

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 43, No. 24

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2024

JOB NOT FINISHED

Loaded OSU Roster Seeking Redemption

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Since the 2021 season, perhaps no head coach in college football has cultivated a roster as talented as that of Ohio State's Ryan Day.

Day and his staff have seen 16 players live out their childhood dreams and be drafted by an NFL franchise during the last three seasons, including six first-round selections. That loaded group is headlined by rising NFL stars and Buckeye greats C.J. Stroud, Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson along with hopeful Arizona Cardinals rookie Marvin Harrison Jr.

The program has also produced 33 All-Big Ten selections, nine All-Americans and three Heisman Trophy finalists in that same span, all an impressive number that has cemented Day's status as an elite identifier and developer of talent.

Ohio State's unique collection of talent has translated to success on the field, where it has secured a 33-6 record from 2021-23, often dominating its opponents for a combined average margin of victory of nearly 22 points.

These numbers would have many FBS programs satisfied, but at Ohio State, that mark is simply not good enough. Despite the blowout wins and countless player accolades, Day and the Buckeyes have failed to deliver a Big Ten or national title and, perhaps most importantly, defeat archrival Michigan over the past three seasons, all of which are the three main goals set by the program before each and every season.

It is a shortcoming that has prompted those who have closely followed the Scarlet and Gray for years to grow increasingly



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOT SEAT — Head coach Ryan Day hopes his team can contend for a Big Ten title and national championship while finally getting the monkey of their backs and defeating That Team Up North for the first time since Day's inaugural season of 2019. The return of valuable veterans plus the addition of talent through the transfer portal should help the cause.

more restless with each passing season, placing an almost inescapable stain on Day's polished Ohio State résumé along with mounting pressure on the program that is impossible to ignore.

Those foreign to Ohio State's football

program may view these lofty expectations as far too unrealistic or even unfair to Day, his staff and even his players. But for those inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, they know what is expected. Those three goals are the standard for this proud program in Columbus, and they must be reached in 2024.

"I wake up and think about it every day. I haven't won a championship, I haven't beat 'The Team Up North,' " senior defensive end Jack Sawyer said at Big Ten Media Days in July. "You walk around the Woody and all you see is championships and championship posters and banners. I've been here for three years and have not helped our team and this organization win any of those. It's something that wears on

me, and it's something that motivates me every day."

"No gold pants, no natty – we're all on the same page. We have to win every single game," senior cornerback Denzel Burke said at the same event. "No ifs, ands or buts about it.

"I told the younger guys, the transfers, to understand that I didn't come back for any BS," Burke added. "We're here to win it all, and we're going to need everybody. We have to hold each other accountable, and every game is a matchup game this year. No matter who we're playing, it's our job to take them out and dominate them."

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From The Message Board

Ohio State's 2024 season is fast approaching, and with an impressive combination of established veterans and promising youngsters on the roster, expectations are sky high for head coach Ryan Day's team. The Buckeyes enter the season having not won a game against archrival Michigan since 2019, while it has also been a decade since the program last brought home a national title. With pressure mounting for Day and Ohio State this season, we asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum what they think will be the keys for Ohio State to achieve these two goals, along with if they think Ryan Day's job security is in question if Ohio State loses a fourth straight game to the Wolverines.

"Has any college football team had this many players named to the preseason awards watch lists? The Buckeyes have too much talent and depth to squander another opportunity to win the Big Ten and win the national championship. Yet, it won't be easy. The players and coaches need to be mentally ready every week for every team's best shot. They need to pass the tests opponents like Oregon, Penn State, Michigan, Georgia, Texas or Alabama might throw at them. Two or three players on offense and defense must take it upon themselves to put this team on their backs and will the team to success. Who will they be?"

"I can't imagine losing to Michigan again, but if they do, Coach Day must find a way to win the National Championship. This team should be too good to accept anything less."
– **Byron McNutt**

"The keys will be two things, one which they have control of, and the other which they have little or no control of. Preparation and avoiding mistakes are keys they have some control over. Injuries are a key they have little or no control over. I don't expect any close games, really, but even if the team would go 9-3, I would not be in favor of firing Ryan Day. Winning the B1G or beating Michigan is 10 times more important to me than postseason success."
– **Terrier Buck**

"Now that (Michigan) can't cheat, that will

definitely help. It helps when the other team doesn't know your plays. Ohio State needs to run the ball well and get the ball in their playmakers hands and show no mercy. I'm okay with running up the score against those clowns."
– **Tiffin Buckeye**

"As far as keys, you really can only point to two areas – and those are the team unknowns. You have to start with the offensive line, the team's biggest question mark, and then you have to get good play from quarterback Will Howard. Every other position on the team seems set and at championship caliber."

"As for Day and TTUN, he would certainly, at the least, be in trouble if he lost, but the new playoff system offers a mulligan. Coming back and winning the national championship would cure all. If he had wanted to, Jim Harbaugh would have survived a massive cheating scandal with his championship. Day would certainly survive a fourth loss to TTUN."
– **Poster That Harley Built**

"Expectations are immense this year for the Buckeyes with all the returning veterans and transfer portal talent that Day has brought to Ohio State! However, expectations do not win the national championship. If the Buckeyes are going to win it all this year, there will be times during the season they will need KEY BIG PLAYS like those that former Buckeyes pulled off in years past. Big plays like the "Holy Buckeye," (Ezekiel) Elliott's "85 Yards Through

the Heart of the South," and (Maurice) Clarett's strip of the Miami player to get the ball back after an interception in the 2003 National Championship.

"It could get quite ugly in Columbus if there was a fourth consecutive loss to the Maize and Blue. However, running the table in the playoffs and winning a National Championship would heal a big wound."
– **BuckeyeScott**

"Of course like everyone else, I have my eyes on the offensive line. But other than that, this team is so stacked I think it will come down to errors and injuries. Great teams don't make a lot of mistakes, and as for injuries that pretty much comes down to luck. That is when your depth comes into play. Ohio State has a lot of depth on defense but on offense I worry about depth on the offensive line and at running back."

"Ryan Day and Michigan? I refuse to accept the possibility that the Buckeyes will lose a fourth time. All those pro-ready players did not come back to Columbus to lose to their rivals a fourth straight time."
– **Mcarr**

"The coaching staff needs to be sure second and third string QBs get sufficient reps to be able to perform at a moment's notice. Last year's bowl debacle and the 2014 season come to mind."
– **R1TBDBITL**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Keep It In The Family

Having read your issue with the interviews with former athletic directors, I must say that I have this thought: I don't care how good Rick Bay and Gene Smith were at the job, they were not indispensable. It is inconceivable to me that Ohio State would ever hire anyone from Notre Dame or, even worse, Michigan for that job. I'm sure that someone with ties to

Ohio State could have done the job as well as those two did. O-H!

**Terry Walrath
Hinckley, Ohio**

Eyes On The Prize

With the Buckeyes fielding a team with an overabundance of talent and strong, intense motivation in 2024, I hope the team keeps on an even keel emotionally,

and approaches each game with calmness and confidence in a "businesslike manner." I want the team to focus on studiously preparing for each opponent, and focus on avoiding the mistakes which can determine the outcome of a game.

**Steven K. Brown
Sunbury, Ohio**

If you would like to express an opinion

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

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly January through April and monthly May through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
1200 Chambers Road, Suite 206
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$119.95/year.

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2023-24 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 43)

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The next issue (Sept. 7 cover date) will be mailed on Sept. 3.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.

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National Title Or Bust For Day, Buckeyes

At exactly this point in time last year, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day hadn't fully committed to naming a starting quarterback, and the prevailing thought was it didn't really matter if that starter was Kyle McCord, Devin Brown or some combination of the two.

The Buckeyes had an ultra-talented receiving cast starring Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, a strong running attack spearheaded by TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams, and a reconstituted defense with a better understanding of second-year coordinator Jim Knowles and his system.

Then came injuries to Brown, Egbuka, Henderson and Williams, an offensive line whose play seemed disjointed at times and downright mediocre at others, a third straight loss to Michigan, McCord's decision to transfer out of the program, and a postseason showing that ranks near the top of the embarrassment scale along with the 2016 Fiesta Bowl, the 2006 national championship game, and the 1990 Liberty Bowl.

Full disclosure. I was firmly in last year's camp of those who believed the Buckeyes didn't need McCord or anyone else to become a marquee player because the supporting cast was good enough to overcome any shortcomings at the quarterback position. It seems that most observers believe the same thing this season about a team that saw a host of veterans return to make another title run and then mined the portal for such talent as preseason All-America safety Caleb Downs, running back Quinshon Judkins and offensive lineman Seth McLaughlin.

The truth, however, is that Ohio State will need one of its other transfer players to rise to an elite level if the Buckeyes are to challenge for the national championship. Will Howard, who completed 58.8 percent of his passes for 5,786 yards and 48 touchdowns in 34 games over four seasons at Kansas State, is going to have to up his game significantly if the Buckeyes are to get where they want to go.

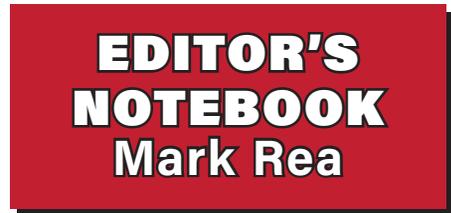
Recent history shows that most national championship teams at the college level have had an alpha dog at quarterback. Say what you will about the brash cockiness of J.J. McCarthy and the fact that his numbers didn't jump off the page. He nevertheless did exactly what he needed to do to lead Michigan to its first undisputed national title in 75 years.

The same can be said for Stetson Bennett, who led Georgia to back-to-back championships in 2021 and 2022, and Mac Jones, who threw for 464 yards and five touchdowns while leading Alabama to a 52-24 wipeout of the Buckeyes in the 2020 title game.

Would I take McCarthy, Bennett or Jones over someone like C.J. Stroud if I wanted to start an NFL franchise? I certainly would not. But raw numbers don't always tell the whole story at the college level. McCarthy, Bennett and Jones were able to elevate their teammates at crucial times, and for whatever reason, Stroud could not. Neither could McCord despite the fact he threw for 3,170 yards and 24 TDs, completed 65.8 percent of his passes, and had a passer rating of 161.6 that ranks among the top 10 single seasons in Ohio State program history.

McCord, much like his predecessor, preferred to let his arm do his talking for him. Maybe each was a totally different person in the huddle and in the locker room, but I doubt it. Then again, I don't think anyone would describe Ryan Day's personality as cocky. Urban Meyer? Now, there's a cocky dude. But not Ryan Day. And perhaps that has been the root of the problem as to why Day can recruit players at such a high level but can't quite get his team to the summit of the college football mountain like Meyer did three times.

I totally reject Lou Holtz and his ilk who insist it's some kind of "softness" that keeps the Buckeyes from achieving greatness against their most marquee of opponents. But there does seem to be a sort of sameness about many of the defeats that have come since the 29-23 loss to Clemson in the 2019 national championship game, a game that took a decided turn on a highly questionable targeting call when Ohio State was holding a 16-0 lead. Since then, we've witnessed a four-touchdown loss to Alabama in the 2020 title game and getting outscored by a combined 43 points during three straight losses to Michigan.



With the expanded playoff, the Buckeyes likely don't need to go undefeated to get into the 12-team field. But let's be honest. The team features a talent advantage over every opponent on its regular-season schedule – and, yes, that includes Oregon, Penn State and Michigan – and anything less than perfection is going to be viewed with a jaundiced eye.

I'm not prepared to say that Day simply must beat Michigan and win the national championship to keep his job. But I'm not exactly prepared to say otherwise, either.

What's In A Number?

Not long ago, I was discussing the upcoming season with a small group of Ohio State fans when the conversation inevitably centered on the quarterback position – specifically the jersey number each QB will wear this season.

We tossed around the novelty of Brown wearing No. 33 – I assume you don't have to be reminded for the millionth time that it is to honor Hall of Fame quarterback Sammy Baugh – and the fact that freshman Julian Sayin drew No. 10, a number that should have long ago been mothballed in honor of Troy Smith and/or Rex Kern.

Then, someone asked why Howard had picked No. 18. The simple answer is that it is the number Howard has preferred dating back to his high school days in eastern Pennsylvania. All well and good, replied my friend, but he should have selected No. 16, the number worn by Cardale Jones and Craig Krenzel, the two most recent national championship quarterbacks at Ohio State.

And then he added, "No Ohio State quarterback has ever won much of anything wearing No. 18."

Not true, of course. The case can be made that Ron Maciejowski, wearing that very jersey number, meant almost as much to the 1968 national championship run as Kern.

There is no doubt Kern, with his unique blend of headiness and devil-may-care athleticism, was the heart and soul of the OSU offense in 1968. But many forget he was sidelined for most of the Michigan State game and all of the following week's contest at Wisconsin, early November games during which Maciejowski excelled.

In front of a then-record Ohio Stadium crowd of 84,859, Maciejowski came off the bench against the Spartans and ran for what proved to be the winning touchdown during a 25-20 victory. The following Saturday in Madison, he nearly put on a one-man show, rushing for 124 yards and three TDs while throwing

for 153 yards and another score during a 43-8 blowout victory.

As long as we're on the subject, a couple of other OSU quarterbacks who wore jersey No. 18 had their moments of glory.

Greg Hare threw for 1,338 yards and six touchdowns, and posted a 10-3 record as a starter for the Buckeyes between 1971 and 1973. And Tate Martell has a single-game program and Big Ten record that might be equaled but will never be broken. He completed 100 percent of his attempts (10 for 10) for 121 yards and a touchdown during a 52-3 win against Rutgers in 2018.

Blowing Off Steam

It doesn't seem like it's been a decade since Ohio State won its most recent national championship. But it has been that long.

For those of us who waited 34 years between national titles in 1968 and 2002, maybe a championship drought of 10 years doesn't seem much like an eternity. But it's honestly becoming a little discouraging to watch the Buckeyes clean up on the recruiting trail year after year after year and then fall short of the finish line during the regular season. It's not only discouraging, it's becoming downright embarrassing.

There is no shortage of theories as to why the Buckeyes consistently fumble their chance to grab the gold ring. One of the most perceptive – at least to my way of thinking – is that Ohio State is not the sum of its parts. All of that recruiting success has put together an all-star roster, but not an all-star team.

I guess I feel a lot like former OSU quarterback and longtime ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit, who earlier this year wondered, "When recruiting, is it a bunch of individuals they're trying to talk to about understanding Ohio State and understanding Ohio State's history? Or is it just a landing spot for three years to propel them into the NFL? Recruiting great talent is one thing, but getting them to buy into being a great team and playing for Ohio State has got to be the No. 1 thing."

In other words, a square jaw and a lunch-bucket mentality might take you a lot farther than an Apple watch and Louis Vuitton cleats.

I'm certain some of this sounds like the ravings of someone reaching the sunset of his years. Maybe, but it doesn't take gray hair or cataract surgery to understand the game of college football barely resembles the game it used to be.

I can pretty well predict eight of the 12 teams that will make up the expanded playoff field. Ohio State can go to Oregon in October and get its doors blown off – something I don't think will happen, by the way – and still make the tournament with relative ease. Teams with campuses on the West Coast have no business being members of the Big Ten. College players should be compensated for their contributions, but not with NIL money rivaling professional contracts. Likewise, there should not be unfettered transfer privileges bordering on free agency.

And above all else, cheating should be ferreted out, its perpetrators shunned, and those programs engaging in such activity punished and punished punitively.

In the end, though, no matter how much conference commissioners, university presidents and athletic directors, and television networks try to screw it up, college football remains one of the truest forms of sport. And while flash and dash continue to dominate the headlines, the all-star individuals who can mesh as an all-star team will be the ones hoisting the trophies at the end of the season.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Bucks Second To UGA In Preseason AP Poll

Ohio State checked in at No. 2 behind top-ranked Georgia in the preseason AP top 25 poll released Aug. 12, receiving 15 first-place votes to open the 2024 campaign.

This follows suit with the USA Today Coaches Poll released on Aug. 5, which had Ohio State trailing behind Georgia and earning seven first-place votes.

Georgia, which is returning several starters from last season's 13-1 campaign – including starting quarterback and Heisman Trophy hopeful Carson Beck – received 46 first-place votes. New Big Ten powerhouse Oregon checked in at No. 3 with one first-place vote.

Ohio State and the Ducks are two of four Big Ten teams in the top 10, with Penn State ranked No. 8 and Michigan defending its national title at No. 9. Also occupying the top 10 are No. 4 Texas, No. 5 Alabama, No. 6 Ole Miss, No. 7 Notre Dame and No. 10 Florida State.

The Big Ten has two other teams ranked within the top 25 in No. 23 USC and No. 25 Iowa, giving the conference a total of six ranked teams to open the season, the second most behind only the SEC, which has nine teams ranked, including four in the top 10.

This year's preseason poll is dominated by the recently expanded Power Four conferences, those being the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12 and SEC. The Big 12 has five teams represented, including No. 12 Utah, No. 17 Oklahoma State, No. 18 Kansas State, No. 21 Arizona and No. 22 Kansas, while the ACC has four teams ranked, including Florida State, No. 14 Clemson, No. 19 Miami (Fla.) and No. 24 NC State.

The only non-Power Four team ranked within the top 25 is Notre Dame, whose football program is not in a conference.

Ohio State's ranking marks the fourth time in the last eight years that the program has started the season as the nation's second-best team, along with the 12th straight year it has been ranked in the top 10 and the 10th time being in the top five since 2013.

The Buckeyes have now extended their streak of consecutive AP preseason poll appearances to 36, a mark that is 11 years longer than the second-best streak of 25 years held by Oklahoma (2000-present).

Walk-On RB Caffey Out For Season

Ohio State will be down one running back for the 2024 season, after walk-on running back TC Caffey suffered a knee

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.)

injury this summer that will require him to miss his entire redshirt sophomore campaign.

Caffey was seen by members of the Ohio State beat wearing a brace and sleeve on his right knee while helping out at the Special Skills Football Invitational at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on July 12, and head coach Ryan Day later confirmed at Big Ten Media Days on July 23 that he would miss the entire season with a knee ailment.

Day had previously been complimentary to his running back, saying earlier this summer that he was playing himself into a bigger role this season.

"The other guy who's been very, very good in there and I think is going to play for us and get carries for us is TC Caffey," Day said on June 19. "He's done a very

good job. He's very disciplined in his approach, and he's a guy that can really bring value for us."

The Hubbard, Ohio, native was expected to battle for the third spot in the running back rotation behind starters TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, competing with freshmen James Peoples and Sam Williams-Dixon for playing time.

Caffey first broke onto the scene in 2022 as a true freshman when he ran for a 49-yard touchdown late in the Buckeyes' blowout win over Toledo, but he suffered an ACL tear later that year and wasn't featured in the Buckeyes' backfield in the 2023 season. He had been looking forward to contributing this season.

"I put in work," Caffey said in the spring. "We've got this saying in the running back room, 'Keep stacking days.' That's what

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Buckeyes Win Five Medals At Paris Olympics

Ohio State was well represented on sport's grandest stage this summer, as 24 current, former and incoming Buckeye student-athletes competed at the 2024 Paris Olympics held from July 26-Aug. 11.

The contingent of 24 Buckeyes at the XXXIII Olympiad, which represented 10 countries and nine sports, was the second-most Ohio State Olympians at a single Olympic Games, trailing only the 26 who competed at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. And those who turned in their Scarlet and Gray for their native flag colors certainly made their presence felt.

The Buckeyes came away with five medals, including one gold, two silver and two bronze. Leading the Buckeye effort at the Olympic Games was former All-American swimmer Hunter Armstrong, who secured two medals in his second Olympics while representing the United States. He helped Team USA earn its first of 40 gold medals in the men's 4x100 freestyle on July 27 by swimming the fastest split on his team, touching the wall in 46.75. He also took home silver in the men's 4x100 medley relay later in the games.

Also helping the United States lead the world with 126 total medals were Buckeye artistic swimmers Keana Hunter and Ruby Remati, who earned silver in the team event, giving Team USA its first medal in the category

since 2004.

As for Ohio State's international athletes, former Buckeye fencer Eleanor Harvey made history on July 28, becoming both the first Ohio State and Canadian fencer to win an individual medal at the Olympics after upsetting favored Italian Alice Volpi 15-12 in the bronze medal match. Former Buckeye men's fencer Maximilien Chastanet also medaled after helping Team France defeat the United States 45-32 in the bronze medal match.

Ohio State's 20 non-medalists also provided some notable moments in France. Former Ohio State pistol athlete Katelyn Abeln became the first American woman to make an Olympic final in the 25m short pistol, finishing eighth in the event. Former Buckeye fencer Fares Arfa of Canada pulled off one of the more stunning upsets in the Olympics when he defeated three-time defending Olympic champion Aron Szilagi of Hungary at the men's individual Table of 32 sabre competition. The win earned him a trip to the quarterfinals and eighth-place finish, Canada's highest in men's fencing history.

Another notable Buckeye who competed at the Olympic Games was three-time NCAA national champion wrestler Kyle Snyder, whose chase for a third Olympic medal fell short on Aug. 11 when he was defeated by Iran's Amarali

Azarpari by a score of 4-1 in the 97kg freestyle bronze medal match.

Below is a list of each of the 24 Olympians.

United States: Katelyn Abeln* – Pistol; Hunter Armstrong* – Swimming; Keana Hunter# – Artistic Swimming; Ada Korkhin – Pistol; Henry Leverett* – Pistol; Ruby Remati – Artistic Swimming; Kyle Snyder* – Wrestling

Canada: Fares Arfa* – Fencing; Duan Asemota* – Track & Field; Alex Axon – Swimming; Emma Finlin# – Swimming; Scarlett Finn# – Artistic Swimming; Eleanor Harvey* – Fencing; Tristan Jankovics – Swimming; Nichelle Prince* – Soccer

France: Maximilien Chastanet* – Fencing; Elodie Ravera-Scaramozzino* – Rowing

Germany: Lena Hentschel – Diving

Ireland: Ciara McGing* – Diving

Lithuania: Tomas Navikonis – Swimming

Nigeria: Sade Olatoye* – Track & Field

Puerto Rico: Kristen Romano* – Swimming

Spain: Aina Cid I Centelles* – Rowing

Trinidad & Tobago: Leah Bertrand – Track & Field

Current student-athlete unless noted.

** Former student-athlete;*

Incoming freshman

collegiate career with 32 tackles (four for loss), one sack and a pass deflection.

"It was very hard for him to step away" Day said. "But even though he didn't get a chance to play on the field as much, he did have a great leadership role, similar to (former Ohio State wide receiver and Block 'O' recipient) Kamryn Babb.

"So a lot of the guys are going to miss him. He just recently went on an internship at the NFL league office in New York. I know he's trying to figure out what's the next step for him. But he'll always be welcome here, and the guys look up to him."

Five Buckeyes Lose Black Stripe At Fall Camp

As BSB went to press, five true freshman Buckeyes had become "official" members of the team during fall camp, shedding their black stripes to signify that they had earned their spot with the program.

First up was safety Jaylen McClain, who received the distinction on Aug. 7 following the team's sixth fall camp practice. McClain, a four-star prospect in the 2024 recruiting class out of West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep, has been a standout in fall camp after a strong spring game performance, most notably intercepting a pass thrown by Will Howard during Ohio State's second practice on Aug. 2, which was open to the media.

Next up were a pair of top 2024 re-

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I've been trying to do, try to build myself for the team so I can contribute."

Luckily for Caffey, he has two more years of collegiate eligibility remaining, giving him an avenue to compete for playing time again in 2025 and 2026 with Henderson and Judkins likely both departing for the NFL.

LB Williams Retires Due To Injuries

Ohio State lost another player for the season just one day before it began fall camp on Aug. 1 when graduate linebacker Kourt Williams II announced his retirement from football, revealing in an Instagram post that he has undergone four knee surgeries and three shoulder surgeries over the past five years.

"In these five years, there's been a lot of light and a lot of dark, but I wouldn't change a thing," Williams wrote. "It's been a long time coming, and it's time to move on. My family, teammates and everybody who has stuck by me (through) it all ... I thank you and I love you."

Williams' injury troubles began right when he entered college in 2020 as a four-star linebacker out of Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco when he suffered a torn ACL during a preseason training camp practice, ending his freshman season before it even began.

He made an admirable recovery from his surgery that next offseason and returned in a backup safety role in 2021, appearing in 11 games at the new position – including his first career start in the Buckeyes' Rose Bowl win against Utah – and recording 27 tackles (four for loss), one sack and one pass deflection.

Williams played in just six games in 2022 before going down with a shoulder injury but recovered before the 2023 campaign as he made a full-time position switch back to linebacker. But his fourth Buckeye season, just like his first, ended before it even started when he suffered his second torn ACL that August, forcing him

to miss the entire 2023 season.

"I really feel awful for Kourt," Day said last August. "I just feel like he can't catch a break. He's such a great young man."

Williams, who was expected to serve as a backup this season behind the likes of C.J. Hicks, Cody Simon and Sonny Styles, among others, finished his Ohio State and

College Traditions Joins VIP Program As New Patron

Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher Frank Moskowitz is pleased to announce that College Traditions, the venerable Ohio State gift shop on Lane Ave., has joined BSB's VIP program. BSB VIP patrons will now receive a \$10 gift card for College Traditions, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, in addition to a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint," as well as a card from either Rusty Bucket or Cameron Mitchell restaurants good for \$10 off your next food purchase. VIP subscribers also enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel.

"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 43 years and what we plan to do in the future. We are also very pleased to welcome College Traditions to the program"

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

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

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

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

The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite-Plus, Elite and Scarlet level VIP subscribers.

Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman): Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

Elite-Plus Donors: Roger Albrecht, Columbus; B2, Reston, Va.; Fredrick Bradshaw, Columbus; Brian Bucher, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.; Thomas E. Farish, Port St. Lucie, Fla.; Terry T. Farmer, Lancaster, Ohio; Sander Flaum, New York; Mike Heimann, Ashland, Ohio; Freddie and Joe Huber, Walpole, Mass.; Gregory Jones, Calabasas, Calif.; Don Kersey, Springboro, Ohio; Kris Kersey, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Fred Krisch, Cleveland; Larry Larson, Ladera Ranch, Calif.; Dan LaVille, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Jerry Lawhun, Rio Verde, Ariz.; Alan Lord, Reynoldsburg, Ohio; W. Lee Mackewiz O.D., Bear, Del.; Allen McMillin Jr,

Logan, Ohio; Jeff Montgomery, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.; In memory of Hugh and Dixie Rea, Washington Court House, Ohio; In memory of Lisa Rea, Greenfield, Ohio; Bob Redfield, Dublin, Ohio; Jim Reichler, Toledo; The Russell Group United, Columbus; Jim Shindler, Sylvania, Ohio; John Thomas, Kentfield, Calif.; Jm Walton, Naples, Fla.; Bob Weber, Mishawaka, Ind.; Richard Yoss, Woodsfield, Ohio.

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Scarlet VIPs: William Adams, Willoughby, Ohio; Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Donald Collins, Kenton, Ohio; Joseph A. Cusma Sr., Massillon, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Julie Ellis, Apple Valley, Calif.; Mike Freeburn, Columbus; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Dave Hamilton, Canton, Ohio; Richard G. Hannan Jr., Chillicothe, Ohio; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, Ohio; Dave Palmer, Washington, Mich.; Theodore Pegram, Eden Prairie, Minn.; Lawrence Romanoff, Powell, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; Dr. William Thomas, Gallipolis, Ohio; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Gaffney, S.C.; Anonymous, Girard, Ohio; Anonymous, Norwalk, Ohio.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

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cruits in defensive end Eddrick Houston and Peoples, both of whom lost their black stripes after Ohio State's eighth fall practice on Aug. 9. Houston, a five-star recruit out of Buford, Ga., turned heads as an early enrollee this spring and has only continued to impress this summer with his already-elite ability.

"He flashes," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said of Houston. "He's strong at the point of attack. He has a great personality. So he'll always go hard. I can definitely see him in there this year."

Peoples, a four-star prospect out of San Antonio Veterans Memorial who excelled in the spring game, has also gained the attention of his coaches and teammates with his physical style of running and willingness to improve. He will like-

ly enter the season as Ohio State's third-string running back behind Henderson and Judkins, which could mean the true freshman is in line for significant playing time in 2024.

Following Houston and Peoples was linebacker Payton Pierce, who became an "official" member of the team on Aug. 13 after Ohio State's 11th practice of fall camp. Pierce, a four-star prospect out of Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy, will likely begin his Buckeye career toward the bottom of Ohio State's linebacker depth chart after being sidelined for most of the spring due to an injury, but that hasn't stopped him from making an impact this fall.

Linebackers coach James Laurinaitis said the freshman has shown a willingness to play multiple positions on the defense in his first summer with the team, a mentality that could earn him some playing time this season, at least on special teams.

"He has an understanding for blocking schemes and how to fall back on certain gaps and is just a very natural, smart football player," Laurinaitis said. "And tough."

Last to shed his black stripe was offensive lineman Ian Moore on Aug. 15. The former four-star prospect from New Palestine, Ind., has taken advantage of a virus that has infected the Buckeyes' offensive line, earning valuable reps at the interior positions and making the most of them.

"He's really coming along," offensive

BSB Offering Reduction In First-Class Mail Rate

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

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

BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said.

"We do ask that those of you who have traditionally upgraded to first class for football season do so now, to save us the cost of sending you a reminder post card in the summer. And as always, we are appreciative of those of you who pay full price on promotions like this, even when presented with a discount."

To take advantage of this offer, send your check or credit card information (don't forget your security code) to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Credit card orders are accepted 24 hours a day at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862.

coordinator Chip Kelly. "He's another guy who's benefited from those extra reps they don't normally get."

McClain, Houston, Peoples, Pierce and Moore join a group of 14 Buckeyes who have shed their black stripes this offseason, a list that also includes quarterback Julian Sayin, receivers Jeremiah Smith and Brennen Schramm, safety Caleb Downs, Judkins, Howard, center Seth McLaughlin, tight end Will Kacmarek and defensive tackle Will Smith Jr.

tackle Ty Hamilton, linebackers Cody Simon and Sonny Styles, and safety Lathan Ransom.

Fryar and Styles were both named Iron Buckeyes for the second time this offseason after the two earned the honor during spring workouts alongside cornerback Davison Igbinosun.

Day Thought Brown Was QB1 Last Summer

Day and his staff acted quickly to name a starting quarterback this season, proclaiming Howard as the lead man on Aug. 15, the earliest the head coach has ever announced his team's starting signal caller in his six years leading Ohio State.

It was quite the opposite situation last season when Day held an open competition between Kyle McCord and Brown that lasted well into the regular season, with Day not tabbing McCord the starter until before the Buckeyes' Week 3 matchup against Western Kentucky.

Almost a calendar year after that situation, Day may have revealed why he hesitated so long to tab McCord as the starter, saying that while the current Syracuse gunslinger earned the job over time, he viewed Brown as the leader in the competition midway through camp before McCord took command.

"At this time last year, I thought Devin was going to be the starter," Day said on Aug. 15. "Kyle just kind of came on and down the stretch (of fall camp) really did a great job. And so, going into those first couple games, I couldn't look the team in the eye and say that he's the starter, because they know what they see (on the field). That's a big part, the locker room. And then (McCord) won it in the first couple weeks and then kind of went from there."

Brown's status as the favorite in last year's competition, at least in Day's eyes, may come as a bit of a surprise, especially considering the lack of reps Brown received last season.

Even with the competition still considered open through the first two weeks of the regular season, the then-second-year player had just three pass attempts and one rush during Ohio State's Week 1 win over Indiana before taking on a larger role

Ohio State Ranks Second In Preseason Consensus Poll

Ohio State prevented Georgia from a perfect score but it wasn't enough to keep the Bulldogs from finishing atop Buckeye Sports Bulletin's annual consensus poll.

The poll includes rankings from The Associated Press, Athlon Sports, CBS Sports, College Football News, ESPN FPI, Phil Steele, Sporting News and the USA Today coaches' poll, and points are awarded on a 25-24-23 scale, with the No. 1 team earning 25 points, the No. 2 team earning 24 points, and so on. The maximum number of points a team can receive is 200, and the total number of first-place votes is written in parentheses.

Of the eight polls, only College Football News had Georgia in second place behind the Buckeyes. The Bulldogs' 199 points were eight better than Ohio State, which was in the No. 2 spot six times but picked fourth by ESPN's Football Power Index, which put Oregon second and Texas third.

Oregon (181 points) finished third in the consensus rankings, two points ahead of Texas. Balloting for the Ducks ranged from second place once (ESPN FI) to sixth (College Football News).

Rounding out our top 10 were No. 5 Alabama, No. 6 Notre Dame, No. 7 Penn State, No. 8 Michigan, No. 9 Ole Miss and No. 10 Florida State.

The Buckeyes play at Oregon on Oct. 12 in the first of only three top-25 matchups: at Penn State on Nov. 2 and hosting Michigan on Nov. 30. The defending national champion Wolverines produced a range of opinions from No. 5 (College Football News) to No. 12 (Phil Steele).

OSU doesn't play USC, the other ranked Big Ten school at No. 21.

There were seven new teams in this year's poll: Arizona, Kansas, Kansas State, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Missouri and Oklahoma State. Eight teams that were in last year's poll fell out (there were 26 teams because of a tie for 25th): Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, Oregon State, TCU, Tulane, Washington and Wisconsin.

A total of 33 teams received votes. Iowa, which was 24th in our 2023 poll, missed finish-

Rk.	Team	Points
1.	Georgia (7)	199
2.	Ohio State (1)	191
3.	Oregon	181
4.	Texas	179
5.	Alabama	164
T-6.	Notre Dame	146
T-6.	Penn State	146
8.	Michigan	138
9.	Ole Miss	136
10.	FSU	121
T-11.	Missouri	103
T-11.	LSU	103
13.	Utah	98
14.	Clemson	97
15.	Oklahoma	87
16.	Tennessee	84
17.	Miami	62
18.	Oklahoma State	58
19.	Texas A&M	55
20.	Kansas State	49
21.	USC	40
22.	Arizona	37
23.	Kansas	24
24.	Louisville	18
25.	NC State	17

ing in the top 25 by three points.

The Hawkeyes had 14 compared to 17 for No. 25 North Carolina State. New Big Ten member Washington – which reached the CFP title game last season – was 30th with seven points while Wisconsin, led by former OSU player and coach Luke Fickell, rounded out the poll with a single No. 25 vote by Phil Steele.

— Compiled by Craig Merz.

Engels, Wilson Promoted To Associate Editors

Patrick Engels and Greg Wilson have been promoted to Buckeye Sports Bulletin associate editors, publisher Frank Moskowitz has announced.

"Greg and Patrick have both done a terrific job since arriving at Buckeye Sports Bulletin," Moskowitz said. "They have both improved as writers and reporters, and they had taken over the day-to-day task of overseeing the editorial efforts at BSB, prompting their promotions.

"I am continually impressed with how well they work together and how well they understand the mission of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Most importantly, these are two genuinely nice guys."

"I'm honored to have received this recognition along with Patrick at a great publication like BSB," Wilson said. "I'm ready to get started with coverage of the 2024 football season working with Patrick and the rest of the BSB staff. My experience has been nothing but enjoyable, and I am eager to continue working with each of them as we move forward."

Added Engels, "I am excited to continue working alongside Frank, Becky (Roberts), Greg and the rest of the Buckeye Sports

Bulletin staff as we move into what should be an exciting football regular season," Engels said. "Working at a first-class publication like BSB has been a great experience for me over the last year or so, and I'm looking forward to what we can accomplish as a group in the future."

Moskowitz also announced the hiring of Bobby Gorbett as a staff writer. Gorbett is a graduate of Ohio University and served as sports editor of The Post, that school's student newspaper.

"Bobby survived a rigorous interview process and probably guaranteed his hiring when, before he was even on staff, he jumped in during an editorial emergency and fulfilled his last-minute assignment without hesitation or fear," Moskowitz said. "And like the others, he is just a nice guy."

Upon his hiring, Gorbett quickly went to work on the BSB Football Preview issue.

"I have greatly enjoyed my first couple of weeks here at BSB, and I am very excited to work alongside Becky, Dave (Breithaupt), Frank, Greg and Patrick going into the 2024 football season," Gorbett said.

in Week 2 against Youngstown State, completing seven of his 13 pass attempts for 101 yards and no touchdowns.

The quarterback's role diminished even further after McCord was named the starter, with Brown attempting just six more passes and collecting 29 rushing yards and one touchdown on 12 carries the rest of the regular season. Brown also started the Cotton Bowl against Missouri, completing just four of his six passes for 20 yards before leaving the game with an ankle injury.

Now, nearly one year after being the favorite for the starting job, Brown once again finds himself as the backup quarterback for Ohio State, this time behind the veteran Howard.

\$20 Million Spent On Ohio State This Offseason

Just over two months before his retirement, former Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith made it clear that the athletic department and its associates were doing whatever it took to help the football program secure a national title, proclaiming that he went "all in" before he stepped away to help the Buckeyes finish on top.

These efforts were outlined by Smith's successor, Ross Bjork, who told Yahoo Sports' Ross Dellenger at Big Ten Media Days that the school's collectives and brand affiliates handed out "around \$20 million" to Buckeye football players this past year, a gaudy number that likely tops all other major programs.

Ohio State's aggressive approach marks a significant philosophical change for the program regarding NIL and the transfer portal, where the Buckeyes relied heavily on their top collectives and sponsors to help fortify their roster for the 2024 season. The program's top NIL collective, The Foundation, likely led the way in these efforts, helping fundraise enough money to bring in top transfers and true freshmen while also convincing those within the program to stay for their senior seasons.

Bjork also discussed with Dellenger whether this aggressive approach will continue into the future, a question that is even more important now considering schools are set to pay their student-athletes up to a cap of 22 percent of the av-

erage revenue generated by power conference programs starting in 2025-26.

The Buckeyes' new athletic director said he is unsure if revenue sharing will have any future impact on the athletic department's approach, but he feels there needs to be some urgency to find a solution with the next recruiting cycle looming this winter.

"It's too early to predict," Bjork said. "How is it going to be broken down from a Title IX standpoint? The challenge is, we're up against the clock. We're signing athletes in football in December. We need some clarity sometime this fall."

This lack of clarity raises questions about the impact of NIL collectives moving forward, which could lose some influence in college athletics when revenue-sharing takes place. While Bjork did not have a clear answer on how this change will change the role of collectives over time, Day said he believes his program will continue to utilize and maximize their NIL resources for the foreseeable future.

"Yes, I do," Day said at Big Ten Media Days when asked if he believes collectives will still play a role with revenue sharing. "I still think they are going to be a part of this. There's just more overall structure in terms of cap and all of those things. Until something happens that leads us to think that they aren't going to be a part of this, I see it continuing the way it is right now."

Ohio State Sells Most Season Tickets In 15 Years

Ohio State's upcoming season is one of the most highly anticipated in recent program memory, and that hype is reflected in ticket sales.

According to a report from The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio State had sold 56,998 season tickets for the team's eight home games this fall, the highest total in at least 15 years. These totals do not include student tickets.

The nearly 57,000 non-student season tickets sold this offseason eclipsed the previous high of 56,484 set in 2022, which also featured eight home games on the schedule. Last season had just 55,233 season tickets sold during that summer, a decreased number that could have been attributed to the team playing only six home games.

(TBD), Iowa on Oct. 5 (TBD), Nebraska on Oct. 26 (TBD), Purdue on Nov. 9 (TBD) and Indiana on Nov. 23 (TBD) before welcoming archrival Michigan to Ohio Stadium on Nov. 30 (noon, FOX).

Griffin To Dot "i" For Season Opener

Ohio State will honor one of its all-time greats during its season opener against Akron on Aug. 31, announcing on July 25 that two-time Heisman Trophy-winning running back Archie Griffin will dot the "i" in Script Ohio when the marching band performs at halftime.

"The opportunity, in Ohio Stadium, to dot the 'i' is a very special honor," Griffin said. "I know that Woody (Hayes) was proud to have had that opportunity, and I am following in his footsteps and am extremely proud of this opportunity."

In the 88-year history of the Script Ohio tradition, only a few non-band members have been selected for the honor, including comedian Bob Hope (1978), Hayes (1983), golfing legend Jack Nicklaus (2006), Sen. John Glenn and Annie Glenn (2009), marching band director emeritus Jon R. Woods (2011) and former Buckeye head coach Earle Bruce (2016).

"When you see someone outside of the band dotting the 'i,' you know that it is extraordinary. That is how I look at it," Griffin said. "It is a big-time tradition for our band, university, fans and everyone who knows Ohio State. To give someone who is not part of the band the opportunity, it must be something special."

"Archie Griffin embodies that same

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Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

RULES AND RATES: 20 cents per word, 10 cents for more than one insertion. Minimum order of \$5. No agency discounts. Make checks payable to Buckeye Sports Bulletin. We accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express.

All ads are uniformly set with the first two words set in boldface capital letters at no charge. However, no other words may be set in boldface. Anyone planning a larger or more distinct ad may receive our ad rate card upon request.

We reserve the right to request additional information or merchandise be submitted from advertiser prior to acceptance of an ad, and we reserve the right to refuse advertisements considered objectionable.

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WANTED TO buy: OSU football memorabilia, programs, ticket stubs, pennants, championship rings, gold pants, helmets, autographs, game-used equipment, small or large collections. Call Chris at (419) 957-6789.

BUCKEYE GAMEDAY Memories: A new book of short stories about humorous gameday experiences in the 1960s through the 2010s by Tim Sullivan. Available on Amazon.com.

FOR SALE: OSU football programs including bowl games, national playoff and championship games. OSU basketball pro-

grams, NFL programs, golf, Olympics, NBA, other print sports memorabilia. Call John at (330) 507-7339.

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.

FOR SALE — OSU-MICHIGAN Game, 1975 - original RADIO broadcast on CD! Woody's last great team & Archie's last UM game as Bucks go 11-0! Three-disk set runs 3½ hours! Listen in your car! \$25 + \$3 S & H. Call 1-630-527-8890!

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WANTED TO buy: OSU basketball tickets/stubs from the 1960s, '70s, '80s, '90s & 2000s. Call Mike at (704) 995-0414.

BSB PUBLISHER Frank Moskowitz and other members of the BSB staff are available to speak at your business, social or alumni group meetings. Informative and fun. Call (614) 486-2202 for details.

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spirit, and on the 50th anniversary of his first Heisman Trophy, we felt it was an easy decision to ask him to share this honor with us," said Nick Pisanelli, senior sousaphone player, who is dotting the "i" during the Ohio State vs. Nebraska game this year. "He's living proof that hard work, determination and passion can take you anywhere, and we are so excited for him to join us as we all live out our dream."

Griffin was a running back at Ohio State for four years (1972-75), winning the Heisman Trophy two times and accumulating 5,589 yards rushing and 25 touchdowns. He is still the career leader at Ohio State in rushing yards.

Griffin would then go on to have a seven-year career in the NFL with the Cincinnati Bengals, totaling 2,808 rushing yards and seven touchdowns in 57 games played.

Aug. 31 at Ohio Stadium will cap off a busy month for the 69-year-old Griffin, who was also recognized with a statue in his honor at the Rose Bowl on Aug. 17. The Rose Bowl also honored Griffin in a brand-new Legends Walk located near the Court of Champions, which was unveiled that same day and features displays and information on the 19 Heisman Trophy winners who played in the Rose Bowl Game.

"Please know that when you honor me with this recognition, you also honor the teams that I played on during my four years at The Ohio State University," Griffin

BuckeyeSports.com Ramps Up For Football Season

Ohio State football season is finally here, and BuckeyeSports.com, Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 24/7 web site, free to all subscribers, will be with you every day, from the opening game against Akron on Aug. 31 to the CFP national championship game from Atlanta on Jan. 20, 2025.

The next issue of BSB will be mailed on Sept. 3. There is no reason to wait for your next Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting activity. The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability throughout football season. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com.

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 will be more so during football season.

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 the 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 also free to subscribers. BSB is also offering special savings on upgrading your subscription to first class mail. See the box on page 6.

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

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

fin said. "I was simply in the right place, at the right time, with the right people. That's what allowed me to enjoy the success that my teammates and I experienced. Again, I am extremely grateful to be honored in this manner."

Griffin will also be honored with a statue outside Ohio Stadium on Aug. 30, Bjork – who was in attendance for Griffin's Rose Bowl statue unveiling – announced following the ceremony. The statue will be located near the stadium's rotunda.

Bjork Mulls Selling Ohio Stadium Naming Rights

Ohio State has long been known for its rich football tradition, which dates back 134 years and includes six national titles, 39 Big Ten championships and seven Heisman Trophy winners.

A major player in the Buckeyes' storied history is the iconic Ohio Stadium, the 102,780-seat venue that has served as the home of Ohio State football for the past 102 seasons.

While "The Horseshoe" has been a college football relic on Ohio State's campus for over a century, the increasing commercialism of the sport has raised questions over whether the stadium will be able to

keep its traditional name as time rolls on.

It's a dilemma that has even stumped new Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork, who said he is unsure if he and his administration will ever look into selling the naming rights for the stadium, or when that even could happen.

"Maybe. Maybe," Bjork told The (Toledo) Blade on July 13 when asked if there could ever be a "tasteful manner" to sell the naming rights to Ohio Stadium. "Obviously there's a lot of historic value in that and what that means. If you go back to how they raised the money to build the stadium, every county contributed, and they did not want to take away from state dollars or tuition dollars.

"If that ever has to get put on the table, it's the same conversation. At this point in time, you can never say never on anything. You have to put everything on the table, and then you evaluate it and make the best decision for the institution."

Ohio Stadium has already sold field naming rights to Safelite in 2022, but Bjork said they could also look into the naming rights for things "in and around the stadium, adjacencies to the field, things like that," according to On3. Bjork also discussed having a jersey patch,

something he said can be sorted out with Nike.

Bjork did not go into specifics on how or when a potential sale of Ohio Stadium naming rights could come about in the future, but he did say that he wants to walk the fine line between keeping up with the ever-increasing demands for change in college athletics and preserving the history and tradition of Buckeye football.

"I always think of a phrase: 'Let's make sure we protect tradition, but not think traditionally,'" Bjork said. "How do we take that ideal and monetize it, commercialize it in the right way, yet know that we have this economic engine that we have to feed, and it's only going to grow and we're only going to have to find more (revenue)? There's always a tasteful way that you can integrate sponsors – commercialization if you will – where it's not putting it in everybody's face.

"You just have to be transparent and say, 'Hey, we're in a revenue-based enterprise, now more than ever.' If we're going to peel away band-aids, let's start ripping them off sooner rather than later and get to a place where we're transparent about everything. We state our case, we honor tradition, knowing that we have this economic engine that's not going to slow down."

Bjork did offer a more concrete opinion on another important tradition involving the team, though, that being the date of the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry. While the elimination of Big Ten divisions sparked conversations about moving The Game up in the season to avoid the two teams playing on consecutive weeks now that the two teams could meet up in the Big Ten Championship Game, Bjork suggested that potential change to the rivalry would be unlikely under his leadership.

"I think it's too iconic," he told the Blade. "If it ever gets hung up in those dynamics, you'd look at it. But there would have to be a lot to play out in order to move off that last weekend."

Bjork Named New NACDA President

Bjork's busy start to his Ohio State tenure continued on July 31 when he was officially appointed to serve as president of the National Association of College Directors of Athletics, or NACDA, for the 2024-25 academic year.

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Buckeyes Abound On Preseason Watch Lists

AWARD	CRITERIA	PLAYER(S)
BILETNIKOFF AWARD	Most outstanding wide receiver.	WR Emeka Egbuka
BRONKO NAGURSKI AWARD	Most outstanding defensive player.	CB Denzel Burke, S Caleb Downs, DE JT Tuimolou, DT Tyleik Williams
BUTKUS AWARD	Most outstanding collegiate linebacker.	LB CJ Hicks, LB Sonny Styles
CHUCK BEDNARIK AWARD	Most outstanding defensive player.	CB Denzel Burke, S Caleb Downs, DE Jack Sawyer
DAVEY O'BRIEN AWARD	Most outstanding quarterback.	QB Will Howard
DOAK WALKER AWARD	Most outstanding running back.	RB TreVeyon Henderson, RB Quinshon Judkins
JIM THORPE AWARD	Most outstanding defensive back.	CB Denzel Burke, S Caleb Downs
JOHNNY UNITAS AWARD	Top senior/upperclassman quarterback set to graduate with his class	QB Will Howard
LOMBARDI AWARD	Most outstanding lineman or linebacker.	OG Donovan Jackson, DE Jack Sawyer, DE JT Tuimolou, DT Tyleik Williams
MAXWELL AWARD	Most outstanding player in college football.	WR Emeka Egbuka, QB Will Howard, RB Quinshon Judkins
OUTLAND TROPHY	Most outstanding interior lineman.	OT Josh Fryar, OG Donovan Jackson, DT Tyleik Williams,
PAUL HORNUNG AWARD	Most versatile player in college football.	WR Emeka Egbuka
POLYNESION PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARD	Most outstanding college football player of Polynesian ancestry.	DE JT Tuimolou,
RIMINGTON AWARD	Most outstanding center	OL Seth McLaughlin
WALTER CAMP AWARD	Most outstanding player in college football.	WR Emeka Egbuka, QB Will Howard, RB Quinshon Judkins
WUERFFEL TROPHY	Player who best combines expempolary community service with leadership and achievement on/off field	OL Seth McLaughlin

Bjork served as an NACDA officer since 2021 and was also an NACDA executive committee member from 2015-19. Before that, he was president of the National Association of Athletic Development Directors, or NAADD, from 2006-07.

The 51-year-old Bjork becomes the 60th NACDA president, replacing former Ohio State executive associate athletic director and current Washington State AD Pat Chun, whose tenure as president concluded after the 2024 NACDA & Affiliates Convention in Las Vegas earlier this summer.

Bjork will work alongside first vice president Heather Lyke – another former Smith disciple and current athletic director at Pittsburgh – along with second and third VPs Sean T. Frazier of Northern Illinois and Pennie Parker of Rollins College.

“Simply put, I am a product of NACDA – that’s why I’m here,” Bjork said in a statement. “As we go into 2024-25, we’re going to remember that we are the leading educational platform in college athletics, and we’re going to continue to provide best practices and lessons learned. In all of this uncertainty and chaos that may be going on inside our walls, how do we capitalize on the momentum that we have outside of our walls? College athletics has never been more popular – that’s our job. We can always make sure that we remember why we are here, and that is for the student-athletes.”

Bjork leads the NACDA in its 60th year of operation. The organization serves as the professional and educational association for more than 23,000 college athletics administrators at more than 2,200 schools throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico, where it aims to offer educational opportunities and act as a vehicle for networking and the exchange of information to those working in athletic administration.

Bjork is the third sitting Ohio State athletic director to lead the NACDA, joining Dick Larkins, who was the association’s second-ever president from 1966-67, and Jim Jones, who served from 1992-93. Smith was NACDA’s first black president from 1994-95 while he was athletic director at Iowa State.

NCAA Approves New Scholarship Limits

During a meeting held on July 23, NCAA power conference commissioners finalized new roster size limits, with the resolution hoping to pave the way for athletic departments to distribute millions of dollars in new scholarships to athletes in, most notably, football, baseball and softball.

According to a report from Yahoo Sports’ Ross Dellenger, the current football scholarship limit of 85 and overall player limit of 120 would shrink to a 105-player limit for the 2025-26 school year but would also see a scholarship increase of 20 players.

One stipulation noted by Dellenger involving football was that the 105-player limit may not begin until the start of the regular season, allowing coaches to potentially have an expanded roster beyond that number during preseason camp. This is a structure similar to the NFL, which allows teams to enter training camp with

a maximum of 90 players before requiring them to cut down to 53 heading into the regular season.

Day was asked about this change at Big Ten Media Days, saying that a trimming of the total roster and an increase of scholarship players could take some getting used to, causing his program to potentially have some contingency plans in place to account for roster attrition.

“I would have to discuss it a little bit more with (Bjork),” Day said. “Ross and I have had that conversation before. Right now, 120 has been the number we all feel comfortable with going into a season. At 105, if you have attrition, if you have injuries, there’s got to be something in place to be able to replace (those players).”

“Does that mean you bring in a certain amount of guys in the preseason and cut it back before the season starts? I think all of those need to be determined.”

As for the other sports, men’s and wom-

en’s basketball will see an increase from 13 scholarships to 15, baseball will move from 11.7 to 34, and softball and women’s volleyball, which each currently stand at 12 scholarships, will increase to 25 and 18, respectively.

Including football, this new proposal accounts for about 60 added scholarships across the six mentioned sports. All roster figures are expected to be finalized when the agreement to the House v. NCAA anti-trust lawsuit is approved, which will distribute nearly \$2.8 billion in back pay to former athletes while also formalizing the new NCAA revenue-sharing model.

Ducks QB Gabriel Had Talks With OSU In Portal

Howard will start at quarterback for the Scarlet and Gray this season, but had the Buckeyes acted differently in the transfer portal this offseason, they could have had a different veteran signal caller

leading the offense.

Speaking with the media at Big Ten Media Days, sixth-year Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel revealed that he had positive conversations with Ohio State prior to committing to Oregon, with the Buckeyes being one of two other teams besides the Ducks that he spoke with during his brief time in the transfer portal.

“It was good,” Gabriel said when asked about the conversations between him and Ohio State. “I think anything, throughout the (transfer portal) process, it’s just gaining information on one another. But I think the recruiting process is what it is, and I think everyone that was a quarterback in the portal was able to have conversations with different schools.”

Gabriel entered the transfer portal for the second time in his career on Dec. 4 after two productive seasons with Oklaho-

Continued On Page 10



Continued From Page 9

ma, throwing for a combined 6,828 passing yards and 55 touchdowns to just 12 interceptions from 2022-23.

The former Sooner told the media that he wanted to commit to a new school early in his transfer process to avoid having to go through the stresses that come with being in the portal for the second time in his career, a timing that Oregon was willing to work with, while Ohio State, on the other hand, was not.

The Buckeyes wanted to wait to see how Brown played in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri rather than pulling the trigger early on Gabriel or another quarterback in the portal, a decision that Gabriel said played a significant factor in his decision to commit to the Ducks over Ohio State.

“Going through my third recruiting process, I know it’s a stressful time for anyone who’s transferred,” he said. “Although there’s beauty in new beginnings and all that, everyone knows the stress that comes with it, whether it’s moving, the moving companies, the moving in. So the faster you can make a decision and feel good about it, be decisive, then it allows you to act accordingly.”

Now Ohio State will have Howard lead them into Eugene, Ore., to face off against Gabriel and the Ducks on Oct. 12 this season for the first conference matchup between the two teams.

NFLPA Says Harrison’s Jersey Not For Sale

Former Ohio State wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. is among the more popular rookies in the 2024 draft class, but despite this renown, fans still cannot buy his No. 18 Cardinals uniform.

According to an Aug. 3 report from NFL Network’s Ian Rappaport, the NFLPA has advised the NFL, the Cardinals and Fanatics that they are still not permitted to sell Harrison’s jerseys based on the wishes of his representatives.

This comes after a long dispute between Harrison and Fanatics – the NFL’s manufacturer and distributor for all NFL-licensed jerseys – involving a contract Harrison signed with the company while at Ohio State in May 2023.

According to both ESPN and The Athletic, Fanatics claimed that Harrison refused to fulfill his obligations to the contract – which, per the lawsuit, was agreed upon by Harrison and his father, Pro Football Hall of Famer Marvin Harrison Sr., in 2023 – while also publicly asserting that the contract does not exist.

The lawsuit named The Harrison Collection LLC as a defendant, the company in which the 2023 Biletnikoff winner and No. 4 overall NFL draft selection sells his own jerseys and other autographed memorabilia.

According to The Athletic, Harrison stated that he had better offers from other trading card companies, and when he asked Fanatics to match or exceed those deals, they asked to see the terms of the

deals, which he refused to do.

Fanatics, on the other hand, alleged that there was a binding term sheet signed by Harrison that he did not fulfill, which, according to ESPN, had Harrison set to earn \$1.05 million between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2026 from the company in exchange for game jerseys and more than 35,000 autographs.

The case between Harrison and Fanatics – owned and founded by businessman Michael Rubin – was still pending as BSB went to press. The term sheet did state, however, that, “promptly” after signing the sheet, the two sides would “work together in good faith to negotiate an agreement to combine, amend and restate” the deal.

Despite the dispute off the field, Harrison, who signed a four-year, \$35.37 million guaranteed rookie contract with the Cardinals on May 23, has excelled for Arizona in his first career training camp this summer and is expected to be one of quarterback Kyler Murray’s top targets in 2024.

Taylor Signs With WNBA’s Mercury

Former Buckeye guard Celeste Taylor found another new home in the WNBA on Aug. 16 when the Connecticut Sun signed her to a seven-day contract.

This is the third WNBA team Taylor has been on since she was drafted by the Indiana Fever with the 15th overall selection in the second round of the 2024 WNBA draft this April.

Taylor appeared in just five games for the Fever early in the WNBA season, totaling just three points, one rebound, one block and an assist in 16 minutes of action, before being waived by the franchise on June 25 in a corresponding move to clear roster space for injured forward

Damiris Dantas.

The former Buckeye guard was then picked up by the Phoenix Mercury on July 12, just two days after she signed a one-year international deal with the Sydney Flames of the Women’s National Basketball League, the longest-running women’s professional league in Australia, whom she will play with during the WNBA off-season to gain more experience and earnings.

But Taylor experienced limited playing time in Phoenix, too, appearing in four games, but she still managed to show her worth as a versatile player, averaging 2.5 points, 1.0 rebounds, 1.8 assists, 0.5 steals and 0.5 blocks in those contests.

Taylor played in just one game for the Mercury after the WNBA’s month-long break for the Paris Olympics, scoring a career-high six points along with one rebound, two assists and a block in an 85-65 win over the Chicago Sky on Aug. 15, before being signed by the Connecticut Sun.

In her first two games with the Sun, she had two points in 11 minutes of action.

Haire, Kumar Introduced As New Head Coaches

Ohio State ushered in a new era for both its baseball and softball programs on July 17, holding a joint introductory press conference for its two new program leaders, Justin Haire and Kirin Kumar, at the Fawcett Center.

Kumar was first to take the lectern after Bjork briefly introduced the two coaches, offering words as the ninth head softball coach in Ohio State history. Kumar was hired on June 4 after transforming Miami (Ohio) into a mid-major powerhouse in her four seasons leading the program, guiding the RedHawks to 174 wins,

2024 Big Ten Schedule

	AUG. 31	SEPT. 7	SEPT. 14	SEPT. 21	SEPT. 28	OCT. 5	OCT. 12	OCT. 19	OCT. 26	NOV. 2	NOV. 9	NOV. 16	NOV. 23	NOV. 30
ILLINOIS	EASTERN ILLINOIS (Aug. 29)	KANSAS	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	at Nebraska (Sept. 20)	at Penn State		PURDUE	MICHIGAN	at Oregon	MINNESOTA		MICHIGAN STATE	at Rutgers	at N'western
INDIANA	FIU	WESTERN ILLINOIS (Sept. 6)	at UCLA	CHARLOTTE	MARYLAND	at Northwestern		NEBRASKA	WASHINGTON	at Michigan State	MICHIGAN		at Ohio State	PURDUE
IOWA	ILLINOIS STATE	IOWA STATE	TROY	at Minnesota		at Ohio State	WASHINGTON	at Michigan State	N'WESTERN	WISCONSIN	at UCLA (Nov. 8)		at Maryland	NEBRASKA
MARYLAND	UCONN	MICHIGAN STATE	at Virginia	VILLANOVA	at Indiana		N'WESTERN (Oct. 11)	USC	at Minnesota		at Oregon	RUTGERS	IOWA	at Penn State
MICHIGAN	FRESNO STATE	TEXAS	ARKANSAS STATE	USC	MINNESOTA	at Washington		at Illinois	MICHIGAN STATE	OREGON	at Indiana		N'WESTERN	at Ohio State
MICH. STATE	FLA. ATLANTIC (Aug. 30)	at Maryland	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	at Boston College	OHIO STATE	at Oregon (Oct. 4)		IOWA	at Michigan	INDIANA		at Illinois	PURDUE (Nov. 22)	RUTGERS
MINNESOTA	NORTH CAROLINA (Aug. 29)	RHODE ISLAND	NEVADA	IOWA	at Michigan	USC	at UCLA		MARYLAND	at Illinois	at Rutgers		PENN STATE	at Wisconsin (Nov. 29)
NEBRASKA	UTEP	COLORADO	NORTHERN IOWA	ILLINOIS (Sept. 20)	at Purdue	RUTGERS		at Indiana	at Ohio State	UCLA		at USC	WISCONSIN	at Iowa (Nov. 29)
N'WESTERN	MIAMI (OHIO)	DUKE (Sept. 6)	EASTERN ILLINOIS	at Washington		INDIANA	at Maryland (Oct. 11)	WISCONSIN	at Iowa	at Purdue		vs. Ohio State at Wrigley Field	at Michigan	vs. Illinois at Wrigley Field
OHIO STATE	AKRON	WESTERN MICHIGAN		MARSHALL	at Michigan State	IOWA	at Oregon		NEBRASKA	at Penn State	PURDUE	vs. Northwestern at Wrigley Field	INDIANA	MICHIGAN
OREGON	IDAHO	BOISE STATE	at Oregon State		at UCLA	MICH. STATE (Oct. 4)	OHIO STATE	at Purdue (Oct. 18)	ILLINOIS	at Michigan	MARYLAND	at Wisconsin		WASHINGTON
PENN STATE	at West Virginia	BOWLING GREEN		KENT STATE	ILLINOIS	UCLA	at USC		at Wisconsin	OHIO STATE	WASHINGTON	at Purdue	at Minnesota	MARYLAND
PURDUE	INDIANA STATE		NOTRE DAME	at Oregon State	NEBRASKA	at Wisconsin	at Illinois	OREGON (Oct. 18)		N'WESTERN	at Ohio State	PENN STATE	at Michigan State (Nov. 22)	at Indiana
RUTGERS	HOWARD (Aug. 29)	AKRON		at Virginia Tech	WASHINGTON (Sept. 27)	at Nebraska	WISCONSIN	UCLA	at USC (Oct. 25)		MINNESOTA	at Maryland	ILLINOIS	at Michigan State
UCLA	at Hawai'i		INDIANA	at LSU	OREGON	at Penn State	MINNESOTA	at Rutgers		at Nebraska	IOWA (Nov. 8)	at Washington (Nov. 15)	USC	FRESNO STATE
USC	vs. LSU at Las Vegas (Sept. 1)	UTAH STATE		at Michigan	WISCONSIN	at Minnesota	PENN STATE	at Maryland	RUTGERS (Oct. 25)	at Washington		NEBRASKA	at UCLA	NOTRE DAME
WASHINGTON	WEBER STATE	EASTERN MICHIGAN	at Washington State	N'WESTERN	at Rutgers (Sept. 27)	MICHIGAN	at Iowa		at Indiana	USC	at Penn State	UCLA (Nov. 15)		at Oregon
WISCONSIN	WESTERN MICHIGAN (Aug. 30)	SOUTH DAKOTA	ALABAMA		at USC	PURDUE	at Rutgers	at N'western	PENN STATE	at Iowa		OREGON	at Nebraska	MINNESOTA (Nov. 29)

Big Ten Championship Game - Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis - Dec. 7 - 8 p.m. ET

42 Buckeyes Receive Degrees At Summer Commencement

Ohio State athletes continued to excel in the classroom this summer, with 42 current and former student-athletes obtaining degrees at the university's summer commencement ceremony held at the Schottenstein Center on Aug. 4.

Nadine Muzerall's national championship-winning women's hockey program led all programs with six graduates, while baseball followed with four, followed by men's hockey and women's track & field with three. Ryan Day's football program did not have a current player earn a degree this summer, but the team did have a standout former Buckeye walk the stage in wide receiver Devin Smith.

Smith, a starter on Ohio State's 2014 national championship team who ranks third in school history with 30 receiving touchdowns and sixth in receiving yards with 2,503, graduated with a degree in communication.

Smith was one of several former Ohio State standout athletes who returned to Columbus to earn their degrees this summer. Also headlining that group was men's basketball standout center and Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2024 inductee Greg Oden, who earned his degree in sports coaching 17 years after dominating on the hardwood for the Scarlet and Gray.

Other notable graduates this summer included two-time NCAA champion and former Ohio State men's diver Lyle Yost (education;

teaching & learning), women's basketball forward Taylor Thierry (sport industry), former women's volleyball player and three-time team captain Sarah Morbitzer (exercise science) and 2023-24 women's hockey national champions Cayla Barnes (kinesiology), Hannah Bilka (kinesiology), Riley Brengman (kinesiology), Jennifer Gardiner (kinesiology), Kelsey King (kinesiology) and Kiara Zanon (sport industry).

The complete list of graduates is below.

Artistic Swimming - Emily Armstrong, kinesiology; Caroline Walsh, marketing.

Baseball - Logan Jones, sport industry; Joseph Mershon, sports coaching; Jacob Morin, kinesiology; Colin Purcell, sport industry.

Men's Basketball - Jamison Battle, sports coaching; Gregory Oden, sports coaching.

Women's Basketball - Taiyier Parks, family resource management; Taylor Thierry, sport industry.

Men's Diving - Lyle Yost, education: teaching & learning.

Men's Fencing - Henry Lange, master's Near Eastern languages and cultures.

Field Hockey - Leanne Bough, Specialized Master Bus-Bus Ana???, Julie Rodjik, kinesiology.

Football - Devin Smith, communication.

Women's Golf - Rio Watanabe, kinesiology.

Men's Gymnastics - Tomohiro Kawada,

air transportation; Logan McGlynn, finance.

Men's Hockey - Matthew Cassidy, Specialized Master Bus-Bus Ana; Joseph Dunlap, economics; Patrick Guzzo, economics.

Women's Hockey - Cayla Barnes, kinesiology; Hannah Bilka, kinesiology; Riley Brengman, kinesiology; Jennifer Gardiner, kinesiology; Kelsey King, kinesiology; Kiara Zanon, sport industry.

Men's Lacrosse - Kurt Bruun, food, agricultural and biological engineering; Gannon Matthews, sport industry.

Rifle - Frank Steyn, public health (MPH) - STEM.

Rowing - Emma Leavens, sports coaching; Tess Thompson, kinesiology.

Softball - Tegan Cortelletti, sports coaching; Samantha Hackenbracht, sports coaching.

Wrestling - Carson Kharchla, sports coaching.

Women's Swimming - Amy Fulmer, clinical research; Josephine Panitz, public management.

Women's Track & Field - Marissa Henley, master's public policy and management; Marcia Sey, criminology; Amaya Ugarte, human development & family sciences.

Women's Volleyball - Kamiah Gibson, psychology; Sarah Morbitzer, exercise science.

to build the program back up and replicate the same type of success he had with Campbell at Ohio State - a program that last appeared in an NCAA Regional in 2019. It is a reality that the former Camel coach understands, but also one that he is poised to change with some hard work and a program-wide commitment to success.

"We're not here to make results-oriented promises," Haire said. "I can't predict the future. I can't tell you how many championships we're going to win and I can't tell you how many guys we're going to get drafted. What I can tell you is that we're going to have the right people in place. We're going to work incredibly hard to create the right process and we're going to make sure that the product that we put on the field is something that everybody can be proud of."

"What can you expect from me and my staff? Enthusiasm for the process of building this program into the monster we know it can be," he continued. "Extreme ownership over every single piece of our program. There will be no room to transfer the blame, to make excuses."

While leading a baseball or softball program at a cold-weather Big Ten program could present some major obstacles when it comes to recruiting and overall program building, Bjork said he is confident his two new hires can beat the odds and turn their respective programs into major players on the national scale.

Continued On Page 12

four NCAA tournament appearances, four MAC regular-season titles and three MAC tournament championships in that span.

The two-time MAC Coach of the Year takes over a Buckeye team that did experience some success under former head coach Kelly Kovach Schoenly, earning five appearances to the NCAA regionals in her 12 seasons in Columbus. But Kumar said she wants to raise the standard for Ohio State softball during her tenure and transform the Buckeyes into a perennial powerhouse through elite recruiting and development.

"This is the school to be at," Kumar said. "We don't come here just to go to the postseason or regionals. We are here to

make this the premier program in the Big Ten. I want to recruit, develop and engage. We want to keep the top talent in the state first, then nationwide. Development will be a huge part of our program."

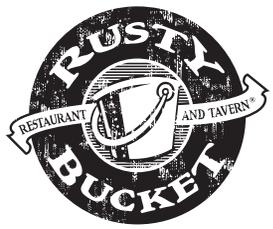
Following Kumar was Haire, a Hamilton, Ohio, native who is tasked with leading an Ohio State program searching for relevancy after a rocky two seasons under now TCU assistant Bill Mosiello. Haire returns home to Ohio after 10 strong seasons at Campbell, where he led the Camels to five consecutive Big South regular-season titles (2018-23) along with four Big South championships and five NCAA Regional appearances.

With the Buckeyes losing in the offsea-

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Continued From Page 11

"The geography is a little challenging, the weather – we have to spend our first month of the season on the road to get out of the cold weather, all those kinds of things," he said. "But there's no reason why we can't be in the mix. So to me, we needed somebody who is going to be creative. Somebody who is going to embrace it."

"I really believe, based on my research, that you can win with players in this re-

gion. Kentucky has done it in baseball. The Team Up North has been in the College World Series in both sports. So if you have the right approach – and it comes down to leadership – then it can happen."

Bruni Drafted By Nationals In 17th Round Of MLB Draft

Former Ohio State pitcher Gavin Bruni was selected by the Washington Nationals in the 17th round of the 2024 MLB draft on July 17 with the 500th overall pick. He was the only Buckeye to be selected in the draft.

The southpaw played three seasons at Ohio State, appearing in 35 games and finishing with a career ERA of 5.57 with 146 strikeouts and 102 walks. In the 2024 season, Bruni pitched 57 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings in 14 games (13 starts) and had a 5.81 ERA.

His best season was his sophomore year with the Buckeyes when he had 14 starts and struck out 74 with a 4.87 ERA.

As a high school prospect in 2021, Bruni came out of Alliance (Ohio) High School and was the No. 1 recruit in the

state, recording 209 strikeouts in 107 career innings pitched.

There are currently four former Buckeyes in MLB – outfielder Dominic Canzone with the Seattle Mariners (playing at OSU from 2017-19), Rockies pitcher Ryan Feltner (2016-18), Detroit Tigers catcher Dillon Dingler (2018-20), who has impressed for the franchise since being called up to the big leagues from Triple-A Toledo on July 29, and pitcher Jack Needy, who was called up by the Cubs on Aug. 20.

Dingler made his presence known out of the gate with the Tigers, getting his first major-league hit and RBI in just his third at-bat on July 29 against the Cleveland Guardians, smoking an 84 mph sinker to the wall in the bottom of the seventh inning that scored a run. Dingler also recorded a walk on the night.

"It was awesome," Dingler said when asked about his first major-league hit. "I got chills when it went over the speaker after it happened, after I was standing on second base, and it's one of the coolest moments I've experienced. I really en-

joyed that."

As of press time, Dingler had appeared in nine games for the Tigers in a mostly reserve role. He had five hits in 31 at-bats (.161 batting average), one of them being his first major-league home run on Aug. 11 against the San Francisco Giants, a 406-foot drive into the bullpen at Oracle Park that helped the Tigers hold on for a 5-4 win.

Former Buckeye Hall Arrested After Domestic Dispute

Former Ohio State defensive tackle and Cleveland Browns rookie Michael Hall Jr. was arrested on Aug. 13 following a domestic dispute the previous night, an Avon, Ohio, police spokesperson confirmed to The Athletic later that morning.

According to an Avon Police Department incident report obtained by The (Elyria) Chronicle-Telegram, the mother of Hall's fiancée called 911 around 10 p.m. on Aug. 12 and said Hall had pushed her daughter and struck her with a baby bottle.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1984

It is when you are the quarterback – and a good one – for a major university with the prominence of an Ohio State, that you become a demigod in the eyes of thousands.

But Mike Tomczak would not lend an ear to talk of such nonsense. There was only one being worthy of such admiration and adoration in his mind – Jesus Christ.

A past president of the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the 21-year-old OSU senior looked to The Lord for inner strength and that relationship had never been more apparent than during Tomczak's recovery and rehabilitation from a three-part fracture of his right leg suffered midway through the second quarter of the annual Scarlet and Gray game May 5 in Ohio Stadium.

The obvious question had been: Was Mike Tomczak going to be ready for the Sept. 8 home season opener against Oregon State?

"I think it feels pretty good. I've been going through a fairly strict rehabilitation period," Tomczak said. "We only have three weeks before the season begins and I've tried to double my workouts."

35 Years Ago – 1989

The 1988 football season was nine months into the history books and John Cooper was still haunted by its memory.

At the previous year's Big Ten Kickoff Luncheon, his first, Cooper led the conference in funny stories, quips and jokes.

However, in the wake of the Buckeyes' 4-6-1 showing, the team's worst record in 22 years, Cooper was a little less jovial for members of the media at the 1989 kickoff luncheon.

"It's hard to be funny when you finish like we did last year but I wasn't aware that I've changed any," smiled Cooper. "I hope I haven't changed. I don't know. I guess it's just that I'm ready to go. I've got my game face on early this year. I'm ready to get after it."

"It's been a hard summer from the standpoint of some things we went through last year. I think we're more determined than we were last year."

30 Years Ago – 1994

It was mostly fun and games as the Ohio State football team returned en masse for the program's annual Photo Day, held Aug. 6 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

The event was usually held at Ohio Stadium, but it was being used as a concert venue where Elton John and Billy Joel were to perform later that evening.

"I'd rather be in the stadium," Lorenzo Styles said. "That's where they ought to be taking pictures. Who wants to see those two guys anyway?"

Obviously there were more than a few. The two singers packed a crowd of about 70,000 into the Horseshoe, an audience which included head coach John Cooper and his family.

When asked whether he was going to see Elton John or Billy Joel, Cooper just smiled and said, "I let my daughter Cindy figure that out. She's the music expert."

25 Years Ago – 1999

"Tug on it!" the cameraman exclaimed in a bossy tone.

"We are," whispered one of the subjects, no doubt feeling a little silly.

The "it" was an Ohio State practice football, and the two guys being ordered to yank on the cowhide like it was a bar of gold were competing sophomore quarterbacks Steve Bellisari and Austin Moherman.

They also were still friends despite their manufactured rivalry. "It's legitimate," quarterbacks coach Tim Salem said of the duo's friendship. "People say they're friends now, but I think they were close anyway. You're talking about two fine, quality people, two guys that you want your daughter marrying or that you want as sons."

"They're class-act guys but they know there's a job to be done out there and a tradition to uphold here at Ohio State, so they're going to give their damndest best effort to make it happen."

20 Years Ago – 2004

Taking more than a month – and absorbing criticism from local and national media outlets – Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger finally got his man, luring Thad Matta from Xavier to become the 13th head men's basketball coach for the Buckeyes.

"This is the pinnacle for me," Matta said during a news conference to formally announce his hiring. "I stand before you today to let you know I've accepted this position for one reason and one reason only, and that is to bring Ohio State basketball back into national prominence."

"I do believe that we've got challenges, but I'm here to roll up my sleeves, and go to work and bring this thing back."

The Buckeyes had been searching for a new head coach since June 8 when Geiger fired Jim O'Brien for giving more than \$6,000 to former OSU signee Alexander Radojevic, who would end up never playing for the Buckeyes.

15 Years Ago – 2009

Stuck in a hotel for a week without cell phones, computers, televisions or any other technological link to the outside world, members of the Ohio State football team proved the old adage that boys will be boys.

With no way to amuse themselves during a coach-and-senior-imposed "Hell Week" during the middle of football camp, the Buckeyes at first resorted to some good ole-fashioned horseplay.

"There was probably a little bit more damage to the hotel than they wanted because guys had nothing else to do but pull pranks on each other," senior defensive tackle Todd Denlinger said. "But it was all in good fun. It was a lot of fun just being able to talk to a lot of the guys and become closer together."

Denlinger wouldn't discuss any of the shenanigans – "We'll keep those to the team," he said with a laugh – but the jovial nature of his comments underscored how exactly the Buckeyes spent the time disconnected from the outside world.

10 Years Ago – 2014

When Ohio State offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Tom Herman was discussing the battle between sophomore Cardale Jones and redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett to back up senior Braxton Miller early in training camp, he made it clear there would be no ceremony to declare which quarterback would earn the No. 2 job during the fall.

"Everybody envisions the little placards with your name on it and one guy is the No. 2 and one is the No. 3," Herman said Aug. 10,

jokingly setting an imaginary depth chart in place with his hands. "I don't know that there's ever been a day that you move the little placard into place."

But that's almost how it felt six days later when head coach Urban Meyer said that Barrett had passed Jones – who won a spring battle to be the backup quarterback while Miller rehabbed his right shoulder – to move slightly ahead in the No. 2 spot.

Two days later, the placard fell even more into place when Miller threw a pass at an afternoon practice and immediately felt pain coursing through his surgically repaired throwing shoulder. By the time it became known the next afternoon that Miller would be out for the season, it was widely accepted that Barrett would be the starting quarterback for the season opener vs. Navy.

Five Years Ago – 2019

It went without saying that first-year Ohio State head coach Ryan Day had some rather large shoes to fill.

His predecessor, Urban Meyer, went 83-9 overall and 54-4 in Big Ten play during his seven seasons in Columbus. He also won the inaugural College Football Playoff national championship, led the Buckeyes to three conference titles and ended his career with the third-highest winning percentage in college football history.

But when reminded of those lofty numbers and expectations that come with being the head man at a prestigious program such as Ohio State during Big Ten Media Days in July, the 40-year-old Day simply grinned and took a sip of his iced coffee.

"I know exactly what you're saying, trust me," Day said. "When you start to think of it that way, you get overwhelmed in a hurry and you start to focus on things that really don't matter."

"The expectations are so high here that if you don't win them all, the minute you lose a game, you can't just come crumbling and fall apart. It's one of those things you have to think about and have a plan for."

One Year Ago – 2023

When it was announced that Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith would hold a press conference on Aug. 9, just five days after it was formally announced that Oregon and Washington would join the Big Ten beginning in 2024, it was assumed that Smith would be inundated with questions about the conference's recent additions.

As it turned out, conference expansion was the last thing on anyone's mind once Smith began his press conference.

Smith announced that, effective June 30, 2024, he would be retiring as athletic director at Ohio State, a post he had held since 2005. It would bring to an end the run of the third-longest tenured athletic director in school history, surpassed by only Lynn W. St. John (1912-47) and Richard Larkins (1947-70).

In making his decision to retire, Smith said that he and his wife, Sheila, planned to spend more time with their children, grandchildren and extended family.

"I want to thank the leadership of The Ohio State University during my tenure for providing me with the opportunity to serve as senior vice president and Wolfe Foundation Endowed athletic director for the past 18 years," Smith said. "The presidents and many members of the board of trustees I have served afforded me the professional opportunity of a lifetime, and I am forever grateful."

2024 Ohio State Football Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Year	Hometown/Previous School
0	Cody Simon	LB	6'2"	235	Gr.	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter's Prep
1	Davison Igbinosun	CB	6'2"	193	Jr.	Union, N.J./Mississippi
1	Quinshon Judkins	RB	6'0"	219	Jr.	Pike Road, Ala./Mississippi
2	Caleb Downs	SAF	6-0	205	So.	Hoschton, Ga./Alabama
2	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-11	205	Gr.	Steilacoom, Wash./Steilacoom
2	Kourt Williams II	LB	6-1	228	Gr.	Harbor City, Calif./St. John Bosco
3	Lincoln Kienholz	QB	6-3	207	So.	Pierre, S.D./T.F. Riggs
4	Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	215	Fr.	Miami Gardens, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
4	Lorenzo Styles Jr.	CB	6-1	195	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
5	Mylan Graham	WR	6-1	185	Fr.	New Haven, Ind./New Haven
5	Aaron Scott Jr.	CB	6-0	185	Fr.	Springfield, Ohio/Springfield
6	Sonny Styles	LB	6-4	235	Jr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
7	Jordan Hancock	CB	6-1	195	Sr.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett
8	Lathan Ransom	SAF	6-1	210	Sr.	Tucson, Ariz./Salpointe Catholic
9	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	195	Sr.	Massillon, Ohio/Massillon Washington
10	Denzel Burke	CB	6-1	193	Sr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Saguaro
10	Julian Sayin	QB	6-1	203	Fr.	Carlsbad, Calif./Alabama
11	C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	233	Jr.	Dayton, Ohio/Archbishop Alter
11	Brandon Inniss	WR	6-0	203	So.	Hollywood, Fla./American Heritage
12	Air Noland	QB	6-2	192	Fr.	College Park, Ga./Langston Hughes
12	Bryce West	CB	5-11	196	Fr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Glenville
13	Miles Lockhart	CB	5-9	193	Fr.	Chandler, Ariz./Basha
13	Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	185	So.	Zephyrhills, Fla./Wiregrass Ranch
14	Kojo Antwi	WR	6-0	194	Jr.	Suwanee, Ga./Lambert
15	Jelani Thurman	TE	6-6	258	So.	Fairburn, Ga./Langston Hughes
16	Mason Maggs	QB	6-2	224	Jr.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
16	Keenan Nelson Jr.	DB	6-1	185	Jr.	Philadelphia / South Carolina
17	Mitchell Melton	LB	6-4	261	Sr.	Silver Spring, Md./Good Counsel
17	Carnell Tate	WR	6-3	191	So.	Chicago/Marist (Ill.) / IMG Academy
18	Will Howard	QB	6-4	237	Gr.	Downingtown, Pa./Downingtown West / Kansas State
18	Jaylen McClain	SAF	6-0	192	Fr.	Rahway, N.J./Seton Hall Prep
19	Nick McLarty	P	6-7	255	Fr.	Melbourne, Australia/Caulfield Punt Factory
19	Chad Ray	QB	6-2	215	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Scioto
20	James Peoples	RB	5-10	203	Fr.	San Antonio, Texas/Veterans Memorial
20	Arvell Reese	LB	6-4	238	So.	Cleveland, Ohio/Glenville
21	Jayden Bonsu	SAF	6-2	207	So.	Hillside, N.J./St. Peter's Prep
22	Calvin Simpson-Hunt	CB	6-0	204	So.	Waxahachie, Texas/Waxahachie
23	Nolan Baudo	WR	5-10	180	Fr.	Chicago, Ill./Marist
23	Garrett Stover	LB	6-1	220	So.	Sunbury, Ohio/Big Walnut
24	Jermaine Mathews Jr.	CB	5-11	189	Fr.	Cincinnati/Winton Woods
24	Sam Williams-Dixon	RB	5-11	203	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington North
25	Malik Hartford	SAF	6-3	194	Fr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
26	Chase Brecht	RB	6-0	205	Jr.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
28	TC Caffey	RB	5-10	215	Jr.	Hubbard, Ohio/Hubbard
28	Leroy Roker III	SAF	6-1	175	Fr.	Fort Myers, Fla./Bishop Verot
29	Glorien Gough	DB	5-11	175	So.	Palos Verdes Estates, Calif./Mater Dei
30	Rashid SeSay	RB	5-11	190	Fr.	Zanesville, Ohio/West Muskingum
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	208	Sr.	Hopewell, Va./Hopewell
32	Brenten Inky Jones	SAF	6-2	205	Jr.	Steubenville, Ohio/Steubenville
33	Devin Brown	QB	6-3	212	Jr.	Gilbert, Ariz./Queen Creek & Corner Canyon (Utah)
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-5	260	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington North
34	Bukari Miles Jr.	CB	6-2	190	Fr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
34	Brennen Schramm	WR	6-0	191	Fr.	Medina, Ohio/Medina
35	Payton Pierce	LB	6-2	223	Fr.	Lucas, Texas/Lovejoy
35	Anthony Venneri	P	6-0	225	Jr.	Hamilton, Ontario / Buffalo 36
36	Gabe Powers	LB	6-4	242	Jr.	Marysville, Ohio/Marysville
37	Zach Hayes	LB	6-3	220	Fr.	LaGrange Park, Ill./Nazareth Academy
38	Jayden Fielding	K	6-0	175	Jr.	League City, Texas/IMG Academy
38	Eli Riggs	LB	6-4	230	Fr.	Cincinnati/Indian Hill
39	Hadi Jawad	P	5-11	185	Sr.	Dearborn, Mich. / Wayne State
39	Joey Velazquez	LB	5-11	226	Gr.	Columbus, Ohio/Michigan
41	Morrow Evans	LS	6-1	205	Fr.	Bellaire, Texas/Episcopal
42	Joe McGuire	P	6-2	212	So.	Melbourne, Australia/Prokick Australia
43	John Ferlmann	LS	6-3	228	Sr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Arizona State
43	Diante Griffin	CB	5-9	185	Jr.	Lima, Ohio/Lima Senior
44	JT Tuimolou	DE	6-5	269	Sr.	Edgewood, Wash./Eastside Catholic

COACHING STAFF: Ryan Day, Head Coach; Chip Kelly, Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach; Brian Hartline, Co-Offensive Coordinator/Wide Receivers Coach; Jim Knowles, Defensive Coordinator; Larry Johnson, Associate Head Coach/Defensive Line Coach; Carlos Locklyn, Running Backs Coach; Justin Frye, Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach; Matt Guerrieri, Safeties Coach; Tim Walton, Assistant Head Coach/Secondary/Cornerbacks Coach; Mickey Marotti, Associate AD/Director of Football Sport Performance; Keenan Bailey, Tight Ends Coach; James Laurinaitis, Linebackers Coach; Brent Zdebski, Quality Control - Defense; Rob Keys, Quality Control - Kicking; Sam McGrath, Quality Control - Defense; Joe Lyberger, Quality Control - Defense; Tim Drevno, Quality Control - Offense; LaAllan Clark, Graduate Assistant - Defense; Mike Sollenne, Graduate Assistant - Offense; Sean Binckes, Graduate Assistant - Offense; Michael Hunter Jr., Graduate Assistant - Defense; Riley Larkin, Program Assistant - Offense; Gunner Daniel, Program Assistant - Special Teams; Devin Jordan, Program Assistant - Offense; Gerren DuHart, Program Assistant - Defense; Joshua Chorba, Program Assistant - Defense; Tony Johnson, Senior Advisor/Analyst.

The report stated that Hall's fiancée said Hall then threw her belongings outside, dragged her along the porch and driveway and later put a gun to her temple, saying, "I will f--- end it all." Hall later left the residence and did not return.

The report states that the altercation between Hall and his fiancée began earlier in the day with an argument involving the "financial needs" for her daughter, who is not Hall's biological child. Hall and his fiancée have an 11-month-old son together who was born while Hall played his junior season at Ohio State.

The argument then, according to the report, escalated when Hall's fiancée refused to unlock her phone so Hall could look at messages between her and the daughter's biological father.

Police, upon arrival to the home – in which Hall and his fiancée have been re-

portedly living together for approximately six months – found damage in the house that was indicative of a fight, the report stated, while officers also found two handguns, a .40-caliber Glock and a 9mm Smith & Wesson.

Hall was arrested later that night and pleaded not guilty to one charge of domestic violence. He was released on \$10,000 bond but is due back in court for a hearing on Sept. 10 – two days after the Browns' season opener against the Dallas Cowboys – according to the Akron Beacon Journal.

Just a day after his arrest, Hall – a 54th overall selection by his hometown Browns in the second round of the 2024 NFL draft – returned to Browns practice, which he left early after suffering a shoulder stinger during an 11-on-11 drill.

Hall sat out the next two practices but

returned to the field for the Browns' second preseason game against the Minnesota Vikings on Aug. 17, where he logged 25 of the defense's 58 snaps and finished with one assisted tackle and a quarterback hit in a 27-12 loss.

Hall, 21, played three seasons at Ohio State before being drafted by the Browns, totaling 45 tackles, 10 tackles for loss and six sacks for Larry Johnson's defensive line unit from 2021-23 while earning third-team All-Big Ten honors as a senior.

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Returnees, Newcomers Have Same Goals

Continued From Page 1

Emptying The Tank For One Last Dance

Ohio State's mission statement for the 2024 season is clear, one that came to fruition during the early days of the offseason.

Coming off a difficult stretch that included a third straight loss to Michigan, the transfer of starting quarterback Kyle McCord along with several other impact players and an uninspiring 14-3 defeat to Missouri in the Cotton Bowl, the Buckeyes' future looked perhaps as dim as it had been in the Day era entering the new year.

That all changed as the calendar flipped to January, however, when nine starters from last season all announced they were returning to the program rather than declaring for the NFL draft, a loaded group of veterans that includes Emeka Egbuka, TreVeyon Henderson and Donovan Jackson on offense and Burke, Jordan Hancock, Lathan Ransom, Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau and Tyleik Williams on defense, most of whom were likely hearing their names called on the first or second day of the 2023 NFL draft.

It was a seismic decision – which also included the return of fifth-year Mike linebacker, team captain and “Block O” recipient Cody Simon – that put Ohio State back into national title consideration after a difficult finish to the year. According to those who opted to stay for their senior or fifth years, that decision was fueled by the concept of unfinished business.

“I made a group chat, and we were all texting and talking during the days and weeks after the Missouri game,” said Sawyer, who many said led the efforts for Ohio State's veterans to return. “I was throwing stuff in guys' ears, talking about how we should come back and how much it would mean to the city if we came back to Ohio State, being able to etch our names into the legacy here if we won a national championship and beat those guys up North.

“Don't get me wrong, I want to go to the

NFL and chase my dream more than the next guy, but before we can chase that, we have something bigger at stake, something bigger than ourselves. Coach Day always talks about leaving your legacy at Ohio State, becoming one of the best teams to ever come through here, and my conversations with them were, ‘If we all decided to come back for our senior year, imagine the things we could achieve.’”

Sawyer and his teammates' decision to finish the job at Ohio State rather than live out their dreams in the NFL has created a motivated and focused group heading into the 2024 campaign, a mentality that Day said has become infectious within the locker room as the season nears.

“It's been a great summer,” Day said at Big Ten Media Days. “The team that we have right now is working with urgency. They're working with purpose. It started with the guys that decided to come back. You can see it. You can see the look in their eyes. It's a special group.”

Beyond the group of returning veterans, Ohio State also added some major reinforcements who could bring them closer to accomplishing their three biggest goals.

Enter Caleb Downs, a former five-star safety out of Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek who joins Ohio State out of the transfer portal after a sensational freshman campaign at Alabama, where he recorded 107 tackles – the most by a Crimson Tide freshman since at least 1970 – and added five pass deflections, one forced fumble, one fumble recovery and a punt return for a touchdown.

Downs, whose efforts last season won him SEC Freshman of the Year and a first-team All-SEC honor, immediately plugs into the starting role at the adjuster/free safety position, providing the Buckeyes with an explosive force in the back end of an Ohio State secondary that also includes returning starters Burke and Davison Igbinosun at cornerback, Hancock at nickel and Ransom at the bandit/strong safety.

“(Downs) is different,” Burke said. “He's wired in. He's smart. He knows the game a lot, inside-out. We're just looking forward to holding everybody accountable and having fun.”

Ohio State also dipped into the transfer portal to improve its offense, which scored 30.5 points per game and averaged 407.9 yards a contest last season, both the worst marks for the team since 2011. Those improvements began with the addition of former Kansas State quarterback Will Howard. The fifth-year takes over for the departing McCord this season as Ohio State's starting quarterback following a strong senior season with the Wildcats, throwing for 2,643 passing yards and 24 touchdowns while also rushing for 351 yards and nine scores.

Howard's rushing abilities – he was clocked at 22 mph on a sprint over the offseason, the fastest of the five quarterbacks on Ohio State's roster – could give the Buckeyes an added dimension at the position that the program has not benefited from since Justin Fields last donned the scarlet and gray in 2020, an element that the transfer thinks could prove to be the difference between close wins and excruciating losses late in the season.

“Are we going to run some quarterback run plays? Sure,” Howard said on Aug. 6. “But at the end of the game, when it's third-and-5 and everyone's covered down the field, am I going to be able to tuck the ball down and go get 6 yards and run someone over? I want those guys that are out there with me to know that I'm going to go get that extra yard.”

Howard is not the only significant addition to Ohio State's offense this season. The team also plucked two-time first-team All-SEC running back Quinshon Judkins from Ole Miss, a move that gave the Buckeyes what many experts believe is the nation's top running back tandem with Judkins and the two-time All-Big Ten rusher Henderson. It also helped fortify the offensive line by bringing in former Alabama starting center

Seth McLaughlin.

Pair those with the signing of the sensational incoming freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith – the nation's top-rated wide receiver recruit in a decade who has captivated those within and around the program with his dominant play at fall camp – and Ohio State is in line for more success on offense this season, at least on paper.

But who is leading this new-look offense? No, it is not Day, who gave up play-calling duties over the offseason to assume a more “CEO” role as head coach, but rather his former coach at New Hampshire, longtime play-caller Chip Kelly.

Kelly, the former UCLA head coach who was hired by Ohio State in early February when former offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien left for Boston College after he spent just 21 days with the program, joins the Buckeyes with 33 years of coaching experience, 14 of those years coming as a collegiate and NFL head coach.

Known for his up-tempo running back-centric style, Kelly is widely considered one of the more innovative offensive minds in football, a reality that has his former quarterback disciple and longtime friend excited for what is to come for the unit in 2024.

“Chip is one of the best offensive minds in the history of college football, in my opinion,” Day said. “He's a great play-caller. I really wanted to have somebody who had head-coaching experience. Now, I never thought that I would have somebody who was a head coach the way he has been in college and in the NFL. It allows me a little more peace of mind and certainly a lot of trust there.

“I trust Chip with my life, and that's a big part of anytime you are handing something over that you have done almost your entire career.”

Still Room For Improvement

Ohio State's aggressive offseason ap-

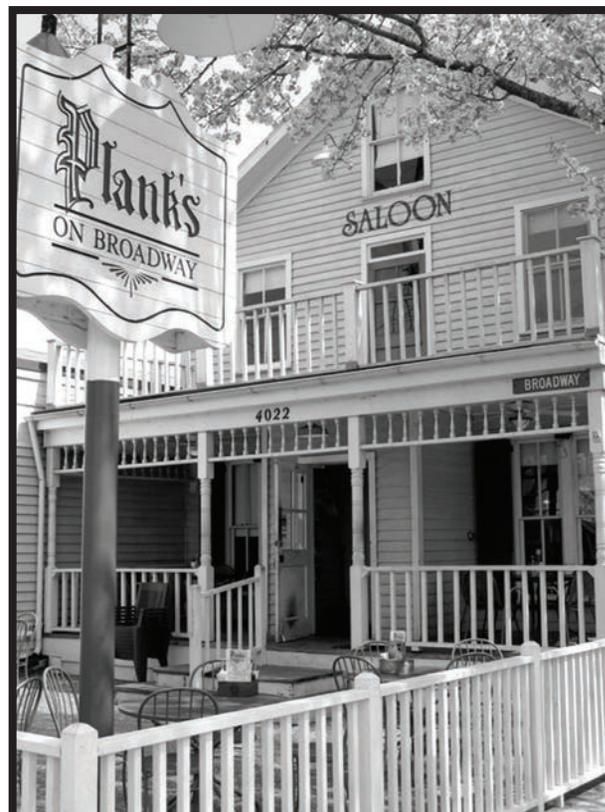
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SONNY BROCKWAY

TIDE TURNED — Safety Caleb Downs joined Ohio State through the transfer portal this past offseason. The Georgia native opted to transfer despite posting a sensational freshman campaign at Alabama, where he recorded 107 tackles and added three pass deflections, one forced fumble, one fumble recovery and a punt return for a touchdown.

proach — which, according to athletic director Ross Bjork, cost the school's collectives and brand affiliates around \$20 million in NIL — has allowed the program to build elite depth at almost every position, which could be a significant asset during an unprecedented 2024 season that includes an expanded 12-team College Football Playoff and a potential 16- or 17-game schedule that could stretch into late January.

But in order for the Buckeyes to truly reach their championship aspirations, they must continue to fine-tune some faults within their roster.

Ohio State's question marks begin at offensive line, a unit that is looking for a bounce-back season after a topsy-turvy 2023 campaign that ended with an underwhelming performance against Michigan and a disaster against Missouri in which it relinquished four sacks, 10 tackles for loss, eight quarterback hurries and two forced fumbles.

Justin Frye's group looks strong on the left side of the line, with an improving Josh Simmons and the veteran Jackson reclaiming their roles at left tackle and left guard, respectively. McLaughlin may prove to be an upgrade over last year's starter Carson Hinzman at center, and Josh Fryar is returning to start at right tackle. But right guard remains a question mark, with Hinzman and Tegra Tshabola duking it out for the

starting role at the position, although Tshabola appeared to have the upper hand toward the end of fall camp.

Regardless of who earns the starting role at right guard this season, many in the program expressed confidence that the offensive line could make sound improvements in 2024, giving the Buckeyes a potentially more physical offense under Kelly.

"I do see the making of a really good unit," Kelly said. "That whole group worked with (head strength coach) Mick Marotti in the summertime. So where they are physically, they came to camp ready to play and ready to compete."

"I feel like there's a different energy from the O-line (this offseason)," sophomore quarterback Devin Brown added. "We can see it in the weight room. The way that they act with each other and just the violence, the presence they bring, you can tell that there's something different. They're tired of hearing all this noise of, 'They didn't do this or that,' and they're ready to get after it this year."

Beyond the offensive line, Ohio State also enters the season with questions on special teams, a unit that widely underperformed last season under the tutelage of now-fired special teams coordinator Parker Fleming, ranking 34th in the nation in net punting (40.6 yards), 67th in kickoff return yardage (19.9), 111th in punt return yard-

age (4.4) and 113th in punt return defense (12.4).

Ohio State's special teams' failure caused Day to make wholesale changes over the offseason, assigning safeties coach Matt Guerrieri and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis to lead punt and kickoff units, tight ends coach Keenan Bailey and wide receiver coach/co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline to lead punt and kickoff return and analyst Rob Keys to oversee the entire unit. It was a change that Day said earlier this offseason came after a conversation with former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, who transformed the Buckeyes' special teams into an elite unit during his 10-year run as head coach using his famed "Tresselball" approach.

"It really made sense to me," Day said earlier this offseason. "We're doing it a little bit different than (what Tressel did), but that kind of resonated with me and I thought that was the right thing to do this year."

"Dayball" may not necessarily flow off the tongue as well, but nonetheless, the unit could be poised for a bounce-back season with either former FWAA All-American and Buffalo transfer Anthony Venneri or 6-7 Australian freshman Nick McLarty taking over punting duties, Jayden Fielding reclaiming his role at kicker and the explosive Downs, Egbuka or Brandon Inniss likely occupying most of the punt and kick return responsibilities.

All Roads Lead To Nov. 30

Ohio State's hectic offseason was defined by program-changing roster additions

and some philosophical coaching changes, which puts the Buckeyes in prime position to compete for a national championship, the program's first since the inaugural CFP season in 2014.

But before they can even think about winning a national championship or even a Big Ten title, another much more important goal must be achieved.

Equipped with a loaded group of motivated veterans and upstart underclassmen, the Buckeyes are ready to flip the script in the rivalry and end the three-game losing streak against the Wolverines come Nov. 30 at Ohio Stadium.

It's a goal that those who returned to the roster are as motivated as ever to chase, and one they believe they must achieve in order to leave the program without any regret.

"Three seasons in a row we came up short against (Michigan), and I'd be lying if I told you that it didn't burn a fire inside of us," Sawyer said. "It's definitely something that we think about. We know what's at stake when we play those guys. All of our goals and aspirations for the season ride on that one game in November. They hate us; we hate them. That's the way it has to be. That's the way we want it to be. That's what makes that rivalry so fun.

"(Beating Michigan) would mean everything. It would mean everything to me. That's the main reason why we came back. That's when we signed our names on our letters of intent. That's what we were coming here to do. Especially me being from Columbus, that would mean the world to me. And that's what I plan on doing this fall."



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OSU Names Four Captains, Simon Gets Block O

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State has officially named its captains for the 2024 season, with four seniors getting the recognition: wide receiver Emeka Egbuka, running back TreVeyon Henderson, defensive end Jack Sawyer and linebacker Cody Simon.

The four Buckeyes are all first-time captains, which they were voted into by their teammates, and given each of their chances to move on to the pros next season it will likely be their only time.

There are no returning captains after last season's team captains – linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, wide receiver Xavier Johnson and tight end Cade Stover – each moved onto the NFL over the offseason. Still, head coach Ryan Day is confident the team chose a good group to lead the Buckeyes this season.

"The great news is we have a great group of leaders," Day said. "Just because you are not a captain doesn't mean you're not a leader. You're still a leader. Leadership is earned and a lot of you guys have earned leadership. There are a lot of captains on this team. The players did a great job voting."

Each of the four announced they would return to Columbus for their senior years despite having a chance to chase NFL opportunities, and instead came back for one final season with the Buckeyes.

Last season, all three of Eichenberg, Johnson and Stover were from Ohio, but this year only Sawyer can say so. He is out of Pickerington North High School, committing to the Buckeyes in the 2021 recruiting class.

Emeka Egbuka

Egbuka returns as the No. 1 receiver in the room and is looking to have a comeback year after struggling some with injuries last



SONNY BROCKWAY

SIMON SAYS – Fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon's effort and loyalty were rewarded when he was recognized as a team captain and awarded the coveted "Block O" jersey. His position coach, James Laurinaitis, called him an unquestioned leader of the team.

year. In his junior campaign, he finished with 41 catches for 515 yards and four touchdowns in 10 games. He is looking to have his second 1,000-yard season after finishing 2022 with 1,151 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Egbuka being voted as a captain by his teammates doesn't come as a surprise to Day, who said he has always seen leadership qualities in the veteran pass catcher since he came to Columbus as an 18-year-old.

"Emeka Egbuka, I can't say enough about who Emeka is," Day said at Big Ten Media Days. "He's an old soul. Since he has been here, he's been a warrior. He has his degree. He had to make his decision on whether he wanted to go to the NFL or not, and he decided to come back with a degree in hand. We didn't get to see the best version of him last season with his ankle injury, but we're seeing it now."

Acting as a leader is also something that Egbuka is used to, even though this is his first time getting the public recognition as a Buckeye.

"I've always felt like I was a natural-born leader," he said. "And that was always something that I really tried to do whenever I was in a situation to do so, but just being at Ohio State has really helped me hone those skills and be a leader who carries the water. Someone who doesn't just talk the talk, but also walks the walk."

Along with being a leader with his actions and words, he is also a leader with his play on the field. If Egbuka is able to bring in 78 catches and 1,042 yards in his senior season – numbers which he was around two

years ago – he will become the Buckeyes career leader in both categories, etching his name into the history books at Ohio State.

TreVeyon Henderson

Henderson is entering a year where he is joined by junior Quinshon Judkins in what is likely the best 1-2 punch out of the backfield in the country. One way he has proved himself as a leader was the way he handled another top-tier running back coming into the room at Ohio State, according to Day.

"When it first happened and Quinshon went into the portal, the first thing was talking to TreVeyon, 'What are your thoughts?' And he was unbelievable," Day said in the spring. " 'If you think it helps the team, Coach, then let's do it.' And then talking to Quinshon and saying, 'TreVeyon is here and he's coming back,' and he said, 'Well, I'd love to go play with him.' But it all started with TreVeyon."

"I think TreVeyon's leadership so far this year as he's transitioned into his fourth year has been tremendous," Day said in February. "The way that he's gone about his work, the way that he's holding guys accountable, he's got a different look in his eye, and I think that's important."

Henderson also has dealt with some injuries the past few years, but has 2,745 career rushing yards and 32 touchdowns in three seasons, showing off his explosiveness out of the backfield since he was a freshman breakout.

Jack Sawyer

Sawyer has also been a leader for Day's team for a long time, but for the defensive

end, it goes back even further than the first time he arrived on campus. Sawyer was Day's first commitment as a head coach, pledging to the Buckeyes in February of 2019 and after that, he took to the recruiting trail to help bring in the second-best recruiting class in the 2021 cycle.

That continued into this past offseason when Sawyer was one of the first to announce publicly that he would be returning to Columbus for one more season, and he rallied his teammates into making the same decision with the idea of coming back to beat Michigan and win a national championship, two things the 2021 commits have yet to accomplish.

"He was very passionate about getting us back," senior defensive tackle Ty Hamilton said in the spring. "He has it in his heart, being a kid from Ohio just like me, having a passion for wanting to win. You're playing for The Ohio State University. You want to win. You don't want to have to settle for anything less."

Sawyer's decision, and his push to bring so many others back, came after he finally began to put it all together in the final three games of the 2023 season. In those three games against Minnesota, Michigan and Missouri, Sawyer finished with 7½ tackles for a loss and five sacks, showing off the type of player he was expected to be when he signed with Ohio State as a five-star recruit.

Cody Simon

Simon enters his first year as Ohio State's starting Mike linebacker since 2021, taking over for Eichenberg, who was a team captain the past two seasons. Simon didn't start for most of the 2023 season, but he did earn a good amount of playing time, especially when Eichenberg was held out of a few games towards the end of the season with an injury.

He also was given Ohio State's "Block O" jersey on Aug. 17, the same day it was announced he would also be one of four captains. The "Block O" jersey is an honor given to the player who displays "toughness, accountability and the highest of character" both on and off the field. He will wear No. 0 this year – as Johnson did last season – shedding his No. 30 jersey he wore last year.

"I love this program so much," Simon said. "I had goals when I got here and even though everything always hasn't gone the way I envisioned, I couldn't have asked for better teammates."

Linebackers coach James Laurinaitis acknowledged just over a week before the news was announced that Simon is one of the leaders of the team, something the Mike linebacker usually needs to take on since they need to act as the "quarterback of the defense."

"He's the unquestioned leader of the group," Laurinaitis said. "He's the leader of the defense."

Simon's status as the leader of the defense comes as no surprise considering he is the longest-tenured Buckeye on the unit, playing in 42 career games and recording 147 tackles, 11 tackles for loss, five pass deflections, three sacks, one interception and one forced fumble.

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The Numbers Game

Final 2023-24 Football Statistics

2023 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Sept. 2	(3) at Indiana	W, 23-3	50,050	
Sept. 9	(5) YOUNGSTOWN STATE	W, 35-7	102,897	
Sept. 16	(6) WESTERN KENTUCKY	W, 63-10	100,217	
Sept. 23	(6) at Notre Dame (9)	W, 17-14	77,622	
Oct. 7	(4) MARYLAND	W, 37-17	104,974	
Oct. 14	(3) at Purdue	W, 41-7	57,319	
Oct. 21	(3) PENN STATE (7)	W, 20-12	105,506	
Oct. 28	(3) at Wisconsin	W, 24-10	76,453	
Nov. 4	(3) at Rutgers	W, 35-16	53,703	
Nov. 11	(3) MICHIGAN STATE	W, 38-3	105,137	
Nov. 18	(3) MINNESOTA	W, 37-3	104,019	
Nov. 25	(2) at Michigan (3)	L, 30-24	110,615	
Dec. 29	(7) vs. Missouri* (9)	L, 14-3	70,114	

*Cotton Bowl

OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	276	203
Rushing	91	88
Passing	161	95
Penalty	24	20
Average Per Game/Rush	138.8	119.5
Average Per Game/Pass	269.1	146.0
Total Offense	5303	3451
Total Plays	831	828
Average Per Game	407.9	264.5
Average Per Play	6.4	4.2
Penalties-Yards	74-579	62-529
Fumbles-Lost	10-6	11-4
Third Down Efficiency	72-168	54-191
Percentage	43%	28%
Fourth Down Efficiency	10-18	16-32
Percentage	56%	50%
Sacks-Yards	28-180	23-140
Time Of Possession Avg.	29:16	30:43

Score						
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot. Avg.
Ohio State	81	120	103	93	0	397 30.5
Opponents	27	38	31	50	0	146 11.2

Individual Statistics						
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long	
T. Henderson	156	926	5.9	11	75	
Chip Trayanum	85	373	4.4	3	40	
Xavier Johnson	28	190	6.8	0	27	
Miyan Williams	49	158	3.2	3	12	
Dallan Hayden	19	110	5.8	1	19	
Evan Pryor	19	49	2.6	0	6	
Marvin Harrison Jr.	2	26	13.0	1	19	
Emeka Egbuka	5	25	5.0	0	9	
Devin Brown	22	23	1.0	1	8	
Jesse Mirco	1	2	2.0	0	0	
Lincoln Kienholz	6	2	0.3	0	2	
Cody Simon	1	-3	-3.0	0	0	
Kyle McCord	32	-65	-2.0	0	9	
Team	6	-11	-1.8	0	0	
OSU Totals	431	1805	4.2	20	75	
OPP Totals	452	1553	3.4	6	45	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Kyle McCord	229	348	65.8	3170	24-6	161.6
Devin Brown	16	28	57.1	217	2-1	138.7
Lincoln Kienholz	10	22	45.5	111	0-0	87.8
Emeka Egbuka	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
Team	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	255	400	63.8	3498	26-7	155.2
OPP Totals	198	376	52.7	1897	9-7	99.2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Marvin Harrison Jr.	67	1211	18.1	14	75
Cade Stover	41	576	14.0	5	49
Emeka Egbuka	41	515	12.6	4	28
Julian Fleming	26	270	10.4	0	37
T. Henderson	19	229	12.1	0	65
Carnell Tate	18	264	14.7	1	55
Xavier Johnson	13	178	13.7	0	40
Gee Scott Jr.	10	70	7.0	1	14
Chip Trayanum	9	53	5.9	0	19
Miyan Williams	4	42	10.5	0	27
Jelani Thurman	2	18	9.0	0	14
Patrick Gurd	1	9	9.0	0	9
Joe Royer	1	5	5.0	0	5
Evan Pryor	1	2	2.0	0	2
Dallan Hayden	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
Brandon Inniss	1	58	58.0	1	58
OSU Totals	255	3498	13.7	26	75
OPP Totals	198	1898	9.6	9	50

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	-	49-50	-	-	16-20	97
Marvin Harrison Jr.	15	-	-	-	-	90
T. Henderson	11	-	-	-	-	66

Cade Stover	5	-	-	-	-	30
Emeka Egbuka	4	-	-	-	-	24
Chip Trayanum	3	-	-	-	-	18
Miyan Williams	3	-	-	-	-	18
Josh Proctor	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jordan Hancock	1	-	-	-	-	6
Tyleik Williams	1	-	-	-	-	6
Dallan Hayden	1	-	-	-	-	6
Devin Brown	1	-	-	-	-	6
Brandon Inniss	1	-	-	-	-	6
Carnell Tate	1	-	-	-	-	6
J. Mathews Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
OSU Totals	50	49-50	-	-	16-20	397
OPP Totals	15	14-14	-	-	14-20	146

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	5-5	6-6	5-8	0-1	16-20
OSU Totals	5-5	6-6	5-8	0-1	16-20
OPP Totals	4-4	0-0	4-4	5-6	14-20

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	50	2174	43.5	0	72
OSU Totals	50	2174	43.5	0	72
OPP Totals	75	3167	42.2	0	71

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jordan Hancock	2	133	66.5	1	93
Jermaine Mathews Jr.	1	58	58.0	1	58
Josh Proctor	1	24	24.0	1	24
Lathan Ransom	1	15	15.0	0	15
Denzel Burke	1	0	0.0	0	0
Steele Chambers	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	7	230	32.9	3	93
OPP Totals	7	53	7.6	0	19

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jayden Ballard	9	49	5.4	0	18
Emeka Egbuka	7	23	3.3	0	8
Julian Fleming	1	3.0	3.0	0	3
OSU Totals	17	75	4.4	0	18
OPP Totals	11	136	12.4	0	35

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Xavier Johnson	11	250	22.7	0	32
Chip Trayanum	1	14	14.0	0	14
Caden Curry	1	-5	-5.0	0	0
OSU Totals	13	259	19.9	0	32
OPP Totals	14	251	17.9	0	30

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Steele Chambers	41	42	83	1.5-3	0-0
Tommy Eichenberg	40	40	80	2.5-8	1.0-7
Davison Igbinosun	39	20	59	1.5-4	0-0
Cody Simon	24	33	57	3.0-6	0-0
Sonny Styles	32	21	53	4.5-13	2.0-6
Tyleik Williams	20	34	54	10.0-19	3.0-6
Jack Sawyer	24	24	48	10.0-46	6.5-40
Josh Proctor	31	16	47	4.0-6	0-0
Jordan Hancock	28	13	41	2.0-16	2.0-16
Ty Hamilton	17	21	38	7.0-46	2.0-10
J.T. Tuimoloau	12	26	38	7.0-46	5.0-39
Lathan Ransom	21	13	34	1.5-5	0-0
Denzel Burke	18	6	24	3.0-8	0-0
Mike Hall Jr.	9	15	24	2.0-15	1.5-14
J. Mathews Jr.	9	4	13	0-0	0-0
Jaden McKenzie	4	6	10	1.5-6	0-0
Hero Kanu	8	2	10	1.0-5	1.0-5
Malik Hartford	5	5	10	0-0	0-0
Caden Curry	5	4	9	3.5-23	1.5-17
C.J. Hicks	5	3	8	1.0-2	0-0
Gabe Powers	6	1	7	1.0-3	0-0
Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	3	4	7	2.0-11	1.5-11
Ja'Had Carter	2	3	5	0-0	0-0
Tywone Malone	3	2	5	0.5-1	0-0
Mitchell Melton	3	-	3	3.0-13	1.0-9
Gee Scott Jr.	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
C. Simpson-Hunt	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Cameron Martinez	2	-	2	0-0	0-0
Reid Carrico	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Kayden McDonald	-	1	1	0.5-1	0-0

2023 All-Big Ten Teams
Here is a look at the All-Big Ten football teams as selected by the coaches and media.

Coaches Team					
FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback - J.J. McCarthy, Michigan; Running Back - Blake Corum, Michigan; TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State; Receiver - Isaiah Williams, Illinois; Marvin Harrison, Jr., Ohio State; Center - Drake Nugent, Michigan; Guard - Zak Zinter, Michigan; Donovan Jackson, Ohio State; Tackle - LaDarius Henderson, Michigan; Olumuyiwa Fashanu, Penn State; Tight End - Colston Loveland, Michigan.					
FIRST TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker - Dragan Kesich,					

2023 All-Big Ten Teams					
FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback - J.J. McCarthy, Michigan; Running Back - Blake Corum, Michigan; TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State; Receiver - Isaiah Williams, Illinois; Marvin Harrison, Jr., Ohio State; Center - Drake Nugent, Michigan; Guard - Zak Zinter, Michigan; Donovan Jackson, Ohio State; Tackle - LaDarius Henderson, Michigan; Olumuyiwa Fashanu, Penn State; Tight End - Colston Loveland, Michigan.					
FIRST TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker - Dragan Kesich,					

OSU Totals	426	364	790	72-275	28-180
OPP Totals	489	298	787	61-222	23-140
Fumbles Forced: Hancock (2), Sawyer (2), Burke, Eichenberg, Ransom, Styles.					
Fumbles Recovered: Igbinosun (2), T. Williams, Tuimoloau.					

2024 Preseason Polls

The Associated Press Top 25				
Rank	School	2023	Pts.	'23 Rank
1	Georgia (46)	13-1	1,532	4
2	Ohio State (15)	11-2	1,490	10
3	Oregon (1)	12-2	1,403	T6
4	Texas	12-2	1,386	3
5	Alabama	12-2	1,260	5
6	Ole Miss	11-2	1,189	9
7	Notre Dame	10-3	1,122	14
8	Penn State	10-3	1,060	13
9	Michigan	15-0	995	1
10	Florida State	13-1	971	T6
11	Missouri	11-2	927	8
12	Utah	11-2	887	NR
13	LSU	10-3	804	12
14	Clemson	9-4	689	20
15				

Howard Could Provide Missing Piece To Title

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Toward the end of the 2023 season, Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day seemed to have it all figured out at the quarterback position.

After a rocky start to the year that began with the team not naming a starting quarterback until the third week of the regular season, starter Kyle McCord was hitting his stride as the calendar turned to late November, completing 44 of his 61 passes for a combined 547 yards, five touchdowns and no interceptions in blowout home wins against Michigan State on Nov. 11 and Minnesota on Nov. 18.

McCord's strong performance those two weeks had many around the program believing that he could lead the Buckeyes to the promised land while also reclaiming the starting role for his senior season, giving the team some stability at the position that was nonexistent before the year began.

But those positive feelings quickly subsided in the coming weeks.

Two interceptions and a gut-wrenching, regular season-ending loss against archrival Michigan later, Ohio State's junior gunslinger was out the door. McCord announced on Dec. 4 – just nine days after the loss to the Wolverines – that he was entering the transfer portal, and he would later transfer to Syracuse, leaving the Buckeyes without a starting quarterback once again.

Things seemed even more dire for Ohio State after its uninspiring Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri a few weeks later, when plug-in starter Devin Brown went down with an ankle injury late in the first quarter and was relieved by true freshman Lincoln Kienholz, who completed just six of his 17 pass attempts for 86 yards and zero touchdowns.

With the quarterback room seemingly in a state of flux, Ohio State looked to make some significant changes at the position before the 2024 season. This effort began in January with the transfer-portal signing of veteran signal-caller Will Howard, a two-year starter from Kansas State who led the Wildcats to a Big 12 championship in 2022 and threw for a combined 5,786 passing yards and 48 touchdowns while rushing for another 921 rushing yards and 19 scores in his four years in Manhattan, Kan.

The 6-4 Howard's dual-threat ability, veteran pocket presence and even-keeled approach to the game are a unique combination of skills that enticed Day and his staff to bring in the former Big 12 quarterback through the portal this offseason, and on Aug. 15 – 16 days before Ohio State's season opener against Akron on Aug. 31 – those traits allowed Day to name Howard the starter to open the season.

It was the earliest Day had ever named a starting quarterback before a season in his six years as head coach, eclipsing the previous quickest starting announcement given to Justin Fields on Aug. 19, 2019.

"Will Howard will start the first game against Akron," Day said. "He is our starting quarterback. We're 13 practices in here, so you're talking almost 27 or 28 practices (this offseason). So when you take the aggregate of all the numbers, Will graded out significantly ahead of the other guys in the team work.

"We're excited about Will being the starter.

Projected Starter(s)

Quarterback
18 • Will Howard

6-4, 237, Gr.
Downingtown (Pa.)/Kansas State

Transferred to Ohio State for his final collegiate season after throwing for 2,643 passing yards and 24 touchdowns while rushing for 351 yards and nine scores with Kansas State in 2023.

Will has really taken command of the offense. You feel him in the huddle. You feel his experience. I think he did a really good job of changing his body in the offseason, so he's become a threat both with his legs and with his arm. He understands more of what he's doing out there. He's really executing very well. I think the guys are excited when he gets in the huddle – not to say that they aren't getting excited when the other quarterbacks are in there – but they do feel Will. And he knows he's excited about leading the team."

Howard's status as the starting quarterback comes as little surprise, as he was the presumed favorite to lead the group ever since he committed to the Buckeyes. But that reality – as well as Day's glowing remarks about the veteran – does not mean that his offseason at Ohio State hasn't come without some turbulence.

The Downingtown, Pa., native admitted early on in fall camp that it took some time for him to acclimate to his new role with the Buckeyes when he first arrived in Columbus in January, a struggle that prevented him from separating himself from the other four quarterbacks in the room.

"In the spring, I was – at the beginning, at least – drinking from a fire hose a little bit, especially just with the way that the offense was installed," Howard said. "But I think that was good for me, learning how to go through a spring or through a couple of practices without really having any prior experience with an offense and going through the struggles that I had and the things that I learned from."

Howard has indicated throughout the summer that he has grown more comfortable and confident with Ohio State's offensive system, which is now led by the Buckeyes' other significant addition to the quarterbacks room, former college football and NFL head coach and offensive guru Chip Kelly. It is a marked change in mentality from the spring that his coaches say has made Howard a more complete player on the practice field as fall camp rolls on.

"Coming off the spring, everything was very new," Day said. "It was a significant change in terms of scheme and what we ask the quarterback to do. Once he went through the offseason, he changed his body and came in with a much better knowledge of what was going on. You can see him playing faster. His feet were moving. The ball was coming out with more pace. And then after the first week (of fall camp), you started to see him take control and make good decisions."

"I think he's really worked extremely hard in the offseason," Kelly said on Aug. 15. "From the end of spring ball on April 13 to now, he's made great strides. We gave him a plan over the summer to work on, and he took it and ran



SONNY BROCKWAY

WILL TO WIN — The Buckeyes shored up their quarterback room in January with the signing of Will Howard, a dual-threat signal caller who spent the previous four years at Kansas State.

with it. Where he is now is pretty impressive."

As Day and Kelly alluded, Howard's extra comfort in Ohio State's system is also due to the improvements he made to his body.

Day revealed at the beginning of fall camp that he and his staff challenged Howard to make positive changes to his weight as soon as he joined the program, a months-long commitment that allowed the fifth year to lose 2 percent of his body fat and trim his weight down from 250 to around 230-235 pounds.

"Oh yeah," Day said when asked if he challenged Howard to change his body over the offseason. "That started when he first got here. We got (performance dietitian) Kaila Olson involved and (strength coach) Mick (Marotti) and everybody we could. We have the opportunity here to do DEXA scans (a body compositional analysis) to get an idea of their body fat and makeup and lean mass. And he got challenged."

"I knew I had to lose weight," Howard admitted. "I feel really good now. The plan worked. I just have to keep maintaining it."

Howard's slimmed-down physique has allowed him to put more "zip" – as both Day and Kelly called it – on his throws this fall camp, but it also helped fine-tune his ability to run outside the pocket. This is a quarterback trait that has been missing at Ohio State since Justin Fields left for the NFL in 2020, and one that is an integral part of a Kelly-led offense.

Kelly, whose offenses have heavily featured the quarterback run, most notably at Oregon where his quarterbacks averaged 568.8 rushing yards and nearly seven touchdowns per season from 2007-12, said his current signal caller was clocked this offseason running 22 mph during a sprint at 236 pounds, the fastest sprint time of the five quarterbacks on Ohio State's roster.

The Buckeyes' offensive coordinator plans to utilize Howard's unique speed and size this season, giving his offense yet another explosive option that was not present in prior years.

"We know how fast Will is," Kelly said. "So it's not like if he runs, it's a 6-yard gain. If he takes off, it could be a 60-yard gain. He's had some really big runs in his career so far. So I think that's just another tool in your toolbox.

"It makes you a little bit more multidimensional. You look at the trend that's gone into the NFL, a lot of those guys – can they keep plays alive and extend plays because of their athleticism? Lamar (Jackson) does that. Patrick Mahomes does that. Josh Allen does that. Will is probably more like Josh, just because he's a bigger guy, but it does add a dimension to your offense."

Howard said his legs can prove to be the difference between close wins and close losses this season.

"That's a big part of my game, and it's going to need to be a part of our game as an offense," Howard said. "Whether that's in the read game or the scramble game, whatever it may be. I just want these guys on my team to know that I'm willing to run the ball and go get that extra yard when I need to. Because at the end of the day, that's what it really comes down to."

Bountiful Backups

Behind Howard on the quarterback depth chart is the longest-tenured Buckeye thrower in Brown, who opted to return to Ohio State for his third collegiate season despite offseason rumors of him entering the transfer portal to find an opportunity to start elsewhere.

The former four-star has often been limited by injury during his career, most notably with his previously mentioned ankle injury in the Cotton Bowl and his finger ailment in 2023 that forced him to miss much of spring camp. But despite those setbacks, Brown has committed to staying with the Scarlet and Gray and competing at the highest level in Columbus, a mentality in which he seems to take utmost pride.

"Honestly, I think people (who think I'm transferring) are cowards," Brown said on March 4. "I think people have this thought in their own heads that I'm going to leave and I'm a quitter, but that's never been me. I mean these people live in their mom's basement saying something about me and they don't know s-t. Excuse my language, but they don't know anything. They don't know who I am, they don't know who I've been, and that's always who I've been."

Brown has transferred that passion to

FOOTBALL PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS

the field this offseason, where he has devoted himself to cleaning up his mechanics and maintaining consistency. The redshirt sophomore said he improved his mechanics while training in California with quarterback coach and former pro Jordan Palmer – who has worked with several NFL quarterbacks such as Allen, Joe Burrow and Trevor Lawrence – an experience that he said allowed him to gain a different perspective on how to succeed at the position.

“Working with Jordan Palmer and (quarterback trainer) Mike White out in California this offseason, that’s been a huge help for me, being more consistent with my mechanics and everything,” Brown said. “So throwing the ball, I feel a lot more consistent.”

“It was just a lot of footwork stuff, a lot of using my front foot differently. The way that they teach is just a different kind of mindset from most quarterback coaches, and it kind of flips your thinking of how you throw the ball.”

Brown’s hard work in the offseason is paying off in fall camp, where he has looked comfortable in the pocket and delivered a number of accurate throws during practice sessions open to the media.

His best day of those open practices came on Aug. 8, when he threw a pair of accurate deep-ball touchdowns to Jayden Ballard and Jelani Thurman while also reaching the end zone on a quarterback keeper at the goal line.

“I’m way more comfortable,” Brown said. “Being my third year in the offense, I pretty much know everything in and out. So I’m not really having to think too much about installs. I’m just going out and playing.”

Regardless of the marked improvements Brown made, Day still thinks the sophomore,

who was named the No. 2 quarterback on the depth chart for the second straight season, needs to show more consistency on the field in order to take that next step with the Buckeyes.

“(Brown) has shown the ability to do just about everything you ask him to do,” Day said. “It’s a consistency part and taking care of the football part that he just has to make sure he does a great job of moving forward. And if he can do that, then he can play and be a contributor.”

“I reminded him again – you all know the story with Cardale (Jones) and J.T. (Barrett) and Braxton (Miller) – and then I also shared with him that (former TCU quarterback) Max Duggan was a backup the year he was a Heisman Trophy finalist in the first couple weeks. So a big part of being a quarterback is having resilience and continuing to work. The minute you face a little bit of an obstacle or resistance along the way, you just have to keep pushing.”

Day named Brown the second-string quarterback as BSB went to press, but he did not rule out the possibility of true freshman Julian Sayin – a surprise addition to Kelly’s room this offseason after he transferred to the Buckeyes from Alabama following the retirement of longtime Crimson Tide head coach Nick Saban – working his way into the mix for the backup role as the regular season nears.

Sayin, the nation’s top-ranked quarterback in the 2023 class who threw for 2,369 passing yards, 24 touchdowns and just one interception as a senior at Carlsbad, Calif., turned the heads of his coaches and teammates as an early enrollee this spring, a strong start to his Ohio State career that thrust him into the

middle of the starting quarterback competition toward the end of spring camp.

While Sayin’s lack of experience likely put him at a disadvantage for the starting role this summer, the true freshman has only continued to impress since, showing a consistent combination of accuracy and high quarterback IQ that has Day confident he can be his quarterback of the future.

“He has a tremendous ability to locate the football. The ball comes out quick. His mind moves quick. You’ve all seen the talent. The thing for Julian is just getting more and more reps. We say, ‘When you get out there, you’re either remembering what you’re doing or learning what you’re doing.’ He’s still learning out there. He still has to figure it out. And that’s a little bit different than where he came from in terms of a jump from high school to college.”

“But you see the talent. And the faster he learns, the faster he’s going to get on the field. He’s going to play a lot of football at Ohio State. When he gets on the field is going to be up to him.”

For now, though, Sayin will likely have to learn behind Howard and Brown before he can make a legitimate run at being Ohio State’s starting quarterback. But that is a role that he appears to embrace this season.

“There’s really good quarterback development here,” Sayin said. “Coach Day, he’s a great quarterback whisperer. The quarterbacks they’ve had in just the past five years have put up great numbers and just really done things the right way. I wanted to come in this offense, be coached by him. Be coached by Coach Kelly. Make adjustments at the line, that type of thing.”

Howard, Brown and Sayin could emerge as one of the top quarterback trios in all of college football, but Ohio State’s quarterback depth does not stop there. The Buckeyes welcomed in another five-star freshman quarterback this offseason in Air Noland, who also comes in with a boatload of hype.

He threw for 2,140 yards and 22 touchdowns as a senior at Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes, after throwing for an impressive 55 touchdowns as a junior – the second most in Georgia high school football history – on his way to leading his team to an undefeated 15-0 record and its first-ever state title.

Noland, who described this season as a “developmental year” for him, finds himself toward the bottom of the quarterback depth chart with Kienholz, a former standout multisport high school athlete from South Dakota who has shown a greater familiarity and comfort with Ohio State’s system this summer after the disappointing outing in the Cotton Bowl.

Noland and Kienholz complete a five-man quarterback room that many consider among the deepest in college football, which could prove important as they navigate through an extended season that could spill into the end of January and test the attrition of the roster.

After all, having depth at quarterback is a luxury that those within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center may know more than others.

“Last time a national championship was won, we were on quarterback three,” Day said. “We’re going to run the quarterback this year. And because of that, we’re going to need depth. So that room has to be strong. We need depth in that room.”

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Ohio State Boasts Best RB Duo In Years

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At first glance, former running backs coach Tony Alford's decision to leave, having coached the likes of Ezekiel Elliott and J.K. Dobbins in his eight years with Ohio State, was a bit surprising. Taking by and large the same position at archrival program Michigan was simply stunning to most Ohio State fans. As the age-old adage goes, when one door closes, another opens, and as Alford slammed one door shut by leaving for Michigan, a door opened for first-year running backs coach Carlos Locklyn.

Locklyn had a lot of success at each of his stops as a positional coach, proving his worth most recently at Oregon, where Bucky Irving would become an All-Pac

12 selection and was one of the first six running backs off the board in the 2024 NFL draft.

Now, coming to Ohio State, Locklyn will be faced with the best problem a running backs coach can have, with two elite backs in the same room.

Two-time all-SEC running back Quinshon Judkins, a junior four-star transfer portal prospect from Ole Miss, and two-time All-Big Ten senior running back TreVeyon Henderson are poised to make for one of the best running back duos in the country.

In some situations, having two of the best players in the country at the same position can cause a division between two competitors wanting the ball, but according to Henderson, that couldn't be further from the reality of the Ohio State running backs room.

"(We are) very, very close," Henderson said. "I'm just so thankful that God brought him here. We both have been helping each other and just sharpening each other."

Henderson's message was echoed by Locklyn when he was asked about balancing unselfishness in the room when each player is chasing personal success.

"The first day I got here, April 2, I told them, 'We're going to learn how to be one,'" Locklyn said. "It doesn't cost you anything to celebrate another man's success. So many people get caught up in accolades. I tell the kids all of the time, 'Don't get caught up in your newspaper clippings. I'm going to hold you accountable.'"

Unlike Henderson, Judkins was not a five-star prospect out of high school. He was the 562nd-ranked player in his class, the 46th-ranked player at the running back position and a modest three-star prospect.

Judkins did not play like a three-star prospect in his true freshman season for Ole Miss. Rather, he took the college football world by storm with 1,567 rushing yards, the seventh most in the country in 2022. Surprisingly, Judkins broke both the single-season rushing-yards record and single-season touchdown record for the Rebels, all while sharing carries with soon-to-be NFL draft pick Zach Evans.

To say that a player took a step back with over 1,300 scrimmage yards and 17 touchdowns is baffling, but that might have been the case for Judkins in his sophomore campaign. He wasn't quite as efficient, though he still made the All-SEC first team for the second straight season. After just two years

Projected Starter

Tailback
32 • TreVeyon Henderson

5-10 • 208 • Sr.
Hopewell, Va.

After a return to form in his junior season, Henderson ranks 14th all-time in rushing yards in Ohio State history. He needs 637 yards to crack the top five.

Projected Starter

Tailback
1 • Quinshon Judkins

6-0 • 219 • Jr.
Pike Road, Ala.

In his first two years at Ole Miss, Judkins gained 1,000 yards in both seasons, including a 1,567-yard outing as a freshman.

with the Rebels, Judkins currently is third for the most rushing yards in Ole Miss history with 2,725.

When he entered the transfer portal over the offseason, the Buckeyes' winning culture and development were too much for Judkins to turn down.

"Why not Ohio State?" Judkins said in January. "A place with great culture, the best coaches, the best fan base that's very passionate about their team and about the whole city."

With all of the differences Judkins will face coming from Ole Miss to Ohio State, one thing that will remain consistent is his mentality.

"I have the same mentality," Judkins said. "I'm a part of the brotherhood. I look forward to going out there and doing my best to help my team."

Like Henderson, Judkins is eager to see how the running backs room carries over into the regular season, especially in offensive coordinator Chip Kelly's scheme.

"With all of our coaches, I think that they'll put us in the best positions to succeed on the field," Judkins said. "With Chip Kelly, knowing the offenses that he's run in the past, you know how he's able to dial up different things not using only one running back but also two as well."

Judkins is understandably known for his ability to carry the ball as a runner, but he also accumulated nearly 300 yards as a receiver in two seasons for the Rebels. Judkins hopes his abilities to catch the ball out of the backfield are reflected in his play at Ohio State.

"That's why I love Chip Kelly's offense," Judkins said, "just being able to be super versatile in the backfield and being able to do anything."

"(Lining up as a receiver) is definitely something that's in my bag," he added. "You can line me up anywhere on the field. You can run me from the slot, the backfield it doesn't matter."

Playing alongside Miyan Williams in his first three years, Henderson has had plenty of experience and success with other tal-



SONNY BROCKWAY

ONE-TWO PUNCH — Two-time all-SEC running back Quinshon Judkins (1), a junior four-star transfer portal prospect from Ole Miss, is expected to tag-team with two-time All-Big Ten senior running back TreVeyon Henderson for carries this season.

ented running backs in the room. Coming off a frustrating, injury-riddled sophomore season, in 2023 Henderson regained the All-Big Ten form he had achieved as a freshman. Although he didn't quite reach his gaudy freshman numbers when he gained over 1,500 yards from scrimmage in 2021, Henderson finished his junior season with 1,155, including 926 yards on the ground.

Instead of being complemented by Williams, it was Chip Trayanum who became the second-leading rusher of the 2023 team with 373 yards on 85 attempts (4.4 yards per carry).

However, with departures from Williams with hopes of being drafted, Trayanum to Kentucky through the transfer portal and Dallan Hayden's leaving through the same means to Colorado, the Ohio State running backs room became somewhat thin, especially considering that Henderson has dealt with injuries throughout his Buckeye career.

The addition of Judkins put concerns mostly to bed, but TC Caffey's season-ending injury over the offseason brought the issue back into focus.

Caffey's injury puts freshman running backs James Peoples and Sam Williams-Dixon at the back of Buckeyes fans' minds. Any injury to either Henderson or Judkins will put Peoples and Williams-Dixon in the spotlight. Locklyn, aware of this possibility, is optimistic about the young running backs' chances.

"I'm confident that they'll get the job done," Locklyn said. "You know why? Because I'm confident in myself, so I have confidence in them. So they'll be able to get the job done."

As Locklyn instills confidence in his young running backs, he would still like to see improvements from them both.

"Both are good runners. The hardest thing for young running backs, because they don't learn it in high school, is pass protection, but they both have the right mindset," Locklyn said. "They're both very coachable."

Peoples, a former four-star running back out of San Antonio, feels the nightmare scenario for some Buckeye fans of a true fresh-

man taking snaps wouldn't be a nightmare at all.

"I feel very confident because of the intensity of practice that we've been through with (Locklyn)," Peoples said. "I feel like if they call my number, I'll definitely be ready. The more we go through fall camp, that just gets me more and more ready for whenever my number is called."

With Henderson and Judkins ahead of him in the room, Peoples is taking in as much as he can from the veterans since they have been able to find so much success at the collegiate level.

"I'm soaking up a lot from these guys," Peoples said, "guys who have been in the system or been in college football for a very long time. Sit back and watch how intentional they are about how they go about their business or taking little things from their game or how they prepare."

Williams-Dixon, who wasn't quite the blue-chip prospect Peoples was, still has the opportunity to provide the Buckeyes with much-needed depth carrying the football despite likely being the fourth man down the depth chart. Being put in a fairly important position as a true freshman running back, Williams-Dixon and Peoples' job is made easier by the guidance given to them by Henderson and Judkins.

"They really slow everything down for us in the meeting room and out on the field," Williams-Dixon said. "They make sure that we see something that we don't normally see."

Both of the freshman backs could turn out to be extremely important this year, especially given the season could be up to 17 games long, but for now, the attention and excitement are on what could be one of the greatest collegiate running-back duos in recent history. At least according to Williams-Dixon, the hype is real.

"(Henderson and Judkins) are the best running backs I've ever seen in my life," Williams-Dixon said. "Lately in practice, they practice like they would play in the games, like all the highlights you see. They practice just like that."

Tight End Candidates Ready To Replace Stover

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Gee Scott Jr. came to Ohio State in 2020 as a heralded wide receiver. But four years older and wiser, and 33 pounds heavier than his freshman season, he's on the verge of being the starting tight end.

Following a move to the position in 2021, he has mainly sat and learned behind Jeremy Ruckert, a 2022 third-round pick entering his third season with the New York Jets, and Cade Stover, the 2023 Big Ten Tight End of the Year who was drafted in the fourth round by the Houston Texans in April.

Stover and Emeka Egbuka tied for second on the Buckeyes in catches (41) last season behind Marvin Harrison Jr.'s 67. Stover totaled 576 yards (14.0 average) and five touchdowns.

Stover is with the Houston Texans now, so there's an opportunity for Scott. But tight ends coach Keenan Bailey said it won't be a one-man show to replace Stover.

"I think everyone needs to step up," Bailey said. "I think about the unit. The unit's got to be the best tight end unit in the conference, best in the country. That's Ohio State. That's why you came here, to be the best. So I don't know if just one person is going to step in and be Cade Stover. I'm not asking anyone to do that. I'm asking the whole unit to be the toughest unit on the team, hardest-working unit on the team, and I think we'll like our results."

Stover proved to be an offensive threat as a check-off for quarterback Kyle McCord, who transferred to Syracuse after the 2023 season.

It will be interesting to see if the number of throws to tight ends decreases with new quarterback Will Howard. McCord would use the tight ends as outlet when he was under pressure while Howard is not afraid to tuck the ball and run away from danger.

Scott (6-3, 243) was a four-star wide receiver out of Eastside Catholic High School in Seattle and No. 10 at his position in the country in the class of 2020 but made the transition to a less glamorous role where a premium is put on blocking ahead of receiving.

He had five catches in each of the 2021 and 2022 seasons but was able to double his total last season with 10 catches for 70 yards, including a 14-yard touchdown from McCord on the road against Rutgers. In total, Scott has 20 catches for 140 yards and two touchdowns.

The numbers don't tell the whole story of one of the most respected players in the locker room.

"He's had the right offseason," head coach Ryan Day said. "He's got the right approach, His leadership and just his demeanor has been excellent. His attitude has been off the charts. I think he's poised to have a really good year. He has to go do it."

Bailey likes the way Scott mentors the younger players.

"I think he sets the tone for the unit," Bailey said. "He's been here for quite a while. He knows what it takes. So he sets the tone as far as details and preparation and effort and toughness and everyone's got to follow."

Projected Starter

Tight End
88 • Gee Scott Jr.

6-3 • 243 • Gr.
Seattle Eastside Catholic

With 10 catches last season, former wide receiver doubled his total from previous two seasons.

End Game

Others in the tight ends room have their own journeys. Ohio transfer Will Kacmarek, a senior from St. Louis, and sophomore Jelani Thurman are challenging Scott for the starting spot.

Kacmarek (6-6, 260) was a lightly recruited (two-star) defensive lineman in the 2021 class who switched positions once he got to Ohio and had a productive career with the Bobcats before leaving for Ohio State in December.

Thurman (6-6, 258) arrived from Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes last season with lofty expectations but played in just five games on his way to a redshirt year, although he made his first career start in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri.

"Of course, you want to come in and play, but obviously if you have somebody in front of you that's doing the job, getting the job done, why not let them do that?" Thurman said. "I'm here to win as a Buckeye, not just get in and play and try to be selfish."

Making a bid to be in the rotation is junior Bennett Christian (6-6, 260), who returns after serving a year-long suspension for testing positive for a banned substance.

Fifth-year senior Patrick Gurd (6-4, 249) was the No. 3 tight end behind Stover and Scott last season. He played 39 offensive snaps last season and had his first career catch for 9 yards against Minnesota.

Freshman Max LeBlanc (6-4, 227) has also caught the attention of Day as he and his staff look to the depth chart and where each player fits.

"I think Jelani, Will, Bennett, those guys are going to have to really step up the next couple of weeks to figure out who's going to be able to play," Day said. "It's going to be one of those deals where, does he deserve to play? If yes, we'll draw that line and roll those guys. But we're looking for them to be able to do multiple things."

"I'm hoping that Bennett can come along. I'm hoping Jelani can take that next step. We're seeing some good things out of Max. Pat Gurd is another guy who's been around the program for a while that is a guy that we hope we can rely on as well in some of the packages that we have."

Fortunately, there will likely be enough snaps to go around. While Stover was the clear frontrunner last season, the ability to share the load will be important to keep players fresh. Also, there will be packages featuring two tight ends.

Day said Aug. 8 that Scott and Kacmarek have moved to the forefront.

"They're both going to play," Day said. "It's 11 (one-tight end) and 12 (two-tight end), so we'll figure out where they fit into those. There's a lot that comes with playing



SONNY BROCKWAY

END RESULT — After arriving at Ohio State in 2020 as a heralded wide receiver, Gee Scott Jr. made the transition to tight end and is expected to start this season. Scott has 20 catches for 140 yards and two touchdowns in his career.

tight end. Cade really, two years ago, probably played maybe too many snaps (707). I mean, that was a lot of snaps for him. We tried to help him out a little bit last year. So there's going to be plenty of snaps to go around."

There's A Will

Kacmarek had one scholarship offer from an FBS school but that didn't deter him. After redshirting his freshman season when he became a tight end, he had 20 receptions for 264 yards (13.2 average) in 2022 and 22 catches for 243 yards (11.0) and two touchdowns last season for Ohio.

"It's a dream come true," he said of being a Buckeye. "Ever since I've been young, it's been a dream to play at the highest level. And now that I'm here, it's really exciting and I'm pumped for the opportunity."

"They contacted me pretty quickly. A bunch of schools contacted me as soon as I entered. I was a little bit later in the portal, just because of a lot of family discussions and things like that. So as soon as I (entered the portal), I got a lot of attention and then I just connected really easily with all the coaches here and I just knew this is my home."

Kacmarek, who has two seasons of eligibility remaining, loves the way Ohio State employs their tight ends.

"They use their tight ends a bunch," he said. "I love to block. And I love to catch passes and stuff like that. And they use both aspects and I just think it's a really cool opportunity for me. I love blocking. I feel like that's one thing that I could separate myself from others."

"I believe I'm a selfless player. I'll do anything to get the win or get the first down or a yard. I like to play hard. I like to get my nose dirty and I just love football."

Like Kacmarek, Thurman will be pushing for more playing time but Day said it has to be earned.

"Jelani has the talent," Day said. "You've heard me say this before, but he has the talent, and you can watch a five-to-10 play cut-up and be very, very impressed. But he needs to be consistent. It's all the no-talent issues with him. It's the focus."

"I love the way he competes. I love his approach. I love his attitude. But in order to play tight end, you have to do a lot of job descriptions so you've really got to be on it every play. And all it takes is one bad play and that can ruin a whole drive at tight end. We say that you have to run routes like a receiver, you have to block like an offensive lineman, you have to protect like a running back and you have to know all of them."

Thurman said he is prepared for the challenge.

"(My freshman year) was basically just a developmental year. Learning from the older guys, actually getting in there a little bit," he said. "I had a few plays during the season, but just learning, sitting back and getting ready for my year."

Day is optimistic that Thurman will make it hard to keep him off the field.

"After, I would say the quarterback, the tight ends are probably asked to do the most things," Day explained. "So we try to do the best we can and keep it simple. But the reality of it is, they are asked to do a lot."

"He needs to continue to work in the meeting rooms to make sure that when he gets on that field, he knows exactly what he's doing. Because we see a huge ceiling in him. He's made strides. He's had a good first couple weeks of camp. But we need him to come on in that area and just show more consistency. If he can, he'll play for us this season."

Egbuka, Smith Highlight Talented WR Room

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Contributor

Freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith will take the field in an official capacity for the first time on Aug. 31 when Ohio State hosts Akron, while senior wideout Emeka Egbuka will suit up for the 36th time for the Scarlet and Gray. Despite being on opposite ends of the timeline when it comes to their careers, the talent gap is significantly smaller between the receivers.

Smith enters this season as the most hyped freshman in the country and is on the short list for the most intrigue ever offered by a first-year player at Ohio State, joining the likes of quarterback Terrelle Pryor, the Bosa brothers and offensive tackle Orlando Pace.

"It's a blessing, but you don't want that hype to affect you," Smith said Aug. 9. "I keep my head down, find ways to get better each and every day."

And gotten better he has.

Since arriving on campus in January, Smith has catapulted himself from a wide-eyed freshman to an undisputed starter for Ohio State alongside Egbuka and sophomore Carnell Tate. The hard work thus far is matching the hype coming in, with Smith arriving as the top overall prospect in his recruiting class and the 10th highest-rated recruit by 247Sports dating back to 2000.

Smith's high rankings were of little surprise to those who watched him at Chaminade-Madonna Prep in southern Florida. He totaled 177 receptions for 3,116 yards and 46 touchdowns over the last three seasons (winning a state championship in all three years) and was an accomplished track athlete, with that speed on display on the gridiron.

"I know it's big expectations for me because of the No. 1 player in the country coming in and all the hype around me, so I just try to block out all that stuff and just focus on the main thing – just the team and our receiver room and the locker room," Smith said. "The first game comes and if I don't exceed the expectations that (the media has) for me, I don't really care. I just want to go out there and win the game."

Smith's 6-3, 215-pound frame does not give off the appearance of a freshman. He is one of the tallest receivers on the team and by far the heaviest, though he moves just as fluidly as those with 20 less pounds to lug around. He isn't afraid to use his size, though, turning 50-50 balls into more favorable 75-25 balls, according to some on the team.

Beyond what he's shown on the practice field, Smith has also been impactful off the field, earning a coveted Iron Buckeye distinction for excellence in offseason workouts.

"He has a lot of tools," said receivers coach Brian Hartline. "He works extremely hard, and I will say this. I would say that we've never had



SONNY BROCKWAY

PROMISING FUTURE – Freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (4) has impressed teammates, coaches and fans alike with his eye-catching ability and athleticism after arriving on campus in January as the top overall prospect in his recruiting class.

an Iron Buckeye from Coach Mick (Marotti) as a freshman. I don't know about ever, but I know definitely since I've been here.

"A lot of credit to him where, as far as Jeremiah goes, he embodied everything that is a part of that conversation. It's not just lifting numbers, speed numbers. It is the way you carry yourself, the way you train, the way you have the edge to you."

As evidenced in a handful of practice sessions viewed by the media and videos posted on social media, Smith has been a nightmare for Ohio State's defense, which is expected to be among the best in the country.

"Jeremiah is a dog," cornerback Denzel Burke said. "I've been saying this for a long time now. He's on our team, and I'm glad he's on our team. We're getting him better. Just his mentality, (coming down with) 50-50 balls. He's a pro's pro. He's 18 years old and he has everything you want in a prototypical receiver."

Some numbers to keep in mind as it relates to Smith: 41 receptions, 648 yards and eight touchdowns. Those are the records for a true freshman at Ohio State, all achieved by Cris Carter in 1984, that could potentially fall 40 years later. It's fair to say that the expectations are exceedingly high for Smith – perhaps too much so – but the freshman is not backing down from the challenge, already looking to establish himself among the Ohio State greats.

"I just have to go out there on the field and just show you guys that I could be the next great Ohio State receiver to come through here," Smith said. "It's a blessing to have that, but I just got to go out there and play and show you guys."

Smith is the shiny new toy for Hartline, but his room is still as well-stocked as any in the country. Egbuka and Tate are the other starters – with Egbuka in the slot and Tate outside along with Smith, though Egbuka will move

around the field – and expectations are high for Egbuka after he missed three games last year with an ankle injury. He still finished with 41 receptions, tied with Cade Stover for second on the team, with 515 yards and four touchdowns.

"Emeka can do so many things," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said at Big Ten Media Days. "Whether it's on punt return, he can take a handoff, he can catch a bubble, he can block, he can run a deep route – there's not much Emeka can't do. When I think of Emeka, I think about someone who's strong. Strong as a player, strong mentally and strong in his faith. He's somebody that's a warrior and somebody we're going to count on this year in big spots."

Egbuka is in sight of several Ohio State records, needing 78 receptions and 1,042 yards this season to become the school leader in both categories. But Egbuka – named a captain for the Buckeyes this season – is focused on what's in front of him.

"Playing bigger, stronger, faster and getting my body healthy from the little hiccups I had last year," Egbuka said of his offseason focus. "Just being someone who can be explosive, go up and make those 50-50 plays, turn those hitches into touchdowns and be a stout blocker on the perimeter."

With all the hype focused on Egbuka and Smith, Tate is the forgotten but equally important man for Ohio State's receiving group. He finished with 18 receptions for 264 yards last season and is primed for a larger role with Marvin Harrison Jr. and Julian Fleming – both of whom played ahead of Tate last year – moving on.

"I'm better everywhere," Tate said. "I've been in the slot, been on the outside as you guys can see. I'm better everywhere. I got faster, I got bigger, I got stronger. I'm better everywhere, and I feel good."

Those thoughts are echoed by Hartline, who has been pleased with the work Tate has done this offseason and looks forward to what he'll contribute this season.

"We can play Carnell anywhere," Hartline said. "I think his ability to learn an offense, the intricate details – throw him in positions, make a mistake, he'll never make that mistake again. He does a good job of learning from others."

Things are less sure outside of Ohio State's top three receivers, though the talent is evident regardless of who will ultimately take the field. Sophomore Brandon Inness – whose lone reception last season went for 58 yards and a touchdown – is likely next up, and he will be particularly important filling in at slot when Egbuka is on the sideline or moved outside.

Inness missed part of the spring with a foot injury, but the second-year wideout is fully healthy as he looks for a bigger role in the offense. And while he waits to make that impact on the field, he has been instrumental thus far off the field.

"He was a guy that impressed his teammates through the summer," Hartline said. "He was a guy that was all gold. He was a guy that the leaders wanted to vote him on to the leadership council. So he earned all that without even playing football."

From there, it's anyone's guess who might step up for Ohio State at wide receiver. Sophomore Bryson Rodgers at one time appeared out the door, entering the transfer portal shortly after last season concluded. But he decided just two weeks later to return to Columbus and is now in position to contribute, likely in the slot.

Projected Starters

Wide Receiver 17 • Carnell Tate	Wide Receiver 4 • Jeremiah Smith	Slot Receiver 2 • Emeka Egbuka
6-3 • 191 • So. Chicago Marist/IMG Academy	6-3 • 215 • Fr. Miami Gardens (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna	6-1 • 205 • Sr. Steilacoom, Wash.
Finished with 18 receptions for 264 yards and a touchdown as a freshman last season, with his receptions and yards both fourth among Ohio State's wide receivers.	Named an "Iron Buckeye" as a top performer during the offseason and believed to be the first true freshman to earn the honor.	Limited to just 10 games last season while dealing with an ankle injury but enters senior season with 124 career receptions for 1,857 yards and 14 touchdowns.

FOOTBALL PREVIEW: WIDE RECEIVERS

“He can run routes underneath,” Day said. “He’s working on making sure that he’s keeping that weight up. I think he wants to be north of 187, and he’s got to be because that position is a physical position. He’s shown that he can do it. That would be encouraging to have him there as a weapon for us.”

The jury remains out on redshirt junior Jayden Ballard, who has consistently been touted as a deep-ball threat but has done little to show that outside of the practice field with just nine career receptions, though he did not record a statistic on offense last season.

“He’s done that in the past,” Day said of Ballard’s occasional flashes. “We need him to be more consistent.”

Rounding out the contributors are redshirt sophomore Kojo Antwi and freshmen Mylan Graham and Damarion Witten, with the latter two arriving in recent months as summer enrollees.

Antwi has yet to record a reception entering his third season, a function of the receivers in front of him rather than a referendum on Antwi’s ability, but Day has been impressed with Antwi this summer.

“I just like his work ethic,” Day said. “He’s really changed his body. He’s changed his life. He’s changed his habits. I’m proud of the pre-season Kojo’s had, and we really need him to be a guy who can help us this year. I see some things in him that are pretty special, and I’m hoping that we can continue to build on that.”

Witten will be making the transition from tight end to wide receiver, with a redshirt likely in order. Graham is an incoming five-star prospect like Smith, and while he has not received the same level of hype, his skill has been evident since arriving on campus.

“He is definitely fluid about the way he moves,” Egbuka said. “We see it in his routes and his releases. When all the wide receivers are in the film room and he’s getting crafty and doing all this body movement stuff, it’s like, ‘OK, we can see he’s got a little something to him.’ It’s just about bringing him along. He just got here.”

With plenty of talent filling spots four, five and beyond on the wide receiver depth chart – and several of those names such as Rodgers and Antwi stepping up in recent weeks – Day is feeling good about where that depth stands entering this season. And recent seasons have shown how important that can be with Jaxon Smith-Njigba missing almost all of 2022 and Egbuka out for a handful of games last season.

“I think that we’re building depth there,” Day said on Aug. 15. “I feel better now than I certainly did two weeks ago.”

But just because the coaches feel good about who is lining up doesn’t mean they’re satisfied with where the group is. A new quarterback in Will Howard and an increased focus on the run game means the outlook may be different this season for Ohio State’s wide receivers, and Hartline is still looking to get this group ready for whatever may get thrown at them.

“I wouldn’t say they’re game-ready yet,” Hartline said. “I don’t think any of them, outside of Emeka – being confident in where he’s at and frankly how healthy he’s been and how he’s back to where he feels he’s really good. I’m very encouraged, though. From a group perspective, a depth perspective, I could say it’s arguably probably one of the deepest groups that I’ve had.”

“I’m feeling really good about a good group of guys. I can’t say game-ready. That’s a big statement. But I’m very encouraged.”



SONNY BROCKWAY

E FOR EXCELLENT – Senior receiver Emeka Egbuka is expected to contend for several school records after he finished last season tied for second on the team with 41 receptions for 515 yards and four touchdowns despite missing three games with an ankle injury.



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OL Hoping For Big Improvement In 2024

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

As strong as Ohio State's team was last season, there was little doubt that the weakest position group was the offensive line, and that was most evident on the biggest stages the Buckeyes played last year.

At the end of the Buckeyes' third straight loss to now-reigning champion Michigan, the Wolverines were able to secure the win in the Big House because of defensive linemen Mason Graham and Jaylen Harrell bringing early pressure at quarterback Kyle McCord on the last play of the game, forcing him to throw an errant pass that was picked off.

When Ohio State missed the College Football Playoff because of that loss, the offensive line had its worst game in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri. Matt Jones moved to center to replace redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman, and Enokk Vimahi was given a chance at right guard. The pressure the Tigers' defense sent at the quarterback all game proved to be too much for the Buckeye line to handle, giving up four sacks, 10 tackles for loss and eight quarterback hurries, allowing two fumbles along the way.

"They were doing a great job bringing a lot of pressure from all over the place," said former Ohio State wide receiver Xavier Johnson. "It ended up kind of giving us some trouble. We were trying to get some plays up, and the lack of time – every time you don't have time to throw the ball, or something doesn't have time to develop, that's an issue."

Some sort of regression from the year before was expected since the Buckeyes lost Paris Johnson Jr., Dawand Jones and Luke Wypler to the NFL, but it never seemed to improve to the point that was acceptable for Ryan Day.

That game only caused more questions and worry from Buckeye fans over the off-season, wondering if transfer quarterback Will Howard will be protected well enough to lead an offense that can compete for a national championship.

Another issue that was prominent last season was the failure to convert on third-and-short, especially early in the year. Runs were stuffed at the line of scrimmage, and when the offense tried to change up the game plan by passing, it was rushed and often wasn't enough to earn a first down.

However, only right guard Jones isn't returning of the starters last season, and the Buckeyes were able to make an addition with center Seth McLaughlin transferring from Alabama, where he spent four seasons and started in 24 games over the past three years.

Hinzman returns with a shot at earning a spot as the right guard but is still battling with multiple other players who have impressed Ohio State coaches in fall camp, like Tegra Tshabola and Austin Siereveld, both of whom took advantage of extra snaps during fall camp while there was an illness going around the offensive line room that they were able to avoid catching.

Regardless of how the offensive line ends up looking in Week 1, it already seems to be a stronger room than the five

Projected Starters

<p>Center 56 • Seth McLaughlin</p> <hr/> <p>6-4 • 305 • Gr. Buford (Ga.)/Alabama</p> <hr/> <p>Entering first season at Ohio State after four years with Alabama, where he started 24 games over the past three seasons.</p>	<p>Left Tackle 71 • Josh Simmons</p> <hr/> <p>6-5 • 310 • Sr. San Diego Helix/San Diego State</p> <hr/> <p>In second season as Buckeyes' starting left tackle after making big improvements throughout the 2023 season.</p>	<p>Right Tackle 70 • Josh Fryar</p> <hr/> <p>6-5 • 320 • Sr. Beech Grove, Ind.</p> <hr/> <p>Faced struggles early in the 2023 season, but has dropped weight and improved strength this offseason to improve his mobility and technique.</p>
<p>Left Guard 74 • Donovan Jackson</p> <hr/> <p>6-4 • 320 • Sr. Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal</p> <hr/> <p>Was voted first-team All-Big Ten in both 2022 and 2023 seasons, starting every game at left guard in both years.</p>	<p>Right Guard 77 • Tegra Tshabola</p> <hr/> <p>6-6 • 327 • Jr. West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West</p> <hr/> <p>Lost starting tackle battle last season but has shown up in fall camp and changed mental approach to earn starting spot in 2024.</p>	

that the Buckeyes consistently sent out last season. Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly thinks a big reason for that is that they have the ability to go up against Ohio State's defensive line in every practice.

"Iron sharpens iron," Kelly said, a consistent phrase preached by the Ohio State coaching staff. "When you have to go against Jack (Sawyer), JT (Tuimoloau), Tyleik (Williams) and that group every day, you can't help but get better. Those guys have taken advantage of the opportunities that they've gotten, and you can see growth from the spring until now. The one thing that we know is it's going to be a long season, so we have to develop those guys. You're not going into the season with just five offensive linemen."

Bookended By Joshes

The task of protecting the blind side of McCord in 2023 was entrusted to Josh Simmons, a transfer from San Diego State who didn't join the team until the end of spring ball. He took the spot of Johnson, who was good enough at the position to be taken with the sixth overall pick in the NFL draft, so Simmons had big shoes to fill.

Early on he struggled with penalties, something that had been consistent during his time with the Aztecs as well. He was flagged 17 times in 2022 and committed seven penalties in his first eight games with the Buckeyes, also dealing with the switch to left tackle after being on the right side of the line the year before.

"You think it's just kind of flip your mindset, but there's a lot more that goes into it," Simmons said on April 3 of the move. "Towards the back end of that, I think I started to figure it out a little bit."

Simmons was able to clean up his play late in the season and had just one flag thrown against him in the final five games of the season, cutting his penalty total by more than half from the season before. He also went from allowing 17 pressures in 2022 to just 10 with Ohio State, according to Pro Football Focus. He credits that to the improvement of the mental side of his game.

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

On the other side of the line is Josh Fryar, who earned the spot at the beginning of last season and had some mixed results. On one hand, Fryar allowed five sacks last

year, which was more than any other offensive lineman on the team. But he also allowed only 12 total pressures according to PFF, which was the eighth fewest among Big Ten tackles with at least 100 pass-block snaps. Fryar himself acknowledged that it was tough for him to adjust to the game early in the season.

"Last year was a learning curve for me starting," Fryar said. "And it's kind of crazy to see the response you get from people when you have a bad season, I guess you could say."

Fryar admitted that he might not have understood the importance of the off-season and spring workouts before he was a full-time starter, but he said that experience has helped him to understand that he needs to always be going as hard as he can no matter what he's doing.

"I think now I've got a better grasp of strength and conditioning, the football part of it, just everything," Fryar said. "And I think I'm well rounded in that to where I just don't have to think about. I just go."

He believes that one of his problems was that when he was on the field, he would think too much about what he needed to do. Now he's trying to make sure that he is comfortable enough on the field that he can shut his mind off as much as possible.

"I think it just comes with more of watching the game, breaking it down in the film room," Fryar said. "And then on the field, when you're playing, you're just constantly going through it and then like, all right, just play. If this happens, I don't care. Just go and go hard."

Day didn't question whether either Simmons or Fryar would have a starting spot going into this season, though he did give Fryar a chance to move to the right guard spot, which was the position with the most question marks when BSB went to press. However, on April 10, Day said he believes both of the tackles have improved their game even more over the offseason, and he can see that when they go up against the Buckeyes' deep defensive line.

"I think it's just overall production," Day said. "You're just seeing – especially in pass protection – those guys in better positions against Jack, JT, and Kenyatta (Jackson) and all of those guys. They're

just more consistent in blocking them."

"First, I think Josh Fryar has really changed his body," Day said. "His body fat is down, and that's something we really hammered this offseason. I think that was significant, and how quickly his feet are moving because he's very sharp in what he does."

"For Josh Simmons, that was never an issue, although he is in great shape. For him it's more of the experience and understanding of the offense, playing more football and the more mental part of it all. Both guys have benefited from another year, but both for different reasons."

The depth at the tackle position, like other offensive line positions as well, is something that is in question for the Buckeyes, which could be an issue with the longer season if they are to go deep into the expanded 12-team College Football Playoff.

Two players who could see some time if necessary on the outside are Zen Michalski and George Fitzpatrick, who seem to be the favorites to take the backup spots, but with the illness that ran through the offensive line room, they haven't gotten as much time to prove themselves.

Keep Your Guard Up

One position that was never a question is the left guard, where Donovan Jackson has started every game in the past two seasons at the spot and done well enough to take home first-team All-Big Ten honors both years.

Jackson had the option to enter his name into the 2024 NFL draft, but like many other Buckeyes he decided to return for his senior season.

"I talked to a lot of guys who are in the league that I have really close relationships with and guys in my class and where their heads were at," Jackson said in the spring, "but at the end of the day, I just wasn't content with my college career yet. A lot of guys come in with dreams and aspirations of what they want to do, and I feel like in terms of what I want to show for myself, it wasn't quite where I wanted to get."

Jackson said the biggest motivation for him was to win. He went three years without beating Michigan or winning a national title, and the loss to the Wolverines last

PREVIEW: OFFENSIVE LINE

season came down to a play where Jackson was tripped on the final play, allowing Michigan to get to McCord quickly and forcing an errant throw. Jackson still wants to get that taste out of his mouth.

"It certainly wasn't an easy time in my life," Jackson said. "It's definitely something I use for motivation. Anytime we do anything, anytime I lift, I lift with intent so I know that if I'm in that situation again, I'm stronger and faster than I was before. I have to be better than I was last year."

Getting better is going to be tough considering how elite Jackson has been the last two seasons. In 2023, PFF recorded 443 pass-block snaps for the interior lineman, and on those, he allowed just one sack and one quarterback hit. It was an extremely strong season for Jackson in that regard, though he did fall off from the year before in run blocking according to PFF, falling from an 80.1 grade in 2022 to a 69.9 grade last season.

Despite some small struggles, Jackson will still be one of the stronger linemen in the country this season, and if he does improve, he could end up hearing his name called early when the 2025 NFL draft rolls around.

The right guard position has been the biggest question of the offseason for Ohio State. With Jones leaving for the NFL, multiple players have been competing for the open spot throughout the offseason, but so far Hinzman and Tshabola seem to be the top two in competition for the starting spot with Tshabola seemingly leading the way as BSB went to press.

"I will say that Tegra has been there the whole time," Day said on Aug. 15. "He's really shown improvement. Today was a physical practice, but I felt him, especially in the last couple of drives. He's taken a step forward for sure."

This will be Tshabola's third season in Columbus, and after playing just 84 total snaps in his first two, he took a specific approach during the offseason to try to earn his way into a starting role, using the motto, "Nobody cares,"

"Nobody cares how you feel," he said on April 1. "Nobody cares where you think you should be. Nobody cares what you're going through. Just take the field and go as hard as you can because too many people invested in you for you to not go hard. Too many people invested in everybody on this field. There are many steps that had to take place for us to get here. And to not go hard is almost a disrespect to those guys."

He said that this approach is a change for him from what he did in his first two offseasons, but after not being able to win a starting tackle job last year, he changed the way he thought.

"I mean, I'm gifted with size and strength and athleticism," Tshabola said. "So it's all just in here. Just making sure I can be consistent, making sure I can take command and making sure I can get the job done because the coaches and myself think I have the ability to."

Hinzman got the opportunity to start at center for the entire 2023 season up until the Cotton Bowl, so he has the advantage of having actually consistently gotten into games at Ohio State, but he was the weakest link on the line last season. While he is still in contention at right guard, it seems that the 6-6, 327-pound Tshabola

is the favorite to earn it with his size and athleticism.

"There's not enough of a body of work to have a really strong opinion in that area," Day added, "but I will say the guys that have been there – Tegra has stood out as being able to play as a starting-level player in the quality he's been playing at right now. There are still things he needs to improve."

Backing them up on the interior will likely be Siereveld and Luke Montgomery, who both could find their way into a competition for a starting spot somewhere on the line next season when those open up. Siereveld and Michalski have been two players who have impressed Kelly in the fall so far.

"Zen and Austin are two guys that have stepped up and caught your eye," Kelly said. "They're taking advantage of their reps. One thing you preach as a coach, and sometimes it's coach-speak, but don't count your reps, make your reps count. Those two guys have really made their reps count."

Center Stage

After Hinzman struggled to play to the standard set for the Ohio State offensive line much of last season, the move was made to start Jones at center in the Cotton Bowl and give Vimahi a chance at right guard, which as previously mentioned didn't go very well.

Day and the Buckeyes went after some new talent at center over the offseason, bringing in former Alabama center McLaughlin through the transfer portal over the offseason. Late in the 2023 season, and in the Crimson Tide's loss to Michigan in the College Football Playoff, he dealt with some issues snapping the ball. But in fall camp for Ohio State those issues seem to be long gone, with the new center showing that he is ready to step into the role and that he has moved on from his struggles.

"Seth McLaughlin has been probably our most consistent offensive lineman in the first couple weeks of practice," Day said.

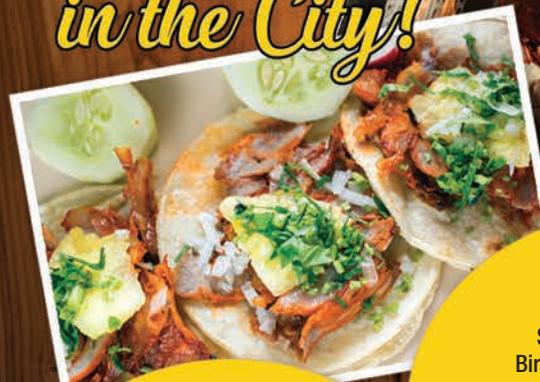
"Once you have a bad one, you kind of start thinking about, 'OK, I've got to get this right,'" McLaughlin said in the spring. "I don't think I was struggling from a mental standpoint. It was a matter of it just happened. I can't really explain what was going on and what went into it, but that's in the past and I'm moving forward."

McLaughlin has already been named to the Rimington Trophy watch list in the pre-season, an award that is given to the best center in college football. He joined 39 other candidates across college football on the list and is largely expected to bounce back from his short-lived issues. Since Hinzman has experience at the position, he will likely be the backup to McLaughlin, at least to start the 2024 season.

One thing that was never a big issue with McLaughlin was his blocking ability, allowing just 14 pressures and one sack last season while being flagged just seven times. If he's able to continue that at Ohio State, the Buckeyes' offensive line could have a chance to be one of the better units in college football. But for that to happen a lot will have to go right. Regardless, it should be a stronger group than what they sent out for the 2023 season.



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Making This Buckeye Team Special Is Goal

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Changes are afoot for the Ohio State specialty units beginning with the firing in January of coach Parker Fleming and continuing with the search for a new punter. The goal is simple: Make those involved in the kick game an asset and not a liability after several years of being the weak link in the program.

Head coach Ryan Day opted not to hire a single replacement but instead will coach by committee, a technique he told the media in March that he learned from former Buckeye head coach Jim Tressel, the godfather of “The punt is the most important play in football.”

“Quite honestly, I made a bunch of calls to a bunch of coaches,” Day said. “And one in particular that hit with me was when I talked to Coach Tressel, and he shared with me that he did this when he was here. He assigned one of the special teams to each of the coaches.

“And it got great buy-in from the players because, as a player, you want to really impress your position coach, you want to impress your coordinator, you want to impress the head coach. Sometimes the special teams coordinator can be a little bit low down the line.”

Not every coach on Day’s staff will be involved, but the assignments as of now

Projected Starters

Long Snapper
43 • John Ferlmann

6-3 • 228 • Sr.
Anthem (Ariz.) Boulder Creek/Arizona State

Second season as a starter after transferring from Arizona State. Did all the kick-snap-ping duties in 2023.

Kicker
38 • Jayden Fielding

6-0 • 175 • Jr.
Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

Made 16 of 20 field goals with a long of 47 in his first season as starter in 2023. Also expected to handle the kickoff duties.

Kick Returner
17 • Carnell Tate

6-3 • 191 • So.
Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

Did not return kicks last season but coaches want to get the ball into the receiver’s hands any way they can.

Punter
35 • Anthony Venneri

6-0 • 225 • Jr.
Hamilton (Ont.) St. Thomas More/Buffalo

Punted 22 times for Bulls the past two seasons before joining the Buckeyes as a walk-on.

Punt Returner
2 • Emeka Egbuka

6-1 • 205 • Gr.
Steilacoom, Wash.

Second on the team with seven returns for 23 yards (3.3 avg.) while hampered by injuries.

appear to include new safeties coach Matt Guerrieri (punt), linebackers coach James Laurinaitis (kickoff), tight ends coach Keenan Bailey (punt return) and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline (kickoff return).

“If you’ve sat in on one of our punt meetings, Matt Guerrieri is running that entire meeting,” Day said. “We get into punt return, Keenan will be up there. He’ll be up there with a little bit of help from Brian Hartline.”

And don’t forget the boss man.

“I’m going to be right there for every meeting and be a part of it,” Day said.

Rob Keys, quality control coach for kicking, will be in charge of schematics and video. Per NCAA regulations, in his role he can’t directly coach players.

“He’s allowed to coach the coaches,” Day said. “So, he can really do a lot of

the legwork in terms of off the field stuff, breaking down the film, helping get things organized for us as we get into the meetings.”

Also helping the cause is Marysville, Ohio, native Gunner Daniel, who is in his first season as program assistant – special teams. He was a long snapper for Wagner College and Boston College.

Fleming took heat for the numerous gaffes that plagued the Buckeyes whether it was deciding when to fair catch, a plethora of penalties, poor decisions on running fake punts or allowing long returns.

In his final game, the specialty units were flagged three times against Missouri in the Cotton Bowl, and two fair catches were inside the 10-yard line to put the Buckeyes in poor field position.

Then there was a Penn State punt that hit the shin of Lorenzo Styles Jr. and the Nittany Lions recovered, Jesse Mirco attempting a fake punt vs. Rutgers which failed that Day said wasn’t a designed play, a bad snap by long snapper John Ferlmann that resulted in a loss of yards against Maryland and the defense looking unprepared for a fake punt on fourth-and-1 that Michigan State converted.

And that was just last season when the Buckeyes were 113th nationally out of 130 programs with 12.4 yards allowed per punt return and 36th with 17.9 yards allowed per kick return and did not block any kicks or punts.

But it wasn’t just Fleming’s coaching, or lack thereof. Specialty teams have been a systemic problem for years. With all the skilled players who have gone through the program, the Buckeyes haven’t returned a kickoff or punt for a touchdown since 2014.

But this is a new era, although Ferlmann and returning placekicker Jayden Fielding retain their starting jobs. Otherwise, there’s competition among the punters, and there are numerous punt and kickoff returners who will get an opportunity to showcase themselves.

Simply Aus-some

With the Australian Mirco a graduate transfer to Vanderbilt after three seasons with the Buckeyes, a pair from Down Un-

der will vie with Canadian Anthony Venneri (Hamilton, Ontario) to handle the punting duties.

Freshman Nick McLarty has drawn the most attention for his bigness, both in size (6-7, 255) and for a viral video he posted on social media last fall that showed him booming a 90-yard punt over a football stadium.

“Coach Gunner and Coach Keys have done an amazing job with me,” McLarty said. “All the specialist group has been really, really helpful towards me. Joe McGuire, another Australian punter, has helped me through the process as well.”

McLarty and McGuire, a junior walk-on, are from Melbourne, Australia. McLarty is out of the Caulfield Grammar & Punt Factory in Australia while McGuire learned at Prokick Australia.

McGuire is the son of a famous Australian rules footballer, Eddie McGuire, but he leaned toward cricket. McLarty played Aussie football and had to make the adjustment to the American game.

“It’s a lot more speed, it’s a lot more sprinting. In Australia, there’s a lot more long-distance running,” McLarty said. “What we do in the weight room and what we do on the field is very different to what we do in Australia. But the adjustment’s pretty easy. You’ve just got to make sure you keep up with it.”

“You’ve just got to take it day by day. You’ve got to make sure you’re doing the work. Make sure you’re doing your recovery. That’s probably the main thing. The coaches are always going to make you work in terms of on the field and in the gym, but outside of that, you’ve still got to stay in that professional mindset.”

Venneri joined the Buckeyes this year as a preferred walk-on following two seasons at Buffalo. He set the season school record with a 43.0-yard average in 2022 when he was named to the Football Writers Association of America Freshman All-America team.

He broke his mark last season with a 44.0 average to rank 30th nationally, one spot ahead of Mirco (43.7).

Going into the final two weeks before the Aug. 31 opener vs. Akron, Day said the competition was still open.



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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: SPECIAL TEAMS

“We’ve got three or four guys in there that are going to be in the mix,” he said. “(McLarty’s) got a big leg. He’s young. So we’ll kind of see. We’ve got another guy with some experience (Venneri) coming in.”

The fourth punter he referenced is Wayne State transfer punter Hadi Jawad, a senior from Dearborn, Mich. He did not punt last season, but in 2022 he averaged 40.1 yards per kick. Prior to Wayne State he played for Wisconsin-La Crosse.

Kick It

Fielding, a junior, is the undisputed starter, but the Buckeyes will want to see more from him even though he made 16 of 20 field goals and 49 of 50 extra points last season to lead the team in scoring with 97 points. He made his first seven attempts through six games but went 9 of 13 the rest of the way.

For the season he converted all 11 field goals up to 39 yards, had eight tries from 40 to 49 but missed from 42, 45 and 48 yards and missed a 52-yarder against Michigan in his lone attempt from beyond midfield. His longest make was a 47-yarder vs. Minnesota.

Senior preferred walk-on Casey Magyar from nearby Dublin, Ohio, and senior Austin Snyder from the Columbus suburb of Groveport will be the backups.

Magyar is in his second season with the Buckeyes after two seasons at Kent State. It’s a similar story for Snyder. He enters year two for Ohio State following three seasons at Findlay.

Snyder made 31 of 40 career FGs for the Oilers with a long of 51 yards and was 105 of 111 on extra points.

Fielding is expected also do kickoffs while one of the punters is expected to be his holder for field goals.

Ferlmann won the long snapper job after transferring from Arizona State in the spring of 2023. He redshirted the 2021 season for the Sun Devils and handled all the snapping duties the next season.

Other snappers are seniors Max Lomonico and Collin Johnson and freshman

Morrow Evans.

Return to Glory?

There hasn’t been much excitement in the return game for years, but a pair of newcomers could inject some life.

Wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, the No. 1 recruit in the 2024 class, was mentioned by Day early in camp as a possible candidate to return punts. Of course, as good as he is projected to be, the coaches might not want to overextend him his first season.

“It’s rare to find someone who’s as talented as he is but who has really good discipline and skill at that age,” Day said. “We haven’t played a game yet, but he’s building a lot of respect among his teammates for sure.”

Alabama transfer Caleb Downs, the top player in the 2024 transfer portal, arrived in Columbus after an outstanding freshman season at Alabama.

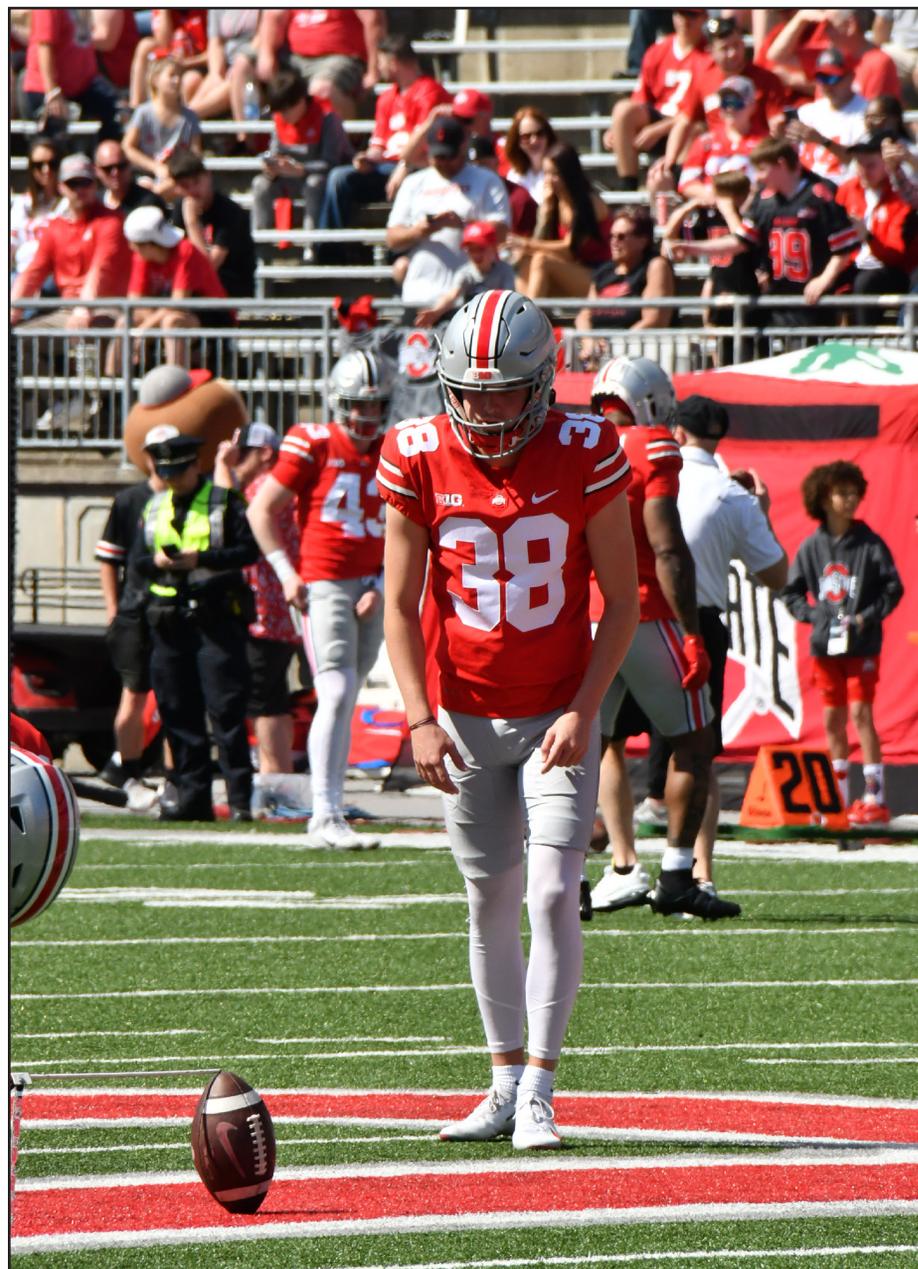
The safety was first-team All-American (Pro Football Focus) and SEC Freshman of the Year while becoming the first Crimson Tide freshman to lead the team in tackles since at least 1970, totaling 107.

He also returned four punts for 87 yards, 85 on a touchdown against Chattanooga.

Jayden Ballard topped the Buckeyes last season with nine punt returns for 49 yards (5.4 average) and Emeka Egbuka had seven for 23 (3.3). Brandon Inness will also get a shot to help improve on last season, when OSU was 111th with a 4.4 average punt return and 67th (19.9) for kick returns.

Xavier Johnson as a graduate last season returned 11 of the 13 kickoffs for the Buckeyes with a 22.7-yard average and a long of 32 yards. Chip Trayanum, now at Kentucky, had a return for 14 yards, and defensive end Caden Curry had a 5-yard loss on a busted play.

Egbuka and Lorenzo Styles Jr. could be in the mix on the kickoff unit, and Day in the third week of camp noted receiver Carnell Tate and running back TreVeyon Henderson as potential returners.



SONNY BROCKWAY

LEG UP — Junior kicker Jayden Fielding is hoping to improve on his season last year when he made his first seven field goal attempts through six games but went 9 of 13 the rest of the way. He also made 49 of 50 PATs.

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D-Line To Try To Live Up To Huge Expectations

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State's offseason may have been defined by players who were seen as NFL prospects deciding to come back for one more year with the Buckeyes, and that charge was led by the defensive line.

Each of Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau and Tyleik Williams could have likely been selected in the NFL draft in April along with a few of their former teammates, but all three decided to run it back, taking on the offseason slogan, "reload the clip."

Sawyer – a Pickerington, Ohio, native – was the first player to commit to Ohio State in the recruiting class of 2021 and played a large part in helping to recruit some of the other players who joined the No. 2 overall class. He also played a large part in getting so many of them to return to Columbus for one more season.

"I think, if you asked all of us that have decided to come back, obviously there's the personal decision to come back too, just the chance to improve your draft stock," Sawyer said in March. "But really, I think for a lot of us, it was definitely the team thing, all coming back. Unfinished business. It wouldn't feel right leaving here like that without getting one more shot that we had. So I think when you talk to all of us, you're going to find out it was a collective agreement."

The Buckeyes already had a top defense in college football in 2023, one that the defensive line became a large part of, especially later in the season. But now Jim Knowles' unit will unquestionably be viewed as the best defense going into this season. That is led by what is arguably the best front four in college football with Ty Hamilton joining Sawyer, Tuimoloau and Williams.

Each of them has significant experience at the college level, with Sawyer, Tuimoloau and Williams each starting all of last season while Hamilton split time fairly evenly with Michael Hall Jr., who was taken by the Cleveland Browns with the 54th overall selection in the second round of the 2024 NFL draft.

Early in the 2023 season, one of the very few things that there was to pick apart with the Buckeyes defense was that they weren't getting to the quarterback as much as expected, especially when the line was bookended by two former five-star prospects.

What made it tough was that Jim Knowles didn't blitz often – a concerted



SONNY BROCKWAY

FOREWARNED – Senior defensive end JT Tuimoloau (44) and senior tackle Tyleik Williams (91), along with Ty Hamilton and Jack Sawyer, are expected to anchor what is arguably the best front four in college football. The defensive stalwarts opted to return for another season.

effort by the defensive coordinator to limit explosive plays, an issue that burnt his unit in 2022 – essentially playing a form of a prevent defense that was very effective when it needed to be. Knowles was never concerned about the lack of sacks early in the year, because he believed the defense was still doing exactly what it was supposed to, and sending more rushers at the quarterback wasn't necessary against the offensive lines they were up against.

"Winning third down, winning fourth down, and limiting explosive plays – that's the most important thing," Knowles said four games into the year. "So, we seem to be on a good track with that. And we want to keep that up. Everybody loves a lot of sacks. So do I. I think when I was younger, I was probably driven more by that. But the bottom line is to eliminate the explosive plays, win on third and fourth down. So that's what we have to continue

to focus on."

The lack of sacks continued through the part of the schedule that Ohio State was able to more or less breeze through, but once the end of the season drew closer, that started to change, largely in part due to Sawyer, who caught fire in the last few games of the year.

He showed flashes against Purdue in game six, earning 1½ sacks in that game, one of which drove the Boilermakers back far enough for their kicker to miss a field goal that would preserve a first-half shutout. But in the final three games, it seemed like Sawyer reached his full potential, getting into the backfield at will.

In those games against Minnesota, Michigan and Missouri, Sawyer had a total of 16 tackles, 7½ for a loss, five sacks, three quarterback hurries and a forced fumble.

"I felt like I was in a groove, probably the whole second half of the season," Sawyer said during spring practice. "I felt like myself again, and I was just out there playing and having fun with my teammates. When you come here and you expect to hit the field and it to be a certain way, it's hard to get over that for a little bit.

"You can look at all of us on the D-line, as a front, we all kind of had our own journey to how we're playing right now. Now it's just all about building and not looking back and playing how we know how to play and being confident out there and using our abilities that God gave us. So I

think that this whole next year, you're just going to see a whole different level of play from all of us."

For Sawyer, the reason was easy to spot. He had been tasked in the 2022 season with playing a position that he was largely unfamiliar with, the "Jack," acting as a hybrid between a linebacker and a defensive end, which was supposed to help the defense adjust into a three-linebacker set without needing to make a substitution.

But Sawyer wasn't able to fully get the hang of it and reach his full potential, and he ended up with 24 tackles, 6½ tackles for loss, 4½ sacks and two quarterback hurries on the year. When he finally got a full season at the defensive end spot, though, things finally clicked for him, and he's only more confident in himself going into his senior year.

Tuimoloau continued his strong play from the 2022 season and comes into the year with 74 tackles in his career, 18 of which have been for a loss, along with seven sacks, nine passes broken up, a forced fumble and two interceptions.

He didn't get into the backfield as much last season but still showed that even without that he can still be an extremely useful player. Tuimoloau said he is looking to make multiple improvements in his individual game going into this season.

"Getting leaner and twitchier, continuing to react quicker and not feeling like I'm thinking out there," Tuimoloau said in the spring of what he is working on. "That starts in the weight room, then phase two, it starts on the field, then going back to the weight room and cleaning up areas and critiquing small things."

Hamilton has become known for his ability to stuff the run up the middle, something he showed off in each of the last two seasons when he was on the field, but he made it a point to become better against the pass as well.

"One of my main points was to elevate my pass rush game," Hamilton said in the spring. "Elevating that will be able to tune myself to being unstoppable. I think by fine-tuning that and really getting good at that definitely makes me better."

A big reason Williams was able to take the next step in his game last season, in which he was able to break out and earn a starting spot, was getting in shape, something he acknowledged was a big deal for him. He dropped 40 pounds over the offseason between 2021 and 2022 and continued to work on his conditioning through the 2023 season.

"I feel good not having to come off the side breathing heavy, waiting for someone else to go in for me," Williams said last year. "I'm going to just stay out there and help my team out as much as I can. We have great offseason training here. Getting in shape – we run a lot, a lot of conditioning – but I think it's helped me tremendously on the field."

He also credited being much more willing to dive into the film, something he admits that he didn't always take as seriously as he should have.

"I always watched film – everybody watches film – but I would just watch it

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Projected Starters

<p>Defensive End 44 • JT Tuimoloau</p> <p>6-5 • 269 • Sr. Edgewood (Wash.) Eastside Catholic</p> <p>Enters 2024 with 74 career tackles and finds himself on the 2024 watch lists for the Bronko Nagurski Trophy and the Lombardi Award.</p>	<p>Defensive Tackle 91 • Tyleik Williams</p> <p>6-3 • 327 • Sr. Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed</p> <p>Had a breakout 2023 season, playing his way into NFL draft consideration, but decided to return after accumulating 54 tackles, 10 for loss, and five passes broken up.</p>	<p>Defensive Tackle 58 • Ty Hamilton</p> <p>6-3 • 295 • Sr. Pickerington (Ohio) Central</p> <p>Split time with Michael Hall Jr. on the interior in 2023 and had a career-high 38 tackles, appearing in all 13 games the Buckeyes played.</p>	<p>Defensive End 33 • Jack Sawyer</p> <p>6-4 • 265 • Sr. Pickerington (Ohio) North</p> <p>Finished the 2023 season strong, finally getting to play a full year out at his natural defensive end position, moving away from the "Jack," which he played in 2022.</p>
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here and there, a couple of minutes every day," he said. "Now I'm really into it. You can't even get me off the film. I think it helps tremendously."

The defensive line also has some impressive depth at each of the four positions. Both Kenyatta Jackson and Caden Curry played last season on opposite edges at times, and they each would have likely been ready to start this year if Sawyer and Tuimoloau had not returned to the team.

Jackson and Curry could have opted to transfer since they weren't going to be able to start for another season – and they likely could at almost any other program in the country – but both of them decided to stay in Columbus.

"I want to touch greatness, and I feel like to do that, (defensive line coach Larry Johnson) is the best coach for me," Curry said during spring practices. "And I'm working around the best guys around me every day. We all talked together because (Sawyer and Tuimoloau) had their decisions and I had my decisions. We all just came together, and we knew we were building something special here."

Curry had nine tackles, with 3½ TFL, 1½ sacks and two hurries, while Jackson had seven tackles, two TFL and 1½ sacks.

On the interior, backing up Hamilton and Williams will likely be Kayden McDonald and Hero Kanu, who also have shown that they are ready to get on the field whenever they're needed. Johnson thinks that with a potentially longer season, the reserves in his unit are going to be needed early and often.

"They've got to be able to come in and play 25-35 plays a game, and do it early in the season," Johnson said in the spring. "That's the plan to get those guys ready for the long haul. They've got to get better, and the only way to get better is by going against the best, and so we're prepping those guys."

Williams himself echoed that in the spring.

"I definitely can last (through a longer season), but we have to get the young guys to come along with us," Williams said. "We just can't play 50 snaps a game, that's too much on our bodies. Everybody, O-line, D-line, we've got to get those younger guys ready to play and get depth pieces so we can last in the long run."

The Buckeyes could even be three deep at each of the positions on the line. Freshman defensive end Eddrick Houston is already looking the part early on, Mitchell Melton is back from an injury and is permanently moved to the edge from linebacker, and Johnson had a lot of good things to say about both Jason Moore and Tywone Malone in the spring as well.

"Moore is 6-5, he's 295 pounds," Johnson said. "He's the ideal three-tech in our system, We're challenging him, and every day is a good day for Jason Moore. McDonald, the same thing. There are a lot of guys doing well, but a guy that's making a jump right now is Jason Moore."

"Tywone was behind football-wise because he had been a baseball player all his

life," Johnson added. "He was behind football-wise, technique, playing the game. It's taken him a year. Now we're seeing the growth. Now we see what he can bring to the table, and that gives us more depth."

Whether or not Ohio State needs to dive into the depth it has on the defensive line, each member of the unit shares the same goal. They want to be good enough

to win games against the best teams at the end of the season.

"We were always one play short, one drive short," Williams said. "We're just trying to take steps this year so that we're a drive ahead in those big games at the end of the season, and I think we've got the team to do it."

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Secondary Striving For Greatness In 2024

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Since the 2017 season, Ohio State's secondary has embraced the three-letter moniker "BIA," or "Best In America," placing lofty expectations on themselves each year to be among the nation's best no matter who is on the field or leading the group.

While the Buckeyes' cornerbacks and safeties have in large part met these expectations since the phrase was first established, they fell short of the high standards two seasons ago under first-year defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, a year in which the secondary relinquished several explosive plays and ranked 26th nationally in passing yards allowed per game at 200.5.

It was a disappointing performance for the Ohio State defensive backs that motivated them to turn the tide in 2023 and bring the unit back to its dominant status.

"We remind ourselves every day," then-junior cornerback Denzel Burke said last summer. "That's not our brand. We're going to bring that back."

Ohio State did, in fact, "bring that back" in 2023. With Burke and his fellow defensive backs feeling more comfortable in year two of Knowles' 4-2-5 system, the group transformed themselves into one of the nation's most dominant secondaries, finishing the season as the nation's top-ranked passing defense at just 145.9 passing yards allowed per game, while also ranking second nationally to only Notre Dame in team passing efficiency defense at 99.2.

Ohio State's secondary reclaimed its "BIA" title last season, and in 2024, the standards for the unit seemed to have risen even higher. Equipped with a loaded group of experienced returning veterans along with some already polished youngsters, Knowles, secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton and new safeties coach Matt Guerrieri are searching for something much greater this season: perfection.

"Vince Lombardi said it," Knowles said

Projected Starters

Cornerback
10 • Denzel Burke

6-1 • 193 • Sr.
Phoenix (Ariz.) Saguro

Bounced back from an injury-riddled 2022 season to become one of the Big Ten's top cornerbacks in 2023, totaling 24 tackles (3.0 for loss), eight pass deflections, one interception and one forced fumble while earning first-team All-Big Ten.

Cornerback
1 • Davison Igbinosun

6-2 • 193 • Jr.
Union, N.J.

Excelled at outside cornerback in his first season at Ohio State after transferring from Ole Miss, finishing third on the team in tackles with 59 while adding five pass breakups and two fumble recoveries.

Adjuster/Free Safety
2 • Caleb Downs

6-0 • 205 • So.
Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek/Alabama

Transferred to Ohio State after a sensational freshman season at Alabama where he recorded 107 tackles -- the most by a Crimson Tide first year since at least 1970 -- and was named SEC Freshman of the Year.

Bandit/Strong Safety
8 • Lathan Ransom

6-1 • 210 • Gr.
Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic

Was one of Ohio State's top defensive performers before going down with a foot injury that forced him to miss the final five games of the season. Finished with 34 tackles (1.5 for loss), two pass breakups, a forced fumble and one quarterback hurry.

Nickel
7 • Jordan Hancock

6-1 • 195 • Sr.
Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett

Thrust into nickel position three weeks into last season and performed admirably, totaling 41 tackles (two for loss), four pass breakups, two interceptions, two sacks and two forced fumbles.

on Aug. 2. "We have to chase perfection. We have to. It's impossible, but you catch excellence in the process. And we can never be satisfied with just being good. I mean, we have the guys to really reach for perfection and we just have to keep pushing for that. We have to keep pushing them and just always chase to be the best in the country."

Ohio State's pursuit of perfection in the secondary starts with the veteran Burke, a two-time All-Big Ten cornerback who opted to return for his senior season rather than enter the NFL draft, where -- like many returning players on the Buckeye defense -- he likely would've been a day-one or -two selection.

Burke boosted his draft stock last season by turning in the best campaign of his career. After struggling through an injury-riddled season in 2022, he served as the team's unquestioned No. 1 shutdown corner, tying for a team-high nine pass deflections and adding one interception, one forced fumble and 24 total tackles (three for a loss).

Burke's bounce-back season allowed him to emerge as one of the Big Ten's top defensive backs at the end of the year, but similar to Knowles' mentality, he believes he enters his final stint in Columbus with plenty more to accomplish.

"I want to be recognized as the best corner to ever come through here," Burke said at Big Ten Media Days. "Put my name on the wall, get a tree (an honor given to each first-team All-American in program history) and a national championship."

"Denzel has already played a high level of football, but he's going to be one of the best corners in America," added Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "He's made great strides as a player, but also in his maturity."

Burke, who is never afraid to say exactly what is on his mind, told the media that one way he can achieve that distinction is by turning some of his pass deflections into interceptions. It has been a secondary-wide emphasis to create more turnovers this season and the senior thinks that can make a significant difference in games.

Last season, Ohio State's secondary recorded a combined 33 pass deflections but had just six interceptions to show for it, a mark that with linebacker Steele Chambers' single interception tied for last in the Big Ten and tied for 109th in the nation with 7.

"That's the goal this year," Burke said. "It's all about the ball. It's my job to turn PBU's into interceptions and hopefully take some back to the crib this year."

Another Buckeye who could create more havoc in the secondary this year is junior Davison Igbinosun, a physical cornerback who is reclaiming his starting role along-

side Burke after an impressive first season with Ohio State.

Igbinosun, who transferred to Ohio State from Ole Miss last offseason, quickly inserted himself as one of the team's most reliable defenders, using his unique length and press-coverage skills to record five pass deflections, two fumbles recovered and 59 tackles (1½ for loss), the third most on the team.

Igbinosun did struggle at times with penalties last season, committing several pass-interference fouls that often extended opponents' drives. But those who go against him in practice say the former Rebel is using his handsy approach to his benefit this offseason by forcing Ohio State's wideouts out of position.

"If you're going to the boundary, (Igbinosun) is going to put his hands on you," sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate said. "You have to be ready."

Igbinosun has also displayed greater confidence in his role this fall camp, a trait that has become increasingly evident through his constant trash-talking to Buckeye receivers, most notably true freshman Jeremiah Smith. Igbinosun was described by many of his teammates as the biggest trash-talker in the secondary, something that the junior said helps him stay motivated each practice.

"Talking trash forces me to bring it every single day because I have to back it up," Igbinosun said.

"You're going to feel No. 1 out there," said Tate, who was one of the wide receivers who listed Igbinosun as the top trash talker in Ohio State's secondary. "You're going to feel him, and then you're going to hear him."

While the always vocal Burke and Igbinosun are set to reclaim their roles at outside cornerback, the Buckeyes will also welcome back a more silent type at nickel cornerback in Jordan Hancock, who returns to Knowles' secondary for his senior year after a strong first season at the position.

Hancock, who practiced at outside cornerback for much of last year's fall camp and was even projected to start at the position ahead of Igbinosun to start the season, performed admirably at the nickel after moving to the new position three weeks into the season, showing off his versatility with 41 tackles (two for a loss), five pass

deflections, two sacks, two forced fumbles and two interceptions. One of his interceptions was among the more impactful plays of last season, a 93-yard pick-six on the road against Rutgers that ignited a second-half Buckeye rally.

While Hancock excelled in his first season as Ohio State's starting nickel, the senior said he is now even more comfortable in the role and with Knowles' overall system heading into 2024, which he thinks can make him an even more valuable piece in the secondary this year.

"This role, I'm super comfortable in it now," Hancock said. "My first start at nickel was Week 3 in the season. Now I have a whole spring, fall camp, and I'm just really knowing the defense. It's just everything that I imagined, just knowing the whole defense front and back."

"I can do more. I can play way more positions. I'm just shooting my gun now, just pulling my trigger for runs, passes because I already know what's happening and what the back end is doing behind me."

Burke, Igbinosun and Hancock are steering the ship at cornerback, but the talent at the position does not stop there. Walton's room also features a plethora of young players who are ready to take the next step in their respective developments this season, a group headlined by sophomore Jermaine Mathews Jr., who is also expected to see some time at the nickel this season after practicing at the position this summer.

Fellow sophomore Calvin Simpson-Hunt has also flashed in fall camp and could earn playing time in 2024, while hopeful freshmen Miles Lockhart, Aaron Scott Jr. and Bryce West have all made names for themselves since joining the program as early enrollees this spring. The group of reserve cornerbacks also includes senior Lorenzo Styles Jr., the former Notre Dame transfer and brother of linebacker Sonny Styles, making for a deep collection of talent that Walton said excites him heading into the year.

"We have a deep room," the coach said. "We have guys who have experience. We have some good up-and-coming young guys who have talent. They have to gain experience, and you usually do that through game days. But we have a good group. We have



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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEFENSIVE BACKS

good depth. We just have to keep it going and keep growing.”

Sensational Safeties

Ohio State may boast one of the nation’s deepest cornerback rooms, but at safety, it may feature one of the nation’s top overall defensive backs. The Buckeyes received a late Christmas gift in January when they plucked reigning SEC Freshman of the Year and first-team All-SEC adjuster/free safety Caleb Downs from Alabama following the retirement of legendary head coach Nick Saban, a seismic move that further raised expectations for Ohio State’s already loaded secondary.

Downs, who revealed this spring that he had received 102 phone calls from several top schools while he was in the portal, was considered the nation’s top player in the transfer portal this offseason. He was coming off a sensational freshman season with Alabama where he recorded an impressive 107 tackles – the most by a Crimson Tide freshman since at least 1970 – along with three pass deflections, two interceptions, one forced fumble, one fumble recovery and an 87-yard punt return score.

Downs’ do-it-all ability gives Ohio State an added dimension at the back end of Knowles’ safety-driven defense, a luxury that his new teammates noticed was on full display from his very first days as a Buckeye.

“When Caleb came in, you would think he had been here for years,” senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka said at Big Ten Media Days. “He fit in perfectly with everybody. And when it comes to on the field, he’s as advertised. He’s a great player. He can play zone. He can tackle. He can play man. He can do it all, and that’s all you would want at the free safety position.”

While Downs’ versatile skill set could help take Ohio State’s defense to another level on the field this season, his coaches said throughout the offseason that what he does off the gridiron may hold even more value. Day, Guerrieri, Knowles and Walton have each gushed about their new safety’s high football intelligence and commitment to the film room, a pro-like mentality that they said has become infectious among the entire secondary this offseason.

“He’s a coach’s dream,” Knowles said when asked about Downs. “He understands everything. He picks everything up. He takes the meeting room to the field. He’s locked in during meetings. He takes great notes. He’s a pro. So I think aside from what he does on the field, making all the adjustments and knowing where to go, he really has a great effect on the guys in the meeting room too.”

“His talent is exceptional, but he’s already created an unbelievable amount of discipline in his life,” Day said in February. “He’s created the skills to play the safety position at a high level. Caleb, you saw what he did as a freshman. To say we’re all excited to have him as part of the program is an understatement. He brings a lot to the table.”

Downs’ addition to the secondary may have overshadowed the return of four-time letter winner and starting bandit/strong safety Lathan Ransom, however.

Ransom has struggled throughout his career to stay on the field due to injury – most notably in 2021 when he suffered a broken leg during the Rose Bowl and this past season when he went down with a foot injury against Wisconsin that forced him to

miss the final five games in 2023 – but when healthy he serves as a reliable veteran presence at the back of Knowles’ defense.

Before his injury last season, Ransom was one of the top performers in Ohio State’s secondary, recording 34 tackles (1½ for loss) along with an interception, two pass breakups, one quarterback hurry and one forced fumble. The fifth-year is expected to return to that solid form as the Buckeyes’ starting bandit safety in 2024, a reality that Day said he is looking forward to seeing come to fruition.

“I just love being around Lathan. I just love him as a person,” Day said. “He just goes so hard, he cares so much. There’s no messing around. He means business. But he also has a big heart and is a great teammate.”

“When he decided to come back, that was a big deal for our entire defense and our entire team. He’s a competitive guy, plays really hard, and he’s poised to have a great season.”

Downs and Ransom could both earn All-Big Ten honors at safety this season, but when it comes to overall depth at the position – something that could be of importance later on in a potentially extended season – there are some question marks that could raise concern.

Knowles and other members of the staff have consistently praised the performance of true freshman and backup adjuster Jaylen McClain this fall camp – which was evident when the former four-star shed his black stripe just six practices into fall camp on Aug. 7 – while sophomore Malik Hartford has also received some notable recognition.

But beyond that, players such as sophomore Jayden Bonsu (bandit) and South Carolina transfer Keenan Nelson Jr. (bandit) have yet to move the needle as BSB went to press, something Knowles marked as a slight concern for the defense as the season neared.

“It goes back to safety depth,” Knowles said on Aug. 15 when asked if there were any glaring issues with the defense going into the team’s second scrimmage on Aug. 17. “We feel good about our starters, but the guys behind there – we have two guys who were unproven and still learning.”

“Every day in practice is a learning experience for them and a challenge, particularly if they get to go against our best receivers. So our safety depth needs to come along.”

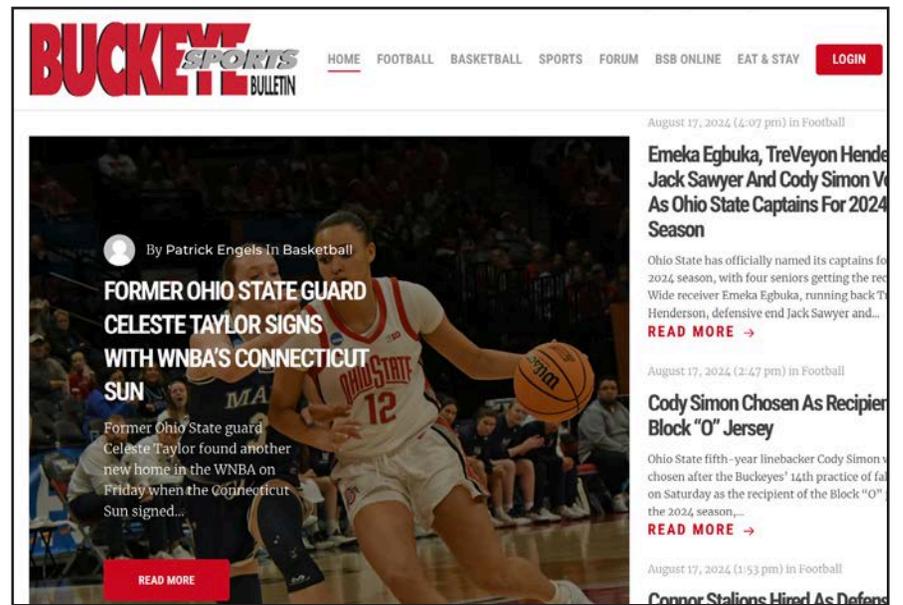
While the lack of depth at safety does raise a minor concern, those who are leading the secondary room are still confident that the unit can take an even bigger step forward in 2024 and further solidify themselves as the “Best In America.”

It is a title they do not take lightly heading into the season.

“I think it’s become an expectation now,” said Knowles. “They’ve taken that spirit. It’s a competitive spirit. It doesn’t matter who we’re going against. They view it as the standard.”

“It means everything that (‘BIA’) is back,” Hancock said. “It means everything to the school, the people that came before us, Coach Walt. I mean, we literally had talks – I remember in the 2022 season, we said, ‘We’re going to bring this thing back.’ We talked about it so many times, the revival of ‘BIA.’ Seeing it come to fruition is crazy.”

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Styles And Hicks Neck And Neck In Positional Battle

By **BOBBY GORBETT**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the first time since 2020, Ohio State's defense will be without All-Big Ten linebackers Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg hovering around the team's top five in total tackles.

The departure of Eichenberg – last year's Big Ten Butkus-Fitzgerald Linebacker of the Year recipient – to the NFL draft will be an especially painful one for Buckeye fans given his production and leadership. However, as Eichenberg and Chambers seek NFL stardom, fifth-year veteran Cody Simon gets a well-deserved opportunity to lead the Buckeyes' defense at Mike linebacker.

"He's the unquestioned leader of the group," said linebackers coach James Laurinaitis. "He's the leader of the defense. He gets everybody lined up. He's very technical. He has really good footwork, really clean footwork, which allows him to change direction and get off blocks and tackle well."

Simon hasn't had the easiest last two seasons after having his starting job taken by Chambers in 2022 and 2023 in large part due to a torn labrum he suffered in 2021. But instead of using the transfer portal, he's gone about his business like a professional, waiting his turn, and is now ready to lead the Ohio State defense.

"This year was really big for me leadership-wise and taking that next step," Simon said. "When you have guys who are big in your culture who leave, there is a void that needs to be filled. This offseason has been about leadership and trying to lift yourself and the other leaders up as well as bringing the guys up below. So I've gotten a lot better at coaching, at encouraging, at being a better teammate. It's gotten me better as a player too."

While Simon's role will be improved in 2024 as the Mike linebacker and leader of the defense, the fifth-year defender still was a key contributor of the 2023 Ohio State defense. He started five games, often in place of the injured Eichenberg, and totaled a career-high 57 total tackles, good enough for the fourth most on the team.

With all of the optimism surrounding Simon's fifth-year season, he still maintains he has room for improvement, shrugging off Laurinaitis' praise.

"You can never be perfect," Simon said. "I really believe that. We have so many good guys in our room that are super athletic, super smart, super talented, so he's being nice there. I have a lot more I can be better at, so that's what camp is for every

Projected Starters

Weakside 6 • Sonny Styles	Middle 0 • Cody Simon	Strongside 11 • C.J. Hicks
6-4 • 235 • Jr. Pickerington (Ohio) Central	6-2 • 235 • Gr. Jersey City (NJ.) St. Peter's Prep	6-3 • 233 • Jr. Kettering (Ohio) Alter
As one of six Buckeyes with at least 50 tackles in 2023, Styles also added 4½ tackles for loss, tied for third most on the team.	Despite starting just five games, Simon finished 2023 as the team's fourth-leading tackler with 57 stops.	Played in 25 games throughout two years with the Buckeyes, second to only Cody Simon at the linebacker position with 42 appearances.

day trying to get better."

The other linebacker positions, though, are where Laurinaitis' expertise and coaching acumen will be put to the test. If production on the football field is any indicator of coaching quality, though, Laurinaitis will be in great shape. As a two-time consensus all-American, former Bronko Nagurski Trophy winner – awarded annually to the nation's best defender – and Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year winner, Laurinaitis is one of the greatest defensive players in Ohio State history.

Laurinaitis' football career was far from over after four highly decorated seasons at Ohio State. He played eight successful seasons with the Los Angeles Rams (2009-14) and New Orleans Saints (2016), a stretch headlined by a 2012 campaign when he led the league in solo tackles with 117.

Six years later, Laurinaitis jumped into coaching under former Ohio State teammate Marcus Freeman at Notre Dame as a graduate assistant and assistant linebackers coach. He then reunited with Ohio State one year later in the same position before being promoted to linebackers coach this offseason, a title that he is honored to hold at his alma mater.

"A year ago when I came back (to Ohio State), I kind of voiced that that was my dream to be a linebackers coach here," Laurinaitis said during spring camp. "I felt pretty confident that I had done the best job I could have to prepare myself for the opportunity. I'm just grateful (head coach Ryan) Day believed in me."

Experience and passion aside, Laurinaitis' talent evaluation skills have been put to test this summer. As BSB went to press, perhaps the most tightly contested position battle for the Buckeyes was at Will linebacker, where juniors Sonny Styles and C.J. Hicks were engaged in a competition that defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said early in fall camp was "neck-and-neck."

On paper, both players have a case to be the next starter. Styles, at least statisti-

cally, had a much greater impact on Ohio State's defense in 2023 as the unit's starting safety, recording 53 total tackles, 4½ tackles for loss, two sacks, a forced fumble and one pass breakup.

Hicks, meanwhile, has 14 total tackles in his entire career. Still, the former five-star's experience at linebacker far outweighs Styles' experience at the position because Styles, who converted to linebacker from safety this offseason to make room for the addition of first-team All-SEC safety Caleb Downs, is getting his first experience at his new position this offseason.

With the move closer to the line of scrimmage for Styles, it was important for the junior to become a more physical player, which is why Styles gained weight to enter the season at 235 pounds. Extra weight can sometimes cause players to lose some explosiveness and speed, but this hasn't been the case for Styles.

"I actually feel better honestly. I gained about 10 pounds, and I actually got faster," Styles said. "All my times went up, my max speed went up, so I got faster, I got stronger and I got heavier."

For Styles, a player who has been a safety every year of his football career since middle school, the transition hasn't been as difficult as one might think.

"I definitely feel comfortable," he said. "I love the position for myself. I think playing linebacker is a mindset. Every play you have to come down to be the hammer not the nail."

While Hicks isn't undergoing a position change, the junior is always looking for ways to get on the field. As the team's best blitzing in the words of Laurinaitis, Hicks has a more varied skill set than a run-of-the-mill off-the-ball linebacker.

"I feel like when you need a play, it's third-and-long, you need somebody to get to the quarterback," Hicks said. "I'm that guy, no matter who the defensive ends are. I love our defensive line, but I feel like I'm the best when it gets to the quarterback."

The most realistic possibility for 2024 is that both Hicks and Styles share playing time at the Will position, something that Laurinaitis, Hicks and Styles are all aware of.

"Sonny and I both talk about it a lot," Hicks said. "We don't really care who starts as long as both of us are eating. He can start, I go in. I can start, he goes in. As long as we're both making plays, that's all that matters to us."

"I've told the guys over and over, I think as we go through this season, since it will be a long one, if you earn the right to play you'll play and rotate," Laurinaitis said. "I'm not going to sit here and say, 'Hey, this

guy is here or there.' I think it's constantly fluid. I like that. It keeps a little edge to it. You have to make plays if you want to go out there with the first unit."

As the theme goes for almost the entire Ohio State defense, the linebacker room is marked by its plethora of talent. Behind the front-runners for the starting jobs, the Buckeyes are looking for former four-star prospect Gabe Powers to take the next step in his junior season.

"I think Gabe Powers has gotten a lot more confident," Laurinaitis said. "I'm always pushing Gabe. When you are the Mike linebacker in any scheme, you have to make the calls. Gabe has done a nice job. He's starting to kind of get more comfortable in that role of speaking up, being loud."

The 6-4 Marysville, Ohio, native played in 10 games in 2023, recording seven tackles, including one for loss against Minnesota. Despite the limited playing time, Powers remains determined to eventually make a serious impact on the Ohio State defense and is ready to produce when his name is called.

"The game is slowing down a lot for me," Powers said. "The game from high school to college is fast – it's really fast – but once you understand the defense it all slows down."

Powers will be joined by sophomore linebacker Arvell Reese. Reese, a difference maker for the Buckeyes in 2023 on special teams, was tabbed as the defensive player of the game in the team's first fall camp scrimmage on Aug. 10.

Like Powers, Reese will hope to get on the field at Mike linebacker in a rotation with Simon, which could potentially align himself to lead the defense for years to come following Simon's departure next season.

"Arvell has made great strides since he's been here," Knowles said on Aug. 15. "When he's on the attack and he's playing downhill, he's really as good as anybody. He makes plays. Right now he's working at Mike linebacker. There's a lot that goes into that. There's a lot of details in the game and formations and checks. He's constantly getting better at that, but when he's on the attack he's really good."

There should be plenty of opportunities for more inexperienced players to assert themselves. But according to Laurinaitis, getting on the field all comes back to trust.

"No matter who it is, whether it's C.J. (Hicks) or anybody in our room, if you want to be trusted, it's not just that you're trying to prove it to me, you're trying to prove it to your boys next to you," Laurinaitis said.

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Buckeye Beat Optimistic Ahead Of OSU's Season

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As the Buckeyes enter the 2024 season with one of the most talented rosters on paper, there is a lot of room for optimism. However, with the opener with Akron rapidly approaching, there are still plenty of questions that remain to be answered.

With this in mind, BSB interviewed four veteran Ohio State beat writers, including Bill Rabinowitz of the Columbus Dispatch, Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors, Steve Helwagen of 247 Sports and Tim May of Lettermen Row, touching on the six most burning questions for the 2024 season.

Q: Ohio State's offensive line faced a lot of criticism last season for underperforming at times, and this year all eyes are on them to improve. What is your opinion on the state of the Buckeyes' offensive line this year, and do you think the unit will show vast improvements from last season?

Hope: "I think there's reason to be cautiously optimistic about the offensive line. From my vantage point, you've got three guys who are coming back as starters in Josh Simmons, Josh Fryar and Donovan Jackson. Then you have Seth McLaughlin who has a lot of starting experience, and a couple of guys there at right guard, whether it ends up being Tegra Tshabola or Carson Hinzman.

"I think Tegra Tshabola has a lot of upside at that guard spot. Carson Hinzman has a year of starting experience at center and he'll be more prepared to play now as a second-year starter if he ends up being that. So I expect the offensive line to be better than it was last year. I don't necessarily expect it to be an elite offensive line, but I do think they'll make strides. They can be good enough to get this team to where it needs to be.

"The question would be, 'Can it round out as the season progresses and really be that dominant unit down the stretch?' I don't know if I can go there yet, but I think the pieces are in place. Josh Simmons and Donovan Jackson, those two have the potential to be two of the best offensive linemen in the Big Ten, if not the entire country, if they really play up to their potential. Josh Fryar's gotten more athletic. Seth McLaughlin, the big question there is just improving his snapping. I think if Seth and Josh can be solid around whoever that right guard ends up being – I don't necessarily expect it to be a fantastic offensive line – but I think it can be a good offensive line."

May: "I'm not sure how you measure vast improvement for an offensive line. You can't play any worse than it did in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri. I would think that this offensive line has a chance to be really good based on what I've seen in practice and the fact that there's actual competition – I mean legitimate competition. For example, one of the starting spots at right guard, Tegra Tshabola looks like the front runner, but Carson Hinzman, a guy who started all 12 games for you at center, might end up being that guy.

"So there are signs of depth arriving across the front, and then everybody else has played. If Carson Hinzman plays, then everybody will have played extensive roles last year. So yeah, there's a chance for big-time improvement based on what I've seen."

Q: Now that Will Howard has been named the starting quarterback, how would you assess how he fits into the equation on offense this season, and is he good enough to take Ohio State over the hump and beat Michigan, win the Big Ten and win a national championship?

Helwagen: "I think spring was a hard time for him coming in, trying to get his body right and coming in to learn a new offense and meet all of his teammates. And it sounds like when the preseason started, he really hit the ground running. So yes, I believe he is going to be the quarterback that can help lead them to championship-level play this year. And as Coach Day has said, they're not looking for somebody to be extraordinary. Just take care of the football and score touchdowns. It's easier said than done. But you have to like his intangibles. He was a championship quarterback at Kansas State. He won the Big 12 there and that's definitely the goal here, to win the Big Ten and go into the playoff."

May: "Who knows about the latter part of this question, but the former part is he fits perfectly with the sort of angled direction that Chip Kelly wants to take the offense. Will Howard has shown that he can stand in the pocket and deliver, and he's gotten much better at that in this preseason camp.

"Having been at Ohio State now for eight months, there's no doubt about his ability as a runner and as a fearless runner to a certain extent. I think that will enhance this offense, compared to the last three years when the quarterbacks were reluctant to run at all. I'm talking about C.J. Stroud – except for the Georgia game and we saw what that did for the offense – and then last year with Kyle McCord. So is Will Howard the answer for the first season? You have to wait for that."

Q: Speaking of Michigan, there appears to be more pressure than ever on Ryan Day to take care of business and defeat the Wolverines. Considering Michigan is likely taking a step back this season after losing several starters and The Game is at home, is Ryan Day's job security on the line on Nov. 30 at Ohio Stadium?

Hope: "I would say yes because I think that's just how much the Ohio State-Michigan game means in Columbus. That's the game you have to win and Ohio State has failed that goal three years in a row. I'm not going to say outright that if he loses that game he gets fired, but I do think his seat is going to heat up if Ohio State does not win that game.

"The one out that he has there is that because of the expanded College Football Playoff and even the new structure of the Big Ten, it is possible you could lose to Michigan, still make the Big Ten Championship Game, win the Big Ten, still make the college football playoff, maybe even win the national championship. So that gives him kind of an out to where if Ohio State loses to Michigan, there's still a chance for Ohio State to salvage the season and for him to salvage his job.

"When you think about what Ryan Day needs to do to keep his job secure, it starts No. 1 with beating Michigan. I think also making the College Football Playoff is a bit of a requirement, but that Michigan game – just for his reputation as an Ohio State coach – that one feels like a must-win."

Rabinowitz: "I think that's overstating it. On

the other hand, it's hard to see an Ohio State coach surviving four straight losses to Michigan. I think Ohio State will win that game. It's obviously going to be a tough game. Michigan is Michigan. Even with all of the losses, they're not going to be a pushover. A lot of it depends on what else happens. If that's the only loss, then they go on to make a deep run into the playoffs and win the Big Ten even if they lose to Michigan, he certainly survives it. If they go 9-3 in the regular season somehow and make an early exit from the playoff, or don't even make the playoffs, then that's a different question, but I don't expect that to happen. I think they're going to be close to a juggernaut this year."

Q: Switching gears back to the players, there has been a ton of buzz around true freshman wideout Jeremiah Smith this fall camp, perhaps more so than any freshman that has come through here in awhile. Smith has shown his elite abilities in practice and has also assumed some first-team reps. Knowing this, how much of an impact do you think Smith can make on this offense this season?

May: "Well if he's a starting wide receiver like we all expect him to be, if they put three receivers on the field, he'll have a chance right out of the gate to make a huge impact. He's the most ready, best freshman receiver I've seen since Cris Carter in 1984, and Cris Carter will tell you the same thing. And Cris Carter is in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Barring injury, Jeremiah Smith will make a continued impact on this Ohio State offense."

Helwagen: "It's hard for true freshmen to compete against 21-, 22-year-old upperclassmen, particularly at defensive back. He had a great spring and I think his preseason has been pretty good.

"It's just such a long season, and at some point, you worry that a freshman is going to hit that wall and maybe back down a little bit. Jeremiah doesn't necessarily fit that mold. He seems to be cut from a different cloth and so we'll find out what he's exactly made of. As they get seven, eight, nine games into the season, is he still producing? And most importantly is he a guy that they can rely upon in the big games? That's the big thing.

"So that's what you want to see out of him, is a guy that's consistent all season, and then when the big games come, he'll be leaning on Emeka Egbuka to be a leader in that group and some other guys. You just hope that Jeremiah Smith has the kind of year that everyone is hoping he can have."

Q: Many experts consider Ohio State's roster the deepest in college football and that depth may need to be tested with a potentially extended season that could stretch into late January. Does Ohio State have enough depth at each position to withstand a longer season?

Helwagen: "Yes, I think so. The offensive line may have been the Achilles heel, but they've got something like 16 or 17 scholarship offensive linemen. They have depth. They're developing depth at wide receiver. They're maybe not that deep at running back. If Henderson or Judkins goes down, then you're down to freshmen and walk-ons, which is not where you want to be. At safety, they got their depth hurt a little bit, but they can cover for that. They've got plenty of good corners on this team. I think

overall, they've got the depth they need to compete and go deep in the playoff. You definitely don't want eight or 10 guys going down with critical injuries, but I think they can withstand one or two if that's what were to happen."

May: "We're not going to know the answer until the end of the year. In my opinion, Ohio State and Georgia have the two best rosters in major college football this year, with Texas kind of close in that regard. Oregon has built a really nice roster. It's not as deep in my opinion as the Ohio State roster. In this age, you have to work on having that complete roster, and Ohio State's done a better job at that since the end of the 2023 season than any team in the country."

Q: Do you have anything else you want to say about the upcoming season?

Rabinowitz: "I think their motto is 'natty or bust,' and I think that's a fitting one. But Ohio State fans should realize it's really hard to win a national championship. If they don't win the national championship, it doesn't mean the season's a failure. I think if you don't beat Michigan and make a deep run in the playoff and win a Big Ten Championship, you can say it's a disappointment. But to say it's truly a national championship or the season is a failure you're probably setting yourself up for disappointment because it is so hard.

"The two national championships Ohio State has won since 1968 kind of came out of nowhere. The years where people thought they really were going to win it or should win it or could win it, they haven't. So seasons are strange things, we'll have to wait and see."

Hope: "I think this team is going to be really good. All of the goals that they talk about are obtainable for this team. In my mind, they do have the best roster in college football. I think they're going to have the best defense, and their wide receivers and running backs should probably be the best in college football too.

"The two big questions really are quarterback play and offensive line. I don't think they need to be elite at quarterback and offensive line. I think they're so good everywhere else that if they can just be good in both areas, this is a team that's going to have a chance to win the national championship. And I view it as very close between them and Georgia for being the best team in college football this year"

Helwagen: "I think for Ohio State fans it's been three very unfulfilling years – 11-2 three years in a row, three straight losses to Michigan, no Big Ten championships. So I think there's this angst. There's this anticipation and it's tempered with a little bit of angst because they don't want to have their hopes built up again just for it to be swept away again in November. And yet I can't see a scenario where that could possibly happen.

"This is such a deep team. I think they've got the makings of a national championship team, provided they can go out and put it together on the field. The schedule sets up really well early on. Two tough road games at Oregon and at Penn State, but you're playing Michigan at home, playing Iowa at home. To me, it sets up very well for them to make a run at the Big Ten and certainly to make a deep run in the playoffs.

"You hate to say that if they don't do it this year under Ryan Day, they'll never do it, but man this is a year where they really could do it. So I think fans should just sit back and enjoy the ride."



Ohio State vs. Akron

Saturday, Aug. 31 • 3:30 p.m. • CBS
Ohio Stadium; Columbus



Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...

SS
9 Paul Lewis III 6-2, 205, Sr.
2 Daymon David, 6-0, 190, R-Jr.

NICKEL
24 DARRIAN LEWIS, 5-10, 190, R-JR.
15 Terence Thomas, 5-9, 200, So.

FS
26 Aman Greenwood, 5-10, 200, R-Jr.
18 DiMarco Johnson, 6-0, 220, R-Jr.

MIKE
10 ANTAVIOUS FISH 6-0, 235, SR.
42 Melvin Spriggs, 6-1, 215, R-Fr.

WILL
40 BRYAN MCCOY, 6-0, 225, JR.
7 Shammond Cooper, 6-2, 220, R-Sr.

DE
3 Devonte Golden-Nelson, 5-10, 180, R-Jr.
4 Justin Anderson, 6-0, 200, R-Jr.

CB
6 Joey Hunter, 6-0, 195, R-Jr.
12 Iesa Jarmon, 6-0, 185, R-Jr.

DE
5 Lama Lavea, 6-1, 300, R-Sr.
95 Andre Proffitt, 6-2, 310, R-Jr.

DT
1 BENNETT ADLER, 6-3, 265, Sr.
94 Kabbash Richards, 6-4, 250, R-Sr.

DT
99 Nathan Kapongo, 6-4, 285, R-Sr.
52 Marcus Moore Jr. 6-1, 310, Fr.

CB
19 CJ NUNNALLY IV, 6-3, 240, SR.
22 Kam Cheatom, 6-3, 235, R-Fr.

WR
17 Carnell Tate, 6-3, 191, So.
14 Kojo Antwi, 6-0, 194, Jr.

LT
71 JOSH SIMMONS, 6-5, 310, SR.
65 Zen Michalski, 6-6, 319, Sr.

LG
56 Seth McLaughlin, 6-4, 305, Gr.
75 Carson Hinzman, 6-5, 300, Jr.

C
77 Tegra Tshabola, 6-6, 327, Jr.
51 Luke Montgomery, 6-5, 308, So.

RG
70 JOSH FRYAR, 6-5, 320, Sr.
68 George Fitzpatrick, 6-6, 313, Jr.

RT
4 Jeremiah Smith, 6-3, 215, Fr.
9 Jayden Ballard, 6-2, 195, Sr.

P
35 Anthony Venneri, 6-0, 225, Jr.
19 Nick McLarty, 6-7, 255, Fr.
42 Joe McGuire, 6-2, 212, So.

QB
33 TREVVEYON HENDERSON, 5-10, 208, SR.
1 Quinshon Judkins, 6-0, 219, Jr.
20 James Peoples, 5-10, 203, Fr.

RB
18 Will Howard, 6-4, 237, Gr.
33 Devin Brown, 6-3, 212, Jr.

SLOT
88 Gee Scott Jr., 6-3, 243, Gr.
15 Jelani Thurman, 6-6, 258, So.
89 Will Kacmarek, 6-6, 260, Sr.

TE
2 EMEKA EGBUKA, 6-1, 205, GR.
11 Brandon Inniss, 6-0, 203, So.

K
38 JAYDEN FIELDING, 6-0, 175, JR.
95 Casey Magyar, 5-11, 185, Sr.

— Starters in bold, returning starters in all caps

WHEN AKRON HAS THE BALL...

NICKEL
7 JORDAN HANCOCK, 6-1, 195, SR.
24 Jermaine Mathews Jr., 5-11, 189, So.
4 Lorenzo Styles Jr., 6-1, 195, Sr.

ADJUSTER
2 Caleb Downs, 6-0, 205, So.
25 Malik Hartford, 6-3, 194, So.

MIKE
30 Cody Simon 6-2, 235, Gr.
36 Gabe Powers, 6-4, 242, Jr.

WILL
6 SONNY STYLES, 6-4, 235, JR.
11 C.J. Hicks, 6-3, 233, Jr.

BANDIT
8 LATHAN RANSOM, 6-1, 210, GR.
16 Keenan Nelson Jr., 6-1, 195, Jr.

CB
10 DENZEL BURKE, 6-1, 193, SR. 22
22 Calvin Simpson-Hunt, 6-0, 204, So.

DE
44 JT TUIMOLOAU, 6-5, 269, SR.
97 Kenyatta Jackson Jr., 6-6, 258, Jr.

DT
58 Ty Hamilton, 6-3, 295, Sr.
98 Kayden McDonald, 6-3, 326, So.

DT
1 DAVISON IGBINOSUN, 6-2, 193, JR.
24 Jermaine Mathews Jr., 5-11, 189, So.

DE
91 TYLEIK WILLIAMS, 6-3, 327, SR.
93 Hero Kanu, 6-5, 305, Jr.

DE
33 JACK SAWYER, 6-5, 260, SR.
92 Caden Curry, 6-3, 260, Jr.

CB
77 Jayvin James, 6-4, 285, R-Fr.
79 Nick Stopiak, 6-6, 290, R-So.

CB
4 TYHLER WILLIAMS, 6-2, 300, R-SO.
62 Max Mobley, 6-2, 290, Fr.

CB
55 Josh Blanchard, 6-5, 285, R-Sr.
73 Jonas Mann, 6-7, 315, So.

WR
17 Justin Campbell, 6-4, 195, R-Jr.
2 Phaizon Wilson, 6-2, 215, R-So.

WR
50 Laurance Seymore, 6-2, 330, R-Jr.
58 Jerrod Burrell, 6-4, 315, Jr.

WR
72 Colin Lyons, 6-3, 295, R-Jr.
56 Keylen Davis, 6-2, 300, R-So.

P
36 Dante Jackson, 5-9, 210, R-Sr.
95 Joseph Castle, 6-2, 210, So.

QB
10 Ben Finley 6-3, 200, R-Jr.
12 Tahj Bullock, 6-3, 220, R-Jr.

TE
15 Adrian Norton, 6-0, 190, So.
3 Jarvis Rush, 6-3, 170, R-Jr.

RB
22 Charles Kellom, 5-11, 200, R-So.
8 Jordon Simmons 5-11, 200, R-Jr.

SLOT
88 Jake Newell, 6-4, 240, R-So.
87 Max Whisner, 6-4, 250, So.

K
99 Owen Wiley, 6-0, 180, So.
47 Matthew Schramm 5-9, 170, Fr.

— Depth charts compiled by Greg Wilson

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. AKRON RUSH DEFENSE

This is the spot for the annual disclaimer that whatever happened last season may not necessarily be predictive of the upcoming one. That is true for the Buckeyes, who will have a new quarterback, a new running mate for TreVeyon Henderson and former UCLA head coach Chip Kelly taking the offensive coordinator responsibilities. Henderson missed six games due to injuries the past two seasons but when healthy he has proven to be one of the best backs in the country. He rushed for 926 yards (5.9 avg.) and 11 touchdowns last season and over the past two seasons has rambled for 1,497 yards. Mississippi transfer Quinshon Judkins is willing to share the load with Henderson to create a terrific duo. Judkins had 2,725 yards and 31 rushing TDs in his first two seasons at Ole Miss before heading north. If those two aren't enough, Kansas State transfer QB Will Howard ran for 921 yards and 19 scores in four seasons, including an 80-yard TD vs. TCU in 2020. Also, his backup Devin Brown can tote the ball as well. The Buckeyes were 87th nationally in running yards last season with a 138.8 average per game. Akron was respectable against the run for a 2-10 team. The Zips were 56th, allowing 147.8 a game. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

AKRON RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Zips relied a lot on QB DJ Irons through the air, but he's gone and the running corps is thin. Charles Kellom (four rushes for five yards) is the leading returnee if that tells anything, but there is hope with a pair of transfers – Minnesota's Marquese Williams and Michigan State's Jordon Simmons. In four seasons as a Spartan, Simmons had 520 yards in 34 games. Williams was a redshirt for the Golden Gophers before leaving. The Buckeyes are absolutely stacked with veteran returnees such as Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimolou and Tyleik Williams up front, so Akron will have trouble moving the chains (an expression that will likely be retired as technology rapidly advances to mark first downs). Akron was a miserable 128 of 130 teams last season with 81.0 yards per game. The Buckeyes were 27th against the run (119.5). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. AKRON PASS DEFENSE

The experienced Howard will be in control of Kelly's offense after producing 5,786 passing yards with 48 touchdowns and 25 interceptions in 34 games over four seasons. While the Buckeyes' offensive line remains in question – again – Howard has the ability to move from the pocket and he certainly has never had such good receivers as Emeka Egbuka, Carnell Tate and freshman Jeremiah Smith among the many options. Egbuka endured an ankle injury last season and had only 41 catches for 515 yards and four touchdowns as the second choice behind the great Marvin Harrison Jr., now with the Arizona Cardinals. Tate had 18 receptions for 264 yards and a TD while Smith was the No. 1 player nationally in the 2024 recruiting class. OSU, with Kyle McCord at the helm last season, was 30th in passing yards (269.1). Akron was 22nd in passing defense (187.3). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

AKRON PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Third-stringer Tahj Bullock returns. He was 32 of 66 for 271 yards, three TDs and three picks in 10 games last season. He will fight for the starting job with Ben Finley, who was previously at California and North Carolina State, where his brother, Ryan, also was a quarterback for the Wolfpack. Ben Finley has started 13 career games, completing 55.7 percent of his passes for 1,484 yards, seven touchdowns and nine interceptions. The Buckeyes stacked secondary includes Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock, Davison Igbinosun, Lathan Ransom and prized transfer Caleb Downs, who had an outstanding freshman season for Alabama (107 tackles, two INTs, four pass breakups) in 2023. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

It will take a village of coaches to run the special teams this season after the firing of Parker Fleming. Jayden Fielding was solid in making 16 of 20 field goals with a long of 47 for the Buckeyes. Joe McGuire or Nick McLarty will take over the punting duties from Jesse Mirco. Downs may get an opportunity to return punts. Akron punter Dante Jackson averaged only 37.5 yards per boot and Zips kickers made only 9 of 16 field-goal tries. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INTANGIBLES

This will be the first of three straight cupcakes at home. It will be up to the Buckeyes to create excitement and results to match the hype. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

If the Buckeyes don't win by at least 45 the entire coaching staff may have to be fired. **OHIO STATE 59, AKRON 7**

Zips Head Coach Moorhead Ready For Beatdown

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The University of Akron changed its name in 1913 to what it is currently known as after trustees transferred the institution to the city of Akron. Before that, the school was called Buchtel College, which is what it was known as the last, and only time it was able to beat Ohio State.

That game took place in 1894 when Buchtel beat the Buckeyes by a score of 12-6, led by head coach John William Heisman, the namesake of the Heisman Trophy awarded to the best player in college football each year.

Overall, the Buckeyes hold an 8-1 record against the Zips, with four of those matchups coming after the turn of *this* century, the most recent being a 59-7 Ohio State win on Sept. 25, 2021, in which the Buckeyes outgained Akron 622-229.

Akron will help kick off the 2024 Ohio State football season when the Zips travel to Columbus on Aug. 31.

The Buckeyes' in-state opponent went 2-10 last season – losing three games in overtime – after having a similar record in both 2022 and 2021 and being on pace for the same in the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season (1-5). With an 0-12 record in 2019, the Zips enter this season with a combined 7-47 record in the past five years – only four wins against FBS teams – and didn't improve much over the off-season.

The most consistent contributors from last year's offense aren't returning for the 2024 season, including quarterbacks DJ Irons and Jeff Undercuffler Jr., leading rusher Lorenzo Lingard and leading receivers Jasaiah Gathings and Daniel George.

Regardless, the Zips and third-year head coach Joe Moorhead will be looking to turn their luck around on the gridiron, despite the overwhelming likelihood that turnaround won't be starting in Columbus, a reality that the head coach himself acknowledged before the season.

"It's going to be great. Unfortunately, it's not a fantasy baseball camp where you're going in and Whitey Ford is going to throw you some meatballs and Mickey Mantle is going to strike out on purpose," Moorhead said. "I mean they're going to kick our butts. But all of that being said, I know it's something that the kids will be excited about."

Leading the Zips will be transfer quarterback Ben Finley, who spent his first three seasons with NC State (2020-22) and one season with Cal (2023), totaling 1,484 yards passing, seven touchdowns and nine interceptions in 15 games played and four starts during that span.

While Finley hasn't lived up to the potential yet, he does come from a family that carries some football lineage. His older brother, Ryan, played two seasons as a backup for the Cincinnati Bengals from 2019-20 after throwing for a combined 10,501 passing yards and 60 touchdowns at NC State from 2016-18.

"(Ben Finley) has won games at NC State, he's won games at Cal. He certainly

comes from a great pedigree and lineage (with) his brother Ryan Finley being an NFL quarterback," Moorhead said at MAC Media Day. "He's a very smart kid – high football IQ, good touch, good velocity. He's able to understand routes as it pertains to the defenses, and he's got surprising athleticism. The thing that I like best is early on, great leadership."

Joining Finley in Akron's quarterback room is redshirt junior Tahj Bullock, who appeared in 10 games last season but was used mostly as a rusher, running 62 times for 165 yards and four touchdowns and throwing 66 times for 271 yards, three touchdowns and three interceptions.

Finley doesn't pose much of a threat with his legs, having rushed just 22 times for a net minus-2 yards during his career, so Bullock could be used as a runner against the Buckeyes if they get into a situation where it's appropriate.

The offensive line hasn't been much of a strength for the Zips in the past, and that may be the case again this year, as they are returning only one starter in center Tyhler Williams. They did make a notable addition through the transfer portal in Laurence Seymore, who comes from Miami (Fla.) after earning little time since committing to the Hurricanes as a four-star prospect in 2021 and could play either interior position on the line for the Zips this season.

Whoever ends up getting time on the offensive line against the Buckeyes is going to have a very tall task when going up against the front four Ohio State will bring at them.

One of the major issues pertaining to the Zips' offensive line has been its run-blocking. They were 128th in the country in rushing yards per game last season with just 81.0 per game, not even eclipsing the 1,000 yards-rushing mark as a team (972). To make matters worse, only one running back who earned time last season is returning for 2024 in Charles Kellom, who had just four rushing attempts for 5 yards gained.

He's joined in the backfield by Jordon Simmons, a transfer from Michigan State who ran the ball seven times for the Spartans last season and gained 14 yards but had 520 yards rushing total for the Spartans in four seasons.

"We've got to get the run game going," Moorhead said. "For two years we've been last in the league and haven't done particularly well – or at protecting the passer either, so we have to address that. But Jordon has shown a lot of flashes of athleticism and speed and the ability to make plays in the open field, the stuff you saw (when he was) at Michigan State."

The outlook is slightly better for Akron when it comes to pass catchers. Its top returning receiver is Alex Adams, who played in seven games last season and caught 22 passes for 188 yards and two touchdowns, but he has shown he can do more, bringing in 63 receptions for 850 yards and a team-high nine touchdowns the season before, his first year with the program after transferring from LSU.

Also looking to make an impact as a pass-catcher for Akron this season is

Get To Know ... Akron

- **2023 Record:** 2-10.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Pistol; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 2, Defense 5, Specialists 0.
- **Head Coach:** Joe Moorhead, 3rd year at Akron, 4-20.
- **Series History:** 10th meeting; Ohio State leads 8-1.
- **School Facts:** Location – Akron, Ohio; Enrollment – 16,193; Nickname – Zips; Colors – Blue, Gold; Conference – Mid American; Stadium – InfoCision Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 30,000).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jordan Simmons	7	14	2	0
Charles Kellom	4	5	1.3	0
Tahj Bullock	62	165	2.7	4

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Ben Finley	54-94	57.5	572	3-4
Tahj Bullock	32-66	48.5	271	3-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Alex Adams	22	188	8.6	2
Adrian Norton	9	71	7.9	0
Justin Campbell	-	-	-	-

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game - 16.25
Rushing Yards Per Game - 81.0
Passing Yards Per Game - 197.6
Total Offense Avg. Per Game - 278.6

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	at Ohio State	3:30 p.m.
Sept. 7	at Rutgers	12 p.m.
Sept. 14	COLGATE	6 p.m.
Sept. 21	at South Carolina	TBA
Sept. 28	at Ohio	TBA
Oct. 5	BOWLING GREEN	3:30
Oct. 12	at Western Michigan	12 p.m.
Oct. 26	EASTERN MICHIGAN	TBA
Nov. 2	BUFFALO	TBA
Nov. 13	at Northern Illinois	TBA
Nov. 19	at Kent State	TBA
Nov. 26	TOLEDO	TBA
Dec. 7	MAC Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks	
Antavious Fish	38	57	95	4.0-14	1.0-3
Bryan McCoy	33	61	94	6.0-18	1.0-7
Darrian Lewis	49	26	75	4.0-7	0.5-2
CJ Nunnally IV	35	30	65	15.5-69	7.0-44
Shammond Cooper	17	27	44	5.5-31	2.0-23
Bennett Adler	8	18	26	5.0-19	2.5-17

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
D. Golden-Nelson	2	0	0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed - 28.0
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed - 147.8
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed - 187.3
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed - 335.0

redshirt junior transfer Justin Campbell, whom the Zips brought in through the portal from Ball State, along with likely starters sophomore wide receiver Adrian Norton and redshirt sophomore tight end Jake Newell.

The Akron defense looks to be better than the offense this season, sending out five returning starters from a unit that ranked ninth in the MAC last season in scoring defense allowing 28.0 points per game.

For a Mid-American Conference team, the Zips' defensive line is very solid, but when it comes to beating the offensive line of a possible national-championship contender, it might not be enough to get much done.

Bennett Adler and CJ Nunnally IV return to bookend the line, combining for 91 tackles, 20½ for a loss, and 9½ sacks a season ago, Nunnally with the lion's share of the stats. Nunnally was named to the Bronko Nagurski trophy watch list by the Football Writers Association of America, the only player on the team to make any watch list. The Zips also bring in Nathan Kapongo from the University of New Hampshire, while redshirt senior Lama Lavea will likely get his chance on the interior after recording 25 tackles and one tackle for loss in 11 games last season.

They also return two starters at the linebacker position in the 4-2-5 defense they use. Antavious Fish and Bryan McCoy – Akron's top two leading tacklers last season at 95 and 94 stops, respectively, will bring experience to a Zips unit trying to stop what should be a potent Ohio

State offense. McCoy said that the Zips are trying to turn things around this season, with some renewed messaging from Moorhead over this past offseason.

"The things that he's instilled in us throughout this offseason would be just to win," McCoy said about the upcoming season. "Competitiveness, going hard every play, win every play. That's what it comes down to, wins and losses, and we know that as a team and we understand that. So our goal is to win."

Akron lost its two starting safeties to the transfer portal after 2023 and will likely send Paul Lewis III and Aman Greenwood onto the field to get the start against the Buckeyes. At cornerback the Zips will likely have Devonte Golden-Nelson and Joey Hunter take the majority of snaps, while Darrian Lewis is another returning starter and could slot in at the nickel position. Lewis finished last year third on the team in tackles with 75 while also recording four tackles for loss, three passes broken up, two quarterback hurries and a forced fumble.

At MAC media days, Moorhead was clear about what he expects to happen when they go into Ohio Stadium on Aug. 31, but he did promise to make sure the Zips are at the very least ready to compete to the best of their ability.

"You've got one of the prohibitive favorites to win the national championship," Moorhead said with a laugh. "We'll go up and compete one play at a time and see what happens."

BSB Staff Says Hype Is Real For OSU In 2024

The 2024 college football season is right around the corner, and with that come countless predictions from experts and talking heads throughout the country. This is especially the case in Columbus, where the Buckeyes are gearing up to begin what many who follow the program believe could be one of the more special seasons for the program in quite some time.

Expectations are sky-high in Columbus in large part due to the loaded roster head coach Ryan Day built over the offseason, which includes several returning starters and future NFL draft picks, a group of talented transfer pickups and some emerging youngsters who are poised to make an instant impact.

With this special collection of talent – one which many believe is among the best in all of college football – also comes immense pressure, something that is only intensified considering the program enters the year having failed to defeat archrival Michigan or secure a Big Ten championship in the past three seasons.

Beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten and securing its first national title in a decade are the three main goals for Ohio State this season, but there are also some regular-season obstacles that could stand in the team's way before they can achieve those aspirations, most notably a cross-country road trip to new Big Ten rival No. 3 Oregon on Oct. 12 along with another tough road test against No. 8 Penn State on Nov. 2.

With all of this in mind, Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members Patrick Engels, Bobby Gorbett, Craig Merz and Greg Wilson took their try at predicting the outcome of Ohio State's 2024 season, while also projecting which teams from the newly expanded Big Ten Conference will make the 12-team College Football Playoff and what players will take home some hardware at the end of the season.

Here are this year's BSB staff predictions.

Engels: Howard Provides Key To Unlock Special Season

Ohio State under head coach Ryan Day has never had an issue with talent, and this year is no different with the Buckeyes fielding perhaps their most loaded team yet in the Day era.

The Buckeyes are filled with first-round caliber NFL draft picks along with a plethora of promising youngsters – I'm looking at you, Jeremiah Smith. But when it comes to winning tough games down the stretch and achieving their three biggest goals – defeating Michigan, winning a Big Ten championship and claiming the national title – fine-tuning the little things and plugging some potential holes on the roster will be of utmost importance.

While it isn't necessarily a "little thing," it is no secret Ohio State will need more consistent quarterback play this season if the Buckeyes want to finish the year on top. Now Syracuse quarterback Kyle McCord was a sufficient starter for most of the season, but his shortcomings were somewhat exposed against Michigan when he threw two interceptions, the first being a poor throw early in the game that seemed to give

the Wolverines the momentum they needed to come away with the close win.

Ohio State, in my opinion, got that upgrade this offseason in Will Howard, who – unlike with McCord last season – was already tabbed as the starter as BSB went to print with the Football Preview issue. Howard brings an added element to the offense with his ability to extend plays with his legs and run for explosive gains, something that has been missing from the Buckeyes' offense since Justin Fields was in town from 2019-20.

Howard's dual-threat ability will only free up more space for future NFL running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins – considered by many as the top tailback duo in college football – a luxury that I think will be on full display as the Buckeyes cruise to early wins over Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall in the nonconference along with Michigan State and Iowa to start the Big Ten slate.

Ohio State and Howard will then be put to the test on the road against mighty Oregon on Oct. 12 in what should be their most difficult matchup of the non-CFP season, as well as one of the more highly anticipated matchups in all of college football. I see the Buckeyes competing hard and Howard making plays at what should be a raucous Autzen Stadium but ultimately falling in a close, well-played contest to spoil their undefeated season.

The Buckeyes will use that loss as motivation as the fall rolls on, taking care of Nebraska on Oct. 26, Penn State on the road – a place where Ohio State has had success since 2017 – on Nov. 2, Purdue on Nov. 9, Northwestern on Nov. 16 and Indiana on Nov. 23, all while the team and Howard continue to improve. That leads to none other than "The Game" on Nov. 30 at Ohio Stadium, a matchup that Ohio State and Day desperately need to win to keep everyone sane in Buckeyeland.

Luckily for Ohio State fans, I see a 2018-type performance coming for the Buckeyes in this season's rivalry game, where the team uses all its pent-up rage along with an emotionally charged crowd to take care of the Wolverines in a convincing double-digit win.

The much-needed victory over Michigan then sets up another revenge game against Oregon in the Big Ten Championship Game in Indianapolis, a place where Ohio State has not competed since 2020. With that along with the previous loss to Oregon in the back of their minds, I see the Buckeyes playing a complete, crisp game on both sides of the ball to come out with the win, propelling them to a Big Ten title and likely a top-two seed and bye in the expanded 12-team College Football Playoff.

This sequence of events would put the Buckeyes in great position to achieve all three of their goals and secure that elusive national title, giving the program perhaps one of their more magical and successful seasons in history.

But like I mentioned earlier, that reality may only be reached if the Buckeyes can get elite and turnover-free quarterback play from the veteran Howard.

No pressure.



SONNY BROCKWAY

HAT TRICK – Ryan Day is working to put all of the pieces together this season for a winning campaign. Beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten and securing its first national title in a decade are the three main goals for Ohio State.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Oregon

Offensive POY: Dillon Gabriel, Oregon

Defensive POY: Jay Higgins, Iowa

Coach of the Year: Greg Schiano, Rutgers

Freshman of the Year: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

Big Ten CFP Teams: Ohio State and Oregon

Gorbett: Beware Of Midseason Road Tests

Before the Big Ten regular-season schedule was even announced, Buckeye fans already had rivalry week on their minds. While there's no bad time for Ohio State to beat Michigan, this year's rendition of "The Game" feels like it needs to go the Buckeyes' way. With on paper a more talented, experienced team and coach, Ohio State will likely be a fairly heavy favorite against its most hated rival. For that reason, Ohio State's big road matchups against Oregon and Penn State are being slightly overlooked.

In years past with Michigan and Ohio State being in the same division and Penn State failing to rise to the occasion against its Big Ten East rivals, the entire season for both teams conceivably did come down to just one game. The winner of "The Game" got a seat in the Big Ten Championship Game against a highly flawed Big Ten West team and, with a win, a trip to the CFP. The loser received a trip to what was then a not-as-important bowl game.

In 2024, the days of divisions are gone, as are the days of the winner of "The Game" having a cakewalk to the Big Ten championship. Instead, there's a conceivable reality where a Michigan team that replaces the majority of its starters from a year ago is eliminated from Big Ten contention before Week 14 and a nightmare scenario for Ohio State where the team loses to both Penn State and Oregon, taking itself out of contention to go to Indianapolis.

Although the Buckeyes won't have a substantial test until their Week 7 matchup, the same is true for the Ducks. Despite all the optimism surrounding Dan Lanning's team, Oregon hasn't necessarily had the landmark win lately to cement itself as national championship contenders. The home matchup against Ohio State presents a golden opportunity to achieve such a win.

The same sentiment is true for Penn State. If Ohio State players, coaches and fans have heard the same mantra about failing to beat Michigan for the last three years, Penn State has listened to the same thing about its narrow losses to top-10 opponents such as Ohio State and Michigan over the last three years.

Ohio State will likely be two top-10 teams' biggest game of the season, both occurring on the road in the span of a month. If the Buckeyes are not ready, they could cost themselves all the rewards that formerly came with defeating Michigan: the Big Ten Championship Game appearance and potentially even a College Football Playoff

CFP Introduces 12-Team Playoff In 2024

College football is ushering in a new era in 2024, with the College Football Playoff set to introduce a 12-team playoff bracket for the upcoming season, expanding from the four-team format that has been in place since 2014.

The 12 participating teams will include the five highest-ranked conference champions, which will receive automatic bids, followed by the seven highest-ranked teams remaining. The top four teams will receive a first-round bye to the quarterfinal rounds, with the fifth conference champion seeded either where it is placed in the final CFP rankings or at No. 12 if it is outside the top 12.

Seeds 5-12 will compete in the first round (5 vs. 12, 6 vs. 11, 7 v. 10, etc.), which will be held from Dec. 20-21 either on the campuses of the higher-seeded team or at another location designated by the higher-seeded institution.

The CFP will then move onto the quarterfinal round, which will be played from Dec. 31-Jan. 1 at the sites of four traditional New Years Six bowls. This year's four quarterfinal bowl sites will be the Fiesta Bowl, held on Dec. 31, along with the Peach, Rose and Sugar Bowls, which will each be held on Jan. 1 in the early afternoon, late afternoon and prime-

time slots, respectively.

The CFP selection committee will determine which bowl site each of the four highest-ranked conference champions will compete in based on historic bowl relationships and consideration of rankings. With the four highest-ranked conference champions assigned to bowls, their four quarterfinal opponents will be dictated by the bracket – which will not re-seed throughout the tournament – with the No. 1 seed facing off against the No. 8/9 winner, No. 2 against No. 7/10, No. 3 vs. No. 6/11 and No. 4 vs. No. 5/12.

The semifinal round will then take place from Jan. 9-10, with the highest remaining seed receiving preferential placement for bowl assignment. The first semifinal game will be played on Jan. 9, 2025, at the Orange Bowl, followed by the Cotton Bowl on Jan. 10, 2025. The inaugural 12-team playoff will then conclude on Jan. 20, 2025, in the CFP National Championship Game, which will be held on Jan. 20 at Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

The 12-team CFP format will be in place until at least 2025, with that season's matchups running from Dec. 19, 2025-Jan. 19, 2026.

either Oregon or Penn State, go 11-1, play in the Big Ten title game and join the Ducks in the playoffs.

As for other conference teams making the postseason, Michigan has a chance but I'm going to go with USC as a dark horse. There's even a possibility a three-loss team such as Iowa, Michigan or Wisconsin could be selected.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Oregon

Big Ten Offensive POY: Dillon Gabriel, Oregon

Defensive POY: JT Tuimoloau, Ohio State

Coach of the Year: Dan Lanning, Oregon

Freshman of the Year: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

Big Ten CFP teams: Ohio State, Oregon, USC, Michigan

Wilson: Bucks Face B1G Speed Bump On Way To B10 Title

With the Big Ten expanding to 18 teams this season and the College Football Playoff expanding to a 12-team format, there will be countless storylines to keep track of over the course of the college football season. But perhaps the one that will matter most to Ohio State fans will be to end the three-game losing streak to Michigan.

Ryan Day's 1-3 record against the Wolverines is a stain on what has been an extremely great start to his head-coaching career, and he spent the entire offseason trying to make sure the Buckeyes can get back on the right side of the rivalry. If they are able to do that, there will be no concern about making the College Football Playoff.

One thing that shouldn't be a question when it comes to whether they can do that is the talent on the defensive side of the ball. The Buckeyes were already a top defense in the country last year and retained seven starters, also adding Caleb Downs at safety. It should be the best defense in all of college football with Jim Knowles leading the way.

The biggest questions for this team remain on the offensive side of the ball with quarterback Will Howard and the offensive line. Howard has the talent around him to

be able to lead the Buckeyes to an undefeated record, a Big Ten championship and a national championship, but whether the former Kansas State signal caller will be able to do that or not is yet to be seen.

Beginning the season with Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall at home will be an easy way for Howard to get acclimated to playing in Ohio Stadium with three big wins right off the bat. Travelling to face off with a new-look Michigan State with Jonathan Smith now at the helm will be a good way for him to ease into Big Ten play, but after that is when the real competition begins.

Playing Iowa at home and Oregon on the road – in what has been rumored to be a night game – will be the Buckeyes' biggest test of the season in back-to-back games. I predict the test will prove too much for Ohio State to handle on Oct. 12 and the Ducks will ruin hopes of an undefeated season for the Scarlet and Gray.

Penn State and Michigan are the other two teams that will likely be ranked when Ohio State plays them on Nov. 2 and Nov. 30, respectively.

Ryan Day has been able to handle James Franklin and the Nittany Lions well so far since he took over in 2019, and that shouldn't change this year. Then, when the Wolverines head to Ohio Stadium, Day will exorcise his Michigan demons and stop them from winning four straight versions of The Game.

The Buckeyes and Ducks could match up in the Big Ten Championship Game for a rematch, and regardless of how that goes, both teams should make the 12-team playoff. But a bye would be up for grabs, which is going to be extremely valuable, and Day will have his team ready to earn its first conference title since 2019.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Oregon

Offensive POY: Dillon Gabriel, Oregon

Defensive POY: Will Johnson, Michigan

Coach of the Year: Dan Lanning, Oregon

Freshman of the Year: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

Big Ten CFP Teams: Ohio State and Oregon and Penn State.

appearance.

This is a sort of nightmare scenario for a reason, though. The Buckeyes are on paper the best team in the Big Ten and even with all of Oregon and Penn State's home crowd power – there certainly is a lot of it at Autzen Stadium and Beaver Stadium, respectively – the Buckeyes appear to have the talent and motivation to overcome inevitable adversity.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Oregon

Offensive POY: Dillon Gabriel, Oregon

Defensive POY: Jack Sawyer, Ohio State

Coach of the Year: Matt Rhule, Nebraska

Freshman of the Year: Dylan Raiola, Nebraska

Big Ten CFP Teams: Ohio State and Oregon

Merz: Optimal Optimism

My staff prediction last season had the headline "Cautiously Optimistic." I felt the Buckeyes were on the verge of greatness but had obstacles along the way, most notably Notre Dame, Penn State and Michigan. I picked OSU to lose the latter two and was half correct (we don't need to explain that further).

Jump ahead to August 2024 and I'm buying for the most part the hype surrounding the Big Bucks Buckeyes who have revamped, retooled, reloaded or whatever "re" you want to use.

There are still perils along the way in the new-look Big Ten beginning with a trip to No. 3 Oregon on Oct. 12 that under past circumstances the outcome might have been the key factor in deciding which program made the four-team College Football Playoff.

Of course, those days are over, and the game does lose a bit of luster with 12 teams vying for a national championship.

It would not be a surprise if the second-ranked Buckeyes win the inaugural expanded playoffs just as they earned the first CFP in 2014 by beating Oregon.

There will be no shock either if the Octo-

ber matchup is the first of two and possibly three meetings this season as I have picked them to play for the Big Ten championship as well as qualify for the playoffs. It's a strange new world.

I don't see the Buckeyes playing the Wolverines in the conference championship game. The defending national champs still have a lot of talent even though coach Jim Harbaugh took his deceitful ways to the NFL. The game will be in Columbus on Nov. 30, and I am not going to pick against the Buckeyes this time.

That leaves a road encounter at Penn State on Nov. 2 as a major stumbling block. At some point, the Nittany Lions will beat OSU. But if the Buckeyes survive the raucous atmosphere in Eugene against the Ducks, I like their chances in Happy Valley.

Before all the drama in the Big Ten commences, the nonconference schedule is bland at best. Unlike the past two seasons when OSU featured Notre Dame in a home-and-home series, or looking forward to the 2025 opener vs. Texas, the thought of playing Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall excites no one.

Neither does a road game at Michigan State on Sept. 28 but at least it's the Big Ten. It says a lot about the schedule that a visit by Iowa on Oct. 5 is the highlight of the early part of the schedule.

The Hawkeyes always present a stout defense, and their offense can't be any worse (right?) than the past few seasons. Their best chance is having the Buckeyes looking ahead to Oregon, but OSU is capable of beating them with one eye closed.

After Oregon, an improved Nebraska – with former OSU five-star QB commit Dylan Raiola – comes to Columbus prior to the Penn State game.

Games against Purdue, at Northwestern and home to Indiana set up nicely for the game with Wolverines. The Northwestern game will be played at Wrigley Field. Add in unpredictable November weather, and I have a hunch that the Wildcats will make the Buckeyes squirm.

So, there it is. The Buckeyes will lose to

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Newcomers Provide A Fresh Look To Big Ten

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Big Ten (in name only) welcomes its

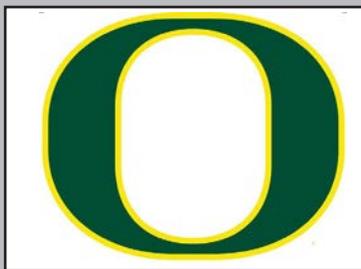
newest members, swelling the conference to 18 teams from coast to coast.

Oregon, Southern California (USC), UCLA and Washington each have rich his-

stories of their own, including crossing paths with Ohio State on the gridiron.

But having resided in the Pac-10, Pac-12, Pac'em Up and Leave conferences for so

many decades, Buckeye fans may be unfamiliar with the schools, so BSB as a public service provides insight on the Ducks, Trojans, Bruins and Huskies:



OREGON DUCKS

Location: Eugene **Founded:** Established -- Oct. 12, 1872.

Opened - Oct. 16, 1876 **Enrollment:** 23,000

Football venue: Autzen Stadium, opened Sept. 23, 1967 (54,000 capacity)

First football season: 1894

Ohio State record vs. Oregon: 9-1-0

First meeting: Jan. 1, 1958 (Rose Bowl); OSU, 10-7

Most recent meeting: Sept. 12, 2021 (Columbus); Oregon, 35-28

Next meeting: At Oregon, Oct. 12, 2024

Next home meeting: 2026 (TBA)

Game to remember - Jan. 12, 2015:

Ezekiel Elliott ran for 246 yards and four touchdowns to help third-string quarterback Cardale Jones lead the Buckeyes to a 42-20 win over the Ducks in Arlington, Texas, to win the first College Football Playoff.

Notable university alums, attendees, and accomplishments: Graduate Phil Knight co-founded Nike along with Oregon track Coach Bill Bowerman. Billionaire Knight has donated millions to the athletic programs, and the school has embraced the moniker

"Nike University." ... National Lampoon's Animal House (1978) was filmed on and around campus. ... Best-known runner in the 1970s was Steve Prefontaine, about whom three movies were made. ... School has produced 16 Pulitzer Prize winners with 20 total awards and 19 Rhodes Scholars. ... Reason for Buckeyes to dislike the Ducks: Oregon defeated OSU in the first NCAA basketball tournament in 1939. ... Those who went there include Hall of Fame coach/broadcaster John Madden, actor Sam Elliott, Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert, Bionic Woman actress Lindsay Wagner, WNBA star Sabrina Ionescu, actress Kaitlin Olson and WKRP in Cincinnati actor Howard Hesseman. ... New OSU offensive coordinator Chip Kelly went 46-7 (.868) in four seasons as Oregon coach from 2009-12.

2023 record: 12-2, 8-1 (Pac-12)

2024 outlook (coach Dan Lanning):

The Ducks, third in the AP preseason poll, host the No. 2 Buckeyes on Oct. 12 for the first time

since OSU's only visit on Oct. 7, 1967 (OSU, 30-0) in what could be an early contender for game of the year. Of course, there's a good chance the teams will meet at least once and maybe two more times this season with the Big Ten championship and the expanded College Football Playoff in play. Oregon lost standout QB Bo Nix to the NFL but snatched one of the top transfers in Dillon Gabriel, formerly of Oklahoma and UCF, to replace him. If the timing had been better when he entered the portal, he might have ended up at Ohio State as the successor to Kyle McCord. The Ducks averaged 531.4 yards and 44.2 points per game last season and have a bevy of receivers to attain such numbers or better. Gabriel and receiver Tez Johnson are on the Maxwell Award watch list for the best player in the country. The defense is in transition but that doesn't mean much anymore with the influx of transfers, a group that is viewed by many as among the best in the nation.



SOUTHERN CAL TROJANS

Location: Los Angeles **Founded:** 1880 **Enrollment:** 49,000

Football venue: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, opened May 1, 1923 (77,500)

First football season: 1888

Ohio State record vs. USC: 10-13-1

First meeting: Oct. 9, 1937 (Los Angeles); USC, 13-12

Most recent meeting: Dec. 29, 2017 (Cotton Bowl); OSU, 24-7

Next meeting: At USC - 2026 (TBA)

Next home meeting: 2027 (TBA)

Game to remember - Jan. 1, 1969:

"The Super Sophomores" completed a perfect season in a perfect way to win the 1968 national title with a resounding 27-16 win over O.J. Simpson and the Trojans in the Rose Bowl. It would be the last Buckeye championship until 2002.

Notable university alums, attendees, accomplishments: Known for its Olympic

sports athletes, at the recent Paris Olympics they earned 15 medals, including seven golds. A Trojan has won gold at every summer Olympics since 1912. ... First man on the moon and Wapakoneta, Ohio, native Neil Armstrong did graduate studies at USC. ... Famous footballers include Marcus Allen, Reggie Bush, Frank Gifford and Troy Polamalu. ... Among actors are LeVar Burton, Will Ferrell, Tom Selleck, John Wayne and Forest Whitaker and filmmakers Judd Apatow, Ron Howard and George Lucas. ... Women's basketball standouts Lisa Leslie and Cheryl Miller attended the school as did Olympic champion swimmer Janet Evans and late Los Angeles Lakers owner Jerry Buss.

2023 record: 8-5, 5-4 Pac-12

2024 outlook (coach Lincoln Riley):

The heat is on Riley as he enters his third season for the Trojans with a 19-8 record following

his arrival from Oklahoma. It was a miserable 2023 even with Heisman Trophy-winning QB Caleb Williams. Redshirt junior Miller Moss is the presumed replacement after he started for Williams in the Holiday Bowl and threw for 372 yards and six touchdowns in a 42-28 win over Louisville. Putting up points has never been a problem for a Riley-coached team, but the defense has been horrible despite a talent like defensive tackle Bear Alexander, who is on the Chuck Bednarik watch list for the most outstanding defensive player. Riley has revamped the defensive staff after USC allowed 34.4 points per game last season. The Trojans, ranked No. 23, have 11 returning starters (six defense, five offense) but it won't be easy for them with away games vs. Michigan, Washington and rival UCLA. The Trojans host Notre Dame, Penn State and Wisconsin.



UCLA BRUINS

Location: Los Angeles **Founded:** 1919 **Enrollment:** 46,430

Football venue: Spieker Field at the Rose Bowl, in Pasadena, opened 1922; UCLA home since 1982 (91,136)

First football season: 1919

Ohio State record vs. UCLA: 4-3-1

First meeting: Oct. 7, 1961 (Columbus); OSU, 13-3

Most recent meeting: Sept. 22, 2001 (Pasadena); UCLA, 13-6

Next meeting: Home, 2025 (TBA)

Game to remember – Sept. 22, 2001: There was nothing special about the game that came early in the season for first-year coach Jim Tressel, but it was 11 days after the Sept. 11 attack and the country was still jittery about being in big crowds and air travel when the Buckeyes flew west. Ohio State was held to eight first downs and 166 total yards.

Notable university alums, attendees, accomplishments: It's

L.A. and Hollywood so there's a galaxy of stars that stepped on campus such as Lloyd Bridges, Carol Burnett, Nicolas Cage, Steve Martin, Marilyn Monroe, Leonard Nimoy, Rob Reiner, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Ben Stiller and director Francis Ford Coppola. ... There's Jim Morrison of The Doors and Red Hot Chili Peppers lead vocalist Anthony Kiedis. ... Marcia Clark was the lead prosecutor in the O.J. Simpson murder case, and Johnny Cochran was his defense attorney. ... When it comes to famous athletes it's hard to top Jackie Robinson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Walton and legendary basketball coach John Wooden. ... Others include Olympics track star Jackie Joyner Kersee and tennis greats Arthur Ashe and Jimmy Connors. ... Chip Kelly stepped away from being UCLA head coach the past seven seasons (35-34,

.507) to join Ryan Day's staff.

2023 record: 8-5, 4-5 Pac-12

2024 football outlook (coach DeShaun Foster): Foster spent 11 seasons as a UCLA assistant before being named Kelly's successor. He loses 11 starters, but the schedule makers were kind in one regard to the Bruins in their first foray into the Big Ten. They don't face Michigan, Ohio State or Wisconsin, but they play at Penn State and Washington and have a nonconference tilt at LSU. UCLA had a well-regarded defense (18.5 points per game), but defensive coordinator D'Anton Lynn left for USC and the top five defensive ends and nine of 11 starters departed.

Quarterback Ethan Garbers, running back T.J. Harden, receiver J. Michael Sturdivant and tight end Moliki Matavao return.



WASHINGTON HUSKIES

Location: Seattle **Founded:** Nov. 4, 1861 **Enrollment:** 50,097

Football venue: Husky Stadium, opened 1920, renovated 2013 (70,138)

First football season: 1889

Ohio State record vs. Washington: 9-3-0

First meeting: Oct. 5, 1957 (Seattle); OSU, 35-7

Most recent meeting: Jan. 1, 2019 (Rose Bowl); OSU, 28-23

Next meeting: At Washington, 2025 (TBA)

Next home meeting: 2028 (TBA)

Game to remember – Jan. 1, 2019: In the last game before Urban Meyer retired and Ryan Day took over, Dwayne Haskins passed for 251 yards and three touchdowns. The Buckeyes almost blew a 28-3 fourth-quarter lead and needed Johnnie Dixon to recover an onside kick to seal the win.

Notable university alums, attendees, accomplishments: Jeopardy! winner and host Ken Jennings, jazz sax-

ophonist Kenny G and Costco founder Jeffrey Brotman are Huskies. ... So too was serial killer Ted Bundy ... Astronaut Michael P. Anderson was a grad. He died in the 2003 Columbia space shuttle disaster. ... Karen Holbrook was Ohio State president from 2002-07. ... Sculptor Dale Chihuly has a long-running exhibit at the Franklin Park Conservatory in Columbus. ... Martial arts expert and actor Bruce Lee and The Office actor Rainn Wilson went to UW. ... Famous athletes include two-time Cy Young winner Tim Lincecum, Hall of Fame QB Warren Moon, innovative NFL coach Don Coryell and the holder of one of the best sports names of all time, quarterback Sonny Sixkiller, who was a cast member in the original "The Longest Yard" movie (1974) starring Burt Reynolds.

2023 record: 14-1, 9-0 Pac-12

2024 football outlook (coach Jedd Fisch): After losing to Michigan in the national championship game to

the disgust of Buckeyes everywhere, it's a rebuild for the Huskies beginning with Fisch. He has the unenviable task of replacing Kalen DeBoer, who has an even more unenviable role in taking over for Nick Saban at Alabama. Fisch comes to Seattle after three seasons at Arizona where he was 16-21 (.432). He also won one of two games as interim coach for UCLA in 2017. Fisch added former OSU running back Scottie Graham (1988-91) as the running backs coach and Steve Belichick, son of former New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, to be the defensive coordinator. Ex-Mississippi State QB Will Rogers is expected to take the snaps now that Michael Penix Jr. is in the NFL. Rogers threw for 12,315 yards and 94 touchdowns in four seasons with 28 interceptions. A key early game is Oct. 5 vs. Michigan. The Huskies also host USC and UCLA but have road games against Iowa, Penn State and Oregon.

Ohio State Misses On Top O-Lineman Sanders

Ohio State missed out on its top remaining player on Aug. 17 when Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 290) pledged his services to Tennessee, instead of committing to the Buckeyes.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Sanders had been Ohio State's top target for a long time, ever since he showed his interest in the school when he made multiple visits to Columbus during the spring. The Buckeyes originally extended their offer to him back in August of 2022 but despite the efforts over the past couple of years, weren't able to beat out the Volunteers.

"Tennessee has done a phenomenal job recruiting me throughout high school, showing me that I'm a priority for their program," Sanders said. "Coach (Josh Heupel) has a phenomenal grip on his program and we're going to do good things in the future as well."

Sanders is currently ranked the No. 2 player in the class according to 247Sports composite rankings, behind only Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Under-

wood (6-4, 205), who is committed to LSU.

Landing Sanders would have been a big deal for offensive line coach Justin Frye, who has yet to land a five-star commitment in his time at Ohio State. The last five-star offensive line recruit to give his verbal to the Buckeyes was Donovan Jackson in the class of 2021, who was recruited by former offensive line coach Greg Studrawa.

Despite not choosing Ohio State, Sanders still only had good things to say about the school and the coaches who were in contact with him throughout the recruiting process.

"Ohio State is another school that is known for developing great offensive tackles at the next level and sending them off to the NFL," Sanders said. "They have a great recruiting staff as well. The entire team they have is really good. The recruiting class they have right now is No. 1, and being a part of that would be something special."

Ohio State recruiting analyst Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop has said that he believes that Frye is going to need to have a good year if he wants to keep his job, and landing Sanders was a big part of that.

"I think this is a big year for Justin Frye," Greene said. "Ryan Day has shown he's not scared to fire coaches. So this is a big year for Justin Frye (pertaining to) who's going to sign and what they show on the field. (The offensive line) has got to be better on the

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.
Jarquez Carter	DL	6-2	284	★★★★	Newberry, 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
Riley Pettijohn	LB	6-1½	215	★★★★★	McKinney, Texas
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

field than they were last year. It was terrible for a team that wants to be a national champion."

An overall improvement on the offensive line this season would help Frye's situation, but missing on Sanders puts him closer to the hot seat.

Frye has previously missed on other top offensive line prospects like Brandon Baker, who chose Texas over Ohio State, and Jordan Seaton, who chose to go to Colorado. They are two five-star linemen who had the Buckeyes on their list of top schools up until the end of their recruitment.

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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

Now Ohio State is looking at a 2025 class that has just two offensive linemen committed in Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290) and Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295).

Lowe is the 50th-ranked player in the country, so if they are able to keep him committed to the Buckeyes it would be no small feat, but adding Sanders to the class would have given them the beginnings of an elite class at the position. Cook is the No. 427-ranked player in the country as of Aug. 19.

As for uncommitted targets that Ohio State could still pursue on the offensive line, the Buckeyes are still after Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist three-star interior offensive lineman Jayvon McFadden (6-5, 300), who visited Ohio State on May 31. McFadden is the nation's 468th-best prospect and 29th-best interior lineman.

Regardless, the loss of Sanders will force the Buckeyes to pivot in their approach if they want another top-ranked tackle prospect in the 2025 cycle. At this point, their best, and possibly only option, is to target someone who is committed to another program that they believe they can

get to flip.

DL Carter Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State got its 24th commitment of the 2025 class when Newberry, Fla., four-star defensive lineman Jarquez Carter (6-2, 284) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on July 18.

247Sports composite rankings have him as the No. 273 overall player in the class, the 30th-best defensive lineman and the 39th-best player in the state of Florida.

Carter chose the Buckeyes over Miami (Fla.), UCF, Penn State and Florida, becoming one of five defensive linemen to commit to Ohio State out of the 2025 class.

Already committed are four-star edge rushers Zion Grady (6-4, 235) of Enterprise, Ala., and Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225) of Philadelphia Imhotep Institute, as well as four-star defensive linemen London Merritt (6-3, 250) of Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, Maxwell Roy (6-3, 285) of Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep and Trajen Odom (6-4, 285) of Matthews (N.C.) Weddington.

While defensive line coach Larry Johnson has already been able to put together a great class for the Buckeyes after signing

just three players at the position last year, it's possible that the Buckeyes aren't done at the position yet.

They are still attempting to flip Opelika, Ala., four-star defensive lineman Malik Autry (6-6, 320), who is still committed to Auburn. Autry is the nation's 104th-best player and 13th-best defensive tackle in the class.

McNutt Commits To Oregon Over OSU

The Buckeyes lost a big recruiting battle that they once seemed to have a big lead in on Aug. 3 when Cleveland Shaker Heights five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) committed to Oregon.

McNutt, son of former Buckeye cornerback Richard McNutt, seemed to be trending towards committing to Ohio State for much of his recruitment until spring ball when he scheduled official visits to four schools and didn't plan on coming to Columbus. He chose to instead head to Eugene, Ore., for his final official visit on June 21, and he ended up landing with the Ducks.

Ohio State's 2025 secondary recruiting class certainly could have used the No. 1 ranked safety in the country, but it also isn't hurting too much without him. At the safety position, the Buckeyes have already earned pledges from Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel four-star Faheem Delane (6-3, 195), Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star DeShawn Stewart (6-2, 185) and Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star Cody Hadd-

ad (6-1, 175).

At cornerback, the Buckeyes boast a very strong class of Houston North Shore five-star Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170) and Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star Na'eem O'ford (6-1, 185), respectively the No. 1 and No. 3 cornerbacks in the country according to 247Sports composite ranking.

Still, it is possible that the Buckeyes could bring McNutt in for an official visit to Columbus during the regular season, but it will be a tough task to flip the five-star from a new Big Ten rival, especially one who has had immense success on the recruiting trail of late.

The Ducks have had multiple recruiting wins over Ohio State this cycle, also beating the Buckeyes out for Conroe, Texas, four-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-0, 200), Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star running back Jordon Davison (6-0, 216) and Duncanville, Texas, five-star wide receiver Dakorien Moore (5-11, 182).

However, despite a few big losses in the cycle, Ohio State still has the No. 1 recruiting class in the country according to 247Sports with 310.62 points, in front of Alabama (296.29) LSU (295.40), Georgia (289.94), and Auburn (279.80) as of Aug. 19. Oregon was ranked 10th in the country with 261.58 points as BSB went to press.

Despite the strong class, missing on McNutt is still a hit for the Buckeyes. If he ends up sticking with Oregon when signing

Continued On Page 42

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

Editor's note: Portions of BSB's interview with Bill Greene were conducted several days before offensive lineman David Sanders' Aug. 17 commitment.

Ohio State experienced a major recruiting loss on Aug. 17 when Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 290) committed to Tennessee over the Buckeyes, Georgia and Nebraska. Sanders was a major target for Ohio State and offensive line coach Justin Frye all summer. What was your reaction to this commitment and what does it mean for the Buckeyes and Frye?

"This one hurts. There's no way to spin this one. To me it's a totally different dynamic than Roswell (Ga.) Fellowship Christian High School four-star offensive tackle Josh Petty (6-5, 265). With Josh Petty I have no idea what went on there. When a kid commits to Georgia Tech, I don't know what to say on that one. At that point you almost have to look at the kid and be like he could have gone anywhere in America, he chose to go to Georgia Tech. I don't know how you blame Justin Frye for that one.

"That's weird, that doesn't make sense. This one, Ohio State's got to be able to beat Tennessee in a recruitment like this. There's nowhere to pivot to. You can't lose David Sanders and just look down your board and get the next tackle because that guy doesn't exist.

"So this is a huge loss. You can't blame it on money because Ohio State has known for a year that they were going to have to be in a NIL battle for David Sanders and I think they knew that. And from what I was told their NIL offer was tremendous.

"You've got to win this one. You've got to be able to point to Dawand Jones and Paris Johnson - I mean you have a recent history of your producing guys in the NFL. All the ducks were in a row here for Justin Frye to nail this one. And the writing was on the wall just if you looked at the kid. I think he had five or six visits to Tennessee in the past year or so. That didn't look good."

Now that Sanders has committed to Tennessee, where does Ohio State go on the offensive line? If they can't go anywhere else, how do you feel about the 2025 class?

"Where they go is probably to some Ohio project, and they go to the other OSU guys that cover recruiting not named Bill Greene and

try to say, 'He's this rank and we really liked him,' that bull crap won't fly with me. I don't know where they go. They're going to end up with a couple of Ohio kids who are three-star kids that they're going to say they really like but they really don't.

"You have to fight it out with David Sanders and Josh Petty. You'll fight it out until they sign something. Georgia Tech could go 4-8 this year, Tennessee could have a lot of things go wrong this year, and Ohio State could be in the playoffs, so you'll fight it out with both kids. There's just nowhere to go. That's the answer. You're not going to get a David Sanders or a Josh Petty farther down that list.

"Then you look at who they have in that class right now. You have Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290) who I really like. Carter Lowe has a chance to be a really good player. Then you have Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295). I kind of like Jake Cook but he would be a four-guy in a four-man or the four-guy in the five-man class. He isn't David Sanders or Josh Petty. He's an inside guy.

"If you (ignore) the offensive line recruiting then this class is excellent, I mean it's really good. But now you have three classes in a row of sub-par offensive line recruiting. You can't overcome that. You're not able to beat Michigan right now, you're not able to win the Big Ten East right now. There's no way to spin it, especially when you look down the road, what offensive line are you putting out there, next year, the year after? To me it looks pretty bleak.

"I think I tend to go over the top sometimes on the importance of offensive line but maybe not, maybe I don't. When I rank teams I rank teams by head coach No. 1, quarterback No. 2, defense No. 3, and offensive line No. 4. I don't even add in Garrett Wilson, Marvin Harrison, Chris Olave, all of those guys. They're great, but how many playoff games did those guys win at Ohio State? How many playoff games did they play in at Ohio State? Those guys are down the list for me. I put that much importance on the offensive line and they've gotten skunked three classes in a row now.

"I really have to emphasize we are in mid-August right now, so nobody has signed anything. So yeah, you're concerned and borderline panicked, but we might have a different conversation when we get to mid-December. When you're planning on flipping guys, it's a lot easier when they're committed to you and you're just trying to

keep them in the fold. That's a lot easier than trying to flip guys, so this is not good."

This was Justin Frye's third summer recruiting at Ohio State. How do you assess how he has done to this point?

"There are two components to his job, on-field production is one. His first year was really good on the field, but you had all of those NFL guys who maybe me or you could've coached pretty well too. Last year he really needed to coach his butt off. He had new guys, and he had Josh Simmons as a transfer - that's where coaching was really going to matter. And they weren't very good last year. So he's had one good year on the field with a bunch of NFL dudes, last year they needed him to really coach his butt off and make something, but he couldn't.

"This is going to be his third recruiting cycle that is not very good, which isn't looking too good right now. So I think he's in trouble. Jim Tressel never fired assistant coaches, and when I say never I mean never. Ryan Day isn't afraid to fire coaches, not at all. He can also navigate his way around pushing them out the door like he did with former running backs coach Tony Alford. He gave extensions to a bunch of assistant coaches and didn't give Alford an extension. So that was kind of a nudge like, 'We're not really happy with you.' So Justin Frye is on notice. There isn't a doubt about it, he's on notice right now."

At this point, most of Ohio State's top targets are committed. Is there anyone they need to pay close attention to before signing day to make sure they don't flip to another school? Is there anyone the Buckeyes are still trying to flip?

"I don't know of anybody that they're about to lose, to be honest. Vero Beach, Fla., three-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) scares me. When you're still taking visits, that's concerning. I still think Cleveland Shaker Heights five-star safety and Oregon commit Trey McNutt (6-0, 189) is kind of up in the air. I don't care about any commitment he's made. Until he signs with someone, he's up in the air.

"So I think we pretty much know what the class is going to be. Hartline is going to get another receiver. He'll get Mission Viejo (Calif.) four-star Phillip Bell (6-2, 195) maybe. We'll see. I don't see a lot of flips for Ohio State or anybody that is going to flip away from Ohio State. I think we pretty much know what this class is going to be and who they are."

Buckeyes In Search Of Quarterback For 2026

Continued From Page 41

day comes around, he would be just the fourth five-star Ohioan to leave the state in the last 10 years, joining offensive linemen Tommy Kraemer (Notre Dame, 2016) and Jackson Carman (Clemson, 2018), and quarterback Drew Allar (Penn State, 2022).

St. Clair Impresses In Preseason Action

One of Ohio State's top commitments from its 2025 recruiting class, Bellefontaine (Ohio) five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225), is awaiting the start of his senior season of high school football and counting down the days until he can get to Columbus to play for the Buckeyes.

But while he waits, he is already showing why he earned his status as the No. 6-ranked player in the country before the season even begins.

In a preseason scrimmage against

North Union High School, St. Clair was on the field for close to one half of football, and in that limited amount of time threw for four touchdowns on fewer than 10 passes, according to Jeremy Birmingham of Rivals, who was on-site to watch the game.

Since St. Clair committed to Ohio State last year, he has only been shooting up the rankings as a prospect, and deservedly so. He has put on a good amount of muscle and filled out while improving his accuracy and consistency on the field.

OSU Struggling To Land 2026 QB

For head coach Ryan Day, the quarterback position has been one that he excels at both recruiting and coaching. The likes of Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud have gone through the Buckeyes system under his tutelage, and the near future at the position looks bright as well with former five-stars Julian Sayin and Air Noland heading into

their freshman seasons and St. Clair set to sign with Ohio State later this year.

However, the Buckeyes are struggling to land a top quarterback in the 2026 recruiting class, a position where elite talent normally comes off the board very quickly. The top 11 quarterbacks in the class that Ohio State offered so far have already committed to another program and the Buckeyes may be running out of options.

The Buckeyes hosted players like Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star Dia Bell (6-2, 200), Harbor City (Calif.) Narbonne four-star Jaden O'Neal (6-3, 200) and Cocoa, Fla., four-star Brady Hart (6-4, 180) and many more at their camps this June, but each of them has already made the decision to go elsewhere when they reach the next level.

Ohio State lost Bell to Texas, O'Neal to Oklahoma, and Hart to Michigan while also falling in recruiting battles for Frankfort (Ill.) Lincoln-Way East four-star Jonas Williams (6-2, 200), who committed to Oregon, and Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley four-star Faizon Brandon (6-4, 197), who committed to Tennessee.

Ohio State's logjam at quarterback for next season and beyond – Sayin, Noland and St. Clair are all likely to contribute to the team in some capacity in the future – is likely a big reason for the top prospects committing to other schools.

Sayin has already looked impressive in spring ball and during fall camp for the Buckeyes as a freshman, and he will compete throughout the year with Devin Brown for the backup spot behind Will Howard. St. Clair has been so good that Greene compared him to Stroud when BSB talked to him earlier in the year.

"C.J. Stroud walked out the door an obvious NFL high draft choice, and then he backed it up last year with his play," Greene said in April. "Now Tavien comes in, and to me, Tavien is, he's C.J. Stroud. That's who he is to me. He's C.J. when C.J. was in be-

tween his junior and senior years of high school. C.J. going into his senior year was probably nowhere near ranked as high as what Tavien is right now. I would think Tavien's ranking blows C.J.'s away.

"He's a for sure starter at Ohio State one day," Greene added. "Almost as sure as you could be is going to get drafted in the NFL one day unless he falls on his face and everything that we're seeing right now isn't what we think it is. He's got the size, he's got the arm strength, he's smart as heck, he's tough. I mean, there's nothing he doesn't have. The upside on the high end, he's C.J. Stroud and Ohio State would sure take that."

One option for the Buckeyes is to completely skip recruiting the position in the 2026 class, especially if they are confident enough in their younger signal-callers to lead the team through at least the 2028 season, which is a real possibility. If they aren't able to do that, going to the transfer portal is always an option to find a quarterback if the need is more immediate in the future, like they did with Howard this season.

2026 Top Prospects Include OSU In Top Schools

Sticking with the 2026 class, the Buckeyes are still in the race for multiple other prospects at other positions, three of whom put Ohio State in their top five schools in the past month.

Headlining that trio is Baltimore St. Frances Academy five-star defensive end Zion Elee (6-4, 220), who included the Buckeyes in his top five along with Alabama, Georgia, Penn State and Oregon.

Elee is ranked the 19th-best recruit in the country and the No. 3 edge rusher in his class. He was one of many top prospects at Ohio State's camp on June 17 and he looked the part of a five-star recruit while he was there.

Also placing Ohio State in his top five was Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 200). He had the Buckeyes in his five along with Alabama, LSU, Notre Dame and Oregon.

Bradford is currently ranked the No. 16 player in the class of 2026 by the 247Sports composite ranking and he is the No. 1 overall safety in the class.

The Buckeyes have done well in the 2025 class in both the secondary and on the defensive line, two positions that have been a big part of their current standing as the No. 1 overall class. So if they are able to continue that momentum, there is a real possibility they could land both Elee and Bradford when the time comes for them to commit.

However, one position they are still trying to improve on the recruiting side is the offensive line. One player who could help that turnaround in the next recruiting cycle is Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280), who has Ohio State in his top seven schools.

The Buckeyes are among Alabama, Clemson, Florida State, Michigan State, Missouri and Oklahoma on his list. Riley told 247Sports that he plans to visit Michigan State on Sept. 14 and Ohio State when they host either Iowa or Nebraska this season.

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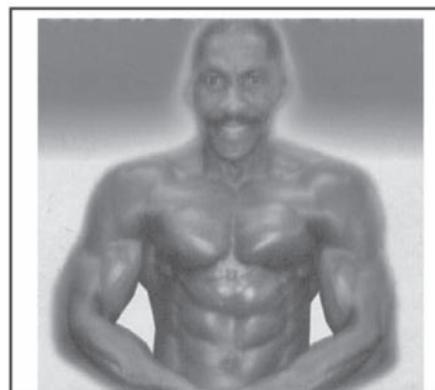
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A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

When Cris Carter was recruited by Ohio State, it was reported that he would come to Columbus because he had been assured by coach Earle Bruce and his staff that he was being recruited to play wide receiver on offense.

Interestingly, in the annual Ohio North-South All-Star game, played in Massillon July 20, Carter caught just one pass for six yards. On the other side of the line of scrimmage, the 6-3, 184-pounder, who set a Middletown record with 10 interceptions the previous season during his only full year on defense, broke up several passes and showed he was also able to hit hard.

However, there was no need to look for the brother of NBA veteran Butch Carter in OSU's defensive backfield. He still insisted his future was on offense.

"They have two graduating receivers, but they have a handful of defensive backs returning – younger guys," he said of the Buckeyes. "Plus, I like to play offense better."

Carter went so far as to say that even if it looked like defense would be a faster route to starting time, he would still prefer to play offense.

35 Years Ago — 1989

It was another great season for Ohio high school football talent and college recruiters from all over the nation had the chance to find plenty of talent on the state's gridirons in the fall.

According to Joe Wilson of Ohio Prep Report, there were some extremely gifted players all over the state, especially at the skill positions.

"Ohio has some strong returning quarterbacks," Wilson said, "along with some of the premier running backs in the country and another good crop of linemen."

Leading the parade of quarterbacks was Joe Pickens (6-3, 210, 4.8 seconds in the 40-yard dash) from Cleveland St. Ignatius. He passed for over 2,200 yards and 13 touchdowns last season while leading the Wildcats to their first state championship.

Cincinnati Princeton was runner-up to St. Ignatius and returning for the Vikings was Johnny Mattress (6-1, 215, 4.6). Mattress passed for over 2,300 yards and rushed for another 650 yards.

30 Years Ago — 1994

John Cooper was fond of saying that you are only as good as your last game, and the same held true in recruiting. Last year's effort by the Buckeyes was an excellent one, headed by wide receiver Dee Miller, running back Pepe Pearson and offensive linemen Orlando Pace and Eric Gohlstein, but the program needed to continue to recruit just as well if it wanted to continue to compete for Big Ten championships.

The previous spring, recruiting coordinator Larry Petroff indicated that OSU might sign only about 15 players this year to help avoid problems with the NCAA's shrinking scholarship levels. But some attrition on the team had led him to rethink that number. Petroff said the Buckeyes may have been able to sign as many as 20 or 21 new players.

As he began to map out the year's recruiting strategy, it was no secret that Petroff would direct the program's attention once again to Ohio, a traditional hotbed for high school talent. The year before, the Buckeyes were able to land a number of outstanding Ohioans including Miller, Pearson, Pace, Gohlstein, defensive backs

Che Bryant and Damon Moore, linemen Brooks Burris and Calvin Brown, quarterback Steve Baird, running back Jermon Jackson, tight end John Lumpkin and linebacker Jerry Rudzinski.

25 Years Ago — 1999

In the six weeks since the last edition of BSB, Ohio State added a pair of verbal commitments for 2000, raising that class total to 10 heading into the season.

Stone Mountain, Ga., wide receiver Corey Adams became OSU's ninth commitment on July 7, while Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne defensive back Willie Allen followed suit Aug. 11.

Here was a look at OSU's two latest commitments:

Adams (6-2, 220, 4.46) was actually a transfer from Ft. Myers, Fla., where he caught 21 passes – seven for touchdowns – as a junior.

OSU assistant coach Bill Conley's spring visit to Stone Mountain (Ga) High School had paid tremendous dividends: Adams joined new teammate Jamal Muhammad, a linebacker, in issuing an early verbal to the Buckeyes.

Allen (6-2, 175, 4.33) was not among Ohio's top-rated prospects, but the OSU coaches had a good book on him, having seen him in camp the last three years.

20 Years Ago — 2004

He had heard it before, but when Brian Hartline was told by Dustin Fox that he undoubtedly had the ability to play for Ohio State, it was all he needed to hear.

Hartline, a receiver entering his senior season at Canton (Ohio) GlenOak High School, the same school that produced Fox, attended OSU's senior advanced camp in late June.

Fox spent some time with Hartline that weekend, and Hartline had the opportunity to go one-on-one with Fox, considered a candidate for postseason honors at cornerback for the Buckeyes.

Hartline's younger brother, Mike, the quarterback at GlenOak and one of the top junior QB prospects in the country, was on hand to throw for the drill.

A decent amount of the time, he was able to connect with his brother.

"Dustin's an amazing athlete, and when I was able to go up against him – and in all fairness, I think I did pretty decent – he reassured me how I could play at Ohio State," Hartline said.

15 Years Ago — 2009

Although it would have taken a strong finish for Ohio State to earn top billing among the 2010 recruiting classes in the Big Ten, the Buckeyes took three big steps forward during the summer months.

After entering July with just eight verbal commitments, the Buckeyes landed three more members to a recruiting class that figured to max out around 17 players on National Signing Day in February. Two of the three commitments were viewed as OSU leans, but one commitment came as a surprise.

On July 29, four-star wide receiver prospect James Louis from Delray Beach (Fla.) Atlantic issued his commitment to Ohio State. Thought to be favoring home state Florida, the nation's No. 24 wide receiver prospect as ranked by Scout.com apparently soured on the Gators and decided to join the Buckeyes instead.

"I just felt like that was the right place to be," Louis told BSB.

10 Years Ago — 2014

While recruiting had become an accelerated process at all positions in recent years, that was especially true at quarterback. One big prospect's early commitment had at times triggered a chain reaction of commitments from other prospects who looked to lock up their place in a class before it got too late.

Ohio State had not been particularly adept at that game under Meyer, as the Buckeyes had several high-profile misses in the 2014 class, and its 2015 class had also seen some prospects slip away.

However, a group of incoming juniors all had the Buckeyes near the top of their lists, and unlike previous years, in which Ohio State got to several battles too late in the game, the 2016 class could come down to which prospect beat out the others and committed to the Buckeyes first.

Potomac (Md.) Bullis four-star quarterback Dwayne Haskins (6-2, 180) was considered to be the likeliest Ohio State commit in the class, and he was ranked No. 11 in the country at his position. He would be the highest-rated prospect at his position to give a verbal pledge to OSU since Braxton Miller in 2011.

Five Years Ago — 2019

Ohio State landed a commitment from one of the nation's top-rated defensive backs on July 16 when Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic four-star safety Lathan Ransom pledged his services to the Buckeyes on his 17th birthday.

The 6-1, 193-pound Ransom was considered the fourth-best safety and No. 77 overall prospect in the class of 2020. He recorded 82 total tackles, eight pass breakups and six interceptions to lead the Lancers to the state championship game the past fall. He picked Ohio State over LSU, Notre Dame, Oklahoma and Texas.

Jeff Hafley extended a scholarship offer to Ransom in January, and the prospect made his first trip to Columbus for an unofficial visit just a few weeks later. The Buckeyes clearly made an impression that weekend, too, and he subsequently listed the program among his top five schools.

Both the Fighting Irish and Longhorns were considered the favorites in Ransom's recruitment at various points in time, with the former sharing a number of similarities with his Catholic high school and the latter ultimately landing his teammate, five-star running back Bijan Robinson.

One Year Ago — 2023

It was a hot summer in Columbus and even hotter on the recruiting trail, with Ohio State landing 17 stars worth of prospects since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press.

The most high profile was Buford, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265), who announced his pledge to Ohio State on Aug. 22. Houston was the No. 23 overall prospect and the fourth-ranked defensive lineman in the class, and he was also the fourth-best prospect in the Buckeyes' recruiting class.

"Ohio State's just been there," Houston said after committing. "I knew hanging out with Jack Sawyer and J.T. (Tuimoloua) just the whole weekend (of June 16-18). They're fun, but when they are working, they're working. I told (the Ohio State coaches) when I was on the visit that it was going to be Ohio State for sure."

His versatility on the offensive line makes him an important target for Ohio State moving forward. He has the ability to play anywhere on the line, and showed that he can also move to either side, playing both left and right tackle in his freshman and sophomore years in high school.

Currently in the 2026 class, Ohio State only has one commitment, but it is a big one, with Santa Ana, Calif., five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) remaining committed to Day and the Buckeyes after pledging his services on July 28 of last year.

Eight OSU Commits Preseason All-Americans

As football season quickly approaches, eight of Ohio State's current commitments were listed on MaxPreps' 2024 Preseason All-American team that was released in early August. Four of them received first-team honors and four were named to the second team.

The Buckeye commits on the first team were Henry, Sanchez, Offord and McKin-

ney, Texas, five-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 215).

The four recognized as preseason second-team All-Americans were Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210), Delane, Grady and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star wide receiver Quincy Porter (6-3, 190).

Bell To Commit On Aug. 31

One position that the Buckeyes always seem to have under control in the past few years is wide receiver, thanks to wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline, who has been one of the better position recruiters in the entire country.

Hartline looks to add to that résumé when Mission Viejo, Calif., four-star wide receiver Phillip Bell (6-2, 195) announces his commitment on Aug. 31. Bell said he already knows where he will be committing to, but he is waiting until then to make his decision public.

"My mind is made up," Bell told On3.

"The main things for me throughout my whole recruitment stayed the same. They were development, a place to know I can be happy at every day and the place I feel can help me get to where I want to be. That is what my decision came down to."

He is currently the No. 184 prospect in the country, the No. 19 overall wide receiver and the 16th-best player in the state of California.

Other schools in the mix along with Ohio State are Georgia, Penn State, USC and Washington, each being schools that he took official visits to in June, although the Trojans are thought to be the favorite by some in the know.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Roswell (Ga.) Fellowship Christian School four-star offensive tackle Josh Petty (6-5, 265) committed to Georgia Tech on Aug. 12. Ohio State offered Petty, but never pursued him very hard since he seemed set on the Yellow Jackets.

- Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star

wide receiver Jaime Ffrench (6-1, 185) left the Buckeyes off of his top four when he announced it on Aug. 9. He is set to commit on Aug. 30, and will choose between LSU, Tennessee, Texas and Miami (Fla.).

- Newport News (Va.) Warwick four-star safety Messiah Delhomme (6-1, 196) committed to Maryland on Aug. 10. The Buckeyes were involved in his recruitment until close to the end, but he was expected to land elsewhere, ending up with the Terrapins.

- Atlanta Douglass four-star cornerback Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 185) committed to Georgia on Aug. 10. He was originally the Buckeyes' first 2025 commitment before St. Clair, but decommitted on July 29, 2023.

For the latest on Ohio State football recruiting, including upcoming summer camp sessions in June, be sure to visit BuckeyeSports.com, available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Bucks Finalize Roster, Add Glover, Njegovan

Ohio State's 2024-25 roster is complete, with the team announcing on July 30 the additions of former Kansas State guard Ques Glover and Croatian center Ivan Njegovan. Glover enters Columbus as a veteran sixth-year senior transfer who has played for three other Division I programs, while the 7-1 Njegovan joins the team as a 19-year-old true freshman with several years of professional basketball experience in Europe.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

"I'm excited for both Ques and Ivan as I think they are both great additions to our program," said head coach Jake Diebler. "Ques is a veteran guard that has played at a high level in the collegiate game. Adding his experience and playmaking strengthens an already talented backcourt. Ivan is a good young big man with high-level international experience. His skill and size will add to our depth in the front court."

Glover – who joins the team as a non-scholarship player but will be compensated through NIL deals – will provide some much-needed backcourt depth for an Ohio State team that found itself searching for extra ball-handlers following the season-ending knee injury of Taison Chatman in June.

Glover had a stint with BYU that was cut short after a few practices due to an NIL issue, and he missed the entire 2023-24 season with Kansas State because of a series of knee injuries. But in 99 games (46 starts) at Florida and Samford, he averaged 10.3 points, 1.8 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game while shooting 46.1 percent from the field, 30.6 percent from three and 78.2 percent from the free-throw line.

Glover has battled injuries throughout the last two seasons, but he has shown in the past that he could serve as a reliable and efficient scorer. He was one of the top scorers in the Southern Conference while at Samford from 2021-23, averaging a career-high 19.2 points per game on 46.8 percent shooting along with 2.8 rebounds, 4.4 assists and 1.2 steals per contest as a first-team all-conference guard in 2021-22 then notching another 14.7 points on 48.0 percent shooting along with 2.5 rebounds and 2.1 assists per game in 2022-23 despite missing nearly two months with a meniscus injury.

Njegovan, meanwhile, adds some international flavor to an already talented Ohio State frontcourt that has reloaded following the transfer departures of centers Zed Key and Felix Okpara. The Zadar, Croatia, native is the first international player to join the Buckeyes since Amadeo Della Valle (2012-14) and spent the last three seasons in the Adriatic Basketball Association and Croatian Premier Leagues, including this past season with KK Bosco of Favbet Prmijer Liga, the top league in Croatian professional basketball.

Njegovan was one of KK Bosco's top interior performers last season, recording team-highs in rebounds (4.8) and blocks



SONNY BROCKWAY

ON BOARD — Jake Diebler heads into his first full season as men's basketball coach following the firing of Chris Holtmann on Feb. 14, but he's not the only new face in the program as he welcomes several coaching additions as well as numerous incoming freshmen and transfers.

(1.6) while totaling 8.2 points per game and shooting 53.3 percent from the field and 31.3 percent from three. His most notable experience, however, may have come this summer, when he competed for the Croatian National Team in the U20 European Championships, averaging 6.1 points, 6.6 rebounds, 1.1 assists and 1.1 blocks in 16.7 minutes and seven games.

Glover will likely compete for playing time in the backcourt with probable starting guards Bruce Thornton and Meechie Johnson, while San Diego transfer wing Micah Parrish, guard/forward Evan Mahaffey and true freshmen Juni Mobley Jr. and Colin White also compete for playing time. Njegovan, meanwhile, will battle with former McDonald's All-American big men Aaron Bradshaw and Sean Stewart along with returning forwards Devin Royal, Kalen Etzler and Austin Parks.

Non-Con Schedule Also Complete

Ohio State also solidified next season's nonconference schedule since BSB last went to press, an 11-game schedule that features five matchups against power conference opponents.

The Buckeyes will play four of their five power conference games against the SEC, starting with one of the conference's most recent additions in Texas. Ohio State will open its season against the Longhorns on Nov. 4 at Las Vegas's T-Mobile Arena in what will be just the third all-time meeting between the two programs. Texas, led by

second-year head coach Rodney Terry, is coming off a 21-13 season and its second straight NCAA Tournament appearance.

Also on the Buckeyes' schedule from the SEC is Texas A&M, where the team will travel on Nov. 15, followed by neutral-site contests with Auburn on Dec. 14 at Atlanta's State Farm Arena and Kentucky on Dec. 21 in Madison Square Garden.

The Buckeyes' game against Kentucky – part of the annual CBS Sports Classic that also features UCLA and North Carolina – is perhaps the most intriguing matchup of the four.

In addition to the game being played at one of the most renowned basketball arenas in America, both Ohio State and Kentucky will be led this season by first-year head coaches Diebler and Mark Pope, who took over for longtime Wildcats head coach and current Arkansas leader John Calipari in April. The game will also be a reunion for Bradshaw, who played limited minutes in his first collegiate season with Kentucky.

Ohio State's matchup with Auburn, however, may pose the greatest challenge. The Tigers, led by 11th-year head coach Bruce Pearl, are coming off their third straight season of 20 or more wins, going 27-8 in 2023-24 on their way to a second-place regular-season finish in the conference and an SEC tournament championship, the program's first since 2018-19.

Auburn returns last season's leading scorer and first-team All-SEC forward/center Johni Broome and adds five-star guard Tahaad Pettiford and Furman transfer

guard JP Pegues.

Ohio State's only non-SEC and power conference opponent is Pittsburgh, which is also coming off its third straight season of 20 or more wins, going 22-11 overall and 12-8 in the ACC in 2023-24.

The Buckeyes will also play some formidable mid-major opponents, headlined by a home contest against Indiana State on Dec. 29 to close out the nonconference slate. The Sycamores are coming off a spectacular 32-7 campaign – the second-best season in program history – but they enter the season under new leadership, with former Sycamores assistant Matthew Grayes taking over for Josh Schertz, who left for St. Louis this offseason along with star center Robbie Avila.

Also on Ohio State's nonconference schedule are home games against Youngstown State on Nov. 11, Evansville on Nov. 19, Campbell on Nov. 22, Green Bay on Nov. 25 and Valparaiso on Dec. 17. Green Bay and Valparaiso offer arguably the most storylines of the four schools, because the Phoenix are now led by longtime sports media personality and first-year head coach Doug Gottlieb, while the Beacons are the alma mater of Diebler, who both played and coached at the school in the late 2000s-early 2010s.

The 11 nonconference games add to a 20-game Big Ten schedule for Ohio State that has the Buckeyes playing Indiana, Maryland and Nebraska twice; Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Northwestern, Oregon, Rutgers and Washington once at home; and Purdue, Illinois, Minnesota, Penn State, UCLA, USC and Wisconsin once on the road.

Dates, tip-off times and TV networks for each of these games will be announced at a later date.

Carmen's Crew Wins Second TBT Championship

Ohio State's alumni team Carmen's Crew won its second The Basketball Tournament championship this summer, rattling off six straight convincing victories as a No. 3 seed to secure the \$1 million winner-take-all prize.

The win gave the team its first title since the 2019 season, when they won with an entirely different roster and team name. It also made them just the second team in TBT's 11-year history to win the title multiple times, joining Overseas Elite, who won the tournament four times in a row from 2015-18.

Carmen's Crew's championship was in large part led by the efforts of former two-time All-America forward Jared Sullinger, who emerged as the unquestioned leader of the team and took home tournament MVP despite being added to the roster just four days before their first-round game.

Sullinger and Carmen's Crew began their TBT run with a bang, using a 21-0 second-quarter run to throttle the No. 6 seed Purple Hearts 93-58 on July 20, their largest margin of victory in the team's eight-year existence. Sullinger had nine points on 4-of-6 shooting, and former Ohio State forwards Andre and Kaleb Wesson (2016-20) – two of five former Buckeyes on the roster – each scored a team-high 12 points and added

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Dorian Jones	G	6-4	160	★★★★	Richmond Heights, Ohio

nine combined rebounds.

Carmen's Crew had its first test of the tournament two days later in the second round against No. 2 seed and Dayton's alumni team Red Scare, which had the benefit of playing in front of its home fans at UD Arena. Carmen's Crew found itself down 41-39 with 1:53 left in the third quarter, but a trio of three-pointers and an 11-2 run allowed the team to take a 52-41 lead into the fourth period and eventually secure a 71-60 win.

Carmen's Crew faced an even stiffer challenge in the third round on July 24, facing off against No. 1 seed and defending TBT champion Heartfire, led by TBT's all-time leading scorer Marcus Hall.

Hall and Heartfire gave the Ohio State alumni team a scare, bouncing back from an early 17-point deficit to take their first lead of the game, 64-



Jared Sullinger

63, with 33 seconds left until the untimed final period. But Carmen's Crew, like many times in the tournament, finished strong, scoring 11 of the game's final 17 points to hold on for a 74-70 upset victory.

The quarterfinals were a much different story for Carmen's Crew, delivering its most dominant outing of the entire tournament against No. 7 seed Takeover BC. Each of Carmen's Crew's 11 active players scored at least a point, while they made 16 threes – 11 coming in the first half alone – and the team held its opponent to just 38.6 percent shooting, all of which helped the team build a lead that ballooned to as high as 40 and eventually cruise to a 90-74 win.

The convincing victory allowed Carmen's Crew to take on another juggernaut in the semifinal round on Aug. 2 in No. 2 seed and Kentucky alumni team La Familia, who featured former All-SEC Wildcats Eric Bledsoe, Aaron and Andrew Harrison and Willie Cauley-Stein.

La Familia's star power paled in comparison to the efforts of the former All-American Sullinger, however, who put together a masterful 16-point, seven-rebound and three-assist performance to guide Carmen's Crew to a 76-70 upset win.

The alumni team saw its double-digit second-half lead evaporate as La Familia pulled within two, 70-68, following an Andrew Harrison layup in the extra Elam Ending period. But a Sullinger jump shot followed by back-to-back three-pointers from guards Desonta Bradford and Jamel Morris allowed them to escape with a win and advance to the finals.

Carmen's Crew encountered one final hurdle in the championship game held on Aug. 4 against No. 2 seed and Houston alumni team Forever Cougs.

The two teams were stuck in a back-and-forth battle to start before the Buckeye alumni squad created some separation in the second half, turning a 36-34 lead into a 48-38 advantage midway through the third quarter and then maintaining a 10-point lead to start the fourth.

Forever Cougs did not go away without a fight, though, cutting the deficit to as low as 60-56 before the untimed final period and trailing 67-65 after an extended Carmen's Crew drought with the Elam Ending score set at 69.

But with the game in the balance, Carmen's Crew turned to the player who led them to that exact moment in Sullinger, who set up in the paint, evaded a double-team and laid in a soft midrange jump shot to win his team the championship 69-65 and the \$1 million prize.

Sullinger finished the game with a tournament-high 18 points, eight rebounds, one assist and one block, putting a stamp on another successful TBT run for both him and Carmen's Crew.

"It feels amazing," Sullinger said after the game when asked how it felt to win the title. "Obviously, it's a little different from 2019. I didn't sweat. I didn't do much. This one is a little different. I have to ice up. But it's a good celebration."

"Family," Diebler's Trust Drew New Transfers To OSU

Since assuming head-coaching duties in February, Diebler has instilled a culture built on cohesiveness and togetherness at Ohio State, a development that helped the Buckeyes finish the 2023-24 season strong while also earning the former interim leader the full-time job in March.

Diebler's emphasis on family – something that he knows well after he and his wife, Jordyn, welcomed their fourth child, Julien, into the family on July 2 – also helped convince some of Ohio State's most heralded offseason portal additions to join the program this spring.

Speaking with the media in July for the first time since joining the Buckeyes, new transfers Bradshaw, Parrish and Stewart all pointed to the family atmosphere that was formed under Diebler as a significant factor in their decision to come to Ohio State.

Bradshaw, the former five-star prospect out of Roselle (N.J.) Catholic, said that Diebler's culture of togetherness was impossible to ignore throughout the transfer process, becoming something that the 7-1 center wanted to be a part of after a difficult first year playing for Calipari at Kentucky.

"It was mainly a family thing with me," Bradshaw said. "I'm not going to lie. Coach Diebler has built a family around this program in the short time that he has been here. Just him doing that and showing that he cares about his players, that's all I really ask for in a coach. So where else would I want to go?"

Parrish, who joined his third team in his five-year collegiate career this offseason, echoed a similar sentiment. While the former San Diego State wing said that winning was an important factor during his transfer recruitment – something he thinks can be accomplished at Ohio State – his decision to commit to the Buckeyes ultimately came down to the unwavering belief and commitment Diebler showed to him throughout the spring.

"For me, it was the family atmosphere,"

Parrish said. "I feel like he created a family vibe for me early. That's big for me. And he also believed in me. He believed that I'm a pro and I believe myself that I'm a pro."

"With those two (factors), I just knew I couldn't pass it up. We were on the phone, FaceTime all the time, text messages back and forth. I didn't even take an official visit here before I committed. That's how much I believed in him and believed in the team."

Belief was a word that also came up for Stewart when asked about his decision to come to Ohio State. The former Duke forward had already established a strong bond during high school with Diebler, who recruited Stewart out of Montverde (Fla.) Academy and kept in constant communication with the McDonald's All-American.

It was a pre-existing relationship that both Stewart and his family valued, and one that he thought only strengthened when he entered the transfer portal this spring, an element that put Diebler and the Buckeyes ahead of other suitors.

"Diebler, when I was in high school, he called, texted me every day," Stewart said on July 19. "He was at my games in Orlando. So just having that relationship with him already, it kind of put him over the top of everybody. I really trust him. He trusts me."

"I feel like I'm really able to grow here," he added. "Diebler and his staff really trust me, my teammates trust me to not make mistakes, shoot the ball, really expand my game. So I'm really excited to be here."

Other Notes and Tidbits

- Ohio State remained in the race for

some top-level 2025 recruits since BSB last went to press. The Buckeyes landed in the top eight for both Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Academy five-star power forward Nike Bundalo (6-11, 215) and Huntington (WV.) Prep five-star combo guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195), whom Ohio State will host on official visits on Sept. 21-22 and Aug. 30, respectively. They were also one of six schools still in play for Glen Head (N.Y.) Long Island Lutheran four-star shooting guard Kiyan Anthony (6-5, 185), the son of NBA legend and 10-time All-Star Carmelo Anthony.

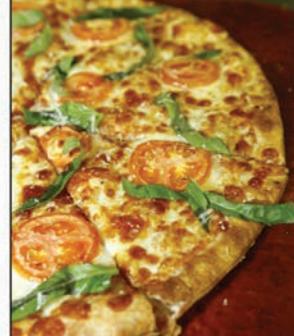
- According to The Columbus Dispatch, former Buckeye head coach Chris Holtmann will receive more than \$8.6 million in buyout money from Ohio State, an amount that will be paid out in monthly installments through June 30, 2028. The payments are reduced by \$125,000 each month because Holtmann was hired as head coach of DePaul in March, saving Ohio State \$6,375,000 over the next four years.

- Several former professional Buckeyes found new homes since BSB last went to print. Forward E.J. Liddell was traded from the New Orleans Pelicans to the Atlanta Hawks on June 28 as part of a deal that sent NBA All-Star guard Dejounte Murray to New Orleans; forward Keita Bates-Diop was traded from the Brooklyn Nets to the New York Knicks on July 6 in a deal that shipped star wing Mikal Bridges to New York; and guard Duane Washington Jr. signed a contract with the Serbian professional team KK Partizan of the Adriatic Basketball Association after leading the Knicks' Summer League team in scoring at 14.8 points per game.










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Notice of Allegations Draft Retrieved By ESPN

According to a notice of allegations draft obtained by ESPN, first-year head coach Sherrone Moore, along with six other Michigan staffers from the 2023 season, broke NCAA rules.

According to ESPN's Dan Murphy and Pete Thamel, the draft revealed Moore deleted 52 text messages sent to Connor Stalions on the day news broke of the alleged sign-stealing operation in October 2023.

BIG TEN NOTES Bobby Gorbett

The sign-stealing operation was allegedly centered around Stalions, a former recruiting analyst, who was accused of attending future opponents' games, which is prohibited by the NCAA. According to the draft, Stalions attended at least 13 opponents' games on at least 58 occasions. It also said that Stalions directed others to scout opponents' games, including one opponent in 2022 that was allegedly scouted seven different times.

The draft states that Michigan, which had previously been under investigation for recruiting violations during the COVID dead period in 2020, is facing a Level 1 violation, the most extreme that a school can face, for its "pattern of noncompliance within the football program."

Moore, who along with four others already reached a resolution with the NCAA in April regarding the recruiting violations, could be considered a potential "repeat violator" by the NCAA.

In an Aug. 13 press conference, Moore commented on the notice of allegations.

"We're cooperating with the NCAA fully," Moore said. "We have in the past, we will in the future, and will continue to do that. I'll just say this, is that I look forward to (the texts) being released."

Four former Michigan staffers also reportedly committed Level 1 violations including former head coach Jim Harbaugh, former assistant director of player personnel Denard Robinson, former linebackers coach Chris Partridge, and Stalions.

For Harbaugh, who has since moved on to take the Los Angeles Chargers' head coaching position, the Level 1 violation likely won't have any impact on his coaching career now that he is in the NFL. But should he decide to return to the college ranks, he already faces a four-year show-cause penalty due to the recruiting violations, and more could be added onto that because of the sign-stealing scandal.

The draft reportedly stated that Harbaugh failed to actively look for or evaluate "red flags" when it came to the sign-stealing scandal that took place over multiple seasons.

Stalions, who resigned early in November of 2023, was accused of handing a play sheet containing a future opponents' signs to a player in October 2023 which he asked the player to take to a team intern's house until he could later retrieve it.

Stalions, who recently accepted a position with Detroit Mumford High School to become the team's next defensive coordinator, was also accused of removing team hard drives from Michigan football offices. He also reportedly refused to let Michigan review his phone.

Murphy and Thamel wrote that the NCAA gathered evidence showing Stalions used a disguise, coaching gear and a bench pass to enter the Central Michigan sideline during the team's opening game against Michigan State in 2023. The Wolverines had the Spartans on the schedule in October, a game they won 49-0. The draft stated that Stalions's conduct "seriously undermined or threatened the integrity of the NCAA collegiate model."

Stalions is set to tell his side of the story in an episode of a Netflix documentary series titled "Untold." The episode he is featured in will be available to watch on Aug. 27.

Former Michigan defensive coordinator

Jesse Minter and former co-defensive coordinator Steve Clinkscale were also accused of recruiting violations separate from the sign-stealing scandal, according to the notice.

Clinkscale and Minter face Level 2 violations for sending text messages to high school sophomores.

Partridge, a former Michigan defensive coach, is accused of pressuring a player to lie or mislead the NCAA to protect the Michigan coaching staff during the NCAA's probe into the Stalions scheme.

Partridge is one of three Michigan coaches to be accused of providing impermissible benefits to Michigan recruits which included paying for a recruit's meal or providing recruits with team gear, along with Robinson and Clinkscale.

Clinkscale, who is now with the Los Angeles Chargers as a defensive backs coach, is accused of helping a recruit get verified on Instagram along with sending a \$100 check to a charity golf event run by a recruit's father.

Harbaugh Receives Four-Year Show Cause Order

The NCAA announced a four-year show cause order given to Harbaugh on Aug. 7 regarding the program's COVID-19 recruiting violations case, effectively banning him from college football until 2028. The decision is separate from that of the ongoing investigation into the alleged sign-stealing operation.

Additionally, should Harbaugh ever return to the sport from being Chargers head coach, he would be dealt a one-year suspension.

According to the 48-page decision from the NCAA, Harbaugh met with two prospects and their fathers at a diner during the COVID-19 dead period, an act that the NCAA deemed a Level 2 violation, according to the decision.

Harbaugh was also issued a Level 1 violation for denying having met with the prospects.

"By denying his conduct, which was plainly supported by the record, Harbaugh violated NCAA ethical conduct legislation and thereby amplified the severity of his case," the NCAA said in its decision.

"Institutional staff members have an obligation to cooperate, tell the truth and further the mission of the membership's infraction process. Harbaugh failed to meet this obligation and thereby engaged in unethical conduct, a Level 1 violation."

Harbaugh signed a five-year, \$16 million deal with the Chargers in January after leading Michigan to its first national title in 27 years, making him the third-highest paid coach in the NFL behind Andy Reid of the Kansas City Chiefs (\$25 million) and Sean

Payton of the Denver Broncos (\$18 million).

The Chargers coach, who is under contract until 2029, one year after the four-year show-cause ends, provided little comment when asked about the penalty on Aug. 8.

"I'm stopping the engagement there with commenting," Harbaugh said. "My only hope is that one day college athletics will be about what's best for the young men and women who participate. That's really all I have to say about it."

Harbaugh No Longer U-M's Honorary Captain

Despite the four-year show-cause penalty, Harbaugh was in line to return to Michigan Stadium for the program's home opener against Fresno State on Aug. 31, where he was reportedly supposed to serve as the team's honorary captain.

This news was delivered by Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel, who revealed during an appearance on the "1 Star Recruits" podcast on Aug. 7 that Harbaugh would be an honorary captain.

"I look forward to seeing him in (August)," Manuel said. "He's going to be an honorary captain for our first game. I look forward to having him back here in Ann Arbor for that game."

Although the timing may have seemed peculiar since Harbaugh was revealed as an honorary captain around the time of the NCAA ruling, Moore said it was something that had been planned months prior to the ruling.

"I actually talked to (Harbaugh) yesterday, and really what went into the decision is – we made that decision in March, I think it was January or February actually – so it was really to honor him and what he's done for Michigan," Moore said. "He came back for nine years and took us to where we are now, so it was really to honor him and nothing besides that."

The former Wolverines coach soon changed course and declined the invite, however, as – according to Moore – Harbaugh told his former assistant in a phone call that he wanted to stay with the Chargers to prepare for their Week 1 game against the Oakland Raiders on Sept. 8.

"Yesterday he called me, he told me he didn't feel he could leave his team in true Coach Harbaugh fashion and wanted to be in the foxhole with his team and not wanting to make it look like he was taking a deep long bow, so he's not going to make it for the game," Moore said on Aug. 13.

Harbaugh will be replaced by his parents, Jack and Jackie Harbaugh, as honorary captains. Jack Harbaugh briefly served as an as-



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sistant coach with the team during his son's three-game suspension at the beginning of 2023.

Newcomers Officially Join Big Ten

The long-awaited arrival of West Coast teams Oregon, Washington, UCLA and USC is over. The four former Pac-12 schools were officially added to the Big Ten on Aug. 2.

The additions to the conference make the Big Ten tied for the most populated Division-I conference in the country with 18 teams, matched only by the ACC. Other Power Four conferences, the SEC and Big 12, sit at 16 teams following the latest wave of conference realignment.

A former Power Five conference, the Pac-12 was reduced to just two teams with Washington State and Oregon State not finding a new home yet. They have, however, struck a deal with the Mountain West conference to schedule three home games and three away games against teams from the conference.

B1G Championship To Remain In Indy

Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti announced on July 23 that the Big Ten Championship Game will remain in Indianapolis at Lucas Oil Stadium through 2028.

The Big Ten Championship Game has been hosted at the home of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts every year since the first game was played in 2011.

While the location of the Big Ten Championship Game remains the same, its coverage and format of team selection will undergo

some changes. Since 2011, Fox has hosted every Big Ten title game, but a rotation between NBC, CBS and Fox will start in 2024.

Also important in deciding the two top teams for the event, the Big Ten is no longer divided into divisions after the expansion to 18 teams and will therefore include the two teams with the best record in the conference, rather than the best teams from each division.

B1G Tourney Venues Released

The destinations of the Big Ten men's and women's basketball tournaments were revealed on July 31, setting Indianapolis as the host for the men's and women's tournaments in 2025.

The women's tournament will also be hosted by Indianapolis in 2026 before moving out West to Las Vegas in 2027 and will be held in Detroit one year later in 2028.

On the men's side, the tournament will go to Chicago in 2026, before returning to Indianapolis in 2027 and finally being played in Las Vegas in 2028.

With a couple of exceptions in New York and Washington, D.C., the Big Ten tournament has primarily been hosted in the Midwest since the event began.

The 2027 women's basketball tournament in Las Vegas will be the first tournament to be played outside of the Midwest in the nearly 30-year history of the tournament.

Rutgers AD Steps Down

Rutgers athletic director Patrick Hobbs resigned from his post on Aug. 15 after a

nine-year stint with the program.

In the interim, Hobbs will be replaced by Ryan Pisarri, former deputy athletic director for competitive excellence and chief of staff.

Hobbs cited health concerns as the reason for his resignation, according to a news brief from Rutgers University.

During his nine-year tenure with the Scarlet Knights, Hobbs notably hired and subsequently fired former head football coach Chris Ash after a brief unsuccessful three-year tenure. However, Hobbs also hired head basketball coach Steve Pikiell, who went on to lead Rutgers to a win in the 2021 NCAA Tournament, the first time the Knights won a game in the event in 38 years.

Hobbs brought current Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano back to the program in 2019 after he coached the team from 2001-11. Schiano trusts the school's ability to stay together following Hobbs' departure.

"I have a unique experience at Rutgers," Schiano said. "When we started it really wasn't very good. Not just the record, the facilities. Everything was awful. So when you go through that, you kind of build experiences, you build relationships and then I come back out of nowhere nine years later, but there were still a lot of the same people in place. So I think the combination of my relationships and the new relationships Pat had formed, it was good. It was good for football. It was good for athletics.

"We're going to continue going in that direction. I know Ryan Pisarri was named interim athletic director," Schiano said. "Ryan is a football guy. He's an athletics guy. He's a Rutgers guy. He's a New Jersey guy. I know

he'll bust his rear end to make sure we keep it on track and all of the senior leadership in the athletic department will work very hard to make sure there's nothing to worry about. We're going to make sure this thing keeps moving forward."

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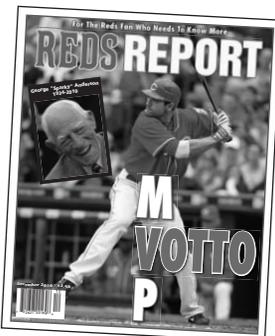
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New Faces But Expectations Stay the Same

Every season in the competitive world of college football brings excitement and lofty expectations. Along with the excitement and pageantry also comes an extreme amount of pressure – pressure on the players and the coaching staff, especially the head football coach. Ryan Day enters his sixth season as head coach of the Buckeyes and has done an outstanding job of putting a top-notch Division I football team on the field each season.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

As a matter of fact, under Day, Ohio State has played in a postseason bowl game every year. More often than not, his teams are part of the college playoff picture. He has kept up the strong tradition of bringing in top quality recruits each year and has mastered the art of working the transfer portal system to his advantage.

As head coach of the Ohio State Buckeyes, Day has a 39-3 Big Ten record, over a 90 percent in-conference winning percentage. The problem is that all three of the losses have been to archrival Michigan, including three losses in a row. No one with the record of Day should have to worry about job security, and he probably doesn't either.

The Maize and Blue have seemed more physical and have made the plays they had to down the stretch in order to win. Buckeye fans expect the Buckeyes to win every game, every year, but in reality, the game that is of most importance is that regular-season finale, whether in Ann Arbor or Columbus.

Adding to the pressure on Day is the high praise the sports media and some former head coaches have given the Buckeyes due to the high talent level of this year's squad. Coach Day has restructured his staff, which

is one of the highest paid in college football, and he has freed himself up from full-time play calling to be more of a CEO type of head coach.

There are other head coaches on the hot seat going into the season such as James Franklin at Penn State and Billy Napier at Florida, and that's part of the profession. Day might decide to leave Ohio State at the end of the season to venture back into the pro ranks, or he might want to stay at Ohio State. One thing is certain: Having a successful season, which includes beating Michigan, will definitely allow Day to have control over his own future.

Portal Power

The current transfer portal system for college football was initiated in 2018, and since then thousands of players have jumped schools in order to find a place where they can compete for more playing time, or a school that has a higher-profile football program, or both. Adding to the incentive of transferring is the opportunity for substantial NIL money. The Ohio State football program is one of those programs that meets all the needs of the better athletes who enter the portal.

Likewise, Division I teams had to restructure their recruiting strategies to seek out those potential transfers who can make an immediate impact on their program. The Buckeye coaching staff has managed the portal as well as any other major-college football power in the country. Looking at the 2024 roster, that portal success is apparent.

The announcement by Day that Will Howard, the transfer from Kansas State, would be the starting quarterback came as no surprise. He has much more experience than any of the other scholarship quarterbacks on the roster with 27 career starts while at Kansas State. Howard has also thrown for nearly 6,000 yards and run for almost another thousand, and he has accounted for 67 touchdowns via pass and run. At 6-4 and weighing 237 pounds, Howard is

a prototypical Division I quarterback. The Ohio State coaches know Howard will have to be accounted for by opposing defenses on third downs and in the red zone as a runner. Howard has only one year of eligibility left, and Day believes Howard will be well worth his scholarship and NIL money of around a million dollars.

Caleb Downs, the Alabama transfer, may be the very best player to have entered the portal this year. Already showing up on all the preseason All-American lists, the talented defensive back immediately fits into defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme, which centers around that safety position.

Downs is an excellent open-field tackler with tremendous range and closing speed. He can play both zone and man coverage with equal precision. Ohio State defensive coaches are just as impressed with Caleb's instincts and knowledge of the game as well as his physical talent. Adding to his résumé, Downs also had an 85-yard touchdown last season on a punt return. Whether Downs will be used as a returner for the Buckeyes is yet to be seen, but he may be the most versatile player since Chris Gamble to suit up in the Scarlet and Gray.

Junior running back Quinshon Judkins is another portal pickup who could make an immediate impact for the Buckeyes this season. Even though TreVeyon Henderson returns at the running back position, depth is always a concern. In his two seasons at Ole Miss, Judkins carried the football for over 2,500 yards and rushed for 31 touchdowns. He is a powerful runner, weighing just south of 220 pounds, and possesses deceptive speed and quickness. Judkins has good hands and can be a target out of the backfield for Howard.

Offensive center Seth McLaughlin and tight end Will Kacmarek are two other portal pickups who should see plenty of playing time this season. McLaughlin, another Alabama transfer, will likely be the starting center come season opener while Kacmarek, an Ohio University transfer, adds needed depth at his position.

Freshmen To Watch

It would be shocking if Buckeye fans do not see a ton of true freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith this fall. The No. 1 prospect in the country coming out of Miami Gardens, Fla., has all the tools to be an impact player for the Buckeyes. At 6-3, 215 pounds, Smith has that great combination of size and speed needed at the position. Buckeye coaches are impressed with his sure hands and route-running ability to go along with his maturity for just being a freshman.

Nobody knows exactly what the pecking order for Ohio State quarterbacks will be after Howard, but freshman Julian Sayin may break into the top three this season. Sayin initially signed with Alabama but jumped into the portal after Nick Saban decided to retire. Sayin came out of high school as the No. 1 dual-threat quarterback in the nation. If he doesn't get redshirted, Sayin may see some mop-up duty this fall.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson is blessed to have a number of talented returners on the defensive front and especially at defensive end. No one will beat out Jack

Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau, but Johnson likes to roll a lot of players into the game. If Buford, Ga., freshman Eddrick Houston continues to improve, he may find his way into the rotation this season. Houston finished his last two years of high school with 23 tackles for loss and 15 quarterback sacks.

Every season, depth at the running back position seems to be a problem no matter how many backs a team starts out with going into the year. Ohio State has had its share of injuries at running back in recent years, and with Dallan Hayden transferring to Colorado, the position is thin. Fortunately, the Buckeyes have one of the very best in the country coming back in Henderson. Judkins was a vital portal pickup and true freshman James Peoples may help with depth at the running back position. Peoples averaged just under 10 yards per carry for his high school in San Antonio and is likely to get playing time this season.

Big Ten And Playoff Expansion

The Big Ten is one of the oldest football conferences in the country. Dating back to 1896, the Western Intercollegiate Conference was formed, and it was the forerunner of the Big Ten. The conference officially became known as the Big Ten in 1917, and over the decades to follow some teams were added and some dropped out.

As we know, no longer does the number "ten" in the conference name refer to the number of teams that actually participate in football. This coming season, the conference now reaches from coast to coast. With the addition of Washington, Oregon, UCLA and Southern California, the Big Ten is now composed of 18 teams.

Ohio State will play one of those new additions this season when it travels to Eugene, Ore., early in October to play the Ducks. Even though the Buckeyes' matchup with Oregon is the only regular-season game that involves one of the new West Coast teams, the expanded college playoff system could easily find Ohio State facing one of the other additions to the conference in the postseason.

Along with the Big Ten Conference expansion in 2024, so goes the same for the College Football Playoff. Twelve teams will make the initial playoff picture. Automatic qualifiers will come from the top five ranked teams that are conference champions. The top four ranked of those teams will get a first-round bye. There is, supposedly, no conference that gets an automatic bid, and there is no limit on the number of teams that can come from one conference.

The playoffs will begin Dec. 20-21, and a new national champion will be crowned on Jan. 20. That champion will have to go through the gantlet of three to four postseason games to win the title. That means a team with the same number of regular-season games as Ohio State could end up playing as many as 17 games. The teams that stay healthy and have good depth will have a definite advantage when it comes to having a shot at being the national champion of college football.



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Will Howard Be QB That Buckeyes Need?

To listen to the preseason chatter, the Buckeyes are loaded beyond belief.

Not only did so many likely NFL draft picks decide to return for another year, but Ohio State appears to have hit the jackpot in the transfer portal – adding an All-American safety, a proven big-time running back talent and much more.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Plus, there's the usual collection of returnees as well as an offensive coordinator known as an offensive innovator going back to his days as Oregon's head coach, and it all seems to fit together like a glove with Ryan Day.

But here's what's causing me not to be all in just yet on all that talk you hear on podcasts, read on the Internet or overhear during a round of golf.

Quarterback.

I don't know that Ohio State has solved its quarterback question.

The Buckeyes might have solved it through the transfer portal. Or they just may be able to solve it through a guy who has been around the program since 2022 if option one doesn't work out.

But I don't know, nor does anyone know besides perhaps those inside the facility able to watch all the practices this year.

The transfer and chosen starter to open the season, Will Howard, was second-team All-Big 12 last year for Kansas State. But Kyle McCord was third-team All-Big Ten last year, and that didn't satisfy everyone, or maybe not even the majority.

Howard has started 28 games of major-college football and thrown 48 touchdown passes, including 24 last year. That's some handy experience, not to mention that he is a fifth-year player and will turn 23 years old in late September. Unlike McCord at this time last year, Howard has a lot of experience.

That all sounds good. But is he good enough to win at Ohio State, in the Big Ten and against the competition awaiting in the playoffs?

That, we don't know, though Ryan Day says he did separate himself this fall from the other quarterbacks on the roster.

As for Devin Brown, the third-year Buckeye who arrived on campus in 2022 with an impressive high school résumé, which included playing for and being endorsed by former OSU quarterback Joe Germaine, we also don't know.

There were some snaps for Brown early last season before McCord won the job outright. And there was an opportunity in the Cotton Bowl, but he got knocked out of the game early. What little we saw in the tiny sample did not tell us he was ready.

Brown could be ready this year if called upon. Quarterback could be just fine at Ohio State this season.

But as far as those lofty predictions, let's apply the eye test over the first several games.

Fresh Take

I liked what I heard from Day at the Big Ten media gathering in Indianapolis when he was asked about coming up just short a few times.

He could have, as I might have, pointed to a play or two last season against Michigan. The same goes for the loss to Georgia in the previous year's playoff.

But instead, Day talked about working hard enough so games don't come down to a play or two. He called it leaving no doubt. I like that.

"It's easy to say that it comes down to a play or two, but that's not really the case. What we need to do is leave no doubt. No doubt. Don't leave it to one play, don't leave it to one call, don't leave it to one stop. Leave no doubt when you're on the field," Day said.

"And we're not going to get into all of the reasons or all of the things that we've done to try to address that, to get that fixed. But we have worked hard on that, and we feel good about where we're at going into the season."

I'll disagree a little bit.

It does come down to a play or two sometimes. And often that's what separates winners from losers in sports: the guy who can make the key three-pointer, the clutch hitter in baseball, the quarterback who goes off script when necessary to turn a big play.

But as far as preparing for a season, a preseason and the long grind of a regular season and then playoffs, I like the attitude of working so hard that you leave no doubt.

Long Haul

Twelve regular-season games before a possible Big Ten Championship Game and then the playoffs, that's a long season.

I would argue it's too long. I would ditch either the league title games or roll back the regular season to 11 games. But that's not going to happen. It's called money.

So with the long season come questions.

If it's a national title you're focused on, would it be so bad not to play in the league title game? I'd argue the rest at that point of the season would be valuable. But there's an incentive. The winner of four league title games will be getting playoff byes.

But the loser gets the double whammy, an extra game when legs are getting tired and injuries are piling up, and no bye.

The way it's set up, the four highest-ranked conference champions get byes – meaning three wins and a national title. For the other eight playoff teams, it will take four wins for a title.

Do you really expect someone to go Miami Dolphin on the world of college football and go through the regular season and playoffs undefeated? In that case, that likely would mean winning 16 games. Seems like a tall order.

The good thing is there's plenty of room for a loss, even two, and they can still make the playoffs.

If you're going to concede at least one loss for Ohio State, who will that come against? There's a possibility of a surprise. Those are difficult to handicap.

If it doesn't come as a total surprise, I see four potential losses: home against Iowa on Oct. 5, at Oregon on Oct. 12, at Penn State



SONNY BROCKWAY

TITLE SEARCH — Head coach Ryan Day is putting his trust in Kansas State transfer Will Howard, much as he eventually did last season when Kyle McCord won the quarterback competition over Devin Brown. McCord transferred to Syracuse following the Buckeyes' third straight loss to Michigan.

on Nov. 2, and, of course, at home against Michigan on Nov. 30.

Given those options, and at this very early stage, I would judge Oregon as the most likely loss, then Michigan and then Penn State.

As for the rest of the season, bet your house (no, don't really bet your house but you get what I mean) that Ohio State will beat Akron, Western Michigan and Mar-

shall – all at home.

Then there are games on the road at Michigan State and Northwestern, and at home against Nebraska, Purdue and Indiana. Those should be fairly certain wins.

Given all this, I see the Buckeyes going 11-1 before the postseason.

Check back with me later about a prediction beyond that, and the quarterback will have a lot to do with the answer.



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presscolumbus.com

Buckeyes Have The Stuff To Win Bigger Big Ten

Folks will tell you that the SEC rules college football, but there is currently one conference that holds the national championship hardware from 2023 – the Big Ten.

After Michigan finally broke through to win its first title since a share in 1997, the league was riding high.

Not since Ohio State won the inaugural College Football Playoff in 2014 had the conference been so much in the spotlight. The Wolverines went back to old-school football, using a bruising ground game and an opportunistic passing attack – and maybe a dab of chicanery – to climb to the top of the college football mountain.

**THE FACTS
MAN
Mike Wachsman**

Now Michigan will see what life is like as the hunted, without most of the offense and without the longtime head coach, who went off to the greener pastures of the NFL. Oh, and did we mention looming NCAA investigations, too? Yeah, the Wolverines will enjoy that national title, but with a larger, new-look Big Ten, they may find themselves scrambling to keep their footing.

The addition of four teams from the Pac-12 means that the conference is now not only numerically challenged, but geographically challenged as well. It is part of the plan to make the Big Ten a nationwide brand, to increase its power in a world where it already wields a ton. It may say it is doing this simply to keep up with the expansion of the SEC, but that isn't completely true. The league has the largest TV contract in America, and if it can add teams, it can add even more money to that contract when it comes up for renegotiation in 2029.

It will take a little time to get used to saying Oregon vs Ohio State and USC vs Michigan are now conference games, but in the changing world of college football, that's how things go. Fans will deal with it, and then the next round of realignment will take place, tradition be damned.

Ohio State won 11 games last year but was seen as disappointing, so it went all in on the transfer portal and brought in big names in Kansas State quarterback Will Howard, Ole Miss running back Quinshon Judkins, Alabama safety Caleb Downs and more as well as adding former UCLA boss Chip Kelly as offensive coordinator. The player additions alone would have been enough to vault the Buckeyes into a favorite's role, but adding Kelly cemented it. The offense should hum, the defense should be lethal, and the schedule is more than manageable, with only an October trip to Oregon seen as truly scary. Yeah, there is that rivalry game at the end that always causes concern, but Michigan is depleted enough that this game sets up as well as any in recent memory for the Buckeyes to win.

Oregon comes into the league as the

most well-prepared for success of any of the West Coast interlopers, thanks to the acquisition of QB Dillon Gabriel from Oklahoma and an offense that is frantic and puts pressure on the opposition. The defense will be better in year three under Dan Lanning, which means the Ducks are definite championship contenders.

After those two, many teams are jockeying for attention, all with at least one nagging question.

At Penn State, the question is whether new offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki can unlock QB Drew Allar's potential and make the offense truly formidable. He did wonders for Kansas, so the hope is that the Nittany Lions can run many of the same things and pressure teams from anywhere on the field.

At Michigan, the question is how to replace so many front-line offensive stars. Gone are J.J. McCarthy, Blake Corum, Roman Wilson and the starting offensive line, and while versatile running back Donovan Edwards returns, that kind of attrition isn't something that's recovered from overnight – especially when Michigan hasn't been recruiting as well as one might expect. The Wolverines are 126th in returning production for 2024, and that is usually a portent of regression.

At USC, the question is – as always – will this be the year there is a serviceable defense? Lincoln Riley is a genius at designing and running an offense, but his abject apathy toward the other side of the ball is also genius level. It's almost as if he views defense as a distraction, something keeping his offense off the field. Maybe there's a hint of being serious about it now after the hiring of ex-UCLA defensive coordinator D'Anton Lynn to run the Trojans' stop unit.

Those are the league's marquee programs, but mainstays Iowa and Wisconsin are not going anywhere, and Nebraska could be ready to make a big move in year two under Matt Rhule. Rutgers looks to finally have teeth, along with a favorable schedule. Washington made the CFP title game last season but had huge roster turnover and has a new coach with credentials – Jedd Fisch –but may need a year to get the program humming again.

Indiana leads the remaining hopefuls, and first-year coach Curt Cignetti has at least talked a good game. Whether his Hoosiers play as well remains to be seen. Minnesota is looking to claw back to respectability, and Maryland is a lot like Washington in that it lost a lot of high-powered offensive talent.

The last group are the squads that should be happy simply making a bowl game, led by Illinois. Bret Bielema has not hit as quickly as many had hoped, and the clock may start ticking if the Illini struggle this season. Michigan State will be good down the road under Jonathan Smith, but there was too much player attrition for Sparty to contend this season. David Braun did wonders as Northwestern interim head coach last season but may come back down to earth as the Wildcats look to be in rebuild mode. Alum Deshaun Foster takes over at UCLA, and as a first-time head coach, he will be bat-

ting a lack of roster depth and tepid fan enthusiasm. Purdue could sputter again if the defense doesn't improve on 2023's horror show, though the offense has some pieces.

Here is one scribe's guess as to how things will shake out in the Big Ten in 2024:

- Oregon (12-0, 9-0)
- Ohio State (11-1, 8-1)**
- Penn State (10-2, 7-2)
- Michigan (9-3, 7-2)
- USC (8-4, 6-3)
- Nebraska (8-4, 5-4)
- Iowa (8-4, 5-4)
- Wisconsin (7-5, 4-5)
- Rutgers (7-5, 5-4)
- Washington (7-5, 5-4)
- Indiana (6-6, 4-5)
- Maryland (5-7, 3-6)
- Michigan State (5-7, 3-6)
- UCLA (5-7, 3-6)
- Minnesota (4-8, 2-7)
- Northwestern (5-7, 2-7)
- Illinois (4-8, 2-7)
- Purdue (3-9, 1-8)

While the belief here is that OSU loses to Oregon in the regular season, the tables get turned in the Big Ten title game, with the Buckeyes taking home the crown and securing a bye in the expanded College Football Playoff.

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: QB Dillon Gabriel/Oregon

DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: LB Jay Higgins/Iowa

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR: S Caleb Downs/Ohio State

FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR: WR Jeremiah Smith/Ohio State

COACH OF THE YEAR: Dan Lanning/Oregon

Frye Into The Fire?

A lot has been made in social media and message boards about Ohio State's inability to land premier offensive line talent. It wasn't all that long ago that the Buckeyes had giants such as Korey Stringer (RIP), Orlando Pace, Juan Porter, Taylor Decker and Paris Johnson opening holes for backs and protecting the quarterback. Now it seems that whenever the Buckeyes are right up to the table for a prime trench recruit, they end up on the outside looking in.

The latest misadventure centered around five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr, who opted for Tennessee over Ohio State. Far be it from me to wonder why a recruit would select a program that A) does a worse job sending offensive linemen to the NFL and B) hasn't contended for a national title since Peyton Manning was under center, and likely won't with the SEC being even deeper with the addition of Texas and Oklahoma.

Playing time was always a big factor in a recruit's decision, and given that Josh Simmons is going to the NFL after 2024, the left tackle spot was there for the taking in 2025. But Sanders chose the Vols. It would be naive to think that NIL didn't have a little bit to do with it – though in this day and age, Ohio State should not be taking a back seat to any school in that department – but there was also some

chatter that Sanders' girlfriend attends Tennessee, which means that OSU (and other suitors) wasted at least six months recruiting the kid. In the end, a player is going to choose either where Mom wants him to be or where the current significant other is enrolled. That's the type of vetting that could save a school time and money. But I digress.

Justin Frye was brought in to coach and recruit offensive line after Greg Studrawa was let go, ostensibly because he couldn't close the deal with big-time linemen. To this point, Frye has not done much to write home about, outside of Ohio native Carter Lowe, who will suit up for the Buckeyes in 2025. Frye had a prior relationship with Ryan Day, which gets tricky because it's only natural for a coach to bring in assistants he knows and is comfortable with. It also makes it harder when a tough assessment is needed, and right now the offensive line is the only piece of the puzzle Day has not "fixed." When the defense stunk, he went out and got Jim Knowles, and that has done wonders. When original OC choice Bill O'Brien left to take the top job at Boston College, Kelly was brought in. He should also do wonders. The dead recruiting weight was excised from the program, with the exception of one spot – offensive line.

Maybe this bunch improves from last year's hot-and-cold performance, and Frye actually makes himself useful as a development coach. If that's the case, Day needs to change his philosophy on offensive line recruiting because whatever is being done right now isn't working. Maybe go for more Ohio kids, maybe kids who are only four- or three-star players but have overflowing heart and desire. Yes, talent matters, but talent with a laissez-faire attitude gets you nothing. The lower-rated kids will want to work harder, and a number of them have room to improve.

It would also help if the Buckeyes cast a wider net, especially given Frye's underwhelming hit rate. According to one recruiting site, OSU has offered just 17 out-of-state linemen in the last three cycles, getting only three. What that means is that the Buckeyes need to either have more offers to out-of-state guys or pare down the number and spend the bulk of time recruiting Ohio for linemen.

The buck stops with Day and Mark Pantoni when it comes to recruiting strategy, so they need to look in the mirror and figure out something, because the current approach is not working. And it may be the one area where you cannot consistently miss, as national title teams are usually strong up front, on both sides of the line of scrimmage.

If offensive line play/depth is what keeps the Buckeyes from realizing their national title goals, you can bet there will be calls for Frye to fry, all the way to the unemployment line. For his sake, and the program's, the offensive line needs to stay healthy and be a strength for the 2024 team.

Buckeyes: May The Fourth Not Be With You

This is my 44th Buckeye Sports Bulletin Football Preview issue (and BSB's for that matter).

In most of those Football Preview issues, I did just that. I previewed the Buckeye football team. I *can* think of one year, when I reached my 28th year as publisher of BSB, the same number of years that Woody Hayes had been the coach of the Buckeyes, I used this space to compare myself to the old coach – a little pretentious, but heartfelt and I thought one of my better columns. But mostly, like the other columnists in the paper, I just previewed the Buckeyes.

This year, I am going to stray from the usual preview script once again. There are plenty of other people who will preview the 2024 team in this issue. As we head into this '24 season I am completely obsessed with one thing:

I CAN'T TAKE A FOURTH STRAIGHT LOSS TO MICHIGAN!

Why this obsession?

Well for one thing, I arrived in Columbus in 1976, in the heart of the famed 10 Year War. It was hard not to get caught up in the rivalry if you were around back then. The Buckeyes lost the first three editions of The Game after I got here, and even an outsider like me could tell that Buckeye fans were getting edgy. By the time they lost the third straight game, 14-3, in 1978, I was savvy enough to believe that if Woody hadn't been in a three-game losing streak against That Team Up North, he might have survived smacking that kid in the Gator Bowl. But people were ready to make a move. That's the environment in which I was indoctrinated to The Game.

It's stuck with me ever since.

Some of my current obsession has to do with a hangover from the John Cooper years. That wasn't a particularly pleasant time to be a Buckeye fan, or the publisher of an Ohio State newspaper that had to *listen* to Buckeye fans. Once Jim Tressel replaced Cooper in 2001 and 310 days later started the Ohio State onslaught with a win at the Big House, I wanted to pour it on. A reciprocal 10-2-1 record was not going to be enough for me. And Tressel and Urban Meyer did not disappoint. The two legendary coaches went a combined 16-1 against the Wolverines, with Luke Fickell losing once and Ryan Day winning once before COVID interrupted the series. And I loved it (the winning, not COVID). I knew the Buckeyes would have to lose at some point, but three in a row? That just wasn't for me. But I don't think the ending of the magical run is what makes me so on edge about possibly losing a fourth in a row.

Jim Harbaugh has something to do with it.

Anyone who has read this column through the years knows I'm not wild about Harbaugh dating back to 1986, when as quarterback of the Wolverines, he guaranteed a victory over the Buckeyes. You just didn't do that back then. It was disrespectful to The Game. What really annoyed me is he backed it up! That was 38 years ago, and I still hold a grudge.

He comes back to take over his alma mater in 2015 and the man who is now suddenly dubbed as one of the best coaches in the nation, college or pro, promptly loses five games in a row to the Buckeyes and most likely would have lost a sixth had he not chickened out of the 2020 game because of the pandemic. How quickly people forget that the Michigan favorite son was struggling so badly, that he was forced to take a pay cut.

But it's not really my grudge against Harbaugh that makes me dread a fourth straight loss, though he is a part of my issue. It's the arrogance of the team, the school and its fans, which was on full display this past season. Michigan fans probably think Ohio State fans are obnoxious. But by school tradition Wolverine fans are arrogant. If I had my choice, I'd take obnoxious.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

First of all, even if the Wolverines *do* win a fourth in a row, they would still have a long way to go to equal the 17 wins in 19 outings that the Buckeyes had posted previously. But they conveniently forget that up north.

Their fearless leader served two different suspensions in one season in 2023, and they act as if this is nothing out of the ordinary.

The first suspension concerned recruiting violations during COVID, charges that Harbaugh simply denied, even though the facts in the NCAA investigation said otherwise.

"By denying his conduct, which was plainly supported by the record, Harbaugh violated NCAA ethical conduct legislation and thereby amplified the severity of his case," the NCAA decision on the recruiting violations read. "Consistent with other recent cases involving violations of the COVID-19 recruiting dead period, Harbaugh's underlying recruiting violations are Level 2. However, unethical conduct – specifically, the provision of false or misleading information – is presumptively a Level 1 violation under NCAA bylaws. Institutional staff members have an obligation to cooperate, tell the truth and further the mission of the membership's infractions process. Harbaugh failed to meet this obligation and thereby engaged in unethical conduct, a Level 1 violation."

This is somebody to look up to? But there was more, and another suspension.

A huge scandal breaks out in the middle of the season, and they just ignore it up there. They had a championship to win, by hook or by crook.

Did cheating have anything to do with Michigan winning the championship? We may never know. But I don't see how Harbaugh could not have known what was going on. After all, he was on the headset. If someone was changing Michigan plays upon reading the opposition's signals, how could he not have known that? And if he didn't know about the stolen signals, then he is guilty of stupidity and lack of control of his program. Yet no one up there seems to care. The national championship seems tainted, but again, no one cares. They are above it all.

"I do not apologize," Harbaugh said when asked about the NCAA's sign-stealing notice to the Wolverines. "I did not participate. I was not aware nor complicit in those said allegations."

You are the head man of the operation. You are responsible for the entire program. You are arrogant and they love you for it – love that and the possibly tainted championship that Wolverine Nation seemed so desperate to win.

I tried to step back from my clearly biased view and figure out if I was being unfair.

Then the bombshell dropped. Michigan was going to have Harbaugh return to serve as honorary captain for their opener against Fresno State on Aug. 31. Decisions like that aren't made quickly by just a few people. A lot of people had to have signed off on that decision, and *no one* apparently thought that was inappropriate.

In fact, the athletic director himself seemed excited about his rules-violating former coach – who abandoned his program ahead of surefire sanctions – returning to Ann Arbor.

"I look forward to seeing him," AD Warde Manuel said during a podcast appearance. "He'll be an honorary captain for our first game. I look forward to having him back in Ann Arbor for that game."

Ultimately, cooler heads prevailed, though it is unclear exactly who figured out this was utterly inappropriate. Was it Michigan? Was it the Chargers? Was it Harbaugh himself? But the fact

there was the possibility of Harbaugh being honored was – well, arrogant. They are still going to honor him, with his parents taking the bow.

By contrast, for Ohio State's opener with Akron, Archie Griffin, the only two-time Heisman Trophy winner and, more importantly, a gentleman's gentleman, is going to be honored by dotting the "I" in script Ohio. Harbaugh or Griffin? Who would you like your kids to emulate?

Hopefully, you understand why I so don't want to lose to this team and its backers a fourth time.

But there are practical reasons as well. As most of you have figured out by now, there is a split along age lines among Buckeye fans, I would say at about 50 years old. Those over 50 – like me – think beating Michigan is the most important thing each season. Beat the rivals and everything else will fall in place.

Those under 50 are often of the school that it's national championship or bust. With the new 12-team playoff formula, the Buckeyes could lose to the Wolverines and still win the crown. So, what's the big deal if we lose a fourth in a row they wonder?

There is no question that Ohio State is loaded this season. But winning the national championship is not an easy task. The Super Sophs could have won three, but they didn't. Tressel took two teams to the championship game, where they came up empty. Even Cooper had several teams that were strong enough to go all the way but didn't.

If you don't win the national championship, but you win The Game, you still have your win over Michigan. Lose the national championship *and* lose to Michigan and what do you have? A new coach?

There is at least one Buckeye under 50 who joins me in wanting to beat the Wolverines. Ohio State defensive end Jack Sawyer, who helped convince several NFL-ready players to return to end the three-game losing streak among other goals, is on my side.

"Three seasons in a row we came up short against Michigan, and I'd be lying if I told you that it didn't burn a fire inside of us," Sawyer said. "It's definitely something that we think about. We know what's at stake when we play those guys. All of our goals and aspirations for the season ride on that one game in November. They hate us, we hate them. That's the way it has to be. That's the way we want it to be. That's what makes that rivalry so fun."

For me, it is not so much fun if they lose number four.

And The Winner Is . . .

No, we're not ready to choose the winner of the Ohio State-Michigan Weekend contest that many of you have already entered as part of your subscription renewal. We will draw that winner in November, giving those of you who aren't already entered plenty of time to do so.

But we did recently add to the prize package.

The contest winner will now receive a \$50 gift certificate to College Traditions, the Lane Ave. institution, to get the latest in Ohio State gear to wear to the game. That is in addition to tailgate treats from the popular City Barbeque and a victory celebration at Roosters, a fun, casual joint. That's not to mention game tickets to the grudge match Nov. 30 with the Wolverines.

Two Words Make Publisher Cranky

I admit it. I've turned into a cranky old man.

It took just two words to set me off recently. A subscriber sent his renewal card back with no

payment and the words "too much!"

Again, I am using this space for something other than previewing the team. But it really bothers me when people seem to think that we are pulling the price of Buckeye Sports Bulletin out of the air, some astronomical figure that is designed to line the pockets of BSB staff members. Let me assure you that everyone here at BSB, from top to bottom, is underpaid and overworked. But everyone here, from top-to-bottom, is dedicated to providing our loyal readers with a quality product in what are challenging times for the newspaper industry.

Those two words sent me flying down to McDonald's to check out the price of a Big Mac, kind of our price measuring stick. It was \$5.79. No drink, no fries, just "two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun," as the old jingle used to proclaim. For \$5.79.

The promotion that our subscriber deemed as too much was offering one year of BSB at \$4.37 per issue and two years at \$3.85 per issue. Now look at this BSB that you are reading and look at your next Big Mac. Which looks like it involves the most expense? And even if you are a legendarily slow eater like I am, how long are you going to enjoy your burger? Remember. That's without fries. Fifteen minutes? Did you know that the average reader spends two hours and six minutes with a typical BSB?

For those who genuinely struggle to pay our necessary price, we offer many specials throughout the year. And many, many thanks to those subscribers who elect to pay full price, even when they are offered a discount, and the many of you who participate in our VIP program. It's heartwarming for us and helps give us the wherewithal – not just financially, but emotionally – to soldier on.

Sorry to be so cranky. But some things just rub me the wrong way – like "too much!"

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

To keep this column almost completely non-editorial, don't forget the postal service raised rates again on July 14, the second increase this year. We have not yet determined our response to the latest boost.

However, just a suggestion. If you see a BSB offer you like, 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.

And for those of you who want to help BSB, we are still offering gift subscriptions to libraries, barber shops, active military Buckeyes and anyone under the age of 35 for just \$19.95, a rate we rarely use anymore. Simply send your check, money order or credit card information to the previously mentioned address or call one of the listed phone numbers. Mention any of the special gift offers.

Reds

AUGUST LINEUP!



AUGUST 2-4



FRIDAY // 7:10

• **City Connect Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Kia**

• **Jerry Garcia Ticket Package**
Fans can purchase a special ticket package that includes an exclusive Jerry Garcia tie-dyed jersey. Must purchase your game ticket through this offer to receive the jersey. Available while supplies last only at reds.com/JerryGarcia.



SATURDAY // 7:15

• **Baseball Card Set, presented by Topps**

SUNDAY // 12:05

• **TJ Friedl City Connect Bobblehead, presented by Cliffs**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)



Run the Bases

Fans of all ages can line up after the game to run the bases, with a priority line for Reds Heads Kids Club members.

AUGUST 12-14



Series presented by Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste

MONDAY-WEDNESDAY

• **House of the Dragon Ticket Package**
Fans can purchase a special ticket package that includes your choice of either a black House Targaryen hat or green House Hightower hat. Must purchase your game ticket through this offer to receive the hat. Available while supplies last only at reds.com/Dragon.



MONDAY // 6:40

• **Bark in the Park, presented by Purina**
(Ticket packages available for dogs and their owners with pet activities, samples and more in the First Star Fan Zone.)



• **Family Discount Day, provided by Klosterman Bakery**
Visit reds.com/Family for a special ticket offer!

TUESDAY // 6:40

• **3-2-1 Tuesday*** presented by Budweiser and Bud Light. \$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!

*Limit 2 per person per transaction

WEDNESDAY // 6:40



AUGUST 16-18



FRIDAY // 6:40

• **City Connect Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by LifeCenter**

Yacht Rock Music Night Ticket Package

Fans can purchase a special ticket package that includes an exclusive yacht captain's hat. Must purchase your game ticket through this offer to receive the hat. Available while supplies last only at reds.com/Yacht.



Ohio Lottery Post-Game Concert, featuring The Docksiders

Free to all fans with a game ticket! Field passes available at reds.com/Concerts.



SATURDAY // 6:40

• **Fireworks Show (rescheduled from April 5)**



• **Reds Tote Bag, presented by JTM Food Group**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Reds Bucket Hat, presented by LifeCenter**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)



AUGUST 27-29



TUESDAY // 6:40

• **3-2-1 Tuesday*** presented by Budweiser and Bud Light. \$3 12oz Beer, \$2 Hot Dog and \$1 Ice Cream Cup available at select concession stands!

WEDNESDAY // 6:40

THURSDAY // 5:10

• **Thomas Rhett Post-Game Benefit Concert, presented by Ohio Lottery**

Free to all fans with a game ticket! Field passes available at reds.com/Concerts.



AUG. 30-SEPT. 1



FRIDAY // 6:40

• **City Connect Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Woodbridge Wines**

Military Appreciation Day

Activities will include ceremonies honoring military groups. Special ticket offers for select games for military members available at reds.com/Military.

SATURDAY // 7:15

Ohio Lottery Post-Game Concert, featuring DIESEL aka SHAG

Free to all fans with a game ticket! Field passes available at reds.com/Concerts.

• **Reds Sticker Sheet, presented by Laura's Lean Beef**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

SUNDAY // 12:10

• **Hunter Greene City Connect Bobblehead, presented by Tickets for Less**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

• **Family Discount Day, provided by Klosterman Bakery**
Visit reds.com/Family for a special ticket offer!



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reds.com / Tickets

*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.