

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 44, No. 1

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 7, 2024

Receiver Smith Breaks Out In Buckeye Debut

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State has had many great wide receivers play in Columbus over the years. Among them are the likes of Cris Carter, Terry Glenn and David Boston, along with recent greats such as Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and most recently Marvin Harrison Jr.

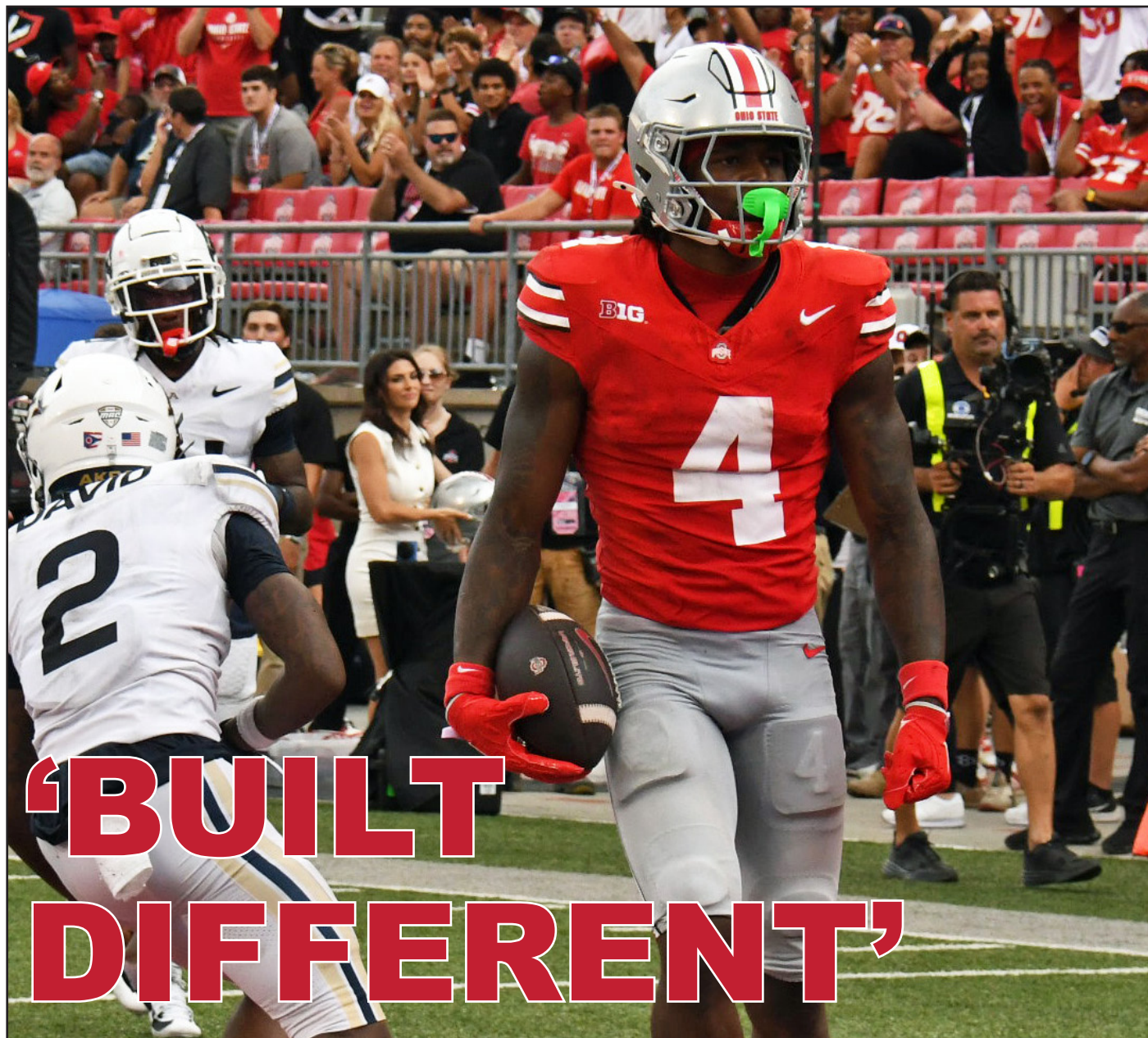
Recently, the Woody Hayes Athletic Center has been a factory for first-round draft picks, and the newest player on the assembly line may be true freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith.

All of the above-mentioned OSU greats came through the program and made names for themselves, moving on to the NFL after leaving a legacy with the Buckeyes. But perhaps none of them have had more hype surrounding them their freshman year than Smith. It's something that Smith himself said previously this offseason he has been trying to tune out.

"I know there are big expectations coming in for me because I'm the No. 1 player coming in and all the hype around me," he said on Aug. 9 in his first media appearance since joining the Buckeyes. "I just try to block out all of that stuff and just focus on the main thing – just the team and our receiver room and our locker room. I don't really care. I just want to go out there and win a game. That's it."

The noise surrounding Smith has been loud ever since the early days of his recruitment. College teams from his home state of Florida spent countless hours trying to flip him away from Ohio State but were unsuccessful, and he ultimately ended up in Columbus when signing day came around.

For a true freshman joining the No. 2-ranked team in the country, the pressure that comes with being cast as the next great to go through a rich NFL pipeline can be overwhelming, and early on in the season opener it seemed like that extra noise might



'BUILT DIFFERENT'

SONNY BROCKWAY

CENTER STAGE – A new season and a new star was born in freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, who had touchdown catches of 16 and 9 yards plus a 45-yard reception in his debut against Akron. Smith was the No. 1 ranked recruit in the 2024 class.

have been getting to Smith.

As one of three wide receivers to start Ohio State's 52-6 season-opening win against Akron on Aug. 31 – the first true freshman to start a season opener at Ohio State since cornerback Denzel Burke did so in 2021 – Smith dropped his first target on

his second play as a Buckeye, a well-placed pass from transfer quarterback Will Howard. Soon after, during the same drive, he had a flag thrown against him for a false start. It seemed that Smith might have been in his head in front of 102,011 fans at Ohio Stadium, but his teammates knew there was no need to worry.

"There was no word said. None of us were worried about him at all," Howard said. "Obviously, it's a drop – it's uncharacteristic, but, hey, I made a couple of bad passes. It's not going to be perfect. But it's that next-play mentality."

Smith showed that to be true, coming back and finishing the game as the Buckeyes' leading receiver, catching six passes for 92 yards and bringing in two touchdowns in the blowout win over the Zips. He

said the pressure of the moment didn't get to him because it's not something he even thinks about.

"Pressure? No, I don't really feel pressure," Smith said. "I just want to go out and play football and win games. I know all the hype around me was crazy coming in, and I just wanted to come in and be a guy that just works and not be all about hype. I just wanted to impress my coaches, impress my peers around me and my teammates."

"Mental toughness is the ability to move on to the next most important thing," Howard added. "We knew his maturity level. We weren't worried about it, and he came back and had a great game."

Smith's coaches, who nervously sweated

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From The Message Board

Buckeye Leaves

After a long and eventful offseason, Ohio State began its 2024 season with a bang, using a dominant defensive performance and some crisp offense to overcome a slow start and defeat Akron by a score of 52-6. Here are some choices from Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the win.

Patrick Engels, BSB: I'm handing my Buckeye Leaf out to linebacker Arvell Reese, who filled in admirably for the injured Cody Simon at linebacker despite not getting the start, putting together one of the top performances on the Buckeyes' defense.

The junior Reese was all over the field for Ohio State in its season opener, often hustling from sideline to sideline to make some impressive plays. He ended the day with four tackles and a tackle for loss, his lone TFL being a minus-1-yard stop on Zips quarterback Ben Finley early in the third quarter.

Reese, whom defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and others have consistently lauded over the offseason for the vast improvements he has made, may not get as much time on the field next week if Simon comes back from his injury. But his all-around performance at Ohio Stadium on Aug. 31 may make it tough for Knowles and the staff to keep him off the field in some capacity moving forward.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: I'm giving my Buckeye Leaf out to one of the two Buckeye defenders who brought one back to the house, Lathan Ransom. The fifth-year senior safety was the most energetic of the Buckeyes defense, flying around to record nine total tackles, including two for loss.

Although Ransom may have had a slip-up in pass coverage against Akron tight end Jake Newell which led to one of the Zips' longest plays, he will rightfully be remembered for the 27-yard fumble he returned for a touchdown in the third quarter, which propelled the Buckeyes to a dominant second-half performance.

Ransom's tackles, which primarily came while the game was somewhat still in doubt, were a team high for the Buckeyes and the second most of his career. In a thin safety room, Ransom's health and production are vital for the Buckeyes the rest of the way.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf

might be the most obvious of the game, but he deserves one nonetheless. Jeremiah Smith came into Ohio State with more hype than possibly any other freshman has ever received so early on. He backed that up in the spring by having highlight catches posted all over social media. Those were all well and good, but he hadn't done anything "real" for the Buckeyes yet.

He came out for his very first game as a true freshman and showed that the hype was very well deserved, finishing as the Buckeyes' leading pass catcher with six catches for 92 yards and two touchdowns.

It was only one game, but judging from the way that his Buckeye teammates have been talking about him, it wouldn't be a surprise to see this continue throughout the season. He's going to have to continue to prove himself in every game, but the noise around Smith might be even louder after his first game in scarlet and gray, and deservedly so.

BSB Subscribers

BuckeyeScott: Give my Buckeye Leaf to Brandon Inniss. He had four punt returns for 60 yards and a 15-yard average per return. That's about four times our average punt return in 2023. It's just a matter of time before he takes it to the house!

Tiffin Buckeye: Offense: Jeremiah Smith - amazing debut. Defense: Arvell Reese - he was flying around. Special Teams: Brandon Inniss for all his punt returns.

Mcarr: I'll go with a couple of obvious ones: Jeremiah Smith and Lathan Ransom. But for someone who deserves a leaf for possibly changing the dynamics of the team, how about Brandon Inniss? When was the last time we've seen such derring-do on special teams? How did Parker Fleming miss the guy?

R1TBDBITL: A leaf for Chip Kelly. I think he called a good game, giving Coach Day more time to be directly involved on the sideline.

Michael Bauer: Nothing original from me: Smith, Ransom, Reese, and Inniss. I was also really happy to see Will Howard right himself in the second half and establish himself as THE quarterback. Maybe not leaf-worthy, but I have a lot more confidence in him now than before the game.

Ohio State shrugged off a sluggish start to secure a blowout win over Akron in its 2024 season opener on Aug. 31, defeating the Zips 52-6 in front of over 102,000 fans at Ohio Stadium. With Ohio State sitting at 1-0 on the year, we asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum to offer any positive or negative takeaways they had after watching the Buckeyes' season-opening win.

"My positive is that I think the defense is going to be as good as advertised, maybe even better. I also have a higher comfort level with Will Howard now that I have actually seen him play in a game, though it is hard to erase that one bone-head play (somehow I don't think he will be doing that again). Special teams looks 100 percent better (maybe 1000) without Parker Fleming. The negative? I am still not sold on the offensive line - at least not yet."

- Poster That Harley Built

"I thought before, during and after the game that it's difficult to learn much about the Buckeyes team against an opponent like Akron. But I'm confident that the coaching staff will be able to see certain things and make them into a teachable moment."

- Terrier Buck

"My positive is we started out a little slow, however both the offense and defense revved it up in the 2nd half. We clearly have another great receiver to call upon, and the punt return game looks light-years better than the last few seasons. Our defense has an opportunity to be very special this year, and their performance against Akron confirmed that with those two TDs off the three turnovers."

"My negative is I still have an outstanding concern with the power run game. I see hard runners, but not always clear lanes to run through."

- Buckeye Scott

"I'm still not sold on the O-line, but it takes several games for them to gel. I am hopeful that it's better."

- Michael Bauer

"While Jeremiah Smith got all the attention, it's clear that Ohio State once again has solid talent at all three wide receiver starting positions. Carnell Tate had four catches for 58 yards and a long of 34, and Emeka Egbuka had four catches for 51 yards and a long of 19, to go along with Smith's six for 92 and a long of 45. That means that Ohio State's starting trio combined for 201 yards and a 14.4-yard average.

"It's hard to cover all three of them, so somebody should be open for Will Howard on most plays. James Peoples eased my concern over depth at running back with a fine performance. Of course, like everyone, I need a little more proof that the offensive line has indeed improved. One thing I really learned is that Akron is going to do much better in the MAC than people expected - a scrappy, well-coached bunch of Zips. Sadly, when you are out-manned you are out-manned."

- Mcarr

"Hey Buckeye Nation: Despite the sluggish start, the Bucks are 1-0, healthy and Ohio State football is back on Saturdays. The team will learn from this game, and coaches often say the biggest improvements come between the first game and the second. Life is good."

- Byron McNutt



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Bucks' Opener Chock Full Of Missteps

Whether it was first-game jitters for a handful of high-profile transfers playing their first game amid the tumult created by more than 102,000 fans, or the reality of playing with a target affixed squarely on its collective back, the Ohio State football team kicked off what is supposed to be a national championship march with more than a few missteps.

When the Ohio Stadium scoreboard clock finally ticked to all zeroes on Aug. 31, the Buckeyes had themselves a 52-6 victory against a courageous but hopelessly outgunned Akron team as well as a mountain of game film that contained equal measures of outstanding individual plays and cringeworthy things that should cause Ryan Day and his coaching staff more than a few sleepless nights.

After TreVeyon Henderson broke off a 9-yard run on his team's first offensive play of the 2024 season, the Buckeyes set about tripping all over themselves.

Much-ballyhooed freshman Jeremiah Smith dropped a second-down slant pass that would have gone for an easy first down before committing a third-down false start penalty. Then new starting quarterback Will Howard had his third-and-6 pass to Emeka Egbuka broken up to end the possession, a breakup that really didn't matter because Egbuka would have been short of the line to gain had he been able to make the catch.

On Akron's first offensive play from scrimmage, OSU cornerback Davison Igbinosun crashed into a sliding Zips quarterback Ben Finley, an inexplicable play for a veteran that drew a personal foul penalty as well as a targeting call. Fortunately for Igbinosun, the targeting call was overturned on replay.

Three plays later, on third-and-2, Akron tight end Jake Newell slipped into the boundary for a 12-yard reception. Opposing tight ends slipping into the boundary to torch Ohio State defenses is something I tired of seeing long ago, and something that is not supposed to happen against an opponent from the Mid-American Conference.

The Zips collected three first downs on their first possession that culminated in a career-long 48-yard field goal from kicker Garrison Smith to give his team a 3-0 lead at the 8:44 mark of the first quarter. I'm not sure what to make of that, especially since we have been told this is the best Ohio State defense in at least five years, but last year's unit allowed a score on the opponent's opening drive of the game just one time.

Howard started the game 0 for 4 in the passing department – not exactly the kind of start the Kansas State transfer was looking for. But he rebounded to connect on his next four in a row, and it would have been five had Big Ten replay officials not been in midseason myopic form to rule incomplete what appeared to be an acrobatic 20-yard touchdown catch by Egbuka.

In short, it was something of a comedy of errors to start the season for the No. 2-ranked team in the nation. But the Buckeyes finally worked out most of their kinks while the Zips eventually ran out of gas.

Howard finished the game with numbers that looked more Kyle McCord than C.J. Stroud – 17 completions in 28 attempts for 228 yards and three touchdowns – and aside from a brain cramp late in the second quarter when he dumped a backward pass that Henderson had to scramble to smother, Howard's debut as a Buckeye was efficient enough.

Likewise with Smith, who shook off his early bout with nerves to finish with game-high totals of six catches, 92 yards and two touchdowns. His advance billing as the next great thing at Ohio State seems accurate since

Smith became the first OSU freshman to tally a pair of touchdown catches in his debut game since Michael Wiley in 1996.

There were other things to like about the opener.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Denzel Burke's pickpocket of an interception. A pair of defensive scores. Henderson's devastating blitz pickup of Zips linebacker Melvin Spriggs that resulted in Spriggs stretched out flat on his back. A reasonable facsimile of the "Tush Push" quarterback sneak popularized in recent years by the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles. Brandon Inniss and his 36-yard punt return, the longest for the Buckeyes since Garrett Wilson returned one 52 yards against Miami (Ohio) in 2019.

First and foremost, however, I thought there were times when neither the offensive nor the defensive line dominated the line of scrimmage. That was especially troublesome on offense since nearly everyone agrees the OL was last year's Achilles' heel. The absence of left guard Donovan Jackson could be the main culprit in the performance against Akron, but the line play is still going to need to improve – and improve a lot – if Ohio State is going to get where it wants to go.

Which brings us to another subject.

The Heat Is On

Books and essays have been written about it. Plenty of popular songs, too. Philosophers and dreamers have mused about its meaning. Some embrace it while others shy away.

Ask a thousand people their definition of "pressure," and you're liable to get nearly a thousand different answers. Most would agree, however, that those who are able to embrace pressure are much more successful than those fearful of crumbling under the weight of it.

On which side of that equation will Ohio State ultimately wind up this season? Because make no mistake: Pressure, real or imagined, is squarely on the Buckeyes as they are nearly everyone's choice – everyone outside Georgia anyway – to win the national championship.

One NFL scout recently told ESPN senior writer Jake Trotter that this was not only the most talented team he has ever evaluated at Ohio State, it has more depth than the 2021 national champion Georgia team that set a draft record with 15 players selected in 2022.

"Pound for pound, player for player," the scout said, "they have as many good players as any (college football) team that I can remember. ... You're like, all right, this team has four guys that can kill us with the ball in their hand. What do we do? You should destroy everybody when you have that many good players at every position."

The scout is not alone. From each of the program's most recent two national championship head coaches to members of the 2014 title team, anything less than total domination will be seen as a failure.

"This is one of the most talented rosters in the last decade – maybe ever," former OSU head coach Urban Meyer said. "That's a big statement ... (but) look at the quality of athlete at every position. I've never seen anything like it. They are loaded."

To which Jim Tressel added, "I don't know if I've ever seen that many great players in that building all at once. At every position, every

place you turn."

"It's national championship or bust," said Cardale Jones, the last OSU quarterback to win a national championship in 2014, who later cofounded The Foundation, one of the school's two primary NIL collectives. "I don't think beating Michigan, I don't think winning the Big Ten championship game and just going to the playoffs is enough."

Jones' former teammate Tyvis Powell, director of player engagement for Ohio State's other collective, the 1870 Society, and defensive MVP in the 2014 national championship game, put things even more succinctly.

"We've got the best," he said. "Every position group is stacked with depth. So, we have no choice but to win the national championship."

At least members of the team know what's expected after years of underachievement – perceived or otherwise.

"Nobody on this team has won a big game in their career at Ohio State," Egbuka said. "We just haven't done it. It sucks to say, but that's the reality. We don't really have anything that counts – anything that matters. But this has been the hardest-working team that I've been a part of. And we're also the most tight-knit group I've ever been a part of. We're really locked in on getting to our goals this year."

And those goals are?

"We've got to win every single game," Burke said with a shrug. "No ifs, ands or buts about it."

Well, boys and girls, put a log on the fire because here comes the cold, hard truth. With the pressure clearly focused upon it, the Ohio State football program doesn't have the best of track records.

Those two most recent national championship seasons – the ones in 2002 and 2014 – weren't supposed to be title seasons at all. The 2002 team began the season ranked No. 13 while the 2014 squad was fifth in the preseason poll before tumbling all the way to No. 22 after a home loss in week two to Virginia Tech. Even the storied 1968 team, often heralded as one of the best rosters ever assembled by Woody Hayes, began that season ranked No. 11.

The 1969 team was supposed to repeat as national champions, but an upset loss to a three-loss Michigan team and its first-year head coach, Bo Schembechler, ruined that season. Likewise the 1970 squad, a season-long No. 1 team that eventually lost to a three-loss Stanford team in the Rose Bowl.

Since The Associated Press began releasing a preseason poll in 1950, Ohio State has held the No. 1 or 2 ranking in 1958, 1962, 1969, 1970, 1980, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2022. I have covered the team through several of those seasons, listening to every patented cliché ever invented, and then watching as those teams succumbed to the pressure and fall short of their ultimate goal.

This year, the AP ranked the Buckeyes at No. 2, and if they are to break their 0-for-14 slump of failing after occupying one of the top two spots in the preseason poll, it's not going to happen with clichés, attitude or bravado. As an old coach once said, "You don't have to be the best team in the country every week to win the national championship. Just be the best team in whatever stadium you're playing on Saturday, and the rest takes care of itself."

If this team truly has the best roster in college football, then it has only one thing to do between now and the Jan. 20 championship game in Atlanta. Prove it.



Vol. 44, No. 1

Sept. 7, 2024

www.BuckeyeSports.com

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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The next issue (Sept. 21 cover date) will be mailed on Sept. 10.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Jackson, Simon Among Seven Bucks Out For Opener

The Ohio State football team was without the services of two veteran starters in their 52-6 season-opening win against Akron on Aug. 31, with fifth-year Mike linebacker Cody Simon and starting senior left guard Donovan Jackson both sitting out of the contest due to undisclosed injuries.

Simon, who was given the Block "O" honor before the season along with being named a team captain, was replaced by a slew of linebackers who rose to the occasion in his absence.

Junior C.J. Hicks earned the start at the Will alongside fellow third-year Sonny Styles, who moved over to the Mike position from the Will. Hicks filled in admirably, recording the team's second sack of the game in the first half along with six tackles. Sophomore Arvell Reese also earned some significant playing time at the Will in Simon's relief, totaling four tackles, including one for loss.

With the two-time first-team All-Big Ten left guard Jackson unavailable, the Buckeyes turned to Austin Siereveld and Carson Hinzman on the left side of the line, with Siereveld gaining most of the starting reps. They helped pave the way for Ohio State to total 170 yards rushing and two scores.

Despite Jackson and Simon both being ruled inactive, the two veterans still warmed up in full uniform, with Simon even going out for the pregame coin toss with his fellow captains Emeka Egbuka, TreVeyon Henderson and Jack Sawyer. Head coach Ryan Day did not seem too concerned when asked about their injuries, saying he is hopeful he will have each of them back for Ohio State's Week 2 game against Western Michigan on Sept. 7.

Jackson and Simon were two of seven Buckeyes listed as inactive on the team's availability report before the game, including offensive lineman Devontae Armstrong, safety Jayden Bonsu, defensive lineman Cade Casto, wide receiver Reis Stocksdale and running back TC Caffey, who will miss the entire season with a torn ACL.

Starters Solidified For Season Opener

Ohio State entered fall camp with several position battles having to be played out, and those competitions culminated with Day's announcement of who had earned the starting roles for the Buckeyes' season opener against the Zips.

Day revealed two key starters for the season opener during his press confer-

ence held at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Aug. 27, saying that both red-shirt junior sophomore right guard Tegra Tshabola and Styles had earned their spots atop the depth charts at their respective positions.

Tshabola had become the favorite to start at the position as fall camp progressed over Hinzman, making the most of his opportunities early in camp while the offensive line dealt with what Day called a "funky virus."

Tshabola's start against Akron was the first of his career, and he served as the starter for the majority of the contest with Hinzman rolling in for a few first-team reps in the first half.

Styles, meanwhile, was also viewed as the favorite to earn the starting role after making what Day and his staff deemed a seamless transition from safety to linebacker this offseason. The junior had been assuming the majority of first-team reps at the Will in fall camp practices open to the media, and he was consistently lauded by defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and others for his high football intelligence.

Styles excelled in his first game at linebacker, recording six tackles on the day, the third most on the team.

Perhaps least surprisingly, Day also named true freshman Jeremiah Smith one of Ohio State's three wide receivers during that same press conference, a decision that would turn out to be a smart one with Smith making an instant impact, catching a game-high six passes for 92 yards and two scores.

Day had also named true freshman punter Nick McLarty as the team's starting punter for the team's season opener on Aug. 22, but that did not transpire after sophomore Joe McGuire took each of Ohio State's three punts against Akron, leaving the 6-7 McLarty on the bench.

Day also announced on Aug. 28 that wide receivers Egbuka and Brandon Inniss would serve as punt returners for the opener, while fellow receivers Jayden Ballard and Carnell Tate would return kicks.

Ohio State's punt- and kick return games seemed to be significantly boosted by these positions against the Zips, with Inniss totaling 60 yards on four punt returns and Ballard running for 23 on one attempt during the very first play of the regular season.

Nine Freshmen Earn Playing Time Vs. Akron

Ohio State's 2024 freshman class was well represented on the field against Akron, with nine first-years making their Buckeye debuts.

The most notable freshman to gain

playing time was the previously mentioned Smith, but he was not the only former five-star to get on the field. Defensive lineman Eddrick Houston and cornerback Aaron Scott Jr. also made their debuts toward the end of the contest, with Houston recording a team-high two pass breakups, including one late in the fourth quarter that resulted in Ohio State's second defensive touchdown of the game, while Scott did not find the stat sheets but did see some action in the win.

Former four-star running back James Peoples also made an impact in the win, recording his first career touchdown on his first-ever carry, a 4-yard gain at the end of the third quarter that extended Ohio State's lead to 38-6. Peoples' performance further solidifies him as the team's third-string running back this season, but fourth in line is fellow freshman Sam Williams-Dixon, who had a single carry for 4 yards with 7:13 left in the fourth quarter.

Also appearing in the stat sheets for the first time was safety Jaylen McClain, who recorded a single tackle on Zips running back Charles Kellom in the fourth quarter. McClain had impressed coaches during the offseason, causing him to shed his black stripe after just six fall camp practices.

No other freshman recorded a statistic, but linebackers Payton Pierce and Garrett Stover and offensive lineman Eric Mensah also earned playing time in their first game as Buckeyes.

Kelly Coaching From Press Box

Ohio State offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly assisted his first Buckeye game not on the field but from the press box, a plan that could be in place for the entire season.

According to Day, Kelly's decision to be elevated in the press box was a matter of organization.

"His plan is to be up in the box," Day said. "I think for him being able to get organized up there – he's got the tablet up there, he's got his call sheet, he can really be clean after every series.

"When you're on the sideline you have your call sheet, but it's hard to get your next series ready when you're doing all these other things.

"When you're up there you get a desk, you can sit down, you can get your thoughts organized for the next series. You can go through everything, you can communicate well, and so that's going to be his plan."

Kelly was joined in the booth by quality control coach Tim Drevno, offensive analyst Billy Fessler and senior advisor/analyst Tony Johnson.



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2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	0-1, 52-6 loss to Ohio State
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	7:30	BTN	0-1, 28-14 loss to Wisconsin
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	TBA	TBA	1-0, 45-3 win over Stony Brook
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	TBA	TBA	1-0, 16-10 win over Florida Atlantic
Oct. 5	IOWA	TBA	TBA	1-0, 40-0 win over Illinois State
Oct. 12	at Oregon	TBA	TBA	1-0, 24-14 win over Idaho
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	1-0, 40-7 win over UTEP
Nov. 2	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	1-0, 34-12 win over West Virginia
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	1-0, 49-0 win over Indiana State
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	1-0, 13-6 win over Miami (OH)
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	1-0, 31-7 win over FIU
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	1-0, 30-10 win over Fresno State

Three Buckeyes Lose Black Stripes

Three more Buckeyes became “official” members of the team since BSB went to press when they had their black stripes removed, including Scott, walk-on wide receiver Nolan Baudo and McGuire.

On Aug. 27 Scott, who was the 36th-ranked player nationally and sixth-ranked cornerback in the class, became the 10th freshman to have his black stripe removed. Scott, a native of Springfield, Ohio, had a strong spring as an early enrollee, culminating in a six-tackle performance during the team’s spring game, and he carried that momentum into the summer with another solid month of camp.

Despite receiving the honor and getting into the season opener, Scott is still unlikely to get much playing time at the position, sitting behind Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock, Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Davison Igbinosun, among others.

Baudo also lost his black stripe on Aug. 27, just one offseason after joining the program as a preferred walk-on in June of 2023. Baudo is a player who is seemingly fun to be around. According to an informal poll of the players on the team about whom they hang around with, 47 percent responded with “Baudo.”

Baudo, who was high school teammates with Carnell Tate at Chicago Marist, was the second walk-on to lose his stripe this offseason, joining fellow wideout Brennen Schramm.

Fellow sophomore walk-on McGuire became the first specialist and 19th player to earn the distinction just two days later.

McGuire earned the honor just three days before earning his first start of his collegiate career. A sophomore from Melbourne, Australia, McGuire has seemingly made a name for himself over the offseason after spending the 2023 campaign behind former Ohio State starting punter Jesse Mirco, who transferred to Vanderbilt this offseason.

Meyer Tabs OSU Roster As Best In Decade

With several starters returning and a number of high-profile transfers and freshmen adding to the mix, Ohio State has one of the most talented rosters in all of college football this year, a luxury that should put them right in the mix for a national championship at the end of the season.

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer took it one step further on Aug. 27, proclaiming on his new “The Triple Option” podcast with fellow FOX analysts

Mark Ingram II and Rob Stone that this year’s Buckeye roster may be one of the better he’s seen in quite some time.

“I’ve read about them, I’ve watched them. This might be the best roster in college football in the last decade,” Meyer said. “As far as NFL talent, as far as depth – you’ve got the second-string running back, whoever it is is probably going to be a first-round draft pick. I mean, they are loaded.”

This was not the first time the former Ohio State head coach has extended praise to Day’s team in the offseason. Meyer told 10TV in Columbus at a charity golf outing earlier this summer that he had “never seen anything like” this year’s Buckeyes’ roster, even saying that this could be the best roster “maybe ever.”

A similar sentiment was expressed by Meyer’s predecessor in Columbus, Jim Tressel, who said at the same outing that he doesn’t think he has “ever seen that many great players in that building at once.”

“Every position, every place you’ve turned,” Tressel said, “Ryan (Day) has done a great job. Ohio State has done a great job.”

Despite the high praise from Meyer, the current FOX Sports college football analyst still raised some concerns for the team heading into the season.

Meyer indicated that he is unsure how new starting quarterback Will Howard – whom Day tabbed as the starter Aug. 15 – will transition from Kansas State to Ohio State and what his ceiling could be but that his speed, along with Kelly’s guidance, could get the offense where they want to be this season.

“They’ve got Will Howard, who’s going to be a big question mark,” Meyer said. “But I feel the combination of him and Chip Kelly, the new offensive coordinator, they’re married for each other. He’s an athletic quarterback. He’s surprisingly fast. I was told he ran 22 mph at practice. That’s fast fast. And he’s a big dude.”

Meyer also pointed to Ohio State having to keep its top players engaged and content during what should be an easy early portion of the schedule as another key concern for the Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes will face off against Western Michigan on Sept. 7 and Marshall on Sept. 21 before opening Big Ten Play on the road against Michigan State on Sept. 28.

“How do you keep all (players) happy? Their schedule is kind of a joke early on,” Meyer said. “That means, statistically,

they’re not going to have many catches, the running backs are not going to have many carries. You’re not going to play those guys in the second half of those games. So how do you keep the personalities, the NIL, the agents I guess – that’s a world I don’t know – how do you keep them all happy?”

Six Buckeyes Named Preseason All-Americans

Ohio State was recognized for its supreme roster talent on Aug. 26 when an FBS-leading four Buckeyes were named to the AP preseason All-America first-team, with Burke, safety Caleb Downs, Egbuka and Jackson all earning the nods.

Henderson and defensive tackle Tyleik Williams were also selected to the second team, giving Ohio State a total of six players featured, also the most by any team.

Ohio State’s star defenders headline this list, starting with Burke, who is looking to cement himself as one of the best cornerbacks in program history after recording a team-high nine pass breakups and an interception in his junior season.

Burke’s quest for that title began against Akron, where he recorded a second-quarter interception of a pass from Ben Finley along with four tackles.

Downs, meanwhile, began his first season with the Buckeyes after an outstanding freshman campaign at Alabama in which he totaled an impressive 107 tackles – the most by an Alabama freshman since at least 1970 – along with four pass deflections, 3½ tackles for loss, two interceptions, a forced fumble, a fumble recov-

ery and a punt return touchdown.

He recorded two tackles and one-half sack in his Buckeye debut.

Burke and Downs have received a lot of preseason recognition this offseason. They were each named to the preseason watch lists for the Bronko Nagurski Award, Jim Thorpe Award, Lott Impact Trophy and Chuck Bednarik Award.

Egbuka, who was also featured on numerous preseason watch lists (Biletnikoff, Paul Hornung and Maxwell Awards), is expected to be one of Will Howard’s top targets along with one of the Big Ten’s best all-around offensive playmakers this season.

The senior struggled through injury last season on his way to an underwhelming statistical year, but he is fully healthy at the start of this year and caught four catches for 51 yards against the Zips.

Jackson earns the preseason honor after serving as Ohio State’s starting left tackle for the last two seasons, making him one of the more dependable linemen in the Big Ten. The senior was also named to the preseason watch list for the Outland Trophy and Lombardi Award.

Ohio State’s four first-team All-American nods are ahead of Georgia and Michigan, who each have three players featured. The top-ranked Bulldogs are represented by quarterback Carson Beck, offensive lineman Tate Rutledge and safety Malaki Starks, while Michigan is represented by tight end Colston Loveland, defensive

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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tackle Mason Graham and cornerback Will Johnson.

Three First-Round Bucks In ESPN Mock Draft

Ohio State was also heavily featured in ESPN NFL insider Field Yates' list of top 25 2025 NFL draft prospects published on Aug. 28, with defensive end JT Tuimoloau listed at No. 15, Burke at No. 22 and Egbuka at No. 23.

Starting with Tuimoloau, Yates said that the defensive end would have been a high draft selection in last year's draft but could boost his draft stock even higher by producing on the big stage for Ohio State this season.

"There was a feeling Tuimoloau could have been a first-round pick in 2024 if he had declared for this year's draft, but Ohio State got a huge boost when he decided to return for another season," Yates said. "JTT fires out of his stance with a real abil-

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Weekly Staff Predictions Are Back

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 win over Akron to the CFP national championship game from Atlanta on Jan. 20, 2025.

The next issue of BSB will be mailed on Sept. 10. 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. The Akron game marked the return of the always entertaining Staff Predictions, which appear the Friday before every game. Each BSB staffer predicted a shutout vs. the Zips but were shut out themselves. 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 8.

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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.

ity to bend the edge and get underneath opposing offensive tackles, playing with a relentless rush approach. He has excellent instincts, too, as was evidenced by his two interceptions back in 2022."

Burke impressed Yates with his unique ball-hawking ability and impressive speed, traits which are obvious when viewing his college film.

"Burke has this electric ability to trigger out of his backpedal and drive on the football, making him a threat for a pass breakup anytime the football is thrown his way – hence the 26 pass breakups over three years. He can really run, and you can see his confidence pop off the tape."

Yates discussed the importance of this season for Egbuka, as he thinks his draft stock could rise even more if he capitalizes on his status as Ohio State's likely No. 1 receiving target.

"A massive season is ahead for Egbuka, who now has his best chance yet to shine as a featured receiver for the Buckeyes after playing alongside megastars for the first three seasons of his career. He had a 74-catch, 10-touchdown season in 2022, and a similar workload could be in store in 2024 after injuries derailed his 2023 campaign.

"He's a dynamic route runner who is so good after the catch and can be Mr. Reliable for Ohio State in terms of catching everything that comes his way and making clutch plays."

Tuimoloau, Burke and Egbuka may be alone with the impressive albeit fluid honor of making Yates' top 25 prospects list, but they are not alone in making the senior bowl watch list released on Aug. 21. They are joined on that list by a slew of experienced veteran Buckeyes, including offensive linemen Josh Fryar, Jackson and Josh Simmons; defensive linemen Ty Hamilton, Sawyer and Tyleik Williams; cornerbacks Hancock and Igbinosun; running backs Henderson and Quinshon Judkins; quarterback Howard; tight ends Will Kacmarek and Gee Scott Jr.; safety Lathan Ransom; and linebacker Styles.

OSU Adds Playoff Incentives To Day's Contract

Day could receive as much as \$1.55 million in incentives this season after the university approved a contract amendment on Aug. 21 that updated the bonus structure of Day's contract to reflect the expanded 12-team College Football Playoff.

According to the amendment, which was approved by Ohio State's board of trustees on Aug. 22, Day would receive a \$1 million bonus if he leads Ohio State to its first national championship in a decade.

He will receive a bonus worth \$500,000 if he leads his team to the national championship game, \$350,000 if Ohio State makes the CFP semifinals, \$250,000 if Ohio State makes it to the second round of the CFP and \$100,000 if it makes the 12-team playoff.

Day will not receive each of these incentives, but rather the highest incentive he reaches.

Day would also earn an additional \$250,000 bonus if Ohio State wins the Big Ten Championship Game or a \$50,000 bonus for an appearance in the conference final.

Other bonuses for Day include \$50,000 if he wins Big Ten Coach of the Year, \$100,000 if he wins National Coach of the Year honors and \$150,000 if his team earns a combined team GPA of 3.5 or better.

These amendments could give the sixth-year Ohio State coach an increase in earnings from last season, which totaled over \$10 million – \$9.96 million in pay along with a \$250,000 retention bonus.

McGuff Among Four Head Coaches Extended

In addition to Day's contract amendment, four other head coaches also received contract extensions on Aug. 21.

Women's basketball's Kevin McGuff received a two-year contract extension through 2028 and a 3.25 percent merit increase to bring his salary to \$1,111,383 after leading the Buckeyes to a 26-6 record and Big Ten regular-season title.

Longtime men's tennis leader Ty Tucker, who led the Buckeyes to a 34-2 record and appearance in the NCAA tournament semifinals last season, received a three-year contract extension through 2029 and a 14.85 percent increase in base salary to



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If you have wanted to show your support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program but are unable to participate at the Scarlet, Elite or Elite-Plus level, now is the time to sign up at the Brutus level for just \$50. Brutus level VIPs are recognized in BSB twice a year, and we will be running the complete list of Brutus VIPs in an upcoming football issue. VIP donors help Buckeye Sports Bulletin stay alive and vibrant.

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

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

VIP subscribers enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint," a \$10 gift card from College Traditions, as well as a card from either Rusty Bucket or Cameron Mitchell restaurants good for \$10 off your next food purchase.

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

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

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

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\$390,000.

Finally, women's volleyball's Jen Flynn Oldenberg and wrestling's Tom Ryan both earned two-year extensions that will have them under contract through 2027, with Oldenberg also earning a 32.48 percent base salary increase to bump her salary up to \$400,000, and Ryan getting a 5 percent increase to \$446,500.

Bjork Talks House Settlement With Board Of Trustees

The first meeting of the brand-new Ohio State board of trustees athletics committee, formed in August to increase strategic alignment between the board and Ohio State's athletic administration, took place on Aug. 21, when Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork broke down the impacts of the House vs. NCAA settlement.

"Really for the first time we have a legal roadmap that allows us over the next 10-year period to really have some clarity over what can be the collegiate model," Bjork said.

In the short term, the House vs. NCAA settlement will have the NCAA paying \$2.8 billion in damages to former collegiate athletes who played for universities

before the introduction of NIL rules in July 2021. According to Bjork, this number will be covered by the NCAA over an approximately 10-year period but may have revenue reductions from member institutions.

Additionally and perhaps more importantly for Ohio State athletics moving forward is that the case allows revenue sharing between universities and student-athletes and removes scholarship limits while establishing roster limits for each sport.

As Bjork explained, if the House vs. NCAA case is finalized, which Bjork is hopeful will happen by early 2025, then in the fall of 2025 football will no longer have a scholarship limit of 85 but instead a roster limit of 105 players.

"We have about 1,100 athletes," Bjork said. "We'll probably lose about 150-175 student-athletes over all of our rosters."

The revenue-sharing aspect of the settlement allows universities to share 22 percent of revenue with their student-athletes, which according to Bjork totaled around \$21-23 million for Ohio State.

Also a part of the House vs. NCAA settlement was the establishment of the regulation of a third-party structure for

name, image and likeness deals. As Bjork explained to the board of trustees, the third-party NIL structure would not count against the 22 percent of revenue given to student-athletes through revenue sharing.

Despite the extra costs to Ohio State that come with revenue sharing, Bjork remains committed to complying with Title IX laws and maintaining space for all 36 of its sports.

"The goal is to maintain our tradition of carrying 36 sports, and so we're mapping out different models of what that looks like," Bjork said. "There's going to be other regulatory aspects of how we map this out, including Title IX. There could be some NCAA layers, some Big Ten layers, so we have to comply with what Title IX looks like. There's still a lot of work to be done in terms of Title IX applying to the revenue share category, so we're working through those elements."

NCAA Mulls Closing Spring Portal Window

According to an NCAA release, FBS and FCS oversight committees recommended the closure of the spring transfer portal window.

Under the current system, college football players can depart from their program during the Dec. 9-Jan. 7 window and additionally during the spring window, starting April 15, before closing April 30. The proposal from the oversight committee would have players able to transfer in the singular 30-day winter window.

According to the NCAA's release, the proposal would have no impact on the five-day extension given to players who play in postseason events.

The release also stated that with the spring period being more of a preparatory phase for the team's next season, the closure of the spring window and focus on the fall window is expected to "promote roster-stability for student-athletes and their programs."

10 Bucks Added To EA Sports CFB 25

In a patch update in EA Sports' College Football 25 video game, 10 new Buckeyes were added to the game who either hadn't arrived on campus before the game launched or hadn't yet signed up to be in the game.

Among the new inclusions in the game were Simmons, given an 83 overall rating, and tight end Jelani Thurman, who was given an 81 overall rating, along with true freshmen Mylan Graham (80), Houston (76), offensive lineman Ian Moore (75), Stover (74), defensive end Dominick Kirks (73), offensive lineman Gabe VanSickle (71), McLarty (71) and wide receiver Damarian Witten (67).

Despite all of the inclusions on the list, Tuimoloau remains out of the game. Still, as the 2024 college football season began, the Buckeyes had the second-highest team rating in the game at 93 overall, one spot behind Georgia, which sits at 95 overall.

Fields Named Backup To Wilson In Pittsburgh

Former Ohio State and current Pitts-

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burgh Steelers quarterback Justin Fields ended up on the losing end of the team's offseason quarterback battle between him and Super Bowl champion Russell Wilson, with Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin announcing the decision to start the veteran over the former Buckeye on Aug. 28.

"I met with both quarterbacks after practice and I informed them that Russ is QB 1 going into Week 1," Tomlin said. "It was a difficult decision, but not difficult in a negative way, to be quite honest with you. The decision was difficult because of what they are capable of doing, because of how they have conducted themselves as opposed to the things that they fall short in in terms of capabilities or negative conduct."

Fields was traded to the Steelers over the offseason from the team that drafted him, the Chicago Bears, for a 2025 sixth-round pick that could end up being a fourth-round pick based on his playing

time.

Fields played in all three preseason games for the Steelers, getting the most playing time during the team's 9-3 loss to the Bills. In the Aug. 17 game, he completed 11 of 17 passes for 92 yards, rushing for 42 yards on five carries.

Despite being released by the Broncos after the 2023 season due to a contract issue, Wilson had a much-improved 2023 season, throwing for 26 touchdowns compared to eight interceptions. Wilson also increased his completion percentage to 66.4 percent from 60.5 percent the year prior.

Despite naming him the backup, Tomlin did not rule out giving Fields, who threw for 5,373 passing yards and 63 touchdowns while rushing for 867 yards and 15 scores in his two seasons at Ohio State, some playing time in some potential special offensive packages this offseason.

"I'll leave all of that on the table," Tomlin said after acknowledging the plan is to utilize Fields' skill set. "Speculate away."

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 replace-

ment 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.

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.

Fanatics Claims Fraud Against WR Harrison

Former Ohio State receiver and current Arizona Cardinals receiver Marvin

Harrison Jr. has had a tumultuous financial start to his professional career, and it has only grown more complicated.

Fanatics, a sports retailer, added

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

Auburn may have had Bo Jackson, Notre Dame may have had Allen Pinkett and Navy may have had Napoleon McCallum, but as far as Ohio State coach Earle Bruce was concerned, there was no running back better than his own Keith Byars.

"He's probably the best running back in the country right now," Bruce said. "I've seen a lot of film and no one runs the ball or catches it any better."

Just a brief review of what Byars did in his sensational sophomore year explained why Bruce felt that way.

There had been five Heisman Trophies awarded to Ohio State backs and 11 times Ohio Staters had rushed for 1,000 yards in a season but only Archie Griffin and Byars had rushed for 1,000 yards as sophomores. The 6-2, 233-pounder rushed for just four yards on five carries in the opener but ended the season with 1,199 yards.

35 Years Ago — 1989

It had been almost nine months since Ohio State finished its first losing season in over two decades with a heart-pounding second-half near-comeback against Michigan.

But the memory of that 30-minute performance against the Big Ten champions, and fainter memories of victories over bowl-bound teams like Syracuse and LSU, had the Buckeyes hopeful they could rebound and challenge for conference honors for the first time since 1986.

Ohio State would possess a potentially explosive offense that season with eight starters returning to a team that ranked third in the Big Ten in passing in 1988 and fifth in rushing.

In addition, the return of seven defensive starters plus an influx of talented freshmen made it seem probable that the Buckeye defense would improve from its number seven ranking in the Big Ten.

30 Years Ago — 1994

(Joey) Galloway touched the football only six times in Ohio State's 34-10 win over Fresno State in the Disneyland Pigskin Classic, two of those on kick-off returns. But Galloway possessed that innate game-breaking ability that meant every time he touched the ball, it was a potential touchdown.

"If you think we're not going to try and get him the ball, you're crazy," said OSU offensive coordinator Joe Hollis. "You saw what he did tonight. Great players make things happen and Joey Galloway makes things happen."

He caught only two passes and ran the ball only twice. But he scored two touchdowns on a 67-yard reception from Bobby Hoying and an 8-yard run.

25 Years Ago — 1999

When Ohio State accepted a bid to play in the Kickoff Classic in December, the Buckeyes had several motives in mind. They included a nifty payout for the athletic department as well as extra practice time for OSU's young football team.

A win over Miami (Fla.), a tradition-rich program that had fallen on hard times over the past several years, was all but a given.

But this was a new year, and that was never more apparent than after the Hurricanes had cruised to a 23-12 win over the Buckeyes Aug. 29 at East Rutherford, N.J.

"It was just a different feeling out there today," said tailback Michael Wiley, a key component on OSU's Big Ten championship teams from 1996 and '98. "I have never felt like this before."

Ohio State looked rough around the edges, playing its first game without departed stars like quarterback Joe Germaine, split end David Boston, linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer, and cornerback Antoine Winfield. OSU's youth and lack of depth in key areas showed throughout a game rife with turnovers – four on each side – and penalties.

20 Years Ago — 2004

If there was a quarterback controversy in the ongoing battle between sophomore Justin Zwick and Troy Smith, the flames were not being fanned by the two combatants. That was especially true of Smith, who called Zwick "my guy" on photo day.

"As a person I can't really speak for him because I don't know what he thinks about it," Smith said of Zwick. "I don't know what goes on in his head. But for the most part our relationship has been a very good one. Justin is a great person. There's a lot of things that he helps me out with, and I am grateful for it."

"He's my guy. When Coach (Jim) Tressel and (quarterbacks) Coach (Joe) Daniels aren't there, he's the guy I turn to."

Listed second on the depth chart, Smith even went so far as to vow that he would not transfer if he became a backup and added he would be willing to rotate in if that's the plan.

"I'm going to react the way any Buckeye would," he said. "We keep striving, we keep on going, we keep moving forward."

15 Years Ago — 2009

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel said he expected his team to get Navy's best shot in the 2009 season opener.

He probably didn't know how prophetic he would prove to be.

Thanks to a scrappy offensive effort that produced three touchdown drives of 80 yards or more and a late interception that set up a fourth score, the Midshipmen hung in with the sixth-ranked Buckeyes until the final minutes before OSU finally squeezed out a 31-27 victory.

There were plenty of anxious moments, though, as members of an opening-day record Ohio Stadium crowd of 105,092 grew more and more restless. Navy clawed its way back from a 15-point deficit early in the fourth quarter and was on the verge of tying the contest after junior quarterback Ricky Dobbs sprinted up the middle for a 24-yard touchdown with 2:23 remaining.

The Mids set up for a two-point conversion attempt, but when Dobbs tried to find an open receiver in the end zone, OSU junior linebacker Brian Rolle intercepted the pass and returned it 99 yards for two points. The four-point turnaround accounted for the final margin of victory in a game the Buckeyes were favored to win by three touchdowns.

"We have to tip our caps to the young men from the United States Naval Academy," Tressel said. "We knew they would fight to the last play and they did just that."

10 Years Ago — 2014

Ohio State senior quarterback Braxton Miller underwent successful surgery on his right (throwing) shoulder Aug. 26.

The procedure was done by renowned orthopedic surgeon James Andrews, and Miller posted a picture of himself with Andrews on Instagram when it was over.

"Me & the best to do it, Dr. Andrews after surgery today! So happy this man said everything went well!" Miller wrote.

Head coach Urban Meyer told reporters on the Big Ten coaches teleconference later that day that his understanding was everything went according to plan.

"Braxton and I talked this morning before he went in," Meyer said. "He had surgery, everything is good. It's very positive. All reports are there were no surprises and everything went well, so he's out of surgery and he's going to be back tomorrow morning."

Five Years Ago — 2019

The Ryan Day era at Ohio State officially began with a relatively easy 45-21 win over Florida Atlantic on Aug. 31, but the ebb and flow of the game was certainly much different than anyone expected.

The Buckeyes jumped out to a 28-0 lead just 8:10 into the first quarter under the direction of sophomore quarterback Justin Fields.

Fields – who transferred from Georgia that offseason and earned his first career start following a lengthy quarterback battle throughout the spring and well into fall camp – ran for a 51-yard touchdown on his first drive. He then completed touchdown passes to sophomore tight end Jeremy Ruckert, senior wide receiver Binjimen Victor and sophomore wideout Chris Olave on the Buckeyes' next three possessions.

No one would have blamed the Owls if they started warming up the buses and packing their bags for the airport at that point in the game. But then the OSU offense cooled off considerably.

Ohio State failed to score on its next seven possessions (including the end of the half), with two series ending with turnovers. True freshman Garrett Wilson dropped a backward pass, and junior running back J.K. Dobbins fumbled on a carry up the middle, the latter of which contributed to a Florida Atlantic field goal.

"We came out to a great start early on," Day said. "We were kind of clicking on both sides of the ball. We hit a little bit of a lull there, but overall, it was a great start."

"I don't know if I've been in a game like that. It was kind of strange. We came out to such a quick lead, and maybe we took a deep breath there. I'm not sure, but we can't let that happen. We have to keep the pedal to the metal on that, keep going."

One Year Ago — 2023

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh was serving a self-imposed three-game suspension to begin the season, but that had not stopped him from speaking his mind about the state of college athletics. The Wolverines' leader spent the first six minutes of his Aug. 28 press conference advocating for student-athlete revenue sharing, urging the NCAA to grant players a fair allotment of the money generated by the sport.

"What I don't understand is how the NCAA, television networks, conferences, universities, coaches can continue to pull in millions, in some cases billions, of dollars in revenue off the efforts of college student-athletes across the country without providing enough opportunity to share the ever-increasing revenues," he said.

"When a student-athlete calls it a game, corporate-types call it a business. When student-athlete call it a business, corporate-types call it a game.

"We should all be about diversity, equity and inclusion," he continued. "I'm calling for a system that is fair, equitable and benefits all involved. Don't exclude the student-athletes from the profits. In my opinion, you can't say you're about diversity, equity and inclusion if you aren't willing to include the student-athletes in revenue sharing."

claims of fraud into a lawsuit originally filed against Harrison in May of 2024 and included Harrison's father, Pro Football Hall of Famer Marvin Harrison Sr., in the lawsuit.

Initially, the younger Harrison was claimed to have breached a \$1.05 million contract that he signed with the company, which according to ESPN reports, would've had the Arizona Cardinals first-round draft pick give an assortment of signatures and game-worn gear to Fanatics in exchange for the money. However, in sworn affidavits signed by the younger Harrison and his father, the pair claimed he didn't actually sign the term-binding sheet, but instead, it was signed by his father as an authorized representative of his company, the Harrison Collection Company.

According to an updated complaint from Fanatics obtained by The Athletic, Harrison Sr.'s signature on the binding term sheet "bears a striking resemblance" to Harrison Jr.'s.

"The defendants' misconduct is now clear," the complaint read. "Defendants knowingly induced Fanatics to enter into the binding term sheet, never intending to perform; mimicked Harrison Jr.'s signature to mislead Fanatics into believing Harrison Jr. had signed for his company; and abused the corporate form in a fraudulent attempt to shield themselves (and the company) from any liability in the pro-

cess."

According to ESPN, court proceedings for the Harrison case could last until June before a trial even begins.

Harrison, who was selected by the Arizona Cardinals with the fourth overall pick in the 2024 NFL draft after winning the Biletnikoff Award as a Buckeye, is expected to make his NFL debut with the Cardinals on Sept. 8 against the Bills.

49 Buckeyes Make Initial NFL Rosters

As initial NFL rosters took shape Aug. 28, 49 Buckeyes appear to have a place on NFL teams.

Among the 49 Buckeyes on NFL rosters were drafted rookies Harrison, Houston Texans tight end Cade Stover and Las Vegas Raiders linebacker Tommy Eichenberg.

With NFL rosters being slimmed down to 53 players, several Buckeyes were released, including wide receivers Noah Brown (Texans), Parris Campbell (Eagles) and Xavier Johnson (Bills); offensive linemen Wyatt Davis (Browns), Jamarco Jones (Lions) and Matthew Jones (Dolphins); defensive linemen Jalyn Holmes (Jets) and Tommy Togiai (Falcons); linebackers Tyreke Smith (Cardinals) and Steele Chambers (Patriots); cornerbacks Kendall Sheffield (Jets) and Shaun Wade (Patriots), and safeties Josh Proctor (Jaguars) and Tanner McCalister (Broncos).

These players will still have a chance to be signed to NFL teams as practice squad members before the start of the season, however.

Johnson, a five-time letter winner at Ohio State who totaled 178 receiving yards on 13 catches while donning the Block "O" jersey last season, already made the Texans' practice squad after having been released by the Bills.

Johnson, who had three catches for 27 yards during the Bills' preseason slate, now joins his former Ohio State teammates C.J. Stroud and Stover in Houston.

Hall Placed On Commish's Exempt List

One notable Buckeye who was missing from an initial 53-man NFL roster was defensive tackle Michael Hall Jr., who was put on the commissioner's exempt list on Aug. 27 following a domestic violence arrest on Aug. 13.

Hall was arrested after having a physical altercation with his fiancée that reportedly stemmed from an argument between

the pair involving the "financial needs" for Hall's fiancée's daughter, who is not Hall's biological daughter.

The altercation escalated to the point that Hall reportedly pointed a gun to her temple, saying, "I will f-- end it all." However, according to Cleveland's NBC affiliate WKYC, Hall's fiancée later recanted the allegation that Hall pointed a gun to her head to a prosecutor in Avon, Ohio on Aug. 21, claiming she was "mistaken."

Hall, a second-round pick of the Cleveland Browns, returned to Browns practice the next day following his arrest. Hall also played in the Browns' preseason game on Aug. 17 against the Vikings, where he recorded one assisted tackle and a QB hit.

According to a tweet from ESPN's Adam Schefter on Aug. 27, Hall's inclusion on the exempt list means he doesn't count against the Browns' 53-man roster, and he cannot practice with the team, play in a game or attend a game. Hall, can, however, show up at the team's training facility.

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Early Mistakes Didn't Faze Freshman Smith

Continued From Page 1

out the final moments of the five-star recruitment last December in fear he would flip to another school, knew their coveted freshman would come right back from his mistakes, a level of trust that Smith is thankful he has already been able to build so early in his career.

"I think I built that trust during practice," he said. "When I make a mistake, they know I'm going to bounce back from it. It's just the trust that they have in me to go out there and continue playing football and make plays."

In his postgame press conference, head coach Ryan Day seemed giddy with excitement when he was talking about his new receiver. It wouldn't have been a surprise to see a true freshman taken out of the game after making two mistakes on the first drive of the game, but Day echoed the sentiment that he never felt nervous about Smith even after the mistakes because they have been able to watch the way he plays the game every single day in practice.

"Nobody even batted an eye. Nobody said a word," Day said. "We thought, 'He's just going to play through this and he's going to be fine.' It wasn't a consideration because we see him every day in practice. We knew he was going to settle in."

And settle in is exactly what he did. After the Buckeyes were forced to punt on their first drive, it was the very next time out that

Smith got another target, which he was able to reel in for an 11-yard completion and his first collegiate yards. When Howard was pressured in the pocket later that drive, he rolled out to the right and spotted a curling Smith to the sideline, who caught the pass and kept his feet inbounds to secure the first down and keep the drive going.

It seemed that the original play the Buckeyes ran hadn't worked, but when Smith saw Howard in trouble, he was able to get himself open and save the drive. Howard was impressed that Smith – in his first college start – was able to have that type of awareness.

"He's pretty, pretty darn good at football, first of all, but he also understands the game really well," Howard said. "There was a third down where I kind of maneuvered a defensive end that dropped to get him a ball on a curl, and the wherewithal he has to figure out, 'Hey, maybe just wrap him a little bit in that window.' He understands the game very well. Emeka (Egbuka), Carnell (Tate), those guys understand the game unbelievably well. All of them do. But Jeremiah, he's a dude, man."

Catching that pass kept the Buckeyes marching down the field, which led to another target for Smith, a 16-yard touchdown on a fade route to the left side of the endzone. It was a ball that he was forced to adjust to while the ball was in midair, and one that Smith adjusted to well, bringing in his first

career touchdown of what is likely to be many.

"If he's pressed, and it's one-on-one, put it up and he'll make a play, and that's exactly what he did," Howard said. "I just saw he was pressed, so I tried to put it up over top, and he actually made a little adjustment and came back to it. That's all I have to do is just give him a chance, and he's going to do the rest. You saw that today."

"Getting that first touchdown felt so great," Smith said.

But it wasn't the first touchdown that was the biggest relief for Smith to get out of the way. He likely knew that was coming sooner rather than later. Instead, he said it was the drop he had on the first drive that he was happy to get over with.

"I was just worried about catching the ball and getting upfield, but I'm glad it happened," Smith said. "I just got that relief and said, 'I'm here now, so I'm good.'"

Smith followed up his first score with another one midway through the second quarter – this one a 9-yard reception on a crisp slant route – giving him the first two touchdowns of the Buckeyes' season. Then when the offense got back onto the field for its first possession of the second half, he caught a deep ball from Howard, gunning for the end zone on a go route. It was a 45-yard pass from Howard which, if it was thrown just a little further to lead Smith more, would have been his third touchdown of the game. In-

stead, he had to settle for getting the offense down to the 2-yard line, where transfer running back Quinshon Judkins would punch it in for his first touchdown in scarlet and gray.

Everything he did on the field in his debut impressed his teammates and coaches. Day – who didn't want to say much about Smith leading up to the season, wanting him to prove it on the field first – finally allowed himself to talk Smith up, and he was very excited to do so.

"You can see the talent, and we're going to play through just about all of it. He's another guy. Sometimes you look at him and you don't think he's quite human, but he is," Day said with a big smile across his face. "He's going to make a few early mistakes, but not very many. You can see the talent there. He's going to sleep good tonight, though, I can tell you that."

Day's glowing remarks have mirrored what his teammates have said when asked about the freshman wideout ever since he stepped onto campus.

The talent that Smith has is obvious, and it always has been. But the eye-popping catches he had in spring camp that were shared all over social media, along with the No. 1 overall ranking he held as a recruit – the first wide receiver to ever have the honor – didn't appear out of thin air. It's the workman-like approach he takes for the game that separates Smith from the pack.

"He's built different," Day said. "He is.

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STAR ATTRACTION — Ohio State co-offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline (left) has a reputation for developing NFL-ready players such as Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and most recently Marvin Harrison Jr.

Just the way his approach is. You can see his size and speed and all of that, but typically somebody with that type of talent doesn't have the discipline, the focus that he does."

It seemed that, with nine targets, Smith was Howard's favorite receiver to look for in their first game together. He had two more targets than Egbuka, a senior who decided to forgo the NFL draft and come back for one more year in Columbus and projects to be a high draft pick next year.

Going into the season with the leadership and veteran abilities that Egbuka has been able to put together over his four years at Ohio State, it would have been no surprise to see him as the No. 1 wide receiver. It was probably the expectation up until around halftime of the game against the Zips.

It could still very well be the case that Egbuka emerges as the top guy for Howard, but it's not unrealistic to think that Smith could take that spot immediately. The way all of his teammates talk about him makes it seem like he is already ready to be the top pass catcher at Ohio State, and Howard doesn't have a long-term connection with Egbuka, despite both of them being in their final years at the college level.

Both Howard and Smith showed up on campus at essentially the same time, with Howard coming in through the transfer portal in January and Smith enrolling early for the spring semester. Those two have had the same amount of time and practice together that Howard and Egbuka have had together. And Smith thinks that connection

will only get stronger as the season goes on.

"Our chemistry is going very well right now," he said. "It's just something we built during practice. And we're just going to continue to build on that, and it's going to get even better, for sure."

As good as Smith is, none of the talented wide receivers who have come through Ohio State were finished products during their freshman seasons, especially in the first game of their first season in Columbus. Smith might already have two touchdowns in just one game at Ohio State, but he has a long Buckeye career ahead of him.

Given how hard he works, he's only going to get better, and Ohio State fans are going to have a lot of fun watching the heights he might be able to reach in three seasons. Howard may only be with him for the first of those three, but he's excited about what the two of them are going to be able to do together in 2024.

"This is just the start for him," Howard said. "I'm excited for him. I think we're starting to develop a lot of chemistry, and I'm excited to see how this season goes for him. He's a phenomenal player, and he's going to have quite a few more targets this year, I'm sure."

But even though everyone who watched the win over Akron came out of it thinking that he is going to be great, Smith still believes it wasn't good enough.

All Smith is focused on doing now is having a good week of practice and building off his performance during Ohio State's

Week 2 game against Western Michigan on Sept. 7.

"I could build on it by not dropping the ball," Smith said. "I feel I could have had a better game. I just made mistakes. Just continue to work and get better each and every day."

The Latest At Wide Receiver U

Harrison is the most recent example of the success that Ohio State has had with recruiting and developing great wide receivers. He was the only one to have multiple seasons of over 1,000 yards receiving, and he played his way into a fourth-overall selection by the Arizona Cardinals in the 2024 NFL draft.

Co-offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline is widely accepted as the reason the Buckeyes have been able to turn into "Wide Receiver University," sending first-round pick after first-round pick to the NFL seemingly every year. It is much too early to say that Smith is going to be part of that group when his time in college comes to an end, but if that is where he wants to be, he got off to a great start against the Zips.

That public perception of Ohio State being the place for great receivers to go largely began with Wilson and Olave, who were both selected in the first round of the 2022 draft with back-to-back picks by the New York Jets and the New Orleans Saints. Smith-Njigba was next, taken 20th overall by the Seattle Seahawks the next year, followed by Harrison the year after.

Now Egbuka has the chance to make it four straight years the Buckeyes will send a receiver to the NFL in the first round.

Hartline began coaching at Ohio State in 2017, just two years after his final season as an NFL player, and he has proved himself as a coach very quickly. Not only has he been able to recruit high-level talent time and time again, consistently bringing in top receiver classes almost every year, but he also is able to develop those recruits into the best players they can be.

Building that type of reputation as a

coach is what attracted a player like Smith, and as long as Hartline remains with Ohio State, that cycle seems like it will keep on going.

What Smith was already able to show off in his first game is not only an advertisement for himself, but for Hartline and the program as a whole. The fact that he was the No. 1 player and was able to start immediately when he got to campus shows recruits in the future that coming to Columbus is more than likely a good choice for them.

2026 five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr., who is already committed to Ohio State, was at the season opener against Akron, and what he saw from Smith likely only whet his appetite to be on that field even more. Henry is also the No. 1 recruit in his class at this point, and he is seeing in real time what could very well be what his future may look like.

The impact of Smith's on-field performance against the Zips was shown that same day, with 2025 four-star wide receiver Phillip Bell committing to Ohio State less than four hours after the game ended.

Another helpful part of there always being a great receiver in the room is the fact that there is always knowledge being passed down. Smith said it has helped him early on to be able to learn from the more veteran pass catchers on the team.

"I mean, I'm still learning. I'm just a freshman," Smith said. "But coming in as a young guy and just listening to the older guys that have been here, that have been through camp, and just listening to Coach Hartline has helped."

Smith is already receiving praise from many of the notable former receivers that went through the Ohio State pipeline, but he knows he needs to show on the field that he deserves it.

"It's something great," Smith said on Aug. 9. "I just have to go out there on the field and just show that I could be part of the great Ohio State receivers that have come through here. I mean, it's a blessing to have that. But I just have to go out there and play and show you guys."



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Howard Shrugs Off Slow Start In OSU Debut

Will Howard's much-anticipated debut as Ohio State's starting quarterback may not have exactly started quite like the fifth-year transfer had anticipated.

Soon after Howard and his new Buckeye teammates trotted out onto the Ohio Stadium field for the first time this season in front of 102,011 eager Buckeye fans, the quarterback struggled to get much going on the offense's first drive, first throwing a screen pass that was dropped by freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith on second-and-1 and then missing his target on a throw intended for Emeka Egbuka on third down to force a three-and-out.

Howard's slow start continued into the second quarter. Despite throwing a 16-yard first-quarter touchdown to Smith on a back-shoulder fade, he completed just six of his first 16 passes for 76 yards and the score to begin the game, opening the door for Akron to stay within striking distance of the Buckeyes, trailing just 10-3 midway through the second period.

Howard's fortunes quickly changed soon after, though. With the Buckeyes facing a third-and-8 on Akron's 45-yard line following an illegal formation call on the offense's fifth drive, the veteran found sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate for a 16-yard gain to extend the possession, followed by a 19-yard run from the quarterback that brought the Buckeyes all the way to the Akron 10-yard line. After a 1-yard TreVeyon Henderson rush, Howard found Smith again in the end zone for a 9-yard touchdown, giving the Buckeyes a more comfortable 17-3 lead that they would eventually take into the half, while also giving Howard some much-needed confidence heading into the locker room.

Howard would go on to complete all seven of his pass attempts in the second half for 112 yards and another score to put his complete-game stats at 17 of 28 for 228 yards and three touchdowns, a strong end to his Buckeye debut that he said was a product of him playing with less recklessness and showing more trust in his teammates.

"I started taking the game as it came to me and not trying to force things," Howard said after the game. "I think there were a couple times in the first half where I was just forcing things and trying to make things happen. With this team, with the guys we have, the more I can just let the game come to me, it makes my job easy, and we can get rolling."

Howard may not have had the perfect start to his Ohio State career – one that could have been worse had his backward pass to Henderson fallen into the arms of

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Engels

an Akron defender instead of his running back at the end of the first half – but head coach Ryan Day said he was content with the poise and control his new quarterback showed during his debut.

"I thought he had pretty good poise the whole day," he said. "He took care of the football except for that one crazy decision at the end of the half, so he's got to take a deep breath on that. For your first start in the 'Shoe – now he is a more experienced guy, but he is in a new offense and in a new environment."

Howard also showed off his talents as a runner in the opener, rushing for 18 yards on four carries and evading the Zips' rush several times to avoid a sack or a negative play. It's an added dimension to the quarterback position this season that could take this talented Ohio State offense to greater heights, but Howard did not want to think about any of that as he left the field. He wanted to soak in the moment of playing his first game as a Buckeye.

"I only have 12 opportunities as a Buckeye guaranteed. Hopefully we get 16 or 17. But I only have so many opportunities as a Buckeye, so I have to soak it all in and enjoy it while I'm here. It was quite an environment, quite an atmosphere, and I'm just glad to be a part of it."

Defense Creates More Havoc

All throughout the offseason, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and his returning players pointed to creating more turnovers as a major emphasis for the unit in 2024, often saying that it could be the one improvement that could further elevate an already special unit, especially if some of the turnovers could turn into touchdowns.

The Buckeyes' vaunted defense achieved just that during the season-opening win against Akron, totaling two interceptions and a fumble recovery on the day that resulted in two defensive scores.

Ohio State's turnover parade started with the one player who was arguably the most vocal about the change in approach, that being preseason AP All-American senior cornerback Denzel Burke. Burke made his presence felt in the secondary early in the second quarter when he snatched a ball



SONNY BROCKWAY

A LEG UP — In a surprise move, punter Joe McGuire got the nod over fellow Aussie Nick McLarty in the season opener against Akron and responded with 44.7-yard average on three boots.

right out of Zips' wide receiver Adrian Norton's hands for an eye-opening interception, an outstanding play that gave the Buckeye offense sound field position and an eventual field goal that extended the lead to 10-3.

"It's something I do on the regular," the often-outspoken Burke said when asked about his interception. "The ball came my way, it's my job to make a play."

The Buckeyes continued their ball-hawking play into the second half, beginning with perhaps the most notable play of the game midway in the third quarter. Ohio State sent out some of its reserves on the defensive line but still wreaked havoc on the Zips' front five, with edge rusher Caden Curry delivering a booming hit on backup quarterback Tahj Bullock that forced the ball onto the ground and into the arms of safety Lathan Ransom, who took the ball 27 yards the other way for Ohio State's first defensive score of the season.

The scoop and score essentially put the game out of reach for the Zips, making the score 31-3 in favor of the Buckeyes, a high-impact play from Curry and Ransom that Day said his defense has worked throughout the offseason to accomplish.

"I thought the effort play by Caden Curry was tremendous," Day said. "(Bullock) was kind of towards the line of scrimmage, and then he retraced back with a great effort play and knocked the ball out."

"That's something we talk a lot about (regarding) turnovers. We did a quick study about college and the NFL, and one of the big percentages of turnovers is strip sacks on the quarterback, whether he's in the pocket or coming out of the pocket. That was a great one. The other study we did was on fumbles and how we want to handle those. If we're in tight areas, we want to get on them. If we get them in open areas we're

scooping and scoring. There's an art to that, and we practice that every Tuesday."

Ohio State added another defensive touchdown for good measure with the game well in hand in the fourth quarter, this time involving linebacker Gabe Powers and true freshman defensive end Eddrick Houston. The 2024 five-star lineman got the play started by deflecting a Brayden Roggow pass attempt into the air, which landed into the hands of a leaping Powers, who took the ball back 29 yards for the pick-six.

The interception put a bow on a resounding 52-6 season-opening victory for the Buckeyes, while also giving the defense a glimpse of what it could turn into if they continue to cause chaos.

"I think that's what's so special about our defense," Ransom said. "By us just doing our jobs, you never know who's going to make a play. There's always an opportunity for any of us to make a big play in the game. You saw Denzel, you saw Gabe today. So if everyone just does their job, the plays are going to come."

One Aussie For Another

Just nine days before Ohio State's season opener, Day proclaimed that true freshman Nick McLarty would serve as the team's starting punter against the Zips, saying that the 6-7, 255-pounder from Melbourne, Australia, earned the role due to his improved consistency and impressive leg strength.

"He'll kick a few that go out of the stadium," Day said on Aug. 22. "He's got a strong leg. But we're looking for that consistency. He's shown that more recently, so he's got the upper hand right now."

While those comments indicated that McLarty could be trending toward earning the full-time starting role in his first season

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

In Ohio State's Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri, the defense had a very solid performance, shutting out the Tigers' offense in the first three quarters before conceding 14 late points, which would be more than enough for Missouri to win the game. Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles partially blamed himself and a lack of aggressiveness for the offensive outburst from the Tigers in a press conference in early August.

The very next chance Knowles got to fix that, there was no lack of aggressiveness in the Ohio State game plan in the first week against Akron, as the Buckeye defense seemed to generate pressures at will. The Buckeyes managed five total sacks against the Zips, starting in the first quarter when senior edge rusher JT Tuimolouau whipped around the Akron offensive line to sack an unexpected Tahj Bullock from behind. Tuimolouau, who didn't get his first sack until the Buckeyes' fifth game in 2023, tallied his first sack this season during Akron's first drive.

As satisfying as Tuimolouau's sack must have been to Ohio State fans, coaches and players alike, it had more to do with the individual skill, effort and talent of Tuimolouau than a perfectly executed play-call, getting around the edge with his quickness. The perfect play call came to set up sacks two and three.

Later in the first quarter, junior linebacker C.J. Hicks – whom linebackers coach James Laurinaitis described as the team's best blitzer during a media availability earlier in August – lived up to Laurinaitis' praise one drive later.

On second and long, Hicks surged right past the Akron offensive line virtually untouched, before brushing past the Akron running back, who unsuccessfully was in pass protection, and slamming Akron's starting quarterback, Ben Finley, to the ground.

Under similar circumstances at the end of the first half, Knowles had six or seven defenders crowding the line of scrimmage. As the linebackers began to backpedal, the Buckeye defense appeared to be dropping into coverage. Instead, sophomore safety Caleb Downs burst into the Zips' backfield from the left side, combining with Tuimolouau to bring down Finley for the unit's third sack of the half.

After 2023 when the sacks took a while to start finding their way onto the stat sheet, the Buckeyes made sure that wasn't the case in this new season.

What Didn't Work

For the team, as a whole, Ohio State was not operating as expected in the first half. Whether that was due to first-game jitters or just learning how to play together in a game for the first time with so many newcomers meshing together from the transfer portal, the offense didn't look like the unit that many thought could be one of the best in the country.

For a group that heard much criticism regarding its shortcomings from a year ago, the 2024

offensive line didn't do a lot in the first half to put those concerns to bed. The Ohio State offensive line struggled to create holes consistently enough for Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson, often resulting in second- or third-and-long situations. The offensive line was by no means terrible, as Ohio State still averaged 4.8 yards per carry in the first half, but that number was at least partially due to the effort of Henderson and Judkins, who seemingly made any play better with their abilities to fall forward and fight for extra yards.

The offensive line wasn't alone in stumbling out of the gates. Fifth-year quarterback Will Howard had a surprising 0-for-4 start passing, which wasn't completely his fault. Freshman receiver, and perhaps player of the game, Jeremiah Smith dropped a pass and subsequently committed a false start penalty (although it was officially credited to Tegra Tshabola despite the on-field referee saying it was Smith) one play later.

Howard's worst blunder came at the end of the first half when he attempted a backward lateral to Henderson that fell to the ground and was nearly recovered by the Zips.

Despite the messy first half, everything seemed to settle down for the Buckeyes quickly. The offensive line created many more holes for the team's running backs, as the offense averaged 5.5 yards per carry in the second half, Howard completed all seven of his second-half passes, and after his slow start Smith went on to catch two touchdown passes and lead all Buckeye receivers with 92 yards on six catches.

Play Of The Game

Lathan Ransom's 27-yard fumble return for a touchdown in the third quarter, which gave the Buckeyes a 31-3 lead, is an easy choice for play of the game. Not only did Ransom's touchdown remove any chance of a Zips comeback and kick-start the Buckeyes' late-game scoring run, but it was emblematic of how the Buckeyes want to improve in 2024.

It has been a theme this offseason of the Buckeyes talking about wanting to create more turnovers on the defensive side of the ball. In the entire 2023 season, they had 11 turnovers. In just the first game of this season, Ransom's fumble recovery was one of three.

On Ransom's touchdown, the Buckeyes didn't just wrestle down Bullock short of the sticks to force a punt. Instead, sophomore defensive end Caden Curry hit the backup quarterback hard enough to force a fumble, Ransom didn't just hop on the ball to secure the turnover but picked it up on the run, enabling him to return it for six points.

The aggressive, risk-taking attitude the Buckeyes showed in the scoop-and-score from Ransom originally surfaced in an interception from senior cornerback Denzel Burke in the second quarter and was reflected in Gabe Powers' fourth-quarter interception returned for a touchdown.

— Bobby Gorbett

with the program, this was not the case on Aug. 31 when the Buckeyes assigned starting punting duties to fellow Australian Joe McGuire.

McGuire, who lost his black stripe on Aug. 28 just three days before Ohio State's season opener, was seen by many who follow the program as the team's third-string punter to start the year behind McLarty and Buffalo transfer Anthony Venneri. But instead, the 6-2 sophomore took all three of Ohio State's punts to open the season, booting kicks that went for 42, 51 and 41 yards for a 44.7-yard average.

When asked about the sudden change on the depth chart, Day said that McGuire earned the starting role after having a strong final week of fall camp, a finish that he said forced Day and his staff to make a late tweak to the depth chart and put in the more experienced punter.

"Going into last week, I felt like Nick was ahead of Joe," Day said. "Joe had a much better week of practice leading up to (the Akron game), significantly. We felt like Joe's experience in the program, being here for a year was better."

While it is unclear if McGuire will be the starter for the entire year, it appears the Prokick Australia product will be in line for more starting opportunities in the near future, likely beginning with Ohio State's Week 2 matchup against Western Michigan. But Day hinted that McLarty could also work his way into the lineup if he shows

more consistency.

"We probably could have given Nick one down the stretch. In hindsight we probably could have done that, and should have done that," Day said. "But we wanted to go with the experienced guy in Week 1. If Nick can continue to grow and build and learn, then we'll get him in there, because he does have a lot of potential and a big leg. But Joe, right now, is a little bit more consistent."

Archie Dots The "i," Earns Praise From Day

Ohio State two-time Heisman Trophy-winning running back Archie Griffin is perhaps the most recognizable and iconic figure in the storied history and tradition of Ohio State football, and his legacy was forever immortalized on Aug. 30 when the school unveiled a statue in his honor in the rotunda of Ohio Stadium.

The 70-year-old Griffin, who is celebrating the 50th anniversary of his first Heisman Trophy win in 1974, received yet another high honor from the university in the Buckeyes' season opener against Akron when he dotted the "i" in Script Ohio during the Ohio State marching band's halftime performance.

Griffin was met with raucous applause from the Scarlet and Gray faithful when he performed the act, becoming just the 15th non-band member to dot the "i," but that was not the only recognition the Buckeye legend received that day.

In addition to each Ohio State player wearing a helmet decal honoring Griffin's first Heisman win, the longtime Buckeye received universal praise from those within the football program during Ohio State's postgame press conference, with Day and his players all signaling the importance of honoring Griffin's accomplishments as a Buckeye.

Day was the first to offer his thoughts on the two-time Heisman Trophy winner, beginning his press conference with an opening statement to honor Griffin's Ohio State legacy both on and off the field.

"Again, just another shoutout to Archie Griffin," said Day, who also had spoken at Griffin's statue unveiling the day before. "You talk about the impact a person has made in his life – they've been playing college football a long time, and there's only one two-time Heisman winner, and that's Archie Griffin."

"I didn't get a chance to see him play, but I did get a chance to see the impact he made off the field, with people in the community, with charities, and I just have so much respect for what he's done. He's a great role model for our team, so congrats to him for his recognition this weekend."

Day's players expressed a similar sentiment. Howard said that it is important for Ohio State to honor the legacy of those who have come before him and made such a profound impact on the program, with Griffin being at the top of that list.

"He's a legend around here," Howard said. "The fact that we wore the stickers for him shows how much we care about our tradition, our history and the people that have come before us. You don't forget about those greats before you and you remember it, and that's why we're doing it."

"It's carrying on that Buckeye legacy, looking at guys like Archie Griffin, who are legends. Being able to put on the scarlet and gray just like they did is an honor and a privilege."

Burke and Ransom both agreed that Griffin means "everything" to the university and football program, with the Buckeye cornerback adding that Griffin's presence inside Ohio Stadium provided him with some added energy prior to kickoff.

"He got the statue planted out in front of the 'Shoe. He's a legend around here," Burke said. "It's dope. I even shook his hand before the game. I had to get some of that juice in me."

Griffin's gameday recognition caps off an eventful month for the Ohio State lifer. He was honored with a statue outside of the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena, Calif., on Aug. 21 – just the fifth erected outside that venue – while he is also prominently featured in the Rose Bowl's new "Legends Walk" near the stadium's Court of Champions, which features displays and information on the 19 Heisman Trophy winners who played in the Rose Bowl Game.

Smith, Howard and Defense Key OSU Victory

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

An imperfect start did not deter No. 2 Ohio State from a strong finish in pulling away from Akron in the second half for a 52-6 win in the season opener before 102,011 fans at Ohio Stadium on Aug. 31.

Heralded freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith on the second play from scrimmage dropped the first ball thrown his way by Will Howard, the Kansas State transfer who threw incompletions on his first four attempts as a Buckeye.

The pair would eventually connect for two touchdowns for a 17-3 halftime lead, and aided by two defensive scores the Buckeyes comfortably won as expected.

Smith, the No. 1 recruit in the nation, had TD catches of 16 and 9 yards and finished with six receptions for 92 yards while Howard completed 17 of 28 for 228 yards on a cloudy 80-degree afternoon.

Quinshon Judkins, the 2022 SEC Freshman of the Year for Mississippi, had 55 rushing yards on 13 carries with a 2-yard TD to make it 24-3 in his Buckeye debut.

TreVeyon Henderson led the Buckeyes with 65 yards on eight runs, but the big story was a scoop-and-score by Lathan Ransom and a pick-six for linebacker Gabe Powers as the Buckeyes scored 17 points off three Zips turnovers.

Opening Jitters

Ohio State got off to an auspicious start after receiving the opening kickoff and a 23-yard return by Jayden Ballard. An offside penalty by Akron was added and the Buckeyes started from the 32, but then they were forced to punt.

Henderson ran for 9 but after Smith's drop, a false start followed by an incompleting led to the first career punt for Joe McGuire, a 42-yarder that placed the ball at the 22 without a return.

Quarterback Ben Finley ran for 5 yards, and 15 more for a late hit by Davison Igbinosun moved the ball to the 42. Finley was injured on the play and was replaced by Tahj Bullock, although Finley would return later in the quarter. On third-and-2 from the 50, Jake Newell caught the ball at the OSU 49 and went 11 more to the 38. Bullock gained 3 and 12 to the 23, but the Zips self-destructed.

A bad snap led to a 14-yard loss, and JT Tuimoloau had a sack for 4 yards which led two plays later to a 48-yard field goal by Garrison Smith for a 3-0 lead at the 8:44 mark.

The Buckeyes then went 75 yards in 14 plays and 6:00 to take a 7-3 lead on a 16-yard catch by Jeremiah Smith with 2:44 left.

Howard threw two more incompletions starting from the 25 before he found Smith for an 11-yarder to the 36 to keep the drive alive. Two plays later, Emeka Egbuka made a catch for 19 to the Zips 44. Three running plays netted 10 yards, and working with fresh downs, Carnell Tate had a 6-yard catch, Judkins was stopped for no gain, and Smith made a grab of 8 to the 20.

A pass to Egbuka was ruled incomplete, and the review confirmed the call on the field. Judkins then gained 4 prior to Smith twisting his body along the left sideline to pull in the score.

On the next possession, Ohio State couldn't take advantage of a 25-yard punt even though the Buckeyes started from their own 41 and ended the quarter with a 13-yard run by Henderson to the Zips 46. Egbuka on the first play of the second quarter received a pass for 16 yards, but the drive stalled on a 4th-and-5 incompleting to Egbuka from the 25.

The Buckeyes extended the lead to 10-3 at 11:23 on a 40-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding, but again, they couldn't punch it in from prime field position.

Denzel Burke stripped the ball from receiver Adrian Norton for an interception at the Zips 33 and Henderson gained 11 up the middle on the first play, but Howard was off target on the next three plays to set up the three points.

Howard to Smith, this time for 9 yards, upped the lead to 17-3 with 4:30 left in the half. The drive went 76 yards in 4:30 with four of the nine plays going for double-digit yardage: Egbuka (12) and Tate (16) had catches, Judkins rushed for 12 and Howard ran for 19 for a first-and-goal from the 10. After Henderson gained 1, Howard connected with Smith on a slant.

"Jeremiah, he's a dude, man," Howard said. "If you get him in one-on-one coverage he's going to win, and at the end of the day, this is just the start for him. I'm excited for him. I think we're starting to develop some chemistry, and I'm excited to see how this season goes for him."

Howard made an ill-advised play late in the first half with the ball at the OSU 38. He was pressured and tossed the ball to Henderson behind the line of scrimmage in an attempt at a pass. The problem was it was a lateral and a live ball.

Fortunately for the Buckeyes, Henderson pounced on it for a 10-yard loss, and McGuire boomed a 51-yard punt on the next play to the 21 where the Zips ran one play before the half ended.

Worth The Wait

Ohio State kicked off to start the second half and didn't go on offense until 8:45 was left after a 36-yard punt return by Brandon Inniss to the OSU 40.

It took just three plays and 52 seconds to go the distance. First, Judkins ran for 13, then Smith took a perfect throw for a 45-yard advancement to the 2. Judkins carried it in from there for a 24-3 lead at 7:53.

Ransom's 27-yard return of a Bullock

fumble 18 seconds later made it 31-3 at 7:35. Caden Curry forced the turnover.

Akron's Smith added a 49-yard field goal with 3:57 remaining in the third at the end of a drive that included a 29-yard catch by Newell for the 31-6 score.

Freshman James Peoples rushed for a 4-yard score with one second left in the third to make it 38-6. The series consumed 75 yards, eight plays and 3:56.

Henderson had contributed 33 yards right off the bat with a 12-yard catch and run of 21. Later, pass interference on a throw to Egbuka placed the ball at the 13. Bryson Rodgers' catch was good for 9 yards before Peoples' carry.

Howard's third TD pass was a 34-yard catch-and-run by Tate with 10:16 to play for a 45-6 advantage. It took 1:53 to go 47 yards on four plays. Howard passed to Egbuka for 4 and to Tate for 2 before Judkins ran for 7 to the Akron 34 prior to Tate's TD.

Devin Brown replaced Howard with 7:13 left, but the Buckeyes punted on the possession. They got their final score when Powers intercepted Brayden Roggow and returned it 29 yards with 2:25 left.

After an Akron three-and-out and a 54-yard punt to the 13, Brown kneeled for a 2-yard loss to end the game.

Notes

The Buckeyes had 404 yards (234 passing, 170 rushing). The Zips totaled 177 with 130 of it through the air. ... Bullock was 9 for 13 for 68 yards and rushed for 42 yards while Finley was 8 for 14 for 53 yards with an interception. ... Smith is the first Buckeye freshman to score in his first game since Jerron Cage against Penn State in 2021.



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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 52, Akron 6

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on not calling plays after doing so for most of his Ohio State tenure: "I don't know what the film will show, but I feel like I was shaking. (Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly) is great because Chip knows what he wants to get done. He's got a long-term vision about what he wants to establish, what he wants this offense to look like. In my mind, I want to score 50 right now. When you're running the ball, that takes work. You have to work through a little bit of what we saw in the first half. When you have younger guys in there and you're pushing through that, you just have to push through it. It's not going to happen overnight. He understands that. He's got great experience in that. I thought he did a nice job of staying poised in there, sticking with what he wanted to get done."

Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Will Howard on the success the offense had during the third quarter: "In the second half, we started rolling a little bit and made a couple of things happen. I think we did do some good things in the first half. We made some good plays here and there, but we didn't really settle into a rhythm. That came in that second half, and we got the ball in the third quarter and started driving a little bit. We settled in in that second half, and we were able to go from there."

Howard on what was his favorite throw of the game: "I don't know if I could pick my favorite throw from today. It was probably that fade ball to (freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith) in the corner of the end zone, or that little peak throw to him in the red zone. I liked those two. But the one to (sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate) – I just threw a curl to him, and he took it 34 yards for a touchdown. That's pretty easy for me, right? I'm just going through my reads. They go one-high. I'm going to the field, to my curl, and there he is. He makes my job easy."

Smith on his favorite catch of the game: "It has to be the deep ball, the one Will threw. Yeah, that has to be the best one."

Howard on the attitude that it takes to be a quarterback who is willing to run: "That's a big part of our game in this offense and what Coach Kelly wants to do. It doesn't even have to be in the run game, it can be in the pass game too. There were a couple times today where I'm honestly mad at myself that I didn't tuck it down and run. Sometimes, they came out and showed us a couple of looks that were new. That's going to happen in the first game. Credit to them. They come out with a different third-down blitz than they've shown in the past. They had nine months to dial it up, so credit to them. The thing is, you have to be ready and you have to adapt."

"But at the end of the day for me, it's not just those designed quarterback runs. It's more like, if they're in man coverage and everyone's got their back turned I have to be able to go get upfield and go get us a first down. I did that a couple times today. It's getting out of that mode of it's touch football in camp when nobody can hit you. Now it's like, 'Oh OK, I can actually go make some stuff shake with my legs.' We had that one play-action where I went down there and did that, and the more I can do that, the better. I just need to do that more. When things aren't perfect down the field, I have to be able to make things happen with my legs, and I think I'm ready to do that, and I want to do that."

Smith on his reaction to dropping his first target on a screen pass during the first drive of the game: "My reaction to dropping the ball was – I don't know. I can't really explain that one. When I came to the sideline, I was just mad at myself. But I mean, it's football. You play receiver, you're going to drop the ball. But you can't drop it that much. So I just moved on, just made a play on the next drive."

Ohio State senior cornerback Denzel Burke on if this year's team has a chance to be more physical than last year's team: "Yeah. It's just the first game and we haven't even hit our ceiling yet. We have another game next week, and we have to improve the week after that. It's our job to continue building and get better at our craft."

Burke on what the defense did to create more turnovers than they were getting last season: "Be around the ball. Run to the ball. If someone's coming at you, try to punch it out. Go get the ball. It's a big emphasis, especially in the back end this season. We just have to continue to keep building."

Burke on if he expected a big game out of fifth-year safety Lathan Ransom: "Yeah, he had a great offseason. He's had that look in his eye all offseason. He's had the game taken away from him. It meant a lot for him. Me and him before the game, we were just talking about embracing every little moment this year. It's going to be our last year together. I'm really happy for him."

Ransom on what it meant to get back on the field after suffering a season-ending injury late last season: "I mean, all that stuff is put into perspective. It was my second injury. I haven't played since October. So it was a little emotional going into the game, getting back out here and playing in front of the fans with my teammates. To have a game like that – just thank you, God, really."

Ransom on if he was more demonstra-



SONNY BROCKWAY

PICKY – Senior cornerback Denzel Burke earned his third career interception in the second quarter when he stripped the ball from Adrian Norton.

ive on the field due to coming back from injury: "Most definitely. I feel like I've had such a change of perspective. No matter who we're playing, no matter what it is – whether it's a practice, whether it's a game, whether it's a scrimmage – I'm just happy to be on the field. So to make a play on the field, it's just my emotions coming through. It's just the emotions I've been holding in. I'm even getting emotional speaking about it right now. So I was excited to be out there playing again."

Ransom on the fumble he returned for a touchdown in the third quarter: "When it bounced, I almost dropped it at first. I was so excited because I knew that if I could catch it I'd get to the end zone. And then for it to just get in my hand, I had a big smile on my face running down the field. It felt amazing."

Akron head coach Joe Moorhead on what he learned playing against Ohio State in the season opener: "I learned that Ohio State is an incredibly talented team that is very well-coached and will have an opportunity, in my opinion, having coached against the 2019 LSU team – and I took my son to see Michigan last spring for a recruiting visit. So I know what a team that can play for a national championship looks like, and this looks like a team that can play for the national championship. It's just an embarrassment of riches. Everywhere you look there's a guy that can catch it, break a tackle and score, or a guy that can run by you, and a guy that can throw the ball, and a line that can protect."

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 52, Akron 6

Aug. 31, 2024 — Ohio Stadium, Columbus

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
AKRON	3	0	3	0	6
OHIO STATE	7	10	21	14	52

First Quarter

AKRON - G. Smith 48 yd FG, 08:44

OSU - J. Smith 16 yd pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 02:44.

Second Quarter

OSU - Fielding 40 yd FG, 11:23.

OSU - J. Smith 9 yd pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 04:30.

Third Quarter

OSU - Judkins 2 yd rush (Fielding kick), 07:53.

OSU - Ransom 27 yd fumble return (Fielding kick), 07:35.

AKR - G. Smith 49 yd FG, 03:57.

OSU - Peoples 4 yd rush (Fielding kick), 00:01.

Fourth Quarter

OSU - Tate 34 yd pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 10:16.

OSU - Powers 29 yd interception return (Fielding kick), 02:25.

Att. - 102,011

Weather - Cloudy, 80 F

Team Statistics

	AKRON	OSU
FIRST DOWNS	11	24
Rushing	5	11
Passing	5	12
Penalty	1	1
Rushes-Yards	35-47	33-170
Passing Yards	130	234
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	18-29-2	18-31-0
Offensive Plays	64	64
Total Net Yards	177	404
Third Down Efficiency	4-16	9-14
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-3	0-1
Punts-Avg.	6-289	3-134
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	1-0
Penalties	5-35	7-45
Time of Possession	34:03	25:56

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - **AKR**: Bullock 14-42; Kellom 3-9; Williams 3-8; Simmons 7-2; Finley 7-0; TEAM 1(-14). **OSU**: Henderson 8-65; Judkins 13-55; Peoples 6-30; Howard 4-18; Williams-Dixon 1-4; TEAM 1(-2).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - **AKR**: Finley 8-14-1-53-0; Bullock 9-13-0-68-0; Roggow 1-2-1-9-0. **OSU**: Howard 17-28-0-228-3; Brown 1-3-0-6-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - **AKR**: Simmons 4-25; Golden 3-32; Kellom 3-10; Newell 2-41; Bullock 2-4; Cravaack 1-9; Polk 1-5; Rush 1-2; Davis 1-2. **OSU**: Smith 6-92; Tate 4-58; Egbuka 4-51; Henderson 2-18; Rodgers 1-9; Ballard 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - **AKR**: Book 6-48.2-60. **OSU**: McGuire 3-44.7-51

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **AKR**: None. **OSU**: Inniss 4-60.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **AKR**: None. **OSU**: Ballard 1-23.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - **AKR**: None. **OSU**: Ransom 1-27.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - **AKR**: None. **OSU**: Powers 1-29; Burke 1-0.

SACKS - **AKR**: None. **OSU**: Tuimoloau 1.5-7; Hicks 1-8; Williams 1-1; Jackson 0.5-4; Melton 0.5-3; Downs 0.5-2.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - **AKR**: None. **OSU**: Ransom 2-3; Tuimoloau 1.5-7; Williams 1.5-4; Hicks 1-8; Melton 1-5; Matthews 1-2; Reese 1-1; Jackson 0.5-4; Downs 0.5-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) - **AKR**: David 5-1-6; Nunnally 2-3-5; Fish 0-5-5; D. Lewis 3-1-4; P. Lewis 3-1-4; Golden-Nelson 2-2-4; Roach 2-1-3; DeWalt 2-1-3; McCoy 1-2-3; Benenge 0-3-3; Greenwood 2-0-2; Spriggs 1-1-2; Cooper 1-1-2; Dall 1-0-1; Kellom 1-0-1; Adler 1-0-1; Cheatom 1-0-1; Anderson 1-0-1; Jackson 0-1-1; Murphy 0-1-1; Kapongo 0-1-1; Thomas 0-1-1; Reardon 0-1-1; White 0-1-1; Lavea 0-1-1; Hunter 0-1-1. **OSU**: Ransom 5-4-9; Williams 2-5-7; Hicks 3-3-6; S. Styles 1-5-6; Hancock 4-0-4; Reese 3-1-4; Burke 2-2-4; Hamilton 1-3-4; Matthews 3-0-3; Tuimoloau 2-1-3; Jackson 2-1-3; L. Styles 1-1-2; Sawyer 0-2-2; Downs 0-2-2; Melton 0-2-2; Curry 1-0-1; McClain 1-0-1; Powers 1-0-1; Igbinosun 0-1-1; Malone 0-1-1; Mickens 0-1-1; McDonald 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - **AKR**: Finley, Bullock, Norton, Golden, Polk, Seymore, Thomas, Davis, Burrell, Shor, Simmons, Adler, Fish, Nunnally, David, D. Lewis, Golden-Nelson, Lavea, Moore, Hunter, Cooper, P. Lewis, Jarmon, Hunter, Roach, Granger, Thomas, Frazier, Davis, DeWalt, Campbell, Johnson, Gainer, Owens, White, Kellom, Cheatom, Williams, Greenwood, Castleberry, Rush, Jackson, Smith, Anderson, McCoy, Dall, Spriggs, Conroy, Book, Reardon, Murphy, Blanchard, Morris, Roggow, Mobley, George, James, Benenge, Cravaack, Newell, Proffitt, Castle, Kapongo. **OSU**: Tate, Howard, Egbuka, Henderson, J. Smith, McLaughlin, Siereveld, Fryar, Simmons, Tshabola, G. Scott, Igbinosun, Burke, Hicks, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimoloau, Hamilton, S. Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Judkins, Inniss, Rodgers, Antwi, Thurman, Nelson, Melton, McClain Reese, Peoples, Bonsu, Simpson-Hunt, Stover, Williams-Dixon, Matthews, Pierce, L. Styles, Jones, Brown, Powers, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Griffin, Ferlmann, Gurd, A. Scott, Motgomery, Mickens, W. Smith, Tounkara, Prater, Padilla, Michalski, Fitzpatrick, Hinzman, Adolph, Christian, Kacmarek, Hartford, Ballard, Mensah, Curry, Kanu, Moore, Malone, Houston, Jackson, McDonald.

Season Statistics

2024 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Aug. 31	(2) AKRON	W, 52-6	102,011
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	7:30 p.m.	
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	TBA	
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	TBA	
Oct. 5	IOWA (25)	TBA	
Oct. 12	at Oregon (3)	TBA	
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	
Nov. 2	at Penn State (8)	TBA	
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 16	vs. Northwestern*	TBA	
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN (9)	12 p.m.	

* at Wrigley Field in Chicago

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	11	24
Rushing	5	11
Passing	5	12
Penalty	1	1
Average Per Game/Rush	170.0	47.0
Average Per Game/Pass	234.0	130.0
Total Offense	404	177
Total Plays	64	64
Average Per Game	404.0	177.0
Average Per Play	6.3	2.8
Penalties-Yards	7-45	5-35
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-1
Third Down Efficiency	9-14	4-16
Percentage	64%	25%
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1	2-3
Percentage	0%	67%
Sacks-Yards	5-25	0-0
Time Of Possession Avg.	25:56	34:03

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	7	10	21	14	0	52	52.0
Opponents	3	0	3	0	0	6	6.0

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	8	65	8.1	0	21
Quinshon Judkins	13	55	4.2	1	13
James Peoples	6	30	5	1	9
Will Howard	4	18	4.5	0	19
S. Williams-Dixon	1	4	4.0	0	4.0
OSU Totals	33	170	5.2	2	21
OPP Totals	35	47	1.3	0	122

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Will Howard	17	28	60.7	228	3-0	
Devin Brown	1	3	33.3	6	0-0	
OSU Totals	18	31	58.01	234	3-0	
OPP Totals	18	29	62.1	130	0-2	

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	6	92	15.3	2	45
Carnell Tate	4	58	14.5	1	34
Emeka Egbuka	7	51	12.8	0	19

T. Henderson	2	18	9.0	0	12
Bryson Rodgers	1	9	9.0	0	9
Jayden Ballard	1	6	6.0	0	6
OSU Totals	18	234	13.0	3	45
OPP Totals	18	130	7.2	0	29

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jeremiah Smith	2	-	-	-	-	12
Jayden Fielding	-	7-7	-	-	1-1	10
Quinshon Judkins	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lathan Ransom	1	-	-	-	-	6
Carnell Tate	1	-	-	-	-	6
James Peoples	1	-	-	-	-	6
OSU Totals	6	7-7	-	-	1-1	52
OPP Totals	0	-	-	-	2-2	6

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	0-0	0-0	1-1	0-0	1-1
OSU Totals	0-0	0-0	1-1	0-0	1-1
OPP Totals	0-0	0-0	2-2	0-0	2-2

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	3	134	44.7	0	51
OSU Totals	3	134	44.7	0	51
OPP Totals	6	289	48.2	0	60

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
OSU Totals	2	30	15.0	1	29
OPP Totals	0	0	0	0	0

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	4	60	15.0	0	36
OSU Totals	4	60	15.0	0	36
OPP Totals	0	0	0	0	0

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jayden Ballard	1	23	23.0	0	23
OSU Totals	1	23	23.0	0	23
OPP Totals	0	0	0	0	0

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot. TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Lathan Ransom	5	4	9 2.0-3	0-0
Tyleik Williams	2	5	7 1.5-4	1.0-1
C.J. Hicks	3	3	6 1.0-8	1.0-8
Sonny Styles	1	5	6 0-0	0-0
Jordan Hancock	4	0	4 0-0	0-0
Arvell Reese	3	1	4 1.0-1	0-0
Denzel Burke	2	2	4 0-0	0-0
Ty Hamilton	1	3	4 0-0	0-0
Jermaine Mathews	3	0	3 1.0-2	0-0
JT Tuimoloau	2	1	3 1.5-7	1.5-7
Kenyatta Jackson	2	1	3 0.5-4	0.5-4
Lorenzo Styles	1	1	2 0-0	0-0
Jack Sawyer	0	2	2 0-0	0-0
Caleb Downs	0	2	2 0.5-2	0.5-2
Mitchell Melton	0	2	2 1.0-5	0.5-3
Caden Curry	1	0	1 0-0	0-0
Jaylen McClain	1	0	1 0-0	0-0
Gabe Powers	1	0	1 0-0	0-0
Davison Igbinosun	0	1	1 0-0	0-0
Tywayne Malone	0	1	1 0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	0	1	1 0-0	0-0
Kayden McDonald	0	1	1 0-0	0-0

Fumbles Forced: One.

Fumbles Recovered: None.



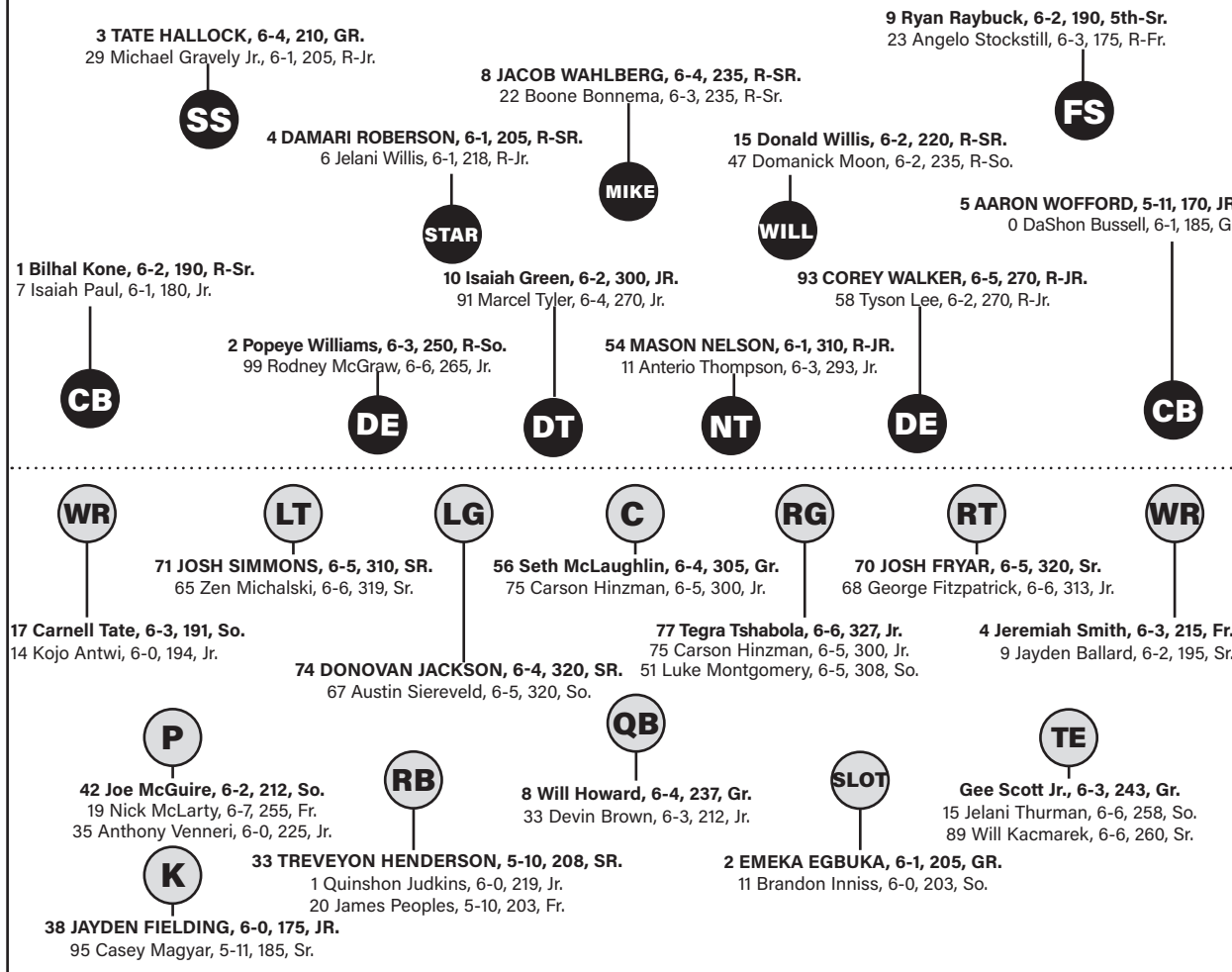
Western Michigan at Ohio State

Saturday, Sept. 7 • 7:30 p.m. • BTN
Ohio Stadium; Columbus, OH

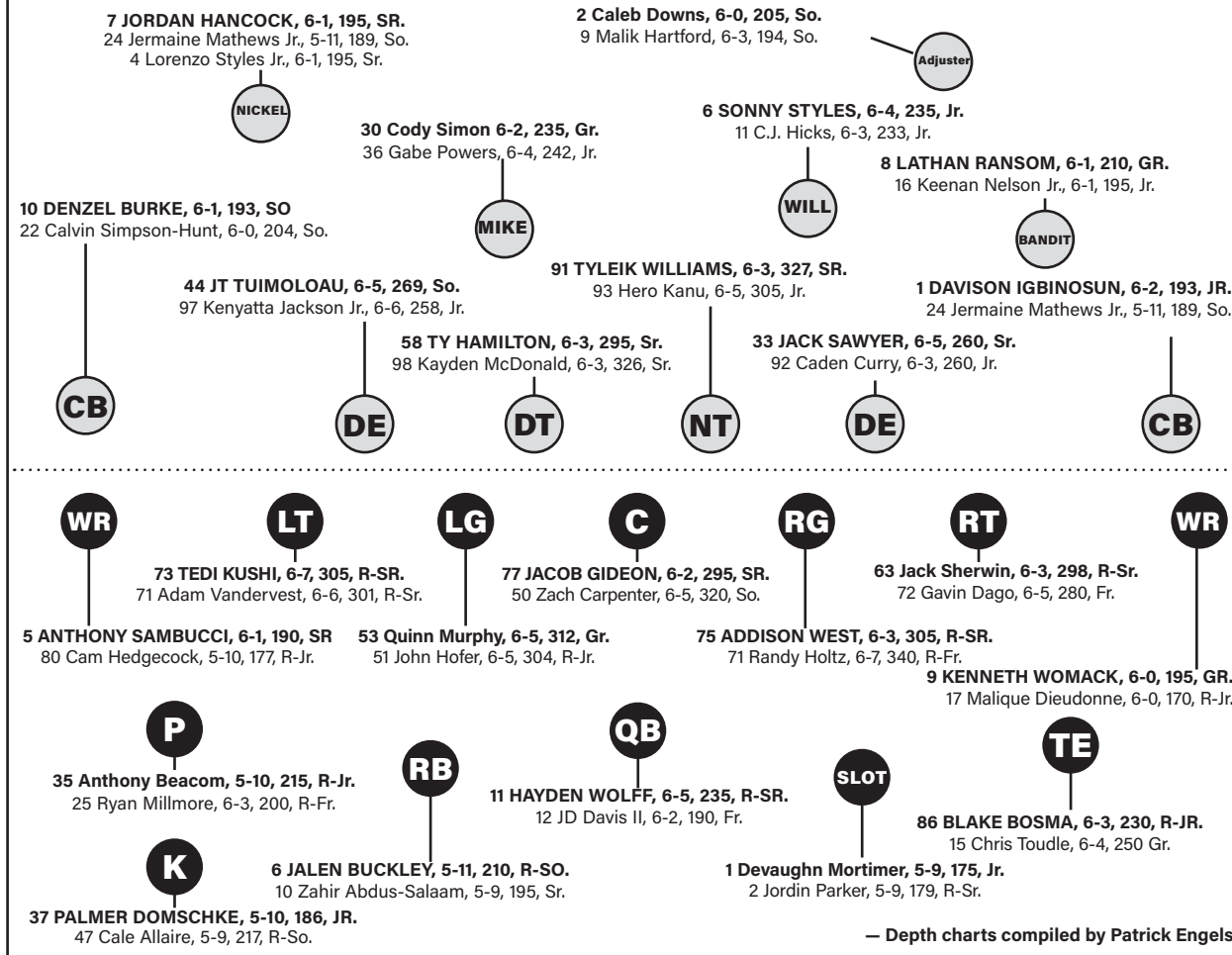


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN WESTERN MICHIGAN HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. WESTERN MICHIGAN RUSH DEFENSE

Ohio State didn't overpower Akron up front in the 52-6 win, but it's a start. The Buckeyes rushed for 170 yards on a 5.2 average with the 1-2 punch of TreVeyon Henderson (65 yards on eight carries) and Quinshon Judkins (55 on 13 carries with a 2-yard touchdown). Freshman James Peoples had six runs for 30 and his first touchdown of 4 yards, and quarterback Will Howard had 18 yards rushing. The Broncos have quality on defense and were impressive for much of the game in a 28-14 loss at Wisconsin on Aug. 30 after WMU was ahead 14-13 in the fourth quarter. The Luke Fickell-led Badgers had no plays over 20 yards and no runs for more than 15. This after Western Michigan was 84th in total defense in 2023, allowing over 393.3 total yards a game. Last season, the Broncos recorded 62 tackles for loss. They returned 45 of those this season, led by defensive end Corey Walker, who had eight. WMU had five TFLs vs. Wisconsin. The Badgers rushed for 196 yards on a 4.3 average with a 9-yard score and two from the 6. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

WESTERN MICHIGAN RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Broncos tallied 120 yards on 33 carries (3.6) with a pair of 1-yard touchdowns by Jalen Buckley in their opener. They earned six first downs on the ground. Buckley carried 16 times for 64 yards (4.0) with a long of 17. He scored 10 TDs last season, all on the ground, and was the Mid-American Conference Freshman of the Year when he was one of 45 players nationally to rush for at least 1,000 yards (1,003). He will face a stern test against the Buckeyes. Akron had a measly 1.3 yards per run resulting in 47 yards on 35 rushes. The Zips' longest run was 12 yards by quarterback Tahj Bullock. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. WESTERN MICHIGAN PASS DEFENSE

They aren't saying "Marvin who?" just yet, but freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith is on his way to becoming a legend after opening his career with six catches on nine targets for 92 yards and two touchdowns. He also had a 45-yarder to set up a score. Of course, it will be difficult to focus solely on Smith with Carnell Tate scampering for a 34-yard score among his 58 receiving yards and Emeka Egbuka gathering four throws for 51 yards. Howard settled down after a shaky start to throw for 228 yards and three TDs, completing 17 of his final 24 after returning 0 for 4. When it comes to getting to the quarterback, WMU returns most of its key members from a group that recorded 24 sacks last season. Linebacker Donald Willis is the top returnee with 3½. Isaiah Green had the lone sack vs. Wisconsin for 9 yards. Badgers QB Tyler Van Dyke completed 21 of 36 for 192 yards (9.1 yards per catch) with a long of 17 against the Broncos. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

WESTERN MICHIGAN PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Sixth-year Broncos QB Hayden Wolff was 12 of 18 for 141 yards with an interception against the Badgers. The longest completion was for 24 yards. His favorite target was Malique Dieudonne, who had 45 yards (15 after the catch) on two receptions. He was targeted four times, the same as Bugs Mortimer. Wide receiver Anthony Sambucci had two catches for 12 yards and also threw an incomplete pass. The Buckeyes had two interceptions vs. Akron, one by Denzel Burke and a 29-yard pick-six by Gabe Powers against the third-string quarterback. The Buckeyes had five sacks for 25 yards. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Palmer Domschke made nine of 15 field goals last season but, more importantly, ran 26 yards from the Wisconsin 30 on a fake kick to set up their second touchdown in Week 1. Ryan Millmore punted twice for a 48.0 average with a long of 53. But, hey, the Buckeyes have return units. Brandon Inniss had 36 of his 60 yards on one punt return, and Jayden Ballard had a 23-yard kickoff return. New punter Joe McGuire's four punts averaged 44.7 yards. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INTANGIBLES

Second-year Broncos head coach Lance Taylor played at Alabama from 2000-03. Notably, he was a wide receiver and defensive back for the Columbus Destroyers of the Arena Football League in 2005. That has to be worth something. His team should be confident after the performance against Wisconsin. **EDGE: WESTERN MICHIGAN.**

STAFF PREDICTION

The Buckeyes incorporated several new faces in key roles so week two will be much better and crisper. Expect OSU to start more decisively than in the opener. **OHIO STATE 49, WESTERN MICHIGAN 7**

— Depth charts compiled by Patrick Engels

Second-Year WMU Coach Leans On Experience

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Since the 2016 season, when former head coach P.J. Fleck led Western Michigan to a memorable 13-1 campaign and New Year's Six bowl appearance before departing for Minnesota that offseason, the Broncos have often settled for mediocrity in the MAC.

While the program did appear in three bowl games under head coach Tim Lester from 2017-22, including a blowout victory over Nevada in the 2021 Quick Lane Bowl, it had just one top-two finish in the MAC West division standings during that span (2019, second), recording a combined 26-20 conference record during those six years.

The Broncos took another step back last season under first-year head coach Lance Taylor, going 4-8 on the year and 3-5 in the MAC, both of which were the program's worst marks since 2013, Fleck's first year leading the program. It was a disappointing first season for Taylor in Kalamazoo, Mich., but also one he thinks his veteran team can use as a building block for more success in 2024.

"I've referred to last year as year zero," Taylor said this summer. "(Our players) were learning the standard and expectation every single day. Going into year two, our players understand what our standard is. They own the culture. They have a want and desire for it to be their team. And that part is

encouraging to me."

Western Michigan returns most of its contributors from last season, including eight starters on offense and six on defense, but its team is under almost entirely new leadership, with Taylor bringing in three new coordinators over the offseason.

Those coaching changes begin on defense, with Taylor hiring former Louisiana Tech defensive coordinator Scott Power to serve in the same role, while also tabbing him as associate head coach and safeties coach.

Power, who replaces Lou Esposito as defensive coordinator, takes over a Broncos defense that struggled mightily in 2023, finishing second-to-last in the MAC in both scoring defense (31.8) and passing yards allowed per game (234.6), marks that also ranked 106th and 81st the nation, respectively. Western Michigan was equally poor defending against the run, giving up a gaudy 158.8 rushing yards per contest, good for eighth in the MAC and 82nd nationally.

Power has a lot of work to do to vastly improve the Broncos' defense in his first season with the program, and it doesn't make it any easier for him considering the unit is missing its top contributor from last season, defensive lineman Marshawn Kneeland, who was selected by the Dallas Cowboys in the second round of the 2024 NFL draft after recording a team-high 4½ sacks along with 57 tackles and 7½ tackles for loss last season.

Get To Know ... Western Michigan

- **2024 Record:** 0-1.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Multiple; Defensive Formation - 4-3; Starters Returning - Offense 8, Defense 6, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Lance Taylor, 2nd Year at Western Michigan, 4-9
- **Series History:** 2nd meeting, Ohio State leads 1-0.
- **School Facts:** Location - Kalamazoo, Mich.; Enrollment - 15,985; Nickname - Broncos; Colors - Gold, Brown; Conference - Mid-American Conference; Stadium - Waldo Stadium (Surface - FieldTurf; Capacity - 30,200).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jalen Buckley	16	64	4.0	2
Parker Domschke	1	26	26.0	0
Zahir Adbus-Salaam	5	22	4.4	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Hayden Wolff	12-18	66.7	141	0-1
Anthony Sambucci	0-1	0.0	0	0-0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Malique Dieudonne	2	45	22.5	0
Jalen Buckley	1	24	24.0	0
Blake Bosma	1	23	11.5	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game	— 14.0
Rushing Yards Per Game	— 120.0
Passing Yards Per Game	— 141.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game	— 261.0

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 30	at Wisconsin	L, 28-14
Sept. 7	at Ohio State	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 14	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	6:30 p.m.
Sept. 28	at Marshall	TBA
Oct. 5	at Ball State	TBA
Oct. 12	AKRON	TBA
Oct. 19	at Buffalo	TBA
Oct. 26	KENT STATE	3:30 p.m.
Nov. 6	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	7 p.m.
Nov. 12	at Bowling Green	7 p.m.
Nov. 19	at Central Michigan	TBA
Nov. 30	EASTERN MICHIGAN	TBA
Dec. 7	MAC Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Bilhal Kone	5	5	10.0	0.5-1	0.0-0
Donald Willis	6	4	10.0	1.0-2	0.0-0
Boone Bonnema	5	4	9.0	1.0-1	0.0-0
Isaiah Green	5	1	6.0	1.0-9	1.0-9
Tate Hallock	4	2	6.0	0.5-2	0.0-0
Domanick Moon	5	-	5.0	0.0-0	0.0-0
Anterio Thompson	4	1	5.0	0.0-0	0.0-0
Aaron Wofford	2	2	4.0	0.0-0	0.0-0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed	— 28.0
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 196.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 192.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed	— 388.0

Despite the significant loss of Kneeland, Western Michigan still returns more than half of its defensive starters.

Headlining that group of returners are safety Tate Hallock and cornerback Aaron Wofford, who will look to improve the Broncos' secondary after finishing at No. 1 and No. 2 on the team in tackles last season with 75 and 71 stops, respectively. Hallock and Wofford's physicality were on full display last season, but they also showed an ability to excel in pass coverage, with the two recording two interceptions each along with a combined nine pass breakups.

Hallock and Wofford lead a veteran secondary that also includes redshirt senior cornerback Bilhal Kone and fifth-year transfer strong safety Ryan Raybuck.

Veteran leadership is also the theme at linebacker, where Damari Roberson and Jacob Wahlberg return after combining for 133 tackles (eight for loss), two sacks and 10 pass breakups in 2023. The two upperclassmen will be part of a three-linebacker system under Power that will have Wahlberg starting at Mike linebacker alongside redshirt senior Donald Willis at the Will, and Roberson playing at the hybrid "Star" position, often used in a 4-3 defense that has the responsibilities of both a weakside linebacker and nickel.

Roberson thinks the combined experience of this linebacker group could pay dividends for the unit in 2024.

"(Wahlberg and Willis) have seen a lot of football, played a lot of football," Roberson said. "So I can just trust them without having to be worried about what they have going on."

Experience will also be a significant factor on the Broncos' defensive line, which brings back two key starters from last year's unit along with another key rusher who also

made a considerable impact.

Leading this year's front four are nose tackle Mason Nelson and defensive end Corey Walker, who each return to Western Michigan's starting front four this season after recording a combined 63 tackles (13 for loss) and 5½ sacks. Walker's eight tackles for loss led the team, while Nelson's three sacks ranked third on the squad.

While Nelson and Walker each made a significant impact last season alongside the now-Dallas Cowboy Kneeland, the team also received significant production from now-junior defensive lineman Isaiah Green, who earned the full-time starting job after appearing in all 12 games and finishing with 26 tackles (4½ for loss) along with two sacks and an impressive four pass breakups.

Also joining the Broncos' starting front four this season is Louisville transfer Pop-eye Williams, who is looking to revitalize his career in the MAC after playing just 50 combined snaps during his two seasons with the Cardinals. He adds to what Taylor thinks should be an improved defensive line and overall defense this season.

"We lost the best player on our team, one of the best in the conference in Marshawn," Taylor said. "However, the sum of our parts is better this year. We have a strong, talented and deep line with eight players who can rotate up front, all four linebackers have started for us, and in the back end, we have guys who have experience, but just not here."

The improved depth of Taylor's defense was on full display during Western Michigan's 28-14 season-opening loss to Wisconsin on Aug. 30. Even with the Broncos being down one defender after Wahlberg was ejected in the second quarter for targeting, the unit still stymied the Badgers' offense at times, holding the Badgers to just 13 points

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OHIO STATE VS. WESTERN MICHIGAN

and 286 total yards through the third quarter before giving up 15 points on 102 yards in the fourth.

It was a strong overall defensive performance that had the Broncos flirting with an upset, going up 14-13 early in the fourth quarter before Wisconsin took over.

Switching to the offense, the Broncos return all but three starters to a unit that was fairly inconsistent in 2023 with now Stony Brook head coach Billy Cosh calling plays. Western Michigan showed some explosiveness on offense last season, ranking second in the MAC in passing offense at 211.2 yards per game and sixth in scoring offense at 23.7 points per contest, but they also faltered at times, scoring 17 or fewer points in five games.

With Cosh now gone, the Broncos will look to improve under the leadership of new offensive coordinator Walt Bell, who served as Indiana's offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach for the past two seasons along with being head coach at UMass from 2019-21.

Commanding Bell's offense is redshirt senior quarterback Hayden Wolff, who emerged as the team's full-time starter toward the end of the 2023 campaign and made the most of his opportunity. He completed 148 of his 226 passes (65.5 percent) for 1,505 passing yards and eight touchdowns to five interceptions in eight games and four starts, while also tacking on another two rushing touchdowns on 44 carries.

Wolff, who threw for nearly 6,000 passing yards and 30 touchdowns in 22 career starts in three seasons at Old Dominion, is learning his second offensive scheme in as many years at Western Michigan this season. But Taylor said his veteran signal caller will not be fazed by the newness of this unit due to his veteran mentality and diligence in the film room.

"When your quarterback has started in 26 football games, there's nothing we can throw at him, there's no defensive look that he hasn't seen," Taylor said this offseason. "He prepares the right way."

Wolf completed 12 of his 18 passes for 141 yards and an interception against Wisconsin, but he did show some toughness and poise in front of a tough road environment at Camp Randall Stadium, a mentality that could reap its rewards in the MAC if it continues.

Wolff has many familiar faces to throw to this season. The Broncos return three of their top four pass catchers from last season, including graduate wide receiver Kenneth Womack (691 receiving yards, one touchdown) – who missed the season opener with a broken hand – redshirt junior tight end Blake Bosma (327, two) and senior wide receiver and third-team All-MAC selection Anthony Sambucci (318, five).

Womack's status for Sept. 7 against Ohio State is in question, but the other two top pass catchers could provide safety blanket for Wolff if things turn dire against a formidable Buckeyes' defense under the Ohio Stadium lights. Junior wideout Malique Dieudonne is also a name to watch for the Broncos after leading the offense with 45 yards on two receptions against Wisconsin in Womack's absence.

Perhaps Western Michigan's biggest star on offense this season is at running back, where reigning MAC Freshman of the Year and freshman All-American Jalen Buckley

returns to the lineup. Buckley, who was also named third-team All-MAC last season, was one of just two freshmen in the nation to reach the 1,000-yard rushing plateau last season, tallying 1,003 yards on 189 carries – an impressive 5.3 yards per tote – along with 10 touchdowns.

Buckley's dominant freshman campaign allowed Western Michigan to rank a respectable sixth in the MAC in rushing offense at 153.8 yards per contest, but Taylor said the unit can only have sustained success this season if they get more production out of some of its other rushers. That could come from senior Zahir Abdus-Salaam, who totaled 470 rushing yards and five touchdowns as the backup to Buckley in 2023, and added 22 yards rushing on five carries compared to the 64 on 16 for Buckley on Aug. 30.

"I think we have to be more balanced in our run game in terms of carrying the load," Taylor said. "Jalen did an excellent job last year, but he had the bulk of the carries. And that's really hard, whether in college or in the NFL. You have to have multiple guys. Just being able to share the load and the carries between the talented guys that we have, it keeps them fresh for the wear and tear of the season."

The Broncos also boast one of the MAC's top offensive lines in 2024, a group of experienced upperclassmen led by first-team All-MAC center and three-time Rimington Trophy watch list member Jacob Gideon, whom Pro Football Focus rated as the conference's top center last season after starting all 12 games for the team.

Gideon is flanked by reigning third-team All-MAC selection Addison West at right guard, while redshirt senior left tackle Tedi Kushi, graduate Notre Dame transfer left guard Quinn Murphy and redshirt senior right tackle Jack Sherwin – who each played at least nine games last season – complete the veteran unit.

"Those are the vets, man," Buckley said when asked about the offensive line. "I would say the best in the country, from my experience. Just having those five all back, I'm just grateful, just blessed."

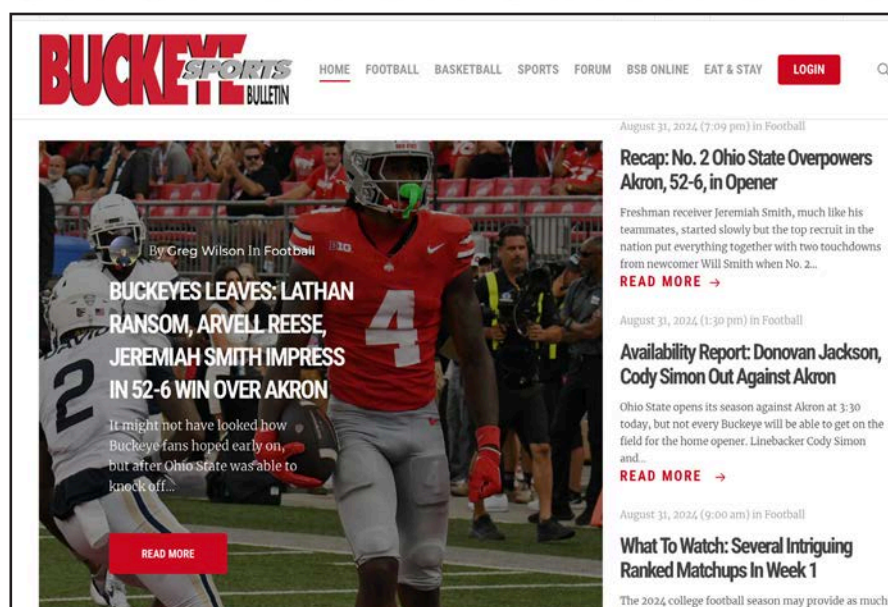
If their scrappy performance against Wisconsin serves as any indication, Taylor's veteran Western Michigan team could be set up for a much-improved season in the MAC this season. But even with the strong showing in Madison, Wis., the Broncos will still need a near-perfect performance on Sept. 7 if they want to compete against the mighty Buckeyes, who sat as a resounding 39.5-point favorite over Western Michigan on Draft Kings as Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

Regardless of the result, Taylor knows the Week 2 matchup could serve as a unique opportunity and important learning experience for his team as they move closer to conference play, making this a game that the entire program had circled on their calendars.

"Our guys are excited," Taylor said. "But we've got one thing on our mind, and that's playing to our Bronco standard. When you play in the MAC, there's great football played. You have to bring your A-game every single week. So it really helps battle-test you for those games later in the season when you have to be at your best."

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Freshman Class Poised For Instant Impact

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The 2024 Ohio State recruiting class was up to par with the rest of the classes in the tenure of recruiting savant and head coach Ryan Day. It was a consensus top-five class in the country featuring many players capable of achieving future All-Big Ten honors and eventually hearing their names called in the NFL draft.

The Buckeyes' class, as is typically the case under Day, starts at the wide receiver position, where Jeremiah Smith, the No. 1-ranked player in the country, draws almost all eyes. Smith is joined in the receiver room by another five-star recruit, Mylan Graham. They brought in five five-stars in the class including Smith, Graham, defensive end Eddrick Houston, cornerback Aaron Scott Jr. and Alabama transfer Julian Sayin. They also brought in 14 four-star recruits, including quarterback Air Noland, cornerback Bryce West and running back James Peoples.

Ohio State had nine freshmen play in the 52-6 win over Akron on Aug. 31. Following their debuts, BSB ranked their potential playing time on a scale of 1-10 at the bottom of each player description with one being likely to redshirt or not see the field at all, a five expected to receive limited playing time and a 10 expected to start at some time this season or be a full-time starter.

OT Deontae Armstrong (6-6, 298), Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward – Deontae Armstrong is one of two Armstrongs in the 2024 class, along with his twin brother, Devontae. A four-star recruit according to 247Sports composite rankings, Armstrong was the 386th player overall in the country, the 33rd-best offensive tackle in the class, and the 14th-best player in Ohio. At 6-6 and 298 pounds, he used his imposing frame and athleticism to become a force in the running game at St. Ed's, where Armstrong was a first-team all-district and all-state player. Sitting behind Ohio State starting offensive tackles Josh Fryar and Josh Simmons, Armstrong will look to sharpen his pass protection to eventually become a starter. In the meantime, Armstrong is highly unlikely to see playing time in a room of fairly experienced offensive linemen. **PTP: 1**

OL Devontae Armstrong (6-5, 303), Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward – Devontae Armstrong is a similarly talented, similarly sized and similarly-named prospect as Deontae. Devontae, an interior offensive lineman at St. Edward High School, was ranked slightly lower than his twin brother as the 445th-ranked player in the country and the 29th-ranked interior offensive lineman, and he finished as the 18th-ranked player in the state. Still, Armstrong made first-team all-region and the All-Ohio team as a senior. Like his brother, Armstrong has impressive size and flashed his lateral quickness to get in front of smaller defenders in the run game in high school. He also has a tough path to playing time in year one behind interior offensive linemen like Tegra Tshabola, Donovan Jackson, Luke Montgomery and Carson Hinzman. **PTP: 1**

WR Mylan Graham (6-1, 185), New Haven, Ind. – Bringing in a new set of highly-touted wide receivers with each recruiting class has quickly become a tradition at Ohio State

under wide receivers coach Brian Hartline. Graham may be the most under-the-radar top prospect in college football history. With plenty of accomplishments in his own right, including going for over 2,000 receiving yards in his career at New Haven High School and a 1,149-yard season as a junior, Graham has been in the rather large shadow of Smith, the No. 1 overall recruit in the 2024 class. Overlooked as he may be, Graham's speed and high-level route running suggest he can make an impact fairly quickly in a crowded Ohio State receiver room. Behind Emeka Egbuka, Carnell Tate, and Smith, it seems very unlikely for Graham to become a starter this season without any injuries to his teammates. The challenge for Graham in his first year will be standing out among the backup receivers, a group that consists of Brandon Inniss, Kojo Antwi, Bryson Rodgers and Jayden Ballard.

PTP: 5

DE Eddrick Houston (6-3, 270), Buford, Ga. – Houston, Ohio State's third-highest-ranked recruit in its 2024 class, has been with the Buckeyes since January when he enrolled early. He recorded 12 tackles for loss in his senior season at Buford High School, and he was the 26th-ranked recruit in the country overall and the seventh-ranked player at his position. At 6-3, 270 pounds, Houston has good size for his position, but as a former track runner in high school, he has the speed and athleticism to make for a formidable edge rusher. Still, Houston resides under a fairly loaded defensive line group behind veterans such as JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer. Houston is currently likely toward the bottom of a group of potential rotational edge rushers like Kenyatta Jackson, Caden Curry and Mitchell Melton in year one, but he could work his way into some playing time. Houston only helped his playing time chances for the rest of the season on Aug. 31 when he batted a fourth-quarter pass up into the air, which was then picked off by Gabe Powers, who returned the ball to the end zone for a touchdown. **PTP: 5**

DE Dominic Kirks (6-4, 255), Painesville (Ohio) Riverside – Perhaps Kirks doesn't quite have the level of abilities as a true freshman that Houston does, but few young players do. Still, Kirks had a productive career at Riverside High School, totaling 86 tackles in his senior season. Kirks, who had committed to Washington earlier in his recruitment before flipping to Ohio State late in the process, was the 163rd-ranked player overall in his class and the 24th-ranked player at his position. Kirks will almost certainly sit and learn his first year from Larry Johnson and behind one of the better defensive line groups in the country. **PTP: 1**

TE Max LeBlanc (6-4, 227), Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School – LeBlanc flashed his pass-catching skills during his last two years of high school in Tennessee, where as a junior he caught 39 passes for 695 yards and as a senior helped lead Baylor to the D-II AA state championship with 884 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns. Sporting his impressive numbers as a junior and senior, LeBlanc, a four-star, was the 258th-ranked prospect in the country and the 14th-ranked player at the tight end position. He will likely be stuck behind Gee Scott, Will Kacmarek, Jelani Thurman, Patrick Gurd, and maybe even Bennett Christian on the Ohio State depth chart this year. **PTP: 2**



SONNY BROCKWAY

HYPE IS REAL – Jeremiah Smith, the No. 1 recruit in the nation for the 2024 class, did not disappoint in his Buckeye debut by making six catches for 92 yards and two touchdowns against Akron.

CB Miles Lockhart (5-9, 193), Chandler (Ariz.) Basha – Lockhart, known for his play-making abilities around the line of scrimmage as a cornerback, could become a future difference-maker for the Buckeyes at the nickel position. He was a four-star prospect ranked 34th at his position nationally, and he had four interceptions as a junior. Lockhart enrolled in classes in January at Ohio State and logged two tackles and a pass breakup during the team's spring game. While a team can never have enough cornerbacks, Lockhart is the third-highest-ranked prospect at his position in just the Ohio State 2024 recruiting class and will be behind Jordan Hancock, Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Lorenzo Styles Jr. at the nickel position to begin his college career. **PTP: 2**

SAF Jaylen McClain (6-0, 192), West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep – With the impact McClain has made on the Ohio State secondary during the preseason, he has been able to make a name for himself in a good safety room early on. As the 36th-ranked player at the safety position and fifth-ranked player out of the state of New Jersey, he was quick to make an impression on Buckeye fans when he had an interception during the spring game, picking off fellow freshman Sayin. McClain's quality play during the offseason comes in a perfect spot for an Ohio State team that lacks the type of depth at the safety position that it has at many others this year. He is vying for playing time behind Caleb Downs and Lathan Ransom, competing with Keenan Nelson Jr. and Malik Hartford for playing time as back-

ups. McClain likely starts near the bottom in the group, but with continued growth throughout the season and some wear and tear from Downs or Ransom during the long season, he could be thrust into an important role in the Buckeyes secondary. McClain got on the field against Akron and recorded his first career tackle. **PTP: 6**

P Nick McLarty (6-7, 255), Melbourne (Aus.) Caulfield Grammar – McLarty, an Australian punter coming in at 6-7, 255 pounds, has generated as much buzz as any special teams player on the roster regardless of class. With videos showcasing his jaw-dropping leg strength – like one shared on social media in which the Australian punter launched a ball 90 yards over a stadium – there is plenty of room for excitement about his capabilities in year one. That excitement reached its apex when Ryan Day named him the starter over Buffalo transfer Anthony Venneri, leaving McLarty waiting for the offense to stall to show off his metaphorical – and literal – big leg. Although McLarty appeared to be the starter a few days before the start of the season, it was sophomore walk-on Joe McGuire, who took all three punts in the Buckeyes 52-6 win over Akron. According to Ryan Day, McGuire overtook McLarty for the starting role after he had a much better final week of practice than his fellow Australian. **PTP: 8**

DL Eric Mensah (6-3, 290), Stafford (Va.) Mountain View – At 6-3, 290 pounds, Mensah provides a more imposing frame as compared to some of the other defensive line recruits

brought in with the 2024 class. Formerly a Virginia Tech commit, Mensah was one of several players to enroll in classes early in January. He was a three-star prospect ranked 90th at his position and hasn't made as much impact in the preseason as some of the other freshmen on the team to this point. With that in mind, Mensah's chances for playing time in his freshman season appeared slim, but he was one of nine freshmen to make it onto the field against the Zips. **PTP: 3**

OL Ian Moore (6-6, 309), New Palestine, Ind. – Moore was the highest-ranked offensive lineman prospect in the Buckeyes' 2024 class, making him an important signing for offensive line coach Justin Frye. Moore did just about everything to help the his high school team win games, including getting some reps on the defensive side of the ball as well. He was the 168th-ranked prospect in the class and the fifth-ranked interior offensive lineman as a four-star prospect. Moore's run-blocking abilities could be invaluable for a future Buckeye offensive line with at least a few question marks. In the meantime, he is unlikely to get much playing time as a true freshman on the Ohio State offensive line. **PTP: 2**

QB Air Noland (6-2, 192), Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes – With a very live arm, great high school production, and solid athleticism for his position, Noland arrived in Columbus as one of the most hyped prospects in the 2024 class. Noland, the 56th-ranked prospect in the 2024 class and fourth-ranked player at his position, threw for over 10,000 yards and 100 touchdowns for Langston Hughes in high school. Noland had an up-and-down preseason in what he described as what should be a developmental year for him. He was able to get a good amount of playing time late in the spring game, completing 5 of 7 passes for 47 yards with an interception thrown, while rushing for 42 yards on five carries. Noland will more than likely be the fifth quarterback on the depth chart in 2024. **PTP: 1**

RB James Peoples (5-10, 203), San Antonio Veterans Memorial – Entering the year as one of two freshman running backs for Ohio State, Peoples could be thrust into a significant role in year one behind possible Heisman candidates TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins. Peoples, a four-star prospect ranked 115th overall in the class, has lived up to the hype so far in the offseason with Ohio State. He is one of 10 freshmen as BSB went to press to have already had his black stripe removed, and during the spring game, he ran for 36 yards and a touchdown. It already seemed as if he would compete for playing time, but now with a season-ending injury suffered by walk-on TC Caffey, Peoples is the team's third-string running back. While the health of Judkins and Henderson will determine exactly how much playing time Peoples receives, he will still be on the field for a good number of snaps to spell the Buckeyes' 1-2 punch. Although it wasn't until the second half, Peoples got his share of snaps against Akron, which included a 4-yard touchdown run on his very first carry as a Buckeye. Peoples finished the game with six carries for 30 yards and a touchdown. **PTP: 9**

LB Payton Pierce (6-2, 223), Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy – Pierce is another freshman who has impressed his Buckeye coaches enough throughout the offseason to have his black stripe removed. He was a four-star prospect from Lucas, Texas, the 204th-ranked prospect in the 2024 class and the 15th-ranked player

at his position. Pierce was an outstanding playmaker for the Lovejoy defense, recording 40 tackles for loss, tallying eight sacks, forcing four fumbles and blocking two kicks in his senior season. As accomplished in high school as Pierce was, he will still have to wait his turn in a deep linebacker room, while potentially making an impact on special teams, working behind the three-man rotation of Cody Simon, Sonny Styles and C.J. Hicks along with Gabe Powers and Arvell Reese, who project to be the backups. He will have to compete for playing time in the future but could be in for a role as the Mike linebacker. He didn't record a stat, but Pierce did make a brief appearance in Ohio State's dominant win over Akron. **PTP: 3**

SAF Leroy Roker (6-1, 175), Fort Myers, (Fla.) Bishop Verot – Roker may not have been the highest-rated prospect in the 2024 class as a three-star recruit and the 88th-ranked player at his position, but he has done well enough before the season to have his black stripe removed. At Bishop Verot, Roker had plenty of positional versatility, making plays in the run game and as a defensive back. Like McClain, Roker comes into the safety room during a time when depth is much needed. Still, it would be a bit of a surprise if Roker plays many meaningful snaps in year one for the Buckeyes. **PTP: 2**

QB Julian Sayin (6-1, 203), Carlsbad, Calif. – One of the last inclusions to Ohio State's 2024 class, Sayin is among the most talented. He was an early enrollee to the Alabama program in January but decided to transfer out of the program after the retirement of head coach Nick Saban. With a strong relationship with the Ohio State coaching staff, it wasn't a hard decision for Sayin to join the Buckeyes. He came in as a five-star prospect and was the sixth-ranked player overall in the class and the top-ranked quarterback in the class. Sayin was also the No. 1-ranked player in the talent-rich state of California. Sayin has put in the hard work to live up to his lofty expectations, notably having his black stripe removed in early April. Sayin even made an honest, albeit unsuccessful, run at the team's backup quarterback spot but will keep competing throughout the season for that spot. If he stays at No. 3 on the depth chart, it will be tough for him to find playing time this season. **PTP: 3**

CB Aaron Scott Jr. (6-0,185), Springfield, Ohio – The fifth highest-rated prospect in the Buckeyes' 2024 recruiting class, Scott hopes to maintain the "Best In America" moniker that the Ohio State secondary takes on for years to come. Scott had a junior season in which he recorded five interceptions and seven pass breakups. He lived up to the hype as a top-40 ranked prospect in the spring game with six total tackles, the third most of any player in the game. He will certainly be behind starting cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Davison Igbinosun and will likely begin the season also behind Mathews and Calvin Simpson-Hunt, but he has the potential to make some noise in a crowded group as a true freshman. Scott may not have had a very memorable appearance in the season opener, but he still got on the field in limited playing time. **PTP: 5**

WR Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 215), Opa Locca (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna – Smith entered Ohio State as one of the most hyped and highest-rated recruits to ever come to Columbus. Prior to the season opener, he had done about as much as a freshman can do to live up



SONNY BROCKWAY

FIRST IMPRESSION – Freshman running back James Peoples ran for a 4-yard score on his first carry as a Buckeye in the 52-6 win over Akron.

to the hype without playing in a game, including wowing fans with highlight-worthy plays in the spring that were shared widely on social media and impressing coaches and teammates with his work ethic, losing his black stripe faster than any other true freshman has since the tradition began. Smith was the highest-rated recruit in the country in 2024 and the highest-rated wide receiver prospect in 247 Sports history. His size at 6-3, 215 pounds, is accompanied by track-runner speed as an accomplished hurdler in high school. Smith started Week 1 against Akron, totaling six catches for 92 yards with two touchdowns in his debut, and he seems to have the starting spot locked up going forward. **PTP: 10**

LB Garrett Stover (6-1,220), Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut – The cousin of former Buckeye tight end Cade Stover, Garrett hopes to make close to the impact his cousin did on the Buckeyes. At 6-1, 220 pounds, he is a slightly undersized linebacker due to a position change from safety in high school. Spending time at both positions, Stover had a strong senior season with 89 total tackles, three for loss, three sacks, a forced fumble and a blocked punt. He came into Ohio State as a four-star prospect, ranked 142nd overall, but 10th for his position along with seventh overall in the state. Stover's speed and athleticism will likely be a weapon for the Ohio State defense for years to come, but for now, he will have to develop behind the more experienced linebackers in the room while potentially getting some snaps with the special teams. Stover was one of several freshmen Buckeyes to not have his name on the stat sheet but still got on the field against the Zips. **PTP: 3**

OL Gabe VanSickle (6-5, 285), Coopersville, Mich. – VanSickle was a four-star recruit coming out of high school, ranked the 17th interior offensive lineman and the sixth-best prospect in the state of Michigan. He should provide the Buckeyes with some good versatility on the line with the ability to move to the outside as well after having played left tackle as a senior. VanSickle is a long shot to get any playing time in his freshman season. **PTP: 1**

CB Bryce West (5-11, 196), Cleveland Glenville – A star cornerback at Glenville,

West had four interceptions in his junior season. As a four-star prospect ranked 64th in the country, he will attempt to form a fearsome duo for years to come with Scott. West flashed his elite speed and athleticism not just on the gridiron in high school, but in track as well, where he ran the 100-meter dash in 10.93 seconds. With that speed, it's not unfathomable for West to get reps in obvious passing situations later in the year when others might need breaks in blowouts. **PTP: 3**

RB Sam Williams-Dixon (5-11, 203), Pickerington (Ohio) North – Williams-Dixon is another prospect who wasn't among the most highly touted in the class but has certainly made a name for himself since being on campus. He was a three-star prospect from Pickerington North and became one of the biggest standouts in Ohio State's spring game as the leading rusher, going for 75 yards and a touchdown in 11 carries. Williams-Dixon has since had his black stripe removed and been put into a greater spotlight as a depth piece following the loss of Caffey. Currently, he is the fourth-string running back, but if disaster were to strike at the position, he would need to be prepared to play meaningful snaps out of the backfield, specifically as a pass catcher. Behind Peoples, Judkins and Henderson, Williams-Dixon received playing time at the tail end of the game, going for 4 yards on his first and only carry of the game. **PTP: 7**

WR Damarion Witten (6-4, 215) Cleveland Glenville – Witten was teammates with West at Glenville, surging late in his senior season by going for 86 yards and two touchdowns in the team's state championship win. Witten was also named U.S. Army Bowl MVP after a three-touchdown performance. He was a three-star prospect ranked the 28th-best player in the country at the tight end position but has since made the switch to be a wide receiver at Ohio State. In a loaded receiver group, he provides better than average size at the position at 6-4, 215 pounds. Witten's size and experience as a tight end could help Ohio State in running situations when blocking is needed, but he is still unlikely to receive substantial playing time in the 2024 season. **PTP: 2**

Howard Managing Lofty Expectations As Starter

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Will Howard has seen a lot of football.

The fifth-year transfer quarterback entered Columbus with 34 games and 28 starts under his belt at Kansas State, throwing for 5,786 yards and 48 touchdowns while also rushing for another 921 yards and 19 scores in his four years with the Wildcats.

Howard has played in some meaningful games during his collegiate career, too. Taking over for the injured former Nebraska quarterback Adrian Martinez toward the end of the 2022 season, Howard propelled Kansas State to an upset win over national runner-up TCU in the Big 12 Championship Game at AT&T Stadium, completing 18 of his 32 passes for 199 yards and two touchdowns along with a rushing touchdown.

Howard's performance helped Kansas State appear on the big stage again later that month in the Sugar Bowl, where against an Alabama team that ranked ninth in the nation in scoring defense that season, he was hit with some adversity, tossing a pair of interceptions and zero touchdowns en route to a blowout 45-20 loss.

The former Wildcat played in more big games as a senior in 2023, none more significant than against then-No. 7 Texas on the road last November, where he turned the heads of 102,846 Longhorn fans by throwing for a career-high 327 passing yards and four touchdowns to one interception in a 33-30 overtime loss.

Howard has seemingly seen it all during his eventful four-year career in Manhattan, Kan. But the fifth-year admitted that he has never experienced anything quite like playing for the Buckeyes.

As an Ohio State reporter joked during Howard's pre-Akron press conference on Aug. 27, Howard is "not in Kansas anymore."

"I played in a lot of places now at this

point in my career," Howard said. "I played in front of hundreds and thousands of people. But the 'Shoe and the atmosphere here, it's different.

"When I went out there for the spring game and there were 80,000 people, I was like, 'At Kansas State, we didn't even have a spring game.' 80,000 at a glorified scrimmage is pretty crazy. Everyone in this city is really bought into the Buckeyes, and it's cool. It's unlike anything else."

With all this attention also comes a whole new set of expectations for Howard, who serves as the starting quarterback of a loaded and veteran-laden Ohio State team that has perhaps as much pressure to win as any college football program in recent memory.

Howard's Buckeye career is already off to a hot start, completing 17 of his 28 passes for 228 yards and three touchdowns before being relieved by Devin Brown in the fourth quarter in Ohio State's 52-6 season-opening win over Akron on Aug. 31. But he knows the pressure to perform and meet fans' expectations for the season – those being a win against Michigan, a Big Ten title and a national championship – will persist throughout the entire campaign, something he is eager to embrace.

"It's an honor, it's a privilege, and I don't take it lightly," Howard said when asked what it means to be the starting quarterback at Ohio State. "There are a lot of really, really good players in that room, and to be named a starter in a group like we have is an honor. It truly is special to me.

"Being the starting quarterback at Ohio State, it's truly a blessing. I know there's a lot of stuff that comes with that. I know there's a lot of expectations and pressure, if you will. I'm fired-up, man. It's going to be fun."

Head coach Ryan Day also feels Howard is ready to embrace the pressure that comes with being Ohio State's quarterback. He said before the Akron game that Howard



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN THE SPOTLIGHT — Will Howard never experienced in his four seasons at Kansas State the type of attention and scrutiny that goes with being the starting quarterback at Ohio State. He welcomes the challenge.

not only understood what would be required of him if he committed to Ohio State during his transfer portal recruitment, but he wanted to experience all that comes with playing for the Buckeyes over any other opportunity presented to him, even one in the NFL.

"He knew what he was getting himself into here at Ohio State," Day said on Aug. 27. "Not to speak for him, but there were only maybe a couple places he would have considered other than going to the NFL, and this was it for him. He wanted to be here. And a big part of that is that he knew what came with it, and he's really embraced that role."

Despite the huge set of expectations placed on Howard to begin the season, those within the program know the veteran quarterback does not need to be perfect in order for the team to achieve its goals.

The Buckeyes boast arguably one of the more formidable defenses in recent program history this season, a supreme collection of talent that was on full display against Akron, with defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' unit giving up just 177 yards and six points.

Ohio State's defense could help take the

pressure off Howard, as could his offensive playmakers, a talented group that includes wide receivers Emeka Egbuka, Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate along with stand-out running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, who combined to account for 339 of Ohio State's 404 yards against the Zips.

Day acknowledged before the season started that he does not need Howard to be a superhero to lead the offense to greater heights but instead become more of a facilitator who can spread the ball out to his talented receivers, command the huddle and, perhaps most importantly, limit turnovers to prevent the Buckeyes' defense from finding themselves in inopportune situations.

"We have a good defense this year, so we don't need extraordinary play," Day said after naming Howard the starter on Aug. 15. "We need someone who's going to take care of the football, make good decisions, play for the team. He's got to play well on third down. He's got to play well in the red zone and win the game in a two-minute drill. That's what we ask our quarterbacks to do.

"We have a good surrounding cast around him, so taking care of the ball is very



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important and also scoring touchdowns.”

Howard has also adopted this mentality. The fifth-year said before the season that, with the help of Day and offensive coordinator Chip Kelly’s teachings, he learned to take more chances down the field and throw balls into tighter windows after realizing he could trust his talented pass catchers to get open and make a play, even if they didn’t necessarily seem “open” to the untrained eye.

This was an approach that Howard said he did not have while at Kansas State and one that mirrors that of an NFL quarterback who has plenty of weapons at his disposal.

“I mean no disrespect to the guys I’ve played with because I’ve played with some really good players,” Howard said. “But I think at Ohio State it’s a little different in the way that Coach Day and Coach Kelly teach some things, saying, ‘Hey, that guy’s wide open. He may not look wide open, he may have a guy right on him, but he’s wide open. In the NFL, he’s wide-open.’ And that’s the mindset that I’ve had to kind of develop a little more.”

“If I put a back shoulder ball on a wide receiver, then that’s a play he can make. And with the guys that we have here – they make plays like I’ve never seen anyone make plays before. If it’s one-on-one coverage, they’re open. It just depends on how I have to throw the ball. And Coach Kelly and Coach Day have instilled that in my brain.”

While the immense talent Howard has at his disposal could make his job easier this season, the former Wildcat is still tasked with some difficult responsibilities as the lead man in Columbus.

In addition to spreading the ball around to his playmakers and playing turnover-free football, both Day and Kelly also want Howard to be a quasi “run-game coordinator” on the field, meaning he is tasked with ensuring that each run call – no matter if it is Henderson, Judkins or even Howard himself getting the carry – can be executed with the right protections and personnel in place.

“The coaches say that all the time, ‘What is your job in the run game? You’re the run-game coordinator,’ ” Howard said. “When we have a good play call and we have pressure coming and we don’t have to run this play into it, it’s my job to get us in and out of it. Obviously, the coaches can only do so much, but we’re the ones that are out there actually calling the shots, and I’m the one that has the chalk last on a lot of that stuff.”

Howard added that having these extra responsibilities in the run game is a challenge that he enjoys because it not only keeps him focused and engaged on every single play-call, but also prepares him for life in the NFL, where making pre-snap adjustments is often crucial to a quarterback’s staying power in the league.

“It’s cool. It gives me a little more sense of responsibility with the offense,” Howard said. “As a quarterback, you’re always clued into something. When you’re a quarterback and you’re mentally taking plays off, that’s not a good thing. You should be locked and dialed in every single play.”

“And Coach Kelly and Coach Day have done a really good job of kind of instilling that in me, just taking responsibility for a lot of things that I have to do, whether it’s pro-

tection in the run game, whatever it is. It’s my job to get us in and out of good and bad plays. And it’s a good responsibility.”

Aside from having added pre-snap responsibilities, Howard has also had to learn how to be a leader in Columbus, which he described as an accelerated process considering he joined the program in January and was named the team’s official starter in mid-August.

Howard said it was a unique experience having to emerge as a team leader as a fifth-year senior transfer with one year of collegiate eligibility remaining, one which he said required him to develop trust and rapport with each of his teammates over the offseason before he could find his voice in the locker room.

“My situation is very different from coming in (at Kansas State) as a true freshman,” Howard said. “You have to come in and really gain the respect and the trust of a whole football team in the span of six, seven months.”

“For me, the first thing that was the most important was just (building) relationships with everyone. I was like, I want to get to know everyone in the team because they’re not going to respect me if they don’t know me. That was what the spring was for, what the winter was for.”

“And then once we got through that spring and we started up summer workouts, that was when I kind of started to settle into that role and feel a little more comfortable challenging guys, just because we already had that relationship.”

Sophomore wide receiver Brandon In-

niss said that Howard has accomplished just that, emerging as the alpha of the Buckeyes’ offense as the regular season neared.

“Everybody listens to him when he’s in the huddle,” Inniss said earlier in fall camp. “He’s the commander. A lot of the quarterbacks (on Ohio State’s roster) have been very good, but he’s been on a different level.”

Howard said his new status as a team leader, which was evident in the blowout win against Akron, has helped him become more vocal both in the huddle and when discussing play calls with Day and Kelly, creating what he called a “collaborative effort” between the quarterback, his head coach and his offensive coordinator.

Howard’s emergence as a vocal leader, along with the other responsibilities he has embraced as the Buckeye quarterback, has set the veteran gunslinger up for what could be a potentially special season in Columbus.

It’s a unique opportunity that Howard has dreamed about since watching Big Ten football in his native Downingtown, Pa., as a young child, and one that he is now fully ready to take on.

“I’ve mentally prepared myself for this for a while, and I kind of knew that last year was probably going to be my last (at Kansas State),” Howard said. “This step that I’ve taken has just been a blessing in every single way. Just the opportunity and the challenges that I’ve had to go through already here have really made me better as a player.”

“It’s a new opportunity, it’s a new challenge, and it kind of lit a new spark in me. There’s something special about this team and about this year, and I’m excited.”

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Teammates Listen To What Cody Simon Says

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Cody Simon on Dec. 12 was the first of the Ohio State players eligible to declare for the NFL draft to instead announce his intention of returning for the 2024 season. Soon after, nearly a dozen others followed his lead.

He did so not for individual recognition, but a chance for program glory.

"There are so many team goals that I want to still complete, and we haven't done a great job of completing them these past couple of years," the fifth-year linebacker said at the time. "I want to be able to go and accomplish those goals, win a Big Ten championship again, and beat The Team Up North. I think we have a lot of unfinished business, and it's something I want to complete."

But as a bonus, Simon (6-2, 235) had already collected personal honors before the Aug. 31 opener against Akron.

First, he was awarded the prestigious Block "O" as the fifth player to honor former Buckeye great Bill Willis, the All-America defensive end and 1942 national champion who went on to help break the color barrier in the NFL with the Cleveland Browns. He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the College Football Hall of Fame.

Simon shed his No. 30 for the numeral zero, joining past recipients Jonathon Cooper (2020), Thayer Munford (2021), Kamryn Babb (2022) and Xavier Johnson (2023).

"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've envisioned, I couldn't have asked for better teammates."

Simon said Cooper and Munford inspired him.

"Every day I have to fight to be the best version of myself," Simon said. "And when I look at guys like Coop, Thayer, I look at them now and you're like, 'Those guys fought.' So for me, it's 'How can I be like that?' Those are the guys who have led the programs for us. So every chance you get, you try to emulate those guys because they are such strong figures in our program."

Simon was also excited to be named a captain along with running back TreVeyon Henderson, wide receiver Emeka Egbuka and defensive end Jack Sawyer.

"I was praying and hoping just to be a captain and for that, to also get Block O, I'm extremely honored and I'm so thankful for the opportunity," Simon said. "To have your teammates think about you in that way, I'm just so thankful. There's really no other words besides 'thankful' and 'honored' to be regarded highly among your teammates."

Simon was an obvious choice, defensive end Caden Curry said.

"Everybody saw it coming," Curry said. "Cody's a hard worker, day in, day out. He definitely puts the hours in and everybody respects him at the highest level here."

Simon didn't have to look far for mentorship in how to be a leader. His brother, Shayne, was a captain last season at Pitt after transferring from Notre Dame as a graduate student.



SONNY BROCKWAY

FOLLOW THE LEADER — Linebacker Cody Simon not only earned the prestigious Block "O" but was also named one of four captains. He did not play in the Aug. 31 season opener against Akron because of an undisclosed injury.

"I model so much of what I do around him," Cody Simon said. "A lot of what you see here for me is a testament to him because he's led me the entire way. Everything I've done, I've been watching him do it."

"I have to be at my best every day. The guys in the room have to look to someone to see an example. And I need to be able to lead them vocally, physically and emotionally. So that's what I try to be every day. And it's a tough role, but I love playing football. I love doing it. I love this place. So, it's a great job to have."

Simon also credits former linebacker coach Al Washington for his captaincy. During the recruitment of Simon, the No. 9 rated linebacker nationally in the 2020 class for Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep, it was Washington who mentioned that he had the makings of a Buckeye captain someday.

"I thank him a lot because he helped me out with a lot of my mentality, especially when I was young and trying to figure a way around here," Simon said. "And then you realize that you stack one day on top of the other, and it's a tough day, but you stack it, you stack it, you stack it and big things and great things can happen."

Ups And Downs

That's how Simon managed his relatively slow journey to success. He played six games as a freshman at linebacker and on special teams in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

The following season he started 10 times and was fourth on the team with 54 tackles, including eight against Nebraska. He also had his first career interception

against Akron. Unfortunately, a torn labrum in his right shoulder late in the season cost him a chance to play in the Rose Bowl, and he missed the 2022 spring practices while he recovered.

That allowed Tommy Eichenberg to move ahead of him on the depth chart, and the two-linebacker system under new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles also curtailed his playing time that season when Simon finished seventh on the team with 32 tackles.

He played behind Eichenberg and Steele Chambers last season and recorded 57 tackles — starting five times for the injured Eichenberg — but with each now pursuing NFL careers, Simon in his fifth season has cemented his spot at middle linebacker.

Simon is the most experienced LB on the team, having played 43 games (15 starts) with 147 career tackles. He wasn't able to play in the season opener this due to an injury, but coach Ryan Day hopes that he will be able to suit up against Western Michigan on Sept. 7.

"It's just the struggles of being a college football player," Simon said. "And it's never an easy road. Everybody's going through ups and downs. So I'm thankful for my path. It's not ever what you really want it to be. It would be amazing to be a three years and out and first pick (in the NFL draft), but I mean, that's not always the reality for everybody."

"I'm just thankful for the opportunities I've been able to have, and I keep that perspective because football can be gone at any moment for us. I just try to go into every day and try to give my best and put out my best

on the field."

He has thrived off the field as well. He earned a degree in finance and was a Big Ten Distinguished Scholar, an OSU Scholar-Athlete and a member of the Academic All-Big Ten team. It was his fourth time as an OSU Scholar-Athlete and his third time receiving Academic All-Big Ten honors.

"He's the unquestioned leader of the group," linebackers coach James Laurinaitis said. "He's the leader of the defense. He gets everybody lined up."

Simon appreciated the comments: "The development of linebackers, you can never be perfect. I really believe that. We have so many good guys in our room who are super athletic, super smart, super talented. He's being nice there. I've got a lot more I could be better at."

"This year was really big for me leadership-wise and taking that next step. You had guys that were big in the culture of your room — there's a void that needs to be filled. This whole offseason has been about leadership and trying to lift yourself and the other leaders up, as well as bringing the guys below. I think I've gotten a lot better at coaching, at encouraging, at being a better teammate, and it's gotten me better as a player as well."

Leading The Way

Simon is versatile enough to play not only in the middle but weakside or strongside linebacker.

"Cody Simon is a guy you could put at Mike, at Will, at Sam," Laurinaitis said. "You can move him all around. 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. I think Cody Simon is probably, if you said, 'Who's the most overall LB?' it's him just because he can go anywhere and he can do anything for us."

Arvell Reese, who moved from defensive end to linebacker a year ago, is a Simon disciple.

"Just watching him, you can learn a lot. Just watching him at walk-throughs, you can learn a lot," Reese said. "So just picking his ear when I can and just watch him, taking mental reps."

Simon is grateful to share his knowledge although being a captain takes him a bit out of his comfort zone.

"Personally, I'm not the type of guy who likes to really be in the limelight and be the center of attention. So even adjusting to that was kind of strange for me," he said. "Ever since I was a child, captains in college football, you see those guys walk out and it could be the biggest game of your life. It was really emotional. I'm just so thankful for it."

"Me as a leader, I'm taking parts of the guys who have led me. Tommy is probably the best leader I've ever been around. He's tough, will work through anything. He's vocal, physical," Simon added. "Guys like that, when you can just take a little bit from them and implement it your own way, it goes miles. And I was just so thankful to have guys like that in my life and on this team, and they've helped me get through a lot of moments."

Tshabola Pulling His Weight On Offensive Line

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

After a year of offensive line struggles for Ohio State, the team seems to be much more confident in the depth that it has at the position going into the 2024 season than it was last year.

Redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman started 12 games at center before being removed from his spot for the Cotton Bowl, a game in which the team had its worst performance of the season, struggling to protect Devin Brown and Lincoln Kienholz.

Now with the addition of Seth McLaughlin at center and only right guard Matt Jones not returning from the starting line for this season, Tegra Tshabola has been tabbed as the starter on the right side, taking the spot that Jones occupied for most of 2023, and he opened the 52-6 win over Akron on the field.

"Tegra will start at right guard for us," Ryan Day said on Aug. 27. "He's had a good preseason. He's done a nice job. We'll continue to assess it all the way up until the game, but he's earned the right to start in this game. He's been consistent. Now he's got to go put it on the field."

Day said he planned on that position being a rotation between multiple players, which is exactly what happened when Hinzman was on the field against Akron for much of the first half, with Tshabola taking the majority of the time at the position. However, the line had some minor early struggles, failing to open gaps for runners in the backfield in the first half.

But when the second half began, the offense broke out of its slump, with the help of the offensive line and Tshabola at right guard. Day said he wasn't surprised by some of the early offensive struggles since there were so many new starters in an offense playing its first game of the season.

"I'll say this overall, I felt like early on the three inside guys, they hadn't played (here) – it was Seth and Tegra, Jeremiah (Smith), Will (Howard), Quinshon (Judkins) first time playing here – and I think across the board they were a little uptight early on," Day said. "They were kind of worked up. You saw a couple of things off. We got ourselves a little off schedule. ... Then I thought we sort of settled in. We started to play a little looser, which is the way we need to play. I thought we were a little uptight early on, and we can't play like that. We have to come out of the gates playing loose."

Tshabola, a West Chester, Ohio, product, had been battling for the starting spot with Hinzman and Luke Montgomery throughout the offseason, and despite Hinzman's year of in-game experience, Tshabola was able to fight his way onto the top of the depth chart.

He said he didn't shy away from the competition with Hinzman, and he believes that instead drove him to work even harder.

"I feel good about the competition because I know that it made me a better football player," Tshabola said. "Competing against a guy as talented as Carson pushed me to be as good as I am right now."

What helped him early on in preseason camp was the fact that he was getting extra

opportunities compared to what a normal season might look like in August since the offensive line was dealing with what Day called a "funky illness." Tshabola was one of the healthy players who took advantage of the extra time he was getting while lining up against the Buckeyes' defensive line.

"We have finally gotten through some of this funky illness that's going on, so we're finally getting these guys out here," Day said on Aug. 15. "We're just a little bit behind there. I will say that Tegra has been out there the whole time and has really showed improvement. I got to watch film from today, and today was a physical practice. But I felt him, especially in the last couple of drives. I think he's taken a step forward for sure."

Throughout fall camp, Day wasn't the only coach taking notice of the play that Tshabola was putting in front of them. Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly also was excited about what he brings to the offensive line, especially when considering his size – which, at 6-6, 327 pounds is a little bigger than guards normally are – which is why Tshabola has been working at both guard and tackle in years past.

"Tegra's really athletic, can really sink his hips and he's long," Kelly said. "He's really long, and when you can play long on the offensive line and keep the defensive linemen away from people because of your length, that's a really big deal for us."

"We like offensive linemen that are big, because big people beat up little people," Kelly added. "So we like Tegra a lot."

Tshabola attributes the improvements he made over the offseason to the grinding mindset he has when it comes to playing football. He said that he has always been hard on himself, but he also has to remind himself that there's always room for improvement.

"I'm a guy that's really hard on himself," Tshabola said. "I'd like to say that's good. I'm pushing myself every single day. I'm trying to be better no matter what. The moment you get complacent, that's when s— hits the fan. So, I try to push myself every day. Whenever anything is going good, I just tell myself that it could be better. There's always something to fix."

"He's just going day to day right now and working," Day said. "That's what has been good about the offensive line is that guys have been working at it every day. But he's been working. It's not like he's knocking at anybody's door and saying, 'What is my situation this week?' He knows that if he continues to play the way he is that he's going to be a starter for us. He's been one of the guys that we've been able to count on in this camp."

Another helpful aspect for Tshabola was that he was able to focus solely on playing the guard position and not have to transition mentally and technically when it comes to the different responsibilities each spot on the line has during a play.

Tshabola, a junior, said the fact that he has been able to focus on just playing the guard position has helped him develop his game into what it is now, but moving back out to the tackle position isn't something that he would be against if it's what the coaches ask him to do.



SONNY BROCKWAY

RIGHT SPOT, TIME — Tegra Tshabola has paid his dues to be the starting right guard. His goal is to maintain the position for the remainder of the season.

"Whatever the team needs, you have to do it," Tshabola said. "If I haven't had any snaps at all, if you ask me to do something to win a game, I'd go do it for the team."

What also may have helped him win the starting job was his inquisitiveness, which he said helped him a lot when it came to the meeting room with offensive line coach Justin Frye.

"I'm always asking questions," Tshabola said. "I'm always trying to grow. I'm always trying to improve. I'm always just trying to gain an extra inch."

"I made the biggest jump in the meeting room," he added. "Like I said, I'm always asking questions and looking for a way to be better. I try to bug Coach Frye, I try to bug (graduate offensive assistant Mike Solenne). 'Hey, what can I do here? Is this the right thing to do? What look is this?' I'm just trying to improve my game knowledge."

That thirst to continue improving is only helped by the fact that he is playing on the same line as Donovan Jackson – who has been an All-Big Ten selection each of the past two seasons, and is set to be drafted after this year – and Josh Simmons, who is entering his second season as the starting left tackle for the Buckeyes.

"The older guys we have on this team, it's crazy the amount of knowledge they have," Tshabola said. "I haven't played a whole season yet. I mean, I haven't played in basically

more than a half yet. When you have guys like Donnie, guys like Josh, it's crazy how much that helps."

When he was going through times in the past few seasons where he wasn't getting playing time, it was tough for Tshabola to deal with the fact that he wasn't on the field. He said he has always been very confident in his abilities, but not seeing that confidence pay off was hard for him.

He added that he kept trying to emerge as the starter for the Buckeyes, but every time he got the chance to do that and it didn't happen, he would be hard on himself and become frustrated with how things were going. His approach changed this offseason in that he didn't come in with any expectations other than he was going to work as hard as he could, and whatever happened, happened.

"Confidence hasn't really ever been a problem for me," Tshabola said. "I grew up confident in my ability. Not trying to guess when my time is (coming) is where I grew a lot. I used to think 'OK, now is my time,' and then when it didn't come, now I'm frustrated. Then 'Now is my time,' and it doesn't happen again. Now at this point, I feel like I can help my team win games."

That approach has led to a starting job on the Buckeyes' offensive line, a spot that he seems to be in line to hold onto going forward.

Myths, Inaccuracies Mark History Of 1894 Season

Throughout the 2024 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* will publish historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "4." This week, BSB looks back at the 1894 season as the Ohio State program struggled to gain a foothold in the world of intercollegiate football.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

History books and official media guides credit Jack Ryder as head coach of the fledgling Ohio State football program in 1894, but the dusty pages of those historic periodicals contain only kernels of truth – not to mention the fact there was no such person as Jack Ryder strolling the OSU campus in 1894.

Frederick Bushnell Ryder, a young man known simply as Fred to his multitude of friends, had learned the game of American football while attending a prep school in suburban Boston. He returned to his hometown of Oberlin, Ohio, to go to college and organize a football team there. But Oberlin officials refused to allow the team to play against other colleges, so Ryder returned to Massachusetts and enrolled at Williams College, located in the northwestern part of the Bay State.

During his time at Williams, he played guard on teams that produced a two-year record of 16-4, losing only to powerhouses Harvard and Yale in each season.

Upon graduation from Williams, Ryder and his younger brother, Robert, returned to the Columbus area where they planned to establish a preparatory school for boys. But when Ohio State football manager Walter Sears got wind of Ryder's return, he convinced the university to hire the 20-year-old as head coach of the Buckeyes at a salary of \$15 per week.

Ryder's knowledge of the game produced immediate success in 1892, including successive midseason victories against Akron (then known as Buchtel College), Marietta and Denison by a cumulative score of 174-0. The team won five times that fall – more than the previous two seasons combined – culminating in a festive 26-10 Thanksgiving Day victory against Kenyon College at Athletic Park, the Buckeyes' home field located on the southern part of the campus near Neil Avenue between the Veterinary Hospital and the North Dormitory.

The win was considered a landmark victory for the Ohio State program. Despite the fact both the Buckeyes and the Lords had begun playing intercollegiate football in 1890, Kenyon was considered the much stronger program.

Ohio State was unable to build off the momentum of that victory, however. The Buckeyes slipped to a 4-5 record in 1893 – including a 42-6 loss at Kenyon and a 10-8 home defeat in a Thanksgiving Day rematch against the Lords – after which university officials began to wonder if it was wise to continue paying Ryder for his services as head coach.

Feeling unwanted, Ryder walked away and left the program without coaching leadership as it prepared for the 1894 season, triggering a series of miscalculations, missteps and mistakes on the part of Ohio



FILE PHOTO

IN THE BEGINNING – Fred Ryder earned \$15 a week beginning in 1892 to coach the fledgling Ohio State football program. He found initial success, including a pivotal victory over Kenyon College that season, but after a 4-5 record in 1893 he resigned.

State.

Nine months before the 1894 season was to begin, the OSU Faculty Council received a letter from the state Board of Agriculture, which oversaw the operation of the Ohio State Fair. The board decided as part of the fair's annual entertainment it would stage a football tournament consisting of Ohio college teams. The winning team in each game was to receive new uniforms, while the overall tournament winner would get a championship trophy as well as 10 new footballs.

Accepting invitations were Buchtel, Denison, Miami, Otterbein and Wittenberg as well as Ohio State. A few weeks after accepting its invitation, Otterbein was forced to drop out, and the Buckeyes – serving as the home team of sorts – were asked to participate in two games. Ohio State accepted, a decision it would come to regret. Within a three-day period, the head coach-less Buckeyes lost a 12-6 decision to Buchtel and suffered a 6-0 shutout against Wittenberg.

The games at the Ohio State Fair drew large crowds for the era even if most of those in attendance knew little about the game they were watching and understood its rules even less.

"The crowd at the football game yesterday afternoon," reported The Columbus

Dispatch, "was made up almost entirely of people who never saw a football contest before, and the great majority did not know which team was which. Plainer uniforms and a pennant distinguishing the part of the field belonging to each side would greatly help persons follow the game."

The closeness of the outcomes might have thrilled state fairgoers, but they also led OSU officials to charge that their opponents were using illegal players imported from other schools. For example, Buchtel head coach John Heisman played quarterback for his team despite the fact the name-sake for college football's most prestigious individual trophy had supposedly exhausted his college eligibility two years earlier while playing at the University of Pennsylvania.

Two days later against Wittenberg, the Buckeyes again cried foul when the Tigers used players such as Albert Tyler, a well-known athlete who had played college football at Princeton and would go on to take second place in the pole vault at the 1896 Summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. (Medals were awarded to only the top two finishers at the 1896 Summer Games. Event winners earned a silver medal, and those placing second received medals made of copper. Gold medals were not awarded until the 1904 Games held in St.

Louis.)

In addition to the inclusion of some players who probably shouldn't have been playing, the Ohio State Fair football tournament turned out to be something of a farce.

There is no record of Denison and Miami playing at all, while Buchtel eventually took home the championship trophy (as well as the prized footballs) even though its victory against Ohio State turned out to be the only game Buchtel played in 1894. Meanwhile, the nomadic Heisman bolted to Oberlin, where he guided the Yeomen to a 4-3-1 record that fall, a record that included a narrow 14-6 loss to a powerful Michigan team in Ann Arbor.

Back in Columbus, Ohio State petitioned the Board of Agriculture with a formal protest regarding the state fair tournament. But when the protest was dismissed, The Lantern published a prescient editorial that suggested the tournament offered "a lesson in what can go wrong when money gets into college sports."

With a break in the schedule of almost three weeks, the university decided it could not get along without a formal head coach as it tried to continue to build its football program.

The Lantern editor-in-chief C.A. Radcliffe, a law school student, wrote, "Why is Yale, Harvard or Princeton greater than O.S.U.? Because they have a better football team. What we want to do is get a great football team and we shall then be a great University. Let us be 'faithful over a few things' that we may be 'ruler over many things.'"

Whether or not Radcliffe's editorial found sympathetic ears among university officials, it was announced before the next game – an Oct. 6 home contest against Antioch College – that Mitchell Campbell Lilley Jr. had officially been hired as Ryder's replacement as head coach of the Buckeyes.

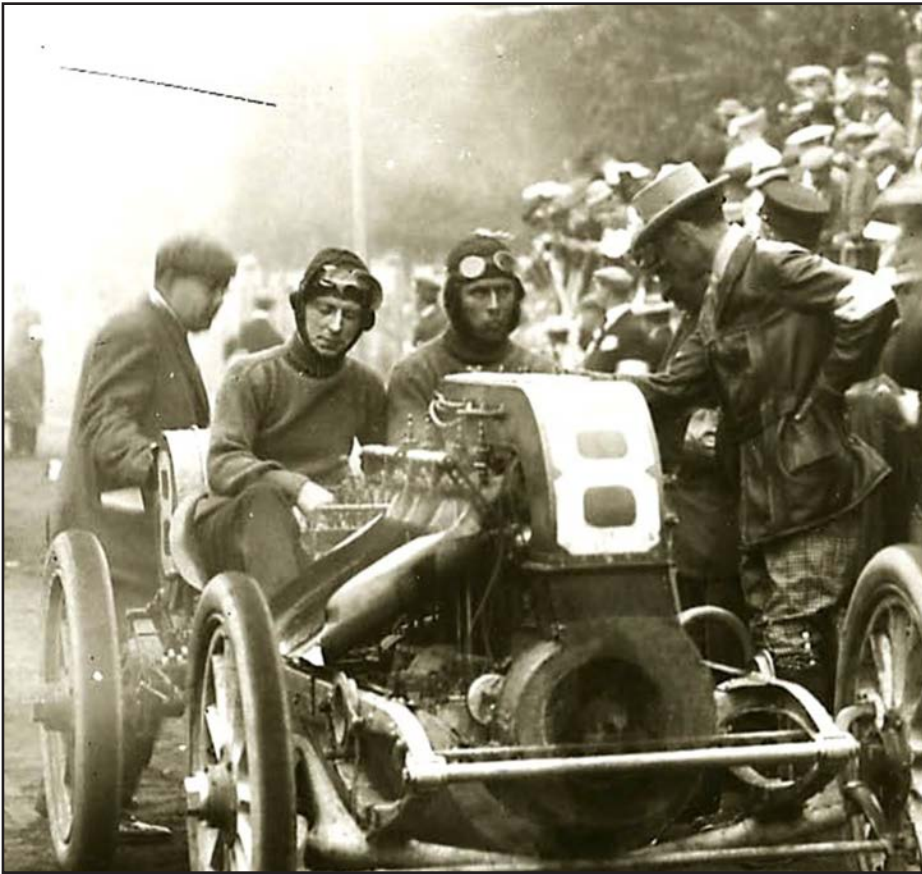
If the name Lilley sounds familiar with regard to Ohio State football coaches, that's because the man known to his players simply as "Mit" was the younger brother of Alexander S. Lilley, who is credited with being the first head coach in program history.

The younger Lilley was a graduate of Yale University, where he had played his college ball for the legendary Walter Camp, including in 1892 when the Bulldogs stomped their way to a 13-0 record while outscoring their opponents by a 435-0 margin.

"He comes to us with vigor and new ideas," wrote The Lantern of the new head coach.

One of Lilley's ideas was to close practice sessions. Under Ryder, anyone was welcome to attend an Ohio State practice session as the coach sought to build a bond between the team and its fan base. Lilley preferred a different approach, figuring the team could better concentrate on the business at hand without any outside distractions.

Another change was in team leadership. Frank Haas, who had served as quarterback and team captain for the two state fair games, had been ruled academically ineligible, and William G. Nagel was named his replacement. Meanwhile, fullback Homer Howard, who had scored the only touchdown during the team's loss to Buchtel, was replaced by Frank Potter and Ord Myers.



FILE PHOTO

RACING TOWARD SUCCESS — One of the most notable players on the 1894 team was Lee Frayer, who years later co-founded the Buckeye Motor Company. The firm not only built luxury cars but racing cars, which led to a relationship with World War I flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker of Columbus.

Myers went on to earn a varsity letter in 1894, while Potter earned one in 1895.

Short Honeymoon

The combination of vigor, new ideas and new starters seemed to pay immediate dividends when the Buckeyes returned to action and rolled to a 32-0 victory against Antioch.

Not only did the team play better, it looked better as well. The Buckeyes sported new uniforms courtesy of Lilley's father, Mitchell Campbell Lilley Sr., who owned one of the world's largest manufacturers of regalia, including military (and presumably football) uniforms.

A rematch at Wittenberg the following week resulted in an 18-6 loss, a game that was to be followed by a contest against Marietta College. But when Marietta officials requested a postponement because of a rash of injuries, the Buckeyes instead took on a team from crosstown rival Columbus Barracks and rolled to a 30-0 win. It marked only the second time in the nascent program's five-year history that it had recorded at least two shutout victories in a single season, but it also represented the high point during Lilley's time as head coach.

When the Buckeyes suffered a 24-4 home setback against Western Reserve (then known as Adelbert College) — a team Ohio State had never beaten in three previous tries — support for the head coach seemed to disappear. The Lantern wrote that not only were the Buckeyes "outclassed" by Adelbert, the team "showed less training (and) also lacked the snap and vigor in play."

The atmosphere didn't improve the following week despite a 10-4 victory against a still-undermanned Marietta team, a game after which the student newspaper accompanied its game coverage with a headline

that read, "From Bad To Worse." Headlines can sometimes be misleading, but not in this particular case as The Lantern writer sharpened his pen and aimed it straight at Lilley.

"Unless there be a rude awakening and subsequent sober reflection and concentrated action in football circles," the story began, "O.S.U.'s blaze of glory with which she was to end the football season will be about as real as a Fourth of July celebration without firecrackers.

"It was a miserable exhibition of football and the victory means almost nothing. ... Something must be done, and that soon, or O.S.U. will be distanced in the race, and above all, will lose the great Thanksgiving game (against Kenyon). The outlook for winning that game is now unfavorable and the prospect gloomy."

If the story's intent was to light a fire under the Buckeyes, it had the opposite effect. The team traveled to the Case School of Applied Science on Nov. 10 and returned on the wrong end of a 38-0 decision, the largest shutout loss since a 50-0 defeat to Oberlin two years before. Amid rumblings of dissension on the team, Lilley abruptly resigned to terminate his brief six-game tenure after which the university admitted its mistake and talked Ryder into returning to finish the season.

The Buckeyes responded to the change with three straight victories — including a 20-4 win against Kenyon in the annual Thanksgiving Day game — to salvage a winning record at 6-5. Ryder stayed on for one more season as head coach, presiding over a 4-4-2 campaign in 1895, and then returned to Columbus again in 1898 after serving in the 1st Cavalry of the Ohio National Guard during the Spanish-American War.

Ryder's team finished with a 3-5 mark

in 1898, giving him a 19-17-2 record over three-plus seasons. He left coaching for good following that 1898 season, moving to Cincinnati where he became an award-winning sportswriter for The Cincinnati Enquirer. During his three decades with the newspaper, Ryder — who still went by Fred but wrote under the pen name "Jack Ryder" — covered the Cincinnati Reds and became a founding member of the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Ryder had many fans throughout the state, including author Lee Allen, who wrote that a typical breakfast in Cincinnati consisted of "plump sausage and barnyard-fresh eggs, strong, fragrant coffee, and Jack Ryder's column."

Another fan was popular humorist and Ohio State alum James Thurber, who admitted shamelessly that he often tried to imitate Ryder's writing style. Upon Ryder's death at the age of 64 soon after his retirement in 1936, Thurber eulogized Ryder, calling him "the man who first inspired me to write humor and whose memory I greatly revere."

Meanwhile, Mit Lilley soured on football after his brief tenure as head coach of the Buckeyes. He left the sport and managed several manufacturing companies in Columbus and Chicago before moving to central Florida, where in 1909 he went into business for himself cultivating eucalyptus trees. Six years later, Lilley died of heart failure in Okeechobee, Fla., just five days shy of his 46th birthday.

Football To Race Cars

One of the most prominent players on the 1894 team was Lee Frayer, who earned a starting spot on the squad despite never before participating in the sport on an organized level.

Frayer was born to a prominent farming family near Wakeman, Ohio, a village along the Vermilion River in the northern part of the state. His grandfather, Ambrose Frayer, was a farmer and stockman in the area before he established and ran a pair of banks. He also earned statewide acclaim as a breeder of thoroughbred horses that excelled at pulling carriages, buggies and sleighs. He was also an inventor and held patents on a variety of farm implements, including one that cleaned and separated seeds.

Although farming made his grandfather a wealthy man, and his father was doing well as a breeder of Merino sheep, young Lee entered Ohio State in the fall of 1892 with the intention of becoming a mechanical engineer. He wasn't very active in extracurricular activities during his first two years on campus, preferring to concentrate on his studies, but thanks to the coaxing of some friends, he went out for the football team during the fall of his junior year.

Football was a brutal sport at the time, but Frayer had been taught from an early age to never back down from a physical challenge. Despite having no real experience playing the game, he earned a starting end position on the varsity team in 1894. One of his competitors for the starting spot was Edward French, who would go on to become one of the best players the Ohio State football program produced during its first decade of existence. French was the younger brother of Thomas Ewing French, the mechanical engineer whose visionary

designs led to the construction of Ohio Stadium.

During Frayer's era, defensive ends needed to be quick as well as physical since they were typically the last line of defense against most of the plays run by the opposition. Newspaper accounts of games in those days rarely mentioned defensive players, but Frayer found his way onto the pages of The Lantern, which reported his play "remarkable for a success which seemed at times impossible."

Despite his physical prowess, Frayer eventually fell victim to the brutality of the game and missed the final three games of the 1894 season. He still performed well enough to earn a varsity letter, although he is misidentified as "Leo A. Frayer" among the roster of letter winners in the official Ohio State Football Media Guide.

When the 1895 season began, he decided that one year of intercollegiate football was enough, returning to his studies and graduating in the spring of 1896 with a mechanical engineering degree.

After school, Frayer was hired as an engineer for the Columbus Buggy Co., one of the world's largest manufacturers of its kind with 1,200 employees turning out an estimated 25,000 buggies each year. Frayer's boss was Joseph Firestone, the chief of manufacturing operations and the younger brother of Clinton D. Firestone, one of the company's principal owners. The Firestones' cousin, Harvey, served as a salesman for the firm until branching out to form the Firestone Tire Co. in Akron in 1900.

Meanwhile, Frayer left the buggy business to begin development of his own automobile, a four-cylinder, air-cooled vehicle. Soon, he began producing a six-cylinder model with a crankshaft-driven rotary blower that kept the cylinders cool by forcing air through their aluminum jackets. With partners William Miller and Oscar Lear, Fryar opened the Buckeye Motor Co., selling automobiles for a then-princely sum of \$2,500 each.

In addition to producing what was then known as a touring car, Frayer and his firm built racing cars, which led to a relationship with Eddie Rickenbacker. Long before Rickenbacker became a flying ace in World War I, he swept out the shop in which Frayer built his racecars. Rickenbacker was just 15 at the time.

Impressed by the youngster's eagerness to learn, Frayer gave Rickenbacker an apprenticeship, then assigned him to the engine assembly department. Eventually, Rickenbacker learned every aspect of building an automobile and then became chief mechanic and test driver for each new model.

In early 1911, Frayer unveiled his newest creation, a 50-horsepower machine he named the "Red Wing Special." On May 30, with Rickenbacker serving as his riding mechanic, Frayer climbed behind the wheel of the car he had painted scarlet and gray in homage to his alma mater and drove to a 13th-place finish in the inaugural Indianapolis 500.

While Rickenbacker went off to become known as "Ace of Aces" for his fighter pilot heroics during World War I, Frayer remained in the automobile business as a designer, manufacturer and racecar driver until his death in July 1938 following surgery for appendicitis. He was 63.

Buckeyes Continue To Build At Wide Receiver

Beating Akron wasn't Ohio State's only win on Aug. 31. The Buckeyes also received a commitment from Mission Viejo, Calif., four-star wide receiver Phillip Bell (6-2, 195) the same day, adding to their top 2025 recruiting class.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Bell is ranked the No. 184 player in the country, the 19th-best at his position and the 16th-best player in the state of California.

The Buckeyes were able to come out on top of Bell's home-state USC Trojans in the recruiting battle for the four-star, pulling him away from the Los Angeles-based school that was considered to be a favorite to land him earlier in the cycle.

"I really love the coaching staff," Bell said about Ohio State after his game on Aug. 24. "Coach (Brian) Hartline has produced multiple first-round picks at receiver the last three or four years, and that's exciting. Ryan Day is a great head coach, an offensive-minded head coach, and they always have great quarterback play at Ohio State. You know every year there they're going to have a five-star quarterback running the offense, and that's big for me."

In Bell's sophomore season, he had 73 catches for 1,335 yards for Sacramento Christian before transferring to Mission Viejo for his junior season, where he caught 56 passes for 644 yards and seven touchdowns.

Despite the fact that the Trojans were the more local choice for Bell, Hartline was able to add to the Buckeyes' class that includes Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic

four-star Quincy Porter (6-3, 190), Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star De'zie Jones (6-0, 180) and Ontario, Ohio, three-star Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180) at the wide receiver position in addition to Bell.

While he did miss out on the No. 3 player in the country, Duncanville, Texas, five-star wide receiver Dakorien Moore (5-11, 182) – who committed to Oregon over Ohio State on July 4 – Hartline has still been able to put together yet another strong wide receiver class, keeping up his impressive stretch in recruiting.

Hartline and the Buckeyes still don't seem to be done when it comes to recruiting 2025 talent at the position.

Ohio State also sent out an offer on July 24 to Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon four-star wide receiver Jerome Myles (6-2, 205), who is getting some late attention in the recruiting process. They could still add to the receiver class with Myles, but they have some ground to make up over schools like Utah and Texas A&M, which each hosted Myles on official visits in June right before he decommitted from Ole Miss, where he had been committed for only two months.

Myles did release a top-five, which includes the Buckeyes. They were among Georgia, Texas A&M, USC and Utah on his list, and he plans to announce which of them he is committing to on Oct. 30, giving him time to make some visits during the football season and make his decision.

His junior season was an impressive one, helping him climb to the No. 45 player in the country and the seventh-best wide receiver. Despite playing in just five games due to injury, he still finished with 19 receptions for 486 yards and six touchdowns. Myles has further proved his status as a top player in the country thus far in his senior season, contributing 120 yards and a touchdown in his team's opening 70-42 victory over American Fork and then totaling another 125 yards and a game-winning touchdown in the Chargers' 35-34 upset victory over No. 4 IMG Academy.

Four-Star OL McFadden Commits To Ohio State

After Ohio State missed on David Sanders Jr. earlier in the month of August, Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist four-star interior offensive lineman Jayvon McFadden (6-5, 300) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Aug. 24.

At the time of his commitment, 247Sports composite rankings had him ranked the No. 407 player in the country, the 25th-best at his position and the No. 11 player in the state of Maryland.

He is the third offensive lineman in the class to this point, joining 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) in the 2025 cycle.

While adding a third solid recruit to the offensive line is a good step for the Buckeyes in strengthening their No. 1 overall recruiting class, this could be the second straight year in which Ohio State is able to sign only three on the line in a class if

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.
Phillip Bell	WR	6-2	195	★★★★	Mission Viejo, Calif.
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

nothing changes. In the 2024 class, the Buckeyes signed Ian Moore along with Devontae and Deontae Armstrong.

However, in McFadden's recruitment, the Buckeyes were able to come out on top over Colorado, Maryland and South Carolina, the other three schools that were included in his top four when he released them.

OSU Commits Off To Hot Start

Many Buckeye recruits got off to great starts in their high school senior seasons, but possibly none more than Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225), who had six total touchdowns in a 48-21 win over Sidney in his first game on Aug. 23.

Four of his touchdowns were thrown and two of them were rushing, showing that he – like many of the quarterbacks on Ohio State's current roster – has the ability and the willingness to escape the pocket and earn some yards with his legs if he needs to. He finished the game with 275 yards passing, 64 yards rushing and the six touchdowns.

St. Clair, who has spent the past year since he committed to Ohio State climbing up the rankings to his current spot as the No. 6 player in the country, said he's putting his future in Columbus at the back of his mind when he's on the field.

"I just don't even worry about the Ohio State stuff," he said to Press Pros Magazine. "Just go play ball. And I felt like I did that tonight."

However, while St. Clair is focused on winning every game for his high school team this season, he also said after the game that he plans to enroll early at Ohio State and that he will be on campus for the spring semester to begin 2025.

The five-star was at every home game of Ohio State's last season and has said that he plans to do the same thing this

season for the Buckeyes' eight home contests. St. Clair was seen on the sidelines prior to Ohio State's season-opening win against Akron on Aug. 31.

Bellefontaine dropped its second game of the season 35-14 to Bellbrook. St. Clair was 15 for 26 passing and threw for 302 yards and two touchdowns, and he said he's trying to learn from the loss.

"Today I had to improvise a lot, and that's not necessarily normal for me but I'm definitely capable of doing that," St. Clair said. "Taking what they give me is going to be huge in my maturity and growth. That's what I took away from today."

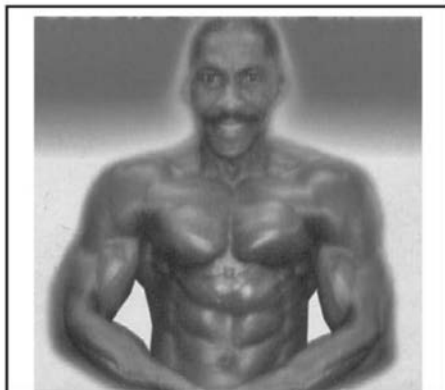
The top running back in Ohio State's

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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

class, Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star Bo Jackson (6-0, 205), also got off to a hot start and did so very quickly, taking a handoff nearly untouched 46 yards for a touchdown just 22 seconds into the first quarter of the game against GlenOak.

Not much later, he took another handoff 45 yards to score his second touchdown of the game, adding to what would be a stat line of 118 yards on six carries for two touchdowns – in the first quarter alone. He wouldn't get many more chances with the lead the Vikings were able to build, and he finished the 42-7 win with 160 yards and three touchdowns, the third coming from just 2 yards out.

"It feels great to be able to come out my senior year, my first game and be able to make plays and get the win," Jackson said after the game.

It will be tough to improve his numbers from his 2023 junior season when he ran for 1,700 yards and 28 touchdowns, but he's off to a good start if he has that goal.

In the second week of the high school season, it was Porter and Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts (6-4, 235) who stole the show out of the Buckeye commits in their high school games.

While Porter's team lost to IMG Acad-

emy – where current 2025 OSU commit four-star defensive lineman London Merritt plays – by a 27-14 score, Porter got his team on the board early, catching a short pass on the right side and using the field laterally to find gaps and blocks to run his way 90 yards into the end zone and tie the game up 7-7. He finished the game with six receptions for 132 yards and that touchdown.

For Roberts, it wasn't elusiveness that had his play shared all over social media between Ohio State fans like it was for Porter. Instead, he used force to find his way into the end zone. He had two touchdown receptions, the first of which he executed a strong stiff-arm and mowed over an attempted tackle at the goal line to easily remain on his feet for six points.

The second of the two was even more impressive. Roberts caught a short pass on a slant across the middle, stiff-arming an immediate tackler to the ground, before looking up to try to get downfield, stiff-arming another defender, juking around another and breaking four tackles before finding the open field and scoring another six points.

St. Clair Attempting To Flip 2025 OT

After Bellefontaine's win over Sidney,

St. Clair talked with reporters about Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class, specifically the offensive line. After the Buckeyes missed on Sanders, who committed to Tennessee on Aug. 17, St. Clair said he has been working on flipping a different offensive tackle whom they missed on earlier in the cycle.

He said that he talks to Mobile (Ala.) Theodore four-star Micah DeBose (6-5, 315) "a lot," and he believes that he can get the Alabama commit to flip from the Crimson Tide before signing day.

"Keep your eyes on Micah DeBose," St. Clair said. "I've been working on him. Be ready for that. We have some things cooking. I talk to him every other day. I try to give him a break every once in a while because I talk to him a lot. I let him know, 'This is home for you.' He loved it on his visit, so I'm just trying to talk him into coming here and blocking for me."

DeBose committed to Alabama on June 22 over Ohio State and LSU, his two other finalists. He is the No. 138 recruit in the country, the No. 14 offensive tackle and the 12th-ranked player in the state of Alabama.

2026 Five-Star Mulling Midseason Commitment

According to a report from On3, New Orleans St. Augustine five-star defensive tackle Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270) is considering announcing his commitment at some point in the middle of the 2024 football season rather than waiting until National Signing Day approaches, although

it's something he's not sure about yet.

Hailing from the state of Louisiana, Stewart is currently favored to land with LSU. He was expected at the Tigers' week-one game against USC in Las Vegas. He also hopes to attend Georgia vs. Texas on Oct. 19 and head to Columbus on Nov. 30 for Ohio State's game against Michigan.

Stewart currently sits in the 2026 class, but he has been thinking about reclassifying to the 2025 class and signing with a team a year earlier, which seems to be the likely result for the defensive tackle.

Ohio State offered him in November of 2023, and the Buckeyes have been on his radar ever since. He came up to Columbus to participate in one of the camps the Buckeyes held after visiting for the spring game as well, which at the time he told 247Sports was "by far my best visit."

At the camp, Stewart received a lot of individual attention from defensive line coach Larry Johnson, which the five-star said was something he appreciated.

"Going into it I looked at some drills, but it was the opposite of what I thought," Stewart told 247Sports after the camp. "It was my first time to do those types of drills. Coach Johnson said he was looking to challenge me. Everything was great. It lived up to what I thought it would be. Coach Johnson is one of the GOATs of college football. It was a life lesson."

If he reclassifies soon, Stewart will be able to head to Columbus again during the fall official visits. Regardless, the Buck-

Continued On Page 30

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OSU In The Running For Top 2026 Back

Continued From Page 29

eyes are going to have some work to do if they want to get the defensive lineman out of his home state.

OSU Hires New Director Of Recruiting

Ohio State has found a new director of recruiting and special events, hiring Morgan Phillips away from LSU where she was the recruiting operations coordinator, officially making the move on Aug. 22.

She replaces Erin Dunston, who left for Michigan to become the director of football operations in June after three years with Ohio State.

Phillips has also worked at Alabama, where the Buckeyes found another member of their staff over the offseason. Sam Pettito, hired in February to be the director of player personnel, held that same position with the Crimson Tide for seven years under Nick Saban.

Phillips spent just one year with LSU in which they brought in the seventh-ranked class in the 2024 cycle, signing one five-star and three more players in the top 100. LSU currently has the third-ranked recruiting class in the 2025 cycle behind Ohio State (first) and Alabama (second), but the Tigers have already landed commitments from three five-star recruits, in-

cluding the top player in the country, Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205).

Phillips will now look to help the Buckeyes keep their spot as the top class for 2025 recruiting.

OSU In Top Five For Elite 2026 RB

The No. 1 running back recruit in the 2026 class is narrowing down his list of top schools, and Ohio State was included in the top five.

When Woodberry Forest, Va., five-star Savion Hiter (6-0, 200) released his top five schools, the Buckeyes were included along with Georgia, Penn State, Michigan and Tennessee.

Hiter was offered by Tony Alford when he was still with Ohio State in October 2023 after he visited on a game day, but Carlos Locklyn has stayed in contact with the five-star and has kept the Buckeyes among his favorites.

He is expected to visit again for a game during the 2024 season, though he hasn't decided which of the eight he will be at yet.

Last season, Hiter – the No. 29 overall player in the country – ran for 1,187 yards and 11 touchdowns on 150 carries while catching five passes for 91 yards in his sophomore season.

Top 2027 QB Trending Toward OSU

With the Buckeyes struggling to find a quarterback in the 2026 cycle due to the depth they have been able to build at the position for the coming years with Julian Sayin, Air Noland and St. Clair, it's possible that they might not sign a quarterback in that class.

However, it already seems like Ohio State could be a favorite for a top 2027 quarterback in Huntington Beach, Calif., Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200). Edmunds has yet to be ranked on the 247Sports composite scale, but their basic rankings have him as the No. 2 quarterback in the class and the 14th-best player overall.

It has always been the case that quarterbacks commit earlier than other prospects, but that trend seems to be speeding itself up as Edmunds told 247Sports that he plans on cutting his list down to a top five in September, with Ohio State likely finding itself on that list.

Edmunds was at one of Ohio State's camps over the offseason, earning his offer that day, and he plans on making a visit to Columbus for a game sometime during the 2024 season when he gets the chance.

Last season as a freshman, Edmunds threw for 2,691 yards and 24 touchdowns, which helped him earn 22 Division I offers. He is also carrying offers from

Michigan, Oregon, Penn State, Texas and UCLA, among others.

Several Prospects Come Out For Akron

Even though the Buckeyes matched up against Akron over the weekend, Ohio State's season opener was still a major draw for recruits considering coming to Columbus. The following list of recruits was compiled using our own information, reports from other outlets and recruits themselves.

Beginning with committed prospects, the Buckeyes hosted 2025 commits Cook; Jackson; Akron Hoban three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 230); Lowe; Miller; McKinney, Texas, five-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 215); and St. Clair. In the 2026 class, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) – currently the No. 1 prospect in the 2026 cycle by 247Sports composite rankings – made the trip across the country to visit his future home. Henry is also planning on being on campus for the game against Michigan on Nov. 30, he told 247Sports.

As for uncommitted prospects, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180) and four-star defensive end Shaun Scott (6-3, 230) were on campus with their team-

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

On Sept. 2, Robert Smith's Euclid, Ohio, team lost a 55-26 decision to Cleveland St. Ignatius, ranked No. 3 in the nation by USA Today. Ignatius star quarterback Joe Pickens was watched as closely as Smith, and Smith had some praise for the quarterback.

"I was nervous on defense at the outset," Smith said. "I had never faced a passer of his stature before and he really did well. I think he is going to have a fine career ahead of him wherever he decides to go."

Where Smith decided to go was the object of all Ohio State fans' attention. He wouldn't make any official visits until the season had ended, but had already seen the Michigan medical school and was familiar with the Ohio State medical school facilities.

30 Years Ago — 1994

Every recruiting season brought the same kind of question: Would the Buckeyes sign a quarterback this year?

Ohio State had gone in cycles trying to lure top quarterbacks. They had five on the roster – Bobby Hoying, redshirt freshmen Stanley Jackson, Tom Hoying and Mark Zban, and true freshman Steve Baird – and would possibly be very selective when it came to recruiting one again this year.

There were no quote-unquote great quarterbacks in Ohio, although the Buckeyes could likely take their pick of some good ones.

Jeff Snedegar (6-3, 205, 4.5) of Buckeye Trail High School in Lore City was rated among the top QBs in the state after throwing for more than 1,000 yards and rushing for better than 900 the previous year. Although he preferred the offensive side of the ball, Snedegar's size and speed may have gotten him an initial look at inside linebacker by college scouts. After all, he had 175 tackles and eight interceptions in 1993.

25 Years Ago — 1999

After Ohio State faced Miami (Fla.) in the Kickoff Classic, a number of players on both sides admitted they had interest in the other school during recruiting.

In fact, OSU's Jerry Westbrook, Courtland Bullard, Fred Sturup, Steve Bellisari and Ryan Pickett were Florida natives who felt a tug toward Miami at some point during their recruitment.

Likewise, the Buckeyes coveted a number of the Hurricanes, including Dan Morgan, Al Blades, Sheven Marshall and Markese Fitzgerald.

Behind recruiting coordinator Bill Conley, OSU had stepped up its efforts in the Sunshine State. Just the previous year, OSU signed three of the state's top 25 prospects, as ranked by Super-

Prep, in Bryce Bishop, Maurice Harris and Sturup. A fourth highly ranked Florida prospect, Roshard Gilyard, also nearly signed with the Buckeyes before heading to Auburn.

20 Years Ago — 2004

When Ohio State hired Darrell Hazell away from Rutgers in the spring to be the team's new receivers coach, it was anticipated that he would bring with him not only coaching acumen but also some connections in the New Jersey area.

While Hazell probably didn't deserve all the credit for OSU's newest verbal commitment – Piscataway N.J., cornerback Malcolm Jenkins, who announced his intentions Aug. 5 – it was worth noting that Jenkins hailed from Hazell's area of expertise and that the assistant also served as Jenkins' primary recruiter.

"It was more me feeling like that was where I needed to be," Jenkins told BSB. "I felt more comfortable with that program. There were a lot of positives with other schools, but there were a lot of positives with Ohio State. I felt like I could succeed there and really get to the best of my abilities."

15 Years Ago — 2009

Ohio State put out a number of offers for its class of 2011, and once again a highly ranked player from within the state immediately jumped on the chance to become a Buckeye.

Four-star defensive end Ken Hayes from Toledo Whitmer landed an offer from OSU and became the first junior to issue his verbal commitment to the team.

"There was no need to wait," Hayes told BSB. "All my life I've wanted to be a Buckeye and there was no other school for me. We are all huge Buckeye fans in my family and they're all happy for me."

10 Years Ago — 2014

Although the 2015 recruiting cycle was heating up, one of the more intriguing Ohio State recruiting storylines that had developed recently was the 2016 quarterback battle that was taking shape.

The Buckeyes were believed to be the leader for Potomac (Md.) Bullis four-star quarterback Dwayne Haskins (6-2, 180), the No. 11 quarterback in the country, but they were also on top for the player ranked right above him in that class.

Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star quarterback Jarrett Guarantano had named a final four of Alabama, Clemson, Ohio State and Oklahoma and had put the Buckeyes on top.

"Ohio State's probably my favorite right now," he said. "They're the favorite, but I really like everything about them – the coaching

staff, the facilities, the campus. Everything struck me. I didn't think it was going to be as good as it was, but now that I went there it really amazed me."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford was all but done with the 2020 recruiting class for the summer, as the Buckeyes were widely expected to land commitments from a pair of top-rated prospects in Tucson (Az.) Salpointe Catholic five-star Bijan Robinson (6-0, 200) and Deerfield Beach, Fla., four-star Jaylon Knighton (5-9, 194).

Then things suddenly changed.

Knighton took an unexpected unofficial visit to Florida State for the Seminoles' Saturday Night Lights recruiting extravaganza then pledged his services to the program just a few days later on July 30. Robinson, meanwhile, informed the staff he was no longer interested in going to college far from home and committed to Texas on Aug. 2.

With the running back board wiped clean, Alford had to refocus his recruiting efforts on the current cycle. He reached out to a number of former targets, including Akron Hoban four-star Deamonte Trayanum (5-11, 220) – who remained solid in his commitment to Arizona State – and Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic four-star Sam Adams II (6-1, 194) a teammate of four-star wide-receiver commit Gee Scott Jr. (6-3, 207), who recently pledged his services to the home-state Huskies.

One Year Ago — 2023

According to a report from 247Sports, a survey of 1,000 recruits asking them to rank college football programs on brand strength resulted in Ohio State being the second-most recognized brand in college football behind Alabama.

Other top programs that were recognized included No. 3 Georgia, No. 4 Oklahoma and No. 5 Clemson, which – and this is likely no coincidence – are some of the programs that finish on top of the recruiting rankings every cycle.

Despite having won the last two Big Ten championships, Michigan checked in as only the No. 16 most-recognizable brand in college football, behind No. 13 Penn State within the Big Ten. No. 22 Michigan State and No. 24 Maryland were as the only other conference teams in the top 25, though future Big Ten additions – including No. 9 Oregon, No. 19 USC and No. 20 UCLA – were also in the rankings.

ASK AN ANALYST

with Allen Trieu of 247 Sports

Ohio State is struggling to land a quarterback in the 2026 class. Why do you think that is, and what approach do you see them taking to that position in this cycle? Could they skip a year at QB?

"I don't know that there's anything more to it. I mean Ohio State has recruited really well at quarterback in previous years. Obviously, you have Bellefontaine, Ohio five-star quarterback (6-4, 225) Tavien St. Clair, who is No. 1 or 2 in the country depending on where you look, so I don't think quarterback recruiting is generally a problem. When you do it at the top of the board, which is what Ohio State does with quarterback recruiting, you're not going to win them all. I think now with the portal teams are always going to have to juggle the ability to skip a year.

"Prior to the portal, you took a quarterback every year, sometimes two quarterbacks. Now the portal allows you to fill a gap. We've seen Ohio State do that this year with Will Howard. Ideally, you want to take a high school quarterback every year. I still think they'll try, but I also don't think they'll reach for a guy.

"I don't see an obvious guy on the board right now. I'm sure they'll go into this year and evaluate quarterbacks nationally and maybe some closer to home to see if anybody pops up. For a long time in the process, C.J. Stroud and Tavien St. Clair weren't guys that you knew about as Ohio State-level prospects in their sophomore year. Maybe someone like that will emerge this season and beyond. It's a little early to start talking about skipping a year because somebody could pop up like that."

Woodberry Forest (Va.) 2026 five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0, 200) included Ohio State in his top five. How do you view the Buckeyes' chances of landing him?

"They're definitely going to be a factor. There's a little bit of a Virginia connection with TreVeyon Henderson being from the same state. Carlos Locklyn has come in and done a really good job of recruiting him. Everything that (Hiter) has ever said about Ohio State has not only been that they're a top school, but he has had them very, very high on his list. You're looking at him with a really

strong top five, which you have when you're a player as good as he is, but I think Ohio State's right there at the top of the list. They're a top contender if not the top contender right now for him."

How do you see the Buckeyes' chances when it comes to Avon Lake (Ohio) four-star 2026 offensive lineman Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280)?

"That one will get a lot clearer this year. I think Ohio State enters this season with a good lead. He's got an early crystal ball on our site to Ohio State. I do think he wants to get to a lot of places. He's already gotten to a lot of places, and he has not been a guy who pigeonholes himself as purely an Ohio recruit or a Midwest recruit. He's looked at Clemson, he's looked at Florida State, he's looked at Alabama, so he's going to get around. When you look at the picture of his recruitment, he's given all of those schools an opportunity to recruit him and I think they all know that Ohio State is the school that they probably have to beat. He's narrowed his list down now. He's focused on seven schools and only two of those are in the Big Ten, so that shows you how widely he's cast his net. After he takes a couple more visits, he'll have a better view of exactly where he's looking and how open he is to leaving his home state, but going into his game visits, I still see Ohio State as the team those schools are trying to beat."

We're not far into the season yet, but have you been able to see any recruits who have impressed you this high school football season?

"Tavien's first game was very encouraging. That might sound obvious but when you have as much expectations as he does, and now you have people calling you the No. 1 quarterback or the No. 1 overall prospect in the country, you could come out in that first game and potentially lay an egg. Not everybody would step up in that situation, but he held serve, and so that was really good to see that."

Are there any other players in the areas that you cover who are standing out to you in the 2026 class who you think Ohio State should be paying attention to?

"There's so much good talent in Ohio. I think that

Ohio State did a really good job last year. If you look at taking Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295), Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy four-star tight end Brody Lennon (6-4, 220) and Ontario (Ohio) three-star wide receiver Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180), they were not guys who were obvious guys going into the summer. Mansfield (Ohio) Lexington tight end Brayden Fogle (6-3, 225) is one that has risen up the boards a lot. He doesn't have an Ohio State offer yet but is definitely a guy that Ohio State can monitor. He'll have a chance to maybe play himself into an offer this year.

"Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225), he's a really big, athletic player. Same with Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200) – he's another one I have Ohio State giving a good look to during the season. Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East tight end PJ MacFarlane (6-5, 205) is not as highly ranked maybe as some of those guys, but as of this summer he didn't have as much tape from last year. I think his junior tape will go a long way in determining what level prospect he is. He could be this year's Brody Lennon."

It seems like Michigan's scandals haven't affected its recruiting to this point, but they received their NOA recently. With the Wolverines likely receiving their punishment soon, do you think that will have any effect on their upcoming recruiting classes?

"I think it will, depending on what that punishment is. Already, they're recruiting Overland Park (Kans.) Blue Valley Northwest five-star offensive tackle Andrew Babalola (6-6, 280), and he's delayed his decision. He hasn't come out and said this, but my take is that he might be waiting on a decision to see what happens at Michigan, and I know that other schools have used that against them in recruiting him.

"I do think it has affected them just a little bit so far, and then once everything gets fully announced then we'll have a better idea just how strongly it will affect their recruiting. Certainly, it has the potential to affect them greatly depending on how severe the punishment is."

mate Henry, along with Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187); Columbia (S.C.) Irmo four-star wide receiver Donovan Murph (6-2, 180); Buford, Ga., four-star safety Nassir McCoy (6-2, 180); Avon, Ohio, four-star defensive back Jakob Weatherspoon (5-11, 172); and Dexter, Mich., linebacker Nathan Gersh (6-2, 225) from the 2026 class. For the 2027 class, Buffalo (N.Y.) Canisius running back Elijah Kimble (5-10, 180) and Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph tight end D'Angelo White (6-5, 235) were at the win over the Zips.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State offered 2028 Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School defensive lineman Asher Ghioto (6-4, 230) on Aug. 27. He doesn't have a ranking yet but has received offers from 11 Division I schools, including Baylor, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Rutgers and Syracuse. Ghioto has already scheduled a visit to Ohio State for the Nebraska game on Oct. 26. He is just the fourth recruit in the 2028 class to receive an offer from Ohio State, including Miami Ransom Everglades School quarterback Neimann Lawrence (6-2, 190), Columbia (Miss.) East Marion quarterback Caiden Belton (6-2, 170) and Brantenton (Fla.) IMG Academy wide receiver Eric McFarland (5-8, 170), who was the first in the class to receive an offer from

the Buckeyes.

- The Buckeyes also offered Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook linebacker Quinton Cypher (6-2, 215). He is unranked currently, as is the entire 2027 recruiting class, but he holds offers from nine Division I schools, including Duke, Georgia, NC State, North Carolina and Wisconsin.

- Murph, whom BSB spotted on the sidelines at the Akron game, announced on Twitter the day after the game that he had received an offer from the Buckeyes while he was on campus. It's his 28th Division I offer, which includes many high-profile programs such as Alabama, Clemson, Miami, Oregon and Penn State. He is the No. 224 player in the country and the No. 37 wide receiver.

- Henry maintains that he is fully committed to Ohio State but told 247Sports that he wants to make it out to Autzen Stadium for an Oregon game this year after working out for the Ducks at their "Saturday Night Live" event at the end of July.

- 2028 prospect Lawrence is expected to be at Ohio State's game against Western Michigan on Sept. 7 with his 7-on-7 coach, Brett Goetz, the leader of the South Florida Express, where Henry and Dixon-Wyatt also play. Goetz is also reportedly expected to be at the game against Iowa on Oct. 5 and the game against Michigan on Nov. 30, likely meaning he will be with recruits on his South Florida Express team at those games.

- Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin five-star wide receiver Jaime Ffrench (6-1, 185) – who was a target for Ohio State earlier in the cycle – committed to Texas on Aug. 30 over LSU, Miami and Tennessee, which were also in his final four.

- Weatherspoon, who was at the win over Akron on Aug. 31, told 247Sports he intends to come back for another game this season and that he hopes it is the game against Michigan on Nov. 30.

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Ferentz Suspended For Recruiting Violations

When Iowa stepped onto the field for its Week 1 game against Illinois State on Aug. 31, it was without longtime head coach Kirk Ferentz after he was suspended for one game due to recruiting violations. The suspension was self-imposed by Iowa.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

“Coach Ferentz and I made the decision to self-impose the penalties, allowing the program to move forward without distraction,” said Beth Goetz, Iowa’s athletic director, in a statement released by the school. “I appreciate the accountability demonstrated, and we will continue to fully cooperate with the NCAA through this process. I have confidence in Coach Ferentz and his leadership, and we look forward to turning our focus to the opening game and exciting season that lies ahead.”

A report from The Athletic stated that the violations stemmed from the program’s recruiting of Iowa quarterback Cade McNamara before the transfer portal opened in 2022. McNamara, who led Michigan to a Big Ten title and College Football Playoff berth during the 2021 season before losing his starting job to JJ McCarthy in 2022, transferred to Iowa three days after formally entering the transfer portal.

“I tell our players that we abide by the rules, and in this specific case, I did not do that,” Ferentz said on Aug. 22. “I made a mistake during the recruiting process, and I want to apologize to our players, coaching staff, university leadership and our incredible fans. In 26 years as a head coach, this is the first potential Level 2 violation that I’ve had, and it won’t happen again.”

Hawkeye wide receivers coach Jon Budmayr was also suspended for one game along with Ferentz for the same incident. Budmayr, who served as a special assistant to Ferentz at the time the violations occurred, was previously an assistant at Wisconsin, where he recruited McNamara in high school, and their past relationship likely had something to do with landing the quarterback when he entered the portal.

Also self-imposed by Iowa due to the infraction is a loss of one week of off-campus recruiting.

McNamara entered the transfer portal on Nov. 28, 2022 – which was the day it opened – and committed to Iowa just three days later on Dec. 1, where he has been since then. The rule violated by the Hawkeyes states that schools are not allowed to contact athletes on other rosters until they officially enter the portal.

McNamara is now in his second season with Iowa, the first of which was ended early due to an ACL tear in his left knee five games into the season. He beat out former Northwestern quarterback Brendan Sullivan for the starting job, and in Iowa’s season opener against Illinois State, he threw for 251 yards.

Ferentz, 69, has been at the helm at Iowa since 1999 and is the longest-tenured head coach in the country. Taking over for Ferentz in Week 1 was assistant head coach Seth Wal-



FILE PHOTO

TAKE A SEAT – Longtime Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz (left) was not on the sidelines for the Hawkeyes’ 40-0 win over Illinois State on Aug. 31 because of a school imposed one-game suspension for recruiting misconduct.

lace, and Ferentz’ absence didn’t seem to matter much. Wallace and the Hawkeyes blanked the Redbirds 40-0.

U-M Receives Notice Of Allegations

Both the NCAA and Michigan confirmed on Aug. 25 that the Wolverines had officially received a Notice of Allegations from the NCAA concerning its sign-stealing scandal. Michigan now has 90 days to respond before the case heads to the Committee on Infractions.

According to Pete Thamel of ESPN, the formal notice is mostly unchanged from the draft that ESPN reported on earlier in the month. Head coach Sherrone Moore and former Michigan staffers Jim Harbaugh, Chris Partridge, Denard Robinson and Connor Stalions were all accused of committing Level 1 violations. Michigan itself also faces a Level 1 violation for a “pattern of noncompliance within the football program” and efforts to hinder the NCAA’s investigation, per the NOA draft obtained by ESPN.

The draft stated that Moore could face a suspension and show-cause penalty for deleting a thread of 52 text messages with Stalions the same day that Stalions was revealed by the media to be the leader of Michigan’s sign-stealing operation.

Nicole Auerbach of NBC Sports reported that Jesse Minter – who, along with Steve Clinkscale, was accused of recruiting violations unrelated to Stalions – and Robinson are working with the NCAA on a negotiated resolution, but the rest of the case will go to a hearing. Auerbach also reported that Moore and Harbaugh could now be considered repeat violators since they were also found guilty of violations related to recruiting during a COVID-19 dead period.

Due to Michigan having about three months to respond, sanctions will likely not be issued against the Wolverines until 2025 since the 2024 season has already begun. After Michigan responds to the notice, a hearing will be scheduled with the NCAA’s Committee on Infractions to determine penalties unless

the school agrees to penalties.

Stalions Documentary Episode Released

An episode of Netflix’s “Untold” featuring Stalions, the alleged head of Michigan’s sign-stealing operation, was released on Aug. 27 telling Stalions’ side of the story. In the episode, titled “Sign Stealer,” Stalions claims that he did nothing wrong despite the NCAA investigation reportedly finding otherwise.

One of the things the episode focused on was whether Stalions was on the Central Michigan sideline in disguise in a game against Michigan State in 2023, a team they had on the schedule later in the season.

Stalions’ lawyer, Brad Beckworth, neither confirmed nor denied whether it was Stalions on the sideline, but other people featured in the episode had more to say about it.

Social media personality and owner of Barstool Sports Dave Portnoy – a Michigan fan – said he knew the answer to whether Stalions was on the sideline or not.

“I know the answer to that because he told me,” Portnoy said. “Yeah, that was Connor on the sidelines. That was Connor on the sidelines.”

“I don’t even think that looks like me,” Stalions said when the documentary switched back to his comments on the matter.

Portnoy has since backpedaled on his statement, alleging in a Twitter post on Aug. 27 that his comments were taken out of context.

When asked by the NCAA in an interview during the investigation whether he was on the sidelines during that game, Stalions answered, “I do not recall.”

The evidence that was obtained against Stalions included public transactions on Venmo between Stalions and the people he would send to games, who would then take video of the sidelines and send that to Stalions. The episode ends by showing Stalions’ interview with NCAA investigators in April, in which he first said he had committed no wrongdoing, but after being pressed he admitted that he received film of opposing sidelines from those

people he sent to games.

However, he does say that he used only television broadcasts to scout, which is not against NCAA rules, and didn’t do any other advanced scouting.

“It’s kind of like when your aunt gives you a Christmas present that you already have,” Stalions said. “You’re not going to be rude and be like, ‘I already have this, I don’t need it.’ (You say) ‘Oh thanks, I appreciate it.’ They feel like they’re helping out or whatever. I already had the signals. I already had memorized the signals.”

Washington Post reporter Will Hobson, who is also in the documentary, has other opinions on that.

“So why were all these Michigan interns and his buddy from the Navy, why were they going to opposing games and videotaping opposing coaches? Just for their own personal interest?” Hobson said. “I do not find it plausible that his sign analysis was solely based on game footage.”

2024 Conference Tiebreakers Announced

Before the start of Week 1, the Big Ten announced that it had officially finalized its tiebreaking procedures that could determine which teams would participate in the 2024 championship game if there is a tie in the standings.

On Aug. 26, the conference released a three-page document that listed seven steps in pairing the two championship participants. If two teams tie, there are six different steps to go through to decide which team would go on, and there is a separate version if three or more teams have the same record when the regular season comes to a close.

In a scenario where two teams are tied, the deciders of which team moves on to play for the title – in order – would go as follows:

- Head-to-head results.
- Record against all common conference opponents.
- Record against common opponents with the best conference record, proceeding through the common conference opponents based on their order of finish.
- Best cumulative conference winning percentage of all conference opponents.
- Highest team rating ranking by SportSource Analytics following the regular season.
- A random draw conducted by Commissioner Tony Petitti or a designee.

The two-team tiebreaker would also determine championship seeding.

If three or more teams tie for a spot in the championship, the tiebreaker would be decided the same way, but with a different first decider than head-to-head results. The first thing to be looked at would be:

- Winning percentage in games among the tied teams. If a team beat all the tied teams, it advances. If all teams involved in the tie didn’t play one another, the tiebreaker moves to the next step.

After that first step for a three-team tiebreaker, the conference would go through the same remaining steps as a two-team tiebreaker, beginning with the record against all common conference opponents.

Ohio State’s schedule gives the opportunity to look at a possible, and realistic tie that could happen as an example. If the Buckeyes

BIG

2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Illinois	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Indiana	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Iowa	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Maryland	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Michigan	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Michigan State	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Nebraska	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Northwestern	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Ohio State	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Oregon	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Penn State	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Purdue	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Rutgers	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
UCLA	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
USC	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Washington	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Wisconsin	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Minnesota	0	0	0.000	0	1	0.000

Aug. 29 Games

Rutgers 44, Howard 7
North Carolina 19, Minnesota 17
Illinois 45, Eastern Illinois 0

Aug. 30 Games

Michigan State 16, Fla. Atlantic 10
Wisconsin 28, Western Michigan 14

Aug. 31 Games

Penn State 34, West Virginia 12
Purdue 49, Indiana State 0
Iowa 40, Illinois State 0
Maryland 50, UConn 7
Indiana 31, FIU 7

Ohio State 52, Akron 6
Northwestern 13, Miami (OH) 6
Nebraska 40, UTEP 7
Oregon 24, Idaho 14
Michigan 30, Fresno State 10
UCLA 16, Hawaii 13
Washington 35, Weber State 3

Sept. 1 Game

USC 27, LSU 20

Sept. 6 Games

Western Illinois at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Duke at Northwestern, 9 p.m.

Sept. 7 Games

Akron at Rutgers, noon
Bowling Green at Penn State, noon
Texas at Michigan, noon
Rhode Island at Minnesota, noon
Eastern Michigan at Washington, 3:30 p.m.
Michigan State at Maryland, 3:30 p.m.
South Dakota at Wisconsin, 3:30 p.m.
Iowa State at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.
Kansas at Illinois, 7 p.m.
Colorado at Nebraska, 7:30 p.m.
Western Michigan at **Ohio State**, 7:30 p.m.
Boise State at Oregon, 10 p.m.
Utah State at USC, 11 p.m.

All times Eastern

beat each of Iowa, Penn State and Oregon this season and those three teams didn't lose any other conference games – which could happen since they don't play one another – they would each be 8-1 and the tiebreaking process would then start at the third step, which would be looking at each of the three team's record against common opponents with the best conference record and proceeding down the standings.

The release also included a separate tie-breaking process if two teams tie and – for reasons beyond the conference's control – the Big Ten championship is not played. The same steps as the previously mentioned two-

team tiebreaker would decide which team would be the league's automatic qualifier for the College Football Playoff that would get a first-round bye.

Star Rutgers LB Out For Season

Going into the 2024 season with high hopes after a seven-win season in 2023, Rutgers suffered a devastating loss on the defensive side of the ball when senior linebacker Mohamed Toure went down with a torn ACL, which will keep him out for the season.

Head coach Greg Schiano announced Toure would miss the season over a week before the season opened, and Toure released a statement on Twitter following the news breaking.

"Heartbroken, upset, and frustrated – there are so many ways to describe how I am feeling right now.

"However, I trust God's plan and leave everything in his hands knowing he knows what is best. Nothing can break me – I faced worse adversity in life and have overcome many obstacles. Chin up and chest out. I am determined to overcome this challenge and come back stronger than ever. God gives his toughest battles to the strongest soldiers, and I am resolute in my strength."

It is Toure's second time suffering a torn ACL, and he was returning for his sixth year with the team as one of the top players on what could be a strong Scarlet Knights defense. Last season, Toure finished with 93 tackles and 4½ sacks, which were second and first on the Scarlet Knights, respectively.

Schiano talked about what that loss means for both Toure and the Knights going into the 2024 season.

"It's sad," Schiano said. "He put so much work into getting ready for the year. But that's the game of football, unfortunately. There are things like that that happen. As a family, we've surrounded him, we are supporting him. We'll help him through the rehab, we'll get him back and help him reach his goals and aspirations."

Former Rutgers Gymnasts Speak Out Against Coach

NJ Advance Media's Brian Fonseca reported on Aug. 27 that seven former Rutgers gymnasts and one who remains on the team currently spoke with him about what they described as a "program in chaos" regarding the leadership of head gymnastics coach Umme Salim-Beasley.

The athletes said that they believed Salim-Beasley was protected from allegations of favoritism, bullying and revenge by former athletic director Pat Hobbs, who resigned due to health issues on Aug. 16.

The gymnasts alleged that Salim-Beasley was unsympathetic toward athletes who experienced mental health issues and physical injuries and tried to penalize athletes who raised concerns about her coaching.

Former Knights gymnasts Isabella Hughes, Brayden Battavio and one who requested anonymity were kicked off the team and said they risked retribution when they publicized their complaints on social media in May. They said they were subsequently fired from their paid jobs working the front desk at the program's practice facility at Salim-Beasley's direction, according to their manager.

"I just couldn't understand how one person could already take away the one thing that was a constant in your life and then continued to try and hurt me after I wasn't even affiliated

with the team anymore," Battavio said. "I don't know why she did it."

The gymnasts who spoke with Fonseca – five of them anonymously – said they tried to speak with Hobbs about the issues they had with Salim-Beasley and that he was quick to defend the coach and didn't give consideration to their accusations. Hobbs reportedly took an "unusual interest in the program," taking frequent visits to team meets, practices and events during his time at Rutgers.

NJ Advance Media reached out to Dory Devlin, Rutgers assistant vice president of news and media relations, about the accusations, who replied with a statement.

"We do not comment on confidential personnel matters," the statement read. "The university takes all complaints of alleged violations of university policy seriously and handles such complaints in accordance with the applicable university policy. Any member of the university community who believes he or she has been subject to conduct that violates university policy is encouraged to initiate a report."

The statement added that Salim-Beasley remains "the head coach of the Scarlet Knights gymnastics program" and didn't specify whether they held a formal investigation into the complaints.

When NJ Advance Media reached out to Hobbs, he maintained that his sudden resignation was due to health issues and said that the complaints had been investigated.

NJ Advance Media reported on Aug. 30 that Rutgers is conducting an investigation into a possible "inappropriate, consensual relationship" involving Hobbs, which would violate university policy. As BSB went to press there was no further information on the matter, but the university did release a statement the same day that stated it "takes seriously and investigates all complaints alleging violations of university policy to ensure the safety and well-being of our students and community members."

The gymnastics complaints are the fourth set of serious allegations made within the athletics department during Hobbs' tenure, joining accusations made against Petra Martin, the swimming and diving coach who was fired, Marcus Smith and Kristen Butler, a husband and wife who coached the softball team, and Mike Szul, the senior associate athletic director for finance, who was charged with "bullying and creating a toxic environment."

NU Hires Nova's Jackson As New AD

Northwestern has hired Villanova athletics director Mark Jackson as the school's new athletic director, the university announced on Aug. 29.

"Mark has been extraordinarily successful at Villanova in supporting students' athletic and academic achievements," Northwestern President Michael Schill said. "After talking to him, I trust that he will prioritize the welfare of our student-athletes and give them the support they need to succeed. I am fully confident in Mark's ability to lead Northwestern athletics to new heights and am excited to see how he will transform our program."

Jackson was one of three finalists for the position – a group that included Pittsburgh's Heather Lyke, who worked at Ohio State from 1998-2013 – and takes over for Derrick Gragg, who was reassigned to an athletics advisory role by the university in June. He will be the third athletic director for the school since

Jim Phillips left to take over the ACC commissioner job in December 2020.

"Northwestern University is world-class in all of its endeavors and its mission, values and pursuit of excellence in academics and athletics are not only aligned with my beliefs and approach but are a model for intercollegiate athletics," Jackson said. "I cannot wait to engage with Wildcat student-athletes, coaches, staff, faculty, alumni and fans, and my family and I look forward to wearing the purple."

Jackson oversaw two men's basketball national title victories during his nine years at Villanova (2016, 2018) and holds a reputation as a strong fundraiser, which is becoming more important each year in college athletics.

He has also overseen the football programs at Syracuse and USC during stints at those schools as executive senior associate director of athletics and director of football operations and assistant athletic director, respectively, working closely with the programs and helping with the renovation of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Jackson takes over at Northwestern during a time in which the university is still dealing with the fallout of the firing of former head football coach Pat Fitzgerald last summer due to hazing allegations within the program. The Wildcats are also currently undergoing a complete stadium overhaul of Ryan Field which will force the football team to play most of its home games at its practice facility and two at Wrigley Field, including their matchup against Ohio State on Nov. 16.

NU Cheerleader Drops Sexual Assault Lawsuit

A former Northwestern cheerleader has dropped her federal sex trafficking and forced labor lawsuit against the university and four employees, including former Wildcats athletic director Mike Polisky, which she originally filed in 2021 over claims that she was groped at school events by drunken fans and alumni in 2018 and 2019.

Hayden Richardson had claimed that she was told part of her job as a cheerleader was to be presented as "sex objects" at alumni events in order to appease wealthy donors. She complained to spirit squad coordinator Pamela Bonnevier and Polisky, then Northwestern's deputy athletic director, who told her to get evidence to prove her case. When she gathered statements from her teammates that reiterated her claims, she was accused of fabricating evidence, which prompted her to file a 58-page lawsuit.

"Their positions on the team were conditioned on pleasing and being groped by wealthy older men and intoxicated fans for the purpose of encouraging donations to the University and supporting Northwestern Football," the suit read.

She didn't say why she dropped her lawsuit, but Northwestern released a statement after she did.

"Since Hayden Richardson's lawsuit was filed over three years ago, Northwestern has steadfastly maintained that her claims should be dismissed," the statement read. "She has now voluntarily dismissed her lawsuit against all defendants. The University is committed to fostering an environment in which all members of our community are safe, secure and free from discrimination or harassment in any form."

Diebler Excited About Late Roster Additions

After practicing with only a 12-man roster for the majority of the offseason, Ohio State and head coach Jake Diebler filled out the rest of the team in late July by adding former Kansas State guard Ques Glover through the transfer portal and international freshman center Ivan Njegovan from Croatia.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Both Glover and Njegovan are still in the early stages of their Ohio State careers, having just stepped foot on campus for the first time as Buckeyes in late August to start the school's fall semester. But despite this newness, Diebler is confident his two new additions can make instant impacts on the program this season.

Starting with the veteran Glover, who transferred to Ohio State on July 29 after an injury-riddled season at Kansas State, Diebler told *The Columbus Dispatch* on Aug. 17 that his new guard, when healthy, has shown the ability to be an elite scorer and all-around playmaker throughout his first five collegiate seasons.

"Good playmaker," Diebler said at the Columbus Crew's Lower.com Field before serving as the MLS team's honorary "match igniter" before the game. "Gifted scorer. Good speed with the ball in his hands and can pressure the ball defensively, too.

"He's certainly established himself when he's been healthy as a really good scorer in the college game. I know things didn't work out at Kansas State, but they were anticipating him being really impactful for them last year before he got hurt."

Glover has averaged 10.3 points, 1.8 rebounds and 2.0 assists while shooting 46.1 percent from the field and 30.6 percent from three in 99 career games at Florida (2019-21) and Samford (2021-23), with his best offensive season coming in his redshirt sophomore season with the Bulldogs when he scored a career-high 19.2 points per game on 46.8 percent shooting, earning first-team All-Southern Conference honors.

Glover's veteran presence and elite scoring ability could provide a significant boost for an Ohio State team that lost the services of sophomore guard Taison Chatman for the entire season when he suffered a torn ACL in his left knee during a summer practice in June.

As for Njegovan, who joins Ohio State after spending the last three seasons in the Adriatic Basketball Association and Croatian Premier Leagues, Diebler told the *Dispatch* that he is impressed by the raw talents his 7-1 freshman possesses in the interior, a set of skills that could give the Buckeyes some lineup flexibility when the season rolls around later this fall.

"I really like his skill," Diebler said. "We thought with the guys we added, adding some more skill could really give us some versatility from a lineup standpoint. That was through some relationships we've



FILE PHOTO

HELLO, COLUMBUS — Ohio State men's basketball coach Jake Diebler welcomed two late newcomers to add to his team's depth. Kansas State guard Ques Glover hopes to rebound from an injury-filled 2023-24 season, while 7-1 freshman center Ivan Njegovan hails from Croatia.

had certainly internationally but also with agents."

Njegovan's versatile skill set was on full display during his most recent season playing for KK Bosco of Favbet Premier Liga, the top league in Croatian Professional Basketball. There, the teenager recorded team highs in rebounds (4.8) and blocks (1.6) while also totaling 8.2 points per game and shooting 53.3 percent from the field and 31.3 percent from three.

Still, the Croatian freshman will likely face an uphill battle for playing time in the frontcourt this season as he competes with former McDonald's All-American big men Aaron Bradshaw and Sean Stewart along with returners Devin Royal and Austin Parks in practice this fall.

It is these types of in-team competitions that Diebler is looking forward to seeing take place on the court this offseason, which he believes can only make the team better moving forward.

"I'm really excited about the lineup versatility we have to work with, and I'm excited about the competition that's going to be in practice," Diebler said. "Guys are going to be competing, and it's that 'iron sharp-

ens iron' mentality. That's how we're going to continue to grow and improve, and I think it's going to help us grow and improve quickly."

Diebler Mulls Making More International Signings

The addition of Njegovan ends a notable drought for the Buckeyes when it comes to roster building, as he is the first international player to join the program since 2012 when former head coach Thad Matta plucked guard Amedeo Della Valle (2012-14) from Italy.

Diebler said it is something the program wants to change in the future.

"(Signing international players) opens up the amount of players we can look at to make sure we find the right fit," Diebler told the *Dispatch*. "That's something we're going to be intentional about. We'll see. How many every year, I don't know, but we're certainly focusing on evaluating the international landscape more thoroughly."

Diebler said he did not travel to Croatia to watch Njegovan play for KK Bosco, but rather relied on associate head coach Joel Justus to make an assessment on the fresh-

man center because he reportedly knew some people in the Croatian's inner circle.

However, Diebler said he does hope to go overseas during the next recruiting cycle, with hopes of bringing more international flavor to Ohio State's roster.

Ohio State could have more success signing players from overseas in the Diebler era due to the international footprint of first-year assistant coach Luke Simons, who spent nearly a decade as a coach and regional coordinator with Athletes in Action, a religious basketball organization that played multiple international competitive tours throughout Europe and Asia.

Simons also served as director of operations for Team USA at three World University Games.

OSU To Pay \$530,000 To Non-Con Opponents

Ohio State will reportedly pay a combined \$530,000 to the six nonconference mid-major teams who will travel to Value City Arena to take on the Buckeyes this season, according to this year's signed games contract acquired by the *Dispatch*.

Ohio State will spread that sum out to a group of lesser-known mid-major programs that includes, in order of game dates, Youngstown State (Nov. 11), Evansville (Nov. 19), Campbell (Nov. 22), Green Bay (Nov. 25), Valparaiso (Dec. 17) and Indiana State (Dec. 29).

This excludes Ohio State's only high-major home opponent in nonconference play, Pittsburgh (Nov. 29), which the Buckeyes will not pay because the two programs agreed to a home-and-home series that has Ohio State traveling to the Steel City in 2025-26.

Ohio State will pay the highest amount to Diebler's alma mater Valparaiso, which will receive \$100,000 to match up against the former Beacons guard-turned-Buckeye coach in Columbus. That is a \$10,000 increase from what Youngstown State and Indiana State will be paid to visit Value City Arena, although the Penguins will receive an allotment of 250 tickets, the most out of any nonconference opponent this season.

The Buckeyes' two games against Campbell and Green Bay will be part of a multi-team event, or MTE, run by the sponsorship company Gazelle Group, to which Ohio State will pay \$250,000 for running the event. The MTE was originally slated to include Evansville, but because Ohio State's three end-of-November opponents failed to meet certain criteria listed in the initial contract regarding their NET rankings, which are used to select and seed the NCAA Tournament, the Purple Aces will not be a part of the event.

Regardless, Ohio State will keep any profits from the three games, including the Evansville matchup.

As for Ohio State's neutral-site non-conference games, the Buckeyes will earn \$250,000 for participating in the 11th-annual CBS Sports Classic on Dec. 21, which has Ohio State facing off against Kentucky at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

The Buckeyes will also earn \$50,000 for competing against Texas on Nov. 4 at Las

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

Vegas's T-Mobile Arena as part of the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame Series, with ticket revenues going to the Hall of Fame and arena and leftover profits going solely to the Hall of Fame.

Ohio State will also likely be compensated for facing off against Auburn at Atlanta's State Farm Arena on Dec. 14 as part of the Holiday Hoopsgiving event, but contract details for the event have yet to be finalized.

Contract Details Revealed For Diebler's Assistants

Ohio State's 2024-25 coaching staff will be paid less than last year's group of assistants despite having one more coach on staff this year, according to documents obtained by the Dispatch.

The documents show that Diebler, Justus and assistant coaches Talor Battle, Dave Dickerson, Simons and Jamall Walker will make a combined \$4,105,000 this year, a total that is over \$700,000 less than what former Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann and his four assistants were paid last season.

Last season's Ohio State staff of Holtmann, Diebler – who served as Holtmann's associate head coach before taking over as interim coach following Holtmann's firing in February – Brandon Bailey, Mike Netti and Jack Owens was paid a combined \$4,835,000, with Holtmann leading the way with \$3.5 million, Diebler getting \$500,000, Owens \$375,000, Netti \$250,000 and Bailey \$210,000.

Holtmann's salary in his final season with the program was a whole \$1 million more than Diebler's \$2.5 million earnings in his first season leading the program. Still, Diebler is making far more than the \$500,000 he earned under Holtmann last year.

No member of Diebler's staff will earn more than what he made as associate head

coach last year, but two assistants will make \$400,000 or more this year, with Justus leading the way at \$425,000 and Walker trailing closely behind at \$400,000.

Justus and Walker are part of a three-man group of assistants that, per NCAA rules, are allowed to serve as off-campus recruiters, which also includes the former Penn State standout guard Battle, who will make \$300,000 after being hired away from Northwestern over the offseason.

Dickerson, who returns to Ohio State after serving as a longtime staff member under Matta from 2010-17, is the fourth-highest earner of the assistants, making \$295,000. This is a raise from what he previously earned with the Buckeyes (\$281,116), as well as when he was head coach at USC Upstate from 2018-24 (\$210,892).

Simons, who spent the past five seasons as director of basketball operations at College of Charleston (2019-21), Boston College (2021-22) and Baylor (2022-24), will make the lowest amount of the five assistants, earning \$185,000.

Former Bucks Captain Williams Passes At 93

Ohio State experienced a loss in its basketball fraternity on Aug. 19 when former team captain and standout forward Thomas Williams passed away peacefully in his hometown of Lima, Ohio, at the age of 93.

Williams played three seasons with the Buckeyes from 1950-53, averaging 8.4 points per game and helping the Buckeyes earn an undefeated 4-0 record against archrival Michigan in those three seasons. He served as captain of the 1952-53 team, which went 10-12 overall and 5-9 in the Big Ten.

Williams was most known on the court for being a tenacious defender, where he was considered one of the best in the con-

ference and often matched up against the opponent's best offensive player.

"Thomas' defense is wonderful, and I recall a number of close games being decided because of his defense," former Ohio State head coach Floyd Stahl, who coached Williams in each of his three seasons in Columbus, said during the 1953 season.

Upon graduating from Ohio State with a business degree in 1953, Williams joined the finance corps of the Army and was stationed in Nuremberg, Germany. He then returned to the United States and worked in the Lima area, where he became the owner of three Lima-based businesses, Fruit Distributors, Brothers Four Country Store and The Old Barn Out Back.

Williams also stayed involved in basketball during his adult years, coaching for various teams, including the Ohio State Lima branch campus basketball teams. He is survived by his wife, Loreen, along with his seven children: Beverly (Steve) Bailey, Barbara (John) Rezabek, Deborah (Doug) Roberts, Donna (Kevin) Creamer, Janet (Eric) Buchanan, Ronald (Dona) Williams and Sandra (Mike) Piatt.

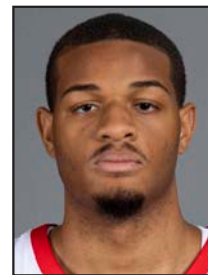
Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State hosted Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star shooting guard and Canton, Ohio, native Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195) on an official visit during the Buckeye football team's season opener against Akron on Aug. 31. Peterson, the nation's third-best player in the 2025 class and top-ranked shooting guard, placed Ohio State

in his top eight list of preferred schools and has already made multiple trips to Columbus.

- Also in recruiting, Toledo Whitmer three-star shooting guard Antione West (6-3, 175) placed Ohio State in his top four schools alongside Dayton, Nebraska and Purdue on Aug. 20. West is tabbed as the second-best player in Ohio and 155th-best player nationally in the 2025 class, and he was on Ohio State's campus earlier this summer during the program's "vet week."

- Former Ohio State guard Roddy Gayle Jr. offered his first comments since transferring to Michigan this offseason, saying earlier this summer that Holtmann's sudden midseason firing led him to consider other options and that Michigan best matched what he was looking for in the portal. "Being at Ohio State for two years, I was taught to hate (Michigan), not really knowing why. But Coach Dusty (May) and his staff reached out, and it made the most sense," he said.



Roddy Gayle

- Njegovan will wear No. 27 for Ohio State this season, making him the first player in program history to wear that number. Glover will wear No. 6, joining Donald Kelley (1954-56) and Dick Schnittker (1948-50) as the only other Buckeyes to don that number.



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OSU To Play Stanford In December Invitational

Ohio State will take on a college basketball powerhouse on Dec. 20 when it faces Stanford in the Invisalign Bay Area Women's Classic at the Chase Center in San Francisco.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

The Buckeyes will play in the first game of a doubleheader, followed by UCLA taking on Creighton. Both contests will be broadcast on FOX Sports, with times to be announced. This is the first game announced for Ohio State's nonconference schedule, which will likely fill out in the coming weeks as the season approaches.

Ohio State has matched up just five times with Stanford previously, the most recent a 71-52 loss at the Cardinal in 2019. The Buckeyes defeated Stanford twice during the 2017 season – once at home and then again at a neutral-site tournament – but both victories were later vacated by the NCAA. Stanford also defeated Ohio State in a neutral-site meeting in 2009, though the Buckeyes got the first win in the series with a 79-47 victory in 1984.

While Stanford is traditionally considered among the top teams in women's col-

lege basketball, the Cardinal are entering a new era following the offseason retirement of longtime coach Tara VanDerveer, also head coach at Ohio State from 1980-85, who led Stanford to three NCAA championships and 13 appearances in the Final Four.

In addition to VanDerveer's retirement, with former Cardinal player and longtime assistant Kate Paye taking the reins, Stanford is also changing conferences, set to compete in the ACC after playing as a member of the Pac-12 since 1918. Stanford finished last season ranked ninth in the final AP top 25 poll but was not included in ESPN's "Way-Too-Early Top 25" released in May following VanDerveer's retirement.

Recruitment Heating Up For Four-Star Ohio Guard Martin

Ohio State is continuing to work the recruitment of Springboro, Ohio, shooting guard Bryn Martin (6-1), considered a four-star prospect by ESPN and the No. 61 recruit in 2025.

Martin included Ohio State among her top 10 schools earlier this summer, with the Buckeyes on the list in addition to Clemson, Dayton, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Virginia Tech, Washington and West Virginia.

With Martin having cut down her list of schools, she's now moving into the official visit stage of her recruitment. According to On3, she took an official visit to Ohio State for the Buckeye football team's 52-6 win

over Akron.

"I want a program where I can play and succeed," she told 247Sports in June. "I want to play in the WNBA, but I'm not going to play basketball until I'm 65. So, I want a good degree from a great school. I want the school that I choose to fit me and my family."

Ohio State has largely been quiet thus far in 2025, with no commitments and little reported in terms of top targets. Martin, however, would be a significant get for what should be a smaller class after signing five players last year.

Cambridge Considered Freshman To Watch By ESPN

Ohio State freshman point guard Jaloni Cambridge was a five-star prospect coming out of high school before signing with the Buckeyes in April, and expectations remain high entering her first year in Columbus.

In an article published by ESPN on July 26, Cambridge – the younger sister of Ohio State redshirt sophomore guard Kennedy Cambridge – was listed as a freshman to watch this season along with South Carolina forward Joyce Edwards, Notre Dame forward Kate Koval, USC guard Kennedy Smith and UConn forward Sarah Strong,

"Ohio State will miss Jacy Sheldon and Celeste Taylor, but Cambridge's arrival softens the blow," wrote ESPN's Alexa Philipou. "The 5-6 point guard figures to be an immediate impact player who along with Cotie McMahon can make this new-look Ohio State squad a tough opponent in the Big Ten."

Oregon transfer guard Chance Gray appears most likely to start at shooting guard, replacing Taylor, while Cambridge, sixth-year senior Madison Greene and junior Kaia Henderson will all get looks at point guard.

Smith Included Among Top 25 Women's Players Of 21st Century

ESPN's Michael Voepel conducted a

ranking of the top 25 women's basketball players of the 21st century on July 25, and legendary Ohio State guard Katie Smith was among those included for making their mark over the past 24 years.

Smith, who played for the Buckeyes from 1992-96, made the list at No. 23, with Voepel citing her status as a two-time WNBA champion, three-time Olympic gold medalist and her induction to the Naismith Hall of Fame for her inclusion on the list.

"An Ohio native, she starred for Ohio State in the 1990s and began her pro career with two championships in the short-lived ABL with the Columbus Quest," Voepel wrote. "She moved to the WNBA in 1999 with Minnesota, but her greatest heights in the league came after she was traded to Detroit during the 2005 season.

"Mostly known as a scorer with the Lynx, she became a point guard and defensive stopper for the Shock, a pivotal part of their 2006 and 2008 championships. Smith spent the end of her playing career in Washington, Seattle and New York, then later became the Liberty's head coach. She's now an assistant for the Lynx."

The top of the list was occupied by three-time WNBA champion Diana Taurasi at No. 1, followed by Tamika Catchings, Maya Moore, Candace Parker and Lisa Leslie.

Buckeyes In The WNBA

The WNBA season is rapidly approaching the end, with the regular season set to finish on Sept. 19 and the playoffs beginning just three days later. With that, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is checking in on a handful of former Buckeyes in the WNBA and how they've done this season.

The most notable is Indiana Fever guard Kelsey Mitchell, who is in the midst of one of her best seasons with the franchise in her seventh year. Already named a WNBA All-Star, Mitchell was averaging a team-high 18.3 points through Aug. 30, slightly ahead of superstar teammate Caitlin Clark at 18.0 points.

The pair have helped the Fever go from dead last in last year's standings to third in the Eastern Conference with a 15-16 record through Aug. 30, which would qualify the team for the playoffs for the first time since 2016, one year before Mitchell arrived in Indianapolis.

Taylor, meanwhile, has bounced around during her rookie season. After being drafted by the Fever, Taylor was ultimately waived after just five appearances and has since played for the Connecticut Sun and Phoenix Mercury, the latter across two separate stints. All told, she has played in 14 games and averaged 8.4 minutes, 1.7 points, 0.6 assists and 0.5 rebounds.

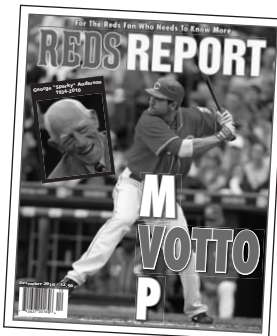
Sheldon has found more consistent success with the Dallas Wings, working into a starting role during her first season at the professional level. While the Wings have not been particularly impressive, sporting just an 8-22 record through Aug. 30, Sheldon has still started in 16 games and is averaging 5.3 points, 2.0 rebounds and 2.2 assists on 40.9 percent shooting.

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FOOTBALL (1-0)

Aug. 31 AKRON, W 52-6.

Sept. 7 WESTERN MICHIGAN; **21** MARSHALL; **28** at Michigan State.

Oct. 5 IOWA; **12** at Oregon; **26** NEBRASKA.

Nov. 2 at Penn State; **9** PURDUE; **16** vs. Northwestern at Wrigley Field; **23** INDIANA; **30** MICHIGAN.

WOMEN'S FIELD HOCKEY (2-0)

Aug. 30 UALBANY, W 6-1.

Sept. 1 BUCKNELL, W 4-1; **6** at Colgate; **8** at Syracuse; **13** at Richmond; **15** at Old Dominion; **20** MICHIGAN STATE; **22** BROWN; **29** LOUISVILLE.

Oct. 6 at Michigan; **11** PENN STATE; **13** KENT STATE; **18** at Maryland; **20** at Rutgers; **25** INDIANA; **27**

IOWA.

Nov. 1 at Northwestern; **3** CENTRAL MICHIGAN.

MEN'S SOCCER (3-0-1)

Aug. 22 CLEVELAND STATE, T 1-1; **25** at Akron, W 2-0; **29** SIUE, W 4-0.

Sept. 1 UNLV, W 3-2; **8** XAVIER; **13** BUTLER; **17** at Penn State; **22** RUTGERS; **27** INDIANA.

Oct. 4 at Michigan; **7** WASHINGTON; **11** at UCLA; **19** at Wisconsin; **25** NORTHWESTERN; **29** MICHIGAN STATE.

Nov. 3 at Maryland; **7** Big Ten Tournament quarterfinals; **10** Big Ten Tournament semifinals; **17** Big Ten Tournament finals.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (3-0-1)

Aug. 15 DUKE, W 1-0; **22** MILWAUKEE, W 4-0; **25** ASHLAND, W 3-1; **29** SOUTH CAROLINA, T 1-1.

Sept. 5 at Navy; **8** at Auburn; **12** at Indiana; **15** BROWN; **19** IOWA; **22** NORTHWESTERN; **26** MICHIGAN STATE; **29** at Michigan.

Oct. 4 MARYLAND; **10** MINNESOTA; **13** at Purdue; **17** at USC; **20** at UCLA; **27** PENN STATE.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (2-0)

Aug. 30 at Dayton Flyer Invitational vs. Florida International, W 3-0; **31** at Dayton Flyer Invitational vs. Northern Iowa, W 3-1.

Sept. 6 at Florida Tournament vs. Southern Indiana; **7** at Florida Tournament vs. South Florida; **8** at Florida Tournament vs. Florida; **13** MIAMI (FL); **14** BUFFALO; **15** WRIGHT STATE; **20** at Bowling Green; **22** BOWLING GREEN; **27** at USC; **29** at UCLA.

Oct. 3 OREGON; **6** at Indiana; **10** at Northwestern; **13** MICHIGAN; **18** PENN STATE; **19** NEBRASKA; **23** at Purdue; **27** MINNESOTA; **31** IOWA.

Nov. 3 at Michigan State; **8** at Michigan; **9** at Illinois; **15** MARYLAND; **16** RUTGERS; **22** WASHINGTON; **24** INDIANA; **27** at Wisconsin; **29** at Minnesota.

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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.

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Buckeyes' Opener More Fizzle Than Sizzle

As a kid growing up in the heyday of the Big Red Machine era, I was always on pins and needles as Opening Day arrived for Major League Baseball. It was the first sport I truly followed and loved, and at one time I could probably recite the batting orders and pitching rotations for most teams. I knew when the calendar changed to April, baseball – specifically the Reds – was right around the corner.



That excitement faded from baseball and moved to college football, and now there is a palpable change in me when the calendar shifts to August because I know college football is near, and I can pour my weekends into it for a full four months. It's quicker than baseball – both in action and the season – and has a physicality and aggression that is missing from the summer game.

Even when the opening game is perceived as a low-level affair, something that should be a walk in the park, it is still exciting. It's a new season, a new team, and new faces looking to become household names. Whether the opponent is Alabama or Akron, when Ohio State runs out of that tunnel for the first time in any season, it brings thrills.

So imagine the surprise when the new season looked a lot like recent seasons.

There was Ohio State, sitting near the top of the rankings ladder, sleepwalking against an overmatched in-state foe that should have been happy to receive its game check. No one told that to Akron, which showed a lot of fight early, even leading 3-0 after a first-quarter field goal. I wondered for a brief moment whether Zips coach Joe Moorhead would stop and take a picture of the scoreboard showing his team in front, a la Lee Corso from his coaching days at Indiana. But that didn't happen, thankfully.

The Buckeyes fuzed around and found out that they would need to actually work and execute if they wanted to win the game, and the message finally hit after halftime, when OSU moved a 17-3 margin to 31-3 in the span of 18 seconds midway through the third quarter. The floodgates opened after that, and the day ended with a 52-6 victory, sending fans home happy. Well, most of them. There will always be a small faction of Buckeye Nation upset about something, even in victory. Fortunately, it's mostly noise.

The slow start was reminiscent of last year's team and was definitely noticed by Buckeye boss Ryan Day.

"They were a little uptight early on, they were kind of worked up," he said. "You saw a couple of things that were off, and we got ourselves off schedule. I thought we settled in and started to have more fun, started to play looser. That's the way we needed to play. We've got to come out of the gates playing loose. But I get it. For a lot of these guys, it was their first start."

It was not lost on the players that maybe they were overlooking Akron and were not as sharp as they needed to be for a tuneup game.

"I think we did some good things in the first half, made some good plays here and there," quarterback Will Howard said. "But really setting into a rhythm, that came in the second half. We got the ball in the third quarter and started driving."

Howard, who went 17 of 28 for 228 yards and three touchdowns and added 18 rushing yards on four carries, said, "At the end of the day we just had to get together and say, 'Settle down, just play our game, don't think about it too much.' We definitely need to work on starting a little faster, starting a little better and not having those mistakes we had in the first half, me included. I think we settled in in that second half and were able to go from there."

It probably won't affect the Buckeyes much in the nonconference portion of the schedule as the rest of the nonleague slate resembles more of a Pushovers' Row than a Murderers' Row. Another Mid-American Conference foe is up next, Western Michigan, and that's followed by a middle-of-the-pack Sun Belt Conference opponent in Marshall. So while slow starts are not optimum, they probably will not do much damage early. If it continues into Big Ten play, then it may be time to worry.

For its part, Akron at least showed tenacity and some creative play-calling early. Coach Joe Moorhead, previously an offensive coordinator at Penn State and Oregon, had a wrinkle where two quarterbacks were in the game together – Ben Finley under center and dynamic athlete Tahj Bullock lined up either in the slot or in an H-back position. It confused the Buckeyes for a bit, but it also showed the dangers of going up against a much bigger and more talented foe after Finley was knocked out of the game with an injury. It's the risk a coach takes when signing up for these kinds of games.

"It's a double-edged sword – yes, it does prepare you right for the games and season where the competitive balance is a little more equal," Moorhead said. "But at the same time, we got our quarterback knocked out."

A Will To Win

Speaking of quarterbacks, Ohio State's new one passed his first audition pretty smoothly.

Other than a head-scratching play near the end of the first half where Howard was going down and attempted to throw the football backward to TreVeyon Henderson, which was actually a fumble – one that Henderson had the foresight to jump on – the Kansas State transfer played well.

He appeared to be under control and in charge of the situation, and he never appeared to be afraid of making a mistake. That was the big knock on Kyle McCord, that he would maybe hold the ball too long or wouldn't make a tough pass because he was too afraid to make a mistake. His face never gave an air of being comfortable, so he left for Syracuse. And he balled out in his first game with the Orange, throwing for over 300 yards and four touchdowns. With the pressure level reduced, McCord should do well at Syracuse.

Howard knows what he signed up for and is not afraid of embracing the challenge.

"It's a freeing feeling when you know you can kind of just put the ball up and let those guys make adjustments, and you don't have to be as perfect," Howard said. "And that's nothing against my guys. I had a ton of playmakers at K-State, and I love those guys, and those guys were making plays for me, too. But I'm just trying to talk about the dudes we've got here. We got some dudes, and it showed out today."

Howard has a league championship under his belt from K-State, so he knows what it takes to get the job done. He won a competition that wasn't as close as the public was led to believe, and now the gig is his. It is filled with equal parts praise and scorn, and he will learn about the latter when he makes his first crucial mis-

take. But the thing that was noticed most about Howard was that in a new situation, in front of over 100,000 rabid fans, things didn't appear overwhelming. Yeah, the opponent wasn't the best, but new is new.

"He had good poise the whole day," Day said. "He took care of the football, other than that one crazy decision there at the end of the half to force something. He's a more experienced guy, but in a new offense and new environment."

Howard knows that he is the caretaker of the Buckeye offense and understands that he needs to tend to his responsibilities for the team's goals to be reached.

"Coach (Chip) Kelly says all the time 'You're the run game coordinator. You've got to get us in and out of the right plays,'" Howard said. "We have to all be working together, with all systems on the same wavelength."

The Praise Was Warranted

In the 1990s, Public Enemy came out with a song titled "Don't Believe the Hype," which told the story of a guy who unfairly gained a bad reputation through gossip in the streets. He implored people not to believe what they had been told.

Well, when it comes to freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith, *do* believe the hype. The kid showed out in his first appearance in scarlet and gray, grabbing six passes for 92 yards and two touchdowns – though his most impressive catch may have been a one-handed grab near the end of the third quarter, which he made despite one arm being held by an Akron defensive back.

Moorhead said Smith "is as advertised."

"Just to see that kid playing in person, after all the kind of pomp and circumstance leading up to it, he lived up to the billing," Moorhead said.

It may not have looked that way early in the game, when Smith dropped his first target, then committed a false-start penalty. But he did not stew about it and instead went about his business of making an impact.

"When I came back to the sideline, I was just mad at myself," Smith said. "I mean, it's football. If you play receiver you're going to drop the ball, so I just moved on."

Know who else dropped their first pass in an Ohio State uniform? A guy named Cris Carter. And he turned out to be kind of good.

Howard was not surprised that Smith was able to corral the deep pass that set up Quinshon Judkins for his first Buckeye touchdown.

"He's a dude, man," Howard said of Smith. "If you get him in one-on-one coverage, he's going to win."

During a visit to Ohio Stadium as a high schooler, Smith predicted the very spot where he would make his first touchdown grab as a Buckeye – the corner of the South end zone. He adjusted beautifully to a back-shoulder throw from Howard and corralled the first of what promises to be many scoring grabs in an Ohio State uniform.

"I don't really feel pressure," Smith said. "I just want to go out there and play football and win games. I know all the hype around me was crazy, but I just wanted to come in and be a guy who works and just not be about all hype."

Deserving Of The Double

Ohio State unveiled a statue of two-time Heisman winner Archie Griffin prior to the Akron game, an honor that was more than deserved for a man whose name has been synonymous with Buckeye football for over 50 years. It

followed a statue that went up outside the Rose Bowl in Pasadena earlier this summer, a game in which Griffin also had a huge impact. He is one of only two players to play in four consecutive Rose Bowls (1973-76), and he finished his career with 412 yards on 79 carries in Pasadena.

Putting aside the debate about other OSU influential football figures getting statues, there is no doubt that Archie's is merited.

"You talk about the impact that a person has made in life," Day said. "They've been playing college football a long time, and there's only one two-time Heisman Trophy winner, and that's Archie Griffin. I didn't get to see him play, but I did get a chance to see the impact that he made off the field, with people in the community and with charities. He's a great role model for our team."

Coach, I *did* get to see him play, and he is a chief reason why I fell in love with the Buckeyes. The blur with the football as I called him, he could get to full speed and still cut or spin on a dime. He was tougher than his size indicated, and wasn't afraid to run to contact.

It may not seem possible, but Archie may be even better as a person than he was as a football player. Always a model of class, he always takes a minute to say hello and ask how you're doing, even though he has a million things on his plate. Quick with a smile, Griffin is the beacon that shines brightest in the Ohio State football skyline.

If not for Archie, Ohio State football might just have one less fan.

Bravo, Archie. And bravo, Ohio State.

Same Old Story

One glaring deficiency coming out of the Akron game was the continued futility of the Buckeyes offensive line. The fact that OSU had trouble getting a push against a team that has maybe one guy who could make Ohio State's roster is troubling and a continuation of a problem that plagued the squad for much of last season.

Mainstay Donovan Jackson was out at one guard, and while he is a preseason All-America candidate, the line shouldn't completely fall apart without him. The Buckeyes averaged 5.2 yards per carry and didn't allow any sacks, so outsiders might wonder what is he complaining about? Had they watched the game, they would know.

OSU could not pick up any ground yardage up the middle. Nearly everything in the first half came on runs by TreVeyon Henderson that were bounced outside of the blockers. The Buckeyes eventually wore Akron down with their size, and that opened up a few holes between the tackles. But it wasn't as successful as the numbers might have you believe.

Howard was largely responsible for the no-sacks number, evading a couple of strong Akron pressures to either run or throw the ball away. He's a big dude, all of 6-4, and his 237-pound frame is not easy to bring down. He did have a clean pocket on a number of occasions but also felt the heat of a pass rush on too many others. That protection will need to be cleaned up before the Buckeyes face the big boys on their schedule.

"When I looked at the numbers at halftime, I thought it was going to be much worse than it was," said Day, whose team finished with 170 yards on 33 carries. "And then it looked much better in the second half. I just think there were some things off in there in the interior where guys were just not quite fitting it up right."

Zip It. Opener Had Its Ups And Downs

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

First of all, hats off to the Akron football team. For a program that had won just seven games total in the past five seasons, they proved a gritty bunch that accounted for themselves perhaps better than the eventual 52-6 score against Ohio State indicated. On the flip side, that same score may make the No. 2-rated Buckeyes look a little bit better than they played, given what I think everyone would consider a sluggish first half.

A couple of days before the game, I listed the five things I would be looking at as the Buckeyes opened this season of promise on our electronic BuckeyeSports.com Forum. Here is what I had:

“1) The quarterback, obviously, and how many other QBs get into the game; 2) The offensive line, obviously, though it may be hard to tell if they have improved playing against the Zips; 3) Special teams, especially punter Nick McLarty. Are he and his leg as big as advertised? We may not see him much against Akron but we will certainly see any kick or punt returners. The returners have no place to go but up. Will they? 4) Sonny Styles. Like many I have been fascinated by Styles since he arrived on campus. Has he found the right position, and is it his time to shine?; 5) Jack Sawyer and JTT, especially Sawyer. This is a pretty impressive duo. Will they create havoc like the Bosas and Chase Young? Has Sawyer finally gotten over having his development stunted by playing the Jack?”

Here are my thoughts on these five topics after viewing what I would, at the least, call an interesting game.

The quarterback, as promised, was Will Howard. After a slow start, which was not necessarily all his fault, he put up a solid, if workmanlike line of 17-of-28 passing (60.7 percent) for 228 yards, three scores and, most importantly, no interceptions. I'm sure Buckeye fans were thrilled when he added three carries for 28 yards in the first two quarters. This was the added dimension that everyone was looking for.

But then came *The Play*.

I've been monitoring Howard's situation since his arrival in January, and I don't think anyone, coach or fan, expected him to be the next C.J. Stroud. Rather they were looking more for a Craig Krenzler type, who could manage a championship-caliber team while making the fewest mistakes possible.

“We have a good defense this year, so we don't need extraordinary play,” head coach Ryan Day said after naming Howard the starter on Aug. 15. “We need someone who's going to take care of the football, make good decisions, play for the team. He's got to play well on third down. He's got to play well in the red zone and win the game in a two-minute drill. That's what we ask our quarterbacks to do.

“We have a good surrounding cast around him, so taking care of the ball is very important, and also scoring touchdowns.”

Just before the half, I was utterly amazed that Howard got in trouble and flung the ball back to TreVeyon Henderson, who made a heads-up play and pounced on it before disaster ensued. That was a play you might expect somebody in high school to make, but certainly not a quarterback with four years of major-college football already under his belt. The score was only 17-3 at the time. An inopportune bounce could have made things more interesting. Sometimes it's best to just eat the ball.

Howard's final rushing line went in the books as four carries for 18 yards, after the fumble yards were deducted.

Note also that Day mentioned the “two-minute drill.” Howard's first as a Buckeye went down as three plays for minus-7 yards.

I am sure that watching the film with the coaches won't be a pleasant experience for Howard. A play like that against Oregon – or God for-

bid, Michigan – could be ugly.

As for my question about which other quarterbacks would play, it turned out to be only Devin Brown, who got only one possession (minus a kneel-down to end the game).

This is as good a place as any to lodge my annual complaint against Day (one of my few complaints) that he keeps his starting quarterback in way too long. What was Howard doing playing in the fourth quarter? One need only look across the field at Akron quarterback Ben Finley (tough kid) wincing in pain on the bench to realize the potential pitfalls of keeping your quarterback in too long. And besides risking injury to your starting quarterback, you are taking away valuable playing time from your reserves, in this case Brown.

Then, Day or Chip Kelly has Brown hand off the ball repeatedly (he was credited with three passes and a completion for 6 yards). Trust me. Devin Brown knows how to hand off the ball.

Now that I have invested this much space on the quarterback, let me continue with one more point before I turn to the offensive line.

There has been a lot of back and forth on our Forum about Howard vs. last year's starter, Kyle McCord.

Purely for informational purposes with no editorial intent, I offer that McCord was 20 of 33 passing (60.6 percent) in the 2023 opener against Indiana for 239 yards, no TDs and an interception. He was not sacked and rushed two times for 8 yards. In Syracuse's opener against Ohio this season, McCord was 27 of 39 (69.2 percent) for 354 yards, four touchdowns and one interception. He carried five times for minus-1 yard in the 38-22 Orange victory.

As for watch area No. 2, the offensive line, I was a little concerned in the first half. I was surprised that the Buckeyes gained 87 yards on 18 carries (4.8 average) in the first 30 minutes, because it sure seemed like the run game was stalling at the line of scrimmage. Even Day admitted he thought the numbers would be worse than they were. Upon closer examination, Henderson had runs of 13, 11 and 9 yards in the first half, Howard a 19-yard run and Quinshon Judkins 12. Take those five carries away and you have 13 carries for 23 yards and a 1.8-yard average. No wonder it seemed so bad.

For the game the Buckeyes gained 170 yards on 33 carries (5.2 average) and two touchdowns. Not a bad afternoon's work on the ground. The big guys up front also did not allow a sack, nor did the Zips have a quarterback hurry or, remarkably, a tackle for loss.

I'm not ready to give the offensive line a national championship-caliber grade just yet, but I give them a passing grade, especially with left guard Donovan Jackson sitting the game out.

As for the No. 3 special teams, there was a minor disappointment, but a *huge* surprise. I was really disappointed that punter Nick McLarty didn't play. I wanted to see the big guy in action. No such luck as sophomore Joe McGuire handled all the punting with three boots for a 44.7-yard average and a long of 51 and no returns.

But after Ohio State's 111th place finish nationally in punt returns last season, with a 4.4-yard average, who could have predicted Brandon Inniss' electric performance against the Zips? It takes a special player to return punts, one with no fear, and Inniss proved to be that player with four returns for 60 yards with a long of 36. He had another 27-yard return called back because of a penalty. It was the kind of reckless

abandon Buckeye fans have been looking for after the parade of fair catches last season.

And Sonny Styles, No. 4 on my list? He was credited with six tackles, but it was a fairly quiet six tackles. He didn't make any big plays, but I didn't really see any gaffes either. I can't help that I am fascinated by his potential. Playing linebacker may put him in a good position for a breakout game and season.

I was pleased to see Gabe Powers have a pick-six. He was a highly-touted local player who has been under the radar for his first couple of years here.

And finally, the duo of Sawyer and JT Tuimolou. As hoped, they created quite a bit of havoc against the Zips. JTT had 1½ sacks among his three tackles. Sawyer had a more modest line with two assists and no TFL. I was left wondering who was keeping stats, because Sawyer was credited with just one quarterback hurry, even though he seemed like he was in the backfield all afternoon. I'm not sure their game stats fully represent the effect on the victory the two defensive ends had.

So, those were the five things for which I was watching. They added up to the 52-6 victory that was pretty much to chalk.

Quick Hitters

- The guy whom I didn't go into the game especially paying attention to who I thought had a really good game was safety Lathan Ransom. He led the team with nine tackles, with two for losses and a fumble recovery for a 27-yard touchdown.

With all the stars on defense, it seems like Ransom, a senior, was kind of the forgotten man, even though he had 34 tackles, 1½ TFLs, an interception, two pass breakups, a hurry and a forced fumble last season, despite playing only nine games.

Consider him forgotten no more.

- Henderson looked like the Henderson of old, especially on a drive in the third quarter that resulted in a James Peoples touchdown run. Henderson had a 12-yard reception, a 21-yard run, and a 6-yard reception to help set up the score. He finished the game averaging 8.1 yards on his eight carries, along with the two receptions. Perhaps the presence of Judkins and even the emergence of Peoples will leave Henderson less exposed to injury. Judkins finished with 13 carries for 55 yards (4.2), and Peoples ended up with 30 yards on six carries.

- One thing that hasn't changed is the Buckeyes taking too many penalties, frequently at inopportune times, such as on Inniss' punt return. This time they were flagged seven times for 45 yards, including one for having two players wearing the same number on the field. The Buckeyes have what seems like dozens of assistants, analysts, quality control people, etc. on staff. You would think it was somebody's responsibility to keep track of dual numbers.

Last season, Ohio State was 60th in the country in fewest penalties per game with 5.7 per contest.

Quote Of The Week

Almost from the time of his arrival, it was clear that offensive coordinator Chip Kelly would add some color as compared to the typical dull Ohio State coaches like Jim Tressel, Urban Meyer or Day. While recently discussing the 6-6, 327-pound Tegra Tshabola, Kelly had this to say:

“We like offensive linemen that are big, be-

cause big people beat up little people. So we like Tegra a lot.”

The Way Back Machine

Peabody and Sherman had their Way Back Machine on the “Rocky and Bullwinkle Show.” BSB has its Mark Rea. This football season, Mark will be looking at Ohio State football seasons with years ending in four. I have no idea what Mark has up his sleeve for the feature, but for his first installment he examines the 1894 season, an article I enjoyed because I am not that familiar with the really early years of Ohio State football.

Two quotes, both from The Lantern, caught my attention because they are still relevant today.

To start that season, the Buckeyes participated in a multi-team tournament at the Ohio State Fairgrounds that turned into a bit of a fiasco. In an editorial, the student paper suggested the tournament offered “a lesson in what can go wrong when money gets into college sports.”

If the people at The Lantern only knew what would be coming 130 years later.

A few weeks after that, The Lantern editor-in-chief C.A. Radcliffe wrote, “Why is Yale, Harvard or Princeton greater than O.S.U.? Because they have a better football team. What we want to do is get a great football team and we shall then be a great University. Let us be ‘faithful over a few things’ that we may be ‘ruler over many things.’”

For decades, Ohio State was accused of being a football factory. I have long maintained the attention that the school garnered through its success on the gridiron attracted the attention – and more importantly the money – that has helped turn Ohio State into the academic powerhouse it is today. And the school now has a better football team than Yale, Harvard or Princeton.

Brace Yourself

Since the day I named myself BSB publisher back in 1981, I have had to deal with postal problems and legitimate complaints from subscribers regarding a situation over which I have no control. Despite dealing with postal issues for over 40 years, I have to say that the days since our Football Preview issue came out on Aug. 21 have been among the most disheartening. The number of readers who had still not gotten their paper as we went to press with this issue was staggering.

Especially affected seem to be readers in the Dayton area, including cities like Miamisburg, Centerville, Vandalia, Beavercreek, Bellbrook, Kettering, etc.

Let me once again make a suggestion. The complete edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin goes up online as soon as it is completed. I understand that this is different from having the paper in your hands, but it is a stopgap until the paper finally arrives. For those of you who think you can't find the paper online, if I can do it, you can do it. And the days of readers claiming they don't have a computer are long gone. You can't get your football tickets without your cell phone or a computer, so we know you have some device.

For instructions on how to read online, see page 6 of this issue or give us a call at (614) 486-2202. Don't forget you can also upgrade your existing subscription to first-class mail in an envelope through football season for just \$25, or \$35 through recruiting. For information, see the box on page 8

We honestly don't see things with the post office getting better. Sadly, it may be the contrary.

Reds

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Fans can purchase a special ticket package that includes an exclusive Cookie Monster bobblehead. Available for all September home games while supplies last only at reds.com/Specials.



SEPTEMBER 2, 4-5



MONDAY // 4:10

Senior Day
Fans 50 and older may purchase select non-premium tickets at half-price in advance of game day only. Visit reds.com/Senior.

WEDNESDAY // 6:40

Family Discount Day, provided by Klosterman Bakery
Visit reds.com/Family for a special ticket offer!

THURSDAY // 1:10

Business Day Special
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

Thirsty Thursday
Fans can purchase a \$30 package that includes ticket and a \$10 concession credit valid for food and beverages.

Senior Day
Fans 50 and older may purchase select non-premium tickets at half-price in advance of game day only. Visit reds.com/Senior.

SEPTEMBER 17-19



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TUESDAY // 6:40 3-2-1 TUESDAYS

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

Bark in the Park, presented by Kroger, Good 'n' Fun and DreamBone.
Special ticket packages available for dogs and their owners at reds.com/Bark.



THURSDAY // 1:10

Business Day Special
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

Thirsty Thursday
Fans can purchase a \$30 package that includes ticket and a \$10 concession credit valid for food and beverages.

Senior Day
Fans 50 and older may purchase select non-premium tickets at half-price in advance of game day only. Visit reds.com/Senior.



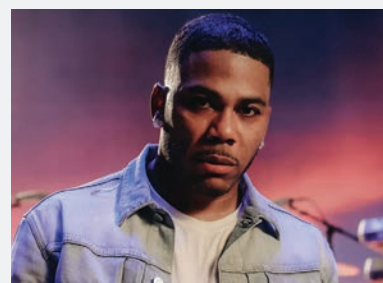
SEPTEMBER 20-22



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2024 Reds Team Photo.
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SUNDAY // 1:10

Reds Bowling Shirt, presented by Encore Technologies.
To fans in attendance, while supplies last.

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