brought in its fair share of transfers before the 2021 rule change who are worth noting. Forward Justice Sueing headlines that list. He served as a two-time captain for the Buckeyes and was a solid contributor during his four-year Ohio State career (2019-23) that was marred by injury.

Like Sueing, former Harvard graduate forward Seth Towns, who joined the program in 2020, had a career negatively affected by injury, but he was a key player off the bench on the Buckeyes' 2020-21 team that earned a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament. Pre-portal transfers such as C.J. Jackson (2016-19), CJ Walker (2018-21) and Keyshawn Woods (2018-19) also put their imprints on the program during their

time in Columbus, combining to average 9.1 points, 3.1 rebounds and 3.3 assists per game for the Scarlet and Gray.

Overall, Ohio State under former coach Chris Holtmann received criticism for its handling of the transfer portal – a key blip on his résumé that 247Sports' Steve Helwagen said contributed to the school's decision to fire the seventh-year coach in February.

"I think, in some regards, you can look at the portal as the undoing of Chris Holtmann," Helwagen said. "Because other than Jamison Battle, he never really got a true impact player that helped them win at a high level out of the portal. And that was what led to his undoing. ... I think that management of the portal is critical for coaches to maintain their jobs (today)."

Regardless of Ohio State's success in the portal, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a look back and ranking the top five transfers the Buckeyes have brought in since 2019.

The list does not include the four incoming 2024 transfers, although BSB does project how each new player will perform for the Buckeyes at the end of this story.

## 5) Evan Mahaffey (2023-Present)

Mahaffey's Buckeye story is still partly unwritten – he opted to return to the program for his junior campaign with two years of eligibility left – but he got off to a respectable start to his Ohio State career.

Mahaffey, who joined the program in 2023 after just one season at Penn State, was a consistent force for the Buckeyes this past season, starting 35 of 36 games and averaging 4.3 points, 4.2 rebounds and 1.6 assists per game.

While these stats do not necessarily pop off the screen, the Cincinnati Moeller product provided value for the Buckeyes with his versatility. Mahaffey saw significant time at the wing, guard and forward positions this season, which made him a key player on the court for the Buckeyes, especially when they opted to go small.

The former Nittany Lion also used his overall length and athleticism to become a key contributor on defense, often disrupting the flow of opposing offenses with 37 total steals and 25 blocks, marks that both ranked second on the team.

Mahaffey will likely fall into a reserve role next season, but if he continues to develop his game and contribute on both sides of the ball, he could find himself shooting up this list in the future.

## 4) Sean McNeil (2022-23)

McNeil joined Ohio State as an already established three-point shooter at the Power Five level. He shot a solid 36.8 percent clip from beyond the arc in his first three seasons at West Virginia, while also adding a combined 10.1 points and 2.0 rebounds to his name.

The former Mountaineer did not miss a step from the three-point line in his lone season with the Buckeyes. He made 59 of his 160 attempts from three on the year – a crisp 36.9 percent – and had eight games of at least three made triples. He also shot 43.0 percent from the field, an improvement on the 40.4 percent shooting he recorded in his two seasons at West Virginia.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BATTLE TESTED** – Forward Jamison Battle (10) started his career at George Washington then played two seasons at Minnesota before finally landing at Ohio State last season, where he was a team leader and one of the top individual scorers.

While McNeil was strong on offense at Ohio State, scoring 9.7 points per game in 35 games (26 starts), his defense lagged at times, a weakness in his game that may have contributed to him starting just three of his final 11 games.

Regardless, McNeil put together an overall strong senior season with the Buckeyes, a year in which he also had to deal with some personal adversity following the passing of a friend and the sudden heart attack of his father during the team's 2022 matchup at Duke.

## 3) Jamari Wheeler (2021-22)

Wheeler, unlike McNeil, was brought onto the team in 2021 due to his status as an elite perimeter defender. During his four-year career at Penn State (2017-21), he led the conference in steals per game and earned Big Ten All-Defensive team selections in both 2019-20 and 2020-21.

The Live Oak, Fla., native was not as dominant on that end of the floor in his lone season with the Buckeyes, but he still served as an effective ball-hawk. Wheeler totaled 39 steals on the year – a career low for the guard but a team high for the Buckeyes – and recorded 11 games with at least two swipes.

While his defensive production was not as fruitful that season, he made up for it with his offense. He served as the Buckeyes' main floor general that season with a team-high 91 assists and added a career-high 7.1 points per game on 45.8 percent shooting, including 38.8 from long range.

These efforts were a welcome sight for

an Ohio State team that had just lost 2020-21 starting guards Walker and Duane Washington Jr., helping them achieve a successful 20-12 season and an appearance in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

## 2) Justice Sueing (2019-23)

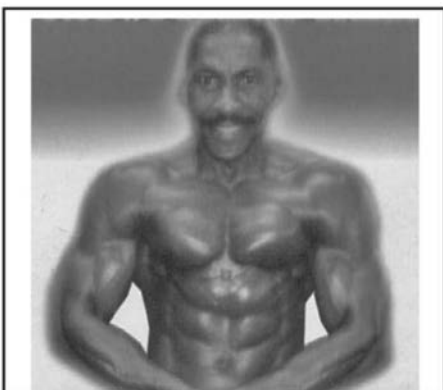
Sueing was brought in well before the NCAA rule change, but his overall longevity and the impact he had on the program are deserving of mention on this list.

The Honolulu, Hawaii, native joined Ohio State in 2019 after two successful seasons at Cal but was forced to sit out the 2019-20 season due to NCAA transfer rules then in place. That did not stop him from making his presence felt while wearing scarlet and gray, however.

Sueing was a key contributor to the Buckeyes' 2020-21 season. Serving as a versatile force at forward, he started all 31 games that season and averaged 10.7 points, 5.5 rebounds and 1.5 assists per contest on 49.1 percent shooting.

But Sueing's Ohio State career would soon be negatively affected by injury following this hot start. He played just two games in 2021-22 before shutting down for the year to deal with an abdominal injury, an ailment that would linger throughout the offseason.

"I think Holtmann was hoping that he would develop into an All-Big Ten player, and it never really materialized," Helwagen said. "Good player, but not great. It's nobody's fault. Sometimes that's just the way it works out. He gave everything he had. The injuries and the problems he had health-



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**WELCOME HOME — Cleveland area native Meechie Johnson is returning to Ohio State after two seasons with South Carolina. Johnson spent his first two seasons with the Buckeyes before opting to play for the Gamecocks, where he improved his skill set.**

wise were terrible.”

Despite this setback, Sueing would recover and return to the starting lineup during his graduate campaign in 2022-23, a year in which he was also named a team captain for the second straight year. He finished his Buckeye career strong, starting 32 of 35 contests and ranked second on the team in scoring at 12.3 points per game while also averaging 5.2 rebounds and 1.8 assists.

### 1. Jamison Battle (2023-24)

Topping the list of Buckeye transfers is Battle, a forward who emerged as one of the top individual scorers and team leaders the program has had in quite some time.

Battle, who started his career at George Washington before playing two seasons at Minnesota, was arguably the Buckeyes' most consistent scorer and shooter throughout the entire season, racking up double figures in points in 28 of his 35 games while also shooting 50.0 percent or better from the field in 20 contests.

The Robbinsdale, Minn., native made his largest impact from beyond the arc, connecting on 91 of his 210 attempts from three this past season, good for an outstanding 43.3 percent. That mark ranked just 0.1 percentage points behind Northwestern's Boo Buie for the Big Ten lead and ninth in the entire nation.

Battle was also key in keeping the locker room together following the firing of Holtmann in the middle of February, often serving as a calming veteran presence during a time of great uncertainty within the entire program. These efforts also helped the Buckeyes find success on the court under Diebler in the final month of the season, a run that Battle played a significant part in

with his play.

He averaged 19.4 points on 50.9 percent shooting — 44.1 percent from three — in his final 10 games while adding 5.1 rebounds and 2.1 assists per contest, a dominating stat line that helped him earn honorable-mention All-Big Ten honors and serve as the main catalyst behind Ohio State's run to the NIT quarterfinals.

“I think you saw his evolution, just in the course of the season, from where — at the beginning — he was just satisfied with catching and shooting,” Helwagen said. “And when the season wore on, he became so much more of a threat offensively, creating opportunities for himself and also driving and dishing for layups and dunks for the other guys.

“And that's why they were eventually able to pull out of their tailspin. He blossomed in some regard. He took their coaching, and said, 'Yeah, I'm comfortable doing this.'”

Diebler and Ohio State might not be in the position they are in today without the efforts of Battle, making his impact on the program perhaps as valuable as any transfer in Buckeye history.

### Looking Ahead To 2024-25: Aaron Bradshaw

The former five-star Bradshaw had a disappointing freshman season at Kentucky, averaging just 4.9 points and 3.3 rebounds in 26 games. But his burgeoning skill set alone could allow him to emerge as one of the better transfer pickups Ohio State has made.

Standing 7-1 and 226 pounds, Bradshaw is an intimidating force at the rim, an aspect of his game that the Buckeyes will certainly welcome following the departure of the elite shot-blocker Felix Okpara. The former Wildcat showed some rim-protecting abilities of his own in limited action his freshman season, totaling 19 blocks on the year, while he also was a participant in numerous lobs and put-back dunks.

“Bradshaw is 7-1, and you can't teach that,” Helwagen said. “He's got length and size. And I think for him to take the next step, he has to accept coaching from the Ohio State coaches, and he just needs to grow and develop his game.”

If Bradshaw can continue to excel above the rim and improve upon his overall offensive skill set, he could transform into one of the premier frontcourt players in the Big Ten for next season and possibly beyond.

### Meechie Johnson

Buckeye fans are familiar with Johnson's skill set after the Cleveland Heights native spent his first two seasons in Columbus before heading to South Carolina. But the former coveted Ohio State recruit has taken his game to another level since he last donned scarlet and gray, especially with his offensive ability.

Johnson, who started all but one game for the Gamecocks from 2022-24, averaged 13.4 points and 3.2 assists on 38.1 percent shooting, in addition to his 3.9 rebounds and 0.8 steals per contest. He especially excelled on offense this past season, leading his team with 14.1 points per game while shooting 39.9 percent from the field and 32.1 percent from three — efforts that earned him second-team All-SEC honors.

Johnson will need to improve upon his efficiency as a shooter if he wants to put to-

gether a career year with the Buckeyes next season, but his raw shot-making ability and overall scoring confidence should make him a key weapon for Ohio State in 2024-25.

“I think there's a potential for him to come back and be a guy who helps get Ohio State back into the NCAA Tournament,” Helwagen said. “And I think that means a lot to him, because he invested a lot into the program the first couple years. I think he wants to succeed at the highest level, and I think he's primed to do pretty well, provided the people around him play pretty well.”

### Sean Stewart

Stewart may be the most intriguing transfer the Buckeyes have added through the portal thus far.

Like Bradshaw, the forward struggled during his freshman season at Duke, totaling just 2.6 points and 3.2 rebounds in 8.3 minutes per contest. But the former Blue Devil possesses a tremendous amount of upside due to his freak-like athleticism. While at Duke, he set the program record for standing vertical jump at 36 inches, breaking the previous mark of 35.5 set by former freshman sensation Zion Williamson in 2018-19.

Stewart showed off his bounce at times at Duke, picking up 16 blocks while also soaring for several dunks. But a more consistent role with the Buckeyes — along with another year of development — should allow him to better tap into those traits, where he could emerge as one of the more versatile forwards Ohio State has had in recent years.

### Micah Parrish

Parrish was arguably the least talked

about transfer portal acquisition for Ohio State this offseason, but he enters the program with a polished skill set and a load of high-level collegiate experience that should catch people's attention.

Parrish, a Detroit native, has appeared in 135 games (94 starts) during his four-year collegiate career at Oakland (2020-22) and San Diego State (2022-24), averaging 9.3 points, 4.7 rebounds, 1.3 assists and 1.3 steals per contest.

While Parrish had a successful career with the Grizzlies — earning a Horizon League All-Defensive team selection in 2021-22 and all-freshman squad honor in 2020-21 — his time with the Aztecs may be more notable. He was a key contributor on a San Diego State team that reached the national championship game in 2023 and the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament in 2024, logging 8.4 points, 3.8 rebounds and 1.2 assists on 38.5 percent shooting in those two seasons.

“You can't instill in somebody the experience of playing in the Final Four, or this year playing in the Sweet 16,” Helwagen said. “He's been there and done it and beaten great teams and played at a high level. Whatever success they have this season, I think his fingerprints are going to be on a lot of it.”

Parrish also brings a defensive tenacity that could fit Diebler's high-paced system, recording 12 games this past season with at least two steals. His traits could make him a potential starter for Ohio State at the wing in 2024-25, a position in which Battle found success during his lone season with the program.

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# Mikesell, Taylor Among Most Impactful Transfers

Keeping with the transfer theme seen elsewhere throughout this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the Ohio State women's basketball team – even if its portal endeavors do not receive the attention of the football or men's basketball programs – has made several important additions from the transfer ranks in recent seasons.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

That is not to say, however, that the Buckeyes and head coach Kevin McGuff have been as active in the portal as their peers in the conference and around the country.

Since the NCAA instituted the current transfer rule in 2021, and up through last offseason, just seven transfers have left their previous schools to call Ohio State home: guards Kennedy Cambridge, Taylor Mikesell, Celeste Taylor and Emma Shumate, and forwards Taiyier Parks, Eboni Walker and Karla Vreš.

Here is this writer's rankings of each of the top five transfers and their impact at Ohio State, with a brief explanation for where each player is slotted.

**No. 1 – Taylor Mikesell:** Undoubtedly

the two most impactful transfers over the last three years are Mikesell and Taylor, but it always felt like the recent Ohio State teams with Mikesell appeared to have a higher ceiling due to her offensive capability.

Mikesell – who arrived at Ohio State for the 2021-22 season after stints at Maryland and Oregon – not only hurt teams with her shot, but opened up opportunities for Jacy Sheldon, Cotie McMahon and Taylor Thierry, among others. Mikesell slotted in as an immediate starter for the Buckeyes once she arrived, going on to start every game over the next two seasons while averaging 17.9 points on 45.4 percent shooting from the field.

But her most important contribution that helped Ohio State to a trip to the Elite Eight was from beyond the arc, where she shot 44.2 percent, the second-best career three-point percentage in program history behind Cheryl Perozek (45.8 percent, 1988-91).

Mikesell's three-point shooting always looked effortless, and she had a knack for knocking one down right when Ohio State needed it. She may not have been as complete a player as Taylor – perhaps evidenced by Taylor securing a WNBA roster spot while Mikesell remains in search of one – but she had the stronger impact in her two seasons in Columbus.

**No. 2 – Celeste Taylor:** Taylor never reached the offensive peak that Mikesell did, averaging just 10.1 points on 40.9 per-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SHOOTING STAR** – Former Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell – who became a Buckeye in 2021 following stints at Maryland and Oregon – started every game over two seasons in scarlet and gray while averaging 17.9 points on 45.4 percent shooting from the field.

cent shooting, but she made her impact felt on the other end of the floor as one of the nation's best defenders last season.

Before her arrival at Ohio State, Taylor – who transferred from Duke – was named ACC Defensive Player of the Year, and she won the same award this past season in the Big Ten after averaging 2.5 steals and helping hold opponents to 64.0 points per game and 41.4 percent shooting. She and Sheldon combined this past season for one of the stingiest backcourts in the country, giving Ohio State's defense a much-needed edge.

Offense was a concern for Taylor as she started out for Ohio State with several poor outings to begin the season, but she eventually rounded into form and was consistently scoring in double digits by the end of the season. While she was limited as a true third option behind Sheldon and McMahon, Taylor was a significant part of the Buckeyes' success last season, even if it did end against her former team.

**No. 3 – Eboni Walker:** All of the other transfers on this list have wrapped up their college careers, but there is still more out

there for Walker, who will return for her sixth season of college basketball and third with the Buckeyes.

Walker transferred to Ohio State before the 2022-23 season after stints at Arizona State and Syracuse, the latter cut short by injury that resulted in her receiving a red-shirt that she will utilize for next season. Undersized at 6-0 for someone who likes to play close to the basket, Walker has been a jack-of-all-trades for the Buckeyes off the bench, averaging 3.9 points and 3.2 rebounds in 57 games, including 12 starts while filling in for Rebecka Mikulášiková.

While not the flashiest player on a game-to-game basis, Walker – even in just 13.5 minutes per game – has provided several highlights for the Buckeyes, including a career-high 15 points in Ohio State's win over North Carolina in the NCAA tournament in 2022-23. Her role figures to be similar this season, but a third year in Ohio State's system could lead to more consistent play, even if it won't be in a starting capacity like Mikesell or Taylor.

**No. 4 – Emma Shumate:** Shumate had the makings of a solid contributor for



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Ohio State, but with extensive guard depth during her three seasons with the Buckeyes, things never seemed to come together for the Dresden, Ohio, native.

After transferring in from West Virginia before her freshman season and taking a redshirt, Shumate worked into the rotation in 2022-23, averaging 1.6 points in 11.1 minutes per contest, and also led the team with 27 blocks. While Shumate's minutes dropped to 9.6 per game this past season, they were much more impactful, as she averaged 4.0 points and shot 41.8 percent from deep, a number that put her among the best shooters in the nation.

But like her minutes, the volume of shooting was never there for Shumate to truly take the next step. She had several notable outings last season, including a career-high 22 points on 6-of-10 shooting from deep in a win against Ohio University on Dec. 5, but the bright bursts never translated to anything more than a rotational role with Sheldon, Taylor, Rikki Harris and even occasionally Diana Collins coming off the bench before her.

More could have been in store for Shumate this season with the previously mentioned guards all having departed the program, but she will instead play out her remaining two seasons of eligibility at Michigan State.

**No. 5 – Taiyier Parks:** What looked like a match made in heaven turned out to amount to little for Ohio State last season. Parks, who averaged 7.1 points and 5.5 rebounds in four seasons at Michigan State, played in 30 games for the Buckeyes but averaged just 3.0 points and 2.1 rebounds in 9.0 minutes per contest.

Even on a team that desperately needed a stronger post presence, Parks – whom I slotted in as a starter before last season considering her extensive experience in the Big Ten – ultimately had just 10 games with three or more rebounds, exactly a third of her outings.

### Sheldon, Taylor Make WNBA Debuts

Both of Ohio State's first-round draft picks have made their WNBA debuts since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

Sheldon, who was taken fifth overall by the Dallas Wings, made her debut on May 15, playing nine minutes and finishing with two points, a rebound, a steal and two blocks in a win over the Chicago Sky. She had appeared in six games through June 2, with all of her appearances coming off the bench, and averaged 2.3 points, 1.3 rebounds and 1.0 assists in 12.0 minutes per game.

Taylor had appeared in just two games for the Indiana Fever this season through June 2, playing 2.6 minutes per game and finishing with an assist, a turnover and a foul in a loss to the Las Vegas Aces. She is hardly to blame, however, as the Fever – even with the top overall pick in former Iowa guard Caitlin Clark, who leads all rookies with 17.3 points per game – were off to a 2-8 start.

One Buckeye who continues to have trouble finding her spot in the WNBA is Mikesell, who was waived by the Los Angeles Sparks on May 6 after signing a training camp contract with the team. Mikesell has now spent time with the Sparks in addition to the Fever, who drafted her, as well as the

Atlanta Dream, for whom she appeared in six games last season.

### OSU At No. 15 In ESPN's Way-Too-Early Top 25

Despite losing two of the nation's best guards to the professional level, expectations remain high for Ohio State next season.

According to ESPN's Charlie Creme, who released a "Way-Too-Early Top 25" on May 6, he views the Buckeyes as the No. 15 team in the country with five months until the season tips off. Creme initially had Ohio State at No. 22 shortly after last season ended, but he moved the Buckeyes up following the transfer additions of Chance Gray and Ajae Petty.

"A month ago, the Buckeyes looked like Cotie McMahon and a collection of youngsters. Then Kevin McGuff hit the transfer portal," Creme wrote. "Oregon's Chance Gray gives the Buckeyes the two-way guard they needed to replace Jacy Sheldon and to mentor the No. 2 recruit in the country, point guard Jalon Cambridge."

"Ajae Petty – who blossomed at Kentucky last season averaging 14.2 points and 10.6 rebounds per game on 50.7 shooting – is the inside force Ohio State didn't have in 2023-24."

South Carolina, the reigning national champion riding a 38-game winning streak, checked in at No. 1, followed by No. 2 USC, No. 3 UConn, No. 4 Notre Dame and No. 5 UCLA, making the Buckeyes the third highest-ranked team in the Big Ten entering this season.

Other Big Ten teams in Creme's top 25 include No. 20 Nebraska and No. 24 Illinois, while Michigan State and Maryland received honorable mentions but just missed out.

### Conference Opponents Announced For 2024-25

Oregon, UCLA, USC and Washington joining the Big Ten means schedules are going to look a little bit different moving forward for the Buckeyes, who got their first taste of that change on May 7 as conference opponents were announced for the upcoming season.

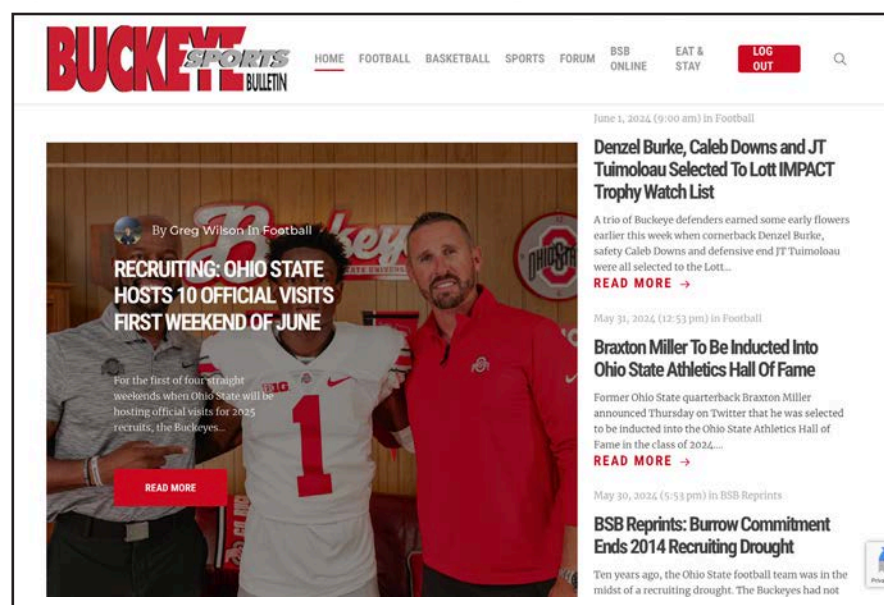
Ohio State's lone home-and-away series will be against Maryland, down from five home-and-away series last season. The Buckeyes will host Illinois, Iowa, Michigan State, Minnesota, Northwestern, Oregon, Purdue and Washington and will travel to Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Penn State, Rutgers, UCLA, USC and Wisconsin.

It got an early look at the newcomers last season, suffering losses to UCLA and USC, the former a 77-71 defeat at home and the latter an 83-74 loss in a neutral-site game in Las Vegas. It last played Oregon in 2022-23, coming away with an 84-67 win in the San Diego Invitational, and played Washington in 2018-19, falling 69-59 on the road.

The Buckeyes hold a 15-10 record against the four incoming teams, with winning clips against Oregon (3-1), Washington (3-1) and UCLA (5-4), and hold a tie against USC (4-4).

The remainder of Ohio State's nonconference schedule will be announced this summer, while dates for conference competition will be announced in September.

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# Women's Basketball Still Looking For Elusive Final Four

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

One of the best all-time scorers in women's basketball lifted a Big Ten program to national prominence, shining the spotlight on a school that that been consistently good but not elite.

Sounds a lot like generational superstar Caitlin Clark of Iowa, right?

Yes and no. Clark and her long-range jumpers carried the Hawkeyes to the national championship game in each of the past two seasons.

But before Clark laced them up for the Black and Gold, Kelsey Mitchell was pouring in points for Ohio State at an unprecedented rate. By the time she finished her four years, she was No. 2 in NCAA women's scoring with 3,402 points to trail only Kelsey Plum of Washington, who had ended her career a season earlier with 3,527.

Of course, Clark, now in her rookie season with the WNBA's Indiana Fever, exited college as the all-time leader, men's or women's, with 3,951 points. Mitchell dropped to fourth among the women this year when Dyaisha Fair of Syracuse surpassed her by a point.

Mitchell is one of the greats of the sport, but her individual success never translated into a deep NCAA tournament run. The Buckeyes bowed out in the second round her freshman season before reaching the Sweet 16 the next two seasons.

It was a bitter ending in 2018 when the Big Ten regular-season and tournament champion Buckeyes (28-7, 13-3) entered the NAAs as a No. 3 seed only to be stunned by No. 11 Central Michigan 95-78 in a second-round matchup at St. John Arena.

"I think it was more mentally when things weren't going our way, we didn't respond to that adversity like we have, and those were the times Central Michigan really made us pay," Ohio State coach Kevin McGuff said afterward.

"We lost. That's all I can say," Mitchell said.

To make it even worse, the Final Four was held a few miles from the OSU campus at Nationwide Arena.

Marcus Hartman, who covered the women's program for BSB before joining the Dayton Daily News, said comparing Clark's ability to lead Iowa to the Final Four and Mitchell's inability is unfair.

"Maybe the rosters were kind of similar, just in terms of raw ability," he said. "But my recollection is definitely that the role players did not play as well around Kelsey. I don't think they were as good at playing with her as some of these Iowa role players were with Caitlin.

"I'm sure there will be some people who would maybe put that on Kelsey, but I put it more on the role players, quite honestly."

It was a regrettable letdown.

"I'm sure that what happened was not what they had in mind," said former BSB writer Wyatt Crosher. "Definitely a missed opportunity there, and I think you saw with Ohio State's program they were down a couple of years after, but credit to Kevin McGuff, it seems like he picked up the pieces pretty well. They're back in a spot where it doesn't



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NOT QUITE THERE — Despite advancing to the Elite Eight in 2023, Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff is still trying to get his team over the hump and into the Final Four of the NCAA tournament.**

feel like all hope is lost forever, which is good, because when you have a class like that it feels like maybe that was your best shot you'll ever get."

It's a continuing trend for the Buckeyes, who have had a host of talented individuals — All-Americans and Big Ten Player of the Year winners — but have not been able to put it all together.

## Not There Yet

The 2023 team was as close as the program has been to the Final Four since the Katie Smith-led Buckeyes lost 84-82 to Texas Tech in the 1993 title game in Atlanta. OSU advanced to the Elite Eight for the first time in 30 years by knocking off juggernaut Connecticut in the Sweet 16 before losing to Virginia Tech.

"I think that should be the standard," Crosher said. "Obviously, they feel like they could be a national title contender as well, which I think is certainly possible. That Elite Eight run for Kevin McGuff was a hurdle he had to get to."

However, it's a recurring theme over the past 20 or so years, under first Jim Foster, who compiled a 279-82 (77.3 percent) record from 2002-13, then his successor McGuff.

Jessica Davenport was the school's first three-time All-American from 2005-07, but the Buckeyes never advanced past the second round. Jantel Lavender was an All-American her final three seasons, which culminated in her first trip to the Sweet 16 as a senior in 2011. OSU lost 85-75 to Tennessee and legendary coach Pat Summitt.

"Ohio State is going through something similar now to what they've really always been going through, since I started covering them in '06-07," Hartman said. "They have good players, but not enough good players. A lot of times the Foster teams will be good but they might be missing one piece.

"I will never forget this. They played Tennessee in the Sweet 16 in Dayton. I was doing research for this story, and Ohio State has four McDonald's All-Americans, which I'm sure is the most they ever had on one team.

"I believe Tennessee had nine McDonald's All-Americans. So literally what happened in this game was it was a competitive game, like a one-possession game, maybe Ohio State even had a little bit of a decent lead in the first half.

"All Pat had to do was, the first five McDonald's All-Americans weren't quite doing it, so she went and got like the sixth and the seventh ones off the bench and one of them scored four or five baskets in the decisive run," he continued.

"So, it was like, OK, Ohio State just didn't have the players. I think people knew that then, but that was just a stark, obvious example. You couldn't miss that just as good as Ohio State was, they just didn't have the players. They had top-10 or top-15 players, but not top-five players."

Crosher, the assistant director of communications in student affairs at UNC Charlotte, thinks the Buckeyes can be among the best teams nationally every season, and they followed up the 2022-23 season with another strong campaign although once again it ended in disappointment in March.

They lost the regular-season finale 93-83 at Iowa after having already clinched the 16th regular-season title for the OSU program. But in the first game of the conference tourney, they were routed 82-61 by Maryland.

Following an 80-57 victory over Maine to open the NCAA tournament, the No. 2 Buckeyes fell 75-63 to No. 7 Duke at Value City Arena.

"This year was a little bit like some of the Foster years where they were not complete enough," Hartman said. "The interior was really lacking this year, in terms of being a poor rebounding team not having much of a defensive presence inside."

Those flaws were exposed by Duke, which had a 38-20 advantage on the boards.

"We really broke down with our rebounding," McGuff said. "I think our offensive execution, our rebounding, were the keys in us not being able to win."

It was a hard landing.

"They were prominent on getting on the glass," Ohio State guard Celeste Taylor said. "They outrebounded us by a lot. So, I think they were just trying to stay within their principles, and that kind of flipped on us."

## Future Is Bright

Crosher, who writes a free newsletter on Big Ten women's basketball, Hoopla (hooplanewsletter.substack.com), said this past season's finish should not diminish the fact people are noticing the Buckeyes.

"It started to pick up especially in that tournament when they beat UConn, people started paying attention," he said "Last year (2023-24) it felt like with the men's team struggling so significantly and the women's team playing so well it really launched the women's team. I don't know if they're neck and neck with the men's team, but it's definitely more of a conversation than it had

been in any time since I've seen that program, which is really cool.

"I felt like people were really latching on, and then there's also some Caitlin Clark effect with this general national attention, but I think Ohio State really started to gain some footing as far as an audience, at least with the younger audience, that they may not have had before."

Speaking of Iowa, now that Clark has moved on and coach Lisa Bluder announced her retirement last month after 24 seasons, the Hawkeyes may be coming back down to earth. Assistant coach Jan Jensen will take over.

"I'm fascinated with what it will look like, truly," Crosher said. "If I was Lisa Bluder retiring, I would too, like, what a way to end it. You probably can't do better than that for a long, long time.

"It seems their new head coach Jan Jensen is basically like Lisa Bluder. She's been there with her for about 20 years. The whole core has to be replaced. I think they'll still be good. But I can't imagine that they can just find lightning in a bottle like that right away again."

Another facet to this is the addition of Pac-12 teams Oregon, UCLA, USC and Washington.

"Unfortunately for the remaining Big Ten teams, I think the two of the Pac-12 teams may immediately take over the Big Ten," Crosher said. "USC and UCLA have been really good for a couple of years. UCLA has a real well-rounded roster while USC has a player whom some would call the new Caitlin Clark in JuJu Watkins.

"Watkins did some very similar things that Clark did in her freshman year, is a crazy good scorer, and is only going to be a sophomore in her first year in the Big Ten. It will be interesting to see how those teams battle with Big Ten opponents. I'm assuming a lot of the preseason rankings will be USC and UCLA one-two in some variety with the likes of Ohio State, Indiana and Iowa following behind."

Hartman is confident McGuff can keep the Buckeyes relevant and maybe reach that elusive Final Four. He said the conference is much stronger than when Foster was on the sidelines for the Buckeyes, and the addition of four more schools adds to that narrative.

"They were only a game away (from the 2023 Final Four) so I think for sure they can get a good enough, deep enough roster to make the Final Four," Hartman said.

"It wasn't like there was some miracle that the team was good. He put together a lot of good players, and some of them developed and he had some experience and some shooting. I think that's a reputable model, not that it's easy by any stretch of the imagination, but it's definitely possible.

"With the transfer portal, which I think benefits people who can develop, and I assume if you've got some money to help supply talent, that would help as well. Ohio State may end up being able to be more financially competitive.

"Can they win the national championship? I don't know. But they could definitely make the Final Four, and you never know how the brackets are going to break either."



# Bluder Announces Retirement After 40 Years

After 24 seasons of coaching at Iowa and back-to-back trips to the NCAA championship game, Hawkeye head coach Lisa Bluder announced May 13 that she will retire at the age of 63. She leaves the game as the winningest women's basketball coach in Big Ten history and 10th-winningest coach of all time.

## BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

"It has been the honor of my career to be a part of the Iowa Hawkeye family," Bluder said, "and to lead a women's basketball program filled with so many talented and remarkable young women, who have gone on to do great things in their careers and, more importantly, in their lives."

With Iowa, Bluder had a record of 528-254 with five Big Ten tournament titles, making 18 NCAA tournament appearances and winning Big Ten Coach of the Year honor three times. In conference games, she went 262-145.

Her replacement has already been named, and not surprisingly it will be Jan Jensen, who was her assistant the entire time she coached the Hawkeyes. She was also her assistant when she coached at Drake after she played for Bluder with the Bulldogs.

Bluder started as a head coach in 1984 with St. Ambrose, spending six seasons there before moving on to Drake, where she spent 10 years before taking on the head role at Iowa in 2000. Her overall record as a head coach is 884-396.

Her last season with the Hawkeyes was another successful one, going 34-5 and making a second straight trip to the championship game behind guard Caitlin Clark, who has since gone on to be the No. 1 pick in the WNBA draft and began her career at the professional level.

Clark broke the all-time NCAA career scoring record under Bluder in four seasons, scoring 3,951 points and winning three straight conference titles. She was named the AP Women's College Basketball Player of the Year the past two seasons and thanked her former coach on Twitter.

"Simply no one better at building a team," she wrote. "Thank you for believing in me more than anyone. Enjoy retirement, coach. Very much deserved."

Bluder said she didn't make the decision until she got into the offseason and was beginning to prepare for the next year.

"After the season ended, I spent time with our student-athletes and coaches reviewing the season and preparing those moving on for what comes next," Bluder wrote. "With that also came personal contemplation about what this journey has meant to me, how to best champion this program and what the future looks like for my family and me. After then taking some time away with my husband, David, it became clear to me that I am ready to step aside.

"There is never an ideal time to retire, and I am sure this fall that I will miss the games, the practices, the road trips, the atmosphere, the tremendous fans and, most

importantly, the players. But my belief in the foundation of this program, knowing that success is now an unrelenting component of women's basketball at the University of Iowa, gives me comfort as I transition to become the program's biggest champion."

### Robinson And U-M Part Ways

Former Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson was arrested on a drunk driving charge in April and since then has been informed that he will no longer be on the Wolverines staff going forward.

Adam Rittenberg of ESPN initially reported that the two parties would be parting ways after Robinson had been on staff since February 2022 as an assistant director of player personnel. The report didn't specify whether he was fired, or if he resigned from his position.

His arrest on April 15 came after he wrecked his vehicle in a single-car crash while intoxicated at 3:05 a.m., close to a mile and a half south of Michigan's Schembechler Hall. His case was submitted to the Ann Arbor city attorney's office for review.

Robinson spent four years with the Wolverines as a player from 2009-12, throwing for 6,250 yards and 49 touchdowns while also running for another 4,495 yards and 42 touchdowns. He was the 2010 Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year and was selected in the fifth round of the 2013 NFL draft by the Jacksonville Jaguars. His NFL career lasted four seasons as a wide receiver and a running back. He finished with 1,368 yards from scrimmage and five rushing touchdowns.

Robinson is the second Wolverine coach to leave the program in the past few months due to an incident of driving under the influence. In March, then-defensive line coach Greg Scruggs – who was hired shortly before the incident – was arrested in Ann Arbor on suspicion of operating a vehicle while intoxicated. He was initially suspended by Michigan and resigned from his position as the defensive line coach shortly after.

### Former PSU Doctor Testifies Against Franklin

According to a story in The Philadelphia Inquirer, a second team doctor has testified that Penn State head coach James Franklin attempted to interfere with the medical decisions of team doctors and trainers.

John Luciew of the Inquirer wrote that Dr. Pete Seidenberg testified on May 21 in a trial that involved Dr. Scott Lynch's lawsuit against Franklin and the school administrators. Lynch was the Nittany Lions' director of athletic medicine and orthopedic consultant to the football team before he was fired from both roles in March 2019.

Seidenberg recounted an instance when Franklin and then-Penn State athletic director Sandy Barbour both wanted an unnamed player who had attempted suicide to be medically disqualified from the team while he received treatment in short-term psychiatric care. The player would have lost his scholarship if medically disqualified, which would have allowed Franklin to offer that spot to another player the next offseason. Both Seidenberg and Lynch declined to follow Franklin and Barbour's request.

Seidenberg also testified about several

meetings in which he claims Franklin pressured him, Lynch and the chief athletic trainer to change their medical decisions regarding players dealing with injuries. Seidenberg repeatedly said that those actions, which included Franklin looking to alter treatment advice and specific medical options given to players, were an "attempt to influence medical decisions."

Lynch's lawsuit claims that he was fired because he refused to "allow a coach to interfere with his medical treatment and return-to-play decisions." At the time the incidents occurred, Lynch reported Franklin's actions to the Penn State athletic department and Penn State Health, the PSU hospital system.

Lynch is seeking compensatory and punitive damages in his lawsuit.

### PSU Beaver Stadium To Be Renovated

Penn State announced on May 21 that the school's board of trustees had approved a \$700 million renovation of Beaver Stadium.

The upgrades to the stadium attempt to make it a year-round, winterized venue since the new 12-team College Football Playoff will have teams playing at on-campus sites for first-round games. Upgrades include widening the concourses, putting in new restrooms, revamping Wi-Fi and improving concessions, premium seating, field lighting, the press box, elevators, escalators and stair towers. The renovations also aim to allow more than just football games to take place at the venue.

"I'm pleased that the renovation will benefit our student-athletes, elevate Beaver Stadium's significance in driving local and state economies, and ensure Beaver Stadium remains a premier facility in all of college athletics," said board of trustees chairman Matt Schuyler.

The west side of the stadium will be demolished and rebuilt for the renovation and will begin the first phase after the 2024 football season. The second phase will be after the 2025 season followed by the third and final phase which would take place after the 2026 football season. The stadium would be fully ready by the 2027 football season. Temporary bleachers will be installed on the west side of the stadium for the 2025 and 2026 seasons.

This approval comes after the board of trustees initially approved a \$70 million renovation in May 2023, which paid for the

design costs and the winterization of the stadium which includes insulating pipes and other upgrades.

Beaver Stadium has served as Penn State's home football field since 1960, and it is the second-largest football stadium in the country with 106,572 seats, trailing only Michigan's Stadium with 107,601.

### Michigan, Nebraska Win B1G Softball, Baseball Titles

Michigan finished the softball season on top of the Big Ten when it won the conference tournament 3-1 over Indiana on May 11, receiving an automatic bid to the regionals of the NCAA tournament.

Junior pitcher Lauren Derkowski pitched three complete games to get the Wolverines through the tournament, including the championship game against the Hoosiers in which she struck out six hitters. She was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player for her performance. The win gave the Wolverines their 11th Big Ten championship and their first since 2019.

Michigan, which was placed into the regional with No. 5 overall Oklahoma State, made it to the finals in the Stillwater regional but lost to the Cowgirls 4-1, ending their season.

Penn State, Northwestern and Indiana each also made it into the NCAA tournament with at-large bids, but each of them was also eliminated in the regional round. The Hoosiers lost both of their first two games, the Wildcats were beat by No. 1 overall Texas twice to get knocked out and the Nittany Lions lost to Texas State in the semifinals of the losers' bracket.

As for baseball, Nebraska beat Penn State 2-1 in the Big Ten championship game on May 26 after losing its first game of the tournament to Ohio State and winning every other game it played, ending the Buckeyes' season along the way.

The Cornhuskers' starting pitcher, southpaw Jackson Brockett, went eight innings and gave up just one run with five strikeouts and just one walk to earn the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

Nebraska was one of three Big Ten baseball teams that made the NCAA tournament along with Illinois and Indiana. As BSB went to press, Illinois and Indiana had been eliminated, and Nebraska was playing in the elimination game.



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# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## FOOTBALL 2024

**Aug. 31** AKRON.  
**Sept. 7** WESTERN MICHIGAN; **21** MARSHALL; **28** at Michigan State.  
**Oct. 5** IOWA; **12** at Oregon; **26** NEBRASKA.  
**Nov. 2** at Penn State; **9** PURDUE; **16** at Northwestern; **23** INDIANA; **30** MICHIGAN.

## BASEBALL (29-26, 12-12)

**Feb 16** vs. Boston College at Phoenix, L 9-2; **17** vs. BYU at Phoenix, W 7-2; **18** vs. USC at Phoenix, W 5-2; **20** vs. Grand Canyon at Phoenix, L 10-3; **22** at Arizona State, W 11-4; **23** at Arizona State, L 14-4; **24** at Arizona State, W 13-4; **25** at Arizona State, L 10-8 (8 innings).  
**March 1** vs. California at Las Vegas Classic in Las Vegas, W 9-4; **2** vs. Pittsburgh at Las Vegas Classic in Las Vegas, canceled; **3** vs. Oklahoma at Las Vegas Classic in Las Vegas, W 4-3; **8** at Cal Poly, L 4-2; **9** at Cal Poly, L 19-2; **10** at Cal Poly, W 5-3; **11** at Cal Poly, L 3-1; **13** at Cal State Fullerton, W 13-10; **15** at West Virginia, L 5-2; **16** at West Virginia, W 7-4; **17** at West Virginia, W 26-11; **22** GEORGETOWN, L 5-1; **23** GEORGETOWN, L 8-5; **24** GEORGETOWN, L 4-2 (10 innings); **26** KENT STATE, postponed; **29** PURDUE, W 8-2; **30** PURDUE, W 12-10; **31** PURDUE, L 7-1.  
**April 2** at Kent State, postponed; **3** at Kent State, postponed; **5** at Nebraska, L

3-0; **6** at Nebraska, L 7-3; **7** at Nebraska, W 9-3; **9** BOWLING GREEN, W 6-4; **10** MOREHEAD STATE, W 13-7; **12** IOWA, W 8-5; **13** IOWA, L 3-2; **14** IOWA, W 11-1 (8 innings); **16** WRIGHT STATE, W 14-13; **17** at Kent State, postponed; **19** at Michigan, L 4-0; **20** at Michigan, W 16-1; **21** at Michigan, L 7-5; **23** at Wright State, L 14-13; **26** MICHIGAN STATE, L 11-4; **27** MICHIGAN STATE, L 17-12; **28** MICHIGAN STATE, W 10-6; **30** CINCINNATI, W 12-6.

**May 1** AKRON, W 18-13; **3** at Illinois, W 7-5; **4** at Illinois, L 10-5; **5** at Illinois, L 12-2; **7** EASTERN MICHIGAN, canceled; **8** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 13-9; **10** NORTHWESTERN, W 7-2; **11** NORTHWESTERN, W 14-6; **12** NORTHWESTERN, L 3-1; **16** at Rutgers, W 6-3 (10 innings); **17** at Rutgers, W 11-5; **18** at Rutgers, L 12-1 (7 innings); **21** Big Ten Championships at Omaha, Neb., vs. Nebraska, W 15-2 (7 innings); **23** Big Ten Championships at Omaha, Neb., vs. Indiana, L 14-7; **24** Big Ten Championships at Omaha, Neb., vs. Nebraska, L 12-5.

## MEN'S GOLF

**Jan. 29-31** Southwestern Invitational at Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1st/13.  
**Feb. 11-13** Puerto Rico Classic at Grand Reserve, Puerto Rico, 9th/15; **19-21** Watersound Collegiate at Destin, Fla., 7th/12.  
**March 9-11** Hayt Invitational at

Ponte Vedra, Fla., 4th/14; **25-26** Valspar Collegiate at Palm City, Fla., 15th/16.

**April 19-21** ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE, 2nd/18; **26-28** BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIP, 5th/18.

**May 13-15** NCAA Regionals at Baton Rouge, La., 4th/14; **24-29** NCAA Championship at Carlsbad, Calif., 3rd/30.

## WOMEN'S GOLF

**Feb. 3** Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., vs. USC, L 1-3-1; **3** Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., vs. ASU, W 2-1-2; **4** Therese Hession Regional Challenge at Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., vs. Baylor, T 2-2-1; **18-19** Spartan Sun Coast Invitational at Sarasota, Fla., 1st/15.

**March 4-6** Darius Rucker Intercollegiate at Hilton Head Island, S.C., 16th/17; **15-16** Florida State Match-Up, 6th/14; **22-24** Clemson Invitational, 6th/16.

**April 13-14** THERESE HESSION BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL, 1st/12; **19-21** Big Ten Championships at Havre de Grace, Md., 6th/14.

**May 6-8** NCAA Regionals at Bryan, Texas, 6th/12.

## SOFTBALL (31-20, 12-11)

**Feb. 9** Felsberg Invitational at Miami, Fla., vs. Stony Brook, L 7-5; **9** Felsberg Invitational at Miami, Fla., vs. FIU, W 6-1; **9** Felsberg Invitational at Miami, Fla., vs. Southeast Missouri State, W 13-0 (5 innings); **10** Felsberg Invitational at Miami, Fla., vs. Stony Brook, W 9-0 (6 innings); **11** Felsberg Invitational at Miami, Fla., vs. FIU, W 7-5; **16** The Spring Games at Leesburg, Fla., vs. Coastal Carolina, W 6-0; **16** The Spring Games at Leesburg, Fla., vs. UC Riverside, W 7-2; **23** Sun Devil Classic at Tempe, Ariz., vs. Texas State, L 6-1; **23** Sun Devil Classic at Tempe, Ariz., vs. Arizona State, L 12-10 (10 innings); **24** Sun Devil Classic at Phoenix, Ariz., vs. New Mexico State, W 10-0 (5 innings); **24** Sun Devil Classic at Phoenix, Ariz., vs. Grand Canton, L 2-1 (8 innings); **25** Sun Devil Classic at Phoenix, Ariz., vs. Idaho State, W 5-2.

**March 8** Tennessee Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn., vs. Missouri State, W 6-2; **8** Tennessee Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn., vs. Missouri State, W 6-2; **9** Tennessee Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn., vs. Tennessee, L 5-0; **10** Tennessee Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn., vs. Tennessee, L 11-0 (5 innings); **10** Tennessee Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn., vs. South Dakota, W 5-3; **12** at Belmont, W 8-0 (5 innings); **13** at Austin Peay, W 7-5 (8 innings); **14** John Cropp Classic at Lexington, Ky., vs. South Dakota State, W 10-8; **15** John Cropp Classic at Lexington, Ky., vs. Columbia, W 9-0 (5 innings); **16** John Cropp Classic at Lexington, Ky., vs. South Dakota State, L 7-3; **16** John Cropp Classic at Lexington, Ky., vs. Kentucky, L 9-4; **17** John Cropp Classic at Lexington, Ky., vs. Kentucky, W 12-6; **22** at Rutgers, L 6-1; **22** at Rutgers, W 11-9 (9 innings); **24** at Rutgers, L 8-6;

**27** DAYTON, W 6-2; **29** NORTHWESTERN, L 10-0; **30** NORTHWESTERN, L 9-7; **29** NORTHWESTERN, W 6-0.

**April 2** PENN STATE, postponed; **5** at Minnesota, L 9-1 (5 innings); **6** at Minnesota, L 14-6 (6 innings); **6** at Minnesota, L 12-11; **10** OHIO, W 8-0 (5 innings); **12** at Wisconsin, L 8-4; **13** at Wisconsin, L 10-5; **14** at Wisconsin, W 9-5; **16** PENN STATE, W 16-8 (6 innings); **16** PENN STATE, W 2-1; **17** PITTSBURGH, W 3-2; **19** MARYLAND, W 4-0; **20** MARYLAND, W 6-3; **21** MARYLAND, W 3-2; **26** ILLINOIS, W 3-1; **27** ILLINOIS, W 13-5 (5 innings); **28** ILLINOIS, L 11-6.

**May 3** at Michigan, L 9-6; **4** at Michigan, W 6-0; **5** at Michigan, W 2-1; **8** Big Ten tournament at Iowa City, Iowa, vs. Wisconsin, L 5-1.

## MEN'S TENNIS (34-2, 9-0)

**Sept. 18-24** COLUMBUS CHALLENGER, NTS. **30** ITA All-American Championship at Tulsa, Okla., NTS.

**Oct. 1-8** ITA All-American Championship at Tulsa, Okla., NTS.; **19-23** ITA Midwest Regional Championship at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; **23-29** Las Vegas Challenger at Las Vegas, NTS.

**Nov. 1-5** ITA Fall National Championship at San Diego, Calif., NTS; **1-5** Big Ten Singles & Doubles Championship at Madison, Wisc., NTS.

**Jan. 21** Eastern Illinois, W 7-0; Xavier, W 7-0; **24** Northern Kentucky, W 4-0; Toledo, W 7-0; **27** VANDERBILT, W 4-0; **28** BOISE STATE, W 4-0.

**Feb. 2** VIRGINIA, W 7-0; **4** WAKE FOREST, W 6-1; **11** SOUTH CAROLINA, W 6-1; **16** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. Alabama, W 4-2; **17** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. Harvard, W 4-1; **18** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. Virginia, W 4-0; **19** National Team Indoor Championship at New York, N.Y., vs. TCU, W 4-3; **24** Notre Dame, W 7-0; **28** Baylor, W 4-1.

**March 6** Illinois, W 4-1; **10** Texas, L 5-2; **13** Texas A&M, W 6-1; **17** Michigan, W 4-0; **22** NORTHWESTERN, W 4-0; **24** ILLINOIS, W 4-1; **29** Purdue, W 4-0; **31** Indiana, W 7-0.

**April 5** Penn State, W 7-0; **13** MICHIGAN STATE, W 6-1; **14** MICHIGAN, W 4-0; **19** Nebraska, W 6-1; **21** Wisconsin, W 7-0; **26** Big Ten tournament vs. Penn State, W 4-0; **27** Big Ten tournament vs. Nebraska, W 4-1; **28** Big Ten tournament vs. Michigan, W 4-1.

**May 3** NCAA Regional at Columbus vs. Cleveland State, W 4-0; **4** NCAA Regional at Columbus vs. Oklahoma State, W 4-1; **11** NCAA Super Regional at Columbus vs. Mississippi State, W 4-1; **16** NCAA Championship at Stillwater, Okla., vs. Columbia, W 4-2; **18** NCAA Championship at Stillwater, Okla., vs. TCU, L 4-2; **20-26** NCAA Singles & Doubles Championships, NTS.

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# Ohio State Falls Short Again In NCAA Tournament

By Lauryn Luderman

Special to Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Even though they have been one of the top teams in the country for more than two decades, there's one award missing from the Ohio State men's tennis team's trophy case, one that reads "NCAA Division I Men's Tennis National Champions."

The No. 1-ranked Buckeyes seemed to have the right coaches, players and a winning mindset, but Ohio State fell short in the 2024 NCAA tournament semifinals on May 19 at Greenwood Tennis Center in Stillwater, Okla. The loss left the Buckeyes with their fifth top-four finish in the last eight seasons, something head coach Ty Tucker is proud of but said is a lot to uphold.

"We've got to be ready to get everybody's best shot," Tucker said. "Everybody knows Ohio State tennis is a darn good program, and everybody wants to beat us."

Beat the Buckeyes is what No. 4 TCU set out to do, and ultimately what they achieved. By a 4-2 final score, TCU bested Ohio State for the first time in the last three meetings between the schools, knocking the Buckeyes out of championship contention.

Since May 20, 2023, Ohio State had been on the winning side of the scoreboard over the Horned Frogs when it shut them out in last year's NCAA semifinals, 4-0, but eventually lost 4-0 to Virginia in the finals. However, the Buckeyes' dominance only grew as they continued the momentum into the 2024 season by winning the ITA National Men's Team Indoor Championship over none other than TCU on Feb. 19.

This win marked the third ITA victory for Ohio State (2014, 2019) and seventh finals appearance, but better yet, it pried another achievement from the Horned Frogs, the two-time defending champions.

Andrew Lutschaunig, the Buckeyes' sole sixth-year senior, experienced two ITA wins over his time in Columbus, which he said was this season's greatest accomplishment demonstrating the team's hard work and passion.

"A national championship is a national championship. We're going to get our rings," Lutschaunig said. "We came back to win that title in the spring just like every other team did, but in sports when you're at the top, there's only one team that's going to be fully satisfied in the end."

Lutschaunig said Tucker prepares his team the same all year round, as if every match is the championship. He said the intensity needs to be developed in the months leading up to the championship – a practice that makes champions. Despite taking on a familiar foe, Ohio State locked in and hit the ground running.

Once you reach the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight, the competition starts to heat up, Lutschaunig said, but one thing that stood out about TCU this time was its desire for revenge, and the Buckeyes could feel it.

"We still practice and game plan the same way we would game plan for any other match," Lutschaunig said. "Leading up to the semis this year against TCU, we knew that they really, really wanted to beat us."

Tucker and Ohio State felt ready as ever

moving into the next round, Lutschaunig said. However, in tennis, he also said that sometimes it's simply not your day.

"If you played the Elite Eight back over five or six times, you might get a new champion every time," he said. "If we played TCU again, maybe we beat them. If we played Columbia again, maybe they could beat us right now. We just try our best to stay the course and not get ahead of ourselves and do the same things we've done all year."

Buckeye senior J.J. Tracy and fifth-year Robert Cash fell in their first doubles match of the day to TCU's fifth-year Jake Fearnley and junior Pedro Vives 6-4. Lutschaunig and partner fifth-year Justin Boulais tied the doubles point up at one with a 6-3 victory over sophomores Sebastian Gorzny and Jack Pinnington.

To earn the doubles point on the day, fifth-year Cannon Kingsley and redshirt sophomore Jack Anthrop took down freshman Duncan Chan and junior Lui Maxted 7-4. Heading into the locker room ahead of singles, Ohio State had a 1-0 lead, which felt good, but not secure enough, Lutschaunig said.

"We knew that the doubles point is not the decider," Lutschaunig said. "It puts you in a good position, but a lot of work still has to be done."

Right from the jump, the Horned Frogs broke even with the Buckeyes in the first complete singles game of the day when sophomore Alexander Bernard suffered his first singles loss of the season. Shortly thereafter, TCU took the lead and didn't look back.

Anthrop defeated Maxted on court three to earn Ohio State's only singles point, while the game between Tracy and Vives went unfinished. The Horned Frogs' victory was secured when Cash fell short in three sets to fifth-year Tomas Jirousek.

Following TCU's victory, Tracy said he beat himself up a bit because he felt like he could have beaten his singles competitor like he did earlier in the season to put pressure on the opponent. However, he said he and the team put their all onto the court.

"It's a terrible feeling, but it definitely eases people's minds knowing we left it all out there," Tracy said. "Everybody was pretty sad and beat up."

The preparation, Tucker said, was there – as was the lineup – but the No. 1 team in the nation since Jan. 24 fell short in the NCAAAs once again.

Tucker, who has led the Buckeyes since 1999 and guided them to 18 straight regular-season Big Ten championships, including this year, said the pressure of being in a win-or-go-home situation could be a factor.

"Sometimes you've got to be able to manage the nerves," Tucker said. "Those guys know what's at stake. It's hard to play tennis when you're one of the last matches on and you know if you win, you win, and if you lose, you lose."

Under Tucker, the Buckeyes made the NCAA tournament for the first time in 2000 and since then have never been excluded from the event, making it into the bracket every year other than 2020 when it was canceled due to COVID-19.

In those 24 seasons, the Buckeyes have



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**DOUBLE TROUBLE – J.J. Tracy (left) and Robert Cash (right) beat out competitors from SMU, Auburn, Arkansas, Louisville and Florida State to claim the second consecutive doubles national championship for Ohio State.**

made it into the quarterfinals 17 times which has resulted in three trips to the finals. The first was in 2009, losing 4-1 to USC, then a 4-2 loss to Wake Forest in 2018 and the loss to Virginia in 2023. Overall, they have a 71-24 record in the tournament.

Lutschaunig said for him it's not the stage that's too big. He said it's the idea of "closing out" a match, which he said TCU did a better job at this year, as well as going for more on each of its shots.

"When you do that it either works or it doesn't," he said. "There's really no other way to put it. The guys that I was watching were hitting the crap out of the ball and they found a rhythm at the right time."

Over the full season, Ohio State won over 80 percent of its singles matches compared to the Horned Frogs' 72 percent, but TCU won more when it mattered most this time around.

Tracy, who competed in doubles as well as a singles match, said he felt affected by the heat. On the day of the semifinals, it was 90 degrees in Stillwater – the type of weather TCU is accustomed to in Fort Worth, Texas, while the Buckeyes are not, playing indoors through the winter in Columbus.

Because Ohio State traveled to Texas three times over the course of the season, playing in the heat, Tracy said he felt fortunate to have had some sort of preparation for the temperature, but even with those matches and the outdoor practice, acclimating to such hot conditions seems to wear out one's physicality and mental state quicker, Tracy said.

"I even gave a break back in the third set because I was thinking too much about, 'Crap, I don't want to cramp out here.' I was trying to preserve my body," he said. "I even started overthinking. I think when you're not used to playing in that heat, it's easy to do that."

Whether it was the scorching sun, nerves or an inability to powerfully close out a match, the team could not punch its ticket to the finals, nor clinch a second national championship in the same season, though its first NCAA.

Ultimately finishing with a 34-2 record

and an ITA championship while securing an 18th consecutive regular-season Big Ten title, Ohio State didn't leave empty-handed, and it didn't end with the team loss for five Buckeyes, each of whom hoped to end their season on a high note.

Tracy, Kingsley, Boulais and Anthrop each qualified to compete in the singles championship, while the duo of Tracy and Cash competed for the doubles title.

Despite the fact they fell short as a team just days prior, Tucker said it doesn't take many words from him to motivate the guys heading into their individual matches.

"You're playing for a national championship, you're playing for a wild card in the U.S. Open, you're playing to be All-American. That's enough motivation for guys to be ready to go," Tucker said.

In singles, Kingsley and Boulais both fell in the Round of 32, while Tracy and Anthrop prevailed until the quarterfinals.

However, in doubles, Tracy and Cash broke down opponents from Southern Methodist University, Auburn, Arkansas, Louisville and Florida State to win the second consecutive doubles championship for Ohio State in three sets, a year after Lutschaunig and James Trotter won it all for the Buckeyes. This marked the third doubles championship in program history.

"I think it's the one way I would dream of ending off my college career," Tracy said.

Despite the team falling short as a whole, the Buckeyes did land back in Columbus with an additional trophy to place in the case. Yet they're still on the hunt for the big one, and they didn't waste any time to start working toward that goal.

With five outgoing seniors and new freshmen joining the team, Tucker said he has already begun summer practices with the 2024-25 team to gear up for next season and chase after the national championship once again.

"I feel like this program's a darn good program and we've got to continue building," Tucker said.



# A Wise Choice Transferring To Ohio State

Jake Wise had only one regret over his decision to transfer to Ohio State after three trying seasons for Boston University. In Columbus, he enjoyed the big campus feel as well as a resurgence in his career for the Buckeyes.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz Craig Merz

Yet, something gnawed at him. "I think if I could go back, I would have picked a place like this to begin with and really get the full college experience," he said in November 2021. "It's beyond hockey. It's so cool to be on a campus like this. I don't know if you've ever been to BU but it's completely different.

"So, getting a real college experience, like football games, is so different."

Wise, who played for the Buckeyes in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 seasons, is Buckeye Sports Bulletin's top transfer in the program since the NCAA amended the rules in 2021 to allow transfers immediate eligibility at their new schools instead of sitting a season.

"If I didn't have to sit out a year, I think I probably would have transferred a little bit earlier," he said. "Now that you're allowed to transfer, I think that made it much easier for me once I knew that it was time for me to move on from BU."

In 75 games for the Buckeyes, he had 67 points (22 goals, 45 assists) compared to 17 points (three goals, 14 assists) in 50 games while at Boston U.

Wise earned second-team All-Big Ten honors and was second in team scoring in 2022-23 as a fifth-year senior with 12 goals and 27 assists for 39 points to help OSU reach the NCAA regional final. He had had four assists in the 8-1 semifinal win over Harvard.

"What drew me here? I think just Ohio State in general," Wise said. "When you look at it from the outside you always wonder what it's like at this massive school. You hear about the football, the basketball, the hockey. I mean, there's so many sports here that are so good.

"So, when I got the chance to come here and visit and talk with the coaches, it was really a no-brainer. I loved it. The facilities are unbelievable."

He parlayed his success into a contract with the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League, and this season he put up 21 points (seven goals, 14 assists) in 53 games for Charlotte and the Chicago Wolves (AHL).

Other notable transfers are defenseman Scooter Brickey (2022-24), Will Riedell (2021-22) and junior goalie Logan Terness, who just completed his first season as a Buckeye after transferring from Connecticut.

### The Right Stuff

Brickey, Riedell and Wise were all named captains at some point in their OSU careers.

"It's a big part of what I believe in," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik. "You've got to get not only good players but good people. Leaders like that come in and bring some experience, and the respect that they bring when they come in, it's been a real positive."

Brickey went from a benchwarmer in his third season with Western Michigan to two productive seasons at Ohio State that resulted in him signing with Wilkes-Barre Scranton of the American Hockey League this spring and playing in eight games (one assist) for the Penguins.

He was in 59 games with Western Michigan but only 10 as a junior. After scoring three goals in 40 games in his first season as a Buckeye, his career stats stood at six goals in 99 games. In 37 games this past season, he had 13 goals to lead the team and ranked second among the nation's defensemen in goals to earn All-Big Ten second-team recognition.

Riedell made an impact joining the Buckeyes after four seasons at Lake Superior, where he captained the Lakers to their first NCAA berth in 25 years in 2020-21.

Though he had only 10 points (three goals, seven assists) in 33 games for the Buckeyes, he was named one of the captains before playing a game.

Rohlik said that shows the value of getting transfers on campus during the summer.

"It's become the most important time, to be honest with you," he said. "You know, you're always worried about when the freshmen came in a week or so before school that they will be acclimated by October. Now you've got to worry about the freshmen and the transfers in the summer when they come in for voluntary workouts.

"They can spend that time getting to know each other, be on the ice with each other, work out with each other, go golfing together in a little less stressful environment. I think it really starts to build your culture."

Terness played 23 games during his sophomore season at Connecticut. He earned the starting job for the Buckeyes in 2023-24 after Jakub Dobeš left after his sophomore season to sign with the Montreal Canadiens. Terness played 27 games and was 11-12-3 with a 3.10 goals-against average for the Buckeyes.

He won Games 1 and 3 when the Buckeyes upset No. 5 Wisconsin in the best-of-three quarterfinal of the Big Ten tournament and made 36 saves in a 2-1 loss to Michigan State in the semifinal.

### Steady Flow

Rohlik brought in three transfers for the 2024-25 season: Northeastern forward Gunnarwolfe Fontaine, Rochester Institute of Technology defenseman Aiden Hansen-Bukata and forward Riley Thompson from Alaska Anchorage.

In 2023-24, the Buckeyes added six

transfers in addition to Terness:

Forward Caden Brown (Wisconsin), forward Jake Dunlap and defenseman Damien Carfagna (each from New Hampshire), forward Riley Hughes (Northeastern) and defensemen Brent Johnson (North Dakota) and Mason Klee (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute).

"It's definitely cool," Klee said of his transfer. "Especially being in the Big Ten, I'm sure there's going to be NHL teams that are watching every night and it's such a skilled league. That's always what you're looking for when you're trying to move on to the next level.

"The culture here, the fans, the people around it just make it such a special place. I enjoyed my time at RPI, which is a smaller school, and I just wanted to try something new. Kind of the opposite end of that, which is here."

A key transfer loss was defenseman Tyler Duke opting to play his sophomore season at Michigan.

The previous season, Brickey was the lone incoming transfer.

Forward Eric Cooley (Niagara) joined Riedell and Wise in the 2021-22 transfer class.

For 2020-21, Matt Cassidy (an alternate captain in 2023-24) came from Quinnipiac with Boston University transfers forward Mark Cheremeta and defenseman Dominic Vidoli.

Paul Caponigri, the 2004 Central Collegiate Hockey Association tournament MVP when the Buckeyes won the championship, has witnessed the changing landscape as an analyst for the Big Ten Network.

He knows the portal is here to stay but rues the fact that coaches seemingly have to recruit their players over and over. There's the first time when a prospect is recruited to a school. That's followed by the continuing wooing of the player so he doesn't transfer once there.

"It used to be that usually talking to a coach this time of the year, it's probably a little more laid-back, but I have a feeling that it's not anymore," Caponigri said. "It's funny, people used to say, 'Oh, go coach in college sports,' hockey or football or whatever, because you recruit, yes, and your job security is really good, right? You have less to worry about in the outside world like in pro sports.

"Honestly, I think it's slipping. It's slipping where college is like, 'Maybe I don't want to do college coaching because now it's becoming professional.' And it's even harder, because pro sports, at least they have contracts. Most likely 90 percent of those guys in their contracts can't just come in and say, 'Hey, I want to leave.' I think at some point, there has to be some regulation."

### Cup Run

When he wasn't keeping track of his roster, Rohlik enjoyed watching former players Mason Lohrei, a rookie defenseman for the Boston Bruins, and Vancouver Canucks forward Dakota Joshua help their teams reach the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Bruins lost in six games to the Florida Panthers in the Eastern Conference

while the Canucks were ousted in seven by the Edmonton Oilers in the Western Conference.

Lohrei, a member of the Big Ten All-Freshman team in 2021-2022, split time between the Bruins and their AHL affiliate in Providence, R.I., this season.

In 41 regular-season games with Boston, he had four goals and nine assists for 13 points while playing 16:57 per game. In 11 playoff games, Lohrei scored a goal and had three assists in 17:12 average ice time.

Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy is excited by Lohrei's progress.

"The sky is the limit for him," McAvoy said. "I think that he's going to be an incredible hockey player. He already is, and I can't wait to see the strides that he takes. I'm so proud of him. I had a great time playing with him. He works extremely hard. I look forward to the relationship that we're going to build."

Lohrei knows there is work to be done.

"It's always been my goal to be an everyday NHL player. Obviously, I'm a lot further now than I was eight months ago," he said. "I want to be great. I want to win the Stanley Cup. I want to be a top defenseman in the league. It's just the way I think. Just keep working and showing up every day and do

my best to make that happen." Joshua, who played for the Buckeyes from 2015-19, set career highs this season with 18 goals and 32 points in 63 games. His 244 hits led the Canucks and was ninth in the NHL.

He added four goals and four assists in 13 playoff games.

"I read all the articles on him, I just chuckled to myself," Rohlik said. "They all say he doesn't know how good he can be. I mean, I said that – I can't tell you how many times – to him, to you, to everybody. He really doesn't know how good he can be."

### Mark It Down

The Buckeyes will have 10 nonconference games this upcoming season, split between home and road among five opponents.

First, there is a home exhibition against Niagara on Oct. 6. The regular season opens at Value City Arena on Oct. 11-12 for the first meetings in history with American International.

Bowling Green will come to Columbus on Oct. 25 followed by the rematch the next night on the Falcons' ice. Former CCHA foe Lake Superior State will play the Buckeyes for the first time since 2013 on Nov. 1-2 at VCA.

OSU travels to Lindenwood on Nov. 15-16. The schools met for the first time in Columbus last Oct. 13-14. Finally, the Buckeyes go to Princeton Nov. 29-30 in a return of the series last season at VCA.



Jake Wise



Mason Lohrei



# Mosiello Looks Forward After OSU Eliminated

Ohio State's baseball season came to an end on May 24 when it lost to Nebraska in the third round of the Big Ten tournament. Winning the conference tournament and earning an automatic bid was the Buckeyes' only chance at making the NCAA tournament this year with their 29-26 overall record, so they will have to wait until 2025 for another shot to make it back.

## FROM THE STRETCH Greg Wilson

They started the tournament off with a splash by beating No. 2 Nebraska 15-2, only needing seven innings to do so. Lefthander Landon Beidelschies started the game for the Buckeyes and went five innings in 76 pitches, giving up just one run and striking out eight hitters to just one walk.

Beidelschies had slowed down from the great start he had at the beginning of the season as the Buckeye ace, but when they needed it most, the southpaw returned to his dominant form.

"His last three games, Illinois he pitched a great one, then he beat Rutgers, then (Nebraska)," Buckeye head coach Bill Mosiello told BSB. "There was that one stage – and I believe it was because he hit a wall from being a stopper last year – once you get to 50 innings, it's a whole different world.

"He was as good as anybody in the country, basically. That gets you really excited to know that

you've got a real No. 1 type of guy coming back next year. He'll be in his third year, it will be his draft year, and he knows he's got a lot at stake for our program and for himself personally."

Mosiello took Beidelschies out with just 76 pitches to try to keep him fresh for another game later on in the Big Ten tournament, but the Buckeyes lost two days later to Indiana by a score of 14-7 and had a rematch with the Cornhuskers in the losers' bracket which they lost 12-5. Nebraska would go on to win the conference tournament over Penn State in a 2-1 pitcher's duel.

It was the first time Ohio State made the Big Ten tournament since 2019, a year in which the program secured the conference tournament crown as a No. 7 seed under head coach Greg Beals and earned its most recent bid to the NCAA tournament.

Mosiello wishes he had been able to take this team that far, but he has been able to look at his two years with the program and realize it's going to take longer than that to build a team that can compete at a high level each season.

"It is what it is. We are where we are," Mosiello said. "It was super disappointing, and we're super humbled. It's really taught

me some patience and understanding that this thing is just not as easy as you think. You can't just snap your fingers and automatically win games. There's a process, and you've got to continue to develop players. You've got to recruit at a high level."

Mosiello said that the first step he's taking over the offseason to make his team more competitive is to address the pitching staff. Ohio State's team ERA was 6.35, good for 10th in the Big Ten, ahead of only Michigan State (6.49), Penn State (6.64) and Northwestern (6.93). Mosiello understands that his team's pitching must vastly improve if the Buckeyes want to play into June, let alone into the NCAA tournament.

"It always starts at pitching," he said. "Great pitching covers up a lot of rough edges, and when you don't have that, your margin of error is basically zero. The biggest focus for us is pitching, pitching, pitching. We have to bring in some portal arms, junior college portal arms. We have a few high school guys coming in that we really

like. "If we can have three to four guys really emerge as freshmen, then bring in some other pieces and have our returners, we have a chance to be in good shape. Our whole livelihood is going to be determined by how well we can recruit this summer and what kind of arms we can bring in.

"It's going to be tough, though, because the good arms that we'd be interested in, so is everybody else in the country. It really gets crazy. Then the elite arms, with the NIL money and all the SEC teams that give huge money, we really don't have any opportunity to get those types of guys."

Mosiello is still going to be trying his best to get everyone he can to Ohio State, whether that is through the portal or recruiting. He said he tells good pitchers that they can get on the mound immediately if they sign with Ohio State given the program's lack of depth at the position, which he thinks can be an effective selling point to recruits and transfers.

"Every pitcher that comes in for us, you get to be a game changer," Mosiello said. "We don't want you, we need you. You go to a team that already has a good pitching staff and you don't pitch great right away, you're not going to get the ball anymore. But with us, you're going to get tons of opportunities and be at a really special university."

### Three Buckeyes On All-BIG Team

A trio of Buckeyes earned All-Big Ten honors on May 21, with sophomore shortstop Henry Kaczmar earning second-team all-conference honors, sophomore right-handed reliever Blaine Wynk making the third team and freshman pitcher Gavin DeVooght being selected to the Big Ten's all-freshman team.

Kaczmar, who was on the Big Ten freshman team last season, improved upon his performance from his first season with the Buckeyes, hitting a team-high .320 with 10 doubles, two triples and seven home runs while starting each of the Buckeyes' 55 games at shortstop this season. Defensively he had a .952 fielding percentage, which



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**SHORT AND SWEET** – Sophomore shortstop Henry Kaczmar earned second-team all-conference honors this season after being named to the Big Ten freshman team last year. Kaczmar batted a team-high .320 while knocking in 10 doubles, two triples and seven homers.

helped him be named to the Brooks Wallace Award watch list for the nation's best shortstop.

Wynk was a reliable arm for the Buckeyes out of the bullpen. He made 21 appearances and pitched 40 innings with a team-leading 3.38 ERA, while also striking out 38 batters.

DeVooght began the season as a reliever but was ramped up to be Ohio State's Sunday starter after excelling in his relief role. He ended up starting eight games and pitching another 10 out of the bullpen, finishing with a 5.08 ERA. He struck out 37 batters in 44 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings pitched.

Each school also had a sportsmanship award winner. The Ohio State honor was given to senior outfielder Mitchell Okuley. The team captain had a career-best .314 batting average with 61 hits, 17 doubles, four home runs and 43 RBI.

### Buckeyes To Play At Globe Life Field

Ohio State announced on May 17 that it will compete in the Shriners Children's College Baseball Series from Feb. 28-March 2, 2025, at Globe Life Field in Arlington Texas, the home of MLB's Texas Rangers. This will mark the first time the Buckeyes have

played in the 40,300-seat ballpark, which was opened in 2020.

The event will take place for the second straight year and for three separate weekends, with the Buckeyes participating in the last of the three along with Auburn, Baylor and Oregon State.

"We are proud to continue our tradition of being a key stop on the college baseball calendar," said Sean Decker, president of REV Entertainment, the exclusive events partner of the Texas Rangers and Globe Life Field. "Along with Shriners Children's, we are excited to host new and returning teams at our world-class venue and look forward to delivering an exciting experience for the schools and their passionate fans."

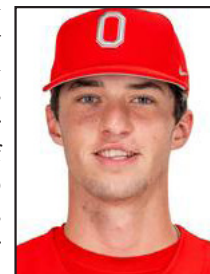
The event will benefit Shriners Children's all three weekends, at a venue that hosted over 100,000 college baseball fans last season during the three weekends.

"We're thrilled to have many of the nation's premier college baseball teams take the field in support of our life-changing cause," said Dustin Johnson, national director of sports for Shriners Children's. "More than 100,000 fans will join us to help our health care system change and improve lives through high-quality specialty medical care."

This is the first game set in stone for Ohio State next season. Game times and matchups for the Shriners Children's College Baseball Series will be announced at a later date.



Landon Beidelschies

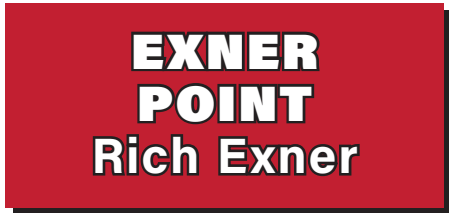


Blaine Wynk



# More \$\$ To Athletes Brings More Questions

I have so many questions – and a few likely answers – about the tentative settlement in a court case that means college athletes will be paid directly by the schools for their services.



**When will this happen?**

Not this season, but 2025-26 is a strong possibility.

**Will the players make more than the coaches, like so many do in the NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball?**

No, at least for the most part.

Baked into the deal is a salary cap of sorts. It's been widely estimated that schools will be capped at around \$21 million to start, increasing from there based on growing revenues.

That's a lot of cash.

But I find it hard to believe any more than a few, if any players will make more than their coach. And it certainly won't be the case for Ohio State football. Ryan Day, according to OSU's NCAA report for the 2022-23 school year, received total compensation of \$9.4 million.

If one player was paid more than that, little would be left over for all the rest of the OSU scholarship athletes to split up.

**So how much will a typical player get?**

That depends on how OSU decides to divide the pie. If it was split among all 763 scholarship athletes, that would average out to about \$28,000 per athlete.

More realistically, most will go to football and basketball players, and little will end up in the hands of athletes in the so-called non-revenue sports.

Already there is a divide. Most of those playing the non-revenue generating sports receive just partial scholarships.

For example, per NCAA rules, schools may award only 11.7 baseball scholarships (sometimes more in special circumstances, such as injuries). Ohio State last year divided 13.1 baseball scholarships among 28 players.

Let's say the \$21 million in pay was all allocated to football, which has an 85-scholarship limit. That would work out to nearly \$250,000 per player on average.

The answer is going to fall somewhere in between, I'm guessing largely earmarking the money for football and both men's

and women's basketball, then a sliding scale down from there. Time will tell. And then there is the other question of whether Title IX gender equity issues will come into play. These are part of the unknown.

But just like in pro sports, we shouldn't expect to see everyone paid the same. When big stars get paid more, that means others won't get quite as much as if it was all averaged out.

**How does this compare to the cost of scholarships?**

Make no mistake, we're talking about a sizable increase in the investment in athletes, beyond what scholarships cost – assuming most of this money lands in the big-time sports like football.

OSU spent \$5.4 million on 88 football scholarships in 2022-23, according to the latest NCAA report available.

Men's basketball scholarships cost \$733,355; women's basketball scholarships cost \$823,591.

After football, in terms of total scholarship costs, was men's ice hockey. The 19.67 scholarships split among 27 hockey players cost just over \$1 million.

But in all, OSU spent \$23.8 million on 431 scholarships split among 763 athletes.

For comparison, almost double that – \$45.3 million was spent on coaching salaries, benefits and bonuses.

**Can OSU afford to set aside \$21 million for pay to the athletes?**

Yes.

Not only can OSU afford it, but it is also the right thing to do.

And it's more workable in OSU's budget than elsewhere.

OSU reported \$279.5 million in revenue for 2022-23 (the 2023-24 report won't be out until next January.) That's more than any school in the country.

Yes, \$21 million would represent a good chunk (about 7.5 percent). But OSU also has more room to play with its budget than anyone else.

There could, however, be some tough decisions to make.

**Should OSU in the new world really have 36 sports teams, many of which are played at very few Ohio high schools?**

It would be tough for OSU to say it can't afford \$21 million for the athletes when it's paying its coaches, support staff and administrators a combined \$90.8 million in salary and benefits. Will some of the money for the kids come out of the "adult" pie?

Yet the \$21 million spread out among many athletes almost sounds like chump change in comparison to the \$12.8 million

OSU is paying fired men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann not to coach.

**What about the rest of the Big Ten?**

A quick look at available money at the other Big Ten schools shows how nicely positioned Ohio State is.

Take Purdue, for example. Whereas Ohio State had total revenue of \$279.5 million, Purdue had \$124.3 million the same year.

This means one of two things: Purdue will have far tougher decisions to make than Ohio State if it wants to spend the cap of around \$21 million and remain competitive on the salary front. Or it will hand out less to its athletes.

Here's how the revenues ranked in the Big Ten in 2022-23, according to the data published by the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database Foundation at knightnewhousedata.org.

**Ohio State – \$279.5 million**

- Michigan – \$229.6 million
- Nebraska – \$204.8 million
- Penn State – \$202.2 million
- Wisconsin – \$197.7 million
- Michigan State – \$170.7 million
- Iowa – \$167.4 million
- Minnesota – \$148.7 million
- Illinois – \$148.3 million
- Indiana – \$144.7 million
- Rutgers – \$125.5 million
- Purdue – \$124.3 million
- Maryland – \$121.2 million
- Northwestern, as a private school, declines to share its data.

**What about NIL payments?**

This is separate cash for the players, not part of their deal. NIL deals can continue. How much, if any, they will be impacted is unknown.

**What about schools like Kent State, Bowling Green and Ohio University?**

They aren't part of the settlement. The class action case involved the five major conferences, plus Notre Dame.

But regardless, Mid-American Conference-level schools would have no business participating, at least at anything more than a very small scale. Students attending these schools, including those who don't play and never attend games, already routinely pay several hundreds of dollars in fees, and in some cases more than \$1,000 a year, to cover the costs of Division I sports on their campuses.

**What about scholarship limits?**

The settlement calls for the elimination of scholarship limits. What this could mean is replacing those limits with roster limits, according to reports, including one I read from Yahoo Sports.

What's the difference? Yahoo noted that such a move could spell doom for walk-on athletes that fill out rosters, and sometimes do eventually earn scholarships. It's too early to know what will happen in this regard. One idea is the creation of practice squad spots for some number of other players.

**Will this ruin college football?**

No.

The game we see – off the field – in four or five years will be far different if this deal goes through. And everything points that it will.

But the game already has changed so much.

I'd call creation of the playoff a bigger deal for the fans, especially now that we're ready to embark on the 12-team playoff, reducing the voices of people who think they know who should be involved. This means the title will be decided on the field.

And the chase of the colleges and their athletic directors for every last dollar has been a huge change over the last several years. Traditions matter no more, they said without saying it out loud, in creating mega conferences and conference television networks designed to generate more money.

The administrators long ago, in making these decisions, decided that money was more important than the traditions of college sports, and the long-term conference rivalries that came with them.

We can debate what was good or bad about all these decisions.

What I hope we can agree on is that once kickoff arrives, and for about 3½ hours, college football is a great game.

And I don't think that's going to change much.

**What does paying players mean for the portal?**

This is the transfer portal issue of BSB so let's try and answer that question.

It is one of the most interesting questions to see how things will pan out. If players are paid mostly in the same range, it won't be a big factor. Remember, every school will be operating under the same salary cap.

But if a school decided to invest more in key players, this could be a big deal, and doing so in the portal means schools will have a better chance of getting a return on the field for their money. These players will come with experience, in most cases, and won't be around for as long. That means less risk for the schools.

Yet, because of the salary cap, the big market teams (like Ohio State and Texas) won't have an advantage over the others like the Yankees do in baseball.

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# “Port”-able Players Jumping From Team To Team

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

Welcome to the “Transfer Portal” issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. This one was my idea, because I find the portal one of the more important and impactful issues in college sports today. The staff bought into the idea, and I hope you find the results of their efforts compelling.

Before I share my own thoughts on the portal, let me remind readers that for as long as I can remember, college athletes have always been able to transfer. They just had to sit out a year, something I never felt was all bad. It gave athletes a chance to get acclimated to their new schools and a better chance to graduate with an extra year to complete their academic requirements.

In my checkered college career, at one point I transferred from Ohio State to Bowling Green – just in time for the Blizzard of 1978 – and back to Ohio State, all without penalty. Why should athletes be treated any differently than I was?

“Transferring has been a thing, but the portal just kind of more formalized that process,” Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors said. “In terms of there being one database where players entered that portal, and coaches would be able to know immediately, ‘OK, this guy’s in the portal and here’s his contact information if we want to contact him.’”

“So, I think that’s really the biggest thing it did for players. It just streamlined that process. Rather than a player having to reach out to schools and say, ‘Hey, I’m transferring, are you looking for me?’ Or parents, other people having to kind of put the word out there for them. The portal created a one-stop shop for schools to be able to look at, ‘OK, these are all the players who are looking to transfer right now.’”

Not that I like all the movements. It makes it harder to become attached to your team, with all the comings and goings, and I would imagine it makes it harder for a team to build chemistry, regardless of how much talent has been amassed through traditional recruiting and the portal.

“In the ‘old days,’ you were assured that you could watch a lot of guys play for three or four years and know that they were going to be there and watch them grow and develop,” Steve Helwagen of 247Sports said. “Well now, if somebody doesn’t get where they want to be in one year, they leave. And you have a whole new crop of guys coming in every year.”

If I could make a change in the portal system, it would be that athletes are allowed just one transfer without penalty. That might create some continuity for teams and fans. But in today’s player-friendly world, I don’t see that happening. Bouncing about is a way of life now, as athletes seem more in pursuit of money than what is supposed to be the real purpose of attending college – an education (wink, wink).

As a side note about education and players not being able to transfer without sitting out a year in the past, many forget that one of Ohio State’s greatest losses via transfer, quarterback Joe Burrow, did not leave via the portal. Rather, he left as a graduate transfer, having taken care of his academic business and earning the right to do what was best for him without delay.

I think the thing that has most fascinated me about the transfer portal is Ohio State’s use of the device.

In reading the stories that our writers put together for this issue about the best players in the major sports to transfer into Ohio State via the portal, it was really sobering to see the lack of impact that transfers have had in Columbus so far. When the staff votes that placekicker Noah Ruggles has been the most successful football transfer to come through the portal under current rules, that really says a lot. If I had a vote in

the matter, I might have chosen Davison Igbino-sun, but you get the drift.

And the list of the top basketball transfers so far may be even weaker.

Has all that changed? The list of football transfers who committed to Ohio State after the first of this year was nothing short of stunning. And while maybe not quite as flashy, the basketball portal class looked stronger than usual, as well. Is this improvement in working the portal linked to college sports’ other big – and controversial – change, NIL (name image and likeness)?

“They finally (embraced the portal),” Buckeye Scoop’s Bill Greene said. “I thought they were slow to embrace NIL and the portal. They almost felt like it was wrong. But it’s legal. (Clemson head football coach) Dabo Swinney, right now, is destroying his program and his legacy because he doesn’t like the portal, he doesn’t like NIL. Well, that’s all well and good. You can hold to your principles. But instead of winning national championships, you’re going to start going 8-4, 9-3, and teams are going to pass you by.”

“I think there was a little bit of that with Ohio State in the beginning. I don’t think they really embraced it. I didn’t think they really knew where they wanted to go with NIL. And then this year, we saw exactly where they wanted to go. They’re going to pay kids to come back. They’re going to pay recruits. They’re going to pay in the portal. And it sure seems like they have the money and are willing to spend it. If you have that attitude, and you’re at a power program like Ohio State, you’re going to have a super roster.”

Hope echoed Greene’s sentiments, especially about NIL’s part in the acquisition process.

“Early on in NIL – and I think (Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith) would admit this, he has admitted this when he’s talked before – Ohio State initially was too conservative,” Hope said. “During the first year or two, they were too fearful of NCAA violations. And they didn’t use NIL to their full advantage. You had schools like Tennessee and Oregon and Florida who were out there and very blatantly using NIL in recruiting, and really nothing ever happened to them. And Ohio State wasn’t really doing that, and I think that hurt Ohio State because it just wasn’t being as aggressive as it could be.”

“I mean, it’s free agency without contracts,” Hope said. “It’s almost more crazy than free agency because in the NFL, you sign a contract that binds you to a team for a certain number of years before you can become a free agent. Whereas in college, there are no contracts. You can leave after any period of time and become a free agent. And I think that’s a frustrating thing for a lot of people.”

As part of this Transfer Portal issue, we were able to track down 1968 national championship quarterback Ron Maciejowski, a poster child for a player in the bygone era who might have benefited from today’s transfer rules. Maciejowski, one of the Super Sophs, sat behind star quarterback Rex Kern for most of his three years playing at Ohio State (freshmen were not eligible at the time).

“Mace could have gone anywhere and played,” Kern said. “But thank God, he didn’t. He saved us so many times. I put him in too many predicaments. But he didn’t pull a rabbit out. He just knew how to do it.”

Without the benefit of today’s portal, Maciejowski stuck it out in Columbus and, despite

playing behind Kern, became one of the more notable figures in Buckeye football history. He recounted a story that demonstrates how staying put rather than transferring made things worthwhile. Not surprisingly, it involved Woody Hayes.

“He came in and addressed all of us as freshmen,” Maciejowski said of the coach. “He said, ‘I want you to look around the room.’ And of course, everybody’s still staring at him. ‘God dammit, look around the room.’ So we all start looking around the room. He says, ‘I want to tell you something right now. These will be the best friends you ever have for the rest of your life.’”

“I didn’t even know these guys. But he was right. And they are my best friends. And we’re that close. We follow each other, we talk with each other.”

Is that a quaint experience from the bygone days that today’s well-compensated and highly mobile athlete will never get to enjoy?

### Postal Problems Draw Scrutiny

I have to admit that BSB delivery problems seem to be getting worse, not better. I am reprinting a May 9 letter from Georgia U.S. Senator Jon Ossoff to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, only slightly edited.

“Dear Postmaster General DeJoy,  
“It has been nearly a month since we spoke at the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on April 16 concerning service failures at the Atlanta Regional Processing and Distribution Center in Palmetto.

“As we have discussed throughout the past few weeks, it is urgent that the performance of USPS delivery in Georgia improve immediately.

“When we spoke at the hearing on April 16th, the percentage of inbound mail delivered on time was only 36 percent following the implementation of the Atlanta Regional Processing and Distribution Center at the end of February. At the hearing, you told me that my constituents should start seeing service improve ‘now’ and that ‘we will get to where we need to be in about 60 days.’

“As I have said repeatedly, postal workers working diligently every day to deliver the mail on time deserve the infrastructure and the management competence to enable them to do so.

“Sincerely,  
“John Ossoff, United States Senator.”

I present this letter for a couple of reasons. First of all, we have many, many subscribers in Georgia, and those subscribers can get a sense of why their service has deteriorated recently. A 36 percent on-time delivery rate? Unacceptable. But I also reprint it because I don’t think these problems are limited to Georgia. Rather, problems are widespread.

According to The Telegraph, out of Macon, Ga., DeJoy told the Senate committee “the delays were the result of problems encountered during the rollout last winter of a restructuring plan aimed at making the postal service economically self-sufficient.”

One of our sources in the post office here in Columbus says that some of the mail stranded down in Georgia has been shipped up here for processing. That would possibly have an impact on BSB delivery, because every Buckeye Sports Bulletin goes through the Citygate plant here, which is having to process increased volume.

“The restructuring plan is on hold for now,”

The Telegraph reported. “DeJoy announced two weeks ago that the postal service would pause the plan at least until next year to give the agency a chance to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it.”

With the restructuring on hold, perhaps we will see some improvement in delivery before the football season.

### Maybe This Will Help

While we are hopeful things will improve, in the meantime we are offering a discount on upgrading your subscription to first-class mail in an envelope for football season or longer.

We always encourage readers, especially those out of state, to upgrade their subscription to first-class mail in an envelope, at least for football season.

For a limited time, BSB is offering a discount on the cost of a subscription upgrade to first class during football season or through football recruiting season in February. The first-class upgrade for football season, regularly \$30, will be just \$25, and the upgrade through the traditional National Signing Day in February will be just \$35, down from \$40.

We hope to offset some of the cost of that discount with a reduction in the number of replacement papers we have to send out and a reduction in the number of subscriptions we have been losing because of untimely delivery.

We do ask that those of you who have traditionally upgraded to first class for football season do so now, to save us the cost of sending you a reminder postcard in the summer. And as always, we are appreciative of those of you who pay full price on promotions like this, even when presented with the discount.

To take advantage of this offer, send your check or credit card information (don’t forget your security code) to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Credit card orders are accepted 24 hours a day at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862.

For those of you who are reluctant or unable to pay for an upgrade, we always encourage readers with delivery difficulties to go to the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, where the entire edition of BSB is posted immediately upon completion. We know this is different from reading your actual paper, but it is a stopgap until your paper arrives. Give us a call at one of the above numbers, and we will help you get started.

### Business Notes

Remember, the post office is preparing to raise rates again, effective July 14. We have not yet decided how we will respond to the upcoming boost.

However, just a suggestion. If you see a BSB offer you like between now and July, you might want to take advantage of it, even if your subscription is not running out just yet. Your renewal will tack right on the end of your current subscription.

Don’t forget we are offering gift subscriptions for anyone in the active military for just \$19.95. It’s a chance to send a little bit of home to those who serve and protect us. For military members overseas, be sure to send their APO address. While it may take a few days to get BSB overseas, our Buckeye servicemen and women will have immediate and free access to each issue of BSB at BuckeyeSports.com.

We are also still offering gift subscriptions to anyone under the age of 35 for just \$19.95. Simply send your check or money orders or credit card information to the previously mentioned address or call one of the listed phone numbers. Mention either of the special gift offers.



# Reds JUNE LINEUP!



**JUNE 6-9**



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**Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste**

**THURSDAY // 7:10**

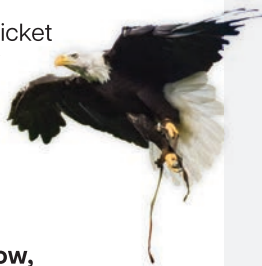
**• Thirsty Thursday**

Fans can purchase a \$30 package that includes ticket and a \$10 concession credit valid for food and beverages.

**• Military Appreciation Day**

Activities will include ceremonies honoring military groups. Special ticket offers for select games for military members at [reds.com/Military](http://reds.com/Military)

**• Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight during the national anthem**



**FRIDAY // 7:10**

**• Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Coca-Cola**

**• Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight during the national anthem**

**• Pride Night Ticket Package, presented by To Be Me**

Fans can purchase a special ticket package that includes an exclusive Pride-themed Reds cap. Must purchase your game ticket through this offer to receive the cap. Available while supplies last only at [reds.com/Pride](http://reds.com/Pride).



**SATURDAY // 4:10**

**• Reds Sticker Sheet, presented by Graeter's**  
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)



**SUNDAY // 1:40**

**• City Connect Pennant, presented by Hot Head Burritos**  
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)



**• Hunter Greene Baseball Card**  
Celebrating MLB's Lou Gehrig Day by honoring Hunter Greene as the Reds' nominee for the Lou Gehrig Award. (To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)



**JUNE 11-12**



Series presented by  
**Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste**

**TUESDAY // 7:10**

**• 3-2-1 Tuesday\***, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light  
**\$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!**

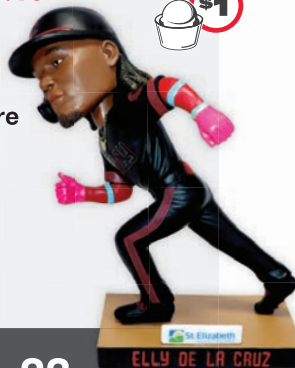
\*Limit 2 per person per transaction

**3-2-1 TUESDAYS**



**WEDNESDAY // 7:10**

**• Elly De La Cruz City Connect Bobblehead, presented by St. Elizabeth Healthcare**  
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)



**• Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight during the national anthem**

**JUNE 21-23**



**FRIDAY // 7:10**

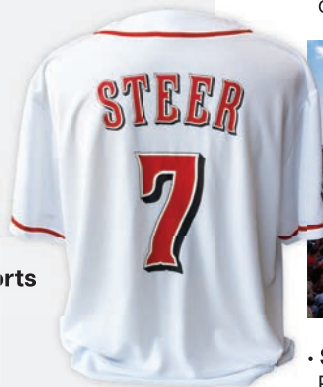
**• Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by PNC**

**SATURDAY // 4:10**

**• Reds Poster, presented by Hit Seekers**  
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

**SUNDAY // 1:40**

**• Spencer Steer Home Replica Jersey, presented by Bally Sports**  
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)



**• Run the Bases**  
Fans of all ages can line up after the game to run the bases, with a priority line for Reds Heads Kids Club members.

**JUNE 24-26**



**MONDAY // 7:10**

**• Family Discount Day, presented by Klosterman Bakery**  
Visit [reds.com/Family](http://reds.com/Family) for a special ticket offer!

**TUESDAY // 7:10**

**• 3-2-1 Tuesday\***, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light  
**\$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!**

\*Limit 2 per person per transaction

**3-2-1 TUESDAYS**



**• Cincinnati Zoo Bald Eagle Flight during the national anthem**

**• Cincinnati Zoo Ticket Package, presented by Kroger**  
Fans can purchase a special ticket package that includes an exclusive bobblehead of the two-toed sloth Lightning and her baby Juno. Must purchase your game ticket through this offer to receive the bobblehead. Available while supplies last only at [reds.com/Zoo](http://reds.com/Zoo).

**THEME TICKETS**



**WEDNESDAY // 1:10**

**• Business Day Special**  
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!



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\*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.