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Vol. 44, No. 6

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 26, 2024



SONNY BROCKWAY

KICK TO THE GUT — Ohio State had a critical goal-line stand against the Ducks on Oct. 12, but Atticus Sappington kicked the go-ahead field goal from 19 yards with 1:47 remaining in the game to give Oregon a 32-31 victory.

By GREG WILSON

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Through five games of the 2024 season, the biggest criticism against Ohio State was that it hadn't been battle-tested, playing three cupcake games against lower-level teams for the nonconference schedule and rolling over the first two Big Ten teams that were unlucky enough to draw the Buckeyes on their schedule.

The Buckeyes would face their first real test in Week 7, where — in front of an Autzen Stadium-record crowd of 60,129 — they engaged in a back-and-forth fight against No. 3 Oregon. It was a battle between two heavyweight contenders and now Big Ten rivals that came down to the final drive, with the Buckeyes down by just one point, needing to get into field-goal range to give Jayden Fielding a chance at sending the Scarlet and Gray into their off week with

a perfect 6-0 record and signature win on their résumé.

But after a game full of the Ducks and Buckeyes trading punches, the knockout blow was thrown by none other than a referee, who called an offensive pass interference penalty on freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith when OSU had already gotten itself into field-goal range but was moved back an extra 15 yards to the Oregon 43-yard line. That proved too much for Ohio State's offense to make up for, with the game ending in a 32-31 loss for Ohio State.

Smith did extend his arms when he ran his route, pushing Oregon defensive back Nikko Reed away from him before he turned around to receive what would have put the Buckeyes in great field position around the Oregon 20-yard line. But head coach Ryan Day suggested after the game that he was not in favor of the call.

"They did a great job getting down the field and continued to fight. But on the one

play there, the DB was grabbing on Jeremiah," Day said. "Jeremiah's fighting there and they called the flag there. That cost us."

Whether the call was correct or not, Day also made it clear that he wasn't saying that play is what decided the game.

Leading up to the season, Day had repeated a slogan of sorts, saying that he didn't want any single game the Buckeyes played in the 2024 season to come down to just one play. Instead, he wanted games to be out of reach by the end so that a single play couldn't change the outcome, whether it's because of a bad call, a blown coverage or an interception that seals the deal, each of which the Buckeyes have been the victims of in past seasons in close games against Michigan, Georgia and now Oregon.

"It shouldn't come down to one play, and we've said that before," Day added. "We want to leave no doubt, and I felt like we should have done that tonight and we did not. You put it in the hands of a call and you don't get it, then that's on us."

Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly didn't say whether he agreed with the call or not, but he said that right when it happened, he was ready to move on to the next play.

"If they make the call, they make the call," he said. "You've got to try to (think about), 'What is the next snap and what are we going to do to try to get ourselves back in field-goal range?' If you see the penalty — you're not going to talk them into not calling it. It's not a reviewable play."

After the penalty, Ohio State was able to get three more plays off as precious time ticked off, the first an incomplete pass to tight end Gee Scott Jr., followed by another incomplete pass, this one to Smith. Then on the final play of the game with six seconds on the clock before the snap, fifth-year transfer Will Howard had all of his options taken away and he decided to tuck the ball and run.

He gained 12 yards on the play, which was enough to give Fielding a chance to send one through the uprights, but he wasn't able to get to the ground quickly enough, going down with zero seconds remaining, officially ending the game.

Howard believed at the time of his slide that he was down in time for the Buckeyes to call a timeout, but the officials didn't see it that way.

"I thought I did, obviously I didn't," he said. "I worried about trying to get enough yards to make the field goal and get us into field-goal range, but we have to go back and look at it and figure out what we did wrong there and I have to get down I guess. It's all good. We have to learn from it."

Had he been able to get to the ground a second faster, it would have been close to a 43-yard attempt for Fielding. Instead, the Buckeyes walked away without a chance to remain undefeated.

Despite the mistake on the last play of

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From The Message Board

Despite having the ball on Oregon's 28-yard line with a chance to win the game on a last-second field goal, then-No. 2 Ohio State found itself on the losing end of the back-and-forth affair against then-No. 3 Oregon on Oct. 12, falling 32-31 to the Ducks to suffer its first loss of the season. There may be several things to point to as to why things went south for Ryan Day's team, but we asked readers on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what they think was the biggest reason behind the one-point loss to the Ducks.

"One word – defense. Time and time again the D could not get a stop when they needed it. This is becoming a common theme – Jim Knowles' defense fails to show up in big games.

– Bstu9

"I'll echo Bstu9. Also, if you're going to call offensive pass interference, the refs better call it every play in every game because they all do that."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"What went wrong is that they lost by one point. The stadium was loud and rattled the Bucks. Burke needed some success covering Stewart and the lack thereof helped lose the game. Bucks played hard though. They are still champs."

– PeyoteBuck

"Yes, the broken record reply is the lack of defense, more specifically the lack of heat on Dillon Gabriel, and we can't ignore the rather porous pass coverage. Regardless of the reason, the Buckeyes went toe-to-toe with a very good team in a very hostile environment. Rest up and learn from it. The season ain't over yet."

– BuckeyeScott

"This may be unworthy of mention, but if the intercepted PAT pass in the end zone had gone for two points instead of the runner getting pushed out of bounds, those two points would have provided the margin of victory. Both teams are good enough to beat each other and anyone."

– Terrier Buck

"Sometimes the other team just plays the better game. Oregon's execution was the best I've seen all year. Penalties were 8-70 for OSU and only 3-25 for the Ducks.

They won the turnover category, and the kickoff hitting our guy was genius."

– R1TBDBITL

"It's a broken record here. Defense, defense, defense. Every time Oregon went ahead, the Ohio State offense answered. Yet the defense never found an answer to get two stops in a row. Don't blame Will Howard. Don't blame Jeremiah Smith. Those guys fought and produced until the end. Actually to the end and one second. Does anyone recall a defensive back having as bad a game as Denzel Burke? If it hadn't been Denzel Burke, he would have been occupying the same seat on the bench that Jayden Fielding was a couple of weeks ago. And if we are going to call out Burke, you have to call out Jim Knowles. The mad scientist never whipped up a winning concoction."

– Poster That Harley Built

"This was a game that Jack Sawyer needed to 'make a big-time statement,' but he was a no-show. As was Denzel Burke. If the star players don't show up in big games, their team will likely lose. Will this loss motivate the players and coaches to fix the problems and sweep the final six games? If they do, they will play in the Big Ten Championship Game, probably a rematch with Oregon.

"The season is not over. The team goals are still achievable. It wouldn't hurt if the team could eliminate the turnovers and mental mistakes/penalties. Fans have to wonder: the defense couldn't bother the QBs of Akron, Western Michigan or Marshall. Why would we expect them to hassle Dillon Gabriel who picked them apart?"

– Byron McNutt

FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Then-No. 2 Ohio State fell short on the road against then-No. 3 Oregon in a back-and-forth affair on Oct. 12, losing 32-31 to the Ducks to drop to 5-1 on the season and 2-1 in the Big Ten. 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 loss.

Patrick Engels, BSB: Entering the game against the Ducks, tight end Gee Scott Jr. was seldom used in the passing game, totaling just four receptions for 19 yards – albeit one of those being a 3-yard score against Michigan State.

But against Oregon, Scott was one of Will Howard's most reliable and productive targets. Howard found the veteran Scott early and often at Autzen Stadium, catching his first pass on the very first drive of the game for a 6-yard gain and then coming away with a 15-yard gain later in the second quarter on a crucial third-and-9 that led to an Emeka Egbuka touchdown later that drive.

Scott had his biggest catch of the night when he found the seam in the middle of the field for a 25-yard gain early in the third quarter that put the Buckeyes at the Oregon 10-yard line, putting the Buckeyes in sound position to take a 28-22 lead on a Jeremiah Smith touchdown two plays later.

In all, Scott was Ohio State's third-leading receiver in the loss with three catches for 46 yards, possibly the best outing of the season for the graduate senior.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf goes to Ohio State freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, who had another standout performance against what is likely the best secondary he had faced all year. Smith, who had already been one of the most productive freshmen in the country coming into the game, came up with several clutch receptions to help the Buckeyes mount scoring drives.

He finished the game with nine catches for 100 yards and a touchdown. Smith's great performance was marked by a critical 18-yard catch on third-and-7 during the fourth quarter that kept the chains going and eventually led to a Jayden Fielding go-ahead field goal. He also had his seventh total touchdown of the season when he hauled in a 6-yard touchdown grab to give the Buckeyes a lead in the second half.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf goes to Caleb Downs, who might have been the Buckeyes' best performer on the defensive side of the ball, which had a fairly rough game against the Ducks.

He was all over the field making plays in some big situations, batting down passes, and finding his way to ball carriers with some impressive football instincts that he has been showing off throughout his first season with the Buckeyes.

He finished the game with eight total tackles – third most on the team – with one tackle for loss and two passes broken up. In a game that was not great for what was supposed to be a very strong Ohio State defense, Downs was one of few bright spots.

BSB Subscribers

Michael Bauer: No win, no Buckeye Leaves. Let's not get soft. There were some spectacular plays last night by some great Buckeyes, but a loss is shared by all equally. Handing out Buckeye Leaves after a loss smacks of participation trophies to me. Besides, I am a terrible grump during games and after losses, so please forgive me if I sound overly harsh.

Tiffin Buckeye: Defense gets minus-100 leaves.

PeyoteBuck: I'll still go with Howard. That was a nerve-racking game and it's unfair to judge him by that last play even though it was a whopper. He did amazing things in the game, pinpoint passes and evading sacks. His athleticism is exceptional. Shout out to Gee Scott Jr. too.

BuckeyeScott: It's difficult to give out Buckeye Leaves in a loss, I get that. However, we did have some players that deserve consideration. Jayden Fielding was 1 for 1 on his 40-yard FG and 4 of 4 on the PATs. Somehow I think he would have made that last-second attempt if given the opportunity.

Poster That Harley Built: Emeka Egbuka and Gee Scott Jr. Those guys would still be catching balls if the game were longer. And I'm going to add Will Howard and Jeremiah Smith. I don't care what anyone says. Those guys fought like Buckeyes until the end. Don't forget they marched all the way into field-goal territory when other players might have folded.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Airing Of Grievances

I have the following observations/questions after the Oregon debacle:

1. Has any Buckeye cornerback ever had a worse performance than Denzel Burke? Holy cow! They beat him like a drum! And he's our best corner and supposedly an All-American. I don't think so.

2. We now know that our "great" defense was only "great" because they had not yet played a team that actually had an offense. When they came up against a real offense they wilted like last week's daisies.

3. Coach Ryan Day is doing a very good John Cooper imitation. Can't win big games, can't win bowl games,

can't beat Michigan. Let's hope it doesn't take our new athletics director thirteen years to figure that out.

**Terry Walrath
Hinckley, Ohio**

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

Loss Gives OSU No Margin For Error

OSU 5 yards closer, now there were only six seconds remaining. That's when Howard faded to pass, decided to run for it and picked up 12 yards. But by the time he looked around to call his team's final timeout, the clock was already flashing all zeroes.

talented receivers. It seems borderline unbelievable that an offense as explosive as the Buckeyes would have finished the first half with 21 of its 36 plays gaining 3 yards or less.

During the opening two quarters, Smith caught four passes, but they were worth a mere 19 yards. Meanwhile, Emeka Egbuka totaled three first-half receptions, including a 15-yard touchdown. His other two catches went for a total of 1 yard.

And every time the running game seemed to catch fire, Kelly stopped using it. On the final two plays of the first quarter, TreVeyon Henderson ripped off back-to-back runs of 17 and 53 yards. When his next two carries netted just 1 yard, Henderson got his number called only five more times the rest of the game.

As I mentioned before, the loss for Ohio State is by no means a death blow to its national championship hopes. With the expanded playoff format, the Buckeyes can run the table and still comfortably make the field. But their margin for error is gone. Two losses might still make the tournament, but I wouldn't count on it. To my mind, they simply must be perfect from here, and that includes beating Oregon in a likely rematch at the Big Ten Championship Game in December.

Can they do it? Sure they can, but I have no idea if they will. The talent is certainly there, but talent can take a football team only so far. Anyone outside Eugene who believes Oregon fielded the more talented team in Autzen Stadium on Oct. 12 can raise their hand.

And that leads me to my final point. As much as this pains me to say, I'm beginning to get that old feeling of a bygone era not that long ago when the Buckeyes often fielded the better team talent-wise and still found a way to lose.

Bucks, Ducks Oddities

Only five times in the 135 years of program history has Ohio State had three players rush for 100 or more yards in a single game. Only once have the Buckeyes had three players total 100 or more receiving yards in the same game. Of those six games, two have come against Oregon.

The first regular-season meeting in the 11-game series between the now conference rivals came in 1961 when OSU hosted the Ducks the week before the Michigan game and sent them back to Eugene with a 22-12 loss.

Oregon had a front-row seat for Woody Hayes and his three-yards-and-a-cloud-of-dust philosophy as the Buckeyes rolled up 370 yards on the ground. John Mummey, one of three quarterbacks Hayes used in rotation that season, led the charge with 116 yards on 14 carries. Halfback Bob Klein added 103 yards and a touchdown on just six carries, while fullback Bob Ferguson totaled 101 yards and two scores on 25 carries.

Sixty years later, during a 35-28 loss to the Ducks in 2021, the receiving trio of Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson combined for 27 catches worth 388 yards and three touchdowns. Smith-Njigba totaled seven catches for 145 yards and two scores, Olave grabbed 12 balls for 126 yards, and Wilson added eight receptions for 117 yards and one TD.

In addition to the victory, the Ducks had another anomaly in that 2021 game. Tailback CJ Verdell rushed for 161 yards, the first time in the series that an Oregon player had cracked the century mark on the ground against the Buckeyes. Ducks running back Jordan James joined Verdell with 115 yards during this year's contest.

For a team that was supposedly single-minded in its goal of going undefeated and winning a national championship, second-ranked Ohio State has given itself no room for error with a 32-31 loss at third-ranked Oregon on Oct. 12.

It was a defeat that will likely be placed firmly at the feet of quarterback Will Howard, who lost track of time on the final play of the game, sliding to a stop on a 12-yard scramble a tick or two after the game clock had turned to 0:00. But to slightly alter the famous JFK saying about victory having a hundred fathers while defeat is an orphan, this defeat had a multitude of fathers.

We might as well begin with Howard, who eclipsed the 300-yard mark in passing for the first time in an OSU uniform and only the second time in 40 career college games (both losses), while throwing for two touchdowns and running for another. However, in crunch time, it was Oregon QB Dillon Gabriel – not Howard – who made the proper decisions.

If you are going to lead your team to a national championship, you might not always have to be the flashiest quarterback, but you have to play clean games, and Howard's performance against Oregon – while extremely efficient at times – was far from clean.

It was Howard's fumbled shotgun snap on third-and-3 at his own 27-yard line that turned momentum around in the second half. With the Buckeyes protecting a 28-22 lead as the third-quarter clock wound under four minutes, the OSU defense (more on them later) had finally come up with a crucial stop on fourth-and-goal at its own 2.

The offense quickly got a first down, and any kind of a sustained possession at that juncture of the game would likely have put the Ducks into desperation mode. But on third-and-3, Howard appeared to momentarily take his eye off the snap, resulting in a fumble the quarterback had to smother for a 10-yard loss.

That led to a 43-yard punt from Joe McGuire, giving Oregon the ball at its own 40. Five plays later, Gabriel faked a handoff and scampered 27 yards for a touchdown to put his team in front at 29-28 with 13:20 remaining.

The remainder of the game was spent with the teams trading field goals before the Buckeyes got the ball for the last time, trailing by a single point with 1:47 remaining and one timeout.

That possession began with Howard slipping and falling on his backside for a first-down loss of 9 yards, but he recovered to lead the team all the way to the Oregon 28. From there, it would have been about a 46-yard field-goal try for Jayden Fielding, whose career long is the 47-yarder he kicked last year against Minnesota. But perhaps remembering what happened at the end of the College Football Playoff semifinal against Georgia two years ago, OSU head coach Ryan Day elected to try to get closer.

And that's when things turned into a comedy of errors. First, Howard's completion to freshman sensation Jeremiah Smith was nullified by offensive pass interference after Smith pushed off on Ducks cornerback Nikko Reed. Not only did that 15-yard penalty push the Buckeyes well out of Fielding's range, but the clock continued to run. Apparently neither Day nor Howard (or anyone else on the Ohio State sideline, for that matter) realized that precious seconds were ticking away, and by the time Howard got off a pass that fell incomplete, there were only 10 seconds left.

The Buckeyes got a bit of a break when the Oregon defense was called for having 12 men on the field, but although that penalty inched

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

It was, in a word, excruciating to get that far, get that close, and then not even give Fielding a chance to win it.

Ugly Case Of Déjà Vu

I said I'd get to the defense, and here goes. Maybe all of those slow starts this season against what was considered lesser opposition should have been telling us something. The Buckeyes took a massive step up in competition against Oregon, and there is no way of soft-pedaling the way the defense played. The unit was sold from the beginning of fall camp as being the best in Jim Knowles' three seasons as coordinator, and that seems now to have been the proverbial bill of goods.

Bottom line: The OSU defense simply was outplayed by the Ducks offense.

There were no sacks and only two tackles for loss, and one of those came from a safety. The Buckeyes hadn't allowed a 100-yard rusher or 100-yard receiver all season and hadn't allowed a 300-yard passer since 2022. Oregon checked boxes next to all three.

There were missed tackles and missed assignments, and preseason All-America cornerback Denzel "Natty or Bust" Burke unfortunately picked this game to have the worst performance of his college career. That sound you heard coming out of Eugene was Burke's NFL draft stock crashing to the ground as he not only got torched on several occasions, he wasn't strong enough to bring Oregon receivers to the ground whenever he did catch up to them.

I understand not selling out and blitzing on every play. That is not and never has been Knowles' philosophy. But there was just too much déjà vu from 2022 when the defense gave up chunk play after chunk play while it was trying to figure out the intricacies of its new coordinator's system.

It seemed to me that anytime Knowles did turn up the pressure – as he did during Oregon's first possession of the second half, and again on the goal-line stand near the end of the third quarter – Gabriel's heartbeat increased and he rushed his throws. But for the most part, the Buckeyes seemed content to sit back and play zone coverage, and the Ducks responded with 496 yards of total offense.

I don't care how good Oregon is on offense. Giving up eight plays of 25 or more yards (worth nearly 58 percent of the Ducks' total yardage for the game) is unacceptable for a defense with national championship aspirations.

And before you think it's only Knowles on my hit list (and I cleaned that up), I've got plenty of room on it for offensive coordinator Chip Kelly. It wasn't exactly Kelly's finest hour as a play-caller as he made a return to the place he developed his original "basketball on grass" theory that won him 46 games and three conference championships in just four seasons at Oregon.

Especially in the first half, Kelly seemed to fall in love with plays that went east and west rather than trying to stretch the field with his



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OSU Falls To No. 4 In AP Top 25

Ohio State moved down only two spots in the Week 8 AP poll on Oct. 13 following its 32-31 loss to now-No. 2-ranked Oregon.

The Buckeyes were surpassed in the rankings by the Ducks, who, outside of No. 1 ranked Texas, were the only other team to pick up first-place votes. Penn State also jumped OSU after it mounted a 14-point comeback to defeat USC 33-30 in overtime on Oct. 12.

Just before Ohio State's loss to Oregon, Texas defeated previously No. 18-ranked Oklahoma 34-3 to strengthen its grip on the No. 1 spot.

The top 10 is rounded out by No. 5 Georgia, No. 6 Miami (Fla.), No. 7 Alabama, No. 8 LSU, No. 9 Iowa State and No. 10 Clemson.

LSU was the biggest riser in the poll, moving up five spots after an overtime win over No. 18 Ole Miss, 29-26, and was one of two new additions to the top 10. Iowa State also jumped into the top 10 after it fended off upset-minded West Virginia 28-16.

In addition to the biggest faller in the poll, Ole Miss, which has lost two of its last three games and fell nine spots, Tennessee was the only other team to drop out of the top 10. The Volunteers almost lost their second straight game when Florida took them to overtime, but they were able to hang on with a 23-17 victory, falling three spots.

Outside of the three Big Ten teams in the top five, three more Big Ten teams, No. 16 Indiana, No. 22 Illinois and No. 24 Michigan, reside in the back end of the poll.

After their blowout loss in the Red River

Rivalry, the Sooners were one of two teams to drop out of the top 25. Utah lost its second straight game when it fell to Arizona State 27-19 on Oct. 11 and dropped out of the top 25 as well.

Oklahoma and the Utes were replaced by Army at No. 23 and Navy at No. 25, the only two newcomers in the poll.

Bucks Enter Oregon Healthy, Leave Injured

After sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate was kept out of the 35-7 win over Iowa on Oct. 5, the Buckeyes went into the game against Oregon with all starters available.

All of the Buckeye starters were able to get into the game, which made it the first time this year Ohio State was able to do so. Linebacker Cody Simon and left guard Donovan Jackson missed Week 1, and Jackson was held out in Week 2 as well. Then Tyleik Williams missed the next two games, before Tate wasn't able to play for the win over the Hawkeyes.

On the availability report released on Oct. 12 before the game, walk-on running back TC Caffey was the only player listed. He is out for the season after suffering a knee injury over the offseason.

The Buckeyes' good health didn't last very long though. In the first quarter, Tegra Tshabola suffered an undisclosed injury but was able to make his return in the third quarter. Then left tackle Josh Simmons suffered a much more serious injury and was carted off the field midway through the second quarter. Head coach Ryan Day said after the game that Simmons' rest-of-season outlook "doesn't look great" and the injury will likely be season-ending.

Tight end Will Kacmarek also left the game against Oregon after making a 32-yard catch on the Buckeyes' first drive, and he didn't return. There was no update on his status as BSB went to press.

Venneri Makes Trip, McLarty Off Travel Roster

Ohio State's travel roster for its second road game of the season against Oregon was nearly identical to the one against Michigan State on Sept. 28, with the only change be-

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	1-6, 34-24 loss to W'ern Michigan
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	3-3, 34-24 win over Akron
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	W, 49-14	FOX	3-3, 24-23 win over Ga. Southern
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W, 38-7	Peacock	3-3, idle
Oct. 5	IOWA	W, 35-7	CBS	4-2, 40-16 win over Washington
Oct. 12	at Oregon	L, 32-31	NBC	6-0, 32-31 win over Ohio State
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	5-1, idle
Nov. 2	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	6-0, 33-30 win over USC
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	1-5, 50-49 loss to Illinois
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	3-3, 37-10 win over Maryland
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	6-0, idle
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	4-2, idle

ing Buffalo transfer punter Anthony Venneri replacing true freshman Nick McLarty as the Buckeyes' backup punter against the Ducks.

Just like against the Spartans, Ohio State brought 74 players to the Pacific Northwest to take on the Ducks, a list that included nine freshmen instead of the 10 who made the trip to East Lansing, Mich. With McLarty staying put in Columbus, the nine freshmen who traveled to Eugene, Ore., were running backs Sam Williams-Dixon and James Peoples, wide receivers Mylan Graham and Jeremiah Smith, defensive end Eddrick Houston, linebacker Payton Pierce, quarterback Julian Sayin, cornerback Aaron Scott Jr. and safety Jaylen McClain.

McLarty was taken off the travel roster over a month after originally being named the starting punter by Day to start the season against Akron on Aug. 31, but that did not end up being the case as Joe McGuire trotted onto the field as the starting punter against the Zips, a role he has held all season.

With the final score being much closer than the 38-7 final score two weeks ago against Michigan State, the only freshman who got into the game against Oregon outside of special teams was Smith, who hauled in nine catches for 100 yards and a touchdown.

The services of Venneri were also not needed. Starting punter Joe McGuire booted each of Ohio State's three punts for an average of 40.3 yards per kick.

Tshabola Likely Taking All Starting RG Snaps

Day indicated in his Oct. 8 weekly press conference held at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center that Tshabola would likely serve as the Buckeyes' outright starting right guard for the remainder of the season.

"Probably," Day said when asked if they will continue to give Tshabola all first-team reps moving forward this season. "But we'll see. We'll keep evaluating on a week-to-week basis. But he is getting better. If he continues to improve and continues to do what he's doing, then it will look the same."

Day's comments came after Tshabola took every first-team snap at right guard in Ohio State's win over Iowa, where he helped an Ohio State offensive line punish the Hawkeyes with 203 yards on the ground while also giving up just one sack, that coming in the third quarter on a stop by standout Hawkeye linebacker Jay Higgins.

Then Tshabola remained the starter against Oregon, taking all first-team snaps until he left with his previously mentioned injury.

The past two games were a change from Weeks 4 and 5, when Tshabola and Aus-

tin Siereveld were rotating throughout the games against Marshall and Michigan State, although Siereveld's snaps shrank against the Spartans.

Transfers Indoctrinated To U-M, OSU Rivalry

It didn't take long for quarterback Will Howard and center Seth McLaughlin to learn the ins-and-outs of the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry. During a podcast interview with the "Triple Option" podcast hosted by former Ohio State coach Urban Meyer, Howard told a story of his unfortunate outfit selection during his visit to Ohio State.

"I remember on my visit, I was wearing a darker blue hoodie, and I remember somebody said something to me (about it being a Michigan color). I was like, 'Damn, I didn't even realize. I just thought it was a nice little Rhoback hoodie,'" Howard said. "I was like, 'Shoot, I've got to change.' So I had to take it off and it was, like, freezing cold. It was January, and I was wearing a T-shirt on my visit. I had to kind of learn as I went, and the mistakes I made, I guess, were highlighted – like every time I said the M-word."

Howard was not alone when he transferred to Ohio State, also joined by McLaughlin. But it wasn't just the new players who were indoctrinated into the Ohio State culture but also McLaughlin's girlfriend or mother, according to Howard.

"I was at dinner with Seth McLaughlin, his family and Coach Day on our visit," Howard said. "I think it might've been Seth's girlfriend or Seth's mom, but Alabama played 'The Team Up North' in the Rose Bowl, and she was talking about it, and she said the M-word, and Coach Day, kind of under his breath, was like, 'The Team Up North.' From that point on, I was like, 'I can't call them Michigan, that M-word, anymore.'"

Stalions Says He Helped OSU Steal Signals

Former Michigan staffer Connor Stalions – the alleged ringleader of the Wolverines' impermissible sign-stealing scandal who resigned from his position last November – claimed he helped Ohio State steal signals prior to the Buckeyes' game against Michigan State in 2021.

On an Oct. 8 appearance on the Barstool Sports podcast "Bussin' With the Boys," hosted by former NFL players Will Compton and Taylor Lewan, Stalions said that following a Michigan loss to Michigan State earlier in the 2021 campaign, he put the Spartans' signals into a package and gave them to a friend where they ultimately ended up in the hands of someone within the Ohio State football program.

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The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, dated Nov. 2, will be mailed on Oct. 29. There is no reason to wait for your next BSB to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting activity. The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability throughout football season. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff mans BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on the breaking stories, plus posting additional features.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Football season marked the return of the always entertaining Staff Predictions, which appear the Friday before every game.

Staff members also man the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively and will be more so after the loss to Oregon.

We want to remind readers that the complete edition of each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon

completion of the paper, making the site a must for the readers having continuing mail problems. This electronic service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stopgap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is also free to subscribers. BSB is also offering the opportunity to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail during football season for just \$20. See the box on page 6.

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

That season, Michigan needed Ohio State to defeat Michigan State in its Week 11 game to avoid a potential three-way tie between the Wolverines, Spartans and Buckeyes for first place in the Big Ten.

"In 2021 we lose to Michigan State, (former Spartans running back) Kenneth Walker had a great game, and we needed some

help," Stalions said. "So I gave Michigan State's signals to a buddy of mine. I changed all of the logos, I made it look like it came from a different school. I don't want to give Ohio State something from Michigan, right? They might not use it, who knows.

"But we needed Ohio State to win, and I know they steal the crap out of defensive

signals, so (I said), 'Here you go.' I gave it to a buddy, who may have given it to a buddy, who then gave it to Ohio State and said, 'I got this from so and so at Name Your School University.' I'm sure they probably already had them, but it just confirmed everything. And then they won like 60-0."

Ohio State would go on to trounce the

Spartans 56-7, not 60-0 as Stalions said, taking a 49-0 lead into the locker room at half-time. The Buckeyes would then go on to play Michigan in a winner-takes-all quasi-Big Ten East division championship game the next week, where Stalions used his sign-stealing expertise against Ohio State en route to a 42-27 victory over the Buckeyes in 2021.

Stalions added insult to injury with his words on the Oct. 8 podcast episode, responding to former Ohio State and current Houston Texans tight end Cade Stover's comments on how Stalions and Michigan knew what play Ohio State was running in the 2022 iteration of The Game while in a formation they hadn't used all season long.

"We tried to throw a tight end screen in a formation we'd never used before, like ever," Stover told CBS Sports on Sept. 6. "As soon as I lined up outside, we had one play where I was going to motion back in, and (former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud) was going to throw a screen to me. When they start yelling 'screen' when you're throwing a tight end screen, that's when you know. It's like, 'What the f— is this? We've never run this before.'"

Stalions retorted: "Here's the thing: Ohio State had like eight signalers all year, something like that. Everyone signals the formation. Mistake No. 1. Mistake No. 2: They never changed who their live signaler was the

Continued On Page 6

Brutus Level VIP Donors Recognized In This Issue

In this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we recognize our Brutus level VIP subscribers along with our other level donors. VIP donors help BSB 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.

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

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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entire season.”

“They motioned into Slot Y-Y,” Stalions said. “They signaled their signal for Slot Y-Y formation, and then the guy who was live the entire season signaled Y then delay. Am I supposed to see that and be like, ‘Oh, I don’t know what this is.’ I said, ‘This has got to be a Y-delay screen.’”

Among numerous other topics in the nearly two-hour interview, which included Stalions discussing how he started deciphering opponents signals while serving as a student assistant at Navy in 2014, the former Michigan staffer also alleged that Ohio State and Day have their own sign-stealing expert on staff, who Stalions said is very good at his job.

NCAA Shortens Transfer Window To 30 Days

The NCAA announced some notable changes to its transfer portal structure on Oct. 8 when the NCAA Division I Council voted to shorten the college football transfer portal window from 45 to 30 days, trimming the fall window from 30 to 20 days and the spring window from 15 days to 10. These changes will go into effect for the 2024-25 academic year.

The winter transfer portal window will now open on Dec. 9 – one day after the College Football Playoff committee announces its first-ever 12-team field – and close after Dec. 28, just over a week after the first round of the CFP and two days before the CFP quarterfinals begin.

The spring window will open four months later, beginning on April 16 and going through April 25 when all teams wrap up their respective spring camps.

Although these changes may do little to stop the rapid player movement in college football, which saw over 3,800 FBS players enter the transfer portal during the 2023-24 academic year, it does mark a subtle change in approach for the NCAA, particularly with the spring portal window.

Just six weeks prior to this ruling, the NCAA Football Oversight Committee reportedly recommended a proposal to the Division I Council to eliminate the spring transfer portal window altogether.

The proposal – which would have given football players at the time just a 30-day window to transfer in the fall and early winter – did gain initial support from the Power Four conferences and the American Football Coaches Association, but traction on that change seemed to have fallen through with the spring window now officially still intact, albeit truncated.

Three Players Named Defensive Player Of Game

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles opted not to hand out a Defensive

Player of the Game award for any of his players after a rather uninspiring performance in the Buckeyes’ 49-14 win over Marshall on Sept. 21, but two weeks later, it appeared Knowles moved well past that decision.

After Ohio State’s blowout 35-7 win over Iowa on Oct. 5, a game in which the Buckeye defense punished the Hawkeyes with four sacks and just 226 total yards allowed, the team gave out the Defensive Player of the Game title to a trio of players: cornerback Davison Igbinosun, defensive end Jack Sawyer and linebacker Sonny Styles.

Styles, who graded out as a champion at 88 percent, earned the honor after having perhaps his best game as a Buckeye to that point, recording a team-high seven tackles including two for loss.

The former safety-turned-linebacker was working sideline to sideline all game and was a constant force near or behind the line of scrimmage. This was especially evident at the end of the first half, when he stuffed Hawkeyes backup running back Jaziun Patterson for a loss of 2 yards on first-and-10 and then dragged star tailback Kaleb Johnson down on third-and-12 to force a punt, all before recording his third tackle in just over a minute and a half on Iowa’s final drive of the half.

Also dominant in that sequence was the Ohio State team captain Sawyer, who, along with fellow senior defensive end JT Tuimolou, laid a booming hit on Iowa quarterback Cade McNamara on the final drive on 2nd-and-10, forcing the Hawkeyes to run the clock to zero after a loss of 5.

Sawyer’s half sack added to a first-half performance that also included a first-quarter stuff of Johnson for no gain. He added to that stat line in a big way in the third quarter when he had a strip-sack on McNamara in the middle of the third quarter that allowed Simon to recover the fumble and the Ohio State offense to score just three plays later to bring the score to 21-0.

Sawyer finished the day with a game-high 1½ sacks, the most he had in a game since his three-sack outing in Ohio State’s Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri last December, and graded out a champion at 91 percent.

Igbinosun likely secured the honor with one game-changing play in the third quarter. With the Hawkeyes facing a first-and-10 at the OSU 24 and threatening to put their first points on the board, the junior hauled in an errant throw from McNamara and returned it 45 yards to the Iowa 40.

The interception was Igbinosun’s first of his three-year career that has spanned one season at Ole Miss and two at Ohio State, and it allowed the Buckeyes to further expand on their lead and score on an Emeka Egbuka touchdown to give them a commanding 28-0 lead.

Igbinosun finished the game with three tackles and the interception and graded out a champion at an impressive 95 percent.

Egbuka Named Co-B1G Offensive Player of the Week

Although Ohio State did not hand out a Special Teams Player of the Game honor to anyone after the Iowa game, it did name one player Offensive Player of the Game, that being Egbuka, who finished with a career-high three touchdowns along with 71 yards on nine catches in the victory.

Egbuka’s career performance also earned him an honor from the Big Ten, where he

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was named the conference’s co-Player of the Week, sharing the honor with Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke.

Egbuka helped Ohio State set the tone on offense on the team’s very first drive of the game when he hauled in a 14-yard catch from Howard to cap off a 14-play, 88-yard drive that spanned 7:36 and gave the Buckeyes an early 7-0 lead.

His day was far from over after that score, though. The senior captain’s other two scores came in the second half, the first a 15-yard catch from Howard at the end of the third quarter and the second a 3-yard reception on third-and-goal early in the fourth.

Egbuka also did some damage in the Ohio State record books following his career outing against Iowa.

With his three scores, he moved into a tie for 10th place in program history in career touchdown receptions with 19. His 71 yards and nine receptions put him at 10th in receiving yards (2,290) and tied for seventh in receptions (154).

Each of those numbers continued to climb after his 10-catch, 93-yard performance against Oregon in which he had another touchdown.

Three Bucks Named Midseason All-Americans

Ohio State had three players recognized as midseason All-Americans by the Senior Bowl on Oct. 10.

Simmons, McLaughlin and defensive tackle Ty Hamilton received recognition when the lists were revealed, showing the Buckeyes have been strong in the trenches early on.

After last season when the offensive line was one of the weaker position groups on the team, the early recognition is just further confirmation of the improvements it has made so far. Through five games, when the honor was announced, the front five had only allowed four sacks, and the Buckeyes as a team were running for 6.2 yards per carry, a major improvement over last season’s 4.2 yards which ranked 87th in the country.

Hamilton had also put together a strong first five games in which he recorded 18 tackles (2½ for loss) and 1½ sacks while also forcing a fumble that the Buckeyes recovered against Iowa. He was helping a defensive line that as a whole did a great job filling gaps and held opposing teams to just 72.6 rushing yards per game, which was third in the country.

Only three teams had a trio of players make the midseason All-American list, with Penn State and Georgia joining the Buckeyes. The Bulldogs had linebacker Jalon Walker, defensive back Malaki Starks and offensive lineman Dylan Fairchild recognized while the Nittany Lions had running back Nick Singleton, tight end Tyler Warren and defensive back Jaylen Reed included.

Bjork Says OSU Spending \$2 Million For Travel

Conference realignment has already taken its toll on the Ohio State travel budget according to athletic director Ross Bjork. In a radio show during Ohio State’s 35-7 win over Iowa, Bjork revealed that the school’s travel budget went over \$2 million, as a variety of different teams travel west to take on new Big Ten teams Oregon, USC, UCLA and Washington.

“It isn’t a cheap endeavor,” Bjork said.

Another concern for Bjork as it pertains to the greater distances teams have to travel is how hard it can be for student-athletes.

“I think the thing that we have to learn is what toll does it take on our athletes,” he said. “What is the right amount of travel to go out there? Luckily, we only have one trip (out west) for most of our teams. I can’t imagine if you’re the four West Coast teams and you’re going to have multiple trips to the Midwest or let alone the East Coast.”

With many teams making their first trip out west, Bjork said Ohio State is still looking for the best way to handle things.

“I think we’re going to have to assess the next couple of years and figure out what’s the right rhythm and what’s the right approach,” Bjork said. “This year will be a nice learning curve for everyone.”

The Buckeyes’ football team got their first taste of the long trip out west in conference play when they flew roughly 2,500 miles to Oregon for their 32-31 loss.

Wrestling’s Ryan Signs Extension With OSU

Ohio State wrestling coach Tom Ryan signed a three-year contract extension with the university on Oct. 11, keeping him with the program through 2027.

“We are excited to announce Tom has accepted a contract extension to continue leading our wrestling program,” said Ohio State’s senior associate athletic director Carly Grimshaw Rusnov. “Tom is an exceptional leader and has demonstrated a strong com-

mitment to our student-athletes, both on and off the mat. This extension is well deserved, and we are confident that Tom's vision for the program will continue to elevate Buckeye wrestling in the future."

The upcoming wrestling season will be Ryan's 19th with the Buckeyes, and he has had tremendous success. He has taken the team to 213 dual wins, earning No. 200 with the program last year, and has coached 73 All-Americans, 26 Big Ten champions and 13 individual national champions.

He also helped guide the Buckeyes to a team national title in 2015 and had Ohio State finish among the top five in the nation nine times.

"Columbus is a special city, and the Ohio State Athletics Department brings a sense of community, connection and pride," Ryan said. "It has been a blessing for my wife and me to raise our children here and to be given the sustained trust in building a championship wrestling program.

"We are grateful for the support of the administrative leadership, deep-rooted relation-

ships with supporters, passionate fan base and an elite staff of co-wrestling coaches. We are optimistic about the future of Ohio State wrestling."

The extension comes just under six months after Ryan was in a non-life-threatening car accident on April 23, causing severe injuries in his left leg that kept him in the hospital while going through surgery. According to reports, Ryan is recovering and ready to lead the program for another three seasons.

The Buckeyes' wrestle-offs are scheduled for Oct. 24, which is when starters will be officially decided to begin the 2024-25 season. Individual national champion Jesse Mendez will be returning to the roster for his junior season with Ohio State after winning the 141-pound title in 2024. His finish helped the Buckeyes finish in eighth place overall as a team.

OSU Eliminating Scholarships For Gymnastics Programs

According to a report from NBC 4, Ohio State will be eliminating scholarships from

its men's gymnastics program. The scholarship cuts do not mean the ending of the program but could signal a shift in the program.

In an interview with the Columbus Dispatch, Ted Carter said that while Ohio State was still committed to its 36 sports, some could look more like club sports in the future.

Participation in men's gymnastics has been on the decline for a while, with NCAA data showing the number of Division I programs has dropped from 59 down to 12 since 1981.

With the impending rule changes coming to collegiate sports in the House vs. NCAA lawsuit, which would allow revenue sharing for student-athletes, athletic departments could give athletes up to \$22 million in revenue – an amount that could rise as revenue does.

Hall Makes NFL Debut Months After Arrest

Former Ohio State and current Browns defensive tackle Michael Hall Jr. made his NFL debut on Oct. 13 against the Philadel-

phia Eagles, exactly two months after being arrested and charged with domestic violence following a fight with his fiancée.

Hall, whom Cleveland selected with the 54th overall selection in the second round of the 2024 NFL draft, recorded a tackle for loss in the Browns' 20-16 loss to Philadelphia.

Hall's debut was delayed when he was placed on the NFL's commissioner exempt list and subsequently suspended five games following his Aug. 13 arrest, which came after he engaged in a physical confrontation with his fiancée over the financial needs of Hall's fiancée's daughter, who is not Hall's biological child.

In a Sept. 19 court hearing, Hall pleaded no contest to his charges and ultimately received a \$250 fine, two years of probation and a suspended 30-day jail sentence.

"I regret the whole situation," Hall told Judge Allison Manning during the hearing. "I wish it never happened. (I'm) just taking those steps and receiving counseling and just trying to better myself."

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1984

In a 28-23 loss to Purdue on Oct. 6, Mike Tomczak had as bad a day quarterbacking the Buckeyes as he'd ever had.

He wound up completing 20 of 41 passes for 280 yards and one touchdown. But even his completed passes were less than perfect. He threw short to several wide-open receivers. And he tossed two costly interceptions. The Buckeyes converted on just five of 19 third down tries in the loss. And there was the blunder.

With the clock ticking down and Ohio State having no time outs remaining, Tomczak was at the center of as much pressure as any quarterback could be. He quickly lined up the offense at the Purdue 28-yard line and threw the ball out of bounds to stop the clock with five seconds remaining.

But it was fourth down. Tomczak had intentionally thrown the ball out of bounds and killed the Buckeyes' last-gasp scoring chance.

"What can I say? I'm human," Tomczak answered when questioned about the mistake.

35 Years Ago - 1989

Borrowing a few pages from Woody Hayes' playbook, Ohio State head coach John Cooper loaded up on the run against Indiana Oct. 14 and came away with a 35-31 victory.

In the contest, the Buckeyes ran for 253 yards and scored three touchdowns on the ground. Running backs Carlos Snow (136) and Scottie Graham (124) both went over the 100-yard mark for the second time in three weeks as OSU ran the ball roughly nine times out of every 10 plays (Greg Frey threw just six passes, completing five).

It was the sort of game that offensive linemen love to play.

"I love playing that kind of game," senior offensive tackle Joe Staysniak said. "It was fun. I like that kind of football. As an offensive lineman, this is the kind of game you like to play. We have a good line and good running backs, so we should have success running the ball."

30 Years Ago - 1994

Following Ohio State's fourth straight loss at home to Illinois on Oct. 8, 1994, this one a surprisingly easy 24-10 romp for the Illini, many fans simply couldn't hold their contempt for what they obviously thought was less than the Buckeyes' best effort.

"You guys have no pride," screamed one guy from the Ohio Stadium stands. Another chimed in, "We haven't beaten these guys here since Reagan was president." Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger walked off the field to someone chanting, "Time for a change! Time for a change!"

Then when head coach John Cooper and son John Jr. made their way to the locker room, the real vitriol began.

"Gotta go, Johnny boy!" was one of the more pleasant epithets, followed by "And take your hayseed family with you!" Most of the bile being spewed was unprintable in a family newspaper. Suffice to say the woman who was screaming, "You stink Cooper!" pretty well summed up the mood of the crowd.

25 Years Ago - 1999

Before leaving town after Ohio State's 25-22 win on Oct. 9, Purdue quarterback Drew Brees critiqued Steve Bellisari's play at quarterback.

"He did very well," Brees said. "He's a great player. He seems like he's a good leader and they sure seem to follow him. He runs

the ball very well and throws the ball very well.

"You'll notice he got out and ran the ball a lot. That's something his team needed him to do and he did it. Maybe that's something we need to look at."

After the game, Cooper admitted that the coaching staff asked backup and former starter Austin Moherman to warm up as Bellisari struggled. But they never pulled the starter.

Earlier in the week, Cooper seemed sold on the sophomore from Boca Raton, Fla.

"I think Stevie has helped our football team," Cooper said. "I think he'll get better with every game and every practice.

"He is exactly what we're looking for."

Cooper compared Bellisari to Purdue's decorated starter.

"He's like Brees," he said. "He exuberates confidence. He plays hard and fires people up."

20 Years Ago - 2004

The last time the Ohio State football team had lost two games in a row, they got a new coach, firing John Cooper for Jim Tressel in 2001.

While nobody save for possibly some overreacting denizens of the internet were calling for Tressel's ouster, it was apparent that the 2004 Buckeyes were at a crucial point in their season.

The word "crossroads" came up more than once in the aftermath of OSU's 24-13 home loss to Wisconsin Oct. 9, a loss that not only sent the Buckeyes to 0-2 in the Big Ten but also snapped the team's 18-game home winning streak, which had been the second-longest such run in the nation behind Boise State's run of 22 home victories in a row.

"It's absolutely devastating, demoralizing," redshirt sophomore defensive lineman Jay Richardson said. "This is our stadium. We haven't been beaten here since I've been here. Since my freshman year of 2002 I've never lost here."

15 Years Ago - 2009

The ninth-ranked Buckeyes' 31-13 win over Wisconsin that unfolded was one of the oddest games, statistically, that Ohio Stadium had ever seen.

Wisconsin had exactly twice as many total yards as Ohio State, 368-184, and had 22 first downs to the Buckeyes' eight. The Badgers ran 89 plays in the game compared to the Buckeye's 40, allowing UW to possess the ball for 42:47 of the game's 60 minutes.

"I don't think I've ever participated in a game like this before," OSU offensive guard Bryant Browning said.

Totals like that would normally mean that Wisconsin's powerful rushing offense controlled the game's tempo and the scoreboard, but OSU came out with the win thanks to a combined three touchdowns scored by the defense and special teams units. Wisconsin added a touchdown on a fake field goal, meaning that only one of the five touchdowns in the game was scored by the offenses.

Wisconsin head coach Bret Bielema was left answering in the negative when asked if he'd ever been in such a strange game.

"Not very often," he said. "I can't think of one that comes to mind, but it's a 31-13 game and 21 (of OSU's) points were scored when our defense wasn't on the field. Anytime that happens you absolutely have no chance of winning on the road in the Big Ten."

10 Years Ago - 2014

With an early-season loss to Virginia Tech, Ohio State's hopes

of playing in the inaugural four-team College Football Playoff certainly took a hit. But as the Buckeyes continued to win and fewer and fewer undefeated teams remained, they continued to climb in the rankings.

With six regular-season games and a potential Big Ten Championship Game left on the schedule, it was far too early to speculate on where Ohio State would end up in the national landscape. The Buckeyes had an open week Oct. 11, providing an opportunity for players and coaches to watch the nation's best teams. The team knew it could only control what was in front of it, but many players acknowledged that the early loss changed how they looked at the big picture.

"I think it makes you play harder because you've got something to prove," safety Tyvis Powell said. "You lose early on and people scratch you out because you've got a loss. But coming back from that loss, you try to prove to the world that you still do deserve to be a part of the big talk."

Five Years Ago - 2019

When the fourth-ranked Buckeyes were finally tested for the first time on Oct. 5 against No. 25 Michigan State, they rose to the occasion and proved once again they belong in the conversation among the nation's elite with a 34-10 win over the Spartans.

During the opening quarter, though, Ohio State looked vulnerable. The Buckeyes were challenged – particularly on offense – in ways that they weren't in blowout wins over Florida Atlantic, Cincinnati, Indiana, Miami (Ohio) and Nebraska to open the season.

Ohio State failed to convert a first down on its first three possessions of the game and finished the first quarter with just 16 yards of total offense, all of which came through the air. The Buckeyes had 10 rushing attempts for zero yards and held a slim 3-0 lead despite starting two drives inside the Michigan State 30-yard line thanks to a pair of fumbles.

"Early on, there were some mistakes made," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "That was not a good quarter of football. But that was good. It was hard. You had guys kind of digging at each other, grinding and yelling at each other, so we've got to figure this thing out. And we did."

One Year Ago - 2023

The lights of Ross-Ade Stadium, which housed 57,319 fans – many of whom wearing scarlet and gray – suddenly shone on Ohio State's oft-forgotten running backs, with Dallen Hayden thrust into significant action after barely seeing the field over the first five weeks of the season and Evan Pryor also getting his first carries in several weeks.

But instead of looking rusty, Ohio State's rushing attack looked as refreshed as it had all season in the team's 41-7 win at Purdue on Oct. 14, finishing with 152 yards and averaging 3.9 yards per attempt. That jumped up to 6.5 yards per carry (143 yards on 22 attempts) when accounting for only the totes of Hayden, Chip Tryanum and utility man Xavier Johnson, the latter finishing with five rushes for 39 yards and a 21-yard reception.

"We just saw looks that we like, and we put in a lot of work during the week to try to correct the mistakes we had earlier on in the year," offensive lineman Donovan Jackson said of the improved rushing attack. "We just tried to put it on the field. It's good if you do it in practice, but it's even better to do it on the field. So that's what we were trying to aim for today."

Howard, Buckeyes Run Out Of Time Vs. Ducks

Continued From Page 1

the game, Kelly and Day both defended their quarterback, applauding the way he played leading up to it and the decision he made to tuck and run.

"He's tough," Day said. "He competed all the way to the end. I give him credit. He was fighting all the way to the end. We were trying to get three guys into the boundary on the last play to get that ball completed. Then somebody flashed in his face, and he scrambled. He'll be hard on himself, but he was competing all the way to the end. He made some big-time throws to give us a chance to be in field-goal range. I do like the way Will played. I thought he competed. I thought he was tough in the game."

"You needed about 10 or 11 yards – I can't tell you exactly where it was spotted – to get us into field-goal range," Kelly added. "We were trying to get a layered route, but we couldn't. (Oregon) did a good job of getting off of it. Then Will made a decision, and he said he thought he was going down – he knew what he was doing. He's sharp. He thought he went down with time on the clock. Once you give yourself up, you're down. I couldn't tell (how much time was on the clock)."

Fielding, who was benched just three weeks earlier for sailing three straight kickoffs out of bounds against Marshall, had just made a clutch 40-yarder to put the Buckeyes in front of the Ducks 31-29. But with his longest field goal made as a starter being a 47-yarder against Minnesota late in the regular season last year, Kelly and the Buckeye offense were determined to get him to a distance where he felt more comfortable.

"We knew the spot on the field we had to get to where we felt like the percentages for the kick were good, and we were in that, especially with that big catch by (senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka) on the sideline," Kelly said. "Then, if the (Smith) catch

counts, you're inside chip-shot area."

Although Howard did finish with the ball in his hands with the clock running down to zero, his coaches were right that he did play well in the game. In his first real road test with the Buckeyes, he was 28 of 35 throwing the ball for 326 yards and two touchdowns through the air, also adding 13 yards and a score with his legs.

His rushing yards weren't the only time he was able to show off his ability to provide an extra weapon to Kelly's offense. Multiple times in the game, Oregon defenders were able to get to Howard in the backfield only for him to elude them and make something out of the play. His touchdown pass to Smith was a perfect example, which had Howard escaping a collapsing pocket to the right and making the throw to an open Smith for a 6-yard touchdown.

Howard may have ended up on the losing side of his first big game in scarlet and gray, but at the very least he proved that he is going to show up for the fight, stepping into the ring and going blow-for-blow with the No. 3 team in the country.

It was the Buckeyes who threw the first punch of the night when the offense drove 75 yards in 10 plays, a series that finished with Howard finding the end zone on the ground, his fifth rushing touchdown of the season, proving yet again the extra value he provides to Kelly's unit with his legs.

The fifth-year quarterback got away with what looked like it might have been an interception on the drive, but after making a keen decision to quick snap, the play was no longer reviewable and it went down as a 32-yard completion to tight end Will Kacmarek.

The Buckeyes' defense then made a stop that got the ball back into the hands of the offense, but it took just four plays until running back Quinshon Judkins was brought down and had the football ripped from his possession by Ducks defensive lineman Derrick Harmon, giving Oregon favorable



SONNY BROCKWAY

SO CLOSE — Quarterback Will Howard threw for 326 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for another, but the clock ran out on him and the Buckeyes on his final run of 12 yards while he was trying to get in field-goal range.

field position to land its first blow by the hands of running back Jordan James on a 3-yard touchdown run.

After a missed point-after attempt, the Buckeyes had multiple chances to score again and eventually came through on a Judkins 1-yard run they were in position for because of a 53-yard run by TreVeyon Henderson two plays prior. The 14-6 lead after Judkins found the end zone was the largest lead by either team the entire game.

But Oregon responded almost immediately with the first of two haymakers. Sixth-year transfer quarterback Dillon Gabriel came into the game fourth all-time in passing yards and left it third on the list ahead of Oklahoma's Landry Jones, throwing for 341 yards in the game. Seventy-seven of those came on the Ducks' first drive of the second

quarter, completing a 69-yard bomb to Evan Stewart before finding the same receiver for a 10-yard score.

After the game, Day obviously wasn't happy with the way the defense performed, but he ultimately wouldn't put the blame solely on that unit since the offense did have its opportunities.

"You hate to point fingers, so I'm not going to do that," he said. "This was a team loss. The offense had a chance to go in and finish it off at the end, and it didn't happen. I felt like we were in field-goal range there, and we wanted to keep (getting closer to the end zone), because if you do, every time you add 5 yards, it increases (your chances at making a field goal.) You take a brutal penalty like that, that pushes you back. It's heartbreaking, but that's football."



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COVER STORY

Oregon was able to keep the momentum after the touchdown to Stewart. OSU cornerback Jordan Hancock was called for a penalty that allowed the Ducks to kick off from the 50-yard line, and they took full advantage of the change. Kicker Andrew Boyle booted the ball directly at safety Caleb Downs, who was directly in front of the kick wearing a No. 48 jersey on special teams, and the safety had no time to get out of the way of the ball. It bounced off him, and Oregon was able to dive on top of it, setting the Ducks up for another drive that ended with a field goal and a 15-14 lead.

Coming out of halftime down by one, it seemed as if the second-half Buckeyes who have shown up the rest of the season might take over in the final 30 minutes yet again. The defense made an early stop, and Howard capitalized with 73 passing yards on the next drive – 44 of them to Smith – finishing it off with a touchdown pass to the freshman receiver.

Howard and the Buckeyes continued to answer almost every blow by Oregon, even though it ended up not being enough by the time the clock ran out, which has to induce some confidence in the signal-caller with six regular-season games left to go.

Déjà Vu

When compared with the most recent conference loss the Buckeyes had before this game, the 30-24 loss to the eventual-national-champion Michigan team last season, there were many similarities.

Ohio State came into the game as the No. 2 team in the country, going on the road

into a hostile environment against the No. 3 team in the nation in a conference matchup. The Buckeye defense came into the game as one of the higher regarded units in the country but was unable to make stops when it was most needed. The offense, on the other hand, was able to keep the game within reach of its archrivals for the entire game.

Against its new Big Ten rival, it even came down to a similar drive to finish the game, with less than two minutes on the clock and the Buckeyes needing a score to win. On the first play of that drive, Howard slipped and lost 9 yards, making their chances look even more bleak, but he responded with a 13-yard strike to Carnell Tate, an 8-yard completion to Egbuka, a 9-yarder to Smith and a 26-yard pass to Egbuka before Smith's offensive pass interference.

But just like last season, the Buckeyes couldn't come out on top of the matchup.

There are, however, two major differences between the two games.

When the 2023 squad lost to archrival Michigan, there was a much more somber feeling postgame. Part of that is because losing to the Wolverines is never fun, but the even bigger reason was that the Buckeyes' season was no longer in their hands. Whether they would get to play for a national championship was at that point in the hands of the College Football Playoff selection committee, and the chances didn't look good, especially without a Big Ten Championship Game appearance.

On Oct. 12 after the loss to Oregon, the postgame attitude that emanated in the press conference was one more of indig-

nation or anger. The Buckeyes felt – just as they likely did the game against Michigan – that they shouldn't have lost to the Ducks. But this time, they have a chance to come back from it, and that's already the way Day is thinking.

“(We have to) address the issues,” Day said. “I say it all the time. The issues are there. And those issues came up in this game, and we've got to get those things fixed. So we're going to have to sit on this thing for a week, get them addressed.”

Also helping the Buckeyes is the new 12-team playoff format. Ultimately, this loss could be the reason they could have to make it through four rounds of the bracket, but it is entirely possible that multiple teams could make it in with two losses on their résumés. While it wouldn't be a good idea for OSU to give up one more game in the regular season, it likely still would have the opportunity to win it all if they did.

In the postgame, Day made sure that his team knows their season does not need to be defined by a midseason loss to Oregon.

“It's halfway through the season,” he said when asked what his message would be to the team. “This one's going to hurt. It does hurt. We should have won the game. Give Oregon credit, they played well, but just too many things that we could have done better in this game that we didn't. There's a lot of football ahead of us, and we have to get those things fixed.”

Losing to Oregon makes it much tougher to get into the Big Ten championship, which now has 18 teams competing to make it in. But with the elimination of divisions, win-

ning out the rest of the regular season could still put the Buckeyes in the conference title game, which would likely end up being a rematch with the Ducks.

A 5-1 record is not where the Buckeyes wanted to be after the sixth game of the year, but as Day alluded to, their season is by no means over at this point. There is still a lot to play for, especially since the three goals they go into every season with – beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten championship and winning a national championship – are all still attainable.

To accomplish two of those goals, however, they could have to go through the same powerhouse Oregon team – possibly two more times – that stripped them of a chance at an undefeated season, something Ohio State has not accomplished since 2012.

Howard, who was obviously upset after the game, giving uncharacteristically short answers in the postgame press conference, expounded on one of his answers to get the point across that this Buckeye team isn't waving the white flag.

“I hope it lights a little fire under us because I still have all the belief in the world in this team. This is a good football team,” Howard said. “I don't think (Oregon) necessarily beat us. I think we beat ourselves a little bit. We left some stuff out there that we have to learn from and get better.”

“At the end of the day, I think this is a good team, and we're going to see them again. The message has to be that we've got to grow from this and learn from this. This obviously isn't how you want to do it, but you can't let them beat you twice.”

Spoil yourself before and after the game!

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OSU Secondary Exposed In Loss To Oregon

In what felt like a tune-up game against Iowa in the week prior to Ohio State's 32-31 loss to Oregon, the Buckeyes faced an elite front seven, a strong running game and one of the nation's best defensive minds in Hawkeye defensive coordinator Phil Parker. What the Buckeyes hadn't seen before Oct. 12 was an elite passing attack. Against Dillon Gabriel, one of the nation's best quarterbacks, an All-America caliber tight end and a very talented receiving corps, the Buckeyes' secondary was exposed.

Gabriel had plenty of success spreading the ball around to a variety of Ducks receivers, passing for 341 yards while completing 23 of 34 passes for two touchdowns and no interceptions. His leading receiver, Evan Stewart, had a sensational performance, hauling in seven catches for 149 yards and a touchdown.

It was senior cornerback Denzel Burke, possibly the most reliable player in the Buckeyes' secondary over the last two seasons, who struggled to stay with Ducks receivers.

Burke's struggles started with a nightmarish second quarter. On second-and-12 with the Buckeyes up 14-6, Burke bit on a double move from Stewart and was left chasing the Texas A&M transfer after Gabriel hit him in stride. By the time Burke finally dragged Stewart to the ground, he had picked up 69 yards.

Two plays later, Burke was again bested by Stewart, this time in the end zone, when Stewart made a contested catch for a 10-yard score.

Later on in the second quarter, Gabriel continued to have his way with the Ohio State secondary, completing a 32-yard passing play to wide receiver Traeshon Holden in a drive that ended with a go-ahead field goal.

While the Buckeyes had trouble for much of the night getting to Gabriel with just four down linemen rushing the quarterback, they opted to attempt to put some pressure on the sixth-year Gabriel with a blitz on third-and-9 with under two minutes to go in the first half. The Oregon offensive line gave Gabriel enough time to look downfield, where he found wide receiver Tez Johnson one-on-one with Burke. As Stewart had done to Burke just minutes earlier, Johnson sped past Burke with a crafty route to find himself wide open on his way to the end zone, hauling in a 48-yard touchdown reception.

On the Ducks' opening drive in the second half, Gabriel once again had all day to throw in the pocket on third-and-10 before finding Stewart for a 17-yard gain for a first down, although the drive didn't amount to any points. Later in the third quarter, Burke's night to forget became even worse when he was misplaced on a route run by Oregon tight end Terrance Ferguson, allowing a catch before struggling to bring him down, leading to a 32-yard gain for the Ducks. OSU's defense would make a goal-line stand to finish that drive, but it still wasn't a good look for the secondary.

Despite Burke having one of the worst games of his career in the team's close loss to Oregon, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said he still would have a positive

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

message for the senior cornerback.

"I would just tell him that he's a great player and that we love him," Knowles said. "He knows and they all know that all the bad plays go on me. He, me, the whole defense, we need to learn from it, and we're going to get more chances, so we have to take that away, and we have to find a way to get better."

Even when the Buckeyes' secondary forced Gabriel into three straight incompletions to come up with a pivotal turnover on downs at their own 2-yard line, they weren't without a lapse in coverage. On fourth-and-goal, the Buckeyes left Johnson wide open in the corner of the end zone. Luckily for the Buckeyes, Gabriel didn't look Johnson's way, but it just as easily could have been another Ducks passing touchdown.

Still, the Oklahoma transfer finished the game strong by completing six of his final seven passes in the fourth quarter, going for 49 yards. Five of the completed passes during Gabriel's late-game groove came in the team's final drive of the game when he helped lead the Ducks on a game-winning field-goal drive.

The 341 passing yards conceded by the Buckeye defense to Oregon were almost triple what the defense had given up on average in their previous five games (129.8). According to Knowles, the difference in effectiveness of the Buckeyes' passing defense had more to do with the increase in difficulty in the opponent rather than a specific change in philosophy.

"We didn't execute. That's coach-speak, but we didn't execute," Knowles said. "We're doing the same things, but when you play a better opponent, you have to raise your level of our game. I just feel like we need to coach our guys better. We need to get them in better positions, focus on the details, make sure that this loss doesn't beat us twice. Fix the problems, coach harder, work harder."

For a defense that had given up only one gain of 30 or more yards all season heading into the game, it's safe to say Gabriel's four completions of 30 or more yards weren't something the team planned for.

"We've got to look at it all," Day said. "The ball got by us twice over the top. Something that we preach a lot is (explosive) plays and keeping it in front and making them work the ball down the field, and it didn't happen in this game. It starts with coaching. We've got to coach it better, demand it better, and drill it better in practice."

Simmons, Tshabola Suffer Injuries

Having not suffered many notable injuries in the first five weeks, any injury luck the team had seems to have run out against Oregon. The woes started in the first quarter when redshirt sophomore right guard Tegra Tshabola was hurt with an apparent lower-body ailment on the same play that TreVeyon Henderson broke free for a 53-



SONNY BROCKWAY

ROASTED — It was a rough outing for the Ohio State pass defense — including Denzel Burke (10), Caleb Downs (2), linebacker Sonny Styles (6) and Lathan Ransom (8) — in the 32-31 loss to Oregon before a record crowd of 60,129 at Autzen Stadium. Dillon Gabriel was given time to throw for 341 yards, nearly triple the average allowed by the Buckeyes in the first five games.

yard run. But Tshabola was able to return to the lineup to start the second half.

He was briefly replaced by Austin Sierveld, who previously rotated snaps with Tshabola in games against Marshall and Michigan State and started in place of then-injured left guard Donovan Jackson during the Akron and Western Michigan games. Because of Sierveld's experience, the injury to Tshabola was never going to cost the Buckeyes the game on its own. The injury to senior left tackle and second-year starter Josh Simmons, though, was a little more serious.

After sustaining what appeared to be a leg injury in the second quarter, Simmons had to be carted off the field. Zen Michalski came in to replace him, taking the tackle spot for the rest of the contest.

Following the game, Day had an unfortunate outlook for Simmons' availability.

"I'll have to get the update on Simmons, but it doesn't look great in terms of him being able to come back this season," Day said. "So that's a big hit for us."

"The injury to Josh Simmons hurt, and Zen did a good job of coming in and competing," Day added. "Tegra went down a little bit there, so Austin had to go in. So I thought those guys competed."

Even with the lineup changes, the Buckeyes' offensive line had a solid performance. The Buckeyes gained 141 yards on 33 carries (4.3 yards per carry) and two touchdowns while conceding just one sack to Howard, who threw for 326 yards on the day.

Turnovers, Miscues Sink Buckeyes

It would have been hard to believe that an offensive effort that had the Buckeyes gain 467 yards wouldn't be good enough for the team to beat Oregon. That becomes easier to believe when taking a look at the many mistakes Ohio State made in the game.

Ohio State's first major error came in the team's second offensive drive when running back Quinshon Judkins had the ball ripped from his arms by Oregon defensive tackle Derrick Harmon.

Judkins hadn't fumbled since his freshman season with Ole Miss in 2022, but his fumble against Oregon was a costly one. The Ducks were set up with prime field position at the Ohio State 28-yard line, scoring quickly with two runs by Ducks running back Jordan James.

The Buckeyes' very next drive was derailed by several mistakes. Facing the raucous Autzen Stadium crowd, it seemed as though the Buckeyes had trouble communicating on the field. On that drive the Ohio State offense had false start penalties from both Simmons and tight end Gee Scott Jr. The drive that was started at the Buckeyes' own 25-yard line was pushed all the way back inside their own 20 at the 17-yard line, where the team punted after a three-and-out and a delay of game on fourth down.

According to Howard, the Buckeyes' pre-snap penalties might have been a product of the team being sucked up into the unique

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

It may be the last thing Buckeye fans want to hear after watching the way the final seconds unfolded in the loss to Oregon, but as a whole, Will Howard and the Buckeyes' passing game were on the mark all game against the Ducks.

It looked as if Howard and his pass catchers were ready to shine on the big stage from the moment they first stepped onto the Autzen Stadium turf. The Buckeye quarterback completed five of his six pass attempts for 65 yards while hitting four different receivers on the very first drive of the game. It was a strong start that allowed Ohio State to go on a 10-play, 75-yard drive in 5:00 that ended with a 1-yard Howard sneak to put Ohio State up 7-0, while also helping the Buckeyes set the tone for the passing game for the remainder of the night.

Howard was in sync with his two favorite targets – wideouts Emeka Egbuka and Jeremiah Smith – the entire game, connecting with them a combined 19 times for 193 yards and two touchdowns. But what made Howard so effective was his ability to spread the ball around. Seven Buckeye pass catchers brought in passes from Howard, including two who are rarely featured in the passing game, tight ends Will Kacmarek and Gee Scott Jr. They combined for four catches and 78 yards.

Howard's ability to find the open target against a strong Ducks defense is a testament to the elite field vision he showed on the road. But it also showed just how accurate he can be. He had numerous clutch throws toward the end of the game that were put right in the perfect spot, perhaps none more clutch than the 26-yard rope to Egbuka down the right sideline on the final drive that put Ohio State in great field position for a potential game-winning field goal.

The Buckeyes may have fallen apart in the final seconds in large part due to the offensive pass interference call on Smith – more on that later – but if Howard can continue to stand tall in the pocket and deliver accurate throws throughout the game moving forward this season, Ohio State's offense will still be a tough guard for any opposing defense in the nation.

What Didn't Work

Coming into the matchup against the Ducks, Ohio State's secondary had given up just 129.8 passing yards per game, good for fourth in the nation, and had yet to give up an explosive play for a touchdown.

Those stats compelled many experts to think that the "Silver Bullets" could neutralize star Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel and his dynamic pass catchers, but the exact opposite occurred. Ohio State's defensive backs got torched by Gabriel and the Ducks' passing offense throughout the contest, leaving several wide receivers open down the field for big gains while also failing to stop some big chunk passes in the intermediate.

These secondary faults were most evident in the second quarter when Gabriel threw for more yards (171) in that quarter alone than the Buckeyes defense had given up per game this season. In the second period alone, the Buckeyes relinquished passes that went for 69, 32 and 48 yards, with the final 48-yarder being a momentum-shifting touchdown from Ducks wideout Tez Johnson that gave Oregon the 22-21 lead at the half.

What was arguably the most surprising about these explosive plays wasn't that they were being made, but rather who was giving them up. On numerous occasions, All-Big Ten and preseason All-

American cornerback Denzel Burke let Johnson sprint right past him for the previously mentioned touchdown and was also on the losing end of the battle with Evan Stewart on his 69-yard completion, which set the Ducks up at the OSU 8-yard line for their eventual score.

While Ohio State's secondary would somewhat limit those explosive plays in the second half, they were still getting beat on just about every single Duck drive. This time, the Buckeyes' defensive backs were struggling on third and fourth down, where they allowed Gabriel to complete passes on third-and-10, third-and-5 and fourth-and-1 after halftime. The fourth-and-1 play went 32 yards to Terrance Ferguson, and although that one did not lead to any points, a similar 26-yard gain in the fourth quarter allowed Oregon to get in range for what was the game-winning field goal.

In all, Ohio State's secondary gave up six pass plays of 25 or more yards, a backbreaking trend that probably gave Buckeye fans flashbacks of the 2022 losses to Michigan and Georgia.

Play Of The Game

The choice for play of the game seemed to change with each passing second as the contest progressed, but when the dust settled, by far the most impactful play of the game was the offensive pass interference penalty on Smith that pushed the Buckeyes back out of field-goal range and out of Eugene, Ore., with a loss added to their record.

Howard was leading Ohio State's offense on a potentially game-winning drive similar to what Kyle McCord did in the final seconds against Notre Dame last year. With just 1:47 on the clock and the Buckeyes facing a 32-31 deficit from their own 25-yard line, Howard completed clutch throws of 13 to Carnell Tate, 8 to Egbuka, 9 to Smith, and 26 to Egbuka to set Ohio State up beautifully for the game-winning kick, sitting pretty at the Oregon 28-yard line with just 37 seconds left.

While it was lining up for kicker Jayden Fielding to play the role of hero and put a relatively short kick through the uprights to give Ohio State a signature road win – which might have propelled them to No. 1 in the AP poll the next day – the Buckeyes instead went 15 yards backward due to an offensive pass interference foul called on the superstar freshman Smith.

Facing off against Ducks defensive back Nikko Reed in tight one-on-one coverage, Smith gave a stutter-step, created some separation by extending his hands on Reed's shoulder pads – which, call it a flop or not, sent him back nearly 5 yards – and hauled in a wide open pass from Howard before bringing the ball near the Oregon 19 with 22 seconds left.

What seemed like a game-winning play instead turned into the losing one just seconds later when a penalty flag was thrown on the ground for offensive pass interference, which sent the Buckeyes all the way back to the Oregon 43 with 22 seconds left.

Ohio State would fall apart after that play. The Buckeyes let the running clock go from 22 to 15 seconds before Howard snapped the ball and threw an incompleteness at 10 seconds, threw another incompleteness with six seconds left, then slid in the middle of the field as time expired after a 12-yard run. It marked a stunning sequence of events that could have been avoided altogether if Smith had not pushed off, or if a flag was not called.

— Patrick Engels

environment at Autzen Stadium.

"Penalties, it's a discipline thing," Howard said. "And when you're playing in an environment like this, you can't be overcome by events. There were a couple too many penalties today. We've got to go back and look at the film and see what we did wrong and correct it."

The Buckeyes' penalty issues didn't stop there. Senior nickel cornerback Jordan Hancock committed a personal foul to set Oregon's kickoff up at the 50-yard line, where Oregon attempted to keep the ball in the field of play in hopes of pinning the Buckeyes back deep inside their own territory in the short field. However, the line drive kick from Oregon kicker Andrew Boyle was hit so hard that Ohio State safety Caleb Downs didn't have the reaction time to get out of the way of the kick, and the ball made contact with his hand.

A scrum quickly ensued between the Buckeyes and Ducks as players from both teams attempted to jump on the live ball, and it was the home team that was able to jump on it and start with the ball inside Ohio State territory, getting a field goal to take their first lead of the game. After the game,

Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly talked about how significant the successful Oregon onside kick ended up being.

"It was a little disjointed after the first drive," Kelly said. "I thought our guys executed, did a really nice job. We had a fumble that hurt us. Then the penalty on the touchdown that (Oregon) scored, kicking it from the 50, and we didn't get that possession back. You can't do that against a good team. You need to stay in a flow and play."

As was the case against Iowa on Oct. 5, the Buckeyes looked virtually unstoppable to begin the third quarter. Starting out on defense, Ohio State forced a punt from Oregon after allowing only 19 yards on the drive.

Then, Howard led the team 79 yards for a go-ahead touchdown drive in only six plays. The Ducks looked to have the answer they were searching for, going on a lengthy drive before they were ultimately stopped at the 2-yard line on fourth-and-goal.

With all of the momentum on their side and needing a score to take command of the game, the Buckeyes were moving the ball again before they were faced with a third-and-3. It wasn't the Ducks that stopped the

Buckeyes on the pivotal third down but a mishandled snap from Howard, which sent the ball 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage. From there, all Howard could do was simply jump on the loose ball to bring out the punt team.

Buckeyes Less Consistent In Trenches

In a dominant 35-7 win over Iowa, the Buckeyes seemed to assert themselves as one of the most physical teams in the Big Ten. As a defense, the Buckeyes were able to mostly shut down All-America candidate running back Kaleb Johnson while the game was still in question, and offensively, Ohio State became one of the few teams in recent years to rush for over 200 yards against a talented Hawkeyes' front seven.

In the Oregon game, Ohio State took a slight step back at the line of scrimmage. For the game, the rushing numbers were pretty comparable. Oregon slightly outgained Ohio State with 155 yards compared to 141 yards, but both teams still found moderate success on the ground.

Led by back-to-back chunk plays of 17 yards and 53 yards on the ground from se-

nior running back TreVeyon Henderson, the Buckeyes went for 99 yards on 10 carries in the first quarter.

The troubles for Ohio State running the football came after the first 15 minutes. In the 45 minutes that followed, the Buckeyes picked up just 42 yards on 23 carries.

Oregon, meanwhile, had a more consistent rushing attack throughout the game. Rushing for 73 yards in the first half, the Ducks remained consistent to finish the game with 82 yards on the ground in the second half, 61 of those in the final quarter of play.

After the game, Day felt as though his defense's struggles against the run were an important factor in the defense's mediocre play as a whole.

"There were some long throws down the field when they got behind us," Day said. "There were some runs that split that weren't fit correctly. So there was more than just one thing. There was a missed tackle on the pull there that Gabriel pulled, and that was a big play in the game. I don't think it was just one thing, but we've got to play better."

Buckeyes Can't Finish In Loss to Ducks

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The game came down to the wire, but unfortunately for the second-ranked Ohio State Buckeyes, they fell off and landed with a thud in a heartbreaking 32-31 loss to No. 3 Oregon in Eugene, Ore., on Oct. 12.

Atticus Sappington kicked a 19-yard field goal with 1:47 to play for the go-ahead points before Ohio State (5-1, 2-1 Big Ten) reached Oregon's 28-yard line. But on the game's final play with six seconds left, quarterback Will Howard ran for 12 yards before going to the ground as time expired to send the record crowd of 60,129 in Autzen Stadium into delirium.

The Buckeyes had taken a 31-29 lead with 6:00 remaining on a 40-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding after Dillon Gabriel's 27-yard touchdown run gave the Ducks (6-0, 3-0) a 29-28 lead early in the fourth quarter.

The Buckeyes trailed 22-21 at the half in a game that had seven lead changes.

A Bit Of Everything

The Buckeyes went 75 yards in 5:00 after receiving the opening kickoff for a 7-0 lead on Howard's 1-yard run, his fifth rushing score of the season on a sunny, 77-degree afternoon.

Howard kept the drive alive on fourth-and-1 from the OSU 44 with a sneak of 3 yards and immediately followed with a pass down the middle to tight end Will Kacmarek for 32 yards to the Oregon 21. The play was ruled a catch and Ohio State snapped the ball before a review to see if Kacmarek had control or if Oregon's Jeffrey Bassa ripped the ball away. Quinshon Judkins ran for 3 then caught a pass for 17 to the 1. Howard then followed Judkins through the left side of the line to cap the 10-play drive.

After Oregon punted on its first possession, Derrick Harmon forced and recovered a fumble by Judkins at the OSU 28, and the Ducks needed two plays to score but bumbled the extra point, leaving the Buckeyes ahead 7-6 at the 5:51 mark.

Jordan James ran for 25 and 3 for the TD, but the PAT snap was botched and a pass by Sappington was intercepted in the end zone by Lathan Ransom. He returned it down the sideline attempting to score two points, but he was tackled 34 yards shy of the goal.

On the Buckeyes' next drive, the crowd noise was a factor, and they committed two false starts and a delay of game before punting to the Ducks 41. Evan Stewart on second down made a 28-yard catch to the OSU 28, but the drive stalled and Sappington missed a 44-yard field-goal try.

Starting from the Buckeye 26, TreVeyon Henderson ran for 17 and 53 to the 4 to end the first quarter. Howard on the first play of the second quarter went left for 3 yards before Judkins powered his way in from the 1 to make it 14-6 at 14:22. The four-play drive of 74 yards took 1:21.

The Ducks on their second play after the kickoff got a 69-yard catch by Stewart, who hauled it in at the OSU 35 and dragged Denzel Burke to the 8. Two plays later, Stewart made a 10-yard TD catch at the left boundary, but a Kenyon Sadiq run for two points was stopped and the Buckeyes held a 14-12



SONNY BROCKWAY

TOUGH BREAK — Freshman Jeremiah Smith had another big game with nine catches for 100 yards and a 6-yard touchdown to put Ohio State ahead 28-22, but a pass-interference call against him on the final drive was a major factor in the Buckeyes being unable to pull out the win.

lead at 12:31. Oregon went 75 yards in four plays and 1:51.

There was a face-mask penalty on Jordan Hancock on the TD, and the Ducks kicked off from the 50, ultimately allowing the Ducks to take a 15-14 lead at 10:09 on a Sappington 27-yard field goal.

The Ducks sort of used an onside kick from the 50 when Andrew Boyle drilled the ball off Caleb Downs — wearing a No. 48 jersey on special teams — who was trying to avoid it. Roger Saleapaga recovered the ball at the OSU 41.

Traeshon Holden's catch went for 32 yards to the 9. James lost a yard, and Holden was assessed a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for spitting on cornerback Davison Igbinosun and was ejected.

The Ducks then faced second-and-goal from the 25. James rushed for 3, and Stewart's catch gained 13 more to the 9 on third down to set up the three-pointer.

OSU suffered a blow on its ensuing drive when left tackle Josh Simmons was carted off with an injury. Earlier, right guard Tegra Tshabola went out as well, although he returned in the second half.

Yet, the Buckeyes regrouped to climb to a 21-15 lead on a 15-yard catch by Egbuka, his fourth TD reception in two games, at 3:53 to complete a 75-yard, 12-play drive that used 6:16.

On fourth-and-2 from the OSU 49, Judkins powered his way for 3 yards. Egbuka ran for 7 and Judkins 5 to the Duck 36. Judkins took a short pass and turned it into a 21-yarder to the 15. After an incomple-

tion, Howard found Egbuka along the left sideline at the 1, and he took it in.

Back came the Ducks to go up 22-21 with 1:17 left on a 48-yard TD catch by Tez Johnson as he blew by Burke. Oregon needed 2:36 and seven plays to go 75 yards.

OSU had a fourth-and-1 at its 34 with 44 seconds left in the half but elected to punt, and Joe McGuire booted it 36 yards for a fair catch at the Oregon 30, and the Ducks punted it back with six seconds left.

Oregon outgained the Buckeyes 285-251 in the first half. OSU had 122 rushing yards. Howard was 13 of 16 for 129 yards while Gabriel went 11 of 16 for 212 yards with Stewart making five catches for 124 yards.

It was more of the same for the Buckeyes' pass defense in the second half, which allowed 341 for the game.

"Got to do a better job coaching. That's it," said OSU defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. "That's the bottom line. We didn't make enough plays. I didn't think we were outstanding in any area."

Bitter Ending

Jeremiah Smith had two big plays to lift the Buckeyes to a 28-22 lead at 9:27 of the third quarter after OSU forced a punt on the Ducks' first series.

Smith on the second snap pulled in a 38-yard pass between two defenders to the Oregon 38. Two plays later, Gee Scott Jr. gained 25 on a catch to the 10. Egbuka moved the ball to the 6 with a catch before Howard rolled right and drilled a pass to Smith for a 6-yard score. There were six plays for 79

yards and 3:08 in the drive.

An Oregon fourth-down gamble in the red zone did not pay off when Gabriel's 2-yard pass was broken up in the end zone by Cody Simon with 3:37 left in the third. Earlier in the drive, needing a yard at its own 48 on fourth down, Gabriel threw to tight end Terrence Ferguson for 32 yards to the 20. James had runs of 9 and 7, but the drive was thwarted without a score.

The Buckeyes moved the ball from the 2 to the 27, but on third-and-3, Howard fumbled the snap and took a 10-yard loss with a 43-yard punt to the Oregon 40 to follow.

Gabriel put the Ducks ahead 29-28 with 13:20 to play with a 27-yard run on a third-and-2 at the end of a 60-yard possession that used just five plays and 1:51. A huge play was a James run for 16 that made him the first back to run for more than 100 yards against the Buckeyes this season.

Fielding's 40-yarder with 6:00 left made it 31-29 in the Buckeyes' favor.

On third-and-7 from the OSU 39, Smith went up for an 18-yard gain to the 43 for the second third-down conversion of the drive. Later, the second false start of the series hampered the Buckeyes, necessitating a field-goal try because they could not advance a third-and-13 from the 22.

Sappington nailed the winner after a goal-line stand. The Ducks went 74 yards in 11 plays and chewed up 4:13.

The Ducks started from the 25. On third-and-6 from their 39, James carried for 9 with under four minutes left. Ferguson picked up 26 on a catch to the 26. A pass interference on Hancock put the ball on the 9 where Noah Whittington rushed for 4 yards with 2:05 left.

Whittington had a catch to the 2, but James gained only 1 yard on third down.

On the Buckeyes' first snap after getting the ball a final time, Howard was sacked for 9 yards. Carnell Tate's catch got 13 back, and Egbuka made a catch of 8 to the 37. Smith picked up 9 to the 46.

Egbuka gained 26 in a catch to the Oregon 28 before a deep ball to Smith was incomplete. A pass interference on Smith off the next snap set the ball back 15 yards to the 43. Howard could not connect with Scott on a throw. An incompleteness to Smith left only 10 seconds left, but an illegal substitution on Oregon moved the ball up 5 yards with six seconds left to set up the fateful last play by Howard.

Howard was 28 of 35 for 326 yards and two touchdowns with Egbuka gaining 93 yards on 10 catches and Smith's 100 yards coming on nine receptions.

Gabriel was 23 of 34 for 341 yards and two touchdowns. Stewart had seven catches for 149 yards, and James ran for 115 yards.

Notes

The Ducks had 496 yards, including 155 rushing. The Buckeyes totaled 467 (326 passing, 141 running). ... OSU had eight penalties for 70, the Ducks three for 25. ... Henderson had 87 yards on 10 carries and Judkins only 23 on 11 attempts. ... Simon recorded a game-high 10 tackles (five solo). ... The Buckeyes were 4 of 12 on third-down conversions and 2 of 2 on fourth down. The Ducks were 6 of 14 and 1 of 2.

BSB Quotebook: Oregon 32, Ohio State 31

Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Will Howard on how he is processing the last-second loss and what he saw on the final play of the game: "I don't know, man. It's a b—h. It sucks. A play like that – you don't want to lose a game like that. I don't know what we could have done better. I could have gotten down earlier, given us a chance. It would have been a longer kick. But we have to go back and look at it and try and not let that happen again."

Howard on the late-game offensive pass interference call on freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith: "I didn't see it. I don't know, I don't want to speak on that. But it sucks when you're in field-goal range like that and the call is why you're kicked out of it. That's a shame."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day when asked about the last 20 seconds of the game: "It should have never come down to that situation. Oregon made too many (explosive) plays tonight. We turned the ball over in the first half, and it cost us. We've got to do a better job of handling those situations and playing better overall. Just too many explosive plays on the defensive side."

More from Day on Ohio State's late-game execution: "Even down to the 1-yard line at the end, I thought the defense got a big stop there to give the offense a chance at 1:47 (on the clock). So the defense did get a stop there to give the offense a chance. When it comes down to offense, defense, stats, all that, what's the No. 1 thing? The No. 1 thing is to win the game. And it didn't happen tonight."

Oregon head coach Dan Lanning to the media shortly after the game ended: "Anybody got a heart rate monitor?"

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim

Knowles on his defense's overall performance: "We have to do a better job coaching, that's it, that's the bottom line. We didn't make enough plays. I didn't think we were outstanding in any area. It felt like we were always behind, and it was uncharacteristic. We have to learn from it. We have to practice better. We have to coach better. Our players are certainly good enough to win that game. We talked about winning that game on defense, and we didn't get the job done."

Ohio State fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon on the explosive plays his defense gave up: "We focus on not giving those up, and we gave up too many today. It's just tough because we've been so good at it in recent history. So we just have to get back to the drawing board and see why we messed up and get back (to Columbus) and get it fixed."

Simon if he can pinpoint why the team gave up so many explosive plays: "As a defense, we just have to be more ready for everything. We just have to have more urgency. A big part of (Oregon) going tempo is just being ready for everything, and we weren't ready. We just have to be better."

Lanning on how his team was able to come out with the win over Ohio State: "I'm so proud of our players. I'm so proud of our crowd. Talk about big moments, big games. This is why you come to Oregon. That's a good football team, hard to stop. Our guys stopped them tonight. They scored enough. They threw enough jabs."

Lanning on Ohio State and what the result of this game meant for both teams: "A lot of credit to (Day) and the team that he's assembled and put together. They are really, really good. We talked about it before this game even was played. Regardless of result, everything is still on the table for both teams. I know that



SONNY BROCKWAY

JUST DUCKY — Oregon coach Dan Lanning didn't make all the right calls, just enough of them for the Ducks to hand Ohio State its first loss of the season.

they're going to put themselves in position to continue to compete and be in great shape the rest of the season."

Day on how frustrating the loss was: "It kind of went back and forth, but we couldn't quite get the stops we needed them to, didn't finish it. Again, we talk about leaving no doubt and (the game) not coming down to one play, and that's what happened in this game. So we can sit here and look at one play here, one play there, complain about a call. We're not going to do that. We're going to own it, and we have to get it fixed."

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The Numbers Game

Oregon 32, Ohio State 31

Oct. 12, 2024 - Autzen Stadium, Eugene, Ore.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	7	14	3	7	31
OREGON	6	16	0	10	32

First Quarter

OSU - Howard, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 5:00.
ORE - James, 3-yard rush (Ferguson pass from Sappington failed), 0:43.

Second Quarter

OSU - Judkins, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 1:21
ORE - Stewart, 10-yard pass from Gabriel (Sadiq rush failed), 1:51.
ORE - Sappington, 27-yard field goal, 2:17.

OSU - Egbuka, 15-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 6:16.

ORE - Johnson, 48-yard pass from Gabriel (Sappington kick), 2:36.

Third Quarter

OSU - Smith, 6-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 3:08.

Fourth Quarter

ORE - Gabriel, 27-yard rush (Sappington kick), 2:36.

OSU - Fielding, 40-yard field goal, 7:20.

ORE - Sappington 19-yard field goal, 4:13.

Att. - 60,129

Weather - Sunny, 77 F

Team Statistics

	OSU	ORE
First Downs	22	18
Rushing	6	8
Passing	16	9
Penalty	0	1
Rushes-Yards	33-141	31-155
Passing Yards	326	341
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	28-35-0	23-34-0
Offensive Plays	68	65
Total Net Yards	467	496
Third Down Efficiency	4-12	6-14
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-2	1-2
Punts-Avg.	3-40.3	3-40.7
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	0-0
Penalties	8-70	3-25
Time of Possession	33:09	26:51

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - **OSU**: Henderson 10-87; Judkins 11-23; Egbuka 2-20; Howard 9-13; Team 1-(-2). **ORE**: James 23-115; Gabriel 4-32; Whittington 3-7; Sadiq 1-1.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - **OSU**: Howard 28-35-0-326-2. **ORE**: Gabriel 23-34-0-341-2.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Egbuka 10-93; Smith 9-100; Scott Jr. 3-46; Judkins 2-38; Henderson 2-4; Kacmarek 1-32; Tate 1-13. **ORE**: Stewart 7-149; Johnson 7-75; Ferguson 4-62; Whittington 2-8; Holden 1-32; Lowe 1-9; James 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - **OSU**: McGuire 3-40.3-43. **ORE**: Ross 3-40.7-45.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: None. **ORE**: None.

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

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: None. **ORE**: Harmon 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: None. **ORE**: None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: None. **ORE**: Uiagalelei 1-9.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Tuimolouau 1-2; Downs 1-1. **ORE**: Uiagalelei 2-10; Caldwell 1-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) - **OSU**: Simon 5-5-10; Styles 6-3-9; Downs 5-3-8; Ransom 3-3-6; Burke 4-1-5; Williams 0-5-5; Tuimolouau 3-0-3; Igbinosun 2-1-3; Hancock 1-2-3; Hamilton 1-2-3; Curry 1-1-2; Sawyer 0-2-2. **ORE**: Savage 3-5-8; T. Johnson 3-5-8; B. Johnson 5-2-7; Jackson 4-3-7; Uiagalelei 3-2-5; Bassa 3-1-4; Reed 3-1-4; Muhammad 2-2-4; Harmon 3-0-3; Jacobs 2-1-3; Tuioti 1-2-3; Caldwell 1-1-2; Winston 1-1-2; Ware-Hudson 1-0-1; Boettcher 1-0-1; Manning 0-1-1; Moore 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - **OSU**: Tate, Howard, Egbuka, Henderson, Smith, McLaughlin, Fryar, Simmons, Jackson, Tshabola, Scott Jr., Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimolouau, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Judkins, Inniss, Hicks, Rodgers, Thurman, Melton, McClain, Reese, Simpson-Hunt, Mathews Jr., Styles Jr., Jones, Powers, Fielding, McGuire, Ferlmann, Gurd, Michalski, Siereveld, Fitzpatrick, Adolph, Christian, Kacmarek, Curry, Kanu, Moore, Jackson Jr., McDonald. **ORE**: Holden, Te. Johnson, James, Ferguson, Strother, Harper II, Cornelius, Stewart, Laloulu, Conerly Jr., Gabriel, Ty. Johnson, Uiagalelei, Bassa, Boettcher, B. Johnson, Tuioti, Savage, Harmon, Muhammad, Reed, Caldwell, Alexander, Woodyard, Laulea, Dickey, Terrell, Lowe, Davis, Kasper, Sadiq, Turner, Soelle, Jackson, Limar, Austin, Winston, Sappington, Jacobs, Basso, Grace, Dunne, Washington, Moore, Whittington, Pickard, Rogers, Manning, Saleapaga, Herbert, James, Hudson-Ware, Boyle.

Season Statistics

2024 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Aug. 31	(2) AKRON	W, 52-6	102,011
Sept. 9	(2) WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	102,665
Sept. 21	(3) MARSHALL	W, 49-14	103,871
Sept. 28	(3) Michigan State	W, 38-7	71,114
Oct. 5	(3) IOWA	W, 35-7	105,135
Oct. 12	(2) Oregon (3)	L, 32-31	60,129
Oct. 26	(4) NEBRASKA	TBA	
Nov. 2	Penn State (3)	TBA	
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 16	Northwestern	TBA	
Nov. 23	INDIANA (16)	TBA	
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN (24)	12 p.m.	

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

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	143	76
Rushing	58	27
Passing	81	43
Penalty	4	6
Average Per Game/Rush	208.7	86.3
Average Per Game/Pass	294.3	165.0
Total Offense	3018	1508
Total Plays	401	345
Average Per Game	503.0	251.3
Average Per Play	7.5	4.4
Penalties-Yards	31-277	21-138
Fumbles-Lost	9-3	9-5
Third Down Efficiency	35-72	27-84
Percentage	49%	32%
Fourth Down Efficiency	9-12	4-8
Percentage	75%	50%
Sacks-Yards	17-83	5-36
Time Of Possession Avg.	31:19	28:41

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	52	80	91	38	0	261	43.5
Opponents	16	30	3	17	0	66	11.0

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Quinshon Judkins	71	491	6.9	6	86
T. Henderson	52	424	8.2	4	53
James Peoples	35	153	4.4	2	12
Will Howard	33	77	2.3	5	19
S. Williams-Dixon	4	44	11.0	0	31
Jeremiah Smith	2	33	16.5	1	19
Emeka Egbuka	2	20	10.0	0	13
Devin Brown	5	10	2.0	0	10
Julian Sayin	1	5	5.0	0	5
Mason Maggs	1	3	3.0	0	3
Team	5	-8	-1.6	0	0
OSU Totals	211	1252	5.9	18	86
OPP Totals	192	677	2.7	4	30

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Will Howard	121	165	73.3	1574	14-3	177.8
Devin Brown	10	18	55.6	108	1-0	124.3
Julian Sayin	5	7	71.4	84	1-0	219.4
OSU Totals	136	190	71.6	1776	16-3	174.3
OPP Totals	98	153	64.1	990	4-4	121.8

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	32	553	17.3	7	70
Emeka Egbuka	40	526	13.2	6	68
Carnell Tate	15	232	15.5	1	36
Brandon Inniss	8	92	11.5	0	27
Quinshon Judkins	7	67	9.6	0	21
Gee Scott Jr.	7	65	9.3	1	25
Bennett Christian	2	61	30.5	1	55
Will Kacmarek	5	58	11.6	0	32
Bryson Rodgers	5	46	9.2	0	12
T. Henderson	8	23	2.9	0	12
Jayden Ballard	2	18	9.0	0	12
David Adolph	1	10	10.0	0	10
Kojo Antwi	1	8	8.0	0	8
Patrick Gurd	1	6	6.0	0	6
Jelani Thurman	1	3	3.0	0	3
James Peoples	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	136	1766	13.0	16	70
OPP Totals	98	990	10.1	4	69

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jeremiah Smith	8	-	-	-	-	48
Jayden Fielding	-	33-33	-	-	3-3	42
Emeka Egbuka	6	-	-	-	-	36
Q. Judkins	6	-	-	-	-	36
Will Howard	5	-	-	-	-	30
T. Henderson	4	-	-	-	-	24

James Peoples	2	-	-	-	-	12
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lathan Ransom	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Carnell Tate	1	-	-	-	-	6
Austin Snyder	-	3-3	-	-	-	3
OSU Totals	36	36-36	-	-	3-3	261
OPP Totals	8	6-6	-	-	4-7	66

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	0-0	1-1	2-2	0-0	3-3
OSU Totals	0-0	1-1	2-2	0-0	3-3
OPP Totals	2-2	0-0	2-4	0-1	4-7

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	16	661	41.3	0	51
Nick McLarty	2	65	32.5	0	35
OSU Totals	18	726	40.3	0	51
OPP Totals	38	1660	43.7	0	60

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Denzel Burke	2	31	15.5	0	31
Davison Igbinosun	1	45	45.0	0	45
Gabe Powers	1	29	29.0	1	29
OSU Totals	4	105	26.3	1	45
OPP Totals	3	36	12.0	0	36

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	12	109	9.1	0	36
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	13	109	8.4	0	36
OPP Totals	2	7	3.5	0	12

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jayden Ballard	2	23	11.5	0	23
Brandon Inniss	1	14	14.0	0	14
OSU Totals	3	37	12.3	0	23
OPP Totals	4	69	17.3	0	20

Def. Leaders

Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks	
Sonny Styles	15	24	39	2.5-6	1.0-3
Lathan Ransom	19	10	29	4.5-6	0-0
Caleb Downs	15	11	26	4.5-7	0.5-2
Cody Simon	12	13	25	1.0-7	1.0-7
Ty Hamilton	7	14	21	2.5-7	1.5-3
Denzel Burke	13	7	20	0-0	0-0
Jack Sawyer	10	9	19	2.5-12	2.5-12
Jordan Hancock	12	5	17	1.0-1	0-0
Arvell Reese	9	8	17	2.0-3	0-0
Tyleik Williams	3	13	16	2.0-4	1.5-1
Davison Igbinosun	10	6	16	1.0-2	0-0
JT Tuimolouau	10	5	15	5.0-19	3.0-16
C.J. Hicks	6	8	14	1.5-9	1.5-9
Mitchell Melton	6	5	11	3.5-15	2.0-12
Kayden McDonald	6	4	10	1.0-3	0-0
Jaylen McClain	5	3	8	1.0-1	0-0
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	5	3	8	0-0	0-0
Caden Curry	3	3	6	1.0-11	1.0-11
K. Jackson Jr.	4	2			

Regardless Of Position, Sonny Is Always In Style

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since becoming a starter in the Ohio State defense early in his sophomore season, junior linebacker Sonny Styles has played and started at the nickel, safety, Mike linebacker, and Sam linebacker and has seemed to find a home at his current spot as the team's starting Will linebacker.

Being able to play five different positions on the defense in two seasons has shown off Styles' imposing frame, incredible athleticism and ability to process new information while learning on the job. Standing 6-4, 235 pounds, with impressive lateral quickness, straight-line speed and a great football lineage, Styles somehow checks all of those boxes.

"The guy's a beast," said former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin (1977-79 letterman). "6-4, 235. Incredibly athletic, he's all over the field. You can't say enough good things about him. He hits people, he takes on blockers, he beats blockers with his quickness, he's big enough to play inside back or outside 'backer or strong safety, nickel, dime, so he's a guy that you want out on the field every play. He's just a great athlete."

It hasn't been necessarily an underdog story for Styles at Ohio State. Coming to Columbus as a local kid out of Pickerington Central High School, Styles wasn't just one of the highest-ranked recruits in the country as a five-star prospect but also the son of Lorenzo Styles Sr., an Ohio State standout linebacker from 1992-94 and subsequent Super Bowl champion with the St. Louis Rams.

There has always been a certain level of fascination around Sonny Styles from the media and fans alike since his arrival at Ohio State. According to Eleven Warriors editor Dan Hope, Styles' father, talent and locality have played a part in the intrigue that surrounded him at the beginning of his Buckeye career.

"Anytime a player is a son of a former Buckeye, that player is always going to have more interest from a fan base as a recruit than a typical recruit who they may not have anything to necessarily connect to," Hope said.

Perhaps adding to the intrigue of his arrival at Ohio State was his reclassification to the 2022 class from the 2023 class. The reclassification move – which allows players to enroll in college a year early at the age they would normally be a high school senior – has been put in the spotlight recently by Alabama's Ryan Williams. Joining the Crimson Tide a year early, Williams has taken the college football world by storm with a sensational freshman season as a 17-year-old. In just six games, Williams had already accumulated 576 receiving yards and six touchdowns.

A reclassified freshman is rarely able to burst onto the scene as quickly as Williams has. Seventeen years old is a very young age to play at anything close to a high level of college football, especially in the era that Styles has played in with COVID-19 red-shirt years allowing players to retain an extra year of eligibility, resulting in some of the

players he's gone up against being as seasoned as Michigan quarterback Jack Tuttle or Utah quarterback Cam Rising, who are both currently 25 years old.

While Hope said it isn't necessarily the right move for every prospect, he likes the way it has worked out for Styles.

"I would say it helped because I think if you go back to last year and him being a starter for most of the season, he would have been a true freshman last year," Hope said. "I don't think he would have been in that position if he hadn't reclassified."

While some players choose to reclassify to become ingrained in the culture while struggling to see the field even in a reserve capacity, Styles was the opposite. As a true freshman, he played in 12 games and was on the field for 280 snaps, second among all freshmen to only fellow first-year Caden Curry.

As Hope mentioned, the experience gained as a freshman was more than likely a large part of him being ready to be thrust into a starting role as an 18-year-old for much of his sophomore season.

It wasn't a linear path to where he is today, though. Instead, it seemed as though defensive coordinator Jim Knowles just couldn't keep Styles and his rare athletic traits off the field.

In 2023, Styles moved down from safety, where he had played in high school, to the nickel.

In the team's opening game, Styles immediately broke out onto the scene with 1½ tackles for loss. It wasn't long before he was moved back to safety in place of current fifth-year senior Lathan Ransom, who suffered a season-ending Lisfranc injury in Ohio State's 24-10 win over Wisconsin. Styles would start the rest of the Buckeyes' games there.

It was a productive season for a player who had barely turned 19 years old by the time of the Michigan game. Styles went for 53 total tackles, 32 of them solo, including 4½ tackles for loss and a pair of sacks.

As much potential as Styles might have had at the safety position, former Alabama safety Caleb Downs' arrival to Ohio State along with the return of Ransom from injury meant it would have been a battle for Styles to start at the back end of the Buckeye defense.

From there, it was a pretty rational decision for the big-bodied safety to make the move from safety to outside linebacker.

After beating out C.J. Hicks, also a five-star from the 2022 recruiting class, for the starting spot as the Will linebacker, Styles' starting spot in the linebacker room has been secure ever since. Through six games, Styles was far and away the leader on the team in tackles with 39 and has also added 2½ tackles for loss.

For any safety moving to linebacker, the typical stereotype that could linger around the player is that while they may not have the physicality to be a true run-stopping linebacker, they will have the speed and athleticism to handle any challenge in coverage. According to Hope and as evidenced by his season-best performance against the run-heavy Iowa offense, the opposite has been true for Styles.

"My feeling was when he moved to linebacker, coverage was going to be his biggest strength because he's been a safety," Hope said. "I think it's actually the other way around. He's really good at that downhill, playing forward kind of stuff, but he still kind of has to work on the playing backward and coverage elements of it."

With that in mind, it seems as though linebacker was always the best position for Styles at the collegiate level, even with his high school experience at safety. Still, Laughlin doesn't feel as though the time Styles spent in the secondary was time wasted.

"The more you can do, the longer you stick around is what we always used to say in the NFL, so you've got to learn everything," said Laughlin, who had an eight year pro career. "I think there's more to learn at defensive back than at linebacker."

"Although if you're at linebacker, a lot of times you've got to call the signals so you have to make all the adjustments. That's a little tough, but when you're a DB you know all that stuff anyway."

Hope was perhaps a little less certain if Styles would have been better suited with an extra year in the linebacker room, but as Hope explained, behind All-Big Ten linebackers Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg, there was no path for Styles to get playing time at the linebacker spot.

"My feeling is if he was a linebacker last year, he probably wouldn't have played a lot, and so for him to get as much experience as he did last year and then to have added things to his skill set that he could now use at linebacker, I would say overall, it was probably a good thing for him," Hope said.

Before the season, Styles himself was glad he spent the first two years of his Ohio State career in the position he did.

"I think playing safety for the first two years definitely helps in terms of the way I'm going to be able to move, being able to cover. I have a pretty solid feel of the zone drops, and then just in the overall picture of the defense I've got a pretty good understanding of knowing what everyone is doing because I had to know what the back end is doing," Styles said before the season started. "Now I have to know what the whole front seven is doing, so I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the entire defense."

That understanding of the defense came in handy when Styles added to his list of positions played in the first game against Akron when starting Mike linebacker Cody Simon was injured. Not only did the adjustment to Mike call for Styles to move inside, but it also meant he became the de facto leader of the defense as he relayed defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' play calls from his helmet to the other players on the defense. Like every other change Styles has made, he learned quicker than most would have expected.

"(Playing that many different positions) is probably one of the hardest things to do," Simon said. "They're all super different positions. Whatever you guys are seeing out there, it's 20 to 15 times harder than you think. He's a great processor, and he knows the defense just as well as anybody, so he's doing really well."



SONNY BROCKWAY

MR. VERSATILITY — Sonny Styles has proved his worth at several spots on the defense whether it be safety, nickel or two of the linebacker positions.

Even though Styles is just 19 years old, he still has only one year of eligibility remaining with Ohio State, which he would only use if he opts to stay with the Buckeyes for his senior season rather than go to the draft. Although Styles has just half a season under his belt at the linebacker position, year three is when some players start reaching their full potential. Hope feels as though there's plenty more to come from Styles.

"I would think most likely Sonny will stay for his senior season," Hope said. "I think if you factor that in with him coming back for another year, at that point he would have a full year of playing linebacker under his belt. I think he's somebody who can continue to get better this year and then could make even another jump next year to really be a star of the defense as a senior."

For someone as young as Styles, it seems very early to get into the heights he could reach at the NFL level, but with the talent that the standout linebacker holds, his future certainly seems to be pointing in the pro direction. As an NFL veteran in his own right, Laughlin doesn't see why Styles can't make it at the next level.

"He sure looks like he can play to me," Laughlin said. "I'm no expert, but the kid makes plays."

OSU Offense Returning To Dominant Form

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

After five straight years of prolific play under the guidance of star quarterbacks Dwayne Haskins (2018), Justin Fields (2019-20) and C.J. Stroud (2021-22), Ohio State's offense took a major step back in the 2023 campaign.

Despite still having talented players such as Biletnikoff Award winner and Heisman Trophy finalist Marvin Harrison Jr., former All-Big-Ten running back TreVeyon Henderson and now-Houston Texans tight end Cade Stover at their disposal, the Buckeyes' unit – led by now-Syracuse quarterback Kyle McCord – never fully reached its potential, averaging just 30.5 points and 407.9 yards per contest, both of those marks being the worst for Ohio State since the 2011 season.

Ohio State's offensive shortcomings – which were often defined by unbalanced play and an inconsistent and inexperienced offensive line – prompted head coach Ryan Day to make some significant changes.

After seven straight years of calling plays for the Buckeyes either as an offensive coordinator or head coach, Day handed over the keys to longtime friend and coaching guru Chip Kelly, who had transformed Oregon into an offensive powerhouse while serving as the Ducks' offensive coordinator from 2007-08 and head coach from 2009-12.

"I trust Chip with my life, and that's a big part of any time you are handing something over that you have done almost your entire career," Day said of Kelly at Big Ten Media Days.

That was not the only major shake-up on the staff. Also joining the Buckeyes this offseason was running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, whom the Buckeyes plucked from Oregon after Tony Alford's abrupt departure to Michigan in March.

Ohio State's offense also looked much different on the field to start the season. Sixth-year Kansas State transfer Will Howard assumed the starting role from McCord. Ole Miss transfer Quinshon Judkins joined forces with Henderson in Locklyn's new backfield. Consensus No. 1 prospect Jeremiah Smith has helped fill the void left by Harrison, joining a crowded Ohio State wideout room that also includes a fully healthy Emeka Egbuka, while Alabama transfer center Seth McLaughlin arrived in Columbus to lead the oft-criticized offensive line.

In all, Day and the Buckeyes made vast changes to their offense during the offseason, and so far in 2024, those changes have paid off in a significant way.

Led by Kelly's creative play calling and the plethora of talent Howard has at his disposal, the Buckeye offense has looked crisp and efficient throughout its first six games, averaging 43.5 points and 503.0 yards per game, marks that both rank sixth in the country and second in the Big Ten to only No. 16 Indiana.

Perhaps the most notable difference this season is their balanced play, with the group both running and passing at an efficient rate, averaging 208.7 yards on the ground and 294.3 through the air.

Day said having a balanced attack on offense can make them a challenging guard for opposing defenses this year, something that was on full display during the team's 35-7 win over Iowa on Oct. 5 when they rushed for 203 yards and passed for 209.

"We always want a good mix," Day said after

the Iowa game. "When the runs are hitting for 4 and 5 yards and the balls are being completed, that makes it easier. 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."

After cruising through its first five games, Ohio State's offense had its first big test against a formidable Oregon defense on Oct. 12, one which, despite some crucial late-game mistakes by Howard and Smith, they did pass as a whole, scoring 31 and gaining 467 total yards (141 rushing, 326 passing) in the 32-31 loss.

With all that in mind, BSB graded each offensive position through the first six games.

Quarterbacks

McCord had a solid year with the Buckeyes in 2023, one which was – fairly or unfairly – defined by his two-interception performance in Ohio State's 30-24 loss to Michigan last November.

He was a respectable starter for Day and Ohio State, but still, it appears the Buckeyes have found an upgrade at the sport's most important position with Howard.

After taking some time to adjust to the new system in the spring, the Kansas State transfer found his footing and made his presence known in fall camp, prompting Day to name him the team's starting quarterback on Aug. 15, the earliest he had ever named a starter at the position in his six years as head coach.

In his first few games as the Buckeyes' starter, Howard made sure that Day would not have any regrets over that quick decision.

Despite it being against three inferior non-conference opponents, he quickly went to work as Ohio State's new signal caller, completing 51 of his first 74 passes (68.9 competition percentage) for 795 yards and six touchdowns with just one interception to help Ohio State dismantle Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall.

Howard's best statistical game in that stretch may have been his first when he threw for three touchdowns on 17-of-28 passing for 228 passing yards and no interceptions in the 52-6 win over the Zips, but he appeared to grow more comfortable with every game. His completion percentage rose after every week, from 60.7 in Week 1 to 69.2 in Week 2 and 80.0 percent in Week 3.

"I'm definitely settled in more," Howard said before the Marshall game. "It feels right. It feels like home. I know I said the first game felt a little bit like an away game, but I'm settled in now. This is what we do."

Howard's fast start with the Buckeyes was impressive, but it wasn't until his fourth start against Michigan State that he would get truly tested.

He struggled in the first half on the road against the Spartans, throwing a second-quarter interception that led to a Michigan State touchdown and nearly having another one in the red zone earlier in the contest, all before being forced out of the game by a hard hit on the last drive of the half.

Howard would buckle his chin strap and rebound after halftime, though, completing four of his six passes in the third quarter for 62 yards and a touchdown, the score coming on a 33-yard toss to Egbuka on fourth-and-5.

Howard's ability to bounce back allowed the Buckeyes to cruise to the 38-7 road win, a showing of resiliency that impressed his teammates.

Rating The Offense

Here is where the OSU offense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Oregon game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Offense	208.7	22nd	2nd
Passing Offense	294.3	18th	5th
Total Offense	503.0	6th	2nd
Scoring Offense	43.5	6th	2nd
Turnovers Lost	6	31st	T-6th
Third-Down Conv.	.486	20th	2nd

"Will was able to bounce back from (his interception)," Egbuka said. "This is something we knew he would be able to do coming in as a fifth-year senior, having that experience under his belt, knowing that mistakes don't define you and coming back and making a statement later in the game."

Howard's poise was also on full display in Ohio State's win over Iowa when he once again shrugged off an early interception to throw for a season-high four touchdowns, and it showed again through the majority of the Oregon game, where he led the Buckeyes on five scoring drives in enemy territory and had his best statistical game for Ohio State to date, completing 28 of his 35 passes (80.0 percent) for two touchdowns and 326 passing yards.

But that performance may also ultimately be defined by his crucial mistake on the last drive of the game where he opted to run 12 yards and slide with zero time left on the clock rather than going down sooner and calling a timeout to set up a potential game-winning field goal from kicker Jayden Fielding.

Howard may have harmed the Buckeyes with his legs at the end of the Oregon game – a decision that could have major College Football Playoff and Big Ten implications down the road – but his ability to run has largely been a huge positive for the offense, as it is an element that has been nonexistent for Ohio State's quarterbacks since Justin Fields last suited up for the Buckeyes in 2020.

Through six games, Howard has gained 77 yards and scored five times on 33 rushes, marks that rank fourth, second and fourth on the team, respectively. To put that in perspective, both Stroud and McCord failed to reach the end zone on the ground while serving as Ohio State's starters from 2021-23, with Stroud's lone rushing touchdown run occurring in a relief role for Fields in 2020.

In all, Howard's first six games as a Buckeye haven't been perfect – he has thrown for three interceptions this season and made a few questionable decisions – but the positive impact he has made on this offense stretches way beyond his stats.

Beyond Howard, redshirt sophomore Devin Brown has excelled when his number has been called upon this season, none more than his 17-yard touchdown strike to Smith at the end of the first half against Michigan State when he was forced into the game for one play for the injured Howard.

True freshman Julian Sayin has also flashed with the opportunities he has had in garbage time this season, completing five of his seven passing attempts for 84 yards and a touchdown.

BSB Midterm Grade: A-

Running Backs

After a disappointing 2023 campaign in which the Buckeyes ranked 87th nationally in

rushing offense at 138.8 yards per game, Ohio State's run game has completely turned itself around in 2024 to become one of the more productive units in the nation, ranking tied for 22nd in rushing offense at 208.7 yards per game and eighth in rushing touchdowns with 18.

Ohio State's revamped rushing attack has a lot to do with the play-calling brilliance of Kelly, but it is also a product of the sheer skill and talent it has in that room, starting with Henderson and Judkins.

When Judkins, a two-time first-team All-SEC player, transferred to Ohio State last winter, many believed he would form one of the more dynamic rushing duos in the nation alongside Henderson.

Through six games, that is exactly what has transpired, with both tailbacks creating somewhat of a thunder-and-lightning pair in Columbus.

So far, it has been Judkins spearheading Locklyn's group. He leads the team with 71 carries for 491 yards and six touchdowns. His 491 yards rank seventh in the Big Ten and 46th nationally.

Judkins has served as somewhat of a do-it-all back for Ohio State through the midway point of the season. He has displayed great explosiveness out of the backfield, as evidenced by his impressive 6.9-yard per carry average, an element of his game that was on full display in the Week 4 win over Marshall.

In that game, he broke through for an 86-yard score – tied for the third-longest rushing touchdown in Ohio State history – after he had another 80-yard scoring burst taken away due to a holding call against Western Michigan.

But he has also shown great physicality with the ball in his hands, even stiff-arming a few defenders to the ground in games against Marshall and Iowa.

"It's his physicality running with the football that has impressed me," Kelly said. "Not that I didn't think he had it. I had never seen him in those situations before. He has really good vision, and he has great feet for a big player. I have noticed that from right at the beginning. You watch him navigate and make a decision on where he's going through a hole, and then he sticks his foot on the ground and he takes off."

While Judkins has been effective for the Buckeyes' offense so far this season, he did have his worst performance of the year against Oregon on Oct. 12, totaling just 23 yards and a score on 11 attempts (2.1 average). The diminished workload was in large part due to his costly first-quarter fumble that gave the Ducks some much-needed momentum after the Buckeyes took an early 7-0 lead.

But luckily for the Buckeyes, they had another all-conference back in Henderson who could pick up the slack. He put together a strong 10-carry, 87-yard performance (8.7 average) in the losing effort, which was highlighted by his longest run of the season thus far, a 53-yarder in the first quarter that put the Buckeyes all the way down to the Oregon 4-yard line.

Henderson may not have as many carries as Judkins so far this season – 52 to Judkins' 71 – but he has certainly made the most of his opportunities, averaging an impressive 8.2 yards per tote along with 424 yards and four scores.

He has also totaled at least 61 yards in each of his six games this season, including two games with at least two touchdowns against Western Michigan and Marshall.

But perhaps Henderson's biggest strength this season has been his pass protection, where he has delivered a number of booming hits on blitzing linebackers and defensive backs right before they can get to the quarterback. No block was more important than his blindside stiff of a blitzing Michigan State defender that allowed Brown to find Smith in the end zone for that game's crucial end-of-first-half score.

"He had some great pickups, huge pickups," Day said after the Michigan State game. "That was big. He's becoming that all-purpose back that we all know he can be."

When also factoring in the play of freshman running back James Peoples, who has impressed in limited playing time with 153 yards and two touchdowns on 35 carries (4.4-yard average), Ohio State's running game has been as dominant as it has been in the Day era, and everyone in that room deserves its flowers for that.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

Wide Receivers

Despite losing the services of Harrison, one of the program's all-time best wideouts, to the NFL, co-offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline's room has not missed a beat so far this season.

As is always the case in a Hartline-led unit, the Buckeyes are blessed with a plethora of talent at wide receiver, and that starts with the youngest one in that room, the true freshman Smith.

Coming into the program as one of the more hyped prospects in program history – and maybe even recent college football history – the 18-year-old Smith could have been fazed by the outside noise and pressure. But instead, he has done just the opposite. The South Florida native earned the starting wide receiver job during fall camp and never looked back, wowing fans from the moment he stepped onto the field.

Smith's talents and maturity were evident from the start when he shook off an early drop and false-start penalty to haul in a team-high six catches for 92 yards and two scores in his first career collegiate game against Akron, a performance that prompted Day to say that his true freshman wideout was "built different."

Smith has since backed up Day's claim by continuing to show off some outstanding traits on the football field, perhaps none more impressive than his back-to-back one-handed catches against Michigan State, which was followed by another one-handed score against Iowa the very next week.

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

Smith continued that dominance against Oregon, totaling a team-high 100 yards and a score on nine catches, but like Howard, that stat line may not be remembered after his costly offensive pass-interference call on Ohio State's final drive that put the Buckeyes out of field-goal range.

Still, Smith leads all Buckeye wideouts through six weeks in receiving yards (553) and touchdowns (seven), putting him just one score shy of the freshman program record currently held by Pro Football Hall of Famer Cris Carter.

The lead in targets so far goes to Ohio State's most veteran receiver Egbuka, who has totaled 40 receptions for 526 yards and six scores.

Coming off a disappointing season in which he dealt with a high ankle sprain for much of the year, Egbuka has returned to his All-Big Ten form to quietly emerge as Howard's most reliable and

consistent target. After starting out somewhat slowly against Akron and Western Michigan, he recorded three straight games with at least five catches, 70 yards and a touchdown against Marshall, Michigan State and Iowa.

His final game in that stretch was his most impressive, going for nine catches for 71 yards and a career-high three scores to lead the Buckeyes to the blowout win over the Hawkeyes.

Egbuka's return to form this season, which continued against Oregon with a season-high 10 catches for 93 yards and a touchdown, is a welcome sight for Day.

"I think Emeka is one of the best receivers in the country," Day said after the Iowa game. "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."

Egbuka and Smith form a strong two-headed monster at wide receiver, but sophomore Carnell Tate is also a weapon in that room. He is third in receiving for the Buckeyes with 232 yards and one touchdown on 15 receptions. But his teammates say he might make the most impact with his perimeter blocking, which has allowed Ohio State's running backs and fellow receivers to run for some explosive gains so far this season.

Aside from those three, sophomores Brandon Inniss (eight, 92) and Bryson Rodgers (five, 46) have also made plays when their numbers have been called this year.

Ohio State's depth at wideout may not be as great as they've had in previous years, but still, the 1-2 punch of Egbuka and Smith is hard for opposing secondaries to beat.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

Tight Ends

Through the first five games of the season, Ohio State's tight ends were used somewhat sparingly in the passing game, with each of the five contributors at the position – starter Gee Scott Jr. and reserves Bennett Christian, Pat Gurd, Will Kacmarek and Jelani Thurman – all failing to eclipse more than four receptions and 62 yards in that span.

That all seemed to change against Oregon, however, when Howard featured his tight ends – mainly Scott and Kacmarek – more prominently.

Scott, who entered the contest with just four catches for 19 yards and a score despite some offseason chatter about him becoming more of a pass-catching threat this season, was the third-most featured receiver against the Ducks, hauling in a trio of receptions for 46 yards with a long of 25.

Howard also got Kacmarek – who came in with just four catches for 26 yards – involved early when he found him down the middle of the field for a key 32-yard reception that put OSU on the Oregon 21 and in good field position to eventually score on its first drive of the game, although he would leave the game with an injury right after that reception and not return to the game.

While these were all made in a losing effort, the potential emergence of both Scott and Kacmarek as potential passing-game threats could be a welcome sight for a Keenan Bailey-led tight end room that entered the season looking to operate more as a committee as opposed to in previous years when former tight end Cade Stover – now with the Houston Texans – dominated the targets at the position.

"I kind of have an idea how it will play out, but hopefully we can roll a bunch of guys," Bailey said during fall camp. "In a perfect world, every-

one could do everything and we could just be fresh, just rolling the guys."

Part of that "everything" for Bailey's tight ends is run blocking, which, through six games, is an area where they have excelled the most in as a collective unit.

Each of the already mentioned tight ends has been called on to serve as key blockers in goal-line and jumbo packages at times this season, with Kelly even employing a heavy four-tight end package on a second-and-goal against Western Michigan that featured Christian, Kacmarek, Scott and Thurman, who each blocked their man to allow Henderson to score from the 3-yard line.

That creativity continued against Oregon, where Kelly drew up multiple plays that had Gurd featured as a lead blocker out of the "T" formation, one of which ended up with Gurd paving the way for Judkins to score from the 1-yard line to give Ohio State a 14-6 early first-quarter lead.

Kelly said having a number of tight ends he can trust as blockers has allowed him to be more creative with his play-calling, especially when in goal-line and run-first situations.

"All playing time here is earned," Kelly said. "When you say, 'Hey, we're going to run three-tight end formations,' it's not just whatever three tight ends are there. That conversation comes up in staff meetings because we really believe in those guys and what they can do. (Scott, Thurman, Kacmarek and Christian) have really earned it, and we'll continue to work through some of those packages and see what's the best fit for those guys."

Whether they are serving as blockers or pass-catchers, Scott said he and his teammates simply want to help the offense in any way that they can this season, a selfless mentality that certainly has been evident through the midway point of the season.

"I want to be able to be the teammate that's able to help in any kind of way," Scott said on Oct. 2. "I was just telling some of my teammates how when we have lead blocks that lead to a touchdown, sometimes those feel just as good as scoring a touchdown, just being a servant for your teammates. It's all about winning. We want to house a trophy in the end. So that's what it's about."

BSB Midterm Grade: B

Offensive Line

Ohio State's offensive line was by far the most criticized out of any position group last season, and some of those criticisms were certainly warranted. Justin Frye's new-look unit often looked disjointed in 2023 and struggled to maintain consistency, two negative traits that showed up when it mattered most toward the end of the season, mostly against Michigan and Missouri.

It seemed as if Frye and the entire unit had their backs against the wall and a major target on their backs to start the 2024 season, and through six games, those outside concerns have mostly been quashed.

Contrary to last year, Ohio State's front five – which heading into the Oregon game consisted of left tackle Josh Simmons, left guard Donovan Jackson, center Seth McLaughlin, right guard Tegra Tshabola and right tackle Josh Fryar – have looked connected all season long, relinquishing just five sacks and 16 tackles for loss on the year while also helping transform the Buckeye run game into one of the nation's best.

While a lot of the credit for these improvements can go to Kelly for putting his guys in the right spots, the change can also be attributed to the seemingly changed mentality the group has put in place this season, one that is built on vio-

lence and aggression.

Howard was not with the Buckeyes last year, but he has noticed that each member of the offensive line has been finishing his blocks with authority all season. This was evident against Iowa, when they flexed their muscles and allowed Ohio State to rush for 203 yards while also allowing just one sack and two tackles for loss.

"Those dudes are bad SOBs," Howard said after the Iowa game. "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."

Ohio State's increased aggressiveness and overall success on the offensive line could also be attributed to the addition of the former Alabama transfer and graduate senior McLaughlin. Coming onto campus with 24 starts in the SEC for the Crimson Tide, he has seemingly brought an edge and an added veteran presence to this unit, something that may not have existed in the middle of Ohio State's offensive line last season with the more inexperienced Carson Hinzman starting at center.

"Even if Coach Frye or myself are barking at him like we will, he just has a calming presence," Day said of McLaughlin. "Like, 'We've got it. We'll get this straightened out.' And that's a good feeling."

"That's what you love to hear as a coach. I mean, when you're going at somebody and they look at you in the eye, like we're going to get this thing straightened out, and they do, that's when you know you've got somebody who is a leader, who's got poise and can kind of pull everybody together."

McLaughlin has not been the only lineman to set the tone for Ohio State through the midway point of the season. Other than the redshirt sophomore Tshabola – who has earned praise from just about everybody in the program for his development this season – the Buckeyes are filled with seasoned veterans on the offensive line, which Fryar thinks has been the leading factor in the line's resurgence this season.

"It's my second year, Josh's second year, (starting) at Ohio State, Donovan's third year," he said. "Seth's experience, too. (It shows up) in the film room, when we're meeting extra. Even just sitting in the locker room talking about what we want to do on Saturday, how we're going to block it, all that stuff. We're constantly thinking about football and how we can get better at it."

That experience took a major hit against Oregon, however, when Simmons was carted off the field during the second quarter after going down with a noncontact left leg injury that Day proclaimed after the game is likely season-ending.

The loss of Simmons could prove costly down the line for Ohio State this season, but against Oregon, backup Zen Michalski filled in admirably for the veteran at left tackle, who helped the Buckeyes' front five allow just one sack on the night.

Day has yet to say who will protect Howard's blind side for the remainder of the season, but regardless, Ohio State's offensive line has shown significant improvement from last year, which should still have Day and his staff excited for what is to come.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

Defense As Advertised Through Six Games

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In 2023, the Ohio State defense transformed from what had been a bit of a liability in 2021 and 2022 to the unquestioned strength of the team.

Theoretically, that strength was only reinforced for 2024 when the team brought back many of the key starters who guided them to those improvements in 2023 – such as senior cornerback Denzel Burke, senior defensive ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolou and senior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams, among others – and even brought in reigning SEC Freshman of the Year Caleb Downs, a sophomore safety, from Alabama.

With all of the talented players scattered around its defense, many before the season believed Ohio State's unit was as good as any in the country.

At least on paper through six games, the unit has lived up to its billing. Following their 32-31 loss against No. 3 Oregon, the Buckeyes ranked fifth in scoring defense (11.0), eighth in yards per game allowed on the ground (86.3), 14th in passing yards allowed (165.0) and third in total defense, allowing just 251.3 yards per game.

The eye test hasn't been nearly as convincing, though. For starters, the Buckeyes hadn't played the strongest competition up until Oregon. In their three nonconference games, Ohio State took on a pair of Mid-American Conference schools in Akron and Western Michigan and Sun Belt opponent Marshall. Even when Ohio State got to conference play, its first opponent, Michigan State, was dealing with both a new quarterback and a new coach.

Ohio State's second Big Ten opponent, Iowa, has had a revered defense for the last few years, but its offense has been the laughingstock of not just the Big Ten but the entire Power Four in recent years, which, to be fair to the Buckeyes, has been much improved in 2024.

In some ways, the Buckeye defense has done mostly everything one could ask for, especially against Akron, Western Michigan and Iowa, where the team gave up a combined 13 points, and the Buckeyes' first-team defense didn't give up a single touchdown.

Against Michigan State and Marshall, though, some slight issues were exposed in the first half, with the Buckeyes allowing a combined 389 yards before heading to the locker rooms for halftime in those two contests. The Spartans and Thundering Herd both used reliable passing attacks with their mobile quarterbacks to give Ohio State's vaunted secondary some fits.

Oregon took full advantage of the vulnerabilities put on display by Michigan State and Marshall. In the Ducks' 32-31 win, they went for 496 total yards, including 341 passing yards.

With all that being said, BSB graded each defensive position group through the first six games.

Defensive Line

As was the case this time last year, the only critique of Ohio State's defensive line has been at times its slightly disappointing

Rating The Defense

Here is where the OSU defense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Oregon game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Defense	86.3	8th	4th
Passing Defense	165.0	14th	3rd
Total Defense	251.3	3rd	3rd
Scoring Defense	11.0	5th	1st
Sacks/Game	2.8	19th	4th
Third-Down Def.	.321	29th	5th

efforts rushing the passer. For a defensive line with three potential first-round picks in Sawyer, Tuimolou and Williams, the expectations are understandably sky-high, which is why the three sacks recorded by Tuimolou and 2½ sacks registered by Sawyer might not be quite enough to appease the more demanding fans.

Although head coach Ryan Day and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles's coaching staff are "never satisfied" with any part of the defense, Day believes any perceived shortcomings in statistics from the pairing is more of a product of the opposing offense's game plan rather than a lack of production from edge rushers such as Sawyer and Tuimolou.

"I think especially for guys like Jack and JT, there's this question of, 'How many sacks are you going to get?'" Day said. "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 pass."

Even with Sawyer and Tuimolou not putting up best-in-the-nation sack numbers, the Ohio State defense, as a whole, still ranks tied for 19th nationally in sacks per game with 2.83, a number that they did not increase upon in an overall disappointing performance against Oregon. Against the Ducks' high-flying passing attack, Ohio State didn't come up with a single sack and overall struggled to get consistent pressure on Dillon Gabriel. In defense of the Ohio State defensive line, Knowles seldom brought blitzes that would have made it easier for the unit to record a sack, but one would have thought edge rushers as talented as Tuimolou and Sawyer wouldn't have needed too much help to get after Gabriel.

Despite the disappointing Oregon performance, the Buckeyes have enjoyed the unexpected pass-rush production of Ohio State's backup defensive linemen.

Rotational Buckeye edge rushers such as Mitchell Melton and Caden Curry have combined for three sacks, with Melton's two sacks being the third most on the team.

Additionally, the unit's ability to create interior pressure comes not just from Williams, who has already recorded 1½ sacks in only four games played after missing the Michigan State and Marshall games with injury, but also from fifth-year Ty Hamilton, who seemed slightly limited in his pass-rushing capabilities in 2022 but has emerged to record 1½ sacks.

Perhaps more significant than anything else has been the team's ability to generate pressure through blitzing, which was almost nonexistent in a more conservative approach in 2023 (more on this later when the linebackers are discussed).

Ohio State's run defense has been per-

haps the strength of the entire unit, something that was on full display in its Week 6 win over Iowa. Despite the Hawkeyes, led by star running back Kaleb Johnson, coming into Columbus with one of the nation's best rushing offenses at the time, the Ohio State defense allowed only 116 yards on the ground on 27 carries, good enough for an average of just 4.3 yards.

The numbers look pretty good as is, but as many Buckeye fans who watched the game know, it was even better than that in actuality. The Hawkeyes received nearly half of their rushing yards from two 28-yard gains from Johnson, one of which took place against the second-team defense in the fourth quarter.

The Iowa game was no fluke though. The Buckeye defense has been solid all season at getting runners down behind the line of scrimmage. Their 40 tackles for loss, good enough for 6.7 per game and 33rd in the country, are much improved from the season before, where the team recorded 5.5 tackles for loss per game, which was tied for 71st in the country.

These are all stats that are directly attributed to the push Ohio State's defensive linemen have generated so far this season. Against Oregon, the Buckeyes' run defense wasn't quite as effective. Although Oregon running back Jordan James didn't take the game over, he still had an effective day out of the backfield, gaining 115 yards and a touchdown on 23 carries. The Buckeyes' struggles against mobile quarterbacks mainly continued against Dillon Gabriel, who added 32 rushing yards on four carries.

BSB Midterm Grade: B

Linebackers

Perhaps the biggest question mark in a defense full of uber-talented, experienced players were the linebackers. Although both juniors C.J. Hicks and Sonny Styles were five-star players coming out of high school, neither player had much starting experience at the position, Styles, in particular, had no experience whatsoever at the position converting from safety. Even fifth-year senior and Block "O" recipient Cody Simon wasn't a full-time starter in 2023 and instead sat behind All-Big Ten linebackers Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg, who have since gone to the NFL.

As inexperienced as they may have been coming into the season, the linebackers have been a general positive for the defense.

With Simon out for the first game against Akron, Styles has been asked to do a lot for the defense in his first year playing at the position. Through six games, the former safety has answered the call, totaling a team-high 39 tackles, 10 more than the No. 2 tackler on the team.

Styles specifically broke through in Ohio State's win over Iowa, where he lived in the Hawkeyes' backfield, registering seven total tackles, including two for loss.

Simon's absence from the team was a short one. The Mike linebacker and "unquestioned leader of the linebacker room," according to linebackers coach James Laurinaitis, has come back to fly around the field plenty in his own right, recording

25 tackles in his five games this season. Perhaps the flashiest of Simon's tackles came in the first quarter of his first game back against Western Michigan, where he brought down Bronco quarterback Hayden Wolff for a sack.

Styles had a similar result as his linebacker running mate just two games later against Michigan State, when he brought down Aidan Chiles on a blitz early in that game.

The tendency of the linebackers, and the defense altogether, to blitz as much as they have goes back to a slight change in philosophy from Knowles, who has strived to call more blitzes than he did in the previous season, a year in which the Buckeyes used a more conservative approach to limit explosive plays.

"We need to be more aggressive in terms of the calls, getting more blitzes run, getting more pressures run, getting more D-linemen in one-on-one matchups," Knowles said Aug. 2. At least statistically, the most productive blitzer on the team has been Hicks – the best blitzer in the linebacker room according to Laurinaitis – who has already recorded 1½ sacks in much less playing time than he probably thought he would have received before the season.

Hicks has also recorded 14 total tackles, including six solo tackles, most of those coming early in the season or in garbage time.

Hicks' playing time has been eaten up by the emergence of sophomore Arvell Reese.

When Reese has been on the field, he has been just about as dynamic as the starters, showing off his sideline-to-sideline speed and high football IQ with 17 tackles and two tackles for loss in somewhat limited playing time.

According to Reese, his big jump from his freshman season to this year as a sophomore has been in his preparation.

"Coach Laurinaitis has made me really realize that I could really do it and actually play," Reese said. "He would always say, if I just put the time in, I could do it. He always saw something in me. So I would say (the flip that switched in terms of preparation) came from Coach Laurinaitis and just me realizing, dang, I really can do this."

Hicks, Reese, Simon and Styles have become a fearsome group of run-stopping linebackers, but in pass coverage, that group hasn't been quite as effective.

The linebackers have at times left tight ends and other pass catchers open, most notably in the game against Iowa, where the Hawkeyes' tight end Luke Lachey was the team's leading receiver with five catches for 39 yards. This is something Simon says the group wants to improve upon.

"We could always do better," Simon said. "Especially this last week (against Iowa), we had some trouble on third down, so we were tightening stuff up and just refocusing and getting back on it."

The linebackers' pass coverage ability was truly put to the test on Oct. 12 against Oregon. Facing one of the best tight ends in the country in Terrance Ferguson, the linebackers had a mediocre performance giving up 62 receiving yards on four catches.

BSB Midterm Grade: B

Safeties

Perhaps not in the exact way some had thought, the back end of the Ohio State defense has without a doubt lived up to the hype.

With all of the other talented players around him, bandit safety Lathan Ransom was sort of forgotten by many pundits and Buckeye fans alike. Ransom didn't waste time in making sure everyone remembered exactly what he was capable of in the team's opening game against Akron, recording a team-high nine total tackles, including two for loss, while also returning a fumble 27 yards for his first career touchdown. Ransom was named Ohio State's Defensive Player of the Game for his efforts.

In the coming weeks, Ransom didn't let his foot off the gas at all. He had as good a performance against Marshall, this time recording eight tackles, including one for loss, and he forced a fumble on Marshall quarterback Stone Earle in the first half that could have ended in a turnover but instead harmlessly went out of bounds.

Although he wasn't as busy bringing down Spartan defenders as he had been in weeks past, Ransom had his second forced fumble in as many weeks when he punched out the ball from Chiles. This time, the Buckeyes hopped on the ball to gain possession.

Ransom may have cooled down a bit, at least on the stat sheets in recent weeks, but he is still among the team's leaders in both total tackles with 29, second most on the team, and tackles for loss with 4½, tied for second most on the team with Downs, behind only Tuimoloau's five.

Downs, the other half of Ohio State's fearsome safety duo, had a quieter start to his season than some fans may have been expecting. In his first three games as a Buckeye, Downs recorded just a combined eight total tackles, which – considering he averaged 7.6 tackles in 14 games in his freshman season at Alabama – may not have lived up to the expectations bestowed upon him before the season.

Against Michigan State, Downs had the stats of his old Alabama self, a game in which he went for six total stops, including one for loss.

For his efforts, Downs was given his first Defensive Player of the Game honor, having graded out as a champion at 89 percent.

Even after the Michigan State game, Downs' numbers are still down from where they were at Alabama, but that has had little to do with a drop-off in quality but more of a change in role. Playing the adjuster position in Knowles' defense, Downs has found himself well behind the line of scrimmage.

Still, Downs has consistently made the open-field tackles he has needed to make, including eight against Oregon. On the year, Downs' 26 total tackles are the third most of the team.

"We've been solid on explosive plays," Knowles said. "You can't forget that, because that wins games. You take a guy like Caleb Downs, who we activated (against Michigan State). We've got to continue to activate him as we get into Big Ten competition."

"You see what he looks like when he's activated. What you don't see a lot is when he's not activated is how many times they just don't throw the ball, because he's in the right place and on top of the routes."

The mark of any good safety tandem, though, is the number of big gains allowed,

something that had troubled Ohio State defenses in years past like 2021 and 2022.

Through the first five games of the season, Downs and Ransom had been as good as any in the country, allowing just one play of 30-plus yards. Against Oregon, this was part of where the defense really struggled. Although Downs and Ransom weren't nearly as much to blame as the cornerbacks, the defense as a whole gave up four gains of 30-plus yards, and four more gains of 25-plus yards.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

Cornerbacks

In the new age of college football, a defense can only be as good as its secondary. The Ohio State defense found that out after a poor performance from its cornerbacks room in the team's one-point loss to Oregon.

In some moments, the team's pass defense has been everything even the toughest critics could have asked for. But in others, the group has been, at times, the weak link of the unit.

Starting off with the positives, Ohio State cornerbacks have already forced three interceptions through six games. To put that in perspective, Ohio State's cornerbacks forced only four interceptions all of the 2023 season.

Senior cornerback Denzel Burke, who made it known in the offseason that he wanted to force more turnovers, has grabbed two interceptions so far in the 2024 season, one more than he came up with in all of 2023.

Junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun had an interception and a subsequent 45-yard return against Iowa, a play that almost single-handedly won him a Defensive Player of the Week honor for that game.

On paper, the Buckeyes' passing defense has pretty much lived up to the hype, with the group ranking 14th in the country with 165.0 yards allowed per game.

Burke, Igbinosun and senior nickel cornerback Jordan Hancock have been solid in run defense. Burke leads the trio with 20 tackles, while Hancock has 17 tackles and a key forced fumble against Michigan State. Igbinosun has been slightly quieter than he was last year near the line of scrimmage, where he was one of the leading tacklers on the team with 59, but he still has recorded 16 tackles.

As much attention as Burke, Igbinosun and Hancock have garnered and deserved, sophomore cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. deserves recognition as the team's fourth cornerback. In limited playing time, Mathews has recorded six tackles, which includes the cornerback room's only sack, a fourth-quarter takedown of Iowa backup quarterback Brendan Sullivan.

Mathews also stepped in admirably for Burke after he was disqualified from the Western Michigan game for targeting. He played well enough in the game – recording just a single assisted tackle in the process – to receive high praise from Knowles in the days following.

"Jermaine is in that area I've talked about before, guys who might not be starters, but in our minds he's considered one," Knowles said. "He's a guy who has proven to be able to compete in the toughest games and situations, so he's kept himself prepared with a good attitude and came in and did a good job."

From a pessimistic perspective, the best

passing attack the Buckeyes faced before Oregon's Gabriel was that of Michigan State and Chiles, who, while supremely talented, has struggled mightily this year, completing just 56.6 percent of his passes and totaling eight interceptions.

Despite these obvious shortcomings, Chiles still managed a respectable passing day against Ohio State, throwing for 167 yards while completing 13 of 19 passes for a touchdown and an interception.

Chiles had a couple of impressive completions on third down against the Buckeyes' secondary, a down in which the group has shown some vulnerability in mediocre first-half performances against both Marshall and Michigan State.

In those games, Ohio State's pass defense conceded completions, allowing opposing passing attacks to convert on a third-and-3, a third-and-4, a third-and-8, and a third-and-10. Allowing opponents to convert on 32.1 percent of their third downs, the Buckeyes have still ranked in the top 30 in the country in third-down conversion percentage allowed, but it's likely something the unit wants to improve upon to be at the

championship level.

All of the issues that had previously flared up for Ohio State in dominant wins against lesser opponents were fully taken advantage of against Oregon. In a 341-yard passing day from Gabriel, the Buckeyes' zone coverage was largely ineffective, Hancock and Igbinosun were flagged for pass-interference penalties in the second half, the defense allowed conversions of multiple third-and-longs, and worst of all was that Burke had one of the worst games of his Buckeye career, giving up two completions of 69 yards and 48 yards and an additional 10-yard touchdown grab.

Going against perhaps the best passing offense the team will face all year in the regular season, the matchup against Oregon was in and of itself a bit of a midterm exam. The verdict on the Buckeyes' secondary is that it came out of its rigorous test looking more like "Burnt in Autzen" than the "Best in America" moniker often given to Buckeye secondaries.

BSB Midterm Grade: C+

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Return Game Showing Slight Improvement

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For two seasons, Parker Fleming served as Ohio State's special teams coordinator after serving as the quality control coach with the special teams units the season before that. One big complaint from fans during those three seasons was that the special team's units were average at best, which is not the standard expected from a program like Ohio State that sets its sights on being the best every season.

Head coach Ryan Day proved that he also felt that way over the offseason when he decided to fire Fleming, doling out those responsibilities to many of his coaches on staff. He also said that with Chip Kelly now calling plays for the offense, he would be able to be more involved with special teams so that he could make sure it's running the way he wants it to.

"I'm going to be very much involved with that," Day said in the spring. "(Quality control coach) Rob Keys, who's one of our analysts, he's allowed to coach the coaches. He can do a lot of legwork in terms of off-the-field stuff, breaking down the film, helping get things organized for us as we get into the meetings."

Day tabbed safeties coach Matt Guerrieri and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis as the two who would handle punt and kickoff duties, while tight ends coach Keenan Bailey and wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline would be in charge of returns.

In 2023, the Buckeyes were 67th nationally in kick returns with an average of 19.9 yards per return, attempting to take only 13 kicks back all season. When it came to punt returns, they were much worse than average. Their 4.4 yards per return on punts was 111th in the country, and they were 113th when it came to punt-return defense, allowing 12.4 yards per return on 11 tries. Net punting and kickoff return defense are where they were best, 36th in both with 40.4 yards per punt – helped by former Buckeye Jesse Mirco's outstanding Cotton Bowl performance – and only 17.9 yards allowed per kickoff return.

It seemed like – for a program with the resources that Ohio State has – the only way to go was up for special teams, and through six games, they have made incremental improvements. Here are Buckeye Sports Bulletin's grades for Ohio State special teams through the first six games of the season.

Kicking Game

Junior Jayden Fielding is in his second season starting for the Buckeyes, and for the most part, he has been exactly what the team has needed him to be. He has nailed 3 of 3 field goals, a 40-yarder in the season-opening win over Akron, a 30-yarder in the conference-opening win over Michigan State and another 40-yarder in Ohio State's 32-31 loss at Oregon.

He hasn't been needed much when it comes to field goals since the Buckeye offense has been able to reach the end zone when it gets into opponent territory and because Kelly and Day have not been afraid to go for it on fourth down this season, something the Buckeyes have had a lot of success with to this point. But in the third game of the season against Marshall, Fielding inexplicably

Rating The Specialists

Here is where the OSU specialists ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Oregon game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Net Punting	38.8	71st	15th
Punt Return Avg.	8.4	69th	10th
KO Return Avg.	12.3	133rd	18th
Punt Return Def.	3.5	23rd	3rd
KO Return Def.	17.3	36th	7th

started to struggle on kickoffs. He sent three straight kicks out of bounds, penalties that allowed the Thundering Herd to start their drives on the 35-yard line. After the third in a row, Fielding was left out to attempt one more extra point, but then former Findlay transfer and senior Austin Snyder was subbed in for kicking duties, which he did well in, booting two of his three kickoffs for touchbacks.

Three kickoffs sent out of bounds would be a lot for a kicker in a full season, let alone in the span of three tries, leaving Day searching for answers after the game.

"That's completely ridiculous," he said. "We've got to get that fixed however we do that. We can't have that. That's putting our defense in a terrible situation."

"You get to a point where you want to let somebody play through it," Day said, "but at another point, you have to make a change. I thought Austin did a nice job of stepping in there and kicking the ball."

At Day's next weekly press conference, he revealed that Fielding told him he had a "little tweak" earlier in the game that caused the kickoffs that went out the left boundary, but Day said the kicker needs to communicate that to him as soon as it happens if it does in the future.

"I just talked to him about his mindset, and he gave me some information just about a little tweak that he had, and he either has to make the correction or has to communicate to us that there was an issue," Day said. "So, I talked to him for a while, though, about that and how much we need him moving forward."

Fielding would reclaim his kicking duties over the next three games, not having any trouble sending the ball into the end zone for touchbacks.

Overall on kickoffs, the Buckeyes have had 34 touchbacks and have allowed an average of 17.3 yards per return, which is 36th in the country. Outside of the kickoffs out of bounds, this part of special teams has been solid.

BSB Midterm Grade: B-

Punting Game

After Mirco transferred, sophomore Joe McGuire was left in the room as the only punter on the team. But Day went out into the transfer portal to add Anthony Venneri from Buffalo and brought in freshman Nick McLarty from Australia, who entered campus with a lot of hype after he posted a video on his social media of him booting a punt over 90 yards out of a stadium this spring.

McLarty was the expected starter, though Day did say throughout the preseason that it would be a battle for the spot. In the week leading up to the game against Akron, Day named McLarty the starter, but when the Buckeyes' first drive stalled early on, McGuire trotted onto the field to boot his first career

punt. He has been the starter ever since.

"Going into last week, I felt like Nick was ahead of Joe," Day said after the game. "Joe had a much better week of practice leading up to (the game). We felt like Joe's experience in the program, being here for a year, was better. We wanted to go with the experienced guy in Week 1."

The 6-7, 255-pound McLarty didn't get in against the Zips, but he has had a couple of chances so far, booting a ball 35 yards in the blowout win over Western Michigan and then just 30 yards the game after that against the Herd.

Through six games, McGuire has been more efficient, averaging 41.3 yards per punt on 16 chances. Because he doesn't have as many chances as other punters have had since Ohio State has scored so much, he doesn't qualify for the individual leaderboards but would be tied for 55th of 72 qualified punters in the country. He has also been able to stick four punts inside the 20-yard line so far, which isn't close to the pace that Mirco was at last year, finishing with 18.

The Buckeyes as a whole are 71st in the country in net punting with an average of 38.8 yards per boot, a mark that is much lower than last season's average under Mirco. There is still a lot of room for improvement in this area.

BSB Midterm Grade: C-

Return Game

If the Buckeyes fail to return a punt for a touchdown before their Nov. 23 game against Indiana this season, it will have officially been over a decade since anyone in the program has accomplished that feat. Jalin Marshall was the last to do so against none other than the Hoosiers on Nov. 22, 2014, taking a kick back 54 yards in a 42-27 win.

It has been even longer than that since OSU returned a kickoff for a touchdown, the last one dating back to 2010 when Jordan Hall took one 85 yards against Michigan in a 37-7 win.

But before the season, Day had some confidence that there would be a return touchdown this year, and he made that confidence public.

"I'm going to guarantee it this year," Day joked during his Aug. 29 radio show on 97.1 The Fan. "I'm putting it out there."

Shortly after those comments, the Buckeyes opened up against the Zips, and Brandon Inniss seemed to be proving that confidence right, almost breaking free on a return that had a chance at becoming a score. He wasn't able to find the end zone, but he did return four punts for 60 yards, almost eclipsing last season's punt return total of 75 return yards in one game. Even though he didn't score, it was still a hugely positive outcome early on that Day was very pleased with.

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

"Brandon Inniss is an example of a couple of those on Saturday, in particular, the one that he returned. It was rolling down probably inside the 10-yard line. He stopped it and then

returned it back. That was probably three or four first downs on offense. That's a big deal."

Inniss talked about the approach he takes to returning punts the week after and why he thought the improvement showed up so quickly.

"I think having an aggressive mindset as a punt returner is what you need back there," Inniss said. "You can't play around when you're back there. You can't tiptoe. You've got to get the ball, make the first two guys miss and go."

"I think it's because our coaches are a lot more involved with special teams now," Inniss said. "They know how long it's been since we got a punt return. They made special teams a focus this offseason, and Coach Day plays a huge role in the special teams this year. And he believes in me to get the job done."

But since then, things haven't gone as well. In five more games, Inniss has had a total of 49 more return yards on punts, partly because of fewer chances to take one back with punters putting more air under the ball or sending kicks into the end zone.

The kickoff return game has been a different story. Jayden Ballard was tasked with the job to begin the season, but against Western Michigan, he had a poor game, highlighted by a fair catch on a bounced kick to start the second half which, by rule, stuck the Buckeyes where the ball was caught, on the 6-yard line. He had also muffed a punt that the Buckeyes were luckily able to jump on. After that, Day made some changes.

"We think that Jayden Ballard had a really good offseason," Day said. "He was recognized as a gold individual during the offseason, which is significant in our program. So we've given him the opportunity to return kicks and a couple of punts here. But the No. 1 thing is taking care of the football. So that has to happen."

Inniss was back to return kicks along with his regular punting duties against Marshall, though he didn't get any chances. Then Eg-buka was given the opportunity against Michigan State, but he also didn't have the chance to return any. Inniss was in the role against Iowa and Oregon and didn't have any opportunities again.

The biggest mistake in the kickoff return game was one against the Ducks on Oct. 12, when they were able to kick off from the 50-yard line due to a personal foul penalty after a touchdown. Andrew Boyle kicked a low line drive directly into Caleb Downs, the closest Ohio State player to the ball. He had no time to react, and the ball bounced off him to the ground where multiple Ducks were able to dive on top of it. It's hard to fault the return team for this play since it was either just extraordinary luck or great execution by Oregon, but it didn't help the unit's case.

Ohio State is currently 133rd in kickoff returns – dead last in the country – with an average of 12.33 yards per return and 69th in punt returns with 8.4 yards per return. The Buckeyes have shown signs of life but need to get back to the aggressiveness that Inniss showed in the season opener.

BSB Midterm Grade: D+

Johnson Tackles Position Move With Enthusiasm

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Paris Johnson Jr. had an excellent rookie season in 2023 with Arizona, playing every one of the 1,133 offensive snaps for the Cardinals.

The first tackle taken in the 2023 draft at the sixth spot and the first Ohio State offensive lineman selected in the top 10 since 2016 Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee Orlando Pace in 1997 (No. 1 to the Los Angeles Rams) proved to be a worthy pick for his performance at right tackle.

Johnson (6-6, 313) allowed 42 pressures and eight sacks last season. He didn't allow a sack in his final three games and gave up just one total hurry over the final two games.

So, what was his reward? A move to left tackle, which means differences in technique and responsibilities. For a player entering his second season in the NFL, it might be a daunting change.

Historically, left tackles are more athletic and agile to protect the "blind side" of right-handed quarterbacks from pass rushers.

Fortunately for Johnson, he is comfortable on the left side of the line, where he was an All-American for the Buckeyes in 2022 after allowing two sacks with 12 pressures in 449 pass-blocking snaps. He told Arizona Sports (98.7 FM) in May that the decision was both challenging and familiar.

"One, it takes time to switch. At the same time, I've already done it at a high level," he said in reference to Ohio State. "I haven't done it at the pro level yet, but I've taken a lot of reps at a high level at left tackle. I think it is just about getting back in that routine because the techniques and the fundamentals we learn here in our offensive line room, it works left or right.

"It doesn't change at all. Now it's really more about feet, your balance, which foot are you trying to drive off with now? Which foot are you trying to dig in the ground a little bit more now? That's really just the reps."

It's no surprise, really, that Johnson is a fast learner. He graduated in less than three years with a degree in journalism and worked for the school newspaper, The Lantern. He was a two-time Academic All-Big Ten and OSU Scholar-Athlete.

The Cincinnati native spent his first three high school seasons playing for Ohio football powerhouse St. Xavier before finishing at Princeton. The five-star prospect was the No. 9 player overall in the class of 2020 by 247Sports' composite rankings and the nation's top tackle.

He played five games as a freshman, mostly at guard for the Buckeyes, including the College Football Playoff championship game against Alabama.

In 2021, Johnson began his streak of 26 consecutive starts over the next two seasons by starting 13 games at right guard. The Buckeyes were No. 1 nationally that season in total offense (561.5 yards per game) and scoring (45.7) while finishing No. 3 in passing offense (380.9).

His junior season he helped the Buckeyes to a No. 2 ranking in scoring (44.2) and a No. 9 ranking in total offense (490.7) while protecting C.J. Stroud's blind side at

left tackle.

Johnson was drafted 24 years and 100 days after his father, Paris Johnson Sr., was selected by Arizona in the fifth round (No. 155) of the 1999 draft. The elder Johnson, a safety, spent the 1999 season with the Cardinals but never played a regular season game.

Being A Mainstay

Now that Johnson, 23, is in his second NFL season, he's made it a point to become a voice in the locker room.

"I came in knowing I was going to be a huge part of this team starting that first year, but at the same time, I never wanted to be that guy who comes in the first year and says, 'This is my room now,'" Johnson said. "I want to be able to add to the room, and I want to be respected by the room before my leadership role begins to develop and become more established.

"I think personally, just year two, it's being able to fulfill all of the expectations that I have for myself, expectations that the team has for me being here. My goal ultimately is to be the best tackle in the game."

He feels in order to attain that status he needs longevity. As a youngster he was able to watch a pair of offensive linemen for his hometown Cincinnati Bengals and has always appreciated how they went about their business: tackles Andrew Whitworth, who spent the first 11 of his 16 seasons with the Bengals before retiring after five seasons with the Rams in 2021, and Willie Anderson, who played a dozen seasons in Cincinnati before a final one for the Baltimore Ravens in 2008.

"I feel like just as a young guy in the game, I like to watch the greats of the game," Johnson said. "I like to watch guys like Whitworth, of course, Willie Anderson when he played on the right side ... to be able to learn from their story, their journey and how they developed. I want my game to be able to be like theirs in a way to where it's being talked about in a way of like, 'That's a guy you need to watch. Just to watch the fight that he played with, the finish that he played with, the technique he played with,' because those guys played almost 20 years.

"When you're 36, 37 years old, you're probably not as strong as you used to be. But that technique and skill set, that's something that I admire."

Johnson is a sponge who loves absorbing advice from current players such as 13-year veteran tackle Kevin Beachum.

"Just learning how to be a pro," Johnson said of what he's picked from his teammate. "For example, I'm a guy that when I like to train by myself, I take a thousand reps of a set, a thousand reps of a reachable outcome. Rep, rep, rep, rep until I figure out 100 times in a row perfect. It's something 'Beach' was talking about in terms of being a pro."

So far, the transition to left tackle has gone smoothly for Johnson, according to Pro Football Focus.

"It was only a matter of time before Johnson burst onto the scene. Last year's sixth overall pick has looked like a high-profile selection in 2024, posting an 83.5 PFF overall grade that ranks ninth among tackles,"



FILE PHOTO

NEW HOME — Paris Johnson Jr. played every offensive down at right tackle as a rookie for the Arizona Cardinals in 2023 but has made a smooth transition to left tackle with the task of protecting quarterback Kyler Murray.

PFF's Bradley Locker wrote. "Johnson has put his blue-chip traits on display across the board — especially in run blocking, where he boasts an 80.6 mark. A nice complement is his pass protection, where he has surrendered only five pressures on 129 opportunities."

Cardinals head coach Jonathan Gannon is not surprised by Johnson's progress.

"I think he's done a good job," he said. "He continues to work on his game. He's been good in pass pro (protection). His attention to detail and his enthusiasm and effort to get better (stands out). I think he puts a lot on himself. He's a very prideful guy, and he wants to be one of the best out there, and he's doing a good job."

Reunion

Johnson, who had Justin Fields and Stroud as his quarterbacks at Ohio State, takes pride in preventing sacks.

"I'm the type of person where I love pass protection," Johnson said. "That's my favorite thing in the world to hear a pass play called, I love it. But I want to take the same demeanor I have toward pass protection in the run game as well. I want to be seen as a powerful run blocker as well, consistent play after play after play."

Cardinals quarterback Kyler Murray is impressed with Johnson's maturity.

"He's a younger guy, but he's growing into his own, becoming a leader each and every day," he said. "He's very versatile in the sense that he's able to be a very funny guy off the field but when we go to war it's time

to go. He's locked-in. You almost can't talk to him, because he's so emotional."

One of those happy times for Johnson was when the Cardinals drafted wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., a Buckeye teammate in 2021 and 2022. When Johnson was drafted, he immediately called Harrison, who replied that he also wanted to play in Arizona. A year later it became a reality.

"I just really loved the Cardinals," Harrison told Arizona Sports. "Watching them growing up, Larry Fitzgerald being one of the best receivers in the league for a long period of time, the Cardinals always caught my eye. It's crazy how it's all come full circle."

The pair have been able to resume the touchdown celebration from their Ohio State days when Johnson would hoist Harrison. They've done it four times, including against the Washington Commanders on Sept. 29, although that one didn't quite go as planned.

"This past touchdown he scored, I went to lift him and he didn't jump. I had to do a strict press in the air," Johnson said. "He's been assisting me, but that was straight me just power lifting him in the air."

"It was all right. We still got a picture, but that was a lot more effort than I'm used to. If he's not jumping, I'm just going to pat him on the head, say, 'Let's go,' and keep it moving, because that was a lot of energy."

If that's the worst problem they have, the Cardinals may be in good shape for years to come.

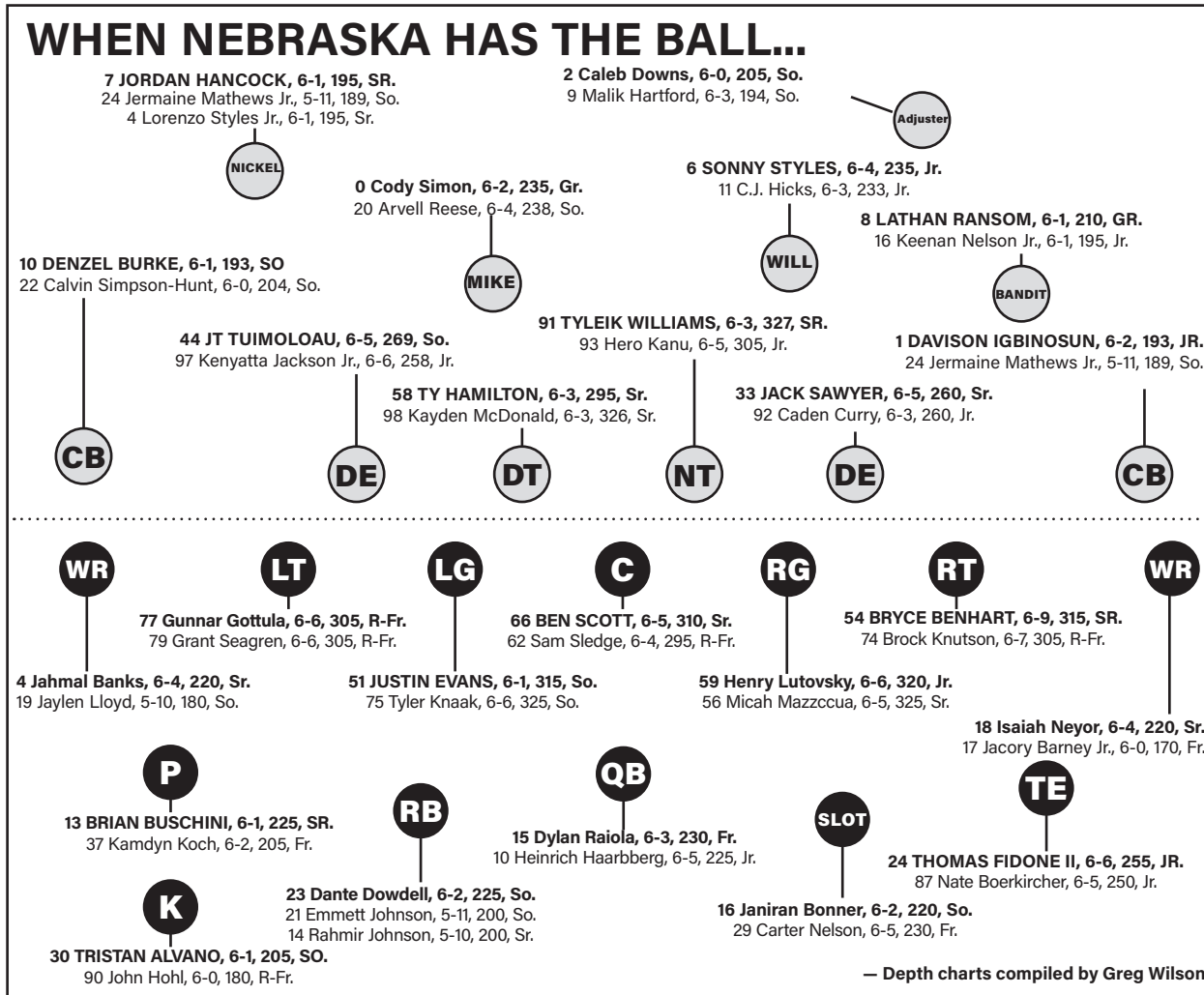
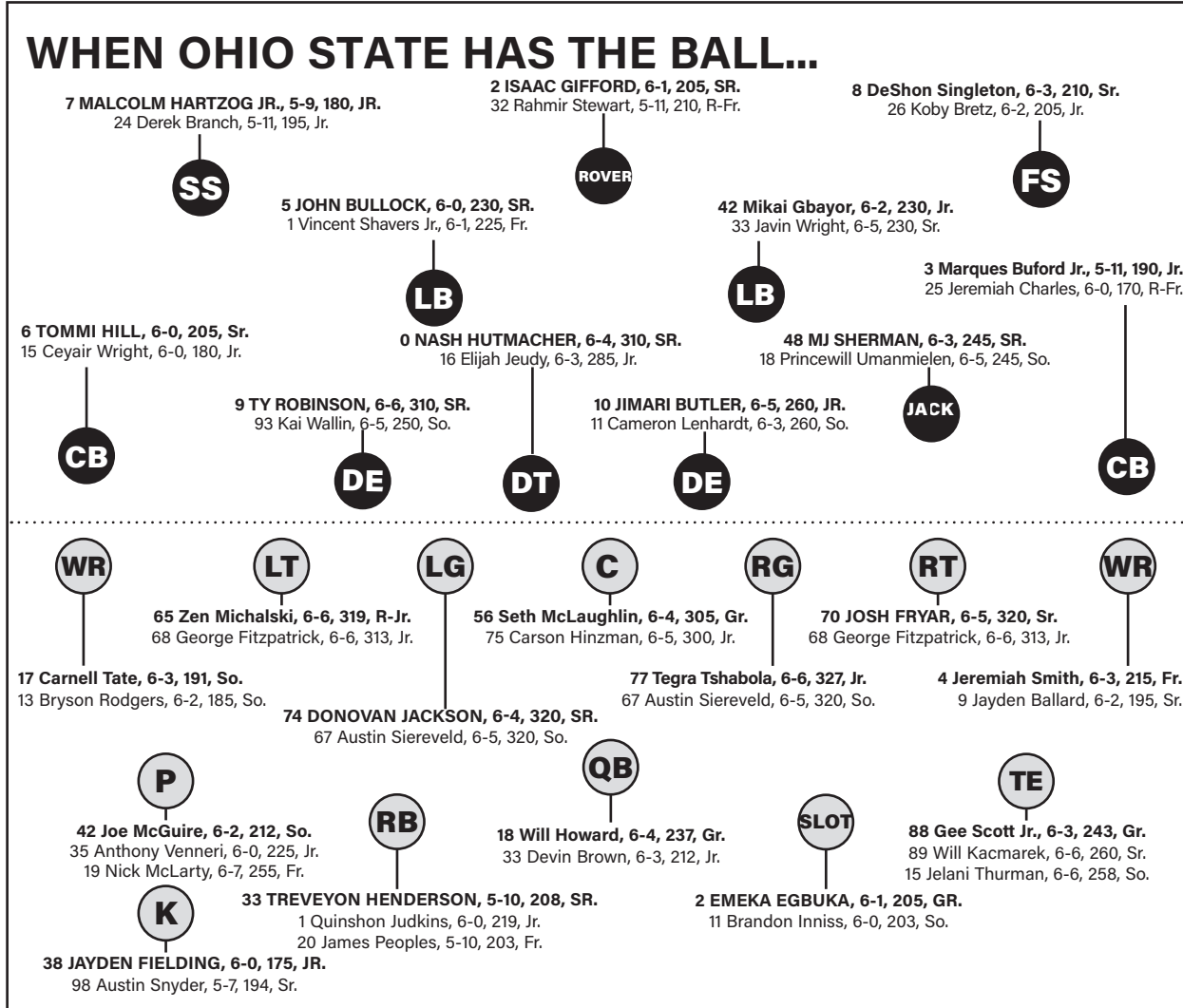


Nebraska at Ohio State

Saturday, Oct. 26 • TBA • TBA
Ohio Stadium; Columbus



Projected Depth Charts



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. NEBRASKA RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes will have two weeks to stew over losing 32-31 at Oregon on Oct. 12. OSU ran for 141 yards (4.3 yards per carry) with TreVeyon Henderson gaining 87 (8.7), but Quinshon Judkins getting only 23 (2.1). The potential long-term loss to injury of left tackle Josh Simmons looms large. Nebraska was idle Oct. 12 in preparation to play at Indiana a week later so the most recent result was a 14-7 win over visiting Rutgers on Oct. 5.

All you need to know about the Cornhuskers is they are the only team in the country this season to not allow a rushing touchdown. OK, there's more. They limited Rutgers to 78 yards on 32 carries and allowing 2.7 yards per carry through six games puts them near the top of the national stats. They have held opponents to 10 or fewer points in five of six games while their 11.3 points given up places them in the top 10. A strong rush defense has enabled the Huskers to hold 13 consecutive opponents below 400 yards, including Rutgers (264). **EDGE: EVEN**

NEBRASKA RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Cornhuskers average 136.7 yards rushing a game with just 3.9 yards an attempt, although they have scored 11 TDs. Dante Dowell led the way against Rutgers with 57 yards (4.1 avg.) and a touchdown. He tops the team with five rushing scores and has 334 yards (4.5 avg.). A player to watch is versatile wide receiver Jacory Barney Jr. He has rushed for 104 yards on just seven carries (14.9 avg.) with two TDs and has caught 19 passes for 149 yards (7.8 avg.). The Buckeyes were gashed for 115 yards (5.0) by Jordan James and quarterback Dillon Gabriel had a 27-yard touchdown run. Expect the Buckeyes to do better. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. NEBRASKA PASS DEFENSE

Will Howard was a tidy 28 of 35 for 326 yards and two touchdowns plus a running TD but he's having trouble holding the snap and his poor decision to run in the last play of the game was disheartening. Egbuka Emeka made 10 catches for 93 yards and a TD while Jeremiah Smith had nine catches for 100 yards and a score. There should be some good battles with Nebraska.

The Cornhuskers are seventh nationally in generating pressure against opposing quarterbacks at a 41.3 percent rate, according to Pro Football Focus College. Their 20 sacks are in the top 10. Ty Robinson is the team's top sacker with four. Nebraska had four sacks vs. Rutgers. The Scarlet Knights entered the game allowing four sacks in their first four outings. Senior rover Isaac Gifford in that game had a team-high eight tackles, including 1 1/2 for loss and a pass breakup. **EDGE: EVEN**

NEBRASKA PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Freshman Dylan Raiola, a former Buckeye commit, has completed 66.9 percent of his passes for 1,358 yards with nine touchdowns against three interceptions. The Huskers average 244.7 passing yards a game and have allowed 12 sacks, or two per game. The top receiver is Jahmal Banks with 21 receptions for 283 yards (13.5 avg.) and two TDs. OSU was torched by Gabriel for 341 yards and two touchdowns. Evan Stewart (seven catches for 149 yards and a TD) was nearly unstoppable and Tez Johnson had seven for 75 with a 48-yard TD. OSU looked far from being one of the top air defenses in the country. **EDGE: NEBRASKA**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Brian Buschini averaged 50.2 yards on five punts vs. Rutgers, including two of 60-plus yards. The Cornhuskers have had two of their field goals and three punts blocked. Jayden Fielding made a 40-yard field goal under pressure for the Buckeyes. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

The Cornhuskers a plus-6 on turnovers. They have committed four (three interceptions, one fumble) and forced 10 (seven interceptions, three fumbles). The Huskers have not lost the turnover battle against any opponent. Ohio State needs to regroup and use the off week to get ready for the second half of the season. There's a lot to work with but Oregon really exposed the secondary. **EDGE: NEBRASKA**

STAFF PREDICTION

Losing the way the Buckeyes did with the goal line in site was similar to how the Michigan game last season ended. If the Buckeyes don't take the Huskers seriously, this could get ugly. **OHIO STATE 35, NEBRASKA 17**

— Depth charts compiled by Greg Wilson

Cornhuskers Hoping To Prove Themselves

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Head coach Matt Rhule took the job at Nebraska at the end of the 2022 season with the goal of bringing the once-great Cornhuskers program back to the heights it had once attained, winning two national titles in the early 1970s and three more in the 1990s, while playing a lot of good football in between.

Last season was the program's seventh consecutive campaign with a losing record, finishing 5-7 in Rhule's first year at the helm, although it was the best record the Huskers had achieved in the past four years. Eight of the team's 30 losing seasons in the school's entire history have come in the past decade.

But a newfound confidence emanated from the program as it was able to retain many different starters despite its 3-6 finish in the Big Ten in 2023, good for a fourth-place tie in the West division. Another reason for that is freshman quarterback Dylan Raiola, who has gotten off to a hot start in his young career.

Once upon a time, the five-star Raiola was committed to Ohio State, decommitting seven months after he pledged his services and committing to Georgia in January of 2023. He would remain committed to the Bulldogs for most of 2023 up until right before the early signing period when he would flip to Rhule and Nebraska – where his father, Dominic, played center from 1997-2000 and won the Rimmington Award for the best at his position his senior year – enrolling early with the team.

He acclimated himself to college football fairly quickly, being named the starter by Rhule before the season started over returning junior quarterback Heinrich Haarberg, who was 77 of 157 throwing the ball for 967 yards, seven touchdowns and seven interceptions in eight starts in 2023.

The task of trying to return a program to national prominence was a lot of pressure to put on the shoulders of a 19-year-old, but he was ready to take it on since he was able to work through learning the speed of the game in the spring.

"Spring was getting adjusted to the speed, getting the plays down and just getting comfortable in the system," Raiola said on Aug. 27. "The summer was from more of a physical standpoint, taking care of my body and getting it ready for fall camp and the season.

"Buckle up. It's going to be a fun ride," Raiola said when asked what his message to Husker fans was.

Nebraska has started the season 5-1, with its most notable wins to this point coming against Colorado (28-10 on Sept. 7) and Rutgers (14-7 on Oct. 5), both games at Memorial Stadium.

Through six games, the freshman quarterback has completed 113 of 169 passes for 1,358 yards and nine touchdowns and three interceptions. He has had a strong pocket presence in his first season but hasn't been able to do too much when he has to leave it with minus-78 rushing yards due to 12 sacks given up by the offensive line.

Rutgers is the strongest passing defense Raiola has had to go against to this point with 187.0 yards allowed per game through the air, and in that game, the freshman struggled to get much going. He completed just 48.1 percent of his passes (13 of 27) for 124 yards and

took four sacks.

Ohio State's secondary could give him an even tougher look, with the Buckeyes' veteran defensive line also forcing him to get the ball out quicker.

But what has helped Raiola to this point has been his offensive line, which has three returning starters – sophomore left guard Justin Evans, senior center Ben Scott and senior right tackle Bryce Benhart. They are joined by redshirt freshman left tackle Gunnar Gottula and junior right guard Henry Lutovsky.

The experience on the line has likely been very useful for the young quarterback when it comes to reading college defenses.

Despite the experience, the line has been part of a rushing offense that is 90th in the country with 136.7 yards per game. The backfield is led by sophomore Dante Dowell, who leads in attempts with 74, rushing for 334 yards and five touchdowns. He has been relieved by both fellow sophomore Emmett Johnson, who has 35 rushes for 207 yards and a score, and senior Rahmir Johnson, who has 36 runs for 147 yards. Of the three backs, Rahmir Johnson is the biggest threat in the passing game, fourth on the team with 16 catches, taking those for 146 yards and a score.

One thing Rhule has been very pleased with is Raiola's ability to spread the ball around in the offense, something the coach said surprised him.

"We've had the ability to get the ball to a bunch of different people," Rhule said. "You can't sit there and key in on, 'Hey, they really like to favor (Isaiah) Neyor, hey, they really like to favor this guy.' We're able to go out and throw general tempo dropbacks, and we're holding up in protections. Emmett and Rahmir were excellent at blitzes. I think that's allowed us to do some catch-and-run type thing. If we can stay on the field a little bit more, maybe get a few more turnovers with the defense, we'll really see some explosive things happen."

The pass catchers getting the ball the most have been Jahmal Banks, Jacory Barney Jr., Neyor and tight end Thomas Fidone II, along with Rahmir Johnson. Banks leads the squad with 21 grabs for 283 yards and two touchdowns, but Neyor has been most effective at finding the end zone with four touchdowns coming from 17 catches and 291 yards. Fidone is more than just a blocking tight end, with 14 receptions for 127 yards.

On the other side of the ball, the Huskers have been strong, especially against the run, and there is good reason. They are returning eight starters from last season, three of whom are on the defensive line in the 3-3-5 system that defensive coordinator Tony White runs.

Seniors Ty Robinson and Nash Hutmacher and junior Jimari Butler have been a strong defensive front for Nebraska, allowing just 84.2 yards per game on the ground through six games, which was good for seventh in the country. Hutmacher has been able to make the most stops of the three with 16 tackles (three for loss), while he also has two sacks and a quarterback hurry. Robinson has been the best on the team at getting into the backfield with a team-high six tackles for loss (14 total tackles), four sacks, two quarterback hurries and three passes broken up.

One of those tackles for loss went for a safety in the season opener against UTEP, a

Get To Know ... Nebraska

- **2024 Record:** 5-1, 2-1 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread option; Defensive Formation – 3-3-5; Starters Returning – Offense 4, Defense 8, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** Matt Rhule, 2nd year at Nebraska, 10-8.
- **Series History:** 11th meeting; Ohio State leads 9-1.
- **School Facts:** Location – Lincoln, Neb.; Enrollment – 49,749; Nickname – Cornhuskers; Colors – Scarlet, Cream; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Memorial Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 85,458).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Dante Dowdell	74	334	4.5	5
Emmett Johnson	35	207	5.9	1
Rahmir Johnson	36	147	4.1	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Dylan Raiola	133-169	66.9	1,358	9-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jahmal Banks	21	283	13.5	2
Jacory Barney Jr.	19	149	7.8	0
Isaiah Neyor	17	291	17.1	4
Rahmir Johnson	16	146	9.1	1
Thomas Fidone II	14	127	9.1	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 28.0
Rushing Yards Per Game – 136.7
Passing Yards Per Game – 244.7
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 381.3

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	UTEP	W, 40-7
Sept. 7	COLORADO	W, 28-10
Sept. 14	NORTHERN IOWA	W, 34-3
Sept. 20	ILLINOIS	L, 31-24 (OT)
Sept. 28	at Purdue	W, 28-10
Oct. 5	RUTGERS	W, 14-7
Oct. 19	at Indiana	TBA
Oct. 26	at Ohio State	TBA
Nov. 2	UCLA	TBA
Nov. 16	at USC	TBA
Nov. 23	WISCONSIN	TBA
Nov. 29	at Iowa	7:30 p.m.
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
John Bullock	17	16	33	5-11	2-3
Isaac Gifford	12	20	32	3-6	0-0
Mikai Gbayor	11	19	30	2.5-4	0-0
DeShon Singleton	18	11	29	1-1	0-0
M. Hartzog Jr.	16	6	22	0-0	0-0
Nash Hutmacher	10	6	16	3-16	2-15
Ceyair Wright	12	4	16	1-5	1-5
M. Buford Jr.	8	7	15	0-0	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
M. Hartzog Jr.	2	15	7.5	0
John Bullock	1	35	35	1
Tommi Hill	1	7	7	1

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 11.3
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 84.2
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 188.3
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 272.5

minus-3-yard stop in the end zone which gave the Cornhuskers a 9-7 second-quarter lead and the ball back at the time.

While safeties are good, Rhule is challenging his defensive linemen to start trying to force a fumble when they're able to get to the quarterback, something they haven't been able to do in six contests.

"Even in the game we lost, we won the turnover margin," Rhule said before the Huskers' matched up against Rutgers. "I'd still love to see us get way more. We have five sacks, but no sacks with fumbles. That's not good enough. I say that because the guys in our meeting – Ty Robinson – comes and barrels through and sacks the quarterback. He's the first one to say, 'I should have knocked the ball out there.' There are a lot of places we have to improve."

White utilizes the Jack position, with MJ Sherman starting in the hybrid defensive end, linebacker role. He has had 14 stops, 2½ sacks and four quarterback hurries going into the Huskers' game against Indiana, which will take place during the Buckeyes' off week.

The two full-time linebackers are junior Mikai Gbayor and returning starter John Bullock. Bullock leads the team in tackles with 33 (five for loss), along with a pair of sacks, two quarterback hurries, a forced fumble and an interception, but Gbayor is not far behind with 30 (2½ for loss). Bullock has been at Nebraska longer than his head coach, and Rhule praised the linebacker for his drive to continue to improve.

"I like the fact that he is a sixth-year player, and he just keeps getting better," Rhule said. "He's still a young player in terms of his development as a linebacker, but he gets better, and better and better. He's always working on something. He's working on getting off blocks,

or striking, or blitz patterns, or playing man. If all of our team was like John in terms of the constant search for improvement and deliberate practice, we'd have a hard time losing."

The Huskers also have three returners in the secondary. Senior Isaac Gifford runs the rover spot, which has the same responsibilities as the nickel position – a title held at Ohio State by Jordan Hancock – in terms of being a little more involved in stopping the run game, while senior cornerback Tommi Hill and junior safety Malcolm Hartzog Jr. are both back from the 2023 team. Gifford has 30 stops this season – second on the team behind Bullock – with three of them going for a loss. He also has one pass breakup and a quarterback hurry.

Hill has been dealing with plantar fasciitis and hadn't played in Nebraska's last two games as BSB went to press. Rhule was expecting him to get into the Huskers Oct. 19 matchup against Indiana, but he will likely still be dealing with some pain when he gets back onto the field, something that could linger into Oct. 26 when they visit Ohio State.

Safety DeShon Singleton and cornerback Marques Buford Jr. are the new starters, and Singleton is taking full advantage of his opportunity as the team's fourth-leading tackler with 29 stops and a fumble recovery.

It's been so long since Nebraska has been the dominant team that it was for decades that ever since it joined the Big Ten – since 2011 – it has only had five winning seasons. The Huskers are well on pace to snap their streak of losing seasons, and if they want to make a statement about being back to acting as a serious force in the world of college football, coming into Columbus against one of the national title favorites would be the time for them to do it.

1944 Title Won Despite Reluctant Coach, Star Player

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 1944 season of transition as Ohio State posts a perfect record and wins a national championship the school does not recognize.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

The Ohio State football program has celebrated only six unbeaten-untied seasons during its 135-year history, and perhaps the most imperfect of those perfect campaigns was the 9-0 record turned in by the 1944 Buckeyes.

While World War II continued to rage across Europe and in the South Pacific with no end in sight, the head coach really didn't want the job, the star player had to be coaxed into playing, and most of the rest of the roster was filled with fuzzy-faced freshmen and young men who had earned a draft rating of 4-F – not qualified for military service for physical, mental or moral reasons.

Then, when the team defeated every opponent and was honored as "Civilian National Champions," the school declined to recognize the achievement.

Ohio State, at least with regard to its football program, was finally right where it wanted to be in the early 1940s. It had hired one of the rising stars in the coaching profession in 1941, and just one year later, 34-year-old Paul Brown had led the Buckeyes to their first national championship.

Lynn St. John had been director of athletics since 1912, and in Brown, he thought he had finally laid the foundation upon which he could build a national football powerhouse. But almost as soon as that foundation had been set in place, it began to crumble due to forces completely outside St. John's control.

The United States had been thrown into World War II after the Japanese attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, and nearly every able-bodied young man enlisted to fight overseas. That included Brown, who just a few days after leading a depleted roster of Buckeyes to a 3-6 finish in 1943 began preparations for reporting to Great Lakes Naval Training Station to accept a commission as a lieutenant junior grade in the U.S. Navy.

Although he was leaving the program, Brown and St. John worked out an agreement whereby the coach would return to Ohio State following the war with assistant Carroll Widdoes serving as head coach in the interim. Widdoes had come to Ohio State with Brown from Massillon High School, where the duo helped lead the Tigers to five state championships six years.

Widdoes served as backfield coach for Brown at Massillon and assumed the same duties in Columbus. He also served as Brown's stand-in at a variety of functions including booster club rallies and alumni association meetings when the head coach was unable to attend. So when Brown enlisted in the Navy, it seemed only natural that Widdoes would take over the Ohio State program.



FILE PHOTO

GLAD HE DID — Leslie Horvath, a member of the 1942 national championship team coached by Paul Brown, had to be persuaded to play the 1944 season. The Buckeyes went undefeated, and he won the school's first Heisman Trophy.

There was only one hitch. Widdoes didn't really want the job.

Carroll Curtis Widdoes was born Dec. 3, 1903, in the Philippines, one of six children to Dr. Harold W. Widdoes and his wife, Alice. Dr. Widdoes was a native of Wichita, Kan., and a graduate of the University of Kansas who became an ordained minister and a member of the United Brethren Mission.

He and his wife spent 40 years as missionaries in the Philippines, spending most of their time on the island of Luzon just north of the capital city of Manila. The couple were among the only English translators in the area, and they formed regular Bible study groups while translating scripture into the native Ilocano language.

When the Japanese invaded the Philippines just a few hours after their attack on Pearl Harbor, many missionaries – including Dr. Widdoes and his wife – were detained. Eventually, they were imprisoned for several years at a concentration camp at Los Baños located at the base of a dormant volcano on the southern tip of Luzon.

While his parents were in the Philippines, Carroll spent much of his childhood in the United States living with relatives. He graduated in 1926 from Otterbein College where he was an athletic star, earning varsity letters in track, basketball, baseball and football. His first love seemed to be basketball, and he earned All-Ohio Athletic Conference honors as a college senior.

Widdoes soon began pursuing a teaching career, which led him to Massillon, where he met Brown for the first time. The two men could not have been more opposite. Brown was strong-minded and straightforward while Widdoes was quiet and unassuming. Still, the two struck up a friendship with Brown believing Widdoes was the perfect counterbalance to his own sometimes-prickly personality.

It was a relationship that worked well – at least until the time Brown left Ohio State with Widdoes as his hand-picked placeholder.

Never one for the limelight, Widdoes was content in his role as assistant coach. He wasn't sure he ever wanted to be head of

his own program, but there was one thing of which he was sure. If he was going to be head coach somewhere someday, it was going to be with no strings attached. Being named interim head coach with the specter of Brown hanging over him wasn't exactly his idea of job security.

Still, his nature wouldn't allow him to turn down the opportunity especially since the program was in a bind. Widdoes understood his role in the transition process and accepted it – at least for the time being.

"Carroll Widdoes was such a good guy, such a gentleman," former OSU player Robert Dove told *The Columbus Dispatch* in 2012. Dove played halfback and punted for the Buckeyes during the 1944 season.

"I know he was conflicted about taking the job. And you don't really know what he was going through with his parents in a concentration camp. That alone would put a strain on anyone. Then, add being head football coach at Ohio State. But you'd never know it being around him."

Meanwhile, Widdoes and his staff were faced with the task of putting together a roster that could at least compete with an upcoming schedule that featured such powerful conference rivals as Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan as well as nonleague foes such as Missouri, Pittsburgh and a team from the Great Lakes base that just happened to have Brown as its head coach.

Star Needed Coaxing

In 1944, there were more pressing concerns facing American teenagers than blocking and tackling. Their choice was often which branch of the military in which they would enlist on their way overseas.

Still, there were many young men who weren't on their way to Europe or the South Pacific, and although there were some who suggested a suspension of college athletics, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was not among them. Roosevelt was no great fan of college football, but he wanted the game to continue during wartime as a national morale booster.

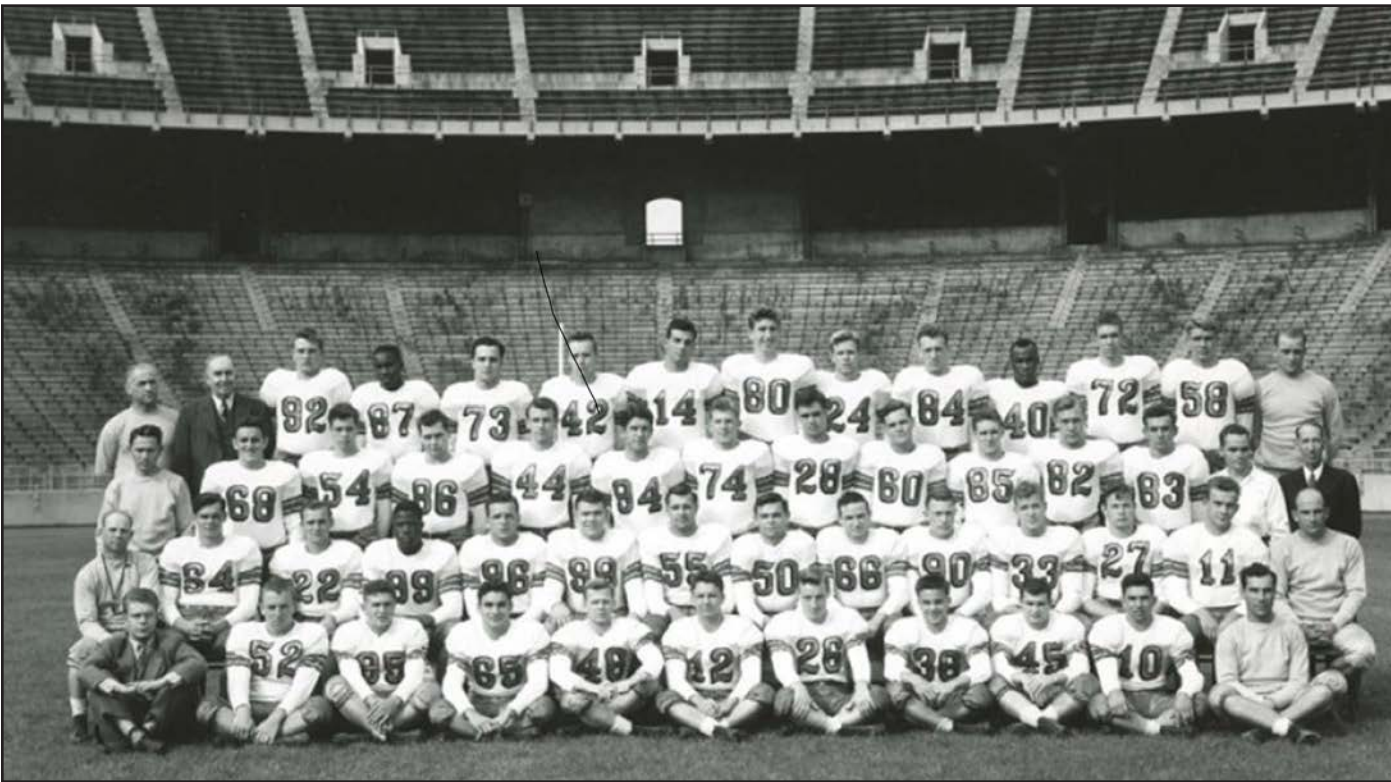
With the exception of the military academies and training bases, a shortage of players affected most college programs, leaving them filled mostly with freshmen too young for the draft and a handful of older players who didn't or couldn't meet military physical requirements.

Ohio State was no exception. The roster included 31 freshmen joined by just five sophomores, three juniors and five seniors.

But Widdoes had an ace in the hole – or so he thought.

Leslie Horvath's college football days were supposed to be behind him. He had been a vital part of Ohio State's national championship season in 1942 as a junior halfback and had already earned three varsity letters for the Buckeyes. But football was now an afterthought.

Horvath had stayed on campus in 1943 to finish his studies as part of the U.S. Army's Specialized Training Programs throughout the country. Those who were involved in those programs were thought of as soldiers just the same as those overseas; therefore, Horvath was barred from playing during what would have been his senior year.



FILE PHOTO

UNSTOPPABLE SEASON — The Buckeyes in 1944 were 9-0 for coach Carroll Widdoes, the Otterbein College graduate subbing for head coach Paul Brown during World War II, and finished second to Army in the Associated Press poll, although they were given the mythical title “National Civilian Champions.”

But in 1944, with his commitment to the military training program completed, Horvath was concentrating on wrapping up his senior year in the Ohio State College of Dentistry. He had other opportunities as well, including an offer of \$7,000 to play professional football for the Cleveland Rams.

That was when Ohio State football re-entered the picture. Widdoes met with Horvath and told the former star that if he would come back and play for the Buckeyes, he would be their starting quarterback. Horvath listened but politely declined the offer.

Widdoes met with Horvath several more times, each time sweetening the deal just a little. The coach explained that he felt he had a good team, but that it needed an experienced leader. Horvath could set his own practice schedule and travel to away games on his own. The university would even look into providing him with a private plane to get to away games. No matter how much Widdoes offered, though, Horvath refused to budge.

Finally, longtime assistant coach Ernie Godfrey asked Widdoes if he could take a shot at Horvath.

“Unless you know something I don’t, he’s made up his mind not to play,” the exasperated Widdoes said. “But go ahead. See what you can do.”

Godfrey met Horvath at the student union and went over everything Widdoes had already offered, but to no avail. Finally, the assistant breathed a heavy sigh, shook his head and got to his feet.

“Well, I guess you know best,” Godfrey said as he stuck out his hand. “You’ve been out of football for a year, and you probably figure it would have been kind of hard for you to go back and get in shape. Heck, you might not even have made the team anyway. Best of luck to you, Les.”

That was a challenge that Horvath simply could not refuse. Godfrey didn’t make it

to the door before Horvath called him back. And when the Buckeyes reported for training camp that fall, the soon-to-be 23-year-old was in uniform and ready to go.

Unblemished Season

Widdoes was smart enough not to stray too much from a winning formula, and with Horvath running an offensive attack straight out of Brown’s playbook, the Buckeyes rolled to a 54-0 blowout of Missouri in the 1944 season opener. Ohio State enjoyed a lopsided 466-168 advantage in total yardage, and it would have been even more one-sided had Horvath’s 87-yard touchdown run in the third quarter not been nullified by a holding penalty.

One week later, the team opened Big Ten play with a 34-0 shutout of Iowa. Horvath led the attack on the Hawkeyes with 118 yards on 16 carries, including the first touchdown of the game on a 9-yard reverse.

It marked the first time in five years the Buckeyes had begun a season with consecutive shutouts, and they shot up to No. 8 in The Associated Press national rankings. But while Missouri was on its way to a 3-5-2 season and Iowa was headed for a 1-7 record and last place in the conference, Ohio State was ready to take a huge step up in competition.

The first road test of the season was at No. 19 Wisconsin, a team featuring All-America halfback Earl “Jug” Girard and led by ninth-year head coach Harry Stuhldreher, a Massillon native and member of the famed “Four Horsemen” backfield at Notre Dame in the 1920s.

Wisconsin had provided the only blemish on Ohio State’s national championship résumé two years before, winning a 17-7 decision at Camp Randall Stadium that became known as the “Bad Water Game.” Members of the OSU team unknowingly drank contaminated water on the train ride to Madison, causing a massive attack of dysentery throughout the team. As a result,

the Buckeyes played the Badgers at less-than-full strength.

This time, team members and coaches made sure there was no repeat, loading their own supply of water aboard the train in Columbus under armed guard.

Once in Madison, OSU took the opening possession of the game 75 yards for a touchdown and protected that 7-0 lead into the third quarter when Wisconsin tied things on a 1-yard touchdown plunge from Girard. But in the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes scored twice – the first set up when All-America lineman Bill Hackett partially blocked a punt, and the second after Horvath returned an interception to the Wisconsin 14-yard line.

After that, Horvath scored on a short touchdown burst to give Ohio State a 20-7 victory.

That set up one of most anticipated games of the season pitting the now No. 4-ranked Buckeyes and the Brown-coached Great Lakes team, which was ranked No. 6. The Ohio Stadium crowd of 73,477 – then the fifth-largest crowd in stadium history – serenaded Brown with a thunderous ovation when the coach brought his team on the field.

On paper, it was something of a mismatch. Brown had assembled a team of college all-stars including former and future Ohio State end Cy Souders and halfback Ara Parseghian of Miami (Ohio), while Widdoes had built his team around Horvath. That apparently was enough as Horvath scored a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns to allow the Buckeyes to pull away with a 26-6 victory.

If there was any animosity between the two coaches, they didn’t show it before, during or after the game. In fact, both Widdoes and Brown joined St. John for dinner that evening at the Neil House in downtown Columbus.

The Buckeyes moved up a spot in the national rankings the following week af-

ter a 34-14 win against Minnesota and got as high as No. 2 after dispatching No. 15 Indiana by a 21-7 final in early November. But a 54-19 decision against a Pitt team on its way to a 4-5 finish was apparently not impressive enough, and the Buckeyes dropped two spots in the AP poll to No. 4.

That set the stage for the season’s penultimate game, a neutral-site showdown against Illinois. The Fighting Illini had been a thorn in OSU’s side during the early part of the rivalry, but the Buckeyes entered the 1944 contest with a nine-game win streak in the series. A crowd of 83,627 packed its way into Municipal Stadium in Cleveland, at the time the largest crowd to watch a sporting event in the city’s history.

Because of a printing error, duplicate tickets had been sold, resulting in the sale of more tickets than seats available. Temporary bleachers were set up near the sidelines to accommodate the overflow.

Halfback Bob Brugge and Horvath, who had grown up two blocks from one another in Parma, Ohio – only about 12 miles from Municipal Stadium – were the stars of the afternoon for Ohio State. Brugge attempted the first pass of his career early in the game and completed it to All-America end Jack Dugger for a 49-yard touchdown. Brugge later scored a touchdown of his own on a 2-yard run, while Horvath crossed the goal line twice on short runs to give the Buckeyes a 26-12 victory.

All that remained between Ohio State and its first unblemished season since 1916 was archrival Michigan. The defending Big Ten co-champions had suffered an early-season loss to Indiana but since then had rattled off six straight wins, outscoring their opponents by a score of 164-46.

But Michigan head coach Fritz Crisler had lost two key players at the beginning of November when All-Big Ten fullback Bob Wiese and high-scoring halfback Bob Nussbaumer were lost to military transfer orders.

Still, the old rivals produced a classic of

Continued On Page 26



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Continued From Page 25

a game in front of an Ohio Stadium homecoming crowd of 71,958 that included more than 2,000 members of the active military sitting in the south bleachers.

National Champs (Sort Of)

The contest was supposed to be between Ohio State's innovative passing attack against sixth-ranked Michigan's control-the-line approach. But with temperatures reaching only the high 30s and a stiff wind blowing in from the northeast, Widdoes quickly adjusted his game plan.

As a result, it was the Buckeyes drawing first blood after fullback Ollie Cline bulled his way into the end zone from a yard away to finish a 56-yard drive and give his team a 6-0 lead with 1:42 remaining in the opening period.

Ohio State effectively controlled the tempo of the game for most of the first half, never allowing Michigan to advance much past midfield. But the Wolverines finally mounted a charge just before halftime thanks to an interception defensive back Ralph Chubb returned to the OSU 25.

Halfback Dick Culligan scored a 1-yard touchdown with just 22 seconds remaining in the second quarter, and Michigan stormed into the locker room with a 7-6 lead at intermission.

Midway through the third period, OSU captain Gordon Appleby recovered a Michigan fumble to set up a Horvath touchdown to give Ohio State a 12-7 lead. But the Wolverines answered in the fourth quarter with another touchdown from Culligan to push

Michigan back in front by a 14-12 count with 8:29 left in the game.

The ensuing kickoff went off the side of the Michigan kicker's foot, traveling just 12 yards before slicing out of bounds at the Ohio State 48. It appeared to be an onside kick although Crisler later told reporters, "It was just one of those things."

It turned out to be one of the game's key moments. The Buckeyes used 14 plays to drive 52 yards before Horvath scored on a 1-yard dive to give Ohio State an 18-14 advantage with just 3:16 remaining. The Wolverines made one final comeback, but when OSU defensive back Dick Flanagan intercepted a long pass from Culligan, the Buckeyes were able to run out the clock on their 18-14 victory.

In a jubilant OSU locker room, the usually staid Widdoes let down his guard.

"We played our best game of the season," the dripping-wet coach said after a triumphant trip to the showers. "We played our best game of the season, and Michigan was the toughest team we faced."

The next morning, the Plain Dealer in Cleveland – clearly in the heart of the DMZ between the Buckeye and Wolverine nations – reported the outcome of the game with special praise for Horvath and Widdoes.

"Where the Buckeyes won was on the ground – blocking, tackling, hard hitting, with speed and power," the Plain Dealer reported. "Horvath, who can be knocked down, pulled apart, tied in knots, but never stopped, carried the ball 33 times – a terrific assignment – and gained 104 yards. He scored both of Ohio's touchdowns in

the last half. He was, without qualification, Ohio's edge – today as throughout the season.

"And not lost in the plaudits is Carroll Widdoes, the Ohio State coach, who in his first season at the head of a college team (as a sub until Paul Brown returns from his Navy service) accomplished what no other Ohio coach has been able to do since the day of Pete Stinchcomb and Hoge Workman – qualify the Ohio team for the Rose Bowl."

Indeed, Ohio State had earned a trip to Pasadena for the first time since 1920, and the Buckeyes would have taken on another unbeaten team in the University of Southern California, although the Trojans had been tied twice during their nine regular-season games.

But the Big Ten had forbidden postseason competition during wartime, and even though a special vote of conference schools was taken at the league office in Chicago the day after the Ohio State-Michigan game, the Big Ten decided against making an exception.

The Buckeyes had to be content with a perfect 9-0 season and a second-place finish in the AP rankings behind national champion Army. Ohio State was given the mythical title of "National Civilian Champions," and the team has retroactively been awarded the 1944 national championship by such entities as the National Championship Foundation and the Sagarin Ratings.

But those are titles the university has never recognized.

Recognition was not a problem for Horvath, who played brilliantly during the 1944

season for the Buckeyes. He logged time at quarterback, halfback and defensive back that season and played 402 of a possible 540 minutes. He rushed for 924 yards, threw for 344 more, scored 72 points, and earned the team's most valuable player award, an honor bestowed upon him by a vote of his teammates.

In addition, he earned first-team all-conference honors, won the Big Ten's Most Valuable Player award and was voted a consensus All-American. To top things off, he was announced Dec. 1 as the 10th recipient of the Heisman Memorial Trophy, the first Ohio State player ever to win the prestigious award.

Several years later, Horvath's wife, Shirley, who admittedly didn't know much about her husband's athletic exploits, asked him about the large bronze trophy that was prominently displayed in their living room.

When Horvath tried to explain that it was the Heisman Trophy, Shirley nodded and smiled, then asked why it had to be so ugly.

Les finally convinced her of the trophy's importance, but after visiting some of their friends' homes – friends such as fellow Heisman winners Tom Harmon and Doc Blanchard – Shirley discovered they also had the same ugly bronze trophy in their living rooms.

Until his death in 1995, Horvath loved to relate the story of what happened next.

"Les," Shirley said, "you told me that football trophy of yours was really something special, but it turns out that everyone we know has one."



BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (5-1, 2-1)

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, L 32-31; **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 (11-1, 2-1)

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, W 4-0; **13** KENT STATE, W 3-0; **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, 4th/4; **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., 16th/10 **Oct. 7-8** Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio, 4th/4; **20-21** Jim West Challenge at San Marcos, Texas.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (1-0-1)

Oct. 6 Niagara (exh.) W, 3-2 (OT); **11-12** AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL, T 3-3; W 5-2; **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 (5-2-0, 3-2-0)

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, W 4-3; T 1-1 (SOW); **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 (9-1-2, 4-1-1)

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, W, 2-0; **11** at UCLA, L, 2-1; **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 (10-2-3, 5-1-2)

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, L 3-2; **13** at Purdue, W 4-2; **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., NTS; **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 (8-8, 1-5)

Aug. 30 at Dayton Flyer Invitational vs. Florida International, W 3-0; **31** at Dayton Flyer Invitational vs. Northern Iowa, W 3-1.

Sept. 6 at Florida Tournament vs. Southern Indiana, W 3-1; **7** at Florida Tournament vs. South Florida, L 3-2; **8** at Florida Tournament vs. Florida, L 3-1; **13** MIAMI (FL), W 3-0; **14** BUFFALO, W 3-2; **15** WRIGHT STATE, L 3-1; **20** at Bowling Green, W 3-1; **22** BOWLING GREEN, W 3-0; **27** at USC, L 3-2; **29** at UCLA, L 3-1.

Oct. 3 OREGON, L 3-0; **6** at Indiana, L 3-1; **10** at Northwestern, W 3-0; **13** MICHIGAN, L 3-1; **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

University Basketball Halls of Fame, recently offered his publication entitled "Coaching Youth Basketball: Coaching the Coaches" for sale on Amazon.com. Access to this instructional manual was previously limited to attendees of his basketball clinics and camps only.

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Ferentz Reaches 200 Wins As Iowa's Coach

Iowa head football coach Kirk Ferentz led the Hawkeyes to a 40-16 win over Washington on Oct. 12, picking up his 200th win as lead man for the program.

Ferentz' 200th win – one that moves Iowa to 4-2 on the season and 2-1 in conference play – is the second most by a Big Ten head coach, trailing only the 205 wins racked up by former Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes from 1951-78. Ferentz, who turned 69 in August, is in his 26th season at Iowa and is currently signed through the 2029-30 season.

1932, reached 199 wins. Bo Schembechler and Joe Paterno notched 194 and 162 wins, respectively, while former Iowa head coach Hayden Fry – who preceded Ferentz from 1979-1998, an impressive mark of just two coaches in the last 45 years for the Hawkeyes – had 143 wins.

Hayes still holds a significant lead in conference wins, however, with 153. This is ahead of Schembechler's 143 wins, Ferentz' 124 wins (as of Oct. 12) and Stagg's 115 wins.

Brown, Williams Opting Out Of Iowa Football

An increasingly disturbing trend in college football has made its way to the Big Ten. Iowa wide receiver Kaleb Brown and running back Leshon Williams announced on Oct. 7 that they are sitting out the rest of the season to retain a year of eligibility and enter the transfer portal.

Williams, a senior for the Hawkeyes, rushed for 821 yards last season but has appeared in just three games this year, carrying the ball 11 times for 21 yards. After dealing with injuries in the fall, Williams was firmly supplanted as lead back by Kaleb Johnson, who is second in the nation with 937 rushing yards through Oct. 12.

Brown, who is in his second season at Iowa after transferring from Ohio State, caught 22 passes for 215 yards last year but has had only one reception for 18 yards this season, also appearing in just three contests. Even in a pass-challenged Iowa offense, 10 other receivers have been able to haul in at least two receptions through Oct. 12, with

Brown not among them.

Brown and Williams join a growing group of players who are opting to sit out the rest of this season to retain a year of eligibility, with reasons ranging from playing time to NIL. Elsewhere in the conference, Indiana receiver Donaven McCulley announced he will be redshirting and entering the transfer portal.

Alabama defensive tackle Jehiem Oatis has also announced he will sit out the rest of the season, directly telling ESPN that the decision is due to playing time. Several players at UCF also announced they will sit out for the season and then transfer, with USC defensive tackle Bear Alexander – a former top-50 recruit – making the same announcement.

UNLV has also been at the center of controversy after starting quarterback Matthew Sluka, who transferred from Holy Cross, left the team in recent weeks after he claimed he was promised \$100,000 by offensive coordinator Brennan Marion during his recruitment out of the portal, though Sluka failed to get any alleged promises in writing.

Big Ten Teams Struggling On Cross-Country Trips

If the first seven weeks of the college football season have been any indication, the new-look Big Ten remains in an adjustment period while conference teams deal with the reality of cross-country travel for a handful of league games.

Through Oct. 12, in games that featured a team traveling at least two time zones over to play a game, the road teams were just 3-10 in those instances. The wins include Indiana's 42-13 win at UCLA on Sept. 14, Penn State's 33-30 win at USC and Minnesota's 21-17 win over UCLA, the latter two coming on Oct. 12.

While the results reflect struggles for teams making the trip, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said ahead of the Buckeyes' eventual loss to Oregon that he was not concerned about the travel portion of the matchup.

"I don't really see it as much of a challenge that way," he said on Oct. 8. "I think it's a 4½-hour flight – a couple more hours than Nebraska. We're going to stay on our time schedule. I think we've got a good plan."

Stalions Says Iowa, MSU Didn't Steal Signs

Former Michigan sign-stealing aficionado Connor Stalions said in an appearance on the "Bussin' With the Boys" podcast on Oct. 8 that Iowa and Michigan State were the only teams he was aware of not illegally stealing signs.

"Pretty much the whole Big Ten (was stealing signs)," Stalions said. "Probably Nebraska. It's everyone except Iowa and Michigan State. Everyone else is stealing."

Also during the podcast appearance, Stalions said he provided Michigan State's signals to Ohio State before their contest in 2021 – a 56-7 win – through an intermediary, with the goal of ensuring a second loss for the Spartans to knock them out of the conference title race.

"They had to lose twice, and we had to win out," Stalions said. "We would have beaten Ohio State and then it just would have been us and Ohio State (at the top of the standings)."

"We needed Ohio State to win, so I gave Michigan State's signals to a buddy of mine. I changed all the logos – I made it look like it came from a different school. I didn't want to give Ohio State something from Michigan, right? They might not use it. But we need

BIG

2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	3	0	1.000	6	0	1.000
Oregon	3	0	1.000	6	0	1.000
Penn State	3	0	1.000	6	0	1.000
Illinois	2	1	0.667	5	1	0.833
Nebraska	2	1	0.667	5	1	0.833
Ohio State	2	1	0.667	5	1	0.833
Iowa	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Michigan	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Wisconsin	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Minnesota	2	2	0.500	4	3	0.571
Washington	2	2	0.500	4	3	0.571
Rutgers	1	2	0.333	4	2	0.667
Michigan State	1	2	0.333	3	3	0.500
Northwestern	1	2	0.333	3	3	0.500
USC	1	3	0.250	3	3	0.500
Maryland	0	3	0.000	3	3	0.500
Purdue	0	3	0.000	1	5	0.167
UCLA	0	4	0.000	1	5	0.167

Oct. 11 Game

Northwestern 37, Maryland 10

Oct. 12 Games

Wisconsin 42, Rutgers 7
Iowa 40, Washington 16
Illinois 50, Purdue 49 (OT)
Penn State 33, USC 30 (OT)
Oregon 32, **Ohio State** 31
Minnesota 21, UCLA 17

Oct. 18 Game

Oregon at Purdue, 8 p.m.

Oct. 19 Games

UCLA at Rutgers, noon
Wisconsin at Northwestern, noon
Nebraska at Indiana, noon
Michigan at Illinois, 3:30
USC at Maryland, 4 p.m.
Iowa at Michigan State, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 25 Game

Rutgers at USC, 11 p.m.

Oct. 26 Games

Nebraska at **Ohio State**, TBA
Washington at Indiana, TBA
Michigan State at Michigan, TBA
Maryland at Minnesota, TBA
Penn State at Wisconsin, TBA
Illinois at Oregon, TBA
Northwestern at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.

All times Eastern

Ohio State to win, and I know they steal the crap out of defensive signals, so here you go.

"I gave it to a buddy who may have given it to a buddy who then gave it to Ohio State who said, 'Hey, I got this from so-and-so,' so they got them. I'm sure they probably already had them, but it just confirmed everything."

Big Ten, SEC Denounce "Super League" Proposals

Leaders from the Big Ten and SEC have made it clear that both conferences are against the creation of any form of "super league," especially ones that involve private equity. Commissioners Tony Petitti and Greg Sankey – from the Big Ten and SEC, respectively – announced in a joint press conference on Oct. 10 that both leagues will push back against these proposals such as Project Rudy and the College Student Football League.

Project Rudy would whittle the current

BIG TEN NOTES Braden Moles

"I was more focused on us getting four (wins)," Ferentz said after the game. "I didn't want to think about being at 3-3 right now, and that's just how it works in season."

"As far as the 200 wins part, you have to be lucky. You have to be in the right place, first of all. You have to be with a lot of good people, and that's the coaching staff and support staff. A lot of people are involved in this. I've worked with nothing but great coaches my entire career. I've been lucky wherever I've been. Then, most importantly, the players."

While Ferentz is the second Big Ten coach to reach 200 wins along with Hayes, Amos Alonzo Stagg, who was the head coach of then-conference member Chicago from 1892-

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BIG TEN NOTES

FBS down to around 70 teams that would all play within one conference and no longer play against FCS or Group of Five competition. The CSFL would take the 72 top programs and place them in the Power 12 Conference, which would be made up of 12 six-team, geography-based divisions. The remaining schools would compete in the Group of 8 conference.

The main component in many of these plans – and the key reason that Petitti and Sankey united against these proposals – is that it would include those private equity investments into college football, something Petitti hopes to avoid.

“I have yet to see a single thing in any plan that I’ve learned details about that contains things that we couldn’t do ourselves and our (Power Four) colleagues as well,” he said. “At the end of the day, there’s a strong commitment that you have the ability to do all of this ourselves. The notion that college football is broken – what we do is broken – is just not right.”

While proposals based on private equity are off the table as of now, it does not mean that the Big Ten and SEC are not still looking to gain more power.

The conferences already have two of the four automatic qualifiers for the 12-team College Football Playoff, and if (more likely when) the playoff expands to 14 teams in 2026, the Big Ten and SEC are each looking to reportedly secure three or four automatic bids.

With nothing set in stone for the future, the commissioners are looking to see how this year’s first-ever 12-team playoff works before pushing for any additional bids or formats.

“I want to see what happens with the evaluation (of those at-large bids),” Sankey said.

Gabriel Leads Big Ten’s Heisman Candidates

As the college football season reaches the midway point, the Big Ten’s potential Heisman Trophy candidates are beginning to shape up.

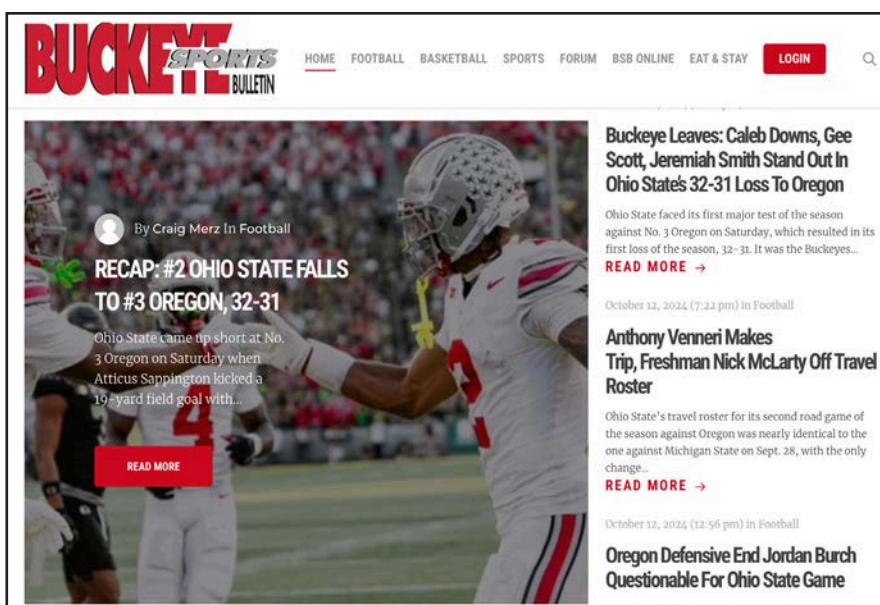
Following an injury on Oct. 12 to Colorado star receiver/cornerback Travis Hunter, the clear favorite for the award is Boise State running back Ashton Jeanty, at plus-160, according to DraftKings. Jeanty leads the nation with 1,248 rushing yards through Oct. 12 – 311 more than the previously mentioned Johnson – and with 17 rushing touchdowns to boot.

The next closest in odds, however, is Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel, listed at plus-380 following his stellar performance in the Ducks’ win over Ohio State. Gabriel threw for 341 yards and two touchdowns while completing 67.7 percent of his passes, and on the season he has thrown for 1,790 yards and 13 touchdowns with just three interceptions.

Rounding out the top five Heisman Trophy candidates are Miami (Fla.) quarterback Cam Ward at plus-550, Hunter at plus-900, and Alabama quarterback Jalen Milroe at plus-1,000. The next Big Ten player on the board is Penn State quarterback Drew Allar, who is 11th in odds at plus-3,000. He is followed by Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke at plus-5,000, while Ohio State quarterback Will Howard (14th) and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (16th) are at plus-7,000 and plus-7,500, respectively.

While the Big Ten can technically claim the Heisman Trophy for USC’s Caleb Williams in 2022 and Oregon’s Marcus Mariota in 2014, the last time an active member of the conference won was Ohio State quarterback Troy Smith in 2006.

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Five-Star 2026 O-Lineman Talks Recruitment

When it comes to the 2026 class, Ohio State has been trending well with a few offensive linemen like Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) and Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285), but maybe the biggest prospect in the group – both literally and figuratively – is five-star Rockville (Md.) Georgetown Prep prospect Immanuel Iheanacho (6-7, 345).

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

He is the No. 3 player in the country and the No. 2 offensive tackle according to 247Sports composite ranking. Iheanacho hasn't officially narrowed down his recruitment with a list of top schools, and he is making sure he covers all his bases when it comes to which schools he is looking at.

Ohio State is one of those few, but he also said that Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Texas, Tennessee and Wisconsin are schools he talks to "every now and then." But he separated one school, saying he talks to Oregon "a lot," and he was on the Ducks' campus on Oct. 12 for the game against the Buckeyes.

Talking to 247Sports about his visit, he commented on why he chose that game specifically to take his visit.

"It's a Big Ten matchup, and it is two teams I like a lot," he said.

He had already made a visit to Oregon over the summer for a recruiting camp, as he did in Columbus as well, showing off his imposing size and strength against recruits from different classes. But Eugene, Ore., has been a place that is standing out to him.

"I like it a lot," he said. "I like the area. The campus is pretty nice. I like how certain buildings are set up. I was talking to Coach (Dan) Lanning and the way his office was set up, you can see the practice field and see

if anybody was getting any extra work in. In the meeting room, you could see the stadium. I thought that was pretty cool.

"Obviously, they have all their Nike stuff. That appeals to me but it's not everything. I also appreciate the coaching staff: (offensive line) Coach (Alique) Terry, the recruiting guys, (defensive coordinator) Coach (Tosh) Lupoi. I also like (assistant director of player personnel) Coach Coby (Sayyah). I appreciate all those guys."

Even though he was able to see Ohio State play already when he was at Autzen Stadium, he still plans to get back to the Buckeyes' campus to take in what a game day is like in Columbus. He said that visit is likely going to be toward the end of the regular season, which could be for the game against Michigan on Nov. 30 if he wants to take in a big-game environment, a game that is always heavily targeted by recruits.

"I like Ohio State as well," he said. "I talk to the coaches on a weekly basis. It's definitely one of my top schools. I love their tradition. If all things go well, my goal is also to go to Ohio State vs. Michigan."

"I would go for Ohio State. I want to make sure I get to some big games, some schools where I realistically see myself going to and I just don't waste my time going to schools I don't see myself going to."

Two other Big Ten schools have also earned consideration from the five-star. He was at Penn State's win over Illinois on Sept. 28 and is still paying attention to Mike Locksley, the head coach of his home-state Maryland Terrapins.

"I saw a very good O-line performance," Iheanacho said about the Nittany Lions after his visit. "I was talking to (recruiting coordinator Chris Mahon), and he was showing me how some of the plays have wider splits along the line. I found that interesting on top of seeing how dominant their running game was in that game."

"It's not all they have. They had the Wildcat with (tight end Tyler Warren) for a touchdown on the first drive. It was great. I like how open their offense is and for me, I like to run block so that is somewhere I could

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

really see myself thriving."

But staying near home is also something that Iheanacho is considering. It's not going to be the end-all-be-all when it comes to his decision-making by any means, but it's one of the big reasons the Terps are still in the race.

"I just like the aspect of being home," he said. "The home factor has always been appealing to me. Being home is something I am still eyeing for sure. It's definitely not out of the picture. Being a hometown hero and potentially bringing Maryland a Big Ten championship, that would be something for generations."

"I am really big on honesty. If everybody in Maryland would stay in Maryland, then Maryland would be a top-10 team in the nation. People go to Penn State, or go to Ohio

State, or Georgia, Pitt or V-Tech or wherever they are being recruited by, so it's a little harder for them. If people would get a stay-at-home movement with the DMV, Maryland would be unstoppable, honestly."

With so much time left in his recruitment and so many different schools to choose from, Iheanacho said that he's taking his time when it comes to making his decision. He told 247Sports that the earliest anyone should expect him to commit is the middle of the summer of 2025. Even so, Iheanacho will likely be a prospect that teams continue to try to flip until signing day, so his recruitment will last until he signs with a team.

Edmunds Enjoys Iowa Game Visit

Huntington Beach, Calif., five-star quar-

ASK AN ANALYST with Allen Trieu of 247 Sports

Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star 2027 wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 160) was one of many visitors for Ohio State's game against Iowa. As an Ohio prospect, are the Buckeyes the favorite to land him?

"I think early on, they're one of the favorites. It's so early to be able to say they're the favorite. They're right there in a group of schools. I would put Ohio State and probably Notre Dame as the two with the best chance right now, although he's gone out to Penn State. He's got some interest in Maryland. There's some connection with Maryland, and they have a former Ohioan on their staff, (offensive analyst) Derek Kief, who I think has kind of bridged the gap. If I had to place early odds on Jamier, I think he ends up probably at either Ohio State or Notre Dame at this early juncture."

Columbus Marion-Franklin four-star 2025 cornerback Dawayne Galloway (6-1, 175) decommitted from Purdue recently. Do you know if he has any interest in Ohio State or if the Buckeyes have interest in going after him?

"They're not a school that has been brought up as somebody who's reached out. I know he camped there over the summer. Personally, I think he would be interested. It doesn't sound like at the moment, Ohio State's interested. I think that could change. I mean, he's right there in the state. He's probably the fastest, or one of the

fastest players in the state for sure. They could give him a look. Based on where the board is at and just what I've been able to glean from talking to people around him, Ohio State was not one of the schools mentioned after he decommitted."

The 2026 offensive line prospects in Ohio seem to be better than they have been in past classes. How much of an advantage is that for Ohio State, and who are the in-state offensive line prospects they are most interested in?

"It's huge when you can stay at home and build one of the most important units on the field. With the offensive line, that's usually the biggest part of your class. You take five, six, seven offensive linemen, so you don't have to go too far for a couple of them. I think that's a huge advantage. Some of the best Ohio State teams have really had a ton of Ohio kids on the front line."

"I think when you look right away at Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280), he's our No. 1 junior in the state (in the 247Sports standard rating). We favor Ohio State in that one. Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310), we favor Ohio State in that one too. It's taken a moment just to see exactly where he fits in, as far as where his game is at, because he was injured for all of last year. He's such a good athlete at his size that he makes a lot of sense."

"They just offered Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285), so that's one that they'll have a chance in. They're in on Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star interior offensive lineman Will Conroy (6-3, 275). He's another one. There are several guys behind them in the state who could end up kind of being like a Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295), who they get to camp and maybe evaluate later on as well."

Will the NCAA's decision to eliminate the national letter of intent have any major impacts on what recruiting looks like moving forward? How is it going to change?

"I don't see any major impact. There have been so many changes recently, from the calendar to obviously NIL, that I don't think eliminating the letter of intent really changes anything more. There's been sweeping changes, so it's a change in the process. For those of us who have followed or covered recruiting for a long time, it's maybe a little bit sad that that's going away, but as far as the process of recruiting, I don't really think that it affects too much."

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

terback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200) has already been a highly sought-after recruit in the 2027 class. Quarterbacks usually go off the board much faster than their counterparts, but there haven't yet been any major verbal commits in that class to this point, with the seven QBs listed by 247Sports composite ranking still without a future home.

Edmunds is the second-highest rated of the seven, ranked the No. 10 player in the country, and he could be nearing a commitment date. Ohio State was already high on his list. He named a top four of the Buckeyes, Michigan, Penn State and Texas, but after his visit on Oct. 5 for the win over Iowa, he is liking Columbus even more.

"It was awesome," Edmunds told Eleven Warriors. "It was everything I expected and more. The Skull Session was awesome because I had never been to an Ohio State game before. Even just the culture and everything like that. I remember going to see Ohio State play Utah in the Rose Bowl three years ago, and that was really cool. Just being in the environment, seeing the culture and the fan base and everything like that while I was there, it was awesome."

With the next few years of Ohio State's quarterback position seemingly locked up – current freshmen Julian Sayin and Air Noland and 2025 commit and Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225) will all be in the room next year – the Buckeyes are having trouble landing a commitment from a 2026 quarterback prospect. Anything could happen with those highly ranked recruits, but current high school juniors must not see a way into much playing time if they join the Buckeyes.

As a result, Ohio State has homed in on the next class, and Edmunds is their top choice. He was at a recruiting camp in Columbus over the summer, earning an offer there from Chip Kelly and Ryan Day, and he has been trending toward the Buckeyes ever since. He said in his chat with Eleven Warriors that he was able to spend a good amount of time with Kelly and Day when he was on campus recently.

"I even sat in on the quarterback meeting," he said. "Individually with my parents, I probably spoke with Coach Kelly and Coach Day each for about 45 minutes. I already know what I'm getting with Ohio State, so it's not like they were really recruiting me or anything like that. We were talking about football, talking about their season, my season, life and stuff like that. It was pretty straightforward, simple stuff."

The high school sophomore also said that he believes he fits into the Ohio State offense very well, especially since he has been able to step up his running game this season, rushing for 217 yards through seven games this season along with his 1,945 passing yards and 19 touchdowns. Despite being all the way across the country, Edmunds' Ohio State connections are still strong.

"My family has been Ohio State fans forever," Edmunds said. "My grandfather is actually from Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, so he grew up an Ohio State fan and went to Ohio

State for a short period of time, so that's all my dad knew growing up and that's all we knew growing up. That offer was definitely one where it was like 'Holy s—,' you know? It was a great feeling.

"I like envisioning things so I always thought I was going to get a chance to play at Ohio State and get that offer. Especially for my dad, my dad was really emotional and my grandfather was really emotional. So it was an awesome feeling for my family."

Edmunds hopes to commit to a school after the end of his football season but before the end of the year, so it won't be much longer that he will be exploring his options. He does currently have at least one other visit scheduled, heading to Texas for its game against Georgia during Ohio State's off weekend. He was also at the USC game when Penn State came to visit on Oct. 12. But when it comes down to his decision, it's going to be about where he feels the most comfortable.

"Right now the talks with schools are like, I'm high on them, but is it mutual? For the most part, I'm pretty sure it is," Edmunds said. "I think Texas has offered two quarterbacks in 2027, Penn State has offered two and Ohio State has offered two, and I'm not quite sure how many Michigan has offered.

"I feel like I'm pretty high on all of their radars, but relationships are what it comes down to at the end of the day. Everyone has their glamorous facilities and this and that, but how well do I get along with the staff, the quarterback coach and the head coach, stuff like that."

2025 RB Commit Jackson Out For Season

Ohio State 2025 commit Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) suffered a knee injury in his team's 53-35 win over Kenston on Sept. 13, one which was revealed on Oct. 8 as serious enough to be season-ending. He won't need surgery on his injured knee, but he also won't suit up again in the coming months.

"We received some very sad and unfortunate news," Jackson's coach, Jeff Rotsky, told The News-Herald. Bo Jackson is done for the season. By the grace of God, he'll be fine. He doesn't need surgery. The doctor confirmed it from the MRI. All I can say is the injury is serious enough that it ended his season. It's going to take about two more months to heal."

Jackson finishes his senior season and high school career with 588 yards and 10 touchdowns in just over three games played after a junior year in which he ran for 1,329 yards and 27 touchdowns. Now he will have to wait until he gets to Ohio State to suit up for his next football game.

"In a couple of months, Bo Jackson is going to be back being Bo Jackson," Rotsky said. "Ohio State has nothing to worry about. They're getting one of the finest young men in the state of Ohio."

Jackson committed to Ohio State on June 4, right after he took an official visit to campus over the summer, making him the first recruit to commit to Ohio State's new

running backs coach Carlos Locklyn.

Jackson is the No. 82 overall prospect in the country, the No. 4 running back and the No. 6 player in the state of Ohio and is one of two running back commitments whom Ohio State has secured in the 2025 class, the second being former Kentucky commit and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star Isaiah West (5-11, 208).

Jackson is not the first Buckeye commit to suffer a season-ending injury this year. It was revealed a week prior to Jackson's injury that Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) – the nation's No. 1 overall prospect and the only Buckeye commit so far in the 2026 class – will miss the remainder of his junior season due to a knee injury.

Buckeye Commits Impress In HS Games

Continuing what has been an extremely strong season for St. Clair, he had another performance that showed why he is ranked the No. 6 overall player in the class of 2025 and why the Buckeyes went after him so early.

In a 56-8 win over Tecumseh on Oct. 4, he completed 18 of 22 passes for 260 yards and five touchdowns. He also had a rushing touchdown, which, as did the rest of his numbers, came in the first half since he and the rest of the starters were removed from the game for the final 24 minutes of the contest.

Ontario, Ohio, three-star wide receiver Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180) also had a strong performance to lead his team to a 7-0 record on the season. The future pass catcher at Ohio State is still under center with his high school team, and in a 35-14 win over Marion Pleasant, he had 169 yards rushing and two touchdowns on the ground on 13 carries while completing 21 of 28 passes for 273 yards and two more scores, spreading the ball around well by completing passes to 11 different receivers.

On the defensive side of the ball, Enterprise, Ala., four-star defensive end Zion Grady (6-4, 235) – who was in Columbus on

Oct. 5 for Ohio State's 35-7 win over Iowa – had eight tackles, three for loss, a sack, three quarterback hurries and a forced fumble in a 17-14 win over Montgomery Carver.

Akron Hoban three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 230) and Newberry, Fla., four-star defensive lineman Jarquez Carter (6-2, 284) also had strong defensive performances on the gridiron. Lee and his team beat Cuyahoga Falls (Ohio) Walsh Jesuit 19-14, and he had 14 total tackles, two for loss and a pass breakup. Carter was part of a 49-0 win over Alachua (Fla.) Santa Fe with four tackles, three for loss and a sack.

OSU 'Could Be Home' For 2027 CB

Another prospect who was on campus for the Buckeyes' win over Iowa was 2027 Aliquippa (Pa.) cornerback Larry Moon III (5-11, 170), and while he still has a long way to go in his recruitment process, it's becoming obvious that Ohio State could be in the running for his services.

Moon camped at Ohio State on June 5, where he earned a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes then returned to campus for a visit in July before coming back for a game day against the Hawkeyes.

"The visit was great," Moon told 247Sports about his July visit. "It was real intimate. I had a chance to talk to Coach Day and Coach (Tim Walton), had great conversations with them, and I had a great time overall."

Moon also talked with 247Sports after his visit on Oct. 5, talking about what was different during a game day.

"The atmosphere was great," Moon said. "I loved everything about it. The fans were crazy and fun. I was impressed with the fan base. The environment is what I'm looking for in a college."

Despite being a sophomore in high school Moon already holds 34 scholarship offers, including some from Alabama, Auburn, LSU, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Nebraska,

Continued On Page 32

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Ohio State CB Commit Offord Visits Oregon

Continued From Page 31

Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and USC. In his freshman season, Moon had 32 tackles (four for loss), two sacks and a forced fumble in 10 games played according to MaxPreps.

NCAA Eliminates National Letter of Intent

Two months before the early signing period, the NCAA Division I Council officially eliminated the National Letter of Intent, which has been around since 1964. The NLI was a signed agreement that an athlete would play for a school, signed either during the early signing period or on National Signing Day.

Under the new guidelines, written offers of athletics aid will now replace the NLI, which will still happen at the same times recruits are set to sign this year. The new athletics aid document will also apply to transfers, who are officially eligible to sign an agreement with a school after they enter the transfer portal, a window that was shortened from 30 to 20 days in the fall/

winter and from 15 to 10 days in the spring window.

The NCAA guidelines say that after a prospect has signed a written offer of athletics aid, other schools that offer athletics-related financial aid won't be allowed to have any recruiting communications with that prospect.

The change could be due to the NCAA looking forward to the new revenue-sharing model that will begin during the 2025 fall semester, and it could lead to recruits signing contracts with schools in the future.

This move comes just over a year after the Collegiate Commissioners Association, which oversaw the NLI program, approved changes that allowed athletes to pull out of NLI agreements without penalty under certain circumstances, like coaching changes and requests for release.

The early signing period this year begins on Dec. 4, 2024, followed by the traditional signing period that begins on Feb. 5, 2025.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- 2025 Ohio State commit Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) has been exploring his options recently with Auburn and Oregon going after him hard, and he was in Eugene, Ore., for the Buckeyes' 32-31 loss to the Ducks on Oct. 12. More OSU targets at the game included New Orleans Edna Karr five-star defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270) – who officially reclassified to the 2025 class and is now the No. 18 overall recruit in the country in the cycle – Saint George (Utah) Pine View five-star tight end Brock Harris (6-6, 238), Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star athlete Jett Washington (6-5, 200) and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star wide receiver Madden Williams (6-1, 185), among others.

• Upper Marlboro (Md.) St. Frances Academy four-star safety Jireh Edwards (6-1, 194) is planning to visit Ohio State for the game against Michigan on Nov. 30, adding him to the already-growing list of major prospects who are targeting The Game to get back to Columbus. "Just the standard they have at the school," he told 247Sports about why he likes OSU. "The defensive co-

ordinator they have, and I think I can bring my standard there, and my physicality and covering skills." Edwards, the nation's 50th-best prospect, sixth-best safety and No. 3 player out of Maryland, camped with the Buckeyes in June and currently holds offers from 22 Division I programs. He has already visited Oregon and Rutgers this season and also plans to get to Tennessee and Auburn.

• 2026 Purcellville (Va.) Woodgrove four-star wide receiver Connor Salmin (6-1, 190) was on campus for Ohio State's win over Iowa as well, and the No. 133 overall prospect in his class told 247Sports that he enjoyed his time in Columbus. "It was great to see the coaches and recruiting staff again and spend some more time with Coach Brian Hartline and Coach Devin Jordan. Their message was mainly that they would be able to develop me as a receiver like no other school, especially since this is only my second season playing receiver. We spoke a lot about the mentality of the wide receiver room and the importance of being different."

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

For the first time in several years, Ohio State's football recruiting efforts stretched well beyond the boundaries of Ohio in 1988. The Buckeyes signed defensive back Darrell Lewis and linebacker Tyrone Morrison from California, wide receiver Aaron Payne from Kentucky, defensive back Tim Walton from Georgia and defensive backs Foster Paulk and Chico Nelson from Florida.

OSU was set to continue the nationwide effort lure more players from outside Ohio to restock the team's talent.

According to national recruiting expert Tom Lemming, the Buckeyes had a chance to sign nearly a dozen blue-chip athletes from outside the Buckeye State.

Four of those players appeared on Lemming's preseason top 200 list of the nation's best prepsters. They were linebacker James Roberson of Lake Wales, Fla., defensive back Larry Kennedy of Sarasota, Fla., wide receiver Jonathan Harris of Houston and tight end Jason Green of La Puente, Calif.

30 Years Ago — 1994

It had always been a sore spot for Ohio State coach John Cooper when any Ohio high school player he wanted signed with another school, but he was especially upset when that player signed with Michigan.

In previous years, the Buckeyes had been victimized by such Ohio natives as Elvis Grbac, Alfie Burch, Buster Stanley, John Kolesar, David Key and, of course, Desmond Howard.

But the tide of Ohio players signing with Michigan had been stemmed in recent years. Marcus Ray was the only Ohio player signed by the Wolverines the year before, the lowest total in recent memory.

The year before that, U of M signed three Ohioans – linebacker Mike Elston of St. Mary's and quarterback Scot Loeffler and center Joe Ries, both of Barberton – while the school signed four Buckeye state natives in 1992, including nose guard Ray Edmonds of Akron Hoban, quarterback Eric Boykin of Dayton Meadowdale, defensive back Deollo Anderson of Youngstown Ursuline and lineman Eric Wendt of Cincinnati Moeller.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Parsippany (N.J.) Hills wide receiver Johnnie Morant (6-5, 225) was ranked No. 3 nationally among all receivers by SuperPrep. As a junior, he caught 39 passes for 990 yards (25.3 average).

"Morant is the best wide receiver I've ever seen," one recruiting coordinator told SuperPrep.

"I think most coaches like my speed," Morant said. "There aren't many guys my size who can run as fast as I do."

For the rainy win over Purdue on Oct. 9, he was hosted at OSU by fellow New Jersey product David Thompson.

"I really liked the area, and I had a lot of fun with David and some of the other guys on the team," said Morant, who was being recruited by assistant coach Shawn Simms. "I know they need receivers, and I could see myself going there. I have them No. 1 right

now. If I go there, I could definitely play as a freshman.

"Then after (Ken-Yon Rambo and Reggie Germany) leave, I would even have a bigger chance to shine. Ohio State is a great team.

"They've had a lot of great receivers like Joey Galloway and Cris Carter. I would like to be one of those guys. I see myself going to Ohio State."

20 Years Ago — 2004

Shawn Oatis, a safety prospect out of Chino, Calif., stood 6-0, weighed around 200 pounds and ran the 40-yard dash in 4.6 seconds. Those were impressive measurables, to be sure, but you could find plenty of talented athletes when you began combing prep programs across the nation.

What you wouldn't find, however, were players who coupled Oatis' athletic ability with his intelligence, both on and off the field. In the classroom, Oatis had maintained a 4.1 GPA, and he applied those same cognitive skills on the gridiron.

"I guess you could say I'm a thinking player," Oatis said. "I like to use my brain more than some other athletes do, and I think that helps out a lot. I study a lot of film and do a scouting report, and I think that benefits me on the field as far as having a little bit of an extra edge on some of the guys."

Oatis had been studying film for the better part of his prep career, and he took to the task almost immediately. Dating back to when he was a rare sophomore starter in the defensive backfield for Chino, Oatis would try to take at least two tapes home every week, rewinding and fast-forwarding ad nauseam in the hopes of finding anything that could give him an advantage over his opponents.

15 Years Ago — 2009

If his presence at the Ohio State-Wisconsin game was any indication, Jamel Turner's future path would still run through Columbus.

The verbal commitment for the class of 2010 took in his first game of the season and told BSB that everything remained in place for him to join the Buckeyes once his senior season was complete.

The status of Turner, a four-star outside linebacker prospect who had committed to OSU in December, had been in question for several months. The 6-2, 205-pounder was ruled ineligible to play for any Ohio high school team in 2009, so the former Youngstown Ursuline star transferred to Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy.

Turner told BSB all was well at the prep school and he would be playing college football in Ohio Stadium the next season.

"That's the goal," he said. "I'll definitely be here. I definitely will be here at the end of my senior year."

10 Years Ago — 2014

Even on a weekend when Ohio State didn't play, head coach Urban Meyer still found a way to win a head-to-head matchup

against an SEC school.

Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star wide receiver Alex Stump (6-4, 195), a former Kentucky commit, flipped to the Buckeyes on Oct. 12 to become the 17th member of Ohio State's class of 2015. It was Ohio State's first commitment in exactly one month.

"Growing up in Ohio, it's always been my dream to play for Ohio State because this is the state I was born in," Stump said. "Once I got the offer, there was just something in my heart that told me I had to be a Buckeye, and today I called Coach Meyer and made that come true.

"I know that they might take another receiver still, but that's fine with me. Coach Meyer said if they get the player they want, that they are going to add another wide receiver."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Ty Hamilton (6-3, 250) was in the unique position of having his older brother, Ohio State defensive tackle Davon Hamilton, being able to relay what it was like to play for the Buckeyes.

And with that, the elder Hamilton was asked by reporters about the advice he'd given his younger brother, who had committed to the Buckeyes in mid-June.

"Just prepare to work as hard as you've ever worked before," Davon said. "Obviously, it's not easy. I feel like it's hard for high school players to understand how hard it is to come here and play."

A fifth-year senior and key contributor along the defensive line that fall, Davon also came to Ohio State as a three-star prospect from Pickerington (Ohio) Central.

Ty had a slightly better 247Sports composite ranking coming out of high school, though – .8635 to .8457.

"I always wanted him to do better than me," Davon said. "I feel like with any little brother, big brother thing, if you can come in here and do better than me, I'm going to be proud of him."

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State added another defensive back to its 2024 class on Oct. 11, securing a pledge from Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot three-star safety Leroy Roker (6-1, 170).

Roker was not considered one of the premier prospects in the class, ranking as just the nation's No. 1153 prospect along with the No. 115 safety and No. 152 overall player in Florida, but he quickly piqued the interest of safeties coach Perry Eliano and Ohio State in the fall. He earned an offer from the Buckeyes on Oct. 3 and took an official visit to campus four days later to attend the Buckeyes 37-17 win over Maryland.

Ohio State was just the fifth school to express interest in him, with only Iowa, Miami (Fla.), Old Dominion and FCS-level South Dakota extending him offers prior to the Buckeyes, with his first offer coming from South Dakota in June.

"Coach Eliano offered me," Roker said. "I was shocked, but I greatly appreciated the offer. Just that Coach Eliano took the time to come out and look at me – he came out last week and watched me practice."

McGuff Sets Stage With Season On Horizon

With the college basketball season just under a month away from tipping off, Ohio State women's basketball coach Kevin McGuff has been making the media rounds in preparation for the upcoming season. The longtime skipper, entering his 12th season at the helm – a mark that ties him with Nancy Darsch (1985-97) for the longest tenure in program history – previewed his team on Sept. 30 before Big Ten Media Days and then at the event on Oct. 2.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

"Hopefully I can be here for a long time," McGuff said at Big Ten Media Days in Chicago. "I've been here for 12 years, and I like to tell people that's like being somewhere else for 25 years. It's not an easy place to be, but it's the best job in the country for me."

That best job in the country is going to look different, at least relative to the last few seasons. The most notable change from last year's team is the departure of current Dallas Wings guard Jacy Sheldon, a program great who had been a fixture in Columbus for the last five seasons.

Sheldon's presence will be missed on and off the court, and other notable departures for Ohio State include guards Celeste Taylor and Rikki Harris as well as forward Rebecka Mikulášiková, who started 88 out of 100 games over the last three seasons.

"Every year is such a new journey, but it certainly feels much different because we had some people that were here a long time," McGuff said. "But the energy in the group is good, and I think everybody is ready to go."

The departures hurt, but the saving grace is that Ohio State has several high-profile returnees in addition to some exciting newcomers. Senior guards Madison Greene and Taylor Thierry and junior forward Cotie McMahon are among those returnees expected to lead the Buckeyes on and off the floor.

"We've certainly got to lean on them with so many newcomers," McGuff said. "The biggest thing when you watch us early on, you're going to see a lot of talent out there and a decent amount of depth. But with so many newcomers, it's when are we going to get that chemistry and everyone feeling comfortable doing what we do."

"More important than that, you lose somebody like Jacy Sheldon, who's one of the best leaders we've had here in a long time – having to replace that, that's where Taylor, Madison, Cotie, they've got to step up and provide some leadership."

Greene, in particular, is an unknown quantity entering this season. She returned to the court last season after back-to-back season-ending knee injuries, but with Sheldon and Taylor firmly in control of the backcourt, she did not start and averaged just 12.5 minutes per game.

Even with the additions of guards Chance Gray and Jaloni Cambridge, from Oregon and the high school ranks, respectively, Mc-

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Daria Biriuk	G	6-1	★★★★	Bell Buckle (Tenn.) Webb School

Guff expects a larger role for Greene this season.

"Madison, knock on wood, looks as good as she's looked since her injuries," he said. "She gives us great experience. She makes everybody around her better, and she's also a great defender. She's doing great. She's doing really well."

With Greene healthy, the only player on the roster dealing with injuries is freshman center Elsa Lemmilä, who McGuff said is coming off an injury suffered during her final high school campaign in Finland.

"She's practicing but she's still getting comfortable out there because she didn't start going live until a couple of weeks ago," he said on Sept. 30. "It's going to take her a while to get comfortable, but I feel like she has a very bright future."

In addition to changes on the court, this will be Ohio State's first foray into the new Big Ten that includes Oregon, UCLA, USC and Washington, with road trips scheduled for the Bruins and Trojans during an extended road trip in February. McGuff said the team is still trying to figure out the logistics behind the cross-country matchups.

"We haven't settled on exactly what we're going to do yet because part of it is unique to us, the way the schedule lies," he said. "You've got to have one off day a week, so it also becomes a compliance issue."

"I believe we play at 6 (p.m. on Feb. 8) vs. USC, because it's a TV game, which is 9 (p.m.) in Columbus," he said. "Do you take a red-eye, which is not good sleep, or do you stay the night, get a better night's sleep and come home the next day? We're still figuring that out."

"It's a mess," he added. "The 'unintended consequences' is what we call this of adding four West Coast teams."

Ohio State Still Looking To Hire Assistant Coach

McGuff also said in recent weeks that he is looking to hire an additional assistant to fill out his coaching staff, with the expectation that person will come from the WNBA ranks.

"The reason it's taking so long is I'm talking to a couple of people in the WNBA who just got through their season," he said on at Big Ten Media Days. "Hopefully within the next few weeks to a month we can get that wrapped up. Hopefully we can get the staff finalized before too long."

McGuff currently has four assistant coaches on his staff, including associate head coach Carla Morrow and assistant coaches Jalen Powell, Ryan Murray and Reid Guzdanski, the latter two adding the title this offseason. This leaves one position open following the departure this offseason of assistant coach Wesley Brooks, now the head coach at Utah State.

The only coach in the WNBA with any direct affiliation with Ohio State is current Minnesota Lynx assistant coach and Buckeye legend Katie Smith, who has helped lead

the Lynx to the WNBA Finals this season, where are tied 1-1 with the New York Liberty in the series as BSB went to press.

Coaches Want Thierry To Be More Aggressive

One of the most underrated players on Ohio State's roster has been Thierry, who rarely makes the exciting play but instead has been one of the most consistent Buckeyes on the court over the last several seasons.

Thierry has combined over the past two years to average 12.4 points, 5.9 rebounds, 1.9 assists and 1.9 steals on 61.8 percent shooting and just 7.7 attempts per game, a hallmark of efficiency throughout the college ranks. But with Ohio State losing 66.5 percent of its scoring production from last season (52.7 points per game out of 79.3), the coaches are looking for Thierry to be more aggressive around the basket.

"She's a really consistent player," McGuff said. "She's got a great work ethic and discipline, so if you tell her to do something, she's going to do it right and she's going to keep doing it. She's got great habits. She impacts us in a variety of ways – she's always in the right spot defensively, she's a good rebounder, she can score the ball, she's unselfish."

"We may look for her to hopefully be a little more assertive on the offensive end. There's a little more opportunity for her to grow in that space. She's really efficient. She doesn't have a night where she's 2 of 12. As efficient as she is, I'd like to see her be a little more assertive."

Thierry said the coaches have been in her ear about taking more shots and assuring her that it's fine if not every shot she takes goes down. That's a reality she has come to accept as she continues to grow as a player.

"Efficiency is definitely important to me. I don't like missing shots," she said. "But I'm going to be more offensively aggressive, just taking open shots and having confidence that my teammates trust me to take those shots. I've definitely had coaches throughout my career remind me that I'm going to miss shots."



Taylor Thierry

But just try to be more confident and trust that I'm capable of making shots."

Greene Compares Cambridge To Sheldon

Cambridge, a five-star recruit for whom expectations are high this season, has already drawn rave reviews from her coaches and teammates. Asked at Big Ten Media Days about her impression of Cambridge, Greene offered a strong comparison.

"She's really quick, she's really fast. This past week she's been playing really good defense," Greene said. "She's been running through (screens) – you know how Jacy does – stealing the ball, doing a lot of great things like that. She's quick off the dribble and has a quick first step just like Jacy does. Nothing's changed in practice."

Ball State, GVSU Added To Non-Con Schedule

Ohio State's schedule – including the nonconference and game times – is finalized for the upcoming season following recent announcements from the team and the Big Ten.

In addition to nine games reported in the previous issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin – including home contests against Cleveland State (Nov. 5), Charlotte (Nov. 12), Bowling Green (Nov. 24) and Youngstown State (Dec. 14); at Belmont (Nov. 17) and Ohio University (Nov. 20); and invitational games against Old Dominion (Nov. 28), Utah State (Nov. 29) and Stanford (Dec. 20) – Ohio State also announced home contests against Ball State on Dec. 10 and Grand Valley State on Dec. 17 to complete the nonconference schedule.

The Big Ten also announced the majority of tip off times and networks for Ohio State's schedule. The Buckeyes will be featured three times on FOX, including Feb. 8 at USC (9 p.m.), Feb. 17 against Iowa (noon) and March 2 at Maryland (5 p.m.). They will have four games streaming exclusively on Peacock, including Jan. 16 at Wisconsin (9 p.m.), Feb. 5 at UCLA (9:30 p.m.), Feb. 13 against Minnesota (7:30 p.m.) and Feb. 20 at Indiana (7 p.m.).

The remainder of Ohio State's games will air on either the Big Ten Network or Big Ten Plus, with the exception of the three invitational games against Old Dominion and Utah State in the Daytona Beach Classic and Stanford in the Invisalign Bay Area Women's Classic. The former will air on Baller TV, while the bout against the Cardinal will be on Fox Sports 1.

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Diebler Runs "Defensive Boot Camp" At Practice

Throughout the offseason, much has been made about the free-flowing offense Ohio State wants to play under first-year head coach Jake Diebler, one which is built upon spacing the floor and playing with great pace and urgency.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

But with the Buckeyes' charity exhibition game against Cincinnati on Oct. 18 quickly approaching, and the team's regular-season opener against Texas on Nov. 4 also inching closer, Diebler wants his team to shift its attention to the other side of the floor.

Speaking at the end of Ohio State's team media day held inside the Buckeyes' practice gym at Value City Arena on Oct. 8, Diebler said he and his staff have placed a strong emphasis on nailing down the details on the defensive side of the ball this fall, starting with what he called "defensive boot camp," that week.

"It is defensive boot camp, and (our) practice plan has been bent heavily towards the defensive side of the ball for us this week," Diebler said. "I felt like, as we start getting into game prep over the next couple of weeks, we have to solidify our defensive foundation."

Diebler said that with his team welcoming eight new players on the roster this offseason, they spent much of the summer installing offensive schemes that could complement their personnel and program identity. That has changed this fall, as he has now devoted significant time to fine-tuning their defensive schemes in order to have them fully prepared for their preseason and early season opponents.

"We needed to just shore up some things and spend a little bit more time and focus (on defense)," Diebler said. "We spent a lot of time this summer building our offense, while alongside that, setting our foundation defensively. Now, as we're getting ready to see different (offensive) actions and specific things, we have to start preparing for that."

"I felt like we needed to emphasize it a little bit more. The aggressiveness on defense will help us on the offensive side, and we will lean into that."

Although there have been few specifics about exactly what the "defensive boot camp" week entailed – other than Diebler showing up to practice in full military garb and face paint to get the point across – the extra emphasis on excelling on that side of the floor should be a welcome sight for a Buckeye program that has struggled to defend in recent years.

Since the 2020-21 campaign, Ohio State has finished the past four seasons ranked 82nd, 111th, 106th and 63rd nationally in adjusted defensive efficiency according to KenPom.com, which tracks each team's points allowed per 100 possessions as adjusted for the opponent.

Diebler did have Ohio State on the right track defensively toward the last half of the 2023-24 campaign, however. In the final 11 games of the season with Diebler manning the sidelines as interim head coach, the Buckeyes ranked 23rd nationally in defensive efficiency, allowing 95.6 points per 100 possessions.

That marked a major step forward from the team's defensive performance under former head coach Chris Holtmann, who, before getting fired after a 71-60 loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 13, had his team ranked 95th nationally in that metric after the Buckeyes' first 25 games, allowing 100.4 points per 100 possessions.

Depth A Strength For Buckeyes

With the 2024-25 men's college basketball season less than one month away, head coaches across the country are beginning to gain a better understanding of how their teams will shape up once they take the floor for their respective season openers.

For Diebler, he is starting to realize that one of his team's biggest strengths this season is its overall depth, which should play right into the fast-paced style the Buckeyes want to come out with starting Nov. 4 against the Longhorns.

"Depth is a real strength for this team," Diebler said during media day. "It provides us with a great deal of versatility. We can play a lot of different types of lineups, whether it's size, speed, there are interchangeable parts, and that is valuable for us."

Diebler said during his press conference that he feels his team does not have a starting five right now, but rather a "starting seven or eight," each of whom he and his staff think can serve as successful starters during the season.

He also indicated that he sees the team running 10 or 11 players deep during the beginning of the regular season, meaning

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Dorian Jones	G	6-4	160	★★★★	Richmond Heights, Ohio

the majority of the 14-man active roster – not counting sophomore guard Taison Chatman, who is out for the season with a torn ACL – could all see time on the court in some capacity early in the season.

Despite the team seemingly having a lot of viable options up and down the lineup, Diebler said one downside of this development is that he and his staff will have to soon determine who will see the floor in critical end-of-game situations. He said choosing the right guys to take the floor during the end of games will be especially important when they enter the gantlet of conference play.

"The biggest challenge for me is figuring out how we're going to end games," he said, "because we know this league is the deepest league in the country and you're going to have to be really good late. That's something we're working on daily and evaluating."

Regardless of who gets the nod at the end of tightly contested games, Diebler thinks that having several players vying for significant playing time this season has created an ultracompetitive locker room of players who go at each other in practice every day, a development that he hopes stays with this program for years to come.

"It's going to certainly present some challenges as far as finalizing the rotation, but the one thing that we do have is some healthy competition, and that will be valuable for us," Diebler said. "There will be a time here soon where we're going to have to define roles more specifically, but right now we're giving guys an opportunity to grow and to some degree fail a little bit, figure out what fits them right now."

"I want this to be a program built on development where guys can continue to grow their game."

Diebler Shares Recruiting Strategy As HC

Diebler has continually stressed the importance of recruiting – especially recruiting within Ohio – since taking over the reins as head coach last spring, and during Ohio State's media day he revealed some of the strategies he and his staff have implemented to try to get top-level high school players to play for the Buckeyes.

When asked to share what he has tried to impart to the high school prospects who have taken visits to Ohio State this fall, the 37-year-old coach said he places great importance on giving them an up-close look at how he and his team operate in practice, which he thinks can provide them with a better feel for the program's still-fresh culture and identity before they depart campus.

"Recruiting is obviously a really, really important – arguably the most important part of the program," Diebler said. "What we've discovered – we've tried to get guys on campus to see us practice. I think seeing us practice is a tangible example of how we

want to play. We're not a finished product by any means right now, but we want them to see how we want to play, see the way I coach, because there isn't a lot of data out there for them to see."

"And we've gotten great feedback, whether it's from recruits, coaches, guests who have seen us practice, and I think that's an important part for us."

This strategy has appeared to pay off for Diebler so far this fall. Two of Ohio State's most highly touted visitors – Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star 2025 teammates power forward Niko Bundalo (6-10, 215) and combo guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195) – both indicated that they enjoyed taking in a Diebler-led practice during their respective visits.

Bundalo, the nation's 26th-best player and seventh-best power forward, called watching Ohio State's practice the highlight of his trip, while Peterson, the No. 3-ranked player in the nation and top-ranked combo guard, said that he learned during his visit that Ohio State's style of play is synonymous with the way he wants to play.

"That's what I take the most from: style of play and understanding the game, because ultimately I'm committing somewhere to play basketball and to have a place that feels like home," Bundalo told The Columbus Dispatch after his Sept. 21 visit.

"I got to watch practice and see some of their plays. Just from what I've seen, they did a lot of DHO's (dribble-handoffs) and ball screens, and that's my bread and butter," Peterson told On3 Sports after his Aug. 31 trip to Columbus.

While having recruits watch practice seems to be a sound strategy for Diebler and his staff, the Buckeyes' head coach said he ultimately wants to leave those who visit campus with a strong parting message about the culture and uniqueness of Ohio State as both a program and a university, one which he thinks can leave a lasting impact on student-athletes.

"It's very easy for me to talk about Ohio State," Diebler said. "I think that's something that people realize, just how much I care about this place, how much I believe in this place and believe in the impact it can have for the young men on our team, certainly while they're here but long after that. I genuinely believe that."

"So when I get an opportunity to talk about that, I try to seize that moment and will continue to do so. Because this place is special. It's elite in so many areas. And we just have to continue to get that message out there."

Diebler's messaging has already produced sound results for the program in the recruiting sphere. In addition to the numerous visits Ohio State is garnering from four- and five-star prospects this fall, Diebler has secured two key pledges since taking over as head coach, earning in-state commitments from Cleveland Garfield



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OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2026 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Marcus Johnson	G	6-1	175	★★★★★	Garfield Heights, Ohio
Alex Smith	F	6-9	195	N/A	Upper Arlington, Ohio

Heights four-star 2026 point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175), the nation's 29th-best player and No. 2 player in Ohio, and Cleveland Richmond Heights four-star 2025 shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160), also the No. 2-ranked player in Ohio in his class and the 18th-best shooting guard.

TV And Game Times Announced

The TV and game times of all-but two Ohio State games were announced since BSB last went to press. The Buckeyes will play on five different TV networks and two streaming services over the course of the season.

Ohio State will play nine of its games on the Big Ten Network, the most by any network, including its Nov. 11 home opener against Youngstown State (6 p.m.), nonconference home games against Campbell on Nov. 22 (6 p.m.), Green Bay on Nov. 25 (7 p.m.) and Indiana State on Dec. 29 (noon) and Big Ten contests at Maryland (Dec. 4, 6:30 p.m.), vs. Oregon (Jan. 9, 6 p.m.), at Nebraska (Feb. 9, 2 p.m.), vs. Washington (Feb. 12, 8:30 p.m.) and at USC (Feb. 26, 10:30 p.m.).

The network that will broadcast the second-most Buckeye games this season is FOX Sports 1. They will be on site for

six conference games, including home contests against Rutgers (Dec. 7, noon), Iowa (Jan. 27, 8 p.m.), Maryland (Feb. 6, 7 p.m.) and Northwestern (Feb. 20, 6:30 p.m.) and road games against Minnesota (Jan. 6, 9 p.m.) and Penn State (Jan. 30, 6:30 p.m.).

Ohio State will also get the chance to perform on the national stage, with seven games on the "big four" major broadcast networks. This includes five weekend games on CBS: Dec. 21 against Kentucky at Madison Square Garden as part of the CBS Sports Classic (5:30 p.m.), Feb. 2 at Illinois (1 p.m.), Feb. 16 at home against Michigan (1 p.m.), Feb. 23 at UCLA (3:45 p.m.) and March 8 at Indiana (3:45) to close the season; and two primetime Friday night home games on FOX: Jan. 3 at home against Michigan State (8 p.m.) and Jan. 17 at home against Indiana (8 p.m.).

The only other game Ohio State is playing on network television is its season opener against Texas on Nov. 4 in Las Vegas as part of the Hall of Fame Series, which will be broadcast on TNT with tip-off at 10 p.m.

As was the case last year, Ohio State will play multiple games on streaming-only services. Five games will be streamed exclusively on Peacock, including home games against Pitt (Nov. 29, 2:30 p.m.), Valparaiso

(Dec. 17, 8 p.m.) and Nebraska (March 4, 9 p.m.) and road games at Wisconsin (Jan. 14, 9 p.m.) and Purdue (Jan. 21, 7:30 p.m.). Ohio State will also play one game on Big Ten Plus at home against Evansville on Nov. 19 (7 p.m.).

One Ohio State game will be broadcast on the SEC Network, when the Buckeyes visit Texas A&M on Nov. 15. As BSB went to press, only one game hadn't its full TV designation, which is the game against Auburn at Atlanta's State Farm Arena on Dec. 14, although it is known that the game will tip off at 1 p.m.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Both Bundalo and Peterson offered significant updates on their recruitments since BSB last went to press. Starting with Peterson, the northeast Ohio native has reportedly set a commitment date of Nov. 1, choosing between his four finalists: Kansas, Kansas State, Ohio State and USC. Peterson has taken visits to all four schools, most recently going to Kansas State the weekend of Sept. 27. Although Ohio State has put itself in great position to land the heralded prospect, one potential hurdle in securing that commitment is that Peterson signed a historic NIL deal with Adidas last November, which made him the first high school player to sign such a deal with the company. Ohio State, along with Kansas State and USC, is represented by Nike, while Kansas – the presumed favorite to land Peterson – is outfitted by Adidas.

- Bundalo, on the other hand, trimmed his list of preferred schools down to four

on Oct. 9, including Ohio State along with Michigan State, North Carolina and UConn. This news comes just a few days after Bundalo canceled and did not reschedule his Oct. 18 official visit to Kentucky, which was initially in his top eight alongside the previous four teams, Pitt, Texas and Xavier. The northeast Ohio native plans to visit North Carolina later this fall and choose a school before his senior season begins, but the hometown Buckeyes seem high on his list. "They've really intrigued me from the jump just because I'm an Ohio kid and I was born and raised there," he told On3 in a recent interview. "I really love what Coach Diebler has done with the team, and the relationship that he's created with every single one of his guys is great."

- According to Forbes basketball insider Adam Zagoria, Diebler conducted an in-home visit with Atlanta Holy Innocents Episcopal School five-star power forward Caleb Wilson (6-9, 205) the night of Oct. 7. Wilson is tabbed as the nation's fifth-best prospect and third-best power forward and holds 27 offers from numerous college basketball powerhouses, including Duke, Kansas and Kentucky. The Buckeyes are one of the 27 offers but have yet to bring him in for a visit, and they are running out of time as Wilson's father, Jerry, told 247Sports that they are "close to the end" of his son's recruitment. Wilson took a visit to North Carolina the weekend of Oct. 5 and plans to visit Georgia Tech in the next couple of weeks, but his father said there are other visits on schedule that they are trying to finalize.

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THANKS A MILLION

Hearing Impairment No Obstacle For Frosh

A goal horn blaring. The cheers of a crowd. A teammate yelling for the puck. All sounds taken for granted by most people.

For Noah Powell, an Ohio State freshman forward, all those noises at a rink are muffled because of his hearing impairment, but he doesn't view it as a detriment when he's playing.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"It's actually helped a little bit in terms of awareness on the ice and creativity, but I kind of found ways to make sure I hear what I need to hear," he said. "I've gotten much better at managing it. It's not a problem."

Powell, 19, does not wear hearing aids on the ice but relies more on lip reading as well as chemistry with his teammates. Off ice, he wears in-ear aids.

"He's a smart hockey player, and honestly, you really don't need to talk to him too much," said junior forward Davis Burnside. "I feel like he knows where to go and where you are, so I think that's helped his hockey sense. He doesn't really need to hear too much to be able to find you and make a play."

"It doesn't really affect him. He does as well as he can. He's a great person, and I think it's just another adversity for him to push through."

Powell has overcome a lot in his short life. In a sport not known for diversity, his mother, Maria, is Colombian and his father, Anthony, is half African-American and half Polish. Nobody in his family played hockey until he started skating at age 4 in Chicago.

When asked if he feels like he's a role model not only for the hearing-impaired community but players of color, he said, "Sometimes. I just try and do my thing, and hopefully it's a good example and a good precedent for others."

His ascension to where he could be one of the top freshmen in the Big Ten this season is remarkable.

In his first season in the junior level United Hockey States League, he had just 19 points (eight goals, 11 assists) in 53 games in 2022-23 for Dubuque. He was passed over in the 2023 NHL draft by all 32 teams

over seven rounds in his first year of eligibility.

Even last season started slowly. 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. Included were four hat tricks and 16 power-play goals.

"I got the opportunity to have a bigger role my second year vs. my first year being a rookie on a much older lineup," he said.

His 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, and the record of 38 by Mike Szmatala during the 2012-13 season.

"He's just scratching the surface," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said. "People are thinking, 'Wow, is this guy going to come in and score 50 goals in the Big Ten?' I don't think that's going to happen. I think he's got to make the adjustment to Big Ten hockey, the speed of the game, understanding the game, but there's so much there to work with."

Powell (6-2, 210) should be able to manage the physical play in college even as a freshman with his background in boxing and martial arts.

"He's strong," Rohlik said. "You don't understand. Most freshmen come in and you're like, 'OK, it's going to take a little time physically.' Physically, he's a beast."

So unexpected was Powell's rise that despite leading the USHL in goals last season, he wasn't among the 223 North American skaters ranked by NHL Central Scouting for the 2024 draft.

Yet, he caught the attention of the Philadelphia Flyers, who selected him in the fifth round (No. 148).

"It was a pretty cool feeling," Powell said. "Obviously, it was a dream come true, but at the moment it doesn't really matter much because I've still got to go out there and play every day."

His path to Ohio State is similar to that of former Buckeye Tanner Laczynski in that the Buckeyes recruited the forward early and were able to hold off challenges from other schools after he blossomed.

"Our staff did a great job of identifying potential," Rohlik said of Powell. "That's a huge word, right? You know where that ends up. But so far, he's proved that he can handle it."

But there's a long way to go."

Laczynski, also from the Chicago area, was drafted in the sixth round (No. 160) by the Flyers in 2016, and after four seasons with the Buckeyes, he played 38 games for the Flyers before signing with the Vegas Golden Knights organization this season.

Common Bond

Powell fell in love with Ohio State after visiting earlier this year.

"There seems to be a really good culture in the locker room," he said. "It's a bigger campus, a little closer to home, and they have a history of moving guys up to the next level, and I liked the academics as well. It was a combination of those things that played a big role, plus the coaching staff."

What Powell didn't know before the visit was that Rohlik's daughter Erin, a sophomore at Ohio State, has a hearing impairment. She was a field hockey player when she was younger and also became proficient at lip reading to communicate.

Powell feels those experiences for Rohlik make a difference in how the two converse.

"I've noticed kind of a little advantage there talking to Coach. We just had a little more fluidity in our conversations," Powell said.

"This is personal to me too, with my daughter, and going through a very similar process with her growing up and what Noah went through," Rohlik said. "So it kind of helps me to communicate because I know that you've got to make contact and talk. Especially in a noisy environment, you've got to look one-on-one."

"I think at times you take things for granted and how noisy it is and heads are turned and all that, but I think he's doing a great job. He asks questions, and I think as a coach I keep knowing that sometimes you've got to stop and communicate with him a little bit more."

Powell's parents didn't know he had a hearing problem until he failed a state-mandated hearing screening twice before entering first grade and it was discovered he had bilateral hearing loss – a mild to moderate hearing impairment in both ears.

A year earlier, they had him work with a speech pathologist because he was not talking much. During that time, he learned lip reading on his own and no one knew he was having hearing problems.

As a youth he used an assisted listening device where a teacher or coach would speak into a microphone directly into his hearing aids. As Powell got older, he stopped using them when playing hockey.

He was fortunate living where he did because he was able to connect with the Chicago-based American Hearing Impaired Hockey Association, a program for hearing-impaired hockey players founded by Chicago Blackhawks and Hockey Hall of Famer Stan Mikita.

Rohlik believes Powell's experiences over the years will make his transition to Ohio State smooth despite the hearing impairment.

"Hopefully through our practice habits and everything we're doing now, it's going to be probably a little more teach on the bench than maybe the yelling and communication

on the ice, which a lot of times it might be ringing for him and not hearing," Rohlik said. "So you've kind of got to let him do his thing on the ice and then when he gets to the bench, that's when the teaching has got to happen."

Rohlik said Powell quickly fit in with the rest of the team.

"The nice part about this group is they had a couple months of this summer where they worked out together and got to know each other," Rohlik said. "The guys got to know Noah very well and understand his situation."

"At the end of the day, Noah and my daughter, you know what? You don't treat them anything different and they go about their business. It's just the communication piece is just a little different than you and I."

Leadership

Burnside and graduate forward Patrick Guzzo were named co-captains while graduate forward Joe Dunlap and defenseman Aiden Hansen-Bukata, a graduate transfer from Rochester Institute of Technology, will be the assistant captains.

Win Some

The Buckeyes opened the season with a 3-3 tie and a 5-2 win against American International College at Value City Arena on Oct. 11 and 12.

Junior Max Montes led the way with two goals on the weekend, and six other Buckeyes also scored.

Although the Buckeyes lost the shootout in the first game it was officially a tie, a disappointing one, after blowing a 2-0 lead before 2,623 fans who saw a wild ending.

Freshman James Hong scored his first goal with four seconds remaining in the first period and sophomore defenseman Nathan McBrayer from nearby Dublin potted his first career goal in his 35th game, but the Yellow Jackets scored once in the second and twice in third to go ahead 3-2.

Montes tied it 3-3 with 51 seconds left after goalie Logan Terness was pulled for an extra attacker.

Then, Northeastern transfer Gunnarwolfe Fontaine ripped the winner with 2:20 left in OT for the Buckeyes only to have it wiped out by a successful offside challenge. The Yellow Jackets looked like they were going to win when they were awarded a penalty with 49 seconds left, but Terness came to the rescue with a huge save to send the game to a shootout where the Yellow Jackets prevailed 2-1 in five rounds.

OSU in the rematch led 4-1 after two periods on goals by Ryan Gordon, Riley Thompson, Guzzo and Montes. After an AIC goal early in the third, Damien Carfagna scored a shorthanded, empty-netter with 19 seconds left to back the 26 saves by Kristoffer Eberly.

The Buckeyes begin Big Ten play Oct. 18 and 19 at Wisconsin before a pair of nonconference games vs. Bowling Green, hosting the Falcons on Oct. 25 before playing on the road the next night.

For a complete recap of the American International series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



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Disappointing Game But Not Too Late For OSU

The four-quarter slugfest between two outstanding teams had all the excitement and drama many expected and resulted in a 32-31 Oregon victory over Ohio State.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

Big-time players made big plays in a back-and-forth battle that came down to the last possession of the game. The contest featured two dynamic transfer quarterbacks who brought their talents to a new program in hopes of upping their stock for the next level once their college days are over. The battle also featured many of the very best skilled athletes in all of college football.

The venue was Autzen Stadium in Eugene, Ore., and it was electric. Both teams played hard and left it all on the field, and the huge national television audience saw the best of college football in terms of entertainment. In terms of the final outcome it was exactly what Oregon fans were looking for, but for the Buckeye faithful, it was a bitter pill to swallow.

In the previous five games this season, the Buckeyes showed an excellent balance between offense and defense. Many of the first halves were hard-fought and some even close in terms of the score, but the Buckeyes had owned all of their previous opponents in the second half of play.

They had given up only 10 total points in the second half in the first five games, and seven of those were scored against the second team. In the second half in Eugene, both teams scored 10 points, and the one-point lead Oregon had at halftime ended up being the differential when time expired in the fourth quarter.

Even though the Buckeyes came up on the short end and the players played their hearts out, they could leave Eugene with their heads up knowing they had fought hard. At the same time, it was a hard pill to swallow due to the mistakes made and opportunities not taken advantage of at times.

An offense which had averaged over 500 yards of offense through five games didn't seem as efficient or dynamic as it has been this season. Most disappointing, however, was the play of the defense.

A defense which led the nation in scoring defense and in total defensive yardage given up vastly underperformed, giving up 25 more points and nearly 300 more yards than their average.

Shocking for a defense that is loaded with as much talent and experience as any college team in the country.

Against another top-five team like Oregon, no one expected the numbers to be as impressive as they had been, but to play that far below our potential was disheartening, to say the least.

Uncharacteristic Mistakes

To win big games away from home, there are certain things the road team must do and not do, the first of which is to take the home crowd out of the game early. It looked as if the Buckeyes were going to do exactly that with a 10-play, 75-yard drive that ended with a Will Howard touchdown run on their first possession.

But things would change on the next Buckeye possession when running back Quinshon Judkins fumbled on OSU's own 28-yard line. This gave the Ducks offense a short field and brought the home crowd to a frenzy which would last for four quarters. It would take Oregon running back Jordan James just two plays to score a touchdown and turn the tide in favor of the home team.

The next Buckeye possession was no better as the offense would commit two false-start and one delay-of-game penalties to end the drive.

The "poise under pressure" the Buckeyes characteristically have shown in the past seemed to have cracked, and even though the Buckeyes would fight back and score 14 more points in the first half, they were never really in rhythm the rest of the night. The lead would switch hands seven times before the game was over, and the Buckeyes courageously matched the Ducks blow to blow but unfortunately came up short.

Explosive Plays

Jim Knowles had two major goals for his defense this season. One was to create more turnovers than last year and to not give up as many explosive plays as in 2023. The stout Buckeye defense had done just that entering the Oregon game by recovering five fumbles and intercepting the ball four times.

The confident "Silver Bullets" rarely had to gamble with man-to-man cover-

age and the blitz in previous games. The defense had been shutting down the opposition by keeping the football in front of the secondary and relying on the skill and talent of the unit to make plays, and it worked.

But Oregon was a different animal.

The Ducks had equal or near equal talent at the offensive skill positions and a proven quarterback who could hurt you with his feet as well as his arm. It was apparent the defensive coaching staff of the Buckeyes would have to devise a more aggressive game plan with some new wrinkles to stop an explosive Oregon offense.

At times the plan worked, but too many times the Buckeyes gave up big plays both in the running and passing game.

James would rush for 115 yards for the evening against a Buckeye defense that had been allowing only about half that much for the entire opposing team. But it was the failures in pass defense that sealed the fate for the Buckeye defense.

The Oregon offense amassed 341 in the air for the night. The Buckeye defense had given up an average of only 129.8 yards previously, which was fourth nationally.

Quarterback Dillon Gabriel was able to hit his receivers in void areas underneath our safeties and overtop our line-

backers as well as throwing the ball deep behind our corners in man coverage. Four different Oregon receivers caught passes of 32 or more yards and as deep as 69.

The Buckeye defense did have some positive moments against the Ducks, especially in some short-yardage situations, but giving up so many explosive plays while forcing no turnovers is unacceptable for so talented a defense.

Time to Bounce Back

In a game that featured some strange situations like a player getting kicked out for spitting on an opposing player to a "too many men on the field" penalty that benefited Oregon time wise in the final minute of play, the end result is the Buckeyes still have a chance to accomplish most of their goals as long as there are no other slips along the way.

Twelve teams will make the College Football Playoff, and the Big Ten championship as well as the national championship are still up for grabs. The Buckeyes must learn from the loss, handle adversity in a hostile environment better, and refocus on the little things that make big things attainable.

Ryan Day and his staff have time to "right the ship," but they must avoid the rough waters ahead.

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One Loss Won't Make Or Break OSU's Season

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The Ohio State-Oregon game showed me two things. OSU was, in fact, beatable. Secondly, it's going to be very, very difficult to run the table in this new Big Ten unless the schedule makers do you some favors to avoid the biggies, especially on the road.

Ohio State lost, 32-31, at Oregon.

The season is not lost. If anything, it brings what needs to be done into focus. Can Ohio State afford another loss? Probably. But I wouldn't want to risk that proposition.

Ohio State needs to identify what went wrong. Determine what needs to be done to fix those issues. And move on with the same tenacity that the 2014 Buckeyes showed en route to the national championship.

This team has the talent to win it all.

It cannot win it all if it blows onside kicks (if that was an onside kick Oregon tried/converted). It cannot win it all with repeated dead-

ball penalties. It cannot win it all with poor clock management.

All those things are correctable, but it will also take more than that. OSU lost to an Oregon team that was far from perfect itself.

The Ducks made plenty of their own mistakes. A botched extra point, a missed field goal, twice failing to get into the end zone from the red zone and a wide receiver spitting his way out of the game.

And Oregon has hardly had a perfect – though unbeaten – run to start the 2024 season. It now counts a three-point win over Boise State and a one-point win over Ohio State on its ledger. A win is a win, but Oregon isn't a finished national championship-level product, either.

All this tells us how tough it will be this season.

Expect the Ducks to be in the Big Ten title game. Their toughest game left is at Michigan on Nov. 2, and they are one up on the Buckeyes.

Oregon Game Takeaways

I expected Oregon to move the ball. But the Oregon defense was better than I expected, pretty much shutting down OSU's run game other than a couple of long bursts from TreVeyon Henderson, and pretty much shutting down the deep ball (or maybe OSU didn't try deep passes enough).

Injuries matter. Replacing two offensive linemen midway through a game against a

top-five team may be too much to ask.

Denzel Burke struggled on the island. I didn't expect to see that. Burke is a good player, but he's not Antoine Winfield, Shawn Springs kind of good, we learned – or at least that's what was shown for one night.

Caleb Downs continues to impress. He's the best tackler on the team. He always seems to be in the right position. And when he decides to take an angle to make a play, he's on target.

OSU needs to blitz more to put pressure on the quarterback. Dillon Gabriel had way too much time to throw too many times when Ohio State rushed just four. That's asking an awful lot from the defensive backfield to cover receivers for so long. Of course, the tradeoff is fewer defenders covering the receivers.

'Leave No Doubt'

I thought the offensive pass interference call on Jeremiah Smith on the final drive – the penalty that pushed the Buckeyes out of field-goal range – was a ticky-tack call. I suppose by the book it was pass interference, but it hardly was the reason why he was open for the catch on the play.

So did that call, which I'm calling questionable, cost the Buckeyes the game? Maybe. But that's not the approach outlined by coach Ryan Day during the preseason Big Ten media gathering.

"It's easy to say that it comes down to a play or two, but that's not really the case. What we need to do is leave no doubt. No doubt. Don't leave it to one play, don't leave it to one call, don't leave it to one stop. Leave no doubt when you're on the field," Day said.

"And we're not going to get into all of the reasons or all of the things that we've done to try to address that, to get that fixed. But we have. We've worked hard on that, and we feel good about where we're at going into the season."

That could be applied to the interference call, Will Howard's failure to hit the ground earlier in time for a long field-goal attempt (or

final pass), the failure to cover the onside kick and a handful of other plays. But then again, I guess that's more than one play.

The objective during the second half of the season is to get enough better to leave no doubt.

On The Bright Side

There are positives to take away from the Oregon game.

If Oregon is the best team in the Big Ten and the best or second-best team in the country, Ohio State is right there.

I wouldn't be afraid to face Oregon again.

Clean up some things. Make some revisions to the game plan. And Oregon is beatable by this Ohio State team.

The national championship is still well within reach. It's just not going to be easy. And who really thought it would be easy?

Exner Point's Top 11

I've been doing a top 11 this year because 11 schools from the major conferences will be invited to the college football playoffs.

The best win to date by an undefeated team goes to Oregon. So I have Oregon at No. 1 this week. Here's my top 11.

1. Oregon, 6-0 – An early-season struggle against Boise State but a big home win against Ohio State.

2. Texas, 6-0 – Still perfect, though it hasn't faced a top-notch opponent yet. Its best wins are over Michigan and Oklahoma. Stay tuned.

3. Ohio State, 5-1 – A one-point loss to my No. 1 team.

4. Georgia, 5-1 – Too many close games against lesser opponents such as a 10-point win over Mississippi State and a one-point win over Kentucky. But a lot of talent on this team and potential to get better.

5. Penn State, 6-0 – I have this team below two one-loss teams because I'm waiting for Penn State to show it can play with the big boys. Working in PSU's favor to post an impressive record is that it doesn't play Oregon or Michigan.

6. Tennessee, 5-1 – I believe there's a big gap between No. 5 and No. 6 on this list. Tennessee has been unimpressive, including needing to go to overtime to beat 3-3 Florida last week. But someone has to fit into this slot.

7. Clemson, 5-1 – The Tigers got hammered by Georgia, 34-3, in their opener but have been strong since vs. unimpressive opponents. Stay tuned.

8. Notre Dame, 5-1 – It doesn't get much worse for a playoff contender than losing to a Mid-American Conference team, as Notre Dame did. But the Irish seem to be playing better now.

9. Miami (Fla.), 6-0 – I've watched a lot of Miami, and I'm not impressed, but the Hurricanes are unbeaten, thanks to a four-point win over Virginia Tech and a one-point win over California in their last two games.

10. Iowa State, 6-0 – Its best win is over Iowa. Still undefeated.

11. Alabama, 5-1 – Should anyone who loses to Vanderbilt be ranked? Probably not. But we're running out of options. So we'll put 'Bama (a two-point winner over South Carolina on Oct. 12) in this final slot.



CAMERON MITCHELL
RESTAURANTS

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Loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers frequently ask us what they can do to help keep BSB vibrant in this increasingly electronic age. One of the things readers can do is introduce BSB to new readers who might find our Ohio State sports content interesting.

In order to help you do that, we are offering an opportunity to send four free trial issues to potential subscribers. We will then offer your potential subscriber a very special offer to get them to join the fold of loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers.

We are also offering a special \$19.95 subscription rate for gifts for our service men and women. It's nice to send a little bit of home to those all over the world who are protecting us. Don't forget to include an APO address when applicable and remember, any subscription includes electronic access to BSB, so our Buckeyes in uniform will be able to enjoy their BSB immediately, wherever they are.

This four free trial issue offer is not good for current subscribers. This offer is to introduce readers to BSB. You can conveniently email your names and addresses to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com or mail them to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

What The Duck Happened To The OSU Defense?

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Heading into Ohio State's game at Oregon, I was convinced that the Ducks were overrated and the Buckeyes were possibly – and I *hate* this word and can't believe I'm using it – generational.

I was probably wrong about Oregon, though the Ducks had plenty of problems of their own against the Buckeyes, many of their own making. At the least, I was premature about the Buckeyes being generational, a word I came to despise when it was affixed to former Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence.

That said, there is one thing I know for certain. I would never in a million years have seen the performance of the Ohio State defense against Oregon coming, most of all the play of Denzel Burke, one of the cornerstones of said defense.

The Ohio State offense, which wasn't necessarily at its best either, seemed to counter every score by Oregon, but the defense was unable to come up with that one more stop they needed. The Buckeyes stopped Oregon on consecutive possessions only once, and that was actually three stops in a row. But the first of those was Oregon running out the clock at the end of the first half, and the last of the three was almost as damaging as a score.

Midway through the third quarter, the Ducks drove 73 yards on 13 plays before Ohio State stopped them on its 2. Yes, they didn't score, but Oregon ate up 5:50 of valuable time that the high-powered Buckeye offense could have used to score points (and they needed only one more). Will Howard and Co. were left to start at that same OSU 2. The Buckeyes moved the ball 15 yards before being forced to punt, giving the ball back to the Ducks at the Oregon 40. It took them just five plays to score on a 27-yard Dillon Gabriel run and take a 29-28 lead with 13:20 to play.

"No pressure on the quarterback. No pass coverage. What's left?" one of the posters on our live game thread at the BuckeyeSports.com Forum wondered.

"You can add no tackling to your list," another poster quickly responded.

Yes, the Buckeye defense pretty much lacked it all.

One of the reasons I was leaning to the generational on this year's team was that not only is there talent at every position, or so I thought, but I wondered if any team in the country has as good a coaching staff as Ohio State, led by offensive and defensive coordinators Chip Kelly and Jim Knowles respectively.

I'm beginning to wonder about Knowles – at least in the big games. As the poster said, the lack of pressure on the quarterback and the failure to defend in the secondary led to Gabriel passing for 341 yards and two touchdowns.

The lack of pressure on the quarterback was particularly maddening. The Buckeyes were credited with all of zero sacks and two quarterback hurries, both by JT Tuimoloau. It reminded me of Kerry Coombs against Oregon in 2021: Just let the opposing offense do the same thing successfully over and over again.

Why not just throw everyone but the kitchen sink at Gabriel? I know, you would be leaving the back end exposed, but they were being picked apart anyway. Why not try something different?

Does Knowles get tight in the big games? His Buckeyes came into the game ranked No. 1 in the nation in both total defense and scoring defense before giving up 496 yards to the Ducks.

If you look at the four big losses in his time in Columbus, losses to Michigan and Georgia in 2022, Michigan in 2023 and the loss to Oregon, the Buckeye defense has given up an average of 37.3 points and 474.3 yards. In this week's NCAA statistical standings, those numbers would rank 124th and 126th, respectively.

I don't recall a totally made-up statistical comparison, but it's my column and you get my point.

"We have to do a better job coaching, that's it, that's the bottom line," Knowles said after the Oregon loss. "We didn't make enough plays. I didn't think we were outstanding in any area. It felt like we were always behind, and it was uncharacteristic. We have to learn from it. We have to practice better. We have to coach better. Our players are certainly good enough to win that game. We talked about winning that game on defense, and we didn't get the job done."

Usually, he adds that any failures on the field are on him.

Well, fix it.

By the way, I didn't think Chip Kelly had his best game either.

I don't recall a lot of those picturesque plays he draws up so beautifully. In fact, by the fourth quarter it seemed like it was Howard and his star receivers Emeka Egbuka and Jeremiah Smith trying to beat the Ducks, one-on-one. Nothing fancy. Just, "We're better than you, stop us."

And Oregon never really did stop them, with the two combining for 19 catches, 193 yards and two touchdowns.

Just a couple more quick points.

After getting better weekly, as far as the number of penalties, including only one the week before against Iowa, the Buckeyes had a total relapse, being flagged eight times for 70 yards. It seemed like each miscue came at a critical time, none more critical than the game-defining interference call on Smith.

And talking about miscues, this time by Oregon, who would have thought that after the Ducks bungled a PAT try, the near return for two points by Lathan Ransom could have been the difference in the game? It was that type of wild and crazy game.

Mirco At Vanderbilt

I like to follow former Buckeyes, whether they have gone to the pros or through the portal.

When Vanderbilt defeated Alabama on Oct. 5, was I the only one who wondered how former Buckeye punter Jesse Mirco did in the monumental upset? As it turns out, quite well actually.

He had only two punts for a 38.0 average, but he put both of them inside the 20, one at the 12 and one at the 4 with no points scored after the second kick. You can't say he didn't do his job.

For the season, Mirco is averaging 44.6 yards with seven of his 19 punts landing inside the 20 through six games. He has a long of 69 among five kicks over 50 yards.

I would say his replacement, Joe McGuire, has been net neutral. His punting hasn't really affected the course of Ohio State's season either way. He had three punts for a 40.3-yard average with a long of 43 against Oregon, with none of his kicks landing inside the 20. He is averaging 41.3 yards on 16 punts with a long of 51 and four inside the 20.

A Personal Mail Woes Note

This is my 44th year as Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher. In that time, we have survived computer failures, power outages, staff upheaval, Hurricanes (seriously) and even the John Cooper Years (talk about angry subscribers!).

The Cooper years are relevant here, because the BSB subscribers took their frustrations with Cooper out on BSB, canceling their subscription in droves, even though we had no control over

what was happening with the Buckeyes.

In all these 44 years, and through all the many challenges, BSB staffers have kept a positive attitude, come up with solutions and consistently put the paper out on time. When we are challenged and we respond is when I am most proud.

But in all the 44 years, I think the last six weeks or so have been the most difficult. Computers fail, you fix them or replace them. The power goes out, it comes back on, generally fairly quickly.

But the mailing issues we have don't seem to go away. Nor do the phone calls from subscribers – some understanding, some unhappy and some outright belligerent. But one thing about *all* of the phone calls is they are relentless. None of us signed on to be a complaint center, fielding complaints that we are unable to fix and keeping us away from what we are paid to do – put out a newspaper. And when the complaints are non-stop, day after day, and you have to try to squeeze your work in between calls, it gets to you. But as I mentioned, like any problem, we deal with it, and as I also mentioned, that is when I am most proud.

First and foremost, other companies would have some automated phone system and if you were able to navigate the system you might end up speaking with someone in India or the Philippines. You call here and a live person answers the phone. Even when we are not here, a live person from our answering service will make sure your message gets to us.

Why do we do this? Because it is the right thing to do.

After an appropriate waiting period, if your BSB doesn't come, we replace it, while most newspapers would just offer you a credit. Keep in mind that we are sending that replacement after we have already paid to mail the paper to you once already, and we send the replacement copy via first-class mail, which is roughly four times the cost of the periodical class rate that most of you have paid for. That will cut into our slim profit margin in a hurry.

Why do we do this? Because it is the right thing to do.

But here is what has really been bothering me in the last few weeks.

The other thing we have tried to do for 44 years is put out a quality publication – one that is informative, entertaining, well-edited and most importantly designed to give the readers what they want.

Why do we do that? Because not only is it the right thing to do, but it is my passion.

I truly believe that by calling and complaining that you don't have your paper, you are paying us the ultimate compliment. You want your BSB!

Here is what has really been getting to me personally – and if you call and the person who answers is cranky, you are probably speaking to me. You have to understand that I am trying to grapple with something that I don't fully understand and is a situation that is harmful to both readers and staffers. Many readers are just coming right out and telling us directly that they will not be renewing their subscriptions because their paper doesn't arrive on time. These are readers that have been with us 20, 30 and, all too often, 40 years or more.

I would like to think that Buckeye Sports Bulletin is compelling enough to readers of that duration that they would try to ride out the storm with us, taking advantage of the online edition,

which is posted immediately upon completion of each paper, until their paper arrives or upgrading their delivery to first-class mail in an envelope through football season for what is now only \$20. Let me assure you, that is below our cost, so we are not trying to upsell you. We are trying to give you what you are complaining you are not getting – quicker service.

If you elect to not renew, you are denying yourself something that you must enjoy, or you wouldn't have subscribed for decades and you are financially weakening the product, which threatens our staff, who work really hard to serve you, and your fellow subscribers that you are leaving behind.

For those of you who continue to subscribe, here is what you can do to help us.

We have very specific waiting periods before we consider your BSB lost and we will replace it, no questions asked. We simply can't afford to send out replacement papers, only to have you receive the original paper the next day, or even later that same afternoon.

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, again, no questions asked.

If you wait until your allotted day, you will save yourself an extra phone call and eliminate a *lot* of the wear and tear on the BSB staff by theoretically cutting the incoming phone calls in half.

We are also asking 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 postal 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. If even 100 readers, a small fraction of our subscriber base, call, maybe someone will start paying attention.

I am sorry I rambled on so badly. I've heard how you feel. I just want to let you know how I feel. It's been a very tough time at Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

BSB Subscriber Of The Month

There is no such honor as the BSB Subscriber of The Month, but if there were one, I would give it to a Mr. Wasilewski of Warren, Ohio. The last couple of issues, the Warren/Youngstown area has been the epicenter of BSB delivery issues, though the problem is far more widespread than just that.

Rather than complain to BSB about his delivery problems, Mr. Wasilewski marched down to the Warren Post Office and found somebody there who would listen to him about his delivery problems. That postal worker took an interest in his plight and is now hot on the case and in contact with me regularly. I mean this guy is fired up! I don't know if he will get anywhere, but if you are in the Warren Post Office Annex on Niles Rd., be sure to tell Woody Jones (he's got the right name, doesn't he?) that you appreciate his efforts.

SHEETZ

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