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Vol. 44, No. 4

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 5, 2024

SMITH THE SILENCER

Frosh WR's Two TDs Lead OSU To 38-7 Win At MSU

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Winning your first conference game of the season is never an easy task, regardless of the opponent. Just ask the SEC's Ole Miss.

Lane Kiffin's Rebels, who entered Week 5 of the college football season as the No. 6 team in the nation, began the busy college football Saturday favored by more than two touchdowns over a 2-2 unranked Kentucky squad, which was expected by many just to roll over against a dominant Ole Miss team with championship aspirations.

Instead, the supposedly overmatched Wildcats went into Oxford, Miss., and did the exact opposite, shocking the entire nation with a 20-17 victory on the road, sending the Rebels home with an excruciating, season-altering loss in their 2024 SEC opener.

Ole Miss' loss likely caught the attention of many teams, especially those with College Football Playoff aspirations, as many began their own conference season in Week 5, with it serving as a painful reminder that your season can turn on a dime if you fail to take a conference opponent seriously, no matter how overmatched that team may be.

That list may have included No. 3 Ohio State, which, like the Rebels, began its conference portion of the schedule with a game against supposedly overmatched Michigan State. Despite holding a 3-1 record and having some newfound energy under head coach Jonathan Smith, the Spartans entered the game against the Buckeyes as 23.5-point underdogs at home.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said just two days before playing the Big Ten opener that his team would be on high alert heading into East Lansing, Mich., with the new-look Spartans posing a real threat to their goals, something that would only be heightened with an intense home crowd in prime time.

"It's a conference game. It's on the road against a team that went on the road and beat Maryland at Maryland," Day said. "They certainly have our attention."

But while the Spartans certainly earned Day's and the Buckeyes' respect in the days leading into the game, it still didn't stop things from getting dicey at times when the two conference rivals took the field under

the Spartan Stadium lights.

Played before an energized green and white crowd of 71,114 who booed the Buckeyes from the moment they stepped out of the tunnel, the game had underdog Michigan State go toe-to-toe with third-ranked Ohio State in the early going, trailing just 10-7 midway through the second quarter following a 12-yard touchdown pass from sophomore quarterback Aidan Chiles to senior wideout Jaron Glover.

It was a close game that was spurred by some self-inflicted wounds from the Buckeyes in the early going.

Ohio State could have taken a 7-0 lead on the very first drive of the game, finding itself with second-and-goal at the MSU 6-yard line following a Will Howard 4-yard rush, but an unnecessary roughness call on tight end Will Kacmarek halted any momentum the Buckeyes had, forcing them to instead settle for a field goal and a 3-0 lead.

Ohio State did bounce back one drive later to take a 10-0 lead off a 3-yard Gee Scott Jr. touchdown catch from Howard in the red zone – which wouldn't have happened if Michigan State's Malik Spencer hadn't dropped what looked like an easy interception of Howard one play earlier – but it failed to extend the lead any further when Howard put the ball into harm's way again on the next time out, this time into a double team and eventually the hands of Spartans linebacker Jordan Turner for the interception, and Michigan State scored its aforementioned touchdown one play later.

"It was just a bad decision," Howard said when asked about the interception. "They went Cover 2 there; we wanted them to go some sort of man on that play. The play clock was running down, and I ended up just kind of rushing the decision and forced it in there. I really should have just gone back side and worked my spread concept back to the field, but that's something we can learn from."

Howard's interception and Michigan State's subsequent score injected even more life into an already amped-up Spartans Stadium crowd, giving Buckeyes fans flashbacks of their team's upset road conference losses of years past.

Ohio State's fans may have been in a temporary state of panic as they watched



SONNY BROCKWAY

FANTASTIC START — Freshman Jeremiah Smith made five catches for 83 yards and had fans buzzing after two sensational one-handed catches, including a 17-yard touchdown late in the second quarter in the 38-7 victory over Michigan State.

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From The Message Board

Ohio State's 38-7 win over Michigan State marked just the second-ever Buckeye game that was solely broadcast on the streaming service Peacock. This caused many Buckeye fans to seek other viewing or listening opportunities for the game, including listening to the game on the radio or watching the game from a sports bar or restaurant.

We asked readers on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum how they chose to consume the game, as well as what their viewing or listening experience was like, and how they feel about streaming in general.

"I listened on the radio and kind of enjoyed it. Paul Keels and Jim Lachey were great. Because they exclusively cover the Buckeyes and have done so for years, they seem to know more about Ohio State football than your run-of-the-mill network announcer. I found listening on the radio very old school. After all, for most of the early part of my life, I listened to the majority of games on radio.

"I did miss the clock and down-and-distance you get on TV, but Keels is a professional and calls out the particulars pretty regularly. As for streaming in general, I don't really get the strategy. I may be out of touch but wouldn't more people not have Peacock than do? That's certainly true among us seniors, isn't it? Why limit your audience and create a lot of bad will?"

– Poster That Harley Built

"Peacock is better than radio in my opinion, but some things are weird. Peacock doesn't have as many graphics as regular TV showing statistics and such. Announcers don't say as much like the distance of a punt and naming the tacklers. Or so it seems to me. Announcers seem more amateurish? Apparently, they have dead time when they are not able to sell commercials and you get a black screen saying, 'We will return to action in a moment.'

"I don't hate streaming but it's slightly different and not better."

–Terrier Buck

"This was the second year I watched the Peacock streaming experiment. Just like last year I experienced extensive video data

lag during streaming. I was participating in the BSB Fan Forum live during the game. Just like last year, those at the game in person that were broadcasting, as well as those listening on radio, knew what was happening long before I did.

"I believe there was at least a minute data lag at times. It's a little frustrating to see someone post 'and the kick is good,' while they still haven't lined up to kick it yet on my TV screen! Well, maybe next year I'll just go to the game."

– BuckeyeScott

"I thought the game on Peacock was fine. I enjoy watching games on there. It's pretty similar to a network broadcast, you'd never even know it was streamed."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I streamed the Keels/Lachey radio broadcast over the internet, as I live in Arizona. Also followed along with ESPN.com gamecast and stats."

– R1TBDBITL

"Does anyone remember back in the dark ages when you could have a productive Saturday because you listened to the game on the radio and you could work around the house, read a book, pursue your hobby, all while listening to the game? Now we are glued to the TV for a chunk of the day, regardless of how the game is delivered to us. Is that progress?"

– Mcarr

"I watched on Peacock and I'm glad because some of those plays were freakishly amazing. See under; Jeremiah Smith."

– PeyoteBuck

FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State shrugged off another slow start to come away with a convincing 38-7 road victory over Michigan State to kick off Big Ten play and improve to 4-0 on the season. 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: Ohio State was somewhat treading water in the early going against Michigan State, but freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith made sure that wouldn't last too long.

With the team holding just a 10-7 lead midway through the second quarter and facing a second-and-1 at the MSU 19, the talented wideout took a reverse handoff from Will Howard all the way to the end zone to give the Buckeyes some breathing room and a 17-7 lead.

That would not be the most impactful play he made in the game, though. That came two drives later toward the end of the half. With the Buckeyes facing a tough third-and-10 at the Michigan State 17 and Howard being temporarily knocked out of the game due to injury, Smith played hero ball once again with a sensational one-handed touchdown catch – one of two eye-popping catches he had that drive – from backup quarterback Devin Brown, which extended the Buckeyes' lead to 24-7.

Smith finished with five catches for 83 yards and a receiving touchdown, along with the 19-yard rushing score, and he continues to show his superstar potential at just 18 years old. I'm sure there are many other Buckeye Leaves in store for him this season.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: Howard showed he was more than capable against Big Ten competition in the team's conference opener against Michigan State and gets my Buckeye Leaf.

Howard completed 21 of 31 passes for 244 yards and two passing touchdowns to one interception and added another rushing touchdown, his third of the season, on a 6-yard run to give the Buckeyes a 38-7 lead in the third quarter.

He faced some adversity in the first half, throwing an interception that allowed the Spartans to get on the board one play later and nearly throwing an interception on a third-and-goal incompleteness early in the second quarter. Howard even faced an injury that had him sidelined for the very end of the first half before making his return.

Through all of the obstacles in his way, Howard made the important throws when the Buckeyes needed them the most. His biggest throws came on a 3-yard touchdown pass in a tight window to tight end Gee Scott Jr. that allowed the team to convert a fourth-and-goal and a 33-yard touchdown pass to Emeka Egbuka on fourth-and-5 in the third quarter that virtually slammed the door on the Spartans' chances.

Cameron Moone, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf will go to Emeka Egbuka, who continued his 2024 renaissance season with a team-leading seven-catch, 96-yard performance

against Michigan State, including a 33-yard touchdown reception on a fourth-and-5 in the third quarter. After a quiet 2023 campaign, Egbuka has truly transformed himself into a reliable veteran wide receiver for the Buckeyes, totaling 21 catches for 362 yards and two scores. His leadership and consistency will play a huge role as Ohio State gets into the meaty part of its schedule.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf goes to Caleb Downs, who was all over the field during the Buckeyes' first conference win of the season. During the nonconference schedule, the transfer safety didn't show up much on the stat sheet due to a change in his role from his freshman season at Alabama.

But it was hard to miss Downs in East Lansing. He was all over the field, making plays in the secondary, in the backfield and from sideline to sideline. He was reading the Spartans' offense well and was able to get to the ball carrier quickly, helping Ohio State's defense limit the Michigan State offense to just seven points, which they scored after Howard's interception that allowed the Spartans to start a drive on the 12-yard line.

Downs finished the game with six tackles, three solo and one for a loss. He topped the OSU defense in tackles – tied with linebacker Sonny Styles – for the first time this season, showing off his ability that allowed him to lead the Crimson Tide in his freshman season with 107 tackles.

BSB Subscribers:

BuckeyeScott: Buckeye Nation may well run out of superlatives to describe Jeremiah Smith before the season ends. Wowzers! Also, give Buckeye Leaves to Latham Ransom and Jordan Hancock for forcing fumbles and a turnover from the Spartans. Finally, stuffing the run on fourth-and-1 gets Cody Simon a Buckeye Leaf!

Terrier Buck: I think Downs, Howard and Smith are three good choices. Emeka Egbuka deserves some consideration.

Tiffin Buckeye: Jeremiah Smith. He's a beast.

PeyoteBuck: Will Howard for getting the ball to the world's most talented receivers.

Mcarr: I'm going to go a little different. The usual suspects get recognition every week. What about Devin Brown? In a pivotal part of the game, with the result still potentially on the line, he comes off the bench cold and throws a strike to Jeremiah Smith to give the Buckeyes some breathing room. Smith will get the accolades because of his acrobatics, but it takes two to tango. A reminder to all the guys on the bench. You have to be ready.

Bob Cody: A Buckeye Tree for Jeremiah Smith. Buckeye Leaves for Caleb Downs, Lathan Ransom, Will Howard, Emeka Egbuka and Devin Brown – who in Ron Maciejowski-like fashion, comes in cold off the bench and throws a huge TD to Jeremiah Smith, who one-hands it into the end zone!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Frustrated with FOX

Regarding the telecasting of the OSU-Marshall football game; if the announcers want to chit chat, they should do it when they are NOT working the football game. The fourth quarter was just a mess with their talking about everything except the game. The next time FOX has the game I will turn off the audio and turn on my radio. Go Bucks!

Bob Shroyer
Galion, Ohio

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

Defense Untracks To Smother Spartans

It's easy to point out the ridiculous embarrassment of riches Ohio State has on the offensive side of the ball, riches on full display during a 38-7 romp in the 2024 Big Ten season opener at Michigan State.

Senior receiver Emeka Egbuka moved into the program's all-time top 10 in career receptions, closed to within 34 yards of the top 10 in receiving yardage, and caught a pass for the 28th consecutive game. That performance was overshadowed by freshman human highlight reel Jeremiah Smith and his one-handed acrobatics.

It wasn't just that Smith caught five passes for 83 yards and a touchdown and scored another TD on a second-quarter end-around. It was how he went about his business.

Late in the second quarter as the Buckeyes were operating their two-minute offense, Smith elevated between Michigan State cornerback Ed Woods and safety Malik Spencer and somehow – despite Spencer's hand firmly inside the freshman's face mask – made a one-handed stab of a Will Howard throw for a 27-yard gain.

Three plays later, with Howard on the sidelines after absorbing a shot to the ribs, Smith made backup quarterback Devin Brown look exceptional with another one-handed catch, this one down the sideline – blanketed again by Woods and Spencer – for a 17-yard touchdown with just 29 seconds left in the first half.

Celebrities from across the pro sports landscape, including NBA great LeBron James, took to social media to praise Smith's talents, but perhaps former Ohio State running back Maurice Clarett put it best when he posted on X (formerly Twitter), "He's 18," followed by four laughing-so-hard-I'm-crying emojis.

Meanwhile, there were other offensive standouts.

It's taken Howard just four games to crack the 1,000-yard mark in passing for the season, but getting more than his share of praise was Brown for what was probably the best pass he's thrown as a Buckeye, that pinpoint dart down the sideline that Smith speared to make it 24-7 at halftime.

TreVeyon Henderson became only the 12th player in Ohio State history to eclipse the 3,000-yard mark in career rushing, but almost all anyone wanted to talk about was his blocking. Henderson channeled his inner Ezekiel Elliott by obliterating blitzing MSU safety Nikai Martinez on the Brown-to-Smith touchdown pass and then did it again in the third quarter, wiping out linebacker Cal Haladay on a 33-yard touchdown pass from Howard to Egbuka.

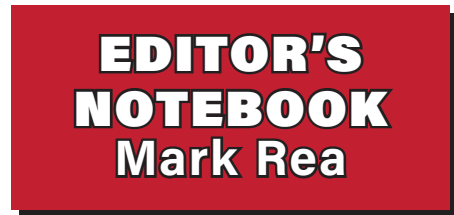
It was basically another walk in the park for a team ranked No. 4 nationally in scoring offense at 48.8 points per game and No. 5 in total offense with an average of 534.8 yards per contest.

But what are we to make of the Ohio State defense with one-third of the regular season already in the books? Slow starters or the best adjust-on-the-fly unit in college football? Maybe it's a little bit of both.

Sold to Buckeye Nation during the summer and preseason as the best unit since defensive coordinator Jim Knowles came to Columbus in 2022 and heralded by some as the best the program has fielded since the 2015 defensive roster yielded seven first-round NFL draft picks – and three more second-rounders – the defense has put up bottom-line numbers so far without looking invincible.

Knowles acknowledged as much himself following the 49-14 win against Marshall, declining to name a Defensive Player of the Game. He might repeat that after the win against Michigan State during which the Spartans began the game averaging 8.6 yards per play on each of their first 20 snaps.

The contest was much too close for comfort with the Buckeyes leading, 10-7, at the 9:41 mark of the second quarter, and it would likely have been even more uncomfortable had the Spartans to that point not fumbled twice inside the red zone and turned the ball over on downs at the OSU 20.



Especially troublesome was the relative lack of pressure early against Michigan State sophomore transfer quarterback Aidan Chiles. Starting only the second Big Ten game of his career after transferring from Oregon State, where he was a backup as a freshman in 2023, Chiles completed each of his first six passes and nine of his first 10 attempts vs. Ohio State for 143 yards and a touchdown. At that point, Chiles had a lofty quarterback rating of 243.12.

But as they did against Marshall, the Buckeyes put the hammer down in the second half. Chiles managed only 25 yards through the air in the second half, and the Spartans never crossed midfield until the meaningless final possession of the game.

Led by safety Caleb Downs, who had a handful of textbook tackles in the open field, cornerback Denzel Burke, who grabbed his fourth career interception, and safety Lathan Ransom, who forced the fifth fumble of his career, the Buckeyes threw a massive bucket of cold water on the Spartans after their hot start. Michigan State's first 20 offensive plays were worth 172 yards and a touchdown, while its final 30 snaps of the game netted only 74 yards and no points.

Ohio State remains the No. 1 scoring defense in the nation, yielding only 27 points in four games. The Buckeyes are also No. 2 in total defense, giving up an average of 196.5 yards per contest. Drill down a little deeper, and you'll find a unit that has given up only three points and an average of just 58.0 yards during the second half this season.

And it's a unit that in my estimation hasn't even come close to playing its best game yet.

Ancient History

Considering the way college football has evolved just over the past decade, things that happened in the 1970s could be considered ancient history.

Case in point: The 1976 season-opening game between Ohio State and Michigan State, an early September contest at Ohio Stadium featuring a 49-21 victory for the Buckeyes.

The final score wasn't that surprising. OSU was embarking upon a season that would culminate with a fifth consecutive Big Ten championship while the Spartans were on their way to a 4-6-1 finish under first-year coach Darryl Rogers.

Woody Hayes, in his 26th season as head coach of the Buckeyes, still favored a run-oriented offense, and it showed in the 1976 opener when his team piled up 463 yards on the ground, still the sixth-highest rushing total in program history.

Tailback Jeff Logan (112) and starting quarterback Rod Gerald (104) each cracked the century mark on the ground, and fullback Pete Johnson (99) almost got there, while Logan, Gerald and Johnson each rushed for two touchdowns. Logan also returned a punt 68 yards for a touchdown.

That a Hayes-coached team used a ground-and-pound attack to beat an opponent into sub-

mission isn't that unusual. The ancient history part of this story comes from the Ohio State passing attack – inasmuch as there really wasn't one.

While Howard threw 31 times against the Spartans in this year's game, the Buckeyes attempted only two passes during the 1974 contest, and neither of them was thrown by Gerald. The only attempt by an OSU quarterback came when tight end Jimmy Moore dropped a pass from backup QB Jim Pacentia just before the first half ended, while the lone completion came from Logan, who connected on a first-quarter option pass to wingback Jim Harrell for a 36-yard gain.

Conversely, Michigan State attempted 36 passes and completed 16 of them for 259 yards and three touchdowns. Two of the scores went to All-America flanker Kirk Gibson, who went on to a 17-year playing career in Major League Baseball. Gibson remains the only member of the College Football Hall of Fame who also won a league MVP in baseball.

Get It In Writing

College football will always provide more than its share of excitement with regard to the product on the field. Regardless of conference bias, it would be difficult to top the entertainment value of the fantastic Friday night finish between Miami (Fla.) and Virginia Tech, Kentucky's come-from-behind upset of sixth-ranked Ole Miss, or the down-to-wire fireworks in the marquee game featuring No. 2 Georgia and No. 4 Alabama.

But behind the scenes, in the chaotic world of free agency (aka the transfer portal) and unfettered bribery of players (aka NIL), things are getting completely out of hand.

To wit: USC defensive tackle Keithian "Bear" Alexander has told the Trojans he will sit out the rest of the 2024 season and then transfer – again. Alexander, who began his career at Georgia, had been a rotational piece for the Trojans this season but indicated his desire to be "a full-time starter and leader."

I would contend that quitting because you aren't starting or because you don't like the way the defense is structured is the very antithesis of leadership. But, for what it's worth, cutting and running apparently is in Alexander's DNA. He attended four different high schools before finishing his prep career at IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla. So, let's shed no tears for Lincoln Riley – or Alexander's next coach, for that matter.

While Alexander was unsatisfied with the way he was being utilized as a player at USC, another player felt he was simply being used by his school. UNLV starting QB Matt Sluka announced recently that he will redshirt and won't play the rest of this season for the unbeaten Rebels.

"I committed to UNLV based on certain representations that were made to me, which were not upheld after I enrolled," Sluka said. "Despite discussions, it became clear these commitments would not be fulfilled in the future. I wish my teammates the best of luck this season and hope for the continued success of the program."

Reading between the lines, Sluka was apparently promised NIL considerations that did not come to fruition. Obviously, a school should live up to its promises, and the recruiting trail just got a whole lot bumpier for UNLV head coach Barry Odom. Not that it mattered Sept. 28 when the Sluka-less Rebels rolled to a 59-14 win against Fresno State.

Still, I guess the moral of these stories is what any legal counsel might advise. Buyer beware because no agreement is binding if it's not in writing.



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OHIO STATE INSIDER

OSU Remains At No. 3 In AP Poll

After a 38-7 win in its Big Ten opener against Michigan State, Ohio State is standing pat at No. 3 in the AP poll.

Ohio State has stayed at the No. 3 spot since its 56-0 win over Western Michigan in Week 2, moving down one spot since starting at No. 2 in the preseason poll.

After Alabama's thrilling 41-34 win over conference rival Georgia, the top five had plenty of movement. Previously No. 2-ranked Georgia moved down to No. 5 following the defeat, while Alabama moved up from No. 4 to No. 1.

Previous No. 1 Texas struggled some against 1-4 Mississippi State in a 35-13 win and was moved down to the No. 2 spot ahead of Ohio State as a result.

Alabama, Texas and Ohio State were the only three teams to receive first-place votes in the Week 6 poll. The Tide led the way with 40 first-place votes, followed by Texas with 19 and Ohio State with four, one fewer than it had a week ago.

Elsewhere in the Big Ten, No. 6 Oregon and No. 7 Penn State solidified their spots within the top 10 with wins in their Big Ten openers against UCLA and then-No. 19 Illinois, respectively. The Ducks and the Nittany Lions both moved up two spots from last week following the victories, while Illinois fell five spots to No. 24 following the loss to Penn State.

No. 10 Michigan moved back into the top 10 from No. 12 following its third straight win and second straight win in the Big Ten,

defeating Minnesota 27-24 at home.

The rest of the top 10 included No. 4 Tennessee, No. 8 Miami and No. 9 Missouri.

No. 11 USC just missed out on the top 10 after a convincing 38-21 win over Wisconsin at home, jumping up two spots from No. 13.

The Big Ten also had one newcomer to the poll in No. 23 Indiana, which cracked the AP top 25 for the first time since the 2021 preseason poll following its 42-28 win over Maryland. The Hoosiers, led by first-year head coach Curt Cignetti, are 5-0 for the first time since 1967.

With Indiana now ranked, the Big Ten has seven teams inside the top 25 entering Week 6, behind only the SEC with nine.

Indiana is one of two newcomers to the poll, joining No. 25 UNLV. The 4-0 Rebels are ranked within the top 25 for the first time in program history following a convincing 59-14 win over Fresno State, which came just days after starting quarterback Matthew Sluka opted to redshirt and seek a transfer this offseason due to an NIL issue with the university.

As for the highest risers and fallers in the Week 6 poll, Ole Miss fell six spots from No. 6 to No. 12 following a 20-17 upset loss at home to Kentucky, which received six top-25 votes, and Utah fell eight spots from No. 10 to No. 18 after its 23-10 home loss to Arizona, which is just outside the poll with 106 top-25 votes.

BYU is the biggest riser from No. 22 to No. 17 following its 34-28 win over favored Baylor which moved them to 5-0 on the season, while Boise State surged up another four spots from No. 25 to No. 21 after defeating Washington State 45-24 at home.

DT Williams Sits Against MSU

In the hours before Ohio State's win over Michigan State, it seemed as though the team would be fully healthy for the first time all season, with senior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams off the team's availability report.

Williams, who had been kept out of Ohio State's 49-14 win over Marshall the week prior with an undisclosed injury, was

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	1-4, 30-10 loss to Ohio
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	1-3, 27-20 loss to Marshall
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	W, 49-14	FOX	2-2, 27-20 win over Western Mich.
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W, 38-7	Peacock	3-2, 38-7 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 5	IOWA	3:30 p.m.	CBS	3-1, idle
Oct. 12	at Oregon	TBA	TBA	4-0, 34-13 win over UCLA
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	4-1, 28-10 win over Purdue
Nov. 2	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	4-0, 21-7 win over Illinois
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	1-3, 28-10 loss to Nebraska
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	2-2, idle
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	5-0, 42-28 win over Maryland
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	4-1, 27-24 win over Minnesota

cleared to play against the Spartans after practicing the week leading up to the contest. But according to Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, he was going to be used only in an emergency role.

Day said the decision to sit Williams was similar to the one he made with starting left guard Donovan Jackson against Western Michigan in Week 2, when Jackson, despite being off the injury report, was kept out of the game as a precaution.

Similar to the game against Marshall, the Buckeyes seemed to miss Williams in the first half against the Spartans, giving up 186 yards for 6.9 yards per play.

In the second half, though, the Buckeyes were much improved and allowed only 60 yards and no points.

Filling in for Williams on the Buckeyes' defensive line against Michigan State were senior Tywone Malone and sophomore Kayden McDonald, who both made their presence felt in some capacity, with Malone recording one tackle in the second quarter and McDonald recording three tackles, including one for loss.

With Williams sitting out in Week 5, the Buckeyes still have yet to have all of their starters out on the field in the same game this season.

In Ohio State's Week 1 win over Akron on Aug. 31, both starting Mike linebacker Cody Simon and Jackson were out with injuries. Simon returned against Western Michigan

for Week 2 on Sept. 7, but Jackson still was kept out, and Jackson returned but Williams was ruled out against Marshall.

Williams was not an official inactive against the Spartans, but four Buckeyes did land on the injury report before the contest. That list included walk-on running backs Rashid Sesay and TC Caffey – who is out for the season with a torn ACL – along with senior wide receiver Reis Stocksdale and freshman linebacker Zach Hayes.

10 Freshmen Make Trip To East Lansing

Ten players in Ohio State's 22-man recruiting class made the road trip to East Lansing for the team's Big Ten opener against Michigan State.

They were a part of the 74-man traveling roster, a group that includes running backs Sam Williams-Dixon and James Peoples, wide receivers Mylan Graham and Jeremiah Smith, defensive end Eddrick Houston, safety Jaylen McClain, punter Nick McLarty, linebacker Payton Pierce, quarterback Julian Sayin and cornerback Aaron Scott Jr.

Among the freshmen to not travel with the team were offensive linemen Deontae and Devontae Armstrong and Gabe Van Sickle, defensive lineman Eric Mensah, tight end Max LeBlanc, cornerbacks Miles Lockart and Bryce West, quarterback Air Noland, safety Leroy Roker III, linebacker Garrett Stover, and wide receiver Damarion

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A Temporary Solution To BSB Mail Problems

Any Buckeye Sports Bulletin reader has either experienced delivery problems in the last few weeks or read about it enough to know that the recent mail service has been problematic and has shown little sign of getting better.

We remind you that the complete edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted online at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion and before the paper even hits the mail. We encourage readers to take advantage of this free service while waiting for their paper to arrive.

"We fully understand that reading the paper online is not a substitute for having your BSB in your hands," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "But it gives you a chance to read the stories you want to read immediately while waiting for your paper to arrive."

And there is much more on BuckeyeSports.com than just the complete copy of the paper.

BuckeyeSports.com will be with you every day this football season, from the opening win over Akron to the CFP national championship game in Atlanta on Jan. 20, 2025.

The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability throughout football season, and the news is available in real time at BuckeyeSports.com.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. Along with daily posts and additional features, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports

Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. For the next several weeks we are looking at past games with upcoming opponent Oregon. Football season marked the return of the always entertaining Staff Predictions, which appear the Friday before every game. Staff members were all fairly close with their Michigan State predictions with Patrick Engels at 38-10, Bobby Gorbett at 41-7 and Greg Wilson at 31-7.

Staff members also man the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively and is even more so during football season.

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BSB is also offering the opportunity to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail during football season. See the box on page 6.

men's hoops coach Jake Diebler when he was hired last March, sharing a post made by Ohio State's men's basketball's team account that featured Diebler and writing "CONGRATS DIEBS!!!!" to his more than 159 million followers.

After the game, Smith was very happy to hear James had issued his support.

"It means a lot, growing up and watching LeBron, looking up to him and things he was doing on the basketball side. It's pretty cool."

Iowa Game Set For 3:30 On CBS

The game time and TV network for Ohio State's Oct. 5 matchup against Iowa have been revealed. The Buckeyes will battle the Hawkeyes in their Big Ten home opener at 3:30 p.m., with the game set to air on CBS.

OSU last faced off against Iowa on Oct. 22, 2022, a 54-10 win for the Buckeyes where future Houston Texans quarterback C.J. Stroud complete 20 of 30 passes for 286 yards and four touchdowns to one interception.

The Buckeye defense also dominated in the blowout win, forcing six turnovers on three interceptions and three fumble recoveries.

Ohio State leads the all-time series against Iowa 47-15-3, but the Buckeyes' win streak is just one with the Hawkeyes' last win coming on Nov. 4, 2017, when they beat OSU 55-24 in a game that J.T. Barrett threw four interceptions.

This will also be the fourth game Ohio State will play on CBS since the Big Ten replaced the SEC in the 3:30 slot as part of a seven-year, \$8 billion deal with CBS, NBC and Fox that runs through the 2029-30 season.

The Buckeyes were featured in the main CBS time slot in their 2023 and 2024 season openers against Indiana and Akron, respectively, along with their game at Rutgers last November.

The only other game time officially revealed for the rest of the Buckeyes' schedule

Continued On Page 6

Witten.

Three non-freshman scholarship players also did not make the trip, including redshirt freshman defensive ends Will Smith Jr. and Joshua Mickens and redshirt freshman offensive lineman Miles Walker.

Smith, as he has been all season, was the most productive of the freshmen against Michigan State, totaling five catches for 83 yards and a touchdown, along with a 19-yard rushing touchdown on an end-around reverse play.

Sayin got into his second game of the season against Michigan State but struggled to get into much of a rhythm. In very brief playing time, he finished the game 0 for 2 against the Spartans. Sayin's performance was a far cry from his previous performance against Western Michigan where he went for 61 yards passing and a touchdown, com-

pleting both of his two pass attempts.

Peoples entered the game against Michigan State with the game in hand in the fourth quarter, running for 29 yards on 10 carries. He has routinely received playing time in the later stages of Ohio State's victories, going for 141 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 32 totes in his first four collegiate games.

On the defensive end of the ball, McClain and Scott each got on the stat sheet late in the game, recording two and one tackles, respectively.

Pierce was the only other freshman to participate in the win despite not recording a tackle.

LeBron Shouts Out Smith After One-Hander

Smith's incredible one-handed recep-

tions in the second quarter against the Spartans caught the attention of plenty of people in the sports world, including Ohio-native LeBron James. The four-time NBA finals champion and league's all-time leading scorer took to Twitter to give Smith praise for his stunning feats.

"JEREMIAH SMITH!!!! MAN KNOCK IT OFF!!!! MY GOODNESS O-H," James' Tweet read.

Even though James has played on the West Coast for the Los Angeles Lakers since 2018, he has still stuck to his Ohio roots, serving as an active and public supporter of the Buckeyes in both basketball and football.

James attended Ohio State's 2022 home opener against Notre Dame while his son and now-Lakers teammate Bronny James was on an official visit to Columbus, and he also voiced his support for first-year head

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Continued From Page 5

is the noon kickoff against Michigan Nov. 30, which will air on FOX.

Noland, Snyder Lose Black Stripes

Two Buckeyes became "official" members of the team since Ohio State's 49-14 Week 4 win over Marshall on Sept. 21, with senior kicker Austin Snyder and Noland losing their black stripes after practice on Sept. 24 and Sept. 25, respectively.

Snyder was the first of the two to earn the distinction and the 22nd player overall to do so this season. It came just three days after the former Findlay transfer filled in admirably for starting kicker Jayden Fielding after the usually dependable junior was benched in the second half of the Marshall game after booting three straight kickoffs out of bounds.

In Fielding's relief, Snyder kept all three of his second-half kickoffs in bounds, while he also made each of his two extra points.

Snyder, who transferred to Ohio State in 2023 after spending three seasons at Findlay, where he was coached by current Buckeye special teams quality control coach Rob Keys, likely got his black stripe removed in large part due to his successful relief of Fielding, but that did not guarantee him more playing time the next time out against Michigan State.

The senior failed to see the field against the Spartans with Fielding reclaiming his spot as the team's kicker and kickoff man, making a 30-yard field goal, knocking through all five extra points and sending all of the team's kickoffs into the end zone for touchdowns.

Still, Snyder became the third walk-on to lose his black stripe this season, joining wideout Brennen Schramm (March 21) and linebacker Joey Velazquez (Sept. 4).

Noland received the distinction one day after Snyder, becoming the 23rd Buckeye to lose his black stripe this season as well as the 11th freshman.

Noland has been with the program since joining as an early enrollee this spring, and he has taken on the role as Ohio State's fifth-string quarterback behind starter Will Howard, redshirt sophomore Devin Brown, Sayin and redshirt freshman Lincoln Kienholz. He earned limited reps this spring and fall and has been the only scholarship quarterback to not see the field in a game this season.

The freshman has deemed his first season with the program a "developmental year," and it appears he has taken strides in practice after becoming an "official" mem-

BSB Offering Reduction In First-Class Mail Rate

For a limited time, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is offering a discount on the cost of a subscription upgrade to first class mail during football season or through football recruiting season in February. The first class upgrade for football season, regularly \$30, will be just \$24, and the upgrade through the traditional National Signing Day in February will be just \$34, down from \$40.

"We think we can offset the cost of this discount with a reduction in the number of replace-

ment papers we have to send out and a reduction in the number of subscriptions we have been losing because of untimely delivery," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said.

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

ber of the team.

An official team member or not, Noland possesses supreme raw talent. He came in as a highly touted five-star prospect out of Fairburn, Ga., after throwing for 2,140 passing yards and 22 touchdowns as a senior.

Noland, the nation's 56th-best prospect and fourth-best quarterback in the 2023 class, had his best campaign his junior year, throwing for 55 touchdowns – the second most in Georgia history ahead of NFL starters Trevor Lawrence (51) and Deshaun Watson (50) – while leading Langston Hughes to a 15-0 record and its first state title in program history.

Howard Bashes OSU's Non-Con Schedule

ESPN analyst and ex-Michigan wide receiver Desmond Howard voiced his displeasure with Ohio State's nonconference schedule on ESPN's "College Football Live" show on Sept. 27.

The former Heisman Trophy winner criticized the Buckeyes after their nonconference schedule consisted of Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall, with an off week between the Bronco and Herd matchups.

"During the week, I was doing my prep, and I said, 'Hey, I need you to look something up,'" Howard said. "I'm looking at

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the lofty standard set by the unit themselves every game.

"Our expectation has to be perfection and domination all the time – I thought we had a slow start," Knowles said. "I thought I could've done a better job. You get into those situations where it's like third-and-3, where (the quarterback) kind of scrambles around and you don't get off the field on the third play or the sixth play, and I think that's when you get into trouble."

Ohio State did hand out other Player of the Game nods, with running backs Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson taking home Offensive Players of the Game and Lorenzo Styles Jr. earning his second straight Special Teams Player of the Game honor.

Tshabola, Siereveld To Continue Rotating

Redshirt freshman guard Austin Siereveld made quite the impression on the Ohio State coaching staff during the two games he played in place of Jackson, who was out with an undisclosed injury. Siereveld had such an impact that Day has been persistent about getting Siereveld more playing time, even since Jackson returned for the Buckeyes' Week 4 game.

Siereveld, who said he initially had some nerves in his first start against Akron, was part of a dominant offensive line effort in Week 2 that had the Buckeyes smother Western Michigan 56-0 in a game the team ran for 273 yards on 39 attempts.

Day made true of his promise in the team's 49-14 win over Marshall on Sept. 21 when Siereveld split snaps with starting right guard Tegra Tshabola.

The plan certainly worked well for the Ohio State coaching staff. The Buckeyes once again had plenty of success with their ground game, going for 280 yards on 31 carries.

The consistent rotation of offensive linemen throughout a game can have its pros and cons, possibly making it difficult to maintain chemistry along the line, but according to Day, the team's routine in practice neutralized that concern.

"I think giving both of them a chance to catch their breath for a series or two is actually a good thing for a young player," Day said. "We look at that during the week. We'll rotate those guys during the week so that there's chemistry (on the right side of the offensive line)."

Going forward, Day seems ready to stay

Continued On Page 8

the top 25 ranked teams in college football, and I'm looking at Ohio State. Are they the only team that in four weeks has not played a Power Four team? And she said, 'Yes, Desmond, you're right.' So pretty much, Ohio State took the whole month off – the whole first month off – and now they play Michigan State."

According to ESPN's strength of schedule rankings, Ohio State's schedule ranked 131st out of 134 at the FBS level after its first three games.

"I'm just saying, they haven't played anybody," Howard said. "Week 5, and they have not played a Power Four team. That's crazy."

As they get into the brunt of their Big Ten schedule and the Buckeyes take road trips to top-10 opponents such as Penn State and Oregon, their strength of schedule will greatly improve.

No Silver Bullet Against Marshall

It was a classic tale of two halves for the Ohio State defense in the Week 4 win against Marshall. In the game's first 30 minutes, the Buckeyes gave up 203 total yards and 14 points, both of which were higher to-

tals than the amount they gave up in either full game against Akron or Western Michigan.

Ohio State's defense cleaned it up after halftime, however, and was as dominant as it had been all season, holding the Thundering Herd to no points on just 61 yards.

Despite the second-half resurgence, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles wasn't satisfied enough to honor a player with the Defensive Player of the Game.

"You have to speak the truth," Knowles said on his decision to not name a Defensive Player of the Game. "While we had some champions, we had no one that we thought really showed a Silver Bullet of the Game performance."

It marks a rarity that the Buckeyes haven't named a Defensive Player of the Game after defeating their opponent, but to be fair to Knowles, there weren't a ton of big plays created by the Buckeye defense in the win.

Knowles' unit generated no turnovers and only one sack throughout the contest, with the lone sack made by defensive lineman Caden Curry, who was disqualified before halftime after a targeting penalty on a

separate hit.

The Buckeyes had seven tackles for loss against Marshall, but each of them was by a different player.

It wasn't just that the Buckeyes didn't have the "Silver Bullet" performance Knowles was looking for. The third-year defensive coordinator said the defense as a whole was a bit frustrating and fell short of



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the course with the rotation of Siereveld and Tshabola.

"I think both of those guys deserve to play," Day said. "I mentioned that last week, and they both did. We'll continue to evaluate it in grade and make sure, but we all know we're going to need these guys. And that's the thing, whether it's (Henderson and Judkins) or Austin and Tegra, these guys are team players, and they want to win. That's the No. 1 thing here. It isn't about statistics or anything like that."

Siereveld and Tshabola both earned playing time at right guard against Michigan State, although Tshabola had the majority of starting reps, totaling 47 snaps as opposed to Siereveld's 30, according to Pro Football Focus.

McLaughlin Recognized For Academic Success

Ohio State graduate center Seth McLaughlin was named a semifinalist for the William V. Campbell Trophy on Sept. 25, an award that recognizes a player for combined academic success, football performance and leadership.

Should he win the Campbell Trophy, he would be the third Ohio State player to take home the award, joining Bobby Hoying in 1995 and Craig Krenzel in 2003.

McLaughlin transferred to Ohio State as a graduate student after graduating from Alabama with a perfect 4.0 GPA and starting in 24 games with the Crimson Tide in his four years at the school, playing in 35 games total. He is working toward earning his third college degree, this one in human development and family science, after earning two

at Alabama: a bachelor's degree in finance and a master's degree in sports hospitality management. He was a first-team Academic All-American in 2023.

McLaughlin is also on the watch list for the Rimington Trophy, which is awarded each year to the best center in college football, his second consecutive year on the watch list.

Simon Named To Witten Watch List

Simon was named to the Jason Witten Man of the Year Watch list on Sept. 26, which is awarded to the player who best demonstrates a record of leadership by exhibiting exceptional courage, integrity and sportsmanship both on and off the field.

Simon is one of 52 players on the watch list, which will get narrowed down to 20

players in late October before three finalists will be named on Dec. 16. A winner will ultimately be announced on Feb. 12, 2025.

As the team's Block "O" recipient and one of four team captains, it should come as no surprise that Simon has been nominated for a character and leadership-based recognition.

Simon wasn't a starter behind future NFL linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers last season, but he received plenty of playing time behind them, totaling 57 tackles in 13 games played.

As the starting Mike linebacker this year, Simon has grown into what many around the program have called the unquestioned leader of the group. After missing the first game of the season with an injury, Simon has also led by example in three games, recording nine total tackles and one sack.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

The way freshman wide receiver Cris Carter saw it, his days as a starter at Ohio State might not have been too far away.

"Maybe I'll get the chance to start this week," Carter said after being on the receiving end of four Mike Tomczak passes for 55 yards in Ohio State's 45-26 win over Iowa on Sept. 22.

"I don't think I should have started the first three games, because I needed the experience and I wasn't playing as well as I could," he added. "I think once you get more reps and more used to the crowd at Ohio State, you can play up to your ability."

If statistics were any indication, Carter had good reason to stake his claim as being ready to start. After three games, he was third on the team in receptions with eight. Only tailback Keith Byars (12) and flanker Mike Lanese (nine) had more. The man starting in front of Carter at flanker, Jay Holland, had just two catches.

35 Years Ago — 1989

Boston College quarterback Willie Hicks, whose second-half performance included 30 yards on five scrambles and nine completions in 12 pass attempts for 184 yards, called timeout with 50 seconds left in Ohio State's 34-29 win over Boston College on Sept. 30. Although nearly all of the 88,936 fans in attendance figured Hicks would have the ball in his own hands, he instead handed off to senior fullback Ed Toner, who tested the middle of the Ohio State defense.

Senior defensive tackle Mike Showalter shot through to meet Toner 1 yard behind the line of scrimmage before teammates Srecko Zizakovic, Derek Isaman and Alonzo Spellman arrived to finish the job. While the defensive unit celebrated, the OSU offense killed the rest of the clock, preserving the 34-29 victory.

"I'm a defensive coach and I have to admit that I didn't like what I was seeing in the second half," said OSU head coach John Cooper. "But you have to give our defensive players credit for that stand."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Those helmetless Ohio State football players over the shoulder of Cooper were not trying to embarrass the head coach with naughty gestures, and they were not trying to communicate with aliens either.

Instead, the active hands of reserve quarterbacks Tom Hoying and Mark Zban had one distinct purpose on game day — to quickly relay offensive plays directly to starting quarterback Bob Hoying.

"It gets pretty involved," Zban said. "For example, we have five different series of pass patterns and there are several pass plays within each series. Even though it sounds like it, it's not real complicated. It was at first, but we're real comfortable with it now."

Quarterbacks coach Ron Hudson said a similar signal code was used effectively at Notre Dame while he was an offensive assistant there.

"We meet every Saturday morning and go over all the signals," said Hudson, who estimated the quarterbacks must have been able to send and decipher at least 65 different play signals per game. "We try to keep things relatively the same so it's not that difficult, yet if you try to figure it out standing there, you can't figure it out."

25 Years Ago — 1999

After his team's 34-20 scrape with Cincinnati — a game that came on the heels of a lackluster win over Ohio U. — Cooper was asked what changes were needed for Big Ten play.

"I don't know how you can get any more intense than we are," he said. "I don't have any rabbits up my sleeve, for goodness'

sakes.

"I don't know what we can do in preparation that we haven't done before. We're preparing now the same way we have every year I've coached here — same practice plan, same time on the field, same meeting schedule."

Then he reiterated what has become a recurring theme: "I just think we need to get better."

The Buckeye defense surrendered a ghastly 525 yards to Cincinnati, a Conference USA team that was just 2-9 the year before. That was the second-highest yardage total the Buckeyes had allowed in the 1990s.

"We've got to iron out a couple of things," said junior linebacker Na'il Diggs. "Going off of today and them having 500 yards on us, I know what a Big Ten team would do if we played like that."

20 Years Ago — 2004

Even though North Carolina State had only one game under its belt — and that was a 42-0 whipping of Division 1-AA Richmond — oddsmakers had taken Ohio State down from an early four-point favorite in the game to an underdog by as many as two points.

The final insult came during ESPN's "College GameDay" when not only ex-Indiana coach Lee Corso picked the Wolfpack to win the game outright, but so did former OSU quarterback Kirk Herbstreit.

With chips on their shoulders the size of hubcaps, the Buckeyes simply went out and did what they had done 28 times in their last 30 games — they used superlative special teams play, outstanding defense and largely mistake-free offense Sept. 18 to score a 22-14 victory over the Wolfpack.

"We showed them what Big Ten football was all about last year (a 44-38 Buckeye win in triple overtime), and I guess they needed to be shown again," said OSU linebacker Bobby Carpenter, clearly miffed about his team's lack of respect in national circles.

"It was exciting for us to go out there today and show everyone that we are a solid football team. It was our first road test, and everyone was wondering about us. I wonder what they think now?"

15 Years Ago — 2009

A hot start to the 2009 football season got at least one University of Cincinnati football player feeling good and talking big about the state of major-college football in the state of Ohio.

Speaking of a potential meeting between the Buckeyes and Bearcats, Columbus native Isaiah Pead told local reporters, "If we ever have to strap it on with them, we're going to win it"

Cincinnati head coach Brian Kelly did not mind such brashness.

"I think as long as you're in the state of Ohio and you're not looked at as an equal or a partner, you're going to play with a chip on your shoulder," Kelly told reporters. "I'm not saying we should be looked at as an equal or a partner, but our players sense and feel that every day by who they talk to, who they see at the mall."

Kelly said his players are often asked to comment on games such as Ohio State's clash with USC on Sept. 12, but the coach added he would rather his Bearcats be asked about their latest contest. Regardless, he did not complain about the perception that Ohio State remains the state's top draw even though the Bearcats were unbeaten that season at 4-0 through Sept. 26.

"As a coach, I kind of like that (underdog) role we have," he said.

10 Years Ago — 2014

The Ohio State offense had a night to remember Sept. 27 in a 50-28 victory against Cincinnati at Ohio Stadium.

The Buckeyes set a school record with 45 first downs and fell 8 yards short of the program record with 710 yards. It was a balanced attack against the Bearcats, as well, with the Buckeyes rushing for 380 yards and passing for 330. Against a porous Cincinnati defense, Ohio State found plenty of success.

"When you have a horizontal and vertical punch, that's the hardest offense to defend," said Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer.

Redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett completed 26 of 36 passes with four touchdowns, and sophomore tailback Ezekiel Elliott had his best game as a Buckeye with a 182-yard rushing performance. Despite those efforts, Meyer went out of his way to praise another group of offensive players when he began his postgame press conference.

"We're an offensive line-driven team, and they won the game for us," Meyer said. "They controlled the line of scrimmage. They protected our quarterback."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields quickly gained his teammates' confidence, guiding them to a 4-0 start with 880 passing yards and 13 touchdowns and 150 rushing yards and six touchdowns. The efficient dual-threat quarterback completed 66 of 95 passes through four games.

Following practice on Sept. 18, Fields joined the media scrum surrounding senior wideout Binjimen Victor, prompting a reporter to ask Victor if his quarterback was overrated.

"No, my quarterback is pretty good," Victor responded with a smile.

"I like that answer," Fields said while walking away.

Victor had enjoyed an excellent start to his senior season, hauling in 15 catches for 242 yards and two touchdowns. He was asked about developing chemistry with Fields, who had arrived on campus in January.

"All of our receivers, we've been working with Justin since he got here." Victor said. "It's no surprise that we're connecting and making those plays when we need to, so we're good"

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State, entering as the nation's sixth-ranked team and Notre Dame ranked ninth, needed every second to take down the Fighting Irish, scoring a game-winning touchdown courtesy of running back Chip Trayanum's 1-yard rush with just one tick remaining on the clock, leaving South Bend, Ind., with a 17-14 win in front of 77,622 shell-shocked fans at Notre Dame Stadium.

But in the midst of it all — the hype of facing Notre Dame on the road and coming out with such an exciting win, one that would almost certainly join the ranks of legendary victories for the Buckeyes — head coach Ryan Day had just one thought on his mind.

"I'd like to know where Lou Holtz is right now," he said in a postgame interview with NBC. "What he said about our team, I cannot believe. This is a tough team right here. We're proud to be from Ohio, and it's always been Ohio against the world, and it will continue to be Ohio against the world. But I'll tell you what, I love those kids, and we've got a tough team."

Day's outburst stemmed from comments made by the former Notre Dame head coach a day prior during ESPN's "The Pat McAfee Show."

"You look at Coach (Ryan) Day — and I coached under Woody Hayes. We won the national championship when I was there. However, Day has lost to Alabama, Georgia, Clemson, Michigan twice, and everybody that beats him does so because they're more physical than Ohio State, and I think Notre Dame will take that same approach... You take this message to Ohio State; they better bring their lunch, because it's going to be a full damn day's work."

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 38, Michigan State 7

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on OSU playing in its first road game: "I thought the atmosphere was excellent early on. I thought they came out and played really hard. (Michigan State head coach Jonathan Smith) is doing a good job of putting his culture and his thumbprint on the program here. You can see it going. I have a lot of respect for him and his staff. But I thought our guys responded well and had some really good poise. That was something that we talked about coming into the game, 'Having poise in the noise.' Getting down in there. Some of those fourth-down conversions were pretty clutch."

Day on Ohio State senior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams' health and fifth-year quarterback Will Howard's injury: "Will is good to go. Just took a shot there. Tyleik was available in an emergency role. If we felt like we needed him, we were going to put him in the game. He was cleared. But we felt like one more week – almost like the Donovan (Jackson) situation – one more week of rest would get him to 100 percent, which we felt like was the right thing to do. If we needed to, we could've put him in the game. We decided we didn't need him."

Day on Ohio State senior running back TreVeyon Henderson's health and growth: "He had some great pickups. Huge pickups. The one on the touchdown to (freshman wide receiver) Jeremiah (Smith) and the touchdown to (senior wide receiver) Emeka (Egbuka), and there were a couple more. He did a really good job coming across. I have to watch the film. But there are like three of them in particular, he came across and picked up some corner fires and did a nice job. That was big. He's becoming that all-purpose back that we all know he can be. And I thought (Michigan State) ran hard."

Jeremiah Smith on Ohio State redshirt sophomore Devin Brown stepping up when Howard went down in the second quarter: "It just says that he's ready whenever his number is called. That's what it shows me."

Egbuka on the Ohio State coaches' confidence in the Buckeye offense to go for it on fourth-and-5, leading to his 33-yard touchdown catch: "It was fourth down, first and foremost. The trust that our coaching staff has in us to be able to go for it on fourth down and not kick the field goal says a lot about this team. We were happy to be able to go out there as an offense and execute on fourth down."

Jonathan Smith on his decision to go for it on fourth-and-1 from Ohio State's 20-yard line in the first quarter: "Going into the game, we felt like field goals against this team and this offense was not going to give



SONNY BROCKWAY

SUPER SUB – Devin Brown (33) replaced the injured Will Howard, and on the first play he threw a 17-yard touchdown pass to Jeremiah Smith, who made a spectacular one-handed grab with 29 seconds left in the first half.

us the best chance to win. Honestly, on fourth-and-1, I'm going to be overly aggressive, and these guys know that, and we need to go get that done."

Ohio State senior cornerback Jordan Hancock on if the defense is close to having things click early in games: "We haven't played our best ball yet. We're working on the constant to keep on watching the film. Going against very good receivers in practice, they're making us better. We're getting better each and every week."

Ohio State senior linebacker Cody Simon on what changed for the Ohio State defense after the first few drives by Michigan State: "After that first quarter and a half, we wanted to rebound on more aggressiveness, more violence, more assertive play. I think, especially in the second half, we came out with intent. I'm just proud of our guys because it's not easy to come out here – Big Ten ball is not easy. The middle eight (minutes) was important, so we tried to come out violent and win those first four minutes of the second half."

Jonathan Smith on Michigan State sophomore quarterback Aidan Chiles' third-quarter interception: "He's going to his left, which isn't ideal. He's got a guy up in his face, he's

trying to lob it over to (tight end Jack Velling). We're trying to action pass when we're down three or four scores, and so it's tough. I did think he had a few good decisions throwing the thing away throughout the night, but on that one pick, that wasn't a great scenario for him. Maybe chucking that out of bounds instead of trying to hit Jack."

Jonathan Smith on the talent gap between the two teams: "I did tell our team that I didn't feel like there were a bunch of snaps out there where we were just overwhelmed, 'Oh, they've got too much talent, they're too physical.' That's a really good team, one of the best teams in the country, but I'm trying to encourage our guys that we can go toe to toe with them if we can finish on some things and get back to some details on ball security and getting off the field on third down."

Jonathan Smith on how to defend a player like Jeremiah Smith: "You want to challenge him. Sometimes you want to affect the passer more than just affecting that one-on-one matchup or double-teaming him if you can get the quarterback off of his spot. They've got weapons in multiple spots, schematically. (Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly) and Ryan, those guys do a good job, so it's a tough task."

Smith Lends A Hand For OSU Road Victory

Continued From Page 1

Howard struggle with turnovers and their vaunted defense give up multiple big plays (the Spartans had gains of 19, 19, 24, 26 and 25 in the first half).

But then Jeremiah Smith took over.

The talented freshman had already secured two catches for 19 yards in the first quarter, but it wasn't until Ohio State's fourth drive of the game that his true impact was felt.

With the Buckeyes facing a second-and-1 from the MSU 19-yard line following a 20-yard catch from Smith, a 37-yard dash by TreVeyon Henderson on first-and-20 and a 9-yard scamper from Judkins, Smith reminded those watching – or those who listened on the radio without a Peacock subscription – just how much of a difference-maker he can be this season.

He took a reverse pitch from Howard from the 25-yard line and did the rest himself, bursting past five Michigan State defenders to find the end zone and give his team a more comfortable 17-7 lead.

It served as a good reminder of the track-athlete speed Smith brings to Ohio State's offense which could be further used by offensive coordinator Chip Kelly in some more special packages this season.

"Chip has a great feel for the game, calling the plays," Day said. "He always has some wrinkles in there. We have a few other ones that we held off on. It's a balance in making sure that you have your fastballs, where you're running downhill and you feel really good about them, but having enough curveballs that you can create explosive plays.

"That's that balance you're constantly looking for. But we always want to try and find ways to get the ball to our playmakers in space, and we're going to keep trying to do that."

Smith's stats after the end-around score – three catches for 39 yards and a 19-yard rushing score – would make for a strong game stat line for many freshman wideouts around the country, but the former five-star and consensus No. 1 overall prospect was not content with just one score and a couple of catches.

With the Buckeyes' defense buckling down with a three-and-out toward the end of the first half, it gave Smith and the Ohio State offense another opportunity to stretch the lead before heading into the locker room.

Unlike in previous moments in the game, the unit took full advantage of it, in large part due to the almost superhuman playmaking of the Buckeye freshman.

This time facing a first-and-10 from the Michigan State 44-yard line with just 56 seconds left following a 16-yard catch and run from Carnell Tate, Smith took matters into his own hands – or hand – to get the Buckeyes into the red zone when he hauled in a dazzling one-handed catch over Michigan State defensive backs Ed Woods and Marcellius Pulliam, contorting his body in midair to bring in the reception and land at the 17-yard line for the 27-yard gain.

Still, Smith was not done shocking the crowd and putting the Buckeyes on his back



SONNY BROCKWAY

HANGING TOUGH — Will Howard left the game briefly late in the second quarter after absorbing a hit while throwing but returned in the third quarter to throw a TD pass to Emeka Egbuka and also score on a 6-yard run.

right before halftime. Just like many times in the half, Ohio State faced some notable adversity soon after when Howard threw two straight incompletions intended for Egbuka and Tate. The second one was the most costly, as it also came with a booming hit on Howard by Turner that the quarterback later said knocked the wind out of him, bringing him to the ground in pain and forcing him off the field for the next play.

Howard's absence meant it was time for redshirt sophomore Devin Brown to step into the game in a critical moment. He had been used sparingly only in blowout wins earlier this season after losing the starting quarterback battle to Howard early in fall camp.

But despite the limited reps from Brown, he still knew exactly what to do when he dropped back to pass: throw it to No. 4 and let him make a play. And boy, did that pay off.

With just 34 seconds left and the Buck-

eyes facing a third-and-10, Brown – with the help of a key blindside block by Henderson that likely prevented a sack or worse – found an open Smith streaking toward the end zone, who used his speed to create some separation from the defender Woods and then reached his right hand to snag the slightly overthrown ball from Brown near the 5-yard line with his momentum taking him the rest of the way into the end zone for the score.

It was another impressive one-handed catch – his second in four offensive plays – that left both the Spartan and Buckeye faithful stunned and put the game further in the hands of the favored away team despite them looking somewhat vulnerable earlier in the game.

"We felt like if we could get a stop there on second down and third down, we're going to call a timeout and give us an opportunity to take a shot at scoring," Day said

when asked about the sequence at the end of the first half. "And then there were just some tremendous plays – the play by Jeremiah. What an unbelievable catch. I couldn't believe he caught it. Just a tremendous play."

"I just feel like I have to make my quarterback look good no matter how the ball comes at me," Smith told NBC Sports' Lewis Johnson after the game. "I feel like that ball is mine. There is no 50-50 ball with me."

Smith did not catch another pass in the second half, when the Buckeyes would continue building upon their lead and eventually take home the resounding 38-7 road win to improve to 4-0 on the year, but his stat line was still impressive, catching five passes for 83 yards and a score, also adding the 19-yard rushing touchdown.

The outing not only helped Ohio State out of its slow start and into a blowout win, but it also added to his impressive start to his overall Buckeye career. Through the first four games of his collegiate career, Smith has totaled 19 catches for a team-high 364 yards and five touchdowns, marks that have him in great shape to smash every freshman receiving record in program history held by Pro Football Hall of Famer Cris Carter.

Smith has made it clear that he doesn't care about any of the accolades or numbers and is solely focused on sharpening his mentality and approach to his game, which he thinks helped him succeed against the Spartans on the road.

"I just had a great night," Smith told NBC Sports. "It started with the week that I had, the preparation with Coach (Brian) Hartline, just meeting with the receivers and breaking down Michigan State. I just had a great week of preparation, that's all."

For those who watch him day in and day out, it's Smith's rare combination of professionalism and raw talent that makes him special, a set of traits that they think can put him on a fast track to greatness.

"(It's) his work ethic," Day said when asked what has allowed his freshman to reach the lofty expectations set on him to start the year. "He does it every day in practice. He just doesn't say a word but works his tail off. His discipline. His humility. He loves being a Buckeye, you can tell, just by the way he works with his teammates. And he's coming out of his shell too, which is great to see.

"But the talent speaks for itself. I just am impressed with the discipline and the hard work – being able to step in at such a young age. The only way you do that is if you go in and put the work in. He came in with that work ethic. (Hartline) has certainly taken it from there, but this is a special young man."

"As his knowledge grows and his game expands, he's really going to turn into something special," Egbuka said about Smith after the game. "So Buckeye fans can be excited for these next few years."

Howard Rebounds From Early Miscues

It wasn't just Smith's heroics that helped Ohio State come out of East Lansing unscathed on Sept. 28. Another important factor to the Buckeyes' 38-7 win over the Spartans was the improved play of Howard, who shrugged off a slow start to have one of

his better outings as a Buckeye.

Howard said in the days leading up to the game that he was excited to play on the road for the first time in his career in a Big Ten matchup, and that excitement may have led to some early mishaps when he nearly threw a red-zone interception, soon after throwing into double coverage for his second pick of the season.

But like many on the team did that night, the veteran gunslinger persevered.

After his second-quarter interception, Howard completed eight of his final 13 passes for 128 yards and a touchdown, bringing his game total to an efficient 21 of 31 for 244 yards, two touchdown passes and an interception.

“We were harping on it all week: When you go on the road, especially in the Big Ten, there’s going to be adversity that strikes,” Egbuka said. “It comes in different forms. It happened to be an interception early in the game, and Will was able to bounce back from it. This is something we knew he would be able to do coming in being a fifth-year senior, having that experience under his belt, knowing that mistakes don’t define you and coming back and making a statement later in the game.”

Howard’s rebound from the interception also came with him dealing with some pain from the hit he took at the end of the first half – although he said he was “all good” after the game – a showing of toughness that should endear him to his teammates and Buckeye nation.

“Yeah, I might be a little sore tomorrow,” Howard said, “but it’s all good. It’s football. It’s part of it.”

Regardless of the extent of his injury, Howard displayed a knack for showing up when it mattered most against the Spartans, especially on third and fourth downs. Howard completed five of his eight attempts – one of those incompletions being the interception – on those downs for 69 yards and two scores, a series of clutch plays that helped the Buckeyes create some separation as the game progressed.

Howard’s clutch factor was maybe on best display on the two fourth downs he had in the game when he first found Scott on a drag route from the MSU 3-yard line for the first touchdown of the game and then hit Egbuka right in stride on a vertical on fourth-and-5 from the Spartans 33-yard line, which essentially put the game away for good with just over five minutes left in the third quarter.

Howard said he was happy to see the trust both Day and Kelly showed in him to have the ball in critical fourth-down situations, which he thinks can only make him and the entire offense more confident if they are put in similar scenarios later in the year. “I love it,” he said. “You feel that confidence from your coordinator, from your head coach when they put the ball in your hand on fourth down and they say, ‘Hey, we trust you’re going to make this play. And we trust the O-line is going to take care of the protection and the receivers are going to run the routes and make the plays.’”

“At the end of the day, I don’t think any of us even thought about walking off the field on any of those fourth downs. We were all out there. And the mentality that that brings – we’re just like, ‘Hey, man, we’re going for

it on these fourth downs, no doubt.’ It’s just all of us are in it together, and it gives you pride.”

Day came out of the game impressed with the poise Howard showed in his first road Big Ten game, especially after the interception, which he thinks – along with the rushing ability Howard used to add 14 yards and a score on the ground – can make his quarterback an even bigger threat as the season rolls on.

“The biggest (pass he wants back) is the interception” Day said of Howard. “He knows that was not a good play, and it could have cost us. So it’s something to learn from. But when you’re going through and learning a new offense, there’s going to be some of these growing opportunities, and learning from those opportunities.”

“But overall, I thought he was solid. He was poised. He made some big throws and then had a couple tough runs in there. You could see a difference it makes when you have someone who can run.”

Still Not There Yet

Despite this growing confidence in Howard and the eye-popping talents of the freshman Smith, the resounding message stayed the same for the Buckeyes after the game: The team is making great strides towards its three main goals but is still nowhere near where it needs to be to ultimately achieve that.

Just ask the head of the operation.

Day channeled his inner Grinch during his weekly press conference held at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Sept. 24,

saying that he “doesn’t feel good about anything” when asked if he feels good about the state of Ohio State’s rushing attack.

“That’s just my mindset,” he said. “That’s just my mindset. I mean, I don’t. That has to be everybody’s mindset. You start to feel good about something, and complacency can sneak up on you fast. So, no, nobody feels good about anything.”

That “leave no doubt” mentality came up again after the win against Michigan State, when a question about Henderson’s growth as a runner turned into another strong message to his team about keeping their foot on the gas pedal, starting with the team’s preparation for Iowa on Oct. 5, another stingy Big Ten team that can give the Buckeyes fits if they don’t play up to their full potential.

Day knows his team is far from being where they want to be to achieve their goals at the end of the season, but he did acknowledge that a tough road win to kick off Big Ten play is at least a good start.

“I think where we are right now, we’re making progress. But we have a long way to go. Our guys have that mindset,” Day said. “It was good to get this win on the road. First road win, good environment. But we know that the challenges are bigger ahead. So we have to get on this film and stay hungry and keep the journey going.”

“We’re going to get back to work tomorrow. And we know that we have a really good Iowa team coming in here next week. They’ve had a week off, and just like always, they’re a very, very good team. They play complimentary football. So we know we have a big challenge ahead of us, so we’ve got to have a good week of practice.”

Spoil yourself before and after the game!



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Defense Bends, Doesn't Break Against MSU

Many times over the course of the 2023 season, the Ohio State defense would give up slow, methodical drives to opponents, only to stop them short of the end zone and either give up a field goal or get the ball back for their offense. That bend-don't-break mentality was one of the biggest reasons that Ohio State was not able to get the shutout that the defenders were chasing the entire year, allowing teams to get onto their side of the field but being able to take a stand.

Even though that ever-elusive shutout is something that the defense was able to achieve in the 56-0 win over Western Michigan earlier this season – allowing just 99 yards in that game – Ohio State has at times had that same problem in the new season, and cornerback Jordan Hancock said that's the mentality they have.

"The first half, the first couple of possessions, they were just moving the ball downfield a little bit," Hancock said after the game against Michigan State, "but we have a bend-don't-break mindset, and we've got to carry that into the game."

Michigan State's first drive of the game didn't end up hurting the Buckeyes even though the Spartans were able to drive down to Ohio State's 20-yard line. Even though that field position will usually result in at least a field-goal attempt, MSU head coach Jonathan Smith elected to go for it on fourth down with 1 yard to gain.

They sent sophomore quarterback Aidan Chiles up the middle on a sneak, but the stout OSU defensive line and linebacker and team captain Cody Simon stopped Chiles at the line of scrimmage. When he tried to go over the pack, Simon met him and held him in place before defensive end Jack Sawyer was able to come in to finish the job on the tackle, giving the Buckeyes the ball back.

"Everyone did their job," Simon said. "It was a great play. I'm just proud of my guys for stepping up and making plays, which allowed me to make plays too."

The Buckeyes were also saved by a fumble recovery on their own 11-yard line early in the second quarter forced by Hancock and another later in that same quarter on their own 16-yard line. It seemed in the first half that the Spartans were able to force their way into Buckeye territory at will, but the defense kept bailing itself out and getting turnovers, something that head coach Ryan Day has always said is a huge part of winning football games.

"The turnover battle was huge in this game," Day said. "If we don't get those turnovers, maybe it's a different game, for sure. But that's the game, and we've got to make sure we're winning the situations. So we'll take a look at the film and figure out where it's at."

When it comes to games against Akron, WMU, Marshall and Michigan State – which could be a bottom-half Big Ten team by the time the season comes to an end – that mentality works. Ohio State has given up a total of 27 points in four games, a total that any team in the country would strive for.

But the flaw in that mentality was exposed when the Buckeyes traveled to Ann Arbor for the 2023 iteration of The Game.

GAME NOTEBOOK Greg Wilson

Although they weren't helped by an early Kyle McCord interception that left them only 7 yards to work with, leading to the first of three Wolverine touchdowns that game, they also allowed a 14-play, 75-yard drive that ended in a score and spanned between the first and second quarters and a 13-play, 56-yard drive for a field goal that spanned 7:00 in the fourth quarter and left the Buckeyes with just over a minute to tie or take the lead.

Michigan's three field goals in the game were enough to seal the 30-24 win, and the defense went back to Columbus after its worst game of the season.

When the Buckeyes get into the tougher part of the schedule – traveling to Oregon on the road and trying to end the three-game losing streak to the Wolverines – the mentality of allowing those drives could come back to bite them.

But Simon believes that the defense is going to improve from what they have put onto the field in four games, pointing out some of the issues that he had with the performance against the Spartans.

"I think the difference between this game and the last was just attacking the ball, getting turnovers," Simon said. "We're never really satisfied. We gave up way too many explosive plays, too many yards. That's our main focus is getting those three-and-outs because that helps the offense out so much. That's something that we're working on every day."

"Every practice, we're focused on getting the ball out, stopping the rush yards. We have a lot to build on. We haven't played a perfect game yet, and that's what's so exciting about it because we could put it all together and then it could be something really special."

Coming out of the first Big Ten game on the road against a much-improved Michigan State team with a huge win is nothing to scoff at, and at the end of the day, the Jim Knowles-led defense gave up only seven points, so coming out of a dominant game like this with any criticism is nitpicking. But the 186 yards gained by the Spartans in the first half tell a different story than the scoreboard does.

Like in many cases this season, the defense responded very well in the second half of the game, allowing just 60 total yards from Michigan State and forcing four punts while also bringing in an interception. The extreme dominance the Buckeye defense can produce showed up in full in the final 30 minutes, and Day was happy with the response.

"When you look at the sum total of it all, 50 plays and 246 yards and seven points, you come away and you say, 'Geez, what a great performance.' I thought we did a really good job of shutting them down, especially in the second half," Day said. "But there are some things that we have to look at in the film and figure out. Kind of early on, some



SONNY BROCKWAY

STUFFED — Michigan State quarterback Aidan Chiles was stopped on a fourth-and-1 at the Ohio State 20 on the Spartans' first drive. Cody Simon (0) was among the welcoming committee that forced the turnover on downs.

explosive plays in there that we have to clean up.

"We were watching the film at halftime. We were close to getting to the quarterback with a couple things. We just needed to hang onto coverages just a tick longer. But listen, they're a good team, and they're well coached and they have good players too. But I thought we responded and made the appropriate changes. The in-game adjustments were solid."

Downs Has Coming-Out Party With OSU

Over the offseason when safety Caleb Downs transferred to Ohio State, there was a question whether the Buckeyes had just added the best at that position in the country to their already strong secondary.

Downs came in after a 107-tackle season, which was enough for him to be named a freshman All-American, and the Buckeye coaches believed he was only going to im-

prove.

In the first three games of the season, Downs wasn't appearing on the stat sheet as much as he had in the past year, but against the Spartans, he made sure he was impossible to miss.

He was all over the field, making plays in the secondary, in the backfield and from sideline to sideline. He was reading the Spartans' offense well and was able to get to the ball carrier quickly, helping the Buckeyes defense come back from what was a relatively slow start.

Day said he thinks the safety, who totaled a tied-for-team-high six tackles (one for loss) played a big part in spurring Ohio State's second-half turnaround.

"I thought Caleb played great tonight," Day said. "He showed up in a big way in a bunch of different spots. You can just see the acceleration, how fast he plays. Part of that is his athleticism, but another part is just the way he prepares. He prepares as hard

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Despite the increase in competition, the Ohio State passing attack did not come close to skipping a beat. In the 38-7 win, Buckeye passers connected for 26 of 40 passes for 298 yards, three touchdowns and one interception. Starting quarterback Will Howard, who played in the vast majority of the snaps, completed 21 of 31 passes for 244 yards and two touchdowns, throwing one interception.

The Buckeye passing attack seemed to be able to move the ball down the field at will in the first half and completed passes on several key downs throughout the game. Perhaps the most substantial completion came on a fourth-and-goal connection from Howard to tight end Gee Scott Jr. from the 3-yard line to put the Buckeyes up 10-0 early in the second quarter.

Later on, the Buckeyes removed any glimmer of hope the Spartans may have had of mounting an improbable comeback when Howard threw a laser to senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka for a 33-yard touchdown on a make-or-break fourth-and-5 play that increased the lead to 31-7.

It was the usual suspects leading the charge in the Ohio State receiving room. Starting wide receivers Carnell Tate, Jeremiah Smith and Egbuka each had at least 50 yards receiving. Smith and Egbuka had particularly memorable outings, as Smith had five catches for 83 yards and a stunning one-handed catch for a touchdown, while Egbuka had a game-high 96 yards and seven catches, including his clutch 33-yard touchdown grab.

What Didn't Work

A mediocre first-half effort against Marshall when Ohio State's defense gave up their first two touchdowns of the season and over 200 yards of total offense frustrated defensive coordinator Jim Knowles enough to not name a Defensive Player of the Game in the days following Ohio State's 49-14 win over the Thundering Herd. The defense's performance against Michigan State wasn't too dissimilar from its play the week prior in the first half. The Buckeyes were facing much stiffer competition than they did in Week 4, and unlike their performance the previous week, they were able to force two turnovers. Still, the defense allowed 186 first-half yards for an average of 6.9 yards per play.

On several occasions during the first half, it seemed as though Michigan State quarterback Aidan Chiles had plenty of time to throw in the pocket, where he would ultimately find open Michigan State receivers for lengthy gains.

Chiles finished the first half completing 10 of 13 passes for 142 yards and a touchdown, a stat line Knowles was likely unhappy about when the Buckeyes got to the locker room at halftime.

As they had done the week before, the Buckeyes tightened things up in the second half, holding the Spartans to just 60 more total yards and no points.

Play Of The Game

If the hype surrounding Smith subdued following a slightly quieter performance against Marshall than fans had become accustomed to, he made sure to bring that hype to new heights after he made two stunning one-handed grabs against Michigan State.

Smith's first one-handed grab came on a long pass from Howard, where the 6-3 freshman went up with two hands but apparently needed only one to pluck a ball out of the air and come down with a 27-yard reception as he fought through contact.

Smith gave an encore of sorts just three plays later. Just before a key third-and-10 play as Ohio State attempted to take a three-possession lead going into halftime, Howard took a hit that he said knocked the wind out of him while delivering a pass in the direction of Egbuka. After the play, Howard was slow to get up, and because the trainers came out for a brief look at Howard, backup quarterback Devin Brown was forced to come off the bench cold on the crucial third-and-long.

With just over 30 seconds to go in the first half, the Spartans brought pressure with a blitz, but a gem of a pass block from running back TreVeyon Henderson gave Brown just enough time to look for the freshman. Smith found himself open down the sideline, and Brown delivered a pass just in the range of the outstretched singular hand of Smith, which he used to snatch the football out of the air and sprint into the end zone for a 17-yard touchdown.

It was the type of play that his teammates had been talking about in the preseason that they had been able to see him make in spring ball, but the rest of the world hadn't been able to see for itself yet. But anyone watching the Buckeyes on Sept. 28 was able to get a taste of what the young receiver will bring to the offense for the next three years.

— Bobby Gorbett

as anybody on our team. He was all over the place tonight and made a huge difference.

"You see the turning point where they were moving the ball some, and he got us going a little bit back there. Those are some big plays, and I think that it kind of turned the momentum for us on defense."

One reason for his lack of stats so far this year is likely his role change in the Ohio State defense, with different things expected out of him in a Knowles-led attack than there were when he was with Nick Saban's Alabama in 2023. It's also a good sign that he's not been appearing on the stat sheet because it could mean that he is shutting down his side of the field and quarterbacks feel like they can't target players where he's covering.

But while his play has already been extremely helpful to the Buckeyes, also very important is the knowledge that he brought to the secondary. Hancock said he tries to pick Downs' brain whenever he can, especially when they're actually on the field together.

"Stabilizing force is a great way to put it, but also on-field coach," Hancock said when asked what Downs brings to the secondary. "There are a lot of questions that I ask him. I continue to grow under him. He just feels like a whole different coach on the field, and that's exactly what we need in our secondary."

Brown Steps Up When Called Upon

In the second quarter of the win, Howard was hit on a second-down play and had to come out of the game, which he told the media after the game was because he had

the wind knocked out of him and he needed to recover for a while on the sideline. But in his place came backup Devin Brown, who had lost the battle for the starting job for the second straight season.

When Brown stepped onto the field after a timeout, he had a passing play set up for him on a third-and-10, and after a huge block by running back TreVeyon Henderson on Brown's blind side, he pulled back and launched a pass down the right sideline to freshman Jeremiah Smith that he caught for a touchdown, extending the Buckeyes' lead to 17 points.

While it ended up being just one play that Brown was needed for before Howard was able to get back on the field, Day was very pleased with the way the redshirt sophomore stepped up when he was needed.

"That was a clutch play. He put it there," Day said. "We told him, 'If you have the opportunity to throw it, rip it. Only throw it where only the receiver can catch it.' He had a couple different options there. If nothing was there, just throw it out of bounds and kick the field goal. And he did that. He gave them a chance. So it was good to see him make that play in a big spot."

Brown did get the chance to get back onto the field in the fourth quarter since the game was a blowout, but his perfect passing line didn't continue, though he was close, going 5 of 7 for 54 yards and the touchdown to Smith.

Scott Early Safety Net For Howard

In the first three games of the season, the tight end position was notably absent when it came to the passing game, but

that was a different story against Michigan State, at least through just over one quarter of football.

Howard found tight end Gee Scott Jr. three times in the first 16 minutes of action, proving that he does have an extra option when he drops back if he needs one. Scott opened up his game with a 4-yard catch, following that with a 7-yard reception that ended with a late-hit penalty and earned the Buckeyes a first down.

But the biggest of his three catches came on the second drive of the game for Ohio State – one that lasted 6:08 and spanned 14 plays, covering 80 yards. He began the Buckeyes' fourth-and-goal play from the 3-yard line on the right side of the offensive line and, after one step, took a hard right into the front of the end zone, running a crossing route to the left side. Howard found him with some space and placed the ball into his arms where he was brought down, just staying across the goal line.

The tight ends have been on a rotation early in the season, with Scott, Will Kac-

marek and Jelani Thurman each getting some time with the starters through the first three games, but they hadn't been much of a factor in the receiving game. Kacmarek led the room in receptions with three and Bennett Christian led in yards with a late-game garbage-time 55-yard yard touchdown from freshman Julian Sayin.

Last season with Kyle McCord under center, when Marvin Harrison Jr. wasn't open, the quarterback would look for another former Buckeye, Cade Stover, who ended up being a safety net for McCord whenever he needed it. With Stover gone, it wasn't clear whether the tight ends would be able to continue being options as pass catchers, but Scott's ability to get open early in this game had to be encouraging for Ohio State.

Scott completely disappeared from the receiving game after his touchdown catch since Smith took over yet again, but he at the very least showed that if he is needed – which might be rare with the talent in the OSU wide receiver room – he can be reliable.

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WR Smith Too Much For Spartans To Handle

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Quarterback Will Howard accounted for two passing touchdowns and ran for another, but he was overshadowed by freshman sensation Jeremiah Smith's one rushing TD and an unworldly scoring catch in the Big Ten opener for No. 3 Ohio State.

Smith singlehandedly helped the Buckeyes to a big first-half lead, and they cruised from there for a 38-7 victory at Michigan State on the night of Sept. 28.

The Buckeyes (4-0, 1-0) led 17-7 late in the first half of their first road game of the season when Smith twice used his right hand to snare passes with the second resulting in a 17-yard TD to make it 24-7 with 29 seconds left before a crowd of 71,114 at Spartan Stadium.

Smith, the No. 1 recruit nationally in the 2024 class, earlier had a 19-yard touchdown run as the Buckeyes took advantage of the pesky but mistake-prone Spartans (3-2, 1-1 Big Ten).

Michigan State had three drives deep into OSU territory in the first half that resulted in a turnover on downs and two lost fumbles.

Smith made five catches for 83 yards, all in the first half. His TD run was his only carry. Howard was 21 of 31 for 244 yards with two TDs and an interception plus a 6-yard rushing TD before being rested in the fourth quarter.

Crazy, Crazy

Ohio State took the opening kickoff and appeared ready to put the ball in the end zone, but a critical penalty to tight end Will Kacmarek killed the drive and the Buckeyes had to settle for a 30-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding at 9:15 for the 3-0 lead.

Starting from the 25, a pass to Henderson lost 4 yards, but Carnell Tate gained 29 on a reception to the 50. Gee Scott Jr. added 4 on catch, and Smith hauled in a 13-yard pass to the 33. Henderson rushed for 4 yards, and Tate again made a catch, this time for 7 and a first down at the 22.

Howard found Quinshon Judkins for 12 yards to the 10 and the QB kept the ball on the next play for a 4-yard pickup, but Kacmarek was called for unnecessary roughness after the play to put the ball back on the 21.

Judkins' catch got 5 back, and Howard scrambled for 4 to the 12 on third down before the field goal.

The Spartans put a scare in the Buckeyes on their first possession when Nate Carter ran for 19 on the initial snap and Aidan Chiles followed two plays later with a 19-yard pass to Brennan Parachek to the OSU 29.

Chiles was sacked by Sonny Styles for a loss of 3, and Carter ran for 4. Jaron Glover made a catch for 8 to the 20 to set up fourth-and-1. Chiles tried to leap over the pile but was met in the air by Cody Simon before he could get to the 19 and the Buckeyes took over on downs.

They took advantage to assume a 10-0 lead at 14:04 of the second quarter on a 3-yard, fourth-down catch by Scott.

OSU got consecutive third-down conver-



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN HIS WAKE — Emeka Egbuka left a trail of would-be tacklers behind on the way to his 33-yard touchdown catch to give Ohio State a 31-7 lead in the third quarter.

sion catches by Emeka Egbuka, the second for 19 yards to the MSU 42. On the next play, Scott made a catch to get to the 35, and 15 more were added due to a personal foul by Malik Spencer.

Judkins ran for 2 and 3 yards prior to a 6-yard catch by Smith to end the opening quarter with the Buckeyes having a first-and-goal from the 9. Judkins had been stopped at the line on first down, but the officials ruled the play was not snapped before the clock expired.

So, on the first play of the second quarter, Henderson got 6 yards on the ground. Howard threw two incompletions with the latter to Smith almost intercepted by Spencer before the Buckeyes won the fourth-down gamble.

Michigan State ate up yardage in chunks on its next drive before a heads-up play by cornerback Jordan Hancock turned a big gain into a turnover.

The Spartans got catches of 9 and 24 yards from Glover, who had missed the previous game because of an injury, before Jack Velling's 26-yard catch-and-run. Hancock stripped him of the ball at the OSU 11, and Sonny Styles returned it 8 yards to the 19.

But the Spartans got a break of their own to make it 10-7 at 9:46 when Glover made a

12-yard scoring grab on the first play after Jordan Turner's interception on a throw to Egbuka at the OSU 48 and his return of 36 yards.

The Buckeyes quickly responded by going 75 yards in four plays and 2:19 to make it 17-7 at 7:22.

Smith started and ended the drive. He had a 20-yard catch to the 45 only for the Buckeyes to face a first-and-20 when on the ensuing play Scott was flagged for holding.

Then Henderson burst through the line for 37 yards to the 28, and Judkins gained 9 before Smith scored his first career rushing touchdown from 19 yards on an end-around.

MSU continued to tear apart the OSU defense as Aziah Johnson had a catch for 15 and Nick Marsh's reception went for 25 to the OSU 35. But the defense came through again on third-and-3 from the 16 when Chiles ran up the middle and had the ball knocked loose by safety Lathan Ransom and recovered by defensive end Jack Sawyer at the 16.

On the Buckeyes' second snap, Henderson made a 3-yard catch to the 23, but he fumbled and Turner recovered the ball. However, the call was overturned when it was ruled that Henderson was down by contact with his right forearm touching the turf

before the fumble.

The Buckeyes had the first punt of the game after Howard went for no gain on a sneak on third-and-3 from the 23 with 1:55 left in the half. Joe McGuire booted the ball 42 yards to the 35 with no return.

A JT Tuimoloau sack of 6 yards on second down helped force a punt which went 27 yards, giving OSU the ball at its 40 with 1:13 left.

The Buckeyes needed only 44 seconds and six plays to take a 24-7 lead with 29 seconds left thanks to the second of the two fantastic catches by Smith, which went for a 17-yard score.

Tate made a catch for 16 to the MSU 44 on the second play before Smith made an amazing catch with his right hand along the right sideline for 27 yards to the 17.

On second down, Howard was hit in the sternum throwing incomplete to Egbuka, and Devin Brown replaced him for third-and-10. After an MSU timeout, the Spartans blitzed but Henderson picked it up, providing Brown enough time to find Smith at the 3 for another incredible one-handed catch as his momentum carried him into the end zone.

"I couldn't believe he caught it," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "Just a tremendous play."

Finishing Touch

Howard returned in the third quarter and engineered a methodical 76-yard, 13-play, 7:09 drive that culminated in his 33-yard touchdown pass to Egbuka to up the count to 31-7 at 4:57.

Egbuka had a 7-yard catch to start the possession, and on a second-and-14 from the OSU 42, Howard tossed him the ball for 20 yards to the MSU 38. Two incompletions and a Henderson 5-yard rush led to a fourth-and-5 from the 33. From there, Howard and Egbuka connected again for the score.

A Denzel Burke interception at the MSU 43 and 31-yard return to the 12 set up Howard's 6-yard run untouched into the end zone on third down for a 38-7 lead at 2:05 of the third.

Brown replaced Howard for the first drive of the fourth quarter at 14:47, and freshman Julian Sayin came in with 9:19 to play. He was 0 for 2 passing while Brown went 5 of 7 for 54 yards and a touchdown.

The game ended with the Spartans reaching the OSU 20 on a 12-yard catch by Makhi Frazier.

Notes

The Buckeyes have won nine straight in the series against MSU and are 20-5 in East Lansing all-time. ... Egbuka had a game-high seven catches for 96 yards. Tate's three catches went for 52 yards. ... Henderson rushed seven times for 69 yards while Judkins gained 54 yards on 11 rushes. ... Chiles was 13 of 19 for 167 yards and a TD against one interception. He was sacked three times. ... OSU had 483 yards (298 passing, 185 rushing); the Spartans had 246 (199 passing, 47 rushing). ... MSU was limited to 60 yards in the second half with only three coming on the ground.

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 38, Michigan State 7

Sept. 28, 2024 - Spartan Stadium, East Lansing, Mich.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	3	21	14	0	38
MICHIGAN STATE	0	7	0	0	7

First Quarter

OSU - Fielding, 30-yard field goal (9:15).

Second Quarter

OSU - Scott Jr., 3-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 14:04.

MSU - Glover, 12-yard pass from Chiles (Kim kick), 9:41.

OSU - Smith, 19-yard rush (Fielding kick), 7:22.

OSU - Smith, 17-yard pass from Brown (Fielding kick), 0:29.

Third Quarter

OSU - Egbuka, 33-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 4:57.

OSU - Howard, 6-yard rush (Fielding kick), 2:05.

Att. - 71,114

Weather - Cloudy, 67 F

Team Statistics

	OSU	MSU
First Downs	23	13
Rushing	6	3
Passing	16	10
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	35-185	25-47
Passing Yards	298	199
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	26-40-1	16-25-1
Offensive Plays	75	50
Total Net Yards	483	246
Third Down Efficiency	8-17	2-9
Fourth Down Efficiency	3-4	0-1
Punts-Avg.	3-36.0	5-46.6
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	2-2
Penalties	4-40	2-19
Time of Possession	35:43	24:17

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - OSU: Henderson 7-69; Judkins 11-54; Peoples 10-29; Smith 1-19; Howard 6-14. **MSU:** Lynch-Adams 9-35; Carter 6-27; Team 1-(-2); Schuster 1-(-2); Tullis 2-(-2); Chiles 6-(-9).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - OSU: Howard 21-31-1-244-2; Brown 5-7-0-54-1; Sayin 0-2-0-0-0. **MSU:** Chiles 13-19-1-167-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - OSU: Egbuka 7-96; Smith 5-83; Tate 3-52; Scott Jr. 3-14; Judkins 2-17; Rodgers 2-17; Henderson 2-(-1); Inniss 1-14; Christian 1-6. **MSU:** Glover 4-53; Marsh 2-30; Parachek 2-27; Foster Jr. 2-17; Johnston 2-14; Velling 1-26; Smith 1-16; Frazier 1-12; Faley 1-4.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - OSU: McGuire 3-36.0-42. **MSU:** Eckley 5-46.6-58.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Inniss 2-19. **MSU:** None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: None. **MSU:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Styles 1-8; Sawyer 1-0. **MSU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Burke 1-31. **MSU:** Turner 1-36.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Melton 1.5-9; Tuimoloau 1-6; Styles 1-3; Hicks 0.5-1. **MSU:** None.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Melton 1.5-9; Tuimoloau 1-6; Hamilton 1-4; McDonald 1-3; Styles 1-3; Downs 1-1; Hicks 0.5-1. **MSU:** Grose 1-4; Buckley 0.5-1; Jones 0.5-1; Spencer 0.5-1; Turner 0.5-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) - OSU: Downs 3-3-6; Styles 2-4-6; Sawyer 3-2-5; Tuimoloau 2-1-3; Reese 2-1-3; Hancock 2-1-3; McDonald 2-1-3; Burke 1-2-3; Melton 1-2-3; Igbinosun 1-1-2; Simon 1-1-2; Hicks 1-1-2; Hamilton 1-1-2; McClain 1-1-2; Siereveld 1-0-1; Ransom 1-0-1; Mathews Jr. 1-0-1; Scott Jr. 0-1-1; Malone 0-1-1; Moore 0-1-1; Powers 0-1-1. **MSU:** Turner 6-3-9; Spencer 5-2-7; Martinez 4-1-5; Haladay 3-2-5; Woods 1-3-4; Grose 3-0-3; Denson Jr. 3-0-3; Thompson 2-1-3; Hughes 2-1-3; Matthews 1-2-3; Jones 1-2-3; Hall 0-3-3; Smith 2-0-2; VanSumeren 2-0-2; Roberts 1-1-2; Brantley 1-1-2; Edwards 1-1-2; Douse 0-2-2; Foster Jr. 1-0-1; Carter 1-0-1; Dunn 1-0-1; Pulliam 1-0-1; Brinson IV 1-0-1; Dunnigan 0-1-1; Bogle 0-1-1; Buckley 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - OSU: Tate, Howard, Egbuka, Henderson, Smith, McLaughlin, Fryar, Simmons, Jackson, Tshabola, Scott Jr., Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Reese, Sawyer, Tuimoloau, Hamilton, Styles, Ransom, Malone, Judkins, Sayin, Inniss, Hicks, Rodgers, Nelson Jr., Melton, McClain, Peoples, Simpson-Hunt, Mathews Jr., Pierce, Styles Jr., Jones, Brown, Powers, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Gurd, Scott Jr., Prater, Michalski, Siereveld, Fitzpatrick, Hancock, Hinzman, Adolph, Christian, Kacmarek, Curry, Kanu, Moore, McDonald. **MSU:** Velling, Chiles, Foster Jr., Glover, Carter, Baldwin, Roberts, Miller, Lepo, Newman, Parachek, Brantley, Martinez, Grose, Bogle, Haladay, Woods, Spencer, Turner, Thompson, VanSumeren, Douse, Schuster, Matthews, Tailey, Johnson, Denson Jr., Faley, Lynch-Adams, Thompson, Brinson IV, Smith, Yanachik, Snow, Martinez, Frazier, Tullis, Hughes, Grose, Alexander, Edwards, Lewis, Gash, Pulliam, Coyne, Schickel, Hall, Terpstra, Johnson, Marsh, Fincher, Young, Dennis, Jones, Gillespie, Hopper, Buckley, Smith, Satchell, Eckley, Kim, Hansen, Dunn, Dunnigan.

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	W, 49-14	103,871	
Sept. 28	(3) Michigan State	W, 38-7	71,114	
Oct. 5	(3) IOWA	3:30 p.m.		
Oct. 12	Oregon (6)	7:30 p.m.		
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA		
Nov. 2	Penn State (7)	TBA		
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA		
Nov. 16	Northwestern	TBA		
Nov. 23	INDIANA (23)	TBA		
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN (10)	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	100	48
Rushing	39	16
Passing	57	27
Penalty	4	5
Average Per Game/Rush	227.0	61.8
Average Per Game/Pass	307.8	134.8
Total Offense	2139	786
Total Plays	268	232
Average Per Game	534.8	196.5
Average Per Play	8.0	3.4
Penalties-Yards	22-197	17-108
Fumbles-Lost	5-1	5-3
Third Down Efficiency	24-49	16-58
Percentage	49%	28%
Fourth Down Efficiency	6-8	3-6
Percentage	75%	50%
Sacks-Yards	13-73	3-22
Time Of Possession Avg.	29:60	29:60

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	38	66	63	28	0	195	48.8
Opponents	10	14	3	0	0	27	6.8

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Quinshon Judkins	47	390	8.3	5	86
T. Henderson	31	276	8.9	4	40
James Peoples	32	141	4.4	2	12
S. Williams-Dixon	4	44	11.0	0	31
Will Howard	14	36	2.6	3	19
Jeremiah Smith	1	19	19.0	1	19
Julian Sayin	1	5	5.0	0	5
Mason Maggs	1	3	3.0	0	3
Devin Brown	4	0	0.0	0	8
Team	3	-6	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	138	908	6.6	15	86
OPP Totals	134	247	1.8	1	19

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Will Howard	72	105	68.6	1039	8-2	173.0
Devin Brown	13	21	61.9	131	1-0	130.0
Julian Sayin	2	4	50.0	61	1-0	260.6
OSU Totals	87	130	66.9	1231	10-2	168.8
OPP Totals	60	98	61.2	539	2-3	108.0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	21	362	17.2	2	68
Jeremiah Smith	19	364	19.2	5	70
Carnell Tate	14	219	15.6	1	36
Brandon Inniss	5	63	12.6	0	27
Gee Scott Jr.	4	19	4.8	1	7
T. Henderson	4	17	4.3	0	12
Quinshon Judkins	4	31	7.8	0	12
Bryson Rodgers	4	38	9.5	0	12
Will Kacmarek	3	14	4.7	0	7
Jayden Ballard	2	18	9.0	0	12
Bennett Christian	2	61	30.5	1	55
David Adolph	1	10	10.0	0	10
Kojo Antwi	1	8	8.0	0	8
Patrick Gurd	1	6	6.0	0	6
Jelani Thurman	1	3	3.0	0	3
James Peoples	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	87	1231	14.1	10	70
OPP Totals	60	539	9.0	2	29

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jeremiah Smith	6	-	-	-	-	36
Jayden Fielding	-	24-24	-	-	2-2	30
Q. Judkins	5	-	-	-	-	30
T. Henderson	4	-	-	-	-	24
Will Howard	3	-	-	-	-	18
James Peoples	2	-	-	-	-	12
Emeka Egbuka	2	-	-	-	-	12

Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lathan Ransom	1	-	-	-	-	6
Carnell Tate	1	-	-	-	-	6
Austin Snyder	-	3-3	-	-	-	3
OSU Totals	27	27-27	-	-	2-2	195
OPP Totals	3	3-3	-	-	2-3	27

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	0-0	1-1	1-1	0-0	2-2
OSU Totals	0-0	1-1	1-1	0-0	2-2
OPP Totals	0-0	0-0	2-3	0-0	2-3

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	11	463	42.1	0	51
Nick McLarty	2	65	32.5	0	35
OSU Totals	13	528	40.6	0	51
OPP Totals	30	1319	44.0	0	60

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Denzel Burke	2	31	15.5	0	31
Gabe Powers	1	29	29.0	1	29
OSU Totals	3	60	20.0	1	31
OPP Totals	2	36	18.0	0	36

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	11	106	9.6	0	36
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	12	106	8.8	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	3	50	16.7	0	20

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Sonny Styles	6	17	23	1.0-3	1.0-3
Lathan Ransom	14	6	20	3.0-4	0-0
Arvell Reese	8	7	15	2.0-3	0-0
Caleb Downs	7	8	15	1.5-3	0.5-2
Jordan Hancock	11	3	14	1.0-1	0-0
Jack Sawyer	8	6	14	1.0-10	1.0-10
Ty Hamilton	5	8	13	1.5-5	0.5-1
Denzel Burke	7	6	13	0-0	0-0
C.J. Hicks	5	7	12	1.5-9	1.5-9
JT Tuimoloau	6	4	10	3.5-14	2.5-13
Mitchell Melton	6	4	10	3.5-15	2.0-12
Davison Igbinosun	6	4	10	1.0-2	0-0
Tyleik Williams	2	7	9	2.0-4	1.5-1
Kayden McDonald	5	4	9	1.0-3	0-0
Cody Simon	3	6	9	1.0-7	1.0-7
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	5	2	7	0-0	0-0
K. Jackson Jr.	4	2	6	0.5-4	0.5-4
Jaylen McClain	4	2	6	1.0-1	0-0
Tywayne Malone	1	5	6	1.0-1	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	4	1	5	1.0-2	0-0
Gabe Powers	3	1	4	0-0	0-0
Caden Curry	2	1	3	1.0-11	1.0-11
Malik Hartford	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Eddrick Houston	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Austin Siereveld	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Jason Moore	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Aaron Scott Jr.	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
C. Simpson-Hunt	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Joey Velazquez	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	124	118	242	29.0-102	13.0-73
OPP Totals	140	110	250	11.0-39	3.0-22
Fumbles Forced:	Ransom (2), Curry, Hancock.				
Fumbles Recovered:	Ransom, Sawyer, Styles.				

Hawkeyes Defense Poses Its Usual Threat

By GREG WILSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

There are a lot of expectations for the 2024 Iowa football team a season after former offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz – son of longtime Hawkeyes head coach Kirk Ferentz – was fired by the program for leading yet another underwhelming offensive attack and not meeting goals that were set for his offense prior to the beginning of the season.

New offensive coordinator Tim Lester hopes that he can turn the identity of the Hawkeye offense around from what it has been known as for a while. It's an identity that further cemented itself in the 2023 season when the most valuable player on the offense might have been punter Tory Taylor – now with the Chicago Bears – who set the NCAA record for most punting yards in a season with 4,479 yards on 93 boots, breaking the 85-year-old mark of 4,138 yards set by Michigan State's John Pingel in 1938.

But while the offense has never been very strong under Ferentz, there's no way to argue that he hasn't been successful in building teams the way he has. Under his tutelage, the Hawkeyes have had 11 straight winning campaigns, with three out of the last four full seasons ending with 10 wins. In two of the last three years, Iowa has won the Big Ten West and played for a chance at the Big Ten title, including being shut out by Michigan 26-0 in last year's edition of the conference champion-

ship game.

Going into the season, the Hawkeyes had hopes that their offensive MVP would be someone other than their punter.

Through four games, things may seem to be trending that way, with the now-Lester-led Iowa offense averaging 32.0 points per game, tied for 53rd in the country at the end of Week 5. It's a spot that the younger Ferentz likely dreamed of having his offense at after finishing 2023 with a dismal 15.4 points per game, which ranked 129th out of the 130 FBS teams whose stats were tracked by the NCAA.

Matching up against Ohio State's defense is going to be a major test for how much Iowa's offense has actually improved, but they are led by the veteran Cade McNamara under center, who does have experience when it comes to beating the Buckeyes. He led Michigan's 2021 offense that put up 42 points on OSU – though that might have been despite McNamara, not because of – while completing 13 of 19 passes for 159 yards with no touchdowns and an interception.

McNamara has shown little improvement in his passing since then, starting the 2024 season by completing 64 of 102 passes (62.7 percent) for 588 yards and three touchdowns to two interceptions in four games.

Lester has been happy with how McNamara has progressed since the beginning of the season. He said that McNamara had his best game by far in the team's 31-14 win over Minnesota on Sept. 21, even

Get To Know ... Iowa

- **2024 Record:** 3-1, 1-0 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Multiple; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 5, Defense 8, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Kirk Ferentz, 26th year at Iowa, 199-120.
- **Series History:** 66th meeting; Ohio State leads 47-15-3.
- **School Facts:** Location – Iowa City, Iowa; Enrollment – 30,779; Nickname – Hawkeyes; Colors – Black, Gold; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Kinnick Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 69,250).

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	ILLINOIS STATE	W, 40-0
Sept. 7	IOWA STATE	L, 20-19
Sept. 14	TROY	W, 38-21
Sept. 21	at Minnesota	W, 31-14
Oct. 5	at Ohio State	3:30 p.m.
Oct. 12	WASHINGTON	TBA
Oct. 19	at Michigan State	TBA
Oct. 26	NORTHWESTERN	3:30 p.m.
Nov. 2	WISCONSIN	TBA
Nov. 8	at UCLA	9:00 p.m.
Nov. 23	at Maryland	TBA
Nov. 29	NEBRASKA	7:30 p.m.
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship	TBA

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Kaleb Johnson	82	685	8.4	9
Jaziun Patterson	26	138	5.3	1
Kamari Moulton	30	124	4.1	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Cade McNamara	64-102	62.7	588	3-2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jacob Gill	13	145	11.2	1
Luke Lachey	12	97	8.1	0
R. Vander Zee	7	94	13.4	2
A. Ostrenga	11	63	5.7	1

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 32.0
Rushing Yards Per Game – 250.3
Passing Yards Per Game – 147.5
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 397.8

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Jay Higgins	12	22	34	0-0 0-0
Nick Jackson	9	16	25	1.5-5 1-5
Sebastian Castro	13	4	17	0-0 0-0
Ethan Hurkett	10	5	15	3.5-19 2-17
Quinn Schulte	8	4	12	0-0 0-0
Yahya Black	6	5	11	2.5-5 0-0
Deshawn Lee	6	5	11	0-0 0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Jermari Harris	2	28	14	1
Jay Higgins	2	5	2.5	0
Quinn Schulte	1	15	15	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 13.8
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 62.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 210.8
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 272.8

though his quarterback threw for just 62 yards on 19 attempts.

"Everything is about your feet and timing," Lester said. "That's how I grade. Can you operate this offense on time? That was his issue in Week 2 (a 20-19 loss to Iowa State). It was probably his worst game as far as his footwork goes. When your feet aren't set, you're not an accurate thrower of the ball."

One thing that has helped the Iowa offense tremendously has been the fact that they have one of the nation's leading rushers in the backfield in junior Kaleb Johnson. The Hamilton, Ohio, native has already rushed for 685 yards on 82 carries this season, an average of 171.3 yards per game. He is well on pace to break the program record set by former NFL tailback Shonn Greene in 2008 of 1,850 rushing yards in a season.

"I'm not sure I remember anybody in four games doing what he's done," Ferentz said. "He just continues to run really well, and he's been really aggressive. He's always been a big, strong guy and a talented guy, but right now he's just focused and coming into his own in terms of using what strengths and abilities he does have."

Lester said Iowa's elite rushing attack – which also includes sophomore Jaziun Patterson (138 yards, one touchdown) and redshirt freshman Kamari Moulton (124, zero) – can help open up more opportunities for his offense outside of the handoff, which can cause opposing defenses to be on their toes all game.

"Once you get the run game going then everything changes," Lester said before the season. "Defenses have to change. Once they change, your explosiveness

changes. But this whole offense is about – we're going to run the ball, and everything comes off of that.

"Overall, I try to be 50/50, but I've called 70 runs in a game, I've called 70 passes in a game, so it depends on who you're playing."

When McNamara does throw the ball, it gets spread around between a few different pass catchers. Junior wide receiver Jacob Gill leads the team with 13 receptions for 145 yards and a score, while senior tight end and Columbus native Luke Lachey – who missed most of the 2023 season after having right ankle surgery last September – is close behind with 12 catches for 97 yards. Junior tight end Addison Ostrenga was the only other player with double-digit receptions at 11 catches for 63 yards and a touchdown, but he is being outgained by true freshman wideout Reece Vander Zee, who had seven catches for 94 yards and a team-high two touchdowns.

Johnson has also caught seven passes out of the backfield but has taken them for only 26 yards.

There are three returning starters on the Hawkeye offensive line with senior left tackle Mason Richman, senior right guard Connor Colby and junior right tackle Genings Dunker reclaiming their roles from last season, while junior left guard Beau Stephens and center Logan Jones are in starting spots for the first time.

Ferentz believes the offensive line has improved from last year, which, along with improvements from McNamara, can allow the Hawkeye offense to have much more success in Big Ten play.

"I think we're a little better up front now than we've been the last couple years, so

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OHIO STATE VS. IOWA

maybe we can handle some things," Ferentz said. "Not only ability to block but also the ability to maybe be in the right spot to block the right guy with the right leverage. And then our quarterback play, if we can get consistency there, too, those two things really help dictate how an offense goes."

Like always, the biggest thing the Buckeyes will have to worry about when playing against Iowa is its defense, which always proves to be one of the better units in the country, something that defensive coordinator Phil Parker – a Lorain, Ohio, native – has been able to put onto the field for the better part of his 13 seasons in his position.

With eight returning starters, the Hawkeyes bring back much of the same defense that was responsible for allowing just 282.5 yards (seventh nationally) and 14.8 points per game (fourth).

It's not ever surprising to see Iowa as a top-10 defense in the nation, but the last time the Buckeyes matched up against them it didn't matter much, with C.J. Stroud leading the offense to 54 points behind 20-of-30 passing for 286 yards and four touchdowns to one interception in a 44-point win in Columbus on Oct. 22, 2022.

Senior edge rusher Deontae Craig and senior defensive tackle Yahya Black return as starters on the Hawkeyes' defensive line and so far have combined for 19 tackles. Black has 2½ tackles for loss, a pass broken up and a quarterback hurry, while Craig has added two quarterback hurries of his own.

Junior Aaron Graves and senior Ethan Hurkett have been solid additions to the starting line so far with a combined 24 tackles (6½ for loss), along with five sacks, two quarterback hurries and two forced fumbles, both of them forced by Hurkett.

Parker deploys a 4-3 defense much of the time, with the standard middle linebacker and weakside linebacker joined by what the Hawkeyes call the "Leo" position, which can act as a linebacker or a weakside defensive end, somewhat similar to a position that OSU fans might be more familiar with being called the "Jack."

Fifth-year Jay Higgins returns in the middle as the only linebacker in the conference who received preseason Big Ten honors in July. He finished the 2023 season with a Big Ten-leading 171 tackles (79 solo, 92 assisted), five tackles for loss, two sacks, an interception, four passes broken up, four quarterback hurries, two fumble recoveries and a forced fumble, filling in very well for former Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year Jack Campbell.

Higgins, the Phile Steele preseason Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year who is a projected fourth-round NFL draft selection next year, doesn't seem to have slowed down. He already leads the team with 34 tackles (12 solo, 22 assisted), along with two interceptions, two passes broken up and a quarterback hurry.

Ferentz thinks learning behind Campbell was the most valuable thing Higgins could have done for himself.

"Jay has been great. I can't say enough about him," Ferentz said. "I said this back in the summertime, in this modern era of cut and run – not that everybody does that, but it seems to be pretty popular – he ends

up sitting behind a guy named Jack Campbell, who's pretty good, and Jay recognized that.

"Instead of running from Jack, he went and ran to him and listened and really watched him most importantly. I think he watched how Jack operated, not that Jay didn't already know how to operate. But good players tend to gravitate towards good players, and Jay was always eyes and ears, and he's learned from the best of the guys in our program."

By his side will be sixth-year senior Nick Jackson, who – after being a third-team All-Big Ten media selection last season – is second to Higgins in tackles so far in 2024 with 25 and has 1½ tackles for loss, a sack and three passes defended. Fellow sixth-year senior Kyler Fisher returns in the hybrid Leo role for Iowa, already contributing 11 tackles of his own.

So far, the linebackers and defensive line have helped contribute to a defense that was fourth nationally in rushing defense at just 62.0 yards per game.

While there is something to say about being a top-five team in the country in rushing defense through four games, it's a different story when the team you're lining up against has Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson in the backfield. The Hawkeyes are likely to give the Buckeyes' 1-2 punch one of their toughest matchups of the regular season, but with the variety of what the Ohio State offense can do, stopping them could be a tall task, even for Parker's defense.

Three of the four Hawkeyes defensive backs are also returning starters with junior cornerback TJ Hall being the odd one out and sixth-years Jermari Harris and Quinn Schulte and junior Xavier Nwankpa reclaiming their starting roles at cornerback, free safety and strong safety, respectively. Those four have been backed up by sophomores Koen Entringer, Deshaun Lee and John Nestor, who have each appeared in each of Iowa's first four games this season.

The group has struggled more than the Hawkeyes secondary has been accustomed to in prior years, however. They have totaled five interceptions in four games – two of them by Harris and two by Higgins – and allowed 210.8 yards passing per game, a mark that ranks 73rd nationally.

Iowa has also fallen victim to some explosive passing plays, which Ohio State has been creating a lot of this season by scoring long touchdowns through the air. Ferentz said he wants to clean up some of the play in a secondary that he knows can improve.

"The lack of ability stuff you can't do anything about, but if it's being sloppy, that's not a good thing," he said. "Then the big-play stuff, if a guy gets beat, a guy makes a great play, what are you going to do? You try to defend it the best you can, and if you get beat, you get beat. Congratulations to the other team.

"But if it's something you can stop or at least make it tougher on them, then that's what we've got to be doing, and those are the things we have to really try to coach. Most importantly, that's what the players have to do is make sure that they're making the other team have to work a little bit."



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Projected Depth Charts

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
IOWA RUSH DEFENSE

Ohio State was effective but not dominant running the ball in its Big Ten opener, a 38-7 win at Michigan State. The wild thing is both rushing touchdowns were by non-running backs – quarterback Will Howard and wide receiver Jeremiaiah Smith. The Buckeyes ran for 185 yards on a 5.3 average per carry. TreVeyon Henderson had 69 yards on seven attempts (9.9), and Quinshon Judkins added 54 on 11 totes (4.9). ... Iowa is coming off an open Saturday after a 31-14 win at Minnesota on Sept. 21. Defense is a tradition for the Black and Gold, and this season's Hawkeyes seem to fall in line, especially against a ground attack. The Golden Gophers rushed for 79 yards on 21 carries (3.8 average) and had 288 total yards, just 66 in the second half. Iowa is fourth in rushing defense nationally (62.0 yards allowed per game) and has yet to give up a rushing touchdown in four games. Overall, the Hawkeyes have allowed 55 points, a 13.8 average that is tied for 15th in the country.

EDGE: EVEN

IOWA RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Kaleb Johnson from Hamilton, Ohio, leads a strong rushing unit. Against Minnesota he ran for a career-high 206 yards on a 9.8 average with three TDs, including a 40-yarder, and he has rushed for more than 100 yards in each game this season. For the season, he has 685 yards (8.4) with nine scores and a long run of 64 yards among his 12 totes of 20-plus yards. Iowa is 10th nationally with 250.3 rushing yards per game. Ohio State gave up 47 rushing yards to MSU on 25 carries (1.9 avg.), with 19 coming on their first play from scrimmage. The Spartans had 3 rushing yards in the second half, but Iowa is a much better running team.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. IOWA PASS DEFENSE

Howard was not overly impressive, still can't throw the deep ball and had an interception for the second straight game. He was 21 of 31 for 244 yards with two TDs. Thank goodness for incomparable freshman Jeremiaiah Smith, who made great catch after great catch and finished with 83 yards on five receptions. The Hawkeyes surrendered 209 passing yards to Minnesota but had two picks and a sack. Iowa has forced seven turnovers – five interceptions and two fumble recoveries – for the season. Linebacker Jay Higgins and defensive back Jermari Harris each have two interceptions for the season with the latter having a pick-six of 28 yards against Troy. There have been cracks, though. In consecutive games against Iowa State and Troy, the Hawkeyes conceded touchdown passes of 75, 63 and 62 yards.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

IOWA PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Passing is often a foreign concept to the Hawkeyes, as evidenced by the dismal effort against Minnesota. Cade McNamara was 11 of 19 for 62 yards. It's a testament to his perseverance that those numbers were as "good" as they were. In the first half he was 7 of 13 for 16 yards and was sacked once for 13 yards. On three drop-backs, he netted all of 3 yards. Addison Ostrenga made two catches for 20 yards with a long of 20. Tight end Luke Lachey, son of former standout OSU offensive lineman and current Buckeye radio analyst Jim Lachey, had three receptions for 9 yards. For the season, McNamara is 64 for 102 (62.7 percent) for 588 yards (147.0 per game) with three touchdowns and two interceptions, although he had no turnovers in the past two games. The vaunted OSU defense was its usual porous self in the first half when MSU had 142 passing yards, but the Buckeyes once again made adjustments and held the Spartans to 57 passing yards in the second half.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

SPECIAL TEAMS

Troy had a 77-yard punt return against Iowa. Rhys Dakin averaged 49.6 yards per his five punts vs. Minnesota with three of them more than 50 yards. Hawkeye Drew Stevens is 6 for 6 on field goals with three being from 40 to 46 yards. OSU's Jayden Fielding was much better on kickoffs, getting touchbacks on all seven.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

INTANGIBLES

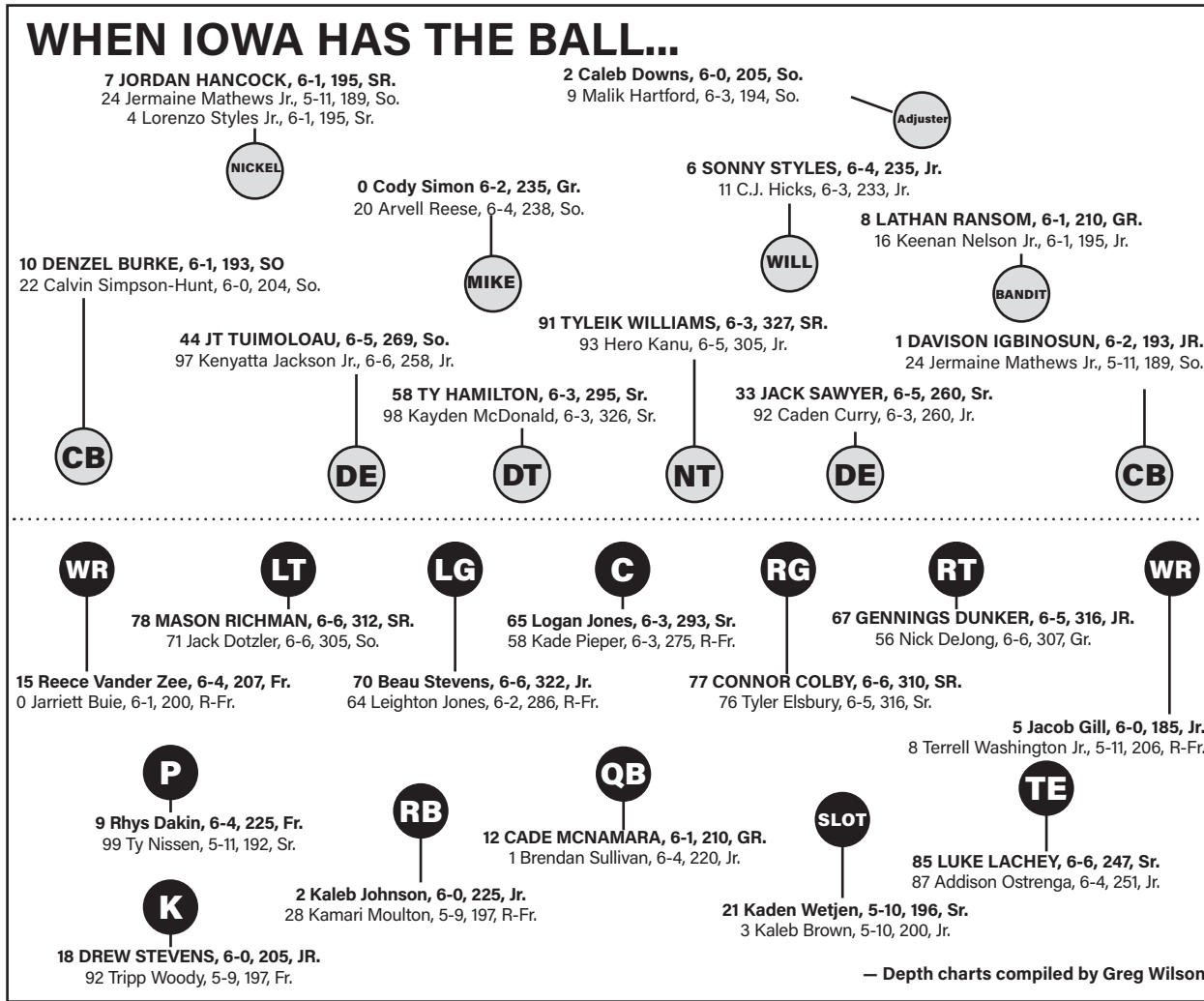
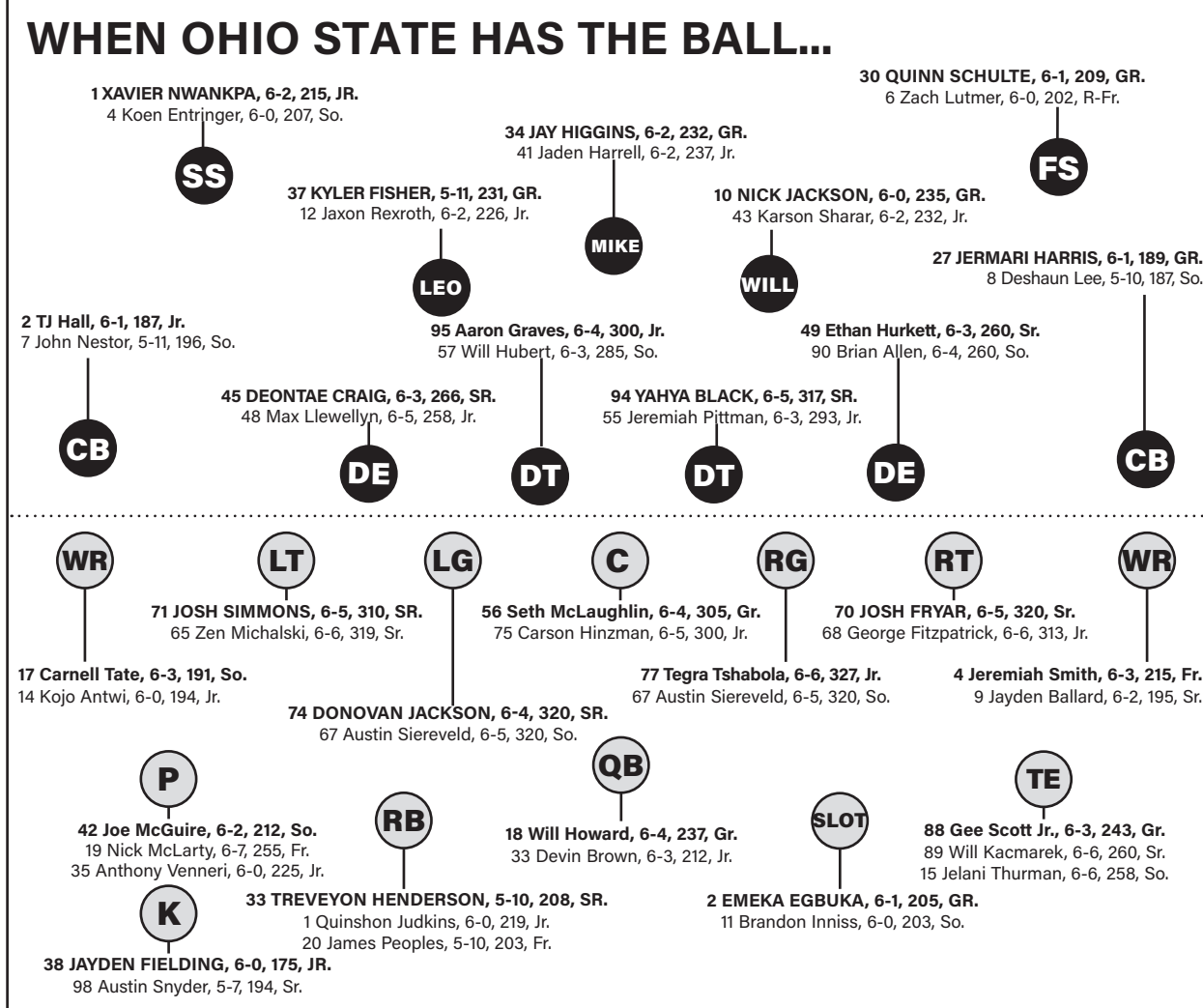
Iowa is going to try to run the ball and control the clock. That's no secret. But with an extra week of preparation the Buckeyes better be ready for some trickery in the passing game and different looks on the defense. If the Hawkeyes can't out-talent the Buckeyes, they will hope to outsmart them.

EDGE: IOWA

STAFF PREDICTION

The slow-starting Buckeyes are going to get hurt at some point if the trend continues, but unless the Hawkeyes can suddenly develop a passing game, the Buckeyes will survive and move on to the showdown at Oregon still undefeated.

OHIO STATE 37, IOWA 14



— Depth charts compiled by Greg Wilson

Harrison Catching On Quickly With Cardinals

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

No one, well anyone with common sense who wasn't looking for a hot take, was ready to declare Marvin Harrison Jr. a bust after his quiet NFL debut on Sept. 8 vs. the Buffalo Bills.

However, there were questions why the No. 4 pick in the 2024 NFL draft had only one catch on three targets for just 4 yards in the 34-28 loss. Was he doing enough to get open? Was quarterback Kyler Murray not looking his way? Did the lack of them playing together in the pre-season cause a problem?

There were all kinds of answers in the aftermath, led by Murray's uneven responses to the media. At one point he said getting the ball to the former Ohio State standout receiver was "not his job" but in subsequent interviews he expressed trust in Harrison.

"Obviously, we want to get him more touches," Murray said. "That's not a secret. I don't want to go forcing things, for sure.

"We've got the utmost confidence in what we're capable of doing. If you went back and watched the game, I think they did a good job of making sure he wasn't going to be single-covered for the majority of the game. But I'll never lose confidence in Marv."

They were never on the field at the same time during the preseason, and Harrison said that was a factor in his unproductive start but that he's not worried.

"I was definitely thinking a lot out there, and I think that will come with reps, thinking less and just going out there and playing," Harrison told ESPN three days after his debut. "It will definitely come with reps, and it's something I'll get better at."

Harrison did not run several routes crisply, and his top speed of 16.7 mph was one of the slowest among all receivers in the NFL that week. He knew he had to play better.

"That's kind of why they brought me here, to help the team, help the offense go. So, I have to do a better job of that going forward," he said. "I've got to get open and catch the ball. That's my job as a receiver. That is your job description."

Harrison and Murray weren't the only ones who came under scrutiny after Harrison's sub-par debut.

"I was a little bit surprised with how much respect they gave (Harrison) early in the game, and I think it opened up some things, especially in the red zone in the run game," Cardinals offensive coordinator Drew Petzing said before the second game.

"But he's one of our top players. Certainly, he's on the forefront of our mind in terms of getting him the ball. I think Buffalo did some good things to take him away, and certainly I could have called some plays differently to try to get him a little bit more involved early."

Murray said he was just running the offense as directed by Petzing.

"As a quarterback, obviously, you're going through your reads," the QB said. "Sometimes the ball goes to him, but that's not my job. I have a sense and a feel for guys when they don't get the ball and when they are getting the ball, but I leave that up to Drew. He tells me, 'Don't worry about that type of stuff. Just keep playing your game and get the ball to where the ball is supposed to go.'"

Second Chance

Fortunately for the Cardinals, a revised game plan for the Sept. 15 home opener against the Los Angeles Rams worked.

Any concerns about the Murray-Harrison connection were allayed 3:57 into the game when Harrison's first catch was a 23-yard touchdown. His second reception went for 60 yards and a score at the 8:47 mark of the first quarter. Harrison had two more grabs and finished the quarter with those four catches for 130 yards (32.5 yards per catch) in the 41-10 victory. Although he didn't make another catch in the game, it was still an epic performance.

Remember his 16.7 speed, or lack thereof? He had shrugged it off when pressed by reporters during the week by saying, "All I know is I'm fast."

He proved that against the Rams when he topped out at 20.0, the fastest of any ball carrier in the game.

In Week 3, Harrison had five catches for 64 yards (12.8) with a 10-yard TD in the first quarter of the 20-13 loss to the Detroit Lions.

With three TDs in the first three games, he was on pace to equal the NFL record for touchdown catches by a rookie, 17 (in 16 games) for Minnesota's Randy Moss in 1998.

However, Harrison was limited in practice leading to the Sept. 29 game against the Washington Commanders due to a quadriceps injury.

Harrison was cleared to play and had a 2-yard touchdown catch early in the first quarter for a 7-0 lead, but the Commanders won 42-14. He made five catches for 45 yards (9.0) with a long of 19.

For the season, he has 15 receptions for 243 yards (16.2) with four TDs.

It's a good start in the pursuit of being the third straight Buckeye to be named NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year after New York Jets wide receiver Garrett Wilson in 2022 and Houston Texans quarterback C.J. Stroud last season.

However, the early favorite is former LSU wide receiver Malik Nabers of the New York Giants, who had 12 catches for 115 yards in a 20-15 loss to the Dallas Cowboys on Sept. 26.

With 35 receptions for 386 yards and three touchdowns, Nabers is the first player in NFL history to record at least 25 catches and three touchdowns in his first four games.

Harrison is showing why he was the highest-drafted wide receiver from Ohio State and the second straight Buckeye to be selected in the first round by the Cardinals, joining offensive lineman Paris Johnson Jr. (No. 6, 2023).

The son of Pro Football Hall of Fame receiver Marvin Harrison won the 2023 Biletnikoff Award as the best receiver in college football, and in three seasons over 38 games (26 starts), he finished third all-time in school history in touchdown receptions (31) and sixth with 155 catches and 2,613 yards. He also had 15 games of 100-plus receiving yards for an OSU record.

One thing that eluded him at Ohio State was a victory over Michigan in three tries, but that didn't stop Commanders rookie cornerback Mike Sainristil, a former Wolverine, from heaping praise on Harrison.

"He's a really good receiver," he said. "To come into the league as a rookie, he's one of the better receivers in the rookie class. What he did in college at Ohio State was phenomenal. I think he's a generational talent."



FILE PHOTO

MARVELOUS AGAIN — After an inauspicious NFL debut when he had just one catch for 4 yards, Marvin Harrison Jr. has shown why he was the No. 4 pick in the 2024 NFL draft by the Arizona Cardinals with four touchdown catches in his next three games.

Speaking of which, the second-generation NFL player equaled his father in just his second game with the Cardinals. The younger Harrison was the first rookie to have four or more receptions and two TDs in the first quarter since the elder Harrison did it in 1996 for the Indianapolis Colts. His 130 yards in the first quarter were more than his father had for any game in his rookie season.

Harrison was also the sixth Cardinals rookie receiver in the past 50 years to have multiple TD receptions in a game.

"He's a mature, serious person, so he doesn't listen to any noise and he holds himself to a high standard," Cardinals coach Jonathan Gannon said after the game against the Rams. "He practiced his ass off this week, and he went and played well.

"So, I'm happy for him. It is good to see him smile."

Wanting More

Yet, Harrison wasn't satisfied. While Murray went 17 of 21 for 266 yards against the Rams, all the misses were throws to Harrison.

"I saw Kyler's stat line and he had four incompletions. All of them were to me. I'm not very happy about that," he said. "I definitely have to get that fixed, but we'll continue to build our chemistry as the season goes on."

Murray concurred: "The more we play together, the more we practice together, we're only going to get better."

Harrison was also hard on himself after the third game because a throw to him was intercepted in part because he ran into double coverage. He said he and Murray are still working out the kinks.

"You just have to do your best to communicate with each other and figure out how we get on the same page and turn things into a positive," Harrison said.

Cardinal legend Larry Fitzgerald liked what he saw from Harrison in the Rams game. The wide receiver posted on Twitter that the way Harrison has quickly adapted to the NFL is a gateway to a successful career: "Big difference

is @marvinharrisonjr's doing it in year one! It took me a few years and a lot of experience to make those plays. The future is really bright for him and the AZ Cardinals."

None of that surprises Ohio State coach Ryan Day.

"Marvin Harrison is a wonderful player. He's going to have a great career in the NFL," Day commented on Sept. 17 about Harrison's two-TD game. "He's such a pro. He's going to translate very well in that league. So that is just the beginning.

"What he's able to do, and it looked to me like some of those were broken plays, I thought the first one was a really great throw and a great catch in the back of the end zone. I don't know how he hung onto that one, but a really nice throw. Then a couple of them looked a little bit ad-libbed but he's a great route runner, so he's going to have these types of plays, and we're proud of what he's doing.

"Also, Paris being there as well — those two guys are going to have a strong impact on that organization."

Yes, life is good for Harrison. After signing a four-year, \$35,374,742 contract, including a \$22,547,084 signing bonus, he recently purchased a \$4.95 million mansion in Paradise Valley, Ariz., 30 miles from the Cardinals' stadium.

Arizona fans hope he will have a long and elite career like Fitzgerald, who had 1,432 receptions for 17,492 yards and 121 touchdowns in 263 games. In his 17-year career, he was an 11-time Pro Bowler and one-time All-Pro, and he will likely be a first-ballot Hall of Famer when he is eligible in 2026.

Before the draft, Fitzgerald had this to say of Harrison:

"Kyler would love to throw it to him. I saw him working out at Ohio State some years back. I'm a big fan of his father, and from everything I've heard, he's just a good hardworking young man. You can never have enough high-character, outstanding, talented football players because those guys are the pillars of your foundation."

OSU Beat Impressed By Run Game So Far

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Unlike in recent years, Ohio State's non-conference schedule lacked a marquee game, with the Buckeyes easily taking care of overmatched Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall at home by a combined score of 157-20, outgaining those three non-Power Four opponents 1,656-540 (552.0-180.0).

Ohio State may not have been tested in the nonconference with teams like Oregon and Notre Dame, whom the Buckeyes battled early in the 2021-23 seasons, but that does not mean there weren't any notable takeaways from these contests. This is especially true when considering how many new players and coaches the Buckeyes brought on board in 2024, with transfers Caleb Downs, Will Howard and Quinshon Judkins, true freshmen James Peoples and Jeremiah Smith and new assistants Chip Kelly and Carlos Locklyn and many more all putting their fingerprints on the team's first three games in some capacity.

With that in mind, Buckeye Sports Bulletin caught up with Buckeye beat writers Marcus Hartman of the Dayton Daily News and Kevin Noon of Buckeye Huddle to gather their thoughts on how Ohio State fared in the nonconference slate, as well as what they learned about the team through three games and what they feel they can accomplish moving forward this season, among other things.

Both interviews were conducted prior to Ohio State's Week 5 38-7 win over Michigan State on Sept. 28.

Ohio State Running Wild

Perhaps the most notable development from Ohio State's first three games was the team's lethal running game, which, under the leadership of new offensive coordinator Kelly and running backs coach Locklyn, rushed for an average of 241.0 yards per contest with 13 total touchdowns, marks that ranked 14th and tied for ninth in the nation entering

Week 5.

The Buckeyes' strong start on the ground was powered by what many view as the best running back duo in the country, senior TreVeyon Henderson and Ole Miss junior transfer Quinshon Judkins, and they wasted little time forming a dominant 1-2 punch.

Both Judkins (336 yards on 36 carries, five touchdowns) and Henderson (207, 24, four) were expected to have impressive seasons, but Noon said the duo has still surprised him with their efficiency and explosiveness. Noon thinks Peoples (112, 22, two) also possesses some home-run ability.

"Largely, Ohio State is who I thought they would be, but I'm certainly more impressed with the running game than I expected to be," Noon said. "And I say that knowing that Chip Kelly has more run fits and things like that in his repertoire than maybe Ryan Day does. But the addition of Quinshon Judkins, and him being flanked by TreVeyon Henderson – the Ohio State run game has just been fantastic. I think the run game really is the biggest surprise that I've had for a team that I felt would be coming out of nonconference play pretty bulletproof.

"We came into the season knowing that Ohio State might have the most talented wide receiver room, but now it looks like Ohio State has the most talented running back room. You spell (Judkins and Henderson) with James Peoples, it just seems like they're three home-run hitters just waiting to come up to bat, like the Dodgers with (Shohei) Ohtani, (Mookie) Betts and (Freddie) Freeman."

Although Noon extended praise to Ohio State's three running backs, Hartman pointed to the play calling of Kelly as the main reason for the team's impressive rushing attack in the nonconference. The former BSB staff member said Kelly has revamped the Buckeyes' rushing game this season by designing more creative play calls, which he thinks helps the entire offense run more smoothly in every aspect, something that may not have

always been the case in previous years.

"It's variety," Hartman said when asked what Kelly has brought to the offense. "Ohio State for the longest time had run three running plays. And now they've run like 10 in each game. That's a big deal. He's just overhauled the running game.

"They just have to figure out the passes that complement the different runs that Chip has installed. That's another thing that will be interesting to watch, just how it evolves, with more play-action passes, where some of the screens and other constraint plays come in. But if you're running more than two run plays, maybe you don't need as many of these screens and constraint plays because you can actually commit to blocking people instead of running around them or trying to fool them."

In addition to the varied play calling, Hartman mentioned that Kelly has also helped transform Ohio State's offensive line so far this season by pushing the unit to improve from a physicality standpoint, which he thinks Ohio State's staff has had a difficult time teaching in previous years.

"I made it a point two years ago, I'm not going to write about toughness again until they beat Michigan," Hartman said. "I don't care how many times they say they're tough or whatever they do, I'm not going to do it. Because it's all just talk until they actually line up and start pushing people off the ball every week.

"Kelly is forcing them to work on that more than they were being forced to work on it during the season the last couple years. As much as Day was trying to make it happen, there was still just something missing. Maybe it was simply just the physicality of the offensive linemen. Maybe they just physically couldn't do it. But it felt like it was just not quite there (in past seasons)."

Hartman pointed to Kelly as the main driver of this change in philosophy, but he also suggested that this change has been player-led, especially by graduate transfer

center Seth McLaughlin. He thinks the Alabama transfer – who started all 13 games for Nick Saban's Crimson Tide at center last season – has made the biggest impact out of any Ohio State offseason transfer because he has provided the Buckeyes with a much-needed veteran presence in the middle of their offensive line who can set the tone for the group on a daily basis.

"It sounds like McLaughlin might really be the biggest impact (transfer), especially when you think about how awful they looked in the Cotton Bowl. If you went through and rewatched the games last year, a high percentage of the time if a run play didn't work, it was because the center (Carson Hinzman) was 3 yards in the backfield. He was just getting his butt kicked on every play.

"(Hinzman) wasn't ready to play. He was too young, and they had to force him in there. Obviously, they needed a better anchor in the middle. And it sounds like he's been not just average, but a plus, in terms of managing these new guys playing on either side and just kind of helping everything come into play.

"I think it's all coming together for them. But they need to do it over the long haul."

Passing Game Aces Early Test

Ohio State's run game may have gotten off to a strong start, but it's not the only aspect of the offense that excelled during the nonconference slate. The Buckeyes' passing game, led by Kelly along with fifth-year Kansas State transfer quarterback Will Howard, also displayed some major explosiveness through the team's first three games, with the Buckeyes averaging 311.0 passing yards per game in that span, a mark that ranked 14th in the nation and second in the Big Ten to only USC (318.7).

Ohio State's passing attack has been spearheaded by the veteran Howard, who – after a rather sluggish start to his Buckeye debut against Akron on Aug. 31 which included a near-first-half fumble on a backwards pass intended for Henderson – was nearly flawless at his new school in his first three games, completing 51 of his 74 passes (68.9 percent) for 795 passing yards and six touchdowns to just one interception.

Howard's stats in the nonconference slate were impressive, but Noon said that it was his leadership and experience at quarterback that made the biggest impact on the offense through three games.

"I think as a leader, he's done a fantastic job," Noon said. "He's vocal enough. I know that there were people that were concerned that Kyle McCord was not a vocal leader. Will Howard says that he's somebody who leads by example, but I think he's also getting the vocal part down.

"I don't have any concerns leadership-wise. I do recognize that maybe he doesn't have the arm talent of some of his predecessors – and I would even put McCord in there – but his ability to process the defense and to be able to have his recognitions is why we're seeing a quarterback that has been on the cusp of 300 yards a couple of times. The biggest opponent to Will Howard hitting 300 yards is Ryan Day hitting him with the hook and pulling him out."

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SCOTT STUART

ON THE RUN — Ole Miss transfer Quinshon Judkins is part of a dynamic backfield duo along with TreVeyon Henderson that has combined for 666 rushing yards and nine touchdowns. Ohio State is averaging 227.0 yards rushing on 6.6 yards per attempt through four games.

Hartman, on the other hand, said Howard's rushing ability has helped the Buckeye offense the most in the nonconference. Howard did not show off his full speed – he was clocked at 22 mph on a sprint during the off-season – rushing for just 22 yards on eight attempts in those three games, but he added two scores, the first on a read option against Western Michigan in the red zone and the second on a “tush push” quarterback sneak from the 1-yard line.

Hartman said Howard's mere threat as a runner opens up the offense more for Kelly and his playmakers, giving the unit an added layer that had not been seen since Justin Fields wore the scarlet and gray in 2020.

“If he's part of the run game, that changes the fits for the defense,” Hartman said. “That makes the job, overall, easier for everybody. Is he going to hit all the throws that C.J. Stroud made? No, probably not. Will he hit more than McCord? That remains to be seen. Maybe he will, maybe he won't. But he doesn't have to be as good throwing the ball even as McCord was.

“With him being able to run the ball – you're not leaning heavily on him running the ball like he's Braxton Miller or something like that – I think just overall, it should make them harder to defend. And then you get the plus of maybe he can come out there and make more of the throws.”

As Howard has alluded to throughout his time at Ohio State, something that has helped the Kansas State transfer succeed for the Buckeyes has been the talented group of pass catchers that he has at his disposal.

In the nonconference portion of the schedule, that group of skill players was

headlined by true freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, who – after an early drop and false-start penalty to start his collegiate career against Akron – burst onto the scene for the Buckeyes, hauling in a team-high 281 receiving yards and four scores on 14 receptions after three games.

Smith has already emerged as an explosive home-run threat for Ohio State, recording catch-and-run scores of 70 and 53 yards through the first three games. And although some wide-eyed freshmen might cool down throughout the long course of a season, Hartman thinks Smith's big-time production is here to stay.

“I think it's definitely sustainable,” Hartman said. “You look at him, he's a big, strong guy. So physically, he should be able to handle it. They say that he does all the right things mentally. And it's not like it's never happened, that they've had a good, big, strong receiver be the guy. David Boston was very similar in terms of build and everything. He probably didn't have the same pure top-end speed, but he was a big dude who, by the end of the year, they were leaning hard on him in the passing game.

“Smith doesn't have to do it by himself. Whatever they get from him is still almost gravy when you look at how good Emeka Egbuka is. I don't know if he's going to have 1,000 yards receiving. But in terms of him being a threat every week, I think that should be pretty sustainable.”

Defense Almost A Finished Product

Ohio State's surging offense often dominated the headlines during the nonconfer-

ence portion of the season, but Jim Knowles' defense, despite the relative lack of attention, still mostly looked the part.

In those three games against inferior opponents, the Buckeyes' vaunted defense gave up 6.7 points and 180.0 yards per contest, marks that ranked fourth and second in the country, respectively. The unit's dominance was on best display in Ohio State's 56-0 win over Western Michigan on Sept. 7, where the unit gave up just 99 total yards – only 5 in the second half – to give the program its first shutout in exactly five years.

But despite this dominance, Ohio State's defensive efforts were still less than perfect. Although the 49-14 final score against Marshall may not indicate a poor defensive performance, Knowles' unit struggled some against the Herd and quarterback Stone Earle in the first half, with the heavy underdog going on an immediate 13-play, 75-yard touchdown drive to start the game and then adding another score at the end of the half to stay within two scores, 28-14, of the Buckeyes heading into the locker room. The Herd totaled 203 yards in the half (132 passing, 71 rushing).

According to Hartman, Ohio State's early-game struggles against the Herd stemmed from the unit both being spread out by the Herd passing game and struggling to generate much push on the defensive line.

He said that Ohio State's defense failed to reach the high standard set by itself by falling short in these aspects, although their shortcomings shouldn't be cause for major concern among Buckeye fans.

“Marshall was able to stretch them out and hit some things here or there offensively,” Hartman said. “So if you were expecting the defense to be almost perfect all year – which is not an incredibly unrealistic expectation when you consider how much experience that they have – then it was a little bit jarring. But at the end of the day, they also only allowed 14 points, and the second touchdown drive, they had penalties and stuff like that.

“I think there's still a question of exactly how good the defensive line is. That's a matter of expectations vs. reality. I mean, it should be one of the best in the country, and it won't be bad, but is it that good? I mean, we'll see. If you wanted the defense to be absolutely lights out and dominant the way Michigan was last season, they weren't quite that (against Marshall), but still pretty good.”

Noon attributed some of these issues to lackluster linebacker play, which he identified as the position group that impressed him the least during nonconference play. Through those first three games, the linebacker core was led by Cody Simon (seven tackles, one sack) at the Mike and Sonny Styles (17 tackles) at the Will, while reserves Arvell Reese (12 tackles, two TFL) and C.J. Hicks (10 tack-

les, one sack) have also contributed.

“Linebackers have been a little inconsistent to me,” Noon said. “Maybe I'm just having a recency bias of the Marshall game and (the unit) just looking a little uninspired. I think that they've got the dudes there, and they have their moments. But I haven't necessarily seen it all the way through. Sometimes, it's difficult when you're only playing two quarters and we're seeing substitutions early in the game, but certainly, linebacker is the one that hasn't really ticked for me.”

Despite these potential defensive weaknesses, Hartman thinks the unit is still spearheaded by its veteran-laden secondary, which he said certainly lived up to the hype during the first three games.

“The secondary is legit,” Hartman. “Maybe once in a while you might give up a 50-50 ball here and there, but I think the secondary is very legit.”

Summing Up: So Far, So Good

Despite the first-half defensive issues against the Herd, Ohio State was still not tested in the nonconference portion of the schedule and rolled into Big Ten play with three straight convincing wins before improving to 4-0 on the year following its road win over Michigan State.

There may not be a lot to discern from the three blowout wins against Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall, but both Hartman and Noon feel that the Buckeyes showed enough in that span to still be perceived as a championship-caliber team that is capable of achieving their three elusive goals – defeating Michigan, winning the Big Ten and winning a national championship – at the end of the season.

“It's hard to say at this point, because they've played a pretty nondescript schedule, but you could say that about last year's national champion (Michigan) and its nonconference schedule,” Noon said. “It's too early to sit there and put nonrefundable deposits down on championship game tickets or anything, but I think Ohio State certainly is playing as well as anyone.

“But a win over Marshall or a win over Western Michigan isn't going to resonate the way that a win over an SEC powerhouse or even Notre Dame is going to. So I think it's still a wait-and-see, but it's certainly trending positively.”

“They've only allowed two touchdowns, and they've been pretty good in all situations,” Hartman added. “Based on who they've played, there have been hardly any moments of doubt. They definitely still have room to improve, and nobody is a finished product at this point in the season. So I think for sure, so far, so good on that.”

Buckeyes Face B1G Midseason Roadblocks

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State wasn't quite tested in its first three games of the season – not that anyone expected it to be against two Mid-American Conference opponents and a Sun Belt team – but more than likely that will change when it takes on a new and improved Big Ten schedule.

Going into the season, Ohio State was labeled one of the most talented teams in college football, and at least from former head coach Urban Meyer, they were tabbed as one of the most talented college football teams in the last decade. Ohio State has mostly lived up to the hype so far, ranking in the top five nationally in both scoring offense (third) and scoring defense (fourth) through the nonconference part of the slate.

With difficult road trips to Oregon's Autzen Stadium on Oct. 12 and Penn State's Beaver Stadium on Nov. 2 coming up, the Buckeyes will soon see exactly what they're made of as they search for their first Big Ten Championship Game appearance and first conference title since 2020.

But before the Buckeyes inch closer to those matchups and began their Big Ten schedule – which started with a 38-7 road win over Michigan State on Sept. 28 – BSB caught up with Dayton Daily News' Marcus Hartman and Kevin Noon of Buckeye Huddle to discuss those looming challenges against the Ducks and Nittany Lions, as well as any other Big Ten teams that could stand in the way between Ohio State and its goals this season.

Bucks Face Major Test Out West

Ohio State's first trip across the country for a conference matchup will be quite the challenge on Oct. 12. Although Oregon stumbled out of the gates in its first two games of the season, playing much closer games against Idaho (21-14) and Boise State (37-



SONNY BROCKWAY

READY TO ROAR? – Ohio State has won seven straight against Penn State since a loss in Happy Valley in 2016, but the Buckeyes could face a stern test there against the Nittany Lions on Nov. 2.

34) than oddsmakers predicted, the Ducks seemingly found their webbed footing when they easily dismantled in-state rival Oregon State 49-14, outgaining the Beavers 546-309 on their way to the victory.

Not only will the Buckeyes change multiple time zones and travel over 2,400 miles to face Oregon, but they will have to endure the raucous crowd of Autzen Stadium, which is regarded as one of the toughest environments in college football.

The Oregon faithful will surely be even more energized for what will likely be a top-10 matchup with major postseason implications, but Noon thinks the Buckeyes will be ready for the crowd noise.

“Ohio State has gone into very hostile environments before, Penn State certainly being one of them. A lot of people try to put Michigan in there,” Noon said. “I don't think Michigan is as loud as some of the national pundits do, but you're looking at a very veteran-laden team in the current iteration of the Buckeyes, so there's not going to be those nerves of it being the first road trip that most of these guys have been playing.”

“Now that doesn't mean Ohio State will be without fault and not commit two or three false-start penalties or something like that, but I don't think that the crowd at Autzen Stadium is the biggest concern for Ohio State. I think the actual Oregon football team is the biggest concern for Ohio State.”

The Oregon defense has struggled some this season, most notably giving up 34 points and 221 rushing yards to Boise State, but the offense appears to once again be one of the better units in the country. Led by former Oklahoma and UCF sixth-year quarterback

Dillon Gabriel and former Texas A&M junior wide receiver Evan Stewart, the Ducks' passing attack has powered an efficient offense that went for an average of 43 points in their wins against Oregon State and Boise State.

Unlike the Chip Kelly and Mark Helfrich-led Oregon teams in the late 2000s and early 2010s, which were among the best in the country at the skill positions but faltered some in the trenches, Hartman believes this year's team is well-rounded enough to give the Buckeyes a true challenge.

“I think Oregon is just one of the few teams that's got enough team speed to kind of run with Ohio State,” Hartman said. “So that makes it a little bit of a different look. They are physical up front, and they're just all around pretty good. They've got a veteran quarterback who gives a better idea of how you can do some things to attack the Ohio State scheme.”

“So in general, they're going to be the most talented team on the schedule, and playing at home will help them a little bit too. It's just all around a good challenge.”

Penn State's Offense Showing Improvement

When Penn State defeated Ohio State in a close battle in Happy Valley in 2016, it seemed to be the starting point of a competitive rivalry between the James Franklin-led program and Ohio State. Instead, the Buckeyes have won the last seven matchups since then, including their last three games at Penn State. This streak comes with Franklin putting together some quality seasons since 2017, including back-to-back 10-plus win campaigns in 2022 and 2023.

Like in previous years, the Nittany Lions once again had a hot start to their 2023 season before experiencing heartbreak against the Buckeyes. In last season's contest played at Ohio Stadium, Penn State and then-sophomore quarterback Drew Allar were dismal offensively, converting just one of their 16 third downs in a 20-12 defeat.

The Nittany Lions have had a better offensive output this season, led by an improved Allar and a new offensive scheme led by offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki.

In its opening game, Penn State not only survived but flourished in a 34-12 blowout road win over West Virginia on Aug. 31, which had Allar throw for an efficient 216 passing yards and three scores. The Nittany Lions had another productive offensive outing against Bowling Green on Sept. 7, totaling 438 yards, but it was the defense that nearly cost the team the game in a 34-27 win against the Falcons, giving up 375 total yards (254 passing, 121 rushing) in the narrow win.

Penn State's defense rebounded in a big way with a 56-0 shutout victory over Kent State on Sept. 21 before giving up just 219 yards in a 21-7 win over Illinois to open Big Ten play on Sept. 28.

But Hartman is not fully convinced the Nittany Lions' new-look defense can excel throughout the course of the season, especially against what is looking like a formidable Ohio State offensive unit.

“They lost a lot on defense,” Hartman said. “Usually you can take it for granted that they will reload there, but once in a while you might come up and be a little shy. I thought before the season they could take a step back defensively, so you can't just assume that they're going to be an elite unit.”

Noon is still skeptical, on the other hand, of the growth of Penn State's offense.

“Drew Allar is still relatively inconsistent and has a shortage of weapons in the throw game,” Noon said. “I think that (running backs) Kaytron Allen and Nick Singleton are both very impressive runners, but if Penn State is going to be competitive with Ohio State, it's going to be because of the defense and not the offense.”

U-M Lacks Fire On Offense In New Era

Much has changed from Michigan's 2023 national championship team, including its head coach, its quarterback and many of its best weapons in the passing game. So far in 2024, many of the subtractions have been noticeable, especially in the team's ability, or lack thereof, to throw the football.

In a 31-12 loss to now-No. 2 Texas in Week 2, for example, then-starting quarterback Davis Warren threw an interception, and usually reliable tight end Colston Loveland had a fumble in the first half. The turnovers led to 10 second-quarter Texas points, and Michigan fell behind 24-3 at halftime. Needing to throw the ball to mount any comeback, Warren threw another interception in the second half as Michigan struggled to move the ball, with its lone touchdown coming when the game had already been decided.

Warren was even worse in a closer-than-expected 28-18 win over Arkansas State on Sept. 14, a game where the former

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walk-on threw three interceptions before being benched for current starter Alex Orji at the end of the third quarter.

The Wolverines made their new identity pretty clear in their next game against then-No. 11 USC. Orji attempted just 12 passes and gained only 32 yards on those attempts in a run-based offensive attack. The run game, which went for 290 yards on 46 carries (6.3-yard average) was just good enough for a 27-24 win.

The Wolverines continued that offensive philosophy in their 27-24 win over Minnesota on Sept. 28, with Orji throwing for just 86 passing yards on 18 attempts and the rushing game adding 155 yards on 43 carries.

Even though the Wolverines have seemed to figure it out with the rushing attack, the question is whether their current game plan offers them any chance against the Big Ten's best teams.

Against Ohio State specifically, though, Hartman said what really matters is the mental side of the game, which he thinks Michigan may still have a certain advantage over the Buckeyes having won the last three games in the rivalry.

"Former Ohio State head coach John Cooper's first couple of teams weren't that good, but then I think he tried to not make too much of the Michigan game, and then that made it end up being too big for them," Hartman said. "So Michigan had a real mental advantage in 'The Game,' and I think that Michigan has a real mental advantage this year, and the longer that they keep winning, the longer that will exist."

As for on the field, in Michigan's 30-24 triumph over Ohio State in 2023, it seemed as though then-acting head coach Sherrone Moore seemed a bit more creative than Ryan Day in his play calling. But in the 2024 iteration of The Game, Noon thinks the Buckeyes may be able to flip that with Kelly taking over the play-calling duties.

"I think Michigan's defense is very susceptible to a good game plan," Noon said. "I don't think USC had a good game plan when you look back at that big win for Michigan, but we saw Texas certainly have success, and I think Ohio State is every bit if not more talented than Texas on the offensive side of the ball."

"Chip Kelly probably is already doodling up plays for that game, just as we speak, because it's not taking him away from his preparation for any other game. And Ohio State will come in ready. It's just going to be a matter of if they'll be able to execute the game plan."

Iowa Facing Bucks At Right Time

Like Penn State, Iowa has seen much better offensive production than it did a year ago. In their last nine games of the 2023 season, the Hawkeyes didn't exceed the 22-point mark once, and they were shut out in their last two games, a 26-0 loss to Michigan in the Big Ten Championship Game followed by a 35-0 defeat against Tennessee in the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl.

Under the new leadership of offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Tim Lester and, so far, a healthy Cade McNamara at quarterback, the Hawkeyes eclipsed 30 points in three of their first four games, including a 31-14 win over Minnesota on Sept. 21 in which they totaled 272 rushing yards.

The Hawkeyes get the Buckeyes at what seems like a perfect time, right before they

embark on a trip to Oregon. Iowa also has the benefit of an off week before taking on Ohio State, giving it ample time to prepare and get healthy for the monumental task of defeating Ohio State in Columbus.

Still, Noon doesn't make much of Iowa's chances of dethroning the Buckeyes at home, a place where they haven't lost since falling to Michigan in 2022.

"It's a trap game in name," Noon said. "I would consider it much more of a trap game if it were at Iowa City, but being in Columbus, I think that helps temper that down a little bit because you're playing at home and you're in your routines and everything else."

Hartman doesn't believe in trap games, but he still thinks Iowa will be a tough challenge.

"I don't know how often that really happens, but it definitely meets the qualifications," Hartman said of the Iowa game. "They're hard to play against. The defense is going to be hard to play against. So you're just not going to run away from them."

Nebraska, Indiana Off to Hot Starts

Second-year Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule and first-year Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti have their respective programs and future Ohio State opponents off to hot starts in 2024.

Indiana made perhaps the biggest statement of the two in the team's first Big Ten game under Cignetti on Sept. 14 when the Hoosiers destroyed UCLA 42-13 at the Rose Bowl behind 430 total yards to UCLA's 238. They followed that up with a 52-14 blowout win over Charlotte and a 42-28 win over Maryland to bring their record to 5-0 through five games.

Indiana's early successes have been spurred by its strong passing attack led by sixth-year quarterback Kurtis Rourke, who has emerged as one of the more efficient quarterbacks in college football. He completed 93 of his 127 passes (73.2 percent) for 1,372 yards and 11 touchdowns to just two interceptions through the team's first five games, with his passing yards and touchdown totals ranking 13th and tied for 17th in the nation, respectively.

Nebraska, meanwhile, has its own impressive first-year starter at quarterback, former Ohio State and Georgia pledge Dylan Raiola. The true freshman has thrown for nine touchdowns to just two interceptions while completing 70.4 percent of his passes to help Nebraska get off to a 4-1 start. The Cornhuskers suffered a heartbreaking 31-24 overtime defeat to Illinois on Sept. 20 but still have a talented bunch on offense, which includes Texas senior transfer Isaiah Neyor at receiver, who leads the team 291 receiving yards and four touchdowns on 17 catches through five games.

Neither team has defeated Ohio State in over a decade, with the Hoosiers' last win coming way before that span in 1988.

When asked between the two teams who had the best chance to break Ohio State's streak of wins, Hartman opted for the Cornhuskers.

"Nebraska is going to have more raw talent," Hartman said. "Indiana had a nice little run where they played Ohio State pretty tough four or five years in a row. You talk about having a savvy senior quarterback that can change things (in Rourke), but I would think Nebraska would have more talent."

"Ohio State should be able to beat both of them, if they take care of business, but I think they both have some things that they can at least make life difficult for you for a little while."

USC Could Make Splash In B1G Race

Ohio State doesn't have USC on its regular-season schedule, but as both teams have aspirations to end the year in Indianapolis for the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 7, the Trojans could be a team for Ohio State to watch out for.

USC established itself as a Big Ten title contender in Week 1 when it upset LSU 27-20 in Las Vegas behind a 378-yard, one-score performance from quarterback Miller Moss, who may be the latest in what has felt like an endless string of highly productive Lincoln Riley quarterbacks, including former Heisman Trophy winners Baker Mayfield, Tyler Murray and Caleb Williams.

Offense has never been an issue with Riley's teams, either at USC or Oklahoma. Instead, it's been the defense holding his teams back for contention for a national title.

Under new defensive coordinator D'Anton Lynn, however, the defense doesn't seem to be nearly as much of a concern as it had been in years past. Lynn's unit gave up just 17.0 points per game and 304.8 total yards through its first four games, marks that rank tied for 30th and alone at 32nd in the NCAA, respectively, a notable improvement from the abysmal 34.4 points and 423.8 yards per game allowed last season.

USC's defense seems vastly improved,

but Noon thinks the Trojans are a bit more limited offensively than they have been in years past, which could give the Buckeyes the edge in a hypothetical Big Ten Championship Game matchup.

"I think Ohio State would fare pretty well in that situation because I did not see in the Michigan game a really strong running game (from USC)," Noon said. "So if Ohio State doesn't have to load the box to keep the running game in check, I like Ohio State's secondary against really about any other team out there in the nation."

"Miller Moss looked like he took a couple of steps back in that Michigan game from what we saw last year in the bowl game and even what we saw earlier in the season from USC."

Bucks Still The B1G Favorite

Despite the flashes from other teams, it seems as though Ohio State is the team to beat in the Big Ten.

Although Penn State and Oregon both had scares against inferior opponents and USC and Michigan have both lost games, it isn't surprising that the Buckeyes, who haven't lost or even been tested, are pretty comfortable favorites to come out on top, at least on paper.

"Ohio State is obviously the best team on paper, but if they show up and have a bad day, there's still five or six teams in the Big Ten that on a good day I think could give them a good run," Hartman said. "If they show up and are having a good day, I don't think there's anyone that can beat them."

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Wilce Contemplates Future After 1924 Season

Throughout the 2024 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* will publish historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "4." This week, BSB looks back at the 1924 season as Ohio State posted a third straight losing record, something that never happened before and hasn't happened since.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Jack Wilce was at a crossroads in the autumn of 1924, and he knew it. The 34-year-old head football coach at Ohio State might have been going through what would be described these days as a midlife crisis.

Wilce had been with the Buckeyes longer than any head coach in program history and experienced the highest of highs – the team's first Western Conference championship, the first-ever victory against archrival Michigan and the wildly-popular Chic Harley era that led to the construction of a concrete-and-reinforced-steel palace on the banks of the Olentangy River called Ohio Stadium.

But those heady, halcyon days seemed to be fading ever farther in the rearview mirror. During his first nine seasons on campus, Wilce and his team never experienced a losing record. Now, after posting a 2-3-3 mark in 1924, and a 1-3-2 league record that was good enough only for seventh place in the 10-game conference, the Buckeyes had fallen on hard times.

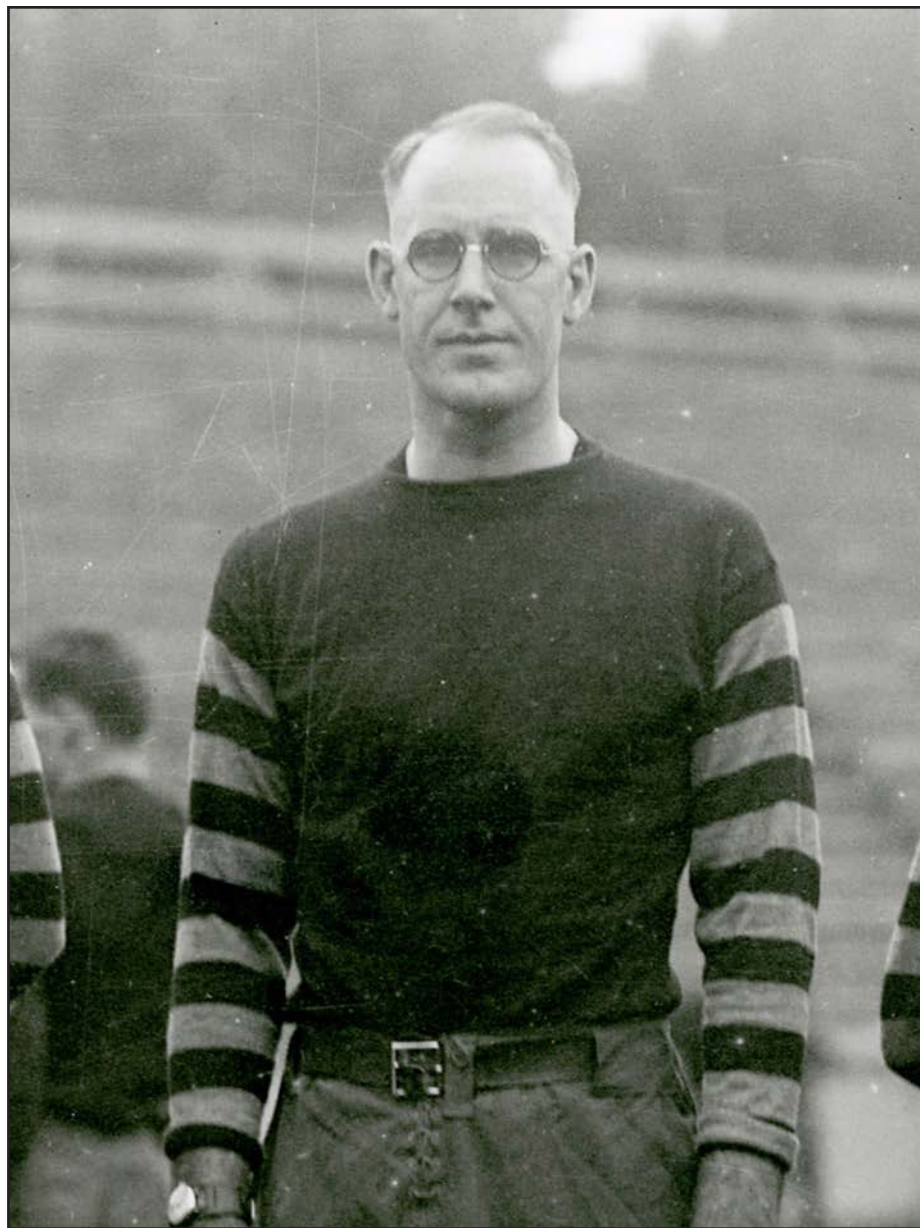
Never before had Ohio State suffered through three consecutive losing seasons, and Wilce wondered if perhaps his team wouldn't be better served if he began practicing medicine rather than continuing to masquerade as a football coach.

After all, his mother had envisioned her son as a physician almost from the time he was born in western New York.

John Watkins Wilce and Rosetta Maria Woodworth had met and fell in love in the tiny Wisconsin town of Mequon, a hamlet near Lake Michigan about 30 miles north of Milwaukee. But shortly after the couple was married, John was lured to Rochester, N.Y., in the late 1880s as the city was experiencing an industrial boom. German immigrants John Jacob Bausch and Henry Lomb had begun manufacturing medical instruments in Rochester in 1861, and entrepreneur George Eastman was launching his newest venture, a photography business that would eventually become known as the Eastman Kodak Co.

With each new industry came a sharp increase in construction, perfect for a skilled stone mason such as John Wilce, and unable to resist the attraction of what seemed like easy money, he eagerly moved his wife and baby daughters Anna and Mary to western New York to seek his fortune. Soon, the family had a new addition – a son born May 12, 1888, and christened John Woodworth Wilce although everyone knew him as "Jack."

Life was good in Rochester as Jack's mother, a lighthearted woman known as Marcy to her friends, filled the house with the sounds of laughter and classical music as well as the aroma of home-cooked meals.



FILE PHOTO

STAYING PUT — Jack Wilce became the Ohio State head football coach in 1913 and remained there for 16 seasons, at the time the longest tenure of any coach of the program.

There was one thing missing, however. It wasn't home, and after only a year in Rochester, the family packed its belongings and moved back to Wisconsin.

There, Jack was exposed along with his older sisters to an old-fashioned Midwestern America upbringing, a nurturing, morality-based environment that molded the stern-principled character and personal conviction he would exhibit the remainder of his life.

Jack was an avid reader from an early age, but reading by the dim light of a candle put such a strain on his eyesight that he was fitted for large, round glasses as a child. Any tall, gangly youngster with glasses was an easy target for neighborhood bullies, but anyone who dared make fun of young Jack's horn-rimmed appearance did so at his own peril. In addition to his studious nature, he was quite an athlete and more than able to take care of himself.

Just the same, his mother was overly protective of her only son, hopeful that he would shy away from athletics and lean harder into academics. In fact, when Jack graduated from high school and headed off

to the University of Wisconsin to further his education, he made a promise to his mother that he would someday become a doctor.

But sports kept interfering with that goal.

Early Athletic Success

While at Wisconsin, Wilce became a three-sport letterman – football, basketball and crew – although his true calling seemed to be football. He earned all-conference honors as a fullback with the Badgers in 1909 but then was fully prepared to leave his athletic career behind following graduation. He had landed a job teaching history at a high school in La Crosse, a city of about 50,000 in the western part of Wisconsin.

Just before the fall semester began, however, school officials approached him to ask if he would be interested in some coaching. As a young man of meager means fresh out of college, Wilce eagerly accepted the extra few dollars that came with the additional duties. He wound up spending only one year in La Crosse as his school's assistant football coach and athletic director, but a spark had been ignited.

Wilce returned to his college alma ma-

ter after being offered positions as assistant professor of physical education and assistant coach on John R. Richards' football staff. That triggered an unlikely chain of events that began with Richards leaving Wisconsin after only one season to take over the program at Ohio State, where he would assume additional duties as the school's first director of athletics.

But Richards quickly decided Columbus was not to his liking, and he resigned immediately following the final game of the 1912 season. That left the university without a football coach or athletic director as the Buckeyes prepared to compete the following season as full-fledged members of the Western Conference.

Ohio State opened a nationwide search for a new football coach, but after being spurned by a pair of experienced coaches, it settled on Wilce, who at 25 had never been a head coach on any level. He more than seemed equal to the challenge, however.

During the new coach's initial season in 1913, the Buckeyes turned in a 4-2-1 overall record including a 58-0 win over Northwestern in the season finale. That represented the team's first Western Conference victory, and it wound up its first season of league membership with a 1-2 conference mark and sixth-place finish.

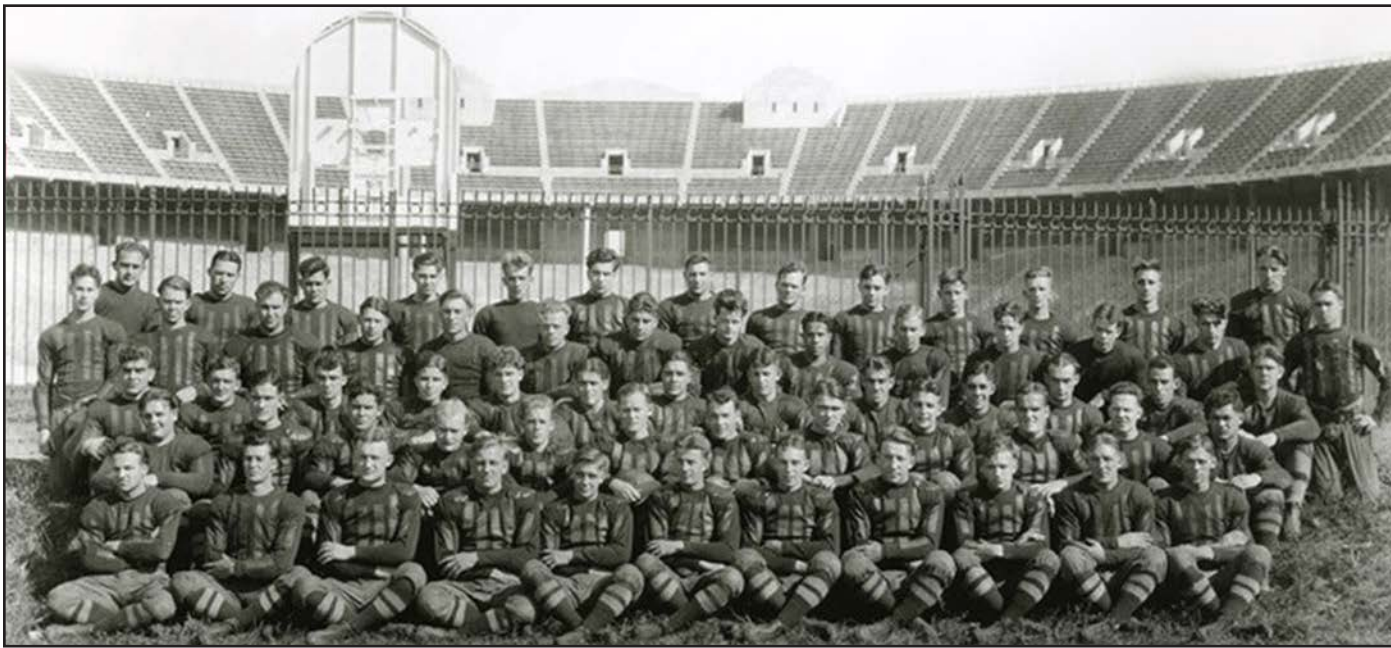
Wilce saw incremental improvement the next two years as Ohio State finished in a fourth-place tie in 1914 and a third-place tie in 1915 before the program's breakout season. The coach had signed one of the country's top prospects from East High School in Columbus, and Charles "Chic" Harley led the Buckeyes to the 1916 Western Conference championship as a sophomore. OSU set a host of school records that season, including a 128-0 win over Ohio Wesleyan, the most points ever scored by the Buckeyes in a single game.

Wilce would guide Ohio State to two more conference titles in 1917 and 1920 as well as runner-up finishes in 1919 and 1921, all the while transforming the Buckeyes into a national power. However, while coaches such as Knute Rockne, Glenn "Pop" Warner and Amos Alonzo Stagg are more renowned today for the impact they had on football's early days, Wilce doesn't receive nearly enough credit for being one of the game's top tacticians of his time.

For example, he was one of the first coaches ever to adopt the strategy of rushing the passer, and he is believed to be the first ever to utilize a five-man defensive line.

In addition to his innovative pass defense, Wilce also specialized in a wide-open passing attack. While most teams of the era played ball-control with their triple-option formations, Wilce allowed his players to throw extensively throughout the game. During the 1920 season, the Buckeyes defeated Illinois when quarterback Harry "Hoge" Workman passed to Cyril "Truck" Myers for the winning touchdown on the final play of the game. The play not only gave the Buckeyes a 7-0 win, but it also won them the conference championship.

Wilce also tried to marry the physical and mental aspects of the sport. He was constantly trying to reform the way his players talked on and off the field, and he is credited with coining the phrase "intesti-



FILE PHOTO

STORIED CAREER — Jack Wilce guided Ohio State to its first Western Conference title and first win over Michigan. He also coached the legendary Chic Harley in a 16-year stint that began in 1913. His 1924 team is pictured above.

nal fortitude,” first using the term in 1916 while lecturing to his team on anatomy and physiology.

By the time the 1924 season was set to begin, however, Wilce had started to think about life after football. Five years earlier, he had earned a medical degree from Ohio State and had thought extensively about the promise he had made to his mother.

Still, his obligations to the university and its football program remained strong, and Wilce entered the 1924 season with a renewed vigor. Unfortunately, the way the season played out was just another signal that his tenure as head coach of the Buckeyes seemed to be coming to an end.

Dissension In The Ranks

Ohio State had only once before experienced back-to-back losing seasons – in 1887 and 1888 when football was little more than a club sport. Now, the Buckeyes were considered a big-time program playing in a big-time conference, and the pattern of losing was not well-received in downtown Columbus.

For the first time in Wilce’s tenure, private grumblings from well-heeled donors and boosters had erupted into more full-throated criticism. Making matters worse was subversion within Wilce’s staff. Assistant line coach Grant P. Ward, who had been on staff since 1916, told anyone who would listen that he disagreed vehemently with the direction of the football program.

It didn’t take long for word of Ward’s criticism to reach athletic director Lynn St. John, who sought to defuse the situation by essentially telling the assistant coach to keep his opinions to himself. But that was not in Ward’s nature, and he lasted only through the 1925 season before tendering his resignation.

His time in the public eye wasn’t over, though. Ward later became a popular sports columnist for the Ohio State Journal and owner of a popular Columbus restaurant, and he earned his law degree and even served as play-by-play announcer for radio broadcasts of Ohio State football games.

Amid the locker-room turmoil, Wilce had other problems. His 1924 team featured an

abundance of youthful exuberance but was lacking in overall athleticism as well as senior leadership. Frank Young, a veteran center from Toledo, was elected team captain, but nearly every other starting position was manned by a junior or sophomore.

In fact, it was a pair of sophomores who helped the Buckeyes win their season opener, a 7-0 decision against Purdue. The game’s only score came on a 56-yard pass from halfback Bill Hunt to fullback Marty Karow on the first play of the second quarter. Karow, who would become an All-American as a senior in 1926, later spent a quarter-century at Ohio State as head baseball coach, leading the Buckeyes to their only College World Series championship in 1966.

The season-opening victory against Purdue in 1924 was significant for several reasons. It marked the first time in the 35-year history of the program that Ohio State had opened a season against an opponent from outside Ohio, and it was the first Western Conference win for the Buckeyes after five league losses at Ohio Stadium.

Unfortunately, the crowd on hand to watch the win against the Boilermakers inside the cavernous Horseshoe barely numbered 30,000.

The following week, the team traveled to Iowa City for the first time and came home with a 0-0 tie. OSU returned home for a 10-0 win against old foe Ohio Wesleyan, pushing the early season record to 2-0-1.

But that was the high-water mark for the campaign. Home ties with Chicago (3-3) and Wooster (7-7) were followed by losses to Indiana, Michigan and Illinois, with each of the defeats seemingly more excruciating than the last. The slide began with the game against the Hoosiers when the Buckeyes drove 93 yards to the IU 3 before time ran out in a 12-7 loss.

Against Michigan, Ohio State jumped out to a quick 6-0 lead when Hunt completed a 63-yard touchdown pass to junior halfback Harold “Cookie” Cunningham on the game’s third play from scrimmage. The Buckeyes protected that slim margin into the fourth quarter before turnovers led to two touchdowns and a field goal for the Wol-

verines, who secured a 16-6 decision.

Then in the season finale, OSU traveled to Illinois armed with the knowledge that Fighting Illini star halfback Harold “Red” Grange was unable to play because of an injury. Grange’s absence didn’t seem to matter, however, as Illinois managed to score a 7-0 victory.

That game also featured the initiation of the Illibuck tradition between Ohio State and Illinois. Bucket and Dipper, OSU’s junior honorary society, and Sachem, its counterpart at Illinois, inaugurated a trophy to be awarded to the winner of the annual game between the Buckeyes and Fighting Illini. Originally, the award was a live turtle weighing about 16 pounds, but when the original turtle died in the spring of 1927, it was replaced by a wooden replica that continues to rotate between the schools.

After a promising start, Ohio State finished the 1924 season with a 2-3-3 overall record and a 1-3-2 league mark good enough only for seventh place in the final Western Conference standings. As mentioned, it was a program-record third consecutive losing season, something that has never been repeated since.

Criticism of Wilce and his program seemed to reach a fever pitch during the offseason, but St. John issued a public statement saying the coach not only had the support of outgoing university president William Oxley Thompson, but that of incoming president George Washington Rightmire as well.

That seemed to quell some of the uprising as did a return to a winning overall record in 1925 and a third-place conference finish in 1926 with Karow as team captain.

Wilce continued to coach through the 1928 season before finally convincing St. John to accept his resignation after 16 seasons. In the end, he cited his reasoning as a personal struggle of trying to balance the ideals of athletics with the increasing financial requirements needed to field a team that could compete annually for national honors.

“I figured football was becoming more and more of a business proposition than I wanted to get into,” Wilce said years later.

“I saw the game being taken away from the boys. I was a faculty-type coach. I had always stressed educational aspects of the sport. This, to me, was far more important than winning the game.

“I don’t want to give the impression that I’m critical of football the way it is played today. It came about through no one’s fault in particular. It followed the normal trend of things and was brought about by the public’s demand. I just didn’t want to become an active part of that type of football, so I quit.”

Wilce could have ridden off into the sunset with his legacy intact. He was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1954 and wrote several books on football, many of which became primers for coaches who followed him into the profession. He was an honorary life member of the American Football Coaches Association, served as the group’s first secretary, and received the Stagg Award in 1959, the association’s highest honor for “perpetuating the example and influence of the great coach in football.”

Wilce also pursued the career for which his mother always dreamed and had as much success as he enjoyed on the gridiron, if not more. After his resignation as coach, Wilce took postgraduate classes at Columbia and Harvard as well as the National Hospital for Diseases of the Heart in London and then returned to Ohio State in the 1930s to become a professor of preventive medicine at the university’s College of Medicine.

Regarded as one of the country’s leading heart specialists, he served as director of Student Health Services at OSU from 1934 until his retirement in 1958. Eleven years later – six years after his death due to complications from a stroke at the age of 75 – the John W. Wilce Student Health Center was completed on the Ohio State campus and named in his memory, its on-campus location fittingly little more than a five-minute walk from Ohio Stadium.

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CB Offord No Longer Visiting OSU In Week 6

Out of Ohio State's 2025 commits, the prospect who has been the biggest flip candidate is Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185).

Offord has been committed to the Buckeyes since Feb. 4 but has been pursued hard in state by Auburn and Alabama and also by the Buckeyes' new Big Ten rival Oregon, which has already landed many recruits this cycle ahead of OSU.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

The Buckeyes are still looking strong in the 2025 cycle with the top recruiting class, ahead of Alabama, LSU, Auburn and Georgia, who occupied the second, third, fourth and fifth spots in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings as BSB went to press. But losing Offord would be a huge blow to the Buckeyes as he is the nation's ninth-best overall player, third-best cornerback and the top player in the state of Alabama in his class.

Offord was originally going to visit Ohio State for the Buckeyes' game against Iowa on Oct. 5, but his father, Kaorie, told 247Sports that is no longer happening since the family will be going to Tulane – where Na'eem's brother Makhli plays as a running back – for its game against UAB.

That doesn't mean that the five-star won't try to make it back to Columbus this season. His father said that they are now looking at Oct. 26 against Nebraska as the game they are circling on the calendar to try to make it back to campus.

But Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene said that Offord visiting Ohio

State later this season does not rule out him still flipping to another school, which he thinks would likely be Auburn if he were to make that decision.

"We're in the NIL era. If you take the money out of it – it was so much easier in the old days you could almost use logic and common sense and kind of figure out that there's not going to be a defensive back de-commit from Ohio State and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton to go to a dumpster fire like Auburn," Greene told BSB about Offord considering flipping to Auburn. "That just couldn't happen. It can happen today. I mean, the money is real, and when kids are being paid like third-round draft picks in the NFL, it changes things.

"What is Offord worth to Auburn right now? He might be No. 1 on their board in terms of NIL, so do you compete with that? It's just the NIL piece has just changed everything in recruiting, obviously."

After a 7-3 beatdown of Alabama A&M in Week 1 of the season, Auburn's year has gone downhill, losing to California 21-14 a week later at home and then, after defeating New Mexico at home 45-19 on Sept. 14, falling again at Jordan-Hare Stadium to Arkansas on Sept. 21, losing 24-14 to drop to 2-2 on the season, followed by a 27-21 home loss to Oklahoma on Sept. 28.

Just how much Auburn's struggles change Offord's opinion on where he wants to go to school for the next few years is something he has kept to himself so far, but it could possibly make the destination even more appealing if his goal is to get on the field as quickly as possible.

This is something Greene said could possibly be the case for another Buckeye commit, Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210), who has taken multiple visits to Florida State, which was off to a 1-4 start as BSB went to press.

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
Jayvon McFadden	IOL	6-5	300	★★★★	Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist
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

"That puts him on the field quickly, and they can sell him on early playing time," Greene said. "You'll be three-and-out, and you'll be in the 2027 draft. Fans kind of mistake the win-loss record for he's not going to want to go there. Well, no, because it's still Florida State. They may have a terrible year this year. They're not going to stay terrible. They're Florida State, and they can promise him, 'Dude, we need you, and that's why we're not playing well. We need you in the middle.'"

It could still be a while before Offord makes his final decision, but he will likely

be one of a few recruits whom the Buckeyes will have to continue working hard all the way up until he signs on the dotted line.

2027 WR McAfee Talks OSU Offer

Despite the regular season being in full swing, Ohio State and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline continue to make moves on the recruiting trail.

The Buckeyes extended an offer to Severn (Md.) Archbishop Spalding four-star 2027 wide receiver Myles McAfee (5-11, 165) following his gameday visit to

ASK AN ANALYST with Marc Givler of Buckeye Huddle

Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225) has visited Penn State multiple times since he committed to Ohio State in January. Do you think the Buckeyes will be able to hold onto him until signing day?

"Right now there's a handful of guys in their class that they're trying to hold onto and prevent from flipping to other schools. I think they've got probably a slightly better chance to keep him than not. But whenever I'm asked who's the one guy they could lose from this class, he's probably the first name out of my mouth when that question comes up. So it's definitely going to be a tight one here down the stretch, and the sooner they can get him back on campus, the better. They've got a few other situations they're trying to keep in the fold here. But I think that one's maybe the toughest one right now."

Ohio State has Toledo (Ohio) Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290) committed in the 2025 class, but other than him, they have struggled landing offensive tackles. Who are some players at the position you've seen in the 2026 cycle that impressed you, and which of them do you see as the most likely to land with the Buckeyes?

"2026 is teed up for Ohio State as well as it possibly could be. I think there's going to be a lot of pressure on offensive line coach Justin Frye to land an elite offensive line class. But it's set up perfectly for him with a lot of talent in state. So you've got Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) and Akron Hoban four-star Sam Greer (6-7, 310) in state, and those are two guys they can definitely get. Greer is definitely a tackle. I think Riley's more of a swing guy who could play tackle or guard, depending upon the situation, or depending upon their tackle situation, and getting their best five

on the field down the line.

"There's also Vero Beach, Fla. four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 305), four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford's (6-2, 210) teammate, and I think they've got a really good lead for Micah right now. That's a guy a lot of people should be excited about. They have a great chance of landing him. Kind of in the Max Riley category of definitely could play tackle but could also maybe play guard is Sarasota, (Fla.) Cardinal Mooney four-star interior offensive lineman (and West Virginia native) Da'Ron Parks (6-5, 282), who's from right down the road in Hurricane, W.V., which is actually only about two hours away. With Micah being in Florida, that's one thing, but you've got Parks and Riley and Greer, all these in-state guys or guys who are within the two-hour radius of your campus. It's plenty for them to have a great O-line class, so we'll see if they can deliver."

Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225) was offered by Ohio State during his visit for the Marshall game. Have you been able to see him play, and if so, what do you make of him as a prospect?

"He was actually right there in my top six or seven guys in Ohio for 2026, before he was offered, so I've been very high on Cincere. I've gotten to see him play several times. He's a very strong, physical kid. He's probably an inside linebacker, not so much an outside guy, but he's one of the guys who likes to play north and south, shoot gaps, get after the quarterback and is a run stuffer. He plays really hard, very physical. He's one of my very top guys in Ohio. I actually had him ranked ahead of a couple of Ohio linebackers that they had already offered, so I'm obviously certainly in favor of that offer. I know it was a good offer by Ohio State."

With OSU commit Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) being pursued by Auburn and Oregon, how much of a factor is this year's on-field performance of the team he decides to commit to, and what else are you hearing is going to impact his decision?

"Ever since Na'eem committed back in the winter, Auburn's been the school I've kind of been told, 'Hey, watch out for these guys as the process unfolds.' From Auburn's standpoint, (the performance of the team) is important. Certainly Ohio State and Oregon have proof of concept already. I don't think there's much they need to show him on the field. Auburn certainly has to show some progress, and so far, that's not really happening, so we'll see how that goes. I know they've had some tough losses down there, and I know Auburn head coach Hugh Freeze's postgame press conference this past week (where he was hyper-critical of his team following a loss to Arkansas) didn't sit well with a lot of people.

"If you're Ohio State, I think everything you're hoping would happen to Auburn so far has happened in terms of trying to keep him. Being part of a winning environment is going to be important. We're talking about a five-star kid in the top five to six prospects in the entire country. He's certainly a consensus top-10 type of guy. So NIL is always going to be a factor with those guys, but Ohio State's been very competitive with NIL across their recruiting target list as far as making sure they're competitive with all of their top guys. It's going to be interesting. I'm not just counting Oregon out by any stretch, but Auburn was the school that I keep being told to watch for, but yet they're the one that are kind of struggling right now."

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

Ohio State for the 49-14 win over Marshall on Sept. 21. He is the nation's eighth-best wide receiver and 51st-best overall player in his class.

Ohio State is McAfee's ninth Division I offer, a list that includes Big Ten rivals Indiana, Penn State and Maryland along with Boston College, Charlotte, East Carolina, Virginia Tech and West Virginia. But despite the attention he has received throughout the country as just a high school sophomore, McAfee said that his latest offer is something special to him, especially when considering the NFL pipeline Hartline has created in his wide receiver room since taking over in 2019.

"Getting an Ohio State offer means a lot to me as they are known for producing high-level wide receiver talent," he told 247Sports. "They also have produced lots and lots of NFL talent, in general, so it is a big blessing."

McAfee was offered during his visit by head coach Ryan Day, with whom he spent time along with Hartline and offensive assistant Devin Jordan. The four-star said he enjoyed the conversations he had with Ohio State's staff, which he thinks puts their wide receivers in the optimal spots to succeed on the field.

"I like how they get their wide receivers in the right spots to make big-time plays and how they take pride in bettering themselves," McAfee said. "I also like Brian Hartline as he is a wide receiver guru. They said keep up the good work and I need to come back up."

As for the visit itself, McAfee said he enjoyed his time in Columbus and was impressed by the energy inside Ohio Stadium for the Buckeyes' game against the Herd.

"The experience was great," he said. "The energy was awesome as there were 100,000-plus fans. I got to meet the coaches, and the fans were showing mad love."

McAfee is in the midst of a strong sophomore campaign with Archbishop Spalding while catching passes from four-star 2025 quarterback and Maryland commit Malik Washington (6-4, 215), and with that comes a busy fall of visits. The Maryland native took a visit to Penn State two weeks before coming to Columbus, and he also visited Duke on Sept. 28 to take in the Blue Devils' 21-20 win over North Carolina.

McAfee was one of four recruits who was offered by Ohio State on the day of the Marshall game. Joining McAfee was Cleve-

land Glenville four-star 2026 linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225) and Glassboro (N.J.) 2027 four-star athlete Xavier Sabb (6-1, 180) and his older brother, 2026 three-star athlete Amari Sabb (5-9, 155).

Mathis Sets Official Visit To Ohio State

Ohio State has done very well so far in the 2025 class on the defensive line, landing six commitments, with Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225) being the highest rated among them by 247Sports' composite ranking.

He is currently the No. 63 prospect in the class, the No. 6 player at his position and the second-best recruit out of Pennsylvania.

Mathis has been a big target for Penn State for a long time, and ever since he committed to the Buckeyes, he has been viewed as a potential flip candidate, taking multiple visits to the Nittany Lions campus over the past year. He has maintained throughout the process that he is still locked in with Ohio State but is also exploring his options as much as possible.

Part of what is keeping him with the Buckeyes is defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who has proved himself to be one of the better developers of linemen in the country, making him a big draw to potential recruits.

"I love Ohio State," Mathis said to 247Sports. "I love Coach Larry Johnson. That's my go-to guy. I love his defensive core. I love those guys he has on his staff. By me just talking to all the defensive guys up there, it builds a big impact on me just because talking to Coach Larry and talking about my craft and my game, and being able to work on my speed and work on my power a lot, and him helping me find out how to have (better) hand placement on my opponent, that helps."

Mathis has set up an official visit to get back to Columbus with the season now in full swing. He will be on campus for the matchup against Nebraska on Oct. 26, where will be joined by his high school associate head coach Cyril Woodland.

"Zah was there for a camp, and he was there for a visit but he has not been there for a game yet," Woodland said to 247Sports. "He will be able to see what a game is like."

Johnson made the trip to Imhotep

during the Buckeyes' off week and is working hard to keep Mathis committed to Ohio State until December when the early signing period rolls around – an effort he is used to making, having kept former five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston committed to the Buckeyes last year despite a strong late push from Alabama – so this will be an important visit for him and the Buckeyes to stand out for Mathis.

Carter Discusses OSU, Miami

Another Buckeye commitment who is a flip risk is Newberry, Fla., four-star defensive lineman Jarquez Carter (6-2, 284), who committed to Ohio State on July 18 and made it to campus for the 49-14 win over Marshall in Week 4 during an off week for his high school team.

"Always good being back. This was my fourth time," Carter told 247Sports. "I went up with my mom and granddad."

He said that he was impressed with what the Buckeyes were able to do on the field despite missing Tyleik Williams, who was out for the game with an injury.

"They did good, even without number 91, Tyleik Williams," Carter said. "It was definitely good talking to Coach Johnson. He talked about how I can compete and have an effect on their defensive line."

Carter also said he plans to graduate early and enter college in January, which will likely be at Ohio State, but he still hasn't fully shut down his recruitment. He is planning to visit Miami (Fla.) for the Hurricanes' Oct. 26 game against in-state rival Florida State.

The Hurricanes have been after Carter hard this fall, but the four-star says that Buckeye fans have no need to worry about a potential flip.

"I'm real locked in," Carter said about his Ohio State commitment. "I'm not thinking about changing my mind. I'll probably be back (at Ohio State) for the Team Up North game."

Carter originally chose the Buckeyes over the Hurricanes, Florida, UCF and Penn State, all of which hosted him on of-

ficial visits over the summer.

He is ranked the No. 276 player in the country, the No. 30 overall defensive tackle and the No. 39 player in the state of Florida.

2026 Florida CB Commit Will Visit OSU

The Buckeyes have been working hard this fall to prevent potential flips from happening, but that doesn't mean they aren't also looking to make some flips of their own in the 2025 cycle.

Seffner (Fla.) Armwood four-star cornerback and Florida commit Jaalen Waters (6-2, 170) told 247Sports that he is going to be taking in an Ohio State game in person when he comes to campus for the Oct. 5 matchup against Iowa.

"I'm supposed to be going to Ohio State on Oct. 5," Waters said. "It's Ohio State. And that's another DBU. I just want to feel their environment. I have been there before. I was there when I was young. So I just want to feel the environment and hang with the coaches and stuff like that."

Waters pledged his services to the Gators on June 15, but like Carter with the Buckeyes, he isn't one to be worried about flipping to another school. But Waters has already shown a propensity to change his mind, having committed to Florida State in April only to back off of that pledge just a few weeks later and reopen his recruitment.

It could be tougher for the Buckeyes to pull him out of his home state, but cornerbacks coach Tim Walton has had some major success on the recruiting trail recently and shouldn't be counted out of the race for any prospect he wants to come to Columbus.

Waters is the nation's 192nd-best player, 17th-best cornerback and 34th-best player out of Florida in his class. He holds 28 Division I offers, including from Miami (Fla.), another in-state school he took an unofficial visit to after announcing his commitment to Florida. He is reportedly

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Class Of 2027 Recruits Planning Visits

Continued From Page 27

also still looking at LSU and maybe more schools which he holds offers from.

OSU Offers Nephew Of Kobe Bryant

On Sept. 23, Ohio State safeties coach Matt Guerrieri was busy on the recruiting trail and offered Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star athlete Jett Washington (6-5, 200). Washington is the nephew of the late Los Angeles Lakers NBA star Kobe Bryant.

While Bryant shone on the court, Washington is a star on the gridiron. He is currently rated the No. 67 player in the class of 2026, the No. 4 athlete and the No. 2 player in the state of Nevada.

He is a standout basketball player, as would be expected from the nephew of Bryant. Last season he scored 33 points in an overtime win for Bishop Gorman held at Crytpo.com Arena, where his uncle won five NBA championships with the Lakers in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2009 and 2010.

Washington has already been out to vis-

it Ohio State two times during his recruiting process, both times over the spring, but he hasn't returned to campus since then. He told Lettermen Row he is hoping to make it out to a game during the fall.

He currently holds 22 Division I offers, including from Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Notre Dame, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Texas and Washington.

Washington said earning an offer from Ohio State was a special moment for him.

"It means a lot to get an offer from a big-time program like Ohio State," Washington told Lettermen Row. "The conversation was great."

In his sophomore year, Washington recorded 37 tackles while also bringing down two interceptions. He also occasionally will play on the offensive side of the ball, lining up as a wide receiver when he's needed.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- When Ohio State is off during the weekend of Oct. 19, multiple different Buckeye targets will be on-site for the

highly-anticipated game featuring No. 2 Texas and No. 5 Georgia taking place in Austin. From the 2025 class, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star linebacker Nathaniel Owusu-Boateng (6-1, 205) will be in attendance on an official visit along with 2026 targets Saint George (Utah) Pine View five-star tight end Brock Harris (6-6, 238), Houston Mayde Creek three-star linebacker Kosi Okpala (6-2, 215) and Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy four-star safety Bralan Womack (5-11, 185). Also planning to attend are 2027 targets Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200) and Jackson, Ala., four-star running back Ezavier Crowell (5-11, 205). Many visitors have already announced their intention to attend that game, but there still will likely be many more who decide to attend in the next few weeks.

- Coatesville (Pa.) Area five-star offensive tackle Maxwell Hiller, the No. 29 overall prospect in the 2027 class, has set an unofficial visit to Ohio State for the Nebraska game on Oct. 26. Hiller was offered by the Buckeyes on Sept. 11 during the team's off week. He has already made mul-

multiple unofficial visits to Penn State, which seems to be his top choice, especially with it being close to his high school. The sophomore is the No. 4 offensive tackle prospect in the class and is currently rated the No. 1 player in the state of Pennsylvania in the 2027 class.

- Edmunds, the No. 2 signal-caller in the class of 2027, has decided to move up the date that he is coming to visit Ohio State. He was originally prepared to come to Columbus for the Nebraska game but will now be on campus when the Hawkeyes are at Ohio Stadium three weeks earlier on Oct. 5. He released a top four early in the month of September, including Ohio State, Penn State, Michigan and Texas. Although he is still a while away from signing anything, quarterbacks go off the board very quickly, so it's possible that the No. 10 player in his class could be making his decision much sooner than the rest of his peers in the 2027 class. As a freshman, Edmunds threw for 2,691 yards and 24 touchdowns, earning an offer from the Buckeyes after an impressive performance at their June 6 recruiting camp.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Soft-spoken Ryan Wilson said he didn't like to brag about his extraordinary abilities on the football field. He preferred to let his aggressive tendencies between the white lines on Friday nights speak about his athletic ability.

Fortunately for those who had not had the opportunity to see Wilson punish a would-be tackler or would-be ball carrier, there were interested observers who were willing to describe the special talents of the 6-1, 230-pound senior linebacker and fullback for the Dayton Meadowdale Lions.

Meadowdale head football coach Pat Masters, who tutored Buckeyes Ken Coleman and Dante Lee in their prep days, said Wilson was without a doubt one of the top prep players he ever coached.

"A lot of times you don't find kids his size with a lot of speed and his kind of strength," Masters said. "He full squats almost 500 pounds."

Wilson's 4.7-second standard in the 40-yard dash was recorded at the Ohio State football camp in the summer where Buckeye head coach John Cooper got an up-close and personal look at a young man he hoped would be studying linebacker as well as pre-engineering at OSU in the fall of 1990.

30 Years Ago — 1994

Despite the fact that Ohio State preferred to get verbal commitments in December and January clusters, Percy King just didn't wait.

The 6-4, 205-pound strong safety from Marion-Franklin High School in Columbus had been itchy about committing to the Buckeyes ever since the summer before. But he was content to wait and take a couple of visits to other campuses just to make sure.

Then the real crunch began.

"At first it was fun, talking to all of these coaches and listening to them tell you how great things were at their particular school," King told BSB. "But after a while, you can only hear so much of that stuff. It all starts to run together. Plus, when the phone rings, you just start to dread it because you know it's always for you. You get into the middle of something and the phone rings. You can't get anything done."

So King put a stop to all the calls and made his verbal commitment public. He planned to sign with Ohio State in February.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Mentor, Ohio, tight end Jason Caldwell became OSU's 13th verbal commitment on Sept. 21.

Caldwell (6-5, 265) received his first scholarship offer of any kind Sept. 18 on the Ohio Stadium turf from OSU coach John Cooper before the Buckeyes faced Ohio University.

"It really took me by surprise," Caldwell said. "It was the first offer I've had."

It was not a surprise that Ohio State was the first school to take

a chance on Caldwell, though. He first came to light during OSU's summer camp.

There, he turned in his respectable 40-yard time and also jumped 29 inches in the vertical leap. Caldwell was a testament to the power of impressing the OSU coaches in person at their camp.

"I would never have been lucky enough to get a Division I offer in football - I'd probably be going Division II or III - if I'd never been seen down at the camp," Caldwell said.

20 Years Ago — 2004

Since Jim Tressel and defensive line coach Jim Heacock stressed the importance of rotating a number of players along the defensive line, it was no surprise that they were continuing to pursue defensive linemen even with three commitments already secured.

One player they were still interested in was Louisville (Ky.) Central defensive tackle James McKinney (6-2, 300), rated No. 8 at the position and No. 99 overall by Rivals.com. McKinney originally committed to Michigan after watching the Wolverines top the Buckeyes the season before, but he had since reopened his recruitment.

"I mainly reopened my recruitment because of my mother," McKinney told BSB. "She thought I made a rushed decision. She wanted me to see some other things out there. It had nothing to do with the staff or anything to do with the program. It was just my mother's decision that I should take it slow, take my time with my decision."

15 Years Ago — 2009

The next time Ohio State's top-ranked 2010 recruit stepped foot on a football field, it would likely be as a member of the Buckeyes.

Five-star offensive tackle Andrew Norwell (6-5, 308) from Cincinnati Anderson underwent surgery on Sept. 21 to repair a broken tibia he had suffered three days earlier in a road game at Columbus DeSales. He would miss the rest of the 2009 season and would have to sit out basketball season as well.

The injury occurred on his team's first offensive series of the game.

"It was a pass play, and we were running out to the left," Norwell told BSB. "I was blocking my guy toward the sidelines, and I collided with the center and his guy. They came down on my right foot, and it rolled."

Right away, Norwell knew something bad had happened.

"It was pretty clear right away," he said. "It was the worst. I couldn't sleep that night because of the pain."

10 Years Ago — 2014

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas 2016 five-star defensive end Nick Bosa (6-3, 230) got a firsthand look at a program that was awfully familiar to him when he made the trip to Columbus to see the Buckeyes take on Virginia Tech.

Speaking for the first time since that game, the younger brother of Ohio State defensive end Joey Bosa said the loss didn't take away from his overall enjoyment of the experience.

"It was my first night game at the Shoe so that was pretty insane," said the younger Bosa, whom Scout rated the No. 2 DE and No. 11 player in his class. "It was the biggest crowd ever, I think. It was pretty, pretty crazy. I've never been to a game that loud."

He was joined in Columbus by 2015 Miami (Fla.) running back commit Jordan Scarlett (5-10, 207), his high school teammate who was on an official visit.

Five Years Ago — 2019

On Sept. 21, just one day after he rushed for 165 yards on 18 carries in a 34-0 win over Cincinnati Moeller, Cincinnati Winton Woods three-star running back Miyan Williams landed an offer from Ohio State.

The 5-10, 210-pound Williams - who was considered the 51st-best running back and No. 758 prospect overall in the class of 2020 - had been on Tony Alford's radar since February. He had visited campus for the first and only time for the spring game back in April.

Williams, who was the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association Division II Player of the Year and runner-up for Ohio's Mr. Football award as a junior, had rushed for 5,387 yards in his career.

He had committed to Iowa State in July over offers from programs such as Boston College, Cincinnati, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Purdue, Rutgers and Toledo.

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith took part in a House Committee on Small Business hearing on Sept. 20 in Washington, D.C., testifying in support of federal legislation for name, image and likeness, but he offered up an intriguing comment about the state of recruiting when it came to NIL.

In his opening statement, Smith discussed how NIL had been mostly beneficial for Ohio State's student-athletes but added there had been challenges in implementing NIL since it was introduced on July 1, 2021.

"When NIL was sanctioned by the NCAA, 'bad actors' emerged seeking personal gain from their ability to influence a young person and/or a family regarding an institution," Smith said. "This has always been a challenge, but NIL has allowed this behavior to be more aggressive. In professional sports, drafts preclude this issue, but the collegiate model relies upon recruiting, not drafting."

"For example, student-athletes and their parents visit campuses at the expense of those universities to evaluate where they may make a commitment. A practice of asking a school for a fee to simply visit campus has emerged. Asking for \$5,000 just to visit has become common. During visits, discussions now emerge regarding how much a student-athlete can expect from NIL."

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (4-0)

Aug. 31 AKRON, W 52-6.

Sept. 7 WESTERN MICHIGAN, W 56-0; **21** MARSHALL, W 49-14; **28** at Michigan State, W 38-7

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.

CROSS COUNTRY

Aug. 30 Tommy Evans Invitational at Norton, Ohio, Men: 1st/8, Women: 2nd/10.

Sept. 20 Roy Griak Invitational at Minneapolis, Men: 5th/17, Women: 7th/17.

Oct. 4 Loyola Lakefront Invitational at Chicago; **19** Wisconsin Pre-Nationals at Madison, Wis.

Nov. 1 Big Ten Championships at Champaign, Ill. **15** NCAA Regional Championships at Norton, Ohio; **18** NCAA Championships at Madison, Wis.

FIELD HOCKEY (9-0)

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, W 2-0; **15** at Old Dominion, W 2-1; **20** MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-0; **22** BROWN, W 5-2; **29** LOUISVILLE, W 4-3 (OT).

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 GOLF

Sept. 9 Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 7th/15; **10** Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 7th/15; **11** Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 7th/15; **23** The Tindall at Fall City, Wash., 6th/14; **24** The Tindall at Fall City, Wash., 7th/14; **30** Blessings Collegiate Invitational

at Fayetteville, Ark.

Oct. 2 Blessings Collegiate Invitational at Fayetteville, Ark. **7-8** Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio; **28-30** East Lake Cup at Atlanta.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Sept. 9 Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 2nd/15; **10** Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 3rd/15; **11** Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 3rd/15; **30-Oct. 2** Blessings Collegiate Invitational at Fayetteville, Ark.

Oct. 7-8 Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio; **20-21** Jim West Challenge at San Marcos, Texas.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY

Oct. 6 Niagara (ex.); **11-12** AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL; **18-19** at Wisconsin; **25-26** BOWLING GREEN.

Nov. 1-2 LAKE SUPERIOR STATE; **8-9** at Michigan State; **15-16** at Lindenwood; **29-30** at Princeton.

Dec. 6-7 PENN STATE; **13-14** NOTRE DAME.

Jan. 3 vs. Michigan at Wrigley Field in Chicago; **5** at Michigan; **10-11** MINNESOTA; **24-25** at Penn State; **30-31** MICHIGAN STATE.

Feb. 7-8 at Notre Dame; **14-15** WISCONSIN; **21-22** at Minnesota; **27-28** MICHIGAN.

WOMEN'S ICE

HOCKEY (2-2-0, 2-2-0)

Sept. 21-22 MINNESOTA DULUTH, L 2-1; L 4-3; **27-28** at Bemidji State, W 8-2; W 3-0.

Oct. 4-5 at St. Lawrence; **11-12** MINNESOTA; **18-19** at St. Cloud State; **22** MERCYHURST; **25-26** ICEBREAKER TOURNAMENT vs. STONEHILL, CORNELL OR PENN STATE.

Nov. 1-2 at St. Thomas; **15-16** WISCONSIN; **22-23** at Minnesota State.

Dec. 2 at Mercyhurst.

Jan. 2 at Wisconsin; **4** at Wrigley Field in Chicago vs.

Wisconsin; **10-11** BEMIDJI STATE; **17-18** at Minnesota Duluth; **24-25** MINNESOTA STATE; **31** at Minnesota.

Feb. 1 at Minnesota; **7-8** ST. THOMAS; **21-22** ST. CLOUD STATE; **28** WCHA Quarterfinals.

March 1-2 WCHA Quarterfinals.

MEN'S SOCCER (7-0-2, 2-0-1)

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, W 1-0; **17** at Penn State, W 5-0; **22** RUTGERS, W 3-0; **27** INDIANA, T 2-2.

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 (8-1-3, 3-0-2)

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, W 3-0; **15** BROWN, W 2-0; **19** IOWA, T 1-1; **22** NORTHWESTERN, W 2-1; **26** MICHIGAN STATE, T 2-2; **29** at Michigan, W 2-1.

Oct. 4 MARYLAND; **10** MINNESOTA; **13** at Purdue; **17** at USC; **20** at UCLA; **27** PENN STATE.

WOMEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 13-15 Debbie Southern Furman Fall Classic at Greenville, S.C., NTS; **21-29** ITA All-American Championships at Cary, N.C.

Oct. 4-6 Notre Dame Invitational at South Bend, Ind.; **10-14** ITA Midwest Regionals at Columbus, Ohio; **25-27** UT Home Invitational at Knoxville,

Tenn..

Nov. 7-10 ITA Central Section Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **7-10** ITA Conference Masters Championships at San Diego, Calif.; **19-24** NCAA Singles and Doubles Championships at Waco, Texas.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (7-5)

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), W 3-0; **14** BUFFALO, W 3-2; **15** WRIGHT STATE, L 3-1; **20** at Bowling Green, W 3-1; **22** BOWLING GREEN, W 3-0; **27** at USC, L 3-2; **29** at UCLA, L 3-1.

Oct. 3 OREGON; **6** at Indiana; **10** at Northwestern; **13** MICHIGAN; **18** PENN STATE; **19** NEBRASKA; **23** at Purdue; **27** MINNESOTA; **31** IOWA.

Nov. 3 at Michigan State; **8** at Michigan; **9** at Illinois; **15** MARYLAND; **16** RUTGERS; **22** WASHINGTON; **24** INDIANA; **27** at Wisconsin; **29** at Minnesota.



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Southern Cal D-Lineman Alexander Redshirts

USC junior defensive tackle Bear Alexander was one of a few college football players to bring their 2024 season to an abrupt end by redshirting after already playing in multiple games. The days in between Weeks 4 and 5 have become a bit of an important deadline for players who have played in their team's first four games in the season and, for whatever reason, are unhappy with their current situation. Under current NCAA regulations, any player who plays in four or fewer of a team's games can maintain an extra year of eligibility by redshirting.

BIG TEN NOTES Bobby Gorbett

Alexander's decision to redshirt came on Sept. 25 due to him not being pleased with his playing time, just four days after he was in for 21 of USC's 58 defensive snaps in the team's 27-24 loss to Michigan. After the game, Alexander took to Twitter, where he posted photos of himself from the game with a caption of "FREE 9-OWE," an apparent reference to himself as he wears the number 90.

Alexander has been with the Trojans

for two years after transferring from Georgia as a freshman. Alexander started 12 of 13 games for a 2023 USC defense that gave up 34.4 points per game, which was 118th in the country.

Under the leadership of new defensive coordinator D'Anton Lynn, the Trojans have been much improved defensively in 2024, allowing 17.0 points per game through four games.

Trojan coach Lincoln Riley didn't take any questions on Alexander's decision to leave specifically when speaking with the media the next day but said that the team would treat his absence like they would a player missing games due to injury, saying the void would create some opportunities for other players to get some more snaps.

"There's a lot of excitement about the opportunities it will create for some of these guys, and I think we'll have several guys jump up and seize it," Riley said. "A lot of people want to play for this defense and this defensive line right now. We've got a good hungry group in there."

SEC, Big Ten To Hold Joint Meeting

The two most powerful conferences in college football are set for a historic joint meeting, according to Yahoo Sports' Ross Dellenger.

The meeting between the Big Ten

and the SEC will take place in Nashville sometime in October and is viewed as a continuation of a partnership between the two conferences initially announced in February. Athletic directors from both conferences will discuss topics such as the potential expansion of the college football playoff and the House vs. NCAA ruling, a new enforcement model (that doesn't involve the NCAA), and a regular-season and postseason scheduling agreement.

Joined by the athletic directors will be Greg Sankey and Tony Petitti, the commissioners of the SEC and the Big Ten, respectively, along with other high-ranking conference staff members.

It isn't expected that the conferences make any impactful decisions, and it is believed that the meeting serves as the next step in the partnership created between the two conferences.

The House vs. NCAA settlement the executives will discuss is set to pay \$2.8 billion in damages to past athletes, which will likely set forth a revenue-sharing model for current athletes and set up a third-party NIL structure independent of the revenue-sharing model.

The new enforcement entity would regulate the revenue-sharing model. The entity isn't in place yet but could be formed by the NCAA and power conferences upon the resolution of the House vs. NCAA settlement.

The College Football Playoff format could still be in flux despite a new 12-team format this season that will include the five highest-ranked conference champions as automatic qualifiers, with the four highest getting first-round byes and seven invites to the next highest-ranked teams regardless of conference affiliation.

A 14-team format was mulled over by CFP officials in February, which would contain three Big Ten teams, three SEC teams, two ACC teams and two Big 12 teams, a group of five team and three other at-large spots.

The most notable of the topics set to be discussed by the two conferences is a potential scheduling agreement. The agreement will have the Big Ten and SEC play more regular-season games against each other and is expected to increase the TV revenue given to them by TV networks. Dellenger also reported that the SEC and Big Ten could be in line to compete against each other in a revamped postseason format for teams

BIG 2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Michigan	2	0	1.000	4	1	0.800
Ohio State	1	0	1.000	4	0	1.000
Oregon	1	0	1.000	4	0	1.000
Penn State	1	0	1.000	4	0	1.000
Rutgers	1	0	1.000	4	0	1.000
Iowa	1	0	1.000	3	1	0.750
Illinois	1	1	0.500	4	1	0.800
Nebraska	1	1	0.500	4	1	0.800
USC	1	1	0.500	3	1	0.750
Michigan State	1	1	0.500	3	2	0.600
Washington	1	1	0.500	3	2	0.600
Maryland	0	2	0.000	3	2	0.600
Minnesota	0	2	0.000	2	3	0.400
UCLA	0	2	0.000	1	3	0.250
Northwestern	0	1	0.000	2	2	0.500
Wisconsin	0	1	0.000	2	2	0.500
Purdue	0	1	0.000	1	3	0.250

Sept. 27 Game
Rutgers 21, Washington 18

Sept. 28 Games
Penn State 21, Illinois 7
Michigan 27, Minnesota 24
Oregon 34, UCLA 13
USC 38, Wisconsin 21
Nebraska 28, Purdue 10
Indiana 42, Maryland 28
Ohio State 38, Michigan State 7

Oct. 4 Game
Michigan State at Oregon, 9 p.m.

Oct. 5 Games
Purdue at Wisconsin, noon
UCLA at Penn State, noon
Iowa at **Ohio State**, 3:30 p.m.
Indiana at Northwestern, 3:30 p.m.
Rutgers at Nebraska, 4 p.m.
USC at Minnesota, 5:30 p.m.
Michigan at Washington, 5:30 p.m.

All times Eastern

that missed out on the playoff, as bowl agreements expire in 2025.

Watkins Named Preseason Player Of The Year

USC sophomore guard JuJu Watkins headlined a list of 11 players on the preseason All-Big Ten Teams, released on Sept. 26. Watkins was tabbed by both the coaches and the media as the preseason Player of the Year within the conference.

Watkins was one of 10 players to make the media Preseason All-Big Ten Team,

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including Iowa forward Hannah Stuelke, Iowa guard Lucy Olsen, Maryland guard Shyanne Sellers, Ohio State forward Cotie McMahon, Nebraska center Alexis Markowski, UCLA center Lauren Betts, UCLA guard Kiki Rice, USC forward Kiki Iriafen and Wisconsin forward Sarah Williams. Illinois guard Makira Cook made the coaches' preseason All-Big Ten team but didn't make the team on the media's list.

Watkins, a first-team All-American in her freshman season, averaged 27.1 points, 7.3 rebounds and 3.3 assists per game. Watkins broke the single-season freshman scoring record last season with 920 total points, breaking the previous record that had stood for four decades held by San Diego State's Tina Hutchinson by 22 points.

Transferring in from Stanford, Iriafen is potentially the best sidekick Watkins could ask for, putting up 19.4 points and 11.0 rebounds per game in her junior season, when she was the Pac-12 Most Improved Player of the Year.

Olsen will hope to fill the massive scoring void left by two-time National Player of the Year Caitlin Clark. Olsen transferred to Iowa from Villanova, where she was the third-leading scorer in the entire country behind Watkins and Clark with 23.3 points per game. Olsen was an All-American honorable mention for her standout season.

Stuelke is one of the few key returners from an Iowa team that lost in the national championship for the second year

in a row. Last year, she averaged 14.0 points per game on 62.7 percent shooting, which helped her make second-team All-Big Ten.

Sellers has been a mainstay on All-Big Ten teams during her Maryland career, averaging 13.9 points per game as a sophomore and 15.6 points per game as a junior. Sellers was an inclusion on the Big Ten's All-Defensive Team as a sophomore, and as a junior, she added 5.5 assists and 5.8 rebounds per game to go along with her scoring.

McMahon is the lone Buckeye inclusion on the Preseason All-Big Ten Team but is certainly deserving of her spot on the list. McMahon was second in scoring in the 2023-24 season, going for 14.4 points per game and grabbing a team-high 6.3 rebounds per game (more on page 34).

Nebraska was one game away from capturing the Big Ten title in 2024 before losing to Iowa and Clark in heartbreaking fashion in the Big Ten Championship Game. Markowski did everything she could to put the Cornhuskers over the top, bringing down 45 rebounds, which was nine more than any other player in Nebraska history in the conference tournament. Having averaged 15.7 points and 10.5 rebounds per game a season ago, Markowski will be hard-pressed to better her loaded stat sheet in her junior season.

Betts and Rice make up one of the best guard and center duos inside the Big Ten, as both players were All-Pac-12

selections last season.

Betts transferred to UCLA from Stanford, and in her first season with the Bruins, she made an immediate impact, with 14.9 points and 9.3 rebounds per game. At 6-7, Betts is one of the tallest players in the Big Ten.

Rice averaged 13.2 points, 5.7 rebounds, and 4.5 assists per game, alongside Betts for a UCLA team that made it to the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament, losing to Angel Reese and LSU by a score of 78-69.

Williams rounds out a loaded list of Big Ten stars as a bona fide All-America candidate in 2024-25. Not only did she average 17.4 points and 10.7 rebounds per game, but she was the Big Ten's Defensive Player of the Year in 2023-24 as voted by the media, while former Buckeye Celeste Taylor took home the coaches' vote in that category.

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Diebler Trying To Establish Culture In Practice

In his first year as Ohio State's head coach, Jake Diebler has broken down the offseason into three different phases, each of which he feels his team must complete before they begin the 2024-25 season against Texas in Las Vegas on Nov. 4.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

According to the coach, the Buckeyes have already conquered phase one and are in phase two of the offseason, which Diebler said revolves around "growth." Growth is something that he thinks can be accomplished during the team's fall practice, which officially began on Sept. 23.

"We've laid a great foundation about playing the way we want to play, and now we have to get detailed and really start to get better at some things leading into what will be phase three for us, which will be some specific prep for some of our exhibition games and our first game Nov. 4," Diebler said to a media contingent in the Schottenstein Center interview room before taking the floor for his first official fall practice.

For Diebler, that foundation and improvement come with playing with great pace and urgency, a mentality on the court that he has attempted to instill in his team since he took over interim head coaching duties at the end of last season.

In Ohio State's first practice open to the media on Sept. 23, the pace and intensity of the session were palpable.

Diebler and his staff were actively participating in team drills, the 37-year-old working up a sweat serving as a high-energy defender who would contest his players' shots at the rim and later as a guard who dribbled to the rim in an effort to teach his group how to stay in front of their man.

Ohio State's team managers were standing on the sidelines constantly clapping and cheering during drills. The team took little to no break throughout the approximately 30 minutes the media were allowed to see practice.

Although it was just Day One, the culture Diebler is trying to establish during his tenure at Ohio State was made clear, one that he is hoping can translate onto the court come Nov. 4 and will also help to reach the standard set by those who came before him in scarlet and gray.

"As a program, we have expectations, and we need to compete for those expectations," Diebler said. "There's a standard in this program, traditionally, that we have

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

not shied away from. You don't get there by just talking about it. You have to recruit to it. You have to practice for it and all that. So I don't know how long that's going to take, but we're trying to get there as quickly as we possibly can.

"I want our former players and the people who have come before us to be really proud of the way we play – with a toughness, with an urgency, with a togetherness that when people turn on the TV or they come to the (Schottenstein Center) to watch us, especially our former players, they look out there and are like, 'Those guys are representing us well.' That's important to me."

OSU Holds Alumni Night At Schott

Speaking of former players, a large contingent of all-time Buckeyes were on hand for the team's alumni night held at the Schottenstein Center on Sept. 21.

The event, which was held on the Buckeyes' practice floor in the arena, featured an impressive group of players returning to Columbus, including former All-Americans Jim Jackson, Jerry Lucas, Greg Oden and Jared Sullinger and fan favorites Malaki Branham, Clark Kellogg, E.J. Liddell and Michael Redd, among many others.

Although media were not present at the event, the alumni night was reportedly headlined by a panel conversation hosted by Diebler that featured Lucas, Jackson, Redd and Sullinger, who each spoke to the crowd – which included Ohio State's 2024-25 team – about a number of topics, including the state of the current basketball program, what made each of their former teams special and what it means to play for the Buckeyes, among other things.

"Jake, we're so proud of you for the path that you were able to take," Jackson said to the crowd in a video posted by the team's Twitter account on Sept. 24. "Big things are going to come. We have your support. We're behind you. We love what you are doing. To me, the university means so much more than just the jersey. It means the people. That's what makes this university so special."

"We will always love this place, these players and the coaches that represent us," Lucas said. "We are so happy and proud to have Jake at the head of this."

Lucas also reportedly talked about his 1960 national championship team, saying that it was the team's trust they had in each other that led them to new heights that season. Trust was a common theme brought up by each of the players on the panel when asked about what spurred their teams' success, which Diebler thought served as a strong message to his current group.

"That was special," Diebler said. "To have Jerry Lucas, Jimmy Jackson, Jared Sullinger and Michael Redd on stage at the same time talking about what this program has meant to them and what was special about their championship teams – it was an

awesome night.

"We had guys from so many different decades here. Champions, former managers – which are such an important part of our program – were here. Former coaches, support staff. It was a really special night and I think really beneficial for our group."

Five-Star PF Bundalo Enjoys OSU Visit

In addition to current players, past legends and other alumni, another notable person in attendance during the team's alumni night was Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star power forward Niko Bundalo (6-10, 215), a highly touted recruit who was able to receive some personal advice from former players during the event to kick off his official visit.

"(I got) to pick their brains a little bit and see what their experiences were like at Ohio State," Bundalo told The Columbus Dispatch about his time speaking individually with former Buckeyes such as Branham, Jackson, Kellogg, Lucas and Sullinger, among others. "One thing they all agree on is Coach Diebler has the know-how and the ability to take that program to the next level, and they all truly believe in him."

Bundalo, the nation's 26th-best player, seventh-best power forward and fourth-best player in California in the 2025 class, is no stranger to the Buckeye tradition. Although he is playing his senior season on the West Coast, he grew up in northeast Ohio and played his first three high school basketball seasons at Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Academy.

It's a similar situation to that of his now-teammate and Buckeye recruiting target, five-star shooting guard Darryn Peterson (6-0, 195), who is also a native of northeast Ohio and played his freshman season at Cuyahoga (Ohio) Christian Academy.

Bundalo, like Peterson, knows that returning to his hometown team and playing for Ohio State could be a unique experience. But the five-star said he realized on his official visit – whether that be through talking to past legends, meeting with the current staff or attending the football team's game against Marshall on Sept. 21 – that Diebler's program has much more to offer than just proximity to home.

"There's not a lot of kids that can go back to a home-state college and at the same time not really lose anything by being there," Bundalo told the Dispatch. "Maybe it's too small of a market or maybe it's a low-major or mid-major school. Ohio State's as big as it gets, and it's right in my back yard. It's a really unique opportunity for me."

One thing that may further separate Ohio State from his other recruiting interests is his already close relationship with Diebler.

Diebler served as Bundalo's primary recruiter while the high schooler was at Hudson Reserve, and he said their relationship has only strengthened since Diebler was named full-time head coach last spring.

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OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2026 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

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

Bundalo said that Diebler even made it a point to reoffer him a scholarship when he became head coach while also maintaining constant communication.

"I knew him as a man before I knew him as a coach," Bundalo said. "He Facetimed me after his most recent child was born (in July). Getting to share that moment with him literally the day after his son was born, it's crazy that guy cares about me like that, honestly.

"Him being my primary recruiter and getting the head coaching job, it was a super, super match-made-in-heaven moment in the fact that the guy who wanted me to come there and was pushing me and talking to me every day is now the guy who controls everything."

All these factors have led Bundalo to strongly consider the Buckeyes, putting the school in his top eight released in August which also includes Kentucky, North Carolina, Pitt, Michigan State, UConn, Xavier and Texas. He plans to visit North Carolina, Kansas and Kentucky this fall and choose a school before his senior season begins, and he had already taken a visit to UConn.

But despite these visits to blue bloods, the Buckeyes have put themselves in prime position to land Bundalo. Whether his teammate Peterson joins him or not is a whole different story.

"I'm from Ohio," Bundalo said. "I love this place, but I'm never going to make a decision based off of where I'm from and playing in my back yard. I am going for the best fit. I truly mean this when I say it: I think Ohio State is one of the best fits for me out of all the schools that I have lined up, and that's the reason I put them in my top eight."

"Sometimes, sometimes," Bundalo told the Dispatch when asked if the two five-stars have discussed teaming up in college. "It comes up a little bit."

Bates-Diop Traded To Timberwolves

Former Ohio State forward Keita Bates-Diop is on the move in the NBA again.

He was traded from the New York Knicks to the team that drafted him out of Ohio State in 2018, the Minnesota Timberwolves, on Sept. 27 in a blockbuster trade that sent four-time NBA All-Star Karl Anthony Towns to New York in exchange for three-time All-Star Julius Randle, Donte DiVincenzo, Bates-Diop and a protected first-round pick via the Detroit Pistons.

Although the trade had not been finalized as BSB went to press, the reported deal puts Bates-Diop on his third different team this summer. He began the summer with the Brooklyn Nets, with whom he played the final 14 games of the 2023 season after being traded from the Phoenix Suns, but he was dealt across town in July to the Knicks in a massive deal that sent wing Mikal Bridges to New York in exchange for three players and five first-round picks.

Before his brief stint with the Suns (4.5 points, 2.6 rebounds), he spent three seasons with the San Antonio Spurs from

2020-23, a period that was the best in his career, starting 56 of 156 games and averaging 6.8 points, 3.4 rebounds and 1.0 assists on 50.6 percent shooting.

Bates-Diop, who also played seven games with the Denver Nuggets in 2019-20, will now look to return to that form on the team that he spent his first two professional seasons with from 2018-20, where he logged 6.0 points and 2.9 rebounds in 67 appearances. He will now team up with fellow Ohio State alum Mike Conley in Minnesota.

Bates-Diop was a standout forward at Ohio State from 2014-18, starting 70 of his 109 appearances and averaging 11.7 points, 5.7 rebounds, 1.1 assists and 1.2 blocks per game across his four-year Buckeye career. His best year came in his senior season under former head coach Chris Holtmann in 2017-18, when he logged a career-best 19.8 points, 8.7 rebounds, 1.6 assists and 1.6 blocks per game while winning Big Ten Player of the Year and consensus All-American honors.

Other Notes And Tidbits

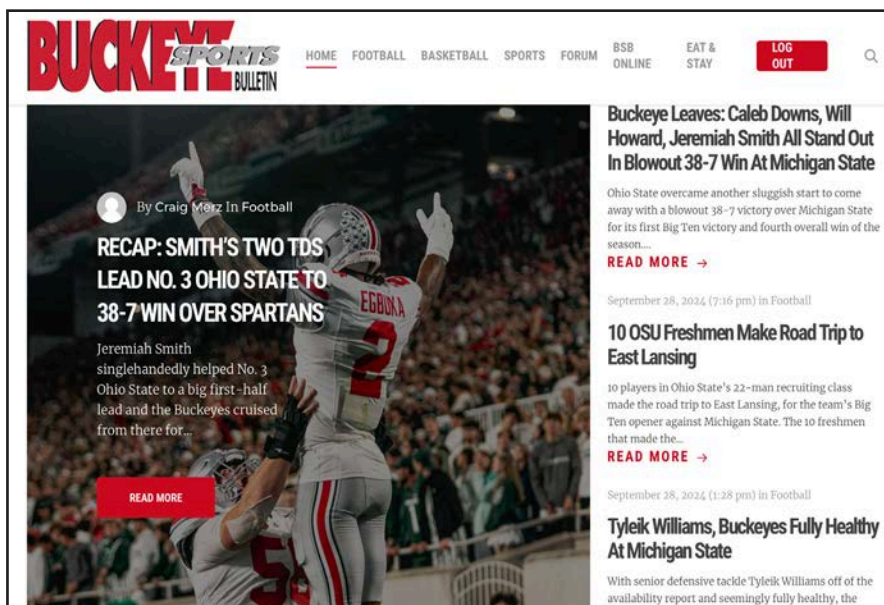
- Diebler proclaimed his team was "pretty healthy" entering fall practice, and that was made evident when the entire roster – except for sophomore guard Taison Chatman, who will miss the entire season with a torn ACL – participated in the team's first practice. Chatman was seen shooting around in practice without a brace, but Diebler said he has a long road to recovery following his offseason surgery. "Some guys are still getting back to full-go, but we're pretty close," Diebler said.

- Tip-off times have been revealed for three Buckeye games this season. Ohio State's season opener against Texas in Las Vegas will tip off at 10 p.m., while its Dec. 14 neutral-site game against Auburn in Atlanta will begin at 1 p.m., and its Dec. 21 contest against Kentucky in Madison Square Garden will start at 5:30 p.m. The game against the Wildcats, which is part of the CBS Sports Classic, will be broadcast live on CBS.

- Ohio State's Jan. 30 game at Penn State will be played at the school's historic Rec Hall, which served as the Nittany Lions' home arena from 1928-1996. Ohio State last played at Rec Hall on March 1, 1995, a 75-68 loss for the then-Randy Ayers-led Buckeyes. The women's basketball team played the Lady Lions at Rec Hall last season, an 82-69 win for Kevin McGuff's team.

- Davidson (N.C.) Day four-star combo guard Isaiah Denis (6-5, 175), who "loved" his official visit to Ohio State on Sept. 10, will announce his college decision on Nov. 2, choosing between the Buckeyes, Kansas, Miami (Fla.), North Carolina, Pittsburgh, Tennessee and Wake Forest. Denis is the nation's 62nd-best prospect and ninth-best combo guard in the 2025 class.

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Buckeyes Picked To Finish Third In Big Ten

Coming off Ohio State's second Big Ten regular-season women's basketball championship in the last three seasons, the Buckeyes are viewed as hunters rather than the hunted entering this season as it relates to the conference title.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

The Buckeyes were projected to finish third by the conference's coaches and media on Sept. 26 behind No. 1 USC and No. 2 UCLA, both of whom are set to begin their first season as members of the Big Ten. Rounding out the top five were No. 4 Maryland and No. 5 Indiana.

Both the coaches and media polls listed only their top five preseason rankings.

Ohio State got off to a rough start against the Big Ten newcomers last season, dropping a pair of nonconference games to then-No. 21 USC and No. 2 UCLA. But the Buckeyes responded by going 16-2 in conference play, dropping only road contests at Michigan and Iowa while sweeping Indiana and Maryland in the regular season.

The Buckeyes will face tough competition at the top of the Big Ten this year, set

OSU Women'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.	Stars	High School
Daria Biriuk	G	6-1	★★★★	Bell Buckle (Tenn.) Webb School

to play on the road at both UCLA and USC during an extended road trip from Feb. 5-8. Ohio State's lone game against Indiana comes on the road on Feb. 20, while Maryland is the lone team the Buckeyes will play at home and on the road, set to host on Jan. 23 before ending the regular season in Coliseum Park on March 2.

McMahon Earns All-Big Ten Preseason Honors

Beyond the team accolades, some individual Buckeyes are earning recognition as well. Junior forward Cotie McMahon was the lone Ohio State player to make the preseason All-Big Ten team on Sept. 26, earning the honor from both the coaches and media.

McMahon appeared and started in all 32 games last season for Ohio State, averaging 14.4 points and 6.3 rebounds on 46.0 percent shooting. For her efforts, she earned AP All-America honorable mention and consensus first-team All-Big Ten honors, adding to second-team honors and a Big Ten Freshman of the Year accolade after her first season.

McMahon figures to be a leader for Ohio State this season following the loss of guards Jacy Sheldon and Celeste Taylor, both of whom averaged double digits last year. Senior guard Taylor Thierry, who had 11.3 points per game last season, also figures to pick up part of the scoring load along with transfers Chance Gray and Ajae Petty.

Joining McMahon with All-Big Ten honors from coaches and media were Iowa forward Hannah Stuelke and guard Lucy Olsen; Maryland guard Shyanne Sellers; Nebraska forward Alexis Markowski; UCLA center Lauren Betts and guard Kiki Rice; USC guards Juju Watkins and Kiki Iriafe; and Wisconsin forward Serah Williams. Illinois guard Makira Cook also made the coaches' team due to a tie in voting.

For more on the All-Big Ten preseason selections, see Big Ten Notes on pages 30-31.



Cotie McMahon

OSU At No. 14 In ESPN's "Way-Too-Early" Top 25

Ohio State is considered third in the Big Ten among the conference's coaches and media, but when it comes to national rankings, the Buckeyes are still considered a top-15 squad in women's college basketball.

According to ESPN's Charlie Creme, who released his "Way-Too-Early" top 25 on Sept. 25, the Buckeyes are the No. 14 team in the country, slightly up from No. 15 in his last rankings in May. Ohio State trails No. 4 UCLA and No. 3 USC within the Big Ten, with No. 1 South Carolina, No. 2 UConn and No. 5 Texas rounding out the top five.

"Much of the Buckeyes' season will depend on how well and how quickly transfers Gray and Petty assimilate," Creme wrote. "Kevin McGuff also brought in five freshmen, led by the No. 2 recruit in 2024, point guard Jaloni Cambridge. Expect Ohio State to be a much better team in February than it is in November. In the meantime, McMahon is good enough to carry the Buckeyes and could be one of the best players in the country."

No. 18 Maryland, No. 22 Nebraska and No. 25 Illinois are the only other Big Ten teams in Creme's top 25, with Michigan State and Indiana among his first teams out. Iowa, now without former head coach Lisa Bluder or Caitlin Clark, was not listed.

Mitchell, Taylor See Playoff Runs End

The WNBA playoffs came to a quick end for Kelsey Mitchell and the Indiana Fever, as well as Celeste Taylor and the Phoenix Mercury, since BSB last went to press.

Mitchell, making her first playoff appearance despite this being her seventh year in the league, had her season end with back-to-back losses to the Connecticut Sun (93-69 on Sept. 23, then 87-81 on Sept. 25) in a best-of-three series. Mitchell played well for the Fever in the two games, averaging 19.0 points, 4.0 assists and 3.0 rebounds on 42.1 percent shooting.

Mitchell, whose three-year, \$618,000 contract expires after 2024, was noncommittal when asked if she will be returning to the Fever next season.

"It's definitely a lot of emotions and thoughts that flow through my mind," Mitchell said during her exit interview on Sept. 27. "I think everything for me is so fresh, I don't know what I need and what I'm going to do. Obviously, I've always had a home in Indy, so it could potentially be a home for me again."

Taylor's rookie season ended in similar fashion, with the Mercury dropping two games to the Minnesota Lynx (102-95 on Sept. 22 and 101-88 on Sept. 25). Taylor played sparingly in those contests, averaging just 2.5 points and 2.5 assists in 14.5 minutes per game.

While it marked a beginning for Taylor in terms of her playoff career, it potentially marked the end for one of the game's all-time greats in Diana Taurasi. The former MVP (2009), three-time WNBA champion and 11-time All-Star has not formally announced her retirement, but many have speculated that the playoff loss was the final game of her 20-year WNBA career.

"She finds a way to affect the game every time she comes in," Taurasi said of Taylor earlier this season. "She has a bright future ahead of her, and we're happy that she's wearing our jersey."

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Seven incoming Buckeyes (as well as one returning player) have received updated jersey numbers for the upcoming season. Forward Eboni Walker will make the change from No. 22 to No. 55; Petty will wear No. 1; freshman guard Ava Watson will wear No. 5; freshman center Elsa Lemmilä will wear No. 12; freshman forward Ella Hobbs will wear No. 14; freshman guard Seini Henry (known as Seini Hicks through her recruitment) will wear No. 15; Gray will wear No. 21; and Cambridge will wear No. 22.

- Penn State announced on Sept. 25 that when Ohio State visits State College on Jan. 19, it will not play at the Bryce Jordan Center, but rather at Rec Hall, the historic venue where Penn State played the majority of its games from 1976-96. The Buckeyes also played at Rec Hall last season, the first time the women hosted a game there since 1996.

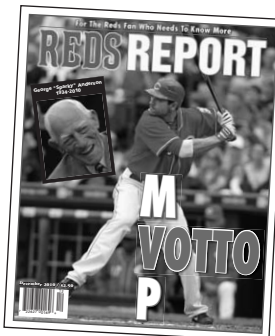
- Former Ohio State forward Taiyier Parks, who played just one year with the Buckeyes last season, has joined Pioneras de Delicias, a professional basketball club in Mexico. In her lone season at Ohio State, Parks appeared in 30 games, averaging 3.0 points and 2.1 rebounds.

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More Ups Than Downs For OSU Thus Far

Will Howard is my MVP four games into the season.

I'm not saying he's the best player. That honor would go to someone like Jeremiah Smith, Quinshon Judkins or Caleb Downs, to name a few.



I'm saying most valuable, because we knew this team was loaded heading into the 2024 season with one notable question – quarterback. Quarterback was the unknown. Yet Howard has proved through four games that he not only is an upgrade over last season, but that he is solid.

Yes, there are those plays that make you cringe. Like when he threw into double coverage more than once against Michigan State, once in the end zone when the ball fell incomplete, luckily, and another time that ended in an interception.

But overall, Howard has provided accurate passing and good decision making. What we haven't seen from him is the dangerous runner we were led to believe the Buckeyes were getting (a net of 36 yards rushing this season on 14 carries, though that includes sacks).

As far as passing goes, his passer rating through four games – the easy part of the schedule – is a solid 173.02, on the strength of completing 68.6 percent of his passes for 1,039 yards and eight touchdowns, against two interceptions.

That's deserving of an MVP award after four games.

Let's plan on another update on this after another four – Iowa, Oregon, Nebraska and Penn State. If the answer is the same, the Buckeyes clearly will be in line for a serious run at the national championship.

What's To Like, And Not Like, So Far

A plus: Buckeye fans must like the domination shown so far, even if the competition has been lacking – 195 points for, only 27 against. I challenge you to find a team anywhere that is posting such dominating scores every week.

A minus: What's not to like has been the start for the defense the last two games. Marshall seemed to move the ball at will early on against the Buckeyes. Same goes for Michigan State.

The Spartans on their first drive moved the ball 55 yards on seven plays – nearly eight yards per play – before being stopped on downs. Drive two traveled 64 yards on five plays (12.8 yards per play) before MSU turned the ball over on a fumble.

A plus: The Buckeyes were not lucky in picking up two fumbles. The Buckeyes forced those fumbles with violent attacks on the ball. That's a big plus.

A plus: Against both Marshall and Michigan State, the Buckeyes clamped things down as the games moved along. Consider this. Points allowed this season in the fourth quarter: zero. Points allowed this season in the third quarter: three.

The Buckeyes have outscored their opponents 91-3 in the second half vs. a first-half advantage of 104-24.

A minus: 22 penalties for 197 yards are too many. That's almost twice as many penalty yards as their opponents (108 yards on 17 penalties).

Case in point in how devastating this can be came on the very first drive of the game. Howard ran 4 yards to the MSU 4, setting up what should have been a second-and-goal with just short yardage to go. Instead, an unnecessary roughness call on Will Kacmarek moved the ball back to the 21. The Buckeyes eventually had to settle for a field goal.

A plus: The way TreVeyon Henderson picks up blitzes has been invaluable. Same goes for the downfield blocking by the Buckeye receiving corps.

A really big plus: The health of the Buckeyes. It's a big deal that Ohio State has reached a third of the way through the regular season without major health problems.

As Advertised, Three Times Over

Sports is filled with hype, all too often prematurely raising or inflating expectations. The Buckeyes are benefiting from three newcomers being every bit as advertised.

That starts with the freshman sensation (18-year-old) receiver Smith.

In watching Ohio State football for about 50 years, Marvin Harrison Jr. was the best receiver I had ever seen, better than Cris Carter, better than David Boston, better than Garrett Wilson, Joey Gallo or anyone else I recalled.

Well, I'm comfortable in saying that Smith already is better than Harrison. The two one-handed catches over a four-play stretch in the second quarter – the second for a TD – will be something to remember for a long, long time.

Smith has caught five TD passes and run for another touchdown, and his team-leading 364 receiving yards on 19 catches translates to 19.2 yards per catch.

Also mark down Judkins as easily meeting expectations. The former All-SEC running back is a beast, picking up 390 yards on just 47 carries – an 8.3-yard average – so far this season.

What a luxury OSU has. When Henderson (who is averaging 8.9 yards a carry himself) breaks off a long run, he can head to the bench for a rest without a downgrade as Judkins takes his turn. Barring injury, they will both top 1,000 yards rushing this season.

And then there's 2023 SEC Freshman of the Year and first-team All-SEC safety Downs. Watching him play center field in the Buckeyes' defense, we now see why he received so many honors a year ago

while at Alabama.

Read, react and pounce on plays with speed and sure tackling. That's Downs' game. What a bonus to have him at the back end of the defense.

Things Are About To Toughen up

As easy as things started, schedule wise, it is about to get tougher. The next four opponents are a combined 15-2 – Iowa (3-1), Oregon (4-0), Nebraska (4-1) and Penn State (4-0).

I watched the Alabama and Georgia game. I know the hype that will follow for 'Bama after that win. But I also believe Ohio State is more talented. If the Buckeyes win their next four to go 8-0, they should be No. 1.

Do You Really Want To Be No. 1

Normally the top seed is the best seed. But that might not be the case for the easiest path to the national championship game in this new playoff format.

Why? It's not for concern of the fourth-seeded team on the same side of the bracket. It's concern for the fifth seed, which very likely could be the third-best team in the country.

Remember, only conference champions can receive the first four seeds.

This means that the fifth seed likely

will go to a very good non-champion from either the SEC or the Big Ten. And the way the bracket will be set up, should that team advance, it will play the top-seeded team in the semifinals. (I'm assuming the fifth seed will be favored over the fourth-best conference champion.)

I'm thinking that will be a tougher matchup for the top-seeded team than a two-three or two-six matchup on the other side of the bracket.

My Top 11

As I noted two weeks ago, rankings fortunately no longer mean anything, as long as you finish the season in the top 11 nationally. That presumes the 12th play-off spot will go to a lower ranked team not from one of the power conferences.

Here's my second take of the season, still very early, on a top 11. Yes, Alabama has the best win to date. But I still think Ohio State is more talented.

1. Ohio State, 4-0
2. Alabama, 4-0
3. Texas, 5-0
4. Tennessee, 5-0
5. Georgia, 3-1
6. Oregon, 4-0
7. Penn State, 4-0
8. Miami, 5-0
9. Michigan, 4-1
10. USC, 3-1
11. Clemson, 3-1



When Being Undefeated Is Not Good Enough

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

It's hard to complain about a 38-7 conference road victory, such as the Ohio State football team registered at Michigan State on Sept. 28 to remain undefeated on the 2024 season. But with all the chatter both inside and outside the program about beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten title and winning the national championship, it's hard not to hold the Buckeyes to a higher standard and to refrain from – well, nitpicking.

I didn't find the Buckeyes – individually or as a team – as crisp against the Spartans as they were for much of the nonconference slate. OK, maybe Jeremiah Smith was as crisp. Perhaps the sluggishness should have been expected as Ohio State took a step up in class against the Spartans and the Buckeyes were also making their first road trip of the year.

But were you like me and found yourself alarmed when, for the second week in a row, a lesser team came out and marched up and down the field against the vaunted Ohio State defense? The Buckeyes ultimately used big defensive plays to thwart the Spartans. Big plays are great and can also be game-changing. However, I don't think consistently relying on big plays is optimum, especially as the competition gets tougher as the weeks wear on. Whatever happened to forcing a three-and-out and turning the ball over to OSU's high-flying offense? Remember, the longer you let the opponent hold the ball, the longer you are keeping the ball away from the star-studded Will Howard and Co.

There's no getting around the fact that the Buckeyes gave up 186 yards in the first half against Michigan State after giving up 203 yards in the first 30 minutes against Marshall. There is also no getting around the fact that Buckeye defensive coordinator Jim Knowles must be the king of the halftime adjustments. His troops gave up only 61 yards in the second half against the Thundering Herd and 60 yards to Spartans.

All right. I am going to risk the wrath of some among the faithful and admit that I am a little disappointed in the defense so far. Are future opponents going to fade offensively as quickly as those whom the Buckeyes have played so far?

On the flip side, is my disappointment caused, as previously mentioned, by the fact the Buckeyes themselves have set the bar so high?

After all, we are talking about a defense that is ranked first in the nation in scoring defense at 6.8 points allowed and second in total defense, yielding 196.5 per contest.

Quick Hitters

- As if Ohio State didn't have enough offensive weapons, here comes tight end Gee Scott Jr. against the Spartans. Scott had three receptions, one for OSU's first touchdown. That gave the veteran Scott four receptions on the season, and it gave opposing defenses one more thing to worry about.

- Ohio State's special teams had a quiet but effective evening against Michigan State, in contrast to any struggles the Buckeyes might have had the week before. Brandon Innis returned two punts for 19 yards with a long of 10, and punter Joe McGuire had three kicks for just 36.0 yards but with two inside the 20. Kicker Jayden Fielding was perfect on five extra points, nailed a 30-yard field goal and, most importantly, booted all seven of his kickoffs into the end zone after his well-chronicled struggles the previous week against Marchall.

Welcome back, Jayden!

- As I noted in the last issue, the Buckeyes

have committed one fewer penalty each game since opening the season with seven against Akron. The trend continued with just four penalties against Michigan State. As I mentioned previously, at this rate the Buckeyes will be down to zero against Penn State on Nov. 2. Of course, sometimes it's not the number of penalties but when you commit them. Just ask tight end Will Kacmarek, who cost the Buckeyes four points on the first drive of the evening.

An Intriguing Coach

I've enjoyed Mark Rea's ongoing series on Ohio State football seasons in years ending in the number four. Maybe the reason I have found the first few entries so interesting is because they have involved the early years of Ohio State football, the era with which I am least familiar.

The installment in this issue is centered around the 1924 season and the Buckeye coach at the time, Jack Wilce, who had reached a crossroads in his Ohio State coaching tenure. I really didn't know that much about Wilce, other than he was the first Buckeye coach to have a stay of any length, coaching the Buckeyes for 16 seasons, when the previous record for full seasons was just four, held by both Jack Ryder (1892-95) and A.E. Herrnstein (1906-09). Wilce's mark stood up until the 28-year stint of Woody Hayes (1951-78).

When I read these stories, I always like to look at ways that seasons and players and coaches tie in or compare to more modern times.

As mentioned previously, Wilce and his program were at a crossroads, turning in three straight losing seasons (1922-24), something that has not happened since – a true testament to the strength of the Ohio State program. In fact, Ohio State has not even had two consecutive losing seasons since 1924.

Wilce survived for another four seasons. I found a note in Mark's 1924 story relevant to the modern era and a situation that would be quite familiar to those of us following OSU football today.

"Ohio State had only once before experienced back-to-back losing seasons – in 1887 and 1888 when football was little more than a club sport," Mark writes. "Now, the Buckeyes were considered a big-time program playing in a big-time conference, and the pattern of losing was not being well-received in downtown Columbus."

"For the first time in Wilce's tenure, private grumblings from well-heeled donors and boosters had erupted into more full-throated criticism."

The Chic Harley years and the subsequent construction of Ohio Stadium had made Buckeye football a city- and state-wide phenomenon, and six decades later, Buckeye fans were not surprised when well-heeled donors and downtown types played a huge part in the demise of Earle Bruce, the seeds of which may have been planted back in the '20s.

Wilce ultimately resigned in light of changes in college football that were not to his liking.

According to Mark, Wilce was having difficulty balancing "the ideals of athletics with the increasing financial requirements needed to field a team that could compete annually for national honors."

Sound familiar?

"I figured football was becoming more and

more of a business proposition than I wanted to go into," Wilce said years after his resignation. "I saw the game being taken away from the boys. I was a faculty-type coach. I had always stressed educational aspects of the sport. This, to me, was far more important than winning the game."

"I don't want to give the impression that I'm critical of football the way it is played today. It came about through no one's fault in particular. It followed the normal trend of things and was brought about by the public's demand. I just didn't want to become an active part of that type of football, so I quit."

Wilce would be unable to fathom today's college football landscape, but he certainly saw that major changes were coming.

Wilce was 40 years-old when he retired from football. The most remarkable part of his story is that at that age he went on to pursue what turned out to be a highly successful career in medicine and as an educator. Mark details Wilce's successful post-football career in his story on pages 24-25. Wilce's varied career made me wonder if a coach today could or would attain such success in such a complex field as medicine, and I found myself pondering which if any of Ohio State's "modern era" coaches would have been most likely to do so. My vote would have been Hayes, because he was the most inquisitive with the most varied interests outside of football.

What do you think?

Quote Of The Week

This issue's quote goes to BSB's own Marcus Hartman, now with the Dayton Daily News. Marcus was talking about improved offensive line play by Ohio State and crediting offensive coordinator Chip Kelly for some of that improvement.

"I made it a point two years ago, I'm not going to write about toughness again until they beat Michigan," Hartman said of the offensive line. "I don't care how many times they say they're tough or whatever they do. I'm not going to do it. Because it's all just talk until they actually line up and start pushing people off the ball every week."

"Kelly is forcing them to work on that more than they were being forced to work on it during the season the last couple years. As much as (Ryan) Day was trying to make it happen, there was still just something missing. Maybe it was simply just the physicality of the offensive linemen. Maybe they just physically couldn't do it. But it felt like it was just not quite there (in past seasons)."

Marcus violated his pledge and talked about physicality before the team beat Michigan. But the fact remains that despite the obvious improvement so far, The Game will be the ultimate test for the big guys up front.

Quote Of The Week, Part II

This one comes from Ryan Day himself. Like Marcus, he is talking about Chip Kelly.

"Chip has a great feel for the game, calling the plays," Day said. "He always has some wrinkles in there. We have a few other ones that we held off on. It's a balance in making sure that you have your fastballs, where you're running downhill and you feel really good about them, but having enough curveballs that you can create explosive plays."

I love baseball analogies.

The Mail Report

It seems like the delivery of the BSB covering the Marshall game was better than the delivery of the previous three, starting with the Football Preview issue. There was some thought here in the office that the post office was finally getting out from under the backlog created by the Labor Day postal holiday. Many readers reported getting two, and in some cases even three, issues of BSB on the same day – all late of course.

Most Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers have been very gracious about the mail delays. There is still a hardcore group of readers who insist that we are mailing the paper out late, which I find ironic because as I am writing this the entire staff is here on Sunday evening, working feverishly to meet our 5 a.m. Monday deadline. Away night games make things difficult, but we have always been up to the challenge, and I am very proud of how good-natured everyone is about the long hours.

Two quick stories from this week alone, to illustrate the problems at the post office.

We now print BSB in Greenfield, Ind., just outside of Indianapolis. In order to get the paper out on time, we have to send the mailing labels over in advance, and to keep the mailing list as up-to-date as possible we "overnight" them to the press. We sent them on Wednesday with delivery guaranteed for Thursday. Of course, you can track overnight packages, and ours was still sitting in Columbus on Friday. On Saturday, it was shipped to Cincinnati for reasons unclear to us. After we finished the paper early Monday morning, I had to drive the 156 miles to Greenfield to deliver an alternate set of labels so we could make sure the paper went out on time. The original set of labels arrived after the paper had been printed and mailed. Yes, I got my \$30 back, but I spent \$36 in gas, not to mention the wear and tear in the middle of the night on your humble publisher.

And that was using "Priority Mail Express," USPS' premium service. You would think they would keep better track of your package, and you can imagine how they must treat your BSB, mailed at the lowly periodicals rate, as it winds through the system.

The second story is another example of service failure and is also a bittersweet story. On that same Wednesday I received a postcard from my brother and sister-in-law from when they were on vacation, postmarked in 2022. Not only did it take two years to get to Columbus, but sadly, my sister-in-law recently passed away. It made me feel like she was reaching out to me from beyond to assure me what a wonderful vacation she and my brother were having. Three suggestions for those having mail problems.

One, you can read BSB online at BuckeyeSports.com while you wait for your paper. The complete edition is posted immediately upon publication and before it even hits the mail. Two, you can upgrade your subscription to first-class mail in an envelope for just \$24 through the Michigan game or \$34 through football recruiting season in February. Or three, you can be patient. It is a virtue.

For information on the free online service or the first-class upgrade, give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or see the information on page 5 of this issue. As for the patience, you will have to find that from within.