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Vol. 44, No. 5

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 12, 2024

OSU Bullies Iowa & Star RB Johnson, In 35-7 Win

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Throughout the past few seasons, Ryan Day's Ohio State teams have often faced heavy criticism – fairly or unfairly – for their lack of physicality and toughness in the trenches.

The critique may have sprouted at the end of the 2021 season, when a 10-1 Ohio State team went into a snowy Michigan Stadium and was bullied from start to finish by the then-Jim Harbaugh-led Wolverines, allowing 297 rushing yards and six touchdowns and conversely giving up four sacks en route to a crushing 42-27 defeat, one which ended the Buckeyes' eight-game winning streak against their bitter rivals.

Those questions surrounding the toughness of Day's team returned at the end of the 2022 campaign when they fell to Michigan for a second straight season, this time at home by a score of 45-23. It was a loss that was defined by the Wolverines' explosive late-game scores but also aided by the Buckeyes' inability to stop the run again, giving up 252 yards and three scores to the same Michigan squad.

The team then followed that up with a tight 42-41 loss to Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinal, where Jim Knowles' unit gave up a whopping 533 yards of total offense in the season-ending defeat.

Those three losses sparked some negative conversations about Day and the Buckeyes, but none were as inflammatory as the disparaging comments made by then-86-year-old Lou Holtz one season later before Ohio State's Week 4 game against Notre Dame. The former Notre Dame coach argued that a Day-led team lacks the toughness and physicality needed to compete against the best teams in the nation.



SONNY BROCKWAY

JACK HAMMER — Against Iowa, Ohio State answered questions about its toughness by winning the trench battles on both sides of the ball, with the likes of Jack Sawyer (33) strip-sacking Hawkeye quarterback Cade McNamara in the third quarter.

"You look at Coach 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," Holtz said.

Day and many of his players have consistently pushed back on these types of claims –including Day's notable callout of Holtz on NBC after Ohio State defeated the Irish at Notre Dame Stadium. But this season, with championship aspirations as high as they have been in quite some time in Columbus,

many believe it's time for them to put their money where their mouth is.

Former BSB staffer and current Dayton Daily-News reporter Marcus Hartman is one of those people.

"I don't care how many times they say they're tough or whatever they do, I'm not going to (write about Ohio State's toughness)," Hartman told BSB on Sept. 25. "Because it's all just talk until they actually line up and start pushing people off the ball every week."

After three cupcake nonconference games and an easy road win over Michigan State, the Buckeyes had their first chance this season to prove to the critics that they had what it takes to excel in the trenches in Week 6.

Entering Ohio Stadium on Oct. 5 was 3-1 Iowa, which, under the leadership of 26-year head coach Kirk Ferentz and 13-year defensive coordinator Phil Parker, has long been known for its bruising style of play on both ends.

This season's Hawkeyes are certainly no different, with the team coming into

the game allowing just 13.8 points (15th nationally) and 62.0 rushing yards (fourth) per game on defense. Conversely, Iowa's offense was totaling 250.3 yards per game on the ground (10th), led by star tailback and Ohio native Kaleb Johnson, whose 685 total rushing yards ranked second in the nation heading into the matchup.

Ferentz' Hawkeyes posed a stiff challenge to Day and the Buckeyes in the toughness department, and on Oct. 5, in front of a season-high 105,135 fans who packed into a sun-drenched Ohio Stadium, Ohio State answered the bell and threw the biggest punch.

Day acknowledged in the week leading up to the game that Iowa was going to make the game a physical, gritty battle, and that is exactly how the game played out, at least in the early going.

Ohio State, which came into the contest tied for third in the nation in scoring offense at 48.8 points per contest, played right into Iowa's hands in the game's first 30 minutes.

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From The Message Board

After another slow start, Ohio State looked crisp in the second half on both sides of the ball to come away with a convincing 35-7 win over Iowa and move to 5-0 on the season. But a much stiffer challenge awaits the Buckeyes next week when they travel cross-country to Eugene, Ore., to take on the Ducks in a top-three matchup. We asked readers on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum if Ohio State has shown enough over its first five games to convince them that they can go into Autzen Stadium and defeat the Ducks, and if there is anything they feel they need to improve on before the game.

"I believe they will win. I think they're definitely the better team. They just have to show up and play four solid quarters, not just one half."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"You touched on what I think they need to do to beat Oregon, or any other team. They need to start quicker. Ohio State has the offensive firepower to play catch-up but that is something you never want to have to do. Can Ohio State beat Oregon? I think Oregon should be questioning whether they can beat Ohio State."

– Mcarr

"I think both Oregon and Ohio State are good enough to beat each other, but I was really impressed with how well Ohio State ran the ball vs. Iowa. I expect Ohio State to win at Oregon."

– Terrier Buck

"Bring it! I had an old girlfriend whose family moved from Columbus to Eugene. I visited her two summers in a row in the early '70s. Oregon was nothing back then. I think we help re-dedicate Autzen Stadium like we did when it first opened in 1967."

– Bob Cody

"The only team that will beat The Ohio State Buckeyes in Eugene, Ore., come Oct. 12 will be the Ohio State Buckeyes themselves. Prevent the turnovers and the Buckeyes return back to Columbus as the deserved No. 1 team in the country!"

– Buckeye Scott

"Obviously, the Buckeyes need to get out of the gate quickly, or at least not slowly. Don't let the Ducks march up and down the field early, like the Buckeyes allowed Marshall and Michigan State to do. Oregon will be able to finish off the drives better than the Herd or the Spartans. Will Howard needs to end his streak of interceptions."

"But in looking at Oregon's record so far, are we building the Ducks up to be something they are not? Their nonleague schedule was almost as weak as that of the Buckeyes, and they fared poorly against both Idaho and Boise State. The Buckeyes on the other hand have taken care of business against all comers, especially the nonconference foes. The Buckeyes just need to get better every week, like they have done so far. Take the crowd out of the game early."

– Poster That Harley Built

"The Bucks have shown me they can take care of the Ducks if (as Emeka Egbuka said after the Iowa victory) they have a great week of practice. We seem to be cleaning up our penalties. Now we need to eliminate turnovers."

– R1TBDBITL

"The Iowa game convinced me we can beat the Ducks. We have an embarrassment of riches, and I like what Chip Kelly is doing. Howard is getting better and better and is not afraid to use his legs. Our WRs will never be equaled. Time to make Duck Soup!"

– PeyoteBuck

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State used a strong second half to defeat Iowa 35-7 at home and improve to 5-0 on the season, setting up a mammoth Week 7 matchup against No. 3 Oregon. Here are some choices from Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the win.

Patrick Engels, BSB: I'm handing out my Buckeye Leaf to junior linebacker Sonny Styles, who may have had his best game at Ohio State to date with a team-high seven tackles, including two for loss.

Prior to the Iowa game, there was a conversation in the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum about Styles making little impact in his first four games at linebacker, but the former safety put those concerns to bed against the Hawkeyes.

Styles was a constant force at or behind the line of scrimmage for the Buckeyes' defense, often coming in for some booming hits that halted the momentum of star Iowa running back Kaleb Johnson. His most notable sequence may have been at the end of the first half, when he sprinted into the backfield and laid a big hit on backup tailback Jaziun Patterson then stopped Johnson on a screen pass one play later on third-and-12 to force a punt.

Those two tackles did not lead to any points for the Buckeyes at the end of the half, but it still helped establish a physical tone for an Ohio State defense that allowed just 4.3 rushing yards per attempt and had nine tackles for loss.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: Senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka continued his hot start to the season after an injury-plagued 2023, going for a career-high three touchdowns in Ohio State's dominant win.

Egbuka might not have had the jaw-dropping highlight plays that fellow wide receiver Jeremiah Smith had, but leading the team with nine catches, the veteran receiver was a reliable security blanket for quarterback Will Howard.

Egbuka's first touchdown was Ohio State's only score of the first half. He didn't create a ton of separation on the play, but he didn't need to. Howard delivered a beautiful throw on the run, and Egbuka made a difficult contested catch through contact right at the goal line to get Ohio State on the board. He wasn't done there, making a similar tough, contested catch in the third quarter for a 15-yard touchdown to put the Buckeyes up 28-0.

If he hadn't done so with his previous touchdown grab, the veteran receiver put the nail in the Hawkeyes' coffin with his third touchdown reception of the game early in the fourth quarter on a short 3-yard catch from Howard to put the Buckeyes up 35-0.

Through five games, Egbuka's five touchdowns are already one more than he had in his entire 2023 season.

Cameron Moone, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf will go to Davison Igbinosun. The former Ole Miss transfer has been a reliable cornerback for Ohio State the past two seasons, and his play was punctuated with his interception against the Hawkeyes on Oct. 5 in the third quarter, sealing the deal for the Buckeyes.

Igbinosun has been Ohio State's most tested corner in coverage and responded well against the Hawkeye offense. Iowa passed for just 110 yards while Igbinosun notched the lone interception of the game for the Buckeyes, picking off former Michigan quarterback Cade

McNamara from the OSU 15 and returning it 45 yards to the Iowa 40.

Igbinosun's interception was his first of the season and first at Ohio State, further cementing himself as a cornerstone contributor to the Buckeye defense in its quest for a national championship.

Greg Wilson, BSB: Defensive end Jack Sawyer gets my Buckeye Leaf in what was another very strong game for the senior. From the very first drive, the entire Ohio State defensive line was in the face of Iowa quarterback Cade McNamara forcing a lot of pressure, and Sawyer was a big part of that.

To start the second half for the defense, when the Buckeyes needed some momentum, the Hawkeyes offense stepped onto the field but weren't there for long due to Sawyer getting to the backfield again for a strip-sack, recovered at the Iowa 19-yard line. That forced fumble set up Howard's 4-yard touchdown run on the next Buckeye drive.

Sawyer finished the game with three tackles and team-high 1½ sacks. He wasn't on the stat sheet too much, but when he did get his name on there, they were big plays.

BSB Subscribers:

Buckeye Scott: Give the entire offensive line Buckeye Leaves. They controlled the line of scrimmage the entire game. 203 yards rushing and 209 yards passing. They got the job done!

Poster That Harley Built: Sonny Styles. That was his best game of the season. Maybe the best of his Ohio State career. Hopefully that is the first of many this season, including next week vs. Oregon.

Tiffin Buckeye: Emeka Egbuka, three touchdowns!

Byron McNutt: I'd give Buckeye Leaves to the officiating crew who went the whole game throwing only a few flags. Both teams are to be commended. When is the last time you saw such a hard-hitting game not marred by penalties? They let the players decide the outcome. I do think the Bucks got a few breaks, like on Sawyer's late hit on the QB during the first Iowa series and the placement of a third-down pass by Howard that was ruled a first down.

PeyoteBuck: Smith of course attracts the spotlight with his flair for performance. He is a freak of nature. But Egbuka is quietly making touchdowns with fantastic skill. Pure talent. He gets a leaf as does Styles for his breakout game.

Bob Cody: Emeka Egbuka – the senior co-captain helps lead us to victory. Sonny Styles – some pundits described him before today as "falling." Yeah, no. Jack Sawyer – another senior co-captain who helped lead us to victory. Will Howard and Jeremiah Smith – both atoned for their miscues in championship fashion. Davison Igbinosun – after having problems at Sparty, he came through big against Iowa. The O-line and RBs, Henderson and Judkins, helped us control the game.

The 7-0 halftime lead seemed bigger than it was. The undefeated Buckeyes put away Iowa in the second half, taking advantage of forced Iowa turnovers. Meanwhile, our defense generally stopped them after our turnovers.

R1TBDBITL: A leaf to Jeremiah Smith. After his fumble, he performed like it never happened. Oh, and for yet another circus catch.

OSU Good Enough Against Iowa, But ...



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The Jekyll-and-Hyde performance by third-ranked Ohio State during its 35-7 walkover against Iowa was truly stunning. There are always a few missteps sprinkled among the big plays in any football game, but I don't think I've ever witnessed one where a team made plays that I would rate at the upper regions of a 1-to-10 scale while making others I would rate near the bottom.

Let's start with first-year offensive coordinator Chip Kelly. OSU's first possession of the game was a textbook drive of 88 yards that consumed 14 plays and more than 7½ minutes. In addition to being the longest drive so far this season in terms of yardage, it featured an almost even mix of eight running plays and six passes against a team that entered the game ranked 18th nationally in total defense.

For the afternoon, the Buckeyes rolled up 412 total yards, achieving an almost total balance between the ground attack (203) and the passing game (209) against Iowa, which had allowed only one of its previous four opponents to total more than 300 yards.

But I couldn't help wondering why Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson totaled only 24 carries, including just 10 between them during the first half. And that fourth-and-2 quarterback run early in the second quarter? With Judkins and Henderson both at your disposal? Guys who to that point in the game were averaging a combined 6.7 yards per carry?

On fourth-and-2, especially with the ball only 8 yards inside Iowa territory, I would have thought there were lots of other options in Kelly's vast playbook than to line up in a shotgun and run your quarterback out of an empty backfield. Making a first down at that juncture – especially after Iowa had just missed a 51-yard field goal – and perhaps converting that possession into a touchdown would have set the tone for an easier afternoon.

Instead, it set the tone for the remainder of a disjointed first half that left the Buckeyes protecting a 7-0 lead at the break.

Will Howard had another extremely efficient day throwing the football, finishing with 21 completions in 25 attempts for 209 yards and a career high-tying four touchdowns. He also added 28 rushing yards and a touchdown on 10 carries, the most for Howard since he ran 11 times during his final game at Kansas State, a 48-24 loss to Iowa State last November.

It's difficult to criticize a performance that included an 84.0-percent completion rate and a passer rating of 199.02, but there is no doubt Howard benefits from an ultra-talented receiving corps starting with Emeka Egbuka and the continued one-handed derring-do of Jeremiah Smith.

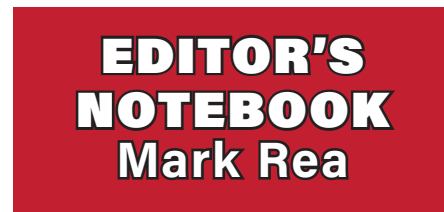
Tidbits of criticism I heard over the summer regarding Howard were that he believes in his arm strength so much that he is willing to try to fit throws into tight windows of opportunity. That was on full display against Iowa, and more often than not, he got away with it. I'm just not sure that will be the case against better secondaries like the ones at Oregon or Penn State, each of which rank among the nation's top 18 in pass defense.

I also wasn't crazy about a couple of undercooked passes, one that Iowa linebacker Sebastian Castro picked off near the end of the first half and another that Smith had to wait for early in the second half. Smith made the catch for a 53-yard gain, but had Howard put a little more air under the ball, it would have been a runaway 57-yard touchdown.

Even the OSU defense had its moments of not being fully engaged.

Iowa running back Kaleb Johnson entered

the game as the No. 2 running back in the country with an average of 177.8 yards per game. The native of Hamilton, Ohio, near Cincinnati, gave Ohio State some bulletin-board material when he told a reporter that he came from an area where you either love the Buckeyes or you hate them, and he fell into the latter category. Perhaps that opinion was steeped in the fact Ohio State did not offer the three-star prospect a scholarship, although he denied that was the reason.



"I feel like even if they offered me, I wouldn't have, like, went (there) because I feel like I want to beat them," said Johnson, who did have offers from Minnesota and Michigan State before choosing Iowa. "I'm the type of person where I don't want to be (with) the top dogs, I want to beat them. It's always a thing for me to show what I've got against the best people in the country, so that's what I want to do."

For the first three quarters of the game, the Buckeyes did their best to make him eat those words, limiting Johnson to just 48 yards on 12 carries. But after the offense scored touchdowns in rapid succession to blow open a close game into a 35-point lead, the OSU defense allowed Johnson to get loose for his team's only score, a 28-yard touchdown run with 8:07 remaining in the game.

The victory of scoring was a largely a pyrrhic one for Johnson since it came against mostly second- and third-teamers.

"I tried my best and gave it my all," he told reporters after the game. "The outcome's the outcome, so now we just have to go back and get ready for a new game."

Johnson finished with a game-high 86 yards but failed to crack the 100-yard mark for the first time this season. Ohio State now has a nine-game streak during which it hasn't allowed an opposing player to rush for 100 or more yards. That is the longest such streak for the OSU defense in nearly eight years.

Still, there were too many missed tackles, missed assignments and missed opportunities for a unit ranked No. 1 in the country in total defense.

When all was said and done, the Buckeyes handily defeated what was generally regarded as their toughest opponent of the season so far. But it's doubtful that the uneven performance against Iowa will suffice on the road at Big Ten interloper Oregon, newly installed as the No. 3 team in the nation.

Egbuka made it plain enough when he told CBS sideline reporter Jenny Dell, "If we show up the same team as we did today next week, we might have a chance of taking a loss."

The Numbers Game

• With his 71 yards against the Hawkeyes, Egbuka moved past Doug Donley (2,252, 1977-80) and into the top 10 on Ohio State's career list with 2,290 receiving yards. Egbuka needs only 43 more to jump past Santonio Holmes (2,295, 2003-05) and K.J. Hill (2,332, 2016-19) into eighth place.

• Henderson rushed for a modest 61 yards against the Hawkeyes, but that was enough to pad his career total to 3,082 and move him past Pepe Pearson (3,076, 1994-97) into 11th place on Ohio State's all-time rushing list. Henderson needs 117 more to

jump Carlos Hyde (3,198, 2010-13) and crack the top 10.

• The 35-7 decision marked the seventh time in OSU program history that the Buckeyes had beaten an opponent by that exact score. The others came against Youngstown State (2023), Bowling Green (2006), Indiana (1977), SMU (1977), Washington (1957) and Washington State (1952).

• Ohio State denied Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz the 200th win of his Big Ten career. In the history of the conference, there has been only one coach to reach the 200-win mark during his career. That, of course, was Woody Hayes, who totaled 205 victories at Ohio State between 1951 and 1978. Ferentz also has 123 conference wins, and that ranks him third all-time behind Hayes (153) and Bo Schembechler of Michigan (143, 1969-89).

• When unranked Vanderbilt scored a 40-35 upset win against No. 1 Alabama on Oct. 5, it was hailed by some as a once-in-a-lifetime achievement. As it turns out, an unranked team knocking off No. 1 isn't that unusual at all. It's now happened 20 times since 1972, including twice to Ohio State. The top-ranked Buckeyes lost a controversial 16-13 decision at Michigan State in 1974 and suffered a 28-21 upset at home to Illinois in 2007.

It's Come To This

College players pocketing NIL riches has apparently not escaped the attention of former players, some of whom were run out of the college game for accepting gifts, cash and other benefits.

In case you missed it, former Ohio State quarterback Terrelle Pryor on Oct. 4 filed a class-action lawsuit in an Ohio federal court against his alma mater, the Big Ten, the NCAA and Learfield Communications (a company that works with hundreds of schools on licensing and marketing deals) over NIL compensation he never received during his college career. Pryor's suit is similar to one filed by Heisman Trophy winner Reggie Bush against USC and the NCAA.

"For many years and continuing to the present, the Defendants have systematically and intentionally misappropriated the publicity rights and NIL of the Plaintiffs and those similarly situated and in doing so have reaped millions, and perhaps billions, of dollars from the Plaintiffs and the class," Pryor's lawsuit said.

"Meanwhile the student-athletes themselves were not only prevented from capitalizing on their publicity rights, but they were punished for doing so through the rules the NCAA forced upon them in order for them to participate."

I don't think I need to rehash the youthful indiscretions of Pryor or Bush, but I would offer that each was punished under the rules of the game during their college careers. The NCAA didn't begin allowing student-athletes to monetize their names, likenesses and images until 2021, so it escapes me why either believes he is entitled to compensation under legislation that didn't exist when they played.

Of course, Bush has already had his 2005 Heisman Trophy restored, so I suppose anything is possible.

But if these lawsuits go anywhere, I would fully expect the floodgates to open, drowning individual universities and the NCAA in the process. After all, how much NIL compensation would you think Ohio State owes to someone like Archie Griffin? You can probably start with an eight-figure number and go from there.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

OSU Moves Up To No. 2 In AP Poll

After Ohio State beat Iowa 35-7 and Alabama lost to SEC opponent Vanderbilt 40-35, the Buckeyes moved up to No. 2 in the latest AP top 25 poll released on Oct. 6. Ohio State received nine first-place votes, one of only two teams to receive any.

The Crimson Tide were coming off beating then-No. 2 Georgia 41-34 the week before and had taken the top spot in the poll, but they weren't able to keep it for long. Texas, after an off week, takes the top spot in the rankings, moving up one spot and receiving 52 first-place votes.

The Buckeyes' Week 7 Big Ten opponent is now ranked No. 3, with Oregon moving up three spots due to some other major upsets in the top 25. Penn State also jumped three spots to get to No. 4 after taking care of UCLA 27-11 at home. This is the first time ever that the Big Ten has had three teams in the top four.

Filling out the rest of the top 10 are No. 5 Georgia, No. 6 Miami (Fla.), No. 7 Alabama,

No. 8 Tennessee, No. 9 Ole Miss and No. 10 Clemson. The Volunteers dropped four spots after losing to unranked Arkansas 19-14, falling behind in the last two minutes of the game.

No. 21 Missouri and No. 24 Michigan took major hits in the rankings, falling 12 and 14 spots, respectively. The Tigers fell 41-10 to now-No. 15 Texas A&M, which jumped 10 spots in the rankings, the biggest increase of the week. The Wolverines lost in a 2023 CFP National Championship Game rematch to Washington, 27-17, and are the only team in the top 25 with two losses.

Also representing the Big Ten in the standings are No. 18 Indiana, which kept its undefeated record with a 41-24 win over Northwestern, and No. 23 Illinois. The Hoosiers are in a three-way tie for their spot in the rankings with Kansas State and Oklahoma.

Newcomers in the rankings include 5-0 Pitt at No. 22 and No. 25 SMU, which knocked off Louisville on the road 34-27, taking the Cardinals out of the rankings. The Mustangs' only loss is to No. 14 BYU, which is undefeated.

Tate Sits Against Iowa

Two hours before the Buckeyes kicked off against Iowa, it was revealed that sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate was questionable to play in the game.

Tate would go through pregame warmups fully suited up, even running through drills with the starters, but when Ohio State's offense marched onto the field for its first drive, he remained on the sideline with his helmet

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	1-5, 27-20 loss to Bowling Green
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	2-3, 45-42 win over Ball State
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	W, 49-14	FOX	3-2, 52-37 win over Appalachian St.
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W, 38-7	Peacock	3-3, 31-10 loss to Oregon
Oct. 5	IOWA	W, 35-7	CBS	3-2, 35-7 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 12	at Oregon	7:30 p.m.	NBC	5-0, 31-10 win over Michigan State
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	5-1, 14-7 win over Rutgers
Nov. 2	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	5-0, 27-11 win over UCLA
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	1-4, 52-6 loss to Wisconsin
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	2-3, 41-24 loss to Indiana
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	6-0, 41-24 win over Northwestern
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	4-2, 27-17 loss to Washington

off.

After beginning the game with two tight ends on the field in Gee Scott Jr. and Will Kacmarek, sophomore wide receiver Bryson Rodgers trotted onto the field to take Tate's place.

It ended up being a combination of Rodgers and sophomore wide receiver Brandon Inniss who played more snaps in place of Tate. Rodgers finished the game with just one catch for 8 yards – coming on a third-down conversion on Ohio State's first drive of the game – and Inniss had three catches for 29 yards.

Head coach Ryan Day used similar reasoning for keeping Tate out as he did when left guard Donovan Jackson and defensive tackle Tyleik Williams were kept out of the Western Michigan and Michigan State games, respectively.

"Carnell was available. He could have played," Day said. "It's another one of these situations where we decided to hold him. If we needed to put him in the game, he absolutely could have played, but we just felt like it was the right thing to do to hold him. Hopefully we'll have 100 percent Carnell going into next week."

With Tate sitting out in Week 6, the Buckeyes still have yet to have each of their starters take the field together in a game this season. In Week 1, linebacker Cody Simon and Jackson were out with injuries, with Jackson missing the win over the Broncos the following week as well. Week 4 was when Williams was ruled out against Marshall, and he was also held out against Michigan State, despite being available to play.

Bucks And Ducks In Prime Time

No. 2 Ohio State's Oct. 12 matchup with No. 3 Oregon at the Ducks' Autzen Stadium – the first top-five showdown in the stadium's 57-year history – will be played in the prime-time slot.

The first game between the two powerhouse teams as Big Ten foes is officially slated for a 7:30 p.m. Eastern kickoff (4:30 p.m. Pacific), with the game being televised on NBC.

Ohio State and Oregon last faced off as nonconference opponents on Sept. 11, 2021, when the Ducks handed the Buckeyes a 35-28 loss at Ohio Stadium, Oregon's first win over Ohio State in 10 tries. In that game, former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was 35 of 54 passing with 484 yards and three touchdowns to one interception, 145 of those yards and two of those touchdowns going to now Seattle Seahawks wideout Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Despite that loss, Ohio State holds a 9-1 advantage against Oregon all-time, with

the last Buckeyes' win occurring on Jan. 12, 2015, a 42-20 victory over the Marcus Mariota-led Ducks in the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship Game which gave the Urban Meyer-led Buckeyes their first national title since 2002.

The matchup with the Ducks is the third primetime game for the Buckeyes in their first six games of the season, already equaling the three primetime games the team had last season (Notre Dame, Wisconsin, Michigan State).

Other than Michigan on Nov. 29, which is set for its usual noon kickoff on FOX, Ohio State has yet to officially announce any other game times this season.

ESPN's "College Gameday" Headed To Oregon-OSU

In case Ohio State's game against Oregon couldn't get more exciting, ESPN's "College GameDay" announced on Oct. 5 that the show is heading to Eugene, Ore., to preview the top-three matchup.

This will mark Ohio State's 60th appearance on the 14-time Emmy Award-winning pregame show, the most all-time. The Buckeyes are 40-19 all-time when "College GameDay" is on hand for one of its games, with the team's latest win coming in last year's 20-12 win over Penn State and their last loss coming in Ohio State's 30-24 loss to Michigan last November.

The show was last at an Ohio State home game for the Buckeyes' win over the Nittany Lions last October, when Stroud served as a guest picker prior to kickoff.

Oregon owns an 18-12 record when "College GameDay" is featuring one of its games, including an 8-3 mark when the pregame show is on site on the Ducks' campus.

"College GameDay" now features a panel consisting of host Rece Davis and analysts Lee Corso, former Buckeye quarterback Kirk Herbstreit, former Michigan wideout Desmond Howard, former Indianapolis Colts punter Pat McAfee and former Alabama head coach Nick Saban, who is in his first year in his role on the show.

Corso has donned Brutus Buckeye's headgear 42 times in his 28 years as Gameday's game picker, the most out of any program. The Buckeyes were also Corso's first-ever headgear selection on Oct. 5, 1996, when he correctly chose Ohio State over Penn State in what was a 38-7 victory for the Buckeyes.

Chris Ward Honored Before CFB HOF Induction

Former Ohio State offensive tackle Chris Ward was honored at the end of the first quarter during Ohio State's 35-7 win over Iowa after it was revealed he would be the 28th for-

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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 last several weeks we have been looking at previous games against upcoming opponent Oregon. Football season also marked the return of the always entertaining Staff Predictions, which appear the Friday before every game. Staff members had a variety of opinions vs. Iowa. Patrick Engels had it 34-10, Bobby Gorbett had 31-6, Cameron Moone had 45-9, and Greg Wilson saw 28-10.

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

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

BSB is also offering the opportunity to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail during football season for just \$24. See the box on page 7.

Miller, Former Athletes Inducted Into OSU HOF

Fourteen former Ohio State athletes were inducted into the 2024 class of the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame on Oct. 4 and honored at the Iowa game the next day, a group headlined by Braxton Miller, Greg Oden and Gene Smith.

Miller was a member of the 2014 national championship-winning team, although he was out for the season with an injury. But he did still have a major impact on the football program from 2011-15, throwing for 5,295 yards and 52 touchdowns, running for 3,314 yards and 33 touchdowns and catching 26 passes for 341 yards and three scores in his final year.

"It means a lot," Miller told Eleven Warriors before the induction ceremony. "Being able to be here and put this nice red jacket on, being able to showcase it and being able to grow up and watch the guys that were before my time playing outside with my friends and mimicking what they do, and I was like, 'I'm going to be there one day.'"

Miller was joined by two other football players, running back Jeff Logan and linebacker Matt Wilhelm, in his induction.

Oden played just one season for the Buckeyes in 2006-07, but it was a big one, earning National Defensive Player of the Year and second-team All-America honors while leading Ohio State to the national championship game, where it would lose to Florida. He would go on to be the No. 1 overall pick in the 2007 NBA draft.

Smith is just months removed from his 19-

Continued On Page 6

mer Ohio State player to be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.

Ward spent four seasons with the Buckeyes from 1974-77, winning four straight Big Ten titles or co-championships and playing in two Rose Bowls, the Orange Bowl and the Sugar Bowl.

Ward was met by Day, who came from the sideline to congratulate him with a handshake when he was recognized at the game.

Ward was presented his College Football Hall of Fame plaque by two-time Heisman Trophy running back Archie Griffin, who was Ward's teammate for two seasons. Griffin was

joined by Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork in presenting Ward with the plaque.

Ward was a two-time All-American during his four years with the Buckeyes and was a three-time All-Big Ten first-team selection.

Ward was also honored at halftime with the rest of his teammates from the 1974 co-Big Ten champion Ohio State team.



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year tenure as the Ohio State athletic director. Smith's illustrious career with the Buckeyes was highlighted by his hiring of successful football coaches Urban Meyer and Day. Under Meyer's leadership, the Buckeyes won the first ever four-team College Football Playoff in 2014.

The most notable other inclusion in the Hall of Fame class was former Buckeye wrestler Kyle Snyder, who was with Ohio State from 2015-18.

During his four years with the Buckeyes, Snyder was a three-time Big Ten champion and three-time national champion. While he attended Ohio State, Snyder also won a gold medal in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro and two UWW World Championship gold medals.

Among the other inductees in the class were men's volleyball setter Chris Blough, men's tennis star Chase Buchanan, women's soccer's Tiffany Cameron, track and field jumper Michael Hartfield, women's volleyball setter Marisa Main, baseball star Brian Mannino, cross country and track distance runner Kathy Monard and men's lacrosse goaltender Tony Russo.

Pryor Sues OSU, B1G, NCAA Over NIL

While one prominent Buckeye quarterback earned enshrinement into the school's Hall of Fame since BSB last went to press, another filed a lawsuit against his former school.

Former Ohio State quarterback Terrelle Pryor has sued Ohio State, the NCAA and the Big Ten over denied compensation for his name, image and likeness during his college career, according to a lawsuit filed on Oct. 4 in an Ohio federal court.

Pryor's college career came to an abrupt end when an NCAA investigation revealed that he and four teammates violated NCAA rules by trading their equipment, memorabilia and autographs for tattoos and cash.

Pryor played with the Buckeyes from 2008-10 before being drafted by the then-Oakland Raiders in the third round of the 2011 NFL supplemental draft, where he would be forced

to serve a five-game suspension to begin his pro career.

Players weren't able to capitalize on NIL opportunities until 2021, and the NCAA is currently settling multiple different lawsuits that will pay former athletes dating back to 2016 compensation of a combined \$2.78 billion, but Pryor believes he also was denied compensation he earned.

"For many years and continuing to the present, the Defendants have systematically and intentionally misappropriated the publicity rights and NIL of the Plaintiffs and those similarly situated and in doing so have reaped

millions, and perhaps billions, of dollars from the Plaintiffs and the class," the lawsuit reads.

"Meanwhile the student athletes themselves were not only prevented from capitalizing on their publicity rights, but they were punished for doing so through the rules the NCAA forced upon them in order for them to participate."

The former Buckeye isn't the first to file a suit like this. He joins former USC running back and 2005 Heisman Trophy winner Reggie Bush, who is suing his former school and the NCAA, as well as multiple former Michigan players, including 2004 Biletnikoff Award winner Braylon Edwards, who are suing the NCAA and Big Ten Network, all for the same or similar reasons.

The lawsuit claims that the NCAA, the conference and the school continue to profit from the use of Pryor's likeness 14 years after he last played for the Buckeyes without the former Buckeye ever being compensated.

"Replays of historic moments from the past are a large part of the Defendant's promotional activities as well as their income streams, and former players have never been compensated for this continuing use of the names, images and likenesses," the

Brutus Level VIPs To Be Recognized

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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lawsuit said.

During his three seasons with Ohio State, Pryor threw for 6,177 yards and 57 touchdowns to 26 interceptions while running for 2,164 yards and 17 more touchdowns on the ground.

OSU Players Create New Woody Hayes Award

Ohio State's winningest head coach, Woody Hayes, and his wife, Anne, will have a permanent scholar-athlete award endowed by a group of friends and former players, it was announced by the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame on Sept. 30.

According to former Buckeye Mark George, the fund was assembled by a varied group of contributors.

"From Heisman Trophy winners to walk-ons, from coaches and trainers to team managers, a wide range of contributors came together to honor Coach Hayes and his wife Anne's legacy," George said. "Coach Hayes always encouraged us to 'pay forward,' and the effort to endow an NFF scholarship in his and her name stands as a powerful testament to their lasting influence. It reflects not only the impact he had on all of us, but also our



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

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

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.

shared commitment to fulfilling his wish for us to leave things better than we found them."

The endowment from Hayes' friends and former players will award an \$18,000 postgraduate scholarship to one member of the NFF scholar-athlete class each year. All NFF scholar-athletes are also finalists for the William V. Campbell Trophy, which Seth McLaughlin was named a semifinalist for this year.

According to the NFF, the Woody and Anne Hayes endowment becomes the 21st within the NFF scholar-athlete program. Hayes is the ninth coach to have an endowment established in his name, joining Bob Blackman, Bobby Bowden, Bear Bryant, Robert Neyland, Eddie Robinson, Darrell K. Royal, Bo Schembechler and Bill Yeoman.

"The establishment of the Woody & Anne Hayes Scholar-Athlete Award is a remarkable tribute, honoring the legacy of one of college football's most legendary coaches," said NFF President and CEO Steve Hatchell.

"The connection between a coach and his players is profound, and we are thrilled that Coach Hayes' former players have chosen to highlight the NFF National Scholar-Athlete program as a meaningful way to celebrate that bond."

Sen. DeMora Scolds Peacock In Dispatch Column

Ohio Sen. Bill DeMora (D-Columbus) voiced his displeasure with the way Ohio State's Sept. 28 game against Michigan State was streamed on NBC's streaming platform Peacock, in a guest column with The Columbus Dispatch.

Earlier this year, DeMora, who represents Ohio's 25th senate district, encompassing areas of Franklin County, even introduced legislation to prevent universities from entering streaming deals with Senate Bill 221.

Ohio State previously had a game played on Peacock on Oct. 14, 2023, against Purdue, and DeMora, a self-proclaimed die-hard Buckeye fan, was familiar with the difficulties that can come with a game played on a streaming service for the consumer, which he talked to BSB about after last year's experience.

"Saturday was a disaster for those people that didn't get to watch the game on TV for the first time since '97," DeMora told BSB. "And for those that actually paid for it as well, the streaming service was horrible. I heard nothing but complaints. It was buffering, it was delayed, the sound was horrible, the picture was horrible."

DeMora's first complaint was that many fans would have to go to a bar to watch the game since they might not have the streaming service. He said that one issue is that due to "exorbitant" fees that come with streaming the game, many bars won't be able to have the game on their TVs.

DeMora said even if bars are able to showcase the games, many will not be synced up meaning one side of the bar could be 10 seconds ahead of other broadcasts in the same room, which would then spoil the big plays for the rest of the room.

"Last year was proof that streaming and live sports do not go together at all but, unfortunately, it does not matter to the Big Ten," DeMora wrote. "The conference does not care about the quality of its product; leaders only care about the bottom line."

According to DeMora, the Big Ten's bottom line is the over \$7 billion media rights deal the conference signed with CBS, FOX and NBC, which ultimately paved the way for eight Big Ten games to be played on Peacock every year.

"But while the executives at the Big Ten get even richer, the sports fans and common consumers get screwed! Even though I may be the biggest Ohio State fan in the country, this exclusivity deal is such a blatant scam that I will not be watching the game, and I know that many Ohioans will be doing the same because this greed-fueled garbage can hardly even be considered football at this point," wrote DeMora.

The state senator said it isn't just his dissatisfaction over struggles to properly watch Ohio State that frustrates him, but the money it costs local restaurants and local media.

"The extra business brought from an Ohio State game is critical to bars and restaurants. Students who already give tens of thousands of dollars to Ohio State every year now cannot watch their classmates compete without forking over more money.

"Local media loses out on the business, which in turn hurts the small businesses that can afford to buy ads on their local affiliate but not on streaming services. This is all just another step to fully commercialize college athletics. And for what? So that a couple of out-of-state millionaires can become out-of-state billionaires."

Still, DeMora's legislation hasn't progressed much, meaning at least as it appears right now, Ohio State games on Peacock aren't going away.

Kick Returner Still Not Settled

Day and the Buckeyes have not landed on a final answer at kick returner or punt returner nearly halfway through the season. The Buckeyes have mixed-and-matched at the position throughout the first five games, with Jayden Ballard returning kicks the first two games before being replaced for the win over Marshall after making a key mistake on a second-half punt return against Western Michigan, electing to fair catch a kick that bounced to pin the Buckeyes inside their own 5-yard line.

Day called on Inniss to assume Ballard's role as the team's kick returner against the Herd, but against Michigan State it was Egbuka who was given a chance, although he did not earn any opportunities for a return as each kick went for a touchback.

The Buckeyes went back to Inniss against Iowa. Like Egbuka, Inniss had a similarly quiet day returning kicks, with a poor return of just 14 yards to open the second half. After Iowa's only touchdown in the fourth quarter, Inniss had a fair catch to bring the ball out to the 25-yard line.

Day indicated before Ohio State's game against Iowa during his weekly press conference on Oct. 1 that the team would be flexible in picking the right returner for the given matchup, taking the position game by game.

"The good news is we have different options to go with," Day said.

OSU Aggressive On Fourth Down

With Day taking on a new CEO role and offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly taking over play-calling duties, the Buckeyes have taken on a more aggressive fourth-down approach.

Through five games, the Buckeyes have already attempted to move the chains 10 times on fourth down, and so far Day's approach has paid off. Of those 10 attempts, seven have resulted in first downs.

Perhaps the Buckeyes' most daring bunch of fourth-down attempts came in the team's 38-7 win over Michigan State, when Kelly and

the offense converted on three of their four attempts, two of those ending in touchdown scores.

The first came at the beginning of the second quarter when quarterback Will Howard connected with tight end Gee Scott Jr. for a 3-yard score on fourth-and-goal, giving the Buckeyes a 10-0 lead. The second occurred during the team's first drive of the second half, when, on fourth-and-5 from the MSU 33, Howard completed a 33-yard strike to Egbuka to expand the lead to 31-7.

Egbuka said after the Michigan State game that the coaching staff's aggressiveness on fourth down was a testament to the trust they have in their players to execute in critical moments of the game.

"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," he said.

But Kelly said in an Oct. 1 press conference that the team was a little more analytical with its approach in deciding when to push the envelope.

"It's a combination of both (game flow and analytics)," Kelly said. "What are the percentages if you go for it in terms of success rate? What does that do to our team if we don't get it?"

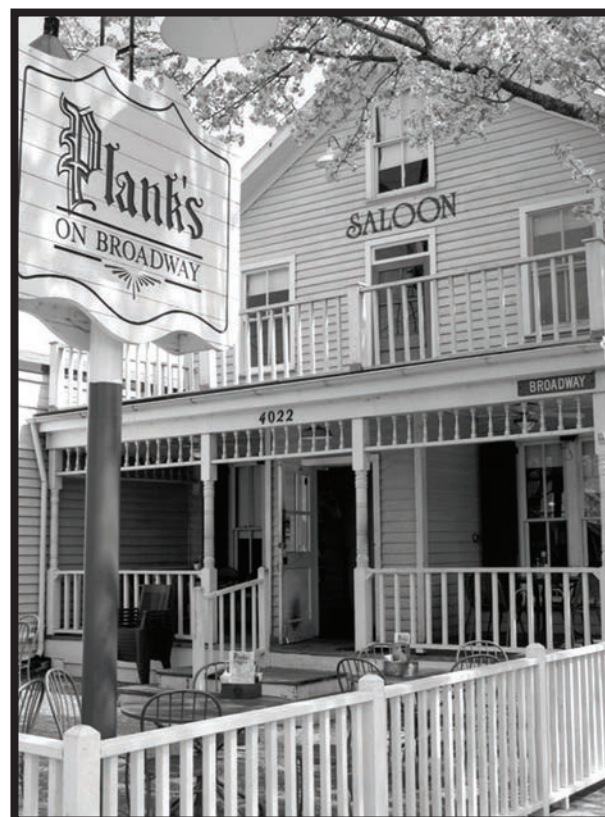
"Everybody is always, 'Hey, we're all in, we're all in.' Well, you're playing poker and you're all in, and you only have a pair of twos. They may have a better hand than you, and that's where the situation is. It's easy to sit there and say, 'Fourth down, you should go for it all the time.' Well, that's not necessarily the case."

Ohio State maintained its aggressive approach in its win over Iowa, attempting two fourth-down conversions, connecting on one of them.

Adolph, Downs, Smith Players Of Game VS. MSU

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles opted not to name a Defensive Player of the Game after the unit's poor first-half

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performance against Marshall in Week 4, but he did feel like there was one Silver Bullet who made enough plays to be worthy of receiving that honor following the road win over Michigan State.

Knowles and Ohio State's staff awarded that title to sophomore safety Caleb Downs, who, after a rather quiet statistical start to his Buckeye career, had his breakout game in scarlet and gray.

The former Alabama transfer totaled six tackles – tied for a team-high – against the Spartans, including three solo and one tackle for loss, a mark that almost matched the season total he had coming into the game of eight stops.

Downs graded out a champion at 89 percent and had perhaps his most impactful tackle later in the first half when he quickly identified a third-and-11 screen pass to Spartans wideout Aziah Johnson and knocked him down 1 yard behind the line of scrimmage. It was a high-IQ play that forced Michigan State to punt before eventually surrendering another touchdown score to the Buckeyes before the half ended.

Downs had his most impactful performance as a Buckeye to date against Michigan

State, and that may be true of Smith as well, who was named the team's Offensive Player of the Game after totaling five receptions for 83 yards and a receiving touchdown along with a 19-yard rushing touchdown, grading out a champion at 91 percent.

Smith, like Downs, helped put the game away for the Buckeyes with several big-time plays in the second quarter. He first took an end-around reverse handoff from Howard to the end zone for a 19-yard score and then hauled in a pair of spectacular one-handed catches two drives later, the first a 27-yard gain that put the Buckeyes in the red zone and the second a 17-yard score on third-and-10 to extend Ohio State's lead to 24-7 before half-time.

Ohio State named junior wide receiver David Adolph as its Special Teams Player of the Game against the Spartans. He didn't record a statistic, but he was on the field often on special teams, garnering 13 snaps for that unit.

The Dublin, Ohio, native did not see the field on offense against the Spartans, but he does have a reception on the season, a 10-yard catch in the fourth quarter of Ohio State's win over Marshall, the first of his career.

Six Buckeyes Earn NCAA Ratings Boost

As highly touted as Ohio State was as a team before the season, few might have predicted the team to have won all of its games by at least 28 points through five games. With the team's dominant 5-0 start in mind, it's no surprise to see several Buckeyes enjoy ratings boosts in the EA Sports video game, College Football 25. In total, six players saw their ratings change in the game's latest player rating update, with four of those changes being for the better.

The six changes included freshman safety Jaylen McClain's increase from a 71 overall to a 76 overall. Sophomore punter Joe McGuire also moved up five spots to a 76 overall, safety Keenan Nelson Jr. moved down one spot from a 77 overall to a 76 overall, senior offensive tackle Josh Simmons saw his overall increase from an 83 to an 85, sophomore cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt moved down from an 80 overall to a 79 overall, and senior cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. had an increase in overall three spots from a 76 to a 79.

For McGuire and Styles the increase in their overall ratings likely come from an uptick in playing time. McGuire was thought to be behind at least one of his fellow punters,

freshman Nick McLarty and Buffalo transfer Anthony Venneri. Instead, McGuire has emerged as the team's starter, where he's had a solid season launching 13 punts for an average of 41.5 yards. Styles meanwhile has become a key piece of the team's special teams unit, twice being named Ohio State's special teams player of the week, and has also started to see some time defensively, rotating in at nickel.

In five games played, Styles has registered eight total tackles and a pass deflection in the Buckeyes' secondary.

Starting tackle Josh Simmons has been a part of an improved offensive line effort that through five games has averaged 222.2 rushing yards per game, including 6.2 yards per attempt, while giving up only four sacks on the season.

In his brief playing time in games, McClain has excelled out of the Buckeyes' secondary. The New Jersey native has yet to see much playing time in closer games but has recorded eight total tackles so far and has been getting time with the Buckeyes' special teams as well.

The likely reason for Simpson-Hunt and Nelson drops in ratings is a drop-off in playing time from what was expected for them.

From The Pages Of BSB**40 Years Ago — 1984**

If Mike Tomczak's performance against Iowa previously didn't already set aside all speculation that he hadn't fully recovered from his broken leg, his outing against Minnesota closed the case.

All Tomczak did against the Gophers was complete 13 of 19 passes for 181 yards and two touchdowns in a 35-22 Ohio State victory. Six times Tomczak passed on third down, and on all six occasions, he completed passes for first downs. Tomczak's effectiveness was a major reason that punter Tom Tupa wasn't called upon until 1:36 remained in the game.

"I felt real good," Tomczak said. "We knew the curls and the flats would be open. We took advantage of that. They tried stopping the curl, and we went to the square patterns. Things just went well today offensively, especially in the passing game."

35 Years Ago — 1989

He didn't play a single down for Ohio State against Illinois on Oct. 7. He didn't fumble, didn't throw an interception, didn't miss a single tackle.

Still, OSU offensive coordinator Jim Colletto shouldered most of the blame for the Buckeyes' 34-14 loss to the Fighting Illini. The way Colletto figured it, his conservatism cost the Buckeye offense a chance to beat Illinois.

"I didn't do a very good job today," said the man in charge of calling OSU's offensive plays. "You have to let the players do what they're supposed to do and not let the bad results out there alter some of the decisions you make on the sidelines. I was guilty of that today without question."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Considering the fact that Ohio State had built a great deal of its football tradition on star running backs, it seemed rather strange that Eddie George became only the seventh player ever to eclipse the 200-yard mark in a single game for the Buckeyes.

Even more strange was the fact that George did it during a road game which was attended by two other Buckeyes who are in the 200-yard club.

Of course, assistant athletic director Archie Griffin was among those at OSU's 17-15 victory over Northwestern on Oct. 1 when George rushed for 206 yards.

But so was Raymont Harris, who was at the time the most recent Ohio State back to eclipse the 200-yard mark before George. Harris had topped off his college career the year before with 235 yards in a 28-21 win over BYU in the Holiday Bowl on Dec. 30, 1993, the fourth-highest total ever for a Buckeye back.

How did it feel for Harris to watch George run 39 times against the Wildcats?

"Very strange. Very strange, indeed," said the man who now toiled in the backfield for the Chicago Bears. "I was a fixture at Ohio State for what seemed like such a long time, and now I'm just a peon on the sidelines, watching. It's a very strange feeling."

25 Years Ago — 1999

Nobody said reality checks were fun.

Vanilla Wisconsin rolling up touchdown after touchdown in

Ohio Stadium after losses to Cincinnati and Michigan was supposed to be just a cheese-headed fantasy.

But it was the OSU defense that resembled a hunk of Swiss in allowing the Badgers to score five touchdowns and three field goals in a numbing 42-17 loss to UW in OSU's Big Ten opener Oct. 2.

Wisconsin scored 42 unanswered points after the Buckeyes jumped out to an early 17-0 lead. Badger running back Ron Dayne led the visitors with 32 carries for 161 yards and four touchdowns.

20 Years Ago — 2004

Northwestern's 33-27 overtime victory over Ohio State on Oct. 2 was historic on several levels. First and foremost, it marked Northwestern's first victory over the Buckeyes in Evanston since a 21-0 shutout in November 1958, and it was their first win anywhere against OSU since 1971, a streak of 24 straight games. It was also NU's first victory over a top-10 team since beating then-No. 7 Wisconsin in double overtime in 2000.

But the game also was historic in terms of where Ohio State's program stood early in the fourth year of Jim Tressel's tenure as head coach. After a host of close victories over the previous 30 games, the Buckeyes had fallen short in three of their last five conference contests on the road. The reason? More often than not, they simply couldn't establish a respectable running attack.

It happened the year before in road losses to Wisconsin and Michigan, and that was the case again at Northwestern.

"Frustrating? Yeah, it's frustrating because I know we have guys who can run the ball and we have guys who can block," said junior offensive tackle Rob Sims. "We just didn't execute like we're capable of doing tonight, and it bit us. We had some opportunities we didn't take advantage of. This game was right there for us, and we didn't take it."

15 Years Ago — 2009

Junior running back Brandon Saine got his first start of the season Oct. 3 against Indiana and made it a good one, carrying 17 times for a career-high 113 yards during a 33-14 Ohio State road victory. The start came at the expense of running back Dan Herron, who was sidelined with an injured ankle. Saine responded with a performance that might have shifted the depth chart at tailback even when Herron returned.

It was the second strong outing in a row for Saine, who had suffered through a pair of injury-plagued seasons in 2007 and '08. Against Illinois in the Big Ten opener, Herron and Saine were a force behind an improving offensive line, and the Buckeyes pounded away on the Illini because of heavy rains.

Saine had 81 yards on 13 carries while Herron added 75 yards on 14 carries as the Buckeyes used a new scheme with the backs getting the ball from quarterback Terrelle Pryor out of the shotgun. To that point, the results had been impressive.

"It took (the coaches) a couple of weeks to see what we do best, and then they changed the offense in a positive way," Saine said. "We can run the ball from the shotgun with the option of Terrelle being able to run. That will also help our passing game."

"I'm pretty confident in running from the shotgun. We can run

every running play we have from the gun instead of Terrelle being under center."

10 Years Ago — 2014

It was safe to say defensive end Joey Bosa had made a big impact as a Buckeye. The Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas product was a five-star prospect who chose Ohio State over several schools, including Alabama, Florida, Florida State and Michigan.

In his first collegiate season in 2013, Bosa made 10 starts and recorded 44 tackles, including 13½ for loss and 7½ sacks. He was named a freshman All-American by the Football Writers Association of America, Sporting News and College Football News and also had a good year as a student, earning an OSU Scholar-Athlete honor.

Following the season, Bosa was already being projected as a first-round pick once he became draft-eligible in 2016. Heading into his second collegiate campaign, Bosa wanted to continue his momentum.

"Take what I'm good at, keep working to make it better and focus on the moves that I have to keep working on to get them better," Bosa said of his goals as a pass rusher.

Five Years Ago — 2019

Before the season began, fans and the media alike circled Ohio State's Sept. 28 game against Nebraska as a potential pitfall on the schedule.

After all, the Buckeyes had struggled with the sub-.500 Cornhuskers at home the previous fall, and similarities between that year's matchup and road losses to Iowa in 2017 and Purdue in 2018 – a night game against a double-digit underdog from the Big Ten's West Division – were more than apparent.

That narrative was laid to rest, however, as fifth-ranked Ohio State obliterated Nebraska 48-7, in front of 89,759 fans, which marked the 371st consecutive sellout at Memorial Stadium.

"I'm proud of the way the guys came out here and played hard," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "We talked all week about what it was going to take to go win this game on the road. We kind of came in hitting on all cylinders."

"It's something that when we looked at the schedule, we knew this was going to be hard. We kind of assumed it would be something like this environment, even back in February, and so we've been preparing for this game for a while."

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State's Week 7 matchup at Purdue on Oct. 14 would be a first for the Buckeyes, as it was revealed the team's noon kickoff would be broadcast exclusively on Peacock on Oct. 2.

This would be the first-ever game for Ohio State that would be exclusive to streaming with no linear option available for the broadcast. The Buckeyes had already appeared on the Big Ten Network, CBS, FOX and NBC this season, with Peacock making it five different broadcast homes through six games.

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 35, Iowa 7

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on if he appreciates how good his defense is: "There's no question. It gives you confidence to go for it on a fourth down early in the game because you feel like your defense is strong, and that's a big part of it. To get the turnovers on a short field like that, you're constantly playing downhill when that happens. Those are huge in a game. Anytime we can do that, it's a game changer."

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz on if he thought about going for it on fourth-and-short situations in the first half: "Not really. We were in pretty good position at that point. The second one, we were obviously thinking about a fake punt, and we felt good about that until we called a timeout. We saw their linebackers nudging up to the line. They were coached on that during the timeout. I think their coach was out in the middle of the field – it looked like a high school game a little bit – but we were still going to give it a shot until we saw those guys coming to the line."

Day on if he feels the Buckeye linebackers are getting more comfortable and confident in their first year starting at the position: "You look at (Iowa linebacker Jay Higgins), he had 171 tackles last year. How many inside zones has he seen in his life? You think about where (former Ohio State linebacker Tommy) Eichenberg was, and you think about some of the great linebackers that are out there, they've played a lot. They've seen a lot. They're able to diagnose plays. The more (Ohio State junior linebacker Sonny Styles) plays, the more he's able to learn and diagnose those plays faster. (Ohio State fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon) played strong in there, (Ohio State sophomore linebacker Arvell Reese) was in the mix. So they were all involved with it. But it's good to see Sonny get more and more of those reps. Because every rep he gets is an investment in his future, and he'll play faster and faster the more he plays."

Styles on if his performance against Iowa was a step forward for him at the linebacker position: "I thought I just played free. I started doing a tradition with my grandparents where I pray with them before games, just pray for confidence. I feel like when you play with that confidence, you just play more free and just go fast and don't worry about anything. Just having a mindset of playing fast. Play fast, play free. Things aren't going to be perfect. I think the way we approached the week as a linebacker room, we had a really good week where guys were playing fast and playing downhill. We stepped into that challenge today."

Styles on what changed in the third quarter after the Buckeyes came out of halftime



Sonny Styles

up only 7-0: "We knew we had to get some turnovers. We were holding them to three-and-outs and things like that, but we knew if we could get after the ball, we could get some turnovers."

Ohio State senior defensive end Jack Sawyer on what the mood was like in the locker room at halftime: "It was good. We were playing well. Defensively, I thought we were playing really well. Obviously, they had a couple good drives, but that's going to happen against a good football team like Iowa. The offense was playing good too, just a couple of turnovers here and there, and that's going to happen sometimes in football. We were all positive in there, ready to come out in the second half and start fast, and we did. (The offense) went down and scored a touchdown, then we got a strip-sack, so we flipped that score pretty quick."

Ferentz on what went wrong on Iowa's turnovers: "One or two of them were tipped, I believe. The other one, it looked like (Iowa quarterback Cade McNamara) lost his grip on it. You've got to be really careful not to get too emotional evaluating things like that, because when you get in a game like this, things usually seem a lot worse than they are in reality. I'm sure there's some protection involved. We probably could have done a better job getting open. That's usually what goes on when you have miscues, run or pass."

Sawyer on Ohio State senior defensive tackle Ty Hamilton's strip-sack: "It was awesome. Big Ty, I think he's the most underrated player on our roster. He doesn't get a whole lot of love. He takes a lot of double teams on for us and makes our jobs easier up front and for the back end. To see him get a play like that is awesome."

Ohio State senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka on if the offense feeds off the defense playing as well as it did: "It makes it really easy on the offense when you get the ball inside the 20 and the morale of the defense that you're going against is really down because their offense just turned the ball over. Turnovers are a huge part of the game. The team (that forces) more turnovers is more than likely to come out on top at the end of the day. We had three, they had two. That's not the only determining factor, but it definitely helps. The defense really won us this game today."

Egbuka on which of his three touchdown catches in the game was his favorite: "I'd have to see them on film and see which one looked the coolest."

Ohio State senior left guard Donovan Jackson on what helps the team come out stronger in the second half than in the first: "The rule change with the iPads, that certainly helps because you can actually see what you did wrong. You can correct it. Before it was like, 'Hey, I think we did this. Let's try to do this.' Now we can actually see, 'This is what happened. Let's try to fix this.' So I feel like that's a huge help. But also having confidence in us as a team. We know that we have a fantastic defense to help us in the back end. We know that if we just keep pounding the rock, eventually TreVeyon (Henderson), Quinshon (Judkins) or any one of our backs are going to make it work. Then we've just got to stay on our blocks, make sure we're ID'd and fitted to the right people, and just execute the plays as they're called."

Jackson on if he was proud of how well the Ohio State offense was able to run the ball on Iowa's strong run defense: "When you look at what we finished with, you're like, 'All right, that's pretty nice.' (Iowa) is a great defense. They're known for not giving up a lot on the run. They'll give you an advantageous box, but they're like, 'Hey, our guys are more disciplined than your guys



Donovan Jackson

and you're not going to execute your plays.' Just being able to run our offense, have a confident front of guys who are getting after it, having great coaches that give us the techniques needed to combat the two-gapping technique. It's a really fun feeling. But we're not complacent at all. We did a lot of good things, but we also put a lot of bad things out there. We have to clean that up, so hopefully we have a great week of practice."

Jackson on if he is excited for the game against Oregon on Oct. 12: "It's one of the reasons you come to Ohio State. Obviously, conference realignment helps, but the reason you come to Ohio State is to play in big games like this. We have great respect for that team. They're well-coached and they're doing a great job over there. We just have to prepare hard and go over there and execute."

Egbuka on if he had the upcoming Oregon game circled on his calendar: "I'm not denying that there are games on the schedule that you look forward to maybe a little more than others. But the Oregon game wouldn't have mattered as much if we dropped this game to Iowa today. So we felt that same level of importance for each game that we played every week. First, it was Akron, then it was Western Michigan, then Marshall and so on and so forth. So Oregon just happens to be next on the list. We were looking forward to that all year, and we're just excited to be able to go over there."

Ohio Native Johnson Fails To Back Up Words

Continued From Page 1

After getting out to a quick 7-0 lead thanks to an impressive 14-play, 88-yard first drive that lasted 7:36 and ended with a 14-yard Emeka Egbuka score, the Buckeyes' offense stalled out.

They failed to score on each of their next four possessions of the half – a sequence that included a turnover on downs, a Jeremiah Smith fumble and a Will Howard interception – and racked up 111 yards to go scoreless the rest of the half.

“We had two turnovers, didn’t convert on the fourth down. I thought we worked hard trying to score there, and then the last four minutes of the first half, we didn’t do that,” Day said of the offense’s first-half performance.

Ohio State’s first-half offensive struggles turned the game into more of a field-position battle than a track meet, a type of game that the Buckeyes have struggled to find success in during the past. But unlike in previous years, Ohio State’s defense, specifically Larry Johnson’s front four, was ready for the challenge.

The Buckeyes’ first order of business on defense was to stop the explosive Kaleb Johnson, who in the week leading up to the game made headlines in Columbus when he said that despite growing up just over 100 miles away from Ohio State’s campus in Hamilton, Ohio, he did not want to play for the Buckeyes coming out of high school, but rather defeat them.

“Even if they offered me, I wouldn’t have gone,” Johnson said on Oct. 1 when asked about the Buckeyes. “I want to beat them. That’s my goal.”

It is unknown if that quote served as any motivation to those within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center during the week leading up to the game, but regardless, those on the defense said they were excited to take on the challenge of defending the All-Big Ten tailback and the entire Iowa running game.

“Yeah, we did,” senior defensive end Jack Sawyer said after the game when asked if he enjoyed the challenge of playing against a team that likes to run downhill. “We knew they were going to be a good team coming in here. They were going to run their stuff. They’re a veteran group of guys. We love going against teams like that, that want to run the ball and challenge our manhood. We were ready, and I thought we did a great job.”

As Sawyer alluded to, he and his teammates took that challenge to heart. In the first half, Johnson did not see much daylight, with each of his eight runs going for 5 yards or less, a 19-yard total that gave him just a 2.4-yards per carry average entering halftime.

The Buckeyes mostly continued that dominance coming out of the locker room. Aside from two 28-yard gains – one of which went for a touchdown against the Ohio State second-string defenders in the fourth quarter, Iowa’s lone score in its 35-7 defeat – Johnson was held to carries of -2, -1, 4, 3 and 7 in the final two quarters, an uncharacteristic performance for the Hawkeye running game that put the senior’s final line at 15 carries for 86 yards and a touchdown, his



SONNY BROCKWAY

OUT OF MY WAY – Iowa entered the Oct. 5 game allowing a stingy 62.0 rushing yards per game, but right guard Tegra Tshabola (77) and center Seth McLaughlin (56) helped create holes for the Buckeyes to rush for 203 yards on a 5.1 average.

lowest rushing total in the first five games this season.

Sawyer said after the game that his defense’s dominance against Johnson and the Hawkeyes’ rushing game will serve as an important tone-setter for the rest of the season in a physical Big Ten Conference.

“It was good. He’s a big, physical back, a good running back,” he said. “Going against a guy like that, especially early on in the season, is big with him coming in here leading the Big Ten in rushing. I thought we did a great job on him all day long, and I think it’s going to continue the rest of the season.”

Day said that Ohio State’s stifling defense helped to make Iowa one-dimensional, often forcing them into long pass situations on second and third downs. He thought that with Iowa and former Michigan quarterback Cade McNamara – who had started for the Wolverines during their 2021 win over the Buckeyes – dropping back to pass more than they may have wanted to and the Hawkeyes’ offensive line worn down, more opportunities were created for Ohio State’s best pass rushers to create some havoc in the second half.

The Buckeyes’ front four did just that, registering a pair of crucial strip-sacks against McNamara after halftime, the first by Sawyer in the beginning of the third quarter that put the Buckeyes’ offense at the Iowa 19-yard-line, and the second by Ty Hamilton to begin the fourth period that put Ohio State at Iowa’s 27.

Both of those recoveries turned into Ohio State touchdowns, spurring the team’s second-half onslaught, outscoring the Hawkeyes 28-7 in that span.

“I don’t know if I mentioned this (during my Oct. 1 press conference), but when you come into games – especially for guys like Jack and JT (Tuimoloau) – there’s this, ‘Well, how many sacks are you going to get?’ ” Day said after the game.

“Well, if they’re running the ball every play, it’s hard to get sacks. And so what do you do? You stop the run and then force them to go down by a couple scores. We wish we had done that a little bit sooner, but we forced them to throw the ball. And then here come the sacks, because now there’s opportunity. And I think they did that and saw some big plays happen.”

Running Game Also Sets Tone

While Ohio State’s defensive line bullied their way to a dominant performance, the same can be said for the big men on the opposite end of the ball.

Much like on the offensive side, Iowa’s defensive line posed a stiff challenge for the Buckeyes’ front five, one they had yet to encounter so far this season. Entering the matchup, the Hawkeyes’ defensive front was among the best at stopping the run, giving up just 62.0 yards per game on the ground, a mark that ranked fourth in the nation just behind Ohio State’s 61.8, as well as an impressive zero rushing touchdowns allowed through four games.

During the week leading up to the game, Iowa’s excellence in stopping the run caught the attention of offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, who said on Oct. 1 that Iowa would be the best-coached defense the Buckeyes will face all season.

“It’s a challenge that you get excited about if you’re a real football guy, going against somebody like Coach Parker,” Kelly said.

But when the two units put their pads on and lined up against one another on Oct. 5, it was the Buckeyes once again winning the battle in the trenches.

Ohio State’s veteran front five of – from left to right – Josh Simmons, Donovan Jackson, Seth McLaughlin, Tegra Tshabola and Josh Fryar were playing just their third game together as a full unit after Jackson missed the first two games due to injury, and they seemed to put it all together against the Hawkeyes.

They helped pave the way for star running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins to rush for a combined 139 yards on 24 carries, an efficient 5.8-yard average, leading what turned out to be a 203-yard, 40-carry (5.1-yard average) and one-score effort on the ground from the offense for the entire game, and they had great pride doing it.

“Just having that mindset and that physicality that running the ball is kind of a badge of honor,” Jackson said of the effort. “You want to run the ball. You want to get after it. You want to see your running backs get down the field, and that’s a sense of pride you have.”

Howard, who added the Buckeyes’ lone rushing score of the game in the third quarter and finished with a season-high 28 yards on the ground on 10 carries, said his offense had committed throughout the week to playing a physical brand of football to match Iowa’s strong defense, a mentality that he thinks was led by his offensive line.

“That was a huge emphasis coming into this game,” Howard said. “We knew we needed to be physical, play downhill football and go at them. Our O-line took that challenge and ran with it.”

“Those dudes are bad SOBs. They are coming downhill and rocking people off the ball, and I think they are playing really good football. They’re just continuing to get better every single week. Our O-line is playing at a really, really high level right now and across the board. I’m really proud of those guys.”

Day seemed to agree with this assessment after the game, while also dishing out credit to Kelly, offensive line coach Justin Frye and both Judkins and Henderson.

“That was the challenge: run the football, stop the run,” Day said. “And it starts with the guys up front. I thought the offensive line played hard. I thought Justin prepared them. The plan was good with everybody on the offensive staff. Chip put a good game plan together, called a good game. I thought the running backs ran hard again – I mean, physically hard.”

Similar to the defense, Ohio State’s success in the offensive trenches also helped the unit run with more efficiency and urgency in the second half.

Day said Ohio State’s ability to consistently run for positive gains allowed it to be more balanced as the game went on, specifically early in the second half when the Buckeyes began to create some separation from the Hawkeyes. He thinks those early second-half drives – which included a com-

bined nine rushes and seven passes on their first three touchdown drives in the third quarter – served as an example of just how good this group can be if they can put it all together, which they believe starts with establishing the rush.

“We always want a good mix,” Day said. “When the runs are hitting for 4 and 5 yards and the balls are being completed, that makes it easier. I felt both of those drives were well orchestrated, well designed and well executed. I think that’s when we’re at our best. When you feel like, ‘OK, you have some run, you have some pass, you’re converting on third down,’ that’s what we’re capable of, and that’s what we expect.”

But Jackson said his group’s success came in large part because of the way Ohio State’s defensive line was playing. The veteran left tackle explained that he and his offensive line teammates often feed off their defensive counterparts while they watch that group make some game-changing plays from the sidelines, as it gives them some added energy needed to keep the domination on both sides going.

Jackson thinks this goes both ways, forming a symbiotic relationship between Johnson’s defensive line and Frye’s offensive line that could lead to some special things down the road for the two units.

“If we have a great first drive, the first person that comes over is Tyleik (Williams) or one of the other D-linemen,” Jackson said, “because we have great battles in practice, so they know what we’re capable of. Tyleik will dap me up, or Coach (Johnson) will come over like, ‘That’s it right there.’ So we

just feed off each other.

“Then in the middle of drives, Quinshon is like, ‘That’s a great block right there, I’ve got to do this.’ Or I’ll be like, ‘Quinshon, that’s a great run, I’ve got to do this. It could spring you over here.’ We’re just trying to feed off each other, make sure that we’re headed in the right direction in terms of what we’re doing because we know that the coaches are going to put us in the right spot.

“But it’s up to us to execute it. Having that brotherhood, it’s not just a slogan or anything like that. We honestly really do care about each other, and we just want all of us to succeed to the best of our abilities.”

On To Oregon For Top 3 Showdown

Ohio State’s blowout win over Iowa marked a significant steppingstone for the program as the Buckeyes continue to embark on what they hope ends up as a championship-winning 2024 season, but a much steeper challenge awaits them in Week 7 when the Buckeyes pack their bags for what should be one of the toughest road trips they have faced in recent years.

For just the second time in its history – the first occurring 57 years ago in 1967, the first season Oregon’s Autzen Stadium opened – Ohio State is traveling over 2,400 miles west to Eugene, Ore., to take on the No. 3-ranked Ducks at Autzen Stadium for what will be the first conference game between the powerhouse programs since the Big Ten officially expanded to 18 teams this summer.

Ohio State’s Oct. 12 battle with the

Ducks, who also sit at 5-0 on the season under the leadership of head coach Dan Lanning and sixth-year quarterback Dillon Gabriel, comes with perhaps as much intrigue as any game this 2024 regular season, and that hype has only grown in the last few weeks after the game was announced to be a primetime 7:30 p.m. kickoff (4:30 pacific time) on NBC, with ESPN’s “College Gameday” coming to town in the early morning hours.

The matchup between the Ducks and Buckeyes carries major Big Ten and College Football Playoff implications, not to mention major bragging rights for former Oregon-turned-Ohio State staffers Kelly and running backs coach Carlos Locklyn. But despite all of this hype, Day and his team chose not to talk about it often during the early weeks of the season.

That all changed when the Ducks officially became the next team on Ohio State’s schedule following the win over Iowa. Despite being just about a half hour out from shaking hands with Ferentz at midfield, the road trip to Eugene, Ore., had already caught Day’s attention.

“Here’s a team right there that feels like they got challenged and they answered that,” Day initially said when asked a question about his team controlling the line of scrimmage. “But as you can imagine, it didn’t take too long for us to set our focus on Oregon. Our focus is, when we leave the locker room today, that we’re already starting on Oregon. But all that being said, we will watch the film tomorrow. We’ll learn from it. We’ll call out the champions, identify those, and make

sure that we recognize the hard work that was done to go win this game.”

Ohio State’s focus is now squarely on getting ready for the heavyweight battle with the Ducks, and with that comes many hours in the film room and practice field to make the necessary improvements.

Egbuka, a Steilacoom, Wash., native who said the Oregon game will be somewhat of a homecoming for him, feels he and his team must devote much of the upcoming week to identifying any weaknesses in film and working out the kinks in practice. According to the senior, anything less will set the Buckeyes up for failure on the road.

“You can’t be oblivious to the fact that you have weaknesses,” Egbuka said. “If we go into Eugene and we’re the same team that was here today and we didn’t improve throughout the week, there’s a good chance that we might lose. So we have to continue to improve throughout the week. You just continue to build week after week, and at the end of the year, you’ll have something special.”

Regardless of how Ohio State prepares, those within the locker room know this has been a matchup that they have circled on their calendars for quite some time.

“I’m super excited,” Sawyer said. “I can’t wait to go compete against a team like Oregon. Going behind enemy lines, we love that, so we’re ready for a heavyweight bout.

“I think we’re ready. I think everybody’s ready in the whole program. We’re really excited for it. I can’t wait, and we can’t wait to get back to work this week.”

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Egbuka's Career Day Lifts Buckeyes In Win

After strong performances in Ohio State's 49-14 win over Marshall and 38-7 win over Michigan State, it seemed as though senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka had returned to his highly productive sophomore form. In Ohio State's 35-7 win over Iowa, the veteran receiver looked as though he had reached new heights.

Egbuka didn't necessarily stretch the field with long receptions, but he certainly showed up when the team needed him the most in the red zone. He finished the game with a game-high nine catches for 71 yards and a career-high three touchdowns.

Egbuka's standout performance is just the latest addition to his impressive senior résumé that already includes five touchdowns on the year and 433 yards receiving. In just five games, the five scores he has accumulated for the Ohio State offense are one more than he was able to manage in his entire 2023 season when he was slowed down with an injury.

In what was a bit of a down junior campaign plagued by an ankle sprain he suffered in the middle of the season, Egbuka failed to find the consistency he had become known for in a 1,151-yard receiving season in 2022.

Now looking fully healthy for the Buckeyes, Egbuka has been the ultimate security blanket out of the slot for quarterback Will Howard, averaging six catches and a touchdown per game.

The consistency and reliability that he

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

has provided to the Buckeyes so far have not been lost on head coach Ryan Day.

"I think Emeka is one of the best receivers in the country," Day said after the win over Iowa. "It hurt him last year to have the high ankle sprain. But you think about where he was the year before and now what he's doing, you just see a complete player. He's the captain of our team. He's a warrior. He does all the dirty work, like he did in the Michigan State game. But then to see him come back and have three touchdown catches – and all three of those were contested – was huge."

Egbuka had the team's first and only touchdown of the first half on the Buckeyes' opening drive when Howard found his favorite target of the day right at the goal line. Though he was well-covered by Iowa cornerback Quinn Schulte, Egbuka made a tough, contested catch, as his momentum kept him just beyond the goal line before he was pushed out of the end zone.

The 14-yard touchdown grab was a sign of things to come. Later in the game, Egbuka had what was possibly a more difficult catch to make when linebacker Kyle Fish-

er allowed him no separation, but Howard was able to place a perfect ball on a fade to the left of the end zone, where only Egbuka could catch it.

He made the savvy, veteran move to show his hands late, so the defender didn't know the ball was coming until it actually had gotten there, and he maintained possession through contact to give the Buckeyes what was an insurmountable 28-0 lead on his 15-yard score.

Just for good measure, he also added a 3-yard touchdown less than five minutes later when he made another difficult catch seem routine on a jump ball in the end zone.

According to Egbuka, with a shrunken field and much less space to operate, tough catches are the name of the game in the red zone.

"We talk about that in practice. There's no really wide-open pass when it comes to the red zone," Egbuka said. "There's limited field, more defenders in the air, all of that type of stuff. Every catch in the red zone has to be a good one, a well-contested one. That's just how it turns out. So it's up to the quarterback to trust the receiver and put it in the spot, which Will did. It's up to the receiver to make a contested catch, because there's not going to be an uncontested catch in the red zone."

Although Egbuka is mainly uninspired by any of his own statistical achievements, he was pleased with the three touchdowns he scored against an elite Iowa defense.

"It was really cool," Egbuka said. "It was fun. It was a good experience for me. You try not to pay too much attention to the stats because they come and go, but having a three-touchdown game is something that I'm proud of. Just a shout-out to (offensive coordinator Chip Kelly), obviously the O-linemen for blocking it up right and ultimately my quarterback for putting it where it needs to be."

Smith Still Sensational Against Hawkeyes

In what has become a pretty routine story for the Ohio State receivers room, Egbuka wasn't the only receiver to make a significant impact in a dominant win. Standout freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith had yet another explosive day both catching passes and picking up yards on the ground.

Smith's stat line of four catches for 89 yards and a touchdown with an additional 14 yards gained on the ground is par for the course for what has been an unbelievable start to his collegiate career.

Smith added to his already chock-full highlight reel against the Hawkeyes. After he made a rare mistake in the first half, ending what had been a successful Ohio State drive with a fumble at the end of a 23-yard catch, Smith came back with a vengeance in the second half.

In need of an explosive play to get out of what had been a bit of a slow start to the game, Smith gave the Buckeyes' offense exactly what it needed on a 53-yard reception on third-and-6 in the first drive of the second half.

Even with two Iowa defenders covering him downfield, all it took was a well-executed double move for Smith to spring himself

wide-open deep into Hawkeye territory. If Howard had led Smith a little better, the receiver could have been celebrating in the end zone to finish the play, but instead, the freshman was tackled at the 4-yard line.

It was probably better that Smith was forced down there, because just one play later he flashed his seemingly superhuman abilities, using only one hand to make the grab in the end zone, giving Ohio State a 14-0 lead.

Smith's amazing one-handed grab, which for many players would be their best catch of the season, was likely his third-best one-handed catch in the last two weeks.

The incredible bounce-back series from Smith after having fumbled just one quarter prior isn't such an unfamiliar sequence. In his first collegiate game against Akron, Smith had a similar rocky start, dropping his first target and committing a false-start penalty on the first drive of the game before going on to bring in six catches for 92 yards and two touchdowns in his debut.

According to Egbuka, Smith's on-to-the-next play mentality isn't so much a product of the encouragement he receives from the team's leaders but more of a result of his own maturity.

"Jeremiah is not one you really have to encourage," Egbuka said. "He's harder on himself than anybody could possibly be. So after that fumble, you kind of give him the space. I'm kind of the same way. I don't really want to talk to too many people out there after I fumble. Then he bounces back and has a one-handed catch. That's just the kind of person he is, his mentality going into things. He doesn't sulk. He doesn't get down on himself. He's frustrated, but then he moves on to the next play, and he's able to make a big play like he did."

Perhaps Smith's other catch in the game won't be as memorable to Buckeye fans as the first three, which resulted in game-altering plays, but he still put his athleticism on full display with his fourth and final grab of the game.

Late in the third quarter, on third-and-11, Smith caught a pass from Howard 5 yards in front of the first down marker before he turned around to find himself surrounded by Hawkeye defenders. Smith backed himself up 2 yards behind where he caught the ball before using a juke move that made the two Iowa defenders run into one another. Smith was stopped 2 yards short of the line to gain, but his progress allowed Day to keep the offense on the field on fourth-and-2, which they would convert, going on to score a touchdown on the drive.

With all of the honors and praise Smith has received, perhaps the thing most indicative of Smith's arrival as a superstar in just his freshman season is the trust Day shows in him, even after mistakes made.

"This is somebody who practices hard every day," Day said. "He's avoided distractions up to this point. He stays disciplined. I know that fumble is going to absolutely kill him. It's going to bother him. I think that's what makes him great. But he also has a lot of confidence, and we have a lot of confidence in him. We go right back to him and know what he's capable of. He's got a great coach in Brian Hartline. He's got a

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Going into the game, Iowa seemed to have the upper hand when it came to its running game against Ohio State's strong defense. No matter how good the Buckeyes' defense was, it seemed like the only thing they would be able to do with one of the nation's leading rushers in Kaleb Johnson would be to slow him down as much as they could. But for almost all of the game, OSU was able to do much more than just slow down Johnson, who came into the game with 685 yards in four games.

Up until a third-quarter run on which he broke free for 28 yards, Johnson had just 17 yards on nine rushes, an average of 1.9 yards per carry. The Buckeyes had effectively taken him out of the game. The fact that he is Iowa's only major offensive weapon might have made it an easier task since quarterback Cade McNamara doesn't present much of a deep passing threat. But the defensive line and linebackers for Ohio State were able to fill gaps effectively and keep Johnson as a nonfactor in the game other than two runs.

His final line of 15 carries for 86 yards and a touchdown is a bit deceptive since 56 of his yards came on two of his runs, one of which was against Ohio State's second- and third-team defenders, but with those taken out of the equation, he had just 2.3 yards per carry, which would have been tough to predict going into the contest.

What Didn't Work

In the first half of the game, Iowa was able to keep the score close. When the two teams went into the locker rooms at halftime, the Buckeyes led just 7-0. Had someone been flipping between channels and catching only bits and pieces of the Ohio State game, they might have seen the offense having no trouble moving the ball downfield against a strong Hawkeye defense. What they might have missed were two first-half turnovers.

At times, Ohio State's offense was a little sloppy with the ball. First, it was a turnover on downs with quarterback Will Howard attempting to run for 2 yards out of the backfield against a unit that was giving up 62.0 rushing yards per game, and he was stuffed behind the line to gain.

Next, it was freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith making his first mistake since the first drive of the season when he dropped his first target and had a false-start penalty. This time it was on a 23-yard catch that Smith messed up. He left the football unprotected with likely All-America

linebacker Jay Higgins coming at him, who was able to punch the ball out and recover his own forced fumble.

Howard had a turnover of his own later in the second quarter when he tried to throw a deep ball to senior receiver Emeka Egbuka that was short and intercepted by Iowa's Sebastian Castro, Howard's third straight game throwing an interception. He also had trouble with a snap in the third quarter that he was able to dive on top of before the Hawkeyes could get to it.

As they did in the first four games of the season as well, Ohio State was able to clean it up in the second half and scored four more touchdowns, but it was a close game early on because the Buckeyes were unable to take care of the ball in the first 30 minutes.

Play Of The Game

If you're talking strictly about how cool a play looked, the play of the game was Smith's one-handed touchdown catch, the second score in two weeks that he needed only one hand for. But in terms of game impact, the play of the game was actually immediately after Smith's touchdown. When Iowa got the ball back for its first drive of the second half, the Hawkeyes were still keeping the game close, thanks in large part to their defense getting turnovers. But whether they would be able to have a long drive down the field to keep the ball away from the Buckeyes offense was in question, and senior defensive end Jack Sawyer had an answer very quickly.

On the first play of the drive, he was able to get into the backfield – a place he's been very often this season – and get to McNamara to punch the ball out, the loose ball recovered by Cody Simon. The ball was recovered on the Hawkeyes' 19-yard line, setting up Ohio State for another quick score that it needed just three plays to accomplish, going up by three touchdowns on Howard's 4-yard scamper into the end zone.

If the wind had not come out of Iowa's sails with Smith's quick touchdown to begin the second half, Sawyer made sure they were demoralized right after with his strip-sack.

— Greg Wilson

great mentor in Emeka Egbuka. But he also came in with a great work ethic and a great mindset."

Mistakes Plague First-Half Offense

The final 35-7 score won't show some of the uneasiness probably felt by Buckeye fans at halftime in what was a one-possession game at the time. Despite gaining 199 yards, good enough for 6.2 yards a play in the first half, Ohio State had just seven points to show for it when the teams went to their locker rooms. Part of this was because of the slow pace at which the Hawkeyes played on the offensive side of the ball, resulting in Ohio State only having five possessions in the entire first half, but it was also due to some carelessness with the football.

In the team's five first-half possessions, one ended in a touchdown, one ended in a punt, one ended in a turnover on downs, and the other two ended in turnovers.

The Buckeyes, who had previously committed only two turnovers all season coming into the game, lost their first fumble of the year when the ball was punched out of Smith's possession by Iowa linebacker Jay Higgins. Several Buckeyes seemed to have a chance to recover the fumble but couldn't quite come up with it and Higgins recovered the loose ball.

The Buckeyes' previous drive ended in a similarly frustrating fashion when on fourth-and-2, Howard was stopped 1 yard short of a first-down conversion on a failed quarterback draw.

Later in the half, starting with the ball at their own 45-yard line and considering how well the unit moved the ball to that point in the game, it seemed almost cer-

tain that Ohio State would run a successful drive with 1:13 remaining in the half to get into junior kicker Jayden Fielding's field-goal range. Instead, on the second play of the drive, Howard underthrew a deep ball to Egbuka, and the ball was intercepted by Hawkeyes defensive back Sebastian Castro.

Iowa didn't have any consistent offensive production in the first half to make the Buckeyes pay for their mistakes, but at halftime, the game was much closer than most fans or experts might have expected.

But Ohio State's offense eventually woke up, and whatever mistakes plagued the team in the first half were put in the past in the second half, when the unit scored touchdowns in each of its first four possessions. According to Howard, the key to the unit's bounce-back performance was the belief they had in each other.

"The confidence that I have right now, especially with the guys I have around me, stuff like that, is not going to shake me," Howard said. "I've done a good job of that thus far this season. Obviously, you don't want to have the pick there and the turnovers. You have to clean that up. In the moment, what you have to do is move on. I did a good job of that, and we as a team did a good job of that."

Buckeyes Wreak Havoc With Turnovers

One major factor for Ohio State being able to light up the scoreboard in the second half was the incredible field position the defense was able to secure for the offense. Opening the second half with three straight turnovers forced, Jim Knowles' unit allowed the Ohio State offense to start each ensuing possession inside Iowa territory.

While the first half was in some ways an equally dominant showing for the defense, having given up no points and for the most part shutting down the Hawkeyes' powerful rushing attack, the second half was the explosive punch the team needed to make for a stress-free closing 15 minutes.

The turnover party started when senior defensive end Jack Sawyer strip-sacked Iowa quarterback Cade McNamara, and the ball was recovered by fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon to give the Buckeye offense an immediate chance in the red zone. For Sawyer, the turnovers created by the defense almost have a snowball effect as each one increases the unit's energy.

"It's a lot of fun," Sawyer said. "When you're playing like that and you're creating turnovers, getting off the field with big plays like that, it sparks the offense, it helps us and gets us fired up."

Senior cornerback Davison Igbinosun halted what looked like a promising Iowa drive when he had one of the easier interceptions of his career on a tipped pass that fell softly in his arms. There was enough of a lane to return the intercepted pass 45 yards to the Iowa 40-yard line.

The third turnover in as many drives forced by the Buckeyes came on another strip-sack. This one was forced by senior defensive tackle Ty Hamilton, who slapped the arm of McNamara just before he could get a pass off, which knocked the ball loose and was ultimately recovered by junior defensive end Kenyatta Jackson.

According to Day, the turnovers the Buckeyes forced aren't just a product of the defense's savviness, but the difficult situation the team put the Hawkeyes in, having to pass the ball to stay competitive in the

game.

"I think any defense would tell you that they work on poking the ball out, and our guys have done a good job of that," Day said. "The quarterback is usually the most vulnerable guy, so the strip-sacks are huge. We had two of those today. The interception was well done. But again, when you force a team to play one-handed, now you have more opportunity to get turnovers, so that's big."



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Ball-Hawking Buckeyes Take Down Iowa

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

From an unforgiving defense to the magical play of Jeremiah Smith, the quiet three-touchdown performance of wide receiver Emeka Egbuka and the five scores produced by quarterback Will Howard, third-ranked Ohio State was able to pull away from Iowa in the second half for a 35-7 victory before 105,135 fans at Ohio Stadium on Oct. 5.

Howard threw four touchdown passes, Smith had another highlight catch and the defense forced three turnovers that led to 21 points to turn a tight game into a rout.

The Buckeyes (5-0, 2-0) were up only 7-0 in the third quarter when Smith made a 53-yard reception to the 4. On the next play, he had a one-handed TD grab which was similar to two catches he made the previous game against Michigan State.

Howard's 4-yard run after a lost fumble by quarterback Cade McNamara made it 21-0, and an interception thrown by McNamara led to an Egbuka 15-yard TD catch to make it 28-0 late in the third quarter against the Hawkeyes (3-2, 1-1 Big Ten).

Not Much There

Iowa got the ball off the opening kickoff for a touchback and gained a first down before a 47-yard punt to the 12.

The Buckeyes methodically went on a 14-play, 88-yard drive that took 7:36 off the clock to take a 7-0 lead on a 14-yard catch by Egbuka at 3:41.

Howard was 6 for 6 for 46 yards with the most important pass, outside of the TD, a third-and-8 from the OSU 35 when he threw between two defenders to Bryson Rodgers. He was ruled just inches short of a first down, but a video review showed Rodgers had stretched across the line to keep the drive alive.

After a 5-yard run by Quinshon Judkins, tight end Will Kacmarek had a 12-yard catch to the Iowa 40. Judkins ran for 7, Egbuka had a catch for 7 and Howard scrambled for 7 to the 19. Judkins was stopped at the line to set up third-and-3, but he came back to rush for 5 to the 14 before Howard rolled right and found Egbuka at the pylon.

Iowa then moved from its 25 to the OSU 33, but needing 3 yards for a first early in the second quarter, the Hawkeyes elected to try a 51-yard field goal that Drew Fields sent left of the upright. During the possession, McNamara completed a third-and-8 from the Hawkeyes 27 to Jacob Gill for 22 yards.

Ohio State got the ball but turned it over



SONNY BROCKWAY

THREE-PEAT — Emeka Egbuka (2) tied his career high with nine receptions, good for 71 yards and a career-best three touchdowns in the 35-7 win against Iowa on Oct. 5.

on downs when, on a fourth-and-2 from the Iowa 42, Howard gained only a yard.

Iowa booted it back on a strange sequence in which the Hawkeyes had a fourth-and-inches from the 50. They got the first down off a short snap from punt formation but not before Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz called timeout. Rhys Dakin then sliced a 22-yard punt out of bounds.

OSU gave it back when Smith had the ball punched away by linebacker Jay Higgins during a 23-yard reception. Higgins recovered it at the Iowa 28.

Later, with 1:35 left in the first half, Iowa began a drive from its 7 after a 34-yard punt by Joe McGuire. Three plays, 14 seconds and 2 yards gained later, Dakin made a 46-yard punt for a Brandon Inniss fair catch at the OSU 45. On the second play, Howard was intercepted by Sebastian Castro at the

Iowa 38, where the Hawkeyes ran three plays to end the half.

Iowa entered the game allowing 62.0 yards rushing (fourth in the nation) but gave up 110 in the first half and the Buckeyes held a 199-90 advantage in total yards and had 11-4 edge in first downs.

The Buckeyes for the game had 203 yards rushing on a 5.1 average per carry.

"Running the ball is a badge of honor for an O-line," said Ohio State left guard Donovan Jackson. "You want to run the ball. You want to get after it. You want to see your running backs running down the field, and that's a sense of pride you have."

Explosion

The Buckeyes made it 14-0 on their first series of the second half when Smith once again made the extraordinary look ordinary with a one-handed catch for a 4-yard TD after his 53-yard catch the play before.

The Buckeyes went 86 yards with nine plays in 5:17 after an Inniss 14-yard kickoff return.

OSU was looking at third-and-6 from its 43 following a 5-yard sack when Howard unleashed a throw to the awaiting Smith at the 12. He ran to the 4 before being tackled.

On the next play, Howard threw a fade to the left corner. Smith held off defensive back Deshaun Lee with his left arm as he leapt to grab the ball with his right at the 9:34 mark.

The Buckeyes quickly extended the lead to 21-0 at 7:59 on Howard's 4-yard run, which came after McNamara was strip-sacked by Jack Sawyer and Cody Simon recovered the fumble at the Iowa 19.

Running back TreVeyon Henderson gained 4 and 11 to set up Howard's keeper to the left.

Iowa drove to the OSU 24 with the help of a 28-yard run by conference rushing leader Kaleb Johnson, but McNamara was intercepted by Davison Igbinosun at the 15 and he returned it 45 yards to the Iowa 40.

Egbuka's second TD, this one for 15 yards, made it 28-0 with 13 seconds left in the third quarter to complete the six-play drive.

Before they went forward, the Buckeyes were moved back to the 50 because of a first-down holding penalty. On fourth-and-2 from the 32, Howard hit Inniss on a slant for 21 yards to the 11. Howard lost 4 yards on a fumble prior to placing a perfect ball to Egbuka along the left boundary.

The Buckeyes made it 35-0 at 10:58 of the fourth quarter on Egbuka's third TD, a 3-yarder after McNamara was sacked for a 2-yard loss by Ty Hamilton and Kenyatta Jackson Jr., recovered his fumble at the Iowa 27.

It took seven plays to score from there, using 3:54. Henderson ran five straight times for 23 yards, and Howard picked up a yard before the score.

Johnson's 28-yard TD run broke the shut-out with 8:07 to play at the end of a five-play, 75-yard series in 2:51.

Backup QB Brendan Sullivan had a 30-yard run, and Luke Lachey, son of former OSU All-America offensive lineman and current Buckeye radio analyst Jim Lachey, had a 12-yard catch.

Johnson, the Hamilton, Ohio native who had a career-high 206 yards against Minnesota on Sept. 21, was limited to 19 yards on eight carries in the first half and finished with 86 yards on 15 carries.

Devin Brown replaced Howard for the series beginning with 8:07 left and had two drives, the last ending the game with a knee at the OSU 32.

Smith had four catches for 89 yards and Egbuka nine for 71 yards. Howard was 21 of 25 for 209 yards, four touchdowns and an interception on the sunny, 76-degree afternoon.

Notes

As mentioned earlier, OSU had 203 rushing yards. They added 209 through the air for a total of 412 yards. Iowa totaled 226 (116 rushing, 110 passing). ... Judkins gained 78 yards on 13 carries, and Henderson accumulated 61 yards on 11 carries. ... McNamara completed 14 of 20 for 98 yards with an interception and two fumbles lost. ... Lachey made five catches for 39 yards. ... The Buckeyes had four sacks for 10 yards. Sawyer had 1½. ... Sonny Styles had a team-high seven tackles (four solo, two TFLs). ... Smith is the first true freshman in Buckeye history to have at least one touchdown in each of the first five games of a season.

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Ducks Looking To Make Big Ten Statement

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Outside of the last three years, Ohio State has historically reigned as king of the Big Ten, capturing 23 conference crowns in its 134-year history, the most of any school in the league and ahead of Michigan's 19, including eight since 2000.

But this season, a new challenger has entered the Big Ten ring with Oregon joining the conference, along with other former Pac-12 schools UCLA, USC and Washington.

Head coach Dan Lanning has No. 3 Oregon (5-0, 2-0 in Big Ten) poised to crash the party in its new conference and pose a significant threat to Ohio State and its Big Ten counterparts.

Joining a storied conference like the Big Ten puts the Ducks in a unique position, which Lanning said presents a whole new set of challenges that his team is embracing this season. Perhaps none of those challenges is more daunting than its matchup with Ohio State on Oct. 12 in Autzen Stadium (7:30 p.m., NBC).

"Entering this conference, there are some new challenges that are presented," Lanning said at Big Ten Media Days this summer. "But I'll tell you here at Oregon, we chase and attack those challenges. We're excited about the traditions that exist here in the Big Ten. We're excited about some of the venues that we're going to get the opportunity to play in, but we know that none of that really matters until you start with game one."

Opening as the No. 3 team in the nation in the preseason AP poll behind only then-No. 2 Ohio State in the Big Ten, the Ducks limped through their late August and early September with a pair of unconvincing non-conference victories.

They began the season with a 24-14 win over FCS team Idaho that had the heavy underdog Vandals trailing just 17-14 after an Idaho score midway through the fourth quarter. Then came a 37-34 win over now-No. 17 Boise State in which it gave up 221 yards rushing and needed a game-winning field goal to erase a seven-point deficit to the also heavy underdog Broncos, a stretch of play that caused some frustration in the locker room.

"You're insane if you keep doing the same s—t and there is no change in result," Oregon sixth-year quarterback Dillon Gabriel said following the Boise State game. "I think we've done a good job of changing it in practice, and I think we did clean up some certain things, but there is a lot more to clean up."

"There's going to be a lot of self-reflection and going to the doctor, as Coach says, and cleaning stuff up. We have to. There's only so much you can get away with."

But with a 49-14 win over former Pac-12 rival Oregon State, a 34-13 win at UCLA and a 31-10 win over Michigan State on Oct. 4, the Ducks are back on track.

The Ducks' 4-2-5 unit, led by third-year defensive coordinator Tosh Lupoi, gave up just 12.3 points per game (79.0 rushing, 164.7 passing) over its last three contests, which now has Oregon boasting the No. 21 scoring defense at 17.0 points per contest, compared to the 65th ranking they

had through two weeks after giving up 20.7 points per game.

Oregon's defensive surge has been led by its secondary, a group spearheaded by senior cornerback Jabbar Muhammad, who is tied for the Big Ten lead with six pass breakups through five games in his first season with the Ducks.

Lanning said that the former second-team All-Pac-12 and Washington transfer Muhammad, who also has 15 tackles and one-half tackle for loss on the season, has excelled so far due to his rare football IQ, which he thinks allows him to outsmart and disrupt opposing offenses every game.

"One thing that really sticks out about Jabbar is he understands the strengths and weaknesses of each call and how he can play those calls differently," Lanning said. "I don't know if I've ever been around a player who understands how they can move themselves to put themselves in position to make plays based on the coverage called, (understand) the strengths or weaknesses of that coverage. Jabbar does a really good job of that."

Muhammad headlines a veteran ball-hawking Ducks secondary that also includes seniors Tysheem Johnson (19 tackles, one interception), Nikko Reed (12 tackles, one interception) and Kobe Savage (18 tackles, one pass breakup) at strong safety, cornerback and free safety, respectively, along with senior Brandon Johnson (16 tackles, two pass breakups, one interception) at the "star" position, a hybrid safety/linebacker role often used in a 4-2-5 defense.

Together that starting group has helped the Ducks rank 18th nationally in passing yards allowed per game (162.0) and first in the Big Ten in pass deflections (31).

Similarly to Ohio State, veterans also abound on the Ducks' defensive line. Leading that unit are seniors Jordan Burch and Jamaree Caldwell at defensive tackle and nose tackle, respectively, along with junior Michigan State transfer Derrick Harmon at defensive tackle and sophomore Matayo Uiagalelei at the hybrid linebacker/defensive end position, otherwise known to Ohio State fans as the "Jack."

Oregon's front four may not have as much continuity and familiarity as that of Ohio State, but they still have wreaked havoc on opposing offensive lines at times this season, totaling 16 sacks through their first five games, good for 11th nationally and fifth in the Big Ten.

The Ducks are also loaded with experience and talent at linebacker, with senior Jeffrey Bassa, redshirt senior Bryce Boettcher, sophomore Devon Jackson and redshirt senior Jestin Jacobs leading the unit. The linebackers have combined for 75 tackles (3½ for loss), 1½ sacks, six pass deflections and one interception through five games.

In all, it's a formidable defensive unit that those who go up against them in practice think can compete with the best in the Big Ten.

"Our defense is loaded," Oregon senior wide receiver Tez Johnson told Sports Illustrated during the offseason. "I feel like our defense will be the best in the country this year. We have so many weapons on defense that it's going to confuse a lot of people. That's why I'm excited to get to the Big Ten

Get To Know ... Oregon

- **2024 Record:** 5-0.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread Option; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5, 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 6, Defense 4, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** Dan Lanning, 3rd Year at Oregon, 27-5
- **Series History:** 10th meeting; Ohio State leads 9-1
- **School Facts:** Location – Eugene, Ore.; Enrollment – 23,834; Nickname – Ducks; Colors – Green, Yellow; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Autzen Stadium (Surface – Field Turf; Capacity – 54,000).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jordan James	88	552	6.3	5
Noah Wittington	42	165	3.9	1
Dillon Gabriel	24	71	3.9	3

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Dillon Gabriel	130-167	77.8	1449	11-3
Dante Moore	4-4	100.0	22	0-0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Tez Johnson	43	395	9.2	5
Traeshon Holden	19	274	14.4	3
Terrance Ferguson	16	259	16.2	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game	— 35.0
Rushing Yards Per Game	— 164.4
Passing Yards Per Game	— 294.2
Total Offense Avg. Per Game	— 458.6

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	IDAHO	W, 24-14
Sept. 7	BOISE STATE	W, 37-34
Sept. 14	at Oregon State	W, 49-14
Sept. 28	at UCLA	W, 34-13
Oct. 4	MICHIGAN STATE	W, 31-10
Oct. 12	OHIO STATE	7:30 P.M.
Oct. 18	at Purdue	8 p.m.
Oct. 26	ILLINOIS	TBA
Nov. 2	at Michigan	TBA
Nov. 9	MARYLAND	TBA
Nov. 16	at Wisconsin	TBA
Nov. 30	WASHINGTON	TBA
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks	
Bryce Boettcher	16	16	32.0	1.0-2	0.0-0
Jordan Burch	7	12	19.0	7.0-23	5.0-16
Derrick Harmon	6	13	19.0	4.5-24	3.0-21
Tysheem Johnson	6	13	19.0	0.0-0	0.0-0
Teitum Tuoti	9	10	19.0	2.0-4	1.0-1
Kobe Savage	7	11	18.0	0.5-2	0.0-0
Devon Jackson	7	8	15.0	0.5-0	0.0-0
Jabbar Muhammad	7	8	15.0	0.5-1	0.0-0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed	— 17.0
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 101.4
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 162.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed	— 263.4

and show everybody we belong in this conference."

Oregon's defense has shown its potential as an elite unit through five games, but the Ducks' path to success this season likely starts on offense, specifically at quarterback.

Leading Oregon at football's most visible position is the Oklahoma transfer Gabriel, who is one of the more accomplished and seasoned quarterbacks in modern college football history.

Entering the highly anticipated matchup against Ohio State, Gabriel ranked fourth in NCAA history in passing yards (16,314), third in passing touchdowns (136), second in total yards (17,445) and second in total touchdowns (166).

With 53 career starts in 54 games, Gabriel is also just seven games behind the NCAA record of most starts by a quarterback, a mark held by his predecessor at Oregon and current Denver Broncos starter Bo Nix.

Gabriel has only backed up his status as one of the greatest statistical quarterbacks in NCAA history in his lone season with the Ducks. The veteran has played as efficient football as any quarterback in the country so far this season, connecting on 130 of his first 167 passes for an impressive 77.8 completion percentage, a mark that ranks just ahead of Florida's Graham Mertz (77.2) for the highest in the country.

Gabriel's teammates think his NFL-ready accuracy and elite decision-making, which have also led to him throwing for 1,449 yards and 11 touchdowns to just three interception – two of those interceptions coming against Michigan State in the red zone – is similar to that of the 2023 Heisman Trophy finalist Nix, which they feel is a comfortable feeling for the whole offense.

"It's the same thing (as Bo)," Tez Johnson said about Gabriel. "I see confidence, poise and trusting his teammates. When you have a quarterback back there like that, it's always comforting as a receiver to go out there and run each play for him. As a receiver, you love that because you don't have to really think too much. His job is already hard as it is, so we try to make it easy for him. Just get open and he'll throw it to you. That's pretty much it."

Gabriel is not the only veteran Duck who is spurring Oregon's offensive efficiency this season. He is beginning to form a strong connection with the senior Johnson, who has shown a historic level of efficiency in his first 19 games with the program.

After transferring from Troy last offseason, Johnson did nothing but make history for the Ducks on offense, totaling an Oregon single-season-record 86 receptions along with 1,182 yards and 10 receiving touchdowns, which also rank third and fourth in single-season program history, respectively.

The speedy 5-10 wideout has continued that excellence his senior season, serving as Gabriel's most productive and explosive pass-catcher with a team-high 43 catches – 24 higher than the next closest Duck receiver – for 395 yards and five touchdowns. Johnson has also served as a major weapon on special teams, returning a punt against Boise State 85 yards for a score to give Oregon a late third-quarter lead over the Broncos, the fifth-longest punt return in program history.

"He's a guy I love going to work with every day," Lanning said of Johnson after the Boise State win. "I've got a lot of admiration and excitement just getting the opportunity to coach a guy like Tez. He brings a lot of

OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

passion and energy, and when it's directed in the right direction, he can be really special."

Joining Johnson in Oregon's wide receiver room are senior wideout Traeshon Holden (19 catches, 274 yards, three touchdowns) and junior wideout Evan Stewart (16, 182, two). But Gabriel's most reliable target may be senior tight end and 2023 first-team All-Pac 12 tight end Terrance Ferguson (16, 259).

The senior often served as a safety blanket for Oregon's quarterbacks throughout his four seasons with the Ducks, and that is shown in his stats. His 107 career receptions and 13 career touchdowns sit 17 and two shy of the program's all-time record by tight ends.

Gabriel said although he has yet to connect with Ferguson in the end zone, his tight end has quickly gained his respect and trust both on and off the field, which has made for a special connection between the two veterans this season.

"He's a guy who's played a bunch of ball, and he's a trustworthy target," Gabriel said of Ferguson. "I think the world of him. He's my neighbor. He's my best friend. We spend a lot of time together. But more importantly, I just see the way he works. When you see that, you respect it. That's a guy you want to go to war with."

The production within Oregon's running backs room – led this season by assistant head coach Ra'Shaad Samples rather than the now-Ohio State coach Carlos Locklyn, begins with junior Jordan James.

He has emerged as one of the more consistent runners in the Big Ten, totaling 88

carries for 552 yards and five touchdowns through five games, an impressive 6.3-yard average per carry.

James, whose 552 yards rank fifth in the Big Ten, has totaled over 100 yards in three games this season, but Lanning has indicated that he wants his junior to break off some longer runs this season. This also goes for junior Noah Whittington, who is coming off a season-ending injury last season and has averaged 3.9 yards per carry this season.

"I'd say there's positives and negatives," Lanning said of the run game. "I still think we're waiting to break some second-level tackles. I do think we're hitting holes in the right spots. It's something we have to continue to be able to lean on and make sure that we can improve because when you become a team that can run the ball extremely well, it opens up everything else in your offense."

Lanning's desires for James and the running game were met in the win against Michigan State, when the team totaled 213 yards on the ground on 37 carries, a 5.8-yard average. These efforts were led by James, who totaled 166 rushing yards on 24 carries, a 6.9-yard average that was boosted by his 41-yard rush early in the game.

"I've been waiting to get one of those all year, so it felt great to finally get that going," James said after the game.

The Ducks can continue to create more explosive runs with some more improved offensive line play, which has occurred this season after a rather sluggish start.

Oregon's offensive line allowed an NCAA-low five sacks in both 2022 and 2023, but this year began much differently. With 2023

Rimington Trophy winner and unanimous All-America center Jackson Powers-Johnson off to the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders, the Ducks' front five struggled to find continuity in the team's first two games, allowing seven sacks to Gabriel along with a combined 13 tackles for loss.

These issues prompted Lanning to make an early change, starting at Powers-Johnson's former position. The Ducks opted to bench junior Charlie Pickard after just two games and shift sophomore Iapani Laloulu, also known on campus as "Poncho," over from right guard to center.

Laloulu's move inside to center led to some other major personnel changes on the line, with the Ducks moving senior Marcus Harper II from his usual left guard spot to right guard and senior Nishad Strother from a reserve role to starting left guard.

Through three games, it seems this change has reaped its early rewards. With Laloulu in charge, Harper and Strother in their new spots and junior Josh Conerly Jr. and senior Ajani Cornelius sticking at left and right tackle, respectively, Oregon has flipped the script on the offensive line, allowing zero sacks in their last three games and paving the way for the Ducks' runners to average 205.0 rushing yards per game.

"I don't think I was really touched," Gabriel said of the line play after the Oregon State game. "I can't even explain how proud I am of them. They just continue to fight. Those are five guys you want to go to battle with or six or seven. I wouldn't want to do it with anyone else."

The Ducks may also have a major rein-

forcement waiting in the wings on their offensive line in the form of Indiana sixth-year transfer right guard Matthew Bedford (6-6, 315), who was expected to start at right guard for Oregon this season but has played just two snaps for the Ducks while dealing with a lingering knee injury. Bedford's status for the Ohio State game was unknown as BSB went to press.

Regardless of Bedford's status, Oregon's improved offensive line play comes at a convenient time, right before its highly anticipated clash with Ohio State, which will have significant Big Ten and College Football Playoff implications, in addition to it being the first matchup between the two historic programs as conference foes.

Those within the program have not been shy about voicing their excitement for the Oct. 12 matchup, including Gabriel, who was in contact with Ohio State this offseason while in the transfer portal but instead opted to sign with Oregon after the Buckeyes indicated they wanted to wait for Devin Brown to play in the Cotton Bowl before making any quarterback-related decision.

"I think it's going to be fun," Gabriel said when asked about the matchup at Big Ten Media Days. "I think it's going to be electric. I know (Ohio State and Oregon) played before in the nonconference, but so many people look forward to those cool matchups. You'd have to wait 10 years to make it happen, but now you get it more consistently. And I think fans, players, coaches, everyone involved in college football are looking forward to that kind of stuff."

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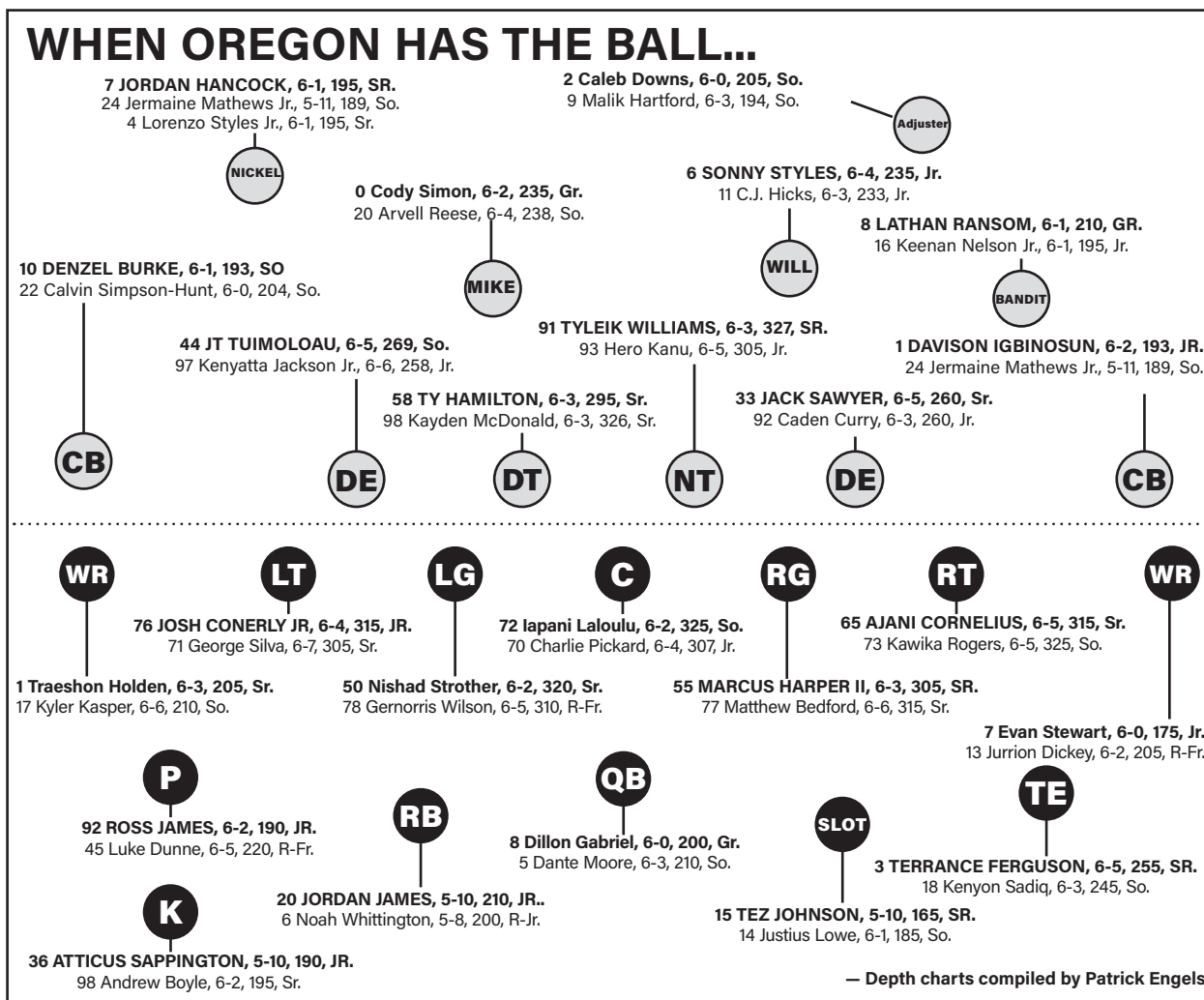
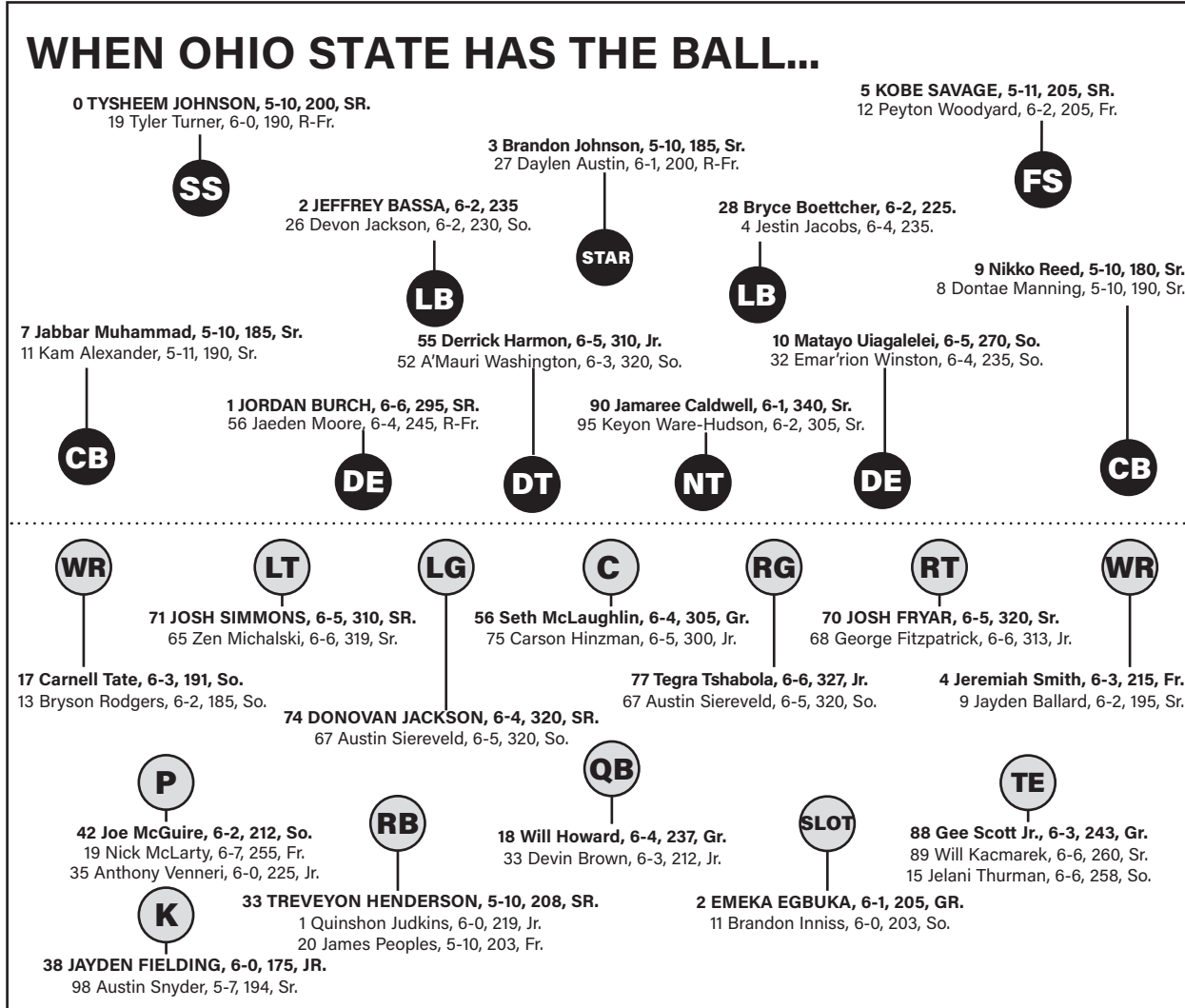


Ohio State at Oregon

Saturday, Oct. 12 • 7:30 p.m. • NBC
Autzen Stadium; Eugene, Ore.



Projected Depth Charts



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. OREGON RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes avoided the rash of upsets nationally by pounding away at Iowa and winning the line play on both sides of the ball in the 35-7 win. The Hawkeyes came into the game allowing 62.0 rushing yards per game and had kept all four opponents under 100 this season. OSU gained 110 in the first half and 203 for the game on a solid 5.1 average per carry. Quinshon Judkins had 78 yards and TreVeyon Henderson 61, but the only rushing TD was a 4-yarder by quarterback Will Howard. The Ducks, coming off a 31-10 home victory against Michigan State on Oct. 4 in a game that wasn't nearly that competitive, are stout. They limited the Spartans to 102 yards in the first half, just 21 on the ground. Oregon is in the top 30 nationally in rush defense (101.4 yards per game). Michigan State finished with 59 rushing yards (2.0 per carry) with most coming in the fourth quarter against the Ducks backups and the backups to the backups. In fact, nearly half of the Spartans' 250 total yards (120) came on two late scoring drives after the Oregon starters were pulled with a 31-0 lead. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OREGON RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Oregon entered the game against Michigan State averaging 152.3 rushing yards per game to rank 76th. They moved up nine spots with a 164.4 average thanks in large measure to Jordan James. He ran for 166 yards on 24 carries - both career highs - with a touchdown as the Ducks totaled 213 yards toting the ball (5.8). James, who had a career-long 41-yard run, has surpassed 100 yards in two straight games and three of the past four. OSU knows a thing or two about stopping runners. Iowa's Kaleb Johnson had 206 yards in his previous game but had a humbling 19 yards on eight carries in the first half vs. the Buckeyes. He had a 28-yard score in scrubs time and finished with 86 yards on 15 carries. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. OREGON PASS DEFENSE

Howard threw an interception for a third straight game but still managed to throw four touchdown passes while completing 21 of 25 for 209 yards. Emeka Egbuka had three of the scores and the incomparable freshman Jeremiah Smith the other with another seeing-is-believing catch, although he earlier lost a fumble. Despite the good vibes, scoring only seven points in the first half was disturbing. The Ohio State offensive line and Howard better be ready because the Ducks are coming for them. They had five sacks vs. the Spartans with Jordan Burch accounting for 2½. The Ducks had three pass breakups after entering the game No. 2 in PBUs (28), No. 3 in passes defended (32) and No. 2 in passes defended per game (8.0). Michigan State quarterback Aidan Chiles was 10 of 17 for 154 yards. In the previous game vs. the Buckeyes, he was 13 of 19 for 167 yards with a touchdown and an interception. **EDGE: OREGON**

OREGON PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Dillon Gabriel, the former Central Florida and Oklahoma quarterback, has posted impressive numbers, but he showed vulnerability when he threw two first-half red-zone interceptions against the Spartans. He was 20 of 32 for 257 yards and two touchdowns and those two picks plus a 9-yard rushing touchdown and 22 yards on three carries. For the season, he's 130 of 167 (77.8 percent) for 1,449 yards with 11 TDs against three interceptions. A favorite target is Terrance Ferguson, who had a career-long 62 yards on a screen pass vs. the Spartans. OSU got four sacks and an interception against the Hawkeyes while holding them to 110 yards passing. Iowa is no Oregon. **EDGE: EVEN**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Oregon kicker Andrew Boyle was injured last season and didn't attempt his first career field goal until the Michigan State game. He nailed a 50-yarder. Tez Johnson has an 85-yard return touchdown for the Ducks. The OSU kick coverage was good, and punter Joe McGuire pinned the Hawkeyes deep once. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

In the past two games, UCLA and Michigan State were a combined 3 of 21 on third-down conversions against the Ducks. Also, Oregon has won 28 straight games when scoring first and has a 19-0 record under head coach Dan Lanning when leading after the first quarter. The Ducks have won 16 consecutive games when ahead at the half. Oh, they're playing at home too. **EDGE: OREGON**

STAFF PREDICTION

Oregon has won 27 straight games when allowing 24 points or fewer. The Buckeyes can't afford a slow first half. Against the Hawkeyes, they were intercepted, lost a fumble and were stopped on a fourth-and-2 - all in the first half. This should be a classic, and an Oregon win shouldn't be considered an upset. **OHIO STATE 31, OREGON 28**

- Depth charts compiled by Patrick Engels

McLaurin Taking Command Of Washington Offense

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Terry McLaurin has persevered through four head coaches, two franchise name changes and a dozen quarterbacks to rate among the best receivers all-time for the pro football team in Washington, D.C.

Whether it be the Redskins, Washington Football Team or the current Commanders, the former Ohio State wide receiver keeps plugging away since being drafted in 2019.

He is the first Commanders receiver to record four consecutive seasons of 1,000 receiving yards and can add to his total this season while also being ranked eighth in franchise history in receptions (401) and yards (5,586) after making four catches for 112 yards, including a 66-yarder, vs. the Cleveland Browns on Oct. 5. He has 27 career touchdowns.

For the season, his 23 catches have produced 303 yards and two scores.

He's done all that despite catching passes from the previously mentioned 12 quarterbacks since his debut. Rookie Jayden Daniels this season became his sixth different opening-day QB.

During the past four seasons of 1,000-plus yards, he's been on the receiving end of throws from Alex Smith, the late former OSU QB Dwayne Haskins, Kyle Allen, Taylor Heinicke, Ryan Fitzpatrick, Garrett Gilbert, Carson Wentz, Sam Howell and Jacoby Brissett.

After the 42-14 win over the Arizona Cardinals on Sept. 29 to run the Commanders' record to a rare 3-1, McLaurin was his usual humble self.

"It's fun. It's not just me, honestly," McLaurin said. "Anybody could touch the ball. We've got so many guys who have the ability to touch the ball and make big plays. I mean, that's when you know you have a fun offense when you've got multiple weapons that the defense has to account for."

One would never know McLaurin had seven catches for 52 yards and a 10-yard TD. For him, it's all about the team.

"I'm a big cheerleader out there," he said. "I'm happy for myself, sure, but I'm happy for our guys. I'm happy for these guys who put in so much work in the offseason and have come from all around the league to be a Commander. And for the guys that have been here so long, we haven't quite had this feeling."

Washington has pretty much been a mess during McLaurin's tenure. His rookie season, the last one the team was known as the Redskins, resulted in a 3-13 record. The Washington Football Team went 7-9 in 2020 to qualify for an NFL wild card spot but lost 31-23 to Tampa Bay. A 7-10 mark followed the next season before the Commanders were 8-8-1 in 2022 and 4-13 last season. In total, Washington was 29-53-1 entering this season.

Along the way, he was coached by Jay Gruden (2019), Bill Callahan (2019), Ron Rivera (2020-23) and currently Dan Quinn.

Turnaround

Another long season appeared to be on the horizon when the Commanders lost 37-20 to Tampa Bay in the season opener. It

was a tepid start as well for McLaurin with two catches on four targets for 17 yards.

Week 2 was slightly better but at least the Commanders pulled off a 21-18 win over the New York Giants with McLaurin making six catches but for just 22 yards.

It took until the third game for McLaurin to remind America how valuable he can be. Doing it on Monday Night Football, he and Daniels finally found their connection to the tune of four catches for 100 yards in the 38-33 win at the Cincinnati Bengals on Sept. 23.

With the Commanders leading 31-26, Daniels threw a 27-yard touchdown pass to McLaurin on third-and-7 with 2:10 to play to put the game out of reach even though the Bengals scored late.

McLaurin said he called the play during a timeout after consulting with Daniels and offensive coordinator Kliff Kingsbury. He made an over-the-shoulder catch along the right boundary by dragging his right foot and getting his knee down.

"During the timeout, I said, 'Kliff, give me a go route to the boundary for the game.' I called it," McLaurin said. "And I went up to Kliff and Jayden and was like, 'Throw me this ball for the game.' For them to have that kind of trust in me, I think that's maybe one of the first times in my career where the game's on the line and I got to up there and call that play and we executed it at a very high level.

"We worked so freaking hard year in, year out to complete those plays. And so, to do it on the biggest stage when we needed it, for him to trust me, I mean that was probably one of the best opportunities. That ball just fell out of the sky. And when I came out of the double move, it fell right into the breadbasket. So I'm hoping we continue that momentum going forward."

McLaurin was happy the work he and Daniels had been doing finally paid off.

"I think it was just a matter of continuing to be patient. Trusting the process," McLaurin said to Washington TV station WUSA9. "I knew Jayden and I and our offense had clicked in camp, and it was just a matter of doing it when it mattered most."

Daniels was a remarkable 21 of 23 (91.3 percent) for 254 yards and two touchdowns. He continued his hot streak against the Cardinals, going 26 of 30 (86.7 percent) for 233 yards with the TD to McLaurin and one interception.

As an aside, former Buckeye (2014-16) Noah Brown had three receptions for 26 yards vs. Arizona while Cardinals rookie and ex-Buckeye Marvin Harrison Jr. grabbed a 2-yard touchdown catch among his five catches for 45 yards.

Brown was a member of the Ohio State 2014 College Football Playoff champions. He broke his leg before the 2015 season and did not play. He left OSU after his red-shirt sophomore season in 2016.

He was the No. 239 pick in the 2017 NFL draft by the Dallas Cowboys and played five seasons before he signed with the Houston Texans and played with ex-OSU quarterback C.J. Stroud in his rookie season. Brown signed as a free agent with Washington on Aug. 28.

Daniels was named the NFL Offensive

Rookie of the Month for September, and McLaurin played a big part.

After making eight catches for 39 yards and no touchdowns in the first two games, he had 11 catches, 152 yards and two touchdowns in the next two games.

Path To Success

McLaurin is impressed by Daniels, the No. 2 pick from LSU in the 2024 draft.

"I think he's really confident in what he's seeing," McLaurin said after the Arizona game. "I think his preparation is very unique for a guy who's just got into the league, and that was him (from) the first day we met him when he got here in the spring. His preparation, the way he attacks practice, the way he is starting to conduct the film sessions at the end of the week for the receivers and the tight ends, it's no surprise when he goes out there and he executes at a high level.

"He is really trusting what he is seeing. He is giving us chances to make plays down the field. As playmakers, we just have to continue to come through for him. I think he is seeing the field well. He is extending plays when he needs to extend plays, but he is also keeping his eyes down the field when scrambling. That just adds another element to our offense when a quarterback can hurt you from in and outside the pocket."

McLaurin has been the beneficiary and is on the way to another solid season. He has caught between 77 and 87 passes each

of the past four seasons, and he has scored four or more touchdowns in each.

He was with the Buckeyes from 2015-18 where he played 53 games, making 75 catches for 1,251 yards and 19 TDs, including 11 in his final season. He was a two-time captain and graduated in 3½ years with a degree in communications.

McLaurin was outstanding on special teams for the Buckeyes and was known as a quiet leader.

That non-flashy approach is unlike many diva receivers, and he's been criticized by the media for not being more vocal about being involved in game plans over the years.

He said he is naturally reserved but that his exuberant reaction after his touchdown catch against the Bengals showed his "wild" side.

"It's the balance of being a pro and understanding patience, but also being confident in my ability and wanting those moments and wanting to have a chance to give us energy," McLaurin said. "So yeah, I was pretty excited. And Jayden, a lot of my teammates, that was a lot of pent-up emotion. And for guys who haven't been around, it's probably the first time they've seen me with that kind of emotion. But people who've been around me for a while now, they know that that's in there. And I think in that moment our team kind of needed that kind of energy from me being a leader."

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Backup Brown Delivers When Called Upon

By GREG WILSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For two straight seasons, Devin Brown has been told by Ohio State coaches that he wasn't good enough to be the starter for the Buckeyes, with Kyle McCord winning the battle in 2023 and Kansas State transfer Will Howard taking the job this season.

When head coach Ryan Day publicly named Howard the starter in August, Brown said it was hard not to be disappointed in the result, but since he was used to it, he knew exactly how to get to work as the backup.

"Obviously there's going to be a little disappointment, but at the end of the day, I'm here to be a Buckeye," Brown said on Oct. 2. "I knew they were going to make the best decision for this team. I've just got to keep doing everything in my power to get better and help this team."

It was a situation that Brown could have avoided this time around, given two different windows to enter the transfer portal as his former teammate McCord did, but he decided to stand pat with his decision to come to Ohio State.

Brown didn't appreciate the people who were saying that he should transfer, relishing the challenge that it takes to win the starting quarterback job at Ohio State and choosing to believe in his abilities.

"Honestly I think people are cowards," Brown said in the spring when there were rumors that he would leave. "People have this thought in their own heads that I'm going to leave and I'm a quitter, but that's never been me. These people live in their mom's basement saying stuff about me and they don't know s—t."

"I have all the confidence in the world," Brown added. "I'll never doubt myself. I'll never waver or anything like that. I'm always going to think that I'm the best quarterback in the room, the best quarterback in the country so I'm going to take it like that."

But for the first three games of the season, Brown was relegated to a bench role after getting the chance to lead the Ohio State offense in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri, a game he was forced to leave early due to an ankle injury, the second one he suffered during the 2023 season.

Because the Buckeyes played against two MAC teams and a Sun Belt team to start the 2024 campaign, Brown was able to get some action late in those contests with the games squarely in hand for Ohio State. During those opportunities, he completed 8 of 14 passes for 77 yards, no touchdowns and no interceptions, mostly handing the ball off to the backup running backs, though he did lead some scoring drives.

But against Michigan State on Sept. 28, Brown's number was called in a critical situation when Howard was hit hard on a drop back by Spartan linebacker Jordan Turner, forcing the Buckeyes' starter out of the game with the team facing a third-and-10 at the MSU 17-yard-line with just 30 seconds left in the half.

Brown had one chance to make a play, and he made the most of it.

Facing immediate pressure on his blind side by Michigan State defensive back Josh



FILE PHOTO

EVER READY — Devin Brown wasn't expecting to be in the game, but when Will Howard got hurt late in the first half against Michigan State on Sept. 28, he responded with a 17-yard touchdown pass to Jeremiah Smith.

Moten — which was picked up by a forceful TreVeyon Henderson block — Brown quickly got the ball out of his hand to find a streaking Jeremiah Smith down the right sideline, who reached forward at the 5-yard line and made an unbelievable one-handed grab, being carried the rest of the way into the end zone by the momentum he already had.

With just one play, Brown was able to turn that game into a three-possession deficit for the Spartans, going into the second half with a commanding 24-7 lead.

When asked about the score, Brown opted not to take any of the credit and instead gave all the praise to Henderson and Smith.

"Will kind of got the wind knocked out of him so they called me in," he said. "We called a go-ball. They brought pressure in a Cover 2, so I threw a shot to (Smith) and he made a hell of a catch. Tre made a hell of a pickup on the blitz coming off the edge and all the pieces fell together."

Brown said that even though he was not warm coming from the sideline with hardly any warning, he didn't have any nerves during that play.

"I was really just playing football," he explained. "I've been doing it since I was 7 years old and playing Pop Warner when my dad was coaching me. It really didn't feel like a huge moment. Obviously, it was a big moment in the game, but I had to trust my guys. I knew Tre was going to make that block for me. I knew Jeremiah was going to make that catch. I was just out there having fun."

The fact that he was able to step up at a moment's notice with little time to warm up for one very important throw impressed both his coaches and teammates.

"That was a clutch play," Day said after the game. "He put it there. We told him, 'If you have the opportunity to throw it, rip it.

Only throw it where 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."

"I thought Devin did an unbelievable job of being ready when his number was called," Howard added. "That's competitive excellence. We talk about that all the time. I really think that throw and that catch right there really sealed the game. I think they put them out of it."

"I'm just so proud of Devin for stepping in and being ready. You never know what's going to happen. I go down. I just got the wind knocked out of me. You have to come out for a play, so it is what it is. He went in there and made the play. It was big time."

Brown has now been in every game that Ohio State has played this season, which isn't something he could say four games into the 2023 season. And unlike last season, when the injury in the Cotton Bowl took away his chance to show what he is capable of in a starting capacity before the offseason started, he got the opportunity to perform in a big moment.

The redshirt sophomore said that although he did have some extra stressors stepping onto the field with the game still close, getting into that moment prepared him better for future opportunities that might arise if something should happen to Howard again in a game.

"There's definitely a little bit of a different stress in your mind, going in there and having to do that," he said. "I wasn't totally warm — I wasn't warm at all honestly. My legs were super stiff. But that's just competitive excellence. When your number's called, you have to go out there and make the play."

While this was his most important, it

wasn't Brown's first passing touchdown. He had two last season — both in the fourth quarter with the game in hand — a 28-yard pass to Carnell Tate in the Week 3 63-10 win over Western Kentucky and a 58-yard pass to Brandon Inniss in the 41-7 win over Purdue. He also had a rushing touchdown last season — also against Purdue in the first quarter — but he said his pass to Smith is now on top of that list of scores as his favorite so far in his college career.

"The rushing touchdown was pretty good," he said. "I think I was the most fired up after this touchdown. Me and Tre were laughing about it on Sunday morning during our lift. We weren't even speaking English at each other, we were just yelling at each other, screaming after the play. I came over to the sideline after the play, and I was shaking because I had so much adrenaline going. It was just a crazy moment. I thought I was going to throw up. I was just so juiced up."

Brown, who finished the game against the Spartans 5 of 7 for 54 yards and the touchdown, believes that his preparation was a big reason for him being ready for that play.

Brown's preparation stemmed from a changed approach he has taken to the game this season, one that includes early morning at the practice facility and plenty of film time with offensive coordinator Chip Kelly. It's a different mentality that he thinks has come to fruition in large part because his new play caller has challenged him in different ways.

"My mental state has been different," Brown said. "My attitude towards the game has been different. Just my whole approach has been completely different. I think the time (I've put in) is different. I've put in a lot more time than I did last year."

"I've been in (The Woody Hayes Athletic Center) at 6:30 in the morning. I come in as early as possible and try to meet with Coach Kelly as much as I can. The biggest thing is it's slowed the game down for me. When you go out there anticipating instead of reacting, it's a completely different game."

"The way (Kelly's) had me approach the classroom differently and the mental preparation differently, practice has been different. The way we do our run game has been completely different. The offense has expanded so much, so it's been incredible to learn from him."

Brown has also embraced Howard despite the fact that he came from outside the program and won the job that Brown was gunning for.

The two celebrated with each other after the touchdown pass Brown threw against the Spartans, a showing of team camaraderie that the backup thinks comes from the relationship and shared winning mentality he has with Howard.

"Me and Will are probably some of the closest two guys on the team," Brown said. "We're with each other from 8 in the morning until 8 at night every day. We've built a really good bond, and we're there for each other no matter what."

"Everybody's so happy for each other at the end of the day. We're there with one common goal — to win as a team, and to celebrate as a team."

McLaughlin Leads By Example For O-Line

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When graduate center Seth McLaughlin decided to transfer to Ohio State over the offseason, the only knowledge the average Buckeye fan had of his four-year career at Alabama was that he struggled to snap the ball well consistently late last year.

Center is the sort of position that few observers care about when things go well but that becomes noticeable and directly in the line of fire when things go poorly, and McLaughlin had about as tough a finish as one can imagine in his last game as a member of the Crimson Tide.

After a season plagued by snap issues for Alabama, McLaughlin had a couple of poor ones in the College Football Playoff semifinals overtime loss to Michigan, including a low snap to quarterback Jalen Milroe on fourth-and-goal that threw off the timing of what could have been a game-tying touchdown.

Instead of going to a second overtime, Milroe was stopped 3 yards of the end zone, and Michigan would go on to win its first national title since 1997.

Two days after Alabama's heartbreaking loss, McLaughlin entered the transfer portal, and it didn't take him long to decide he wanted to be at Ohio State.

The transition from Tuscaloosa to Columbus couldn't have been an easy one, but McLaughlin's was made more comfortable by other big-time transfer additions to the team such as quarterback Will Howard, running back Quinshon Judkins and McLaughlin's former Alabama teammate Caleb Downs.

He has specifically formed a tight bond with the former Kansas State quarterback.

"Me and Seth are super tight," Howard said after Ohio State's 49-14 win over Marshall. "He's one of my best friends on the team, and we spend a lot of time together."

Given their places now as the starting center and starting quarterback of the team, McLaughlin's friendship with Howard has become a very significant connection on the field as well.

"If he makes a call, I'm like, 'Oh yeah, he probably sees something I don't see,' and we can bounce ideas off each other," Howard said. "Hey, why did you do that? Why did you make a left call? Whatever it is, we have that relationship to where we trust each other."

McLaughlin came into a bit of a hectic situation along the Ohio State offensive line. In 2023, the Buckeyes' front was the source of many problems that plagued an offense that scored just 30.5 points per game, by far the worst in the Day era.

The offensive line's issues culminated in back-to-back uneven performances in the team's last two games of the year, losses to Michigan and Missouri.

Against Michigan, the offensive line conceded what would be a game-deciding hit on then-starting quarterback Kyle McCord, who threw an errant pass that was intercepted by the Wolverines.

Against Missouri in the Cotton Bowl, the line had its worst performance of the season when Day decided to make a change at

center, benching redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman. The line gave up four sacks, 10 tackles for loss and eight quarterback hurries while the running game was practically nonexistent, averaging just 2.9 yards per carry on 33 attempts.

Despite 2023's woes, the 2024 offensive line brought back three of its starters from the previous year in left tackle Josh Simmons, left guard Donovan Jackson and right tackle Josh Fryar. They also were able to add McLaughlin and his wealth of experience, which included 24 starts at Alabama.

After the heartbreaking loss in the Rose Bowl, the center found out the hard way how errors can be illuminated when they occur on college football's biggest stage, but luckily for him and the Buckeyes, he came out of the difficult situation with the right mindset.

"When you go through something like that, you kind of have to sit down and look at yourself and be like, 'OK, who am I as a person? What am I?'" McLaughlin said on Jan. 30. "I kind of just sat down and thought about, 'Where can I go from here?' I can't control what happened in the past. I can't control what happened in that game. I can't control the public reaction to that."

"But I'm here now. I'm in a great place to continue my development and play for an incredible program, play for incredible coaches, so I'm very positive. I have no negative feelings about what happened. It is what it is. It's exciting moving forward."

As any good player would be able to, McLaughlin put the snap issues that gave him trouble in 2023 in the past. Now that the Buckeyes are in action and his place on the offensive line has helped the group see vast improvements through five games, his low snap in the Rose Bowl seems like a distant memory.

Against Western Michigan and Marshall, Ohio State appeared to take a leap forward, rushing for 273 yards and 280 yards, respectively, in games two and three of the season. In 2023, Ohio State scraped together only two rushing performances of 200 or more yards all season, and neither performance came close to reaching the 250-yard threshold.

In the Buckeyes' 35-7 win against a talented Iowa front seven on Oct. 5, the Buckeyes had yet another productive game on the ground. McLaughlin was a strong part of the team's third 200-yard game in four games when Ohio State runners ran for 203 yards on 40 carries. In pass protection, the Ohio State offensive linemen had another clean day in protection of Howard, giving up just one sack.

Although run game production doesn't start and stop with the center position in any offense, the leadership exuded by McLaughlin has played a significant role in the signs of growth of the offensive line as a whole.

"He has meant a lot," senior tackle Josh Simmons said. "I mean, he's played in some really big games, coming from Alabama. I guess you can say he knows his way around this whole thing. He can teach us different tips and tricks on how to get to a block."

The veteran center isn't the type of player to pat himself on the back for helping out his teammates, but having been around plenty

of locker rooms and team leaders during his time at Alabama, he learned firsthand not just what leadership sounds like, but the effort it takes to lead by example.

"From a leadership standpoint, I'm challenging myself to be the guy that somebody can emulate," McLaughlin said. "I've had leaders in the past that will just yell, yell and yell and say, 'Hey, we've got to go harder, go harder,' but he's not the one going the hardest. I'm really just trying to put an emphasis on that for myself, be the guy that people can emulate, and when I say something, I want it to mean something. So I have to put myself in the position to have that role."

The first job anyone thinks of when they think of the center position is the snapping of the ball to the quarterback. The next job that comes to mind might be the center's blocking after the play begins, but equally important is making pre-snap adjustments of the offensive line's protection based on what he sees from a defense.

As Howard pointed out following the Marshall game, this is where McLaughlin's wealth of experience at the highest level of college football has paid dividends for Ohio State. According to Jackson, even if the opposing team is giving the Buckeyes a look the veteran center hasn't seen before on tape, McLaughlin still seems to know what changes to make.

"I'm very grateful for Seth," Jackson said. "Seth is the tip of the spear of our offense, I would say. If teams play us, they're not going to come out in exactly what we think they're going to do because that's just the game plan, but Seth communicates almost down to the snap count of what we have to do to make sure all guys are on the same page."

"There would be times where Will is in his cadence and he yells at me, 'Hey, we're going over here,' and so I know to just follow what he says, and then we're going to make a good play out of it."

Every football team has voices that take command of the locker room, but the two traits that always seem to come up when coaches and teammates are asked about McLaughlin's leadership are his poise and intelligence.

"Seth has done a great job of getting everybody on the same page," Day said after the win over Marshall. "He's like having an NFL center in there. When you go into a meeting and you say something, he's got the answer, or he's going to get it fixed in-game. He's talking to those guys. He's just a calming presence."

"He's really calm in the storm," said sophomore guard Tegra Tshabola. "You never see real panic. Having a guy like that next to you when you haven't really played as many meaningful snaps – there's no one else I'd rather have to my left and to my right with (senior offensive tackle Josh Fryar) and Seth."

It might not be a prerequisite for any leader to be of the highest intelligence, but McLaughlin has plenty to go around. In four years at Alabama, he was a 4.0 student, a four-time SEC Academic Honor Roll winner and an Academic All-American. He received his bachelor's degree in finance in just 2½ years and picked up his master's degree in hospitality management while with the



FILE PHOTO

MIDDLE MAN — Alabama transfer center Seth McLaughlin has provided much-needed experience to the oft-maligned offensive line while earning the trust of quarterback Will Howard.

Crimson Tide. Now he is actively working on a third degree at Ohio State in human development and family science.

McLaughlin's book smarts have translated well enough to the football field to have been noticed repeatedly by his teammates.

"He's really smart, and I trust a lot of what Seth says," senior offensive lineman Zen Michalski said before the season. "A lot of the time when he gets up, he has something to say. I'm like, 'OK, we're going to take this seriously because I know that Seth means this.' Seth, he has something behind that. I know that he has good meaning in that whatever he's saying is probably important."

On the field, in the locker room, and apparently in the classroom, McLaughlin seems to handle everything like a professional, but even with his workmanlike attitude and massive responsibilities of being the offensive line's fearless leader, he has managed to have a blast with the Buckeyes so far.

"I haven't had this much fun playing football since I was in high school," McLaughlin said. "I think that's a testament to how much I love the guys on this team, how much I love showing up to work every day."

NIL Reshapes Football Roster Construction

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact turning point in college football. Some may say it was when players were first allowed to earn money from their name, image and likeness before the start of the 2021 football season, while others might point to the last wave of conference realignment or the opening of the transfer portal. Most probable is that all of the changes have combined to render collegiate sports, especially football, virtually unrecognizable from what it was just a few years ago.

Former UNLV starting quarterback Matthew Sluka's decision to redshirt in the midst of his senior season was the latest of the stunning dominoes to fall in the changing landscape of college football. Sluka, who will enter the transfer portal after the season having protected his eligibility from this year because he played in fewer than five games, was a part of a 3-0 start, which included two wins over Power Four opponents.

Sluka made the decision to depart the Rebels' program after transferring from Holy Cross, a program he spent four seasons with. Sluka reportedly left the program after not receiving the \$100,000 he says he was promised by an assistant coach before the season.

As coaches across the country would come to find out, Sluka's choice to forgo playing in the rest of his team's games to retain

his eligibility was just the tip of the iceberg. A couple of days later, USC defensive tackle Bear Alexander made the same decision to redshirt and enter the transfer portal, and UCF starting wide receiver Xavier Townsend followed the others' lead by redshirting and entering the transfer portal. On the other side of the ball, Knights defensive back Bryon Threats did the same.

"That is the signature event of NIL right now," Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told BSB. "(Sluka) is playing great, he's got a school, and they've got a shot at the playoffs as the Group of Five team. He is not an NFL prospect by any stretch of the imagination, so why is he doing this?"

"If an assistant coach promised him \$100,000, which he's not allowed to do, they're not allowed to be involved in quoting figures, and then the school collective says, 'No, we promised him nothing,' it's sad. It's a sad commentary on where college football is today, but it's reality."

Members of a team's coaching staff aren't allowed to arrange NIL deals with players per NCAA rules, as pay-to-play is still officially outlawed. Instead, the vast majority of Power Four programs have corresponding independent collectives, which feature a variety of alumni and donors who negotiate and facilitate NIL deals for athletes.

Three years after the introduction of NIL rules, it seemed as though the dust had settled around what can and cannot be done with NIL in college sports, but the Sluka

news seemed to add another nightmarish wrinkle into the mix for coaches.

"It potentially will start to become more common, although I do think there are some boundaries that can be put in place to help this not be the case," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Allen Trieu. "For one thing, just make sure that everything is in writing, everything is agreed upon, and in a place where you can go back to that as a reference point. Rather than in this situation, you have both sides saying different things about what occurred and what was promised."

The more professional approach that has overtaken college football over the past few seasons is reflected by the job title changes within some of the most prominent college football programs.

Since NIL's inception, Ohio State has been a prime example of a program not just adapting to the new NIL rules but thriving under them. Mark Pantoni, whose official position has changed from director of player personnel to general manager of the Ohio State program, has seen more than just his title change in the last few years. Now in the new NIL world of college football, Pantoni is dealing with players' agents in negotiating NIL deals and almost working with a sort of salary cap management as he and the rest of the staff try to manage the team's NIL funds, which are at least partially provided by the program's two primary collectives, The Foundation and The 1870 Society. Through three seasons, at least from a roster construction standpoint, the Buckeyes have to like their results.

"I think they've done a great job of getting right on top of that and immediately having formed collectives and immediately finding ways to use NIL in recruiting," Trieu said. "I think they compare very well (to other programs), and I think that the proof of that is in the results."

As Trieu said, the Buckeyes' results speak for themselves since the implementation of NIL. In the past three years, Ohio State brought in three straight top-five recruiting classes according to 247Sports composite rankings, and as BSB went to press, their 2025 class was ranked first in the country. The 2024 recruiting class was headlined by No. 1 overall recruit Jeremiah Smith, who chose the Buckeyes over a variety of suitors.

"I don't think that you can sign top-ranked classes and bring in the Jeremiah Smiths of the world without being extremely competitive, if not excelling in NIL, any longer," Trieu said. "I think Jeremiah is the best example of that because he had all of the top schools in the country going after him, and the same thing with Eddrick Houston. Schools were trying to flip him, Air Noland, guys like that. You don't go into Georgia and Florida and win those recruiting battles anymore without being very competitive in NIL."

According to Greene, Ohio State may not just be competitive with the highest caliber of college football powers, but at the very top as far as the amount of money the program can put into its roster. Evidence of this isn't just in the players Ohio State lured to the program out of high school but the players the team kept around, even after they could have gone to the NFL, and the players Ohio State brought in from the transfer portal.

"We don't know (how much NIL money Ohio State has) because nobody publishes that stuff," Greene said. "All we can go by is what we see. And what I see is the money that was allocated to JJ Smith and that crew, the money that was allocated toward Caleb Downs, Quinshon Judkins, Seth McLaughlin, and then the money that was spent to retain Jack Sawyer, J.T. Tuimoloau, Tyleik Williams and Denzel Burke. You have to put Ohio State at the top or with Texas at the very top."

The closest thing to a ballpark of the money involved in the construction of the juggernaut team the Buckeyes have assembled was a story from ESPN's Jake Trotter, who reported the 2024 team cost the program \$20 million in NIL.

If Ohio State's annual budget to assemble its roster every year is in the ballpark of \$20 million, one has to assume there is only so much talent the team can acquire with its budget. With that in mind, it would be easy to assume that the Buckeyes or any other top-tier college football program can only go after so many highly touted prospects. According to Trieu, that hasn't been the case to this point.

"(College GMs) are doing more cap-management style stuff than ever before, but at the moment, I still think schools are just trying to get the most talented players they can get on their roster," Trieu said. "I don't think they're trying to, at the moment, limit themselves to say, 'We can't afford to sign a class of 25 five stars.' I still think that's the goal, to sign the best group of kids you can."

Not every program is created equal even in some of the Power Four conferences. Rivals recruiting analyst Richie O'Leary said Rutgers, at least in football, is limited in attracting high-end talent that other schools like Ohio State might be able to get.

"Obviously they're not landing the five-star guys," said O'Leary, who covers Rutgers, Penn State and UConn for Rivals. "Those guys are getting quite a bit of change. They do have a top-25 class currently, and it's no secret that NIL plays a factor in not just their recruiting class but 90 percent of the recruiting classes around the country."

This doesn't mean Rutgers is not a factor in recruiting, and as O'Leary put it, the funding within the program kind of ebbs and flows with the success of the team. Now that the team is 4-1, O'Leary said there is more energy around the program. O'Leary even said a donor drove down to the Rutgers vs. Washington game from New York City, enjoyed himself at the game, tailgating with some of the local fans, and ended up donating \$2 million to the program.

"There was a lot of fear that Rutgers struggles with recruiting as is. 'How the hell are we going to be able to raise money?' They're struggling to raise money for facilities and stuff. They're one of the only programs in the country that still uses a bubble instead of an indoor practice facility, but fans have stepped up. Fans have stepped up a lot," O'Leary said.

Even Florida State, which historically has been a powerhouse of a program within the ACC, has its limits on the amount of great players it can bring in, according to Greene.

"Florida State, I've been told, doesn't compete with NIL. I've been told they don't



have the money that Ohio State has," Greene said. "So they've got to be really smart in how they allocate their money.

"Then it's not just the money that you have to allocate from your collective to the incoming freshmen. What if you have that quarterback that is thinking of going to the draft? And if you're going to talk him into staying, he's not going to stay for free. Then what if you need somebody in the transfer portal? What if Florida State wanted Seth McLaughlin? Can they get into a bidding war with Ohio State? Probably not."

As much as NIL has changed the game in talent acquisition and retention, which Greene and Trieu agree is a severe change, the elements that influenced highly touted prospects such as Smith, Houston, and Noland to come to the program before the days of NIL are still in place today, even in a slightly less important role.

"Ohio State just had to be competitive with (Smith), and they were definitely going to get him all along," Greene said. "The relationship with wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was so strong, and Ohio State had gotten in there so early with him that they definitely had the upper hand so that all they had to do was compete with the other schools that were chasing him financially. Once they were competitive (with the money), there was no doubt where he was going to go."

Trieu agreed that a high NIL offer doesn't guarantee a program a prospect but instead just gives a program a seat at the table.

"The hard thing is you won't get a lot of recruits to be able to say directly, 'Yes, NIL was the difference,' or 'NIL was the reason I chose a school,' " Trieu said. "I don't believe that NIL is the reason most kids choose a school. I think in those cases, you have to be competitive in NIL."

"I know of cases where recruits have chosen a school that is offering them less NIL money, but it's competitive enough, and then the other factors about the school made the difference. I think now NIL just becomes one of the factors when you talk about the campus, when you talk about, 'Do I like the coaches? Do I like my teammates? Do I like the class that I'm coming in with?' NIL now just has to fit into that picture."

The Buckeyes may have more NIL resources than many other major programs, but they are definitely not alone in adjusting to the NFL-like model. Under new head coach Kalen DeBoer, Alabama signed its new general manager to a three-year, \$2.5 million contract and boasts its own NIL collective, "Yea Alabama."

As Greene mentioned, Texas has been a force to be reckoned with since NIL came around. The Longhorns grabbed former five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers from the transfer portal after he departed from Ohio State and signed Arch Manning, a five-star quarterback and nephew of Peyton and Eli Manning, out of high school, and he is most likely Ewers' heir apparent next season. They also more recently beat out the Buckeyes for now-freshman offensive tackle Brandon Baker, who was the No. 32 player in the 2024 class.

Ole Miss seems to also be a big beneficiary of the new NIL rules, with its Grove Collective. The program brought in one of the best transfer portal classes in the country over the 2024 offseason.

According to Trieu, Missouri has also made strides in its talent acquisition in large

part due to its NIL funding.

"I think Missouri might be the best example nationally of a school who changed their recruiting efforts quite a bit due to having good NIL," Trieu said. "I don't think they have Luther Burden on their roster without that."

"Williams Nwaneri, a five-star guy, I don't think that they get him without their NIL, and I've heard multiple other recruits who kind of surprised me that they were looking at Missouri. They, off the record (to me), have said, 'Well, they have a really good NIL package.'"

Some schools didn't quite make the fastest adjustments to the new rules and, in turn, fell behind in recruiting.

"It's funny, Michigan is an example of a school that, for a while, a big complaint among their fan base was that they weren't doing enough with NIL, and I don't think that was because Michigan didn't have it. I think that was because their philosophy was that they wanted to get guys on the roster first before promising them big NIL packages," Trieu said. "They weren't wanting to promise that out of high school. They've since shifted."

As there always has been, there's a gap between the resources of Group of Five teams and even lower-end Power Four schools compared to those of the blue bloods. But Trieu believes the difference has shrunk some for schools that might not have the tradition that bigger programs do but have been able to gather together NIL resources to occasionally be competitive with the bigger programs. Still, the types of players Group of Five schools are going after out of high school are probably less talented than the five stars in their class, and they understandably have much fewer NIL offers out of high school, if any at all.

"Once you get to a certain level, I think the G5 schools, you're not having to pay out kids," Trieu said. "You're not having to promise kids as much NIL out of high school, and so you're able to wait until they kind of develop into contributors and then figure it out from there."

Regardless of a program's NIL situation, the recruiting process and roster construction in general have become more complicated, especially at the top of a given recruiting class.

According to Trieu, flips have become much more common because of the NIL process, as schools can come in during the eleventh hour with an improved NIL offer to change a prospect's mind.

"The most recent famous example that I can think of – and I don't know that NIL was 100 percent of the reason, but it played a factor – someone like Dante Moore was committed to Oregon for most of the process," Trieu said. "We barely heard anything about UCLA. UCLA comes in at the end, then he signs with UCLA. Obviously, he's now transferred out, but I think the way that recruitment went and changed right at the end is a lot more common year to year because of NIL."

College coaches would certainly love to need to worry only about high school players flipping from their program to another, but as UNLV found out with Sluka, roster retention with current players is just as much of a challenge, even if conversations between coaching staffs and players about added NIL don't go beyond closed doors.

"I think there's all kinds of NIL conversations and ebb and flow that we are not privy to," Trieu said. "I've heard on the back end of

schools having to up packages to keep guys on the roster. Roster retention now becomes extremely important."

This becomes even more of an issue at Group of Five schools where players could have a sudden boost to their NIL value after a stretch of strong play, putting them in line for a bit of a payday that their school might not be able to provide.

In short, coaches aren't allowed to contact players of other programs to get them to join their program before they enter the transfer portal. Like many other rules in college football, there are certain ways – whether allowed by the rules or not – that coaches have tried to work around the boundaries of tampering.

"I think it's happening all the time," Trieu said. "There's levels to tampering. Schools who have connections back to those players from high school, whether it be a trainer or a parent, even if they're going directly to the player themselves, they're finding a way to say, 'Hey, we're interested if you want to enter the portal.'"

Greene and Trieu agree that more so than ever, the roster construction of college foot-

ball resembles that of the NFL. But despite all of the changes NIL has caused, at least in their eyes, what makes college football unique is still intact.

"I think that's why you choose a school, and the pageantry of college football is still there," Trieu said. "I also think that those rivalries are pretty hammered into everybody who comes into that program. Ohio State hammers that into their recruits. It's woven into the fabric of the school, not just the football program. The same with Michigan. I don't think that changes."

"I think these kids love to play. You look at someone like Caleb Downs. He doesn't look like someone going through the motions to me. Seth McLaughlin – I think those guys play their asses off. Competitors compete," Greene said. "I think they're going to want to win the national title this year. I don't see anything like that out of the new guys they brought in or the guys that have been here a while – Sawyer, (Tuimolouau), Tyleik – I don't think those guys are just playing for money this year and they don't give a crap whether they win or lose. I refuse to believe that."

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Schmidt's '34 Hiring Turns Rivalry Upside Down

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 1934 season as Ohio State hires an innovative new coach with a singular focus – beating Michigan.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

When first-year Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler assembled a group of gritty, underrated players in 1969 and managed to upset the juggernaut that was defending national champion Ohio State, it triggered the so-called "Ten-Year War" between the Wolverines and Buckeyes, elevating the series into one of the most hotly contested rivalries in all of American sports.

Thirty-five years earlier, the rivalry was still every bit as heated, but it had also become something of a one-sided affair in Michigan's favor. That was until a boisterous coach armed with a disarming Southern drawl and an armload of innovative plays named Francis A. Schmidt turned the rivalry upside down.

Beginning in 1922, Michigan rattled off six straight victories against Ohio State, and by the end of the 1933 season, the Wolverines had won nine of their previous 12 meetings with the Buckeyes. Adding insult to injury was the fact that OSU had never finished higher than third in the Western Conference standings during that 12-year period while Michigan had won eight league titles or co-titles and five national championships.

Truth be told, no one outside Columbus thought it was much of a rivalry. Since the series began in 1897, Michigan held a lopsided 22-6-2 advantage against the Buckeyes, including back-to-back shutouts in 1932 and 1933. Then, as now, repeated failures against Michigan were detrimental to the professional health of Ohio State head coaches.

When John W. Wilce resigned following the 1928 season after 16 years as head coach of the Buckeyes, his hand-picked successor was Sam Willaman. The 38-year-old Willaman was a star halfback at OSU in the early 1910s, good enough to have been selected in 1921 to the program's all-time roster as a second-team halfback behind only All-Americans Chic Harley and Pete Stinchcomb.

Willaman, a native of Salem, Ohio, and product of East Technical High School in Cleveland, had played some professional football after college before going into coaching. He spent four seasons as head coach at Iowa State before Wilce lured him back to Columbus as an assistant. Three years later, Willaman was in charge of his alma mater's football program.

His first season began with a bang as the Buckeyes got off to a 3-0 start in 1929, a winning streak that included a 7-0 win at Michigan, OSU's first win in Ann Arbor in eight years.

Willaman was unable to sustain his early success, however. That first team won only one of its final five games, and the subsequent three seasons produced a string of fourth-place finishes in the Western Con-



FILE PHOTO

MERCY ME — Francis A. Schmidt earned the nicknames "Frantic Francis" and "Close the Gates of Mercy" for his take-no-prisoners approach. He brought that style to Ohio State in 1934 and immediately turned around the rivalry with Michigan.

ference. That incurred the wrath of alumni, boosters and donors then known by such names as the "High Street Crowd" or the "Downtown Quarterbacks." Around the football program, they were derisively called "The Wolves."

Regardless of the nomenclature, they had Willaman's attention as well as the ear of Ohio State athletic director Lynn St. John. With each passing loss, the criticism ratcheted up, and Willaman began experiencing debilitating stomach pains, a condition later diagnosed as a chronic intestinal condition.

The problem subsided only slightly when Willaman's team experienced a resurgence in 1933, posting a 7-1 record starting with a 75-0 pounding of Virginia in the season opener. But the lone blemish on that year's record was a 13-0 loss at Michigan in late October, giving Willaman a 2-3 record in the rivalry.

St. John, long bothered by Willaman's coaching style that the AD considered too laid-back for Ohio State, had clandestinely approached a head coach at another school before the 1933 season about taking over

the OSU program. That went nowhere, especially when Brown head coach DeOrmond "Tuss" McLaughry told newspapers about it while announcing he was staying with the Ivy League Bears.

Weathering the public embarrassment that came with McLaughry's disclosure of the one-sided courtship, St. John resigned himself to the fact that Willaman was his coach for the foreseeable future. But when the Buckeyes suffered another loss to Michigan in 1933, the knives were out again.

Western Conference commissioner John "Major" Griffith thought he was being helpful when he sent a letter to his close friend St. John indicating that Minnesota head coach Bernie Bierman was being asked to take a pay cut, and perhaps Ohio State could lure him to Columbus by matching his current salary. But St. John rejected Griffith's overture, deeming it unethical for the commissioner to use information at the expense of another conference member whose interests were supposed to be treated equally.

Bierman eventually stayed at Minnesota

where, beginning in 1934, he won five national championships over the next eight seasons.

Meanwhile, St. John had decided Willaman must go, but he didn't have a viable replacement. He briefly considered Clark Shaughnessy, who had replaced the legendary Amos Alonzo Stagg the previous year at the University of Chicago, as well as Purdue head coach Noble Kizer. But St. John eventually came to the same conclusion about Shaughnessy and Kizer that he had regarding Bierman – poaching a league rival's coaching staff was not a good look.

In the meantime, Willaman had had enough of twisting in the wind. On Jan. 30, 1934, the coach tendered his resignation and almost simultaneously announced he had accepted a three-year contract to take the head coaching job at Western Reserve.

St. John finally decided to expand his search outside the Midwest, centering on a man he had met while serving on a national basketball rules committee.

Francis A. Schmidt had experience coaching football, basketball and baseball at the college level and most recently had served as head of the football and basketball programs at Texas Christian University since 1929. More importantly – at least in St. John's estimation – the outgoing Schmidt was everything the laid-back Willaman was not.

Success At Every Stop

Francis Albert Schmidt was born Dec. 3, 1885, in Downs, Kan., a tiny dot of a town that rose out of the northern Kansas prairie only because locomotives for the Central Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad had to have somewhere to turn around.

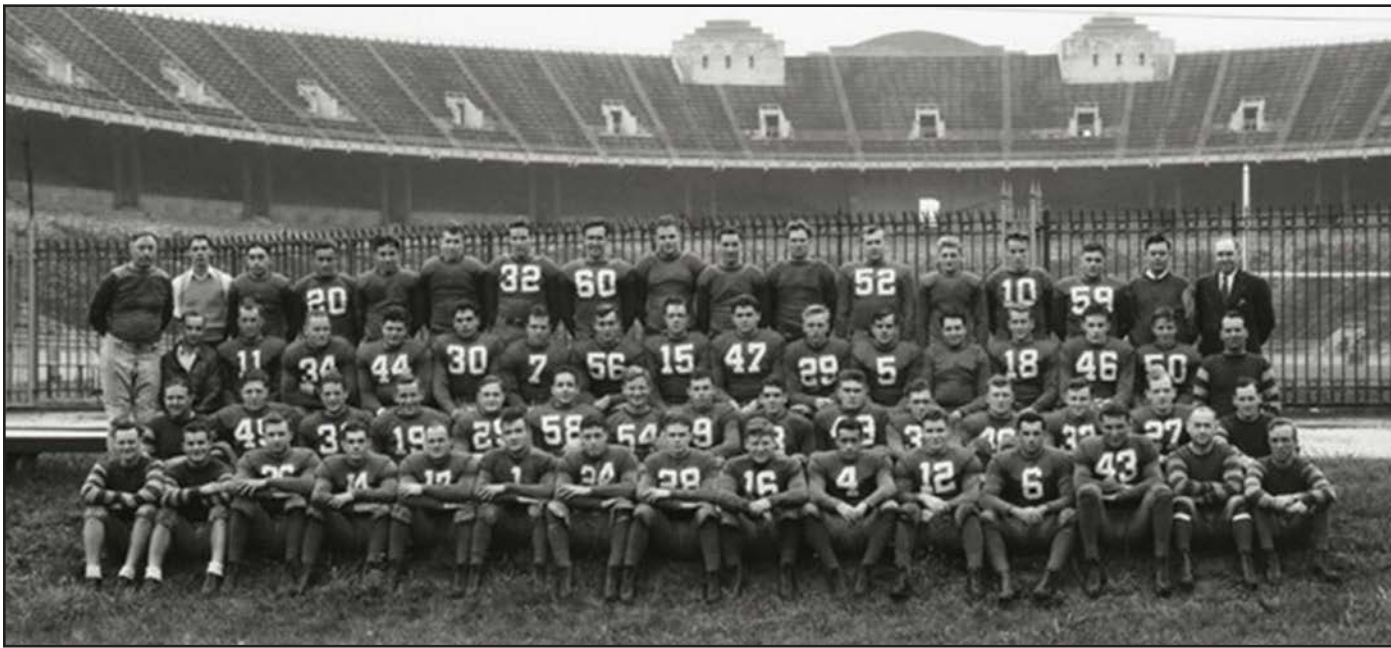
Schmidt's father, Francis Walter Schmidt, was a studio photographer during a time when not many Kansas farmers had the means or wherewithal to sit for portraits. Therefore, he uprooted his family every few years in search of a new customer base.

That kind of restlessness seemed to have an impact on young Francis Albert, who never remained very long in one place his entire life. He did stay long enough in Fairbury, Neb., to graduate from high school there and earn his first measure of success. He was elected senior class president, captained the football team and helped his two-man track team finish second at the state meet, a single point behind a much larger team from Lincoln.

Second place wasn't good enough for Schmidt, though, saying that he "cleared those hurdles with too much room to spare." It was the beginning of a chase for perfection that would ultimately destroy him.

Following his high school graduation, Schmidt continued the life of a vagabond, but he seemed successful nearly everywhere he went. He won a varsity letter at the University of Nebraska during the only season he played college football and completed his academic work toward undergraduate and law degrees simultaneously in just three years.

He fully intended to pursue a career as an attorney, but his mother, Emma, had fallen ill in the summer of 1907, and young Francis chose to help care for her. By then, the Schmidt family was in Arkansas City,



FILE PHOTO

SOLID GOLD — A remark by new coach Francis A. Schmidt in 1934 that Michigan was not to be feared eventually led to the Gold Pants Club for beating the Wolverines.

Kan., and he took turns caring for his mother and running his father's business, making himself into an excellent photographer.

Emma Schmidt died later that year, and Francis stayed in Arkansas City to help at the family photo studio. Still, he knew his hyperactive mind wouldn't allow him to settle for such a mundane existence. He began taking long walks around town during the early evening as he tried to clear his head and ease his restlessness. During one of those walks, he stumbled upon the city high school football team as it began fall practice.

Not long after, Arkansas City High School had itself a new football coach.

It was the beginning of a new career for Schmidt, one that evolved rapidly. In the fall of 1915, he spent the first of two seasons as an assistant football coach and head men's basketball coach at Henry Kendall College (now the University of Tulsa). He left Kendall to join the U.S. Army during World War I, quickly rising to the rank of captain. Upon his discharge, he returned to Kendall, where he was named head coach of both the football and men's basketball programs.

Schmidt eventually concentrated his career solely on football, but it was at Kendall that the man known for his bombastic personality began to develop the kind of frenetic offensive philosophy that earned him such nicknames as "Frantic Francis" and "Close the Gates of Mercy."

After winning a pair of conference championships in only three seasons at Kendall, Schmidt's coaching career skyrocketed. Seven years at the University of Arkansas were followed by five seasons — and two more titles — at TCU before Schmidt finally hit the big time.

Not knowing how he was going to sell an outsider to the fan base, much less the "High Street Crowd," St. John nevertheless sent a telegram to Schmidt in mid-February to gauge his interest in the Ohio State head coaching job. That same evening came a single-line response: "Am greatly interested."

Two weeks later, Schmidt was on a train from Fort Worth to Columbus to formally accept the university's offer of a three-year contract with an annual salary of \$7,000. It

marked the first time an Ohio State coach in any sport had been offered a contract for a period of more than one year.

The same day he accepted the job, Schmidt met with members of the local media, many of whom were more than a little skeptical about the tall, angular man who came north armed with little more than a bow tie and a distinctive Southern drawl.

As he sat in a downtown Columbus hotel barber shop and was peppered with a battery of questions, the inevitable was finally asked.

"Michigan is pretty tough," a reporter offered. "How concerned are you about them?"

"How concerned should I be?" Schmidt replied slowly, flashing a wry smile. "Don't forget they put their trousers on one leg at a time just the same as anyone else."

No one knew it at the time, especially since the coach was simply repeating an old Texas saying. But somewhere along the line the word "trousers" was substituted for "pants," and the genesis of one of Ohio State's oldest and most cherished traditions — the Gold Pants Club — was born.

Rivalry Turnaround

Michigan would have to wait, however. For the first time in nearly a decade, the rivalry game had been scheduled for the second half of the season. (It wouldn't become the traditional season finale for the two teams until the following season in 1935.)

Indiana provided Ohio State's season-opening competition for the first time in history, and the Schmidt-led Buckeyes responded with a 33-0 victory, the most lopsided win against the Hoosiers since a 46-7 decision in 1916. Perhaps better still was the fact that 47,736 fans showed up to watch a new brand of Buckeye football. At the time, it was the largest opening-day crowd in Ohio State history.

Schmidt threw open his vast playbook against Indiana, showing everything from the single wing to the double wing and nearly everything in between. In the first period, halfback Frank Boucher broke through the right side of the IU line on a fake reverse before galloping 78 yards for the first touch-

down of the Schmidt era.

The Buckeyes attempted 26 passes in the game, completing 11 of them for 131 yards, including a fourth-quarter touchdown pass from quarterback Tippy Dye to halfback Frank Antenucci.

Schmidt and his team were the toast of Columbus for exactly one week. The following Saturday, they traveled to Illinois and came home with a 14-13 loss. The Buckeyes had entered the fourth quarter staring at a 14-0 deficit but scored twice in the waning minutes only to have team captain Regis Monahan's extra-point kick sail wide for the one-point loss.

The Buckeyes responded to the defeat with four straight victories, a streak that included a 10-7 win against a powerful Colgate team on its way to a 7-1 record in 1934 and a 76-0 wipeout of Willaman-coached Western Reserve.

That set up the eagerly anticipated Nov. 17 showdown with four-time defending conference champion Michigan. But the Wolverines were no match for the Buckeyes during a 34-0 rout that included five different players scoring touchdowns for Ohio State.

Halfback Dick Heekin and fullback Damon "Buzz" Wetzel scored on short TD runs during the first half before Antenucci scored early in the fourth quarter when he pounced on a loose ball in the end zone. Schmidt then turned up the heat down the stretch as three-time All-America end Merle Wendt went 66 yards to pay dirt on a halfback option pass and fellow end Frank Cumisky scored on a 33-yard pass from Dye.

Ohio State led by a large margin in every statistical category, including 460 yards of total offense to just 40 for Michigan. It marked the largest margin of victory for the Buckeyes in the series and was greeted with a large portion of the 68,678 fans in attendance triumphantly claiming the Ohio Stadium goalposts.

"That famed Michigan jinx," a writer from The Associated Press reported the following day, "nemesis of Ohio State grid teams since the turn of the century, was buried far beneath the cleat-torn sod of the Buckeye gridiron Saturday as the Wolver-

ines, baffled by Coach Francis A. Schmidt's intricate offense, went down to a 34 to 0 defeat, the most humiliating ever handed an Ann Arbor eleven by the scarlet and gray."

The Buckeyes closed out the 1934 season the following Saturday with a 40-7 win against Iowa, a win that gave them a second-place Western Conference finish behind Illinois and pushed them to No. 9 in the final Associated Press rankings of the year.

It was the beginning of a star-crossed, seven-year run for Schmidt as head coach of the Buckeyes. His teams claimed victories against Michigan in each of his first four seasons, a streak that stood among Ohio State coaches until Urban Meyer went a perfect 7-0 in the rivalry series.

But Schmidt wound up a victim of his own eccentric behavior. Convinced everyone from university officials to his assistant coaches and even his own players were out to sabotage his program, the coach became more and more paranoid.

Then the losses began to mount. The Buckeyes compiled only a 4-3-1 record in 1938 and suffered their first defeat against Michigan after four straight victories. Losses to the Wolverines would follow during the next two seasons, including an embarrassing 40-0 loss to Michigan that completed a four-loss campaign in 1940.

The Columbus rumor mill produced countless reports that the university was ready to fire the coach, but Schmidt's nature wouldn't allow him to wait until things blew over. He offered a hastily written letter of resignation to the university Athletic Board and then hoped the board would reject it.

On Dec. 16, 1940, however, the board unanimously voted to accept Schmidt's resignation despite an overall seven-year record of 39-16-1. Five weeks later, the Buckeyes announced Paul Brown as Schmidt's successor.

Schmidt's demise in Columbus signified the beginning of the end of what had been a superlative career. He resurfaced at the University of Idaho during the spring of 1941 but posted two losing seasons before the Vandals suspended their football program for the duration of World War II.

Years of neglecting his health in favor of his coaching career finally began to take its toll, and Schmidt was hospitalized in Spokane, Wash., in early September 1944. Less than three weeks later, he was dead of a brain tumor at the age of 58.

By that time, his predecessor at Ohio State was also gone.

Willaman was convinced that a change in scenery would improve his health. Instead, it got worse. Despite finishing the 1934 season with a 7-1-1 record at Western Reserve that earned a Big Four championship, the coach's stomach problems got to the point where doctors recommended surgery.

Willaman resisted as long as he could, and during the late summer of 1935, he felt well enough to embark upon a fishing trip to Canada with his wife and some friends. But the trip was cut short when Willaman fell ill, and he was hospitalized three days later in Cleveland.

One emergency procedure was followed immediately by another, but they were surgeries from which Willaman never recovered. He died a few hours after the second surgery at the age of 45.

Visitors Flock To Columbus For Iowa Game

The Buckeyes' first three home games were not necessarily very big draws when it came to bringing recruits to town, although they still took the opportunity to get some on campus. But the 35-7 win over the Hawkeyes on Oct. 5 was by far the biggest attraction that Ohio State has hosted so far this season, though bigger weekends are sure to come.

**RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson**

The following list of recruits in attendance was compiled using BSB's own information, reports from other outlets and recruits themselves.

Starting with committed prospects, many of Ohio State's 2025 players made it to campus. Those players were Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210); Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295); Enterprise, Ala., four-star defensive end Zion Grady (6-4, 235); Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star safety Cody Haddad (6-1, 175); Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star wide receiver De'zie Jones (6-0, 180); Akron Hoban three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 230); Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290); Ontario, Ohio, three-star wide receiver Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180); Matthews (N.C.) Weddington four-star defensive lineman Trajen Odom (6-4, 285); McKinney,

Texas, five-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 215); Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts (6-4, 235); Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170); Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225); and Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star safety DeShawn Stewart (6-2, 185).

Of those visitors who are committed, the most important of them might be Alford, who has been exploring his options in his home state, taking an official visit to Florida State on Sept. 14 for a 20-12 loss to Memphis. He had also taken official visits to UCF and Miami (Fla.) over the summer. He is the No. 62 player and No. 5 linebacker in the country, and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis had the chance on Oct. 5 to reassure Alford that he is needed at Ohio State.

The Buckeyes had one uncommitted 2025 prospect on campus for the game. Nappanee (Ind.) NorthWood kicker Dominic De Freitas was in Columbus for a visit. So far this season, he has made five out of six field-goal tries, also making 17 of 18 extra-point attempts, according to MaxPreps. De Freitas also plays soccer in high school and has scored 19 goals in his senior season.

Many uncommitted 2026 recruits and one flip target made their way to campus on Oct. 5, including Painesville (Ohio) Harvey four-star running back Shahn Alston (5-9, 205); Carrollton, Ga., four-star cornerback and current Alabama commit Dorian Barney (6-1, 175); Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star interior offensive lineman Will Conroy (6-3, 275); Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park four-star defensive end Rod-

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	

ney Dunham (6-4, 227); Indianapolis Warren Central three-star defensive lineman JJ Finch (6-3, 260); Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200); Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285); Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial wide

receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187); Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280); Galloway (Ohio) Westland three-star athlete Emoni Smith (6-1, 175); and Watkinsville (Ga.) Oconee County four-star linebacker Zach Weeks (6-2, 215).

Barney was impressed after his visit to cam-



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

pus and said that he plans to come back for another visit at some point, targeting the Nov. 30 game against archrival Michigan as his return date.

“What impressed me is how the coaches were still locked in even when they’re up that much,” Barney told 247Sports. “The atmosphere was crazy, one of the best I’ve seen yet. I’ll be back soon for sure.

“I talked to (cornerbacks coach Tim Walton) and Coach (Ryan) Day,” Barney said. “The conversations went really well, always good to talk to them.”

Conroy, Guthrie and Riley are three of offensive linemen from what is proving to be a strong position group of in-state players whom the Buckeyes have been going after for a while. Conroy left Ohio State off his top-five list recently but still seems to be considering the school now that he came to campus for an unofficial visit.

Weeks talked to 247Sports about his visit before he went to campus and emphasized how excited he was to get back to Columbus after last being there for a recruiting camp over the summer. He said he talks to Laurinaitis consistently and that his top schools are Ohio State, LSU, Florida, Michigan and Tennessee.

“We talk weekly about how I’m doing and how the season is going,” Weeks told 247Sports. “It’s going good. I think they see me developing as more of a Mike (linebacker), but only time will tell.”

As for 2027 prospects, Ohio State hosted Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace running back Julian Baker (6-0, 190); Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 160); Austintown (Ohio) Fitch athlete Brayden Bryant (6-1, 180); Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison athlete Darius Dennis (6-1, 190); Huntington Beach, Calif., five-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200); Mobile (Ala.) Williamson linebacker Ellis McGaskin (6-1, 190); and Pittsburgh Aliquippa cornerback Larry Moon III (5-11, 170).

Edmunds was the biggest 2027 visitor for the Buckeyes on Oct. 5. He has been trending toward Ohio State in recent weeks and seems likely to make a decision on his commitment by the end of the year. He has set a top four of Ohio State, Penn State, Michigan and Texas, the latter of which he is expected to visit on Oct. 19 during Ohio State’s off week for the Longhorns’ game against Georgia.

Brown, the No. 6 player in the country who was at Ohio State for a recruiting camp on June 5, talked to 247Sports and said he was impressed by the receivers in the Michigan State win. Jeremiah Smith brought down two one-handed grabs in the first half of the 38-7 win.

“I’ve been talking to some of the Ohio State coaches and sometimes Coach Day,” Brown said. “I watched some of the Ohio State-Michigan State game and some other clips. The wide receivers are great.”

He said the schools that are starting to stand out to him this early in the process are Ohio State, Penn State, Notre Dame and Maryland. He was at the Penn State win over Illinois and the Notre Dame win over Miami (Ohio).

Offord Talks OSU In Oregon, Auburn Gear

Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na’em Offord (6-1, 185) has been rumored to be a potential flip candidate from the Buckeyes 2025 class with both Auburn and Oregon recruiting him very hard since his Feb. 2 commitment to Ohio State. He has taken official visits to those two schools and Alabama since he pledged his services to OSU.

After his game on Sept. 27, Offord talked to the Hoover Sun in a video posted to Twitter while wearing orange sleeves, an Auburn towel and wristband, and an Oregon windbreaker.

“I’m still locked in with Ohio State,” Offord said. “I’m just showing love to all of the schools still recruiting me.”

He was originally scheduled to visit Ohio State for the game against Iowa but canceled that plan to go watch his brother play instead. He said he will try to get to Columbus for the game against Nebraska on Oct. 26.

That visit could be one of the more important ones on the schedule all season for the Buckeyes, especially if Walton is able to convince Offord to remain with the Buckeyes.

Offord is the No. 9 player in the country in the 2025 class, the No. 3 cornerback and the No. 1 player in the state of Alabama.

Whether Offord remains committed to the Buckeyes or not, it will be a battle for Ohio State down to the wire for Offord’s services until the early signing period in December.

2026 WR Henry Out With Knee Injury

Ohio State’s only current 2026 commit, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), is reportedly going to have to sit out for the rest of his junior season with a knee injury.

He is ranked by 247Sports composite ranking as the No. 1 player in the country in the class and has been committed to Ohio State since July 28, 2023.

Originally from Cincinnati, Henry transferred to Mater Dei to play out the final two seasons of his high school career after a sophomore season at Cincinnati Withrow in which he had 71 receptions for 1,127 yards and 10 touchdowns in 14 games.

The son of the late former Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Chris Henry did take a visit to Oregon during its recruiting event in July but has said that he remains committed to Ohio State.

“I’m always locked in,” Henry said in June after attending Ohio State’s recruiting camp. “I’m just still enjoying the process of being a recruit because this is only happening one time. I’m still just going to enjoy it. The other schools, I tell them, ‘Yeah, it’s going to be really hard to try and get me to flip, because it’s Ohio State.’ This is where I want to be.

“For receivers, this is where you want to be. This is the standard, being at Ohio State. It’s a great program.”

Henry said at the time that wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was a big part of why he remained so committed to Ohio State despite moving across the country and he enjoys work-

Continued On Page 28

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THANKS A MILLION

Buckeyes Looking To Fill Needs Past 2025

Continued From Page 27

ing with him whenever he can.

"I enjoy it every time," he said. "Just being out here, learning from him, picking up new things, it's just been great. I always enjoy being out here. I feel more fluid and smoother every time I come out here."

OSU Sends Out 2026, 2027 Offers

Despite the fact that the Buckeyes are in the middle of a season that they say is a "national championship or bust" campaign, they are still looking toward the future and trying to continue to build rosters like the talented one they have for the 2024 season.

The week between the Michigan State game and the Iowa game was a fairly busy one for Ohio State on the recruiting trail compared to previous weeks during the season. Part of that was sending out seven offers, five of which were to 2026 recruits and two of which were to 2027 running backs.

The 2026 players who received offers from the Buckeyes were Dunham, Guthrie, Finch, San Francisco Archbishop Riordan four-star interior offensive lineman Tommy Tofi (6-6, 320)

and Prosper, Texas, four-star offensive tackle Zaden Krempin (6-5, 270) while Brenham, Texas, running back Jakoby Dixon (5-9, 183) and Chandler (Ariz.) Basha running back Noah Roberts (6-1, 190) were the 2027 recruits who got an offer from running backs coach Carlos Locklyn.

Dunham is the highest rated of the seven, currently listed as the No. 56 prospect in the country, the No. 6 defensive end and the sixth-best player in the state of North Carolina.

He has 23 Division I offers so far, including offers from Auburn, Florida State, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Texas A&M and Wisconsin. In his sophomore high school season, he had 55 tackles (16 for loss) and seven sacks. Through three games this season, Dunham had recorded eight tackles, four sacks, eight quarterback hurries and one forced fumble.

Guthrie received his offer at the Iowa game and is the No. 211 recruit in the country, the No. 16 offensive tackle and the No. 9 player in the state of Ohio. He talked to 247Sports after his visit and said that Ohio State is one of his top choices at this point.

"It was a great day," Guthrie said. "Had a good time and had all my questions answered, and it seems like they did as well. Coach (Jus-

tin) Frye offered me out on the field (before the game). It was definitely surreal always dreaming of playing for that team, especially with it 30 minutes away. Coach Frye let me know where I stand with them. Definitely high on their board."

Guthrie currently has 37 Division I scholarship offers. In addition to Ohio State, that list includes Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Penn State, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas.

Finch is the 455th-best player in the country, the 40th-best defensive lineman and the No. 1 player in the state of Indiana. He has received 21 scholarship offers, many of them from Big Ten programs.

Tofi is rated the No. 123 player in the nation, the No. 10 interior offensive lineman and the No. 16 player in the state of California. He currently holds 27 offers, including some from Auburn, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, USC and Washington.

Krempin is ranked the No. 152 player in the country and the No. 19 player in the state of Texas. He is a highly sought-after recruit with 43 Division I offers, including many from major-college football programs such as Alabama, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oregon, Penn State and Texas.

Ohio State was the 14th school that Dixon has received an offer from so far, including some from Baylor, TCU, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and Texas Tech. In his freshman season, he ran for 1,181 yards and 14 touchdowns on 133 carries and also had 34 catches for 502 yards and five receiving touchdowns.

Roberts is the ninth running back so far who has received an offer from Ohio State. He currently has no ranking with many players in his class still waiting to receive theirs, but he does hold offers from nine Division I schools – Arizona, Arizona State, Central Michigan, Colorado State, Iowa State, Northern Arizona, Ohio State, Oklahoma and Tennessee.

Through five games of his sophomore season, Roberts had run for 393 yards on 46 carries for nine touchdowns, also adding 11 catches for 135 yards and two touchdowns through the air. He is the former teammate of current Ohio State freshman cornerback Miles Lockhart.

"It was a blessing to receive an offer from Oklahoma, specifically from coach DeMarco Murray because I know he was in the NFL and can develop running backs," Roberts told 247Sports. "It was also a blessing to receive an offer from Ohio State because I know the

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Dayton Meadowdale High School's Rod Boykin was a "can't miss" major-college football player. That was not news to recruiting coordinators across the country, who had started taking notice of the 6-0, 185-pound defensive back more than a year before.

But his head coach, Pat Masters, said the "can't miss" tag was more appropriate for Boykin than for many more one-dimensional prep gridiron standouts.

"As a defensive back he is really, really talented and can go as far as he wants to," Masters said. "He has great strength and speed and can play corner or safety."

"But he is one of those kids who is a heck of an athlete and can do a lot of other things. You can recruit him and fit him where he is needed. He is a 'can't miss' because he could also play quarterback, receiver or tailback if there is a need."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Pennsylvania had always been a tough place to recruit for Ohio State. For the past quarter of a century, Joe Paterno had usually picked the state clean for his Nittany Lions and left the rest for anybody who wanted them.

Notable exceptions for the Buckeyes were All-America tight end Jan White of Harrisburg, a member of the 1968 national championship team, and All-America linebacker Lorenzo Styles of Farrell, who grew up and spent most of his life in Columbus before moving to Pennsylvania.

During the last several seasons, OSU had tried to recruit some of the best players Pennsylvania had to offer but always seemed to come up a little short. The school finished second to Pitt several years before in the running for Sean Gilbert then lost out to Penn State the year before for the services of Floyd Wedderburn.

There had been many others. The Buckeyes also tried to get offensive linemen Ryan Fagan and Brad Jones, as well as linebacker Clint Seace, and just fell short.

But the OSU program remained undaunted. It would give Pennsylvania another shot in 1994. And although many players in that state offered Ohio State as only a token choice on their list of favorites, at least two highly-rated prospects appeared to be very interested in the Buckeyes, the most notable being fullback Rashonn Drayton (6-3, 215) of Central Catholic High School.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State welcomed in roughly 30 high school football prospects, including three for official visits, for its Oct. 2 home game with Wisconsin.

Those who made official visits were defensive back Bobby Britton of Jacksonville (Fla.) Raines, defensive end Nautyn McKay-Loescher of Toronto (Ont.) Central Tech and tight end Willie Roberts of Miami Southridge.

That trio brought OSU's total official visits for the season to six. California tight end Will Svitek and the Florida duo of running back Willis McGahee and offensive lineman Jonathan Colon had visited

OSU previously.

Britton could tell Ohio State's 41-17 blowout loss to Wisconsin had taken the wind out of the players' sails.

"I have followed Ohio State a lot, and I know things like that don't normally happen," he said. "They had some miscues, and Wisconsin was able to capitalize on them."

"The players handled it well. That was tough with it being a Big Ten game in front of their home crowd. On the outside, they showed a lot of pride, but I know it was tearing them up inside. But things like that happen. You have to build on it."

20 Years Ago — 2004

When it came to recruiting, observers often talked about Ohio State needing to "put a fence around Ohio" in order to keep the state's best players from heading elsewhere. It appeared that the Buckeye coaching staff was willing to leave the gate open for Adam Myers-White.

The Hamilton, Ohio, safety was rated No. 3 both overall in Ohio and among safeties nationally by Rivals.com, which also considered him to be the nation's No. 63 overall player. Myers-White received a Buckeye offer shortly after signing day in February, seemingly confirming his lofty status among Ohio's class of 2005.

He remained in that position until September, when Myers-White received a surprising phone call from OSU defensive backs coach Mel Tucker, informing him that the Buckeyes were withdrawing their scholarship offer and would no longer be recruiting Myers-White.

"They called me and said they were going in a different direction," Myers-White told BSB. "That's the only reason they gave me."

15 Years Ago — 2009

When Ohio State landed a fresh commitment, head coach Jim Tressel liked to make sure the newest member of the program had made a thoroughly researched decision.

It stood to reason that Tressel was at least a little concerned when he found himself accepting a verbal commitment from four-star wide-receiver James Louis from Delray Beach (Fla.) Atlantic.

If so, he was right to feel that way.

The 5-11, 180-pound wideout was set to issue a verbal commitment to Florida when head coach Urban Meyer and his coaching staff stopped returning his phone calls. After about two weeks of unsuccessful attempts to reach the Gators, Louis abruptly switched gears and committed to the Buckeyes in late July.

Louis had publicly been mum on his commitment, but SoFLA-football.com was reporting that the Gators were back in the hunt and trying to sway the nation's No. 24 wide receiver prospect back to their program, and that they were not alone in their efforts to pry him away from Ohio State's commitment list.

"Florida has a great program, a great coaching staff," Louis said. "I still talk to (recruiting coordinator) Billy Gonzales all the time and Urban Meyer. I have a great relationship with them. Florida is still a good school to me. I don't have anything against them."

I still like them."

10 Years Ago — 2014

The presence of outside linebacker Jerome Baker at the Cincinnati game was a cause of joy for Ohio State fans, but the possibility of adding another linebacker might have caused a commit to have second thoughts.

Dublin (Ohio) Scioto four-star linebacker Nick Conner (6-3, 215) seriously considered taking an official visit to Kentucky on Oct. 4 for the Wildcats' game with South Carolina, but the Ohio State staff was able to persuade him to cancel the trip.

While the assumption from some may have been that Conner thought his spot was in jeopardy, that simply wasn't the case. As an early enrollee, Conner had signed a financial aid agreement that forced Ohio State to honor his commitment.

Five Years Ago — 2019

Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral four-star quarterback Jack Miller (6-4, 210) had been one of the more vocal members of Ohio State's 2020 recruiting class in an effort to get some of the best prospects in the country to join him in Columbus.

However, Miller had recently fielded questions about the strength of his pledge with the Buckeyes actively looking to add another signal caller in the recruiting cycle for depth purposes. He took to Twitter on Sept. 27 to shut down any rumors of discontent between the two parties.

"All the speculation, I'm solid," Miller wrote.

The Buckeyes had been linked to – but had yet to offer – quarterbacks such as Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., four-star C.J. Stroud (6-3, 194); Honolulu St. Louis three-star Jayden de Laura (6-1, 190); and Stephenville, Texas, three-star Kade Renfro (6-4, 189), a North Texas commit.

One Year Ago — 2023

Buford, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265) was one of the most important prospects in Ohio State's class, and while there's always a fear that highly touted recruits such as Houston could continue to explore their options, he appeared locked in with the Buckeyes with just over two months until the early signing period.

Houston, who visited for Ohio State's 37-17 win over Maryland on Oct. 7, told 247Sports that he had continued to hear from other schools but was not returning the communication.

"I'm also going up there when they play Penn State and Michigan State," Houston said. "I want everyone to know I'm committed to Ohio State and not going anywhere else. Other schools still hit me up, but I don't talk to them."

Through five games, Houston – the No. 22 overall prospect and fourth-ranked defensive lineman in the class – had picked up five sacks.

ASK AN ANALYST

with Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

Columbia (S.C.) Irmo four-star wide receiver Donovan Murph (6-2, 188) reclassified to the 2025 class on Oct. 1 and said he plans to commit late this year. Is he still a prospect Ohio State is interested in, and if so, do they have a chance to land him by the time he commits?

"I haven't heard all that much regarding him and Ohio State, to be honest. I don't think he's taken an official visit yet unless there's one that I've missed. Who knows what's going to happen? This is a new deal here. I was told Alabama could possibly be in the lead for him, but this reclassification thing, it speeds up his timeline considerably. What you have to see here are, I guess, the official visits. When these kids reclassify like this, it really throws everything into the loop. Now Ohio State, they've got a bunch of receivers committed already for 2025. You have to see where he shows up. He's definitely moving up his timeline. Maybe with South Carolina playing better, he decides to stay in state. He looks like a heck of a player to me, but I haven't heard anything about Ohio State being in the lead or Ohio State being one of his leaders. I just don't have anything there at all. He's good. I would be interested in him."

Ohio State offered Duluth, Ga., four-star offensive lineman and Georgia Tech commit Damola Ajidahun (6-6, 280) last month. What do you make of him as a prospect, and what are you hearing about how likely he is to flip?

"He's not going to Georgia Tech. There's nothing that kid has done in the past two or three weeks that even remotely looks like he's committed to anyone, so he isn't going there. I like him as a prospect. He's not a five-star kid, but there's a lot to like there with his foot quickness, he's got length, and I think he is a tackle. A lot of

these guys, they're definitely inside guys. Westerville (Ohio) North three-star offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295) and the rest of that crowd, Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290) is a tackle. With Damola, I like him, and he's going to be at Ohio State in two or three weeks for an official visit. He's already been to Georgia. That was a long time ago.

"Who are they fighting to get him? That's the interesting thing. Probably South Carolina, I would think, would be the biggest threat right now. He's a Georgia kid, but it doesn't look like Georgia's putting a lot of heat on him.

"I think Ohio State can get him. I don't know where they're at. NIL is huge. Who's offering the NIL money to that kid? If I'm Ohio State, when you look at the class, the O-line class they have right now, mostly inside guys, I would chase that kid. I think there's upside there. There's height, length, foot quickness and he's a pure tackle, which they need. I know he's committed to Georgia Tech, but there's nothing that kid is doing right now that even remotely looks like a committed recruit anywhere. He's wide open, and I think Ohio State can get him. If they push for him, if they put together an NIL package for him, I would think they'd be the favorite to get him."

Opelika, Ala., four-star defensive lineman and Auburn commit Malik Autry (6-6, 320) has seemed very committed to Auburn, making him an unlikely flip candidate, although OSU is still trying. Have been there any changes in how open he is to exploring other options?

"I don't think so. It just doesn't seem like it to me. I can get why they're chasing him. I would too. If you look at Ohio State right

now, they've got a gang committed on that defensive line. A lot of them are inside guys, but they've got five or six defensive linemen committed right now. They would take Autry for sure. You would take him and either tell one of the other guys to hit the road or take seven of them. I don't see anything yet right now that makes me think they're getting Malik Autry. They would take him, and they would love to have him. I just don't see it. I see nothing right now that makes me think they're getting him."

The Buckeyes haven't had a 2026 commitment since Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. Do you expect Ohio State to get any commits in that class during the football season? Who are the names to look out for?

"These kids always have their own timeline, and I would always look at that in-state offensive line group, which is interesting to me because I think Ohio State could take a ton of those kids. Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310) - that whole group there. Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive lineman Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285) is a guy that's really interesting to me, although I don't think they've offered him yet. Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) is a stud, and I think they're the clear favorite to get him. Cleveland four-star offensive lineman Will Conroy is now at St. Ignatius. It appears like fences are being mended there.

"They could literally take four or maybe five players just from in state on that offensive line and be fine. I would look at that offensive line group and look to them for maybe an early commitment. Other than that, I would have nothing right now on that."

school has a prestigious history in football and they produce a lot of NFL players year in and year out."

WR Murph Reclassifies To 2025

Columbia, S.C., four-star wide receiver Donovan Murph (6-2, 188) was on schedule to graduate early in the 2026 class and was set to get onto a college campus as an early enrollee, but he has decided to instead reclassify to the 2025 class. He will now graduate in May of 2025.

"I've been thinking about it for a couple of weeks now. I've been going on these visits and each school has been talking to me about, 'Why don't you just come now? We'll take you now,' " he told TheBigSpur on Oct. 1, the day he announced his decision.

"That's just a way for me to retire my family earlier. I got that opportunity, so that's definitely a route I want to go.

"I've just got to get the work done, take a couple of months and just grind it out."

Murph, the No. 257 player in the country, No. 36 wide receiver and the No. 5 player in the state of South Carolina, took an unofficial visit to Ohio State for the 52-6 win over Akron on Aug. 31 to open the season and since then has also taken unofficials to North Carolina, South Carolina and Alabama, taking just the weekend of Sept. 21 off.

Since he was in the class of 2026, he hasn't yet been able to take official visits, but now that he has reclassified to the 2025 class, he said he's planning to get those set up as soon as he can. It has also sped up the process of when he will end up committing to a school.

"It definitely sped up the process for me, reclassifying to '25," Murph said. "But these next couple of weeks are when I take official visits. I'll have a commit date, probably by the end of this year."

He has since scheduled a visit to Tennessee on Oct. 19 for its game against Alabama. Currently, South Carolina is the favorite to land Murph, and he returned to the campus for another visit the weekend after he announced his reclassification. But Clemson will also continue to be a big player as it has been

for Murph to this point.

Bucks Included On Narrowed Lists

The Buckeyes were included in the top five for Missouri City (Texas) Fort Bend Marshall three-star safety Isaiah Williams (6-0, 190) when it was released on Oct. 2. Also included with Ohio State were LSU, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas.

He is currently rated the No. 391 player in the class of 2026, the No. 31 safety and the No. 57 player in the talent-rich state of Texas.

In his sophomore season, Williams had 91 tackles, four interceptions, two pass breakups and a forced fumble. He was originally offered in January by safeties coach Matt Guerrieri.

The Buckeyes were also included on a top-10 list for 2027 four-star defensive lineman Jamarion Carlton (6-5, 238) of Temple, Texas. He

is ranked the No. 51 player in the class, the No. 2 defensive lineman and the No. 5 player in the state of Texas.

Also included on his list were Baylor, Kansas State, LSU, Nebraska, Ole Miss, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and USC. Carlton is currently favored to remain in state with Texas, but with so much time left in his recruitment, he could be swayed away from the Longhorns.

He was at an Ohio State recruiting camp over the summer and received an offer on June 12 after he attended.

Other Notes And Tidbits

• There were many committed prospects on campus for the Iowa game, but Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star running back and Ohio State commit Isaiah West (5-11, 208) will wait to come back to Columbus until the Buck-

eyes' next home game against Nebraska on Oct. 26. West told 247Sports that he plans to graduate early and enroll early at Ohio State in January, and no other schools are recruiting him at this point because he has "made it pretty clear" that he is going to Ohio State and isn't looking elsewhere.

• 2027 prospect Cincinnati Anderson linebacker Antwoine Higgins (6-3, 215) told 247Sports that he is looking to get back to Ohio State for the Nebraska game although he hasn't yet been offered by the Buckeyes. He said that Oregon, Michigan and Tennessee are "starting to stand out" from the schools that are recruiting him. Higgins has no ranking from 247Sports composite yet, but 247Sports' standard ranking has him as the No. 57 player in the country, the No. 1 linebacker and the second-best player in the state of Ohio.

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B1G Officiating Change After Onside Offside

The Big Ten conference announced a change to the officiating process after the end of Michigan's 27-24 win over Minnesota on Sept. 28.

Minnesota came back from down 24-3 going into the fourth quarter to trail the Wolverines by just three points with 1:37 left in the game. After scoring, the Gophers elected to onside kick and recovered it, but they were flagged due to linebacker Matt Kingsbury – the player who recovered the kick – being offside.

made by just one person.

Fleck reacted to the call and the rule change during the following week.

"Here is what I'll say about that," Fleck said two days after the game and before the conference had announced the alignment change for the officials. "I had a conversation with the Big Ten commissioner and the officials. We know they're reviewing it, and we expect to hear something this afternoon. That's all I'll say about the last play."

Fleck later would go on his weekly radio show "Gopher Football Weekly," hosted by Minnesota play-by-play announcer Mike Grimm, where he would joke about the ruling made by the Big Ten.

"You didn't hear?" Fleck said on Oct. 1. "They said we get to play them one more time. Get everybody back together during the bye week. We get one play. We get the ball at the 39-yard line, one timeout, (1:37) to go."

Despite being seemingly frustrated by the process and the call, he accepted that it couldn't be changed and said that his team learned from it.

"You have to be really good at losing to continue to find ways to win. I'm not accepting losing, what I'm saying is you have to understand when you do lose, you're going to learn the most," Fleck said. "Our players, I can't give them enough credit for how hard they played in the second half, the resiliency they showed. That's going to stay with them through life. I think they've handled everything with class."

Smith, Ballo Headline All-B1G Preseason Team

With basketball season quickly approaching, the Big Ten conference released its 10-member men's basketball preseason All-Big Ten team on Oct. 1, with Purdue guard Braden Smith highlighting the group.

Smith, who was the only unanimous All-Big Ten selection, was also named Big Ten Preseason Player of the Year after playing a significant role in the Boilermakers' run to the NCAA Championship Game, their first title-game appearance since 1969.

Smith finished the 2023-24 season with 12.0 points per game, 7.5 assists and 5.8 rebounds as the team's second-leading scorer behind center Zach Edey, who is now with the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies. According to the Big Ten's release, he was the second player in NCAA history to amass at least 450 points, 275 assists and 225 rebounds in a season, while he also set a Big Ten and Purdue record with 292 assists.

Joining Smith on the 10-player team was Indiana redshirt senior center Oumar Ballo, Iowa senior forward Payton Sandfort, Minnesota senior forward Dawson Garcia, Northwestern senior guard Brooks Barnhizer, Ohio State junior guard Bruce Thornton (more on page 32), Oregon sophomore guard Jackson Shelstad, Penn State senior guard Ace Baldwin Jr., Rutgers true freshman guard Dylan Harper and Washington senior forward Great Osobor.

Ballo comes to the Hoosiers as a transfer from Arizona, where he averaged 12.9 points and 10.1 rebounds per game in his junior season with the Wildcats. He will look to improve Indiana's 10-10 record in the conference from last season, its worst since 2021-22.

Sandfort has scored double digits in 47 career games with 18 20-point contests, and he was a third-team All-Big Ten team selection last season when he averaged a team-high 16.4 points along with 6.6 rebounds and 2.7 assists per game. The Hawkeyes were also 10-10 in the conference last season, finishing just ahead of the Buckeyes' 9-11 record.

Garcia continued his strong play with the Golden Gophers last season, scoring a team-high 17.6 points per game and 6.7 rebounds while accumulating 32 blocks on the defensive side of the ball.

Barnhizer was a third-team All-Big Ten selection last year and made the conference all-defensive team as well. He started in all 34 games and averaged 14.6 points, 7.5 rebounds, 2.6 assists, 1.8 steals and 0.8 blocks per game in an average of 36.7 minutes of action.

Shelstad is one of the only two players from the Big Ten's four newcomer teams to receive preseason honors. He made the Pac-12 all-freshman team last season by starting in 30 of 32 games and averaging 12.8 points, 2.8 rebounds and 2.8 assists per game.

Baldwin finished the 2023-24 season as the only active Division I player with more than 1,000 career points (1,297), 600 career assists (618) and 250 career steals (271). Last season, he averaged 14.2 points, 6.0 assists, 2.7 rebounds and an impressive 2.7 steals per game – the most by a Big Ten

BIG 2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	3	0	1.000	6	0	1.000
Ohio State	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Oregon	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Penn State	2	0	1.000	5	0	1.000
Nebraska	2	1	0.667	5	1	0.833
Michigan	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Washington	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Illinois	1	1	0.500	4	1	0.800
Rutgers	1	1	0.500	4	1	0.800
Iowa	1	1	0.500	3	2	0.600
Wisconsin	1	1	0.500	3	2	0.600
USC	1	2	0.333	3	2	0.600
Michigan State	1	2	0.333	3	3	0.500
Minnesota	1	2	0.333	3	3	0.500
Maryland	0	2	0.000	3	2	0.600
Northwestern	0	2	0.000	2	3	0.400
Purdue	0	2	0.000	1	4	0.200
UCLA	0	3	0.000	1	4	0.200

Oct. 4 Game

Oregon 31, Michigan State 10

Oct. 5 Games

Wisconsin 52, Purdue 6
Penn State 27, UCLA 11
Ohio State 35, Iowa 7
Indiana 41, Northwestern 24
Nebraska 14, Rutgers 7
Minnesota 24, USC 17
Washington 27, Michigan 17

Oct. 11 Game

Maryland at Northwestern, 8 p.m.

Oct. 12 Games

Wisconsin at Rutgers, noon
Washington at Iowa, noon
Purdue at Illinois, 3:30 p.m.
Penn State at USC, 3:30 p.m.
Ohio State at Oregon, 7:30 p.m.
Minnesota at UCLA, 9 p.m.

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player in a single season in 31 years – which allowed him to be named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year.

Harper – the younger brother of former Rutgers guard Ron Harper Jr. and son of five-time NBA champion Ron Harper Sr. – is the lone freshman on the list, coming into Rutgers as the No. 3 overall prospect in the country in the 2024 recruiting class. He will try to translate his 22.4 points per game average from Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep to the college game alongside fellow five-star teammate Ace Bailey, who was the No.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

Minnesota was forced to rekick the onside try, and the Wolverines were able to recover the second attempt. The play was not reviewable, and it couldn't be challenged, despite FOX rules analyst Mike Pereira saying on the broadcast that he didn't believe Kingsbury was offside. The slow-motion replay shown on the broadcast confirmed that he wasn't.

"Everybody is going to focus on that," Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck said about the missed call immediately after the game. "I'm not going to sit here and get fined and do all those other things. I have more respect for my boss and the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten. That's one play."

After the game, the Big Ten admitted that there was an officiating mistake on that play saying it was "too tight" to throw a flag in that situation, leading to an officiating change they would announce.

The conference said in a statement that it had received immediate approval for an alignment change on onside kicks for officials. Moving forward, the head judge and the line judge will be positioned on the 35-yard line of the kicking team, giving the crew two views down the line so that the call won't have to be



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BIG TEN NOTES

2-ranked prospect in the 2024 class.

Osobor transferred from Utah State to Washington over the offseason – a move that made the forward \$2 million richer from NIL agreements, the highest-known valuation in college basketball this season – after being named the Mountain West Player of the Year in 2023-24. He started in each of the Aggies' 35 games, averaging 17.7 points and 9.0 rebounds per contest.

IU WR McCulley Enters Portal

Indiana wide receiver Donaven McCulley joined the growing list of players who intend to enter the transfer portal on Dec. 9 after the football regular season ends, seemingly making the decision before he played in five games so that he could use the 2024 season as a redshirt year and maintain another year of eligibility.

On Oct. 1, McCulley was no longer listed on the Hoosiers' roster, and it was later confirmed that he would no longer be on the team to finish the season.

McCulley originally entered the transfer portal when former head coach Tom Allen was fired following the end of the 2023 season but decided to come back when Curt Cignetti was named the new head coach.

"I was extremely excited when Donaven came back," Cignetti said at the time. "We got (Ohio University transfer Kurtis Rourke's) commitment, and about two hours later Donaven called me. That was a great day. I truly was not expecting that because the word on the street was Florida State."

Though the Hoosiers were 5-0 when he made the decision, McCulley had played in only four games due to a helmet-to-helmet hit in the season opener that took him out of the next game. He had caught just two passes for 21 yards, one of which was for a touchdown. The score came in his most recent game, a 42-28 win over Big Ten foe Maryland on Sept. 28.

Since his return to the lineup in the third game of the season, McCulley was on the field for only 11 total plays in the three games.

McCulley was Indiana's most productive pass catcher last season, totaling team highs in receptions (48), receiving yards (644) and touchdowns (six), five of those scores coming in the Hoosiers' final five games. But that positive momentum did not carry over to this season, something that may have prompted the sudden transfer.

McCulley first came to Indiana as a quarterback and played in seven games as a freshman in 2021 while backing up future Washington star Michael Penix Jr., completing 37 of 84 passes for 542 yards, three touchdowns and two interceptions. He converted to the wide receiver position for the next season and finishes his Indiana career as a receiver with 66 catches for 834 yards and eight touchdowns.

Wisconsin RB Mellusi Steps Away

On Oct. 3, Wisconsin announced that sixth-year senior running back Chez Mellusi would be taking a leave of absence from the team to care for his body. Mellusi had suffered from multiple significant injuries during his college career, the latest of which being a broken leg he suffered against Purdue during the 2023 season.

"We want to let people know that Chez is going to be stepping away from the team for

now and working to get his body healthy," a statement from Wisconsin read. "He's endured many injuries and has worked extremely hard to be able to play this year, but his body hasn't responded the way he expected. We're here to support Chez in any way we can and hope he'll be back on the football field again one day."

Through its first four games of the season, Mellusi had led Wisconsin on the ground with 232 rushing yards and three touchdowns in 56 attempts, averaging 58.0 yards per game and 4.1 yards per carry.

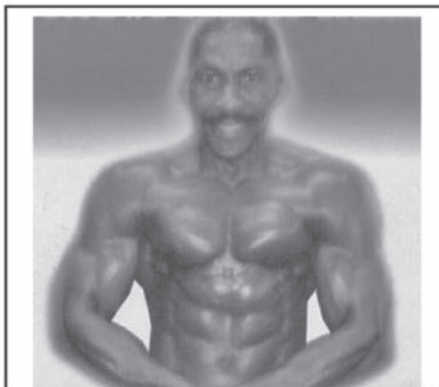
Badgers head coach Luke Fickell acknowledged the tough times Mellusi has gone through after a 27-13 win over South Dakota in Week 2, a game in which he ran 16 times for 60 yards and two touchdowns.

"Everyone knows you have to battle through injuries and things like that happen in football and it stinks," Fickell said. "But all the other emotional things he's had to go through, the ups and the downs, I think I've seen him at his best today and this past week and even last week.

"It's the best I've seen him, and I just don't mean playing. I mean as a leader, as a guy who can provide some energy, provide some spark. It's a great reminder to us that understand this landscape of college football is changing, that the older ones can grow and continue to grow."

With Mellusi out for the foreseeable future, Fickell and the Badgers will likely call on senior running back Tawee Walker – who had been splitting reps with Mellusi through four games – to take on more of a workload in the backfield, along with sophomore Cade Yacamelli.

The Badgers didn't miss Mellusi too much in his first game away from the team, beating Purdue 52-6 on Oct. 5. Six different Wisconsin players ran the ball in the game, Walker leading the way with 19 carries for 94 yards and three touchdowns. Yacamelli had five carries for 39 yards and a score, and freshmen running backs Dilin Jones and Darrion Dupree got involved when the game got out of hand with seven carries each for 65 and 24 yards, respectively.



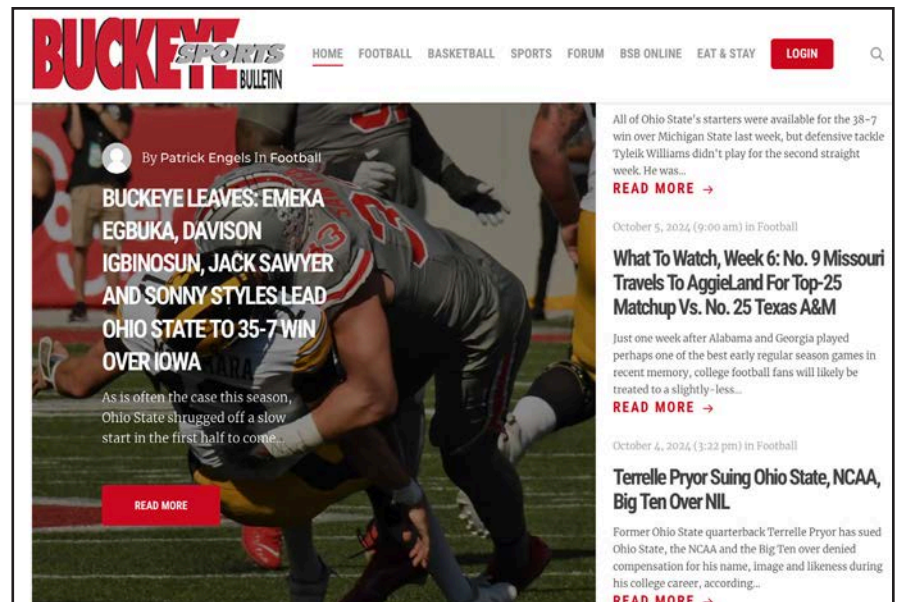
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OSU Eighth In B1G Media Preseason Poll

Ohio State is projected to finish above the mean in the Big Ten during Jake Diebler's first year leading the team.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

In the eighth annual unofficial Big Ten media poll conducted jointly by The Columbus Dispatch and The Indianapolis Star that was released on Oct. 2, the Buckeyes were picked to finish eighth in the new-look 18-team conference, just one spot ahead of rival Michigan at No. 9.

Out of the 33 media members who placed a vote – a group that included at least one from each of the 18 teams – one picked Ohio State to finish in first place, that being Tyler Tachman, who covers Iowa for the The Des Moines Register.

Purdue, which has taken the last two Big Ten regular-season championships and is coming off a national championship game appearance, received 20 of the 33 first-place votes to take the top spot. The Boilermakers will be playing this season without two-time Naismith Player of the Year center Zach Edey, who is now with the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies, but voters believe Matt Painter's team has another star in the making in guard Braden Smith, who earned 27 of 33 votes for Big Ten Player of the Year.

The Boilermakers and Buckeyes were two of six Big Ten teams to receive first-place votes. Indiana, led by fourth-year head coach Mike Woodson and Arizona transfer center Oumar Ballo, earned seven first-place votes to be ranked No. 2, while Big Ten newcomer UCLA was No. 3 with two votes, Illinois was No. 4 with two votes and Michigan State was No. 5 with one vote.

Ranked just ahead of Ohio State were No. 6 Oregon and No. 7 Rutgers, while Michigan, No. 10 Maryland, No. 11 Iowa, Wisconsin and Nebraska tied for 12th, No. 14 USC, No. 15 Washington, No. 16 Northwestern, No. 17 Penn State and No. 18 Minnesota followed the Buckeyes.

The Big Ten media voted on some individual awards other than Player of the Year, selecting five-star Rutgers guard Dylan Harper as Freshman of the Year and Ballo as Transfer of the Year.

Ohio State will begin Big Ten play on Dec. 4 when it travels to College Park, Md., to take on the Terrapins, the first of 20 conference games on the schedule.

Thornton Named Preseason All-Big Ten

Ohio State's eighth-place preseason ranking is in large part due to the return of junior point guard Bruce Thornton, who on Oct. 10 was named to the official 10-member preseason All-Big Ten team as voted on by the media.

Thornton, the lone Buckeye represented on the list, was also named first-team All-Big Ten in the unofficial media poll, earning 34 votes for the selection.

Thornton is coming off a strong sophomore campaign in which he served as the unquestioned team leader of the 2023-24 team both on and off the court, leading the team with 15.7 points, 4.8 assists and 1.2 steals per game while also adding 3.7 rebounds and shooting 42.7 percent from the field, 33.3 percent from three and 85.0 percent from the free-throw line in a team-high 33.6 minutes per contest.

Thornton, who is the Big Ten's third-leading returning scorer this season, was also one of the more efficient point guards in the nation last year, ranking second among all Division I players with a 4.0 assist-to-turnover ratio. He became just the third player in program history with more than 100 assists and fewer than 50 turnovers in a season, joining Brandon Fuss-Cheatham in 2004-05 (100 assists, 38 turnovers) and Shannon Scott in 2012-13 (142 assists, 45 turnovers).

Each of these stats earned him third-team All-Big Ten honors from the media and honorable mention among the coaches, one of two Buckeyes last season to earn postseason honors along with now-Toronto Raptors forward Jamison Battle (honorable-mention All-Big Ten).

But Thornton made perhaps the biggest impact on the team last season with his leadership when he made it a point as team captain to offer support and guidance to his teammates in the weeks after former Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann was fired and Diebler was elevated to the interim role. Diebler mentioned that Thornton's leadership was critical to the team's end-of-season success last year, and it is a trait that the junior will look to continue to have in 2024-25, where he will likely be named team captain for the third season in a row.

Thornton is expected to have another successful season in 2024-25 alongside a new cast of characters in the backcourt that includes South Carolina transfer and former Buckeye Meechie Johnson, San Diego State transfer Micah Parrish and true freshman John Mobley Jr., among others.

For more on the All-Big Ten team see Big

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

Ten Notes on page 30-31.

CBS Sports' Rothstein Raves Over Mobley

Just one day before Diebler, Thornton and Johnson departed for Big Ten Media Days held at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont, Ill., on Oct. 3, CBS Sports men's college basketball insider Jon Rothstein paid a visit to Value City Arena to take in the Buckeyes' Oct. 2 practice.

The always-colorful Rothstein, who is one of the more recognizable college basketball analysts on social media, garnering almost 390,000 followers on Twitter, went to Twitter after practice to give his thoughts on how Diebler's team is shaping up this fall, where he extended some noteworthy praise to one of Ohio State's new backcourt pieces, the true freshman Mobley.

"The theme of the day for the Buckeyes is the perimeter," Rothstein said in a video posted to his account. "We knew that Bruce Thornton and South Carolina transfer Meechie Johnson would be one of the best backcourts in the Big Ten, but we didn't necessarily know that John Mobley, the talented freshman guard for Ohio State, would be fearless in multiple ways.

"He can make shots off the dribble. He can drill shots from deep. And he plays like he's a junior or senior – an incredibly confident player who will be among the best newcomers in the Big Ten."

Mobley entered the program this offseason as a highly touted four-star prospect out of Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy, where he was the nation's 49th-best overall prospect, sixth-best combo guard and No. 1 player out of the state of Utah in his class.

The freshman was best known in high school for his efficient three-point shooting – named "The Sniper" in the 2024 Class Superlatives by 247Sports – which helped him average 21.5 points, 5.4 assists, 2.4 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game as a senior at Wasatch.

Rothstein was also impressed by another new member of Ohio State's backcourt, Kansas State fifth-year transfer Ques Glover, who he said on Twitter was the biggest surprise from the Buckeyes' practice.

"The surprise today at Ohio State? Kansas State (transfer) Ques Glover," Rothstein wrote. "Going to be in the Buckeyes' rotation. Gives Jake Diebler a capable fifth guard."

Rothstein also offered his thoughts on Ohio State's new-look frontcourt pieces, former McDonald's All-Americans and blue-blood transfers Aaron Bradshaw (Kentucky) and Sean Stewart (Duke). He thinks the duo possesses a lot of raw talent but is still unproven and will need some more game reps in order for them to reach their full potential at Ohio State.

Rothstein projected both Bradshaw and Stewart to be in Diebler's starting lineup,

along with guards Thornton and San Diego State transfer wing Micah Parrish.

The CBS Sports analyst said he felt the team had an obvious identity in practice of high-pace and high-intensity play, one which Diebler has tried to instill into his team since he took over as interim head coach last winter.

"There is a conscious effort by Jake Diebler to play as fast as possible with the middle of the paint wide open," he wrote. "The Buckeyes are going to let it fly."

Four-Star Anthony Leaves OSU Out Of Top 3

Ohio State fell out of the race for a coveted 2025 prospect on Oct. 2 when Glen Head (N.Y.) Long Island Lutheran four-star shooting guard Kiyon Anthony (6-5, 185) – the son of 10-time NBA All-Star Carmelo Anthony – left the Buckeyes off his top three list of preferred schools.

Anthony is the nation's 28th-best prospect, the sixth-best shooting guard and the No. 1 player out of New York in his class and will choose between Auburn, Syracuse and USC, leaving the Buckeyes, Florida State and Rutgers off his list after originally placing them in his top six in the summer.

Anthony had previously indicated he planned to take a visit to Columbus at some point this fall to take in an Ohio State football game, telling On3 that the Buckeyes were "really high" on his list.

"I know it's a new building program with Coach Diebler over there," Anthony said over the summer. "They were the first coaches in the gym to come see me today so that shows that they're really interested in me. I really like that so they're really high on my list. I'm looking forward to taking a visit."

The Buckeyes originally offered Anthony – who hails from the same high school as former Ohio State and current Dayton forward Zed Key – on June 7, shortly after his time playing for the Nike EYBL 17U Circuit team Team Melo, where he averaged 19.9 points, 4.3 rebounds and 1.6 assists per game that spring.

But after a summer of recruiting the son of an NBA legend, Diebler and the Buckeyes will now have to move on.

Ohio State has already secured one commitment in the 2025 class, earning a commitment from Cleveland Richmond Heights four-star Dorian Jones (6-4, 160) on July 1, but it would like to add a few more to the class. Headlining that list of priority recruits are two Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star teammates, combo guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195) and power forward Niko Bundalo (6-10, 215), who have both already taken visits to Ohio State this fall and have not ruled out playing together in college.

Bundalo, the nation's 26th-best prospect and seventh-best power forward, told 247Sports that he is working toward narrowing his list of preferred schools – cur-

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

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

rently Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan State, North Carolina, Ohio State, Pitt, Texas, UConn and Xavier – after taking three more visits this fall to UNC, Kentucky and Kansas.

Peterson, the nation's third-best prospect and top-rated combo guard, has yet to provide an update on his recruitment since trimming down his list of schools to Kansas, Kansas State, Ohio State and USC, but he is in the midst of his visits. He most recently took a trip to Kansas State the weekend of Sept. 28, but many presume the in-state rival Jayhawks are the current favorite to land the five-star.

Washington Traded To Charlotte Hornets

Another former Buckeye was traded in the NBA since BSB last went to press.

Former Ohio State guard Duane Washington Jr. was dealt from the New York Knicks to the Charlotte Hornets on Oct. 1 as part of a three-team trade that sent four-time All-Star Karl Anthony Towns to New York in exchange for three-time All-Star Julius Randle and Donte DiVincenzo. The Hornets acquired three second-round picks, guard Charlie Brown Jr., guard DaQuan Jeffries and Washington in the deal.

The trade, which was officially announced on Oct. 1, also sent former Ohio State forward Keita Bates-Diop to Minnesota, the team that originally drafted him in 2018, after spending just three months with the Knicks.

Washington, like Bates-Diop, has bounced around in the NBA since being signed by the Indiana Pacers as an undrafted free agent in 2021. The former Buckeye made the most of his two-way deal with the Pacers that season, averaging 9.9 points, 1.8 assists and 1.7 rebounds per game in 48 outings (seven starts) in 2021-22, but that did not guarantee him a spot on the squad the next season and he was waived by the franchise that offseason.

He then signed with the Phoenix Suns, where he averaged 7.9 points and 2.0 assists on 36.7 percent shooting in 31 contests, including three starts, in the 2022-23 campaign, but was waived for the second time following that season.

Washington then found a new home with the Knicks, but it was his most unstable one to date. He never appeared in a game for the franchise in his one season on the roster as he battled a lingering thumb injury that eventually required surgery, only appearing for the G-League Westchester Knicks, averaging 27.3 points, 6.3 points and 4.0 rebounds per game in just three appearances, and he was signed and waived three different times by the franchise throughout the 2023-24 campaign.

Washington was seen on the Knicks' bench throughout last season's playoff run and led New York's summer team in scoring at 14.8 points per game.

Now, the 24-year-old Washington will look to revitalize his career on a Hornets team that went 21-61 last season and is led

by 2021-22 NBA Rookie of the Year LaMelo Ball and former Alabama star forward Brandon Miller.

Washington, who averaged 11.4 points, 2.9 rebounds and 1.8 assists in his three-year Ohio State career (2018-21), also recently signed with the Serbian professional team KK Partizan of the Adriatic Basketball Association. According to Keith Smith of Spotrac, both the NBA, FIBA and KK Partizan had to "get creative" in order for Washington to be dealt to Charlotte – and for the entire three-way trade to go through.

Smith said that Washington needed to get a Letter of Clearance, or LOC, from FIBA in order to be released by Partizan but also needed another LOC from FIBA to re-sign with Partizan after clearing waivers from Charlotte in the NBA.

This process appeared to be successful. Washington returned to Serbia after clearing waivers shortly after being traded.

According to Smith, Washington will receive roughly \$2.3 million in NBA salary for this season.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- The NCAA announced on Oct. 3 that Columbus' Nationwide Arena will serve as a host site for the first and second rounds of the 2028 NCAA men's tournament. The NCAA also listed Ohio State as a host. Nationwide Arena last hosted the NCAA men's tournament in 2023, when most notably No. 1 seed Purdue fell to No. 16 seed Fairleigh Dickinson.

- Ohio State hosted two four-star 2025 prospects from Branson (Mo.) Link Academy the weekend of Oct. 5, center AMare Bynum (6-8, 210) and combo guard Jerry Easter (6-3, 183). Bynum is the nation's 104th-best prospect and 17th-best center in the nation and is being heavily recruited by Colorado, Iowa, LSU, Nebraska and Xavier, according to the four-star. Easter, the nation's 32nd-best prospect and fourth-best combo guard in the class, is a native of Toledo and hails from the same high school as former Ohio State center Felix Okpara. This is his fourth visit this fall, joining Georgia Tech, Oregon and SMU. The Buckeyes are also recruiting Easter's and Bynum's Link Academy teammate, four-star shooting guard Davion Hannah (6-5, 175), who visited Columbus on Sept. 21.

- Ohio State will participate in the 2025 Battle 4 Atlantis tournament held at the Atlantis Paradise Island resort in the Bahamas. The annual event will take place during Thanksgiving week and will also include Auburn, Saint Mary's, VCU and Virginia Tech, with three other team participants yet to be determined. Ohio State was in line to participate in the 2020 version of the Battle 4 Atlantis, but the Buckeyes pulled out of the event, which was moved to a new location in South Dakota, due to COVID-19 pandemic-related travel concerns.



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New Season Brings Renewed Hope For Icers

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There's an old joke that gets attached to struggling teams: "The good news is most of the players are back this season. The bad news is most of the players are back this season."

For Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik, he believes the first sentence is a truer statement based on how the Buckeyes finished the 2023-24 season.

They rebounded from a horrid start – winning just one of their first 18 Big Ten games – to win twice on the road at No. 5 Wisconsin in the best-of-three conference quarterfinals before losing 2-1 in the semifinals to eventual champion Michigan State. The Buckeyes finished 14-20-4 overall and 3-18-2 in the Big Ten.

His optimism comes from having "only" 10 newcomers (seven freshmen, three transfers) on the 28-player roster compared to last season's 15 (eight freshmen, seven transfers) among the 26 players.

It took months for the team to find an identity, and by that time the Buckeyes were buried in last place, just as had been predicted in the Big Ten coaches preseason poll.

"I think our guys that are back from last year realize our second half, and really our last month, but our second half, we were a different team, especially at the end," Rohlik said. "It was selfless. It was team. Less penalties. Don't put ourselves in bad spots. Try to play with the lead. Get good goal attending. I mean, it was a team deal, and I thought our guys really bought into that."

"That's something these guys have talked about a lot. We've got to start this season with that – not finish with it but start with it."

The players took it upon themselves to make sure the integration of new and returning players was smooth. In past offseasons, the players would stay through the end of May after the semester ended to do their skating and conditioning then go home for much of

the summer. This year they left in May for about a month and then returned. In addition to skating and training together in July and August, they did group activities such as playing softball.

"At first, personally and for a lot of guys, we weren't a big fan of it just because none of us are really from Ohio and didn't get to go home as much as we wanted to," said graduate forward Patrick Guzzo from Marysville, Mich. "But when it was all said and done, I think it was a great switch, staying here and building chemistry with the younger guys, the new guys coming in, really getting to know each other and just being on the ice for like two months with each other so we're not just thrown into the fire before the season actually starts. I thought it was a great switch, and I don't see it changing anytime soon."

One of the newcomers, graduate forward Gunnarwolfe Fontaine, appreciates the efforts to make his transition easier after four seasons playing for Northeastern.

"Coming into a culture that I haven't really been a part of yet, I just wanted to get into the swing of things early," he said. "Everyone's been unbelievable. They're bringing me into the fold, and I was able to come here early in the summer and work out together, which obviously brought the team closer together. I've been loving it here so far."

The bonding is nice, but the Buckeyes must fill some big holes, although the crop of new players look promising.

Stepping Up

Leading scorer Stephen Halliday, the No. 104 overall pick in the 2022 NHL draft by Ottawa, signed with the Senators in April. He had 36 points (10 goals, 26 assists) last season and in 78 career games posted 77 points (19 goals, 58 assists).

Defenseman Scooter Brickey, who topped the Buckeyes with 13 goals and tied returning junior Davis Burnside for second in points with 26, exhausted his eligibility and signed a minor-league contract with the Pittsburgh Penguins organization.

Cam Thiesing was sixth in scoring with 16 points (nine goals, seven assists) his junior season but opted to sign with the New York Islanders. Four other players also turned pro after last season: Michael Gildon and Mason Klee (Worcester, ECHL), Dalton Messina (Toledo, ECHL) and Riley Hughes (Iowa, ECHL).

Brickey was one of those who benefited by both the transfer portal and the bonus season given by the NCAA due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, spending three seasons at Western Michigan and two at Ohio State. He entered his final season with six goals in 96 career games, but he more than doubled that total in 37 games.

Rohlik hopes Fontaine can experience a similar jump in his lone season with the Buckeyes after four at Northeastern. The Nashville Predators draftee (No. 202, 2020) had 92 points (30 goals, 62 assists) in 127 games for the Huskies. This past season he scored eight goals and had 19 assists for 27 points in 36 games.

Importantly, he had four game-winners including in the semifinal and final of the prestigious The Beanpot in Boston, a tournament held the first two Mondays in February for the city's bragging rights among the major-college hockey programs (Boston College, Boston University, Harvard and Northeastern).

Not only does Fontaine have a memorable first name, but he will also be remembered for leading the Huskies to back-to-back trophies.

"Mr. Beanpot as they call him out East," junior defenseman Damien Carfagna said. "He's a gamer so he's going to be exciting to watch in those big games."

Another newcomer to track is forward Noah Powell, whose remarkable rise led to him being selected No. 148 by the Philadelphia Flyers in June.

Last season playing for Dubuque, Iowa, in the junior United States Hockey League, Powell had three points in his first 14 games before erupting for 66 points (38 goal, 28 assists) over a 44-game stretch to finish with 74 points (43 goals, 31 assists) in 61 games.

Powell's goal total was a team record. One of the players he surpassed was the late Columbus Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau, who had 36 goals in 2011-12.

"He's a big (6-2, 210), strong, powerful kid," Rohlik said. "He can score dirty goals. What I mean by that is he's around the net, he can shoot the puck, and he has a knack for being in the right spots."

What's remarkable about Powell is he's doing that despite being hearing impaired. He used to wear an assisted listening device, similar to a quarterback hearing the play call in his helmet from the coach on the sideline. He doesn't wear it now and relies on lip reading.

Rohlik's daughter Erin is a sophomore at Ohio State and is also hard of hearing. She would read lips while playing field hockey growing up, but Powell did not know that before he committed to the Buckeyes.

"Knowing what my daughter went through and her adjustments and doing unbelievable and you see what Noah's done and his ability to fight through, that tells you all you need to know about him," Rohlik said.

Entering his 12th season as coach of the Buckeyes, Rohlik knows the changing landscape of college athletics with the transfer portal provides challenges.

"You never know from year to year what you have," he said. "The one thing I do know is you get a different personality, and I talk about that a lot. This team certainly will be different than last year's, but you've just got to be flexible. I think that's the biggest thing."

No matter the roster, he knows how he wants his team to play.

"We always want to be relentless. We always want to play with depth," he said. "We always want to go 60, 65 minutes, whatever it may be. That's kind of our identity of who we are. 'It's Ohio State, they're here from start to finish.'"

Sophomore forward Max Montes said it's all about getting wins early if the Buckeyes want to reach the NCAA tournament for the second time in three seasons.

He feels the momentum can carry over from last season's finish.

"We knew that our Big Ten play wasn't the greatest the first half of the year, so the second part of the year we had nothing to lose," Montes said. "Every single game we went out there and played our hardest, and we bought into whatever system we were playing that night, and it worked out for us."

In The Net

Rohlik has the luxury of having two goalies to share the net.

Senior Logan Terness started the first 16 games last season, his first with the Buckeyes after three with Connecticut. He ended up making 27 starts and had an 11-12-4 record with 3.10 goals-against average and a .904 save percentage.

When sophomore Kristoffer Eberly finally got a chance in December, he performed well (3-8-1, 2.98, .911).

Rohlik declined to designate a No. 1 goalie at this stage, and he is comfortable using each as he did in the playoff series against Wisconsin when Terness started the first and third games.

"We'll let that unfold," Rohlik said. "I think the guys deserve their opportunities. They both played well. Our guys made some huge strides last year."

Senior Reilly Herbst (0-0-0, 7.36, .813 in two games) is the third-stringer.

Terness said the Buckeyes need to learn from last season's slow start.

"I think it's just keeping our foot on the gas, remembering what we did right and remember how we started," he said.

He knew what it was like to be a newcomer last season, so he wants to be a mentor to the new ones this season.

"Especially as a freshman, learn as much as you can from the older guys," he said. "I think that's the biggest thing. Just ask questions. If you're not sure what to do, or if you need help, all the older guys are here for them, and we just want to see everyone do well and everyone do their part. If you're a freshman, keep an open eye, a view of what's going on and just try to do your best around that."

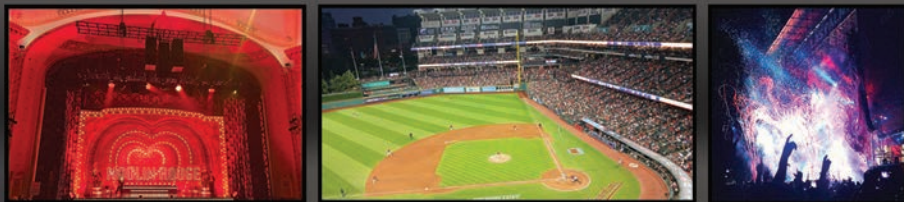
The lone addition to the coaching staff is Carter Krier, a 24-year-old who spent the past four seasons on the staff of Fargo, N.D., in the USHL. Krier, a 2022 graduate of North Da-

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OHIO STATE MEN'S ICE HOCKEY

kota, is sort of a goalie guru who even at his young age founded Edge Goaltending to develop netminders across the country.

"He's got a great hockey mind," Rohlik said. "He's got a goalie background, but he's a good coach in general and a lot of people have seen that he's had success in a short window so far, and he fits in well with our staff."

For The Defense

Rohlik is looking for Carfagna and senior Brent Johnson to anchor the blueliners. Johnson, the No. 80 pick by the Washington Capitals in 2021, had five goals and eight assists for 13 points in 37 games following two seasons at North Dakota. Carfagna posted six points (two goals, four assists) in 34 games.

"You start with those two, but there's a lot of other guys that have played minutes back there," Rohlik said. "Obviously, we're leaning on Brent and Damien, but we have a lot of depth."

Graduate defenseman Aiden Hansen-Bukata provides experience, having played 132 games for Rochester Institute of Technology over the past four seasons with 78 points (nine goals, 69 assists). He won the 2023 Atlantic Hockey Best Defenseman award and made the 2024 All-Atlantic Hockey second team.

"He brings calmness," Rohlik said. "I can see that already. He's played a ton of minutes where he was. That's all I'm asking him to do here, come in be a good leader, be a good presence. He's got a good track record and proved himself there, and he's played in some big moments."

Big things are expected from sophomore Theo Wallberg from Stockholm, Sweden. His freshman season (2-19-21) was a transition as he learned best how to utilize his size (6-5, 203) and his skating.

"I think we've got a great team," the Ottawa pick (No. 168, 2022) said. "I feel like we've got more of what we didn't have last year – more grit, a bit more skill. It felt like some guys had it, some guys didn't. It was kind of split up. We're a way better team this year, and the group is coming together great. I just hope that translates to the ice."

Sophomore Nathan McBrayer made strides his first season, but the native of near-by Dublin is still looking for his first goal after collecting seven assists in 34 games. His best game offensively was two assists vs. Notre Dame on Jan. 12.

William Smith is also in his second year, having played 32 games. He scored his only goal against Penn State on Jan. 27 and had two of his four assists vs. Michigan State on Feb. 23.

Junior John Larkin played three games last season with a goal against Omaha on Oct. 28. That's his only point in 13 career games.

The freshman defensemen are Chris Able and Chris Romaine.

Able spent the past three seasons with the USHL's Chicago Steel and first committed to the Buckeyes in January 2019 when he was 14. He totaled 43 points (10 goals, 33 assists) in 140 career games for the Steel, and in the past two seasons he was a combined plus-32.

"He has a couple of years of experience in USHL," Rohlik said. "He brings a lot of games under his belt. He's got good size (6-1, 198). The one thing I'm asking for all these freshmen coming in is – and I say it all the time – just come in and be you and be a part of this.

"You don't have to come in and be somebody else. I think that's a hard adjustment.

Sometimes they think they've got to come in and prove themselves."

Romaine, the No. 193 pick of the Colorado Avalanche in 2022, split time between Omaha and Green Bay (Wis.) of the USHL in 2022-23 for a combined 10 assists. Last season for Green Bay, he had six goals and 24 assists for 30 points in 55 games.

"He went through a little injury last year for a while, was out, came back, played at the end of the second half," Rohlik said. "I think we could put him in out there in every situation."

Looking For Goals

Rohlik takes pride in rolling four lines with the belief all can contribute offensively. Scoring by committee has always been a theme, but he wouldn't mind if a forward had a breakout season, much like Powell had in juniors.

"There's surprises every year, and guys that maybe we don't even think could get there, will," Rohlik said. "We've even got a guy sitting here (Montes) who in the first half had a few points. The second half, the last month and a half, it kind of exploded for Max. "A lot of our guys could have that potential. It's not just going to be one line for us. I think we have five lines that can play, and there's going to a lot of guys pushing to be in the lineup."

Montes had 18 points (nine goals, nine assists) in 37 games, each of his goals coming in the second half of the season. He scored two goals in the opening game of the quarter-final series at Wisconsin, had an assist in the second game and scored vs. Michigan State in the semifinals.

Like the veterans on defense, Guzzo and graduate Joe Dunlap will be relied upon for their experience and leadership. Guzzo had 15 points (eight goals, seven assists) while playing all 38 games.

"Patty's played against everybody's top lines for a long time here," Rohlik said. "He's an invaluable piece who sometimes doesn't get the credit for what he brings to the table. He brings his size (6-3, 198) up the middle. He's played in every building how many times? Having those kind of veterans and being here at this program for five years is something pretty special."

Dunlap was injured through the first half of the season before returning to post three goals and five assists in 13 games until a season-ending injury heading into the post-season. He is still rehabbing from offseason surgery but hopes to be cleared to play soon.

"I give him all the credit in the world to work through it," Rohlik said. "I think he's excited to try to get out there."

Fontaine is another fifth-year player eager to contribute.

"Hopefully, I can bring a lot like offense and mojo on the ice and be a leader as an older guy who's been through the college experience, obviously, through four years at Northeastern and I've been to a (NCAA) tournament as well," he said.

In addition to Powell, there are four other freshman forwards.

Dylan Godbout is a former Wisconsin commit who was a 2022 Mr. Hockey nominee in Minnesota.

He played only 23 games for Sioux City (Iowa) in the USHL last season because of surgery after an injury, but for his career there he had 66 points (19 goals, 47 assists) in 87 games.

"He's worked awfully hard to put himself

2024-25 Ohio State Men's Hockey Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Yr.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown
1	Logan Terness	Goalie	Sr.	6-1	175	North Vancouver, B.C.
2	Chris Able	Defenseman	Fr.	6-1	198	Libertyville, Ill.
4	John Larkin	Defenseman	Jr.	6-2	190	Northville, Mich.
5	Chris Romaine	Defenseman	Fr.	6-0	190	Boston, Mass.
7	Brent Johnson	Defenseman	Sr.	6-0	185	Frisco, Texas
8	Nathan McBrayer	Defenseman	So.	6-0	195	Dublin, Ohio
9	Riley Thompson	Forward	So.	6-4	215	Ottawa, Ontario
10	Thomas Weis	Forward	So.	5-10	180	Madison, Wis.
11	Jake Rozzi	Forward	Fr.	6-0	182	Kirkland, Quebec
12	Caden Brown	Forward	Sr.	5-11	185	Chesterfield, Mo.
13	Gunnarwolfe Fontaine	Forward	Gr.	5-10	180	East Greenwich, R.I.
15	Noah Powell	Forward	Fr.	6-2	210	Chicago, Ill.
16	Max Montes	Forward	So.	5-8	165	Hartland, Wis.
19	James Hong	Forward	Fr.	5-10	177	Irvine, Calif.
20	Aiden Hansen-Bukata	Defenseman	Gr.	6-1	195	Delta, British Columbia
21	Joe Dunlap	Forward	Gr.	6-0	185	Windham, N.H.
23	Davis Burnside	Forward	Jr.	6-0	176	Scottsdale, Ariz.
25	Sam Deckhut	Forward	So.	5-11	195	San Diego, Calif.
26	Dylan Godbout	Forward	Fr.	5-11	185	Woodbury, Minn.
28	William Smith	Defenseman	So.	6-1	195	Toronto, Ontario
29	Ryan Gordon	Forward	So.	6-0	185	Stone Mountain, Ga.
34	Reilly Herbst	Goalie	Sr.	6-0	185	Niwot, Colo.
44	Theo Wallberg	Defenseman	So.	6-5	203	Stockholm, Sweden
60	Kristoffer Eberly	Goalie	So.	6-4	208	Pinckney, Mich.
63	Nathan Lewis	Forward	Fr.	6-6	210	Shorewood, Ill.
71	Patrick Guzzo	Forward	Gr.	6-3	198	Marysville, Mich.
91	Jake Dunlap	Forward	Jr.	5-9	175	Windham, N.H.
93	Damien Carfagna	Defenseman	Jr.	6-0	185	Wood-Ridge, N.J.

Head Coach — Steve Rohlik

Assistant Coach — JB Bittner, **Assistant Coach** — Paul Kirtland, **Assistant Coach** — Carter Krier, **Director of Hockey Operations** — Layne LeBel, **Equipment Manager** — Tim Adams, **Strength & Conditioning** — Taylor Brown, **Athletic Trainer** — Jason Rule, **Performance Dietitian** — Caroline Riewe, **Lead Sport Psychologist** — James Houle, PhD

in a spot where he's at least healthy on the ice," Rohlik said. "We've got to be patient."

James Hong has lived a nomadic life. He was born in Seoul, South Korea, moved to Canada at a young age and lived in Vancouver and Toronto before his family settled in Irvine, Calif.

He had 53 points (17 goals, 36 assists) in 57 games for Madison (Wis.) of the USHL last season and also played four Olympic qualifiers for South Korea.

"He's smaller (5-10, 177) but skilled," Rohlik said. "He's a great human being. He brings a great culture to our group."

Nathan Lewis is a project, a big project at 6-6, 210. He was injured for long stretches last season for Youngstown (USHL) but still managed 15 points (eight goals, seven assists) in 12 games.

He attended the Columbus Blue Jackets' development camp this summer as an unsigned prospect.

"You can't teach size," Rohlik said. "He's got to get out of his comfort level because I think he can be more physical and use his size to his advantage. He shows a lot of potential."

Jake Rozzi split time in the USHL last season with Madison before being traded to Tri-City (Kearney, Neb.) There he had 38 points (13 goals, 25 assists) in 50 games.

"He's got a great skill set and a great hockey IQ," Rohlik said.

The second forward transfer is Riley Thompson, who brings his 6-4, 215 frame to Columbus after one season at Alaska Anchorage where he had 24 points (nine goals, 15 assists) in 34 games with the Seawolves.

"He was put in a lot of situations and produced," Rohlik said. "He's got a 200-foot game. I think that's a pretty valuable piece."

Burnside is the top returning scorer with his 26 points (nine goals, 17 assists) in 38 games.

Sophomore Thomas Weis had four goals and seven assists in 37 games and senior Caden Brown overcame some injuries to post 10 points (four goals, six assists) in 24 games.

Junior Jake Dunlap equaled his older brother Joe's eight points (three goals, five assists) in 33 games after a transfer from New Hampshire. Sophomore Sam Deckhut's six points (three goals and assists apiece) came in 29 games, and sophomore Ryan Gordon added a goal and two assists in 30 games.

"We've got a lot of returners, and I believe in the group that we have," Guzzo said. "I think we're a deep team. We've got a lot of new guys coming in that I love."

Blanked

Ohio State did not have a player named to the coaches' preseason poll for All-Big Ten first or second team.

The Buckeyes were also tabbed to finish last behind Michigan State on top followed by Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Notre Dame and Penn State.

"I think it's awesome to be an underdog," Carfagna said. "Even when people doubt you, I think it's an even better feeling when you prove people wrong."

On The Calendar

The Buckeyes hosted Niagara in an exhibition game at Value City Arena on Oct. 6 (3-2 win in OT) before opening the season at home vs. American International on Oct 11 (7 p.m.) and 12 (5 p.m.). The Big Ten schedule begins at Wisconsin on Oct. 18-19.

OSU plays an outdoor game at Wrigley Field against Michigan on Jan. 3 and hosts the Wolverines for the final regular-season games Feb. 27 and 28. It's a prelude to the Stadium Series at Ohio Stadium between the Blue Jackers and Detroit Red Wings on March 1.

OSU Field Hockey Leaning On Leadership

By **CAMERON MOONE**

Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

The No. 4 Ohio State field hockey team has had a simple recipe for success this season: rely on leadership. Be it graduate forward and dual-sport athlete Makenna Webster's methodical offensive approach, junior back Katie Fichtner's corner-goal prowess or senior goalkeeper Abby Danson's sub-1.00 goals allowed average mark, the Buckeyes have leaned on experience en route to a 9-1 record halfway through the season.

Coming out of the gates, the Buckeyes were a defensive nightmare for opposing offenses, allowing just three goals in the opening seven games, a total that is even more impressive considering the 28 goals scored by Ohio State in that same span.

Fichtner said she knew this team would be special from the jump.

"I realized that on our first day of pre-season," she told BSB. "I was like, 'Guys, this is our year.' We're so good this year and everybody came back ready to go, and it's just going to be so awesome."

A season-opening 6-1 win over then-No. 20 University of Albany on Aug. 30 was followed by a 4-1 win over Bucknell two days later. The next ranked test for the Buckeyes came against then-No. 10 Syracuse on the road on Sept. 8, a 5-0 decision in favor of Ohio State. The wins continued to pile up, highlighted by a 2-1 ranked victory over then-No. 18 Old Dominion on Sept. 15.

There was little adversity for Ohio State in its first eight games of the season before a 4-3 thrilling overtime win against then-No. 13 Louisville in Columbus on Sept. 29. Webster, who had just played an ice hockey game in Bemidji, Minn., against Bemidji State on Sept. 28, sent in the game-winning score – her second of the game and 10th of the season – to lift Ohio State to its best start to a season in program history.

"I think we dominated a lot of the game," Webster said. "Louisville is a great team, but we knew what to expect. It was a little frustrating that we let two goals in at the end, so we can't do that again. Going into overtime, we were all super confident, like, 'We're just going to win this game.' We all said it to each other, and then we went out there."

"I think that every person touched the ball before I was able to get that goal. It just shows the depth and how great our team is."

Seventh-year head coach Jarred Martin shared a similar sentiment and said that the win against the Cardinals was a marquee moment of the season for Ohio State.

"Going into overtime, that was probably my favorite moment so far this season," Martin said. "We just got lit up with a couple of goals. To see the mentality in our huddle following the game going into overtime, there was not a single doubt that we weren't going to step on this field right now and win this game. I think that says a lot about how they believe in themselves and each other."

"It's definitely going to show your resiliency and mentality in those moments. After each score for us, how are we responding? I thought

we managed them scoring first and getting our offense going a little bit more."

That previously mentioned depth has been an important aspect for the Buckeyes with four members of the team all sitting at double-digit points after 10 games. Webster leads the way with her 29 points (10 goals, nine assists) with Fichtner and sophomore forward/midfielder Brenna Bough each sitting with 12 points (five goals, two assists) apiece and junior forward Lindsey Roberts rounding the top four out with her 10 points (five goals).

Martin thinks his team's even distribution of points – which also includes contributions from senior forward Hallie Brost (six points, three goals), senior forward/midfielder Cameryn Forgash (six points, two goals, two assists) and junior forward/midfielder Zella Bailey (five, two, one), among others – serves as a testament to the overall selflessness and hardworking mentality of his players, a shared mentality that he thinks is driven by the team's veteran leaders.

"The team is full of just great people," Martin said. "One of the strengths of our team this season is that some of our best players are also our hardest workers. If you come to practice, they are the ones setting the tone, pushing the energy, pushing the speed of play and just doing it with the mentality to bring people with them."

"(Webster and Fichtner) have been great. I tell them the wins are a result of how practice is going, how our team dynamic is, how detail-oriented we've been, and it's nice to see those results."

Both Webster and Fichtner have appeared on the scoresheet in at least six out of the 10 tilts this season, with Webster even notching a hat trick in the season opener. That duo has lifted Ohio State to a 3.7 goals per game average, good for second in the Big Ten, sitting just behind No. 9 Michigan (4.4) for the top spot.

Danson has been Ohio State's most reliable netminder through the halfway point of the campaign. Sitting at a clean 0.97 goals allowed average mark and maintaining a .795 save percentage, she has cemented herself as one of the premier goaltenders in the country.

"Oh, it's so amazing. I'm so happy she's back this year," Fichtner said of Danson. "She's honestly one of the best goalkeepers I've ever played with. We're super, super lucky to have her, and she's the backbone of the team."

After going perfect in the nonconference slate, Ohio State will take on a Big Ten team in six out of its final eight games, a tall task in a tough conference. A positive for the Buckeyes throughout that stretch is they won't have to go farther west than Evanston, Ill., for a game against Northwestern on Nov. 1 in the penultimate contest of the season, even though the Big Ten welcomed West Coast teams Oregon, Washington, UCLA and USC to the league this summer.

"I mean, it's really tough," Martin said on Oct. 2. "So that part you have to be ready for in the Big Ten. Everybody is ranked, everybody is going to be a close game, and we know all the programs fairly well so naturally it's going to have a different feel."

"The second part is there's a little bit more at stake. Not only are you getting a win or loss, but conference standings at the end of the season will come into play as we head into the Big Ten tournament."

"The team knows that going into it, and as you look at the rest of the season, it will be predominantly conference so we know it's going to be tough. We know the competition is going to be high. We're going to be facing an Olympian (Michigan's Abby Tamer), a few more throughout the year, so definitely some high-level players."

Two weeks after opening up Big Ten play unblemished with a 4-0 victory against Michigan State on Sept. 20, the highs of the season came somewhat crashing down following a 1-0 loss to Tamer's Wolverines in Ann Arbor on Oct. 6, a team that Martin knew was going to be a tough draw for the Buckeyes.

The loss to Michigan was the first blemish on Ohio State's record, and the blemish has extra sting with the loss coming to the Buckeyes' most bitter rival. However, Webster said earlier this season that a loss on the schedule will not deter anyone on her team.

"Obviously, 9-0, we're really happy about it," Webster said on Oct. 2. "No matter what, even if this group was 4-5, we still would know that we are a great team and that we could pick it up. We're halfway through. We have a lot more games to go, but we just have a lot of confidence and our work ethic is second to none."

As BSB went to press, Ohio State still sat at No. 4 in the rankings and will next take on Penn State on Oct. 11 in Columbus. Martin said he understands that every game won't go Ohio State's way, so handling the ebbs and flows of a season is what really matters.

"You never know how the game is going to turn out," Martin said. "You want to step on the field and give your best effort and have some focus points or a game plan. I think the different elements that have come out throughout our season, whether we've been scored on first, whether we've scored first – I think that's shown the versatility of our team and overall the resiliency and poise we have with this group."

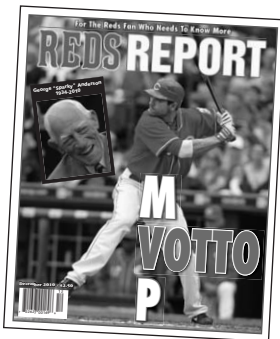
"We just put in so much work every single week, so we know what we are capable of," Fichtner added. "We work on man-down situations or goal-down situations, whatever it is. We're always just prepared, and we come together and we're like, 'Come on, we got this. Don't freak out, everybody. Just stay calm and do what we know how to do.'"

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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (5-0)

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, W 35-7; **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, Men 9th/15, Women: 10th/16; **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 (9-1, 1-1)

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, L 1-0; **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., 5th/10.

Oct. 1 Blessings Collegiate Invitational at Fayetteville, Ark, 5th/10. **2** Blessings Collegiate Invitational at Fayetteville, Ark, 6th/10; **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** Blessings Collegiate Invitational at Fayetteville, Ark., 9th/10.

Oct. 1 Blessings Collegiate Invitational at Fayetteville, Ark., 9th/10; **2** Blessings Collegiate Invitational at Fayetteville, Ark., T6th/10 **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 (exh.) W, 3-2 (OT); **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 (4-2-0, 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, W 3-2 (OT), W 5-3; **11-12** MINNESOTA; **18-19** at St. Cloud State; **22** MERCYHURST; **25-26** ICEBREAKER TOUR-NAMENT 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 (8-0-2, 3-0-1)

Aug. 22 CLEVELAND STATE, T 1-1; **25** at Akron, W 2-0; **29** SIUE, W 4-0.

Sept. 1 UNLV, W 3-2; **8** XAVIER, 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, W 6-3; **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 (9-1-3, 4-0-2)

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, W 3-0; **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., NTS.

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 (7-7, 0-4)

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, L 3-0; **6** at Indiana, L 3-1; **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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TIM POND, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein

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Buckeyes Ace First Real Test Of The Season

If you pay any kind of attention to the national media, then you probably heard a lot of “But who has Ohio State played?” when attempting to assess the 2024 Buckeyes. Sure, the analytics said they were a top-three team, but how did anyone *really* know? To this point they had faced what a friend of mine describes as “tomato cans,” and though that may be slight hyperbole, it has some legitimacy.

THE FACTS MAN
Mike Wachsman

The Buckeyes had not really faced a team that would be considered good until Iowa came into the Horseshoe on Oct. 5. Some of that was OSU’s own doing, putting together an absolutely pathetic nonleague schedule, and some was the whim of the Big Ten computer, which spits out the conference matchups. OSU drew Michigan State out of the box, and the Spartans were unable to show much resistance.

But Iowa promised to be more formidable, and for a half that turned out to be true. The Hawkeyes made Ohio State work for all it got in the first 30 minutes, allowing a touchdown on the Buckeyes’ opening possession before putting the clamps on. The teams entered halftime with Ohio State clinging to a 7-0 lead, though it wasn’t your typical one-score margin as you – or at least I – never felt Iowa was truly a threat to win the game.

Iowa was looking up at nearly everyone last season when it came to offense, averaging fewer than 16 points per game, which led to some coaching staff changes. Under new offensive coordinator Tim Lester, the Hawkeyes had hit 30 points three times in their first four games and possessed a real live rushing attack, fueled by Ohioan Kaleb Johnson. The Cincinnati-area native came into the game ranked second nationally in rushing yards per

contest (171.3) but was held largely in check by Ohio State, finishing the day with just 86 yards and a touchdown. Iowa was going to lean heavily on Johnson to get the offense going, but that never materialized. The bulk of his yardage came on a pair of 28-yard runs, but otherwise, he found running room hard to come by.

A little bit was made of a comment Johnson uttered in the days leading up to the game. He mentioned that he was never really recruited by Ohio State, and even if he had been he wouldn’t have gone there. He said he wanted to beat them rather than play for them.

All that did was poke the bear. “We knew they were a veteran group and they’re going to come in here and run their stuff,” defensive end Jack Sawyer said. “We love going against teams like that. They want to run the ball and challenge our manhood, so we were ready. I thought we did a great job.”

This game was Ohio State’s best performance to date in terms of getting pressure on the quarterback and forcing turnovers. The Buckeyes recovered a pair of fumbles, picked off Cade McNamara once and were in the backfield so often that Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz probably thought a few Buckeyes had defected to the visitors.

“You have to play clean football against a team like this,” Ferentz said. “We turned it over, and a lot of bad things happened today.”

While Iowa is indeed better on offense than it was a year ago, there are still limitations, which is why many in Buckeye Nation still don’t know whether their team is truly good.

Fortunately for everyone, that question will be answered at roughly 11 p.m. Eastern time Saturday, right around when the clock hits triple zero at Oregon’s Autzen Stadium.

Making Impossible Look Routine

It was just another chapter in the growing saga of Jeremiah Smith, who finished the day with four catches for 89 yards and a touchdown.

Smith kick-started the Buckeye offense

early in the third quarter when he outran two defenders and grabbed a pretty ball from Will Howard before being tackled 53 yards later at the Iowa 4-yard line. On the next play, Smith ran a simple stop route, turned around, leapt while holding off a clingy Hawkeye defender and made another in a growing collection of one-handed catches, this one for the touchdown. They are becoming so routine that soon somebody is going to start a YouTube channel dedicated solely to Smith’s one-handed grabs.

It was redemption for Smith, who earlier in the game showed he was human when he allowed an Iowa defender to punch the ball out of his grasp. Iowa recovered, short-circuiting what could have been a second Ohio State scoring drive in the first half.

“Jeremiah has emotional maturity,” Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. “He’s someone who practices hard every day and has avoided distractions up to this point. That fumble is going to bother him, and I think that’s what makes him great. He has a lot of confidence, and we have a lot of confidence in him.”

Smith is reaching elite territory with his exploits and threatens to push aside Cris Carter, the longtime standard bearer for freshman receivers at Ohio State. Carter became relied upon more and more as the 1984 season progressed and finished with 648 yards and eight touchdowns. Smith is currently at 453 yards and six touchdowns, so it appears a pretty safe bet that after this season folks will be using the same reverential terms for him as they have for so many years for Carter.

Don’t Forget About Me

Lost in the Smith hype is the steady play of Emeka Egbuka, a guy who would be a No. 1 receiver on most teams in college football. He suffered through a high ankle sprain last year and wasn’t nearly the player he showed himself to be in 2022, when he had 74 grabs for 1,151 yards and 10 touchdowns. That injury, along with a desire to win a national title, was a big reason Egbuka returned for a fourth season.

“Emeka does all the dirty work, like he did in the Michigan State game,” Day said. “To see him come back and have three touchdowns (against Iowa), that’s a great thing. He’s a leader and a warrior for us.”

Egbuka finished with nine grabs for 71 yards and was still out there blocking for the ground game, which rolled up 203 yards and averaged 5.1 yards per attempt.

“Shout out to Coach (Chip) Kelly for calling the plays,” Egbuka said. “We just try to execute whatever our coaches need so it’s an 11-man effort. All 11 guys are working together, and we’re just trying to have that camaraderie as we go on through the season.”

Egbuka actually has more catches than Smith (30 to 23) and is just a tick behind him in yards and touchdowns, but the great thing about the guys in Ohio State’s receiving corps is that they genuinely do not care who gets the spotlight. When one of them wins, they all win, and the team can reach its lofty goals.

From Liability To Strength

One glaring concern fans had coming into 2024 was the play of the Buckeye offensive line. Far too inconsistent for its talent quotient, the Buckeyes lacked toughness in key situations and were too leaky in pass protec-

tion for the liking of the coaches.

With a new man in the middle – Alabama transfer Seth McLaughlin – and veterans returning, the hope was that the Buckeye trench unit would make a big jump. After all, the best teams are usually beasts up front, and if Ohio State wanted to hoist that championship trophy at season’s end, it would have to be better along the offensive line.

Consider the mission accomplished, at least to this point.

Ohio State ranks 14th in the country in run blocking and 20th in pass blocking, according to Pro Football Focus. McLaughlin had the conference’s best pass-blocking grade among centers and was third in run blocking, while All-America candidate Donovan Jackson was by far the best run blocker in the conference among guards. For good measure, left tackle Josh Simmons had the highest pass-blocking grade at his position and could be in line for All-America kudos of his own as he has allowed just one quarterback pressure in 142 pass-blocking snaps.

That left side has been a great foundation, yet Ohio State found much of its early success against Iowa running to the right – specifically behind guard Tegra Tshabola, who had his best game as a Buckeye.

“We knew we needed to be physical and play downhill football, and I think the O-line took that challenge,” quarterback Will Howard said. “Those dudes are bad SOB’s, and they’re coming downhill and rocking people off the ball. I think they are playing really, really good football right now.”

The development has been nothing short of amazing, and while much of the credit has to go to offensive line coach Justin Frye, a good deal also must be given to Kelly, who is in his first year as Ohio State’s offensive coordinator.

If you have a chance, do yourself a favor and watch games a second time, just to keep track of the different formations Kelly uses and the diverse play calls he throws out. Last year it was a near certainty that Ohio State was going to run on first down, but this year Kelly has done a wonderful job of keeping defenses off balance with first-down throws and rollouts with a run-pass option. He is a master at setting up the run game and is a major reason why OSU is fifth in the country at 6.2 yards per carry.

When Kelly left his head coaching gig at UCLA to become coordinator for the Buckeyes, many in the football media world were stunned. Why would a guy want to go from being top dog to just being another cog in the machine? For Kelly, it was simple: “I just wanted to coach ball.”

Kelly said there were so many ancillary responsibilities to being a head coach that he felt more like a fundraiser and babysitter. Getting to draw up plays for the Buckeyes and work with the quarterbacks and the offense was a welcome change, one that has rejuvenated him.

Besides not having to deal with fans screaming for your head, Kelly said there was one other big perk that goes with being an OC.

“You can get up to use the bathroom between series,” he said.

It’s always about life’s little joys, isn’t it?

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Ducks Not All They're Quacked Up To Be?

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I was editing Patrick Engels' preview of Oregon in advance of the meeting between the Ducks and Ohio State on Oct. 12. As I worked my way through the various personnel and position groups, I became more and more alarmed. On paper the Ducks were looking like they were one of the greatest college football teams of all time (see for yourself on pages 16-18 of this issue). I was concerned about the fate of the Buckeyes as they travel west to meet this juggernaut, as the Ducks appear.

Then I had a few days to think about it and a chance to watch the Buckeyes dispatch a solid, well-coached Iowa team handily, and I'm thinking maybe it's Oregon that needs to worry about Ohio State. I don't imagine if you looked at the Buckeye personnel and position groups on paper, as well as on the field, the Bucks look like world-beaters too. I guess that will make for a pretty good matchup.

I have not seen Oregon play this season, but in looking at its record so far, there is nothing overwhelming about the results. The Ducks are one of the few teams that played a nonconference schedule rivaling that of the Buckeyes. But while Ohio State took care of business against its nonconference patsies, Oregon was struggling against the likes of Idaho and Boise State. And the two teams actually played a common opponent in back-to-back weeks with Ohio State defeating Michigan State, 38-7, and the Ducks downing the Spartans, 31-10.

I guess my question is, are we making Oregon out to be something that it is not? And are we forgetting that the Buckeyes are something that they are?

Those of you who read this column regularly know that I have nitpicked a little bit with the Buckeyes this season. But I think that is because they are so good that they have yet to come near to reaching their potential, a peak which I hope comes Nov. 30 against archrival Michigan. But each week the Buckeyes seem to get better, and each week they take care of business. Why should the game against Oregon be any different?

The team is so good that there was a debate on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum about which unit on the team was the weakest and the posters were struggling to produce an answer. The possible nominee was the linebackers, with most agreeing that being last among Ohio State groupings was not necessarily an indictment, rather an indication of just how good the Buckeyes are. And if there are any doubters, the linebackers may have had their best game of the season against Iowa.

I'm not suggesting that Oregon is not the toughest opponent Ohio State will face so far this season.

One thing the Buckeyes need to do is start more quickly than they have been doing this season, with their slim 7-0 halftime lead vs. Iowa a prime example. Ohio State needs to take charge immediately against the Ducks. They do not appear to be a team that will just wear down later in the game like the others this season. Ohio State has the firepower to play catch-up, but that is not a position you want to be in. Let Oregon get the jump on the Buckeyes, and suddenly you are playing 12 on 11 football with the Autzen Stadium crowd playing the role of the extra man.

While Ohio State has outscored opponents 45-10 in the first quarter of games this season, it has outscored its foes 66-14 in the second period and an incredible 84-3 in the third. Why not try to have a quarter like that in the first period against the Ducks and let Oregon play catch-up? I'm sure Ryan Day and his staff are

trying to figure out how to get their team off to a quick start as I write this column.

One of the few things I would like to see go differently against the Ducks is ending the disturbing trend of Will Howard – who is having a terrific season – throwing an interception in each of the last three games, all in the first half. That's no way to jump on a team early and often.

Just remember: The Ducks puts their pants on the same as everyone else – one leg at a time (see Mark Rea's historical piece on pages 24-25).

Thoughts On The Iowa Game

Heading into the game with the Hawkeyes, we heard a lot about running back and Ohio native Kaleb Johnson, who was coming off of a 206-yard rushing performance in a victory over Minnesota. When you check his stat line against Ohio State, it is a respectable 15 carries for 86 yards. But that is a tad misleading.

In the first half, when the teams were battling to take control of the game, Ohio State held Johnson to only 19 yards on eight carries, good for just 2.4 yards per attempt. By the time Johnson finally broke loose for a 28-yard gain, the Buckeyes were ahead 21-0. Johnson would add another 28-yard run for Iowa's only score in fourth-quarter garbage time.

It was an impressive performance by the Buckeye defense to hold Johnson, who entered the game as the No. 2 rusher in the country with 171.3 yards per contest, at bay. Oregon also brings a productive runner into its game with the Buckeyes. Jordan James is averaging 110.4 yards a game and is coming off a 24-carry, 166-yard effort against Michigan State. Checking James the way the Buckeyes did Johnson would go a long way toward a Buckeye victory over the Ducks.

Another encouraging sign as the Buckeyes move on from the Iowa win and head out to Eugene is the fact Ohio State was flagged for only one penalty against the Hawkeyes after averaging 5.5 penalties heading into the game. Regular readers of this column know I was predicting the Buckeyes would be down to zero penalties by the Penn State game on Nov. 2. Expediting that schedule to having no penalties vs. Oregon would be just fine with me.

Eloquent Writing

Speaking of Mark Rea's flashback on Francis Schmidt and the 1934 Ohio State football season, there was a beautifully written quote from an AP writer upon the Buckeyes' 34-0 victory over Michigan in Schmidt's first season as head coach in Columbus:

"That famed Michigan jinx, nemesis of Ohio State grid teams since the turn of the century, was buried far beneath the cleat-torn sod of the Buckeye gridiron Saturday as the Wolverines, baffled by Coach Francis A. Schmidt's intricate offense, went down to a 34 to 0 defeat, the most humiliating ever handed an Ann Arbor eleven by the scarlet and gray."

You just don't see writing like that anymore.

Schmidt's Buckeyes would go on to win four straight against their rivals, all shutouts, after losing nine of the previous 12 before the coach's arrival from TCU.

Quote Of The Week

Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly,

ever colorful, was asked about differences between being down on the sidelines and calling plays from up in the press box.

"One thing I like about being offensive coordinator is that I can go to the bathroom in between series, but other than that it's not much different," Kelly said.

I'll guarantee you, every guy over 50 who heard or read that got it and probably chuckled. I wonder how the reporter from back in 1934 would have captured Kelly's remarks.

By the way, Kelly is 60 in case you were wondering.

OT: Pete Rose

I know that Cincinnati Reds great Pete Rose was never a Buckeye and to my knowledge never had anything to do with Ohio State or Ohio State athletics. But Rose, who passed away on Sept. 30, was larger than life in much of Ohio and merits mention, just as I am sure I mentioned Jim Brown, the larger-than-life running back for the Cleveland Browns, when he passed away last year. Both Rose and Brown were as much a part of the Ohio sports fabric as Woody Hayes or Archie Griffin.

And like Hayes, while Rose was revered in Ohio, he was reviled in most other parts of the civilized world. But no one questioned the Hit King's accomplishments on the baseball field. His many records and winning ways speak for themselves.

As the late Jack Kelly, well known bartender at Plank's Café through the years, used to say (and quite frequently I might add), "If Pete Rose isn't in the Hall of Fame, there shouldn't be a Hall of Fame."

But Pete Rose *isn't* in baseball's Hall of Fame, having received a lifetime ban from baseball for betting on the game. At the risk of offending Cincinnati Reds fans everywhere, I don't think Rose belongs in the Hall of Fame. Betting on one's own sport is an absolute no-no in my book, completely undercutting the integrity of the game. However, Rose might have already been in the Hall, as I write, if he had come clean with baseball from the beginning. But that just wasn't Charlie Hustle's style. Now that he has passed, he may get in someday. But I think the baseball powers-that-be should refrain from rushing into forgiving and forgetting.

I had two remote interactions with Rose throughout the years.

When I was sports editor of the now-defunct Madison Press in London, Ohio, my first daily newspaper job, Pete had entered free agency and met with John W. Galbreath, developer, horseman and owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates, at his Darby Dan farms, close to London – well, close enough for me to make an excuse to go cover the press conference that followed. After it was over and Pete had rolled off in his Rolls Royce, I got to chat with Mr. Galbreath. He knew our publisher, a terrific newspaper man named C. Carlton Hartley, and when Mr. Galbreath found out I was with the Press, for whatever reason he took me into his private trophy room behind a secret wall panel. There was a lot of horse racing memorabilia there, but in reality, the "trophy room" was a shrine to the late Pirate star Roberto Clemente. As a huge baseball fan at the time, it was very exciting.

My other Rose story is from Rose's march to the all-time hit record. With Rose tied with Ty Cobb and needing just one more hit to set the

record, BSB ad salesman Ron Friedman took me to the Reds game at Riverfront Stadium. Rose did *not* break the record the day I went. He broke it the next day. So, while you always hear fans saying they were there when Rose broke the record, or when Don Larsen pitched his perfect game, or they were at the Snow Bowl, and you wonder if they were really there, I can honestly say I was *not* there when Pete broke the hit record, and I have the program from the day before to prove it.

Mail Woes Continue

After a week when the BSB mail service seemed to have improved, the USPS was back to its old ways the following week, with problems in the Warren-Youngstown area in particular, where no one seems to have gotten their paper.

The sheer volume of phone calls we have been receiving is frustrating, because we have been unable to help our readers, and we know *you* are more frustrated than we are. Many of you have spoken to me, the affable Dave Breithaupt or assistant publisher Becky Roberts on the phone. Dave and Becky have been much more patient and pleasant about it than I have. I apologize to any of you to whom I have been cranky. I am always happy to talk to a subscriber, but this has been overwhelming, especially when readers just out-and-out say they are not going to renew because of the delivery problems. The newspaper business is tough enough these days as it is.

Just a couple of hints to head off your having to make multiple phone calls and to reduce some of the wear and tear on our staff so we can go about the business of producing Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

If you live in central Ohio or are a first-class subscriber, we consider your paper lost on Tuesday, one week after mailing. We will replace the paper or credit your account. If you live in-state, but outside of central Ohio, we consider your paper lost on the second Friday, 10 days after mailing. And if you live out of state, we consider your paper lost after two weeks, on the second Tuesday after mailing. We will replace your paper or give you credit, no questions asked.

As always, we remind you that each issue of BSB is posted immediately upon completion at BuckeyeSports.com, a free service to all subscribers while they wait for their paper to arrive. You can also upgrade your subscription to first-class mail in an envelope through the Michigan game for \$24 or through the Football Recruiting Wrap up in February for \$34. Call us at (614) 486-2202, and we will get you going.

Loyal subscriber Terry from Cleveland, who called his local post office to complain about his chronic delivery issues, suggested that as many BSB subscribers call the postal complaint number as possible and maybe we will annoy them enough to have someone do something about the delivery.

The complaint number is (800) 275-8777. In classic USPS style, the process to make a complaint is tedious. You are put through a series of prompts. When you are offered the chance to say "mail," say mail, then "daily mail." When offered "not applicable," say not applicable. When they say, "submit a request," say submit a request, then "specific" and they are finally going to ask for a date when the problem started. Let's all say August 15, 2024. Then they will ask you for contact information. Be patient, but let's be numerous and vocal. Buckeye Sports Bulletin power!

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