

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 44, No. 2

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 21, 2024

Bucks Put On Clinic In 56-0 Rout Of WMU

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Since Ryan Day took over as head coach in 2019, Ohio State has traditionally been equipped with an explosive offense. With outstanding quarterbacks Justin Fields (2019-20) and C.J. Stroud (2021-22) leading the unit during Day's first four years as head coach, the Buckeyes never averaged fewer than 41.0 points per game, putting together top-three finishes in the country in scoring offense in three of those seasons (2019, 2021, 2022).

Ohio State's excellence on offense throughout those years, which was also aided by star and current NFL wideouts Marvin Harrison Jr., Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, among others, earned Day the reputation as one of the more innovative offensive minds in college football.

But his offensive genius did not necessarily produce those same results in 2023, with the Buckeyes, led by first-year starter and current Syracuse gunslinger Kyle McCord, averaging just 30.5 points and 407.9 yards per contest, both of those marks being the worst since the 2011 season when Luke Fickell led the Scarlet and Gray.

Ohio State's offense was – as Day often called it – “clunky” in 2023, a reality that he viewed as simply not good enough and worthy of making some significant offseason changes.

“We're going to look at everything,” Day said after the Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri when asked if he anticipated any offensive staffing changes in the offseason. “You've got to go win the game, and it didn't happen. So like I said before, everything is going to get looked at.

“If it's what helps Ohio State reach our goals and win these games, then we'll make those changes. We really have to evaluate it the right way and make sure I'm doing it the right way and do what's appropriate and



SCOTT STUART

BUCKING THE BRONCOS — Quinshon Judkins put his speed on display with a pair of 23-yard touchdowns plus an 80-yard score nullified by a holding penalty in a 56-0 win over Western Michigan.

best for the program.”

Day backed up those words in the winter by making some notable changes to his offense. After struggling to wrap his head around the idea in 2023, the Buckeye coach relinquished play-calling duties for the first time in his head-coaching career

to embrace more of a “CEO” role, hiring offensive mastermind Chip Kelly as his offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach on Feb. 9.

Day also found some new offensive toys through the transfer portal and recruiting, plucking quarterback Will Howard from Kansas State and running back Quinshon Judkins from Ole Miss and signing five-star wide freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith in hopes of bringing more explosiveness to the group. He also had to make an abrupt hiring in the spring following running backs coach Tony Alford's departure to Michigan, replacing him with Oregon's Carlos Locklyn to lead the Buckeye running backs.

Day's offseason of change did not necessarily produce immediate results in Ohio

State's 52-6 season-opening win against Akron on Aug. 31, with the unit getting off to somewhat of a slow start, scoring 17 points in the first half on 203 total yards before exploding for 35 points after halftime.

“I thought it was just OK,” Kelly said on Sept. 3 when asked how he felt his play-calling debut for Ohio State went. “I thought we could have executed better, especially early. To go four plays on the first drive and out, that's not good.”

Ohio State and Kelly may not have had the crispest offensive outing to open the season against the Zips, but in their Week 2 game against Western Michigan on Sept. 7, they seemed to put it all together.

In the team's 56-0 rout of the Broncos,

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From The Message Board

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State put together a crisp showing in its Week 2 matchup against Western Michigan on Sept. 7, holding the Broncos to just 99 total yards while gaining 683 on offense en route to a 56-0 blowout victory. 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: There were several players who are worthy of earning Buckeye Leaves after the blowout win, but perhaps no player was as deserving as running back Quinshon Judkins.

With star freshman wideout Jeremiah Smith bursting onto the scene in Ohio State's season opener against Akron, Judkins was often overlooked in the week leading up to the game against Western Michigan, but he made sure his presence would be felt early and often against the Broncos. The former Ole Miss runner took two of his first four carries to the end zone, first a 23-yard sprint at the end of the first quarter and then another 23-yard rush in the middle of the second.

In between those carries was also an 80-yard scamper that he took to the house which was called back due to a holding penalty on wide receiver Bryson Rodgers. If not for that flag, Judkins would've had a fantastic stat line in just his second game as a Buckeye, but his nine attempts for 108 yards – an impressive 12.0-yard average – and two touchdowns is certainly nothing to scoff at.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: From the very first offensive drive, Will Howard flushed his poor start against Akron down the drain. Completing all 10 of his first 10 passes for 177 yards against Western Michigan, Howard was extremely efficient in leading the Buckeye offense, finishing the game 18 of 26 for 292 yards and a touchdown.

Howard wasn't without some poor individual plays, underthrowing a ball that likely would have been a touchdown to Jeremiah Smith in the first half and nearly throwing an interception on a ball intended for Jelani Thurman on the same drive. Still, Howard's positives far outweigh his negatives.

Although not his longest play of the game, Howard's 6-yard touchdown run on a read option keeper had to be a welcome sight for Buckeye fans, who hadn't seen a starting Ohio State quarterback run for a touchdown since Justin Fields in 2020.

Greg Wilson, BSB: It seemed that all

game against Akron in Week 1 when the starters were still playing that defensive end Jack Sawyer was finding his way into the Zips backfield, but that ever-elusive first sack of the season never came in the 52-6 win. His fellow defensemen had no issues getting their names onto the stat sheet in that category, but despite Sawyer applying all kinds of pressure, he didn't finish with one.

He seemed determined in Week 2 to finish with a different result, and he was successful, brushing straight by a blocker in the second quarter to get his first sack of the season.

Sawyer finished the game with three total tackles, a sack and a quarterback hurry, making his presence felt by the Broncos offense every time he was in the game yet again.

BSB Subscribers

BuckeyeScott: EVERYBODY ON THE DEFENSE! This was the first shutout in five years. Everybody on "The D" earned Buckeye Leaves. They gave up just 99 fricking yards!

PeyoteBuck: We all saw the obvious stars of the first half. How about Inniss and Peoples in the second? Good job gentlemen. Also loved McDonald's ball-swatting ability.

R1TBDBITL: Buckeye leaves for all the non-starters who performed well, and there were a lot of them.

Poster That Harley Built: You can't have an offensive explosion like that without strong offensive line play. Leaves to the whole maligned bunch. And speaking of the offensive explosion, what about a Buckeye Leaf to Chip Kelly? The combination of Kelly calling the plays and Ryan Day running the show seems like a winner.

Bob Cody: Buckeye Leaves for Will Howard, Jeremiah Smith, the RB Room – Henderson, Judkins and Peoples – and the ENTIRE defense. Coal in the stocking for the awful officiating crew. Among the outrages: that was NOT targeting by Denzel Burke.

bstu9: I'm going to go in a different direction and reward my Buckeye leaf to the newest special teams demon, Lorenzo Styles Jr. Styles always seems to be around the ball on kickoff and punt returns, and he had a couple tackles inside the 20 on kickoff returns.

Ohio State fans were treated to a 56-0 drubbing of Western Michigan on Sept. 7, but that was not the only excitement they received that day. Week 2's Saturday slate started with No. 10 Michigan falling to No. 3 Texas 31-12 at Michigan Stadium for its first home loss in 23 games, followed by No. 5 Notre Dame suffering a shocking upset defeat at the hands of Northern Illinois, falling 16-14 to the Huskies at home on a last-second field goal.

We asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what they thought of both Michigan and Notre Dame's Week 2 losses, as well as the impact they think these two results will have on the college football season moving forward.

"A great football Saturday! Michigan gets waxed at home, and the game was not as close as the score might indicate. They will not be in the CFP Playoffs. Notre Dame loses at home, again. Maybe Marcus Freeman shouldn't have burned the bridges he did in trying to curry favor with Notre Dame's fanbase.

"Laughable that some were already penciling in Notre Dame for the playoff after an opening win at also overrated Texas A&M. The Irish's CFP Playoff chances are on life support at this point."

– Bob Cody

"What do I make of the two losses at home by Michigan and ND? Michigan was greatly overrated and I expect them to lose three or more games this season. NIU over ND may prove to be the biggest upset of the season. For the College Football Playoff, I think ND can probably qualify with two losses. Should I add here that Mich and ND are my least favorite teams, year in and year out?"

–Terrier Buck

"Some shaky outings this last Saturday with TTUN and ND. And PSU struggling against Bowling Green? I don't know what to make of it. Regardless, I say beware the trap game, they happen and OSU is not immune."

– PeyoteBuck

"I said at the beginning of the season Michigan will lose four games and I stand by that statement. Everyone was shocked they didn't take a QB from the portal and I also guessed they would get smoked by Texas because they don't have the offense to keep up with good offensive teams.

"The Notre Dame debacle I never would've imagined happening. I was definitely shocked at the result because I figured they would go undefeated until the last game potentially, but I guess I underestimated how bad Riley Leonard is."

–Tiffin Buckeye

"As much as I loathe TCUN (thanks, Tiffin!), there is no shame in losing to Texas this year. The Horns did expose Michigan's woeful offense, which I believe will be their Achilles heel all season. My other impression is that Michigan's secondary isn't in the same league as their front seven.

"On the other hand, Notre Dame's loss to Northern Illinois at home was shocking. I plan on dumpster-diving into both teams' fan sites today to see how their loyalists are spinning it."

– Michael Bauer

"The football bounces in funny ways at times. Notre Dame losing and now being declared playoff dead may be as premature as declaring last week they were playoff bound. We are in new waters this year with the 12-team playoff and I am certain some of those playoff teams will have a loss or two. As far as 'the cheaters up north,' I don't give a damn for the whole state of Michigan."

– BuckeyeScott

"Couldn't happen to two nicer teams. With Notre Dame lacking a conference affiliation, the loss for them is more damaging than what a loss might be for a potential conference champion."

– Mcarr

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Respect The Boss

First, there is no way that Ryan Day should lose his job if he fails to achieve the football Buckeyes' three objectives this year – beat TTUN, win the Big Ten championship and win the national championship. His record to date has earned him enough goodwill to, at least, complete his current contract. He is, as Urban Meyer described him, an "elite" coach, who can inspire our Buckeyes on the field and in the classroom. I'm old enough to remember the great teams that Coach Hayes had that did not always beat TTUN and/or win national championships. The same holds true for each of

his successors.

Second, I'm somewhat surprised to hear several of the Buckeyes say that they needed a year or more "in the system" before they truly devoted themselves to the football program. Many have said they either didn't lose needed weight or didn't put in enough film study, etc. Is it the job of our coaches to properly inspire the players when they arrive on campus or properly evaluate them in the recruiting process? Go Bucks!!!

**Jim Terranova
Millbrae, Calif.**

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

Bronco-Busting Buckeyes Roll To Win

ball only to discover Howard still had possession, ready to run or throw to an open receiver.

Some fans continue to keep tabs on McCord and his hot start at Syracuse, which has him third in the nation with 735 passing

and moved into the top 15 among all-time rushers at Ohio State. His career total of 2,876 yards pushed him past Dan "Boom" Herron (2,869, 2008-11), and he needs 124 more to become only the 12th OSU player with at least 3,000 career yards on the ground.

Judkins and Henderson became the first OSU tandem to each rush for two touchdowns in a game since Henderson and Master Teague III did it during a 59-7 win against Akron in 2021.

Freshman QB Julian Sayin's 55-yard touchdown pass to tight end Bennett Christian tied for fifth longest by an Ohio State quarterback in terms of his first career scoring strike. J.T. Barrett holds that record with an 80-yarder to Devin Smith during a 34-17 win against Navy in the 2014 season opener.

Christian became the first OSU player wearing jersey No. 85 to score a touchdown in seven years. The most recent was Marcus Baugh, who was wearing that number when he gathered in a 25-yard pass from Barrett during a 31-20 win at Michigan in 2017.

Ohio State scored a 56-0 victory for the sixth time in program history. Other 56-0 wins came vs. Rutgers in 2017, Purdue in 2013, Wisconsin in 1975, Indiana in 1957, and Case in 1918.

Western Michigan was held to just 99 total yards, the first time the Buckeyes had held an opponent to fewer than 100 total yards since Maryland managed only 66 during a 62-14 loss in Columbus on Oct. 7, 2017.

The shutout was No. 276 all-time for Ohio State, but only the second for Day in his 66th game as head coach of the Buckeyes. The only previous one came exactly five years before, a 42-0 whitewash of Cincinnati on Sept. 7, 2019.

Karma Comes Calling

It wasn't a very good weekend to be a Michigan Man.

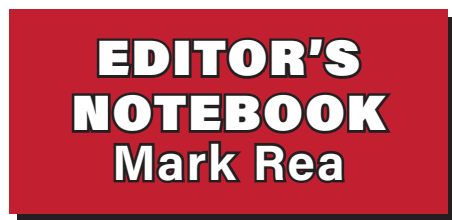
In addition to the defending national champion* Wolverines being bum-rushed by No. 3 Texas, former Michigan QB Cade McNamara – who transferred to Iowa last year to help breathe some life into a lifeless offense – managed only 99 yards through the air and the Hawkeyes lost a 20-19 decision to in-state rival Iowa State.

Elsewhere, former Michigan head coach Rich Rodriguez fell to 0-2 in his second season at Jacksonville State following a 49-14 loss to No. 22 Louisville. Former offensive coordinator Josh Gattis, now manning the same position at Maryland, watched his team drop a 27-24 decision at home to Michigan State in its Big Ten season opener. The Spartans, just 2-8 on the road during the previous two seasons, were predicted to finish 16th in the revamped 18-team conference.

Then, there was notorious former assistant coach Connor Stalions, who left the U-M program last year under the cloud of the sign-stealing scandal. Stalions was hired during the offseason as volunteer defensive coordinator at Mumford High School in Detroit, where he watched his defense get pushed around a bit (to say the least) during a season-opening 47-6 loss to Redford Thurston.

Things went from bad to worse for Mumford when head coach Will McMichael suffered a minor stroke after the season opener with Stalions reportedly ready to take over as interim head coach. Not true, Mumford athletic director Donshell English told the Detroit Press, insisting "all the coaches are coaching the team."

Despite whoever was running things, Stalions' defense actually took a step back from its season opener with a 60-0 loss in week two against Flint Hamady.



yards in two games, and wonder what might have been had he decided to stay in Columbus. But in terms of quarterback efficiency, McCord (170.75) is just a tick ahead of Howard (170.15). Comparatively speaking, McCord has one interception in 85 attempts and has taken two sacks while Howard has yet to throw a pick in 54 attempts and hasn't taken a sack.

No knock against McCord. In fact, I wish him well at his new home. But in terms of the type of offense Kelly and Ryan Day are now running at Ohio State, it seems – at least after two games – Howard is the better fit at quarterback.

Fun With Numbers

With victories against Akron and Western Michigan, Ohio State is now 40-1 all-time against teams currently playing in the Mid-American Conference. The only loss was a 12-6 decision in 1894 against Akron (known as Buchtel College in those days) in a game played at the Ohio State Fairgrounds.

The Buckeyes began this season against two opponents from the MAC for the first time since 2011. That season, with Luke Fickell as interim head coach, Ohio State rolled to a 42-0 win against Akron in the opener and followed with a 27-22 victory against Toledo. Unfortunately, the team lost seven of its final 11 games to finish with a 6-7 record, the first seven-loss season for the program since 1897.

With 108 yards on only nine carries, Judkins became the 18th Ohio State player to crack the century mark in rushing against a MAC opponent since 1992. But he is only the second to do so with fewer than 10 carries. Terrelle Pryor had 104 yards and a touchdown on only seven attempts during a 73-20 win against Eastern Michigan in 2010.

Howard began the game with 10 straight pass completions for 177 yards and one touchdown. Since 1960, only two other Ohio State QBs have begun games with longer streaks. Craig Krenzler connected on his first 11 attempts for 142 yards and a score during a 51-17 win against Kent State in 2002, and just last year, McCord hit on his first 11 passes for 64 yards and a touchdown during a 35-16 win at Rutgers.

As unbelievable as this sounds, Howard, with his 6-yard run in the second quarter, became the first Ohio State starting quarterback to rush for a touchdown since Justin Fields scored twice on the ground during a 52-12 win at Michigan State in 2020.

Emeka Egbuka became the 13th OSU player in history to top the 2,000-yard mark in career receiving yardage. His 98 yards vs. the Broncos pushed his total to 2,006, and he needs only 27 more to move past K.J. Hill (2,032, 2016-19) into 12th place on the program's all-time list.

Egbuka also caught at least one pass for the 26th consecutive game. That places him at No. 15 on the all-time list in that department, tied with Brian Robiskie (2007-08), Devin Smith (2012-14) and Harrison (2021-23).

Henderson carried 10 times for 66 yards

On the same day a Mid-American Conference team took down the No. 5 ranked team in the nation and another nearly did the same to No. 8, second-ranked Ohio State avoided any kind of similar MAC attack with a workman-like 56-0 victory against an outmanned and outgunned Western Michigan.

Despite Northern Illinois going into South Bend and pulling off a 16-14 shocker against fifth-ranked Notre Dame, and Bowling Green taking eighth-rated Penn State to the mat before bowing to a 34-27 final, the Buckeyes took full advantage of the bumps and bruises the Broncos suffered during their season opener when they traveled to Wisconsin and gave the Badgers everything they wanted before the Fighting Fickells were able to salt away a 28-14 victory.

Pardon my French, but it was almost a *fait accompli* when Broncos center Jacob Gideon, a first-team All-MAC performer from last season, went down and out after the second play of the game. Add to that the absence of starting running back Jalen Buckley, who had rushed for two touchdowns against Wisconsin, and the outcome was pretty much preordained from the outset.

Still, the Buckeyes did anything but mail in their performance. They pounded away for 683 yards of offense – a total that would have been knocking on the door of 800 had penalties not wiped out a couple of big gains – and held Western Michigan to just 99 total yards.

TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins combined to run for 174 yards and four touchdowns, James Peoples became the first OSU freshman to rush for a touchdown in each of his first two games since Maurice Clarett in 2002, and freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith had five more receptions for 119 yards, 70 of them on a touchdown sprint late in the first quarter.

There were those this spring who began clicking off the names of Terry McLaurin, Garrett Wilson, Chris Olave and Marvin Harrison Jr., and then telling me that Smith was better than any of them. My response was that I would have to see it to believe it. I have now seen it, and I'm beginning to believe it. Big Ten Network analyst Jake Butt perhaps summed it up best when he said of Smith, "You are watching an NFL-caliber player who just happens to be a college freshman."

With 11 catches for 211 yards and three touchdowns in just two games, Smith is the first true freshman in program history to break 200 yards in his first two games, and he's already nearly halfway to the single-season school record for most touchdown catches by a freshman, a mark set in 1984 when Cris Carter totaled eight.

Smith was already a polished receiver when he set foot on campus, a consensus five-star prospect out of Chaminade-Madonna Prep in Miami Gardens, Fla. But I think we have to thank new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly for unbridling Smith and allowing him to showcase his talents. After all, McLaurin, Wilson, Olave and Harrison were each four- or five-star prospects, too, and none of them made much impact as freshmen.

Kelly is also responsible for making the Buckeyes look a little sleeker on offense this season as the team transitions from the relative immobility of Kyle McCord to the shiftiness of Will Howard. It's not that Howard has put up huge rushing numbers so far – just five carries for 24 yards in two games. But the run-pass option is back in Ohio State's arsenal after being away for a while, and Howard seems more than comfortable with RPOs at his disposal. More than once during the game against the Broncos, I thought a running back had the



Vol. 44, No. 2

Sept. 21, 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. 28 cover date) will be mailed on Sept. 24.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Texas Jumps OSU In AP Poll

Despite playing a nearly perfect game against Western Michigan on Sept. 7, defeating the Broncos 56-0, Ohio State fell to No. 3 in the latest AP top 25, released on Sept. 8, for the first time this season. The Buckeyes fell behind No. 2 Texas, which jumped one spot after coming away with a convincing 31-12 victory over then-No. 10 Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Georgia held onto its top spot in the poll for the fourth straight week after taking care of Tennessee Tech 48-3 at home, receiving 54 votes for the top spot. Ohio State earned five first-place votes following the beatdown of Western Michigan, the same amount it received last week, while Texas garnered four.

Filling out the rest of the top five were No. 4 Alabama and No. 5 Ole Miss, while No. 6 Missouri, No. 7 Tennessee, No. 8 Penn State, No. 9 Oregon and No. 10 Miami (Fla.) rounded out the top 10. The Vol-

unteers moved up seven spots from their No. 14 ranking last week – the highest jump of any team in the top 25 – after securing a blowout 51-10 win over then-No. 24 NC State, while the Ducks continued to dip in the rankings, falling another two spots after squeaking past Boise State 37-34 at home.

The poll saw two notable teams drop out of the top 10 for the first time this season in Notre Dame and Michigan. The Fighting Irish fell 13 spots from No. 5 to No. 18, the biggest drop by any team this week, after suffering a stunning 16-14 home loss to now-No. 25 Northern Illinois. The Wolverines dropped seven spots to No. 17 after the blowout home loss to Texas, which snapped their 23-game home winning streak.

The Big Ten has six teams in the top 25, including the Buckeyes, Ducks and Nittany Lions in the top 10 along with No. 11 USC, Michigan and No. 23 Nebraska. Iowa dropped out of the poll from No. 21 after falling at home to in-state rival and now-No. 21 Iowa State 20-19.

The Cornhuskers, led by true freshman quarterback and former Ohio State pledge Dylan Raiola, are in the top 25 for the first time since Sept. 3, 2019, after securing a 28-10 victory over Colorado at home.

Nebraska is one of four newcomers to the poll, including Iowa State, Northern Illinois and No. 24 Boston College, which is in the top 25 for the first time since 2018.

Simon Returns, Jackson Sits Again Against WMU

Ohio State returned a key defensive contributor during its 56-0 shutout victory over

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	0-2, 49-17 loss to Rutgers
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	0-2, 56-0 loss to Ohio State
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	TBA	TBA	1-1, 31-14 loss to Virginia Tech
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	TBA	TBA	2-0, 27-24 win over Maryland
Oct. 5	IOWA	TBA	TBA	1-1, 20-19 loss to Iowa State
Oct. 12	at Oregon	TBA	TBA	2-0, 37-34 win over Boise State
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	2-0, 28-10 win over Colorado
Nov. 2	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	2-0, 34-27 win over Bowling Green
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	1-0, idle
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	1-0, 26-20 loss to Duke
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	2-0, 77-3 win over Western Illinois
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	1-1, 31-12 loss to Texas

Western Michigan on Sept. 7, with graduate linebacker Cody Simon making his 2024 debut against the Broncos after missing the season opener with a lower-body injury.

Simon was held out of Ohio State's season-opening win over Akron on Aug. 31 for mainly precautionary issues, although the graduate did say after the game that he felt "sore" leading up to the opener. Head coach Ryan Day listed him as "day-to-day" throughout the week leading up to Ohio State's Week 2 contest, and Simon was healthy enough to be taken off the availability report and suit up on game day.

Simon, who was designated a team captain and given the Block "O" honor before the season started, made a considerable impact in his 2024 debut. He helped the Buckeyes' vaunted defense reach their first shutout since 2019 by recording three tackles and a key sack on Western Michigan's first drive of the game.

Simon earned his first game reps of the season against the Broncos, but that was not the case for Ohio State's other veteran player who was held out Week 1, senior left guard Donovan Jackson.

Like Simon, Jackson was listed as inactive on the Akron availability report but participated in pregame warmups while nursing an undisclosed injury. Day also tabbed Jackson as day-to-day throughout the week leading up to the game, and it appeared that he would make his first start of the season on Sept. 7 when his name was off the pregame availability report.

But Day and Ohio State still kept their starting left guard, who participated in pregame warmups for the second straight game, out of the contest for precautionary reasons. Day revealed after the game that Jackson was available to play against the Broncos, but the team's medical staff thought it was best to keep him out with an off week coming up.

Jackson will likely reclaim his starting left guard role in Ohio State's next game against Marshall on Sept. 21, but against the Broncos it was redshirt freshman Austin Sierveld getting the starting nod. Sierveld also earned the start against Akron and helped pave the way for the Buckeyes to rush for 273 yards on 39 carries against Western Michigan, a 7.0-yard average. He was also flagged for a 10-yard holding penalty in the first quarter.

Simon and Jackson were off the availability report against Western Michigan, but there were some other Buckeyes remaining on the list. Four Buckeyes were out for the Week 2 matchup, those being offensive lineman Deontae Armstrong, safety Jayden

Bonsu, wide receiver Reis Stocksdale and running back TC Caffey, who is out for the season after suffering a torn ACL in his right knee in July.

Changed Pregame Routine Helping Ohio State

Among the many new additions, players, and even communication systems in place for the Buckeyes, perhaps the most prominent off-the-field change was the team's pregame routine.

Having traditionally stayed at the Blackwell Inn, located on Ohio State's campus, just 0.3 miles away from Ohio Stadium, the night before games, the Buckeyes moved to a hotel in downtown Columbus this season in an effort to eliminate distractions and, according to a team spokesperson, have more space for pregame walkthroughs.

Additionally, the Buckeyes changed from their sharp dress attire of suits and ties to the comfortable gray sweatsuits that they were seen sporting before their season opener.

Although these changes sparked mixed reviews from both traditional and new-wave Buckeye fans, Day said the team has already reaped rewards from their pregame switches, including potentially unintentional ones like getting to see different parts of the campus on their drive to the Skull Session.

"We actually went down towards all the (fraternities), kind of went through campus a little bit, which was neat," Day said on his weekly radio appearance on 97.1 The Fan on Sept. 5. "Our guys get a chance to see what game day is like as you're driving through campus and as people are getting ready for the game, so that was a unique experience that we hadn't experienced before – I hadn't experienced that before – because it's always been right at the Blackwell. So to see it all, that was unique."

Day further explained the reasoning behind the pregame changes on his radio appearance with Paul Keels and Jim Lachey, saying that both staying at a more discreet hotel downtown rather than a well-known establishment right by Ohio Stadium and wearing more comfortable clothing before games can keep his team focused, free from unnecessary distractions.

"We talked about it as a staff, and the Blackwell is great, it has been unbelievable for us, but not being right there on campus," Day said, "it's just a little bit less of a distraction. It's just a little bit more quiet. We're kind of by ourselves a little bit, and I think that helped us. Hopefully, it will continue to move forward."

"And the whole deal with the sweatsuits



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and all that is just one less thing for our guys to worry about. I don't want them to worry about ties and what they're wearing and all these different things.

"(Ohio State football equipment services director) Kevin Riles will get you your sweatshirt, make sure everyone's zipped up and looking the same. We want to look exactly the same across the board and be a team. But it's one less thing I don't need any of these guys to worry about. I want them to worry about playing really, really fast and violent on Saturday night."

Locklyn Channels Woody During Skull Session Speech

Running backs coach Carlos Locklyn sent the Buckeye faithful into a frenzy inside St. John Arena before the team's kickoff against Western Michigan during Skull Session, when he delivered an ode to legendary former Buckeye head coach Woody Hayes.

Locklyn, who was hired as Ohio State's new running backs coach in March after Tony Alford left for Michigan to take on the same role, urged fans to be as loud as possible at the end of the third quarter when the Ohio State band performs "Hang on Sloopy."

This was a reference to an old quote by Hayes, who once said, "I don't know a dang thing about music, but when the band plays that Sloopy song, it really fires the guys up, and I don't even know what the hell it's about."

Locklyn even added a little extra flavor to his quote, making a specific reference to the team's rival in Ann Arbor when challenging the fans to be as loud as they can.

"When the third quarter comes and the best band in the land plays, 'Hang on Sloopy,' I want you to get up on your feet," Locklyn said. "I want you to be so loud that the entire country, especially up I-75 north, 3½ hours (away from Columbus) – I want you to let them know that we are coming and we're bringing blood and thunder with us."

Although Locklyn is clearly ready for The Game, senior running back TreVeyon Henderson and Day were more focused on the short-term.

"We've just been trying to take it day-by-day to try and get better each and every day," Henderson said. "And today, we're going to focus on today, to strive to be the best team in America and the hardest playing team in America."

"We're taking it one day at a time, we're taking it one week at a time, we're taking it one game at a time until we build so much momentum and apply so much pressure to our opponents that they can't hold up anymore," Day said. "And it continues tonight."

Meyer Trolls U-M Fans On "Big Noon Kickoff"

Former Ohio State coach Urban Meyer made sure to take plenty of digs at Michigan in his trip to Ann Arbor while working as an analyst for FOX's "Big Noon Kickoff" during its coverage of the Texas vs. Michigan game.

Meyer, who coached the Buckeyes from 2012-18, went 7-0 against the Wolverines, and he made sure fans in attendance didn't forget it. During his introduction at the beginning of the "Big Noon Kickoff" show, Meyer turned to the Michigan fans, saying

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"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."

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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.

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"O-H" before quickly sitting back down. Meyer then joked that he needed to stay close to former Michigan Heisman Trophy winner Charles Woodson, also an analyst on "Big Noon Kickoff," as protection from the Michigan fans. Meyer was consistently booed on the show by the Wolverine faithful whenever he talked.

Meyer also made a guest appearance in a sports management class at Michigan while wearing a "Beat Michigan" t-shirt, one which Woodson later stepped on during FOX's pregame broadcast of the game on Sept. 7. A video posted to Big Noon Kickoff's Twitter account on Sept. 7 showed Michigan students booing the former Buckeye coach as he made his way to the front of the class.

OSU Heavy Favorite Against U-M After Week 2

When the pregame theatrics from Meyer, Woodson and Wolverines fans subsided, Michigan suffered the ugly defeat at the hands of Texas.

The blowout loss caused odds to sig-

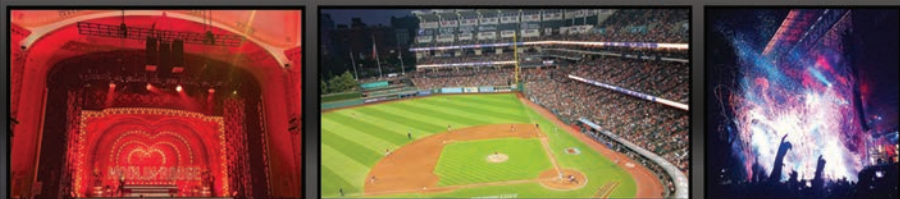
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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

nificantly shift in Ohio State's favor for The Game on Nov. 30, with FanDuel Sportsbook tabbing the Buckeyes as a convincing 17.5-point favorite at home over their archrivals.

Originally a 9.5-point favorite in The Game in April, the Buckeyes' chances of winning are even higher than they were before the season, according to oddsmakers.

While Ohio State has looked dominant over Akron and Western Michigan in Weeks 1 and 2, Michigan has struggled to move the ball offensively both in its loss to Texas and in a 30-10 win over Fresno State in Week 1. The Wolverines' total yardage in the Texas and Fresno State games combined, 555, is 128 fewer yards than the 683 total yards the Buckeyes had in their 56-0 win over Western Michigan.

The Buckeyes were a 2.5-point underdog before the 2023 matchup in which they lost 30-24. If the 17.5-point spread remains heading into the 2024 matchup, it would be the largest spread Ohio State has had in their favor for The Game since 2014, when they were a 21.5-point favorite. If Ohio State surpasses that number before the Nov. 30 matchup, it will be the most points a team has been favored by in the history of The Game.

Howard Among Three Players Of Game Against Zips

In a dominant 52-6 performance against Akron, plenty of Buckeyes were capable of taking home player of the game awards, but

No BSB Print Edition Until Sept. 24

BuckeyeSports.com, Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 24/7 website free to all subscribers, will be with you every day this football season, 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. 24. 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. Football season marked the return of the always entertaining Staff Predictions, which appear the Friday before every game. No staffer saw the extent of the Buckeyes' dominance over Western Michigan, with Patrick Engels predicting a 41-3 score, Bobby Gorbett 41-10, and Greg Wilson seeing it 45-6.

Staff members also 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 the opportunity to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail during football season. See the box on page 8.

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it was fifth-year quarterback Will Howard, fifth-year safety Lathan Ransom and sophomore wide receiver Brandon Inniss who got the honors.

Completing 17 of 28 passes for 228 yards and three touchdowns in his Buckeye debut, Howard was winner of the offensive player of the game title after bouncing back from a rocky start in the game. The former Kansas State Wildcat began his Buckeye career by throwing four straight incompletions and connected on just 10 of his 21 pass attempts before halftime.

Howard rebounded in the second half, however, completing all seven of his passes for 112 yards and a touchdown to help the Buckeyes record three offensive scores before the starters were removed with the game in hand.

According to the tweet from Ohio State football that named the players of the game,

Howard easily hit the 80 percent threshold used by the team to determine who graded out as "champions," grading out at 86 percent.

It's hard to make a case for any Buckeye to have won the defensive player of the game honor other than Ransom. With a team-high nine tackles (two for loss) and a fumble returned for a touchdown, Ransom had one of the best games of his career.

This performance came after he missed the final five games of last season with a leg injury, a triumphant return to the field that Ransom said compelled him to play with great emotion and intensity, celebrating after the many great plays he made during the game.

Ransom graded out as a champion at 85 percent.

Ohio State's special teams, a weak point for the squad in 2023, looked like a completely different unit against Akron, and that is in large part due to the efforts of new starting punt returner Brandon Inniss.

The former five-star Inniss, who sits as the backup slot receiver to Emeka Egbuka, seemed to embrace his new role, finishing the game with four returns for 60 yards, good for an impressive 15.0 yards per return. This was much improved from the 4.4 yards the team averaged last year on punt returns, which ranked 111th in the nation.

Inniss' best return came on a ball he fielded from inside his own 5-yard line and brought all the way back to the Ohio State 40 for a 36-yard gain. He nearly did something similar when he returned one punt over 20 yards from deep inside his own territory, but the return was called back for holding.

Like Howard and Ransom, Inniss graded out as champion at 81 percent.

Frye "Meets Expectations" On Performance Review

Ohio State offensive line coach Justin Frye received the lowest rating among returning assistant coaches in the team's recently released summer performance review obtained by Buckeye Sports Bulletin

on Sept. 6, earning a rating of "performance meets expectations."

Frye was the only one of the returning assistant coaches to receive that rating, with each of the other Buckeye coaches, along with Day, general manager Mark Pantoni and head strength coach Mickey Marotti receiving a rating of "performance exceeds expectations."

In the review, Day's 2024 goals for Frye, who was the only assistant coach not to receive a new contract this offseason, are to build a "championship level" offensive line that is "physical, tough and dependable," recruit and sign the "best OL class in the nation" and "enhance run game gameplan and creativity."

As for Frye himself, he wrote in his year-end self-review that he needs to "continually adapt and adjust to the new recruiting ways of college football" while also "building this room and team back to championship level this season."

These goals come after a difficult 2023 season for Frye in which his new-look offensive line struggled to consistently produce and form a cohesive unit, an issue that came further to light in the last two games of the season when his group gave up a late-game pass rush to Michigan that led to Kyle McCord's game-sealing interception, then allowed four sacks, 10 tackles for loss, eight quarterback hurries and two forced fumbles against Missouri in the Cotton Bowl.

Frye's struggles spilled into the offseason in the recruiting sphere, where he failed to land Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 290), who committed to Tennessee over the Buckeyes on Aug. 17. Frye has yet to secure a five-star offensive line recruit in his first three seasons with the program.

As for the rest of Day's staff, new offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly, Locklyn, linebackers coach James Laurinaitis and safeties coach Matt Guerrieri all received "meets expectations," although the review was completed in June before fall camp even began.

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Former Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith wrote Day's performance review in May, just before his retirement at the end of June. He gave Day a rating of "exceeds expectations," saying the seventh-year head coach "exceeds expectations in many areas," including personnel management, growth as a leader and presence in the community.

Day said in his self-review that he needs to work on "delegating responsibilities better, especially on offense," while also "holding assistant coaches accountable for production and performance of units at high level." He also said that he wants to "become an expert in end-of-game management with two-minute warning rule change," "research and study best practices for upcoming playoff postseason with potential 16+ games and be "constantly in search of best NIL practices at other universities and teams."

Day listed beating "TUN," meaning Michigan, at the top of his list of performance goals, a sentiment that was also shared by Frye, Guerrieri, Locklyn, Marotti, defensive

coordinator Jim Knowles and defensive line coach/associate head coach Larry Johnson.

Day's four performance goals were "Beat TUN, win the Big Ten Championship, make the College Football Playoff and win the national championship," in that order.

Former U-M Linebacker Velazquez Sheds Black Stripe

Walk-on linebacker Joey Velazquez became an "official" member of the team on Sept. 4 when he had his black stripe removed after Ohio State's practice.

Velazquez, a Columbus native and St. Francis De Sales graduate, transferred to Ohio State from archrival Michigan, where he played both football and baseball. A standout in the batter's box, Velazquez started in 63 of 80 games for the Wolverines baseball team between 2022-2023, hitting .257 with 15 doubles and nine home runs.

On the gridiron, Velazquez played in 17 games for the Wolverines from 2021-22, mainly on special teams, but he did appear in a select few games at linebacker, including five in the 2022 season.

Even though Velazquez came to Ohio State as a transfer from Michigan, he always had a connection to Ohio State. He was coached in middle school football by former Ohio State walk-on basketball player Eric Hanna, who played for the Buckeyes from 1994-98.

Velazquez joined the Buckeyes as a transfer in the spring. The linebacker briefly made an appearance in Ohio State's season opener against Akron, and had an assisted tackle against Western Michigan playing six snaps on special teams, and will look to continue to make an impact behind linebackers Arvell Reese, C.J. Hicks, Sonny Styles, Simon and Gabe Powers.

"I just appreciate you guys all inviting me and embracing me into this culture. I mean this is awesome," Velazquez said after earning the distinction in a video posted on the team's official Twitter account.

Velazquez is also the 20th Buckeye to lose his black stripe this year and the fourth walk-on, joining wide receivers Nolan Bau-do (Aug. 27) and Brennen Schramm (March 21) and punter Joe McGuire (Aug. 28).

Downs Pranked Day During Portal Phone Call

During an offseason of retaining NFL draft-caliber talent, solidifying a top-five recruiting class and acquiring some of the best talent the transfer portal had to offer, Day probably didn't have a more stressful moment than when former All-SEC safety Caleb Downs decided where he would transfer.

That is according to Sports Illustrated's Pat Forde, who wrote in his Aug. 29 story, titled "Ohio State's Northern Slight Turned Into a \$20 million Comeback." Downs couldn't help but add some late drama, albeit in good humor, during an offseason Face-Time call with Ohio State's head coach.

As Forde explained, Ohio State was firmly in the mix to get Downs out of high school, before he ultimately chose Alabama. Day and the Buckeyes clearly made enough of a connection with Downs in his recruitment as the five-star safety prospect called Day in tears to tell him of his decision

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From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

Linebacker Chris Spielman came to Ohio State touted as one of the finest high school football players in the land the previous year. His picture even appeared on a Wheaties box.

"Expectations, I love. I love to live up to them," Spielman said. "There's nothing older than yesterday's headlines. It's time to make new ones."

That's exactly what Spielman did with his opening day performance - live up to all expectations and make plenty of new headlines.

Spielman didn't start in Ohio State's 22-14 win over Oregon State on Sept. 8; in fact he was in for only two plays in the first half. But once he entered the game in the third quarter, he established himself as a leader. The 6-2, 223-pounder ended up with 10 tackles, including two behind the line of scrimmage, and a forced fumble.

"I've never not started a football game in my life," he said. "It was hard to accept at first, but I've got to understand I'm not in high school. I'm playing with men. I'm an 18-year-old kid playing with big guys that shave every day," Spielman said.

"But when they called my name to go in there, I got that bold feeling back. My body started to tingle, and I said, 'It's time to play football!'"

35 Years Ago — 1989

Faced with a four-point deficit with less than 30 seconds to go in the first half, the Buckeyes stormed back to score 28 unanswered points and blow by Oklahoma State 37-13 in their 1989 season opener.

The offensive output represented Ohio State's biggest point total since a 42-point effort against Minnesota in 1987 and its biggest margin of victory in an opener since a 31-6 whupping of Oregon in 1983.

Perhaps even more important for the Buckeyes was their defensive effort. Despite playing more than a dozen first-year defensive players during the afternoon, OSU held the Cowboys to just 259 total yards, the lowest total for an opponent in 14 games.

"I thought it was a good opening win," said second-year head coach John Cooper. "We need to give our young defensive team an awful lot of credit. They certainly didn't play a perfect ballgame, but we got a chance to play all those freshmen on defense that we anticipated playing. Obviously, they made some mistakes, but I thought they made some good plays."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Joey Galloway had been a willing centerpiece in the college football spotlight for a full year now. But that light was blinding at the beginning of the month when the Heisman Trophy candidate admitted accepting money from a financial planner and was subsequently suspended for two games by the NCAA. Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger confirmed the ruling in a statement released by the university Sept. 7, one day before the Buckeyes traveled to Seattle for a weekend matchup with Washington.

"The situation was disclosed during a normal investigative procedure by the NCAA," Geiger said. "We declared Joey ineligible, then appealed to have his eligibility restored. The NCAA has restored his eligibility, but after the Pittsburgh game (the following week)."

Galloway, a senior co-captain, violated NCAA rules when he

did not return the money before he decided to remain at OSU for his final season.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Steve Bellisari jogged out onto the Ohio Stadium field to replace Austin Moherman as almost an afterthought. Roughly three hours later, though, the sophomore quarterback left the Horseshoe as the hero of the day after he helped Ohio State roll to a 42-20 win over UCLA in a nighttime encounter on Sept. 11.

Bellisari and the rest of the Buckeyes had endured nearly two weeks of ridicule after dropping their season opener in lackluster fashion to Miami (Fla.) at the Kickoff Classic.

In that game, Bellisari spelled the starter, Moherman for two forgettable series - one of which saw him fumble and lose a snap from center - in that 23-12 defeat.

"It was frustrating because I knew we were a lot better team than that," Bellisari said. "For us to go out there and play like that, it was almost embarrassing."

"It was frustrating because we're a good football team, and that's what we proved tonight."

Bellisari hit on 11 of 16 passes for 159 yards and two touchdowns. He also kept the ball three times for 50 yards, converting important third downs each time.

20 Years Ago — 2004

Ted Ginn Jr. entered his first rookie season at Ohio State with as much acclaim as any football player in recent memory and saw action in the opener against Cincinnati. Ginn was used primarily as a third receiver on offense and caught a pair of passes. Although the net result for the two receptions was negative yardage, the freshman was just happy the wraps were off for his debut.

"I'm just happy that I was able to get some playing time today," Ginn said. "I practiced as hard as I could and I thought that I'd be in line to play, but you never know."

He said he was not nervous when it came time to enter the game, something that was different from when he was a high school star at Cleveland Glenville.

"I used to get real nervous in high school but I wasn't today," he said.

When someone suggested that perhaps that was due to the fact that he was asked to do just about everything for the Tar-blooders, he smiled and answered, "Maybe, but I don't think so. I just felt like I had worked hard and belonged out there. I wasn't nervous at all. It was kind of a strange feeling, to tell you the truth."

15 Years Ago — 2009

All big-stage losses are not created equal, but some have eerie similarities. On Sept. 12, eighth-ranked Ohio State added another uniquely familiar chapter to its recent history of high-profile failures. This time, the Buckeyes allowed a nearly game-long lead to slip away thanks to insufficiency on both sides of the ball en route to an 18-15 loss to No. 3 Southern California at Ohio Stadium.

The offense failed time and time again to capitalize on opportunities to score many more than 15 points, and then the haggard defense finally gave way to the embarrassment of riches that constituted the USC offense at the skilled positions.

Like most others under the brightest lights during the past

four-plus seasons, it was just not Ohio State's night.

10 Years Ago — 2014

An Ohio State team that entered the season with a lot of holes to fill sprang a bunch of leaks Sept. 6 in a loss against Virginia Tech.

The most significant difference between the two teams in VT's victory was that one played aggressively while the other seemed to mostly try to. The Buckeyes might figure out how to play like the Hokies by the end of the season, but it wouldn't undo the 35-21 final score.

Coaches and players alike agreed in a somber postgame interview room at Ohio Stadium that the only way to avoid sinking as the season wore on was to go back to work on the many deficiencies the Hokies exposed, some physical and others mental.

"We have enough skill on this football team to get by people," head coach Urban Meyer said. "It didn't look like it, but we have to get by people - or what you saw today you'll see every week."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Former Ohio State player, assistant and interim head coach Luke Fickell led his Cincinnati Bearcats into Ohio Stadium on Sept. 7 with thoughts of an upset.

Instead, Fickell - who made a then-school-record 50 starts for the Buckeyes from 1993-96 and won two national titles in his 16 seasons as an assistant - watched as his team was overwhelmed by the Buckeyes in every facet of the game on the way to a 42-0 loss.

"We took one in the mouth today, and for four quarters," Fickell said. "It's not like we took it in the mouth for two quarters. I hope everyone in that locker room uses it as a humbling experience like I'm going to."

"I asked everyone if they've ever had their absolute butts whipped before. If they hadn't, they just did. I know I've had it several times before, but how you react and respond is important."

One Year Ago — 2023

Entering the game under center with 13:58 left in the second quarter, Devin Brown led his offense on a deliberate 13-play, 60-yard touchdown drive, headlined by the sophomore gunslinger's key fourth-and-7 completion where he bought time in the pocket, scrambled to his right and delivered a strike to tight end Gee Scott Jr. for the first down against Youngstown State.

Unlike in the season opener, a 23-3 win at Indiana, Brown would see more time on the field for Ohio State behind Kyle McCord, leading the Buckeyes on another touchdown drive late in the third quarter and then closing out the game with his final offensive possession in the fourth.

Brown, who finished the day 7 of 13 passing for 101 yards with an additional six rushing attempts for 9 yards, did not play his best game in the 35-7 win over the Penguins, delivering some inaccurate throws that sailed over the heads of receivers. But the challenges he faced could have served as a major steppingstone in the young quarterback's development.

"I missed some throws that I would definitely like to have back, but I think that I didn't have any reads I felt were wrong or anything like that," he said after the game. "No mental mistakes, other than physical mistakes with a couple throws. But overall, it was pretty good."

Continued From Page 7

to go to Alabama.

Downs proceeded to have one of the best seasons a true freshman has ever had at Alabama, leading the team in tackles, winning SEC Freshman of the Year, being on the all-SEC first-team and assuredly keeping Day and the rest of the Ohio State coaching staff heartbroken over their near-miss.

Former Alabama head coach Nick Saban's retirement and Downs' subsequent entry into the transfer portal gave the Buckeyes new life.

According to Forbes, although he was now entrenched in a battle with Georgia for Downs, Day felt confident about his chances to secure Downs. He received a Face-Time call from Downs around this time and knew a commitment was getting closer, when Downs took the opportunity to play a fun prank on Day.

"Downs began the conversation with a sorrowful apology to Day – 'I put that sad face on,' he says – then hung his head," Forde wrote.

"'Stop,' Day said. 'Don't do this again.'

"'Just kidding, Coach,' Downs responded. 'I'm coming.'"

McCord Continues To Shine For Orange

Downs is arguably Ohio State's most heralded transfer to join the program this year, but Ohio State's most notable outgoing transfer, McCord, continues to shine for his new team.

McCord, who started all 12 regular-season games for the Buckeyes in 2023 before transferring to Syracuse last December, has led the Orange to an undefeated 2-0 record this season, most recently helping guide the Orange to a 31-28 upset win over then-No. 23 Georgia Tech on Sept. 7.

McCord helped the Orange cause by completing 32 of 46 passes for a career-high 381 passing yards and four touchdown passes. In the postgame press conference, McCord talked about his mentality in leading the Orange to a top-25 win, their first in two seasons.

"It's more so just a mindset every week,

playing free and having fun," McCord said. "(Having that mindset) makes it feel like Little League, going out and having fun and enjoying football, and not getting caught up on one mistake and letting that kind of ruin the drive. Just having a short-term memory and letting it rip out there, I think that definitely came out today."

McCord's masterful performance against Georgia Tech only adds to a strong start for the former Buckeye in his still early Syracuse career. In a 38-22 win against Ohio University in Week 1, McCord was similarly efficient, completing 27 of 39 passes for 354 yards and four touchdowns with one interception. After McCord's performance in his first game, first-year head coach Fran Brown said he was proud of his performance and that he is happy the former Buckeye has traded his scarlet and gray for orange and blue.

"Kyle's a good football player," Brown said. "I should send Ryan Day a bottle of champagne for allowing us to get him. It's pretty cool."

McCord, who completed 229 of his 348 passes (65.8 percent) for 3,170 passing yards, 24 touchdowns and six interceptions in his lone season as Ohio State's starter, hopes to lead Syracuse to its first conference championship since 2012. The Orange received 63 top-25 votes in the latest AP poll.

Stover Says U-M Knew Screen Was Coming In 2022

Former Ohio State tight end Cade Stover addressed Michigan's impermissible sign-stealing operation during a brief media availability for his current team, the Houston Texans, on Sept. 5, when he cited a suspicious play during Ohio State's 45-23 loss to the Wolverines in 2022.

Stover's comments were sparked when Houston media personality Landry Locker asked the former Ohio State tight end if he had watched the Netflix documentary "Sign Stealer," which profiles former Michigan staffer Connor Stalions, who was allegedly the ringleader for Michigan's sign-stealing operation before resigning

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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.

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from the program last October.

Stover, who was Ohio State's starting tight end against Michigan in both the 2022 and 2023 games, quickly said he did not need to watch, as he had already witnessed what had transpired during his time matching up with Stalions and the Wolverines as a Buckeye.

"No, I knew enough about that bull-t it was," Stover replied.

Stover then went on to say that Michigan had surprisingly picked up a tight end screen designed for him during Ohio State's 45-23 home loss to the Wolverines in '22, a play which he said they had never used before that moment.

"We tried to throw a tight end screen in a formation we've never used before, like ever," Stover said. "As soon as I lined up out wide, we had one play where I was going to motion back in and they were going to throw a screen to me. When they start yelling, 'Screen!' when you're throwing a tight end screen, that's when you know like, 'What the f- is this? We never ran this before.'"

The likely play in question occurred in the first quarter of the 2022 iteration of "The Game," when Stover popped out for a screen on first-and-10 in Wolverines territory but was quickly followed by a trailing Michigan defender. With Stover blanketed, former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud pump-faked to his tight end and scrambled for a 5-yard gain. The Buckeyes picked up the first down a couple of plays later but would go on to kick a field goal on the drive to take a 10-3 lead.

Stover's comments come after Michigan was handed a Notice of Allegations from the NCAA earlier this summer for their alleged sign-stealing operation, which issued Level 1 sanctions to former Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh and former U-M staffers Chris Partridge, Denard Robinson and Stalions.

Current Michigan head coach Sherrone Moore was given a Level 2 sanction for deleting a thread of 52 text messages sent to Stalions, who, as BSB went to press, was among several assistants jointly serving as acting head coach at Detroit Mumford High School after their head coach reportedly suffered a mild stroke.

Stover showed he still clings to his hatred for Michigan when he was asked if he could hate the program any more.

"Nope, not possible, but I don't have a lot of room to talk," he said. "I didn't do much.

They beat us. So it is what it is."

Steelers Extend Former OSU DT Heyward

Former Ohio State defensive tackle Cam Heyward signed his fourth contract with the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sept. 3, inking a three-year, \$45 million deal with the franchise that drafted him in 2011. The deal reportedly includes \$29 million in new money and \$16 million fully guaranteed and essentially guarantees that he will finish his career in black and gold.

"There are certain guys who are one-helmet guys. I want to be one of those one-helmet guys," Heyward said.

Heyward has been a stalwart for the Steelers' defense since being drafted by the franchise with the 31st overall selection in the 2011 NFL draft. He had racked up 647 tackles and 80½ sacks heading into this season – which tied for second in Steelers franchise history with James Harrison, behind only his teammate T.J. Watt – during his 14-year career in Pittsburgh, making six consecutive pro bowls from 2017-22 and earning three first-team All-Pro selections in 2017, 2019 and 2021.

Heyward has also shown his leadership and high character off the field, serving as Pittsburgh's captain for 10 consecutive seasons and most recently winning the Walter Payton Man of the Year award in 2023. He won the award in large part due to leading his main charity project "Cam's Kindness Week," where he sets out on daily missions to make a difference in the community, mostly with today's youth.

"We all start being great players, but we understand that to be a great player is just not enough," Heyward said. "The community needs us."

With a three-year extension in place, Heyward is now looking for a bounce-back year on the field this season after recording just 33 tackles, six tackles for loss, two sacks and a pass deflection in 11 games while dealing with a groin injury.

He recorded four total tackles (three solo) in the Steelers 18-10 Week 1 win over the Atlanta Falcons on Sept. 8.

Heyward had quite the collegiate career at Ohio State from 2007-11, earning two All-Big Ten selections his junior year and senior year and recording 15½ sacks and 163 tackles (37½ for loss) during his four-year career with the Buckeyes.

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Head coach Ryan Day on fifth-year quarterback Will Howard's performance: "I think he started 10 for 10 and had the rushing touchdown. There's going to be things, though, that we see (we need him to improve on). The shot to (tight end) Jelani (Thurman), maybe throw it better, catch it better. There are a couple things in there. I'm always going to be super critical of the quarterbacks. But Will has a good demeanor. You can see the effect he can have in the pass game. You can see the effect that he can have with his feet. I thought he threw some nice play-action passes tonight, a couple from under center. To see Jeremiah (Smith) catch that pass and run, you see the one that Carnell (Tate) had last week, catch and run. Those balls are all on time, and they're on the money. And those guys are tremendously talented and do a good job of running after the catch. But a big part of running after catch is timing and location of throws and accuracy. So he deserves credit on that."

Howard on improved timing with his receivers: "I think we were just settled in from the start, and I think the way that we started kind of helped us get into a rhythm faster. There are some certain things that I know I need to keep working on, but I think we were able to get into a quick rhythm and get a couple of completions. And from there, you're able to settle in and kind of let things happen."

Howard on junior running back Quinshon Judkins' 80-yard touchdown run called back for holding: "When Q went out there on that speed option, that should have been a touchdown, but I'm not going to talk about that. But on that one, he puts his foot in the ground and there's no doubt in my mind that those guys are going to score. Guys like that, they just find a way to score. And Q is so much like that, he's just going to go out there and make some special plays."

Judkins on what it is about the running back room that allows each of them to shine when they get on the field: "I think it's just the way we all believe in each other. We know everybody in the room is special. We know everyone in the room is talented. It's good to see everyone in the room work hard each and every day and teach each other different things about our game that we think others can learn. It comes with experience, especially for the younger guys. But the way we

mix together and go out on the field and execute, I think it's pretty special."

Judkins on what he saw from the offensive line: "Last week was the first game of the season. You go and game-plan on certain things, and you look at the film and see how you can get better for the next week. I'm definitely happy. The whole team played well. There are still things we can improve on, but overall, we played really good today."

Fifth-year center Seth McLaughlin on when he got a sense that the offensive line was clicking against Western Michigan: "We go through our opening plays – like what we think we're going to call on the opening drives – and when you see a lot of run plays in there, you kind of know that we're going to try to set the tone early with the run. And when you do, we just need to keep on coming downhill. You have to be really successful on those first runs to get confidence the rest of the game."

McLaughlin on correcting snapping errors from the previous year: "I just tried to get rid of that in the offseason and have been working each day to improve and make sure that's not a problem going forward."

Junior linebacker Sonny Styles on what the team needs to prioritize during Ohio State's off week: "We're only going into Week 3, so it's more of an improving week for us. See the film, see what we need to improve on. There's going to be three hard workdays this week. There's a lot to improve on this week. I think some guys who may not have gotten a lot of game reps should be able to get a lot of practice reps."

Styles on how nice it was to have fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon back out on the field: "It was good. Cody's a leader on our defense. He's got the Block 'O' for a reason. He's a great player, great leadership. He's played a lot of ball, so it's definitely nice to play next to him."

Simon on how it felt to be back on the field after injury: "It was awesome. I was joking that it was one of the first times I've tackled this whole year. So it felt good to just be out there and be with my teammates. It was awesome."

Simon on if there was any chance he would have missed the Western Michigan game: "Last week I felt a little sore, but when I ran down the tunnel, I was like, 'Oh, I'm ready to go.' But the trainers were like, 'No. Slow down a little bit.' So this week, I definitely had to go."

Simon on the depth of Ohio State: "That's really the goal of any team. You want to have as many guys to be able to play as good of football as anybody. It shows how hard we worked in the offseason. I'm just really proud of that O-line, because (left guard Donovan Jackson) is a big leader in that unit. Especially in the linebacker room, these guys, they're ready to go. And I'm happy for Coach (James) Laurinaitis because it's showing his teaching is really working."

Day on what freshman quarterback Julian Sayin showed to earn playing time: "I thought Devin (Brown) did a nice job on that first drive that he went in there. He hit a nice play-action pass, did a couple of nice things: threw an over route to Bryson Rodgers, which was well done, made a couple nice checks in the run game. So I thought that was good. And then he got a couple drives, and I felt like we wanted to get Jules in there and Lincoln (Kienholz) as well. Those guys are working, and they deserve an opportunity to play in those types of situations. The more we can do that, the better. We'd love to get them more and more reps, but when you have that many quarterbacks, it's hard to do. But again, I think this team, overall, is unselfish. Everyone is cheering for each other. They're pulling for each other. The ball got spread around today, and that was good."

Western Michigan head coach Lance Taylor on if Ohio State looked like a national championship team: "Ohio State's a really good football team. They've got playmakers at all three levels in all three phases, and they're really well-coached. Coach Day and his staff do an excellent job. I was really impressed when I turned on the tape and even more impressed in person. They're a very disciplined football team, and I think sometimes when you're a very talented football team, you're not always the most disciplined football team. But they're both, and that makes them very tough."

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Howard Puts Arm, Legs On Display In Win

Continued From Page 1

played in front of 102,655 Buckeye fans at Ohio Stadium on a brisk early September night, Ohio State came together for a masterful offensive performance, totaling a whopping 683 total yards of offense – 273 on the ground and 410 through the air – and scoring touchdowns on eight of its 12 drives excluding Lincoln Kienholz' final kneel-down of the game, with 406 yards and 35 points coming in the first half alone.

For Day, it was the dominant performance that he had likely envisioned when he restructured his offense over the offseason and one that he knew was coming following a strong week of practice.

"I feel like we had a good mix in the game today," Day said after the game. "A lot of guys touched the ball. I thought Chip called a good game, a mix of run and pass. There was some good ball-out-of-hand stuff. There were a couple of shots down the field.

"But to me, it goes back to our week of practice. We practiced strong and physical and had good intent. We had a good Tuesday, had a really good Wednesday and I felt like we were about to come into the game and dominate like this. I did. I just kind of had that feeling going into the game. But it came down to the players playing really hard."

Ohio State's offensive masterclass started with the man whom Day and Kelly handed the keys to midway through fall camp in Howard. The fifth-year Kansas State transfer may not have had the start he envisioned against the Zips in his Buckeye debut, misfiring on each of his first four pass attempts and 10 of his first 16 before turning it up after halftime and finishing with 228 passing yards and three touchdowns.

But the exact opposite was the case against the Broncos. With another week of practice and preparation under his belt, Howard came out firing against a Western Michigan offense that had allowed just 192 passing yards to Wisconsin on Aug. 30.

He completed each of his first 10 passes for 177 yards and a touchdown, connecting with five different receivers in that sequence. His most notable completion during that stretch was, not surprisingly, to the freshman Smith, who once again dazzled early by taking a short pass from Howard before turning on the jets for a 70-yard score to put Ohio State up 14-0.

Howard said after the game that his fast start allowed him to settle in more and find his rhythm with his still relatively new receivers.

"You feel like you're in the zone. Especial-



SCOTT STUART

SOARING AND SCORING — TreVeyon Henderson (32) gets a celebratory lift after rushing for one of his two touchdowns vs. Western Michigan as quarterback Will Howard arrives to join the party.

ly when you get a couple of easy completions early, it just settles you down," Howard said. "You just feel like you're settled in. It doesn't feel like you're guessing or anything. For me, I just kept getting into a rhythm. And once I made a couple of completions, everything kind of matriculates and then it feels good."

Howard's early quick hitters allowed him to have a solid passing night all-around, completing 18 of his 26 attempts for 292 yards and a touchdown. It's a strong performance that he also attributed to him finding some extra comfort in his daily routine during the week leading up to the game.

"(I felt) so much, so much more comfortable," Howard said. "I just felt settled into the routine of everything. The routine was set, and I knew what it was. I didn't feel surprised by anything. I'm a big routine person, whether it's day-to-day or on a game day or whatever. I just like to have a routine. And

when you can settle into that routine and know what to expect, it just settles your mind down a little bit, and you don't have as many jitters. I think you saw that today."

But perhaps the most encouraging sign for the veteran was his ability to escape the pocket and use his legs to extend drives, or even find the end zone.

Howard had just one rush, but it was an important one. Facing a first-and-goal from Western Michigan's 6-yard-line with 4:20 left in the second quarter, the fifth-year transfer took the ball for himself on an option play with TreVeyon Henderson and bounced to the outside for the 6-yard score, giving him his first rushing touchdown as a Buckeye and also Ohio State's first rushing score by a starting quarterback since Fields in 2020.

"I always say it's great to throw a touchdown – it feels awesome, it's a great feeling – but there's nothing quite like running a touchdown in and feeling the crowd and celebrating with your teammates in the end zone," Howard said. "There's no feeling like that, and it was pretty awesome."

Day seemed encouraged when asked about Howard's rushing abilities after the game, but he said he was most impressed by a play his quarterback made two plays before his rushing score, when he evaded a sack, escaped the pocket and threw the ball away, a showing of poise and athleticism that he thinks will give his team a key advantage moving forward this season.

"I think he did a good job out of the

pocket on a couple of the play-action passes that were well designed. So again, a good day for Will," Day said. "My favorite part of the whole day was, we missed a blitz on a play-action pass, a guy came free, he avoided the sack and then threw the ball away. To me, that was a big play. And those are the things that are going to matter in some of these closer games."

Double Vision In The Buckeye Backfield

Howard may have started the Buckeyes' rout of the Broncos, but a significant part of the damage on offense was done by Ohio State's formidable running back duo.

When junior tailback Quinshon Judkins transferred from Ole Miss – where he totaled 2,725 rushing yards and earned consecutive first-team All-SEC nods from 2022-23 – to Ohio State in January, many believed he and the returning senior Henderson would pose the best running back tandem in all of college football.

That reality did not immediately come to fruition against Akron on Aug. 31, when Judkins totaled just 55 yards and a touchdown on 13 carries, good for a 4.2-yard average, and Henderson finished with 65 yards on eight attempts. But the lethal duo came to life against the Broncos, with the two former all-conference backs each finding the end zone twice and finishing with a combined 174 rushing yards on 19 carries, for a 9.2-yard average.

Judkins, whose Buckeye debut was overshadowed by Smith's against the Zips, had the breakout performance that many Ohio State fans had been waiting for. Just like with Howard, the former Rebel got the party started early, scoring his two touchdowns on his first three carries, first on a 23-yard scamper off a pitch from Howard in the first quarter and then another 23-yarder off an outside handoff in the middle of the second.

Perhaps even more impressive, between those two carries was an 80-yard burst through the heart of the Broncos' defense and to the end zone that was called back due to a holding penalty by wide receiver Bryson Rodgers, negating what could have been an even greater performance from the junior transfer.

Regardless, Judkins still finished with a strong 108 rushing yards and the two scores on just nine carries, good for an impressive 12.0-yard average.

Ohio State center Seth McLaughlin said he enjoyed blocking for the speedy Judkins, who he thinks resembled his video game self – Judkins is regarded by many as one of the best offensive players in the new NCAA Football 25 video game – due to his explosive running style.

"He's hard to get on the ground. He's almost as hard to get on the ground in real life as he is in the (NCAA) football game," McLaughlin joked. "So it's fun blocking for him. On the 80-yard touchdown run that got called back, that was a blast seeing him make some guys miss. I ran all the way down there and celebrated and then I turn around after running 100 yards, and there's a little yellow flag on the ground and you have to jog all the way back. But he did a really good job of making guys miss and making really

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good reads.”

Henderson was no slouch himself. Much like with Judkins, the Buckeye veteran put his imprint on the game early, taking his second carry of the game for a 3-yard touchdown in the red zone for Ohio State’s first score of the contest. The senior may not have had the same explosiveness as his running back counterpart, but he still was able to find the end zone the same number of times, the second on an outside counter from the Western Michigan 16-yard line that he took to the end zone, giving Ohio State a commanding 42-0 lead with 6:44 left in the third quarter.

Producing on outside handoffs became somewhat of a norm for Ohio State’s rushers against Western Michigan, with all but one of their six rushing touchdowns coming from the Buckeyes bouncing their runs to the outside and using some late downfield blocks for the score.

This could be a product of some more aggressive blocking from the Buckeyes’ front five – which was undermanned for the second straight game while left guard Donovan Jackson sat out again with an undisclosed injury – a mentality that may not have been there all season in 2023 with the Buckeyes sometimes struggling to find a second gear on runs, especially those going toward the outside.

McLaughlin said there wasn’t much of a different approach for the Buckeyes’ front five from Week 1 to Week 2, but he did say he challenged his fellow linemen during the week leading up to the game to play with more urgency and violence, which he thinks he and his teammates did accomplish

against Western Michigan.

“I just put an emphasis on the importance of coming out and starting fast,” McLaughlin said. “I challenged some of those guys to not feel their way into the game and just go out there and play hard. We’re going to do our job, and if we just come out and don’t feel your way through anything, you’re going to play hard. And I think they did a good job of that.”

“I think they got into a rhythm as a group,” Day said when asked about the offensive line’s performance. “I thought, again, they had a good week of practice. But they kind of settled down in this game, I felt like. If there was a mistake made, it was full speed. We’ll get on the film and try to figure out where that is.”

But McLaughlin also mentioned that his and his four linemen’s jobs are made much easier when they can lean on the supreme running back talents of Henderson, Judkins and even true freshman tailback James Peoples – who added his second touchdown in as many career games as a Buckeye on a 12-yard rush in the third quarter – a luxury that he said only motivates him to play with the utmost passion and energy during games.

“It does a lot when you know and you have faith in those guys, that if I just block my guy really hard where I’m supposed to with the right targets, that they’re going to make a play,” McLaughlin said. “Sometimes if you get a guy back there that you’re not 100 percent confident in, it’s like, ‘OK, if I make this block, we may not get a good run.’ But if you know as an offensive lineman that if you’re making your blocks, and everybody’s on the same page that there’s going

to be explosive runs, it makes it really easy to keep going hard.”

No Rest For The Weary

Ohio State’s offense – and more specifically its new offensive weapons – seemed to find its groove against Western Michigan after a not-so-perfect outing in Week 1, and a repeat of that performance moving forward this season could be a scary sight for the Buckeyes’ remaining opponents considering the NFL-caliber talent that is on both sides of the ball.

Many of Ohio State’s players who spoke to the media after the win acknowledged just how lethal the unit could become this season if all the new pieces are put into the offensive puzzle correctly, including the newcomer Howard, who suggested that this group has an untapped potential that they are confident they can reach later in the year.

“I truly don’t think there is,” Howard stated when asked if there is a limit to how good Ohio State’s offense could be this season.

But while this group knows that they could achieve special things this season – especially while playing alongside a dominant defense that recorded its first shutout in exactly five years – there also seemed to be a shared sentiment that it will take hard work to achieve this potential and that they are nowhere near where they want to be toward the end of the season.

“We played well tonight, but the thing is, there are still some plays that we left out there, still some meat we left on the bone,” Howard said. “And I think that’s the exciting

thing about this team. We have so much talent and so many guys that are doing so many good things, but we still can build on it and grow and become a better team. I think that’s the exciting thing, is that we’re never satisfied.”

For Howard and his teammates, the work continues, despite the Buckeyes not having another game on their schedule until Sept. 21, when they host Marshall for their final nonconference tuneup game of the season.

While some teams would take some time off during their off week, Day and his team are heading back to work. There are much bigger goals at stake for the Buckeyes this season than pitching a Week 2 shutout or recording nearly 700 yards on offense, and Day knows that there is not much time to waste before those goals start escaping them.

“Next week is an improvement week,” Day said of the week following the WMU game. “We have our off week after the Oregon game as you look on the schedule. So we’re going to go to work. We’ll be back at it tomorrow. We’re three weeks into the season, so we feel like we have a lot to improve on. Trust me, there’s a lot on the film that we have to get better at.

“Every week we have to improve. But at the end of the day, it’s about going really, really hard and playing with great passion and great energy and great intensity. The sideline was on fire tonight. You could feel all that. That, to me, is where we have to keep building.”

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Defense Gets First Shutout In Five Years

It had been five years to the day since Ohio State last shut out a team, and the defense was aware of it. Linebacker Sonny Styles said that Cody Simon let him know after the game that Sept. 7, 2019, was the last time the Buckeyes had done so when they blanked Luke Fickell's Cincinnati 42-0.

"I didn't even realize it was 2019," Styles said. "I was surprised. Cody told me right after the game. It definitely feels good. With the defense we have, we should have more shutouts."

Shutting out its opponents has been the goal for Ohio State every single game, as it likely is for every defense. The difference is that it's a realistic hope for the Buckeyes every time they step onto the field with the defense they have.

"We were trying – even last year, that was our goal," Simon said. "We're always trying to get a shutout, and it hurts when you let up anything. But I think it's a great goal for us to have. We want to dominate. We know the end goal in mind, the goal right now is not to just win game two. We want to get to the end and win everything. So that standard that we set right now is super important for that."

Last season, if the goal was to hold other teams to zero, the defense left disappointed many different times. The zero on the scoreboard was an elusive number, with all three of Indiana, Michigan State and Minnesota able to put only a field goal through the goalposts when they played against Ohio State's strong defense. But they were still able to score.

Then on Aug. 31, Akron opened up the scoring with a field goal, but the Zips were only able to score six points the entire game. There were many times the Buckeyes were well within reach.

In a game like they played on Sept. 7, Styles understands that it doesn't just rely on the starters to get that shutout, but the players who came in down the depth chart when it was a blowout as well. He said everyone on the field deserves credit for finally achieving the feat.

"It definitely feels good. It's a goal for us as a defense every game," Styles said. "That takes all 11, whoever is out there the entire game. We get up by 40, some of the younger guys get in, they score a field goal, the shutout is done. So I think that goes to show how good our depth is. Everyone that comes in the game is ready to play."

Head coach Ryan Day could see how important the shutout was to his strong defense. They had been hoping to get it for so long, and Day said he was proud that they were able to finally get it done, finishing the impressive performance allowing just 99 yards in the entire game as well.

"It was six points last week and we didn't allow them in the end zone, and all I could hear the defensive guys talk about at halftime was a shutout," he said. "There's a mindset there. Our guys are competitive. I think you can see that even to the end they're competing, and that's a good sign. I've said that all summer, and you could feel it on the field."

"It's something these guys have pride in. And to know you shut somebody out was a good day. Now we're going to put this behind

GAME NOTEBOOK Greg Wilson

us. Grow from it, learn from it. But overall our guys were proud of that. They're proud of the fact that they held them to only 99 yards and zero points, that's a big deal."

But now that the Buckeyes know that their goal can be a reality, they want to do it again this season.

"We've been talking about it for four years now, trying to chase that," Simon said. "And to finally get it, now we just want to get another."

Smith Continues Hot Start To Career

When Ohio State beat Akron 52-6 in Week 1, true freshman Jeremiah Smith was the biggest story of the game, catching two touchdowns in his Buckeye debut on six catches for 92 yards.

While nobody expected that he was a one-game wonder, he came out and proved that he would be here to stay as a top target for fifth-year quarterback Will Howard, finishing with five catches – tied for the team lead with senior Emeka Egbuka – and securing his first game of 100 yards receiving or more with 119.

TreVeyon Henderson got the scoring started in the first quarter when the Buckeyes sent out a jumbo set with four tight ends blocking for the senior along with the offensive line. However, it didn't take long for Smith to get involved.

He caught one of Howard's four passes during the Buckeyes' perfect first drive, getting Ohio State's initial first down of the drive on a 10-yard reception which led to Henderson scoring from 3 yards out. Then after Howard completed a 4-yard pass to wide receiver Carnell Tate and a 7-yard pass to tight end Will Kacmarek, Smith got another chance on the next possession to show off what made him the No. 1 overall recruit in the country when he signed with the Scarlet and Gray.

With Tate in motion running from left to right in the backfield, Howard looked right and faked a screen pass which would have had Smith as the lead blocker for Tate. The pump fake from Howard did just enough to get the cornerback to leak toward Tate, leaving Smith open 5 yards downfield with nothing but one defender and a sea of green turf keeping him from the end zone.

With a quick, shifty juke move from Smith, the safety between him and a touchdown slipped to the ground, and then it became a footrace between the freshman receiver and the stampede of Broncos chasing him down, which was no problem for the speedy Smith. He raced 70 yards to the end zone and put the Buckeyes up 14-0 still with 4:00 to go in the first quarter.

Howard understands that what he's seeing out of Smith in just his first two games is special, and he's very confident in his ability to make plays when he has the ball in his hands after the catch.

"It's fun. It's like watching a highlight



SCOTT STUART

YOU 'D' MEN – Jack Sawyer (33), Cody Simon (0), Sonny Styles (6) and Tyleik Williams (91) were part of the monstrous defensive effort that earned the Buckeyes their first shutout since 2019 by limiting Western Michigan to 99 total yards.

tape on the field," Howard said. "It's pretty cool. When I saw Jeremiah catch that ball and the safety fell down, I was like, 'He's gone. It's a touchdown, there's no question.'"

Then early in the second quarter, when it seemed like it was going to be another game full of Smith making his presence felt, the freshman got open deep downfield again, and Howard saw him streaking down the right side. With at least 5 yards of separation from his defender, Smith had to slow down for a pass from Howard that was greatly underthrown, making it so that cornerback Bilhal Kone had enough time to recover and break up the pass.

Had Howard made even a mediocre throw, Smith was so wide open that he could have jogged into the end zone for a 55-yard touchdown, making his numbers in his first two games even more unbelievable than they are without it. It was fully a mistake on Howard's part that the two didn't connect for another score, albeit one of very few that Howard made in the blowout win.

It might have hurt Buckeye fans that they didn't get to see Smith score his fourth touchdown in two games, but they can take some solace in the fact that Howard is hurting even more after missing that pass.

"That throw I underthrew to Jeremiah, it's going to really hurt me for a little bit," Howard said. "I think I played a pretty clean game for the most part. But coming out of a game like that, those are the ones that sting and burn, and that I remember and I don't want to let happen again."

If the first two weeks are any indication,

the two will be connecting for quite a few more touchdowns throughout the one season they have together.

Burke Ejected For Targeting

Late in the first quarter, the Ohio State defense lost one of its main catalysts when senior cornerback Denzel Burke was ejected for targeting.

On a 7-yard rush to the right by Bronco running back Jaden Nixon, safety Caleb Downs ended up being the first to make contact with the ball carrier, who had put his head down to power through the hit he was about to take on the sideline. Burke came in shortly after, both defender's helmets making contact with Nixon, but Burke was called for targeting.

It forced Ohio State's hand, making the Buckeyes prove the depth that they have at the position. Sophomore Jermaine Mathews Jr. came in to replace Burke, and he was able to help the Buckeyes complete their shutout. Day said it was important that they were able to test that depth in a game like this since they know they're going to have to dig into the depth chart at every position over the longer season.

"It's extremely important," Day said. "We know that that's going to be huge. A great example of that – and I felt awful for Denzel that he was out – but what a great teaching example that something like that can happen. Jermaine Mathews, you have to go into the game right now. It's like, 'Whoa.'"

Mathews going into the game and not

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

The easiest answer for what worked well is almost everything. Offensively the Buckeyes were firing on all cylinders, and it started early on. After what could be described as a slow start the week before, the improvements can be credited to many different people, but one of the biggest reasons Ohio State came out of the gates so fast was offensive coordinator Chip Kelly and his creative play calling.

It seemed at times in Week 1 that Ohio State was scraping together points in the 52-6 win over Akron after a slow start. Against Western Michigan, there was no scraping together points. In just the first half, the Buckeyes went for 406 yards, averaging 11.3 yards per play and Kelly put his play-calling acumen on full display.

On the team's longest first-half play, the Buckeyes executed a fake screen to perfection, which created a 70-yard touchdown from Will Howard to freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith.

It definitely helps to have players as fast as the former No. 1 overall recruit, but it also had to be nice for fans to see Kelly's offense in midseason form. With the talent that the Buckeyes have all over the field, he was able to spread the ball out between many different players with six different Buckeyes scoring touchdowns in the blowout win. Ohio State finished the game with 683 total yards on offense with 273 of those coming on the ground and 410 through the air.

What Didn't Work

If the Ohio State return unit took a step forward against Akron from a disappointing 2023 season, it took two steps back against Western Michigan. The Buckeyes were never going to rack up a ton of return yards against a punter who wasn't necessarily booming the ball, but the Buckeyes made their share of mistakes.

Punt returner Brandon Inniss showed off his elite ability to make defenders miss in Week 1, but that was absent in his returns against the Broncos. With 11 opportunities in the game for the Buckeyes, Inniss attempted to return four punts, averaging 1.5 yards on those returns. He called

for a fair catch on six of them, while Jayden Ballard received the other.

With a lack of production on returns throughout the game, the worst of the slip-ups came in the second half when the game had already been decided. On the opening kickoff of the third quarter, Ballard called for a fair catch but proceeded to let the ball bounce before it got to him on a low kick. Instead of getting the ball at the 25, which is the case on a normal fair catch, the Buckeyes got the ball right where Ballard caught it at the 6-yard line. The Buckeyes were forced to punt after starting with poor field position.

Ballard's night only got worse from there. With 2:37 to go, he put the shutout in serious jeopardy by dropping a punt at Ohio State's 31-yard line. The play ended with Ballard jumping on his own fumble, but it would have been as grave a mistake as a player can make with an eight-touchdown lead if he had failed to recover the ball.

Play Of The Game

While many plays could fit here, Smith's 70-yard touchdown was the biggest. As if the hype around the South Florida native couldn't get any higher, he added to his collection of jaw-dropping highlight-reel plays against Western Michigan. The score was a product of creative play design from Kelly, Day and the rest of the offensive coaching staff. But in the end, it was Howard and Carnell Tate who sold a wide receiver screen that stretched out the Western Michigan defense and created room for Smith to make the reception and race for the end zone.

As well as the play was crafted and executed, few would have expected it to go for the 70-yard touchdown it ended up being. It took a slip from the Western Michigan safety to create a path for Smith to turn upfield and put his speed on full display. With a lane up the middle of the field, Smith outran five Western Michigan defenders to secure his third touchdown as a Buckeye and give the team a 14-0 lead in the first quarter.

— Bobby Gorbett

serving as a hindrance to the Buckeyes' goal of getting the shutout is evidence of the attitude that each of them has when it comes to being ready at all times. Styles is confident that at any position on the defense, they could do the same thing that Mathews was able to.

"Next man up. Our defense, at every single position, we have guys all the way down the depth chart," Styles said. "So 'Zel goes down, and obviously you don't want to see that happen, but next guy up. Jermaine, he's a great player."

Since Western Michigan had a holding penalty on the same play, the two flags offset and the down was replayed, but the Buckeyes had to deal with losing their top cornerback for nearly 45 minutes of game time.

Burke got off to a great start in his final Ohio State season when he came out of the Akron game with an interception, snatching the ball directly out of the hands of a Zips receiver in Week 1 for the team's first take-away of the season.

He surely was looking to keep that momentum going into the matchup against Western Michigan, but he was forced to sit out for the rest of the game due to his penalty. Now he will have to wait through the Buckeyes' off week to get back into a game and try to get back on the right side of the stat sheet.

Penalties The Bugaboo For The Bucks

Burke's ejection was part of a larger issue the Buckeyes had in their nearly spotless game.

The defense went out and shut out Western Michigan, and the offense gained 683 yards to the Broncos' 99. So many different stats show that the Buckeyes were by far the better team on the gridiron in just about every way they could be. Except for one.

Ohio State finished the game with six penalties which accumulated to 58 yards

lost. Western Michigan finished with just one penalty and 2 yards lost. The Broncos also had a defensive holding penalty that Ohio State declined since Howard completed a 17-yard pass to Egbuka on the play. Regardless, it was still the worst part of the completely dominant performance on the field.

The 58 yards shown along with the six penalties for Ohio State is also a little misleading because one of the flags came on such a big play. Wide receiver Bryson Rodgers was called for holding on a play that running back Quinshon Judkins was able to find a gap and take the ball 80 yards to the end zone. The game ended with a 56-0 score, but had that penalty not been committed, there would have been another touchdown on the board for the team, and Judkins would have left Ohio Stadium with an even greater stat line, scoring three touchdowns with more than 150 yards. Instead, punter Joe McGuire had to kick the ball away for the first time in the game.

Outside of that hold, cornerback Davison Igbinosun was flagged for the second time in as many games. Against Akron, a hit of his on quarterback Ben Finley was reviewed for targeting, and while he didn't end up getting tossed from the game, he was still flagged for a late hit. Against the Broncos, he gave up an automatic first down on a defensive pass interference call on the sideline.

That didn't end up leading to anything for the Broncos, but when the Buckeyes get into Big Ten play, they will need to cut down on mistakes like that, because those teams will be more likely to take advantage of free plays.

The four other flags on OSU were a holding call against left guard Austin Siereveld — who was standing in for an injured Donovan Jackson for the second straight game — an ineligible receiver downfield call on right tackle Josh Fryar, holding on Zen Michalski, and a hold on a punt return on Brenton Jones.

Sayin Throws First Career TD

While the quarterback battle went on between Howard and Devin Brown in pre-season camp, freshman Julian Sayin made sure he wasn't being forgotten in that conversation.

While it was extremely unlikely that Sayin was going to start this season, he at least impressed Day enough to make the head coach mention his name in that conversation multiple times.

"He's in the mix," Day said during spring practices. "Julian's been competing his tail off, and he'll continue to do that. He's got a very bright future."

At the end of the Western Michigan game, Day got a glimpse of what that future might hold in scarlet and gray. After Brown had a few drives when Howard was taken out of the blowout, Day decided to get Sayin into the game for his first collegiate action, and he didn't hold back by forcing the freshman to hand it off every play.

Still on its own side of the field and up by seven touchdowns with just over five

minutes remaining in the game, Ohio State elected to go for a fourth-and-1 with Sayin under center. With a fake handoff and blockers to the right, the Broncos completely missed tight end Bennett Christian streaking down the left side of the field. Sayin saw him immediately, and the two connected for a 55-yard touchdown, the Buckeyes' final score of the game.

"We were just trying to get more guys more plays," Day said when asked about the decision to go for it with the game in hand. "There are a lot of guys on our team that deserve plays and deserve reps, and it was close enough that we felt like it was one of those ones we were going to go for. We wanted to continue to get these guys these reps."

"It's not always an easy situation when you're up by that kind of score. We totally respect our opponents and respect Coach (Lance Taylor) and the whole team at Western Michigan, but we also need to get these guys plays because it's so important down the road."



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Offense Good But Defense Even Better Vs. Broncos

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It is darn near impossible to overshadow an offense that racked up eight touchdowns, 683 total yards and 30 first downs, but that's what the defense for No. 2 Ohio State did in a thorough 56-0 win over Western Michigan on Sept. 7 in Ohio Stadium.

Sure, Ohio State scored on its first three possessions to propel the Buckeyes to a 35-0 halftime lead with the help of Quinshon Judkins' two 23-yard touchdown runs and quarterback Will Howard running for one score and passing for another.

And yes, Howard finished 18 of 26 for 292 passing yards and a touchdown while Judkins rushed for 108 yards on nine carries and TreVeyon Henderson added 66 yards and two TDs on 10 runs.

Add in wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, the No. 1 recruit nationally in the 2024 class, making five catches for 119 yards before a nighttime crowd of 102,665 and Emeka Egbuka's five catches that went for 98 yards.

But more impressively, the Buckeyes (2-0) got their first shutout since a 42-0 win over Cincinnati on Sept. 7, 2019, and did so by limiting the Broncos to 99 total yards – with just five coming in the second half.

It was the first time OSU limited an opponent to less than 100 yards since allowing 66 in a 62-14 win over Maryland Oct. 7, 2017.

Not Messing Around

Western Michigan (0-2) went three-and-out on the game's first possession, highlighted by a Cody Simon 7-yard sack on third-and-4 from the 31.

After a punt, the Buckeyes started from their 45 and quickly moved the 55 yards in six plays and 2:35 for a 7-0 lead on Henderson's run from the 3.

Gee Scott Jr. had a 5-yard catch to begin the series, and Smith followed with a grab for 10 to the WMU 40. Egbuka snared passes of 10 and 21 yards to the 9. Henderson ran for 6 before completing the drive on the next snap at 11:04.

The Broncos on their second series got two third-down conversions and a 19-yard reception by Anthony Sambucci, but the drive stalled at the 25 and Luka Zurak missed a 42-yard field goal try to the right.

Smith electrified the crowd with a 70-yard catch-and-run TD at the 4:00 mark for a 14-0 score. It was first-and-20 from the 30 after a holding penalty when Howard hit Smith on a slant at the 37. He juiced a



SCOTT STUART

SEE YOU LATER – Jeremiah Smith turned a short gain into a 70-yard touchdown catch to give the Buckeyes a 14-0 lead against Western Michigan. The freshman has three TD receptions in the first two games.

defender, and no one could catch him. The four-play drive went 75 yards in 2:28.

The Buckeyes made it look easy to take a 21-0 lead at 1:02 of the first quarter, racing 73 yards in five plays while consuming 1:39, ending with a 23-yard run by Judkins.

Egbuka sandwiched 15- and 17-yard catches with Smith's 18-yarder. After an incompletion from the 23 down the middle to Jelani Thurman, Howard pitched right to Judkins, and he raced to the end zone.

The Buckeyes on the Broncos' next drive lost senior cornerback Denzel Burke for targeting Jaden Nixon when the Broncos got the ball back. Jermaine Mathews Jr. replaced Burke.

Howard was 10 of 11 for 177 yards, and Smith had three catches for 98 yards in the first quarter.

Early in the second quarter, an 80-yard Judkins TD run was nullified by a holding penalty on wide receiver Bryson Rodgers.

After exchanging punts, Judkins finally got his second TD, this time going left for 23 yards at 8:28 to extend the advantage to 28-0. The first of four plays in the 65-yard, 1:17 drive was a 35-yard Egbuka catch to the Bronco 30. An incompletion to Egbuka led to Henderson's rush for 7 to set up the score.

Yet another Western Michigan punt allowed the Buckeyes the opportunity to slice up the defense again, and they did so as Howard ran for a 6-yard TD with 4:20 left to make it 35-0.

Using six plays to go 70 yards in 2:34, Judkins was the catalyst with a 14-yard run on the first play. Carnell Tate gathered a 36-yard throw to the WMU 20. On third-and-5, Henderson rammed his way 9 yards to the 6. From there, Howard faked a handoff to Henderson and ran to the right pylon for the six points.

The Buckeyes amassed 406 yards in the first half – 274 through the air and 132 on the ground with 17 first downs compared to 94 total yards and six firsts for the Broncos.

Howard in the first half completed 15 of 22 for 274 yards and a TD with Smith making five catches for 119 yards and a TD. Judkins rushed for 82 yards.

Rolling Along

The Buckeyes took advantage of a 37-yard punt to start from the Broncos' 40 and up the count to 42-0 at 6:44 of the third quarter. The big play was a 19-yard catch by Brandon Inniss to the 19 on a fourth-and-8. Henderson ran for 3 then the final 16 at the end of the six-play, 3:15 series.

Backup Devin Brown then replaced Howard on the series beginning with 4:18 remaining in the third quarter. He guided the Buckeyes 81 yards on eight plays and 4:13 to make it 49-0 when freshman James Peoples ran it in from 12 yards.

Peoples also had an 11-yard run in the series, and Brown connected with Rodgers and Jayden Ballard for 12 apiece and 27-yarder to Inniss.

Heralded freshman Julian Sayin, who transferred from Alabama, took over for Brown with 7:06 to play and threw a 55-yard touchdown to Bennett Christian with 5:01 left for the final score.

Lincoln Kienholz quarterbacked the final drive beginning with 2:37 to play at the OSU 31. Freshman Sam Williams-Dixon had carries for 4, 31 and 5 yards, and Mason Maggs rushed for 3 to the Broncos 26 before Kienholz took a knee at the 29 and the Buckeyes got their shutout.

"We've been talking about it for four years now, trying to chase that, and to finally get it, now we want to get another one," linebacker Cody Simon said of the whitewash.

Numbers

The Buckeyes had 410 passing yards and 273 rushing. Western Michigan finished with 71 passing and 28 rushing. All 5 yards gained by the Broncos in the second half were on the ground. ... Peoples' 10 carries led to 51 yards. ... Sayin was 2 for 2 for 61 yards. ... Brown went 5 for 5 for 57 yards. ... The Buckeyes had three sacks for 18 yards. ... Twelve Buckeyes had at least one catch.




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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 56, Western Michigan 0

Sept. 7, 2024 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
WESTERN MICHIGAN	0	0	0	0	0
OHIO STATE	21	14	14	7	56

First Quarter

- OSU - Henderson, 3-yard rush (Fielding kick), 11:04.
- OSU - Smith, 70-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 4:00.
- OSU - Judkins, 23-yard rush (Fielding kick), 1:02.

Second Quarter

- OSU - Judkins, 23-yard rush (Fielding kick), 8:28.
- OSU - Howard, 6-yard rush (Fielding kick), 4:20

Third Quarter

- OSU - Henderson, 16-yard rush (Fielding kick), 6:44
- OSU - Peoples, 12-yard rush (Fielding kick), 0:05.

Fourth Quarter

- OSU - Christian, 55-yard pass from Sayin (Snyder kick), 5:01.

Att. - 102,665

Weather - Clear, 64 F

Team Statistics

	WMU	OSU
First Downs	6	30
Rushing	0	13
Passing	5	17
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	31-28	39-273
Passing Yards	71	410
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	8-17-0	25-33-0
Offensive Plays	48	72
Total Net Yards	99	683
Third Down Efficiency	3-15	3-10
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	2-2
Punts-Avg.	11-41.2	4-42.3
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	2-0
Penalties	1-2	6-58
Time of Possession	25:24	34:36

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - WMU: King 8-22; Nixon 9-19; Lowry 4-16; Abdus-Salaam 4-8; Hailey 1-(-1); Wolff 4-(-16); Team 1-(-20). OSU: Judkins 9-108; Henderson 10-66; Peoples 10-51; Williams-Dixon 3-40; Howard 1-6; Sayin 1-5; Maggs 1-3; Brown 1-(-3); Team 1-(-3).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - WMU: Wolff 8-15-0-71-0; Lowry 0-2-0-0-0. OSU: Howard 18-26-0-292-1; Brown 5-5-0-57-0; Sayin 2-2-0-61-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - WMU: Sambucci 3-41; Nixon 2-21; Parker 2-11; Abdus-Salaam 1-(-2). OSU: Smith 5-119; Egbuka 5-98; Christian 1-55; Inniss 3-45; Tate 3-45; Ballard 1-12; Rodgers 1-12; Antwi 1-8; Kacmarek 2-7; Gurd 1-6; Scott Jr. 1-5; Peoples 1-(-2).

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - WMU: Millmore 11-41.2-53. OSU: McGuire 3-44.7-47; McLarty 1-35.0-35.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - WMU: Parker 1-(-5). OSU: Inniss 4-6; Ballard 1-0.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - WMU: Nixon 1-15; Abdus-Salaam 1-15. OSU: Ballard 1-0.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - WMU: None. OSU: None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - WMU: None. OSU: None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - WMU: Wahlberg 1-4; Walker 1-7. OSU: Sawyer 1-10; Simon 1-7; Hamilton 0.5-1; Williams 0.5-0.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - WMU: Walker 1-7; Wahlberg 1-4; Moore 1-2; Washington 1-2; Wofford 1-1. OSU: Sawyer 1-10; Simon 1-7; Igbinosun 1-2; McClain 1-1; Hamilton 0.5-1; Williams 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) - WMU: Willis 6-5-11; Hallock 7-2-9; Wahlberg 5-1-6; Roberson 3-2-5; Kone 4-0-4; Franklin 3-1-4; Adams 2-2-4; Washington 3-0-3; Wofford 1-2-3; Walker 2-0-2; McGraw 2-0-2; Moore 1-1-2; Thompson 0-2-2; Moon 0-2-2; Hailey 1-0-1; Bonnema 1-0-1; Raybuck 1-0-1; L. Williams 1-0-1; P. Williams 1-0-1; Tyler 0-1-1; Young 0-1-1. OSU: Igbinosun 3-1-4; Downs 2-2-4; Hamilton 1-3-4; Styles 0-4-4; McDonald 3-0-3; Styles Jr. 2-1-3; Hancock 2-1-3; Reese 2-1-3; Simon 1-2-3; Sawyer 1-2-3; Ransom 2-0-2; Melton 2-0-2; Powers 2-0-2; Tuimoloau 1-1-2; Williams 0-2-2; Hicks 0-2-2; McClain 1-0-1; Houston 1-0-1; Malone 0-1-1; Simpson-Hunt 0-1-1; Velazquez 0-1-1; Mathews Jr. 0-1-1; Curry 0-1-1; Hartford 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - WMU: Mortimer, Abdus-Salaam, Wolff, Toudle, Dieudonne, Sambucci, Hofer, Sherwin, Kushi, West, Gideon, Kone, Thompson, Washington, Willis, Hallock, Roberson, Wofford, Nelson, Lee, Wahlberg, Walker, Bussell, Green, Moore, Williams, Lowry, Webb, Zurak, Berris, Williams, Parker, Franklin, Bonnema, Mack, Pope, Millmore, Young, Hailey, Nixon, Adams, King, Gerig, Todd, Moon, Murphy, Parker, Willis, Hrabowski, Muraski, Schuster, Martin, Marshall, Morris, Bosma, Johanningsmeier, Wooten, Raybuck, Tyler, Childers, Gustwiller, McGraw. OSU: Tate, Howard, Egbuka, Henderson, Smith, McLaughlin, Siereveld, Fryar, Simmons, Tshabola, Scott Jr., Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimoloau, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Judkins, Sayin, Inniss, Hicks, West, Rodgers, Antwi, Thurman, Nelson Jr., Maggs, Melton, McClain, McLarty, Reese, Peoples, Simpson-Hunt, Stover, Williams-Dixon, Mathews Jr., Pierce, Kienholz, Jones, Brown, Powers, Fielding, Velazquez, Styles Jr., McGuire, Ferlmann, Rudzinski, Gurd, Scott Jr., Graham, Montgomery, Mickens, Smith Jr., Wilson, Prater, Padilla, Michalski, Fitzpatrick, Moore, Hinzman, Adolph, Mitchell, Christian, LeBlanc, Kacmarek, Hartford, Ballard, Mensah, Curry, Kanu, Moore, Malone, Houston, Jackson Jr., Snyder, McDonald.

Season Statistics

2024 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Aug. 31	(2) AKRON	W, 52-6	102,011	
Sept. 9	(2) WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	102,665	
Sept. 21	(3) MARSHALL	TBA		
Sept. 28	Michigan State	TBA		
Oct. 5	IOWA	TBA		
Oct. 12	Oregon (9)	7:30 p.m.		
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA (23)	TBA		
Nov. 2	Penn State (8)	TBA		
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA		
Nov. 16	Northwestern	TBA		
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA		
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN (17)	12 p.m.		

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	54	17
Rushing	24	5
Passing	29	10
Penalty	1	2
Average Per Game/Rush	221.5	37.5
Average Per Game/Pass	322.0	100.5
Total Offense	1087	276
Total Plays	136	112
Average Per Game	543.5	138.0
Average Per Play	8.0	2.5
Penalties-Yards	13-103	6-37
Fumbles-Lost	3-0	2-1
Third Down Efficiency	12-24	7-31
Percentage	50%	23%
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-3	2-3
Percentage	67%	67%
Sacks-Yards	8-43	2-11
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:16	29:44

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	28	24	35	21	0	108	54.0
Opponents	3	0	3	0	0	6	3.0

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Q. Judkins	22	163	7.4	3	23
T. Henderson	18	131	7.3	2	21
James Peoples	16	81	5.1	2	12
S. Williams-Dixon	4	44	11.0	0	31
Will Howard	5	24	4.8	1	19
Julian Sayin	1	5	5.0	0	5
Mason Maggs	1	3	3.0	0	3
Devin Brown	3	-3	-1.0	0	0
Team	2	-5	-2.5	0	0
OSU Totals	72	443	6.2	8	31
OPP Totals	66	75	1.1	0	12

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Will Howard	35	54	64.8	520	4-0	170.2
Devin Brown	6	8	75.0	63	0-0	141.2
Julian Sayin	2	2	100.0	61	1-0	521.2
OSU Totals	43	64	67.2	644	5-0	177.5
OPP Totals	26	46	56.5	201	0-2	84.5

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	11	211	19.2	3	70
Emeka Egbuka	9	149	16.6	0	35
Carnell Tate	7	103	14.7	1	36
Bennett Christian	1	55	55.0	1	55
Brandon Inniss	3	45	15.0	0	27
Bryson Rodgers	2	21	10.5	0	12
Jayden Ballard	2	18	9.0	0	12
T. Henderson	2	18	9.0	0	12
Kojo Antwi	1	8	8.0	0	8
Will Kacmarek	2	7	3.5	0	7
Patrick Gurd	1	6	6.0	0	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	5	5.0	0	5
James Peoples	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	43	644	14.9	5	70
OPP Totals	26	201	7.7	0	29

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Q. Judkins	3	-	-	-	-	18
Jeremiah Smith	3	-	-	-	-	18
Jayden Fielding	-	14-14	-	-	-	17
T. Henderson	2	-	-	-	-	12
James Peoples	2	-	-	-	-	12
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Will Howard	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lathan Ransom	1	-	-	-	-	6
Carnell Tate	1	-	-	-	-	6

Austin Snyder	-	1-1	-	-	-	1
OSU Totals	15	15-15	-	-	1-1	108
OPP Totals	0	-	-	-	2-3	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	2-3	0-0	2-3

Punting

	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	6	268	44.7	0	51
Nick McLarty	1	35	35.0	0	35
OSU Totals	7	303	43.3	0	51
OPP Totals	17	742	43.7	0	60

Interceptions

	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Gabe Powers	1	29	29.0	1	29
Denzel Burke	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	2	29	14.5	1	29
OPP Totals	0	0	0.0	0	0

Punt Returns

	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	8	66	8.3	0	36
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	9	66	7.3	0	36
OPP Totals	1	-5	-5.0	0	0

Kickoff Returns

	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jayden Ballard	2	23	11.5	0	23
OSU Totals	2	23	11.5	0	23
OPP Totals	2	30	15.0	0	15

Def. Leaders

	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Lathan Ransom	7	4	11	2.0-3	0-0
Sonny Styles	1	9	10	0-0	0-0
Tyleik Williams	2	7	9	2.0-4	1.5-1
Ty Hamilton	2	6	8	0.5-1	0.5-1
C.J. Hicks	3	5	8	1.0-8	1.0-8
Jordan Hancock	6	1	7	0-0	0-0
Arvell Reese	5	2	7	1.0-1	0-0
Caleb Downs	3	4	7	0.5-2	0.5-2
Jack Sawyer	1	4	5	1.0-10	1.0-10
Davison Igbinosun	3	2	5	1.0-2	0-0
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	3	2	5	0-0	0-0
JT Tuimoloau	3	2	5	1.5-7	1.5-7
Denzel Burke	2	2	4	0-0	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	3	1	4	1.0-2	0-0
Kayden McDonald	3	1	4	0-0	0-0
Mitchell Melton	2	2	4	1.0-5	1.0-5
K. Jackson Jr.	2	1	3	0.5-4	0.5-4
Gabe Powers	3	-	3	0-0	0-0
Cody Simon	1	2	3	1.0-7	1.0-7
Caden Curry	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Tyhone Malone	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Jaylen McClain	2	-	2	1.0-1	0-0
Malik Hartford	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Eddrick Houston	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
C. Simpson-Hunt	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Joey Velaz					

OSU Adjusting To Helmet Communication System

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When the alleged Michigan sign-stealing operation was first revealed in October of 2023, few pundits probably could have predicted that it would immediately spawn a streamlined play-calling system in college football. But less than a year later in Ohio State's season opener against Akron, offensive coordinator Chip Kelly was sitting up in the coaches' box delivering play calls directly into fifth-year quarterback Will Howard's ear.

The helmet communication system, which was first implemented into college football during the 2024 offseason, was new for all the college football teams in Week 1.

"We've been working with it since spring, so it's not really a new thing that we have to deal with," Howard said in a press conference on Sept. 3. "Obviously this year it's new, but we've been doing it for pretty much the whole time I've been here, so it is new, but for it being the first game, I think we did pretty well with it."

The play-calling system is in one player's helmet on each side of the ball. The system starts after the play ends and cuts out at the 15-second mark on the play clock. The play-caller, Kelly in the offense's case, voices the play call to Howard, who communicates that call to the rest of the

team. Players who have the communication system in their helmets have a green dot on it, denoting them as the player with the earpiece. It's ultimately a simple system. It can take some getting used to, especially for a guy like Howard who has played four years in college without it, according to head coach Ryan Day.

"When you're near Will and the quarterbacks and you can hear the voice in a helmet, you realize that's a different thing," Day said. "To have a voice in your head while you're on the field is something to get used to, so we've worked hard on that in practice to get used to that.

"That is a good sign when a play is called and you already know exactly what it is. The good news now is that (Kelly) can tell him why he called it. He can give him little bits of information here and there. You can make sure that he understands the situation, he understands the down and distance, or maybe give a tip to one of the guys in the huddle. So it's something new, but so far it's been good."

The coaching staff is working with a bit of a time crunch in between each play with the communication eventually shutting off. Having to consider a variety of factors, the coaching staff is tasked with coming up with the perfect play to communicate to Howard quickly.

"You have from when the previous play ended until 15 seconds on the play



SONNY BROCKWAY

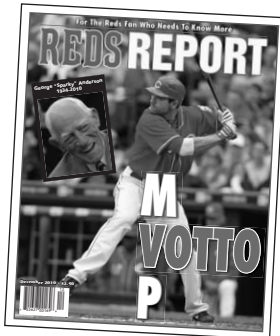
CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? — Offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly (left) and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles (right) are getting used to the new helmet communication system along with the players.

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clock, but you're not talking for that entire time," Kelly said "You're making decisions on, 'What are we? We're second-and-5. Where's the ball? It's on the left hash. What play are we going to call?'"

For Howard, things can get a lot more complicated depending on the type of play call from Kelly, where Howard may have to choose between several different plays in a given call based on what he sees from the defense pre-snap. Still, Kelly and the rest of the offensive coaching staff try to make it as simple as possible for him.

"We're trying to get information to Will as quickly as possible so he can digest it. If we're huddling – and we huddled a few times on Saturday – then he needs to communicate that to our guys," Kelly said. "If it's a signal system, we make sure we tell everybody that we're using a signal on this play. Then Will has an opportunity to survey the defense a little bit longer and get a chance to see that.

"Then there could be a check within that call so the play could come in as one play, two plays or three plays. There are some three-play sets that come in. Then Will has to make the decision at the line of scrimmage. 'What's the best play for us?' and then get us into that right play. It's not a conversation because he can't talk back, but we try to be as brief as possible so that he gets as much information as he can and then he can operate."

Kelly is being literal when he says Howard can't talk back. The transfer quarterback doesn't have a microphone to communicate back to Kelly before the play, meaning the pairing has to be prepared for a situation where the headset could

potentially go out.

"Obviously I can't speak back to him, so he doesn't know when I've heard it or what I've heard or if it cuts out, but we're working through those things," Howard said. "We have hand signals. If I throw my hands up, that means 'I can't hear you.' It's just little things like that."

It's after possessions when Howard heads to the sideline when he and Kelly can talk as much as they want about the previous drive.

"We talk extensively between series of 'What did you see here? Why did you go to that?'" Kelly said. "With the video, you can kind of confirm that he saw what he saw and understands why he called what he called."

"We were able to have a little dialogue on the headset, and it's really beneficial for us," Howard said. "We can continue to move on and keep using it in a new way going forward."

On the defensive side of the ball, the typical quarterback of the defense, fifth-year Mike linebacker Cody Simon – who would usually receive the play from defensive coordinator Jim Knowles – was out with injury against the Zips. That meant junior Will linebacker Sonny Styles had to step up to become the leader of the defense. For someone who came from the safety position over the summer and hadn't played any linebacker position during game action, let alone at the Mike, Day was impressed.

"I thought Sonny, moving positions within a week and a half of playing this season, he handled that very well," Day said. "I thought his communication was

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

good. Everybody was on the same page and that was good."

The middle linebacker has the same responsibilities on the defensive side of the ball as Howard does on the offensive end, in terms of getting the play call and making sure everyone else on the field knows what it is.

For Styles, the adjustment from Will to Mike linebacker wasn't very hard. He said the two positions were pretty much interchangeable. The real challenge came with the headset.

"I think I have a pretty good grasp of the defense and knowledge of the defense, so it wasn't a super hard switch for me," Styles said. "The biggest thing was this was my first time being on the field with the headset."

The experience overall went pretty smoothly for Styles and the Ohio State defense with one exception when the play clock running down became an issue.

"It goes away at 15 seconds so it doesn't get too low in the play clock," Styles said. "There was one play where the call came in a little late. That's when it kind of got a little hectic because everyone's looking at you like 'What's the call? What's the call?' But it wasn't too bad. I thought it was a solid day. I thought I did pretty good with it."

That one bad play aside, Styles communicated well enough to his teammates for the defense to not allow a touchdown against Akron, and just as important he received the approval of senior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams.

"(The linebackers) played well," Williams said. "They're doing everything they need to do as well, getting us the calls, doing their assignment. I didn't think there was a drop-off there either."

Redshirt sophomore linebacker Gabe Powers came into the game at Mike linebacker when it was out of reach for Akron in the fourth quarter. It was then that Powers came in with the green dot on his helmet and inherited the responsibility of leading the defense.

Powers' performance will be remembered more for his pick-six than his communication skills, but through one game Powers was pleased with how he used the device.

"It was good," Powers said. "I don't know how it's going to go when it's really loud. When I was in there it wasn't too loud, but third downs in the 'Shoe gets crazy loud, so we have to communicate to everybody."

Getting loud on third down to make it difficult for the opposing offense to communicate is a staple of a good fan base at all levels of football, but as Powers alluded to it can be a bit of a double-edged sword for the home team.

Simon, one of the captains of the team, is well aware of this challenge and believes that it might be even more difficult to communicate at times than it was a year ago.

"(Playing the Mike position) is not very easy, but it's getting used to having to communicate on a different level," Simon said. "At home games, it's especially going to be tough if you've got 100,000 people screaming on third down. You have to be able to communicate effectively, quickly and really make your voice heard in ways that maybe you didn't have to earlier with

signals. It's just going to be an adjustment, but there's always adjustments in college football."

Bucks Adjusting To New Roles and Rules

In past years on the offensive end of the ball, it would have been Day in his quarterback's helmet as the play-caller, but after the hiring of Kelly as the Buckeyes' offensive coordinator and play-caller, Day has moved to more of a CEO role. Day isn't fully removed from the process though. Instead, he provides consistent suggestions or tips to his coordinators.

"The best way to describe it is to just imagine Jim's calling it, or Chip's calling it. I'm kind of there having a conversation," Day said.

"Not getting in the way of what's being called, but just making sure to understand the situation, the down and distance, time, things we're seeing down on the field. Maybe someone's got big eyes. We've got to get these guys going. Maybe there's a little lull. Whatever those things are, you're just trying to communicate that to both sides."

For Kelly, the conversations with Day in between possessions were very reassuring, hearing that Day was happy with what he was thinking as the play-caller.

"(Day) was great," Kelly said. "There were a couple of suggestions that he ran up to the booth, 'Hey, let's get to this.' Or I was maybe between one or two, but I felt really good when he felt really good about it. The communication in between (is about) what they're doing, what we think they're doing, changing speeds, changing tempos, some of those things. I thought he did a really good job. He's involved with the defense, with Jim, and he's involved with the special teams guys too."

"I understand that role because I've been in it," Kelly added. "Sometimes you can't get to the special teams and you can't get to defense because you're thinking about what your next series is going to be like offensively and spending time with your offensive coaches, but he really contributed a lot on Saturday offensively."

Making Day's job easier or at least more substantive in his newfound CEO role is the addition of tablets to college football sidelines. Starting in the 2024 regular season, college football teams could have up to 18 tablets on the sidelines or the coaches' box. The tablets have access to the broadcast feed of the game and camera angles from the coach's sideline and the end zone.

Now, college football teams can watch film during the games, whether that be in the locker room during halftime, for coordinators in the coaches' box, or for players and coaches on the sidelines in between possessions. The change is greatly appreciated by Day in his new role.

"You get the iPads and so you can kind of see what's going on during the game and get a feel for exactly what you're seeing," Day said. "That is new. We didn't really have that before. You're really relying on the guys up in the box to give you information. Your eyes can sometimes deceive you down on the field. Now you're able to confirm what you think you saw, make adjustments and have communication with the players in that moment."

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Inniss Embracing New Role As Punt Returner

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Entering the program last offseason as Ohio State's top-rated recruit in the 2023 class – coming in as the nation's 35th-best prospect and fifth-best at his position – former five-star wide receiver Brandon Inniss was expected by many to continue a rich lineage of talented Buckeye pass catchers, following in the line of former Ohio State standouts and now NFL receivers Marvin Harrison Jr., Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, among others.

Inniss still has a likely promising Buckeye career ahead of him, but in his first 15 months with the program, his path to wide receiver stardom at Ohio State hasn't gone quite as he had planned.

The Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage product, like many highly touted first-year wideouts in recent seasons, struggled to find the field on offense as a true freshman, recording just one catch for 58 yards – albeit a long touchdown reception against Purdue on the road – as he sat behind veterans Harrison, Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming, among others.

It typically takes some time for Ohio State's top wideouts to break out, with Harrison, Egbuka, Olave, Smith-Njigba and Wilson each having breakout campaigns as sophomores after experiencing limited production as freshmen, but it may be difficult for Inniss to achieve that same fate due to the team's receiver depth.

Inniss entered his sophomore campaign on the outside looking in on the starting wide receiver depth chart, sitting behind veteran slot receiver Egbuka – who returned to the program for his senior season, taking Inniss' potential starting role in the slot – along with fellow sophomore Carnell Tate and true freshman Jeremiah Smith on the outside.

This reality may have Inniss looking at a backup role at wide receiver for the 2024 campaign, but that has not stopped him from trying to make an impact on the team in other areas. Instead, he has embraced a different opportunity in his sophomore season, when he has looked to transform Ohio State's often-struggling special teams unit by serving as the team's punt returner.

"I try to embrace every role, but since special teams are such a key factor for us, I have embraced that role a lot more," Inniss said.

"Our coaches are a lot more involved with special teams now, and they know how long it's been since we had a punt return (for a touchdown). They made special teams a focus this offseason. (Head coach Ryan) Day plays a huge role in the special teams this year, and he believes in me to get the job done."

Embracing new roles on a football team is nothing new for Inniss. As a junior at American Heritage, he was called upon to serve as the team's starting quarterback despite gaining attention from Division I programs due to his unique talents as a pass catcher.

Inniss' receiving talent is what earned him a scholarship from Ohio State and other top Division I programs, but he also made his mark on special teams as a high schooler, returning punts and kicks throughout his career, his longest return touchdown going for 96 yards on a kickoff, according to the sophomore himself.

Fast-forward a few years, and the South Florida resident has reclaimed that versatile role as Ohio State's starting punt returner. It was a decision that he said was made by both him and the coaching staff during the offseason



SCOTT STUART

TAKING IT IN – Brandon Inniss hopes to make a difference for the Buckeyes with his punt returning skills.

in an effort to create more explosive plays on special teams by getting the ball in his hands.

"They knew I wanted to be a factor on special teams since I came out of high school, and I think they just felt like I was the guy to be back there this year," Inniss said.

"Brandon, he came up playing running back for a lot of his life, played a little quarterback here and there," wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said during fall camp. "Now he's a receiver. He can do a lot of different things. So we just try to put him in a position where he can be the most successful. And the position that makes him the most successful is just the ball in his hands."

Inniss is no stranger to being a punt returner, but the sophomore said he still had to go to work this offseason to reacclimate himself to the position. He spent countless hours fielding punts from a JUGS machine, having his teammates run at him while catching the ball to simulate a game-like feel.

It was an offseason approach that he felt allowed him to identify the differences between fielding a punt and catching a spiral pass from a quarterback.

"It is definitely different," Inniss said. "What helped me a lot was catching punts on the JUGS. It's not the same as in-game, but just going out there and getting a feel for it, having guys run full speed at you, I did that a lot in the offseason. I was just getting my mind right because I pretty much knew I was going to be the punt returner this year. So I just had to do that and embrace that role."

Inniss said his coaches also played a significant role in getting him ready for his new role as punt returner over the offseason, most notably Hartline, who, along with tight ends coach Keenan Bailey, was assigned by Day to orchestrate punt and kick-return coverage this season in an effort to have the unit coached by a committee of established assistants rather than a single special teams coordinator.

Inniss said that Hartline, Day and others have taught him to have an aggressive ap-

proach this season while fielding punts, where he is always moving his feet and getting ready for a return.

This is a technique that Inniss can get behind because he thinks it resembles that of his all-time favorite punt returner, Devin Hester, who carved out a Hall of Fame NFL career with the Chicago Bears and Atlanta Falcons by returning 14 punts for a score along with another five kickoff touchdowns.

"I used to watch highlights of (Hester) playing for Miami (Fla.) all the time, and I just feel like I can do something like that," Inniss said. "He's the best punt returner ever. You just watch him, it's stunning to watch."

"Having an aggressive mindset is what you need back there. You can't play around when you're back there. You can't tip-toe. You have to get the ball, make the first two guys miss and go."

Inniss has a long way to go before he reaches the successes Hester had as a punt returner, but the sophomore did get off to a strong start in his debut at the position against Akron on Aug. 31.

He returned four punts for 60 yards in the Buckeyes' blowout win, a number that could have been even higher if his 27-yard punt return in the fourth quarter wasn't negated by a holding call on cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt.

Regardless, Inniss' return yardage in Week 1 nearly eclipsed the unit's 75-yard total from all of last season, which ranked a disappointing 111th in the nation.

This stat, among many other issues, contributed to the firing of former special teams coordinator Parker Fleming this offseason.

"You could see we were close to a couple of the returns," Day said after the 52-6 win over the Zips. "We're working at it, and we're just one or two away (from returning it for a touchdown). I don't know what Brandon's return yardage was, but you can see there's some potential back there."

"We have a bunch of guys buying into that, and we're getting there. It was better today than

I remember it in the past, so we'll keep working on that. Because if we can get some special teams scores – that can be a huge part of our season."

Day continued to stress the importance of Inniss' punt returns throughout the week after the Akron game, saying that he was mostly pleased with the aggressiveness the sophomore showed on his four returns. He pointed to one return in the second quarter that was specifically valuable to the team, where Inniss fielded a punt that was quickly rolling toward the Buckeyes' end zone and returned it to the Ohio State 24-yard line.

"The one that (Inniss) returned, it was rolling down, probably inside the 20-yard line, and he stopped it and then returned it back," Day said. "That was probably three or four first downs on offense. It's a big deal."

"One of the studies that we did (over the offseason) was every time the ball hits the ground on the turf field, there's an average of like 10 yards a roll there. So we want to make sure we're aggressive in fielding those punts. You've seen some of those poor punts just kind of take off on the turf. So we try to eliminate those."

Inniss mentioned that his performance against the Zips could propel teams to stop kicking it to him. However, he had eight punts directed his way and fair caught four of them, returning the other four for 6 yards total against the Broncos.

With Inniss' punt-returning talents seemingly giving Ohio State another explosive element this season, both he and Day are confident the sophomore can return one for a touchdown this season, a feat that the Buckeyes have not accomplished since the team's national championship-winning season in 2014, when wide-out Jalin Marshall returned a punt 54 yards to score in the team's 42-27 home win over Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014.

Day is so confident that he even guaranteed the end of the decade-long drought before the season started.

"I'm going to guarantee it this year," he said Aug. 29 on his weekly radio appearance on 97.1 The Fan. "I'm putting it out there."

Regardless of whether Inniss can channel his inner Hester and return a punt for a touchdown this year, the sophomore said that excelling on special teams could also help him earn more playing time on offense this season as he looks to make an impact in a crowded wide receiver room, one which is led by the same coach who is helping him excel on punt returns.

"You want to impress your position coach more because that's the guy who's also going to get you playing time on offense," Inniss said. "They say, 'You play better on special teams, you get more plays on offense.'"

But Day said Inniss doesn't have to worry about playing time this season, no matter what position he is lining up at on Saturdays. Instead, his hardworking, team-first mentality will make it hard for his head coach to take him off the field.

"He is going to be a big part of our offense this season," Day said. "We're going to keep getting him in the game and try to get the ball in his hands, because not only is he a playmaker, but he has a great way about him. He has a great energy about him, a physicality, a toughness, a grittiness that is just contagious. He's a guy you like to be around, and the guys really rally around him. So he'll be a big part of our offense this season."

McGuire Gets Kick Out Of Being Starting Punter

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Before the season opener against Akron, Ryan Day named freshman punter Nick McLarty the starter, but when fans were watching on Aug. 31 to see what kind of power his 6-7, 255-pound frame could put into a football, sophomore Joe McGuire trotted onto the field to kick it away on the Buckeyes' first drive. Day explained the decision after the game.

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

McGuire finished the game against Akron with three boots for a total of 134 yards (44.7 yards per punt) and a long of 51. He said his first experience of getting into a game in scarlet and gray was an exciting experience.

"It was pretty cool. There was a massive crowd, obviously," McGuire said. "I knew what to expect a little bit from following Jesse (Mirco) last year, backing him up, so I had warmed up on the ground and everything. But being out there is a different experience. It was unbelievable."

McGuire getting his chance was a surprise, especially given the expectations for McLarty. The excitement around McLarty began when he first visited Ohio State in the spring, where he would receive his scholarship offer, and he committed immediately after despite having plans to visit multiple schools when he first flew to the States from Australia.

When a punter with the stature of McLarty is on the roster, and a video makes its way around social media of that punter booting a ball 90 yards out of a stadium, it's natural to want to see what he can do when he gets into a game situation. However, even though Day himself is excited about the power in McLarty's leg, he acknowledged that what the Buckeyes need for the few times a punter will kick the ball away this season is consistency.

"We probably could have given Nick one down the stretch," Day said after the win. "In hindsight we probably could have done that and should have done that. 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."

McGuire said the competition came down to the wire and that he wasn't told that he would be the guy for Ohio State until late in the week leading up to the season opener. But it wasn't something that he didn't feel prepared for since he is always working out as if he's going to be on the field.

"I was pretty excited," McGuire said. "I've been training pretty hard so that no matter when my number is called I'm ready. You never know what could happen in a game, so I work to always be ready for the occasion. So I was excited initially, then I thought, 'All right, I've got to get myself ready to perform.'"

"Nick's a very good punter, and we were



FILE PHOTO

KICKING BACK — Joe McGuire has stepped into his role as the first-team punter after knowing little about American football growing up in Australia.

neck-and-neck the whole camp, essentially," McGuire said. "We just did our own thing. I went out and performed as well as I could, and he did the same, then whoever the coaches choose on the day of gets to punt."

After Mirco transferred to Vanderbilt following his Cotton Bowl performance of eight punts for an average of 48.2 yards per kick, by far his best performance of the season, McGuire was the only punter left on the roster. He knew it wasn't likely that he would just be handed the spot without any competition and figured Day would go out to find at least one more person to compete for the job. However, the sophomore didn't let that get in his way, and he embraced the competition when McLarty and Buffalo transfer Anthony Venneri came to Columbus.

"I was the only punter here at the time, so I was expecting it," McGuire said. "If that's what they think makes the team better, then great. Because at the end of the day, we just want to win. If that's what they want to give us the best chance to win, then so be it. As they say, iron sharpens iron. Having good competition is good for all three of us."

McGuire, like many other punters, had never played football before someone told him he should try it out. When he lived in his native Melbourne, Australia, he played Australian football and cricket. But since there aren't college sports there like there are in the United States, that drove him to look for more options, which ultimately ended up with him coming to Columbus.

"I grew up my whole life playing Australian football and cricket as well in the summers. I didn't even start punting until probably about three or four years ago," Mc-

Guire said. "But in Australian football, the main way to pass the ball is through kicking, which is very similar to punting."

"One of my friends just came to me and said, 'Mate, you've got a solid leg. Why don't you try this out?' And I did, not expecting anything. Then (Prokick coach Nathan Chapman) basically said to me 'Yeah, you should come and join us.'"

"There's no real college sport in Australia," he added. "I was lucky enough that I've visited America a few times and I've got some friends and family who have been here a lot, and I love the sport as well. I thought I might as well give it a try. I worked pretty hard with Prokick and Chapman, John Smith and Tim Gleeson back home for a few years, then luckily I got good enough. I knew a lot about the Buckeyes, and (Ohio State) said, 'Yeah, we think you could go here.' I was over the moon. It was fantastic."

Mirco was another Aussie punter who went through the Prokick system before coming to Ohio State, and while he wasn't the entire reason McGuire joined the Buckeyes, McGuire said it did help him make his decision and that Mirco helped him a lot last season when McGuire was backing him up.

"It definitely helped," McGuire said. "He was fantastic. He's been a great mentor. I still talk to him most days. It was invaluable having him around and following him for a year. I think it was the best thing that I could have done."

"A lot of what I learned from him is mind-set in the game, just following him around and seeing how it all works. I hadn't played American football before, so I didn't really know what to expect and he sort of showed

me the ropes. That's helped me the most. And little technique things as well."

Even though Mirco is gone, McGuire still feels like he has someone on the team he can relate to. Even though he and McLarty are competing for the same job, he's still someone McGuire can bond with.

"It's great. I love having him around. At least one person in the room knows what I'm saying, so that's nice," McGuire joked. "It's been good. We can talk about Australian footy as well and a bit of cricket."

McGuire was hoping that he would be able to get another chance in the game against Western Michigan since it would be one of the best chances this season that his family could watch him play halfway around the world. The 7:30 p.m. kickoff time in Columbus was at 9:30 a.m. the following morning in Australia, giving friends and family the chance to see him.

That hope became a reality on Sept. 7 when McGuire served as the starting punter again for the Buckeyes, booting three kicks for a 44.7-yard average.

Regardless of whether his family is watching or not, McGuire is off to a good start this season, with his average punt traveling 44.7 yards, which would be good for 19th in the country if he qualified for the leaderboard (minimum of 3.6 punts per game). But he's still likely looking to get that number up.

McGuire didn't have an average in mind when he was asked about what he wants to kick for this year. He only said he wanted it to be as far as he can manage.

"As far as I can kick it with as few return yards," McGuire said. "That's all I care about. Whatever helps the team the most. (44.7 yards per punt against Akron) wasn't too bad for my first game, but it was just one game. There's another 15 if we play our hand right. So my goal is as far as I can kick it with as few of return yards. That's all I care about."

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Marshall's Herd Of Transfers Ready For Bucks

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

When Marshall head coach Charles Huff met with the media before the Thundering Herd's Week 2 matchup against Virginia Tech, he talked about how impressive it was that the Hokies were able to retain so many players over the offseason who had produced for their team the year before.

Those compliments from Huff were likely straight from the heart because that's something he was unable to do going into the 2024 season. Marshall returns just three starters to its lineup this year, including just one on the offensive side of the ball.

Maybe that is a good thing for a team that underperformed to a record of 6-7 (3-5 Sun Belt) last season. One thing it has undoubtedly done is create competition in every position group, which has been obvious in the Herd's first two games.

In 2022, Marshall finished with a 9-4 overall record, a season that culminated in a 28-14 Myrtle Beach Bowl win over UConn. Another good season was expected, so after a disappointing year in 2023 – and losing six players to the NFL either through the draft or as undrafted free agents who signed with a team – it might have been a concerted effort to try to construct a new-look team from bits and pieces they could pull from the transfer portal, and they did so very effectively.

"We lost some really good players, no doubt about it, on both sides of the ball," Huff said be-

fore the season began. "But I think we've done a better job at closing the talent gap from the one to the two (on the depth chart). Does that mean that the ones are better than the ones last year? No. It just means that there's less of a drop-off from one to two, which should create a lot more competition."

Marshall brought in 45 new players over the offseason – including 14 incoming freshmen and 31 transfers – and without a doubt, it has created some competition.

Everyone who has witnessed a quarterback battle for their favorite team knows the saying, "If you've got two quarterbacks, you've got none." So what does it mean if a team has three quarterbacks?

Marshall played three in its season-opening 45-3 win over Stony Brook, those being Tulsa transfer Braylon Braxton (141 passing yards, two touchdowns), North Texas transfer Stone Earle (97 yards, two touchdowns) and redshirt sophomore Cole Pennington (52 yards, one touchdown), the son of former Thundering Herd standout quarterback and former 11-year NFL veteran Chad Pennington.

On Marshall's depth chart, it lists the three of them with an "or" between each of their names, indicating all three will likely receive time, although snaps to his point have been slanted toward the Herd's two more mobile quarterbacks, Braxton and Earle, who combined for an additional 73 rushing yards on 12 carries in the opener to Pennington's four on a single carry.

The rotation isn't a case of all three quar-

Get To Know ... Marshall

- **2024 Record:** 1-1.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Multiple; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 1, Defense 2, Specialists 0.
- **Head Coach:** Charles Huff, 4th year at Marshall, 23-18.
- **Series History:** 3rd meeting; Ohio State leads 2-0.
- **School Facts:** Location – Huntington, W.Va.; Enrollment – 12,862; Nickname – Thundering Herd; Colors – Kelly green, White; Conference – Sun Belt; Stadium – Joan C. Edwards Stadium (Surface – AstroTurf; Capacity – 30,475).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
A.J. Turner	14	222	15.9	1
Stone Earle	18	86	4.8	0
Jordan Houston	17	55	3.2	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Stone Earle	23-52	44.2	228	3-1
Braylon Braxton	7-11	63.6	141	2-0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
C. Fitzpatrick	8	170	21.3	2
Elijah Metcalf	7	72	10.3	2
Carl Chester	3	47	15.7	1
C. Montgomery	4	44	11.0	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 29.5
 Rushing Yards Per Game – 203.0
 Passing Yards Per Game – 210.5
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 413.5

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	STONY BROOK	W, 45-3
Sept. 7	at Virginia Tech	L, 31-14
Sept. 21	at Ohio State	TBA
Sept. 28	WESTERN MICHIGAN	TBA
Oct. 5	APPALACHIAN STATE	TBA
Oct. 12	at Georgia Southern	TBA
Oct. 17	GEORGIA STATE	7 p.m.
Nov. 2	LOUISIANA MONROE	TBA
Nov. 9	at Southern Miss.	TBA
Nov. 16	COASTAL CAROLINA	TBA
Nov. 23	at Old Dominion	TBA
Nov. 30	at James Madison	TBA
Dec. 7	Sun Belt Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Landyn Watson	7	13	20	1.0-1	0-0
Jaden Yates	4	15	19	0.5-0	0-0
Mike Green	5	9	14	3.5-23	3.5-23
Deeve Harris	1	12	13	0.5-1	0-0
AG McGhee	4	7	11	0-0	0-0
J.J. Roberts	4	7	11	0-0	0-0
J. Anderson	3	7	10	0-0	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Jordan Reagan	1	0	0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 17.0
 Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 151.0
 Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 144.0
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 295.0

terbacks being so close in talent that Huff can't decide who deserves to be on the field. Rather, it's something Huff believes can give the team an advantage because each of the three has different strengths, and he uses them when those strengths are needed.

After the win over Stony Brook, Huff said the plan was to build a game plan for the team they are playing that week and then to decide which of the three quarterbacks fits that game plan best, and that's who will see more time that game.

"We've got real competition in that room," Huff said. "We had planned to put Braylen in at

the end of the second quarter or the beginning of the second half to be able to change what we did. We talked about, 'Let's not try to force anything.' I thought as a whole, the quarterback room was efficient."

In two games this season – including the 31-14 loss to Virginia Tech on Sept. 7 – the Thundering Herd's leading passer is Earle, who earned the start against the Hokies and played throughout the entire loss. He is 23 of 52 passing for 228 yards and three touchdowns with one interception. With Earle's poor performance of 13 for 36 throwing the ball for 131 yards with a touchdown and an interception in Week 2, Huff might be looking at a different game plan going into the game against Ohio State.

One thing that Earle has been able to provide for the offense when he's on the field is the ability to tuck the ball and run – adding another 31 rushing yards in the loss – something Huff believes can make the entire team tougher to defend by forcing the defense to be prepared for it.

"I think it creates a lot of challenges for defenses when the quarterback can run," Huff said. "I think it also creates a lot of challenges for defenses when you have a quarterback that can get through his reads quickly."

The attitude that Huff and his quarterbacks have taken on this season is that efficiency is king. They won't try to force the big play and are perfectly happy with a long march down the field filled with short gains that lead to an eventual score.

"That's a big emphasis," Huff said. "Take care of the ball and be efficient. Explosions will come. The big plays will come. But if we can't be efficient and get bored with efficiency – that's where you want to be. It means you're taking what the defense is giving you and seeing what you need to see."

It's a similar situation at running back for

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OHIO STATE VS. MARSHALL

the Herd, with three of them earning a fair share of carries in the first two games. Red-shirt sophomore A.J. Turner leads the way so far with 14 carries for 222 yards, a 15.9 yards per carry average that is largely helped by an 80-yard touchdown run he had in the Week 1 blowout win.

Both Jordan Houston and Ethan Payne have also been on the field, with 17 carries for 55 yards from Houston and six carries and six carries for 24 yards from Payne. It's been a timeshare in the backfield that is also likely to continue against Ohio State, although Huff went into the season with the approach that they would be passing a lot more than they would be running after losing Rasheen Ali, their leading rusher in 2023 who ran for 1,135 yards and 15 touchdowns and was drafted by the Baltimore Ravens in the fifth round of the 2023 NFL draft.

"We've changed systems," Huff said. "I think the air-raid system will play more to our strengths, especially with where we are. We don't have the bell cow, Rasheen Ali. I've been in multiple really, really good offenses, and sometimes when you have (one) good player, you're a little bit handicapped because you're trying to find a way (to get them the ball). Then when you don't have him, you put so much time into that, you haven't developed the things around him. Now we've been able to develop the things around it."

The only pass catcher who is returning for the Herd is Charles Montgomery, who didn't actually start but was in the rotation enough to bring in 20 catches for 269 yards and a team-high three receiving touchdowns.

So far this season, Christian Fitzpatrick leads the team with eight catches for 170 yards and two touchdowns while Elijah Metcalf trails behind him with seven catches for 72 yards and two scores of his own.

It was very common last season for the Herd to be in 12 personnel, but with so many receivers who have playmaking ability they have moved to more often playing in 11 personnel, spreading the field more.

The offensive line is where the Herd's lone returning starter sits. Redshirt senior Logan Osburn is back on an offensive line that has been able to create some gaps in the running game to this point and has also performed well protecting the passer, giving up just three sacks compared to eight by the Herd defense.

"We've got a lot of new pieces, so the connectivity of them playing together is going to be important," Huff said. "I think part of the scheme will help them – the air raid system is about getting the ball out of the quarterback's hands quickly. The reality of it is there are about three schools in the country that can block for six, seven, eight seconds."

On the other side in the trenches, the Herd have had the opportunity to rotate many different players through because they are also trying to figure out who their best guys are there as well.

"Depth on the defensive line is something that we felt like we had coming in this year," Huff said after Week 1. "(Defensive line coach Ralph) Street did a really good job of rotating a bunch of guys. We're trying to see, with 45 new guys – who do we really have? What can they do in game situations? We played a lot of guys, so we had an opportunity to evaluate some of those guys.

"When you're good on defense, you have a good D-line," Huff said in the preseason. "So that was our focus going out in the transfer portal, 'How can we improve the depth of our

D-line?' We weren't as deep last year, so we weren't able to stop the run. So we'd get into situations where it's 50/50, 'Are they going to pass, or are they going to run?' It changes things."

The picture is becoming clearer for what the 2024 Marshall defense will look like going forward, and while the Buckeyes will likely still see a lot of rotation and substitutions when it comes to the game on Sept. 28, there will probably be more consistency than the Herd has shown to this point.

Ohio State should expect to see Jabari Ishmael and Mike Green bookending the defensive line with Jason Shuford and Chris Thomas on the interior. Marshall's front four was effective at stopping the run in its season opener, giving up 94 rushing yards on 47 carries, an average of 2.0 yards per carry. Of the seven rushers who had chances in that game, none of them had 3 yards per carry or more.

The Herd had a setback with their improved run defense in Week 2, allowing Bhayshul Tuten of the Hokies to rush for 120 yards and a touchdown while three other runners combined for 88 more yards. So as they will for every defense they go up against this season, Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson will be tough for Marshall to deal with.

At linebacker, redshirt junior Landyn Watson is playing next to Gahanna High School product Jaden Yates, both of whom are in the starting lineup for the first time. In two games, they have 20 and 19 tackles, respectively, the top two tacklers on the team

Due to the improvements Huff believes they made on the defensive line when it comes to stopping the run – which seems to be a big emphasis for the Herd head coach – he wouldn't be surprised if their linebackers don't show up much in the stat sheets despite the results from the first two games, but that would be more of an indication of the defensive line's efforts rather than a lack of production from Watson and Yates.

"Linebackers can do a really good job of being statistically irrelevant if the D-line is really good. If the D-line can fill gaps and make it really, really hard to run, it takes a lot of pressure off of the linebackers. They can play more free when they know the guys up front are going to be consistently in their gap, holding their gap and getting pushed."

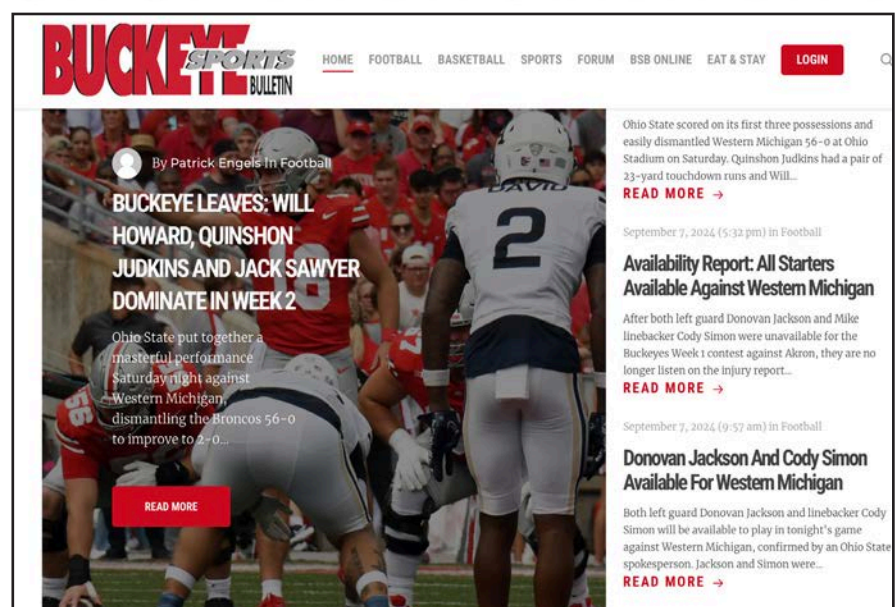
Josh Moten and AG McGhee both started for the Herd last year and returned to the secondary. McGhee finished the 2023 season sixth on the team in tackles with 46 along with three passes broken up and an interception, while Moten had 30 tackles (one for loss), a quarterback hurry, six passes defended and one interception.

They will be flanked by J.J. Roberts – who was injured for much of last season – at safety, Jacobie Henderson at cornerback and Jadarius Green-McKnight at slot corner, although there will be rotations on the defense just like there will be with the offense.

Huff is excited about the secondary since he thinks it improved as well over the offseason, whether that's due to another year of experience or adding a good player to the roster.

"I used to have hair when I took this job," Huff joked. "We ended up playing two freshmen last year, and you guys had probably as many head-scratchers as I did with AG and (cornerback) Ahmere Foster. The beauty of that is they're a year older, and they played a lot. If you really look as the season went on, they got better."

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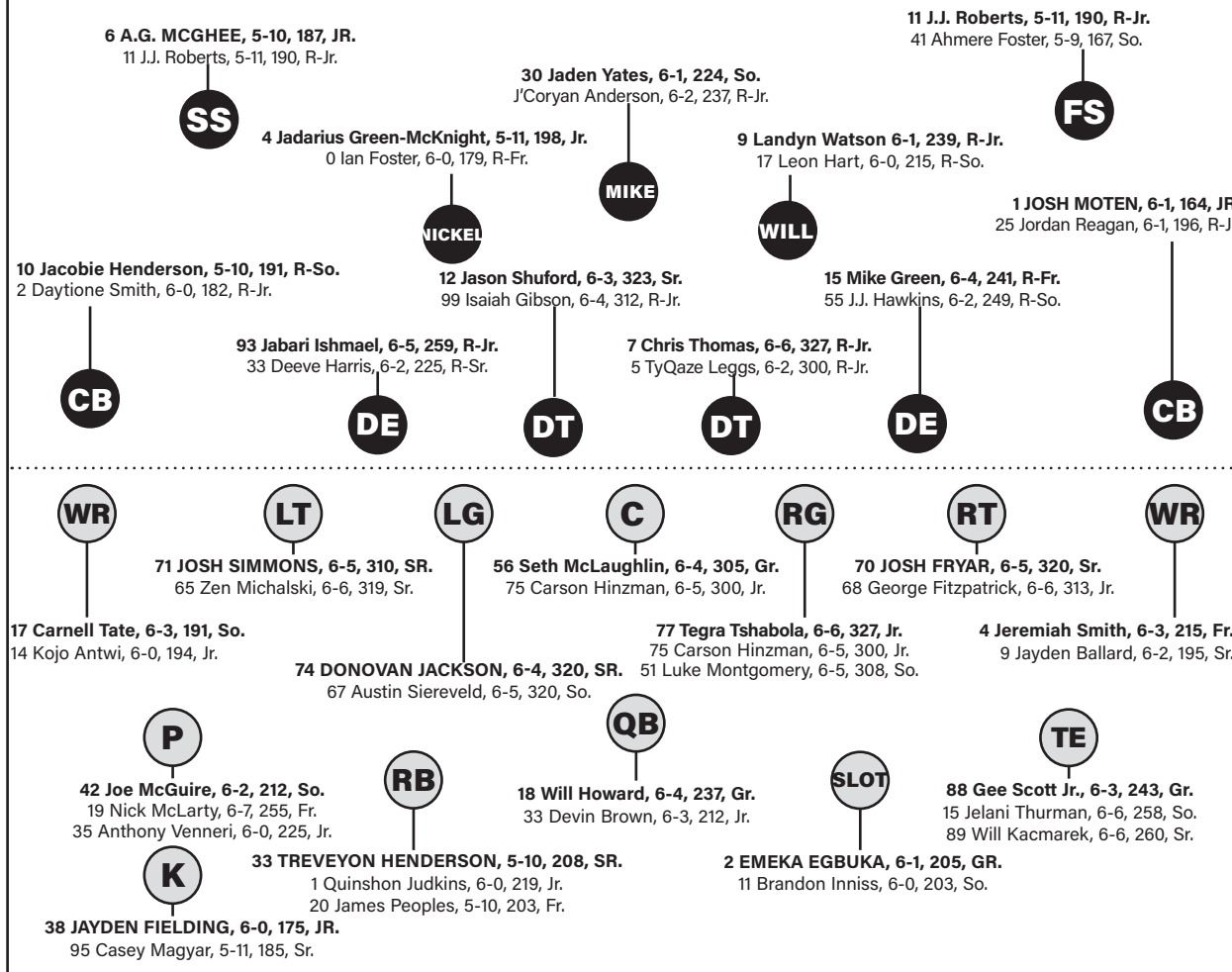
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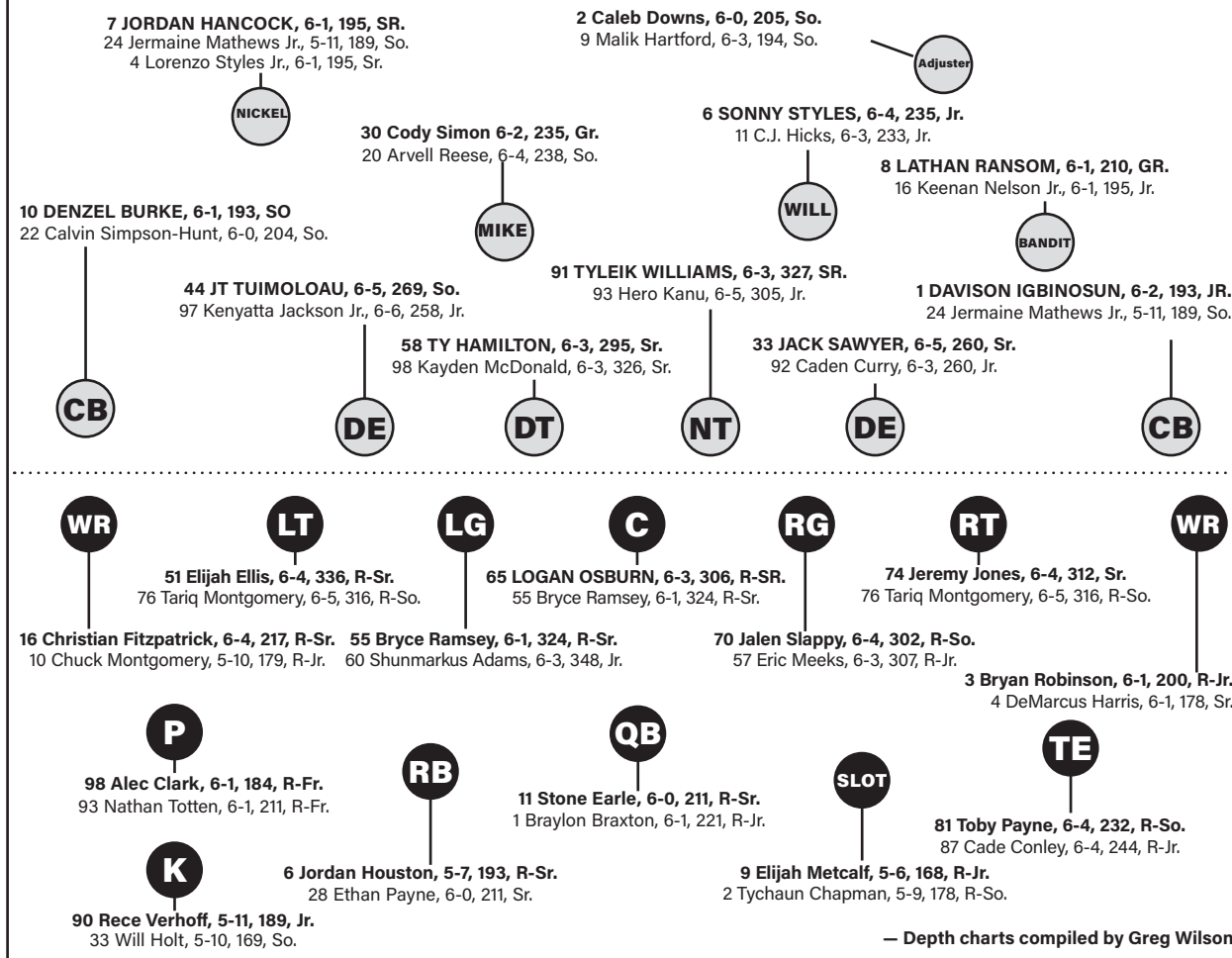


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN MARSHALL HAS THE BALL...



— Depth charts compiled by Greg Wilson

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. MARSHALL RUSH DEFENSE

Quinshon Judkins ran for 108 yards and two scores. TreVeyon Henderson chipped in with 66 yards and two touchdowns, and James Peoples in mop-up duty ran for 51 yards and a TD. The Buckeyes gained 273 yards, averaging 7.0 yards per attempt. Marshall opened the season with a 45-3 thrashing of Stony Brook in which the Thundering Herd gave up 94 rushing yards (2.0 per carry). Game two was a steep climb in competition when Marshall visited Blacksburg, Va., to take on Virginia Tech on Sept. 7, losing 31-14 to the Hokies. Virginia Tech had 51 rushes for 208 yards (4.1). The Thundering Herd have fully embraced the transfer portal. All 11 on the defensive line are transfers, including six newcomers in 2024, so the team is still jelling even though entering the season the interior line had 34 combined career starts. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

MARSHALL RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Thundering Herd ran for 259 yards against Stony Brook (7.2), led by A.J. Turner's career-high 119 yards on eight carries (14.9), including an 80-yard run. Against Virginia Tech the Herd gained 147 yards (5.7). Turner again cracked the 100-yard barrier (103), including a 69-yard romp. The Thundering Herd know how to run. They've had a 1,000-yard rusher in each of the past three seasons but they haven't faced a defense like OSU's that gave up 28 yards rushing (0.9) to Western Michigan and only 99 total yards – just five in the second half. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. MARSHALL PASS DEFENSE

The Buckeyes threw for 410 yards, led by Will Howard (18 of 26 for 292 yards, one TD). Jeremiah Smith continues to amaze. He had a 70-yard catch-and-run TD as part of his five catches for 119 yards. After Marshall allowed only 158 passing yards to Stony Brook, Virginia Tech posted 130 yards. TyQaze Leggs and Mike Green headline the pass rush, which has eight sacks this season. The linebackers had only six career starts at the start of the season, so the Buckeyes will look to take advantage. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

MARSHALL PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Stone Earle is the starter, but in the opener the Thundering Herd had three QBs throw TDs for the first time in the program since 1932. Earle and Braylon Braxton had two while Cole Pennington tossed one. The latter is the son of former Marshall quarterback Chad Pennington (1995-99), the No. 18 pick by the New York Jets in the 2000 NFL draft. Earle was 13 of 36 for 131 yards, a TD and an interception vs. the Hokies. The Buckeyes will be ready after limiting Western Michigan to 71 passing yards, including zero in the second half. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ian Foster had a 51-yard kick return vs. Stony Brook. Alec Clark averaged 40.1 yards on eight punts against Virginia Tech, and Marshall in that game blocked its first punt since 2022. Joe McGuire averaged 44.7 on three punts for the Buckeyes vs. Western Michigan. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

Fourth-year coach Charles Huff is the only Marshall coach in the FBS era to lead the Thundering Herd to a bowl game in each of his first three seasons. He has a 23-18 record with wins over No. 8 Notre Dame in 2022 and Virginia Tech the next season so he knows how to prepare for the big boys. For the Buckeyes, it's the final warmup before going to Michigan State for the Big Ten opener. **EDGE: MARSHALL.**

STAFF PREDICTION

Marshall, by the way, is idle Sept. 14 like the Buckeyes, so the Thundering Herd will be fresh and likely ready to employ a few wrinkles against the superiorly-talented Buckeyes. There could be a few anxious moments early for OSU, but ultimately to no one's surprise the Buckeyes will prevail with authority. **OHIO STATE 45, MARSHALL 7**

QB Fields Dreams Of Starting For Steelers

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Everyone seems to have an opinion of quarterback Justin Fields and what's best for him and the Pittsburgh Steelers.

The bottom line is the only voice that matters is that of head coach Mike Tomlin, who declared on Aug. 28 that the battle between newcomers to the organization was decided with former Denver Broncos quarterback Russell Wilson earning the start against the Atlanta Falcons in the Sept. 8 season opener.

"It was a difficult decision, but not difficult in a negative way, to be quite honest with you," Tomlin said. "The decision was difficult because of what they're capable of doing. Obviously, Russ' résumé is a unique one in terms of length and success, and that tends to play a factor in the decision-making, but not from a decision-maker's perspective. It's just the fruit of his labor. He's seen a lot and done a lot, and I think it was reflected in the way he played and conducted himself."

However, Tomlin's plan was put in jeopardy when Wilson was listed as questionable on the injury report two days before the game because of a lingering calf injury.

"The most important thing is tons of treatment and getting ready to see what I can do each day and take it day by day," Wilson said on Sept. 6. "I'm going to do everything I can to be ready."

"If I can go, I'm going to go and try to do everything I can to help us win. If not, I'm going to do everything I can to help us win in that way too."

Fields, who grew up just outside of Atlanta in Kennesaw, Ga., and played one season for Georgia before transferring to Ohio State, started against the Falcons after Wilson was placed on the inactive list the day of the season opener.

It wasn't pretty and the most positive thing about Fields' performance was he didn't turn the ball over, enabling the Steelers to defeat the Falcons 18-10 on six field goals by Chris Boswell (57, 51, 44, 56, 40 and 25 yards).

Fields fumbled the snap from center on his first play but picked up the ball and gained 3 yards. He totaled 57 rushing yards on 14 carries (4.1 average) and completed 17 of 23 passes for 156 yards, 40 coming on a throw to George Pickens. Fields was sacked twice for 23 yards.

"It feels great to start the season 1-0," he told FOX Sports. "Of course, we have a lot to work on, but I'm proud of the whole team coming out, executing. Big shout-out to the defense keeping us in there and creating turnovers."

He was prepared whether he started or not. "Just keep the same mentality," he said. "The biggest thing is I've been here before. I've started a lot of games."

Prior to the game, Fields said being ready in a pinch is part of the job.

"I learned my rookie year how fast things can change," Fields said. "I remember my third game, rookie season, Andy Dalton was just running out of bounds. It looked like a normal play, and he tweaked his knee. Right then and there I was in. I always prepare like I'm the starter."

Fields Day

Prior to the injury news, former players

and commentators alike spent the countdown to the Steelers' first game wondering a) whether Fields should start the first game, b) when he should take over and c) how to best utilize Fields as a non-starter.

Tomlin added to the conversation on Aug. 28 by going on "The Rich Eisen Show" to issue a playful warning to the Falcons head coach.

"My friend Raheem Morris better be ready for a Justin Fields package," Tomlin said. "There's too much talent to be sitting around watching."

Fields, the former Ohio State signal caller (2019-20), spent three seasons with the Chicago Bears after being drafted 11th in the 2021 NFL draft. In 40 games with the Bears (38 starts), Fields threw for 6,674 yards with 40 touchdowns and 30 interceptions while rushing for 2,220 yards and 14 scores.

It could be debated that Tomlin was trying to play mind games with Morris and use Fields as a decoy. Or maybe there really was a package to get Fields snaps even though Wilson was the presumed starter when he said it.

Either way, Morris had some fun with it a few days later.

"Mike told me to prepare for Justin Fields, so we did," he said. "Russell's going to go out there and present the challenge he's always presented to teams. But there are roles that guys are going to play, so expect the expected."

"And that's what we'll do. So, we'll go out there and prepare."

Morris even commended Tomlin's gamesmanship.

"That's a nice way to make me waste time, and he's the master at it," Morris said. "He's conducting a master class on Fields, or he's not and Fields is going to show up."

It should be noted that Tomlin and Morris go way back, having been on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers staff together from 2002-05.

But even if Tomlin was messing with his old friend, there's a reason it makes sense to have Fields involved.

Last season he completed 227 of 370 passes for 2,562 yards with 16 touchdowns and rushed 124 times for 657 yards with four touchdowns.

Despite missing four games due to injury, Fields ranked second in rushing yards among quarterbacks (657), was tied for ninth in 20-plus yard touchdown passes (eight) and was tied for 16th in completions of 20-plus yards (45).

In Week 14 vs. Detroit, he surpassed 2,000 career rushing yards to become the second-fastest quarterback in NFL history to reach 2,000 yards on the ground (36 games) to Lamar Jackson's 33.

Fields is also the third quarterback in NFL history with at least 2,000 rushing yards in his first three seasons (Jackson - 2,906; Cam Newton - 2,032) and became the second-fastest to reach 5,000 passing yards and 2,000 rushing yards (Jackson, 35 games), doing so in 36 games.

Impressive numbers, yes, but that didn't satisfy the Bears, who wanted an upgrade and drafted 2023 Heisman Trophy winner Caleb Williams out of USC after trading Fields to the



Justin Fields

Steelers on March 16 for a sixth-round selection in 2025.

In Or Out?

The problem for Fields was the day before the trade, the Steelers signed free-agent Wilson to a one-year contract after he spent two seasons with the Broncos. The nine-time Pro Bowl selection spent his first 10 seasons with Seattle, guiding the Seahawks to a 43-8 win over Denver in Super Bowl XLVIII (48) on Feb. 2, 2014.

Wilson, who turns 36 on Nov. 29, threw for 3,070 yards with 26 touchdowns against eight interceptions last season.

Fields, 25, was popular and respected by his Bears teammates, but he knew management coveted Williams and his time in Chicago had an expiration date.

"I'm not naive to that fact," Fields said in May. "I can read body language and stuff like that. It wasn't really just a shock to where it's like, 'Oh, I got traded.' I knew what was going to happen beforehand. I'm just glad I got traded to the spot that I wanted to be at."

"It was definitely a relief to kind of be on a team and know where I'm going to be."

Tomlin at the time of the trade made no promises to Fields about playing time and in fact had all but coronated Wilson as QB1 unless Fields could beat him out in the preseason. Fields welcomed the challenge.

"I'm not the same quarterback as I was last year, and I'm not the same quarterback I was even yesterday," he said. "So, I'm going to continue to get better each and every day. I'm nowhere near my ceiling, for sure."

Wilson was hampered by a calf injury that occurred during a conditioning drill on July 24, and in the preseason games he took only 25 snaps compared to Fields' 56. In the final game against Detroit on Aug. 24, Wilson started but was in for five plays before Fields took over.

In the preseason, Field was 19 of 27 for 199 yards, and he rushed 13 times for 48 yards.

ESPN analyst Dan Orlovsky said on the network's "Get Up" show that he doesn't like the idea of Tomlin having special plays for Fields while Wilson remains the starter.

"I'm always hesitant with this because the rhythm of an offense matters so much, especially for an offense that's not going to be incredibly explosive," said Orlovsky. "And if you take the quarterback off the field and you bring Justin on and then it doesn't go well, now a noisy situation becomes an even bigger one because that's when you can start to fracture a locker room."

"As much as there is the appeal to do it in the red zone, maybe, but I'm so hesitant in always doing that."

"I understand the appeal of it, and I understand the benefit of it in certain situations. But I always think the rhythm of the offense is more paramount than trying to get too cute."

For Fox Sports analyst Emmanuel Acho, the fact Wilson was named one of the captains was a bad move.

"I have a huge issue with it," Acho said on "The Facility" show. "Here's my issue with it. Russell Wilson, I believe, is one of the greatest men I have ever met in my life. We came into the National Football League together. Russell Wilson is probably one of the best leaders of men in society. My issue is this: Don't name a

captain you might bench."

His point is that if Fields outperforms Wilson, the locker room could be divided even though the Steelers have been through this before with two recent quarterbacks, Kenny Pickett and Mitch Trubisky, named captains despite tenuous holds on the starting job.

Former Steelers QB Ben Roethlisberger opined on his "Footbahlin'" podcast: "My concern is if Russ struggles, that Justin fan base is going to start to grow and they are going to be - it happened last year. Mitch Trubisky was the starter and as soon as he starts doing bad, they are yelling for Kenny. Then Kenny struggled and they started to chant for Mitch. When you have two guys, it can get tricky."

Dallas Cowboys defensive coordinator Mike Zimmer didn't weigh in directly on the Steelers' QB battle, but in an interview with the Minneapolis Star Tribune on Sept. 2, he belittled Fields' NFL career.

Zimmer was the Minnesota Vikings head coach when general manager Rick Spielman, the older brother of former Buckeye great Chris Spielman, tried to trade up to draft Fields, a move that Zimmer disagreed with and helped create a rift between the two.

"The first round, (Spielman) tried to trade up for Justin Fields, who hasn't done anything," Zimmer said.

In a delicious twist, the Steelers host the Cowboys in a Sunday night matchup on Oct. 6.

Looking Ahead

Fields has a chance to be the starter by then. At least that's what Albert Breer of the Monday Morning Quarterback wrote:

"It does make sense for Pittsburgh to start the season with Russell Wilson at quarterback. If the coaches think it's close, and they do, and there's doubt with each guy, it's logical to give yourself two shots at getting the most important position on the field right."

"It's much easier, for obvious reasons, to go from Wilson to Fields at midseason than it would be the other way around. In fact, had Mike Tomlin picked Fields, there'd be some questions as to whether you could carry Wilson on the roster at all."

"In this scenario, they'll get a look at what a work-in-progress offense looks like with Wilson. If it doesn't work? Well, this is a roster that's been through change at quarterback in consecutive seasons already and a roster, I'm told, that really likes and respects Fields."

Breer, an Ohio State graduate, noted the Steelers have started Trubisky, Pickett and Mason Rudolph in the past two seasons with little success.

"This isn't anyone's first rodeo in Pittsburgh, and Fields took some fundamental changes that the offensive coaches gave him (one being a return to the type of footwork he'd used at Ohio State) and really worked on them over the past few weeks of camp," Breer wrote. "It was enough to have some folks internally push for Fields to start. There was plenty of merit to the idea. But the way it is now, again, to give yourself two shots also makes plenty of sense."

"And if that leads Fields to starting in Week 5 or 8 or 12, I wouldn't be surprised."

Premium Pricing Genesis More Than Century Ago

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 1904 season as the Ohio State program had a new coach, college football had new rules, and the university came up with a novel way to increase revenue.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Ohio State athletic department officials might think they were being creative a few years back when they introduced premium pricing for marquee football games. But the practice of charging more money for games against bigger-name opponents actually dates back more than a century to the 1904 season when the university was trying to come up with new ways to fund an ever-growing program.

Ticket prices for games at Ohio Stadium this fall range from \$46 for the least expensive seat to watch the Buckeyes take on Western Michigan to \$458 for the most expensive ticket for the annual showdown against Michigan scheduled for Nov. 30.

Considering the fact that \$458 in 1904 is worth nearly \$16,000 today, university officials back then could not in their wildest dreams have guessed anyone would be willing to cough up that much money for a single ticket to an Ohio State football game regardless of the opponent. But they did harbor the opinion that fans would be willing to pony up a little more cash to watch the Buckeyes take on opponents that exhibited a little more pizzazz.

Therefore, since nine games during the 1904 season were to be played at home, members of the Ohio State Athletic Board agreed unanimously to do away with the practice of selling season tickets, instead offering individual game tickets at varying prices.

Such in-state opponents as Otterbein, Miami University, Muskingum and Denison held at 25 cents per ticket – the same price for single-game tickets as in previous years – while games against slightly-stronger programs such as Case, Illinois and Kenyon were bumped up to 50 cents. For the marquee games of the season against Michigan and the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the price was the princely sum of \$1 per ticket.

Not only did ticket prices go up, so did the number of available seats at University Field. The Athletic Board voted to add an additional 1,500 bleacher seats to the facility, increasing capacity to approximately 2,000.

In addition to accommodating more fans, and asking them to pay a little more for watching the Buckeyes, university officials knew they would have to put a better product on the field. The program had burned through five head coaches (some historians would say six) in eight seasons, a period that had produced a decent enough win-loss record of 45-26-7. But the team continued to struggle against stronger competition such as Michigan amid complaints that the sport was too dangerous and should be abolished at the college level.

Ohio State approached 21-year-old Edwin R. Sweetland to become player-coach in the spring of 1896. Sweetland had played one season at Union College in New York, but left that program despite being named team cap-



FILE PHOTO

EARLY SUCCESS — Edwin R. Sweetland was wooed several times by the Ohio State administration to become the football coach before finally accepting the position in 1904.

tain for the following year.

Sweetland reportedly visited Columbus to meet with university officials, but eventually spurned the overtures made by Ohio State, and instead chose to play at Cornell for legendary head coach Glenn "Pop" Warner.

Warner was not yet a coaching legend, having just graduated in 1894 from Cornell at the ripe old age of 23 – hence the nickname of "Pop" because he was among the oldest students on campus. He would later become head coach and athletic director at Carlisle before winning three national championships at the University of Pittsburgh between 1915 and 1918, and one more at Stanford in 1926.

Sweetland played tackle for Warner and the Big Red beginning in 1897, and was good enough to earn third-team All-America honors in 1898 from national sports columnist Walter Camp.

Meanwhile, Ohio State was left in a bind. Officials were so sure that Sweetland was going to take the head coaching job, they had no backup plan for the 1896 season. Former head coach Jack Ryder, who had left the university to establish a preparatory school for boys in Columbus, suggested Charles Hickey, a fellow alum of Williams College in Massachusetts, and the university hired Hickey almost solely on Ryder's recommendation.

There was one hitch, though. Hickey wasn't available until the second week of October.

Stepping into the void was Holway "Sid" Farrar, whose main claim to fame was outstanding play as a fullback for Starling Medical College – located inside the St. Francis Hospital in downtown Columbus – in the only football game the school ever played. Farrar

was credited with converting two extra points during a 10-0 victory against Ohio Medical College in 1895.

Farrar had intended to play for the Buckeyes during the fall of 1896, but instead took charge of the Ohio State team practices, and was the de facto head coach during the season opener, a 24-0 win against Ohio Medical. Hickey arrived in Columbus on the Monday after the game, and took control of the team while Farrar became a footnote in football history.

Farrar left the Buckeyes and returned to Starling, where he received his medical degree in 1898. He had a practice for many years in Columbus and also taught at his alma mater. In 1921, he received a patent for a lighting fixture he had designed to better illuminate operating rooms.

Back at Ohio State, Hickey insisted upon installing an entirely new system that didn't always work, and the Buckeyes finished the 1896 season with a 5-5-1 record. After the season, Hickey left the program to pursue a law career, triggering a series of coaches making their way to Columbus, none of whom lasted more than two seasons.

The football program itself weathered a major storm in 1901 that threatened its very livelihood when calls for its abolishment came in the wake of the death of star player John Sigrist, who suffered a broken neck during a late October game against Western Reserve.

Amid a national debate, during which one newspaper used the tragedy of Sigrist's death to opine that "the price paid was too high for the satisfaction that is to be gained from the game," the OSU Faculty Council established a committee to examine the risks of continuing

the football program.

It might well have ruled for abolition of the sport until a member of Sigrist's family came forward. Charles Sigrist, who also played football for the Buckeyes, had withdrawn from school following the death of his older brother and returned to the family farm about 90 miles northeast of Columbus.

But he sent word to university officials to say that it was his wish, as well as that of his family, that football continue at Ohio State. Shortly after that, the committee voted 18-8 to continue the football program.

Three years later, after two more coaching changes, the university approached Sweetland for a second time with an offer that was significantly different than it had been in 1896. The head coaching job was being expanded to include training of athletes in other sports in addition to football.

Sweetland had been coaching in his native New York, including two seasons at Syracuse. But he was always looking for new challenges, and when Ohio State offered an annual salary of \$1,500 (equal to about \$53,000 today) as well as the expanded duties, he accepted.

Sweetland's methods were markedly different from his predecessors. He believed football to be as much a mental as physical sport, and introduced his concepts by first walking through plays so that each player could learn their assignments without contact. He also outlined his schemes on a blackboard, and often quizzed his team with written exams on what they had just seen.

"His methods seem to be catching on," reported *The Lantern* just before the 1904 season began. "Players seem more engaged, and it is widely thought that a team coached by Ivy League product E.R. Sweetland will be a pleasant team to watch indeed."

That turned out to be something of an understatement – at least as far as the first month of the season was concerned.

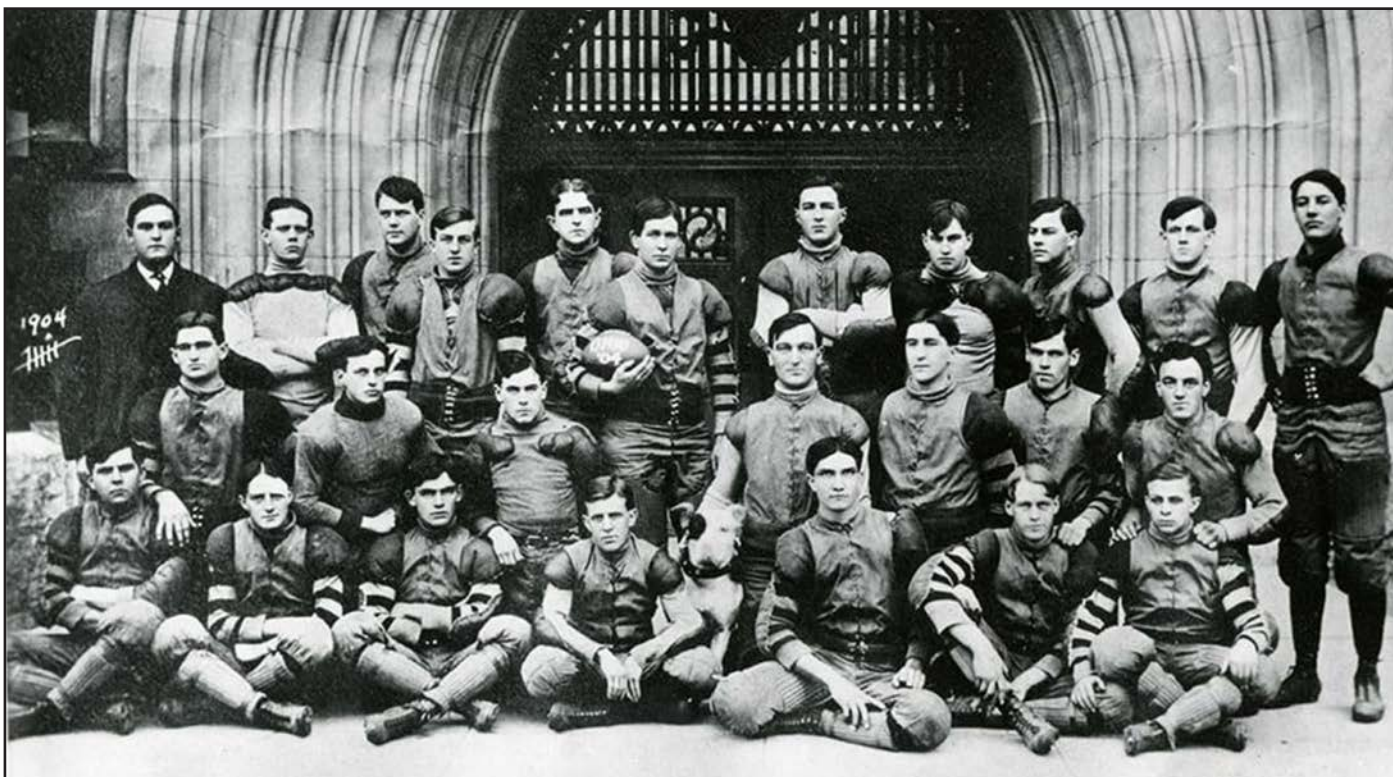
Streak Of Shutouts

On a cool, crisp late September afternoon, the Buckeyes rolled to a 34-0 victory against Otterbein in the 1904 season opener. The *Lantern* estimated the overflow crowd at nearly 3,000 at the newly expanded University Field, reporting "those who couldn't find seats ringed around the field several persons deep."

The following Saturday, another huge crowd cheered on the Buckeyes as they steamrolled their way to an 80-0 win against Miami. It was the first-ever meeting between the in-state rivals, and still ties for the fourth-highest scoring output in Ohio State program history.

The total is even more remarkable since touchdowns in 1904 were worth only five points. Rule changes beginning that season also reduced field goals from five points to four, while all conversions – running, passing or kicking – were worth one point. Safeties were still scored as two points. (Field goals would not be worth the current standard of three points until 1909 with touchdowns changing from five to six points in 1912.)

Four days after running roughshod over Miami, the Buckeyes hosted Muskingum College for a rare Wednesday afternoon game. The home crowd was notably smaller, but the outcome was similar to the first two – a 46-0 wipeout of the Muskies. Three days later, the refrain was the same with a 24-0 victory



FILE PHOTO

ALL FOR ONE — The 1904 team was 4-0 until losing to Michigan, 31-6, and the Buckeyes finished the season with a 6-5 record.

against Denison.

Ohio State was a perfect 4-0 to start the season, and had outscored its opponents by a 184-0 margin. That wasn't exactly unexpected, though, since the Buckeyes entered the season with a combined all-time record of 11-3-3 against their four in-state rivals. But looming on the horizon was three-time defending national champion Michigan, off to its own 4-0 start by outscoring its opposition by a lopsided margin of 248-0.

The Wolverines were led by future College Football Hall of Fame head coach Fielding Yost, who was in his fourth season in Ann Arbor with a nearly unblemished record of 37-0-1. What's more, Yost's squads had been nicknamed "The Point-A-Minute Teams" for their penchant for running up scores against lesser competition. When the Wolverines came to Columbus in mid-October 1904, they had allowed just six points in their previous 16 games while scoring 813.

That didn't seem to deter Sweetland, nor did the fact Ohio State was 0-4-1 and had been outscored by a 177-0 margin in the nascent series against Michigan.

"What has passed has passed," the coach told The Lantern. "The boys are in good spirits, and we expect a good, close game. There is no reason to expect otherwise."

Pregame ceremonies including musical performances, balloons and a lengthy parade simply added to the festivities, but once the game itself began, a jampacked University Field crowd estimated at nearly 8,000 looked on in near silence when the Buckeyes' shutout streak ended with an early Michigan touchdown.

But the sullen mood suddenly changed early in the second half when OSU fullback Bill Marquardt picked up a fumble near midfield and returned it the distance for a touchdown.

With a deafening roar ringing in his ears, Ralph Hoyer came on to kick the extra point, giving the Buckeyes a 6-5 lead and upping the decibel count even more. Not only had Ohio State scored its first points against its

archival, it marked the first lead ever for the Buckeyes in the series.

Unfortunately, the euphoria didn't last long. Michigan halfback Willie Heston scored three second-half touchdowns, and the Wolverines eventually ran away with a 31-6 victory. The importance of Ohio State's ability to finally dent the scoreboard against Michigan was not lost, however.

"The following day," longtime OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB, "the sports section of the Detroit News carried a headline that read, 'Ohio Scored On Michigan,' implying that Ohio State's touchdown was more significant than Michigan winning the game."

Yost was apparently not amused. The following Saturday, his team punished West Virginia to the tune of a 130-0 final score on its way to a fourth consecutive national championship.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes took a more modest 16-6 win against Case the following weekend to move their record to 5-1 for the season. But that represented the high-water mark for 1904. Back-to-back shutout losses to Indiana and Illinois were followed by a 4-2 loss at Oberlin that dropped Ohio State's all-time record to 3-8 against the Yeomen.

The season ended with an 11-5 win against old foe Kenyon, and then a 23-0 Thanksgiving Day loss to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The Indians were a formidable opponent in 1904, but not yet the powerhouse they would become when Warner returned to the program in 1907 after a three-year absence with a roster that included the legendary Jim Thorpe.

Despite a 6-5 finish in 1904, the Buckeyes shared the Ohio Conference championship with Case, and Sweetland was recommended for retention the following year. It didn't hurt that he received ringing endorsements from university president William Oxley Thompson as well as a newly formed campus association of athletes known as Varsity "O."

In 1905, the Buckeyes played a 12-game schedule for the first time, and finished with an 8-2-2 record, after which The Lantern

reported, "Coach Sweetland has won the respect and confidence of all the men under him." That included the OSU track team, which saw a spike in performance thanks to Sweetland's training program, as well as the men's basketball team, which won the Ohio Conference championship.

Not everyone was in the coach's corner, however. There was another loss to Michigan

— this time by a 40-0 final score — and there were accusations against Sweetland for "improper influences used in securing athletes." In other words, recruiting violations during an era when recruiting was strongly discouraged.

Two stars for Sweetland, backfield mates Joseph Lantry and Harley Kirby — natives of Kansas and Indiana, respectively — had previously played at Notre Dame and each had left South Bend under questionable circumstances. Lantry left Ohio State after the 1905 football season and resurfaced at Notre Dame the following semester, while Kirby stayed in Columbus long enough to star on Sweetland's track team. The following year, Kirby joined the Massillon Tigers professional football team, making him perhaps the first former OSU player to play pro football.

Sweetland enjoyed his time at Ohio State, but admitted the criticism bothered him. He left campus following the 1905-06 academic year and took over the program at Miami University. He later made coaching stops at Kentucky State College (now the University of Kentucky) and West Virginia, and also coached basketball at Kentucky and Tulane as well as track at Colgate and Tulane.

Sweetland left coaching in the late 1910s, and returned with his wife, Hester, to his hometown of Dryden, N.Y., where he became a farmer and part-time lawyer. He also participated in community service as a member of the local draft board, a livestock superintendent at the New York State Fair, and a town supervisor. He also frequented the local high school's athletic facilities, offering tidbits of advice to any coach who might listen.

Sweetland continued to live in his hometown until his death on Oct. 21, 1950, at the age of 75.

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TIMPOND, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein

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OSU At Risk Of Losing Five-Star CB Offord

Ohio State still holds the No. 1 recruiting class in the 2025 cycle, a spot it has had for a while, and that is in large part due to how well the Buckeyes have done with recruiting in the secondary. They landed commitments from Houston North Shore five-star Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170) and Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) – the No. 1 and No. 3 cornerbacks in the 2025 class, respectively – in the early months of the year, but they are still in the long process of trying to hold onto them before signing day.

"It went good," Offord told 247Sports. "The crowd stood out. They were good. They only gave up three points. That's not bad for a college level. That's pretty good."

Offord said that he is still currently committed to Ohio State and is just enjoying the process of recruitment. During the month of June, he took official visits to Ohio State, Alabama, Auburn and Oregon. He has been on multiple visits to Auburn, and some recruiting experts believe the Tigers could be the favorite to land the cornerback by the time the signing period rolls around, although the Ducks still seem to be a factor as well.

Recruiting analyst Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop previously thought that there was nothing to worry about for Ohio State when it came to Offord, but now he's beginning to have second thoughts.

"I've been saying all along that I thought Ohio State was going to keep him, for sure," Greene told BSB. "But now I don't know. It kind of seems like things are turning there. I can understand a kid from Birmingham maybe wanting to flip to Alabama, that part I get. He's also visited Oregon, and that's attractive – they pay. But Auburn is really surprising to me. I won't be surprised if he commits to them by (Sept. 16).

"But it really doesn't make sense," Greene added. "I mean, they're not a great program. They're not really developing NFL corners. He must be comfortable

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	

there. He's been there a lot."

If Offord does flip from Ohio State, the Buckeyes' top class they have held for so long is in jeopardy, and their extremely strong cornerback group loses a big piece of what made it so great. Greene said he's not sure where they go at the position in the 2025 class if they do lose the five-star.

"I thought they were pretty much set here. I kind of thought that they had taken too many safeties and not enough corners," Greene said. "Now if you lose Offord, you're really set back there. I would probably look in-state to Columbus Walnut Ridge four-star cornerback and Purdue commit Dawayne Galloway (6-1, 175). I don't think they liked him all that much

though.

"I have no idea if they're doubling back on game film, senior tape to look at him, but that's a guy that I think they could get, and I think he's a pretty darn good player, too. But I never got the feeling that they thought that he was a big-time player.

"So, I don't know. It's just the nature of where we are right now. Things aren't the way they used to be, that's for sure. Maybe they just redo their board and see who's out there and go after somebody that's committed to another big-time program. It's all fair game until someone puts their signature on paper. This will be a tough one, because Offord, he's a superstar and

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

It seems at this point that Sanchez is fully committed, although there is still a lot of time before the early signing period, but Offord – the No. 9 player in the country – is going to be someone whom the Buckeyes are going to have to fight to keep around.

He went on a visit to Auburn during Week 1 for its Big Cat Weekend recruiting event when the Tigers beat Alabama A&M 73-3 on Aug. 31, and he enjoyed his time there.



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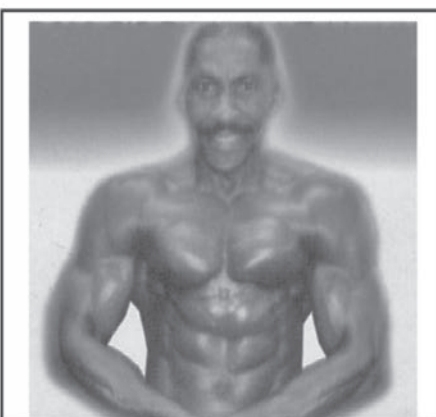
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OSU Football 2026 Commitment

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

those guys don't grow on trees."

With a few months to go still, cornerbacks coach Tim Walton and the Buckeyes are going to have to work hard to keep Offord committed in the 2025 class.

2027 QB Edmunds Down To Top Four

While it seems like Ohio State could be set at quarterback for the near future, it's still not too early to be preparing even further down the line, and the Buckeyes are currently a favorite for one of the top quarterbacks in the 2027 class.

On Sept. 2, it was revealed that Huntington Beach, Calif., quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200) was down to his final four schools, which are Michigan, Penn State, Ohio State and Texas.

Edmunds was at one of Ohio State's early June camps, which is where he initially received his offer from the Buckeyes, and since then they have been able to turn themselves into one of the favorites.

"OSU has been one of my dream schools since Day 1," Edmunds told 247Sports. "They have a great group of coaches in the QB room, so it only makes sense as to why they have such a stacked room right now. They're a national contender every year."

247Sports composite rankings aren't calculated for any 2027 recruits to this point, but 247Sports itself has Edmunds ranked as the No. 14 player in the class and the No. 2 quarterback as BSB went to press.

Greene was able to see Edmunds throw at Ohio State's camp and was very impressed with what he saw.

"I did see him and he looks like he's about 9 years old, but everyone looks young to me," Greene joked about the sophomore. "He's good. He's really good.

I can see why they're chasing him hard. I sure would too. I mean it's really early to start – 2027, he's just a baby. But I'm going to tell you what: That dude, he looks special to me.

"Now, can you get him all the way from California? I don't see why not. But my gosh, does he throw the ball nice. When you look at that kid as a 2027 recruit, when does he hit the field for Ohio State? Five years from now, six years from now. So that's tough for me to project someone that young, but I can see why they're chasing him. He's got all the tools. He's got everything he needs to be that pocket passer that Ryan Day really likes."

Quarterbacks normally fly off the recruiting board very quickly, sooner than any other positions overall, but in 2026 that pattern seemed to speed up even faster, and it seems like it could be the same thing for the 2027 class.

As BSB went to press, the Buckeyes still didn't have a commitment from a 2026 quarterback and were not expected to get one anytime soon. It's possible that with the depth they have at the position right now, they could skip a year for quarterbacks. In that case, Day and his staff would likely want to make a big splash in the 2027 class, which could be Edmunds.

The Buckeyes have earned two crystal balls for Edmunds in recent weeks, one from 247Sports national recruiting analyst Greg Biggins on Aug. 27 and another from 247Sports mountain region recruiting analyst Blair Angulo on Sept. 2, so things are trending well for Ohio State. He is reportedly hoping to make a visit to Columbus for a game day in the month of October when Nebraska visits the Buckeyes on Oct. 26.

As a freshman at Huntington Beach, Edmunds threw for 2,691 yards and 24

touchdowns and stood out at the Elite 11 regional in Los Angeles in the offseason, showing he was comfortable both in the pocket and making throws on the run.

OSU Offers 2026 WR Murph

As BSB went to press, Ohio State's lone wide receiver commit in the 2026 class is Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), but wide receivers coach Brian Hartline is looking to add to that.

Columbia (S.C.) Irmo four-star wide-out Donovan Murph (6-2, 180) was at the Buckeyes' 52-6 win over Akron on Aug. 31 and was seen on the field talking to Day and Hartline. The day after the game, Murph posted on social media that he had received an offer from Ohio State.

It's one of 30 offers that Murph has received so far, including from Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State and many others.

He is currently ranked the No. 224 recruit in the country, the No. 37 wide receiver and the fourth-best player in the state of South Carolina. In his sophomore high school season he finished with 57 catches for 1,084 yards and 17 touchdowns. So far, through two weeks of the 2024 season, Murph has caught 16 passes for 227 yards and one touchdown, the score coming in Irmo's 35-27 Week 2 win over James F. Byrnes on Aug. 30 when he had 11 catches and 160 yards.

2026 DE Griffin-Haynes Planning OSU-UM Visit

Rolesville, N.C., four-star defensive end Zavion Griffin-Haynes (6-6, 220) told 247Sports the week before Western Michigan came to Columbus that he is planning to come back to Columbus when Michigan comes to town on Nov. 30 this season.

Griffin-Haynes earned an offer from Ohio State when he came up for one of the Buckeyes' camps in June, where he said he enjoyed being coached by Ohio State

defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

"It was great," Griffin-Haynes said. "He worked me until I was tired. I kept going back-to-back, even if I was tired. He told me, 'Keep going, finish the drill.'"

"Coach Johnson told me to come, and I wanted to work," he added. "Being coached by Coach Johnson, he coached Nick Bosa, Joey Bosa, so I wanted to experience that for myself."

He has offers from 22 Division I schools including Auburn, Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, Ole Miss, Penn State, Tennessee and UCLA. He is tabbed as the No. 114 overall prospect in the 2026 class, the 11th-best edge rusher and the No. 9 player in the state of North Carolina.

When he spoke to the media after the camp, it was before he had officially received his offer from Ohio State, but even then he said the Buckeyes were his top choice at the time.

"It would be great," he said when asked what an offer from the Buckeyes would mean for him. "Ohio State is the top school on my list at the moment. So it would be great."

Johnson and the Buckeyes have had a successful 2025 cycle so far when it comes to recruiting on the defensive line, landing commitments from Enterprise, Ala., four-star edge rusher Zion Grady (6-4, 235); Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive lineman London Merritt (6-3, 250); Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star defensive lineman Maxwell Roy (6-3, 285); Newberry, Fla., four-star defensive lineman Jarquez Carter (6-2, 284); and Matthews (N.C.) Weddington four-star defensive lineman Trajen Odom (6-4, 285).

Ohio State doesn't seem to be finished with the position group in the 2025 class, still going after some flip candidates such as Opelika, Ala., four-star defensive line-

Continued On Page 28

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Athlete Coleman Gauging OSU's Interest

Continued From Page 27

man and Auburn commit Malik Autry (6-6, 320) and Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star edge rusher and Alabama commit Justin Hill (6-3, 220). Now they hope to have the same success in the next cycle as well.

2025 Late Bloomer Planning OSU Visit

Warren (Ohio) G. Harding athlete Chaz Coleman (6-5, 225) was not at Ohio State for the matchup against Western Michigan, but he is planning to set up a visit to Columbus at some point this season.

As BSB went to press, the 2025 prospect had only two Power Four offers from Kentucky and Ole Miss, but his recruitment has been heating up in the past few weeks since the beginning of the high school season.

He currently plays quarterback at Warren G. Harding, but 247Sports recruiting analyst Allen Trieu, who specializes in prospects who play in the Midwest, wrote that his size and speed allow him to be very versatile when it comes to which positions he could play in the future.

"Yeah, a lot of people are calling and

gauging interest on him," Harding head coach Matt Richardson said to 247Sports. "I told him with more blessings comes more responsibility. He's working hard to be the best teammate he can be, best person in school he can be, all good things, but it has definitely changed as far as contacts. He heard from Pittsburgh, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Michigan State – a lot of people have come in since getting that Ole Miss and that Kentucky offer."

Coleman also shows off his athletic ability on the basketball court. Last year, he averaged 15.7 points, 6.9 rebounds, 2.9 assists and 2.4 steals per game, and he has some Division II offers on the court.

However, it seems like he is beginning to garner interest from some major programs in college football. Richardson said Coleman will likely be on campus for Ohio State's game against Marshall on Sept. 21 and that the senior has been handling the sudden extra attention well.

"I would say he's taking it all in because it's new, but I feel good about the staff I have and he trusts the staff I have," Richardson said. "I think he's trusting our guidance with it and taking it all in. Last year, he only started three or four games, which was crazy to me, but a lot of dif-

ferent things went on during the season. Since I've been here, since January, he's done what I've asked and been a leader for our group."

Several Prospects Come Out For WMU

The Buckeyes' first two games of the season were both against MAC opponents, and Ohio State picked up its second win of the season 56-0 on Sept. 7, but the lack of drama didn't lead to a lack of recruits visiting for the game against Western Michigan. The following list of recruits was compiled using BSB's own information, reports from other outlets and recruits themselves.

The committed prospects who were on campus were Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225), who said he plans to be on campus for every home game just like he was last season, along with Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy four-star tight end Brody Lennon and Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295). Both Lowe and Cook were also in Columbus for the Week 1 win over Akron, and given the

shorter distances they have to travel as in-state recruits, they might be trying to join St. Clair as much as they can.

Uncommitted prospects in the class of 2026 who visited were Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310), Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas (6-0, 175) and Dunlap, Ill., four-star tight end Mack Sutter (6-5, 225). Both Greer and Sutter are top-200 players in the class, with Sutter just missing the top 100 at No. 109 overall in 2026, and both of them already have offers from the Buckeyes along with many other offers from Power Four schools. Thomas has also received an offer from the Buckeyes and is ranked No. 241 in the class.

The 2027 recruits were St. Clairsville, Ohio, offensive lineman Mason Wilt (6-5, 282) and Perrysburg, Ohio, offensive tackle Reed Gerken (6-5, 290). The big-time offers have not started coming in for the two high school sophomore linemen yet, but since the position can take more time to develop than others, those are likely coming in the next year or so for them.

The Buckeyes also hosted a 2028 prospect for the game against the Broncos, with Miami (Fla.) Ransom Everglades

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Cleveland St. Ignatius quarterback Joe Pickens may have been the best-known Ohio high school player at his position.

But there were several other excellent quarterbacks finishing their prep careers in 1989 whom Ohio State would undoubtedly attempt to lure to Columbus.

The Buckeyes had signed no quarterbacks in the previous recruiting season. The two players regarded as Ohio's top quarterbacks last season – Franklin's Lance Harp and Newark Catholic's Doug Wollenberg – were not heavily recruited by Ohio State. Harp went to South Carolina, while Wollenberg eventually ended up at OSU on a baseball scholarship.

The Buckeyes actively sought quarterbacks Glenn Foley of Cherry Hill, N.J., and Adrian Jarrell of Athens, Ga., but wound up telling both players as signing day neared they could not offer them a scholarship.

Foley eventually signed with Boston College, while Jarrell selected Notre Dame.

30 Years Ago — 1994

Just how good was Randy Moss?

Talk to college scouts and you would have gotten every superlative from outstanding to phenomenal.

Last season, he won top player honors in West Virginia, playing at Belle High School in DuPont, W.Va., the same school that produced his brother, Eric, three years before.

Randy caught 40 passes last year for 972 yards and 14 touchdowns. He also ran 37 times for 484 yards and five TDs, made 63 tackles, had seven interceptions as a safety and punted for an average of 35.5 yards.

Rated one of the top prospects in the country, Moss had already reportedly narrowed his choices to three schools – Notre Dame, Florida State and Ohio State.

As BSB reported in its August 1994 issue, the rumors had already been flying that Moss was leaning heavily toward a commitment to Notre Dame, but he insisted that Ohio State was still very much in the race and that he would continue to keep an open mind on the issue.

"There is still a lot of time," the younger Moss told BSB. "I don't feel any pressure to make a decision this early."

25 Years Ago — 1999

Cincinnati Moeller offensive lineman Michael Munoz, Ohio's No. 2 overall prospect according to The Ohio Football Recruiting News, topped the list of roughly 30 players in attendance for the UCLA game Sept. 11.

Munoz (6-7, 285, 5.1) continued to list OSU among his top five with Tennessee, Texas, Michigan and Florida State. He got the

red-carpet treatment at OSU as he and his father, former NFL All-Pro Anthony Munoz, were invited onto the Ohio Stadium turf to chat with coaches during warmups.

OSU commitments Alphonso Townsend, B.J. Barre and Darri-on Scott also attended the game.

20 Years Ago — 2004

Perhaps most notable on the sidelines prior to the 27-6 win over Cincinnati was verbal commitment Brian Hartline, a receiver out of Canton (Ohio) GlenOak. Hartline broke his left leg on a punt return during the first week of high school action and was expected to miss his entire senior season.

At the OSU game, Hartline was in a wheelchair with his left leg elevated in a cast.

Classmate Brandon Long, a linebacker/tight end at GlenOak, and Hartline's younger brother, junior quarterback Mike Hartline, were among those who took turns navigating Hartline around the sidelines. He received plenty of attention from the Buckeyes warming up for the game too: Head coach Jim Tressel came over to shake his hand as did GlenOak graduate Dustin Fox and fellow northeast Ohio product Kirk Barton, a Massillon Perry alum.

15 Years Ago — 2009

It may not have been the weekend Ohio State was hoping for on the field, but the 18-15 loss to USC did not stop the Buckeyes from adding to their recruiting class of 2010.

After taking in Ohio Stadium while the Buckeyes hosted the Trojans, four-star wide receiver Corey Brown from Springfield (Pa.) Cardinal O'Hara decided that he had seen enough and issued his verbal commitment to the Buckeyes.

"I was watching the game, and they played USC real tough," Brown told BSB. "I realized they can compete with anybody and they play all the top schools. Then when I saw the facilities, they were amazing. The weight room was nice and the academic support is unreal. They're real big on getting a degree and stuff. That's what they're about."

Entering the weekend, Brown said he had no idea he would wind up issuing a verbal commitment to the Buckeyes while on his unofficial visit. Then he was verbal member No. 13 in OSU's class of 2010.

"I had never been there before," Brown said. "I went to see the facilities (Sept. 13) and they were nice. I realized I couldn't get much better than what it was, so I just decided to commit."

10 Years Ago — 2014

Gahanna (Ohio) Lincoln defensive end Jonathon Cooper made the trip to Ohio Stadium to see the Buckeyes face off against the Hokies, and the 6-3, 215-pound four-star prospect came away im-

pressed in his initial trip to the Horseshoe.

"It was my first time ever being at Ohio State, and it was really cool," Cooper said. "The atmosphere was impressive, and the fans were very supportive. They stuck with them right to the end."

"I really watched the defensive line, mainly to see what Coach (Larry) Johnson was doing with them. They all did a great job, especially (Joey) Bosa and he had a few great hits on the quarterback."

The four-star lineman was expected to be an Ohio State commitment at some point, but he left the stadium without issuing a verbal commitment.

"I spoke with Coach Johnson before the game," he said. "He said he was really excited I was there for the game, and said it's time for me to commit to Ohio State. He said he hopes I will be committing soon!"

Five Years Ago — 2019

Recruiting is all about relationships, so there's no doubt Ohio State put itself at a disadvantage on the recruiting trail when head coach Ryan Day hired four new defensive coaches in January.

But co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison, co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff Hafley, linebackers coach Al Washington and assistant secondary coach Matt Barnes all hit the ground running, establishing new relationships throughout the country while also relying on those they'd already formed throughout their respective coaching careers.

Since then, the Buckeyes had landed 17 commitments – bringing their total for the 2020 recruiting class to 22 – and sat at No. 4 in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings.

One Year Ago — 2023

Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198), who had been committed to Ohio State since last December, was the top-rated receiver (and second overall prospect) in 2024, and he showed why in a recent outing.

Before his unofficial visit to Columbus on Sept. 9 for the Youngstown State game, Smith and Chaminade-Madonna Prep picked up a 61-21 victory over New Jersey's Bergen Catholic on Sept. 8 with Smith going for 16 receptions, 316 yards and three touchdowns. And those numbers piled up for Smith despite not playing in the fourth quarter, with nine of those receptions and 249 of those yards coming before halftime.

Despite interest from other schools such as Florida, Georgia and Miami (Fla.), Smith had consistently reaffirmed his commitment to Ohio State, and the expectation was that the nation's best receiver would sign with the Buckeyes in just a few short months.

ASK AN ANALYST

with Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

Opelika, Ala., four-star defensive lineman and Auburn commit Malik Autry (6-6 320) has been an Ohio State target for a while. What do you think the chances are that Autry flips?

"I don't know, I'm not hearing anything good there. Then if you look at the D-line, they've got a ton of D-linemen committed right now. Now they would take Autry in a minute, and I would too, but I'm really not hearing anything there and I don't know that he wants to be a part of a seven-man D-line class. I've never heard anything positive yet about him possibly flipping to Ohio State. They would take him though. They would love to have him, and I would too."

Does Ohio State still want to take a third running back in this class, and if so who do you think they would bring in?

"Three running backs in one class just doesn't seem to make sense to me at all. Maybe they know more than I know. It just seems like if you take three in one class you're just almost guaranteeing yourself that you're going to put somebody in the portal. It's hard to take two in one class and keep those guys satisfied with touches and carries. It does look like they're going to chase Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back and Alabama commit Anthony Rogers (5-8,190). They're chasing him for sure."

"What makes more sense to me would be taking an older running back out of the portal than taking three high school kids out of the same class, but they know more about this stuff than I do. So we'll see. They've got

two good ones committed right now. That seems fine to me. If you can flip Anthony Rogers, take him. If not, then I would look to take an older kid out of the portal if they think they need help for next year."

Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavi-en St. Clair (6-4, 225) said a couple of weeks ago that he is working hard to try to flip Mobile (Ala.) Theodore four-star offensive lineman Micah DeBose (6-5, 315), who committed to Alabama earlier this summer. Is Ohio State working just as hard, and how receptive do you think DeBose will be to St. Clair and the Buckeyes?

"That's another one like Autry where I never really heard anything that makes me think they're going to get him. I understand why they want to get him. If you look at the O-line class that Justin Frye is bringing in or you look at the classes that he's already brought in, in years prior, I get why they're after DeBose, I would be too."

"You have Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), who is really good. Lowe has a chance to be an excellent college football player, and he's a tackle. But then you have Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295), who I like, but he's an interior project. And then you have Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist three-star interior offensive lineman Jayvon McFadden (6-5, 300), who is kind of a duplication of Jake Cook as an interior guy and more of a three-star project type."

"They need tackles, so I would do anything to get Micah DeBose. It doesn't make sense why he would flip to

come to Ohio State. I don't know, it's been done, it can be done, but I have nothing positive on that from my end."

Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon four-star wide receiver Jerome Myles (6-2, 205) plans to commit on Oct. 30. The Buckeyes were a little late to the party when it comes to recruiting him, but do you think they have a chance with him?

"I think they have a chance, but it sure seems like he's going to stay in state. It just has that look to it. I would take him. I like him. Then again, they've got Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star wide receiver Quincy Porter (6-3, 190), Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star wide receiver De'Zie Jones (6-0, 180) and Ontario (Ohio) High School three-star Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180) committed, they just got Mission Viejo (Calif.) four-star Phillip Bell (6-2, 195). I mean are you going to take a five-receiver class? That's a lot of guys in one class."

"Would I take him? I'd take him in a minute if I could get him. This is a new era of college football. You're paying these kids now, so if I could get Myles, I'd probably drop one of the other guys. Probably De'Zie Jones, I'd probably have a conversation with him and just tell him, 'Sorry, that's the way it is. It's a new era of college football. Guys are getting paid now, and it's great for you guys, but we've got to manage rosters the way the NFL does.' If I get Jerome Myles, I wouldn't bring in a five-receiver class. That's too many in one class. You're just guaranteeing that somebody is going to leave anyway so you might as well get rid of them now."

School's Neimann Lawrence (6-2, 190) coming to Columbus to see the win.

Lawrence is the second player whom the Buckeyes offered in the 2028 class, offering him over the summer before the freshman had played a single down of high school football, the same thing they did for Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy wide receiver Eric McFarland. Lawrence and McFarland were in Columbus for a camp at Ohio State in June. Both Chip Kelly and Day were able to see Lawrence throw when he was at the camp and were impressed by the arm talent he showed off.

"Getting the offer was great," Lawrence told Eleven Warriors after the camp. "I had the mindset to come out there and compete with some of the best guys like Tavi-en St. Clair. (Day) told me that I have a lot of potential and that I'm only a rising freshman but there were a lot of good things that caught his attention. Honestly, it's a big deal (to get an offer so early).

"I like the quarterbacks that they've developed," Lawrence said about Ohio State. "They've really got some good things going on over there. I can see myself there in the future, but my recruiting process is just starting. I have a long way to go."

Other Notes And Tidbits

- 2026 New Orleans St. Augustine five-star defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270) is transferring from his current high school, the first step he is taking to officially reclassify to the class of 2025 and graduate early. He had been thinking about reclassifying for a while, and it seemed likely, but now Stewart, the No. 3 recruit in the 2026 class, will make that a reality. If he does officially reclassify, he would likely graduate in December and enroll in his college of choice in January. Ohio State is a top contender for Stewart along with LSU, Oregon and USC, with the in-state Tigers viewed as the favorite. Stewart has said he wants to be in Columbus for the game against Michigan on Nov. 30.

- 2025 Ohio State commit and four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) of Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph continues to impress in his senior season, rushing for over 200 yards and three touchdowns in just the first half of a 60-0 win over Mansfield Senior on Sept. 6. It took him just one quarter of football to run for 162 yards and two touchdowns. Jackson is the fifth-best running back in the 2025 class and sixth-best player in Ohio.

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Michigan's Moore Still Coaching Without Contract

First-year Michigan head coach Sherrone Moore is one of a handful of college football coaches still leading their respective programs this season without a full-length contract.

BIG TEN NOTES
Patrick Engels

According to an Aug. 30 report by USA Today's Tom Schad and Steve Berkowitz, Moore is still working under a three-page document he signed with athletic director Warde Manuel in January called a memorandum of understandings, or MOU, which outlines some details of Moore's future deal, including salary figures and bonuses, but excludes some of the specifics regarding the contract, most notably the circumstances that would occur if Moore is fired for cause due to his involvement in Michigan's impermissible sign-stealing scandal.

MOUs are reportedly commonplace in college athletics, as it allows new college coaches to sign the agreement before finalizing the small details and specific language that usually comes with a longer multiyear contract.

Manuel said that Michigan is working toward a longer agreement with Moore – who was hired as the Wolverines' head coach on Jan. 26 following the departure of Jim Harbaugh to the Los Angeles Chargers – as the season goes on and that the MOU allows the two sides to take their time while the university and football program deal with a quick transition of leadership and the ongoing NCAA investigation.

"They are being worked on as we speak," Manuel said during an appearance on the "Conqu'ring Heroes" podcast released on Sept. 5. "I've signed a couple of the assistant coaches (to contracts). We had not only a transition in football, but we had a transition in basketball. We're dealing with NCAA matters, we're dealing with the situation with our apparel provider. These things take time, the contracts."

Moore, however, sang a different tune, saying on Sept. 6 that he has signed a contract with the university and is committed to the program in the long term.

"I am committed to Michigan, they're committed to me," Moore said on ESPN's "Pat McAfee Show" held at Michigan Stadium. "I am getting paid, and I am under contract. So we're in a good place."

Michigan underwent a similar process in 2021, when it took the university nine months to fully offer Harbaugh a contract after both sides agreed to an MOU that January, a process that ultimately ended with Harbaugh taking a pay cut.

Moore's reported lack of a long-term contract comes after the Wolverine leader was hit with multiple Level 2 NCAA violations, one for recruiting violations that date back to 2021 and another for his involvement in the program's elaborate sign-stealing operation orchestrated by former staffer Connor Stalions.

According to the NCAA's notice of allegations released last month, Moore deleted a thread of 52 text messages with Stalions the day after he was identified as the ringleader of the football program's sign-stealing operation

last October.

Because Moore was hit with two separate NCAA violations involving recruiting and the sign-stealing scandal, the Wolverines coach is considered a "repeat violator" of NCAA rules, which could result in more extreme penalties when the sign-stealing investigation concludes.

Despite these potential punishments, though, Manuel said he remains committed to working toward a longer-term deal with Moore and is looking forward to the program being run under his leadership both in the short and long term.

"Sherrone knows our commitment to him" Manuel said. "We know his commitment to us. It's just a long form with more details, more situations at hand. But listen, I'm very happy with him, very happy with our staff, and I look forward to having that signed and it becoming a nonissue."

Fans, Coaches Enjoy NU's Lakefront Stadium

While many Big Ten football programs have close to or over 100,000 fans flock to their campus to fill their stadiums each week in the fall, Northwestern is doing things a little differently this season.

As the university awaits an \$800 million rebuild of Ryan Field, the Wildcats are playing the majority of their home games in 2024 and 2025 at Northwestern Medicine Field at Martin Stadium, a roughly 12,000-seat venue based in Evanston, Ill., that sits along the shores of Lake Michigan and overlooks the Chicago skyline.

The gameday experience at a Northwestern home game may not resemble that of its Big Ten rivals, but for those who were a part of the unique Wildcat home opener against Miami (Ohio) on Aug. 31, it was one that they would remember for quite some time.

"I don't know if there's anything to compare it to," Northwestern head coach David Braun said after the game when asked about the venue. "I mean, it's just so unique. But it was awesome. The stands were packed. We had a sellout. It was primarily purple in the stands."

The Wildcats came away with a 13-6 win over the RedHawks in front of a capacity 12,023 fans – a much smaller number than the 47,130-seat capacity at Ryan Field – but that number did not factor in the large contingent of "sailgaters" who took in the action from boats stationed near the shore of Lake Michigan.

Graduate wide receiver Bryce Kirtz, who recorded a team-high 91 yards on six catches in the opener, said he wished he could have joined in on the fun and gone on the floating tailgates.

"I was actually really jealous," Kirtz said. "I wanted to go tailgate because I saw how cool that stuff looked back there. But I had to play."

A similar sentiment was expressed by Northwestern's student body, at least one of whom said that the stadium's setup along the lake could make for an exciting and entertaining fall for those who attend games.

"I don't know if they are going to address the tailgating issue and introduce some equity between the two areas, but if you're a Northwestern student, hell yeah, it's a great setup," Northwestern graduate student Wyatt Browdy told Andrew Katz of the Evanston RoundTable before the game.

While Northwestern will play the majority of its games at Northwestern Medicine Field at Martin Stadium in 2024 and 2025, a select few games will be held at Chicago's Wrigley Field, including its game against Ohio State on Nov. 16.

But those within the program say that they will be ready to compete no matter where their games are held.

"The culture of this team is that you can put the ball in the middle of the street," quarterback Mike Wright said. "We'll go out there and play."

Moore Hopes To Use QB Orji More

Michigan junior quarterback Alex Orji played just nine snaps for the Wolverines during their season opener while serving as the backup to senior Davis Warren, but Moore does not want those limited snaps to become the norm as the season progresses.

Speaking on the weekly radio show "Inside Michigan Football," Moore said that he anticipates Orji – whom many expected to be the Wolverines' starter this season over the former walk-on Warren – will be more heavily involved in the offense as the season progresses, which the U-M leader thinks can be done by installing more special packages featuring the veteran quarterback.

"He'll have an extensive package of what he does throughout games, and it will grow every game," Moore said.

Orji had been the favorite to take over for now Minnesota Vikings quarterback J.J. McCarthy despite attempting no passes for the Wolverines last season. He did appear in three games in 2023 as a "wildcat" quarterback, however, totaling 86 rushing yards and a touchdown on 15 carries, 22 of those yards coming on a pair of carries against Ohio State last November.

But Orji lost traction in the quarterback competition as the offseason progressed, allowing the senior Warren to earn the start in the season opener and complete 15 of his 25 passes for 118 yards and a touchdown to one interception.

Orji did make the most of his nine snaps in the game against Fresno State, though, totaling 32 rushing yards on five carries while also throwing a 3-yard touchdown to running back Donovan Edwards in the first quarter.

"He averaged about 6 yards per carry when he did run the ball," Moore said. "So he did a really good job."

Although all signs point to Warren being the clear starting quarterback for the Wolverines moving forward this season, Moore said that he still wants to rotate his two quarterbacks some during the early portion of this season.

That strategy was not evident during Michigan's 31-12 loss to No. 2 Texas on Sept. 7, however, with Orji playing just two snaps, recording two carries for -1 rushing yards.

Fickell Hires Former NFL HC Del Rio

Wisconsin head coach Luke Fickell added a notable name to his staff on Aug. 29, hiring longtime NFL head coach Jack Del Rio as a senior advisor to the Badgers' coach.

Del Rio, 61, spent 25 years as a coach in the NFL, most notably as head coach of the Jacksonville Jaguars from 2003-11 and Oak-

BIG

2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan State	1	0	1.000	2	0	1.000
Illinois	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Indiana	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Nebraska	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Ohio State	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Oregon	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Penn State	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Rutgers	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
USC	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Washington	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Wisconsin	0	0	0.000	2	0	1.000
Purdue	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
UCLA	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Iowa	0	0	0.000	1	1	0.500
Michigan	0	0	0.000	1	1	0.500
Minnesota	0	0	0.000	1	1	0.500
Northwestern	0	0	0.000	1	1	0.500
Maryland	0	1	0.000	1	1	0.500

Sept. 6 Games
 Indiana 77, Western Illinois 3
 Duke 26, Northwestern 20

Sept. 7 Games
 Rutgers 49, Akron 17
 Penn State 34, Bowling Green 27
 Texas 31, Michigan 12
 Minnesota 48, Rhode Island 0
 Washington 30, Eastern Michigan 9
 Michigan State 27, Maryland 24
 Wisconsin 27, South Dakota 13
 Iowa State 20, Iowa 19
 Illinois 23, Kansas 17
 Nebraska 28, Colorado 10
Ohio State 56, Western Michigan 0
 Oregon 37, Boise State 34
 USC 48, Utah State 0

Sept. 14 Games
 Alabama at Wisconsin, noon
 Arkansas State at Michigan, noon
 Central Michigan at Illinois, noon
 Prairie View at Michigan State, 3:30 p.m.
 Washington State at Washington, 3:30 p.m.
 Oregon at Oregon State, 3:30 p.m.
 Notre Dame at Purdue, 3:30 p.m.
 Troy at Iowa, 4 p.m.
 Indiana at UCLA, 7:30 p.m.
 Eastern Illinois at Northwestern, 7:30 p.m.
 UNI at Nebraska, 7:30 p.m.
 Maryland at Virginia, 8 p.m.

Sept. 20 Game
 Illinois at Nebraska, 8 p.m.

Sept. 21 Games
 Charlotte at Indiana, TBA
 Marshall at **Ohio State**, TBA
 Villanova at Maryland, TBA
 Rutgers at Virginia Tech, TBA
 Kent State at Penn State, TBA
 Michigan State at Boston College, TBA
 UCLA at LSU, TBA
 Iowa at Minnesota, TBA
 Northwestern at Washington, TBA
 USC at Michigan, 3:30 p.m.
 Purdue at Oregon State, 8:30 p.m.

All times Eastern

land Raiders from 2015-17. He totaled a 93-94 record during his 12 years in those two stints in the head-coaching chair.

The former 11-year NFL linebacker is most known for his defensive expertise, which he first showed in 2001 as linebackers coach for the Super Bowl champion Baltimore Ravens, who boasted one of the NFL's all-time great defenses led by Pro Football Hall of Fame linebacker Ray Lewis. Del Rio's time in Baltimore

landed him a defensive coordinator role with the Carolina Panthers in 2002, a role he also held with the Denver Broncos from 2012-14 and most recently the Washington Football Team/Commanders from 2020-23.

The Commanders fired Del Rio last November following a 45-10 Thanksgiving Day loss to the Dallas Cowboys, which further put Washington at the bottom of the league in scoring defense.

Del Rio is now looking for a fresh start in the collegiate ranks, where he is providing a veteran presence to a Wisconsin team that is 2-0 on the season following wins over Western Michigan on Aug. 30 and South Dakota on Sept. 7.

He is not the only former NFL head coach Fickell tried to hire during this past offseason. Fickell and his staff were close to hiring former Tennessee Titans head coach and Ohio State teammate Mike Vrabel to the staff in a similar role as Del Rio's, but the former Buckeye instead chose to join the NFL's Cleveland Browns as a coaching and personnel assistant.

New-Look B1G Goes 17-1 To Open Season

The Big Ten underwent unprecedented change during the offseason when it officially admitted former Pac-12 institutions Oregon, Washington, UCLA and USC into the conference, following suit with the trend of conference realignment that swept the NCAA this past year.

That change has already produced some positive results for the new 18-team conference, at least on the gridiron, with the Big Ten going an impressive 17-1 over the Labor Day weekend to kick off the 2024 college football season.

The new-look Big Ten began its string of success on Aug. 29 when Rutgers trounced Howard 44-7 behind 165 rushing yards and a touchdown from star tailback Kyle Monangai. The conference hit its first and only setback later that night when North Carolina took down Minnesota 19-17 thanks to a missed 47-yard field goal from Gopher kicker Dragan Kesich as time expired, but it rebounded shortly after with Illinois shutting out Eastern Illinois at home 45-0.

The Big Ten added two nail-biting victories the next night on Aug. 30, with Michigan State eking out a win over Florida Atlantic 16-10 at home and Wisconsin turning a 14-13 fourth-quarter deficit into a 28-14 win over Western Michigan at Camp Randall Stadium, but it was a much more dominant showing the following day on the first college football Saturday of the season.

The super-conference went an undefeated 11-0 on Aug. 31, a streak that was headlined by then-No. 8 Penn State going into a difficult road environment and handily defeating West Virginia 34-12 behind 216 passing yards and three touchdowns from quarterback Drew Allar.

No. 2 Ohio State, the highest-ranked Big Ten team, took care of Akron 52-6 at home, but No. 3 Oregon had a much more difficult path to victory in its Big Ten debut. Dan Lanning's team found themselves up just 17-14 on significant underdog Idaho after a Vandals fourth-quarter touchdown, but the Ducks and transfer quarterback Dillon Gabriel – who threw for 380 passing yards and a pair of touchdowns on 49 passing attempts in his Oregon and Big Ten debut – buckled down and survived with a 24-14 victory.

The fourth top-10 team in the Big Ten, No.

9 Michigan, had a similar fate, defending its national championship with a rather uninspiring 30-10 victory in Moore's debut as full-time head coach, while No. 24 Iowa dominated Illinois State 40-0 in its highest-scoring outing since the beginning of last season when the Hawkeyes beat Western Michigan 41-10 on Sept. 16, 2023.

Following wins by existing Big Ten programs Maryland (50-7, UConn), Purdue (49-0, Indiana State), Indiana (31-7, Florida International), Nebraska (40-7, UTEP) and Northwestern (13-6, Miami (Ohio)), the Big Ten's new teams took center stage.

UCLA needed a last-second field goal from kicker Mateen Bhaghani to survive on the road against Hawaii with a 16-13 win, while last season's national runner-up Washington blew out Weber State 35-3 in Jedd Fisch's Huskie-head coaching debut.

Then, on Sept. 1, the Big Ten may have saved its best for last, with No. 23 USC sending a statement to its new conference with an impressive 27-20 victory over No. 13 LSU in Las Vegas behind a game-winning drive by first-time starting quarterback Miller Moss and the Trojan offense.

"That was some pretty good Big Ten football today," USC head coach Lincoln Riley joked after the game.

The Big Ten continued its successful start on the gridiron in Week 2. Excluding Michigan State's 27-24 win over Maryland, the lone conference game on the schedule, the Big Ten went 11-3, highlighted by No. 23 Nebraska's 28-10 victory over Colorado in primetime on Sept. 7.

RU Hires Law Firm To Investigate Gymnastics Program

Rutgers has hired the law firm Lowenstein Sandler to conduct an external investigation into the school's gymnastics program, a school spokesperson told NJ Advance Media on Sept. 4.

According to NJ Advance Media's Brian Fonseca, the investigation will be led by Matthew Boxer, a former New Jersey state comptroller and federal prosecutor who was also in charge of investigating the abuse scandals involving both the Rutgers softball program in 2020 and university neurosurgeon Dr. Anil Nanda in 2021.

Rutgers is calling for the investigation "to be completed as expeditiously as possible," with the school set to pay at least \$470,000 for the investigation, with fees being revisited if additional time is needed to complete the review.

The hiring of Lowenstein Sandler comes just four days after Rutgers president Jonathan Holloway called for an external investigation into the school's gymnastics program, which has been riddled with complaints from former players claiming that head coach Umme Salim-Beasley fostered a "toxic" environment dominated by favoritism, bullying and revenge by Salim-Beasley.

The allegations caught the attention of New Jersey governor Phil Murphy, who called the situation "really ugly and very disturbing" on Aug. 30, one day before the university launched an internal investigation into the program.

Multiple former gymnasts alleged that former Rutgers athletic director Pat Hobbs – who resigned from his role on Aug. 16 citing health concerns – ignored their complaints regarding the toxic environment within the program, often being quick to defend Salim-Beasley, while

also taking an "unusual" interest in the team and being a frequent visitor to team meetings, practices and events, even taking a trip to Nashville, Tenn., in January and participating in a yoga session with the team.

The gymnasts believed that the complaints were ignored in large part because Hobbs and Salim-Beasley had an unusual relationship for an athletic director and a coach of an Olympic sports program. The university later revealed that they are conducting an internal investigation into a possible "inappropriate, consensual relationship" involving Hobbs, which is believed to have prompted his resignation rather than his alleged health concerns.

Hobbs has yet to comment on the situation, but Rutgers said in a statement that it "strongly discourages romantic, dating intimate and/or sexual relationships between University employees."

As BSB went to press, Salim-Beasley remained head coach of the gymnastics program and was reportedly present for the team's first meeting this fall semester on Sept. 3.

MSU Pays Millions Over Nassar Agreement

Michigan State University paid the U.S. Department of Education a total of \$2,761,502 in fines for failing to comply with a 2019 settlement agreement pertaining to the sexual abuse scandal involving disgraced former Spartan sports physician Larry Nassar, according to a settlement agreement obtained by multiple news outlets in early September.

Under the terms of the 2019 agreement, Michigan State was prohibited from allowing students to use federal financial aid to enroll

in new programs without the U.S. Department of Education's approval. The university, however, enrolled students in 16 different programs that were created after the settlement agreement and without the department's approval, and it was subsequently ordered to pay the fine by Aug. 1.

A Michigan State spokesperson confirmed to the Lansing, Mich.,-based WLNS-TV 6 that the fine was paid in July.

The fine comes almost eight years after Nassar was arrested and charged with abusing more than 500 female gymnasts, many of them children and young adults, under the guise of medical treatment for at least 14 years of his career as team doctor of USA Gymnastics and a sports physician at Michigan State.

Nassar was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison for seven counts of felony criminal sexual conduct in the first degree in January 2018 – which he will serve after his 60-year prison child pornography sentence – and is currently serving his term at the United States Penitentiary Coleman II, a high-security federal prison in Coleman, Fla.

Michigan State, in addition to the over \$2 million paid to the U.S. Department of Education this summer, reached a \$500 million settlement with victims of Nassar in 2018 for its lack of awareness regarding Nassar's crimes while he worked with the university.

Michigan State fired Nassar in September 2016, two years after Michigan State graduate Amanda Thomashow filed a Title IX complaint against the former trainer for touching her inappropriately during a medical procedure, an act by Nassar that the university then deemed "medically appropriate."

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OSU Adds In-State PF Smith To 2026 Class

Ohio State and head coach Jake Diebler continued to fill out their 2026 recruiting class with in-state talent on Sept. 2 when power forward Alex Smith (6-9, 195) from nearby Upper Arlington pledged his services to his hometown Buckeyes during an unofficial visit to Ohio State's campus that weekend.

"Words cannot explain how grateful I am for everyone who has helped me get to this point," Smith said on his Twitter account. "I would like to thank Coach Diebler and the OSU staff for believing in me. I would like to announce my commitment to THE Ohio State University! Go Bucks!"

With just 2.6 miles separating Upper Arlington High School from the Schottenstein Center, Smith said it has been a life-long dream to play for the Buckeyes after watching them from up close since he was a young child.

"Ever since I could walk, ever since I could talk, I've always been a Buckeye fan," Smith told Eleven Warriors. "It's my dream to go to OSU. Just to be able to commit now, it's kind of a surreal feeling to think that all the hard work that I've put in has now paid off and it's my dream school."

As Smith alluded to, he has had to put in work to earn a spot with the Buckeyes. Smith said he has spent countless hours in

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

the gym perfecting his craft as a power forward, a grinding mentality that – aided by a late growth spurt this past year that put him at 6-9 – allowed him to attract more attention from Division I schools this off-season.

Smith earned offers from multiple Power Four programs this summer, including Ohio State, which extended the forward a scholarship offer on June 17 following a strong performance at a recruiting camp run by the program at the Schottenstein Center. Ohio State was Smith's second Division I offer, the first being Indiana, which offered him in February.

Smith continued that positive momentum at the Midwest Live basketball showcase held from June 28-30 at the Cedar Point Sports Complex in Sandusky, Ohio, where he showed off his extended shooting range and versatility in front of Diebler while competing for his high school. He has also competed this summer in the Adidas 3SSB circuit 16-U team Midwest Basketball Club.

Smith believes his improved set of skills can translate to the collegiate level for the Buckeyes come 2026, where he thinks he can serve as a versatile forward who can stretch the court.

"(Diebler) doesn't necessarily tag people as numbers, but if you want to play the numbers game, he sees me as a stretch four," Smith said, "someone who can step outside, knock the three-ball down. Of course, I need to add some muscle and some weight to be able to play the four coming in my freshman year. That's definitely something me and Jake will look at and start now."

Smith is Ohio State's second in-state 2026 commitment, the first being Garfield Heights five-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175), the nation's 19th-best prospect and top player in Ohio who committed to the Buckeyes on April 10.

Diebler also earned an in-state pledge this summer from 2025 prospect Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160), the nation's 69th-best player and No. 1 player in Ohio.

Bucks In Five-Star's Top Four After Visit

Smith was joined in Columbus by a potentially program-changing prospect whom the Buckeyes now have a stronger chance of securing.

Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star combo guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195), the nation's third-best prospect and top-ranked combo guard, placed Ohio State in his final four alongside Kansas, Kansas State and USC on Sept. 3 after having what he called a great visit with the Buckeyes the weekend of Aug. 31.

"Overall, the visit was great," Peterson told Joe Tipton of On3Sports. "I really enjoyed being there. It was my second or third time being there, but it was the first time with Jake Diebler as the head coach. So I

really enjoyed that part of it."

As Peterson alluded to, Ohio State and Diebler have established a relationship with the five-star that dates all the way back to his middle school days. Ohio State offered Peterson, a native of Canton, Ohio, the summer before his freshman season at Cuyahoga Valley in 2021, becoming one of the first of what is now 24 Division I schools to extend him a scholarship.

Ohio State's pursuit of Peterson has always been with Diebler at the forefront – he served as his primary recruiter while as an assistant on former head coach Chris Holtmann's staff – a factor that the guard said goes a long way when choosing where to spend his likely short college basketball career.

"Coach Diebler has been recruiting me since like eighth grade so the relationship is already there. He's doing a great job recruiting me," he said. "The coaching staff walked me through where they all came from and the experience they have and that they're super excited to get a chance to coach me. The staff is all experienced, and they've coached a lot of pros. I feel like if I went there, they would be able to develop me and help me get ready to play in the NBA."

There were few details revealed regarding what the Canton native did on his visit to Columbus other than him posing for pictures in an all-gray Buckeye uniform in a photoshoot later posted on social media. However, Peterson mentioned that he got the chance to watch the team practice at Value City Arena, where he learned that their style of play is similar to the way he operates as a player.

"I got to watch practice and see some of their plays," Peterson said. "Just from what I've seen, they did a lot of DHOs (dribble hand-offs) and ball screens, and that's my bread and butter. That was something I really liked because that's something I do a lot with my team now and all the teams I've been on. DHOs and ball screens are what I love to do."

Peterson's off-the-dribble ability, among many other things, has helped him gradually emerge as one of the top prospects in the 2025 class. After averaging 31.0 points, 9.8 rebounds, 2.8 steals and 1.3 assists and becoming an Ohio Mr. Basketball finalist his sophomore year at Cuyahoga, Peterson transferred to Huntington (W.Va.) Prep, where he excelled again, scoring roughly 24 points, six rebounds and four assists per game last season.

Peterson's hot start to his high school career, along with his successes on the AAU circuit while playing for Phenom United, has brought him to another basketball-centric private school, Prolific Prep, his senior season, where he will look to further fine-tune his craft and potentially make a run to become the top prospect in the class.

Peterson has yet to provide a timeline on when he wants to commit to a school, but regardless, the Buckeyes have put themselves

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Smith, who is an unranked prospect by 247Sports but tabbed as the third-best 2026 prospect in Ohio by PrepHoops.com, committed to Ohio State over teams such as Cincinnati, Indiana, Nebraska and Xavier.

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Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Marcus Johnson	G	6-1	175	★★★★★	Garfield Heights, Ohio
Alex Smith	F	6-9	195	N/A	Upper Arlington, Ohio

in great position to secure what would be the program's highest-rated commit since former Buckeye and two-time All-America forward Jared Sullinger in 2010.

OSU To Play Cincy In Charity Exhibition

Ohio State announced on Sept. 4 that it will travel to Cincinnati to take on the Bearcats on Oct. 18 in an in-state charity exhibition game.

The Buckeyes and Bearcats will face off inside Fifth Third Arena in Cincinnati as part of the CareSource Exhibition Game for Mental Health, an event that also includes a matchup between Dayton and Xavier on Oct. 20 that will be played in Dayton.

All net proceeds from ticket sales will benefit mental health providers and charities within each school's footprint, including Jay's Light, an organization created by Dayton head coach Anthony Grant and his wife, Chris, to help families find the necessary resources to deal with mental health struggles.

Grant's daughter, Jayda, died in 2022 at 20 years old following a two-year battle with a mental illness.

"We're excited to partner with Cincinnati and CareSource this preseason for such a tremendous cause," Diebler said. "The opportunity to raise awareness, specifically in our great state, was important to our program and university."

"The overall wellness and mental health of our student-athletes has long been a priority for our athletic department, and we are blessed to have incredible resources here at Ohio State. Being able to join Coach Grant, along with Coach (Wes) Miller and his program, is important for our state as we continue to work to have a real impact in our communities."

Ohio State, then led by Holtmann, participated in a similar event last fall when it took on Dayton in an exhibition game in front of a sold-out UD Arena, which capped off a four-day charity event coined "The Spotlight" that aimed to raise awareness and education toward the mental health struggles of adolescents and young adults.

The event raised \$500,000 for suicide prevention and other mental health resources, and Holtmann was moved to tears during the postgame press conference following the exhibition.

While this game won't count toward either team's regular-season record, Ohio State will look to continue its success against its in-state foes. The Buckeyes hold an 8-4 record against the Bearcats in regular-season games, with the most recent meeting occurring in the 2022 Maui Invitational, where the Buckeyes won 81-53.

Cincinnati, led by fourth-year head coach Miller, is coming off its first season in the Big 12, going 7-11 in the conference and 22-15 overall. The Bearcats earned an NIT bid last season and, like Ohio State, fell in the quarterfinal round, losing 85-81 to Indiana State.

Liddell Released By Suns After Trade

Former Ohio State forward E.J. Liddell's tumultuous start to his NBA career continued this summer when he was waived by the Phoenix Suns on Aug. 21 in a move to create more roster flexibility.

Liddell spent just two weeks with the Suns before being released, capping off a difficult offseason for the former Buckeye in which he spent time with three NBA teams.

He began the offseason with the New Orleans Pelicans, the franchise that drafted him with the 41st overall pick in the second round of the 2022 NBA draft, before being traded to the Atlanta Hawks on June 28 as part of a deal that sent All-Star guard Dejounte Murray to New Orleans in exchange for four players and two first-round draft picks.

Liddell spent part of the summer with Atlanta and contributed to the Hawks' Summer League team, averaging 7.8 points, 4.0 rebounds, 1.0 assists and 1.2 blocks in five appearances. But despite this production, the former Buckeye was traded for the second time in less than a month, this time to the Suns on July 26 in exchange for forward David Roddy.

Liddell was then released nearly a month later, putting a pause on a so-far disappointing NBA career for the former Buckeye that has been marred by injury. Liddell's first bad break occurred just three weeks after he was drafted by the Pelicans when he suffered a torn ACL in his right knee during a Summer League game on July 12, 2022, ending his rookie season before it began.

The former Buckeye made a full recovery from the ailment and returned to the Pelicans that next summer, even earning a three-year, \$6.2 million contract from the franchise that July after excelling in Summer League play. But the forward still struggled to find playing time in the NBA, logging just 23 total minutes and four points in eight appearances with the Pelicans last season while playing mostly for their G-League affiliate Birmingham Squadron before being traded away this offseason.

But as BSB went to press, Liddell, a two-time All-Big Ten player at Ohio State who averaged 14.1 points, 6.1 rebounds and 1.6 assists per game from 2019-22, signed a deal with the Chicago Bulls according to Michael Scotto of HoopsHype and will hope to make it through the offseason with them.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Sticking with former Buckeyes, former Ohio State forward Cedric Russell announced on Twitter that he will play for the Arkadia Traiskirchen Lions of Austrian Basketball Superliga, the highest professional basketball league in Austria. Russell played just one season for Ohio State in 2021-22 after spending four seasons with Louisiana, averaging 4.2 points, 0.6 rebounds and 0.4 assists per game, but was perhaps most known for his 12-point outing in the Buckeyes' upset win over No. 1

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (2-0)

Aug. 31 AKRON, W 52-6.

Sept. 7 WESTERN MICHIGAN, W 56-0; 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.

FIELD HOCKEY (4-0)

Aug. 30 UALBANY, W 6-1.

Sept. 1 BUCKNELL, W 4-1; 6 at Colgate, W 5-0; 8 at Syracuse, W 5-0; 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 (4-0-1)

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, W, 3-1; 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 (4-1-1)

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, W 4-0; 8 at Auburn, L 1-0; 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 (3-2)

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, W 3-1; 7 at Florida Tournament vs. South Florida, L 3-2; 8 at Florida Tournament vs. Florida, L 3-1; 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.

Duke on Nov. 30, 2022.

- Diebler spoke highly of the leadership on his team this season in a conversation with The Columbus Dispatch in late August, specifically citing Bruce Thornton and Meechie Johnson as players who have stepped up in that role while also challenging transfer wing Micah Parrish to use his voice this season. "I'm excited. I think leadership is going to be a real strength for us,"

Diebler said.

- In other recruiting news, Greenville (S.C.) Legacy Early College 2026 point guard Dezhon Hall (6-3, 180) will take an unofficial visit to Ohio State on Oct. 5. Hall is unranked by 247Sports but is considered a top-50 guard in the nation by On3. He holds offers from Illinois, Texas A&M and Wisconsin, among others.

Buckeyes Off 'Two' A Good Start With Wins

What's not to like?

Perfection? No. Impressive start in many, many areas? Yes.

And the quarterback? There's a lot to feel good about.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

These September throwaway games can be difficult to draw conclusions from, but it's hard to imagine a more impressive start, given the schedule, than what the 2024 Buckeyes have accomplished.

Two games – 108 points scored, and just six allowed. That's a plus-102.

The Buckeyes haven't topped 100 points in their first two games since 2018. But that resulted in a mere plus-95, after beating Oregon State, 77-31, and Rutgers, 52-3.

For a better plus/minus, you have to go back to 2016, when a 125-13 two-game score represented a plus-112, the result of beating Bowling Green, 77-10, and Tulsa, 48-3.

The offense scores when it wants to.

And the defense has been stiff, allowing just two field goals.

Expect much of the same against Marshall, which is 1-1 after opening with a 45-3 win over Stony Brook, followed by a 31-14 loss to Virginia Tech.

And even the Michigan State game at the end of the month shouldn't provide much of a test. It's likely going to be October – starting off with back-to-back games against Iowa and Oregon – when we'll know how this team and these players really stack up.

But so far so good.

What's to like?

Quarterback play for one. That was the big question mark. We were told Will Howard was solid. And through two games he has been solid. He runs. He throws from the pocket. He throws on the run. And he's pretty darn accurate. Quarterback play has been an upgrade over last season.

Running backs? Buckeye fans now know what all the hype is about in regard to transfer Quinshon Judkins. He needed only nine carries for his first 100-yard game as a Buckeye, running for 108 yards, a 12.0-yard per carry clip. And that's not even counting an 80-yard run that was called back by a holding penalty.

Beyond the numbers, what's really to like about Judkins is how his more power-

ful running style seems like a perfect complement to TreVeyon Henderson's shifty and fleet-footed style. Of course, Judkins is fast as well. He just showed us a different style against Western Michigan than that of Henderson.

The receivers? Wow. Three serious threats in Emeka Egbuka, Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith. Of course, everyone is talking about Smith, with good reason. He's merely started off with 11 catches, 211 yards and three touchdowns in his first two games out of high school. His fast start brings to mind that of Maurice Clarett. Remember how Clarett ran for 175 yards and three touchdowns on just 21 carries in his freshman debut against Texas Tech in 2002? That's Jeremiah Smith-like.

And how about the depth at all positions?

Three quarterbacks led touchdown drives against Western Michigan. It might have been the best we've seen of Devin Brown (5 of 5 for 57 yards passing). And while our first glimpse of much-hyped freshman transfer Julian Sayin was brief, I'm saying he was impressive, hitting both of his passes for 61 yards and a touchdown and running once for 5 yards. The position is in good hands.

We also got a glimpse of some of the running back depth. It's good. And we got our second look at freshman running back James Peoples. He can run. Through two games, he has 81 yards and two touchdowns on 16 carries, a solid 5.1 yards per try.

The defense? It sure seems like there are a full 22 – at least – who can play. Solid everywhere. Only six points allowed in two games. No touchdowns. Yes, the competition has been light. But we've seen Ohio State defenses in past years do worse against weak opponents, and often we've seen the defense wilt when second-unit players entered games. This has not happened this year. Five straight quarters and running with nothing allowed.

The season is longer than ever in 2024. Winning a national championship means playing 16 or 17 games. September is no time to make predictions based on performance, especially with the kind of early-season schedule OSU has this year.

But the early review is very positive.

Around The Country

The season is just two weeks old. But already Michigan has lost. So has Notre Dame. And plenty of schools ranked in the top 10 have been in nail-biters.

Alabama, ranked fourth, went into the fourth quarter clinging to a 14-13 lead over South Florida, before breaking away for what looked – by the scoreboard – like an easy win.

No. 5 Notre Dame was a 27.5-point favorite over Northern Illinois from the Mid-American Conference and lost, 16-14.

No. 10 Michigan did have a tough opponent, No. 3 Texas, but looked like anything but a top-10 team in getting blown out by the Longhorns. Only a very late score made the game look closer, at 31-12. But the game wasn't that close.

Oregon started the season ranked third. Then dropped to seventh after a close win, 24-14, over Idaho. Then it took a fourth-quarter rally to pull out a 37-34 win over Boise State in Week 2.

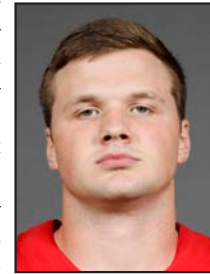
Checking In On McCord

Kyle McCord is off to a solid start for Syracuse. Good for him.

McCord completed 32 of 46 passes for 381 yards and four touchdowns in a 31-28 win over No. 23 Georgia Tech.

A week earlier in the opener, he was 27 of 39 for 354 yards and four touchdowns, with an interception, in a 38-22 win over Ohio University.

Don't be surprised if McCord has Syracuse in contention for a spot in the ACC championship



Kyle McCord

game.

Checking In On Hayden

Promising Buckeye back Dallan Hayden transferred to Colorado after showing bursts of talent, when given the opportunity, during two seasons in Columbus.

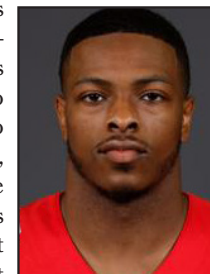
So far, he is off to a slow start in Colorado. He ran nine times for 20 yards in Colorado's opener, a 31-26 win over North Dakota State. Then he had five carries for 32 yards in a 28-10 loss to Nebraska.

Checking In On Traynum

Running back Chip Traynum transferred to Kentucky to close out a college career that started at Arizona State before landing at Ohio State.

The Wildcats were counting on him. But he didn't see any action during the first two games, reportedly because of a broken hand expected to keep him out

of action for the first three to four games.



Chip Traynum

Top 11

Fortunately, rankings no longer mean anything, as long as you finish the season in the top 11 nationally. Presumably the 12th playoff spot will go to a lower-ranked team not from one of the power conferences.

Here's my very early take on a top 11. But there's a lot of guessing here after Miami, given the lack of information so far.

1. Ohio State, 2-0
2. Georgia, 2-0
3. Texas, 2-0
4. USC, 2-0
5. Miami, 2-0
6. Alabama, 2-0
7. Tennessee, 2-0
8. Utah, 2-0
9. Oregon, 2-0
10. Penn State, 2-0
11. Oklahoma State, 2-0

The Ohio State University Alumni Association

GUIDE YOUR CAREER

3,200+

active employers working with Alumni Career Connection

4,500+

AlumniFire members ready to network

9,000+

The Buckeye Network reaches active members on LinkedIn

BOND WITH FELLOW BUCKEYES

121

Join one of Regional Clubs

48

Connect with one of Societies supporting your interests

168

Attend special events hosted in FY16

PAY FORWARD

150

More than volunteer projects done by Buckeyes in 2016

TRAVEL THE WORLD

30+

Join one of trips with Alumni Tours

GET SOCIAL

Follow along to stay up to date with The Ohio State University Alumni Association

f

32,515 Likes

t

34,300 Followers

540,000+ alumni across the globe

YOU'RE A BUCKEYE FOR LIFE

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

This Time, Punt Returners Don't Catch A Break

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

What can I say about a performance by the Ohio State football team that was so close to flawless that my biggest complaint is, after a brief ray of hope in the opener against Akron with Brandon Inniss running wild, that the Buckeye punt return team reverted to its old fair-catch ways. It's not like the Buckeyes didn't have their chances at returns. With the OSU defense at the top of its game, giving up only 99 total yards, the Broncos were forced to punt 11 times. The Buckeyes turned those opportunities into five returns for 6 yards and a long of 3.

"Having an aggressive mindset is what you need back there," Inniss had said of returning punts after his big day against the Zips. "You can't play around when you're back there, you can't tip-toe. You have to get the ball, make the first two guys miss and go."

Sounds good to me. I'm just not sure where that aggressive attitude went once the Broncos came to town.

Oh well, it was fun while it lasted. Or are the Buckeyes saving their newfound weapon for the bigger games down the road?

While I am nit-picking, there is still that issue of penalties. This time the Buckeyes were flagged six times for 58 yards, to only one penalty by the Broncos. It's not just that Ohio State is frequently flagged – they are currently 75th in fewest penalties at 6.5 per outing and 62nd with 51.5 yards a game – but it's also the timing of the miscues.

In this game, the Buckeyes had an 80-yard Quinshon Judkins run to pay dirt negated by a holding penalty after losing a 27-yard punt return by Inniss in the game against Akron to another flag.

It's really unfair to be such a Debbie Downer after such an amazing performance, but it is a lot easier to point out the few flaws than list all the superlatives.

With praise to go all the way around, I'm just going to pick out a couple of things that were important to me.

First of all, after throwing – unsuccessfully – to a tight end only once vs. Akron, the Buckeyes looked to the tight ends eight times vs. the Broncos, completing five of them. The highlight among those had to be the 55-yard connection between freshman quarterback Julian Sayin and tight end Bennett Christian that resulted in the final touchdown of the evening for the Buckeyes.

The pass play helps highlight the other thing about the game I wanted to applaud. All sorts of reserves got into the game, and I was really impressed with how hard – and well – they played given that the game was well out of reach.

"That takes all 11, whoever is out there the entire game," linebacker Sonny Styles said. "We get up by 40, some of the younger guys get in, (the opponent scores) a field goal, the shutout is done. So, I think that goes to show how good our depth is. Everyone that comes in the game is ready to play."

One defender who has played well off the bench the last two weeks is linebacker Gabe Powers, who had a pick-six and a tackle against the Zips and mixed it up against the Broncos and was credited with another two tackles.

With Devin Brown and Sayin, along with Lincoln Kienholz, all seeing action, it should be noted that Ryan Day pulled starter Will Howard with 4:18 to go in the third quarter and the Buckeyes leading 42-0. That has to be some sort of record for fastest removal of the starting quarterback in the Day era.

Brown and Sayin combined to complete 7 of 7 passes for 118 yards and Sayin's touchdown toss.

Judkins Shows Explosion

With Judkins averaging just 4.2 yards a carry in his Buckeye debut against Akron, on the heels of averaging 4.3 yards in his 1,158-yard season with Mississippi last year, there was a lively debate on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum as to whether the 6-0, 219-pound junior was an "explosive" runner.

Judkins answered that question against the Broncos, averaging 12.0 yards per carry with a long of 23, which didn't include his best run of the day, his 80-yarder that was called back. Add that run in (if you could) and he would have carried 10 times for 188 yards and an 18.8-yard average instead of his 108 yards on nine carries. Regardless of any stats, he looked every bit the part of the big-time back, as he was advertised upon his transfer.

His running mate, TreVeyon Henderson, has yet to break a big one – his long so far is 21 – but he is averaging 7.3 yards an attempt with 131 yards on 18 carries. Freshman James Peoples turned in another solid reserve outing against WMU with 10 carries for 51 yards with a touchdown for the second straight game. But the longest run of the evening was turned in by fellow freshman Sam Williams-Dixon, who ran for 31 yards on a fourth-quarter carry.

Any concerns about depth at running back for the Buckeyes may have been unnecessary.

Quote Of The Week

In this edition, we hop in the Wayback Machine and travel back 40 years for our quote. Buckeye all-time linebacking great Chris Spielman would ultimately become famous for his colorful quotes, including several following the upset of No. 1 Iowa in 1985. But back on Sept. 8, 1984, the freshman and former prep phenom Spielman had yet to play a college game.

Legend has it that during the season opener that year, Spielman paced up and down the sidelines in the first half, muttering to nobody in particular, "I've got to play, I've got to play." Buckeye coach Earle Bruce was finally forced to send Spielman in, and the rest, as they say, is history.

"I've never not started a football game in my life," he said after the 22-14 victory over Oregon State. "It was hard to accept at first, but I've got to understand I'm not in high school. I'm playing with men. I'm an 18-year-old kid playing with big guys that shave every day."

Spielman may have been a smooth-faced freshman back then, but he played like a man among men once he finally got on the field. Despite barely playing in the first half, Spielman finished with 10 tackles, including a sack, and forced a fumble. His tackle total was second on the team only to Terry White with 12.

In looking back at the stats from that season, I was surprised to see that Spielman was only 11th on the team with 45 tackles, two TFLs, the sack he had against the Beavers, two pass breakups and the caused fumble for a team that went to the Rose Bowl. By the time the Buckeyes got to Pasadena, Spielman recorded 15 tackles, including 12 unassisted, in a 20-17 loss to USC. He also recovered a Trojan fumble.

Make Yourself At Home

If you were wondering about Chip Kelly's offense after the opener against Akron, where the Buckeyes sputtered at times especially in the first half, you probably aren't worrying anymore.

Kelly's troops moved the ball with ease,

through the air and on the ground against Western Michigan, racking up an impressive 683 yards, including 410 yards passing and 273 rushing. Kelly and his quarterbacks used virtually every weapon available with all the projected offensive stars turning in stellar performances. As mentioned, the Buckeye quarterbacks even targeted the tight ends eight times.

Kelly's plays were so intricate that there were instances when I had a hard time following who had the ball.

There was an interesting note in the last BSB about why Kelly is working from the press box. I always figured a coach worked from up high because he could see the field and the action better.

Former OSU coach John Cooper used to famously say, when questioned by the press about plays after a game, "Guys, I've got the worst seat in the house."

But according to Day, there is another, perhaps more practical reason, that Kelly likes to work from the booth.

"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."

That's access to a lot more information than Day had when he was calling plays from the sideline and was limited to his single play sheet.

Remembering Fields And Wilson

Elsewhere in this issue, Craig Merz recaps the battle in Pittsburgh between former Buckeye Justin Fields and former Super Bowl-winning quarterback Russell Wilson to earn the starting quarterback position with the Steelers, a job ultimately won by the veteran Wilson, who then went down with injury on the eve of the Steelers opener, opening the door for Fields.

Fields, one of the best quarterbacks in Ohio State history, took his licks both on the field and from fans and media alike during his three-year stint with the Chicago Bears before he was traded to the Steelers this offseason.

Fields' stats with the Bears, as compiled by Craig, seem nowhere near as bad as some may have suggested. You can see for yourself in Craig's story on page 23 of this issue.

Last season, despite missing four games due to injury, he completed 227 of 370 passes for 2,562 yards with 16 touchdowns against nine interceptions and rushed 124 times for 657 yards with four touchdowns, as the Bears went 7-10.

We'll see how top-draft pick Caleb Williams does during his stint under center with the Bears.

As for Wilson, he was involved in probably the biggest win of Ohio State's dysfunctional 2011 season, when Luke Fickell was forced to take over for the deposed Jim Tressel.

Wilson had transferred to Wisconsin after starting for three straight seasons at North Carolina State and was having a magical year for the Badgers. He would end up completing 72.8 percent of his 309 passes, good for 3,175 yards

and 33 touchdowns against just four interceptions. He also rushed for another 338 yards on the ground and six touchdowns, while averaging 4.3 yards per tote.

The No. 12 Badgers entered Ohio Stadium with a 7-1, 3-1 Big Ten record, while the struggling Buckeyes were 4-3, 1-2. Ohio State led for much of the game, but Wilson brought the Badgers storming back with a pair of late touchdown passes and Wisconsin led 29-26 with only 1:18 left to play. However, freshman Buckeye quarterback Braxton Miller was ready to work a little magic of his own.

I summed up the final minutes of that game in just two paragraphs in this space in the Nov. 5, 2011, issue of BSB.

"Wisconsin's Russell Wilson showed that he has that gift when he led his team to two touchdowns in the final 4½ minutes of Ohio State's 33-29 victory over the Badgers, connecting on scoring passes of 17 and 49 yards," I wrote.

"Then, here comes OSU freshman Braxton Miller, turning the corner with running room in sight and the possibility of setting up a field goal to send the game into overtime. Instead, he spots fellow freshman Devin Smith in the end zone and throws a game-winning 40-yard touchdown pass. That big play came on top of a 44-yard touchdown run by Miller earlier in the quarter that seemingly had iced the game for the Buckeyes."

Wilson finished the game 20 of 32 passing for 253 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions. Miller threw only 12 passes in the game, completing seven of them for 89 yards with a score, but that score was the big one. Miller also rushed for 99 yards on 19 carries and two scores.

Miller finished his freshman year with 85 completions on 157 attempts (54.1 percent) for 1,159 yards, 13 touchdowns and four interceptions. More importantly he rushed for a team-leading 715 net yards (4.5 average), with seven TDs.

Technical Difficulties

Apologies to any subscribers who attempted to participate in our live game thread on the Forum at BuckeyeSports.com during the Western Michigan game. Our website went down at almost exactly the time the game started and did not come back up until roughly the final gun.

I can't speak for anyone else, but there were times when I was definitely fidgety about not being able to comment on some play or player in real time.

Hopefully that was a one-time incident, and we encourage those who have not been checking in during the game to join in on the fun.

This Week's Mail Report

As this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin was going to press, we were still receiving calls from subscribers who had yet to receive their Football Preview issue, which was mailed on Aug. 21. As I mentioned in the last issue, the Dayton area was the epicenter of the delivery problems, but poor delivery was not limited to that locale. The problems were both state- and nation-wide.

For those considering upgrading their subscriptions to first-class mail in an envelope, the cost has come down to \$26 for the rest of football season and \$36 through the traditional Football Recruiting Wrap-Up in February. 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. Mention either the "Football" or the "Recruiting" upgrade.

Reds

SEPTEMBER LINEUP!



ALL SEPT. GAMES

Sesame Street Ticket Package
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



Series presented by Cuties

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.



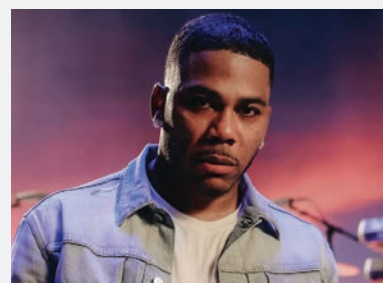
SEPTEMBER 20-22



Series presented by Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste

FRIDAY // 6:40

Ohio Lottery Post-Game Concert featuring Nelly.
Free to all fans with a game ticket, visit reds.com/Concerts.



City Connect and Fireworks Friday presented by Woodbridge Wines

Military Appreciation Day
Special offer for Military members available at reds.com/Military



SATURDAY // 1:10

2024 Reds Team Photo.
To fans in attendance, while supplies last.

SUNDAY // 1:10

Reds Bowling Shirt, presented by Encore Technologies.
To fans in attendance, while supplies last.

Fan Appreciation Day
Lucky fans will win prizes throughout the game!



Family Discount Day, provided by Klosterman Bakery
Visit reds.com/Family for a special ticket offer!

(513) 381-REDS (7337)



reds.com/Tickets

*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.