

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 43, No. 23

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

July 2024

Smith Looks Back On 19-Year OSU Tenure

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After 19 years as Ohio State's athletic director, Gene Smith announced that he would retire at the end of June 2024 with Ross Bjork taking over the position on July 1.

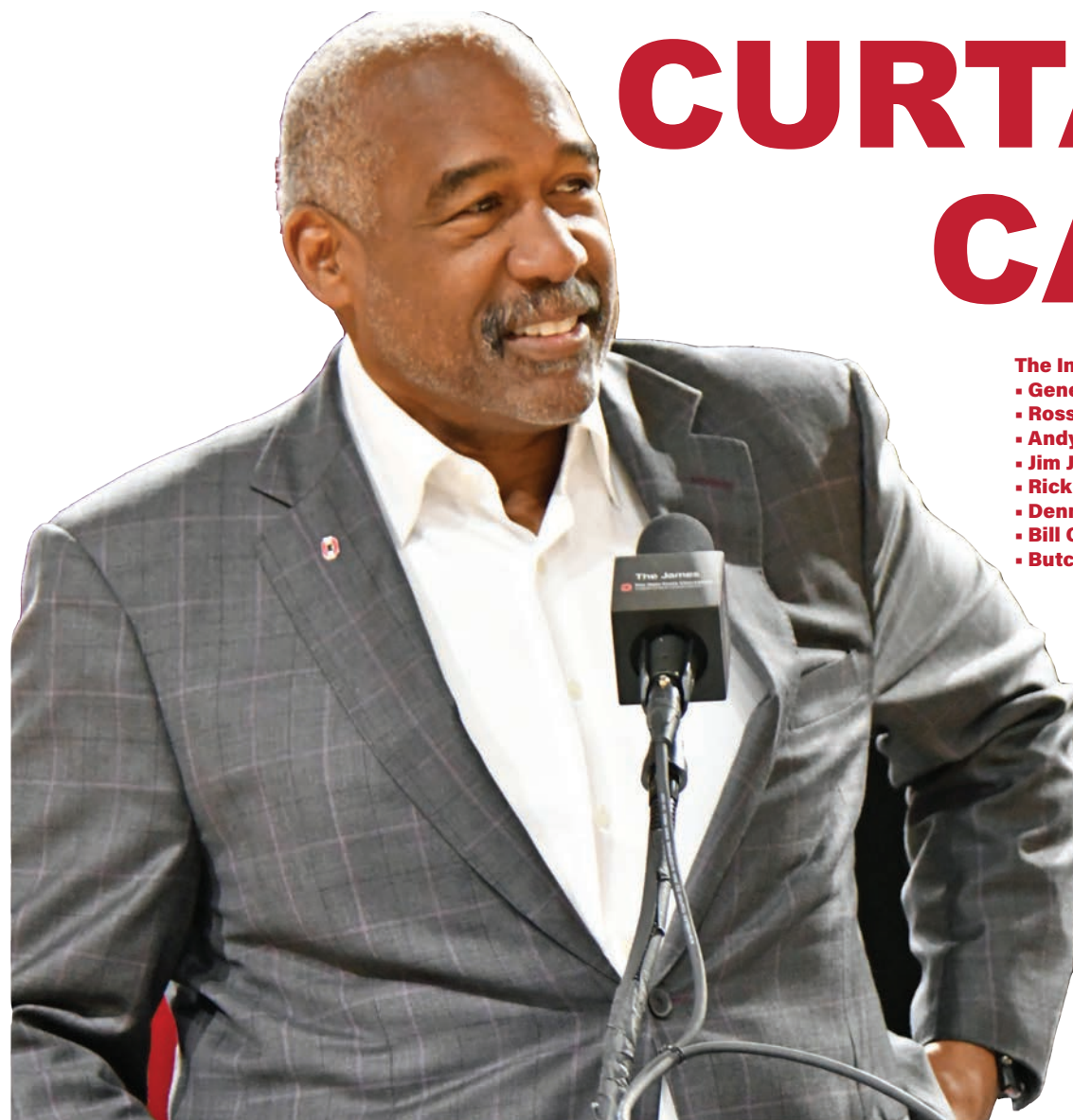
Since replacing Andy Geiger in 2005, Smith has been at the head of the athletics department for 35 team and 127 individual national championships and has seen more student-athletes having academic success than when he took over.

He has also had to navigate through a very quickly changing college athletics landscape, with name, image and likeness and the transfer portal becoming extremely prevalent and changing the major sports in their own significant ways.

Since Smith last spoke with Buckeye Sports Bulletin, Ohio State football and Ryan Day lost their third straight rivalry game to Michigan and watched the Wolverines win a national championship while they were unable to make the four-team playoff field. Smith fired men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann and let Bjork handle the hiring of Jake Diebler, and the women's basketball team had a great regular season only to be knocked off in the second round of the NCAA tournament. There was plenty of success to go around for the Buckeyes' Olympic sports, including the women's hockey team's second title in three years and many individual national champions.

Smith spoke with BSB on June 18 to headline our annual Interview Issue, touching on a variety of topics and looking back at some of the defining moments of his career in athletics.

BSB: With only a few days left of being Ohio State's athletics director after serv-



CURTAIN CALL

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BRADEN MOLES

END OF ERA — After 19 years at the helm of Ohio State athletics, Gene Smith stepped down from his role as athletic director on June 30. Smith was instrumental in navigating the rapidly changing landscape of collegiate athletics with the implementation of NIL and the expansion of the transfer portal.

ing for 19 years, is it starting to settle in for you that you're about to retire?

Smith: "Yeah, it is. Sheila, my wife, and I, we haven't second-guessed the decision since we made the announcement last year, and it is settling in. My wife's a planner, so we're going to plan, but it is settling in and I'm ready. I want to spend more time with my family. So we have a plan for that, and we've just been working towards it. So

I'm ready."

BSB: What is post-AD life going to look like for you?

Smith: "We're moving to Arizona. Our family is largely West Coast-centric, in Arizona, San Diego, Vancouver and Las Vegas. We're going to move to Arizona, and I'm going to stay involved a little bit. I'm on the Fiesta Bowl board so that will mentally keep me engaged in the industry to some degree.

"I'm kind of anxious to find my new path, my next chapter. I'm healthy. So I'm going to play golf. I'm going to hike a lot. Just try to enjoy life and try to sleep in. I work out in the mornings now. Usually, I have to get up

and work out so I can go to work, but now - 'OK, I'm going to sleep in and then work out.' So anyway, that's the plan."

BSB: Have the last few months been business as usual for you, or has it been any different with Ross coming on board soon? What have your responsibilities looked like for the past few months?

Smith: "It's been a little bit of business as usual, but also managing the transition with Ross. That's worked exceptionally well, spending time with him and helping him onboard the right way. He's

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BUCKEYE SPORTS .COM

From The Message Board

While many Ohio State fans believe quarterback Will Howard is the presumed starter for the 2024 season, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day has repeatedly stated that the team is still holding an open competition at quarterback this offseason.

With fall camp fast approaching, we asked readers on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum whether they believe the starting quarterback job is Howard's to lose, or if Devin Brown or Julian Sayin has a legitimate chance to start under center to open the season, as well as when they would like a decision to be made. Here are some of the responses:



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"Ryan Day knows what Brown can do or not do. He has a pretty good idea about Howard's skill set. Sayin is in the mix, but I believe only if the first two fail to impress in fall camp. I believe him when he says the competition is not over yet, but I'm fairly sure it's about 80 percent over and in favor of Howard. He is waiting on the completion of fall camp and before the first week of the regular season to make the announcement and I'm good with that timing."

– Buckeye Scott

"Howard will take the first snap. Those nipping at his heels will have to do some warp-speed catch-up to take his place. However, I have not seen what is going on behind the scenes so this is a blind guess. Nothing would surprise me though."

– PeyoteBuck

"The question asked is whether it is Will Howard's job to lose. I think the answer is 'yes.' But I don't think he has won it just yet. The question for me is whether he does or does not secure the job before the season starts. I hope Devin Brown gets a fair shot, but I hope the guy who can best manage the offense and makes the least mistakes wins the job."

– Mcarr

"Whoever can manage the offense the best should be the starter. I hope it's a fair competition. I'm still eager to see what a healthy Devin Brown can do with his feet and not just plugged into an obvious run situation at the goal line that wouldn't fool a high school defense."

– R1TBDBITL

"I definitely believe the starting quarterback competition is Will Howard's to lose. He has the most experience of the entire QB room, and is tall and capable of successfully running with the ball if needed. I would like to see him named as the starting QB no less than two weeks before the Akron game."

– Bob Cody

"I have very few complaints against Ryan Day, but one of the few is that he doesn't get the reserve quarterbacks in enough. Assuming Howard takes the first snap against

Akron, it would be very helpful to this whole process if Day tried to get some of the other quarterbacks in against the Zips and Western Michigan the next week. Maybe with Chip Kelly on board, they will do a better job of getting other quarterbacks action and once the starter is finally settled on, getting him out of there in games that are completely under control."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I think it's Howard's job to lose AND that Brown and Sayin have a legitimate chance to start. I think the probability is high that Howard does not start all 12 games, whether for injury or ineffective play. The sooner a decision is made, the better. I wouldn't be stunned if Howard took the first snap vs. Akron and someone else started vs. Michigan."

– Terrier Buck

"This is Howard's job to lose and it should be. Devin Brown could be very good but you'll never see it because the kid cannot stay healthy. It's not a shot, it's just a fact. Sayin, I believe, is very good but he's not ready to start for Ohio State yet. Maybe down the road this season that will change, but he's nowhere near ready to take the first snap against Akron. I will say, I believe he's the starter for the next two years after this year."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Howard will get the start against Akron unless he gets injured during August. It's a long season and Chip Kelly will run his quarterback at times which puts them at risk of injury. We know Devin Brown is injury-prone. For the Bucks to achieve all of their 2024 goals, they will need three quarterbacks: Howard, Brown and either Kienholz or Sayin. They all need to be game-ready."

"Looking at 12 to 15 games, there will be games in which the starter is not 100 percent healthy. There could be a Saturday in which the starter 'just doesn't have his A-game' and Day/Kelly needs to rely on the best backup. In today's college football, a team like Ohio State can't afford to lose a critical game. Those of us old-timers have had our hearts broken many times."

– Byron McNutt

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A Look Ahead To 2024 Season For OSU

By the time you read this, there will be fewer than 60 days until Ohio State kicks off its 2024 season, a campaign the Buckeyes are banking upon (literally as well as figuratively) becoming a march to the national championship.

A windfall of NIL riches enticed several potential high NFL draft picks to return for one more season, and with a couple of notable exceptions, the schedule seems friendly enough for a team that appears to feature star power up and down the depth chart.

Of course, any team that enters a season without a proven commodity at quarterback is subject to increased scrutiny, and that makes it all the more important for Ryan Day to name his starter sooner as opposed to later.

As for the schedule itself, gone are the Big Ten divisions, meaning the welcoming back of such old friends as Iowa and Purdue, no more easy cupcakes the likes of Rutgers and Maryland, and what should be a fun (and likely frigid) trip to Wrigley Field in mid-November.

Here are thumbnail previews of Ohio State's opponents for the upcoming season.

Aug. 31 vs. Akron – The Buckeyes begin their quest for a national championship against a Zips team coming off a 2-10 season during which they were outscored by an average of nearly two touchdowns per game.

Defensively, Akron ranked a more-than respectable 31st nationally in total defense, but the offense often struggled mightily, ranking 126th of 130 teams in total offense and 127th in scoring.

It looks like a mismatch, and probably will be. But OSU might want to take note of the last two times the Zips served as its season-opening opponent – 2001 when Ohio State finished with a 7-5 record, and 2011 when the Buckeyes suffered through a 6-7 campaign.

Sept. 7 vs. Western Michigan – On five previous occasions since 2006 have the Buckeyes played two Mid-American Conference opponents during the same season. The last time was in 2015, and the Broncos were part of that situation with a 38-12 loss in Columbus.

Western Michigan finished with a 4-8 record last year to give the program back-to-back losing seasons for the first time in more than a decade. Defense was the problem. The Broncos allowed 34 points or more in six of their 12 games.

Since the late 1990s when OSU began filling out its nonconference schedule with MAC teams, the Buckeyes are a perfect 28-0 against the conference, outscoring the opposition by an average of more than 32 points per game.

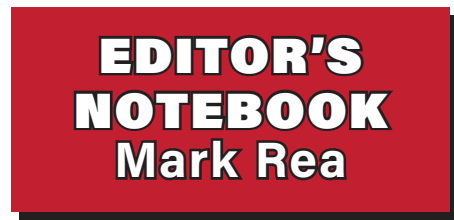
Sept. 21 vs. Marshall – The Thundering Herd could be the poster child for conference realignment. They lost to Ohio State in 2004 as a member of the MAC, and in 2010 as members of Conference USA. The 2024 season will mark their third year in the Sun Belt Conference.

Marshall started out like gangbusters last season, jumping out to a 4-0 record that included an offense that averaged nearly 30 points per game. But that offense hit the skids during a midseason losing streak of five games, and the Herd finished at 6-7, their first losing record in seven years.

Last year's starting QB, Cam Fancher, a product of the same Wayne High School in suburban Dayton that produced such former Buckeyes as Braxton Miller, Will Allen and Marcus Freeman, will not have a chance to play in the Horseshoe. He announced in December his transfer to Florida Atlantic.

Sept. 28 at Michigan State – Former Oregon State head coach Jonathan Smith takes

over the program in East Lansing, and the schedule-makers have done him no favors. A monthlong stretch beginning in late Sep-



tember has the Spartans hosting Ohio State, traveling to Oregon, hosting Iowa and then traveling to Michigan.

Smith's hiring was a bit of a head-scratcher. In a career that spans more than two decades, he has never coached east of the Mississippi River, and his six-year run at Oregon State produced a 34-35 record.

The new coach will have some work to do on either side of the ball. Last year, the Spartans ranked next-to-last in the conference in both total offense and total defense.

Oct. 5 vs. Iowa – The Hawkeyes return to Columbus for the first time since 2022 when they absorbed a 54-10 beatdown from the Buckeyes, the most lopsided outcome in the series since Ohio State scored a 49-0 shutout in 1975.

Iowa is coming off a 10-win season and Big Ten West championship, but its offensively-challenged team was never more exposed than at the end of the season when the Hawkeyes lost the Big Ten Championship Game to Michigan and the Citrus Bowl to Tennessee by the combined score of 61-0.

That performance cost longtime offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz his job, but his father remains head coach. Kirk Ferentz begins his 26th season in Iowa City just seven wins shy of joining Woody Hayes as the only Big Ten coaches with 200 or more conference victories.

Oct. 12 at Oregon – The Buckeyes should be off to a 5-0 start when they jet off to the Pacific Northwest for their first trip to raucous Autzen Stadium since 1967. That trip resulted in a 30-0 win for Ohio State, but things have changed a bit over the ensuing 57 years.

Oregon is no pushover – as the Buckeyes learned during a 35-28 home loss in 2021 – and that is underscored even more when the Ducks play in Eugene. They're 40-3 at home since 2017.

Like many other teams, Oregon will be breaking in a new starting quarterback, but don't shed too many tears for the Ducks. Figuring to replace NFL first-rounder Bo Nix is transfer Dillon Gabriel from Oklahoma (and UCF before that). He has thrown for more than 14,000 yards and 125 TDs during his college career.

Oct. 26 vs. Nebraska – The once-proud program has fallen a long way from the days of Bob Devaney and Tom Osborne. The Cornhuskers finished 5-7 last year, their seventh consecutive losing season. Devaney and Osborne coached a combined 35 seasons in Lincoln, won 22 league championships and five national titles, and never experienced a single losing season.

Nebraska believes second-year head coach Matt Rhule is the man to turn things around, but he is going to have to teach the Cornhuskers how to win again. Since 2021, the team is 4-18 in games decided by single digits, including each of the four losses that ended last season.

Nov. 2 at Penn State – Some pundits are of the mind that the elimination of divisions will help the Nittany Lions, who had to do battle with Ohio State and Michigan for supremacy in the East.

I happen to think the inclusion of four Pac-12 teams will make it even tougher for Penn State to make it to the Big Ten Championship Game, a destination it has reached exactly once in the 13-year existence of the title contest.

James Franklin begins his 11th season in Happy Valley and is working on back-to-back seasons of 10 wins or more. The Nittany Lions haven't strung together three straight double-digit win seasons since 1980-82, with that '82 season culminating in a national championship.

Nov. 9 vs. Purdue – There are those who believe this could be a trap game for the Buckeyes, but that was also talk last season when OSU went to West Lafayette and cleaned the Boilermakers' clock by a 41-7 margin.

The Buckeyes lead the all-time series by a healthy 41-15-2 margin, but Purdue has pulled off four victories – each time as an unranked team – over the last 11 meetings. Still, the Boilermakers have never had much success in Columbus, going 5-28-2 all-time, a record that includes losses in 17 of their last 18 visits to Ohio Stadium.

For Purdue to entertain any notion of an upset this year, it will have to play better on defense. The Boilers ranked 12th in the 14-team conference in total defense and dead last in scoring defense.

Nov. 16 at Northwestern – It's doubtful there were many tears shed when dearly departed Dyche Stadium (renamed Ryan Field in 1997) succumbed to the wrecking ball earlier this year.

In its place will be a state-of-the-art facility estimated to cost in the \$800 million range and due for completion in 2026. In the meantime, the Wildcats will occupy the same on-campus facility that is home to the lacrosse and soccer teams – a facility to be renovated to accommodate up to 15,000 spectators.

There will be a handful of games played elsewhere, including the one against the Buckeyes, which will take place at historic Wrigley Field, home of baseball's Chicago Cubs since 1916.

Nov. 23 vs. Indiana – Since nearly making it to the Big Ten title game in 2020, the Hoosiers have won only nine of 36 games overall and are just 3-24 in conference games over the past two seasons.

IU's new head coach is Curt Cignetti, a 62-year-old who has never had a losing season in 13 seasons as a head coach at IUP, Elon and James Madison. Presumably, Cignetti knows that Indiana has had only three winning seasons over the past quarter-century.

The schedule isn't especially friendly, either. November features back-to-back games against Michigan and Ohio State, teams with a combined 142-22-5 all-time record against the Hoosiers.

Nov. 30 vs. Michigan – The Wolverines lost their head coach to the NFL, and he took most of his staff with him. Only four players remain from the 22 that started the national championship game against Washington, and the sign-stealing scandal is still unresolved as far as the NCAA is concerned.

But to some of us of a certain age, that means nothing. Several times during John Cooper's tenure, his teams were either ranked higher than Michigan or favored to beat the Wolverines (sometimes both), and they came away with just two wins and a tie in 13 tries.

Michigan has a tough schedule that includes Texas, USC, Washington and Oregon, and the Wolverines have lost nine of their last 10 games at Ohio Stadium. Yet none of that will likely matter come late November.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

No Update On QBs, O-Line Still Shaping Out

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day has often been tight-lipped when asked this off-season to provide updates on the starting quarterback competition, and he did not stray from that approach during his first formal press conference held at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center since the spring game.

Speaking in front of a group of reporters on June 18, Day provided no further update on his team's likely three-man quarterback battle between Devin Brown, Will Howard and Julian Sayin, saying he and his staff are more focused on recruiting and offseason training during this time of the year rather than making any firm roster decisions.

"Really no update," Day said. "We've really been busy here in June. June's been busy in recruiting but also with our team. To say coming out of the spring and where we are right now that there is a lot of movement at any position wouldn't be accurate. We'll work hard, and there will be a lot of progress made with (assistant athletic director for football sports performance Mickey Marotti) in the weight room. But we won't really know much until we get into the preseason."

Day's words seemed to resemble how Ohio State was dispersing reps between quarterbacks during the spring. While Brown was getting the majority of first-team snaps in spring practices available to the media, Howard earned the start in the spring game, with Brown and Sayin trailing behind. Day also deemed Sayin "in the mix" for the starting role on April 11.

Day provided no real update at quarterback, but he may have tipped his hand when asked about the offensive line, a position with many question marks entering the summer, especially on the right side. He proclaimed that Josh Fryar, whom he lauded for the vast improvements he made over the offseason, is trending toward reclaiming his starting role at right tackle, leaving the starting spot at right guard still unclaimed.

"We feel confident with (Fryar) playing guard and tackle," Day said. "We have to figure out what that right side looks like. I would say we're probably leaning towards

playing him at (right) tackle and trying to figure out who that right guard is at this time, but we do have some flexibility there."

If Fryar plugs into the starting right tackle role for the second consecutive season, there will likely be a battle at right guard between sophomore Luke Montgomery and redshirt sophomore Carson Hinzman, who each earned reps at the position during spring camp and the spring game.

Regardless of how these two positional battles shake out, Day said he knows his team needs to trust not only their starters but also their depth pieces at every single position if they want to have success throughout this potentially lengthy season.

"I feel like we have to build enough depth at receiver that we feel like we can put five or six in the game and feel good about it. On defense, I think we're still looking to figure out who are going to be the guys inside, the third, the fourth or fifth interior defensive lineman that we are going to put in the game.

"We need to figure out depth, a little bit, at safety, just to see who those next guys are who are going to step up. We know it's going to be a long year. We're going to need everybody, and for a lot of those areas, it's about depth."

Day Says Running Back An Option For Downs

Despite offering little information regarding his team's positional battles, he did raise some eyebrows during that same press conference when he revealed that safety Caleb Downs, who earned All-SEC and All-America honors at the position last year, could earn some reps on the other side of the ball this season if the Buckeyes need him there.

"We started having conversations with Caleb during the recruiting process regarding him (playing) a little bit of running back as well," Day said. "It's something he wanted to do. We've been having him in the meetings and some of the individual drills as a possibility there if he's needed down the road to continue to build depth at the position."

Downs has yet to play a snap at running back in college, but he did return four punts for the Crimson Tide as a freshman, with one of those resulting in an impressive 85-yard touchdown late in the season against Chattanooga. He also has experience playing at the position in high school, rushing for 389 yards and 20 touchdowns on 57 carries as a senior at Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek.

Downs' explosiveness as a runner has obviously piqued the interest of Day, who said that he has the capability and athleticism

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.)

to play both offense and defense. But reps may be hard to come by in Carlos Locklyn's running backs room, which boasts former All-Big Ten and All-SEC tailbacks TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, who many believe make up the top running back tandem in the nation, along with true freshmen James Peoples and Sam Williams-Dixon, who each flashed at times this spring.

Day acknowledged that he is confident in the four scholarship running backs on his roster, which he thinks will likely be enough to carry the load in the backfield this season. But with the season potentially extending into January and the Buckeyes being riddled with injuries at the position in past seasons, Day said he is leaving all options on the table, including putting Downs at tailback.

"We'll see where that goes. We don't have a specific plan now, but we want to introduce him to (the position)," Day said. "It's healthy. This time of the year you can get away with that a little bit and a little bit in the preseason. Where it goes, we'll see, but you just never know. We're trying to put some contingency plans in place because it could be a long season."

Smith, Miller Headline 2024 HOF Class

Ohio State announced on June 20 that it will enshrine 14 former players and administrators into the school's Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2024 at a ceremony held at the Covelli Center on Oct. 4.

The Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2024 includes Christy Blough (men's volleyball), Chase Buchanan (men's tennis), Tiffany Cameron (women's soccer), Michael Hartfield (men's track and field), Jeff Logan (football), Marisa Main (women's volleyball), Brian Mannino (baseball), Braxton Miller (football), Kathy Monard (women's cross country/track), Greg Oden (men's basketball), Tony Russo (men's lacrosse), Kyle Snyder (wrestling), Gene Smith (administrator) and Matt Wilhelm (football).

Miller, who already publicly announced his enshrinement over Twitter on May 31, headlines the list of honorees. He totaled 8,609 yards from scrimmage in his career as a quarterback from 2011-14 and a wide receiver in 2015 – a mark that ranks third in program history – including 3,314 rushing yards (seventh all-time) and 5,292 passing yards (12th).

Miller is also a two-time winner of the Chicago Tribune Silver Football (2012, 2013), Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year (2012, 2013) and Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year (2012, 2013), while he also secured Thompson-Randle-El

Freshman of the Year honors in 2011.

Smith, who retired from his role as athletics director after 19 seasons on June 30, the third-longest tenure among the school's eight athletic directors, is also a notable name in the class. Since starting in his position in April 2005, he has seen Ohio State win a combined 117 Big Ten and 35 national championships and finish as the No. 1 athletics program in the Big Ten in the Learfield Directors' Cup standings eight times.

Smith has also been pivotal in facilitating numerous construction projects of athletic facilities, including the creation of the Schumaker Complex, Covelli Center and Jennings Wrestling Facility, Ty Tucker Tennis Center and the school's field hockey and lacrosse stadiums.

Oden and Snyder are also notable names getting enshrined next fall. Oden starred for the Thad Matta-led Buckeyes in his lone season with the program in 2006-07, helping lead Ohio State to a 35-4 record and appearance in the national championship game by averaging 15.7 points, 9.6 rebounds and 3.3 blocks as a freshman. These efforts earned him national defensive player of the year and consensus All-America honors, while also allowing him to become the No. 1 overall selection by the Portland Trail Blazers in the 2007 NBA draft.

Snyder is the most recent Ohio State athlete in this year's Hall of Fame class, taking the mat for the Buckeyes from 2015-18. A four-time captain and All-American for head coach Tom Ryan's program, he helped lead the Buckeyes to a national title in 2015 while also winning three individual NCAA championships as a heavyweight from 2016-18.

Snyder also became the youngest Olympic Gold medalist in U.S. history in 2016 when he claimed the Olympic wrestling title for the United States in the 2016 Rio De Janeiro Games. He has since earned a silver medal in the 2020 Tokyo Games and will participate in the 2024 Games in Paris.

The honorees will also be recognized during Ohio State's home football game against Iowa on Oct. 5.

Meyer, Laurinaitis On CFB Hall Of Fame Ballot

A pair of Buckeye legends will have the opportunity to be enshrined into the College Football Hall of Fame Class of 2025, with former Buckeye linebacker and current linebackers coach James Laurinaitis and former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer each landing on the foundation's 77-person ballot revealed on May 30.

Laurinaitis, who was also inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in

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handling to label and insert the copy of BSB," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "However, we hope we can offset some of this cost 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."

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2018, is on the ballot for the sixth year in a row. He was one of the more dominant defenders in Ohio State history, winning first-team All-America honors three times (2006-08) – one of just eight Buckeyes to achieve that feat – while also taking home two Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year nods (2007-08) and earning the Bronko Nagurski Trophy as the nation's top linebacker in 2006.

He finished his Ohio State career with 375 tackles (24½ for loss), 13 sacks and nine interceptions, and he helped lead the Buckeyes to four straight Big Ten titles and a pair of national championship game appearances (2007-08).

Meyer was one of the most successful

head coaches in modern college football history, winning three national titles, two with Florida (2007, 2009) and one with Ohio State (2014). He posted a 187-32 career record from 2001-18, good for an 85.4 winning percentage, the fourth-highest in FBS history behind Notre Dame's Knute Rockne (88.1 percent, 1918-30), Notre Dame and Boston College's Frank Leahy (86.4, 1939-53) and Bowling Green's Doyt Perry (85.5, 1955-64).

Meyer did a significant amount of his damage at Ohio State, winning 83 of the 92 games he coached from 2012-18 as well as all seven matchups against Michigan. In addition to winning the first-ever College Football Playoff in 2014 – Ohio State's first

national championship since 2002 – Meyer also claimed a trio of Big Ten titles in 2014, 2017 and 2018.

If Meyer is selected, he would become the eighth Ohio State head coach inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame, joining Howard Jones (1910), John Wilce (1913-28), Francis Schmidt (1934-40), Woody Hayes (1951-78), Earle Bruce (1979-87), John Cooper (1988-2000) and Jim Tressel (2001-10).

Laurinaitis, on the other hand, would become the 29th former Buckeye inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame as well as the fourth Ohio State linebacker, joining Tom Cousineau (1975-78), Randy Gradishar (1971-73) and Chris Spielman (1984-87).

The CFP Hall of Fame Class of 2025 will be announced early next year.

Recruiting Staffer Dunston Leaves For U-M

Former running backs coach Tony Alford isn't the only Ohio State staff member to leave the Buckeyes for Ann Arbor this off-season. Ohio State's assistant athletic director for football recruiting and events, Erin Dunston, is headed to Michigan to serve as the program's director of operations.

Dunston has been at Ohio State since early 2021 when she was the director of on-campus recruiting, which she did for three years before a promotion to her current role in February of this year. Her role, according to Ohio State's official website, was to manage the budget associated with on-campus recruiting, coordinating all re-

cruiting efforts with a primary focus on official visits, unofficial visits, gameday recruiting, programming, junior days and special events.

Dunston does have a connection to the University of Michigan. Her sister, Jillian, played on the Wolverines' women's basketball team from 2014-18 and now serves under head coach Kim Barnes Arico's staff as an assistant coach (2023-present).

When asked on June 18 about Dunston's departure and if the hiring could give the Wolverines any type of advantage over the Buckeyes, Day declined to answer, saying he is only focused on the players and staff members who are still a part of the program.

"All good questions," Day said. "I just want to talk about the guys that are here. The staff members that are here. The coaches that are here. The players that are here. The ones that are Buckeyes."

Erin Dunston graduated from the University of Delaware in 2015 before earning her master's degree from LSU, spending two years in an administrative role with the Tigers before moving on to work with Purdue and Kansas before heading to Columbus.

Ohio State Hiring Fessler AS QB Analyst

Ohio State also gained a staff member since Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, with the program on June 16 reportedly hiring former UCLA and Akron quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler as an offensive analyst.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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Fessler was initially hired by Ohio State offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach and former UCLA head coach Chip Kelly this offseason to serve as the quarterbacks coach for the Bruins but was shifted into an analyst role after new UCLA head coach DeShaun Foster hired Ted White as quarterbacks coach.

"Billy has earned a reputation for his attention to detail toward the quarterback position," Kelly said after hiring Fessler at UCLA in January. "I look forward to seeing what he can accomplish on and off the field with our talented quarterback room."

Prior to his brief stint in Los Angeles, he spent two seasons at Akron, first as the Zips' quarterbacks coach in 2022 and then as offensive coordinator in 2023. Last season under Fessler's leadership, Akron averaged just 16.3 points per game en route to a 2-10 record.

Fessler also has prior experience at Ohio State, serving as an offensive graduate assistant in both 2020 and 2021, when the Buckeyes, led by Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud, boasted the nation's 11th and best-ranked scoring offense in the nation at 41.0 and 45.7 points, respectively.

Fessler is a former quarterback at Penn State, playing for the Nittany Lions from 2016-17, and completed just one of his two pass attempts for 4 yards.

Fessler replaces former Ohio State analyst Todd Fitch, who worked with Ohio State's quarterbacks for the past three seasons before departing the program on March 2 to become a senior offensive analyst at LSU.

Fessler's guidance will be an important one for Kelly, who will both call plays and coach quarterbacks with the Buckeyes as Day transitions to a more CEO-type approach. Last season's quarterbacks coach, Corey Dennis, departed the program in February to become an analyst at Utah, only to leave his position with the Utes and take on the same role at Ole Miss later that same month.

Former Buckeyes Find New Homes

Since BSB last went to press, two former Buckeyes have found new homes, with linebacker Nigel Glover returning to Northwestern and former safeties coach Perry Eliano getting hired at Toledo as the cornerbacks coach.

While neither Glover, who transferred to Ohio State from the Wildcats last year, nor Northwestern has officially announced the transfer, the former Buckeye was seen wearing Wildcats gear in a post made by the team's official Twitter account on June 16, with the caption reading, "Welcomed the

The Last BSB Print Issue Until Late August

As any veteran Buckeye Sports Bulletin reader knows, with the publication of this July Interview issue, we are entering the largest publishing gap of each year. The next print issue of BSB, the big Football Preview issue, will be mailed the week of Aug. 24, roughly seven weeks from this mailing. In the 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. Big Ten Media Days and the opening of fall football camp, are coming and the BSB staff will be covering all of it. Any news will be 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 and is sure to pick up as

the season approaches.

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 stopgap 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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newest members of our family to campus this morning."

Glover, a former four-star safety out of Clayton (Ohio) Northmont, had spent just one spring with Northwestern before entering the transfer portal last July following the firing of former Wildcats coach Pat Fitzgerald.

Glover transferred to Ohio State on August 1, 2023, and participated in the Buckeyes' entire summer camp, but he did not play a single snap for the team, sitting behind Steele Chambers, Tommy Eichenberg, Cody Simon and others on the linebacker depth chart.

Eliano served as safeties coach at Ohio State for the previous two seasons, helping the Buckeyes secondary bounce back from a subpar 2022 campaign and transform into the nation's No. 1 passing defense at 145.9 yards per game in 2023. He was fired by the program on Jan. 8 and subsequently replaced by Matt Guerrieri two days later on Jan. 10.

Eliano will now look to rekindle that success he had as cornerbacks coach at Toledo. The Rockets are coming off a successful 11-3 season in which they appeared in the Barstool Sports Arizona Bowl.

Bucks Make Changes To 2025 Football Schedule

Ohio State announced a tweak to its 2025 nonconference schedule on June 17, which has the Buckeyes canceling their Oct. 18 contest with UConn and replacing it with a Sept. 6 home game against Grambling State.

According to an Ohio State football spokesperson, both the Huskies and Buckeyes mutually agreed to cancel the matchup, which would have been the first ever contest between the two programs. Instead, the Buckeyes will welcome a Grambling State program that has also never matched up against Ohio State.

The Tigers, currently led by former Cleveland Browns head coach Hue Jackson, are members of the FCS and compete in the Southwestern Athletic Conference. They finished with a 5-6 record (4-4 in conference play) last season.

Grambling State was one of two non-conference opponents on Ohio State's 2025 schedule as BSB went to press, joining

Texas, whom the Buckeyes will welcome to Ohio Stadium to open the season on Aug. 30.

OSU To Hold Four Open Practices In August

Ohio State fans will get the opportunity to see how the team is shaping up later this summer when it begins fall camp.

On Aug. 1, 2, 3 and 4 – the first four practices of fall camp – the Buckeyes will open the Woody Hayes Athletic Center doors to the public as part of what they're calling "Ohio State Football Kickoff Week." Doors will open for the practices at 8:30 a.m., with the Buckeyes taking the field approximately 45 minutes later.

According to a press release from the university, tickets for each practice, which went on sale in the middle of June, were sold for \$50 apiece, and the school sold 750 to each event with a limit of 10 tickets per order. Each ticket also included a pair of commemorative 2024 Ohio State training camp sunglasses and access to the family-friendly "Fanfest."

Ohio State will also hold its second annual Ryan Day Season Kickoff Luncheon at the Fawcett Center on Aug. 1. The event, which will run from noon to 1:30, will likely include remarks from Day and a Q&A session with the coaching staff. Based on last year's event, tickets will likely be sold for over \$2,000.

Proceeds from the ticket sales to both events will go to Ohio State's name, image and likeness efforts going forward.

Bjork Plans To Pay Athletes Maximum Revenue

Ohio State plans to share the maximum amount of revenue allowed provided a federal judge approves a legal settlement of three antitrust cases against the NCAA, incoming athletic director Ross Bjork told The Columbus Dispatch on June 20.

"What we're working on right now is what the plan looks like," Bjork said. "We know the percentage. We know the rough calculations. We know there are escalators. That's all we know now."

With Ohio State having 36 varsity sports, many questions linger regarding how revenue would be most evenly dispersed under the new model.

A significant portion of these funds will likely go to men's basketball and football, the two sports that generate the most revenue for the athletic department, but Bjork said he believes the payments distributed to male and female athletes must still be proportional to student enrollment, a plan of action that resembles the rules set in place by Title IX regarding the allocation of scholarship money.

"We are committed to Title IX," Bjork said. "We have to be. It's the right thing, but it's also federal law."

According to documents obtained by the Dispatch, Ohio State's 2023-24 enrollment was 52 percent female and 48 percent male.

Bjork, who officially began his tenure as athletic director on July 1, also acknowledged that payments will not be evenly divided between each athlete, as players in men's basketball and football will likely be paid more generously while those in women's basketball, women's volleyball and wrestling – sports that, despite spending more money than they make, still generate more revenue than other smaller Olympic programs – could also receive a significant portion of the pot.

"There are going to be hard decisions," Bjork said, "because it's a recalibration of the model."

Despite the focus on some of Ohio State's non-revenue sports, the leader of the department's top money-making sport also voiced his support for revenue sharing, with Day saying on June 4 that he believes it is a positive step toward the stabilization of college athletics.

"I do," Day said on June 4 when asked by a group of reporters at Ohio State's Wexner Medical Center if revenue sharing is a positive thing for the game. "I think it's the first step in institutionalizing all of this. There's still a lot of things to be figured out, but we're excited about it."

Day, Holtmann Highest Earners At Ohio State In 2023

There is no question that sports are a main driver of the revenue at Ohio State, and that is evident when looking at who is receiving most of the university's pot. According to a June 6 report from the Dispatch, members of the Ohio State athletic department claimed five of the top 10 spots

on the list of top 25 earners at the university in 2023, with head coaches of the two most popular sports leading the way.

Day was Ohio State's top earner in 2023, receiving over \$9 million in gross pay. In addition to his base pay of \$2 million, he also earned \$6.9 million in allowance, supplemental pay and incentives and another \$250,000 in bonuses. According to Yahoo Sports, Day is tied for the fourth highest-paid head football coach in the country with LSU's Brian Kelly.

Ohio State's next highest earner in 2023 was former head men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann, who received over \$3.2 million from a \$1 million yearly salary and \$2.2 million in other earnings. Holtmann was fired in February after a disappointing 14-11 start to the season. Holtmann's buy-out following the firing was set at \$12.8 million, which, according to the Dispatch, is not included in the database.

Smith ranked third on the list with gross pay of \$2.79 million, followed by Ohio State Wexner Medical Center CEO and executive VP Dr. John Warner at \$2.74 million. Warner was the only person in the list of top five earners not associated with athletics, however, as defensive coordinator Jim Knowles rounded out the top five at over \$2.3 million, a salary that makes him one of the highest-paid assistants in college football.

Offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Brian Hartline was the only other member of Ohio State athletics represented in the top 10, landing at No. 8 with \$1.75 million in total compensation. Other Buckeyes who were also listed in the top 25 were defensive line coach/associate head coach Larry Johnson at No. 11 (\$1.41 million), head women's basketball coach Kevin McGuff at No. 17 (\$1.18 million), offensive line coach Justin Frye at No. 18 (\$1.16 million) and secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton at No. 20 (\$1.13 million).

NCAA Removes Limit On On-Field Coaches

The NCAA Division I council voted on June 25 to approve a rule change that allows any staff member to provide technical and tactical instruction to players during practices and games.

The new rule, which will be in effect immediately, will not affect the number of coaches who are allowed to go on the road to recruit, which is still limited to the head coach and 10 assistant coaches. The rule also states that FBS programs are still able to have up to four graduate assistant coaches and no more than five strength and conditioning coaches.

"NCAA members continue efforts to modernize support for student-athletes, and removing restrictions on skill instruction in football will provide those student-athletes with increased resources to achieve their greatest on-field potential," said Josh Whitman, chair of the council and athletics director at Illinois. "At the same time, the council determined that maintaining limits on recruiting personnel will preserve competitive balance in recruiting while also localizing decision-making around how best to maximize support for student-athletes."

With the rule change, Ohio State and other teams could have more than 25 coaches coaching during practices and games, meaning analysts, quality control coaches and other program assistants will be able to

coach without restriction now.

For Ohio State, those coaches will include quality control coach Tim Drevno; defensive quality control coaches Joe Lyberger, Sam McGrath and Brent Zdebski; program assistants Devin Jordan, Riley Larkin, Gerren DuHart and Joshua Chorba; and offensive analysts Billy Fessler and Tony Johnson, among others.

Sheldon, Tracy Named OSU Athletes Of Year

Former Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon and men's tennis player JJ Tracy were selected on June 18 as Ohio State's 2024 Athletes of the Year. The honor placed Sheldon and Tracy, who both exhausted their eligibility with the Buckeyes this past season, on the ballot for Big Ten Athlete of the Year, which went to former Iowa guard Caitlin Clark and former Purdue center Zach Edey.

Sheldon, now a member of the WNBA's Dallas Wings, earned the honor following a fifth-year senior season at Ohio State in which she averaged 17.8 points, 3.8 assists and 3.2 rebounds and 2.1 steals per game, helping the Buckeyes secure a 26-6 record (16-2 in Big Ten) and their second Big Ten regular-season championship in the last three seasons.

Sheldon's efforts her senior season placed her among the program's greats, ranking sixth all-time in points (2,024) and steals (250), tied for 10th in games played (130) and 11th in assists (399). These num-

bers helped her be selected fifth overall by the Dallas Wings in the WNBA draft held last April. She has averaged 4.7 points, 1.9 rebounds, 1.8 assists and 0.4 steals across her first 18 games with the franchise and has started at guard for the Wings in every game since June 20.

Tracy also had an impressive senior season. The Powell, Ohio, native finished his year with a combined record, both individually and in doubles, of 77-12, the second-most wins in a single season in program history. He also captured a pair of championships this season, first winning the doubles title at the ITA All-American Championship alongside Robert Cash in October, then becoming part of just the third Buckeye duo to win an NCAA doubles national championship with Cash in May.

Tracy helped the Buckeyes secure their third ITA Indoor Team National Championship, an 18th consecutive Big Ten regular-season title, a 17th Big Ten tournament title and an appearance in the semifinals of the NCAA championship this season. He was named an All-American in both singles and doubles while also earning first-team All-Big Ten and winning the ITA Midwest Regional Senior Player of the Year award.

Tracy is the second consecutive men's tennis player to be named an Ohio State Athlete of the Year, joining James Trotter in 2023, finishing his Ohio State career with 235 wins, the fifth-most in program history.

OSU Finishes 15th In Directors' Cup After Error Corrected

Ohio State announced on June 26 that it finished 15th in the final 2023-24 Learfield Directors Cup standings and second in the Big Ten, just two weeks after stating that it had finished seventh nationally and first in the conference.

The university announced earlier in the month that Ohio State was on pace to finish first in the Big Ten in the Directors' Cup standings for the 10th time in history, with only baseball's score left to be counted. However, a scoring error miscalculated the Buckeyes' final score, ultimately reducing their point total to 981.00 points.

Still, Ohio State athletics performed well enough to land in the top 15 of the Directors' Cup, a national competition that honors schools that achieve success in their NCAA sports programs. Ohio State had 18 programs compete at their respective NCAA championships this past year with 16 of those sports contributing points toward the Directors' Cup total. Only 19 teams can score points toward the Directors' Cup, four of which have to be baseball, men's basketball, women's basketball and women's volleyball.

Ohio State had 10 women's teams make an NCAA field, including women's hockey, which secured their second national championship in three seasons, swimming and

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diving (ninth), rowing (12th), gymnastics (13th), basketball and tennis (17th), golf (31st), cross country (32nd), soccer (33rd) and track and field (45th). Seven men's teams met those same criteria, including tennis (third), golf (third), volleyball (fifth), gymnastics (sixth), wrestling (eighth), football (10th) and swimming and diving (13th).

The coed fencing team also finished sixth at the NCAA championships.

OSU Posts High Academic Progress Rates

Ohio State and its student-athletes have shown marked improvement in the classroom over the last five years, according to NCAA Division I Academic Progress Rate data released on June 4.

In the 20th year of academic progress rate data, which provides a real-time look at a team's academic success each semester by tracking the academic progress of each student-athlete on scholarship, factoring in academic eligibility, retention and graduation, Ohio State posted a cross-sport multiyear rate of 989. This most recent data was based on a multiyear rate that averages scores from the 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years.

Out of the 31 Ohio State athletic programs that were in the data set, nine had a perfect multiyear score of 1,000, including football. They joined Harvard as the only two Division I football programs to post a perfect multiyear score.

"It speaks to the maturity of our team," Day said on June 4. "It's cool to go to class. It's cool to get your degree. It's cool to do well in school. It speaks to the type of guys we have and the work that they've done."

Men's and women's cross country, men's fencing, field hockey, men's and women's golf, women's soccer and women's volleyball joined football as the only programs to earn perfect multiyear scores, while another 15 programs had a score of at least 990.

This past academic year, 491 Ohio State student-athletes were named to the Academic All-Big Ten team, and 811 Buckeyes earned a spot on the Ohio State Scholar-Athlete list. Additionally, 203 current and former student-athletes received degrees at spring commencement.

Former Bucks Hall, Davis Sign With Browns

Former Ohio State defensive tackle Michael Hall Jr. has officially become a member of the National Football League, signing his rookie contract with the Cleveland Browns on June 7.

Hall, who was the last of the Browns' six-player 2024 draft class to officially join the team, signed a four-year deal worth \$7,069,828 with a signing bonus of \$1,961,692, according to Spotrac.

Hall, a Garfield Heights, Ohio native, signed with his hometown team after being selected by the franchise with the 54th overall pick in the second round of the 2024 NFL draft on April 26. He was the second Buckeye taken off the board, trailing only wideout Marvin Harrison Jr., who was picked by the Arizona Cardinals with the fourth overall selection.

Hall was also the last Ohio State 2024 draftee to sign his rookie contract. Tight end Cade Stover, drafted in the fourth round by

the Houston Texans (four years, \$4.76 million) and linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, drafted in the fifth round by the Las Vegas Raiders (four years, \$4.36 million), were both signed to their respective franchises on May 9, while Harrison agreed to a four-year, \$35.37 million deal with the Cardinals on May 23.

Hall will look to make a name for himself this summer on a loaded Cleveland defensive line that features reigning AP NFL Defensive Player of the Year and three-time NFL All-Pro defensive end Myles Garrett as well as 10-year NFL defensive tackle Shelby Harris, among others.

Hall played at Ohio State from 2021-23, racking up 45 tackles and six sacks in 28 games.

He is not the only former Buckeye the Browns added since BSB last went to press. Cleveland also signed former Ohio State guard Wyatt Davis on June 7. Contract details were not known as BSB went to press. Davis, a former third-round pick by the Minnesota Vikings in the 2021 NFL draft, has struggled to find success in his first few years in the league. Davis played just six games on special teams for Minnesota during his rookie season and was waived by the franchise before the 2022 season. He then bounced around the league in 2022, playing one game apiece for the Cardinals, New Orleans Saints and New York Giants before being waived and placed on injured reserve by the Giants before the 2023 season, a year in which he was not on a roster.

Davis, who was a two-time first-team All-American at Ohio State in a career spanning four years (2017-2020), will now get the chance to revitalize his career on a Browns team that features six former Buckeyes, including Hall, safety Ronnie Hickman, offensive tackle Dawand Jones, cornerback Denzel Ward and center Luke Wypler.

Chambers Claimed By Pats After Release From Lions

Another former Buckeye found a new home in the NFL when linebacker Steele Chambers was claimed by the New England Patriots on June 11 just one day after being waived by the Detroit Lions.

Chambers initially signed with Detroit as an undrafted free agent on April 27 after going undrafted, but he was waived on June 10 despite taking the field with the team for rookie minicamp this spring.

He will now look to carve out a reserve role on a New England roster that, according to ESPN, holds 10 other linebackers, a group that includes last season's starters Ja'Whaun Bentley and Matthew Judon along with former Buckeye Raekwon McMillan.

With Chambers now claimed by the Patriots, eight out of the nine Buckeyes who entered the NFL draft this offseason have found a home in the NFL, including draft picks Eichenberg, Hall, Harrison and Stover along with undrafted free agents Xavier Johnson (Buffalo Bills), Matt Jones (Miami Dolphins) and Josh Proctor (Jacksonville Jaguars).

Running back Miyan Williams is the lone Buckeye who remained unsigned as BSB went to press.

Olatoke Signs With Harbaugh, Chargers

Former Ohio State club football player Praise Olatoke also earned the opportunity

to live out his dream when he was signed on June 14 by the Los Angeles Chargers to play wide receiver.

Olatoke, who also ran track and field for Ohio State from 2021-22, earning first-team All-Big Ten honors during the 2022 outdoor track and field season, found a home in Los Angeles by participating in the NFL's International Pathway Program, which grants opportunities for international athletes coming from many different sports backgrounds to earn a spot on an NFL roster.

As part of the program, Olatoke, who was born in Nigeria and raised in Scotland, practiced at IMG Academy this spring and also participated in Ohio State's Pro Day held at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in March.

Olatoke showcased great talent and speed at receiver while playing for the Buckeyes' national championship-winning club team in 2022, catching seven passes for 231 yards and four touchdowns in his lone season with the club.

"I know physically, I can do it," Olatoke told Eleven Warriors in March. "I'm tall enough, fast enough, I've got the right make-up. So just marrying those two together gives me confidence that I can do what I say I want to do."

Olatoke (6-2, 205 pounds), does have an avenue to make head coach Jim Harbaugh's team. The Chargers lost their two leading receivers from last season, Keenan Allen and Mike Williams, during the offseason. But even if Olatoke does not make the 53-man, the Chargers can keep him as a 17th member of their practice squad which is designated by the NFL for international players.

Linsley Released By Chargers, Set To Retire

Former Ohio State center Corey Linsley, who announced in February that he is likely to retire due to a non-emergent heart-related issue, was released by the Chargers on June 5.

Linsley, a former fifth-round pick in the 2014 NFL draft, played 10 seasons in the NFL, spending his first seven with the Green Bay Packers and his final three in Los Angeles. He started each of his 132 games as a professional and earned one Pro Bowl nod and two all-pro selections, including a first-team honor with Green Bay in 2020.

"Corey is everything you hope for and more in an NFL player," said Chargers team president John Spanos. "The consummate professional, his mentorship of younger players, work ethic, integrity, leadership, competitive drive and sense of humor all played a role in earning him the 'C' on his jersey throughout the entirety of his time with us. And as good of a football player as he is, Corey's an even better person."

Linsley initially announced in January that he was "99 percent sure" he was going to retire from football due to his heart condition, which he said was not life-threatening but could cause significant damage if he continued to play. Linsley was initially placed on injured reserve in September due to his condition after playing just three games in 2023 and had agreed to a restructured contract in February that lowered his base salary from \$11.5 million to \$1.2 million to account for his impending retirement.

Linsley initially signed a lucrative contract with the Chargers in 2021, inking a five-year, \$62.5 million deal that was still the

highest total value for any player at his position at the time of his retirement.

Linsley, a Youngstown, Ohio, native, played at Ohio State from 2009-2013. He started at center in his last two collegiate seasons, earning first-team All-Big Ten honors as a fifth-year senior and team captain in 2013.

ShIPLEY Earns Amateur Honors At U.S. Open

Former Ohio State golfer Neal Shipley earned low-amateur honors at the U.S. Open held from June 13-16 in Pinehurst, N.C., making it the second time he has achieved that honor after doing so at The Masters earlier this year.

Shipley earned the distinction by beating out Luke Clanton of Florida State in the final round on Sunday. Both were at 4-over par going into the day, and Shipley finished with a final score of 6-over while Clanton was 8-over.

Shipley was able to earn low amateur honors again, joining just six others who have done so in The Masters and the U.S. Open in the same year, including Ohio State alum Jack Nicklaus, who did it in 1960, and Phil Mickelson in 1991.

"I have some big shoes to fill because the guys who've done it before have gone on to great careers," Shipley said after the tournament.

Shipley began his professional golfing career at the PGA's Rocket Mortgage Classic held from June 27-30 in Detroit. The former Buckeye shot 67, 68, 70 and 72, placing him in tied for 20th place in the tournament.

Former Buckeye Maxwell Moldovan played in the U.S. Open, his first as a professional, but he missed the cut with a score of 14-over par through 36 holes on June 13 and 14.

Muzerall Adds Former Blue Jacket Wisniewski To Staff

The Ohio State women's hockey team welcomed back a familiar and well-respected face on June 25, hiring former Buckeye volunteer assistant coach and longtime NHL defenseman James Wisniewski to serve as associate head coach to Nadine Muzerall.

Wisniewski, 40, was a volunteer assistant coach for the Buckeyes from 2019-21, helping lead the program to its first-ever WCHA Final Faceoff title in program history in 2019.

"It was such an honor to be part of the Buckeye family four years ago and I'm excited to rejoin the program in this new role," Wisniewski said. "It's been incredible to see what (Muzerall) has done to turn this program around, and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to assist her, the rest of the staff and the players in continuing the Buckeyes' dominance in women's hockey."

Before assisting Muzerall at Ohio State, Wisniewski embarked on a 14-year career as an NHL defenseman. He was drafted by the Chicago Blackhawks in 2002 and played for them (2005-09), along with the Anaheim Ducks (2009-2010, 2014-15), New York Islanders (2010-11), Montreal Canadiens (2010-11), Columbus Blue Jackets (2011-14) and Carolina Hurricanes (2015-16). He finished his career with 274 points on 53 goals and 221 assists, with 121 of those points coming with Columbus.

Wisniewski also won a gold medal for

Team USA in the World Junior Championships in 2004 as well in the World U18 Championships in 2002. He represented the country in 2018 on the Team USA Olympic men's hockey squad that competed in PyeongChang.

"The biggest things I look for in a staff member is loyalty and hard work, and I know that James possesses both," Muzerall said. "He's an exemplary coach because of his knowledge of the game having played at the level he did both in the pros and for Team USA. He's not only smart about the game, but he is creative and brings unique concepts to our program. At Ohio State we have elite standards, and James fits that standard."

Eight Buckeyes Selected In PWHL Draft

Sticking with Muzerall's squad, the Buckeyes had eight players from their 2023-24 national championship-winning team selected in the 2024 Professional Women's Hockey League draft held on June 10, the most by any school this year.

Ohio State produced two of the first five picks in the draft, with PWHL Boston selecting forward Hannah Bilka with the

fourth overall pick and Montreal selecting defenseman Cayla Barnes at No. 5.

Bilka, who played four seasons at Boston College before ending her collegiate career with a national title at Ohio State, led the Buckeyes with a career-high 48 points on 22 goals and 26 assists, winning first-team All-WCHA honors along the way. Barnes led the nation with a plus-71 plus-minus and blocked a team-high 62 shots while also finishing with 11 goals and 25 assists. She earned second-team All-America honors and was selected to the Frozen Four All-Tournament Team.

Ohio State had three more players selected in the top 20, with forward Jenn Gardiner going No. 11 to Montreal in the second round and forward Gabby Rosenthal and defenseman Stephanie Markowski being picked in the fourth round by New York and Ottawa at No. 19 and No. 20.

Gardiner was Ohio State's team captain this past season and helped lead the Buckeyes to both their national titles. She also finished her career as the program record holder for games played with 54. Rosenthal spent this past season as a graduate assistant on Muzerall's staff, but she previously served as a two-time captain for the Buck-

eyes and helped lead the team to its first national championship, recording 19 goals and 16 assists that season.

Markowski played her final collegiate season with the Buckeyes after spending her first four at Clarkson, finishing her graduate season with 27 points and a career-best 24 assists.

Rounding out the group of Buckeye draftees were defenseman Lauren Bernard to Toronto at No. 24, defenseman Hadley Hartmetz to Boston at No. 40 and goaltender Raygan Kirk to Toronto at No. 42.

With eight Buckeyes selected, Muzerall has now coached 16 PWHL draft picks in the last two seasons, a group that also includes 2023 selections Clair DeGeorge, Sophie Jaques and Liz Schepers of the Walter Cup-winning Minnesota team, Madison Bizal (Montreal), Paetyn Levis (New York), Emma Maltais (Toronto), Natalie Spooner (Toronto) and Jincy Roesse (Ottawa).

OSU Hires Gackowski As Head Rowing Coach

The Ohio State rowing team found a new leader on June 25, hiring Buckeye assistant coach Emily Gackowski to serve as the team's next head coach. Gackowski agreed

to a five-year contract with the program, according to Ohio State.

"I am very excited for Ohio State rowing," Bjork said. "Emily has a wonderful spirit for Ohio State University and this program, and the future is bright under her leadership."

Gackowski served as an assistant coach under former program leader Kate Sweeney, who resigned from her role on May 29, for the past five seasons. In that time, she helped lead the Buckeyes to a Big Ten championship and NCAA championship appearances in each season it has been held, along with two top-10 national finishes.

Gackowski has also been Ohio State's novice coach since she joined the program in 2019-20.

"I'm honored and humbled by the chance to lead the Ohio State rowing program," Gackowski said. "I'm appreciative to (senior deputy director of athletics) Janine Oman and Ross Bjork for their belief in me, and I am looking forward to the opportunity to build upon the legacy of success this program is known for both academically and athletically."

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

A relationship with The Ohio State University athletic department of more than 20 years came to an end when Hugh Hindman stepped down as athletic director at OSU.

Hindman had served as an assistant football coach and associate athletic director and was Ohio State's AD since 1977. But Hindman had been present on the Ohio football scene for much longer than that.

He was a quarterback at Columbus North High School in the early '40s, playing for Mike Hagely, who coached at North for 33 years and was one of the most colorful coaches of the era.

From North, Hindman went on to play four years of football at Miami (Ohio). Interestingly, despite having played quarterback in high school, he was a guard for the Redskins.

35 Years Ago — 1989

"Why did Ohio State give newly hired basketball coach Randy Ayers a five-year contract?" Rich Exner wondered in his "Inside Look" column. "Ayers might be a nice guy. He might be a super recruiter. He apparently was very loyal to Ohio State. But do we know how well he'd do as a head coach?"

"Ayers is unproven. That's not to say he doesn't deserve the opportunity to become the next Ohio State basketball coach.

"Five-year contracts are normally used to attract proven, prime time-type coaches – people like Seton Hall's P.J. Carlesimo, who took the little school in the Big East to the NCAA championship game.

"Five-year contracts are not used to promote an assistant to the head coaching position."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Sitting to the left of his two immediate bosses, Randy Ayers sat and faced the music.

A few hours before, Ayers had listened in on a teleconference as David Swank, chairman of the NCAA Committee on Infractions, singled him out for various recruiting violations that had resulted in Ohio State being placed on probation for one year.

Then he joined OSU vice president for student affairs David Williams II, who oversaw the athletic department for university president Gordon Gee, and OSU athletic director Andy Geiger for a news conference to respond to the NCAA's findings.

In all, there were 17 violations committed, all of them during the recruitment of Cincinnati Woodward star Damon Flint. The most serious of the violations occurred Oct. 30, 1991, when former assistant coach Paul Brazeau and volunteer coach Tom Souder entertained Flint and Woodward head coach Jim Leon at Damon's restaurant near – but off – campus.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State's football team may have been mired in the dog days of summer, but OSU head coach John Cooper said his team had its sights firmly set on the light at the end of the tunnel.

"We are looking forward to playing Miami (Fla.) and UCLA," Cooper said, referring to his team's first two tests of the 1999 season. "The kids are really pumped up to play those games."

After a one-week break at the end of the spring quarter, the

Buckeyes reconvened June 21 to begin an intensive six-week conditioning program designed to have them in tip-top shape when preseason camp opened in early August. The season opener against Miami at the Kickoff Classic then beckoned on Aug. 29.

"We will have a good solid football team," Cooper predicted. "Will we be as good as we've been two out of the last three years? That remains to be seen. But the work ethic and chemistry of our football team could not be any better."

20 Years Ago — 2004

Former Ohio State men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien was fired ostensibly because he gave nearly \$7,000 to recruit Alexander Radojevic in 1999.

But that exchange – a clear violation of NCAA regulations – might never have come to light had it not been for a civil suit filed by Kathleen Salyers, who said she housed and provided financial assistance to former OSU guard Slobodan "Boban" Savovic during his playing career with the Buckeyes.

Salyers said she sheltered, fed and clothed Savovic, paid for him to register for classes at OSU, incurred the player's medical and dental expenses and paid for his car insurance as well as long-distance telephone bills.

Salyers' 800-plus page deposition was filed May 27 as part of her civil suit that was filed in August 2003 in Franklin County (Ohio) Common Pleas Court against Columbus residents Dan and Kim Roslovic.

Apparently, O'Brien admitted that he gave money to Radojevic only after he realized the payment might become public because of the deposition.

15 Years Ago — 2009

As often happened, in an interview with Ohio State head football coach Jim Tressel after a significant event, a reporter asked the football coach to highlight the No. 1 aspect of his experience.

Tressel returned from a multi-continent trip with a handful of other college football coaches to visit American military troops abroad. He was asked about the highlight of his trip.

"The biggest thing was just seeing the faces of the kids," Tressel said. "Seventy percent of the kids over there are under 25, so it's like the guys we work with. Just to see how appreciative they were, to see how much they were sacrificing and how proud they were of that – that was probably the biggest thing."

Tressel enjoyed another chance to catch up with old acquaintances, too, including Texas head coach Mack Brown and Wake Forest head man Jim Grobe while getting to know better the likes of Houston Nutt of Ole Miss, Rick Neuheisel of UCLA and Troy Calhoun of Air Force.

Amid trading coaching stories and meeting various military personnel, Tressel was the subject of some playful jabs as a result of his employer's popularity among the troops at many stops.

10 Years Ago — 2014

The Ohio State athletics department announced in April that over the previous year it had spent or was in the process of spending more than \$45 million for improvements in the various facilities in which its teams trained and competed.

Of the many upgrades, the most expensive one was the \$19 million spent at the Schottenstein Center for a second basketball practice gym, new locker rooms for the basketball programs and a new weight room.

The most visible changes, though, came in the form of the \$13.7 million spent at Ohio Stadium for an expansion in the south end zone by almost 2,600 seats and the addition of permanent lights and a new playing surface.

In all, at least 23 of Ohio State's 36 sports received facilities improvements over the previous year.

Five Years Ago — 2019

Former Ohio State and current Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker Ryan Shazier was named the recipient of the George Halas Award, the Pro Football Writers of America announced on June 3. The award is given annually to the NFL player, coach or staff member who "overcomes the most adversity to succeed."

Shazier had not played football since suffering a serious spinal injury during a "Monday Night Football" game against the Cincinnati Bengals in December 2017. He was given less than a 20 percent chance of walking again but had made remarkable progress in the 18 months since, which included walking across the stage at the 2018 NFL draft, box jumping during a workout in April and dancing at his wedding in May.

"In my 35 years covering the Steelers, I've seen many players overcome much adversity, but never have I seen such determination by a player to overcome what Ryan has and to reach a point, physically and mentally, where he is," Steelers beat writer Ed Bouchette said in a press release announcing the award. "It's unbelievable how teammates talk about how he has inspired them. (Steelers vice president/general manager) Kevin Colbert and (head coach) Mike Tomlin have spoken many times about what he has meant to the organization, the front office and the players. He has been one big inspiration."

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State removed the 14,000-pound scoreboard at St. John Arena in June due to a lack of athletic competitions and the difficulty in finding parts.

The scoreboard was installed at St. John Arena in 1987 by Whiteway Sign Company, which went out of business in 2014, requiring Ohio State to utilize spare parts to keep the scoreboard in working order.

St. John Arena began hosting men's basketball games in the 1956-57 season and later added women's basketball, hosting both teams until The Schottenstein Center opened for the 1998-99 season.

Ohio State intended to recycle around 11,000 pounds of the structure, with the other 3,000 pounds – consisting of the corner scoreboards – expected to be placed in Value City Arena and the Covelli Center. Barring any surprises, this meant the last athletic event to take place at St. John Arena was a 66-50 loss for the women's basketball team on Dec. 28, 2019, while the last event for the men was a 71-52 win over Kent State on Nov. 24, 2019.

Interaction With Buckeye Community Will Be Missed

Continued From Page 1

done a marvelous job with that.

"But still, you have the department to run. We have 575 employees, a lot of different events, we have the Buckeye Country Fest coming up, and so we're still making decisions along the way. But most of the time, based upon what they were, I kind of had Ross make those decisions to hire around softball, basketball and now baseball. All those are his decisions, and he's rolling with it. So it's slightly business as usual, but onboarding Ross has been huge."

BSB: You've had the role of helping Ross adjust to his new position and providing guidance to him, which is similar to when you were at Eastern Michigan in the 1980s when you were the under-study to Paul Shoults. What has this experience been like for you on the other side, and what have you seen in Ross that makes you confident about the state of Ohio State athletics moving forward?

Smith: "It's been great. He's been in the business for a long time. He's a seasoned athletic director, a seasoned athletic administrator. He holds the values that we all hold dear, and so that made it a lot easier. He's just a good human being, and that's kind of our culture.

"Fortunately, my teammates, they put together a good onboarding plan for him. I didn't have to do that, they actually put it together, and then they shared it with me and asked for my input. He's met a lot of people. We have 575 employees, and then you have all of Buckeye Nation and the many donors in this community. You have to spend time getting to know people, and he's done that exceptionally well. Then you go into things and see how they operate.

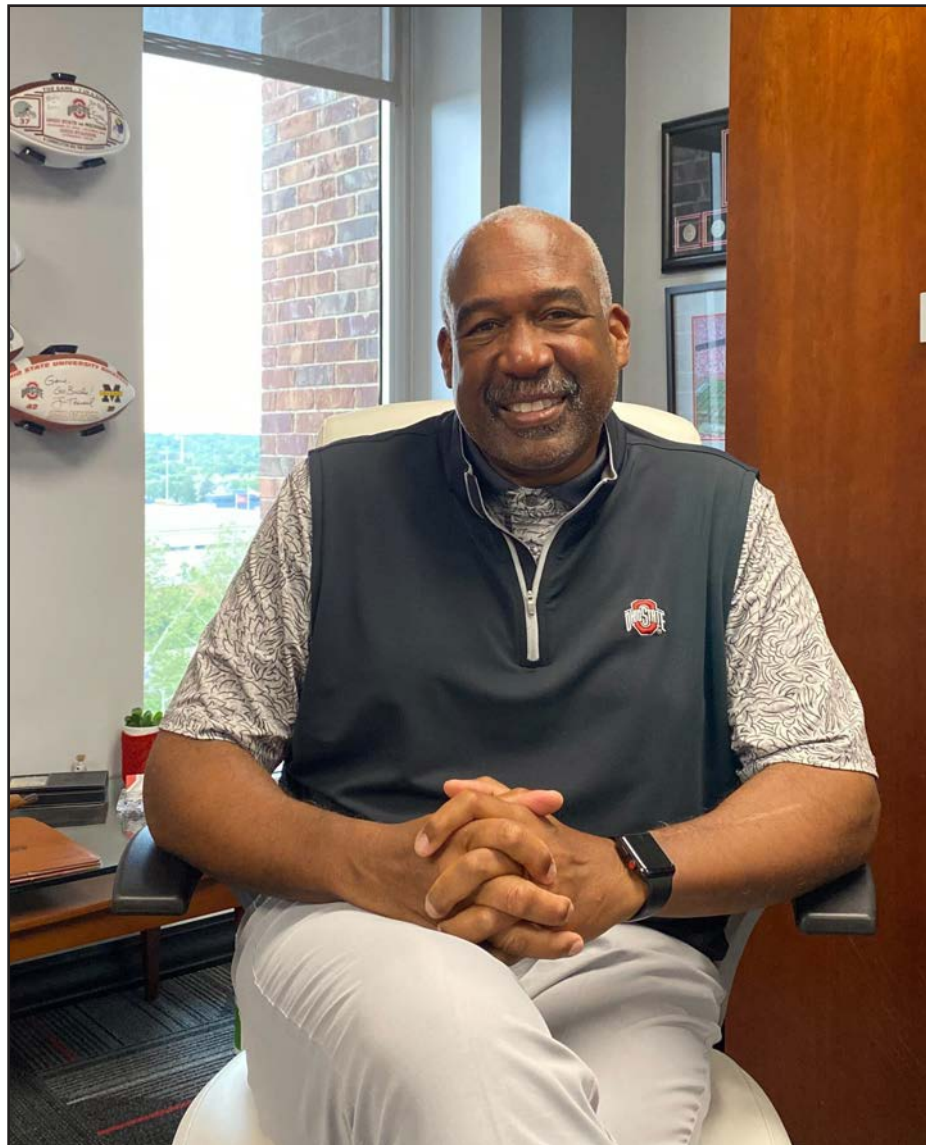
"We have a lot of facilities. Most people forget we oversee Nationwide Arena, so he had an opportunity to go see that setup and how we manage it. We oversee the Blackwell Hotel. Most people don't know or forget about that, but going over to the hotel and understanding that business and how it operates.

"There's a lot of different things in our portfolio that he's had to embrace and learn, and he's done a great job with it. But in the end, it all gets down to people. The facilities, the events, all of those are what they are, but you have to get to know the people, and he's done a great job with that."

BSB: Are the people what you're going to miss the most about being an athletic director?

Smith: "Well said. I'm going to miss the people. I'm going to miss game days around a lot of sports, just seeing people come in and chatting with people. I'm going to miss the interaction with the athletes. I'm going to miss the interaction with my teammates in the building and when we're planning events and things of that nature.

"I had the opportunity yesterday to go over into basketball and watch their vets' camp, all the former players coming back to play with our current players. And seeing DeAngelo Russell and Evan Ravenel, all of those guys. Will Buford, I can just keep going on – Duane Washington, there's a bunch of them. I'm going to miss that. I met



FILE PHOTO

A NEW CHAPTER — Former Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith is looking forward to spending more time with his wife, Sheila, as well as their four kids and eight grandchildren now that he is officially retired.

this morning with (former Ohio State and NFL football player) Nate Ebner, trying to understand his next chapter in life and how I might be able to help him, and I'm going to miss that.

"So, the people. That's what makes Buckeye Nation so great is the people. The facilities are one thing. They're the place where our kids grow and learn and compete. And where we provide a remarkable experience for our fans. But it's the people that matter the most."

BSB: You've said since you announced your retirement that you know it's the right time for you to go. Why do you think that is?

Smith: "I have always said that I wanted to retire before I was 70. I'm 68. I wanted to retire healthy. I'm healthy right now. And I wanted to leave the place better than I found it, in good shape. There's a number of things that have to be done, particularly as we move into whatever this new model is going to look like, but I feel good about our culture. I feel great about the culture around our student-athletes and their focus on academics, which is a lot different than it was in 2005. It was just time. We need to hand it over to (young people) to take over and run."

BSB: With college athletics changing

so rapidly with revenue sharing coming soon, which you have been a proponent of, did the changing landscape have any impact on your decision to retire now?

Smith: "No, it didn't impact it at all. Actually, it was interesting. I was telling somebody the other week, that's the type of stuff I like to get my hands around. I like this change. This is the type of stuff that I like to get my hands dirty on and just brainstorm around and come up with how we manage the new model. People support what they build, and if I'm able to build it, then I want to be here to support it and make it grow.

"But it had nothing to do with my decision. I've always embraced the fact that we need to provide as many resources to our student-athletes as possible. The revenue sharing model, how do we ratchet up, and at another level, a financial literacy education program. Because all of a sudden, these kids are going to have even more money in their pocket. So how do we ratchet up our education around taxes? All of those types of things. I get excited about building that type of stuff, but it's time for the young puppies to do that."

BSB: You have said before that you actually turned down a couple of interviews for the Ohio State job when you were at Arizona State. What do you remember

about that time, and why were you hesitant to come to Columbus at first?

Smith: "Well, it wasn't about Ohio State. It was really about me and where I was. It was such a blessing to have been at Eastern Michigan and Iowa State. At both of those places, I felt comfortable that many of the goals and the vision that was set were accomplished. You ask people to invest in you, invest in a program to help accomplish a vision. At Arizona State, I had done that, but I hadn't accomplished those goals and objectives nor attained a vision, and that was uncomfortable. When you care about people and ask them to invest in your vision and you leave, it's hard. I didn't want to do that.

"So it really wasn't about Ohio State, it was about my relationships in the valley and what I had asked people to jump on board with. That was really it. The other part was, I'm from Cleveland. I had a pool in my back yard (in Arizona) and I was looking at the mountains. I was on a golf course. I mean, come on.

"But anyway, it was more about my commitment to the people who had invested in us and trying to make sure that everything we shared that we were going to do, that it was done. That was really hard for me to walk away from. It really wasn't about Ohio State. It was about where I was."

BSB: You are the first Black athletics director at Ohio State, and when you started at Eastern Michigan, you were one of two in the country at the Division I level. What does it mean to you that you were able to pave that path for others?

Smith: "It means a lot. Years ago, people would ask me about being a Black athletic director. I just aspired to be the best athletic director, period. I also knew early in my career that I couldn't fail. I did not want to be the excuse for higher authorities to say that they can't do it. And that's what it used to be like until our environment changed and the whole nine yards. But I wanted to, in the back of my mind, do the best that I could and perform at the highest level to open the door for others.

"And I'm really proud of the fact of – look around the Big Ten, there's more people of color in AD seats. You look around the Mid-American Conference, more people of color. You look nationally, there are more women in AD seats. I take a lot of pride in the fact that I was able to set an example and also mentor. The majority of them in the Mid-American conference and in the Big Ten, and actually nationally, I've mentored along the way, and talked to about being Black in a leadership position and what it means and how you navigate or operate. So I have a lot of pride around that."

BSB: What does it mean to you that you were able to directly advance the careers of so many minorities who now have those positions around the country?

Smith: "It means that I can probably get tickets to most events that I want to go to. But when you see some of your people that you've tried to help along the way ultimately get into a seat, it just makes you proud. Martin Jarmond got the job at Boston College; now he's at UCLA. Or Pat Chun going to Florida Atlantic and then to Washington State, and now he's at Washington.

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: GENE SMITH

"At one point in time, we had the most diverse senior leadership team in the country. To me, when you're able to provide an opportunity for people who otherwise would not get opportunities, it's just so fulfilling. Early in my career, that focus was so intentional. It's still intentional, but the environment has changed. Hiring authorities have changed. Presidents have changed.

"When Heather Lyke got hired at Pittsburgh, the president (of the university) at that particular time had a totally diverse pool in his final three. So it wasn't me having to call and convince him that a female could do the job, which is what I've had to do with some other presidents along my path."

BSB: You spent 19 years at Ohio State, but one of the biggest moments of that time was the 2014 football national championship. Where does that title rank in terms of your top moments, and what did it mean to you to be the first ever College Football Playoff champion?

Smith: "That was great. It's right at the top of the pyramid. It's No. 1. It was special in so many different ways. You look over that whole year at the games and the impact of the student-athletes, you look at the leadership change. You had three quarterbacks. Unbelievable to manage that. The talent was stupid. But going into the South and beating Alabama basically in their backyard then going and playing in the biggest facility there is in Dallas and beating Oregon for the championship. That was just a beautiful thing. It was so special in so many different ways.

"The next one is the wrestling championship in St. Louis. Those young men did an unbelievable job. They were phenomenal. That's right there with that football championship."

BSB: There were 35 team and 127 individual national championships during your time at Ohio State. Do any others stand out to you?

Smith: "A lot of them do. The women's ice hockey, men's volleyball, and probably because it's recent, going to Stillwater, Okla., and watching (men's tennis players) JJ Tracy and Robert Cash win the doubles championship. And if you like tennis, which I do, just seeing those guys grind it out. All of us watched on TV as our men's golf team chased it this year. They were so close to winning a national championship. There were those where we actually won it, and then there were some that were so exciting that we were so close.

"That's what I've always shared with our coaches, 'Just give our kids a chance. Just give them an opportunity.' Then if you give them that, then it's on them and you've got a shot. There's so many of them. Volleyball

was the coolest thing at St. John Arena, that was awesome."

BSB: You accomplished as much as anyone could dream of in your 19 years, but is there anything you wish you had been able to do that you weren't able to?

Smith: "I feel good about everything that we've been able to do. I really feel comfortable with Ross taking over. The culture is the most important thing. The academic performance of our kids is at a peak. Who would think that we would have metrics that compared football to Harvard? A 1,000 APR score, 36 of our sports with a 3.0 GPA or higher.

"Everything we've accomplished as a team, it sets Ross up and the rest of the team for the next chapter. He can create a vision around that and chase it. The Woody Hayes facility, we need to do a renovation and an addition to the Woody Hayes. He's on that project and trying to define it. So I feel good about where I left it in that regard. I know what we've accomplished."

BSB: I want to ask you about when you and Urban Meyer were suspended in 2018 for your handling of the Zach Smith domestic abuse case. When that happened, did you agree with the suspension, and was there anything that you felt like you took from that experience?

Smith: "I learned what it meant to tailgate inside. My wife made hot dogs, I had a beer and just watched the games on TV. I was trying to get Urban to think that way, but it was impossible. He was sitting in the dark somewhere. He was impossible. I get it. I wasn't the coach, there's a difference. So it was harder on him probably than on me. But I was trying to go get a hamburger and just chill.

"But I've always tried to take the high road on everything that we deal with. That was a difficult time. Do I agree with the decision? No, of course not. But it was what it was. So accept it and move on, and think about how you come out of it and be positive and do what's next. You're going to have bumps when you're blessed to be in this leadership position over this amount of time. To expect that it's going to be kosher every year, every day, it's not realistic. So I ultimately tried to just enjoy the moment for those three weeks and watch the games on TV and drink some beer."

BSB: You touched on the academic success at Ohio State. In 2005 there were only 324 scholar-athletes, and there were over 800 this year. What does that say about the commitment of you and your staff to improve academics?

Smith: "It's personal for me. I wouldn't have had an opportunity to go to college if it weren't for football. I would have gone to community college and maybe been an

electrician, which would have been fine. But I had a chance to go to college and get a degree because of football, so it was personal for me.

"Then for Ohio State, that's the culture we should have. Parents give us their children and then trust that we're going to help develop them, whether that is competitively or holistically as a person, but ultimately to get that degree. I put a lot of emphasis on that. At that particular time, we had no Black football players that had a 3.0 GPA or better. We needed to change that culture. So I put a big emphasis on making sure we recruited young people with character who were committed to academics.

"Our institution changed. It got harder because they went to selective admissions before that, but the profile of incoming freshmen got even higher academically. I'd never want to put a young person in a class where their self-esteem goes down because they don't feel like they belong and can't compete.

"We have a majority of our athletes graduate in less than four years. And remember, only 1 percent of our kids go pro or have an opportunity in the Olympics. At the end of the day, you have to get your degree and you have to perform at the highest level academically. And make sure you're able to present yourself in an interview that shares, 'Hey, I got my degree in less than four years.' Ninety-nine percent of the time they don't ask you what your GPA is, but it's cool for you to say that I was a scholar-athlete at The Ohio State University. We had 811. So I get a little passionate about that because I think that's what we owe those young people."

BSB: What is it you want to be remembered for during your time at Ohio State? What do you think your legacy is?

Smith: "I don't know what my legacy is. That would be up to the people and to the media to define. Our hope is that people recognize that I cared about the kids and put in place the resources that they needed to develop as people. We're a character-based program first and foremost. Then, as we

talked about, we focus on making sure they get their degrees, and fortunately this past year we had 96 percent of our student-athletes who got their degrees and already had jobs, or were going to grad school or going pro, chasing the Olympics. I hope people would recognize that I really cared for them to a great degree."

BSB: Jim Delany, the former Big Ten commissioner, said that you deserve to be on the Mount Rushmore of college athletics. What goes through your mind when you hear that?

Smith: "It means I'm old and I've been in this a long time. But Jim and I were close. I remember when I was at Eastern Michigan, I told Jim that one day I wanted to work in the Big Ten. I didn't know it was going to happen this way.

"But I hoped that I would have that level of respect from people in the industry. Most people in the industry know what we do, what we deal with and how we have to handle things, and I hope that that's recognized. The highest form of flattery is when people copy or emulate what you do, and many of the programs that we have here have been emulated across the country. People come and visit us to see what we do. People recognize that we have created a culture of respect, a culture of integrity, a culture of work ethic and all of those types of things."

BSB: You're about to have a lot of time on your hands when you retire. What are you most looking forward to now about retirement?

Smith: "I want to be able to sleep in and work out when I want to, and spend time with my grandkids and my children. We have four children and eight grandkids, and I want to spend quality time with them, go to their events, go to their school and see them do things and then be a grandfather. So that's really what I'm all about. I'll still help my colleagues wherever they need help and whenever they call, but that's really it."

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Bjork Ready To Lead OSU Through Uncertain Times

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

From 2005-2024, now former Buckeyes athletic director Gene Smith transformed Ohio State into an athletic and academic powerhouse, leading the Buckeyes to 35 team and 127 individual national championships along with countless scholar-athlete and All-Academic Big Ten accolades throughout his 19-year tenure.

While Smith left an indelible legacy at Ohio State – one that has already earned him a spot in the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame and cemented him as one of the more well-respected athletic administrators in modern college sports – a new era has dawned in Columbus, with Smith handing over the reins to former Texas A&M athletic director Ross Bjork, who officially took over the role on July 1.

Bjork has over 30 years of experience working in college athletics – including 13 years as a Division I athletic director at Western Kentucky (2010-12), Ole Miss (2012-19) and Texas A&M (2019-23) – and takes over at Ohio State during a time of significant instability and uncertainty in college athletics. With the influence of NIL and the transfer portal high and the NCAA introducing revenue sharing in college sports starting in 2025-26, many schools throughout the country will likely look to Bjork and Ohio State to provide guidance and leadership through these turbulent times.

It is a position that Bjork is used to being in, however, having been a consistent advocate for NIL legislation over the years, even meeting with members of the Texas legislature in 2021 to provide input regarding the implementation of new NIL laws.

Before he succeeded Smith and began his tenure as Ohio State's ninth athletic director, Bjork spoke with Buckeye Sports Bulletin to discuss his transition to becoming the athletics director, his vision for Ohio State athletics under his leadership and a variety of other topics pertaining to his new position.

BSB: What has this transition process from Texas A&M to Ohio State been like for you, and how have you liked Columbus so far?

Bjork: "So my last day at Texas A&M was Feb. 2. Man, I really took the month of February just to – I was around the family, I was talking on the phone to a lot of people at Ohio State, talking to Gene it seemed like probably every other day or so. And then obviously the basketball transition happened. So I had to dive in maybe sooner than I was anticipating, which was fine. It worked out great. It actually allowed me to learn, I think in an accelerated manner, about the entire program, the entire university. I was already kind of soaking it all in. But doing that (coaching) search, it was like, 'OK, you better be ready. You better know your stuff and be able to speak in an educated way.

"So I did a lot of Zoom interviews from

Texas with a lot of basketball coaches and then when I was able to get on the ground on March 2. My first athletic event was the (men's) basketball game on March 3 against the team up North, and that was a great way to start because that was a victory. I wish I could have stayed undefeated against that team, but we lost a (women's) lacrosse game later that week. So really since March 2,

I've been on the ground, in Columbus, walking the hallways, meeting with people, meeting with staff, groups of staff, meeting with a lot of people one-on-one, meeting with a lot of head coaches. I haven't met with every head coach one-on-one yet – maybe by the time this runs we will have accomplished that – I think we will. But I've met with a lot of head coaches. It started with the fall sports, and then I worked my way through the winter sports and then some into the spring.

"To me, the transition plan was several things: One, make sure I respect the legacy and honor Gene for what he stood for, not only at Ohio State but all of college athletics, and give him the ultimate space and the ultimate deference. Thus, no media interviews other than the Jake Diebler hire, no public speaking. I think I spoke to two small groups, but they weren't really public settings. So I haven't done any public speaking. I've been around in public because I've had to meet people. But I've really been intentional about honoring and giving deference to Gene.

"And to me, the best thing that I can do when I do take over on July 1 is to get to know the people and the place. And if I do that effectively, then I think I'll be more effective when I do start understanding more things and casting vision and putting together operational plans, tweaking things that may need tweaking or adjusting along the way. I think I'll be better equipped because of the way that we've done this transition. I told the staff that my title is 'curious observer,' for maybe the first six weeks. And then that shifted to more, 'invested learner.' And then it will become 'invested leader' on July 1.

"I think President (Ted) Carter has done a great job laying this out during the transition, and Gene has been awesome, the staff has been awesome. I've just tried to be patient and humble and soak it all in, because I think that will make me more effective come July 1."

BSB: You touched on it in the previous question, but how has Gene Smith helped you along the way? It seems like you are always tied to his hip when you are in Columbus. What has he meant to you during this whole transition?

Bjork: "I've known Gene forever in college athletics. I first met Gene in the summer of 1997 at Iowa State. I was working at Missouri, he was the athletic director at Iowa State, and we had a summer fundraising workshop in the Big 12 at that time. I met Gene, and he spoke to us. So I've known Gene for a long time. I've always admired Gene and the way he ran things. In our business, we don't work in other athletic departments, we don't see the day-to-day. But you hear how certain peo-



FILE PHOTO

LOOKING AHEAD – Former Texas A&M athletic director Ross Bjork took over the reins as AD from Gene Smith at Ohio State on July 1. Bjork has over 30 years of experience in college athletics and is looking forward to implementing his vision for the future.

ple operate. And Gene's reputation was that he operated at a high level. He was a strategic thinker. He had a great culture in his athletic department, and the morale was always high among the staff.

"You always heard these things. Well now, I've been able to see it in the last four months. I've been able to see it firsthand. So I want to make sure I don't mess it up. Because there's a lot of positive momentum. That's something I've tried to soak in. But from Gene's perspective and what he's done – sometimes I felt kind of bad because I was sort of his shadow along the way.

"But watching him operate and him allowing me to be there when he was operating allowed me to say, 'OK, this is how you can do it at Ohio State. This is what it means to be a leader at Ohio State.' I think it's one thing for leaders to always come in and think they know, (saying), 'This is how it should be,' or, 'This will be my plan.' I've never operated that way. This transition allows me to see, 'OK, this is what leadership means at Ohio State.'

"I'll have to be my own self, and I will. But at the same time, having this overlap with Gene and really seeing the culture and seeing firsthand what people mean here and him allowing all of that to happen with a lot of patience and a lot of grace – I know he wants to leave (Ohio State) in great shape, and that's going to be my job, is to continue that. I know he wants to leave it in the best shape possible, which he's doing. And this transition, I think, is giving him comfort that things are going to be handled the right way.

"I'd say in the last couple weeks, (Smith's)

been a lot more like, 'Here's my recommendation, or I defer to Ross,' which is fine. That's great. But the early part of the transition was, 'Here's what we've done. This is what this has meant. This is the history behind this contract or this project. Here's the politics. Here's how things work on campus. Here's how things work in the community.' Those things, you never get that in this type of business in college athletics. So to have that resource and have that foundation, that's just a blessing. That's just going to be worth so much when I do take over on July 1."

BSB: With all the things that Gene has taught you since you arrived in March, have you come to realize that serving as an athletic director at Ohio State carries a little more weight than being the leader of other athletic departments? And if so, what have you noticed about that difference?

Bjork: "People have asked me, 'What's been the biggest surprise?' The fundamentals of what every athletic department does are pretty much the same. There's the budget. There's compliance. There's sponsorship. There's fundraising. There are facility projects. There is NIL now. There are all the challenges in college athletics. It's been funny, I've sat in some meetings at Ohio State, and there's maybe some frustration (from other staff members), they look at me and they're like, 'Well, what happened at Texas A&M?' And I said, 'You know what, I feel like I was in the exact same meeting six months ago, or a year ago.' We all have been talking about the same thing. So the fundamentals are pretty much very similar to what we do.

“I would say the biggest surprise – and maybe I should have anticipated this – was how small of a town it is in a big city, that everything is connected through the people and that relationships truly, truly matter. That’s easy to say no matter where you are, but what I’ve learned at Ohio State is that it is a small town in a big city, and so we get to capitalize on that. Now that means you also have to communicate, I think, at a deeper and more impactful level, a more intentional level. That’s my style anyway, but I’ve really learned that the people are really what matters and that the relationships are all interconnected.

“The way I described it in my (introductory) press conference was that (Ohio State) is a public trust with the state of Ohio. No matter what county you’re in, no matter what city you’re in, no matter where you’re from in Ohio, you’re a Buckeye. I know it firsthand because my mom is from northwest Ohio, and I have cousins and second cousins and third cousins and aunts and uncles, they’re all Buckeyes because they’re from Ohio. So I know firsthand what that means. And seeing that on the ground and really understanding that I’m only getting started in terms of understanding the state, it means so much, and that becomes a great responsibility that we all have to take seriously.

“So every word matters. Everything we put out matters. No matter how minute it may seem to us, it’s a big deal, because it’s the Buckeyes. I think that’s a really, really great attribute that not every program has. I think that part is very unique compared to other places that I’ve been to.”

BSB: You were talking about your initial impressions of Columbus. Have you found any good restaurants in the city that you and your family have liked to eat at during your brief time here?

Bjork: “I have. I have. If I name any, I’ll probably get in trouble. Let’s just say that I’ve stayed in the Short North area in a temporary apartment, and there are a lot of good restaurants around the Short North.”

BSB: You mentioned trying to get to know Ohio and Ohio State, and one thing that everybody knows about Ohio State is the football program. You said during your introductory press conference that Ryan Day “is going to get it done and it’s going to be a lot of fun when we win those championships.” You’ve known him for only a short time. What makes you have that belief in Day, and in that short time you’ve known him, has he validated that sentiment?

Bjork: “I said that early on because I watched it from afar. If you’re in college athletics, I think it’s your responsibility to know who the great coaches are and to really study the landscape. So I’ve always been impressed with how Coach Day has carried himself. People have to remember that he’s only been a head coach – this will be his sixth year coming up, and people will think that he’s been a head coach for 15 years because of his experience, because of his credibility.

“Getting to know Coach, what I’ve found is that he’s super innovative. He’s super aggressive. He believes in culture coming first. You have to have the talent. I mean, that’s a given. Ohio State’s always going to be able to recruit elite talent. But in today’s environment, he understands that culture is going to matter. Culture is going to win the day. I’ve been so impressed every time I’ve seen him

speak to the team and carry himself in the media.

“One of the most impressive things was watching him speak to the parents of the players the day of the spring game. He went through everything that they’re teaching the team off the field. He didn’t really talk anything about football but went through all the characteristics and all the teachings that were happening in the spring, sort of segment by segment, and it’s real-life stuff. It’s ‘Real-life Wednesdays,’ is what they call it.

“So he went through all of those topics with the parents, and I had never seen that before. Where a head coach was giving that much information about, ‘This is what we’re telling your sons and you need to know this.’ Because I know from my son, he doesn’t tell me much. So I think it was really neat to see that in action. That speaks to culture. That speaks to leadership.

“I’ve seen him adapt coming out of the last season. We know that that’s not the standard. I mean, everybody has high standards at Ohio State. We totally get that. We signed up for that. That’s one of the reasons why I signed up for it. I want to embrace that. Coach Day embraces that. He made the right adjustments. Having (offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach) Chip Kelly there, some new staff members, some new energy around the building, I think it has really gotten a pep in everybody’s step.

“Look, everything rises and falls on leadership, and Coach Day is really dialed into the leadership and the character development and the culture. To me, that’s what’s going to make great football programs going forward in this modern era. I’ve been able to see that firsthand with Coach Day. It just gives me all kinds of confidence that we’re on the right track. Now we have to perform, we have to deliver, and that’s on all of us. So we’ll embrace that going into 2024.”

BSB: I’m sure you’ve heard, there’s a pretty big rivalry here in Columbus. With Michigan, is there any way that you can help as the athletics director to get Ohio State back to where it was in the past 15 years before this 0-3 streak?

Bjork: “An athletic director doesn’t call plays. He doesn’t evaluate players, none of that stuff. He or she doesn’t pick the game plan. My job is, ‘Do we have the right resources? Do we have the right people? What is the culture? What is the development piece of the program?’ My job is to eliminate distractions for the head coach. If there have to be distractions, let me handle it. Let Coach Day focus on the team, on the culture, on the recruiting and on the landscape of the football program. Let me worry about facilities. Let me worry about NIL. Let me do those things as the athletic director to eliminate distractions. I want our coaches focused on what happens between the lines.

“Then there are some CEO elements of being a head coach, and we want our coaches to be involved in some of those things, but I think the best thing that I can do is help him stay focused and eliminate distractions. And then that makes them better on Saturdays, it makes them better in game planning, because they’re not worried about the 97 other things that it takes to run a program. We can handle a lot of those things. So I’m never going to call a play. I’m never going to suggest a play. Maybe a fullback belly here and there because I played fullback. But ADs don’t do that. Our job is to make sure we surround the

programs with all the tools to be successful, and then you let the coaches be experts and do their jobs.”

BSB: The football team appeared to be really aggressive – both in recruiting and in the transfer portal – with its NIL strategy this offseason, perhaps more than ever before. Is that something that is going to be sustainable moving forward?

Bjork: “It’s really fascinating – and I probably said it at my press conference. I talked about what we have to do. We have to sit down with the players. We have to start sharing revenue. We have to engage in NIL. I mean, look where we are today. This article will run in July, and we already have a new landscape. We are going to have revenue sharing in the fall of 2025. So I think our job will be, ‘Do we have the right infrastructure?’ To not only deal with the revenue share piece that will come directly from the university, but there’s still going to be third-party NIL, and we still will have to rely on our community, our business leaders, our donors and our sponsors.

“We have to sort of re-create the infrastructure and what that looks like. We will need our coaches. We will need the head football coach to be engaged in that, just like Jake Diebler will need to be engaged in it, just like Kevin McGuff, just like Nadine (Muzerall). All of our coaches will have to be involved in the NIL space. That part is not going away, but the infrastructure will look different and being aggressive in that space. One of the things you asked earlier about uniqueness, to me, Ohio State is the best-positioned athletic department in the country because of our city and because we have business advancement that reports to athletics. That’s affinity programs with sponsors. That’s the Nike contract. That’s the Learfield contract.

“So to your question, we are equipped to be really, really aggressive (with NIL) because we have the resources, and because we have the city and because we have the infrastructure really already kind of built out. Now, we just have to repackage it and then keep engaging with our donors and our sponsors and take advantage of the new world and what that will continue to evolve into as we go into this fall and then the fall of 2025 with revenue sharing.”

BSB: Gene Smith has been an outward advocate for revenue sharing. I wonder if you feel the same way? Do you think that’s the right way for college sports to go, and how do you plan on utilizing it?

Bjork: “It’s pretty early in terms of the mechanics of it. We know sort of a gross percentage and a gross number, but a lot of the details still have to be worked out with the (legal settlement of three antitrust cases against the NCAA). So we don’t really know how it’s going to be paid, what classification

this money will be called. Is it financial aid? Is it salary? We don’t know any of that kind of stuff. So a lot of those details will be flushed out here – maybe by the time this is published, but probably into the fall before we really have a framework.

“I’ve been a proponent all along of we should have been doing more for the athletes. We should have allowed NIL 25 years ago. So revenue sharing probably was not the nomenclature back then. But it should have been, ‘How do we benefit athletes? How do we really get the athletes more involved in this whole stratosphere as the money escalated?’ We just never did that. We always had this restrictive environment. So I’ve been a believer – not necessarily in the term revenue sharing because that’s evolved – but in the ecosystem of, ‘We should have allowed our athletes to really capitalize on being a college athlete,’ and we just never did.

“Then we’ve done a bad job of telling the story of the true value of what these athletes actually get in terms of scholarship, in terms of benefits, in terms of all the things that come with being a Buckeye or being a Texas A&M Aggie or an Ole Miss Rebel. I mean, we’ve done a bad job of telling those stories, and that’s kind of led us to where we are. So I’m glad we have some clarity. That’s the most important thing in this conversation, is that we have clarity. Now we know what we can work with, and then we’ll figure out what the infrastructure and the mechanics look like as we go into the coming months.”

BSB: You have been a consistent proponent of NIL legislation, so you may know the answer to this question more than some others. How will revenue sharing change the way NIL is utilized in college athletics moving forward?

Bjork: “When all of this started in 2021, I think all of us took the position that we’re going to let the market sort of dictate. Between the athlete and the marketplace, we would let things happen and evolve naturally. We were not going to force anything from the university perspective. We were going to let the ecosystem basically take care of itself. As things have gone on, as the collective world came into being – you have state lawsuits coming to the forefront, you have all these things coming at us – I think we’ve come to realize that the athletes really look to the universities for advice. They look to the universities for direction, asking, ‘Hey, is this a good deal or not? Hey, what kind of legal advice should I have? Should I have representation? Should I not?’

“To me, this is the next evolution where the universities can be more involved. The next evolution of this is that we take all of the resources that we have now, whether that’s collectives, whether that’s for-profit or non-

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Bjork Faces Changing NCAA Landscape

Continued From Page 13

profit (organizations). We're going to have revenue sharing. We're going to take our sponsorship ecosystem. We're going to take our licensing ecosystem. We're going to take our charity ecosystem because our athletes do a lot of charity work anyway. They make a lot of appearances. How do we take all those ecosystems and create a new entity that's housed inside the athletic department, or at least a third-party relationship? Maybe we sub-license that to somebody else.

"But we have an ecosystem where the universities are way more actively involved in matchmaking and pursuing deals for athletes. We can't be their agent. Legally, we're not set up for that. But how do we match-make between an entity – a business, charity, whatever that might be – and the athlete, and what does that look like? I think we need to have that ecosystem organized within the athletic department or at least by our third-party partner, like a Learfield. So those conversations are happening already.

"Again, by the time this is published, maybe some of those things become more clear. But to me, that's the world that's going to be around NIL. You'll have the revenue sharing, that will be one bucket. Then you're going to have another bucket of NIL that will be operated more closely aligned with or within the athletic department."

BSB: With NIL, is this what you were expecting it to look like back in 2021? Did you anticipate it going this way?

Bjork: "I thought all along it would evolve in some way, shape or form. The (House v. NCAA antitrust lawsuit) has been going on since 2020. So we knew that eventually the NIL structure as it was known back in 2021, we were probably just delaying the inevitable of bringing this in-house, revenue sharing, things like that. Employment has been a discussion for several years. I think NIL in the last three years probably has been more of a distraction from the real issue, and the real issue is revenue sharing. The real issue is, 'What is the relationship between the university and the athlete?' Is it just a financial aid agreement? Is it a letter of intent? That's the way it's been, but should it evolve into something more substantial?"

"I'm not saying employment. I'm not saying collective bargaining. But how do we create an ecosystem where we actually sit down with the athlete and learn about what they expect and learn about what's beneficial for them? Then how do you structure that? Is it a professional services agreement? Is it an independent contractor agreement? To me, we need to figure that piece out. I've always envisioned that component coming into our ecosystem at some point in time. To me, we probably need to get to that place. Maybe with the way revenue sharing is, the mechanics of it, there is going to be some sort of concrete agreement that will come to the forefront."

BSB: Looking into the future, the Big Ten is expanding to 18 teams this upcoming academic year with the admittance of Oregon, Washington, UCLA and USC. Last year, Chip Kelly advocated for one 64-team Power Five conference in college football that governs itself and is separate from the



FILE PHOTO

LEARNING CURVE – Ross Bjork (left) was introduced as the incoming athletic director at a January press conference with outgoing AD Gene Smith (center) and OSU president Ted Carter (right). During the transition, Bjork described his role as variously "curious observer" then "invested learner" and deferred to Smith, although he did run point on the hiring of Jake Diebler as men's basketball coach.

NCAA. Is that a change you would be in favor of moving forward, and are there any conversations happening about that right now among college athletics?

Bjork: "I'm probably rambling on some of these answers just because there's a lot of thought that goes into it. I've been thinking about these things for a long time. To me, there are two layers to what you're getting at. One is the governance of the NCAA. Clearly, for the higher-resource institutions, the governance is really broken. We're not allowed to do certain things because of competitive equity. We've always said, 'Well, there are 360 or so Division I programs. They should all be treated the same. They all have the same access.' Well, that world has changed. The ecosystem around resources has changed that equation.

"So we need to solve the Division I governance, and then we need to solve the FBS governance. What does that look like? Right now, we have 130 FBS programs, and there is a disparity. You've heard some Group of Five folks talk about how they should have their own playoffs, or how do they have their own identity. To me, there's a place for everybody. And that's what we need to get to. Everybody should say, 'Look, this is what we're capable of. Here's our identity, and here's the ecosystem that we can play in. So the governance around Division I and FBS is a piece of that. I think that was what Chip was talking about.

"The second layer to that is media rights and TV contracts. Conferences (deal with) scheduling, your multimedia contracts and TV contracts. That's really why you're in a conference. You have like-minded institutions who schedule to play each other, and

you have a TV contract that binds everybody together. I've talked to Chip about this. I think what he was talking about is how do the biggest brands coalesce around media agreements? Right now, that's not possible.

"The Big Ten has a contract (with CBS, FOX and NBC). The SEC has a contract (with ESPN). I think it will be fascinating to see what happens in the ACC with some of those institutions pushing back on their grant of rights. We know when the Big Ten contract runs out (in 2029-30). We know when the SEC contract with ESPN expires (in 2035). So I think it will be really fascinating to see what happens in the next eight to 12 years around the media value of our agreements. Then what does that mean on the other side of that? I do think, at some point in time, there could be a situation where the biggest brands can coalesce, not necessarily to form a new conference or a new entity, per se. But people are talking all the time now about are college sports undervalued? I think we'll know that answer when these TV contracts start to wind down."

BSB: Ohio State Olympic sports will now likely be forced to travel to the West Coast for games during the week, which could conflict with each student-athlete's academic schedule. With expansion looming, how might this change how Olympic sports are funded, and is it possible to keep all 36 Division I sports going forward?

Bjork: "Gene and his team had been working on a plan (for revenue sharing) before I got here, and we'll have to continue to execute that plan in terms of really looking at how all the sports are modeled and funded. We want to keep all 36 sports. That has been very clear, but they may look different.

Expectations may be different. The funding model of those sports may look different. The economic structure between the athlete and the institution may look different.

"Right now, we provide a lot of scholarships in those sports. That may look different. What that means, we don't have all those answers yet. But we have to be thinking that way.

"Then as it relates to conferences, that is something, too, that I think we have to look into (regarding) the economic sensibility of traveling all over the country. In the Midwest, there are a lot of programs that we can play that are a lot more economically feasible to travel and you still have great competition. So I think all of those things have to be on the table in this new model as we go into it. We want to be in the Big Ten, obviously that's clear. We want all of our sports to thrive at the highest level. But the expectations and the funding model is now going to shift in a very, very dramatic way, and if we don't adapt to that, then we're not doing our job.

"It's like that old saying, 'If you don't like change, you'll like being irrelevant even less.' So we better change, or we're going to be irrelevant. So that's going to be our job, to make sure that we change."

BSB: Switching gears to the men's basketball program, what has the early response been from fans, boosters, sponsors, etc. regarding the hiring of Jake Diebler as head coach?

Bjork: "There's just so much confidence in Jake. I think it's just the way he carries himself. It's the job that he did in the interim role. It's the enthusiasm that he brings to the job. To me, one word to describe the response is confidence. Then if you layer that into re-

cruiting, they're recruiting at a high level, not only in the transfer portal environment but also in the high school environment. That's one of the things I noticed when I was doing research on Jake, is every time I would talk to people in the recruiting world, he was already viewed as a national elite recruiter. I didn't really know that about him until I started doing that research. So that was really fascinating.

"Then I think the other reason why people are fired up is the Ohio ties. He's from the state. His family is a household name in the basketball community. What his brother (former Ohio State guard Jon Diebler) did at Ohio State, everybody remembers Jon. So I think it's twofold. One, it's the confidence that he exudes, which then allows people to be confident, and then I think it's the Ohio roots. So everything that I see is just excitement, confidence and energy around the program. Those NIT games, every time he was introduced as the head coach, the whole place was giving him a standing ovation. So we expect all of those things to continue, and it's just been fun to watch.

"It's been fun to watch his maturity, too, because you saw it during the interim period. But then it's, 'OK, now you're officially in charge. Are you going to have the same sort of wherewithal?' And the answer is absolutely. It's been really, really neat to see him just exude that confidence in running the program now day-to-day."

BSB: Diebler experienced a hectic spring, with the program seeing five players transfer out and conversely adding four players to the roster from the transfer portal. How would you assess this first off-

season for Diebler and the program?

Bjork: "The transfer world, the coming and going of players, is going to be part of it. You're not going to hold on to everybody. You wish you could. There are some guys that, obviously, we wish would have stayed. But we also picked up new guys who are going to be just as good, if not better, and then rounding out the depth, getting key depth was also a goal. So I would say Jake has nailed the off-season from a recruiting standpoint.

"What hasn't gotten a lot of attention is the staff that he put together. He put together, in my mind, an elite staff with the guys that he recruited to come here. To me, you have to have that. It's just like football. Coach Day has an elite staff. Coach Diebler, we told him, 'Look, we know we're promoting you from within, but we're going to give you the tools to go out and hire the best staff possible,' and I think we did that.

"There's experience with Dave Dickerson, being a former head coach (at USC Upstate), being at Ohio State before (as an assistant under Thad Matta from 2010-17). A guy like (former NC State assistant and current associate head coach) Joel Justus, who's recruited at an elite level all over the place. And then the other guys who he's known, who he trusts and really sees things the same way that he does. I think that's been really, really something that hasn't gotten a lot of attention, is the quality of the staff that Jake has hired this offseason."

BSB: What are your expectations for both the men's basketball and football programs next season?

Bjork: "Look, this is Ohio State, and so we expect to be the elite of the elite. That's

what we want to be. That's what Coach Day's after. That's what Coach Diebler's after. Are we going to win every game? We hope we can, but there are also other people who are trying to win too. So our expectation is that we compete at the highest level, that we're knocking on the door for a Big Ten championship. In football, we know we haven't won one of those in a couple years.

"It's a process. You hear that all the time. You hear coaches say that, and I think it applies. You have to have the talent. You have to have the staff. There has to be chemistry, there has to be culture, and then you have to go perform. So our expectation is that we're in the hunt for Big Ten and national championships. I said it (during Diebler's introductory press conference), we want to cut down nets. We all embrace that. We have to keep building. On the basketball side, we probably have a little farther to go. Football, we think we'll be right there. That's going to be the expectation really in all of our sports that we compete at the highest level.

"There's going to be a recalibration that we talked about with all of this. Not necessarily around football and our revenue sports, but there is going to be a recalibration of what all this looks like in this landscape. We'll adapt to that, and we'll be relevant. No matter what, we'll be relevant. Because Ohio State is Ohio State, and we know that we're going to compete on the biggest stages every single time."

BSB: Wrapping up, what would an ideal tenure look like for you at Ohio State?

Bjork: "Gene has said it: You have to have a long-term perspective here. To me, the fundamentals are, 'Leave it better than you

found it.' Now that's a high bar, because it's pretty darn good right now. We know that it is. It's really good. Academically, I mean it's unbelievable, the academic accolades of our student-athletes and the graduation rates and all those kinds of things. But if you take a long-term view of the fundamentals of, 'Leave it better than you found it,' then I'll make the right decisions along the way. We'll hire the right people along the way.

"We could have gone out and hired a splash in men's basketball and won the national press conference. To me, that's not what it's all about. It's about, 'Who's the best person for our job?' And we won the local press conference, that's for darn sure, with Jake Diebler. So you have to look at it that way, holistically, for the whole department. Leave it better than you found it, knowing that that's a high bar. No one's ever going to replace Gene Smith. All I can do is be the best version of myself. And I can only promise a couple of things:

"That's working hard. That's having an unbelievably positive attitude every single day and then being a strategist on how to capitalize on all the great things about Ohio State. Those things I know I can do. The rest of it will come because we did all of those things correctly. So to me, that will be what I strive for every single day. Are we making it better than it was the day before? Are we making it better for the long term? That's going to be my perspective and vision. There are going to be specific elements from a strategy standpoint that we'll lay out at the right time. But that's what I'm going to promise early on, is simply to try to leave it better than you found it. That's all you can do."

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Geiger Reflects On Wide-Reaching Career As AD

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Former colleagues have described Ferdinand August Geiger as everything from “a renaissance man” to “a visionary.” A wide-ranging career in college athletics administration, one that spanned six different decades during which Geiger served seven universities, earned him those descriptions as well as a host of accolades.

But now removed from the competitive nature of college sports, he is more comfortable when you simply call him “Andy,” a still-active octogenarian enjoying retirement in his home on the banks of a river on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, surrounded by his family, flower garden and jazz records.

A native of upstate New York, Geiger was on his way to becoming a railroad engineer when fate stepped in to begin a love affair with college sports that lasted well over a half-century. He was coaxed into trying out for the freshman crew team at Syracuse University, and two years later he was a member of the U.S. squad that won a gold medal at the 1959 Pan American Games.

Injuries derailed his own athletic career, but his involvement in what he calls “the arts department” of the athletics business – Olympic sports such as volleyball, fencing, wrestling and his beloved crew – led to a career as a coach and administrator lasting nearly 50 years, including athletic directorships at universities across the nation, most notably Stanford and Ohio State.

At the age of 32, he earned his first job as athletic director, leading a small Ivy League department at Brown University. Less than a decade later, he would oversee 27 national championships at Stanford before helping to resurrect the athletic program at Maryland, reeling in the wake of repeated NCAA investigations and the 1986 death of basketball star Len Bias due to cardiac arrhythmia induced by a cocaine overdose.

Five years later, Geiger was on the move again, this time to Ohio State where he led one of the most ambitious building and renovation projects any university had ever seen – all while presiding over a behemoth program that continued to add sports and win championships.

But there is more to Geiger than athletics – much more – and he admits that some of the most important things came to him later in life.

Twenty-five years into their marriage, Geiger and his wife, the former Eleanor Rollings, a math teacher who earned advanced degrees at whatever college was next on her husband’s career path, adopted their two sons.

“I think it was a way Eleanor and I renewed our vows in a spiritual way,” he said. “Parenting changes your life. It brought us really close together. It’s probably the healthiest thing I’ve done in my development as a human being.”

It was also in his late 40s that Geiger

became friends with legendary jazz tenor saxophonist Stan Getz. Getz was the music department’s artist-in-residence at Stanford, and he took the Geigers on tour with him to Israel and later presented Andy with a musical instrument that would change his life – his own tenor sax.

Once he picked up the instrument and began to learn some of the improvisational riffs that had been filling his head for years, Geiger found an outlet that took him away from the pressures of major-college athletics. It is a hobby-turned-obsession that he pursues to this day.

“Andy is one of the icons in our industry,” said former Horizon League commissioner Jon LeCrone, whose time with Geiger goes back more than 30 years when both were in the Atlantic Coast Conference. “But he’s also a renaissance man. That’s what makes him such a good man, such good company, and such a fascinating person to be around. He has an excellent mind and can talk about any topic, politically, socially or musically.”

Geiger has also endured his share of criticism over the years.

He had an embarrassing public incident while at Stanford when, during a conference tour, he engaged in a heated argument with a sportswriter from Seattle, an argument that ended with Geiger pouring a glass of wine on the writer’s head. The self-described “low moment” sent Geiger to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and he did not drink for years thereafter.

“I’m not a teetotaler now,” he admitted before adding, “but ever careful.”

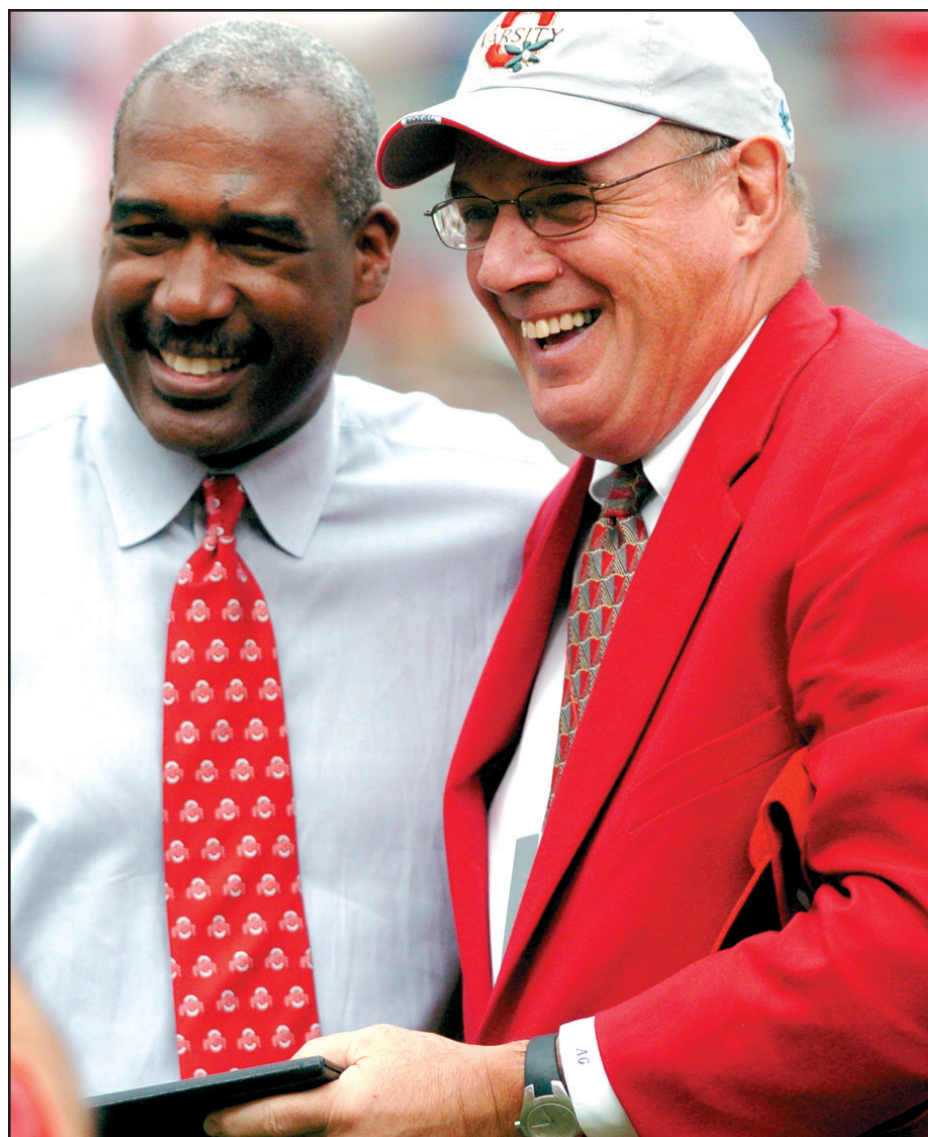
Geiger was also in the middle of two controversies in the summer of 2003 when he rescinded the scholarship of Ohio State star running back Maurice Clarett because of alleged violations of the amateur clause and then fired men’s basketball coach Jim O’Brien for committing alleged NCAA violations. Both cases wound up with lawsuits filed against Geiger and the university.

Geiger was even criticized for what some thought was an over-enthusiasm for building projects, going so far as to derisively nickname the markedly-changed OSU campus landscape as “Andy-land.” But what some saw as shortsighted, others saw as prescient.

“Andy is a visionary in what needs to be accomplished,” said former Wisconsin athletic director Pat Richter. “He was very aggressive in building facilities at Ohio State and was criticized at the time for the cost. But I’m sure the people there now are saying they’re glad he did what he did.”

Those projects, as well as the myriad changes in today’s world of college athletics, provided the backdrop for BSB’s telephone interview with Geiger from his Pacific Northwest home.

BSB: I’d first like to ask your opinion about how the landscape of college athletics has changed since you began your career as an assistant athletic director at your alma mater Syracuse in the 1960s.



FILE PHOTO

AT THE HELM — Former AD Andy Geiger (right, pictured here with Gene Smith) enjoyed a career in collegiate athletics that spanned six decades and earned him numerous honors and accolades.

Geiger: “It’s changed enormously. All of things that have happened just in the last two years – the transfer portal, the NIL or whatever it’s called, the financial consortiums that have been formed – the tremendous changes that have taken place and continue to take place, I believe were inevitable at some point. But it’s a completely different situation now than when I was an athletic director. It’s changed a lot, and I think that change is still developing.”

BSB: Do you think the changes such as conference realignment, expanded football playoff and basketball tournaments, seemingly unlimited NIL money, and a spinning-door transfer portal are good or bad for college athletics?

Geiger: “I have a lot of thoughts about that. I don’t care for it, but there should be an asterisk attached to that opinion. I’ve been mostly out of it for nearly 20 years, but I think a lot of what we did at Ohio State laid the groundwork for what has turned out to be the inevitable.

“I was pretty much shocked when I got to Ohio State and saw the condition of the facilities, particularly the football stadium. There were rickety bleachers at the south end of the Horseshoe, chunks of concrete were falling regularly, and the wiring was from the original construction in the early

1920s. There was asbestos and lead piping throughout. There was one elevator, and that was supposed to be used only for access to the press box. C-deck had zero bathrooms. Zero. Nothing. And two little concession stands. It just wasn’t safe.

“So I started to lobby that we had to do something. Long story short, we undertook a massive renovation project, introduced a lot of luxury suites and other amenities, and completely changed the financial basis for the football program. We bonded that project because we needed to maintain the 33-sport athletic program. We needed to pay our annual fee on the bond and all of that sort of thing, so we really pushed the financial envelope in terms of sponsorships, corporate involvement, and as a result, the stadium became quite a center for all types of events because of the changes that we made.

“Therefore, I can’t really be a critic of what’s happening now. It would be disingenuous of me because I see the footprint. My hope and prayer is that Ohio State will continue to support the broadly-based athletic program. The joy I felt doing the Ohio State job – not everything was joyous, of course – but the thing I remain most proud of was maintaining the broad base of the program. Rather than reduce men’s teams in order

INTERVIEW ISSUE: ANDY GEIGER

to satisfy Title IX requirements, we added women's programs, and tried to upgrade everything for everyone. If there is something that has been maintained regarding what I might have accomplished at Ohio State, it has been the maintenance and support of the broadly-based program.

"I am really excited that Ohio State won another women's ice hockey national championship this year. That means a lot. It means a lot to me as a rower that when I was an undergraduate, Syracuse supported a program that generated no revenue whatsoever other than alumni donations. But it was an enormously powerful learning experience for me to be able to participate in that program. That was always my driving philosophy as an athletic director. And the only way Ohio State was ever going to do that was to become even stronger – not only a competitive powerhouse in football, but an economic powerhouse as well. I think Gene (Smith) and his staff have done an awesome job in continuing that vision and improving upon it."

BSB: You were always a champion of what used to be known as non-revenue sports, going so far as to say that you were more proud of a national championship in fencing at Ohio State than of the national championship in football.

Geiger: "Well, maybe 'more proud' was a poor choice of words. I would amend that to say equally proud. I truly believe in the value of athletic education for people who are gifted in athletics. It's like music education for people who are really gifted in music. I mean, Ohio State has an outstanding music program, and I don't see any difference between that and the athletic program in terms of the value to the participants. I think there is great value in sport when it's done well and done right. The young people who came to Ohio State because we had that (fencing) program and such a great coach, I think that meant a great deal to the university.

"I have sometimes been accused of being, for lack of a better word, anti-football. Nothing could be further from the truth. I love football. Always have. But I think there is a curse on football if you're not good at anything else – both in the athletic department and elsewhere. Football at Ohio State is excellent, but I think excellence shouldn't be reserved for the football program. Excellence is something all parts of a university should strive for.

"I said I was as proud of our national championship in fencing as the one in football because I think trying very hard for success in as many sports as possible validates the football program. If any school is just having teams for the sake of having them, and not investing anything in them, and all that school does is win football championships, then you have a football factory. I was never interested in that."

BSB: I'm interested in how you got into sports administration. Was that something you thought about from an early age?

Geiger: "No. Growing up, I was fascinated by trains and I wanted to become a railroad engineer. I went to college with the idea that I was going to get an undergraduate degree in business with an emphasis on transportation because I had a love affair with railroads. I grew up in Syracuse, New York, and just had a fascination with

trains while growing up, and that continued for quite a while."

BSB: What happened? How did you get from the railyard to the athletic department?

Geiger: "As I was going into the gymnasium to register for classes at Syracuse in September of 1957 – I was tall and thin, and the crew guys were recruiting. I was approached and asked if I was interested in rowing, and I said yes. I started as a total novice – as most of us did back in the day. I was in the freshman boat, and I was astounded at how that impacted my life in terms of conditioning and dedication and commitment to something more than yourself. It was then that I discovered that athletics is a pretty special thing. And I got the idea that if that could happen to me, it could happen to others. I immediately wanted to get into coaching at that point.

"I thought it would be several years before I would begin coaching, but I suffered an injury. I'd had a bad back off and on and was declared not medically fit to row during my senior year at Syracuse. So I became a coach. My first job after graduation was a physical education instructor and assistant rowing coach for the heavyweight crew at Dartmouth College. I did that for three years and had a marvelous experience with the sport. But I was interested in all sports."

BSB: Is that how your interest in athletic administration came about?

Geiger: "Sort of. The sport with which Syracuse was most associated during my undergraduate days was football. Jim Brown had finished fifth, I believe, in the Heisman Trophy voting in 1956, the year before I got to campus, and then Ernie Davis won the Heisman in 1961. Ernie was going to play for the Cleveland Browns (as the overall No. 1 pick in 1962) and would have gotten to play with Brown – what a backfield that would have been. But, of course, Ernie tragically died just a few months later of leukemia and never got to play in the NFL.

"At any rate, it was an exciting time on campus because of the football team. We went to bowl games and everything like that. So I went to the football coach – a man named Ben Schwartzwalder, who was head football coach at Syracuse for 25 years – and asked if I could be a manager and spend some time in the athletic department to learn what it was all about. So I did that.

"Then, when I was at Dartmouth, I got involved with other activities within the athletic department. I was even the P.A. announcer at football and basketball games. Then after three years there, at the age of 25, I got a call from Syracuse. The assistant athletic director (Jim Decker) had just been promoted to athletic director, and he asked if I'd be interested in coming back to be his assistant. So that kind of put me at a crossroads. I had to make a choice. Did I want to try for a career in coaching or was I interested in athletic administration? Obviously I decided upon administration and wound up spending six years back at Syracuse."

BSB: You also tried your hand at helping run a conference.

Geiger: "That's right. I spent one year as assistant commissioner of the Eastern College Athletic Conference, which was then a pretty big deal because all of those leagues

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Retirement Allows Geiger Time For Music

Continued From Page 17

like the Big East hadn't formed yet. We had Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Boston College ... we were known as 'The East Indies.' (Laughs.)

"We had more than 200 members divided into Divisions I, II and III much like the NCAA. I spent a year there, doing things like hiring referees, managing championships, and all that kind of thing – and I hated it. But I thought it was a way to move my career along a little bit. After about 11 months of that, I went after and got the job as director of athletics at Brown University. Then, I went from there to the University of Pennsylvania. Four years at Brown, four years at Penn, and then 12 years at Stanford, four years at Maryland, and almost 12 years at Ohio State."

BSB: I'm interested in how someone who had grown up, went to school and spent the first decade and a half of his career in the East suddenly found himself on the opposite end of the country at Stanford.

Geiger: "With the obvious being the change of location, it wasn't that much different. I was already in the Ivy League, and for all intents and purposes, Stanford is an Ivy League school as far as academics, reputation, standards and tradition. It's just 3,000 miles away from the other Ivy League schools. Stanford – it's hard to describe because it's such an unbelievable place. I just fell in love with it. So I applied, and lo and behold, I got the job and we moved out west. I had 12 amazing years there."

BSB: You enjoyed tremendous successes at Stanford, winning 27 national championships in a variety of sports. You had such a good deal going when Maryland approached you to take over an athletic department already on NCAA probation and reeling from the death of basketball player Len Bias. What led to the decision to go from such a prosperous program to one in tatters?

Geiger: "Several things went into that decision. Twelve years as an athletic director at an institution like Stanford is a good, long tenure. At the time, my wife's mother and my mother were in their late 80s, early 90s, and living on the East Coast, and we had adopted two boys. One was born in 1986, and the other in 1988, and we wanted them to meet and know their grandmothers as well as have a relationship with the rest of the family. That was one reason why I was interested in moving back East."

"The second was, as wonderful as Stanford was, it was a hard job. I had done it for 12 years and I was tired. I had just hit a mental wall, and they probably realized it as well. We weren't in any kind of trouble, but (Maryland) was an opportunity where I was asked to help on a consulting basis. When I was still at Syracuse, the first athletic directorship I ever applied for was at Maryland. I didn't get it, but it had always been on my mind."

"Then, Maryland intrigued me at that time because of the challenge. It was on probation, it had no money, and was really struggling. It was a job we call a two-athletic-director job because it's almost too much for just one person to handle. But I did what

I could and like to think we did some good there."

BSB: And then after five years at Maryland, you took over at Ohio State.

Geiger: "I got a call from (then OSU president) Gordon Gee to gauge my interest in the Ohio State job, and I initially said no because I was fully immersed in what we were trying to do at Maryland. But he persisted, and I finally said, 'OK, I'll come and take a look.' As it turned out, I liked them and they liked me, and I decided to make that move. I found that Dr. Gee can be very persuasive and very persistent. There is only one Gordon Gee. He is a remarkable guy."

BSB: We've already talked a bit about your accomplishments at Ohio State. Would you care to talk about your reasons for leaving when you did?

Geiger: "Sure. I don't think it's any great secret that I was weary – the kind of tired that a nap doesn't fix. I was 66 at the time and felt like I didn't want to do it anymore. I had lost the sense that it was fun. I was not feeling like I was accomplishing anything important at that point. All I felt like I was accomplishing was fighting fires. The president (Karen Holbrook) wanted me to stay, but I didn't want to."

"It was a heartfelt decision. It didn't mean I didn't care about Ohio State or was angry over something. Frankly, I was worried about my health. I didn't like the way I was behaving. I was really heavy, wasn't feeling very well, and I thought, 'This is pretty dangerous.' So, I thought the time was right. And, again, 12 years as athletic director – whether the institution is Stanford or Ohio State – that's probably long enough."

BSB: When you left Ohio State, it seemed you were content to ride off into retirement. But after a seven-year pause, and at the age of 73, you accepted the job at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. What went into that decision?

Geiger: "It started as a consulting job. Michael Lovell, who was chancellor at UWM at the time, got in touch with me and asked me to come and take a look at the program. Then he asked me to stay on for a couple of months. That turned into him asking me, 'Why don't you just stay on awhile as athletic director?' I did that, but it was hard. My wife was still on the West Coast, and I knew I was just a place-holder. I did some fundraising for them while they found a new athletic director, and when they did, I thanked them and went home."

"I did get to meet one of the most amazing people I've ever met in my life during my time at UWM, and that was Michael Lovell. I went there because of my fondness for him and what he was trying to do. Michael later became president at Marquette University, where he was again doing great things. Sadly, he just recently passed away from sarcoma at the very young age of 57. It's such a shame, too, because Michael was such a good guy, a special guy. Although it was hard in many respects, I have a lot of fond memories of being in Milwaukee, and getting to know Michael is just one of them."

BSB: I'd like to talk a bit about music. You were once quoted as saying, "Sports

are my business, but the music, that's a religion." Do you still feel that way?

Geiger: "More and more every day. I take great joy in listening to and now playing jazz music. I am a very mediocre tenor saxophone player, but I'm tremendously enthusiastic. I play tenor in a local big band and have my own group. You know, my given name is Ferdinand, and the group is called 'Fat Ferdie and the Stolen Sweet.' (Laughs.) We play six to eight regular gigs a year, and then if anything else pops up that we like, we do that. I like to think I'm a decent player. The sax and I get along OK. We'll play just about anything from the Great American Songbook – jazz, rock, Latin standards, you name it. But I'm partial to jazz."

"I'm actually going to music camp this summer for the second year in a row. It's more of a jazz workshop at a place here in Washington called Port Townsend. There is a former Army base there called Fort Worden. It's where the movie 'An Officer and a Gentleman' was filmed back in the early 1980s."

"I go up there for a week, live in a barracks, and interact with great professional musicians from all over the country. I'll be there with 200 other campers this year. Last year, they made a point of saying the campers ranged in age from 14 to 84. Well, I know who the 84-year-old was. But I look forward to it. It's great fun."

BSB: This is a game music lovers enjoy playing, so I'll try it with you. If you were limited to listening to only one jazz saxophonist, which would you choose? John Coltrane or Stan Getz?

Geiger: "I would choose Getz. That's because of the personal relationship. I love them both dearly, but I knew Stan really well and was very close to him while I was at Stanford. He gave me my first horn, you know. We were really tight. Coltrane is great, of course. In fact, when I was introduced as athletic director at UWM, it was to the sounds of Coltrane's 'Blue Train.' But if I could only listen to one, it would be Stan."

BSB: Most people of a certain generation choose warmer climates such as Florida or Arizona when it comes time for retirement. How did someone born and bred in upstate New York, someone who had crisscrossed the country during his professional career, find a tiny corner of the Pacific Northwest in which to retire?

Geiger: "When we were at Stanford, we had traveled up and down the Pacific coast because we were in the Pac-12 – the late, lamented Pacific-12 Conference. Most of our summer AD conferences were in either Oregon or Washington, and we really liked the climate here and it's just drop-dead gorgeous. I mean, it's really beautiful."

"So my wife was traveling with our women's basketball team at Ohio State on a summer tour in Europe, sitting on the bus somewhere in Switzerland with a guy who was running the trip for a travel organization, and the guy happened to be from Bremerton, Washington, and he and Eleanor got into a conversation about retirement. He talked up the Pacific Northwest, but we really liked the Smoky Mountains area around Asheville, North Carolina, and

thought about retiring there."

"We visited both but were a bit leery of the Pacific Northwest because of the amount of yearly rainfall it gets. We didn't want that. Then the guy asked if we'd ever heard of a place called Sequim (pronounced SKWIM). He said that it was located in what's known as a 'rain shadow,' and only gets about as much rain a year as Columbus, Ohio. So, we came out to take a look, fell in love with it, and bought a place. It very seldom gets over 75 degrees here, and it very seldom freezes. It's very temperate and we like that very much."

"Fishing, boating, hiking – it has everything, and we've done all of that. I particularly enjoyed fly fishing. Nowadays, though, I pretty much keep to gardening. Mostly flowers, but I have a garden (model) railroad, too, same as I had in Columbus. I guess I never got too far away from railroading."

"That and my music. I practice every day, and I have a teacher that I met while I was in Milwaukee, and we FaceTime once a week. I work at it because I'm so fascinated by all of these tunes that I love. So, I play along – sometimes with the records and try to learn the solos they're playing – and the time just flies by because I love it so much."

BSB: I would like to ask about your family and how they are doing.

Geiger: Well, Eleanor is off on a hike right now. Every Monday, she goes out on a hike of about six miles with a group that calls itself 'The Ramblers.' They also have a seniors' edition called 'The Amblers.' (Laughs.) We live at the opening of Olympic National Park, and there is some elevation involved on the hikes, but it is simply beautiful. Breathtakingly beautiful. Eleanor is 82, I am 85, we are both extremely well – thankfully – and we will celebrate our 62nd wedding anniversary in August."

"Phil, our oldest son, is into aquatics. He was a member of a very, very successful swimming squad at Upper Arlington High School and went to Long Beach State as a recruited walk-on and never left. He's still in the Long Beach area and is working for the unified school district in swimming pool maintenance and management. They have six high schools and six pretty significant swim facilities, so he takes care of all of those and enjoys it tremendously. Our younger son, Greg, is a recruiter. He recruits software engineers for a little company you might have heard of – Google. We are truly blessed."

BSB: One final question. If you could write your own epitaph, how would it read?

Geiger: "Oh, my goodness. (Long pause.) I think, um ... I think I would want it to say something along the lines of because of my belief in athletics as a force for good, I worked very hard to make it a first-rate experience for the student-athletes that were involved in our programs over the years. I took a tremendous amount of pride and derived a tremendous amount of joy from being a director of athletics, and I hope our student-athletes got to experience some of the same."

Hayes Led Jim Jones To Athletic Department

The following is a reprint of an interview with former Ohio State athletic director Jim Jones, who passed away in 2020, from BSB's 2019 Interview Issue. The chat with Jones gives this issue interviews with the past five Ohio State Athletic Directors, spanning 40 years of Ohio State sports.

By **GARRETT STEPIEN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Jim Jones graduated with his degree in mathematics from Ball State, he never envisioned the path it would put him on.

With his foot in the door at Ohio State via the physical education department, Jones ended up on the football team's radar as head coach Woody Hayes sought out improved academics for the Buckeyes.

Jones became an academic advisor – or, as Hayes called it, the 'brain coach' – and embarked on an unexpected career in OSU's athletic department.

How did he go from support staffer to administrative assistant and, eventually, one of just eight athletic directors in the department's rich history?

Jones, who held the position from 1987-94, revealed his unique path to prominence in a recent interview with Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

BSB: You started out in Ohio State's physical education department. How did that opportunity arise? Did you ever think you would end up in your job as an academic counselor?

Jones: "I went to Ohio State to get my Ph.D. It's a long story, but I'm not a phys. ed. grad. I'm a mathematics graduate. But for whatever reason, my connections from Ball State, where I came from, got me a position in the (Ohio State) physical education department.

"The rest is history because shortly thereafter, a friend of mine told me that Coach Hayes had heard about me. I don't know if that's logical or who told him or what, but at any rate, he had heard about me and wanted to talk to me. 'Would you be interested?' And I said, 'Yes, I would.' For one reason, I don't know anybody that had ever played or coached in Ohio, which I didn't, who wouldn't want to say they had on their resumé that they interviewed with Woody Hayes. So I did.

"He did a very interesting thing in the first talk. It turned out that first talk was an interview, but I didn't know that. He was an unusual bird in that, normally, if you interview with somebody, they ask you for recommendations or whatever. He didn't ask me for anything like that. What he did was he made notes to himself about the conversation we had, such as, 'Who is your best professor?' or 'Whom did you work for?' Well, subsequently, when I went back, maybe four or five weeks after that, he had called all those people. So he got his own recommendations without asking me who to call (laughs), which is an interesting idea. Most people would ask for recommendations, so I'd give them my minister or my best friend or whatever, so I know that the recommendations would all be good. Well, that wasn't what he was looking for. But at any rate, he hired me.

"He and Darrell Royal, who was the long-time football coach at Texas, were very good friends. They had been talking – I don't know how long, but I know they had been talking –

and each of them had the idea that they'd like to have somebody on their staff to worry about the academic side. And so Woody beat Darryl to the punch, turns out, because I was Woody's first what he called 'brain coach.' They didn't have such a thing in the university's staff directory (laughs). And eventually, I became the athletic counselor. And now, it's a number of people. But at any rate, I was hired as the 'brain coach' on the football staff. Period. And unbeknownst to Woody, behind his back, I helped in two or three other sports because, originally, he had told me football first. So eventually, I made the job into something more than just football.

"I was the 'brain coach' and assistant to the freshman coach. In those days, freshmen were not eligible, so freshmen were separate from the varsity in practice and everything else. So I was the assistant to the freshman coach and a 'brain coach' and I operated what (Hayes) wanted for academics for football."

BSB: As an academic advisor or 'brain coach' for the Ohio State football team right before the 1968 national championship season, what did you think of Woody initially? What did Woody think of academics?

Jones: "(Laughs.) I don't know how to answer the first question. Academics were very, very, very important to Woody. Woody used to tell (the varsity players), along with every freshman with me, 'We are going to get your football out of you, we know more about how to get a good education than you do and we're going to see you get an education.' And that was his goal. He gave everybody a hard time.

"As a result, we started, I guess, what they call study hall now. We called it study table. So four nights a week, I met with all the freshmen for two hours and made sure that they spent time studying. In other words, I was, I guess, a poorly paid proctor for a study hall. And it was my job, eventually – and my idea – to start hiring tutors. So I would bring a math tutor in or an English tutor or whatever because, in those days, you had to write themes. I don't even know what they do now. The first quarter in English then was writing themes. The second one was term papers. And the third quarter was poetry. At any rate, I would bring in a tutor to help players write themes. Not very many freshmen that I ran across came to school prepared to write one- or two-page themes. I guess everybody emphasizes that now in high school, but in those days, they didn't.

"I have a former student who was a physician who treated me for sleep apnea. They put you in a room. He came down, knocked on the door and stepped in and he said, 'Hi, Coach.' And I said, 'Wait a minute, Jeff. My name's Jim. I'm your patient, remember?' And he said, 'I need to remind you of something. My first day on campus, as a freshman football player, Coach Hayes had all of us in a room with him and you, and he gave us this lecture about academics, and he said that this man's name is either doctor, Mr. or coach. No first names. So God dammit, for the rest of my life, you're going to be one of those three.' So we laugh about it now."

BSB: What do you think about the way academic emphasis has evolved through

the years? Support staffs seem to have grown exponentially, especially for academics in athletics.

Jones: "No question. It's getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and part of it's because of the emphasis and how they want to emphasize it with the players and the public. And part of it's because of the way they spend money now. We couldn't, in the old days. Money is nothing anymore in athletics. That's a terrible quote, but they have a lot more money to spend than I had.

"As I think back, I got hired as the 'brain coach.' The next day, (Hayes) came into my office. He said, 'I just came from the director of athletics and I got you more money than I thought I could ever get.' And I said, 'Coach, that's great. How much?' You ready for this? Sixty-eight hundred dollars. Period. (Laughs.) In those days, I think the top assistant coach was only making \$13,000 and Woody never made more than 50 (thousand dollars annually) the whole time he was with us. But I made \$6,800 in 1965 as the 'brain coach' – working a lot more than 40 hours a week."

BSB: Circling back to the '68 national champions, did you think that team would be so great? What do you remember from that season, being around for Ohio State's historical run?

Jones: "There are probably a lot of assistants out there that would shudder at my answer, but you have to remember, in 1967, we recruited a great group of freshmen. But we had had two bad years in a row. And in 1967, we went up to Michigan State, which was the defending national champion, and beat Michigan State in East Lansing.

"Coach Hayes said we had been told that we were gone – that was the whole football staff – and we came back from Michigan State. Now, we hadn't played Michigan yet. But we came back and (Hayes) convinced the powers that be and the board that we had this great freshman class and we deserved an opportunity to coach them, and if we couldn't win with them, then we ought to be fired. Yeah, we thought that they were pretty good, but we didn't realize that they were going to be that good.

"As I recall, in 1968, the starters – I want to say there were 18 or 19 of them – were sophomores. And obviously, that's how we saved our jobs. They were a great offensive football team, which is not what Ohio State was known for."

BSB: What are some of your favorite stories? Favorite players?

Jones: "My first answer would be I didn't have any favorites. I was close to various ones. I was close to the quarterback, Rex Kern.

"(Kern) has a story that he loves to tell the people about me because Coach Hayes came into this staff meeting – I always sat at the foot of the table with the defensive coordinator – and (Hayes) asked me, at the start of the meeting, if I read for pleasure. And I said, 'Yes, I do.' Remember, now, all the assistants are sitting at the side of the table. And he threw this book at me and it slid across the table and fell in my lap. And he said, 'Well, then read this book, because we have a great freshman in

there and he's got to pass this goddamn class.' It was psych 100 and it was the textbook for psych 100 that (Hayes) wanted me to read. And he was talking about Rex Kern. So Rex still laughs about that story."

BSB: After you were hired as an assistant director of athletics in 1969, Ohio State replaced Hayes with Earle Bruce in 1979. How did you move up, and why did Bruce make the most sense to replace Hayes?

Jones: "(The administrative move) came right after the national championship year in '69. The director of athletics retired, Dick Larkins. His associate, Ed Weaver, took over and two of us off the football staff, Hugh Hindman and Jim Jones, moved up to administration. And in those days, unlike now where you advertise the damn job for 47 people and interview a lot, there's no advertising of the job. The new director of athletics chose Hugh Hindman and me to take over in administration. So that was done in 1969.

"No, I did not (envision athletics administration). That was not where I thought I was headed. I got this call from Ed Weaver, the associate director of athletics. He needed to see me. I went to see him and he closed the door and he said, 'I think you should know that Friday I'm going to be named the director of athletics, OK?' It hadn't been announced that Dick Larkins was stepping down. He just told me that that's what was going to happen. And he said, 'When I am, it's my intention to make you an assistant.' I said, 'OK, fine.' So I'm going to be an assistant director of athletics. It's just a different title. Still working for the department.

"The rest, I guess, is history because I became a part of it. I remember telling Ed, 'Can I tell Woody?' And he said, 'No, he works for the department. I'll tell Woody, OK?' I don't know how he told Woody or what Woody said. I know that Woody wasn't real pleased with me leaving the staff. I continued on doing somewhat the 'brain coach' and the new job for a while. I probably took three or four months

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Ayers, Cooper Part Of Jones' Tenure With Buckeyes

Continued From Page 19

into the summer.

"And then Ed (1970-77) stepped down after seven years, Hugh (1977-84) became the director of athletics, and he moved me up to senior associate, which, to my knowledge, nobody in the country had one of those, either, at the time. Well, that was his way of designating (duties). Technically, I was going to be – in today's business world, I'd be known as the chief operating officer because everybody in the department answered through me to the director of athletics and he didn't worry about anything but the big problems.

"Subsequently, Woody was dismissed and I was the No. 2 guy. Both Hugh and I had worked for Woody, and Hugh had played for Woody at Miami (Ohio). At any rate, (Hayes) was dismissed at the (1978) Gator Bowl and I was the No. 2 guy at the time. That's when we went out and hired Earle Bruce. Subsequently, Rick Bay came."

BSB: You were involved with the head-coach hire of Earle in 1979 and, ultimately, his dismissal. What do you remember from each process?

Jones: "Well, No. 1, if you remember, Earle and I were on the football staff at the same time with Hindman. In my opinion, there was no better offensive football coach, offensive mind than Earle Bruce. He did one heck of a job for us. Obviously, I participated in (hiring Bruce) with Hugh being the director of athletics. And then, of course, Rick Bay (1984-87) came. Rick is the person that dismissed Earle at the behest of the president and the board of trustees. At that point in time, Rick was not a happy camper, and he stepped down when we dismissed Earle. And they named me the director of athletics."

BSB: Right in the middle of Ohio State firing Bruce in 1987, you became athletic director. How chaotic was that stretch?

Jones: "Well, it was very hectic and it was quick. Of course, I was close to Rick and I knew everything that was going on politically. Rick was a strong supporter of Earle Bruce, and for whatever reason, Earle was crossed with the president or the board – who knows. I was not part of that decision. Rick and the president discussed what was going to happen and eventually dismissed Earle. And when that happened, because he was a strong supporter of Earle's – and rightfully so, I might add – (Bay) left. He resigned. And I became the director."

BSB: So that decision with Earle, it was out of both your guys' hands?

Jones: "Well, it was definitely out of my hands. The president and the board of trustees were the discussion people."

BSB: And Rick stepped down because he didn't agree with that move?

Jones: "That's correct. That's correct."

BSB: Ultimately, it led to your hire as director of athletics. You said you never envisioned yourself going on that type of path. What was your reaction when you finally reached the heights of that position? With how fast it all transpired, was there ever a moment when that realization hit you?

Jones: "Oh, yeah, there was that moment. The faculty rep was a good friend of mine, and he had been talking to the president, unbeknownst to me, and I think he knew that



FILE PHOTO

SPANNING DECADES — Jim Jones served as athletic director from 1987-94. Jones was initially hired by Woody Hayes as an academic advisor prior to the 1968 national championship season.

the president was not going to have a big-time search like they do now. The president talked to the board, got the approval, called me in and said, 'I've talked to the board this afternoon.' This is the same day or next day after Rick stepped down. He said, 'I've talked to the board and I'm going to name you the director of athletics.' And here I am.

"It happened so fast and so confusing that there wasn't an opportunity to sit around and think about, 'Well, do you want this job?' Or, 'How do you want to do this job?' Or, 'What would you like to ask for?' There wasn't any opportunity to worry about all of that. It just happened so fast that I'd all of sudden ended up there. To a degree, with Hindman, I'd somewhat been a director of athletics as its chief operating officer. So I was familiar with the job and what needed to be done and so on. But I didn't anticipate, one, I was going to be the director of athletics and, two, it was going to happen the way it did."

BSB: What route did you originally see yourself going before eventually ascending up the ladder of Ohio State's athletic department? Hard to imagine director of athletics was the plan all along.

Jones: "(Laughs.) No, it wasn't the plan. You're right. (Laughs.) Well, when Ed Weaver moved me from the football staff – which, I thought, was probably going to be the pinnacle of what I accomplished in my life – I got moved into administration and Ed Weaver changed my life quickly. Everything happened pretty fast after that. I didn't have an opportunity to think about, 'Well, how do I get out of this?' Or, 'Well, what else should I do?' Especially when you think about it – director of athletics, there are a lot of those jobs. Up to the time that I had been named director of athletics, there had only been four predecessors in the history of the university – L.W. St. John, Dick Larkins, Ed Weaver, Hugh Hindman and then me. It just so happened, we didn't go outside. Everybody was always an inside person. It's just the way it was. So there was no opportunity for me to think about all of that.

"When things did die down, I sat in that red

chair and thought about it. I had a strong assistant, Bill Myles, who we brought on from the football staff. He was a strong assistant, and he used to tease me about two or three things. Well, No. 1, if a kid would come in complaining or questioning a decision, he'd bring them down the hall, stand outside my office and he would say, 'You see that big red chair in there? Until you have sat in that big red chair, you will not understand the job that the director of athletics has.'

"And secondly, he used to tease me a lot because he said, 'You realize being the director of athletics at Ohio State is one of the two or three or five powerful jobs in the state of Ohio?' If you go back and look at the history book, L.W. St. John started it all and all the other successors were in the department. In L.W.'s days, the legislature used to come up to Ohio Stadium on Saturday morning to pick up their football tickets to go to the game. That made the director of athletics pretty damn strong, when you've got the legislature coming in to see you to get their tickets."

BSB: John Cooper replaced Earle. You chose Cooper, an outsider from Arizona State. What stood out about him as a candidate?

Jones: "Well, the process, first of all – the board of trustees had an idea of how they wanted the search done and what they wanted me to do and whom they wanted me to look at and find. For one thing, the board, in those days, wanted no part of anybody who had worked for or was associated with Earle Bruce. So that restricted, obviously, what we could do. Then it was my job – and I met with the president.

"We eventually had a three- or four-man committee. But Bill Myles and I, essentially, chose whom the candidates were going to be that we were going to interview. I met with the board of trustees, explained to them what we were doing and what we were looking for because they were very interested in making sure that whomever we chose had nothing to do with Earle Bruce. I'm not sure I understand that, to this day, but it is what it is.

"So it was my job, with Bill Myles, search out four or five candidates and then we had a search committee. The search committee was the president, secretary of the board of trustees, Bill Myles and myself and a faculty representative and that was it. We interviewed five or six or seven or eight (candidates) and it was my job to select one and convince the president that that's what we wanted to do. And that was John Cooper.

"The downtown people, in those days, had done their research, obviously. The Wolfe family (owners of The Columbus Dispatch) was strong in Columbus and still is, and they were effusive in their praise for John Cooper: they did their research. John, I think, was a good football coach and a damn good recruiter. Unfortunately, he had two or three things going against him. One, he had a Southern accent. Two, he didn't beat Michigan, which doesn't help you in Ohio. In fact, I don't think, until John Cooper, any football coach had ever survived more than two losses in a row to Michigan. And of course, it was my job to convince the board – well, the athletic board as well as the board of trustees – that we were progressing and that we were on the right track. I guess they believed me – for a while, at least – because he was still the football coach when I left. (Laughs.)"

BSB: Cooper got off on the wrong foot with the Ohio State fan base in 1988, going 4-6-1. How much did that hinder his tenure as head coach? How stressful was it for you?

Jones: "Well, it was very stressful. And on top of it, you obviously want your choice to be successful. And when we weren't, it was stressful. I kept looking for reasons why that was happening, were we going in the right direction and so on. I think subsequent years turned that to be the case. You know, John's a good football coach. John had some good wins.

"At any rate, John was out of a different mold than Ohio State football coaches had been known for. He was much more open. When he came to us from Arizona State, he had done the coach's show in the stadium after the game. Woody Hayes had the longest-running coach's show in the country. For 28 years, he did it in Columbus, Ohio, on Saturday night after the home games. He did it for different reasons than anyone else. He did it because he thought it was expected of the Ohio State football coach. A lot of those people that succeeded him, one of the things that they wanted for that was some extra money, which is typical. That was not what Woody was interested in."

BSB: The morning of the Michigan game in 1991, Ohio State announced a three-year contract extension for Cooper. The Wolverines won 31-3, though, leading to criticism of the move. Looking back on the decision, what do you think about the optics of it? Do you ever wish you could do it differently?

Jones: "No. Nope. I did it the way we should have done it. It just didn't all work out. The president wanted to talk to me about it and he was getting a lot of pressure, as was I, and obviously John was not the most popular guy in Columbus. And I said, 'Mr. President, you need to understand. No. 1, in my opinion, Ohio State embarrassed themselves by the way in which we got rid of Earle Bruce.' I said, 'I don't think that we should do that a second time. And my contention is we gave this guy five years, and I think we should live out the five

years, OK? I don't think we ought to do it any different than that. And one additional thing, I think we need to add three years to his contract.' And of course, the president said, 'Oh, my God. I'll never sell that to the board.' I said, 'Well, here's the way you sell it to the board, because here's the way it ought to be looked at.'

"We were going to add three years. What I was interested in was John Cooper and his staff, as much pressure as they were getting, be able to go into a recruit's home and say, 'You don't have to worry, because Coach Cooper has a four-year contract, through your four years, OK?' That was my thinking in why we wanted to add. I think that was logical, so I've never gone back and thought any differently. Obviously, it didn't come off well in the press and the result of the game didn't help it, but nevertheless, we survived it."

"That particular Michigan game, the president – behind my back – had a PR guy release it to the press just before the kickoff that we were adding three years to the contract. Clearly, that did not sit well with the press. They didn't want to get it at the last minute. They wanted to cover the game and on and on and on. And it is what it is. I would not have released it that way, no. I was never asked, so I never had to answer that question from any press people I know of, but he decided that's the way he wanted it done and it was released – not by me – that we were adding three years to the contract. And of course, the press guys, that's not what they wanted to cover right there. They wanted to cover the game."

BSB: On the court, head men's basketball coach Gary Williams (1986-89) left Ohio State for Maryland – his alma mater – after three years. But things seemed more complicated. Why do you think Williams left?

Jones: "Well, Gary Williams was a good basketball coach. If I were to criticize him after the fact, the only criticism I have of the way he coached the team was he wound them up tighter than a ball of string. It was difficult to play for Gary Williams, and that's just how he ran his operation. I think that took its toll on our players, but that's just me."

"Why did he leave? I think part of it was he got sold a bill of goods by Rick Bay when we hired him, but I don't know that that's fair in that he came from a school, Boston College, where football was more important and hockey was more important than basketball. And I don't think he was looking for that to happen again. And it turned out that's exactly what happened."

"I told Gary this once – and no one knows this – but we had this discussion. I was in his office, and I said, 'Gary, I want you to look out the window and then I want you to take a walk with me.' We were in St. John Arena. He said, 'Well, where are we going?' I said, 'Well, we're going out and we're walking around that stadium. There is no university that I know of that has a 90,000-seat stadium in the middle of their campus. So don't think for one minute that anything is going to be more important than football at Ohio State. That's foolish to think that way. That doesn't mean you can't be as important as football, but you're never going to outshine football in Columbus, Ohio. Fred Taylor did a super job with our men's basketball program and our basketball program was very good, but you've got to understand my point.'"

BSB: Did you ever feel like Williams was uncomfortable at Ohio State or grew tired of basketball being second to football?

Jones: "I don't have any idea. I never dis-

cussed that with him. He played at Maryland and he got that opportunity, but he had interviewed at more than one place. And I finally told him, 'You know what, Gary? You've got to decide where you want to be.' I said, 'I can't keep going to the president and telling him that I'm giving you permission to interview someplace. Because at some point in time, he's going to ask me, well, do you have the wrong guy?' And I didn't think we had the wrong guy, but I don't think he was ever comfortable at Ohio State. And Maryland, of course, was going home. Obviously, he did a hell of a job at Maryland. After the fact, they thought highly of him."

BSB: You ultimately promoted Randy Ayers, an assistant for Williams for all three seasons, to head coach in 1989. What went into the decision to hire him?

Jones: "Well, two or three things. You're talking to an old traditionalist, who had been at Ohio State for a long time and Ohio State means a lot to him, Jim Jones."

"However, when Gary Williams left us, it was late in the summertime, so that it was going to be difficult to get anybody with any kind of a job to interview at Ohio State. Because if you had done a pretty good job, you don't want it to get out, just before school starts, that you're looking to leave. That's one. You don't want that to leak out, so that made it difficult to get somebody, and that was a major problem. And (promoting Ayers) had nothing to do with other than the fact that Gary decided to leave and it was late. Most of the guys that had pretty good jobs had agreed to stay where they were and they weren't looking, so it was difficult for us. But yes, we did interview some other people. And in the end, I decided that Randy Ayers was the guy. And I think Randy did a good job with us. Subsequently, I don't know what my successors thought after I left."

"I watched Randy as an assistant to Gary and I watched him in recruiting. You've got to look at what's important when you're hiring a coach. It's can they recruit, how's the public image and so on. He had checked all the boxes for me. The only thing that you wished that he'd had was experience. He had never been a head coach. Up till then, he had done all the other things. He had played, he been at a high level, he had been a No. 1 assistant, he had done a lot of recruiting. So he did all of those things."

BSB: Ayers got off to a good start at Ohio State, eventually clashing with Indiana and Bobby Knight, rekindling a rivalry between the Buckeyes and Hoosiers. What did you think about the rivalry between OSU and IU at that time?

Jones: "Indiana and Ohio State had a rivalry way back to Fred Taylor. Bob Knight is a good friend of mine. He was a student (playing forward for the Buckeyes from 1959-62). He had his feelings about Ohio State. I think, at one point in time of his career, I bet you he would have loved to succeed his coach, who was Fred Taylor, at Ohio State. But I don't know that. That adds fuel to the fire of the rivalry. And clearly, if you're sitting where Randy is, you don't enjoy anybody making comparisons to somebody else's program as compared to yours."

BSB: Drama came in 1993 when there were minor recruiting violations for Ohio State's pursuit of Cincinnati Woodward guard Damon Flint, who ended up signing with Cincinnati. Did it seem minor at the time?

Jones: "Well, I don't know what you want me to think. It was a minor thing. In today's world,

they probably wouldn't have even looked at it. In all kinds of ways in recruiting, with what you're allowed to do and where you're allowed to take recruits and so on, today (has changed drastically).

"Part of the thing that blew up with the Damon Flint situation was because he was being recruited by Cincinnati, which is not one of the favorite schools for Ohio State and, two, we were accused of taking him to lunch over at that restaurant on Olentangy River Road, which is less than a mile and a half from the (athletics) office. I don't remember now why we went there. I don't remember now why school was closed. But at any rate, in those days, you weren't supposed to take them any place, I guess, and we did – that is, Randy's staff did."

BSB: How much did the Flint probe wear you down? Did it at all?

Jones: "No. Nope. Because I thought we did everything that we were supposed to do. I responded to the NCAA and it is what it is. If they decide there's a violation, tell me what the violation is and what the penalty is. That didn't bother me. Obviously, it must've bothered Andy Geiger or he wouldn't have let (Ayers) go."

BSB: You ultimately resigned. Was there a buyout involved? What went into the decision to step down?

Jones: "Well, No. 1, I didn't get a buyout. No. 2, I had the maximum number of years in the retirement system already. The president and I weren't on the same wavelength, and I determined that I couldn't continue working for him and I'm sure he thought the same thing. So I just stepped down."

BSB: Did you feel like you were forced out?

Jones: "It was my decision to leave. I guess I could have fought it a little longer to see if I was going to be forced out. I didn't think about that. I just couldn't get on the same wavelength as the president. Therefore, it was up to me to leave. My predecessor, if you recall, got into a catfight with the board of trustees and the president. I was determined that I wasn't going to be one of those kinds of people."

"But I didn't get any buyout. I wish that I had, now that I look at all these numbers. (Laughs.) When I look at the fact that Gene Smith (makes a lot) – well, go back to Andy Geiger. Andy Geiger, his first salary was way more than my best salary ever. And Gene Smith, you know, makes my salary look like a custodian's salary."

BSB: How much do you pay attention to Ohio State athletics today?

Jones: "I pay a lot of attention to Ohio State and the decisions, where they go and so on. I go to all the football games, and I go to a few basketball games before I go to Florida (for the winter). I just happen to go to Florida, so I don't see many basketball games."

BSB: What are your thoughts on Gene and what he's done throughout the course of his tenure as athletic director since 2005? You were someone who was in his shoes – obviously, at a different time. But you know what comes with sitting in that red chair.

Jones: "Well, No. 1, I believe that the predecessor has no business judging your successor. Secondly, I don't see that he's done anything wrong, offensive, whatever. He's done it different. It's his ideas as opposed to what I might have done or what other people might do. I think he's done fine. He's clearly got the department in good financial shape."



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Never A Dull Moment For Former AD Bay

By CRAIG MERZ

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Rick Bay was the athletic director at Ohio State from 1984-87, but during his short stint both football coach Earle Bruce and men's basketball coach Eldon Miller departed under unusual circumstances.

Bay, 82, is best known among Buckeye fans for his resignation in protest when OSU president Ed Jennings fired Bruce the week of the 1987 Michigan game. Bay accepts that, but in a wide-ranging interview with BSB he expounded on his love for the university and provided colorful insights as to how a "Michigan Man" won the support of even his harshest doubters while running one of the nation's premier athletic departments.

It's really an amazing journey for the former U-M wrestler and reserve football player (1961-65) to have a career that saw him butt heads with sports titans Phil Knight of Nike and George Steinbrenner of the Yankees, with whom he spent 100 days before leaving the fabled baseball franchise.

Bay was also AD at Oregon before the Ohio State job and afterward Minnesota and finally San Diego State – with a brief stop with the Cleveland Indians.

He wrote a book, "From Buckeyes to The Bronx" and several others on his travels around the world, but when BSB caught up to him he was in the Midwest visiting his brother.

When I mentioned during our lengthy chat that I didn't want to take any more of his time, he said, "That's OK. I'm in Iowa. There's nothing to do here."

He was laughing when he said it, and that was a constant sound throughout the conversation. He could barely get through recounting how he tried to win over Woody Hayes and Bruce, but he also provided texture into some of the major events in his professional life, especially those that involved Ohio State.

He was gracious with his time but more importantly happy to recount, as he put it, some of the best times of his life in Columbus.

BSB: What are you doing now?

Bay: "The last three years, I've been fully retired, and my wife and I live half the time, during the summer, we live in Ann Arbor, where I had a home for a long time, even when I moved around and worked in various jobs, but the other half of the year, in the winter, we live in Palm Desert, Calif. It's a nice combination.

"I'd like to say that I'm busy with all sorts of important agenda items, but I'm not really. I'm trying to stay fit and healthy and I'm playing a lot of golf, not very well, but it keeps me entertained, and lot of reading, that sort of thing.

"I did write for a while but I'm really not doing too much, either. I'm really in excellent health, except I've developed a little tremor in one hand. It not only hurts my

putting, which was bad to begin with, but it also makes it more difficult to type on a keyboard, which is irritating. I still can do it, but to get into long treatises is a bit of a challenge. So, I'm just enjoying life, to be honest with you, and trying to keep up with this crazy world of intercollegiate athletics, which has changed so dramatically in the last few years that it's hard for even someone with a background like mine to make heads or tails of it."

BSB: You led me to my next question. You've been following everything. Could you have predicted 20, 30, 40 years ago how this would turn out in college athletics?

Bay: "No, no. I don't think anybody could have. I can't say that it's wrong at all, but it's a model that I guess I don't like in the sense that I want to enjoy the differentiation between amateur athletics and professional sports. I think that line is no longer gray, it's pretty much erased.

"While it's true that college athletics, football and basketball in particular, generate millions of dollars, billions of dollars perhaps for schools and colleges, most of that money went back into overall programs, broad-based programs, other sports, providing opportunities for lots of young college athletes who were not football and basketball players. And I thought that was its main value to the university.

"Surely, coaches make a lot of money, but I think for the most part athletes were not being exploited by any stretch of the imagination, at least those who were not football and basketball players, and the non-revenue sports were certainly not generating a lot of money for universities or athletic departments. In fact, they were spending money, a lot more money than they were making, and it was a good thing for so many student-athletes who were not in the money-making sports."

BSB: What advice would you give current athletic directors, and are there basic tenets, principles that you had that still apply no matter the circumstances in the NCAA nowadays?

Bay: "Oh, boy. Well, you know, it's cliché, I guess, but integrity. It starts with integrity and how you deal with all your various publics – the student-athletes, for sure, but also your fan base and your university.

"You have to be above board on what your goals are and what you're really trying to achieve, and I hope that with all the changes we've seen, it's just not a matter of money, who makes what, but there's still the principle that competitive athletics does brings with it – the learning of values and it teaches people lifelong lessons about dealing with all sorts of issues that come up in one's life – dealing with success, but also dealing with failure. Those are things that, again it's cliché, but cannot be learned in a classroom or through books or lectures but have to be experienced."

BSB: Take me back to a young Rick Bay. How did you end up at Michigan and why wrestling over football? It sounds



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Jennings Fires Bruce, Bay Resigns

Winning Not Enough To Save Coach

By Ken Halloy

The late mail will end. Earle Bruce has been fired.

The Big Ten's winningest coach during his tenure was informed of his dismissal by athletic director Rick Bay the afternoon of Nov. 15, shortly after Bruce declared at his weekly postgame conference.

"I'm staying at Ohio State. I like my job. I'm going to prepare and work hard this week on Michigan," said the glass-eyed coach with his wife, Jean, at his side. "I'm going to stay and prepare this team next year through the winter and through the summer so that we can have a Big Ten championship next year."

There is no next year for Bruce, only the Michigan game, his last as the Buckeye coach. Bruce's nine-year record stands at 80-25.

Bruce has led the Buckeyes to four Big Ten championships and all of his eight teams played in bowl games. Ohio State and Nebraska are the only Division I schools in the nation to win nine or more games each of the past eight years.

Bruce's overall record of 126-60-1 ranks him in the top 15 nationally among active major college coaches.

The firing, ordered by university president Edward H. Jennings, was intolerable to athletic director Rick Bay. In protest, Bay resigned.

"I'm resigning based on philosophical differences with the administration," he said.

Jennings issued only a written statement, giving no reason for Bruce's dismissal.

"The president informed me he was under pressure to make a coaching change and that we had to do that," Bay said. "Earle Bruce, as a result of this action, after the game against Michigan, will no longer be the head football coach here at Ohio State."

There was speculation that the board of trustees was behind the decision, though trustees president Edmund Redman, in an interview with WCMH-TV in Columbus, denied a vote to fire Bruce was ever taken. Redman said the decision was solely Jennings', though he said he did agree with the president's action.

"The public image of Coach Bruce was not as good as it might be," Redman said.

Jennings appeared briefly on WBNS-TV, giving no reason for the decision.

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Differences Of Opinion Cited By AD

By Ken Halloy

On a day when the Ohio State University seemed to lose some of its integrity, Rick Bay kept his head.

Bay, in his third year as athletic director at Ohio State, resigned Nov. 16 when informed by university president Edward H. Jennings that football coach Earle Bruce was fired. Bay opposed the decision and has supported Bruce since rumors surfaced the morning after the Iowa game that Bruce's job was in jeopardy.

Jennings apparently made the decision without consulting the board of trustees. Bay said the decision was not rational, considering Bruce's record and graduation rate of football players.

"I'm resigning based on philosophical differences with the administration," Bay said at a press conference that afternoon.

"I had told the president earlier when we were discussing all these rumors that I could not be a part of that. I understood people were trying to do the right thing and I had to do what I thought was the right thing," Bay said.

Jennings issued a press release announcing Bruce's firing, but it was Bay who addressed the press. Jennings gave no reason for Bruce's dismissal in the release.

Bay said Jennings phoned him at 11:30 a.m. and told him of the decision to fire Bruce. The two then met at 1:30 p.m. to discuss details. But at 11:30 a.m., Bay knew his career as a Buckeye had ended.

"It (the decision to resign) was somewhat instantaneous, although I told the president a couple of weeks ago if we continue to move down this path and all the rumors were about – and the president indicated to me he was getting a lot of pressure – I told him I could not be a part of it," he said.

"I don't know if, when he called me today, whether he thought I'd reconsider or what. I don't mean to minimize he was calling my bluff. He had a decision to make, and I had one to make, and we both made our decisions."

The meeting was impromptu and caught Bay off guard.

"I didn't know he was going to call me this week. In fact I was a little surprised because while I knew there was possibly an impending crisis, I thought that the way that could happen, which has happened, would

Continued On Page 20

Rick Bay Explains Events Leading To Firing

Says Jennings. . .

The following is the statement released by Ohio State University president Edward H. Jennings on Nov. 16, 1987.

Earle Bruce has been relieved of his duties as head football coach at The Ohio State University. I will recommend to the board of trustees that the university fulfill the financial terms of his contract. We will initiate an immediate search for his successor. Coach Bruce has been a loyal Buckeye throughout his career. We are grateful for his dedication to the university, and to Ohio State's great athletic tradition. We wish him well for the future.

Furthermore, I have this afternoon accepted with regret Rick Bay's resignation as director of athletics. He has done a fine job as our athletic director and has agreed to remain with the university on special assignment to my office. We look forward to his continuing efforts on behalf of Ohio State.

I have named James L. Jones, senior associate director of athletics, as director effective immediately, and will recommend that the board of trustees approve his appointment at the next meeting.

FILE PHOTO
TAKING A STAND – Former AD Rick Bay's tenure came to an abrupt end when he resigned in protest following the firing of Earle Bruce the week of the Michigan game in 1987. Bay felt his authority had been undermined by the decision from president Ed Jennings and the board of trustees.

like you starred in both.

Bay: "My dad was a high school coach in Illinois near Chicago, Waukegan, Illinois, so I lived a very fortunate childhood because I was always around sports with my father. He was the wrestling coach and the football coach at Waukegan High School, so I played both sports and I also played baseball in high school but my best sport was wrestling.

"As a result of that, I ended up going to Michigan on a wrestling scholarship, but with the understanding with the wrestling coach that I would also be free to play football. So I did play both sports there for three years. My fourth year I wanted to play football and finish my fourth year. I was just a down-the-line quarterback. I was a second- or third-string quarterback. I didn't play very much, and I was a reserve placekicker as well.

"But it turned out in my senior year I was captain of the wrestling team, and my wrestling coach prevailed upon me to dedicate the entire year to wrestling and not go out for football, which I reluctantly agreed to do and it turns out the football team went to the Rose Bowl that year and won the Rose Bowl so I didn't get to be part of that experience. But at the same time, we had a couple of

great wrestling teams that won Big Ten championships so that was gratifying.

"When I finally graduated, I never intended to go into coaching. I was really a liberal arts major in English and speech, and I hoped to go into journalism and professional broadcasting. But that was during – and this really dates me – but it was during the Vietnam era and I was trying to get a job in broadcasting and the people that would interview me pretty much said, 'We might be interested in hiring you but we're going to train you and then you're going to get drafted so you might as well get your military out of the way before you get too far into your career aspirations.'

"So, I did that, and in the meantime my old wrestling coach called me and asked if I would like to be the assistant wrestling coach so I did that for four years, and then I became head coach (at Michigan) for four years and had two great teams, undefeated, Big Ten champs, came within a point of winning the national championship, but I knew I didn't want to coach forever so I left.

"But I couldn't get into administration right away. There wasn't an opening. I worked for the University of Michigan Alumni Association for about six or seven

years, but I also kept my hand in intercollegiate sports and was president of the United States Wrestling Federation, which at that time was trying to get national governing body status for the sport in the United States. I was working with another guy from the NCAA who was running the basketball tournament for the NCAA, but anyway, he was an Oregon graduate and said Oregon's looking for an AD. He wanted to stay with the NCAA, he recommended me and Oregon ended up hiring me as their AD, and that's where I was when Ohio State hired me three years later."

BSB: I know it's well chronicled you had some difficulties with Phil Knight and Nike and you stood your ground.

Bay: "Well, that was interesting. You know when I went to Oregon, I went there right at the time that Nike went public and really became a national, international company and Phil Knight had run track at Oregon and had been coached by the great Bill Bowerman. I hadn't known him or anything. At that point, it was very early, I know little Eugene, Oregon, had about eight or nine instant millionaires when Nike went public. Overnight. No pun intended.

"Phil at that time was supporting the track program but not the athletic department in general or the university at large. I didn't really know him, but he made an innocent mistake in the sense that he was sending Nike equipment directly to track and field, our track and field athletes, which was an NCAA violation so I had to call him on it. I just said, 'You know you can't do that.' And he said, 'Well, I tell you, I know you're a new AD, but I'm running this company and I'm a private citizen. I can do whatever I want.'

"And I said, 'Well, you know, you can do that but every time you do it I'm going to have to declare those kids ineligible,' so that put a stop to it immediately. You don't want that to happen.' I think he kind of took it personally. I didn't really have any ongoing issues with him. He did a great deal for the university, and after I left Nike got bigger and bigger and bigger. I mean, my gosh, he's donated hundreds of millions of dollars for the university at large. But we did kind of tangle over that."

BSB: How was the transition from Eugene to Columbus?

Bay: "Oh my gosh. I was just shocked. It kind of came out of the blue. I had been at Oregon for three years, and suddenly Ohio State's athletic directorship opened. I had read where Hugh Hindman was stepping down.

"You know, I had grown up an Ohio State fan even though I had gone to Michigan. As a kid, Hopalong Cassidy, Howard Cassidy, was my guy. And Robin Freeman in basketball and Frank Howard. For some reason those athletes captured my imagination as a young boy.

"When I was in junior high school, I still remember Tad Weed was a placekicker during Howard Cassidy's time. If Ohio State had recruited me, who knows? Woody was smart enough not to do it because I was never much of a football player as far as the college level. But anyway, Ohio State was always interesting to me.

"I had worked in the Alumni Association at Michigan for seven years so I knew Dan Heinlen, who was the Alumni Association president at Ohio State. He was prior to Archie. Out of the blue I called Dan and I

said, 'This is going to sound crazy but I'm at Oregon here and would you mind nominating me for the directorship of Ohio State?' He said, 'No, I think you'd be a great fit,' and said he would do that and so he did.

"I didn't expect anything really to come of it, but the next thing I knew I got a call from Ohio State to go meet with part of their search committee in Denver. I flew to Denver, met with the committee, and I asked the question, 'Why would you guys even consider somebody with a Michigan pedigree?' And they said that Ed Jennings, the president at the time, felt that Ohio State had been a little too inbred and that it was time to shake it up a little bit so he was interviewing people that had no Ohio State background. So apparently that was the motivation, and I interviewed there. I thought it went well. But again, I didn't expect much, but a couple of weeks later, I got a call, 'Hey, I think we're interested in you. Could you be ready to come to Columbus on short notice if we decide this in another week?' and I said absolutely and then they did almost the next day so I flew to Columbus and they offered me the job.

"I was shocked but I was honored. For me, it was just wonderful, a dream come true, really and all my friends in Michigan were shocked but delighted."

BSB: Your first year as AD in 1984, the Buckeyes went to the Rose Bowl so I guess you finally made it there.

Bay: "Yeah. That's ironic, isn't it? I finally made it to the Rose Bowl, and it was with Ohio State."

BSB: Did Keith Byars deserve the Heisman Trophy in '84? He finished runner-up to Doug Flutie in part due to Flutie's Hail Mary for Boston College to beat Miami (Fla.)

Bay: "Absolutely. If it hadn't been for that one play he would have won for sure. He was a great player. I was really lucky to be there when Keith played.

"I remember Keith Byars ran, I think we were behind Illinois 24-7 or something like that, and on one of those runs (67-yard touchdown), he lost his shoe about 10 yards into the run."

BSB: The next year you beat No. 1 Iowa in the rain at the 'Shoe. What did you think of that game?

Bay: "It was an exciting game. The weather was lousy and it was dark by the end but a great game."

BSB: In 1986 you had to let Eldon Miller go. That's got to be one of the toughest things to do as a boss in any profession, but how difficult was that and what led to it?

Bay: "Well, that's really interesting. I never fired Eldon Miller, and I never asked him to resign.

"Earle was working on just a one-year renewable contract, the same as was Eldon as was Woody for 20-some years, and when I came to Ohio State there was a lot of speculation that I was brought in to fire both Earle and Eldon.

"That was never put to me in the interview. It was suggested that there were concerns about football and basketball, and I suppose maybe it was somewhat suggested that I would have to consider that. But in my mind, it was going to have to play out and I'd make that decision, and I made it clear with the president in my interview before he hired me that I was truly going to be the

chief executive of the athletic department and that I would make all the personnel decisions, and they agreed to that so I came in with that charge.

"So, with that as background, we get halfway through the (1985-86) basketball season and Eldon wants a long-term contract. I had told him earlier, 'Coach, if I can't get one for Earle, I can't get one for you.'

"About halfway through this season, say in February, we went on the road. Eldon had been second in the Big Ten several times, but I don't think we ever won a Big Ten championship under Eldon. We were second or third lots of times.

"We came back from a road trip. We lost a couple of tough games, and we were again third or fourth. We had to go to Minneapolis for a Monday night game (Jan. 30), and this was right after Minnesota had lost a game over the weekend to, I want to say, Wisconsin. Anyway, there was an incident where several of the Minnesota players were suspended or something at the end of this game, and by the time we went over to play them on a Monday night, they ended up having to play a bunch of football players who had played basketball in high school. I mean, it was truly a JV team.

"We went in there and I knew we were going to lose the damn game because everybody was fired up in Minneapolis and they had a bunch of football players that are going to play Ohio State on a Monday night. The atmosphere was just electric. They were huge underdogs, and we're going in there with our tails between our legs, having just lost a couple of games, and sure

enough, they beat us (70-65).

"The next day, Eldon came into my office and said, 'You need to find yourself a new basketball coach.' I said, 'Coach, I'm not firing you.' And he said, 'Well, you can't get me a contract. I'm not getting the support I need and you just need to find yourself a new coach.' I said, 'Well, why don't we finish the season and we can talk about this later?'

"I don't remember if it came out publicly at that time or if it took a few weeks, or if it even made it to the end of the season but he essentially resigned, not in so many words, but I had not fired him. So that was the deal. I never could get either one of them (Bruce or Miller) long-term contracts."

BSB: You almost lost Earle after the 1987 Cotton Bowl because of that?

Bay: "After the (bowl game) there were NCAA meetings later in January in San Diego, and it was also the same time that the American Football Coaches Association met there. When I was at that meeting Cedric Dempsey, who was the athletic director at Arizona at the time, later became the president of the NCAA, he called me – we knew each other well from working together in the Pac-10 – and he said, 'Rick, I want you to know, I'm coming after Earle.'

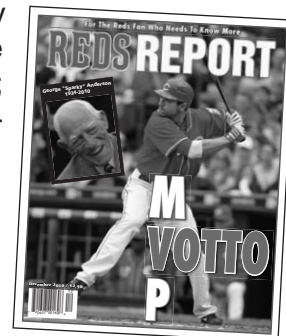
"I said, 'Well, I appreciate you letting me know.' He was a real gentleman. A lot of guys would not have done that. Earle was out there for his own meetings, and I said, 'Ced Dempsey is going to call you. They're going to try to get you to go to Arizona. I don't want you to go. That's for sure.' And he said, 'Well,

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Bruce Firing Becomes Bay's Undoing

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some of the other coaches have long-term contracts and I'm only year-to-year. I really need a long-term contract. I'd feel better if I had some more security.' I said I understood. So, I went to the president. I called him from there and said we've got to keep this guy. He's just won the Big Ten.

"You probably remember this. Earle was not real popular. Plus, there was the Art Schlichter stuff, and he'd gone to the racetrack and Earle had changed broadcasts. He'd gone from, I think it was WBNS, to WTVN with his coach's show, and he did it just before I got there and he did it for peanuts, I mean, another \$10,000, or something like that. If I'd have been there, I would have made up the difference, but I would not have let him make that change because the Wolfes owned the paper (The Dispatch). It was crazy. But anyway, he had done it.

"So he was not popular on several fronts, and that had trickled down to the trustees. The trustees didn't like him. So by the time I went to Ed Jennings and talked about long-term contracts, Ed said the board's not going to do it, we can't do it.

"So with that in mind I got Earle and there were several assistant coaches out in San Diego at the same time, and I got them all in a room out there in the Town and Country hotel, I remember it vividly, and I said, 'Guys, I don't want any of you going – and Earle would have taken most of the staff

with them had he gone to Arizona – but I'm not going to be able to give you long-term contracts. It's still going to be year-to-year, and the way things are right now next year is going to be a bitch and the first time we lose one or two games you're going to hear about it, so it's not going to be easy but having said that, I don't want any of you going anywhere.'

"Earle decided to stay, and the whole staff decided to stay."

BSB: Now to the '87 football season. Does it bother you that maybe some people only associate you with Earle's firing and your resigning there and not for the other things you did for the university?

Bay: "Yeah, it's a little disappointing. I think I said one time I thought in my heart I did more for Ohio State than simply resigned.

"I felt proud of the job I did at Ohio State, and I thought people accepted me despite my Michigan background. I felt like we weathered that pretty well and people embraced me. I thought I was well-liked in Columbus, and I loved my time in Columbus. It was the best job I ever had. I was certainly extremely proud given my background to get that job. I thought it was against all odds that I could get that job.

"Even though I know some people remember me only for that, it hasn't dampened the pride I've taken having been there."

BSB: Looking back on it so many years

later, anything you would have done differently during that Michigan week or anything you could have done to prevent Earle from being fired and the way it was handled by the university?

Bay: "Well, I guess I could have been more pliable.

"I think we were or 5-5, maybe 6-4 (5-4-1) going into Ann Arbor for the last game, and it was the Sunday before the Michigan game. We just lost a close game to Iowa, which knocked us out of a major bowl. It was our fourth loss, and I knew that everyone would surmise going into Michigan that the game would determine, maybe it had already been determined, but that game would certainly determine whether Earle remained our coach or not.

"I went down to the football operations center on that Sunday morning, where Earle usually addressed the media before the Michigan game. I think the Sunday before the Michigan game was the only time he ever did that, and I knew all the media would be there. I just wanted to make it clear to everybody that whether we beat Michigan or not, Earle Bruce was still my coach.

"I think I actually said we could go to Michigan and lose 50-0 and as far as the athletic director was concerned, Earle Bruce was still my coach, and of course, I knew that would get a lot of attention.

"I didn't want the staff thinking that if they won the game, they're still employed, but if they lost the game, they weren't. I just thought the staff deserved better than to have their future hinge on one game. I thought the body of work that Earle had achieved over time deserved more than that.

"So I said that knowing that was a pretty tough position to take and sure enough, Monday I go to the office and Ed Jennings called me and he said, 'You need to come over. The trustees don't like what you said.' I went over to his office and he said, 'You know, you're going to have to make a change almost no matter what.'

"I said, 'When you hired me, you told me these personnel decisions would be mine, and in my mind, we've got a good coach. I know he's not popular, but we've cleaned him up. He's not going to the racetrack. He's been a solid coach. He's been a good citizen. I just don't think it speaks well of the university to fire him with the record that he's achieved. It sort of reinforces the negative stereotype that Ohio State has with some people that we are just a football factory. This isn't the right message so I just can't do it.'

"He said, 'Well, I'm telling you right now, you might as well know that Earle's been fired. We're not bringing him back.' I said, 'Well, if Earle's fired then I'm leaving.' He said, 'Well, I wish you wouldn't do that,' and I said, 'While I appreciate that, you and the board of trustees have undermined my credibility. I don't see how I can manage the department with any degree of credibility if you guys can come in and fire my most important employee against my recommendation.

"I appreciate the opportunity you've given me, and I'm going to go over and tell Earle tonight at practice so that the staff knows

and this team knows where this stands.'

"So I did and went right over to practice. Earle was getting ready for practice and went down and he was by himself for a moment and I said, 'Coach, you should know you've been fired and I've quit,' and he said, 'Well, Rick, you didn't have to do that.' I said, 'Well I did.'

"He brought in the staff, I was still there, and he told them and then he went into a team meeting, and I left. Then there was a press conference, and we went up to Ann Arbor and beat Michigan."

BSB: Did you go to the game even though you weren't the AD anymore?

Bay: "I flew with the team. Sat with Earle in the front of the plane, and I said, 'Coach, I don't know how I could have made this trip and been sitting here the whole time knowing you had been fired. How disingenuous would that have been to make the trip and sit next to you and not tell you that you can beat Michigan 50-0 and you've been fired?'

"We beat Michigan and went into the locker room afterwards. Somehow the team got bandanas that said 'Earle' or whatever it was, and afterwards in the locker room, Bo (Schembechler) came in and Bo was a friend of mine. I had been the wrestling coach when Bo was hired as the football coach at Michigan, so we've both been on the same Michigan overall coaching staff together, and Bo came into our locker room and said to the team something to the effect, 'You guys know that I hate losing, but if there was ever any game that I wouldn't mind losing, this would be it,' so it was quite a saga, really.

"But I don't regret any of it. I regret that I wasn't there longer. If that hadn't happened, Gene (Smith) might have never gotten a chance to be the athletic director at Ohio State if that didn't happen. Gene or Andy Geiger (laughing).

BSB: What didn't you get to do that you really wanted to at Ohio State?

Bay: "I think a lot of the things that Gene did. We did start a master plan, and we built the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. It's been added to since then I understand. I haven't been there in a long time, but that was our thing. That was dedicated the week of the Michigan game.

"Ohio State's athletic facilities were really pretty substandard for a school of that stature when I first got there. We needed to do something about it. We had started down that path for sure. So I think that and just continuing to build the program into the kind of program that Andy and especially Gene have been able to realize."

BSB: It's funny, the new athletic director Ross Bjork is asked the same question that you were asked 40 years ago in an interview with BSB: What's the possibility of a hockey rink?

Bay (laughing): "Well, yeah. They don't still play in that Quonset hut (OSU Ice Rink), do they?"

BSB: The women do and the men practice there.

Bay: "They still play in that? Oh my god. I didn't realize that. I don't know. I guess I didn't think about where they play now. I mean that was awful when I was there,

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that's for sure."

BSB: At Minnesota and Oregon, you came in when they were under NCAA investigation. Were you a glutton for punishment?

Bay: "It wasn't anything that I sought out. When I left Ohio State, I didn't have a job, period, and I just hung around Columbus, trying to figure out what to do. My wife had a job in the new bank building downtown, Huntington Bank. She was in the hospitality business. She was the manager of the private club at the top of the Huntington Bank.

"I didn't have a job. I had a couple of offers to go into private business still in Columbus, which made me feel good because it made me feel like I wasn't a pariah in Columbus.

"But that's when the Yankees called me when I was there, and that only happened because when I left Ohio State, the commissioner of the Southeastern Conference was open and there was a guy named Harvey Schiller that had left to become head of the U.S. Olympic Committee and that left the job open, and I thought that'd be interesting to be the commissioner of the Southeastern Conference. But I didn't have any connections in the South.

"So Ed Weaver, another former (OSU) athletic director, told me he knew George Steinbrenner is really tight with the president of the University of Florida and that guy at Florida is going to be the chairman of the selection committee. I'd never talked to Steinbrenner, but Ed said you ought to call him. He arranged for George to talk to me because Ed was still tight with George and the Clippers played in town, so I got permission to call Mr. Steinbrenner.

"I call him, and he said, 'What can I do for you?' And I said, 'Well, I understand that you know the president of Florida. Here's what I'd like to do, go down and interview for that job and I don't have any cachet with those guys.' He said he'll talk to him, and he did. I was invited down for an interview for the job as commissioner of the Southeastern Conference. I did go down and I did interview, but it turned out that Harvey Schiller decided to go back to the SEC. So that job was suddenly closed, and Steinbrenner called me back and said, 'What are you going to do now?' I said, 'Well, I'm still looking.' He said, 'I need an executive vice president and chief operating officer to run the Yankees. Why not come talk to me about that job?' I did and he hired me.

"And it was an interesting amount of time. I'm glad I did it, but it wasn't very satisfactory. George treated me OK and we parted friends, and he later recommended me for the job with the Indians.

"He just couldn't let go. He thought he wanted me to manage it, but then he wanted to manage it. Later I said, 'You know, George, I need some responsibility. I'm not going to make it a big thing but I need to look for another position, maybe back in college athletics.' He understood and so I left quietly. Minnesota was looking for an AD, and I knew some people at Minnesota having worked at Ohio State, and I got hired for that job.

"And you're right, they were under investigation. And I went there and it was a good job. I liked the people there. I liked that job. I've never really had a job I didn't like. ... I had a lot of them."

BSB: You spent some time with the In-

dians, like you had mentioned. You were right at the forefront of that group of players in the early '90s like Jim Thome and Kenny Lofton that were at the beginnings of their careers. What did you see from that group that a few years later would move into a new stadium and make the World Series?

Bay: "I happened to be with the club in New York when Thome hit his first home run into the upper deck at Yankee Stadium. Albert Belle, Jim Thome, Robbie Alomar, Sandy Alomar. All those guys, you could tell it was going to be a good team, and it was fun to be with them.

"That's another job where I would have been there a lot longer, but the owners, the Jacobs brothers, Richard Jacobs, he hired me but then as we were building the stadium he decided he wanted to be president himself of the club. And that's basically what happened. I mean, there was no animosity. He said, 'I think this is something I want to do and I didn't realize it at first but I do want to do it,' so I was out on that.

"I did a couple other things and then ended up at San Diego State, which was sort of a retirement job although I was there for a long time."

BSB: When was the last time you were at Ohio State?

Bay: "Archie invited me back maybe three or four years ago. I came back to a game and sat with Archie and Bonita, and we watched the game. I can't remember exactly what game it was. It was a night game. I remember that. That was a lot of fun.

"I had hired Archie when I was AD to be my associate athletic director. He surprised me because Earle was looking for a running backs coach and Archie was working in, I think, the personnel office for the university. I told Earle I'd like to get Archie over here in the administration. He said he'd like to have him as a running backs coach.

"I said let's give him his choice. I brought Archie in and I told him we need an associate AD to help me with external operations or Earle needs a running backs coach. What do you want to do? And he shocked me. He said, 'I'd like to broaden my horizons a little bit and work in administration.' It disappointed Earle and surprised me."

BSB: Did you have an opportunity to meet Woody when he was on campus in his retirement?

Bay: "A few times. Initially, of course, he was chagrined that I was a Michigan guy. I had been on campus for maybe a week or so and said it's time to face the music. Woody had an office over in the ROTC building that was his permanent office on campus, so I made an appointment with him and went over.

"I'd never met him before, and I went over and walked in and he shook his head and said, 'You know, I didn't want a Michigan guy for this job.' I said, 'I understand, Coach, but you know, you get out all the film clips and all the newspaper clippings and you'll see I never did anything to hurt Ohio State,' and he laughed at that. I had been on the football team. Bump Elliot was my coach, but I never did anything to hurt the Buckeyes so he kind of chuckled at that.

"I think in the search he had championed Rex Kern for the job, and then he would come to practice periodically and he was always there for senior tackle before the Michigan game."

"Because I had been a placekicker, I have one story, I don't know if I ever told it or not, to break the ice with the football staff because they were like, 'Here's a Michigan guy who's going to be the AD.' I had met Earle only once and that was at a golf outing so I didn't really know him.

"I was one of the last straightaway kickers, the square toe and I had an old kicking shoe, real old that had the old square.

"I thought, well, I'm going to go out on the practice field. The team was in the Horseshoe. It was an early fall practice before any games, and I went out there in shorts and a shirt and the staff had barely met me. They have the placekickers down at one end of the field and Earle was running some goal-line stuff at the other end, and I wondered if he noticed me or not.

"I went out and joined the placekickers and I introduced myself to the guys, and they were all straight-ahead kickers still. The guys were delighted to have me there, and they snapped the ball a couple of times and I kicked a couple of extra points. All of a sudden, I hear from the other end of the stadium Earle shouting, 'OK, fifth-team kicker down at this end.' I was the fifth-team kicker.

"It was kind of a test but everybody was perked up, and so I run down to the other end. He says, 'OK, we're going to line up and we're going to let this guy kick an extra point. If he makes it, we're not going to have to run and if he misses it, we're going to run.' And everybody was kind of sheepish wondering how this was going to go. But I was game for it. I was glad that they were too and so they lined up, snapped the ball and, hell, I shanked the thing. Didn't even come close.

"Earle forever claimed that they had to re-turf the entire stadium because I made such a big divot. So, then they let me kick another and I floated one through so it kind of broke the ice with football staff."

BSB: Do you have any favorite players or games or coaches at Ohio State you remember fondly?

Bay: "Certainly the Iowa game. The first game against Michigan that we won at Ohio Stadium my first year. That was a game that Michael Lanese made a great catch at the end of the game to allow us to maintain possession of the ball and run out the clock and beat Michigan. Also, the Illinois game that year as well. And certainly, the Cotton Bowl game against Texas A&M (a 28-12 win)."

BSB: That was when Earle wore the fedora?

Bay: "That's right. That was another story. The way that came about was whoever owned the rights to the (1986) Kickoff Classic, it was NBC or ABC, called me said, 'We want you guys to play Alabama in the Meadowlands in New York,' and that was an early game, like the end of August (the 27th).

"The problem with that was we didn't play our first game until the third week in September so there's a long time between games, and then bringing the kids back in the middle of the summer to get ready. So, it was a lot to ask, and I went to Earle and said, 'Do you want to play this game? Here's all your problems,' but we could make, I don't know what the payout was, I'm going to say half a million dollars, which doesn't sound like that much these days. But I said, 'If you want to play it, I pledge to put the whole half million dollars toward a new Woody Hayes Athletic Center, and if you

don't want to play it, I understand. That's your decision, because it's going to screw up the summer for the kids and you're going to have three weeks between the first game and the second game and that's a lot of time to hang around campus, especially if we lose the game.'

"He talked it over with the staff and they said they wanted to play the game. So, we go to the Meadowlands and we lose the game (16-10). We're going in for the winning touchdown and we fumble the ball at the 1-yard line or something, so we lose the game to Alabama.

"Ray Perkins was the coach on the Alabama side, and the week before we played, Earle broke his foot somehow. I can't remember because he wasn't very athletic, so he's wearing a cast on his foot and he's kind of dumpy looking, anyway. He didn't wear a coat and tie; this is a nationally televised game, the only game on, and here's dapper Ray Perkins, with his fedora, his coat and tie and sharkskin sport coat, all that, walking along the Alabama sidelines.

"Here's Earle limping along, in his coaching gear, overweight, and of course we lose the game and the media picked up on that, the tremendous contrast between the teams and the coaches and everything.

"And now we've got three weeks to wait till we go to the first game, which is at Washington, and we get blown out (40-7).

"This is when I realized what a great coach I really had because we're coming back from Seattle. We're 0-2 for the first time since 1897 or something and flying all the way back from Seattle, and I'll tell you, my dauber is down and everyone's dauber is down.

"Earle is having none of it. I'm up at the front of the plane and he calls his whole coaching staff up there and he says, 'All right everybody, get your head out of your ass and get back there with your position guys and we've got to start getting ready for the next game so quit feeling sorry for yourselves. We've got to start coaching right now.' And hell, I don't think anyone felt like doing that. Everybody just wanted to sleep and forget about it, do something, but he got them going. I think we won the next nine games in a row (before losing to Michigan).

"So that was something I'll never forget, that flight back from Seattle, and that's when we ended up going to the Cotton Bowl, but I'm getting off track.

"So we came back to play Colorado, and I went to Earle before the game and I said, 'We've been getting all this negative press, and part of it has been you've been gimping around and the way you're looking and all these unfair comparisons have been made. You could really win some people over if you come out of the tunnel in Colorado in a coat and tie and show people you're paying attention.' He said, 'Rick, I can't do that. That's not me. I can't do it.' I understood and he didn't do it, but in the Cotton Bowl he did."

BSB: That's another great story. I've enjoyed reliving those days.

Bay: "It brings back a lot of memories. I've enjoyed it more than you did. Thanks for thinking of me and say hello to all my buddies there.

"I'll never forget my days at Ohio State. It was the best job I ever had. I loved the place. I loved all the people that were involved. It was such an honor, just was a terrific highlight."

Longtime Buckeye Hoobler Bleeds Scarlet And Gray

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Over the last half-century, few people have grown to understand what it means to be a Buckeye more than Denny Hoobler. A Dellroy, Ohio, native and 1972 Ohio State graduate, he spent over 35 years working within the Buckeyes' athletic department in a variety of roles pertaining to marketing and fundraising. In his time in Columbus, he worked closely with four athletic directors, six head football coaches and a multitude of other coaches and administrators, helping elevate Ohio State into one of the premier athletic departments in the country.

As director of the Buckeye Club and assistant athletic director for development, he played an integral role in raising money for numerous projects around campus, including the construction of Bill Davis Stadium, the Schottenstein Center and Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium and the renovation of Ohio Stadium. He also was hired as the athletic department's first-ever marketing director in 1985, where he worked to generate added fan interest for some of Ohio State's lower-revenue sports, among many other responsibilities.

Hoobler officially retired in 2021 as the associate athletic director of development and now lives in Upper Arlington, Ohio, with his wife, Nancy. He spoke with Buckeye Sports Bulletin to discuss his lengthy career with Ohio State, reflecting on some of his biggest career accomplishments while also offering his thoughts on the changing landscape of fundraising in college sports, among other things.

BSB: You were involved with Ohio State sports for over 35 years, working in several different positions throughout your career. How did you get your start with the athletic department?

Hoobler: "When I finished my undergraduate in business and marketing at Ohio State, it was at the tail end of the Vietnam War. So I had to spend some time in active duty with the army. We got that behind us, my then-girlfriend Nancy and I got married, and we moved back to Columbus where I was working on my MBA at Ohio State.

"Athletics just kept coming up. So Nancy and I talked one day, and I said, 'I'm going to try and go over and talk to somebody in athletics just to find out how I can get in the business.' So I tried to get a meeting with (former AD) Hugh Hindman. That wasn't going to happen. His assistant suggested that I go down the hall and talk to Al Bohl and Rex Kern. And I'm saying, 'Oh my god, I watched Kern play football.'

"So I talked to them, met with some faculty member in the department of education, and they all ended up saying, 'Who you really need to talk to is Jim Jones,' who was the associate athletic director at the time. I thought he'd give me five or 10 minutes, his assistant would knock on the door and say, 'Hey, Jim, your next meeting's ready to go.'

But we ended up talking for 30-45 minutes. I just asked, 'Jim, is there anything I could do? I mean, I'll stuff envelopes, I'll do whatever.' And finally, he said, 'Dennis, I'll tell you what. I'll let you volunteer in the ticket office in the business office, but I'm not going to pay you.' That would have been about \$2 an hour. I did that for about two years.

"But that's how it all started. If I wouldn't have gone over to the athletics office and up to the second floor of St. John Arena, I'd probably be working at a business in Columbus. But I went, and the rest is history."

BSB: After spending three years as an assistant athletic director at Furman and then returning to Ohio State to work in the school's alumni office, you were hired as Ohio State athletics' first-ever marketing director in 1985. How did that opportunity come about, and was it somewhat daunting taking on a role that had never been given out before?

Hoobler: "Rick Bay was saying, 'Look, we need to promote wrestling. We need to promote women's basketball and baseball. We need to start selling some signage.' If you were to go to a game, there wasn't any advertising in the stadium. But I can remember people saying, 'What in the world are you getting into here? Where is this going to lead?'

"This was the beginning of people starting to think, 'Hey, even though football is the major revenue-maker, we need other sources.' So, we went to State Farm Insurance, they did our T-shirt giveaways. We had Huntington Bank, Wendy's, Honda, we had five or six sponsors. And we convinced them to be on the scoreboards around campus.

"But at first, it was like, 'What in the world am I doing here?' I had a daughter, she was around one year old at the time, and we said, 'Man, we better get settled here.' Our second child, Andrew, was on the way. It ended up working out, but marketing was hardly a word that was used anywhere in collegiate athletics in the mid-'80s."

BSB: With marketing being such a new thing at the time in college athletics, what was your strategy in this new role? How did you work to create more fan interest in Ohio State sports?

Hoobler: "It really centered around three sports initially, not counting football and men's basketball. It was women's basketball, our coach was Nancy Darsch. We had wrestling, coached by Russ Hellickson, who came here from Wisconsin. Then we had baseball, where Bob Todd had just arrived. Nothing against the previous coaches, but these three coaches in particular said, 'Hey, we know we're not football. But we have a pretty good product, and we want to get as many people at the games as we can.'

"We didn't think as much about the money, but obviously, if more people come to the matches and the games, you're going to sell more concessions and parking, which would help the revenue. Even (basketball coach) Gary Williams, he was like, 'Hey, we need more student involvement.' And we

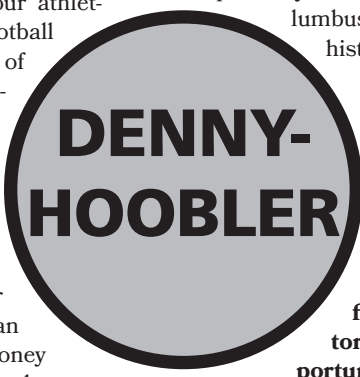


PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNY HOOBLER

SELLING THE BUCKEYE BRAND – Longtime Ohio State administrator Denny Hoobler (right, pictured here with Heisman Trophy winner Troy Smith) was a 1972 graduate of OSU before embarking on a 35-year career with the university in marketing and fundraising.

moved the student section down to the floor at St. John Arena, and we started winning.

"We also started selling sponsorships for games. We had a supermarket chain called Big Bear who we got close to, and they started sponsoring two or three games a year – 'Come in and make a purchase of these products and you'll get two tickets, or go in and get four tickets for the price of two.' The teams were winning, so you could promote a lot.

"I'll never forget, Ohio State wrestled Iowa in St. John Arena. We gave out T-shirts to the first 500 people who walked through the door. We had set up a little card table on the south side of the stadium, and, my god, we got there early and there must have been over a thousand people lined up for these T-shirts. It was like, 'Oh my god, what are we going to tell the 501st person?' because wrestling fans get pretty aggressive. But it just seemed to take off a little bit from there."

BSB: Pertaining to football, one of the first things you had to deal with as marketing director was scoreboard advertisements. How did that idea come about, and what was the process to get them up?

Hoobler: "Rick Bay said, 'Look, these scoreboards are ancient.' They had nothing on it other than the score, the down-and-distance, timeouts and the time. Other schools and professional teams had scoreboards where you could see stats. You could see what yard line the ball is on. They did animations on the board, things like that.

"So Rick went to the board of trustees and said, 'Hey, here's the type of scoreboard we want to do.' Part of the discussion at the

time was, 'Well, you're going to get this new scoreboard, you're going to do these things, how are you going to pay for it?' And they said, 'Well, we're going to sell advertisements.'

"We're going to pay 'X' dollars of revenue from the signage, and that's really how we'll pay that off. It was a drastic change, all of the selling of advertising. And I give Rick Bay credit. Nothing against the previous staff and administrations, but when that started to kick off, they realized that there is a lot of money to be made here with selling ads. People are listening to the games on the radio. People are watching the games. People in the stands will see the signage. That's kind of how it started here."

BSB: You spent six years as Ohio State's marketing director. In that time, what impact do you think marketing had on the athletic department, and how did you see the marketing department grow?

Hoobler: "It's funny when you mention that. I'm sure – and again, I was one of the youngest in the department – but I'm sure a lot of people were saying, 'What do we need marketing for? What is going on here? This is Ohio State, we don't need that.' But as we moved into the late '80s and into the '90s, not only the administrative staff but coaches were saying, 'Hey, you had great success generating interest for a baseball game. Could you help us out?'

"Our assistant athletic director, Phyllis Bailey, Phyllis was one of the pioneer women in athletics. She would come in and say, 'Hey, Denny, let's see if we can help out these women's sports on an event or two.' Even some of the people who had been

around said, 'We don't know what it will do for money, but if we can get 1,000 people at a tennis match or field hockey game, that's good for the kids.'

"So marketing started to take off, and then we added staff and more money. Now you look at the budgets, and there are funds designated for marketing. It's even beyond marketing. It's that fan experience, whether it's a high school, college or professional game."

BSB: After your time as marketing director, you became director of the Buckeye Club in 1991. What was the purpose of the Buckeye Club, and how did that evolve over time?

Hoobler: "The purpose of the Buckeye Club was initially only to raise money to cover the grant-in-aid costs for scholarships. At one point, you could only raise enough money to cover the scholarships. There was kind of this fear that if we don't cap athletic funds at this number, we might just cannibalize all the giving. Now that never happened. As time went on, it was like, 'No, no. We need all the money we can get.'

"With hundreds of thousands of alumni out there and all the corporations in Columbus or Ohio that support Ohio State, we're missing a gold mine out there if we don't ask these people for support. You might be a Capital graduate or a Kent State graduate – no disrespect to those schools – but deep down, when the Buckeyes are playing, you're probably wearing your scarlet and gray. You got your jersey on and your ballcap. But it just seemed like there was such a potential of untapped funds out there that, in some way, we had to make an effort to mine."

BSB: So how did you tap that "gold mine" of funds and resources throughout Columbus and Ohio?

Hoobler: "You would develop relationships and identify potential donors. We would have receptions. Andy (Geiger) would have some events at his house. We would do different events around the state. You never would turn down any gift. You might meet a couple who owned a business and were big Buckeye fans.

"Of course, you were always trying to identify former student-athletes at Ohio State who were successful, a lacrosse player, a women's tennis player who owns a business. You just said, 'Hey, this family's daughter swam at Ohio State. Let's talk to them about the new McCorkle Aquatic Pavilion.' And then we tried to find out what they could support.

"Then it became more of a profession where we would renovate or build stadiums throughout campus and have four or five people step up with a major gift. We need all the \$1,000 or \$500 donations we can get, but we need two or three families or corporations to stand up and say, 'Hey, I can give you \$500,000-\$1 million.'

"But you don't go out on a first visit and say, 'Oh by the way, would you give us \$1 million?' You've set that up and worked with people over time. When we started with the stadium renovations or the construction of the Schottenstein Center or the McCorkle Aquatic Pavilion, the SASSO (student-athlete support services office) Building, Younkin Success Center or Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium, we said, 'Hey, we put somebody's name on the building, but we have a number of naming opportunities in-

side the building.' So you just put together plans and identified donors. I'm sure that's the way they're doing it now."

BSB: You served as the director of the Buckeye Club for over six years, overseeing various fundraising projects that helped elevate Ohio State athletics. Are there any projects or campaigns that you are specifically proud of?

Hoobler: "Obviously, you think football. I was heavily involved there with Andy and Archie Griffin with the renovations to Ohio Stadium, the areas we named in the stadium, the donations with that. And the renovations to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, we've renovated and expanded the Woody Hayes many, many times, and it looks like there's more coming in the future. I also had fun with the construction of Bill Davis Stadium and the renovation to the golf course. We were involved a little with Jack Nicklaus, who donated his time for that.

"The Schottenstein Center was a major project. There were a number of people who wanted to stay at St. John Arena and just update and renovate it. But I think between Andy and Gordon Gee, Gordon wanted the new facilities. So those are the four projects that stick out. It was a lot of work, I guess you could call it pressure.

"And the coaches would be involved. Randy Ayers and Jim O'Brien, John Cooper and Jim Tressel. Bob Todd, too. Those guys were willing to drive out to see somebody for a \$1,000 donation. I think the coaches knew – or maybe it was the marching orders from the ADs – that they needed our help. Donors are going to want to meet the coaches. They're going to want to come to a practice, do this or that. So you have to be on board and be involved if you want this."

BSB: Speaking of coaches helping out, I wanted to ask you about the annual Meet the Buckeyes event in Toledo. We have a lot of subscribers from northwest Ohio who often ask about what happened to that event. How did Meet the Buckeyes grow, and what led to its demise?

Hoobler: "That goes back to Jim Jones and Phil Harrison. Phil had the idea, and Archie was involved with it. Of course, I was doing a lot of the legwork, but we were able to put together those events. They went a few years, and then we probably had a coaching change or two. And Andy said, 'This is nice, but if we're going to ask the three main, most visible head coaches to go up there, we need to raise more money.' And I think that went a little bit against Phil Harrison's philosophy. I don't think I was the one who told Phil, but we had to call him and tell him this was going to be the last one.

"Meet the Buckeyes actually started with Archie and I taking a coach or two, and they'd do a Friday afternoon reception in their home that might have 50 or 60 people. Then out of that – I think it was Phil's idea – he said, 'What if we can get a community hall and get 500-1,000 people to come out and pay \$100 per person?' Even though it was good PR, a lot of it dealt with the money. But that's how it all started, and then it was just over with. We haven't done anything really like that since. We're not totally getting back to it, but it's similar to NIL now, where you can pay a certain amount to hear Ryan Day speak at a luncheon and go to practice.

"But that was just a few people putting that together. We would just load up on a

custom coach on a Friday afternoon and go up and do a cocktail reception, a dinner, and hear all the coaches speak."

BSB: Switching gears, you were promoted to assistant athletic director for development in 2001. How did this role come about, and what were the responsibilities that came with it?

Hoobler: "I was director of the Buckeye Club and then became director of development, and then Archie just said, 'Hey, I want to get you another title if I can.' So I was made assistant athletic director of development. I was still kind of overseeing the Buckeye Club and maybe at that point a little bit of the marketing too. But it was still mainly fundraising, although it shifted more to 'major gifts,' for lack of a better term. I ran a courtesy car program for coaches and staff members. We did a couple of fundraising golf outings. We started the Buckeye Pro-Am Golf Outing, which raised money for the men's and women's golf teams.

"Along the way, I picked up some other duties. I was always involved in bowl planning. We traveled to all the football games with the team. And then we started traveling with basketball. Those were fun. They were work, but they were fun, too. But my roles just expanded along that route."

BSB: What are some fun memories that come to mind from your time as associate athletic director for development?

Hoobler: "Traveling with basketball was always neat. You would go to shootarounds and pregame dinners. I always had to go out onto the floor and make a jump shot or two. I did that at Madison Square Garden, Assembly Hall, you name it. There are two memories that come to mind for football, and they both involve Penn State trips. It was Andy's first away game, we went to Penn State, and they just beat us bad. And he got on the bus and said, 'Well, Hoobs, it's probably not a good time to pass the offering plate right now, is it?' And that just struck me. Here he is, at his first road game, we got our butts handed to us and he was making a joke.

"And then one of Gene and Sheila's first trips to State College. We landed in Altoona, Pa., and it was raining. The bus drivers couldn't get out of the parking lot. We had to back the buses up, and some of the players were starting to chirp, saying, 'Where are we?' And I'm thinking to myself, 'Oh my god, here's Gene and Sheila's first trip, and we can't even get the buses out of the parking lot.'

"Football was a different animal, but basketball was so much fun. You were just hanging out with the team and the players. Through the years, you could sit there with Aaron Craft or Greg Oden or Mike Conley, that was really neat to be around those guys. When Craft was here, we went to Duke, and it was the first time I ever saw a game at Cameron Indoor Stadium, that was just so neat to experience. Going to Assembly Hall and seeing Bobby Knight on the other bench. I always enjoyed the trips to Michigan State. Tom Izzo, he knew me personally, and he would always speak to me. He'd always stop and shake my guests' hands. Being part of those things through the years, it was just neat."

BSB: It seems like you were around Andy Geiger a lot. What was your relationship like with him, and what did he do well during his time as athletic director?

Hoobler: "I got to know Andy probably as well as anybody, just being with him on these trips. He would always come up to me and say, 'Who are four or five people that we need to see in Canton, Ohio?' or you name a place. It was just great to be around him. Andy was always looking forward, and facilities were a big thing for him that he wanted to upgrade, to give all of our kids a chance to win.

"With Andy, you knew there was always something new coming. He always had thoughts of, 'Can we do this better? Can we do that better?' And he was always good to listen to. Just traveling with Andy a lot early in his time here was great for me personally and professionally. He was also the one who stressed the importance of the Directors' Cup. I remember him saying, 'Hey, we're Ohio State, and with our facilities, our number of teams and resources, we ought to be competing to win that.' And he made that a higher priority. That was very important, that we compete for that.

"Andy was a rower in college at Syracuse, so he liked to compete. He thought that if we're going to help with these sports, we should want to win. We didn't want to finish at the bottom of the Big Ten."

BSB: You worked with four athletic directors during your time at Ohio State. Other than Geiger, what are some of the things that the other three did well?

Hoobler: "Rick was always good. He had wrestled and was on the football team at Michigan, so it was kind of a laughing point with him. Rick was very supportive. I spent most of my time with Al Bohl, but it was Rick who would have made the final decision on any idea I had. I always enjoyed Rick, and he was very supportive of some of the ideas we had.

"Jim was more old-school, balancing the budget and keeping the ship afloat. And then when Andy came in, it was a whole different ballgame with fundraising and adding sports. Not so much saying, 'Why can't we do it.' That didn't work. It was, 'Let's do it, and how are we going to do it?' I think Andy just kind of got tired at the end. We had the Maurice Clarett issues and a few other things. He was older, and I think it was just time.

"Gene Smith, I think he's one of the premier athletic directors ever. What he's done for us, keeping the student-athletes in mind with scholarship and funding, and continuing with the facilities. He just seemed like the right person for the time. He was on all these national committees, the chairman of the NCAA Basketball Committee (in 2010), NIL exploratory groups, the College Football Playoff. So I've been pretty fortunate to work with these four guys. Just great people."

BSB: Similarly to the previous question, you've also worked with six Ohio State football coaches during your career. Do you have any stories about each of them that are worth sharing?

Hoobler: "With Earle, I'll never forget it. At the Cotton Bowl in 1987, he came out with the suit and his fedora, that was neat. I remember one of the equipment guys was the only person who knew Earle was going to change out of his coaching shirt and into a suit and his fedora. I knew something was

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Former Coach Conley A Buckeye For Life

By GREG WILSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State has been able to remain near the top of the college football world for decades, and that wouldn't be possible without the high-level recruiting the Buckeyes have been able to accomplish.

Nobody knows the recruiting side of coaching better than Bill Conley, who spent 17 years with Ohio State as an assistant coach and recruiting coordinator, and he found a lot of success doing it. At one point, he was recognized by ESPN as the No. 1 college recruiter in the country, bringing such players as Eddie George, Troy Smith, Orlando Pace, Terry Glenn and many more to Columbus.

Along with being the recruiting coordinator, Conley was also at different points in time the coach for the linebackers, tight ends, defensive ends and special teams, coaching under each of Earle Bruce, John Cooper and Jim Tressel after spending his playing days under Woody Hayes.

Conley graduated from Ohio State with a degree in education and walked on to the football team his freshman year, getting to watch the 1968 national championship team in action when he was sidelined as a freshman. He ended up working his way up to some playing time, mostly on special teams, but he was able to take much of what he learned as a player and use it in his future career in coaching.

Outside of Ohio State, Conley began his coaching career in 1972 at London (Ohio) High School and has also had stints at Groveport (Ohio) High School, Middletown (Ohio) High School, Dublin (Ohio) Coffman High School, and he spent six years as the head coach at Ohio Dominican. He finished his time with every program with a winning record.

Conley talked to BSB about his time at Ohio State and some of the big moments he witnessed and was a part of during his career with the Buckeyes.

BSB: Going back to your playing days, you walked on at Ohio State in 1968. Why did you decide you wanted to try to walk on with the Buckeyes then?

Conley: "When I was in high school, I was not the typical guy for starting early with football. I didn't start playing until I was in high school, and I really fell in love with the game and picked it up quick and had some success. I ended up being one of six guys that played both ways.

"I didn't have the money to go play at some other schools, and I didn't have the notoriety because I hadn't been playing that long. I had some offers to go to some Division III schools, but there are not scholarship programs there. And of course, being in Columbus most of my life, I loved the Buckeyes. I just wanted to be a part of it. There were a lot of us. I think the first meeting there were like 150 walk-ons and by the time it was all over, going into the season there were about half a dozen of us left."

BSB: When you were a freshman, you got to watch the Super Sophomore team that won the 1968 national championship. Who do you think was the best of that bunch?

Conley: "That's a tough one because there was just so much talent. If I had to pick just one guy out of that entire class, it would have to be Jack Tatum. He could play multiple positions being a defensive back and a very physical football player. I remember several times in spring practice – we used to practice the whole month of April, and we went five days a week. Every other practice was an intrasquad scrimmage. I remember almost every scrimmage he would intercept a pass and several times took it back for a touchdown because nobody could tackle him. He could have been a heck of a running back."

BSB: You were able to work your way into some playing time over the years. How were you able to get to that point?

Conley: "You just get a little better the more you play, all that stuff. Give 100 percent every time. But when I broke in, it was special teams, and that's what I did. I ended up playing mainly special teams and kickoff return team, extra-point team, things like that."

BSB: Do you have any favorite Woody Hayes stories from your playing days?

Conley: "Well there's a lot of Woody Hayes stories. But the great thing about Woody Hayes is that he was all business on the field – I mean it was all business – but off the field, he would do anything for his players. It didn't matter if you played every snap or just once in a while like I did. He was always willing to help out in any way, shape or fashion.

"I wanted to get into coaching after I graduated, and he was instrumental in helping me get a job. He was doing so much behind the scenes, and he didn't want credit for anything. He would make speeches to high schools and never would charge a dime. I really think his influence on me was the reason I got into coaching. He helped out everybody. He worked so hard and had a great work ethic. And really, I modeled my career after him."

BSB: What did you take from Woody into your coaching career?

Conley: "I took a little bit of everything from him, like his great love of the game, his hard work ethic and attention to detail. His motivational ideas to motivate his players so that you're ready to play. He didn't leave any stone unturned in terms of a coach. He was very well-organized, and he was one of those guys that when he spoke, everybody listened."

BSB: How was it that you were able to get into coaching?

Conley: "I started off in engineering, but I ended up in education. Every year I played, I fell more in love with the game. Then, again, Woody's influence. I thought, 'I could do this for the rest of my life.'

"I remember when I got my first head coaching job, and I was only 23 years old at London High School. I had replaced the guy



FILE PHOTO

BRINGING IN BEST – Bill Conley spent 17 years with Ohio State as an assistant football coach and recruiting coordinator. He coached under Earle Bruce, John Cooper and Jim Tressel.

that had been there for a long time, like 30 years or something. I went to Woody's office, and by that time he had finished coaching and his office was in the ROTC building. I went over there and I said, 'Can you give me one major piece of advice as a coach?'

"I was going to be the youngest guy on staff, and I was the head coach. He said, 'Coach like you're going to be at that high school for the rest of your life, and jobs will find you. You won't have to go looking.' If you have success, other schools will come looking for you, and that's exactly what happened. I never had to look for a job after that."

BSB: At one of your stops along the way, you coached Cris Carter at Middletown. Did you know right away what you had in Carter when you saw him?

Conley: "Well, it was funny. I got that job and went down to Middletown – they only had two coaches in recent times. I was replacing Tiger Ellison, who just so happened to be my freshman coach at Ohio State, and a guy named Jack Gordon, both very successful coaches. I took that job, and they had not had a very successful season the year before, but we slowly started working the kids out and there was some talent on that football team, some good athletes, and Cris was one of them.

"He had some success. He was only a sophomore. He was trying to make a decision whether to play football again his junior year or just play basketball like his brother Butch, who was playing for the Indiana Pacers. He didn't know for sure whether he wanted to play, so I said, 'Cris, you're very good at basketball, everybody knows that, but I think you can be an outstanding football player. I

want you to stick with football one more year. If things go well, then you have your choice, your senior year you can play both sports.'

"And he did that. Of course, after that year he had a tremendous amount of success. Then, of course, he was on everyone's recruiting board, and it was the same in basketball. He was all-state in both sports. When it was time for him to choose a college, he had a choice between Louisville for basketball – that was the one school he decided to visit – then Ohio State, Michigan, Southern Cal and Notre Dame were his choices for football, and he signed with Ohio State, which didn't break my heart at all."

BSB: So how was it that you originally got on staff at Ohio State?

Conley: "Well, Earle Bruce had, of course, been my position coach when I played, so that was the first connection. The second thing is that Dom Capers was recruiting Cris and the other guys initially, then he took a job with the Philadelphia Stars of the USFL. Then Jim Tressel replaced him, and I got to know Jim, and we had success and being a former Ohio State player and all that.

"And one thing about Woody was that he was known throughout his career at Ohio State for hiring all high school coaches. That's how Earle Bruce got the job. Earle had that same thing too. If there was a good high school coach around, he thought they could meet the needs. We had success at Middletown, and I know Jim put in a strong word for me, and Earle knew me from my playing days. It just kind of worked out for me."

BSB: In your very first season at Ohio State, you went to the Rose Bowl against USC. What was it like getting to do that

right away?

Conley: "It was neat. What was really special about that is that Southern Cal was one of those schools that Cris was going to visit. What happened was the coach from Southern Cal was coming to Middletown to set up a visit for that weekend, and he flew into Chicago and a big snowstorm hit. He had to make a decision. Was he going to wait until the next day and come in or go back to California? He chose to go back to California and tried to do everything via phone, set the plans, talk to Cris and his mom.

"So Cris came to me, and I said, 'Are you going to take your trip to Southern Cal?' He said, 'Coach, I don't think they're really interested because the coach didn't come and see Mom, all that stuff. I think if they really wanted me they would come and see me before I went out.' So it's ironic we played them in the Rose Bowl. The coach that had been recruiting him saw me before the game, walked up and said, 'I guess I should have waited for that plane the next morning.'"

BSB: Were there any players in your first stint at Ohio State that you really enjoyed working with?

Conley: "Yeah, my first year I came in as a linebacker coach. My first year, Chris Spielman was a freshman. Man, you talk about great athletes. Chris Spielman ended up being one of the greatest linebackers ever to play at Ohio State. And Pepper Johnson was there. He was a great linebacker. Then of course, Cris playing wide receiver. That was an outstanding class that came in. There was a ton of talent."

BSB: What do you remember about Earle being fired? Did you suspect that it was coming?

Conley: "Oh no. It shocked everybody. They fired Earle the Monday of the Michigan game. Iowa had pulled off an upset, they won late in the game, but why wouldn't they wait one more week? Things weren't like they are today where you have to hire someone immediately. So it was a complete shock. And it stabbed Earle in the heart because he loved Ohio State, and he loved Ohio State until he died. That's where he came to play ball, and he ended up coaching here and it just was shame.

"The players took it very personal. The one thing Earle said was, 'Listen, we can't let this affect the game this week. We have to give everything we can to beat Michigan,' and we did. Usually when a coach is fired, all of his assistants start calling buddies and try to find another job. That didn't happen. Coaches stayed steadfast in getting a good game plan, and of course the players played their hearts out. And of course, the Earle headbands. That surprised Earle. It surprised us. That was something the players did on their own.

"To be honest with you, after that game was over and we won, we thought there was a chance the president might rehire him. But he didn't. Rick Bay, the athletic director was in our corner 100 percent. He resigned over the whole thing. It was, I guess you could call it sweet revenge, on both Michigan and the president."

BSB: So then you get brought back on staff under John Cooper in 1991. How did that happen?

Conley: "Well Coach Cooper came here and he wasn't from Ohio, but they had done a good job explaining to him the tradition and everything Ohio State's about, and he

learned it. They were having some trouble recruiting in state, and some coaches on staff that I knew went to John and convinced him to give me a shot as recruiting coordinator. So he did.

"The guy that was the recruiting coordinator, Steve Pederson, he left to go to Tennessee. So there was an opening. I came in that first year and I was strictly a recruiting coordinator. We had some success and a position opened up on the field, and also the NCAA passed the thing that the recruiting coordinator also had to be a position coach. So I became the defensive end coach and recruiting coordinator."

BSB: What was it like coaching with Cooper compared to Earle?

Conley: "Completely different personalities. I coached under three head coaches at Ohio State. They all were different in a lot of ways. What you do as an assistant coach, you look at the things they do well and try to incorporate that into your own philosophy.

"Earle was a guy who was just like Woody. Coached like Woody. He loved Ohio high school football. He was a workaholic too. John was a little bit of a different personality, but the great thing about John Cooper is that he did a great job of hiring coaches and letting them push their players. And they all did an outstanding job. Many of those guys would go on to coaching at the professional level. So John Cooper was more of a coach's coach. He was a guy that coached his coaches, and as a coach, you felt very confident and very relaxed in the sense that you knew the head coach had faith. And that's important for an assistant coach."

BSB: I understand the recruitment of Eddie George was interesting. Do you remember what happened when you were recruiting him?

Conley: "Yeah, that's a great story. Eddie was at Fork Union Military Academy. When I was recruiting back then, you got a list from different recruiting services, and you cross-referenced those lists, and also you know high school coaches in the area. So your position coaches would recruit an area, and they would know the good players coming up. We didn't really recruit Virginia that much anyway, and Eddie was from a school that we didn't know any players from.

"There was a student manager, he came up to me one day on the practice field and said, 'Coach, you're recruiting this running back from my high school.' And I said, 'Well where'd you go to high school?' And he told me and I said, 'Well what's your buddy's name?' And he said 'Eddie George, he's a senior.' We're talking September of his senior year and I've never heard of him. Well I said to him, 'I'll be in my office tomorrow morning, come by and give me the coach's name and telephone number and I'll give him a call about Eddie,' thinking he wouldn't show up. 6 a.m. the next morning, there's Danny, and he hands to me the coach's name so now I have to call the guy.

"I didn't have any film on this guy or anything, so I call the coach up. John Shuman was the head coach. I got John Shuman on the phone and said, 'Coach Shuman, you have a player named Eddie George,' and this is a strict military guy. He said 'Yes sir.' I ask, 'So he's a pretty good player?' 'Yes sir.' I ask for some film on him. 'Yes sir.' Then I ask a question, because I know Coach Cooper will ask this question: 'Who else is recruiting him?' He said he'd been offered by Louisville.

That was the only school that was recruiting him.

"So I forgot about him, he sent me the film, it came in an eight-track VHS tape. And these VHS tapes, it was 10 days later, I came off the practice field, look on my desk and there's this film on Eddie George. So I sat down and said, 'I got to look at this tape. I'm the recruiting coordinator, that's my job.' I look at it and after about three plays I realize this guy's pretty good. Then I notice he's huge for a running back. He runs over the linebacker, about 12-15 yards, next play takes a toss sweep and goes about 30 yards. Next series he's in there and is catching passes, takes one down for a touchdown, and I'm thinking, 'Holy smokes, this guy is really good.'

"So I called Eddie. I wanted to talk to him. Back then at Fork Union you could only call them on Monday nights on the hallway phone. There's no cell phones and no phones in the room, so the player would have to go down and use the phone in the hallway, about 7 o'clock, after practice and dinner. I said, 'I'll call you every Monday at 7 o'clock, be ready by the phone.' He said, 'OK, Coach, I will.'

"We had great talks. I find out all about him, tell him about Ohio State. He loved Ohio State. He loved those silver helmets. I always ended the call by asking 'Who else have you heard from this week?' He goes, 'Louisville,' and that was all. Until the last week of October. He said, 'Coach, it's funny you ask me because Penn State, Michigan and Notre Dame called.' I thought, 'Uh oh, they found out we were recruiting him.'

"He comes up to visit. He was going to visit those other few schools after Christmas. Back then at the airport you could go to the gate and wait for him to get off. All of a sudden, here comes this guy, this is what an athlete is supposed to look like. He was like 6-3, 225, in a military uniform, perfect V-shape. I mean, he was a specimen. This guy looks bigger in person than he did on film.

"That weekend we had a great visit. His mom came with him. She had a good time, asked a lot of questions. Then Sunday morning we would have a meeting before the recruits got out of bed. We'd go around and talk about all of the recruits by position coach that brought one in – was there a chance to get him and stuff like that. It gets to me and Coach Cooper is sitting down and asks, 'How about Eddie George? Man everybody loved him. The College of Engineering, the trainers and doctors, everybody loved this guy.' He was a super young man, yes sir, no sir. He said, 'What's the chance of getting him?' I said, 'Well, Coach, I don't know because his mom is going to make the decision. And he's got three other visits to go so we're not going to know until the last minute.' So he just told me to make sure I stay on him.

"So I take them back to the airport, him and his mom. Mom gets on the plane. I say, 'Eddie, thanks for coming to Ohio State. I'll call and make sure you get home all right.' He says, 'Coach, I'd like to commit to you.' I give him a big hug, it was great. Mom comes back off the plane and said they loved Ohio State."

BSB: It might still be tough to think about it today, but what was it like when you lost to Michigan State in 1998 that knocked you out of national championship contention?

Conley: "Well first of all, it was one of those games that seemed like every break went to the other team. For example, they

were back punting on their own 15-yard line, the punters on about the 5 and there's a bad snap. He barely got the ball and kicked it, line drive down the right side. It just so happened that a guy was going downfield to cover, it was like man-to-man coverage. You get on the guy and don't let him into the middle of the field, and that guy's doing a great job, but then the ball hits him in the back. It was such a bad punt and they recovered at midfield. That was just one thing that happened. They were able to score a few plays after that.

"Then one play, they had two defensive ends lined up on the same side, and it was into the boundary in the open field. Nobody there, it's wide open. So if we get to the edge, it's a touchdown. One of those defensive ends saw that he had lined up wrong, ran to the other side of the field, and it was timed accidentally perfectly, and he came in behind our blockers and tackled the quarterback. I mean, there's the goofiest things happening, and that was one of them. But we had a chance in the red zone at the end of the game and we just didn't convert. But there was no doubt that we were the best team in college football."

BSB: So then Tressel gets the job a few years later. How did it happen that you were retained by him?

Conley: "(The fact that I already knew him) was part of it. The second thing is, we had success recruiting for the past 10 years. And we were in the middle of recruiting when it happened too. So he gave me a chance, and it worked out."

BSB: Did you think from the beginning of the 2002 national championship season that the team was good enough to compete for it?

Conley: "Well, going into that season we were not highly ranked. I think the top ranking we had was 12 or 14 by one of the services. It was one of those unusual seasons. We had some young players on the team, some really outstanding juniors on the team. What happened was the team got better

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Attention Reds Fans

Here's a chance for Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers who are also Cincinnati Reds fans to enjoy a year of Reds Report, BSB's sister publication covering the Reds, for just \$9.95, a \$36 savings over the regular \$45.95 rate. Take advantage of this special offer for BSB readers and we will also send you a voucher good for two free tickets to your choice of select Reds games this season.

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Reynolds' Positivity Overcomes False Accusations

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Imagine going from the top of the world to the bottom of the heap all because someone deemed you guilty of something you weren't. Then spend the next 34 years – and counting – trying to clear your name and regain your image as one of the best ever in your sport.

Welcome to the life and times of former Ohio State track star Butch Reynolds, the Akron native who on Aug. 17, 1988, in Zurich, Switzerland set the world record for 400 meters (43.29 seconds), breaking a 20-year-old mark set by Lee Evans (43.86) at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Reynolds' record stood until Michael Johnson (43.18) broke it 11 years later.

One of Reynolds' idols was OSU legendary sprinter Jesse Owens, and the track meet named for him was always a favorite for Reynolds. So it was a special moment during the 1987 Jesse Owens Classic that Reynolds ran the fastest 400 at sea level with a 44.10 (Evans' world record was set at 7,350 feet) and the third-fastest race in history.

Reynolds, who lives in the Columbus suburb of Westerville, recalled that glorious moment in an interview with BSB on June 17, nine days after his 60th birthday. He is in a good place mentally, physically and spiritually but the pain of a scandal that should never have happened is a constant reminder that life and people can be cruel.

The world was Reynolds' stage, and even the "disappointment" of winning a silver medal in the 400 at the Seoul Olympics in 1988 (he won gold as part of the 1600-meter relay) made him even more determined to win gold at the 1992 Olympics.

But his world was turned upside down in the summer of 1990 when the International Amateur Athletic Federation (now World Athletics) accused him of using an anabolic steroid after he tested positive for the banned substance following a meet in France. He was given a suspension that would not end until after the 1992 Olympics.

Reynolds was incredulous. He had submitted numerous samples throughout his career without a problem and continued to be tested after the meet in France – before the results were known – with no trace of steroids in his system.

His legal battle to clear his name went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, where he was awarded financial compensation, but the damage was done to Reynolds from competitive and financial standpoints.

His journey is chronicled in the ESPN 30-for-30 documentary "False Positive" which first aired in June and is available on ESPN+. Kent State University Africana Studies professor Ismail Al-Amin was the director.

It is informative and maddening. The IAAF never acknowledged wrongdoing even though Reynolds and his legal team,

which included former Ohio State football player and Columbus mayor Greg Lashutka, showed how the samples were mishandled by a lab worker, who in his sequencing of the vials on a chart missed a number and marked Reynolds (H5) for being positive when it was actually a sample from an East German woman (H6).

The lawyers showed that even though the technician said H5 was positive they produced documents that he twice circled H6 on two separate documents as being positive.

When the worker was asked about the mistake, he simply said he was having a bad day with circles. Reynolds lost millions from sponsors such as Nike, Kroger and the United States Postal Service – as well as appearance fees and winnings from meets.

The IAAF doubled down in large measure because the French lab had been selected to conduct testing leading to and including the 1992 Olympics. Track and field had been rocked by a doping scandal involving 100-meter world record holder Ben Johnson at the 1988 Olympics, and IAAF vowed to clean up the sport.

While the intent was admirable, they did not want to be embarrassed with the revelation that the testing process was flawed, so evidence to the contrary was ignored.

In 1991, he won an appeal with The Athletic Congress (now USA Track and Field) but he lost in IAAF arbitration and his status as a cheater remained unchanged.

What followed was lawsuit after lawsuit by Reynolds. The Supreme Court issued an injunction allowing him to compete in the 1992 Olympic trials, but the IAAF threatened to invoke a "contamination" rule which would have made anyone competing against him ineligible for the Olympics. The 400-meter qualifying race was delayed four days until the governing body backed down. Reynolds made the team but the IAAF extended the ban to make sure he could not run in the Olympics.

Also in 1992, Reynolds was awarded \$27.3 million in damages due to the false accusation, but he never received the money because a federal appeals court in 1994 ruled that the London-based IAAF was outside of U.S. jurisdiction.

Upon the lifting of the ban after the Olympics, Reynolds won two gold medals and two silver medals in the world championships in 1993 and a silver and gold medal at the championships in 1995.

He made the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, but in the 400 semifinals he suffered a hamstring injury to end his competition there.

Reynolds retired in 1999 and a few years later established the Butch Reynolds for Care Kids Foundation for afterschool care in Akron and continues his foundation work in Columbus.

He was the speed coach for the Ohio State football team from 2005-08 under Jim Tressel and later an assistant coach at Ohio Dominican University in Columbus.

Today, he is president of the Butch Reyn-

**BUTCH
REYNOLDS**



FILE PHOTO

CLEARING HIS NAME — Butch Reynolds, a former Ohio State track star and world record holder in the 400 meters, has been fighting accusations of a failed drug test in 1990 and the stigma that goes with it, and he took his battle to the Supreme Court. A new ESPN 30-for-30, "False Positive," chronicles his journey.

olds Speed Academy and conducts personal training.

We started our conversation with me saying I did a feature on him for Columbus Monthly in the July 2010 issue. He immediately said he remembered me coming to his home for the interview. Until that moment, I had forgotten about that part.

BSB: Looking back to 2010, what would the 60-year-old Butch have told the 46-year-old Butch all those years ago?

Reynolds: "Wow. Be patient and trust the process."

BSB: Back then could you envision the life you have now? What was your plan then, and how has it turned out for you?

Reynolds: "I guess when I talked to you 14 years ago to now, it was challenging. I just left Ohio State and I was going through some challenging times but I kept the family together through that challenge. I'm proud of the fact that we made it through."

BSB: What's going on in your life?

Reynolds: "I'm still doing personal training. I'm still doing group training. I'm doing a lot more work with the foundation this school year. I'm hoping to find some grants to help me get into these school systems here and I can put my Gold Medal Focus program inside the school systems."

BSB: How does that program work?

Reynolds: "What I did is I took what it took for me to break the world record and used what it took for me to go through the adversity. I took the same principles and I tried to find the common denominator, what I used to break the world record and what I

had to use to regain and to clear my name.

"One (the world record) was more positive and one was going through the negativity, but it was the same common denominators. The same words that I found helped give me the energy, give me the wisdom, the knowledge.

"You've got to have a goal in life. You've got to know what you want to do. You've got to have those dreams that go with that process, and then you've got to have guts to have life transitions, the work that goes through that process.

"Nobody wants to change. We are asked to change but we all don't want to change. It could be a positive change or a negative change, it's still very uncomfortable. So, it's getting a new set of transitions of life. I had my transitions of life. I had my thrilling victories and the agony of defeat.

"And I think the next thing I had to go through was conflict resolutions. There's many ways to handle the problem. I was falsely accused in front of the world, and there's a way to handle that problem and there's a way you don't want to handle that problem. It goes to attitude. It's easy to maintain a negative attitude. It's easy to find ways to be upset and be mad, but you've got to find the cup is always half full. Period. The cup is always half full.

"And last but not least, it's about teamwork. Find the team. I learned that trying to break the record. (He mentioned former OSU track coaches Frank Zubovich and Russ Rogers as well as his Olympics coach Brooks Johnson among many who helped him).

“And then when that accusation came, I had to find another team – (attorney) John Gall, Greg Lashutka, Dr. (David) Black (a forensic toxicologist), a lot of people helped me. So you learn that process of finding things and understanding those pieces. I called it the five starting blocks.”

BSB: How important was it for you as an Akron kid to come to Ohio State and run track at the same place as Jesse Owens?

Reynolds: “Ohio State was a blessing. I thought going to Ohio State because of Jesse Owens to me was the best channel for athletes in the world. For me to go there, and I know that it wasn’t a track and field school, they weren’t at the top of the Big Ten championships at all, they weren’t going to the NAAs, so I knew that I could come there and recruit some kids and make that school so that we can be represented in the Big Ten better, we could be represented in the NCAA championships better, and that was my goal when I came to Ohio State.”

“You know, they didn’t give me any big favors that other schools offered me at the time to go, but I knew that I could get a degree from Ohio State and I got my degree from The Ohio State University. I’m very proud of my degree from The Ohio State University.”

“I did a lot for Jesse Owens. I think I ran his meet for 10 years. I went to the university. I did all I could do. I’m the only world-class athlete that ever ran that meet over 10 times. Period. I felt compelled to because I went to Ohio State. And it wasn’t about finance. I didn’t charge the university for running. Back then I was making \$100,000 a race, you know, but it wasn’t about that. It was about giving back, living up to my man’s legacy and doing it the best way I can.”

BSB: What was it like running on the track inside Ohio Stadium as Jesse Owens did years before?

Reynolds: “I can sum it up and say I set a world record in that stadium and that was the most electrifying race performance for my career besides the world-record race in Zurich. That was at the top of my racing career that day because it was so cold and it was in honor of Jesse Owens. Nobody else set a (world) record inside that stadium. They have a lot of Horseshoe (football) games and people don’t even know they had a track inside that stadium. People don’t know that a record was set inside that stadium. That can be a trivia question and people probably would say Jesse Owens and not Butch Reynolds.”

BSB: Like you said, most people who go to football games have no idea there was a track at one time. I know there’s the Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium now for track but do you miss having events in the ‘Shoe? Was there something about running in that stadium?

Reynolds: “Oh man, Jesse Owens ran in that stadium. No, I didn’t want to see the track leave, of course, but I understand the business. They said, ‘You’ve got to leave and we’re going to get you another track just as good.’ OK, what can I say? They gave us another stadium just as strong. ... No, I’m fine with that.”

BSB: Are you still competing on some level?

Reynolds: “I don’t compete at all. I train a lot now. That’s what I do. I motivate people. I train. I’m a motivational speaker. That’s

what I love to do, tell my story, motivate people doing it and work with the youth around Columbus, around Ohio.”

BSB: Watching the documentary, the word that comes to mind is infuriating how that whole situation unfolded around you. You said at one point you considered crashing your car and killing yourself. How did you get through the dark moments?

Reynolds: “You have to have faith. You have to believe in God. It’s easy to say keep the faith, true enough, but I had to believe in God because those dark moments were truly dark. It became lighter when I accepted the challenge, when I accepted what had to happen. It became a lot better then. But in the meantime, it wasn’t easy at all. It wasn’t easy at all, I’d say that.”

“You know, people can be mean, organizations can be mean and I can understand, but what I didn’t understand is that I went to the Supreme Court and won. Why would I have such a hard time when I went to the highest court in the land and I won? And it was just like, ‘Well since you didn’t get the money, you must have been guilty.’ Or ‘Where there’s smoke, there’s fire,’ etc., etc., etc. That’s what I was dealing with. I was like, ‘OK, Butch, just keep pushing and keep pushing, stay focused, don’t get upset. God’s going to take care of it.’ It was tough when people look at you and the doors aren’t opening up when the doors should be opening.”

BSB: There were peers who were upset when you won court orders allowing you to run after being banned. That was especially evident at the 1992 Olympic trials when the international track governing board threatened through the “contamination” rule to ban from the Olympics any athlete who ran against you. How did you cope with not only the pressure of competing but the open hostility toward you?

Reynolds: “You’re not going to please everybody. Brooks Johnson, my coach at the time, told me, ‘Not everyone is going to like you.’ When he told me that, it helped me understand people will try to hurt you just because you’re Butch Reynolds. Or people are trying to hurt you because you are representing the United States of America. Or people are trying to hurt you because you’re Black. OK, there’s a lot of reasons people don’t like you and want to hurt you.”

“And for me, I wasn’t raised that way. I was raised to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you don’t do that to anybody, then nobody’s going to do it to you. If I don’t push anybody, nobody’s going to be pushing on me. I don’t have that bully approach. Bullies get beat up in my neighborhood.”

“Their morals, ethics and values weren’t the same as my morals, ethics and values.”

BSB: During the 1992 Olympic trials you said at a press conference that this battle wasn’t about you. How much did you feel like you were taking on the responsibility, not just for the athletes back in ‘92 but their kids and their kids’ kids and the athletes today?

Reynolds: “It wasn’t about me anymore. When my grandfather told me to clear his name, that’s when it became more than that for me. And then when I got there, I saw what they were doing, not just to me – other athletes had been going through that. My daughter might want to run. My son might

want to run, and I didn’t want them to go through that process.”

BSB: So, the IAAF never apologized for their accusation?

Reynolds: “No, and that was the biggest issue right there because some people might say, ‘Butch, you know what? You were exonerated, don’t worry about it.’ I respect that, I do in my heart and my mind. Yeah, but as far as the legal goes, I don’t want my grandkids one day to be searching through Google, ‘Granddaddy was busted for cheating? Oh, my!’ and I’m dead and I can’t say, ‘No, that was a mistake. That wasn’t granddad.’ No, I’m not going through that. They’re going to have to fix that. I’m sorry, as long as I’m drawing the breath in my body, they’re going to have to fix that.”

BSB: One of the things in the documentary I didn’t realize was you tested negative a week after the alleged positive test that they had in Paris. It seems incredible that they completely overlooked that evidence. How’s that possible?

Reynolds: “It gets to a point where if you’ve got to ask why, it’s beyond you now. You’ve got to go somewhere else and that’s what happened. I had to keep asking why. And when it’s like that you’ve got to have God take advantage. He’s the only one who can do it for you then. So, that’s where I was at. It was hard. It was hard. I’ll tell you that but it was part of the learning and it just kind of gave me more confidence in my faith.”

BSB: How did you feel when you were selected for the United States Track and Field Hall of Fame in 2016, as well as being inducted into the OSU Hall of Fame in 1995? What’s it like to be a member of those two exclusive clubs?

Reynolds: “You know what? That’s why you do what you do because you ask the hard questions. And when I say that, I mean that in ‘95 I get into the Ohio State Hall of Fame. OK, but it’s funny because I’m in the Hall of Fame but I can’t get the job (head coaching) up there. Really? ‘I’m like, man, I’m in the Hall of Fame but I can’t get the job.’

“If it wasn’t for Coach Tressel, he looked beyond that. He saw what it is. He saw me for who I was, and he judged me for that, not what people think or said, and I respect that. I love the man today because he gave me the opportunity to see one of the best at his job. When I was able to watch him go through that process, it really helped me cultivate the mindset that I have.”

“I think all those kids that have been coached by Coach Tressel, it’s an advantage because he teaches them life skills. I was very impressed as a coach when I was there because he brought all of us together as one to have one common goal. And that is to be a national champion.”

“Being in the Ohio State Hall of Fame was awesome and I was shocked, but I was very, very happy. But being in the track and field Hall of Fame I was intrigued even more so because I’m like, ‘Wait, it’s 2016 and I’m just asking you to help me get exonerated from the world governing body and you’re saying this is over, there’s nothing you can do? But you put me in the Hall of Fame? So why would you put me in the Hall of Fame and – quote unquote – you think I’m guilty and you’re not going to clear my name? So you put a guilty athlete in there now?”

“I’m just trying to figure this out. Why are we doing this here? That was my question.

I didn’t understand that at first. I mean, you don’t want to help me get exonerated but you want me in the Hall of Fame?”

BSB: Did you ever get answers from anybody?

Reynolds: “No. I accepted the Hall of Fame nomination because that was the best thing to do because I wasn’t going to accept the nomination. But once again, it’s not about me. If it was about me, I wouldn’t accept it, but it wasn’t about me and that’s why I accepted it with that mindset.”

BSB: What’s it like to go all out for 400 meters, that feeling of becoming the fastest person to run that race?

Reynolds: “The only sensation is pain. It’s a painful race. It really hurts from head to toe. You really suck yourself up for that 43 seconds and you train for that 43 seconds. You’ve got to have anaerobic and aerobic activities in your body to maintain that. You’ve got to have almost 50-50 of both.”

BSB: How did the documentary come about, and did anything make you uncomfortable?

Reynolds: “I was always in favor of it. Me and the director, Ismail Al-Amin, knew each other. He worked for my afterschool program for nine years so we knew each other then. Then for the next seven years, we stayed in touch. We kept talking and I’d tell him a story here, I’d tell him a story there and then he just said, ‘Man, we’ve got to tell your story.’ So, he called Bradford Young (the first Black person to receive a Best Cinematography Oscar nomination) and Bradford Young called John Hock (Emmy award-winning producer and director) and we all met in Boston, at the Boston Harbor, and we sat down, we kind of articulated what we felt and what we thought.”

“Ismail Al-Amin took it and he ran with it so I’m very happy with the team effort. Like I said before, I believe in team, I believe in unity and it took a team to put the documentary out. It took Ismail to Bradford, to John and myself. Like Team Reynolds and my attorneys, it took that. To break the world record, it takes a team.”

“If you find the right team, anything in this world is possible. You’ve got to find the right players, the right people and you’ll be surprised what you can achieve.”

BSB: What was the reaction after it was shown on ESPN?

Reynolds: “I got a lot of, ‘Butch, I did not know.’ And I got a lot of, ‘You made me cry. That story made me cry.’ I got that. I got, ‘I’m mad. I’m going to go fight.’ I got all three of those really.”

BSB: What are the most important things you want people to take away from “False Positive”?

Reynolds: “It’s funny, because at one time it was like, ‘Man, that’s Butch Reynolds. That’s the man that broke the world record.’ OK? Then it’s, ‘That’s the guy that they accuse of using steroids.’ Now, it’s ‘That’s Butch Reynolds. Man, that guy fought. That guy was accused of using steroids and that guy is still fighting 34 years later. He ain’t used no steroids. He’s strong. He believes in doing the right things. He fights for what he believes in. He fought for the better of mankind. He stands up for what is right. He sacrificed for what is right.’ I think that’s what’s important at this point.”

A Life Well-Lived At Ohio State

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going on, but he didn't tell me at the time.

"Then with John, I know we struggled against Michigan, but John would do anything for you at any time. He was such a nice guy. Unfortunately, we just couldn't get over the hump against The Team Up North.

"Jim is Jim. Most of my direct involvement was doing things to help Jim, and he was just so good for me from day one. The day he was hired, we picked him up at the airport. I don't remember if Jim remembers all this, the night he was introduced, we played Michigan in basketball. That day he asked me, 'Hey, Denny, do you know what's the date of the Michigan game?' I didn't really know the exact date, but I said it's the third Saturday in November. And then that night, Jim got up in his speech at the Schottenstein Center and said, 'In 310 days, you'll be proud of us when we go to Ann Arbor.'

"Luke Fickell, I was kind of his point person, so if he had any questions, he'd ask me. It was just a turbulent time. But I always liked Luke and his wife, Amy. And then Urban, I knew him when he was a graduate student at Ohio State when Earle Bruce was coach.

"But boy, how the recruiting picked up. It was just way more aggressive recruiting. I was around Urban and Shelley a good bit. Obviously, we had great success under him, with a national title in there.

"Ryan, I've gotten to know him a bit. I've been around and helped a little bit on game days. He's a great guy. The pressure just builds every year, with NIL and all of that now. But I've just been so impressed with him. He always has time to speak with me, I go to practice and we always chat for a couple minutes."

BSB: Speaking of NIL, you've been around the world of marketing and fundraising since the mid-1980s. From the time you started to the time you retired in 2021, how have you seen those two industries evolve over time?

Hoobler: "It's just amazing to me. It seems, and it's been like this for years, that marketing and fundraising all revolve around money now. And I think it's just going to grow and grow. With NIL, I don't see it going away. Andy used to have this saying, 'That train left the depot.' It's not coming back. Now with NIL, the building of new facilities, scholarship costs going up, I just wonder where it ends. But we're so fortunate how much support we get from individuals and corporations.

"But it's sure come a long way when the only thing you did back then was sell signage and hand out T-shirts for three or four games. It's just mind-boggling. You have to think that in a lot of cases, one of the main things presidents or search committees ask an athletic director is, 'How much money can you raise?' That just seems to be one of the main areas of emphasis right now, and I don't see that slowing down."

BSB: There seems to be an increasing influence of NIL and collectives in college athletics, especially when it comes

to recruiting and the transfer portal. Are you in favor of these changes?

Hoobler: "Ten or 15 years ago, I probably would have been totally against it. But now, I'm thinking maybe the student-athletes should get compensated. You couldn't do anything like this back in the day, whether it's buying an athlete a vehicle or giving them money. It's just amazing where we've evolved in the last few years. People like Caitlin Clark, what she did for ratings and attendance – should those types of athletes get more money? But I never thought I'd see the day where guys are driving new pickup trucks or Mercedes, getting whatever compensation they get.

"At some point, somebody has to put some guardrails on this. You have maybe 10 or 20 schools in the country that can really play at this level with the resources needed. I'm not sure how some of the schools in the Big Ten can compete. It's just so different from what I grew up with, but I guess you have to change. Either you go with it or you get left behind, and at OSU, we want to be out in front of it."

BSB: Wrapping up, you've spent a great deal of your life at Ohio State, first as a student, then as a graduate assistant and finally as a longtime staff member in the athletic department. What does Ohio State mean to you?

Hoobler: "If you would've told me my freshman year of college that I could work in Ohio State athletics for my full career, I would've signed up at age 18. I often tell people – jokingly, but also with some truth – that I've never had a real job in my life. I looked forward to coming in every day. How many people can say you get paid to watch football and basketball games? My decision to come to Ohio State, I couldn't have drawn up a better picture.

"Ohio State, it's in my blood. If you cut my wrist, it's going to bleed scarlet and gray. This is where I grew up. But it just worked out. I worked with great people. I had a pretty good run and really enjoyed every moment. I'd do it all over again."

BSB: What does retirement life look like for you now?

Hoobler: "I'm not good sitting around, and my wife doesn't want to see me every day. There's an old saying Woody had, 'You can't pay back, you can only pay forward.' So I go down to the Mid-Ohio Foodbank in Grove City two or three mornings a week and sort food, box up food to help others. That's been good for me.

"I've also been helping out on game days. We do a program for military folks, and I host them before the game. I take them down to the field, and they get to meet Coach Day. I help out a bit in the press box too. I try to play some golf. I ride my bike a lot through Upper Arlington. But I need more. I keep wrestling this NIL thing. If Ross Bjork needs a volunteer to do something, maybe I can help. Or I might look to help some high school programs around here. I just can't totally get it out of my system."

Recruiting Today Presents Challenges

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each week. I mean they really did, they progressed. It's almost like a fairy tale. Because as we got better, we still had close games and we were able to win those close games.

"We had a Cincinnati game, we won that late, the Purdue game won late, Illinois in overtime. They just played their hearts out and ended up being undefeated and got to play for the national championship."

BSB: At one point you were known as possibly the best recruiter in the country. How were you able to get to that point? Is it something that came naturally to you?

Conley: "I guess so. Recruiting was different back then. First of all, you had guys recruit their area then the recruiting coordinator organizes it all and also does his own recruiting and helped out on everybody else. I think being a high school coach really helped out because there you meet a lot of different parents or different kids from different environments. It's the same thing when you're recruiting college. It's all these people from these different environments.

"Also, both my sons actually played football, so they went through the recruiting process somewhat. So I was able to see recruiting from all ends – as a parent, a coach, as the recruiting coordinator. I think all of those things helped out. And I was able to adjust to any type of environment socially and socioeconomically – any parent from any situation from the very poor to the very rich – and it just worked out. You don't think about it. You just do it. Work hard and it will work out."

BSB: Recruiting is very different today with NIL and the transfer portal. What do you think about the state of the game right now?

Conley: "It's the wild, wild West. This all changed overnight. Programs had to adjust, and coaches had to adjust to the portal and NIL. College football has completely changed. It's more like professional, and so it's a completely different animal. The NCAA could have done a much better job at preparing for this, and they didn't do it. So coaches and programs are kind of lost, and it's a shame. It should have never happened. Coaches, they adapt to situations that are different, that are difficult. And they've done it well. Especially a team like Ohio State. Ryan Day has done an outstanding job in this transition."

BSB: Is recruiting something that you would be able to do today or something that you would even want to do with the game how it is now?

Conley: "Well it would be different. But as a coach, your work ethic, your personality that you must have to be a coach, I think you can still be successful at it. But just like the first time I ever got a job at the college level, it would take a lot of hard work. But once you're a coach, you're always a coach. It's never out of your blood."

BSB: You ended up as the head coach at Ohio Dominican for six years. Obviously that's going to be very different from coaching at Ohio State, but was there anything that surprised you about coaching at the Division II level?

Conley: "I don't know if there was anything that surprised me, but it was a lot more like high school than Ohio State. You only had a limited number of scholarships to work with, a limited amount of money, so you needed to recruit numbers and retain those guys. The reason I say it was a lot like high school is because as a high school coach, you get players who come in early in their career as a freshman and you really think as a coach that you have a lot to do with their development on and off the field. They become better students, they become better people, they become more responsible and they become teammates, because that's what you stress all the time as a head coach.

"So Division II football was kind of like that. Get all of these guys from different environments in different places. (Ohio Dominican) had some success as an NAIA program. They jumped to Division II when I got to town. You're playing more experienced talent. They worked so hard, and they bought into everything that we taught them. Pretty soon we were in the playoffs and had a shot at the national championship. So it happened pretty quick. We started having great success in just a couple of years."

BSB: How was it that you ended up getting involved in media?

Conley: "Oh, it was an accident, completely. I wrote a book, and it had some success. I think we sold about 26- or 27,000 copies. There were a lot of stories in there. I hit the speaking circuit and did some speeches. And being from central Ohio most of my life, I was pretty well-known in the area, and I got the opportunity starting off with WTVN. They called me, and things worked out there. Later on I developed the thing on television, Channel 4. So it was by accident, but just people I knew from there."

BSB: And you've been writing for Buckeye Sports Bulletin for a while now. How did that relationship begin?

Conley: "Well, Frank Moskowitz, who I think is an outstanding person, he's an outstanding publisher. Especially during recruiting season I spent a lot of time talking to Frank and people associated with Buckeye Sports Bulletin. So Frank gave me a call.

"I never really wrote anything. The book was the first time I wrote anything. I learned early that you can't just start writing down stuff, you better be organized, just like in football. You have to be organized in what you're saying. It seemed to work out really well. I felt comfortable doing it. And the knowledge of being an insider in college football really helped. I think a lot of the readers enjoyed that aspect of it."

BSB: Is there anything else I didn't touch on that you wanted to say?

Conley: "No, I just think the thing is – I was very, very fortunate that I was able to play at Ohio State, coaching at Ohio State. When I was there as a player we won a couple of national championships and as a coach won a national championship. That's unusual, all of that stuff, to have all of your career in one state. There were some opportunities to leave sometimes, but I love Ohio State and coaching in Ohio. I never, never wanted to leave."

203 Ohio State Student-Athletes Receive Degrees

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State athletics was well represented during the university's spring commencement ceremony held at Ohio Stadium on May 5, with 203 current and former student-athletes obtaining degrees.

The rowing team led all programs with 18 graduates, while men's lacrosse and football trailed behind with 14 and 10 graduates, respectively. Ryan Day's squad, which joined Harvard this year as the only two schools to post perfect Academic Progress Rate (APR) multi-year scores of 1,000, had a list of graduates highlighted by defensive lineman Ty Hamilton (family resource management) and former wide receiver Xavier Johnson (translational data analytics), who is now a member of the NFL's Buffalo Bills.

Other notable graduates this spring include former men's basketball point guard Aaron Craft, who received a doctorate degree in medicine 10 years after donning the scarlet and gray for the final time in his career, along with men's golfer Neal Shipley (public management), who competed at both The Masters and U.S. Open as a low amateur golfer, and 2023-24 women's hockey national champions Lauren Bernard (civil engineering), Hadley Hartmetz (sports coaching), Raygan Kirk (environmental science), Quinn Kuntz (kinesiology), Stephanie Markowski (kinesiology) and Amanda Thiele (criminology & criminal justice).

The complete list of graduates is below.

Baseball – Tim Baird, finance; Justin Eckhardt, environmental assessment; Trent Jones, communication; Mitchell Okuley, mechanical engineering; Hunter Rosson, sport industry; Mason Sawyer, sport industry.

Men's Basketball – Aaron Craft, doctor of medicine; Zed Key, family resource management; Owen Spencer, biology; Antonio Woods, sports coaching.

Women's Basketball – Rikki Harris, sports coaching; Rebeka Mikulasikova, consumer sciences; Celeste Taylor, sports coaching; Karla Vres, master in the study of law.

Cheer – William Bertsch, human development and family science; Brendan Gass, computer science & engineering; Maria Law, health sciences; Mikayla Smith, marketing; Noah Subasic, aerospace engineering.

Men's Cross Country – Alex Dediu, economics – business; Giovanni Copploe, fashion and retail studies; Ivan Slyepkan, health sciences.

Women's Cross Country – Ann Allen, operations management; Mia Mlynek, health sciences; Gianni Napoleon, women's, gender & sexuality studies; Daniella Santos, social work.

Dance – Nina Andrianos, sport industry; Marley Blanchard, communication; Brenna Bocik, exercise science; Josie Cahall, communication; Jesslene O'Loughlin, neuroscience; Alina Serafin, health sciences.

Men's Diving – Mohamed Noaman, applied economics.

Women's Diving – Mackenzie Crawford, biomedical engineering; Ciara McGing, health sciences.

Men's Fencing – Luca Fioretto, Specialized Master Bus-Fin; Vincent Haney, neuroscience; Clark Kokenge, political science;

Edriss Ndiaye, communication; Max Rodney, communication.

Women's Fencing – Karina Dyner, political science; Kelly Feng, international studies; Mikaela Guillen, economics – business; Kristen Ruscitelli, evolution and ecology; Zoe Shay-Tannas, industrial design; Montserrat Viveros, marketing.

Field Hockey – Ali Gordon, communication; Delaney Lawler, sports coaching; Sarah Richards, health sciences.

Football – Quinton Burke, zoology; Patrick Gurd, health sciences; Ty Hamilton, family resource management; Samuel Hart, logistics management; Xavier Johnson, translational data analytics; Parker Lewis, human development and family science; Maxwell Lomonico, human development and family science; Cameron Martinez, human development and family science; Andrew Moore, family resource management; Chad Ray, health sciences.

Men's Golf – Maxwell Moldovan, marketing; Andrew Mulcahy, finance; Patrick Schmuecking, Specialized Master Bus-Fin; Neal Shipley, public management; Adam Wallin, family resource management.

Women's Golf – Jillian Bourdage, aviation management; Emily Hummer, accounting; Caley McGinty, communication; Kailie Vongsaga, sport industry.

Men's Gymnastics – Harrison Andary, biomedical engineering; Justin Ah Chow, communication; Christian Bartolini, psychology; Kazuki Hayashi, electrical and computer engineering; Jakob Murray, electrical and computer engineering; Jadon Roberson, marketing.

Women's Gymnastics – Claire Gagliardi, master's of educational studies; Alexis Hankins, exercise science; Ella Hodges, master of accounting; Raina Malas, public management; Hannah Oliveros, communication; Emma Pritchard, communication; Nicole Riccardi, finance; Joselyn Warga, fashion and retail studies.

Men's Ice Hockey – Michael Gildon, sports coaching.

Women's Ice Hockey – Lauren Bernard, civil engineering; Hadley Hartmetz, sports coaching; Raygan Kirk, environmental science; Quinn Kuntz, kinesiology; Stephanie Markowski, kinesiology; Gabriella Rosenthal, master of speech language pathology; Amanda Thiele, criminology & criminal justice; Makenna Webster, communication.

Men's Lacrosse – Daniel Brady, diversity, equity & inclusion; Thomas Burke, Specialized Master Bus-Fin; Connor Cmiel, finance; Trent DiCicco, mechanical engineering; Elijah Fisher, diversity, equity & inclusion; Brett Gladstone, diversity, equity & inclusion; Jack Graffagnino, family resource management; Thomas Greenblatt, healthcare leadership & innovation; Marcus Hudgins, physics; Kyle Lewis, diversity, equity & inclusion; Noah Mendoza, information systems; Mitchell Sandberg, health sciences; Justin Sherrer, healthcare leadership & innovation; Jacob Snyder, public management.

Women's Lacrosse – Regan Alexander, finance; Riley Alexander, marketing; Grace Dower, marketing; Sarah Johnson, diversity, equity & inclusion; Sarah Klein, healthcare leadership & innovation; Erin O'Neil, finance; Kiana Perez, pharmaceutical sciences; Leah

Sax, health sciences.

Mascot – Nathan Chaykowski, environment, economy, development & sustainability; William Moddeman, public management, leadership & policy; Ryan Vespi, exercise science.

Pistol – Henry Leverett, international studies; Maria Tsarik, accounting.

Rifle – Philip Becker, aerospace engineering; Tyler Hanson, communication; Viktor Kiss, international studies.

Rowing – Natalie Chourova, kinesiology; Olivia Clotten, international business; Noah Fletcher, French/environment, economy, development and sustainability; Evelyn Frutkin, international business; Alexandra Gluntz, mechanical engineering; Jamie Harris, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Claire Holtyn, marketing; Isabelle Huebener, sport industry; Mary Jaskoviak, health sciences; Kira Katterle, biomedical engineering; Morgan Miller, sport industry; Audrey Murphy, health sciences; Darby Pethrick, environment, economy, development & sustainability; Svea Pichner, operations management; Iman Sattar, neuroscience; Gabriella Schmidt, psychology; Amelie Sens, primary education; Jocelyn Spanbauer, psychology.

Men's Soccer – Connor DesRoches, finance; Thomas Gilej, economics.

Women's Soccer – Kina Floetre, human development and family science.

Softball – Hannah Bryan, health sciences; McKenzie Bump, sport industry; Kirsten Epple, health sciences; Taylor Heckman, human development and family science; Reagan Milliken, human development and family science; Destinee Noury, communication; Allison Smith, biomedical engineering.

Men's Swimming – Jack Burroughs, sport industry; Brandon Day, exercise science; Charles Gustafson, computer & information science; Jean-Pierre Khouzam, exercise science; Peter Krusinski, finance; Mario McDonald, exercise science; William Regan, sport coaching, rec and phys ed; John Satterfield, finance.

Women's Swimming – Hannah Bach, public health; Maya Geringer, environmental policy & decision making; Liberty Gilbert, political science; Alyssa Graves, communication; Tristan Harrison, communication; Mia Lachey, finance; Catherine Russo, neuroscience; Kyra Sommerstad, health sciences; Katherine Zenick, neuroscience.

Synchronized Swimming – Victoria Carlson, landscape architecture; Megan Wong, pharmaceutical sciences.

Men's Tennis – Justin Boulais, sport industry; Robert Cash, chemistry; Andrew Lutschaunig, public management; James Tracy II, finance.

Women's Tennis – Lina Ali, psychology; Madeline Atway, finance; Akanksha Bhan, Specialized Master Bus-Fin; Irina Cantos Siemers, kinesiology.

Men's Track – Adrian Curry, communication; Daniel Drellishak, finance; Evan Johnson, real estate and urban analysis; Shac- quille Lowe, sport industry; Armani Modeste, economics; Adam Riedinger, forestry, fisheries and wildlife; Oscar Smith, marketing; Hayden Tobias, chemistry; Leo Uusimaeki, electrical and computer engineering.

Women's Track – Abigail Kuhn, finance; Anne Moses, industrial and systems engineering; Bryannia Murphy, diversity, equity & inclusion; Chanler Robinson, animal sciences; Lacey Stringer, psychology; Ava Tenaglia, biology; Kambi Walker, criminology & criminal justice.

Men's Volleyball – Justin Howard, kinesiology; Jacob Pasteur, marketing; Noah Platfoot, finance; Thomas Poole, mechanical engineering; Nathaniel Wilson, sport coaching, rec and phys ed; Michael Wright, public management.

Women's Volleyball – Anna Morris, communication.

Wrestling – Nicholas Boykin, family resource management; Gavin Hoffman, diversity, equity & inclusion; Klay Reeves, kinesiology; Isaac Wilcox, communication.



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Buckeyes Land In-State Four-Star RB Jackson

Ohio State continued its success in the 2025 recruiting cycle with a commitment from Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph's four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) on June 4, the first at the position to commit to the Buckeyes in that class. His announcement came soon after he finished his official visit to the campus.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

"I came down here with an open mind," Jackson said after he attended the last one-day camp the Buckeyes held in June on the 17th. "I didn't know if I was going to commit. Then I got here and I felt a family atmosphere with the players and the coaches."

Jackson is the 81st overall prospect in the class and the fifth-best running back, and his commitment comes after a long process in which he was favored to land in Columbus for a while.

Jackson was initially recruited by former running backs coach Tony Alford, who has since left for the same position at Michigan, but when Carlos Locklyn took over in Columbus, he continued to go after the in-state prospect.

After his official visit during the weekend of May 31-June 2, it didn't take Jackson long to realize that he wanted to be with the Buckeyes. He said a lot went into the decision to come to Columbus, but he ultimately decided that he wanted to stay in-state with a program that he liked the direction it was heading.

"The location is right down the street, and I love what they have going on with the program," Jackson said. "I'm really comfortable with my decision."

Jackson said that the final selling point for him to solidify his decision was the fact that he likes Locklyn and wants him to be his coach moving forward.

"It was Coach Lock. I like Coach Lock a lot, I like our relationship," Jackson said. "He's intense, but you can still joke around with him."

The running back said that Ohio State has communicated to him that the class of 2025 will have only two running backs in it, but with Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star running back Isaiah West (5-11, 208) committing to the Buckeyes almost two weeks after Jackson did, it seems like they could take three. The Buckeyes are still after some higher-ranked backs in the class, such as Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star Anthony Rogers (5-8, 190) – who is currently committed to Alabama but continues to receive attention from other schools.

Despite that possibility, Jackson said that he will remain committed to Ohio State whether he is one of two or three running backs in the class.

Bucks Land Top Four-Star SAF Delane

Just five days after the Buckeyes earned a commitment from Jackson, they added

another big name to their secondary in the 2025 class with Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel four-star safety Faheem Delane (6-3, 195) announcing on June 9 that he was committing to play at Ohio State.

He was the third safety in the class after Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star De-Shawn Stewart (6-2, 185) committed in late March and Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star Cody Haddad (6-1, 175) pledged in April.

Delane, the 34th-best player in the class, adds to what seems like a stacked secondary in the class, which also includes five-star cornerbacks Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170) of Houston North Shore and Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) of Birmingham (Ala.) Parker, the fifth and sixth overall players in the class and the No. 1 and 2 cornerbacks, respectively, according to 247Sports' composite rankings. The Buckeyes are also continuing to pursue Cleveland Shaker Heights five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180), the No. 1 safety in the class.

Delane was a highly touted prospect in the 2025 cycle and committed on the final day of his official visit weekend over schools such as LSU, Oregon, Maryland and Virginia Tech, each of which he had visited recently or was planning on visiting soon.

Delane, the No. 2 overall safety in his class, was initially offered by former safeties coach Perry Eliano in 2022, but Matt Guerrieri was able to pick up where Eliano left off and secure Delane's commitment.

The Buckeyes could potentially lose almost all their secondary pieces to the NFL draft next year other than Caleb Downs, so the elite talent Guerrieri and cornerbacks/secondary coach Tim Walton have recruited in the 2025 class comes at the perfect time.

In his junior season, Delane had 69 tackles and 18 pass breakups, with 41 tackles and two forced fumbles to show for his sophomore season, showcasing the ability that has gotten him to such a high ranking as a recruit.

Four-Star WR Porter Commits To Buckeyes

The Buckeyes added a top wide receiver commitment on June 14 when Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star Quincy Porter (6-3, 190) announced he intended to sign with Ohio State. He is the 49th-best recruit in the nation and the No. 8 overall wide receiver.

Porter's commitment came a week after his official visit to Columbus began, but even though he had originally set his commitment date for July 14, he chose a month in advance and canceled his remaining official visits with Michigan and Oklahoma the day he made his announcement. The Buckeyes also beat out Penn State, where Porter had already been on an official visit the weekend of May 31-June 2.

He was the second wide receiver in the class, following Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star De'zie Jones (6-0, 180), who committed in March of this year.

With Porter's commitment, wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline has continued to prove that he will be able to land some of the top wide receivers every recruiting cycle, following up a year in which he secured Jeremiah Smith,

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.	
Jake Cook	OL	6-5	295	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) North	
Faheem Delane	SF	6-3	195	★★★★	Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel	
Zion Grady	DE	6-4	235	★★★★	Enterprise, Ala.	
Cody Haddad	SF	6-1	175	★★★★	Cleveland St. Ignatius	
Bo Jackson	RB	6-0	205	★★★★	Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph	
De'zie Jones	WR	6-0	180	★★★★	Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic	
Eli Lee	LB	6-3	230	★★★	Akron Hoban	
Brody Lennon	TE	6-4	220	★★★	Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy	
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	
Bodpegn Miller	WR	6-4	180	★★★	Mansfield (Ohio) Ontario	
Trajen Odom	DL	6-4	285	★★★★	Matthews, N.C.	
Na'eem Offord	CB	6-1	185	★★★★★	Birmingham (Ala.) Parker	
Quincy Porter	WR	6-3	190	★★★★	Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic	
Nate Roberts	TE	6-4	235	★★★★	Washington, Okla.	
Maxwell Roy	DL	6-3	250	★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep	
Devin Sanchez	CB	6-2	170	★★★★★	Houston North Shore	
Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	225	★★★★★	Bellefontaine, Ohio	
DeShawn Stewart	SF	6-2	185	★★★★	Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic	
Isaiah West	RB	5-11	208	★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep	

who was the nation's top overall 2024 prospect and highest-rated wide receiver recruit since Missouri's Dorial Green-Beckham in 2014. Hartline has also received a commitment from Santa Ana, Calif., five-star Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), who is currently the No. 1 player in the 2026 class.

Three-Star RB West Commits To Ohio State

As mentioned earlier, the Buckeyes received another commitment in the backfield on June 16 from West, making him the second running back in the 2025 class.

He is from the same high school as both former Buckeye wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. and quarterback Kyle McCord and is the No. 534 overall player in the class of 2025 and the 45th-best at the position.

West had originally committed to Kentucky on March 1, but after Locklyn arrived at Ohio State, he made West a priority target. After going on an unofficial visit to Columbus on May 10, he decommitted from the Wildcats just three days later and didn't take any other visits, committing to Ohio State just over a month later.

In his junior season, West recorded 861 yards from scrimmage and 10 touchdowns, helping his team win a state championship with a 13-1 overall record.

Ohio State Secures In State Three-Star WR Miller

Ohio State added another commitment to its 2025 class in Mansfield (Ohio) Ontario wide receiver Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180), who pledged to the Buckeyes on June 21 just three days after receiving a scholarship offer from the program.

A converted quarterback, Miller impressed Hartline enough at the Buckeyes seven-on-seven tournament that he was able to secure an offer, which he jumped on quickly.

He was the 17th overall commit in the class and the third wide receiver with Jones and Porter both committed to the Buckeyes already. He is currently ranked the No. 580 overall player in the class and the No. 91

wide receiver in 2025.

Miller held offers from 16 Division I schools including Boston College, Iowa State, Northwestern and Ohio, as well as Penn, Yale and Youngstown State, among others. He had an official visit set to go to Boston College the weekend he committed but reportedly canceled it.

While Miller was the third receiver commitment in the class, Ohio State is still likely going to try for at least one more with Duncanville, Texas, five-star Dakorien Moore (5-11, 182); Mission Viejo (Calif.) four-star Phillip Bell (6-2, 195); Orlando (Fla.) Jones four-star Vernell Brown III (5-11, 170); and Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star Daylan McCutcheon (5-11, 175) still uncommitted.

Three-Star OL Cook Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State earned its second offensive line commitment in the 2025 class on June 23 when Westerville North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295) announced he would be joining the Buckeyes.

Cook had committed to Louisville in February, but after Ohio State showed some interest in him, he opted to decommit from the Cardinals and commit to his hometown team that he grew up rooting for. Offensive line coach Justin Frye was able to watch Cook at Ohio State's one-day camp on June 5, the first of five, as well as its seven-on-seven camp on June 12, where he impressed.

"I'd say it's one of the best feelings in the world," Cook told 247Sports. "It feels awesome. My family has been freaking out."

He is currently ranked the No. 624 recruit in the nation, the No. 39 interior lineman and the No. 23 player in the state of Ohio. He is the seventh in-state commit in the 2025 class.

Over the past year, Cook has lost more than 40 pounds which has helped him improve his stamina and technique and get noticed by many Division I schools, such as Boston College, Kentucky, North Carolina and West Virginia, before he ultimately decided to play for the Buckeyes.

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	205	★★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei

Four-Star DE Grady Adds To Solid 2025 D-Line

After he took his official visit to Ohio State over the weekend of June 21-23, Enterprise, Ala., four-star defensive end Zion Grady (6-4, 235) committed to Ohio State on June 24, making him the 19th in the 2025 class for the Buckeyes.

Grady was originally committed to Alabama but decommitted when Nick Saban announced his retirement in January. The Buckeyes were able to beat out Miami (Fla.), Florida State, Auburn and Tennessee in the race for the edge rusher.

He is currently ranked the No. 66 overall player in the country, the sixth-best edge rusher and the No. 6 player in the state of Alabama by 247Sports composite ranking.

In his junior season, Grady finished with 87 tackles, 24 for a loss, 22 quarterback hurries, 11 sacks and an interception. As a sophomore, he finished with 108 tackles, 27 quarterback hurries, 22 sacks, three forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries while winning Alabama Class 5A Lineman of the Year.

He is the third defensive lineman to commit this cycle, joining Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star edge rusher Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225) and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive lineman London Merritt (6-3, 250).

Other possible defensive lineman targets in the 2025 class are Newberry, Fla., four-star Jarquez Carter (6-2, 284); Elkhart, Ind., four-star Mariyon Dye (6-5, 270); Matthews (N.C.) Weddington four-star Trajen Odom (6-4, 285); and Indianapolis Warren Central four-star Damien Shanklin (6-4, 230).

Three-Star TE Lennon Commits To Buckeyes

Ohio State secured its 20th commitment in the 2025 class with Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy three-star tight end Brody Lennon (6-4, 220) announcing his commitment on June 27.

Lennon is the second tight end in the class along with Washington, Okla., four-star Nate Roberts (6-4, 235), who committed to the Buckeyes in April. It's the second straight season that Ohio State will have a class with two tight ends after signing Damorian Witten and Max LeBlanc in the 2024 class.

Lennon is the No. 609 overall player in the country, the 30th-best tight end and the No. 22 overall player in the state of Ohio, according to 247Sports' composite ranking.

The Buckeyes beat out Missouri, Pitt, Kentucky and Wisconsin in his recruitment after offering him on June 13 when he attended one of Ohio State's one-day camps and impressed tight ends coach Keenan Bailey.

Four-Star DL Odom Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State earned a commitment on June 28 from Matthews, N.C., four-star defensive lineman Trajen Odom (6-4, 285), making him the 21st commitment in the 2025 class.

Before Odom's commitment, the Buckeyes already had a very strong defensive line class with Grady, Mathis and Merritt.

Odom is ranked the No. 284 overall recruit in the country, the 31st-best defensive lineman and the seventh-best player in the state of North Carolina by 247Sports' composite rankings. He chose Ohio State over USC and Oregon, which he had included in his top three last month.

In his junior season, Odom had 54 tackles, 22 for a loss, four sacks and a forced fumble in 10 games. The year before, he had 41 tackles, 11 for a loss and five sacks in 11 games.

The Buckeyes could still add another interior defensive line prospect despite already having two in the class, as they are still pursuing Opelika, Ala., four-star Malik Autry (6-6, 320), an Auburn commit, and Elkhart, Ind., four-star Mariyon Dye (6-5, 270).

News and Notes From OSU's Recruiting Camps

Ohio State held seven recruiting events in June – five one-day camps and two high school seven-on-seven tournaments – and Buckeye Sports Bulletin was at each of them and has updates from every one-day camp session where hundreds of high school players came to be seen at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. BSB staff writer Patrick Engels contributed to this report by conducting interviews with several prospects.

June 5: There was a good turnout for the Buckeyes' first camp, including Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy five-star safety Bralan Womack (5-11, 185); Toledo Central Catholic four-star cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160); and Loganville (Ga.) Grayson four-star linebacker Anthony Davis (6-2, 200), who each currently hold offers from Ohio State.

Current Ohio State commit Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290) was at the camp as well.

Davis impressed at the camp, going through the one-on-one drills toward the end of it with linebackers coach James Laurinaitis watching and coming out of it with multiple interceptions and passes defended.

Many recruits who went into the camp without offers walked out with one from the Buckeyes, including Womack; Singleton; Avon, Ohio, four-star 2026 defensive back Jakob Weatherspoon (5-11, 172); and multiple 2027 prospects.

June 6: The biggest recruit to come to the second one-day camp was New Orleans St. Augustine five-star defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270), who is the No. 2 overall prospect in the country in the class of 2026.

When he went through one-on-one drills against offensive linemen to finish the day, he dominated his competition almost every time his turn was up. Since he is from Louisiana, it could be tough to pull the defensive lineman into Ohio, but Stewart coming to the camp was a good sign for the Buckeyes.

Uncommitted prospects joining Stewart were Saint George (Utah) Pine View five-

star tight end Brock Harris (6-6, 238); two from Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School in four-star wide receiver Naeem Burroughs (5-11, 160) and safety Simeon Caldwell (6-3, 185); Dunlap, Ill., four-star athlete Mack Sutter (6-5, 215); and 2027 Huntington Beach, Calif., quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200), who received an offer at the end of the camp.

Ohio State 2025 commits Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225) and Roberts were at the camp as well.

Burroughs, who said he doesn't have any visits planned this summer yet, told reporters he worked on his game with Hartline as much as he could since he had the chance to and that Ohio State is high up on his list.

"If you want to be great, come to Ohio State," Burroughs said after the camp. "It's as simple as that. They were showing love, they were showing that they actually want me. Some schools like to say that without actually showing it. As soon as I got to Columbus, (Hartline) called me and let me know he was happy to have me here."

Burroughs, as many other recruits have talked about, said that he has been watching film of Marvin Harrison Jr. for the past couple of years to try to improve his game and take what he can from the recently drafted former Buckeye.

Caldwell, cornerbacks coach Tim Walton's nephew, said he was planning on visiting Alabama and Michigan in June, but it was good to be able to get an offer from Ohio State.

"Ohio State's one of my top three schools, so getting an offer means a lot," he said, "knowing they see my potential of where I can be and knowing that I'm one of the best

athletes in the country."

Caldwell plays safety, linebacker and wide receiver, but he said he's willing to play any position on the field.

"I'll do whatever it takes to stay on the field," he said. "Wherever I play, that's my favorite position – wherever I can get on the field and make an impact on the game."

June 11: St. Clair – who has frequently visited Ohio State since he committed, making it to every 2023 home game and setting that same goal for 2024 – was at camp again on June 11.

After his rankings have skyrocketed in the past few seasons, St. Clair said he believes he's gotten to this point because of his work ethic.

"My competitive drive and my work ethic in the offseason – it doesn't even have to be throwing the football," St. Clair said. "I'm just getting stronger, really understanding defenses, understanding disguises defenses are going to try to run on me and trying to get a mental head start on the competition."

He said the reason he's on campus so much is because he wants to be able to learn as much as he possibly can from coaches such as offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, who has coached many great college quarterbacks.

"His knowledge of the game is the biggest thing that's wearing off on me," St. Clair said. "I'm learning a ton every time I'm here. That's why I'm here so often. I just want to learn everything I can about the game and be a student of the game. I think his knowledge is up there with anybody in the country."

Among the standouts who were also at

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TIM POND, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein University Basketball Halls of Fame, recently offered his publication entitled "Coaching Youth Basketball: Coaching the Coaches" for sale on Amazon.com. Access to this instructional manual was previously limited to attendees of his basketball clinics and camps only.

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Five-Star's Interest Piqued By Ohio State

Continued From Page 35

the camp were 2026 Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star quarterback Dia Bell (6-2, 195) – who has since committed to Texas; Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park four-star wide receiver Brody Keefe (6-3, 185); San Diego Cathedral Catholic quarterback Brady Palmer (6-3, 195); and 2028 recruits Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy wide receiver Eric McFarland (5-8, 170) and Miami (Fla.) Ransom Everglades quarterback Neimann Lawrence (6-2, 190).

McFarland received an offer from Ohio State last month, the first in his class to be able to say so, and he's already sure that Ohio State is one of his top two schools along with LSU.

"LSU and Ohio State are both receiver university," McFarland said. "You've got people who came from LSU like Odell (Beckham Jr.), Jarvis Landry, Ja'Marr Chase. (At Ohio State) you've got (Jeremiah Smith), Carnell (Tate), Jaxson Smith-Njigba, a lot of people that came here to be a part of that."

While he was at the camp, McFarland showed why he deserved his very early offer from Hartline, despite never playing a snap of high school football yet. When he went one-on-one against the corners and safeties

he lined up against, he was a step ahead of anyone else his age, and even many others who are older than he is.

When he eventually makes a decision on where he's going to go for college, which he has a lot of time to decide on since he hasn't begun his freshman year yet, he wants it to be somewhere he can have a good relationship with a coach, which he believes he already has with Hartline.

"I want to make sure I can come somewhere where I have a good relationship with the coach," McFarland said.

June 13: At the Buckeyes' fourth one-day camp was a collection of talent that included recruits such as Upper Marlboro (Md.) St. Francis Academy four-star safety Jireh Edwards (6-1, 194); Flower Mound, Texas, four-star offensive tackle Drew Evers (6-4, 285); Akron Hoban five-star cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 170); Rockville, Md., Georgetown Preparatory School five-star offensive tackle Immanuel Iheanacho (6-7, 340); West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star athlete Cam Thomas (6-2, 217); and Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225).

Iheanacho was – perhaps both literally and figuratively – the biggest star of the day, routinely showcasing his unique strength

in drills with Frye and other prospects and holding his own against some of the top defensive line recruits toward the end of the camp.

Iheanacho, who entered the camp as the nation's fourth-best player and second-best offensive tackle in the 2026 class, said he enjoyed his first visit to Ohio State.

"The camp was great," he said. "I'm trying to get better. I learned a little bit of technique that I didn't really know coming in."

Hill said he thought he performed well at the camp and was appreciative that he was able to take some new things that he learned home with him.

"I got to compete with some guys from all over the country," Hill said, "and just learning some new things and picking up some new tools from Coach Walton and (Guerrieri). Every time I see them it's something new and my interest goes higher and higher every time I talk to those guys."

Evers had received a scholarship offer from Ryan Day the day before he camped at Ohio State, which he said surprised him.

"It was a surreal moment. I was in Coach Day's office and he kind of just dropped the bomb on me," Evers said. "I wasn't really expecting it at all. I was just expecting to go in there and meet Coach Day for the first

time, but when he said, 'Coach Frye thinks highly of you and we're going to offer you right here,' I was kind of taken aback. That doesn't happen every day. You don't get offered by Ohio State, you don't get offered by Ryan Day every day."

Evers said the camp at Ohio State was one of the "smoother" camps he has done in the many he said he has attended throughout his time in high school, and he really enjoyed the hands-on coaching approach from Frye and the other assistant coaches.

"(Frye's) attention to detail, he's really big on the small things," Evers said. "He's going to coach you hard, but he's also going to love you hard. He'll get on you if you do something wrong, but he'll also love you up and hug you. But he's also not going to hold your hand. I love Coach Frye."

June 17: While every camp had a good amount of talent present, the final one-day camp of the month was by far the biggest in terms of the number of high-level recruits who were present, likely due to the seven-on-seven competition the day after.

At the forefront was Ohio State's lone 2026 commit Henry, who said he remains locked in on Ohio State despite taking other visits to LSU and Oregon. The wideout said his relationship with Hartline is one of the

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Although John Cooper, recruiting coordinator Steve Pederson and the OSU staff were prohibited by NCAA rules from talking about particular underclassmen, there didn't seem to be much secret about the top prospects in Ohio.

Leading the pack was Robert Smith (6-2, 187) of Euclid, Ohio. As a junior, he won The Associated Press' "Mr. Football" award, symbolic of the state's best high school football player.

Smith had sprinter's speed to go along with an excellent frame. He used both to good advantage in 1988, rushing for 1,564 yards on 177 carries, an average of 8.8 yards per attempt for the Panthers, who finished with a 9-1 record.

He also had 10 punt returns for an average of 31 yards per return and brought back three for touchdowns. Three other returns for apparent touchdowns were nullified because of penalties. He returned one kickoff 60 yards, and no team kicked to him again the rest of the season.

30 Years Ago — 1994

One Ohio State football recruit was out to prove that last isn't always least, as the old saying goes.

Central McClellion was the final player signed in a great recruiting class, ranked as high as second best in the country by some analysts, but he certainly didn't appear to be any less of an athlete than any of his future teammates.

McClellion came to Ohio State from Olympic Heights (Fla.) High School, where his dominance at defensive back led to his being named first-team All-Florida in Class 4-A.

In his final two seasons, McClellion led the Lions to back-to-back undefeated regular seasons. The team had the longest regular-season streak in the state at 20 games.

Known as a hard hitter, McClellion looked to use his 6-0, 180-pound frame and 4.47 speed to help out in the Ohio State secondary.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State completed another successful summer football camp in June, entertaining over 2,400 players from grade school through high school and netting three verbal commitments.

The commitments came from Ohio products John Hollins, a wide receiver, and Terry Pogue, a running back, and West Virginia linebacker Darrion Scott.

OSU coach John Cooper saw the camp as one of his program's biggest recruiting tools.

"We had over 2,000 kids in our camp this year," he said. "What we're trying to do is put a fence up around the state of Ohio and keep those good players here in the state."

"The best thing we can do is get these kids into our camp so we can evaluate them. We can't go out to where they are and

weigh them and measure them at their place. In fact, we're restricted in how many times we can even see them play in person. "But having them here means a lot."

20 Years Ago — 2004

On June 28, Brian Hartline joined a group that included names such as Steve Rehring, Curt Lukens, A.J. Hawk, Rob Sims, E.J. Underwood, Jay Richardson and T.J. Downing.

Aside from all being commits or current members of the Ohio State football team, the group Hartline joined also had something else in common – they all got their official scholarship offers from the Buckeyes after attending OSU's one-day senior advanced camp, and each committed shortly afterward.

Hartline attended the advanced camp June 26, spoke with offensive coordinator Jim Bollman the following evening and learned a scholarship offer from Ohio State was on the way, and waited just about 24 hours before giving the coaching staff his verbal commitment.

He became the sixth member – and the fifth Ohioan – in OSU's recruiting class of 2005.

15 Years Ago — 2009

After a dry spell that lasted nearly two months, the Ohio State recruiting class of 2010 expanded by three members in a little more than a week in late June and early July.

First came a commitment from a quarterback, perceived by most experts as a position of need for the Buckeyes class. Although fans grew enamored with the thought of the son of Joe Montana lining up under center for the Buckeyes, Westlake Village (Calif.) Oaks Christian Nick Montana wound up issuing a verbal commitment in early June to Washington.

A battle then ensued as OSU pursued other options, and the Buckeyes wound up nabbing the son of another former NFL quarterback. Wheaton (Ill.) North quarterback Taylor Graham – the son of former Buckeye QB Kent Graham – earned a scholarship offer and issued a verbal commitment June 23 to the program.

As the calendar flipped to July, Ohio State earned another important verbal commitment when four-star running back prospect Roderick Smith from Fort Wayne (Ind.) Paul Harding committed while on campus for an unofficial visit.

10 Years Ago — 2014

After a recruiting drought that lasted months was broken when The Plains (Ohio) Athens four-star quarterback Joey Burrow pledged to Ohio State on May 27, the dam broke 12 days later.

First came Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic three-star safety Tyler Green on June 8, followed by Sioux Falls (S.D.) Roosevelt three-star offensive tackle Grant Schmidt and Worthington (Ohio) Kilbourne two-star long snapper Liam McCullough on consecu-

tive days.

Dublin (Ohio) four-star linebacker Nick Conner pledged June 17 and was joined by Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star defensive end Dre'Mont Jones and Macedonia (Ohio) Nordonia three-star cornerback Denzel Ward over the next two days. Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer also flipped his first recruit of the 2015 class by reeling in former Miami (Fla.) commit Kevin Feder, a three-star offensive tackle from Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep, on June 22.

Five Years Ago — 2019

Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star linebacker Cody Simon committed to Ohio State on June 29. His announcement came just one week after he completed an official visit with the Buckeyes.

The 6-1, 218-pound Simon was considered the 10th-best outside linebacker and No. 154 prospect overall in the class of 2020, recording 89 tackles, 14 tackles for loss, five sacks, four pass breakups, two fumble recoveries, one forced fumble and one pick-six for the Marauders the previous season.

Simon landed an offer from Ohio State in early May, so his recruitment went rather quickly. He chose the Buckeyes over finalists Nebraska, Penn State and Virginia, among a handful of other offers.

With his decision, Simon became the 14th member of Ohio State's 2020 recruiting class, joining Clark Phillips and Lejond Cavazos on the defensive side of the ball.

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State had found a quarterback for 2025, earning a commitment on June 21 from Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star signal caller Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210).

St. Clair's commitment came after a busy spring and summer at Ohio State. He was offered by the program in May and then made several visits to campus for recruiting camps throughout June, where he routinely impressed those in attendance in drills and competitive outings.

It showed a significant improvement for St. Clair compared to his camp experience the previous summer, a full year before he would pick up his offer. In the last year, he developed from a quarterback on Ohio State's radar to one who was now in the class for the Buckeyes, choosing the school over the likes of Alabama, Michigan, Penn State and Tennessee.

"I'm kind of just taking what the defense gives me," St. Clair said of his improvement over the last year. "I'm not necessarily trying to make all the perfect throws. I'm just going out there and playing, not really thinking as much. I'm here with my team, trying to get better and make the throws when they're there."

ASK AN ANALYST

With 247Sports' Allen Trieu

Ohio State got commitments from Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph's four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star running back Isaiah West (5-11, 208) in June. Are the Buckeyes going to try to get another running back in the class, and who might that be if they do?

"There was some talk about Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star running back Jordon Davison (6-0, 216), and it would have to be a guy of that quality, I think. And even that seems to be kind of going away from Ohio State at this point. So at this point, I think it would have to be a big-time type of running back, and even then, I'm not sure that they would be in the position to take another running back at this point."

The Buckeyes have also been able to put together a great class in the secondary this cycle so far. Do you see them being able to hold on to their top commits until signing day, and do you think they will try to add at those positions in the 2025 class?

"So when you're talking about hanging on to commitments these days, you never feel safe until they sign on the dotted line. Especially when you can recruit at an elite level like Ohio State. In last year's cycle, they had to protect their commitments all the way – I mean literally as the kids are signing their national letter of intent. So you can never count on that."

"In the secondary class, I do think that they could have some more additions still at this point. The big one to watch is obviously Conroe, Texas, five-star cornerback Dorian Brew

(6-0, 200). He's originally from the state of Ohio. Ohio State has recruited him for a long time. He would be the next one to watch in the secondary.

"Cleveland Shaker Heights five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) is another one. And that one is a battle. At one point, I would have said Ohio State had the inside track, but now I don't think that's the case anymore. I think he's pretty wide open. It's probably a good thing that he's planning to take it into the fall and give Ohio State a chance to continue to recruit him because he has been to a lot of places. When you visit schools like Oregon and USC, those schools do a really good job. So that one is a battle. Between the two, I think they have a better chance at Brew right now, but they still have time to turn it around with McNutt."

Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225) has improved a lot over the last year and impressed at the Elite 11 finals in June. Have you been able to see him throw recently, and what do you make of his ability?

"I've been able to see him a lot. He kind of progressed over the last few years, and I had a chance to see him again this spring. I wasn't at the Elite 11 finals, but I did see him prior to that. He's just about as good as it gets. We think he's neck-and-neck with Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205), who's the No. 1 guy right now. There are people out there who have seen them both who would make an argument for Tavien.

"Regardless of that, I think he's an elite quarterback prospect. What I like about him is that he's not one of those guys that grew up with a private quarterback trainer and that kind of thing. He's really grassroots and there's still so much there that he can improve on. There's meat on the bone. But he's outstanding. When you see him put on the weight, when you see him continue to improve, when you see him continue to move in the right direction, that doesn't happen by mistake. He's very obviously willing to work towards reaching his ceiling."

Ohio State received its second 2025 tight end commitment when Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy three-star Brody Lennon (6-4, 220) committed in June. If they're able to hold onto him and Washington, Okla., four-star Nate Roberts (6-4, 235) until signing day, it will be the Buckeyes second straight class with two tight ends. What do you make of tight ends coach Keenan Bailey as a recruiter?

"In addition to being a good recruiter, I think the evaluation of the players there is important too because Brody wasn't a guy that they targeted until he came to camp and they had a chance to work with him. He's been kind of bubbling up under the radar a little bit. But (Bailey) has been talked about ever since he joined the coaching staff as somebody who has a bright path. I think he's shown that in both his ability to coach and recruit. I think he's one of the better young assistants in the Big Ten."

things keeping him in Columbus.

"I enjoy every time I (work with Hartline)," he said. "Being out here and learning from him, picking up new things. It's been great."

He echoed the same sentiment that many receivers have over the past few years since Ohio State has been sending receivers into the NFL in the first round, and that is that if you're a receiver, Ohio State has to be a top option.

"It's not really hard," Henry said. "For receivers this is where you want to be. This is the standard. It's such a great program."

There were many other elite prospects who already held offers from Ohio State, including defensive ends Joppatowne, Md., five-star Zion Elee (6-5, 225); Indianapolis Warren Central four-star Damien Shanklin (6-4, 230); Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star Justin Hill (6-3, 220); and De Kalb (Miss.) Kemper County four-star interior offensive lineman Mario Nash Jr. (6-4, 280).

But along with other recruits who held offers who were at the camp, there was still enough talent there that Ohio State ended up extending 18 scholarship offers to prospects who performed that day before the night was over.

St. Clair Shines At Elite 11 Finals

A year after current Buckeye freshman Air Noland impressed at the Elite 11 finals, St. Clair did so as well, taking the chance to show that he is in fact one of the best quarterbacks in the country in the class of 2025, if not the best.

"A chance to prove yourself to be the best in the country is an opportunity that you should take every single time you get that chance," St. Clair said. "I've dreamed about being in the Elite 11 finals for a really long time. It's just a way to showcase your talents against the best."

He came out of the event ranked by 247Sports as the top quarterback there, and while he wasn't named the MVP, he did show off on the national stage the skills

that he had been showcasing at Ohio State camps earlier in the month.

"Tavien St. Clair was solid all three days and made things constantly look easy," Andrew Ivins of 247Sports wrote. "He not only has ready-to-play size, but he possesses clean mechanics and is able to touch all different corners of the field. We loved how St. Clair was able to glide both inside and outside of the pocket and came away impressed with his ability to layer the football over the middle. In our eyes, St. Clair is the type of signal caller that you could drop into next year's NFL Scouting Combine and he would have scouts buzzing given the combination of his frame, mobility, arm and mindset."

On the first day of the event, St. Clair completed 16 of his 20 passes during the pro day competition, which was won by Carrollton, Ga., five-star quarterback Julian Lewis (6-1, 185), who is currently committed to USC and is one of just two quarterbacks ranked higher than St. Clair by 247Sports' composite ranking. LSU commit Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205), the No. 1 player in the class, is the other and didn't compete in the Elite 11 finals.

St. Clair also won the accuracy challenge on the second night of the event, which tests the quarterback's ability to hit stationary targets downfield.

St. Clair Recruiting Top OT Sanders

Since St. Clair committed, he has been very active in trying to get more recruits to come to Columbus and join him in the class of 2025. He has said that he tries to get in contact with anyone who commits, and for highly touted recruits, he gets in contact with them earlier to try to convince them to join the Buckeyes.

Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 290) is one of those players whom St. Clair is going hard after.

"We are very close," St. Clair said on June 11. "I just texted him yesterday. I'm in contact with him all of the time. I really

just check up on him. Even though he's on his other official visits, I'm just making sure he knows (Ohio State) is still in the mix. My relationship with David is really special. I elaborate to him all of the time that he'd make our class that much better. We have the No. 1 class in the country right now, but we're trying to have the No. 1 class when it finishes up. We want the best player to play for the best team. He's the best player in the country, and that's why I'm pursuing him so hard."

Sanders is ranked the No. 2 player in the country and the tops at his position, so he could be the first five-star commitment for Frye as the offensive line coach and the first for Ohio State since Donovan Jackson in the class of 2021.

Every other school that Sanders took an official visit to – Clemson, Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama – is in the South, which presents a unique challenge for Ohio State in terms of Sanders' recruitment, since they will need to convince him to go even farther from home, but the Buckeyes are anything but out of the race.

He took his last official visit from June 21-23 and it was to Columbus, where St. Clair accompanied him on his official visit, which might have been planned on the quarterback's part since he wants to have a great offensive line protecting him in the future.

Buckeyes Hold Top-Ranked 2025 Class

After nine commitments in the month of June, Ohio State earned itself the current top spot in the 247Sports 2025 recruiting class rankings.

At 301.80 points as of June 30, the Buckeyes stand ahead of Alabama (284.17), Georgia (269.55), Notre Dame (264.56), Oregon (251.99), Oklahoma (247.72), Penn State (243.27), Clemson (237.83), Texas A&M (234.80) and Tennessee (233.74), which was the top 10.

After finishing the 2024 cycle with 289.10 points and in fifth place, Ohio State has had an extremely good start to the 2025

cycle, which won't be finalized until National Signing Day on Feb. 5, 2025, but the Buckeyes have good momentum to try to finish with the top class.

Since 247Sports began tracking the top recruiting classes, Ohio State hasn't finished a cycle in the top spot, but it has come close multiple times, most recently in 2021 when it finished second to Alabama with its top commits being Quinn Ewers, J.T. Tuimoloau, Jack Sawyer, Jackson, Emeka Egbuka, TreVeyon Henderson and McCord, each of whom were five stars and ranked within the top 30.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- As BSB went to press, Ohio State secured another commitment from Philadelphia St. Joseph's four-star defensive lineman Maxwell Roy (6-3, 285). He chose the Buckeyes over Michigan and Rutgers, the only other two schools he took an official visit to, putting Ohio State at 22 recruits in the 2025 class.

- Harbor City (Calif.) Narbonne four-star 2026 quarterback Jaden O'Neal (6-3, 200) put Ohio State in his top 10 schools at the beginning of the month of June but ended up committing to Oklahoma on June 24.

- Two top offensive linemen the Buckeyes were after in the class of 2025 – Carmel, Calif., four-star Jackson Lloyd (6-7, 290) and Mobile (Ala.) Vigor four-star Micah DeBose (6-5, 315) – both committed to Alabama over Ohio State.

- Shanklin, a 2025 four-star defensive end, set his commitment date for Aug. 29. He took official visits to Alabama, LSU, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Tennessee and Texas in the month of June.

- Gibson, the No. 36 overall player in the country, visited Ohio State on June 18 and decommitted from USC on the same day he was in Columbus. But he has since committed to Georgia on June 24.

All rankings are as of June 30.

Chatman To Miss Season With Knee Injury

Ohio State sophomore guard Taison Chatman will miss the entire 2024-25 season after suffering a torn ACL in his left knee during a summer workout that required surgery. Chatman reportedly underwent a successful surgery on June 18 and is expected to make a full recovery for the 2025-26 season.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

"I'm incredibly sad for Taison that he's going to miss the entire year," Buckeye head coach Jake Diebler said on June 19. "After a tough start to his collegiate career, he worked his way back and played a role for us at the end of last season. He continued that development this spring and was working out really well. I was looking forward to watching him take the next step this year. But I know he'll work hard and get back to form as soon as he can."

Chatman's knee surgery continues a disappointing start to his Ohio State career, marred by injury. The Minneapolis native, who was the program's highest-rated recruit in the 2023 class, also underwent a procedure on his meniscus last October that limited him during fall practice and forced him to miss the first four games of the season. This came after his first knee surgery in 2022, which he previously said hampered him until the end of his senior season of high school.

Diebler confirmed to the media on June 20 that Chatman's previous injuries did not play a factor in his torn ACL.

Despite the string of knee injuries, Chatman still saw the floor for the Buckeyes last season as a true freshman, albeit in a limited capacity. He appeared in 17 games for Ohio State, totaling 17 points, 12 of those coming

from beyond the arc, eight rebounds and six assists.

Chatman scored his first collegiate points on a jumper during his homecoming game at Minnesota on Feb. 22, which seemed to begin a more positive trend of play for the then-freshman. He appeared in five of Ohio State's final six games of the season, making a three-point field goal in three of those five appearances.

"He's been really good in his minutes," Diebler said on March 25, one day before the team's season-ending NIT quarterfinal loss to Georgia. "You can see we've tried to give him an additional part of the rotation. He's earned that. He's a good player. There's no question about it."

Chatman entered the program in 2023 as a four-star prospect out of Minneapolis Totino-Grace, coming in as the nation's 33rd-best player and seventh-best combo guard.

With Chatman out for the entire year, Ohio State's backcourt now consists of likely starters Bruce Thornton and Meechie Johnson along with San Diego State transfer wing Micah Parrish, true freshman Juni Mobley and walk-ons Colby Baumann and Braylen Nash.

While sophomore guard Evan Mahaffey (6-6, 200), who played most of the 2023-24 season at the wing/interior, could also fill in to play in the backcourt, Ohio State and Diebler may now look to the transfer portal to use their final roster spot on a guard.

"I think we're looking at all options," Diebler said "And one of them is sitting tight too. We're evaluating that. One thing I don't want to do (is) we have a really good thing going right now. I don't want to rush into something. But we're evaluating (the transfer portal), certainly."

The Buckeyes had not filled their final roster spot as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

Diebler Embracing New Challenges As Head Coach

As he approached his third month as Ohio State men's basketball head coach, Diebler admitted that serving as the face of the program carries a little different weight than being the second or third person in line.

Diebler, who described his time in the head coaching chair this offseason as a blur, said he can no longer embark on his normal routine in Columbus without being recognized by Ohio State fans who are excited to hear about the upcoming season. It's a significant lifestyle change for the 37-year-old who began his coaching career as a video coordinator for Ohio State in 2014.

"It's different," Diebler said on June 10 at Value City Arena in his first press conference since the team's NIT quarterfinal loss to Georgia in March. "I've got my few coffee spots I like to hit in the morning, (that's) changed. I can't sneak in there anymore, sneak in and out, which is fine. I've met some great people. I've heard some really awesome stories. People who have been lifelong Buckeye fans, or people who moved into the state who are now Buckeye fans. It's different. But it's all good."

While Diebler has experienced a bit of a culture shock as head coach around the city, he has also faced some new challenges on the hardwood, particularly with the player movement that has significantly altered his roster this offseason.

Since he was named head coach in March, six players have departed the program via the

transfer portal, including 2023-24 starters Roddy Gayle Jr. and Felix Okpara, while four players have conversely transferred in, including former five-star prospects Aaron Bradshaw and Sean Stewart, former South Carolina guard and Ohio State recruit Johnson and Parrish.

Diebler acknowledged that learning to weather the storm of the transfer portal has been an adjustment for him, but it is also one that he is fully embracing.

"You have to be able to adapt," he said. "The days of having a true understanding of what your roster is going to look like a year in advance, those days are mostly over. But I choose to kind of look at it as a positive. It allows us the flexibility every offseason to be able to bring in the right pieces."

"The days of summer being kind of, 'Oh, we'll be a little more laid back,' you can't do that anymore."

Despite this hectic first offseason, Diebler said that he felt he and his program still responded well by bringing in four high-impact transfers who he thinks can both fit the team's fast-paced style of play and bring a winning mentality that could help a young roster reach the next level.

"We certainly wanted to structure the roster that fit, a little bit more, the style that we want to play moving forward," Diebler said. "Versatility is important, and it makes us harder to guard and allows us to be a little more creative defensively. So we were intentional about that."

"And the other thing we were intentional about, all four of those guys were in the NCAA Tournament and won at a certain level last year. So that was something I'm really excited about, their experience. I mean, Micah played in the national championship game two years ago (and) went to the Sweet 16 (last season). Meechie's helped lead South Carolina to the best season they've had in a long time. And Aaron and Sean, for being young players, to be able to get NCAA Tournament experience is really valuable."

While there is still some time until the value of this transfer class is truly determined for Ohio State, Diebler said the moves the program made this spring, including a complete coaching staff overhaul, have him excited for his first full season as program leader.

"There's certainly added stress, pressure, whatever it may be," Diebler said. "But also, I'm having a blast. It's been a lot of fun. I'm excited about this group. (I'm) really excited about our staff, excited about our roster. It's been a fun spring."

Diebler Excited About New Staff

Diebler also spoke about his new coaching staff for the first time this offseason on June 10, a new-look group that includes multiple experienced and well-versed assistants, many of whom have close ties to either Ohio State or Diebler.

The first-year head coach offered significant praise for the five assistants he hand-picked during the offseason – those being associate head coach Dave Dickerson from USC Upstate and assistants Talor Battle (Northwestern), Joel Justus (NC State), Luke Simons (Baylor) and Jamall Walker (Grand Canyon) – claiming that, similarly to his transfers, they each bring a winning mentality that can become infectious within the locker room

as they prepare for the 2024-25 season.

"If you look at our staff, much like the guys we brought in through the portal, they're all coming from winning programs, and they've won at a high level," he said. "And I think that's really valuable. Joel coming from NC State and the run that they went on (to the 2024 Final Four), his experience will be valuable for us. Jamall coming off really the best three-year stretch in the history of the school, and certainly, his experience in the Big Ten (at Illinois from 2012-20) was important. Talor, at Northwestern, had unbelievable success, both in our league and in the NCAA Tournament, best (period of play) in the history of the school as well."

"And then Luke being at Baylor and working for (head coach) Scott Drew, who's someone I know and trust, and seeing how that program is run, that's certainly going to be valuable for us. And then Dave Dickerson, who's certainly a familiar name around here. He was on the last staff that went to a Final Four here and won a Big Ten championship. I love that about him."

Aside from the winning aspect, Diebler also pointed to his assistants' experience as a positive addition to the program. With the quintet of coaches entering Columbus with over eight decades of combined experience in collegiate coaching and basketball operations, including 11 seasons served as head coach, all by Dickerson, and 17 seasons spent as a coach in the Big Ten, the Buckeyes leader said he has built a knowledgeable and well-versed staff.

"What (Dickerson) has seen throughout his career is really, really important for us," Diebler said. "He can lean back on different experiences he's had, and that can certainly serve our players well, but also our staff well. I think anytime you hire, you're also, to some degree, hiring guys who are bringing the knowledge from their respective programs. And I think we hit it out of the park in regards to that. So I think it's great."

Diebler also pointed to his assistants' ability to challenge his players to compete at a championship level and help them develop as both athletes and people. These traits, according to the coach, were a requirement, among many other things, during the hiring process this spring.

"When I was going through the hiring process, there were a couple of things that I was just trying to stay committed to making decisions based upon, 'Do I think it's helping us move towards winning the championship?' And then are these guys committed to helping young men grow? Which is something I'm really passionate about. That had to be aligned for this to work."

"Putting a staff together is much like building a team. You're looking for strengths, weaknesses, how they complement each other. Chemistry is really, really important. So there was a lot that went into it, certainly."

Battle Earns Summer League Invite With Raptors

Former Ohio State forward Jamison Battle did not hear his name called during the 2024 NBA draft held from June 26-27, but he will still get a chance to showcase his talents at the professional level this summer, earning an invitation to play for the Toronto Raptors' Summer League team on June 27.

Battle, who was not expected to be selected in this year's draft, will play for Toron-

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MEN'S BASKETBALL

to after a strong lone season at Ohio State. He ranked second on the team in scoring at 15.3 points per game while also adding 5.2 rebounds and 1.4 assists per game, with 46.9 percent shooting from the field, earning him honorable-mention All-Big Ten recognition at the end of the season.

The Robbinsdale, Minn., native made perhaps his biggest impact this past season from beyond the arc, a skill that can translate to the modern NBA game that increasingly revolves around the three-point line. Battle shot at a career-high 43.3 percent clip from three with the Buckeyes, a mark that was just .1 percentage point below former Northwestern guard Boo Buie for the Big Ten lead while ranking ninth in the nation.

He also shot 92.6 percent from the free-throw line, which led the Big Ten and was tied for sixth in the country.

Aside from his shooting, Battle can also showcase his improved ability to score off the dribble and find the open man this summer. This was an element of his game that was on full display during the end of his season with the Buckeyes when 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.

Battle, who spent two seasons at George Washington and another two at Minnesota before coming to Ohio State, will begin his quest to become a professional basketball player on July 7 when the Raptors begin Summer League action.

Carmen's Crew To Play In TBT, Roster Revealed

Carmen's Crew is set to participate in The Basketball Tournament for the seventh time in its history this summer, featuring a nine-man roster of both former Buckeyes and local Ohio hoopers.

The Ohio State men's basketball alumni team, which formed in 2017 under their original name Team Scarlet & Gray and claimed the championship in 2019, is once again organized by former Buckeye forward and two-time All-American Jared Sullinger, along with Columbus native Leon Rodgers. The team earned the third seed in the Dayton Regional and will begin their quest for the \$1 million, winner-take-all prize against No. 6 Purple Hearts on July 20 in the first round.

Headlining the Carmen's Crew roster is former Ohio State forward Kyle Young, who joins the squad for the second consecutive season after spending five years playing for Chris Holtmann at Ohio State. Young suited up for the Buckeyes from 2017-22 and averaged 6.5 points and 4.5 rebounds per game in 135 games, including 69 starts.

Joining Young on the roster again are brothers Andre and Kaleb Wesson, who manned the paint for the Scarlet and Gray from 2016 to 2020, averaging 5.7 points and 2.8 rebounds and 12.9 points and 7.0 rebounds, respectively, during their careers. Carmen's Crew will also welcome back former Buckeye guard Keyshawn Woods, who played just one season for the Buckeyes in 2018-19, netting 8.1 points, 3.1 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game in 35 games, including 15 starts.

The only other former Buckeye on this year's Carmen's Crew roster is forward Evan Ravenel, who played two seasons with the Thad Matta-led Buckeyes after transferring in from Boston College. He served as a bench piece on Ohio State's Final Four team in 2011-12, notching 3.4 points and 2.2 rebounds per

contest in 39 appearances.

Rounding out the team this season are a quartet of players outside of the Ohio State fraternity: former East Tennessee State guard Desonta Bradford; Gahanna, Ohio, native and former Glenville State and Fairmont State guard Jamel Morris; Pickerington, Ohio, native and former Boston College forward CJ Penha; and former Bowling Green guard Scott Thomas, an Ashley, Ohio, native who also played for Carmen's Crew last summer.

Carmen's Crew's July 20 first-round matchup against the No. 6 seeded Purple Hearts will tip off from Dayton's UD Arena at 7 p.m. and will air live on Big Ten Network. It will then take on the winner of No. 2 seed Red Scare – Dayton's alumni team – and No. 7 seed DaGuys STL on July 22 at 8 p.m. on Fox Sports 2.

Four-Star 2025 SG Jones Commits To OSU

Ohio State received its first 2025 commitment as BSB went to press on July 1 when Cleveland Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160) pledged to the Buckeyes over Michigan, Missouri and Rutgers.

Jones is the nation's 72nd-best prospect, 12th-best shooting guard and No. 2 overall player in Ohio.

"(Ohio State) has belief and faith in me," he said after he committed. "So I'm putting my trust into them now."

Jones' pledge is a significant get for the Buckeyes. He has turned in an outstanding first three high school seasons at Richmond Heights, helping lead the Spartans to a combined 73-13 record and three-straight OHSAA Division IV state championships.

Last season, he earned first-team All-Ohio Division IV honors by averaging 14.1 points per game while also thriving on the defensive end. He was perhaps more dominant his sophomore season, averaging 20.1 points per game and earning Division IV Player of the Year honors.

Other Notes and Tidbits

- Ohio State on June 7 extended an offer to Glen Head (N.Y.) Long Island Lutheran four-star shooting guard Kiyon Anthony (6-5, 185), the son of former 10-time NBA All-Star forward Carmelo Anthony. Anthony is the nation's 33rd-best prospect and fifth-best shooting guard in the 2025 class.

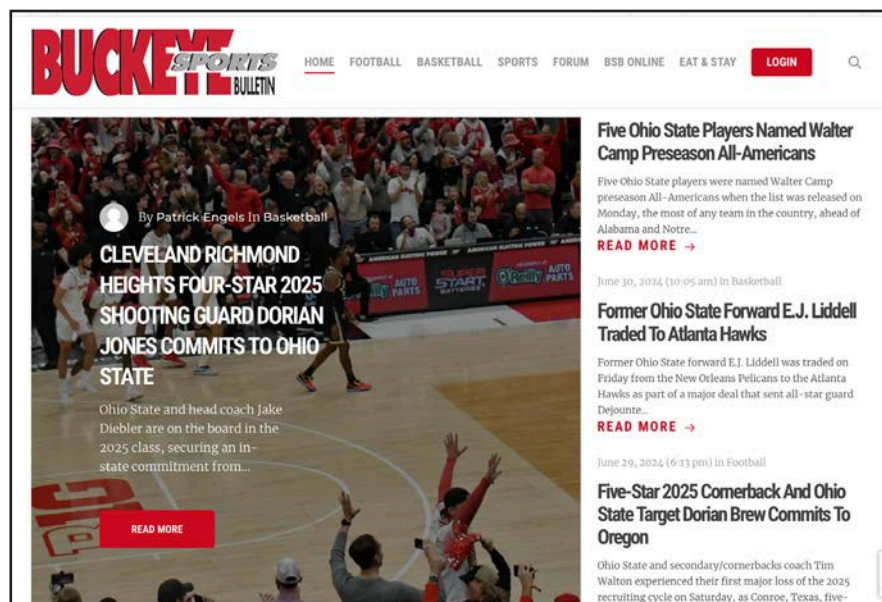
- The Buckeyes revealed jersey numbers for their entire 2024-25 roster. Among the newcomers, Bradshaw is No. 4, Johnson is No. 1, Mobley is No. 0, Nash is No. 14, Parrish is No. 8, Stewart is No. 13 and Colin White is No. 20. The only returning Buckeye who switched his jersey number was Baumann, who went from No. 42 to No. 10.

- Ohio State has added Green Bay to its nonconference 2024-25 schedule, according to CBS Sports' Jon Rothstein. The Phoenix are led by longtime sports talk radio host and former Oklahoma State guard Doug Gottlieb, who was hired by the program on May 14.

- Former Ohio State guard Mike Conley Jr. was named on June 13 as a two-time major donor to The Foundation, Ohio State's top NIL collective for the men's basketball program. Conley's contributions could prove critical to the program's NIL efforts. The NBA veteran is currently signed to a two-year, \$20.8 million contract with the Minnesota Timberwolves.

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Big Challenges Await In New-Look Big Ten

The Big Ten – and college athletics as a whole – continues to undergo significant change, but Ohio State, the women's basketball team and head coach Kevin McGuff are working to ensure the Buckeyes are staying ahead in a shifting landscape.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

In an interview with the Big Ten Network's Rick Pizzo during the conference's spring meetings, McGuff touched on a variety of topics, including changes in the conference and what awaits Ohio State in the upcoming season and beyond.

In the midst of the offseason, much of McGuff's focus has been off the court, where he

said things such as the transfer portal have changed how the program operates.

"It's changed dramatically," he said. "We have to put so much time into fundraising and to managing our roster, especially at the end of the year. There are dramatic changes. At heart, I view myself as a teacher. I never want to get away from what I'm doing on the court in helping lead our program from a teaching perspective. I'm hopeful that I'll always have time to do that, because I think it's impactful for the way our young women grow in the program."

The transfer portal is one of several significant changes in recent seasons along with name, image and likeness and conference expansion, among other things, and McGuff said the key to handling everything is being adaptable.

"As they say, adapt or die," he said. "There's been so many changes, and the way things go now are so different. You've got to have a pulse on your team at all times so it gives you a chance to manage the roster and see what's

coming next and make sure you're ahead of it."

The upcoming season also presents challenges with the addition of the four former Pac-12 teams in Oregon, Washington, UCLA and USC, the latter two having beaten Ohio State this past season in (then) nonconference matchups.

"I think we already had the toughest league in the country, and now you add four great programs that really commit to women's basketball," McGuff said. "There's no doubt this will be the most competitive league we've ever seen, and I think this is going to be great for our sport."

Despite all those changes, McGuff is confident that Ohio State will continue to persevere and find success entering his 12th season at the helm.

"There is a lot of unknown which creates a little bit of anxiety," he said. "But I know I'm at Ohio State, which I think is a great job and a great institution to be around. However these changes evolve, I think we're going to be at the forefront of that and make sure we put our programs in position to be successful."

McGuff Wishes Farewell To Smith

Also in the interview with the Big Ten Network, McGuff delivered some parting comments for outgoing athletic director Gene Smith, who served his final day at Ohio State on June 30. Smith, who has been at Ohio State since 2005, hired McGuff in 2013.

"He's been such an incredible force in college athletics," McGuff said. "He's been so important to Ohio State and our growth in all sports. In women's basketball, I've never been around an AD who's done a better job of getting to know the student-athletes, what their goals are, what they want to accomplish, and then inserting himself in how he can help that happen."

McGuff also said he's had "really positive conversations" with incoming athletic director Ross Bjork, who has already made a strong impression.

"I think he's got a great vision for where we

are in college athletics," McGuff said. "More importantly, where we need to go and how Ohio State can be a big part of that."

Up And Down For Buckeyes In WNBA

Ohio State's most recent draftees in the WNBA have taken different trajectories in the past month, with Jacy Sheldon earning her first start with the Dallas Wings while Celeste Taylor was waived by the Indiana Fever.

Sheldon, who came off the bench for her first 13 games, started her first game on June 20 as the Wings dealt with several injuries to their backcourt. She finished with nine points, three assists and two steals, and she followed it up on June 22 in another start with a career-high 16 points, doing so on 6-of-10 shooting, including 4-of-7 shooting from beyond the arc.

Through June 29, Sheldon has started five games for the Wings and is averaging 4.7 points, 1.9 rebounds and 1.8 assists on 41.0 percent shooting from the field and 40.0 percent shooting from deep. Despite Sheldon's efforts, the Wings are 10th of 12 in the WNBA standings with a 4-14 record.

Taylor, meanwhile, was waived by the Fever on June 25. She was a second-round pick (No. 13 overall) by Indiana and appeared in just five games, all off the bench and totaling just 16 minutes in those appearances.

Her waiving caused some confusion throughout WNBA circles, as the Fever's issues this season have largely come on the defensive end of the floor, with the underused Taylor viewed as a potential solution. Indiana is allowing opposing teams to shoot 45.3 percent from the floor, 11th-worst in the league, and is averaging just 7.1 steals, ninth in the WNBA.

While Taylor's time with the Fever has come to an end, it is likely the former Big Ten and ACC Defensive Player of the Year will catch on somewhere else in the coming weeks, though she had not signed with a team as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

Mikesell Headed Overseas To Spain

Another former Buckeye is also on the move. It was announced on June 26 that Taylor Mikesell had signed with Gerbike KESB, a team based in Gernika, Spain, that competes in Liga Femenina, the highest level of professional basketball competition in that country.

"I'm super excited to get to the city to meet my teammates, my coaching staff and to meet the fans and enjoy the culture," Mikesell said on social media. "I'm excited to take this next step in my basketball journey and continue to grow as a player and as a person."

Mikesell has been without a team for the past few months, after the former second-round selection by the Indiana Fever – evidently a bad omen for former Buckeyes – was with the Los Angeles Sparks in training camp but was waived before the WNBA season began.

This will not be Mikesell's first foray into foreign competition. She previously represented the United States in the Pan American Games in Peru in 2019, helping the team to a silver medal, and the FIBA Under-17 World Cup in Spain in 2016, helping the United States pick up a bronze medal.

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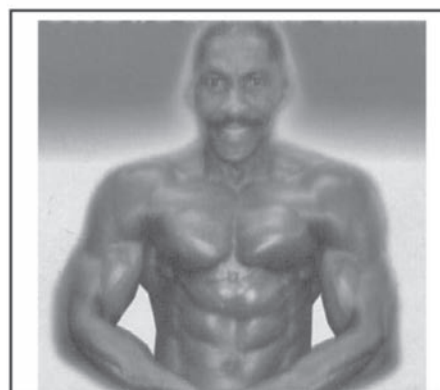
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Edey, Clark Big Ten Athletes Of The Year

Iowa's Caitlin Clark was named the Big Ten Conference Female Athlete of the Year and Purdue's Zach Edey was named the Jesse Owens Male Athlete of the Year when the honors were announced by the conference on June 27.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

Both Edey and Clark have now won the award for two straight years. Edey is the first male athlete to win it in back-to-back years since Ohio State wrestler Kyle Snyder achieved the honor in 2017 and 2018. They are the only two men to have won two times in a row.

Clark is the first back-to-back female winner since Lilly King, a swimmer from Indiana who did so in 2017 and 2018. She also joins Suzy Favor, who ran track and field for Wisconsin and won the award three times in a row (1988-90).

Other Iowa athletes to win the award were field hockey standout Kristy Gleason in 1994 and Megan Gustafson, who also won the award for her performance on the basketball court in 2019. Edey is the third male athlete at Purdue to take home the award, joining diver David Boudia in 2011 and basketball's Glenn Robinson in 1994.

Edey earned the award by improving on his junior season and putting up 25.2 points, 12.2 rebounds, 2.2 blocks and 2.0 assists per game while also shooting 62.3 percent from the field and 71.1 percent from the free-throw line. He led the Boilermakers to their first Final Four appearance since 1980 and first NCAA championship appearance since 1969.

Along with Big Ten male athlete of the year, Edey also won all six National Player of the Year awards for the second straight season, making him the first player since UCLA's Bill Walton (1972-73) – who passed away in June – to accomplish this feat.

He was taken with the ninth pick in the first round of the 2024 NBA draft by the Memphis Grizzlies on June 26, much earlier than he had been projected to go since the college basketball season ended.

Clark, who has already started her professional career in the WNBA for the Indiana Fever, broke the all-time scoring record for all of college basketball, men's and women's, with 3,951 points, passing Kelsey Plum, who had 3,527, and Pete Maravich, who scored 3,667. She also owns the record for most all-time field goals made with 1,293 in her career.

In the 2023-24 season, she scored 31.6 points per game and had 8.9 assists per game to go along with that. She led the country in those two stats, along with three-pointers made (201) and triple-doubles (six). She led Iowa to a 34-5 record and its second consecutive Big Ten regular-season title and NCAA championship game appearance, losing to South Carolina.

The first overall pick has gone on to put up 16.3 points, 6.6 assists, 1.5 steals and 5.4 rebounds per game in her first 18 games

as a pro as of June 26.

Ohio State's nominees for the awards this year were men's tennis player JJ Tracy and women's basketball's Jacy Sheldon.

Clark also added another trophy to her already stuffed trophy case in June when she was named the winner of the Honda Cup, presented to the top female athlete of the year. It's her second straight time winning that award as well, and she is the first Iowa athlete to win it in back-to-back years.

B1G Represented In NBA Draft

Edey wasn't the only player from the conference to be taken in the 2024 NBA draft. The next player to be selected from the Big Ten was former Indiana center Kel'el Ware, who was selected by the Miami Heat with the 15th overall choice in the draft.

Ware spent one season with the Hoosiers, and in 32.1 minutes per game, he led the program in points per game (15.9), rebounds per game (9.9) and blocks (56). He was named by the media to the All-Big Ten second team and by the coaches to the third team and was part of the Big Ten All-Defensive team.

After Ware was Illinois guard Terrence Shannon Jr., who was selected 27th overall by the Minnesota Timberwolves.

The former Fighting Illini was arrested in December after an alleged incident in September in Lawrence, Kansas, where he was accused of rape and aggravated assault. Shannon was found not guilty of those charges by a jury in Kansas earlier in the month of June.

After missing six games when he was suspended by Illinois and filing a restraining order that allowed him to get back on the court, the university dropped its investigation and cited a lack of evidence as its reasoning.

He finished the season with 31 games played, averaging 23.0 points and 4.0 rebounds per game.

The last player taken in the draft out of the Big Ten was Minnesota's Cam Christie, who played just one season with the Golden Gophers in which he had 11.3 points, 3.6 rebounds and 2.2 assists per game as a starting guard. He was named Big Ten Freshman of the Week twice during the season and made the All-Big Ten Freshman team at the end of the year. He was drafted by the Los Angeles Clippers with the 46th overall pick in the draft in the second round.

While the Big Ten hasn't expanded quite yet – the official date that Oregon, Washington, UCLA and USC are welcomed into the conference is Aug. 2 – the soon-to-be Big Ten teams were also represented in the draft. Isaiah Collier of USC was drafted with the 29th overall pick by the Utah Jazz. The Philadelphia 76ers selected UCLA's Adem Bona with the 41st overall choice, and the Los Angeles Lakers took Bronny James from USC, the son of current NBA great LeBron James. They are the first father-son duo to be in the league at the same time and are set to play on the same team next season.

U-M Has Toughest B1G Schedule Per Sporting News

The Sporting News ranked each of the

18 Big Ten teams that will be in the conference beginning on Aug. 2 by which it believes has the hardest football schedules, and the reigning champion Michigan Wolverines were ranked at the top.

The rankings were based on many different things, like how many ranked teams they will play against throughout the season and how many road games they have compared to home games.

"Sherrone Moore will not have an easy task," Bill Bender of The Sporting News wrote. "The defending national champions have the toughest nonconference matchup with Texas visiting Ann Arbor in Week 2. The Wolverines are the welcoming committee for USC and Oregon – who also come to the Big House – and Washington – where the Wolverines travel for a CFP championship rematch. That all leads to the finale at Ohio State. Michigan's opponents (had) a combined winning percentage of .624 (last season). There are few breaks on this schedule."

Behind Michigan were Purdue and USC who tied for second, followed by Michigan State, UCLA, Washington, Ohio State, Illinois and Wisconsin and Northwestern, who tied for ninth to round out the top 10 toughest schedules in that order.

Teams that have what seem to be easier schedules going into the season are Maryland, Indiana and Oregon tied for 12th, Nebraska, Minnesota, Penn State, Iowa and

Rutgers, who has the easiest schedule in the Big Ten, playing only USC and Washington among teams in the Sporting News' top 25.

Four Future B1G QBs Compete At Elite 11 Finals

Ohio State was represented by 2025 quarterback commitment Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225) in the Elite 11 Finals, and he impressed there, showing why he has been shooting up the rankings in the past few years. He won the accuracy competition and wowed on the national stage in front of a large audience to show that Ohio State's future is bright.

He wasn't the only future Big Ten quarterback to compete in the event, though. He was joined by USC commit Julian Lewis (6-1, 185) – a Carrollton, Ga., five-star who is ranked the second-best quarterback in the country ahead of St. Clair; San Diego Lincoln four-star and Oregon commit Akili Smith Jr. (6-5, 200); and Orange (Calif.) Lutheran four-star TJ Lateef (6-2, 185), who is committed to Nebraska.

Duncanville, Texas, four-star Keelon Russell, who is committed to Alabama, won the Elite 11 MVP award, making it the second straight year a Crimson Tide commit won it. Julian Sayin was named the MVP last year and transferred to Ohio State after Nick Saban announced his retirement in January.

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Football Season Cannot Arrive Soon Enough

Anyone who has lived in Columbus for any amount of time knows that Ohio State football dominates the headlines 365 days of the year. Fans cannot get enough of the Buckeyes, which is good for outlets such as this one, and even the most minute details are reported like they are world-changing events.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

The time between Ohio State's ignominious loss to Missouri in the Cotton Bowl and now – I hesitate to call it the offseason because there really isn't such a thing where the Buckeyes are concerned – has been interesting to say the least. There have been transfers, both in and out, signing day drama and recruiting wars going on into the summer. While all of that is necessary in today's college football, there is something about actual games being played that gets the blood going. All of the other stuff is like a low-level opening act. The games are the headliner, which is why this year brings more intrigue and excitement than recent campaigns.

Ryan Day has invested in some new pieces and new coaches, and on paper it certainly seems that the Buckeyes are one of the teams to beat in the race for the national title. But we all know games are not played on paper and that Ohio State has to actually go out and win ballgames.

Many believe that OSU has an easy road to the College Football Playoff and a top-four seed, but it should be noted that there are a few more potholes on the road to the title than many see.

October will be when folks really know what this team is about. Iowa comes to town the first weekend of that month, and though the Hawkeyes are offensively challenged, they are not pushovers. Iowa routinely has a defense that is second to none, and that should be the expectation once again.

A trip to Oregon is up next, in a contest that could be the game of the year in

college football in 2024. The Ducks are showing that they aren't taking entry into the league lightly, building a talented roster and recruiting lights out. Oregon just won a pair of recruiting battles over the Buckeyes, for running back Jordon Davison and cornerback Dorian Brew, so the Ducks are in it for the long haul. They may be in it right away, too, as it would not be any kind of shock to see them beat the Buckeyes in what promises to be an eardrum-splitting Autzen Stadium.

Nebraska closes out the month, and even though the Huskers have been off the radar for a number of years, the defense was very good last season in year one under Matt Rhule. The offense could be better this year, and a return to the postseason – where the Huskers have not been since 2016 – appears realistic.

Though November includes Penn State and Michigan, my calendar will have October highlighted as that will be the defining stretch of the season for Ohio State. Should it win all three, there is a great chance that an unbeaten record and top CFP seed looms. But drop a game – even two? – and you'd best believe that the headlines around the program, especially Day – will be nonstop.

Former Buckeyes Dot Landscape

While all Ohio State fans are dialed in on the current team, there are a number of former Buckeyes spread throughout the college football landscape in 2024. Some are well known, a few not as much, but all will be giving it a go at a new school. A total of 25 Ohio State players went in search of greener pastures in this offseason.

It's only natural to be a little bit curious about them, so as a public service, what follows is the list of ex-Buckeyes and where they are now.

- QB Kyle McCord/Syracuse
- RB Dallan Hayden/Colorado
- RB Chip Trayanum/Kentucky
- RB Evan Pryor/Cincinnati
- RB Will Hartson/Southern Illinois
- C Jakob James/Toledo
- OG Enokk Vimahi/Washington
- C Victor Cutler Jr./Louisville
- WR Julian Fleming/Penn State
- WR Kyion Grayes/California
- WR Noah Rogers/NC State

- TE Sam Hart/Colorado
- TE Joe Royer/Cincinnati
- DE Omari Abor/SMU
- DT Jaden McKenzie/East Carolina
- LB Reid Carrico/West Virginia
- LB Nigel Glover/Northwestern
- CB Jyaire Brown/LSU
- CB Ryan Turner/Boston College
- S Cam Martinez/Boston College
- S Cedrick Hawkins/UCF
- S Kye Stokes/Cincinnati
- S Ja'Had Carter/Syracuse
- P Jesse Mirco/Vanderbilt
- K Parker Lewis/Arizona State

There are also several former Buckeyes who transferred prior to last season who are floating around college stadiums, the biggest name being Quinn Ewers at Texas. The Longhorns made the CFP last season and should once again be contenders, and Ewers will almost certainly be leading the way. It's interesting to wonder whether Ohio State would have been better last season with Ewers at the helm rather than McCord. From this corner, Ewers is more prone to inconsistency with his throws, but his toughness and mental makeup appear stronger.

Most of the names above were guys who were being passed up on the depth chart and as such are little more than depth losses. McCord and Hayden are the two biggest pieces in the group, and both could have helped in 2024 for sure. Neither wanted to stick around and compete, so they went to lesser programs where they will be the starter – in theory, at least. While McCord is entrenched with the Orange, Hayden is not a given to be the lead back for Coach Prime and his style-over-substance Buffs.

And that leads me to another question I have wondered about for some time, but really have not found an answer to. Would most players want to be a rotational piece on a team that can contend for a championship, or would they rather be a starter on a team that seems to have a ceiling right around .500? It baffles me why kids wouldn't want to go for the brass ring – because football is, after all, a team sport. I get the individual dynamic and how guys need to try to gain exposure for the NFL. But if you're good enough, the pros will find you. Playing average on a poor team does not help anyone's cause, so you would think that some of these guys would think harder about their destinations.

Baseball Program Fouls Out

The sudden resignation of Bill Mosiello from the Buckeye baseball program caught many off guard and brought home the reality that the program has largely been spinning its wheels since Bob Todd coached his final game in 2010.

Todd showed that a Midwest team could be competitive nationally, winning 50 games twice and being regular participants in the NCAA tournament. Much has changed in the world of college baseball since he retired, however, with the balance of power shifting even more heavily to the South. This year's College World Series consisted entirely of ACC and SEC

teams, all of whom have a weather advantage over the Buckeyes and the other teams that play in cold weather for a good part of the early schedule.

Mosiello came in from Texas – specifically TCU – with designs on making Buckeye baseball relevant but decided to return home after just two seasons. There was slight improvement as OSU made the Big Ten tournament for the first time since 2019, which was also the last time it was part of the NCAA tournament. There was talk that Mosiello was not completely invested, and he admitted that his family did not move to Columbus while he was in charge of the program, which is curious if you're really serious about bringing glory back. In the days after his resignation, a number of former players went on social media and derided him, saying he always had just one foot in and wondering how you could build a culture in just two seasons.

Baseball was the first sport at Ohio State and has some real history, so it has been baffling as to why the Buckeyes have been stuck in the mud for the balance of the last decade and change. It seems to be a program that needs a leader who understands what baseball in the Midwest is about, and OSU thought it had that in Mosiello's predecessor Greg Beals. Even though his background was in Ohio, it never truly clicked in Columbus. After a solid start that had the Buckeyes reach the Big Ten tournament six straight years and the NCAA tournament once, three of the last five full seasons showed the Buckeyes with a losing record.

Mosiello had made a name for himself as a trusted assistant and savvy hitting coach but had never overseen a program. That was probably a red flag that should have been examined longer than it was.

But the past is the past, and OSU has moved on to a guy who seems to be a great fit, Justin Haire. A native of Hamilton, Ohio, with playing experience at Bowling Green, Haire has led Campbell for the past 10 seasons. In that time, the Camels have become a Southern mainstay, winning the Big South conference every year since 2018 and taking five trips to the NCAA regionals. Campbell has averaged over 30 victories per season under Haire's guidance, and he seems more than ready to take on the challenge of bringing the Buckeyes up from the ashes.

"We need to understand as you build an identity and especially in the college baseball landscape, I think identity is important in knowing exactly who you are and exactly who you aren't and knowing it's OK to not be like somebody else," Haire said in a recent appearance on Sirius XM College Sports. "We're not trying to be a mini version of an SEC school. We're not trying to be the mini version of anybody. We're trying to be the absolute best version of being the Ohio State Buckeyes on the baseball diamond."

Maybe going back to basics rather than trying to reinvent the wheel is the proper approach. If Haire can make things work, then it won't be long until Bill Davis Stadium is once again rocking.



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From Bay To Bjork and Every AD In Between

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Welcome to our annual Interview Issue – The Athletic Director Edition. We are offering BSB readers exclusive interviews with the last five Ohio State ADs, covering 40 years of Ohio State sports, which is a pretty good trick when you consider that one of the directors passed away a few years ago. And no, we didn't use AI.

I am really proud of this issue. A lot went into making it happen, and there were efforts from a lot of people. I wanted to give a little background as to how all of this came about.

Foremost, thanks to Jerry Emig, associate AD for communications, who really got the ball rolling. Despite the fact that outgoing AD Gene Smith and incoming AD Ross Bjork were obviously in high demand for interviews, Jerry was able to line up time for us with both of them. While Gene has been the mainstay of the Interview Issue since its inception in 2014, I felt getting Bjork for this issue, Smith's last, was a real coup, and I was really excited.

Then I got to thinking, if we have Smith and Bjork, why not go for Andy Geiger and we can bookend Smith's career at Ohio State? But first I had to get managing editor emeritus Mark Rea, who was supposed to be on vacation for the month of June, to do the Geiger interview. I pretty much badgered him into doing it, telling him what a great issue it would be if we had all three. He wilted under my pressure, and he quickly had his chat set up with Geiger.

Now, I'm on a roll.

What if we could track down Rick Bay and have interviews with all four living Ohio State athletic directors? There was only one problem. How do you get ahold of Bay, who hasn't been at OSU in nearly 40 years? Enter Denny Hoobler, who recently retired after a lengthy career in the Ohio State athletic department in marketing and fundraising and was scheduled for an interview of his own in this issue.

It turned out Denny had a number for Bay. By the way, Hoobler may not be as well-known as some of the others interviewed, but be sure to read his entry. It's a fascinating look at the changes in four decades of marketing and fundraising, and it's also a tale of a guy who just loves Ohio State and Ohio State sports and found his dream job.

So, the staff is going full speed ahead on the issue and everyone is really excited about what we are doing when it occurs to me that we did an Interview Issue entry with the late Jim Jones a couple of years back. Why not go for the clean 40-year sweep and reprint Jones' interview? And here we are.

In the end, the biggest thanks go to the interviewees themselves. They couldn't have been more cooperative, nor more candid.

Please enjoy BSB's 2024 Interview Issue – The Athletic Director Edition.

The Interviews Themselves

This journey through the athletic directors obviously starts with Rick Bay, and it really starts even before Bay arrived in Columbus.

"I flew to Denver, met with the committee and I asked the question, 'Why would you guys even consider somebody with a Michigan pedigree?' Bay, a former Michigan athlete, said of his interview process. "And they said that Ed Jennings, the president at the time, felt that Ohio State had been a little too inbred and that it was time to shake it up a little bit so he was interviewing people that had no Ohio State background. So apparently that was the motivation, and I interviewed there."

When I reached out to Hoobler to try to get the number for Bay, he was telling me he had initially been hired, early in Bay's tenure, as Ohio State's first athletic marketer. When you consider what a money-raising machine OSU is now, that was hard for me to grasp. Hoobler credits Bay for helping bring Ohio State into

the modern athletic world.

"Part of the discussion at the time was, 'Well, you're going to get this new scoreboard, you're going to do these things, how are you going to pay for it?' " Hoobler says in his interview. "And we said, 'Well, we're going to sell advertisements.'

"It was a drastic change, all of the selling of advertising," Hoobler continued. "And I give Rick Bay credit. Nothing against the previous staff and administrations, but when that started to kick off, they realized that there is a lot of money to be made here with selling ads.

"That's kind of how it started here."

A big part of what the athletic directors who followed have dealt with is raising money, right up to Smith and Bjork, who have had to deal with the new wrinkle of raising money for NIL.

As far as the raising money, the need for cash reached new heights when Geiger came on board and embarked on the ambitious facilities projects for which he is best remembered.

"I was pretty much shocked when I got to Ohio State and saw the condition of the facilities, particularly the football stadium," Geiger said. "There were rickety bleachers at the south end of the Horseshoe, chunks of concrete were falling regularly, and the wiring was from the original construction in the early 1920s. There was asbestos and lead piping throughout. There was one elevator, and that was supposed to be used only for access to the press box. C-deck had zero bathrooms. Zero. Nothing. And two little concession stands. It just wasn't safe.

"So, I started to lobby that we had to do something. Long story short, we undertook a massive renovation project, introduced a lot of luxury suites and other amenities, and completely changed the financial basis for the football program. We bonded that project because we needed to maintain the 33-sport athletic program. We needed to pay our annual fee on the bond and all of that sort of thing, so we really pushed the financial envelope in terms of sponsorships, corporate involvement, and as a result, the stadium became quite a center for all types of events because of the changes that we made."

But building projects were not the only thing on which Geiger was spending money, and his vision remains a source of pride – and expense – today.

"My hope and prayer is that Ohio State will continue to support the broadly-based athletic program," he said. "The joy I felt doing the Ohio State job – not everything was joyous, of course – but the thing I remain most proud of was maintaining the broad base of the program. Rather than reduce men's teams in order to satisfy Title IX requirements, we added women's programs and tried to upgrade everything for everyone. If there is something that has been maintained regarding what I might have accomplished at Ohio State, it has been the maintenance and support of the broadly-based program."

The demand for more and more money became even greater with the recent addition of NIL to the mix.

Our Greg Wilson asked Smith if such changes hastened his recent retirement?

"No, it didn't impact it at all," Smith said of the changing landscape and his retirement. "Actually, it was interesting. I was telling somebody the other week, that's the type of stuff I like to get my hands around. I like this change. This is the type of stuff that I like to get my hands dirty on and just brainstorm around and

come up with how we manage the new model. People support what they build, and if I'm able to build it, then I want to be here to support it and make it grow.

"But it had nothing to do with my decision. I've always embraced the fact that we need to provide as many resources to our student-athletes as possible. The revenue sharing model, how do we ratchet up, and at another level, a financial literacy education program. Because all of a sudden, these kids are going to have even more money in their pocket. So how do we ratchet up our education around taxes? All of those types of things. I get excited about building that type of stuff, but it's time for the young puppies to do that."

Quotable Quotes

Here are some other quotes from the interviews that I found enlightening or entertaining.

There's a wonderful picture in the January 1987 issue of BSB covering Ohio State's Cotton Bowl victory, showing a smiling Bay hugging a suit and fedora-wearing coach Earle Bruce.

In his interview, Bay talks of the genesis of Bruce's surprise outfit. It all started when the Buckeyes opened the 1986 season against Alabama in the Kickoff Classic.

"Ray Perkins was the coach on the Alabama side, and the week before we played, Earle broke his foot somehow," Bay recalled. "I can't remember because he wasn't very athletic. So he's wearing a cast on his foot and he's kind of dumpy looking, anyway. He didn't wear a coat and tie. This is a nationally televised game, the only game on, and here's dapper Ray Perkins, with his fedora, his coat and tie and sharkskin sport coat, all that, walking along the Alabama sidelines.

"Here's Earle limping along, in his coaching gear, overweight and of course we lose the game, and the media picked up on that, the tremendous contrast between the teams and the coaches and everything."

Two games later, the Buckeyes hosted Colorado.

"I went to Earle before the game and I said, 'We've been getting all this negative press, and part of it has been you've been gimping around and the way you're looking and all these unfair comparisons have been made. You could really win some people over if you come out of the tunnel (against) Colorado in a coat and tie and show people you're paying attention.' He said, 'Rick, I can't do that. That's not me. I can't do it.' I understood and he didn't do it, but in the Cotton Bowl he did."

I just loved how Bay, one of Bruce's biggest backers, described his coach with such words as "not very athletic," "dumpy looking," "gimping around," and "overweight." I had to laugh.

Speaking of ADs who backed their coach and described them accurately, thus making me laugh, Smith talked about his time being simultaneously suspended with Urban Meyer for three games in 2018 over the Zach Smith affair. The AD took the hiatus better than his coach.

"I learned what it meant to tailgate inside," Smith said of what he gained from the incident. "My wife made hot dogs, I had a beer and just watched the games on TV. I was trying to get Urban to think that way, but it was impossible. He was sitting in the dark somewhere. He was impossible. I get it. I wasn't the coach, there's a difference. So, it was harder on him probably than on me. But I was trying to go get a hamburger and just chill.

"But I've always tried to take the high road on everything that we deal with. That was a difficult time. Do I agree with the decision? No, of course not. But it was what it was. So, accept it and move on and think about how you come out of it and be positive and do what's next. You're going to have bumps when you're blessed to be in this leadership position over this amount of time. To expect that it's going to be kosher every year, every day, it's not realistic. So I ultimately tried to just enjoy the moment for those three weeks and watch the games on TV. And drink some beer."

Geiger recalled the hiring process that lured him from Maryland to Ohio State.

"I got a call from (then OSU president) Gordon Gee to gauge my interest in the Ohio State job, and I initially said no because I was fully immersed in what we were trying to do at Maryland," Geiger said. "But he persisted, and I finally said, 'OK, I'll come and take a look.' As it turned out, I liked them and they liked me, and I decided to make that move. I found that Dr. Gee can be very persuasive and very persistent. There is only one Gordon Gee. He is a remarkable guy."

Yes he is, Andy. Yes he is.

And finally, steering away from athletic directors, BSB's own Bill Conley, who was a freshman in 1968, was asked who he thought was the best of the star-studded sophomore class that helped Ohio State win the national championship that year.

"That's a tough one because there was just so much talent," he said. "If I had to pick just one guy out of that entire class it would have to be Jack Tatum. He could play multiple positions being a defensive back and a very physical football player. I remember several times in spring practice – we used to practice the whole month of April – and we went five days a week. Every other practice was an intrasquad scrimmage. I remember almost every scrimmage he would intercept a pass and several times took it back for a touchdown because nobody could tackle him. He could have been a heck of a running back."

Upgrade To First Class

For a limited time, BSB 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.

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.

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 14, 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.

We are now offering gift subscriptions to libraries or barber shops for just \$19.95. We are also still offering gift subscriptions to active military Buckeyes and 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 any of the special gift offers.



MARCH/APRIL						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					29 @STP 7:37	30 @STP 3:07
HOME OPENING NIGHT						
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						

2024 PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

TUE. "TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG" NIGHTS
- 4/2, 4/16, 4/30, 5/14, 5/28, 6/11, 6/25, 7/23, 7/30, 8/20, 9/3, & 9/10

WED. "MILITARY & FIRST RESPONDERS" GAMES
- 50% off all available tickets (max of 4) for active & retired Military & First Responders
"DOLLAR DAYS" - \$1 select concession items (4/3, 5/1, 5/29, 6/26 & 9/11)
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"
- Students 14 and above can present a valid ID and for \$10 receive a Reserved Seat ticket AND \$5 in Clippers Cash for food, beverage or souvenir purchase

THU. "COPA DE LA DIVERSIÓN"
- Clippers transform into Los Veleros on Thursday Nights
"THIRSTY THURSDAYS"
- Beverage Specials on Beer, Margaritas & Soft Drinks
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"

FRI. "\$5 FRIDAY"
- \$5 for a slice of Donatos Pizza & a Small Pepsi
- \$5 Beers (small) and Wine
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"

SAT. "PARTY-AT-THE-PARK" - Starting on MAY 18
- Pre-Game live music from 5:30p-6:45p on the Stage on the RF Concourse

SUN. "FAMILY DAY & SENIOR DAY"
- \$18 Bleacher or \$27 Reserved Family Pass for 2 Adults & up to 4 Kids (18 & under) or Seniors (60 & over)
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- First 500 kids (12 & under) receive a victory bell courtesy of Dor-Mar
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