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Vol. 44, No. 7

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 2, 2024

Bucks Win Ugly Against Huskers, Hang On For 21-17 Victory

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Through the off week after the loss to Oregon, Ohio State was subjected to some harsh criticisms from fans, pundits and others across the world of college football, with many beginning to doubt just how good this Buckeye team – one which entered the season with national championship expectations – really was.

Most of those concerns were centered around Jim Knowles' defense, which, after looking rather sharp the first five games of the season, had a poor performance across the board against the now-No.1-ranked Ducks, relinquishing 496 total yards of offense and several explosive plays while also failing to record a sack on Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel.

But the criticisms did not stop with the defense. There was also chatter about the inability of head coach Ryan Day to win the big game against a formidable opponent – backed up by his 2-6 record against AP top-five teams – as well as the team's clock management mishaps, none more talked about than quarterback Will Howard's game-ending slide with zero seconds on the clock.

With all of those criticisms seeming to grow louder and louder as Ohio State went through its second off week of the season, it seemed like there was no better time for Day and his team to quiet those concerns with a convincing home victory over a supposedly inferior Nebraska team.

It made even more sense to win big considering the Cornhuskers were coming off a 56-7 blowout loss to Indiana in which they gave up over 200 rushing yards and were led by a struggling first-year quarterback in Dylan Raiola – a former Buckeye commit – who had thrown four intercep-



SONNY BROCKWAY

ESCAPING THE CLUTCHES – Quarterback Will Howard and his Ohio State teammates found it was much harder than expected to put away underdog Nebraska before rallying for a 21-17 victory to keep the Buckeyes in the hunt for a Big Ten championship and a playoff appearance.

tions and zero touchdowns his previous two games.

Four days before the Nebraska game, Howard even acknowledged that his team wanted to rebound from the Oregon loss and quiet the concerns by playing with more of an edge, a mentality that he said

started during the off-week in practice.

"Overall, the mindset was just, 'We can't let that happen again,'" Howard said. "We had more of a motivated, pissed off, ticked off mentality. And that starts from the top. The coaches definitely brought it a little bit more last week, not that they weren't (previously)."

It seemed as if all the stars were aligned on Oct. 26 for a statement Buckeye win that would silence the public critics. But instead, those critics may have only grown louder following the game.

In a matchup that had the Buckeyes pinned as an over-25-point favorite at kickoff over the 5-2 Cornhuskers, Day's team looked rather uninspired throughout.

Plagued by a lack of continuity on a

banged-up Ohio State offensive line and a few defensive lapses, Ohio State limped through 3½ quarters to find itself in a 17-14 hole before waking up at the end of the fourth period to come away with a 21-17 victory.

It was a performance that fans rarely see from a Day squad that routinely takes care of unranked opponents, and one that will likely cause the Buckeyes to go back to the drawing board before another critical matchup against No. 3 Penn State on Nov. 2.

But for Howard, the game also served as a positive reminder that when the going gets tough, the Buckeyes can still find ways to win.

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From The Message Board

Despite entering the 2024 season with sky-high expectations, Ohio State's defense has yet to reach its full potential, showing some minor lapses against Marshall and Michigan State before having its worst performance of the season against Oregon, giving up 496 total yards and failing to record a sack in the 32-31 loss. With the season around its midway point, we asked readers on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what they have thought of Ohio State's defense so far, what it needs to improve upon in order for it to reach its full potential and if they believe the recent struggles are more of a coaching or personnel issue.

"I think it's too early to tell how good or bad the defense will be. We have seen too many teams move the ball too easily. I tend to think that coaching is more of a problem than personnel, but I say that with no great confidence.

– Terrier Buck

"We've seen flashes of how good this year's defense can be, but then they flame out. Coaches probably tell our talented, veteran players they need to play disciplined, assignment football. Opposing offensive coordinators don't seem to have any problem scheming against the defense: That shouldn't happen.

"It's my opinion that every starting quarterback of teams ranked in the top 25 has the ability to pick apart almost any defense if given the time (three to five seconds) to stand in the pocket and survey the field. A mobile QB can make most defenses look inadequate by scrambling. With the talent and skill of the Silver Bullets, all opposing QBs should fear for their health. "This has rarely been the case, so far. Unless the Buckeye defense suddenly becomes hyperactive, the team might not live up to its expectations. Why are the players not producing? Maybe it is the coordinator. Maybe the offense needs to operate knowing it needs to score 45 or more points per game, not 31!

– Byron McNutt

"I'm wondering if the problem is not the coaching or the personnel, but ME. Did I overestimate the ability of both the players and the coaching staff? I thought the credentials of the defense were impeccable all the way around. Now I wonder. Did they oversell me, or did I oversell myself?"

– Mcarr

"I think all of the newer tackling

fundamentals on how NOT to target or get a penalty called has reduced the aggressiveness needed to be effective."

– R1TBDBITL

"The defense never shows up in big games."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Agree with Tiffin 100 percent. If the D doesn't improve in big games the rest of the season, then it might be time to find a new D coordinator. Interesting stat: here's the number of punts forced in the fourth quarter: 2022 vs Michigan: 0. 2022 bowl game vs Georgia: 0. 2023 vs. Michigan: 0. 2023 bowl game vs Missouri: 0. 2024 vs Oregon: 0. I think this is the definition of 'failing to get off of the field' when needed."

– Bstu9

"Tiffin summed it up perfectly. I've calmed down since the Oregon game, but the pass rush was pretty awful against Oregon, and our secondary paid a high price for it, although they weren't always great either.

"I think things can still come together. In 2014, the defense didn't really become dominant until later in the season. I'm hoping poor Denzel Burke was just a victim of a bad scheme and a woeful pass rush."

– Michael Bauer

"No doubt I've been disappointed in the defense. Let's get refocused on the fundamentals and go back to the basics: See QB, rush QB, hurry QB, sack QB. As far as the reasons, rarely are the issues just one thing or the other, but rather a combination of both coaching and execution. In the words of someone famous, 'Suck it up.' Let's get going and kick some butt!"

– BuckeyeScott

"I look at the defense and there is virtually a star at every position. Yet so far those stars have somehow not added up to a dominant defense for the ages. That would point to coaching.

"Have we succumbed to the Jim Knowles mystique, and he is not as good as we have made him out to be? Yet, on the other hand, statistically his defenses are among the nation's best. But there is always something that goes wrong in the big games. Does he coach not to lose those games?"

"Which is worse, being burned on a big play or dying a slow death? In the 2022 game against our rivals, the Buckeyes gave up big play after big play after big play. The Buckeyes come back in 2023 and give up a back-breaking 7-minute drive in the fourth quarter to lose the game. Overcompensating? Playing defense not to lose?"

– Poster That Harley Built

Buckeye Leaves

In what was a shaky performance overall, Ohio State came away with a 21-17 victory over Nebraska on Oct. 26 to improve to 6-1 on the season, coming back from being down 17-14 in the fourth quarter to survive a season-altering upset. Here are some choices from Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the win.

Patrick Engels, BSB: There wasn't much to cheer about throughout the game on either side of the ball for Ohio State, but one of the few bright spots for the Buckeyes in their game against Nebraska was the superb play of Caleb Downs, who continues to showcase his All-American potential with each passing game.

Downs was all over the field for the Buckeyes against the Cornhuskers and was especially impactful near the line of scrimmage. He was often used in some key blitz packages for Ohio State on third down and made his presence felt on just about every rush, including a key tackle in the second quarter that went for a loss of 3 yards.

But perhaps Downs' biggest play came in the third quarter on a 14-yard rush by Nebraska running back Dante Dowdell, where he had a shoestring tackle that prevented the Cornhuskers' rusher from getting a huge gain and possibly a touchdown.

If not for that tackle, the game may have turned out much differently for the Buckeyes, so I'll give the Alabama transfer a ton of credit for coming through when it mattered most.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: The often overlooked Carnell Tate came through for the Buckeyes with a couple of monumental receptions in the 21-17 win.

Tate made the most of his four catches to accumulate a team-high 102 yards and a touchdown. He got the Buckeyes on the board late in the first quarter on a double-move that allowed him to spring wide open for a 40-yard touchdown reception from quarterback Will Howard.

Tate also keyed the Buckeyes' go-ahead touchdown drive in the fourth quarter, leading off the drive with a 37-yard reception from Howard, putting the offense into Nebraska territory.

Tate's touchdown reception was only his second of the year, and the 102 yards he recorded in the game was the most he has had in his still-young Ohio State career by 23 yards.

Cameron Moone, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf will go to linebacker Cody Simon, who arguably put together his best game at Ohio State while donning the famous Block O jersey.

Simon tallied a team-high eight total tackles – three for loss – and his presence was felt throughout all four quarters in the Buckeyes' 21-17 pearl-clutching win over Nebraska on Oct. 26.

During a scoreless third quarter in which Ohio

State didn't have a first down, Simon was part of a defensive unit that stymied Nebraska with a four-down goal-line stand, capped by the linebacker's stop of Cornhuskers running back Dante Dowdell at the 1-yard line.

Simon logged two of his three tackles for loss on Nebraska's final drive of the day, dropping Cornhusker running back Emmett Johnson twice for losses of 3 and 1, respectively.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf goes to Denzel Burke, who was coming off of the toughest game of his career against Oregon on Oct. 12 when he gave up multiple long passes and had struggles making tackles as well.

Early on, it seemed like Dylan Raiola and the Cornhuskers were targeting Burke because of the weaknesses he showed against the Ducks, but he was able to mostly return back to form in the win over Nebraska. He was not only solid in coverage, forcing the Huskers to look for another corner to pick on – which they did with Davison Igbinosun – but he was also able to secure multiple tackles for loss, getting to the ball carrier quickly.

He finished the game with six tackles and two for loss, proving that he can get back to the player he was before his rough performance.

BSB Subscribers:

Poster That Harley Built: Cody Simon, Cody Simon, Cody Simon. It's been a while since I have seen a defender have a game like that. Maybe JT Tuimolou vs. Penn State a year or two back. On offense, Buckeye Leaves to Carnell Tate and Will Howard for his legs in the fourth quarter.

BuckeyeScott: Will Howard, Will Howard, Will Howard. With the exception of the interception, he played a near-perfect game. He took the offense down the field and responded to Nebraska's go-ahead score in the fourth quarter when we needed it most to put the Buckeyes on top.

PeyoteBuck: It's autumn and there are not too many leaves to give. Cody Simon stood up in the end and performed CPR. Carnell Tate showed up too. It was a piecemeal game.

Tiffin Buckeye: Downs, Tate, and Simon.

Terrier Buck: Tyliek Williams was a force early.

Michael Bauer: Cody Simon, for those two great stops near the end, plus Carnell Tate and Caleb Downs.

Luckeeman: I give my leaf to Will Howard, who took the Buckeyes down the field for the game-winning touchdown after Nebraska had grabbed the lead 17-14!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

He Gets His BSB

Other than my time in the service, and graduate school at OSU, I've spent my adult years as a BSB subscriber in rural northern New York. Most folks in the Midwest automatically think NYC or Buffalo or Rochester when they hear New York, but what we proudly refer to as the "North Country," here on the Canadian border, is more like southern Ohio.

Getting to the point of my letter, I can probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of times my BSB has not arrived in a timely manner – usually on Thursday! And I am on an RFD route! 550

miles from Columbus! If there are Ohio State fans who aren't getting their BSB in a timely fashion, their beef is properly with the local post office, not BSB!

For the past several years, virtually every Buckeye game has been on TV. I think I've only missed one game in the past few years, and that was when one of my granddaughters was inconsiderate enough to schedule her wedding on a Saturday in October! Of course you know I am just kidding. Her father was thoughtful enough to tape it for me, just one of many skills I lack.

Keep up the good work and keep smil-

ing. It ain't your fault. Remember, you're dealing with the government!

**Peter Lively
Chaumont, N.Y.**

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.

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Buckeyes Not Playing Like Title Team

Not to put too fine a point on the proceedings that occurred Oct. 26 inside Ohio Stadium, but it looked for the world like a circus act – and not too good a one at that.

Yes, Ohio State scored a 21-17 victory against upstart Nebraska to remain among the top four teams in the national rankings and keep alive its fervent hopes for a national championship. But the afternoon was a showcase for mistakes, missteps and misadventures as the Buckeyes essentially took advantage of a Cornhuskers program that has forgotten how to win close games. Since the beginning of the 2018 season, Nebraska has a 9-32 record in games decided by eight or fewer points.

Let's begin with the officiating crew, ring-masters of the three-ring affair that played out before a largely disapproving and wholly disappointed Ohio Stadium crowd of 104,830. Headed by referee Jeffrey Servinski, who has been an official on the college level for more than 15 years, the zebras had a bad afternoon – and that's saying something for what passes as officiating in the Big Ten these days.

I've already been on my soapbox once this season about targeting, so I'll spare you (mostly) my feelings about the fourth-quarter travesty that befell OSU linebacker Arvell Reese. Let's simply say that I've never seen a replay result in two incorrect calls on the same play.

With the Cornhuskers in possession of the football and still entertaining hopes of registering their first win over a top-five opponent since 2001, Reese made an athletic play on a pass across the middle, throwing his shoulder into the upper chest of Nebraska receiver Jahmal Banks, dislodging the football from Banks' grasp in the process.

It was a play that, almost from the dawn of the sport, would have been lauded as textbook defense with just a hint of malice. To put it another way, Jack Tatum would probably have been proud.

From every angle that was available to me, it was not targeting, and Banks did not complete the catch. So naturally, targeting was called and Banks was credited with a reception, giving the Cornhuskers the ball at their own 46-yard line just four points down with 3:14 to play and one timeout remaining.

Then, for some reason, Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule and his team decided they had no clue how to cash in on their good fortune. A false-start penalty was followed by two of the most questionable calls in the game – an east-west pass to running back Emmett Johnson that Ohio State linebacker Cody Simon sniffed out for a 3-yard loss, and a dump pass to Johnson in traffic near the line of scrimmage that resulted in Simon throwing Johnson to the ground for a 1-yard loss.

On the next play, Nebraska QB Dylan Raoula – once the consensus five-star darling of the so-called recruiting experts (more about them later) – pitched a third-and-19 throw into an area occupied only by OSU cornerback Jordan Hancock, who grabbed perhaps the easiest of his three career interceptions to clinch the victory for the Buckeyes.

And, make no mistake, it was a victory for the Buckeyes, a bottom-line result that cannot be overlooked. Seven teams from the preseason top 10 already have one loss – some have more than one – so a victory, no matter how ugly, is always to be cherished.

Still, a four-point, come-from-behind win against an unranked opponent coming off a 56-7 shellacking from Indiana is one that begs dissection. My autopsy will begin with an offensive line that is playing nowhere close to a national-championship level, starting with a left tackle position that has quickly gone from

a strength to a glaring liability.

Veteran left tackle Josh Simmons blew out his left knee during the Oct. 12 loss at Oregon and will miss the remainder of the 2024 season. Losing your starting left tackle, especially with a right-handed quarterback, is a blow to any team. Taking over for Simmons was senior Zen Michalski, a 6-6, 319-pounder who was given a four-star rating by Rivals.com in 2021, the same year 247Sports ranked him the No. 4 high school player coming out of Indiana.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

To say Michalski was overmatched by Nebraska's pass rush would be a bit of an understatement. To be fair, the Cornhuskers entered the game ranked second in the Big Ten in both sacks and tackles for loss, so even with a healthy Simmons, the Ohio State offensive line might have had its hands full. But with a reconstituted line, the Buckeyes' normally potent offense was reduced from a rocket ship to a wet firecracker.

Following an attack that rolled through its first five opponents, averaging 510.2 total yards per game, with 222.2 of that coming on the ground, the floodgates have closed to a trickle. Oregon held Ohio State to a season-low 141 rushing yards, and then Nebraska held the Buckeyes to only 64 yards on the ground, the lowest total for the OSU ground game since it had 64 during a 42-27 loss at Michigan in 2021.

Looking a little deeper into that total, the ground game actually was stopped almost before it got started. According to the analytics website TruMediaNetworks.com, the Buckeyes averaged 0.79 yards per rush before contact, and that's its fourth-worst mark since 2019.

The one-two punch of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins got 10 carries each, and neither was able to crack 30 yards. A full half of the tandem's 20 attempts went for gains of 2 yards or less, with five of those accounting for lost yardage.

Not all of that was Michalski's fault, of course, but some of it most definitely was. I'm not an expert on offensive line play, but I do know a struggling lineman when I see one. Michalski was never really able to use his size and leverage because of shuffling feet, and that combined with outstretched arms that the likes of Nebraska defensive lineman Jimari Butler (three tackles for loss) simply swatted away, made for a difficult afternoon for the Ohio State run game.

Likewise, consistent pressure from his blind side made it harder for quarterback Will Howard to execute the game plan. Howard was pressured countless times, although he was sacked only twice, and while two sacks isn't that much, it did amount to the same total Howard had been sacked in the previous three games combined.

What wasn't Michalski's fault was the fact that once it was obvious he was struggling mightily, the coaching staff didn't take many opportunities to help him. I didn't see much tight end help on his side, and the Buckeyes continued to run the ball to the left – essentially expecting a different outcome despite evidence to the contrary.

Whether it was head coach Ryan Day, offensive coordinator Chip Kelly or offensive

line coach Justin Frye, someone had to realize things weren't working. Once Michalski went out of the game with an injury of his own, the Buckeyes moved left guard Donovan Jackson to left tackle and put sophomore Luke Montgomery in at Jackson's guard spot.

Why didn't that happen sooner? After all, Montgomery was another four-star prospect, at least according to Rivals, while 247Sports ranked him the No. 1 high school player coming out of Ohio in 2023. The official Ohio State Media Guide also states that Montgomery is "versatile and athletic enough to play any position on the offensive line."

And yet moving Jackson to tackle and putting Montgomery into the game was a last resort used only when Michalski got hurt? Either the coaching staff is not properly utilizing its talent, or the recruiting services are a little too eager to hand out four- and five-star ratings. My suspicions are that it's a little bit of both.

For the second game in a row, Ohio State fielded a roster that was more talented than its opponent, and for the second game in a row, the Buckeyes struggled. Perhaps they are, as some critics say, overrated. Perhaps they are crumbling under pressure largely created by themselves when they declared "national championship or bust" for the 2024 season.

All I know for certain as October turns to November is that Ohio State is not playing like a national championship team. Not even close.

A History Lesson

For those of you out there more than eager to move on from Day as head coach of the Buckeyes, be careful what you wish for.

The college football landscape is littered with programs trying to navigate through the wilderness caused by a coaching change, and that is no more evident than at Nebraska.

Within a four-year period beginning in 1994, the Cornhuskers posted a 49-2 record and won three national championships. That run of superlative greatness was engineered by Tom Osborne, who presided over the program for 25 years. Osborne retired following the 1997 season with a record of 255-49-3, leaving the Cornhuskers in the capable hands of longtime assistant Frank Solich.

Solich posted a 42-9 record over his first four seasons as head coach at Nebraska, and his teams finished among the top eight teams in the final national rankings during each of those seasons. But Solich wasn't Osborne, and when his 2002 team lost seven games – the most by the Cornhuskers in 60 years – and his 2003 squad suffered three more defeats, Solich was fired.

Nebraska has not been the same since.

Beginning in 1962 with Bob Devaney as head coach, and continuing for 42 seasons through the tenures of Osborne and Solich, the Cornhuskers had a record of 414-88-5 (a winning percentage of .821) that included 21 conference titles and five national championships.

In the subsequent 20-plus seasons, Nebraska is currently working on its sixth different head coach and, after its loss to Ohio State, has sported a record of 141-116 (a winning percentage of .549) with zero conference titles and zero national championships. The Cornhuskers' highest finish in the polls over the last 20 years? That would be No. 14 back in 2009.

The moral of this history lesson: Simply changing head coaches and believing your program will not miss a beat might not be as easy as it sounds.



OSU Stays At No. 4 In AP Poll

Following its 21-17 victory over unranked Nebraska, Ohio State stayed at No. 4 in the most recent AP top 25 poll released Oct. 27, setting up a top-four matchup with No. 3 Penn State in State College, Pa., in Week 10.

The entire top four remained unchanged from Week 9 to Week 10, with Oregon manning the top spot and receiving 61 first-place votes following a 38-9 win over now-No. 24 Illinois, followed by No. 2 Georgia (one vote) and the Nittany Lions and Buckeyes, who are ranked No. 4 for the third consecutive week.

There was some shakeup in the top five, with No. 5 Miami jumping No. 6 Texas after the Hurricanes won convincingly over Florida State and the Longhorns squeaked past Vanderbilt on the road, winning 27-24.

The rest of the top 10 – outside of Tennessee, which stayed at No. 7 during its off week – also features newcomers. No. 8 Notre Dame jumped four spots from No. 12 after a 51-14 drubbing of then-No. 24 Navy, No. 9

BYU moved up two spots from No. 11 following a 37-24 victory at UCF, and No. 10 Texas A&M jumped four spots from No. 14 after a convincing 38-23 win over then-No. 8 LSU.

Each of those teams passed Clemson and Iowa State, which are in a tie for No. 11 after being idle in Week 9.

Indiana also stayed at No. 13 following its impressive 31-17 win over Washington, which improved it to 8-0 on the season, tied for the program's best start in history. The Curt Cignetti-led Hoosiers are one of five Big Ten teams in the latest AP poll, including the Ducks, Nittany Lions, Buckeyes and Illini.

Two newcomers entered the poll for Week 10. Washington State was ranked No. 22 following its 29-26 win over San Diego State, while head coach Deion Sanders and No. 23 Colorado returned to the top 25 for the first time since last September after a 34-23 win over Cincinnati.

The only two teams that fell out of the rankings were Navy and Vanderbilt.

Ransom, Kacmarek Inactive, Michalski Hurt

Ohio State wasn't fully healthy in its 21-17 win over Nebraska and instead had to persevere without the likes of starting bandit safety Lathan Ransom or backup tight end Will Kacmarek.

Kacmarek was injured early in Ohio State's 32-31 loss to Oregon after a 32-yard reception on Ohio State's first drive.

Ransom meanwhile played the entire Oregon game, but head coach Ryan Day announced on Oct. 23 that he was dealing with a short-term injury.

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	2-6, 25-21 win over Eastern Michigan
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	5-3, 52-21 win over Kent State
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	W, 49-14	FOX	4-3, idle
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W, 38-7	Peacock	4-4, 24-17 loss to Michigan
Oct. 5	IOWA	W, 35-7	CBS	5-3, 40-14 win over Northwestern
Oct. 12	at Oregon	L, 32-31	NBC	8-0, 38-9 win over Illinois
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	W, 21-17	FOX	5-3, 21-17 loss to Ohio State
Nov. 2	at Penn State	Noon	FOX	7-0, 38-13 win over Wisconsin
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	1-6, idle
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	3-5, 40-14 loss to Iowa
Nov. 23	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	8-0, 31-17 win over Washington
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	5-3, 24-17 win over Michigan State

In the tight end room, Kacmarek's injury paved the way for backup sophomore Jelani Thurman to get more playing time, while starting tight end Gee Scott Jr. got his usual share of reps and hauled in two catches for 20 yards.

Nickel cornerback Jordan Hancock did an admirable job filling in for Ransom and finished the game with five total tackles and the game-sealing interception in the fourth quarter. Hancock was at times spelled by true freshman safety Jaylen McClain, who registered a pass breakup in limited but important playing time for the Buckeyes.

With Hancock's nickel cornerback vacant, redshirt junior Lorenzo Styles Jr. and sophomore Jermaine Mathews Jr. rotated in, and they each recorded a tackle as part of an overall strong performance from the Buckeyes' secondary.

Also missing from the game was true freshman cornerback Aaron Scott Jr., who had recorded just one total tackle in limited playing time during four games played this season.

A new but unsurprising inclusion to the injury list was senior left tackle Josh Simmons, who was carted off the field with a knee injury against the Ducks and subsequently ruled out for the season by Day in an Oct. 22 press conference.

Simmons was replaced in the Oregon game by redshirt junior offensive tackle Zen Michalski, who endured a similar fate as Simmons during his first career start against Nebraska. He was carted off with an apparent lower-body injury during Ohio State's second-to-last drive in the game with 3:48 to go.

Although the severity of Michalski's injury was unknown as BSB went to press, Ohio State seems to have a contingency plan in place for its now-thin offensive line. The Buckeyes moved senior Donovan Jackson from left guard to left tackle and inserted Luke Montgomery at left guard for the remainder of the Nebraska game.

"We're going to have to talk about it and figure it out," Day said when asked about Michalski's injury. "We knew that if (Michalski going down with an injury) happened in the game, that was our answer and solution to get out of the game. Now we're going to have to go back and figure out what's next."

2014 Team Honored During Game

Ohio State's 2014 national championship team was met with quite the round of applause in between the first and second quarters of the team's win over Nebraska.

As part of the 10-year anniversary season since their triumph in the inaugural College

Football Playoff, former head coach Urban Meyer and linebacker Curtis Grant both spoke to the 104,830 fans inside Ohio Stadium, where they talked about the team and revved up the fans.

"To be in your home state – I'm from northeast Ohio – to look up there and see the 2014 (sign hanging in Ohio Stadium) and share it with guys you love in the most improbable national championship with a third-string quarterback," Meyer said between the first and second quarters. "That team was so good. There are still guys 10 years-plus in the NFL. That's how good that team was. That's one of the great teams in college football history."

Meyer would be carried off the field by some of his former players following the ceremony.

Although there were some notable members of the team who were not in attendance due to their NFL obligations, including quarterback J.T. Barrett, defensive end Joey Bosa and running back Ezekiel Elliott, among others, some key contributors did make the trip. Among them were defensive tackle Mike Bennett, center Pat Elflein and wide receivers Devin Smith and Jalin Marshall.

Penn State Game Time Revealed

The game time for Ohio State's matchup against Penn State on Nov. 2 has been revealed. The Buckeyes' Week 10 game against the No. 3 Nittany Lions is officially slated for "Big Noon Kickoff" on FOX.

This will mark the 40th all-time matchup between the two powerhouse Big Ten programs as well as the 23rd time the two teams will play each other as AP top-25 opponents.

It will also be the second consecutive time the two teams are matching up against each other as AP top-10 opponents, with last year's contest being a 20-12 win for the No. 3-ranked Buckeyes over No. 7 Penn State.

In that game, Ohio State's defense had one of its strongest performances of the season, forcing the Lions to go just 1 for 16 on third downs in the game, the only conversion coming on a late scoring drive in the fourth quarter. Former Buckeyes wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. had 11 catches for 162 yards and a touchdown while now-Syracuse quarterback Kyle McCord was 22 of 35 for 286 yards and a touchdown in that game.

Ohio State has gotten the better of Penn State in previous seasons, with the Buckeyes winning the last seven games against the Nittany Lions, including 11 of the last 12. Penn State's last win against the Buckeyes came eight seasons ago in 2016 – James Franklin's third year as Nittany Lions head coach – when cornerback Grant Haley returned a



Follow The Build-Up To The Penn State Game

The excitement is bound to build up daily as Ohio State prepares to meet Penn State in Happy Valley. There is no need to miss all the latest news on this key Big Ten clash. The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability throughout the week in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers. The discussion should also be hot and heavy on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, where subscribers and staff members interact.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff reports on the breaking stories, plus posts additional features. This is also where you can find the latest recruiting news.

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. As you can imagine, the staff was off on its picks for the Ohio State-Nebraska game. Patrick Engels said 35-10, Bobby Gorbett had it 38-10, Cameron Moone 42-14 and Greg Wilson checked in at 42-10.

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 for the rest of the regular football season for just \$20. See the box on page 7.

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blocked kick 60 yards for a touchdown with just 4:27 left in the game to give the home team the 24-21 lead.

With the Penn State matchup now set, game times and TV designations for three of Ohio State's remaining five games have yet to be announced. Those include the team's home games against Purdue on Nov. 9 and

Indiana on Nov. 23 along with their road game against Northwestern on Nov. 16, which will be played at Wrigley Field in Chicago.

Ohio State's regular-season finale against Michigan on Nov. 30 is set for its usual noon kickoff on FOX.

ESPN's "College GameDay" Heading To Happy Valley

"Big Noon Kickoff" will not be the only notable pregame show in town for Ohio State's matchup with the Nittany Lions. ESPN announced on Oct. 27 that it will send its "College GameDay" show to State College, Pa., to preview the top-five Big Ten battle.

This will be the second time in four weeks Ohio State will be the featured game on ESPN's 14-time Emmy Award-winning pregame show, the first occasion being the Buckeyes' Oct. 12 matchup against Oregon.

The show has not been kind to the Buckeyes recently, though. Day's team has lost its last two matchups when the show is on site for an Ohio State game, including the 32-31 loss to the Ducks and last season's 30-24 loss at Michigan.

Still, the Buckeyes do have historic success with "GameDay" on hand, holding a 40-20 record in their 60 all-time appearances on the show, the latest win coming just over a year ago for Ohio State's win over the Nittany Lions in Columbus last October when former Buckeye quarterback C.J. Stroud served as a guest picker prior to kickoff.

"College GameDay" will return to State College, Pa., for the first time since 2021, when the show was on hand for the Nittany Lions' early-season win over Auburn. They have hosted the ESPN pregame show 11 times and have been featured 25 times overall. Thirteen of those occasions have been for a game with the Buckeyes, which makes Penn State-OSU the most frequent matchup in "College GameDay" history.

The Nov. 2 matchup will also give long-time "College GameDay" analyst Lee Corso the opportunity to don Brutus Buckeye's

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BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

Now is the time for loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers to show their support through our VIP subscription program as we struggle through these times of high inflation, which have affected all small businesses. As most of you know, the newspaper business these days is challenging in even the best of times.

"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.

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

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

And those who donate \$150 or more will have their names listed as Elite-Plus VIPs. The four largest Elite-Plus donors to the Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP program will have their names listed in each issue as Wachsman Level Elite Plus donors, in honor of the late BSB assistant publisher, Karen Wachsman, and our largest donor will be designated as the Woody Level Wachsman Elite-Plus Donor.

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

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

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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headgear for the 43rd time in his 28 years as GameDay's game picker. The Buckeyes were Corso's first-ever headgear selection on Oct. 5, 1996, when he correctly chose Ohio State over Penn State in what was a 38-7 victory for the Buckeyes.

The 89-year-old was unable to put on the Brutus headgear for the Oregon game because he didn't make the trip out West due to health reasons, but he still indicated to the

show that his "first love" Brutus would have been his headgear pick had he been on set.

Smith Placed On Biletnikoff Watch List

The Tallahassee Quarterback Club Foundation announced its third in-season addition to the 2024 Biletnikoff Award watch list on Oct. 16, adding Ohio State freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith.

Smith lands on the watch list for the Biletnikoff, awarded annually to the nation's best pass catcher, after emerging as one of the nation's top freshmen in all of college football this season. Through seven games, Smith has already totaled 35 catches for 623 yards and eight touchdowns, becoming the first OSU freshman to record a receiving touchdown in each of the first seven games of his career.

Smith's eight touchdowns ties Cris Carter's 1984 freshman single-season program record, while he is also approaching the Pro Football Hall of Famer's marks of 41 receptions and 648 yards set that same year.

Smith can become just the second-ever freshman in college football history to win the Biletnikoff Award, joining former Texas Tech and longtime NFL wideout Michael Crabtree, who took home the honor in 2007.

Smith is not the only Buckeye wideout to be placed on the list, joining senior Emeka Egbuka. Egbuka, who was already named to the preseason watch list for the award, leads the Buckeyes through seven games in receptions with 43 and has 546 yards for six touchdowns. He had a career-high three-touchdown performance against Iowa on Oct. 5.

The Buckeyes are not even a year removed from their most recent Biletnikoff Award winner, with Harrison taking the honor after his 2023 season after a 67-catch, 1,211-yard and 14-touchdown campaign. Before Harrison, the only OSU receiver to take home the award was Terry Glenn in 1995.

Egbuka and Smith join a list that, after the Oct. 23 update, has over 60 players, including Miami's Samuel Brown, Missouri's Luther Burden III, Colorado's Travis Hunter, Boise State's Ashton Jeanty, Oregon's Tez

Johnson and Alabama's Ryan Williams.

Six Buckeyes Named Midseason All-Americans

Ohio State had six players named to The Associated Press' midseason All-American teams on Oct. 17, with center Seth McLaughlin named to the first team and safeties Caleb Downs and Ransom, defensive tackle Ty Hamilton, Jackson and Simmons selected to the second team.

McLaughlin, Jackson and Simmons earned the honor after helping pave the way for Ohio State's talented running backs and protecting Will Howard through the team's first five games of the season. With those three each starting on the line, Ohio State had the nation's 16th-best rushing game at 222.2 yards per contest entering the match-up against Oregon, while they also allowed just four sacks.

Those numbers have changed significantly since Simmons was injured against the Ducks. The Buckeyes now rank 35th nationally in rushing offense at 188.0 yards per

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

Keith Byars had his name put up there alongside Archie Griffin's in 1983 when he rushed for 1,199 yards, becoming only the second sophomore — Griffin was the first — to rush for more than 1,000 yards at Ohio State.

Byars' best game was a 174-yard performance in a 24-10 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 28, well off Griffin's single-game rushing mark of 246. But Byars didn't think Griffin's record was out of reach.

"Over the summer, I had a copy of a program that showed all the records," the 6-2, 233-pound speedster said. "I never set a game in which I wanted to break it, but it's a goal — if you are a running back — that you always want. If one person could do it, I was sure another one could do it."

Bramble, as his teammates called him because of what they thought was a combination of Jim Brown and Earl Campbell, got that record in Ohio State's 45-38 win over Illinois on Oct. 13. He also surpassed the 1,000-yard rushing mark, checking in with 1,074 after six games.

35 Years Ago — 1989

Ohio State's defensive unit, on the critical list for much of the last season and a half, was beginning to show signs of coming to life. The defense played a big role in the Buckeyes' 21-3 homecoming victory over Purdue in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 21.

The unit held an opponent to a single field goal for the first time in 26 games. The last time was a 24-3 victory over West Virginia in the 1987 season opener. It was also the first time the Buckeyes had held an opponent out of the end zone since a 13-6 victory over Minnesota on Oct. 22, 1988.

30 Years Ago — 1994

Running back Eddie George wrapped up Ohio State's 23-7 road win over Michigan State on Oct. 15 with a career-high 219 yards on 29 carries. Coupled with the 206 yards he had two weeks earlier against Northwestern, George became the first running back in the long and storied history of Ohio State football to have a pair of 200-plus rushing days in a single season.

He also tied two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin for the most 200-yard days in an OSU career with two.

Although he set records, tied Griffin and stepped into the limelight as one of the team's bona fide leaders by example, George acted somewhat sheepish about his personal accomplishments.

"It's a great honor," he said following the game, "but things like that are for the end of the season and the end of a career. I'm just happy that what I did today and the way I performed helped us in whatever way it could."

25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State quarterback Steve Bellisari got a brutal baptism into the world of big-time college football during his team's 23-10 loss at Penn State on Oct. 16.

Bellisari was the key offensive ingredient on no less than 41 of his team's 56 offensive plays. He attempted 21 passes, completing seven, and was credited with 20 rushing attempts, although eight of those were recorded as sacks.

On the positive side, he gained 97 yards on his 12 running plays, gains that were a combination of designed quarterback draws and impromptu runs when no one was open. But he lost 59 yards on those PSU sacks.

At the end of the day, Bellisari confirmed he was one sore Buckeye.

"I'm used to it," said Bellisari, a sophomore who had started OSU's last five games. "I don't think it's more than I expect. I'm definitely sore, but that's part of football."

20 Years Ago — 2004

Eager to turn around their first 0-2 start in the Big Ten since 1999, the Buckeyes traveled Oct. 16 to Iowa City, a place that had been friendly to them many times in the recent past. In fact, OSU hadn't lost to Iowa in Kinnick Stadium since 1983 and had beaten the Hawkeyes eight straight times overall.

But as its players and fans were quickly finding out, the 2004 season was becoming anything but ordinary for Ohio State.

A month that began with the first loss at Northwestern in 46 years and continued with a home defeat at the hands of Wisconsin continued to be Black October for the Buckeyes as they absorbed a 33-7 whupping that looked — and probably could have been — much worse.

Until OSU scored a largely meaningless touchdown with 2:19 left in the game, the Buckeyes were on their way to being shut out for the first time since a 28-0 loss to Michigan in 1993, a span of 133 games. Had the final score ended 33-0, it would have represented the worst shutout loss for an Ohio State team since a 40-0 whitewash at the hands of Michigan in 1940.

As it was, it was still Iowa's largest margin of victory over Ohio State, eclipsing a 35-12 win in 1960.

15 Years Ago — 2009

Four days before Ohio State hit the road on Oct. 17 to face Purdue, senior wide receiver Ray Small predicted an offensive explosion for his beleaguered unit. Instead, what the Buckeyes delivered was simply offensive.

Despite a furious late rally, No. 7 OSU dropped its first Big Ten game of the season 26-18, to a Purdue team that previously had been winless in the conference.

A desperation heave from quarterback Terelle Pryor that fell harmlessly to the grass with 2:16 remaining positioned the Buckeyes firmly in their own coffin, and a face-mask penalty on senior team captain Doug Worthington on what would have been a third-down stop for the OSU defense hammered the final nail.

There was plenty of blame to go around.

"We had all the confidence in the world coming in, and we expected them to play great," Worthington said. "They did at times but (our) special teams, defense or offense didn't get the job done."

10 Years Ago — 2014

Even though a soft four-game stretch made it seem so, it wouldn't always be easy for Ohio State as it tried to fight its way back into the national title picture.

Penn State showed as much. The Nittany Lions, who entered as two-touchdown underdogs on Oct. 25 in Happy Valley, climbed out of a 17-point halftime deficit to force a tie with nine seconds left before falling 31-24 in double overtime.

It was Ohio State's fifth straight win, but the No. 13 Buckeyes didn't post the impressive winning margin of the previous quartet of games, a dominating stretch that might have quickly raised expectations for a young team that may not have been as good as the scores indicated.

"I tried to keep telling you guys," said Ohio State offensive co-

ordinator Tom Herman. "You guys wouldn't listen. We certainly are a work in progress, like I said. We're playing with a quarterback that now has seven games under his belt, and we're playing with a few guys up there that this was really their first road test in a ridiculously hostile environment."

"Hats off to Penn State. They played their tails off, and obviously their crowd is a big factor in what they do. It was exciting to see us keep responding, keep responding. Although it took some time, at the end of the day our guys pulled it out when they needed to."

Luckily for the Buckeyes, they had sophomore defensive end Joey Bosa, a one-man wrecking crew whose laid-back demeanor turns into a ruthless disposition once he steps on the field. The Florida native made the play that won the game, charging into the backfield on fourth down in double overtime and driving helpless running back Akeel Lynch into quarterback Christian Hackenberg, who went down for the game-ending sack.

Five Years Ago — 2019

With the NFL's Washington job officially open, there were of course rumors that came with it, including some that included Washington QB Dwayne Haskins' former offensive coordinator and current Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. Day was said to be a top priority for Washington, but the Buckeye head coach said that they did not reach out. He also made a stronger statement, not just about Washington, but about his job prospects in general.

"I don't really ever want to talk about any of that stuff," Day said. "I love it here, and this is where I want to be."

Day also mentioned the toll that being in the NFL took on him and, more importantly, on his family.

"That's the thing that I don't know if people realize," Day said. "You have to move your family — we have a young family. When you're moving them all over the place, it is the worst thing to go home to your family and tell them we've got to move again. They've got to be the new kid again, and your wife has to figure out a new set of friends again. It's just not good."

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State's defense, frequently maligned since Day took over as head coach in 2019, had played without a certain swagger over the last few seasons, a swagger that was a trademark of the defenses under Urban Meyer, Jim Tressel and the later years of John Cooper when the Buckeyes styled themselves as the Silver Bullets.

With the carousel of coordinators, lack of continuity among defensive assistants — sans defensive line coach Larry Johnson — and some misses on the recruiting trail in Meyer's last classes and Day's first classes, the unit had not been up to snuff, at least compared to the team's usual standards over the school's history.

But if No. 3 Ohio State's 20-12 win over No. 7 Penn State on Oct. 21 was any indication, witnessed by 105,506 at Ohio Stadium, not just that swagger and energy might be back, but with it may be the return of those same Silver Bullets who had been missing in action.

"The expectation at Ohio State is to be the best in the country," Day said after the win. "And our defense, I think, has a chance to do that. When (defensive coordinator Jim Knowles) got here, I know that was what he wanted to do. He's done a great job of installing his defenses, especially in the first year, but now he really has a feel for the conference."

BSB Offering Reduction In First-Class Mail Rate

For a limited time, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is offering a discount on the cost of a subscription upgrade to first class mail during football season or through football recruiting season in February. The first class upgrade for football season, regularly \$30, will be just \$20, and the upgrade through the traditional National Signing Day in February will be just \$30, down from \$40.

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

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

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

game and allowed three sacks in the last two games.

On the other side of the ball, Downs, Hamilton and Ransom earn their second-team nods after each emerging as significant contributors to an Ohio State unit that ranks fourth nationally in scoring defense and second in total defense.

Downs has been as advertised for the Buckeyes so far this season following a bit of a slow start. The former Alabama transfer has been all over the field of late, recording 22 tackles (five for loss) and a pair of pass deflections in his last four games. His safety counterpart Ransom has been equally impressive, totaling 29 tackles (4½ for loss), along with two forced fumbles and a quarterback hurry.

Hamilton has served as a steady force within the middle of Ohio State's veteran defensive line unit this season. He has totaled 26 tackles – the most of any Buckeye defensive lineman – along with 3½ tackles for loss, 2½ sacks and a forced fumble.

Other notable inclusions on the midseason AP All-American list were Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel and defensive back Derrick Harmon, Michigan defensive tackle Mason Graham and cornerback Will Johnson, Iowa linebacker Jay Higgins and running back Kaleb Johnson, Penn State safety Jaylen Reed and tight end Tyler Warren, and Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke.

In other midseason All-American lists from The Athletic and The Sporting News, Jeremiah Smith and defensive tackle Ty-leik Williams were also named midseason All-Americans. Smith was also named the AP's top freshman player in the Big Ten as of Week 8.

OSU-Oregon Most Watched B1G Game Since 2008

The first-ever Big Ten matchup between Ohio State and Oregon drew quite the national audience.

In a classic game that saw the Ducks triumph 32-31 over the Buckeyes on NBC's "Big Ten Saturday Night," an average of 10.2 million fans tuned into the game, making it the largest primetime honor for a regular-season Big Ten game since 2008, according to NBC.

The audience peaked in the final minutes of the game from 10:45-11 p.m. Eastern Standard Time when 13.4 million viewers tuned in to watch the Ducks secure the last-minute victory.

The top metered markets for the game were Columbus, followed by Cleveland, Portland, Ore., and Cincinnati.

The previous most-watched primetime Big Ten matchup also involved the Buckeyes, when on Oct. 25, 2008, 10.4 million viewers tuned in to see Penn State triumph over Ohio State 13-6 at Ohio Stadium on ABC.

NCAA Alters Rulebook After Ducks' 12-Man Penalty

The NCAA has officially changed the rule that allowed Oregon head coach Dan Lanning to put 12 men on the field against Ohio State late in the fourth quarter of its 32-31 win over the Buckeyes on Oct. 12, helping the Ducks run the clock down an extra few seconds.

"After the two-minute timeout in either half, if the defense commits a substitution foul and 12 or more players are on the field and participate in a down, officials will penalize the defense for the foul and at the option of the offended team, reset the game clock back to the time displayed at the snap," the rules memo from the NCAA said.

"The game clock will then restart on the next snap. If the 12th defender was attempting to exit but was still on the field at the snap and had no influence on the play, then the normal substitution penalty would be enforced with no clock adjustment."

Now, when a team commits a substitution foul inside the final two minutes of either half, the clock will reset to how much time was left before the play began.

Lanning and Oregon took advantage of the now-closed loophole in the Oct. 12 matchup with the Buckeyes, where the clock ran down from 10 to six seconds remaining in the game during the play when the Ducks had 12 men on the field.

Even more, Ohio State gained only 5 yards due to the penalty, making it tough for Will Howard and his offense to get into field-goal range and find an open man downfield, leading to Howard sliding at the Oregon 26-yard-line with no time remaining on the clock.

When asked about the sequence on Oct. 15, Lanning implied he had his team commit the penalty on purpose to bleed off more time on the clock.

"There was a timeout before that – we spend an inordinate amount of time on situations," Lanning said. "There's some situations that don't show up very often in college football but this is one that obviously was

something we had worked on. So you can see the result."

Howard, Day Speak On Last-Second Slide

Speaking of Howard's slide, the fifth-year quarterback expressed some discontent with the officials' decision to end the game after his run when asked about the play at an Oct. 22 press conference.

Howard argued that, despite the clocks going to zero and the game ending, his offense should have been allowed to run one more play and that there was instead one second on the clock, while also alleging that the officials did not want to keep the game going with hundreds of Ducks fans already storming the field.

"I thought I was down with one second, but they didn't feel like clearing the field with all of the kids that were already on it," Howard said. "It's tough, but we always talk about leaving no doubt, so I probably should have gotten down even quicker to make sure that we didn't leave any doubt there."

In the hours after the Oregon game, pictures of Howard's last run circulated on Twitter that showed the Buckeyes' signal-caller appearing to start his slide, which marks the ending of the play, with one second left on the clock. With Howard's slide being so close to the game clock expiring, Ohio State needed to call a timeout as soon as Howard started his slide.

Day said during his own Oct. 22 press conference that he and his players did exactly that, and although it was not granted, Ohio State still sent the play in to be reviewed by

the Big Ten, but to no avail.

"We sent (the play into the Big Ten)," Day said. "They said there was no time left. Brandon (Innis) was calling a timeout, I was right next to the referee calling a timeout. You can see it on the coach's copy, and they said time had run out."

Judkins Undergoes Hand Procedure

Ohio State junior running back Quinshon Judkins reportedly underwent a minor procedure on his hand during the team's off week.

Judkins had reportedly been dealing with the injury leading up to the team's loss to Oregon and got it repaired soon after during the off week.

The Ole Miss transfer had his worst game in his early Buckeye career against the Ducks, rushing for just 23 yards and one score on 11 carries, good for a season-low average of 2.1 yards per tote. He also recorded his first fumble since his freshman season at Ole Miss during the Buckeyes' second drive of the game, which proved to be a crucial momentum swing in the game, setting up Oregon for an eventual touchdown to tie the game at 7 after going down 7-0 on the very first drive of the game.

When asked about the injury on Oct. 22, Day said he didn't feel the ailment had anything to do with Judkins' sluggish performance with the Ducks and that he should be ready to go the rest of the season.

"No, no, that wasn't an issue there," Day said when asked if Judkins' fumble had any-

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thing to do with his injured thumb. "(There was) a minor procedure. I think he's actually feeling better now than maybe he did going into the Oregon game, so he's good."

Regardless, Judkins had an up-and-down outing in his first game since the surgery, rushing for just 29 yards on 10 carries against Nebraska but scoring the game-winning touchdown on a 9-yard reception.

Through seven games, Judkins had rushed for a team-high 520 yards and six touchdowns on 81 carries, marks that rank ninth, tied for sixth and tied for 16th in the Big Ten, respectively.

LeBlanc, VanSickle Lose Black Stripes

Two more Buckeye true freshmen became "official" members of the team since BSB went to press when tight end Max LeBlanc and interior offensive lineman Gabe VanSickle shed their black stripes on Oct. 17 and Oct. 23, respectively.

LeBlanc, a Saint-Bruno, Quebec, native, entered the program in June as a four-star prospect out of Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor

School, where he was the nation's 258th-best prospect and No. 14 tight end in the 2024 class.

He flashed his pass-catching skills during his two years at Baylor School, hauling in 39 passes for 695 yards as a junior and then another 884 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior to help lead the Red Raiders to a D-11-AA state championship.

LeBlanc has yet to make much of an impact for the Buckeyes as a freshman, appearing in just one game this season with five snaps in Ohio State's blowout win over Western Michigan on Sept. 7. But he could be in line for more playing time down the line this season with Kacmarek expected to miss multiple games with an injury.

VanSickle, a Coopersville, Mich., native, was a late addition to the Buckeyes' 2024 recruiting class after decommitting from Northwestern last fall and pledging to Ohio State on Thanksgiving Day last year.

Ohio State viewed VanSickle as more of a late bloomer last year while he was having success playing at left tackle his senior season at Coopersville, compelling the Buckeyes to host him on visits for their 2023 games against Michigan State and Penn State.

He arrived on campus in June as the nation's 283rd-best prospect, 17th-best interior offensive lineman and sixth-best player out of Michigan.

LeBlanc and VanSickle are now the 12th and 13th freshmen to have their black stripes removed, joining, in order, wide receiver Smith (March 21), quarterback Julian Sayin (April 8), safety McClain (Aug. 7), defensive end Eddrick Houston (Aug. 9), running back James Peoples (Aug. 9), linebacker Payton Pierce (Aug. 13), offensive lineman Ian Moore (Aug. 15), safety Leroy Roker (Aug. 21), wide receiver Mylan Graham (Aug. 21),

cornerback Scott (Aug. 27) and quarterback Air Noland (Sept. 25).

10 members of Ohio State's 2024 class still have yet to earn the distinction, including offensive linemen Deontae and Devontae Armstrong, running back Sam Williams-Dixon, defensive linemen Dominic Kirks and Eric Mensah, cornerbacks Miles Lockhart and Bryce West, punter Nick McLarty, linebacker Garrett Stover and wide receiver Damarion Witten.

Day Fifth Highest-Paid FBS Head Coach

Day was listed among the highest-paid coaches in college football according to USA Today's coaching salary database Oct. 16 update for the 2024 season.

With a salary of \$10,021,250, Day is ranked as the fifth highest-paid coach in college football. The only coaches with a higher salary in 2024 are Georgia's Kirby Smart, who leads all of college football with a salary of \$13,282,580, followed by Clemson's Dabo Swinney (\$11,132,775), Texas' Steve Sarkisian (\$10,600,000) and USC's Lincoln Riley (\$10,043,418).

Since taking over as the Buckeyes' head coach in 2019, Day has amassed an impressive total record of 59-9, good for an 86.8 winning percentage, along with a 41-4 mark in the Big Ten. But he also holds a record of 1-3 against archrival Michigan – including three losses in a row – as well as a 2-6 record against AP top-five opponents.

Four-Star 2025 Forward Bynum Commits To OSU

Ohio State and head basketball coach Jake Diebler secured a second commit for the 2025 class on Oct. 22, earning a pledge from Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star center A'Mare Bynum (6-8, 210).

Bynum, the nation's 104th-best prospect, 17th-best center and sixth-best player out of Missouri in the class, committed to the Buckeyes over Iowa, Colorado, LSU and Xavier just 18 days after taking an official visit to Columbus on Oct. 4.

"Looking at everything, I came down with a decision with my family after looking at the pros and cons of every school," Bynum told The Columbus Dispatch upon committing. "I just felt like the best was Ohio State, because of Diebler. It's been great. Ever since the summer he's been talking to me pretty much every day, Facetimeing me, doing whatever he can to get me, and it worked."

Last season at Omaha (Neb.) Bryan – where he spent his first three seasons of high school before transferring to Link Academy – Bynum averaged an impressive 21.1 points, 9.0 rebounds, 2.0 assists and 2.3 blocks per game, showing off a versatile skill set that he thinks can allow him to play power forward at the collegiate level.

That skill set was also on display this summer when he competed at the NBPA's Top 100 camp in Orlando, Fla., from June 8-12, which is where Ohio State gained heavy interest in the high school senior, offering him a scholarship on June 12.

Bynum joins an Ohio State 2025 recruiting class that also includes Cleveland Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160), the nation's 109th-best prospect and No. 2 player in Ohio.

The Buckeyes are likely not done for the 2025 class and could add one or two more prospects. They are still in heavy pursuit of

Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-stars Niko Bundalo (6-10, 215) and Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195) – who have both visited campus this fall – while they are also after Bynum's Link Academy teammate, four-star combo guard Jerry Easter (6-3, 183), who visited Ohio State the same weekend as Bynum.

Ohio State also hosted Atlanta Holy Innocents Episcopal School five-star power forward Caleb Wilson (6-9, 205) for an official visit on Oct. 26. He is the nation's fifth-best prospect and third-best power forward.

Battle, Liddell On Two-Way NBA Deals

A pair of former Buckeye hoopers earned a chance to play on basketball's biggest stage since BSB last went to press, with forwards Jamison Battle and E.J. Liddell signing two-way deals with the NBA's Toronto Raptors and Chicago Bulls, respectively.

Battle earns a spot on the Raptors' roster after appearing in five preseason games for the franchise this fall, averaging 6.4 points on 9.8 minutes per game in that span while helping Toronto to a 3-2 record.

The Robbinsdale, Minn., native originally found his way onto the Raptors' organization after they invited him to play on their Summer League roster in June, an opportunity he made the most of. He was signed to an Exhibit 10 deal after playing just two Summer League games, scoring 12 and 11 points, respectively, on a combined 8-of-12 shooting in those contests.

Battle, who averaged 15.3 points and 5.2 rebounds per game in his lone season with Ohio State, has already made the most of his opportunity with the Raptors this season. He has recorded at least six points and two rebounds in each of his first three NBA games, including a 12-point, six-rebound performance in Toronto's 115-107 win over the Philadelphia 76ers on Oct. 25 in which he shot 4 of 5 from the field in 15 minutes of action.

Liddell – a two-time first-team All-Big Ten forward for the Buckeyes from 2019-22 – will now play for his hometown team this season after playing two preseason games for the Bulls, averaging 4.0 points and 4.0 rebounds in 15.1 minutes per game in that span.

The Belleville, Ill. native and former second-round draft pick by the New Orleans Pelicans now finds some stability after a tumultuous 2023-24 offseason in which he was traded twice in one summer. He was first dealt from the Pelicans to the Atlanta Hawks in June as part of a blockbuster deal that sent All-Star guard Dejontae Murray to New Orleans, and then he was sent from Atlanta to Phoenix in exchange for forward David Roddy nearly a month later.

This all came after he had struggled to see playing time for the Pelicans after being drafted in 2022, most notably tearing his ACL during a Summer League game his rookie year that ended his first NBA season before it began.

With both Battle and Liddell on two-way deals, the two former Buckeyes are, per NBA rules, allowed to play a maximum of 50 NBA games and cannot be on the playoff roster. They will be simultaneously on the rosters of their professional squads and G-League affiliates, Battle's being Raptors 905 and Liddell's the Windy City Bulls.

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TIMPOND, 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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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 21, Nebraska 17

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on if he got the response he wanted from his team coming off the Oregon loss: "I certainly think on defense, the response was excellent. I just like the way our demeanor was, the way we were playing. We were flying around, we were getting lined up, a lot of things to build on there coming out of the game. On offense, we have to do a better job in a few different areas there. So we have to get back to the drawing board and figure that part out because we've got a big challenge here against Penn State."

Ohio State fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon on if the defense had a different attitude against Nebraska than it did in the 32-31 loss to Oregon two weeks prior: "We knew two weeks ago was unacceptable. We refocused, rebuilt on every little thing that we needed to do, and we came out with what we felt was an edge. We have to keep coming like that every single week. We had a good mentality, and it needs to stay like that. We can't get complacent at all."

Simon on if the Buckeyes were stuck on the Oregon game because of the off week: "I've been saying for a while that I wish we had a game in between because you can move on, but when you have that (off) week it just sticks with you. We definitely had a bad taste in our mouths, but now it's moving on. It doesn't matter anymore. Now it's onto the next one."

Simon on what it means that the defense was able to secure the win despite the offense not playing its best: "That's the expectation. That's what we want to do. If the offense isn't working, it's OK. The defense should be able to step up. We should get a stop."

Ohio State senior cornerback Jordan Hancock on if this game brought back memories of the 2023 season when the defense needed to win some games on its own: "For sure. The offense is going to get it right though. It felt good. Reminiscent of 2023, that's how it was, but it felt good."

Simon on if he was shocked with how the game played out: "We don't really expect anything. We could go into the game, and it could be 0-0, and the defense – we have to do our job. It doesn't matter what the score is. That's our mentality every time we go out there."

Ohio State senior defensive tackle Ty Hamilton on his role for the fourth-and-goal stop in the third quarter: "As interior guys, one of the things is take out the offensive linemen because if you stop the offensive linemen, you're able to make big plays like Cody did. Take him out, take the knees out, and he goes out there and makes a play. So that's how it works as a defense together."

Simon on the two tackles for loss he

made on the final drive for Nebraska: "It wasn't super complicated stuff. I just read my keys, be on my man and I was lucky enough to make a play."

Hamilton on Simon's performance in the win: "Oh, man, he's a great player. Being able to go out there and digest the offense, to be able to go out there and make plays, it's huge for the defense. When you can digest the offense, and go out there and break plays, it's big for the defense."

Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Will Howard on whether the Nebraska defense was showing different looks than he had seen this season: "Yeah, I think they did some interesting things up front, and that definitely messed with our run game a little bit. I think they had like two blitzes that were perfectly called into our runs. I don't know how that happens, but it's just part of the game sometimes. It's a chess game, and they made some good moves."

Howard on whether the running game not working puts pressure on him or frees him up to pass more: "I think you can go either way with that. You can say if you can't run the ball, it makes it harder to throw the ball play-action-wise. But at the same time, I try not to worry about that. It's one play at a time. Just execute what I have to do and what my job is. Obviously, we want to run the ball better than we did and get ourselves ahead of the sticks more. But for me, I wouldn't say it changes anything. My job is my job every single play, and I'm just trying to take it one play at a time."

Howard on how much responsibility he takes as run-game coordinator: "I try to take responsibility for everything in this offense. I think that my ability to run the ball, pull the ball and run has a really good effect on this offense. The more that I'm able to do that, the better. I don't know if we had that much this week, but I think I was a little more aggressive to the keeper on that last drive. They were kind of crashing in and taking the running back over and over, and I hadn't really pulled one yet. Late in the game, when the game is on the line, my legs come into the picture a lot more. We had a third down. We ran a little draw. We had that one where I pulled off the rover guy. We were actually swiping back for the backside D-end, but I was pulling off the D-Gap defender. Just something to get their eyes lost. I just have to control it."

Ohio State running back Quinshon Judkins when he was asked if his injured hand affected his play at all after getting a procedure over the off week: "I want to give a big thanks to our athletic trainers here. They helped me a lot. Nothing is tremendously wrong with my hand. I still was able to play today. So big thanks to them."



SONNY BROCKWAY

FIRED UP – Ohio State coach Ryan Day was irate after hearing from an official that sophomore linebacker Arvell Reese had been ejected for targeting in the fourth quarter against Nebraska.

Judkins on his touchdown in the fourth quarter that gave the Buckeyes the lead: "It was just an outside release route. Looking at the leverage of the linebacker, he overplayed the route, so I cut it up. Nobody was in that area of the field, so I just gave my back shoulder to the quarterback, so he threw the ball to the back pylon."

Nebraska true freshman quarterback Dylan Raiola on Ohio State fans throwing bottles onto the field when Buckeye linebacker Arvell Reese was disqualified for a targeting penalty: "The bottles being thrown kind of feels like it disrespects football and the nature of it. But it happened and we have to get away from it. But it was loud and it was a cool environment, and we knew that coming in."

Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule on his team's mindset during and after its loss to Ohio State: "It's the first time since I've been here that I've felt a championship mindset in the locker room. Along with a championship mindset, as those who compete know, comes utter disappointment when you lose. That part's hard. It's hard for the guys. But I saw a group of guys, even at the very end, take the field going out there to make one more play to have a chance to compete against one of the best teams in the country. I thought they grew up."

Offensive Line Woes Continue To Plague OSU

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“It wasn’t perfect, but a win is a win,” Howard said after the Nebraska game. “We were able to show when the going gets tough, and when maybe things aren’t going our way, we’re able to win the fourth quarter.”

Regardless of the victory – which puts the Buckeyes at 6-1 entering Week 10 of the 2024 college football season, still in control of their own destiny for a Big Ten title – Ohio State had some glaring issues that hindered them from the start.

The team’s struggles began on offense, more specifically with the offensive line.

The Buckeyes’ front five had a successful first five games of the season before projected first-round NFL draft selection and starting left tackle Josh Simmons went down with a season-ending knee injury against Oregon, forcing Day and his staff to make some adjustments with the unit.

With Simmons out, Ohio State assigned senior Zen Michalski to serve as the team’s starting left tackle for the rest of the season, a move that did not work well for the Buckeyes’ offense against the Cornhuskers.

Making his first-ever start for the Buckeyes in front of a jam-packed Ohio Stadium crowd of 104,830, Michalski missed on many assignments early on, allowing multiple Husker defensive linemen to shed his block and either get pressure on Howard or get to running backs TreVeyon Henderson or Quinshon Judkins near the line of scrimmage.

Michalski’s struggles seemed to make Ohio State’s entire offensive line a bit disjointed in the first half. The Buckeye rushers totaled just 9 and 21 yards in the first and second quarters, respectively, while Howard was also sacked twice, one of which was a direct result of a missed block by the new left tackle.

When asked about Michalski’s struggles

after the game, Day said he did not think twice about sitting the veteran – who would later leave the game with an apparent lower-body injury – and attributed some of those mistakes to the nerves of somebody making his first start.

“We felt like for his first start, he had to play through it,” Day said. “We didn’t want to panic and just pull him out because it’s your first start, so there’s some things you’re going through. Whether it’s first-time jitters or whatever it might be, you’re pressing and you’re trying to get your feet underneath you. We wanted him to play through that and see how that went.”

Despite the early offensive-line struggles, Ohio State’s offense still managed to get some points on the board thanks to the solid first-half play of Howard, who connected on all 10 of his first 10 passes for 172 yards and two touchdowns.

Both of those scores came on consecutive throws by Howard, the first a 40-yard strike to Carnell Tate, and the second a 60-yard bomb to Jeremiah Smith, which gave the true freshman wideout his eighth receiving touchdown in seven games, tying Cris Carter for the program record for a true-freshman receiver.

“I thought that the execution on the throw and catch to Carnell was big, and then the one to Jeremiah was really well executed,” Day said. “The timing was right. Good throw, great catch.”

Those two throws allowed Ohio State to withstand the poor offensive-line play and hold a 14-3 lead toward the end of the second quarter, but the Buckeye offense would soon begin to crater again right before half-time.

With the Buckeyes looking to expand on their 11-point lead facing a second-and-6 at the Nebraska 22, Howard was stripped by true freshman linebacker Willis McGahee IV before the loose ball was picked up by Donovan Jackson.

This started a negative string of plays



SONNY BROCKWAY

MORE PROBLEMS – The Buckeyes were already without left tackle Josh Simmons due to a season-ending knee injury when his replacement, Zen Michalski, sustained a lower-body injury in the second half and was forced to leave the game.

for Ohio State that included a sack on Howard that occurred in large part because of a mishap by Michalski, followed by a missed field goal by Jayden Fielding that sailed very wide right with just over two minutes to go in the second quarter, giving Nebraska sound field position that it would eventually use to hit a 54-yard field goal as time expired at the half.

With the score at a much closer than anticipated 14-6 entering the third quarter, Ohio State’s offensive woes only seemed to worsen.

The Buckeyes failed to record a single first down in the third quarter, mustering up just 23 total yards on 10 plays. It was an anemic sequence that also had Howard throw his fourth interception in the last five games, sailing a ball over the head of Smith and into the arms of Husker defensive back Malcolm Hartzog Jr., who returned it 34 yards to the OSU 7-yard line with 7:11 left in the period.

Howard’s turnover could have proved crucial had it not been for the heroics of Ohio State’s defense, which came together for four straight stops from the goal line to force a turnover on downs, the last stop coming by way of both Cody Simon and Davison Igbinosun, who worked together to corral running back Dante Dowdell before he could dive into the end zone, keeping

the score at 14-9.

But the most glaring issue for Ohio State in that quarter was its continued inability to run, with the unit totaling 18 yards on the ground on six carries.

When asked about the struggles in the run game, Day said the overall performance – a season-low 64 yards on 31 carries (2.1-yard average) – was simply unacceptable, especially given who was toting the rock for the Buckeyes all game.

“We need to run the football,” he said. “We ran the ball for 64 yards, and 14 were from Will. That’s not even close to good enough. We’re averaging under 3 yards per carry with Quinshon and TreVeyon. That’s not getting it done. We have to do better than that.”

Late-Game Heroics Save Bucks From Upset

Ohio State’s offensive struggles allowed Nebraska to be within striking distance of a monumental upset in Columbus, trailing by just five points entering the fourth quarter. But it was actually a few defensive lapses that gave the Cornhuskers the late lead over the Buckeyes.

After the two teams traded a pair of short drives each to end the third quarter, Nebraska and Raiola found themselves on their own 26-yard line with a fresh set of

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downs with 14:53 remaining in the contest.

The drive began with a bang for the road team, with Dowdell gaining 19 yards on an outside rush to move the sticks and then Raiola finding a wide-open Thomas Fidone II down the middle of the field on a crossing route for a gain of 33, bringing Nebraska all the way down to the OSU 22 in a span of just two plays.

After Igbinosun stopped the bleeding with a key 4-yard tackle for a quarterback keeper by backup Heinrich Haarberg, Nebraska inched closer with methodical gains of 7, 8, 3 and 7 before getting into the end zone on an easy 1-yard rush by Dowdell.

The Huskers would add two more on a nifty fake reverse and pitch to tight end Nate Boerkircher, giving them an unlikely 17-14 lead on the road in front of a shocked Scarlet and Gray crowd with 10:47 left in the game.

Nebraska's nine-play, 74-yard drive put Ohio State on the brink of its first loss to an unranked opponent in the Day era – the last defeat for the Buckeyes being on the road to Purdue on Oct. 20, 2018 – which would have been a major blow to the team's College Football Playoff chances, almost a requirement for the Buckeyes to meet this season.

But with pressure and boos mounting, Day had one thing on his mind. He wanted his team to finish the job and win the fourth-quarter battle that his team had struggled to secure two weeks prior in Eugene, Ore.

“(I was thinking), ‘What do we have to do to get going?’ and ‘We have to find a way to win the game in the fourth quarter,’” Day said when asked what was going through his mind after the Nebraska score. “When we find ourselves in these matchup games, it’s almost like the first time you’re in that situation, of, ‘OK, how do we have to go do this?’”

“Well, we have to get the guys together, figure out how we’re going to go win the game, and then go do it.”

Luckily for Day, that is exactly what happened for the Buckeyes down the stretch.

Nebraska's lead did not last very long due to the efforts of Ohio State's offense, which put together its best drive of the game when it mattered most. Starting at the OSU 25 with just under 11 minutes left, the Buckeyes instantly hit on an explosive play when Howard found a wide-open Tate down the right sideline near the 43-yard line, who gained a few extra yards after the catch, making it to the Nebraska 38 for a 37-yard pickup.

Howard said this first play served as a collective sigh of relief for the offense, giving them the confidence they needed to finish the drive.

“The first play, I thought it was a great play call,” he said. “They were running Cover 3 on that play, and it was perfect. Carnell did a good job of getting some extra yards. And once we had that, I felt like there wasn't any stopping us.”

Like the Huskers' previous drive, Ohio State methodically moved the ball down the field following Tate's catch, gaining 3, 2, 4, and 3 yards, the final play being a key 4th-and-1 completion to Emeka Egbuka that kept the drive moving.

After Judkins finally found a lane to rush for 7, his biggest gain of the day, Howard

gained 10 yards on a quarterback keeper that brought him down to the Nebraska 9, setting up what would be the game-winning score on a quick pass to a wide-open Judkins in the end zone.

Ohio State's eight-play, 75-yard drive gave the Buckeyes the 21-17 lead with 6:04 left, a clutch series of plays that Howard said served as a testament to the next-play and even-keeled mentality he and his teammates have when their backs are against the wall.

“You have to keep your head down. No matter how it's going, you have to stay locked in,” Howard said. “I'm not going to let a couple of bad plays affect me. I've played a lot of ball. I've had some games where things aren't going your way, and you have to find a way to win at the end.”

“It's not always going to be pretty, but sometimes you have to scrap it out and make it work. It wasn't going our way in that third quarter. We were stalling out on drives, and it bugs me. It hurts. I just want to get back out there. It just irks me, just the competitor in me – I don't like that. But we kept our heads down and knew that our time was coming and we had to make some plays down the stretch, and we did.”

With Ohio State's offense finally doing its job, it was time for Knowles' defense to shake off the previous touchdown drive and step up to make a late-game stop. Unlike against the Ducks, the unit answered the call with numerous winning plays.

The first winning play came from senior defensive end JT Tuimoloau, who, on a second-and-6 from the Nebraska 29, exploded off the edge to stuff running back Emmitt Johnson for a 1-yard loss, leading to an eventual three-and-out.

Nebraska would earn one final chance to take the lead and come away with the win after an Ohio State three-and-out, but the opportunity did not last long due to more strong Buckeye defense.

After a controversial targeting call on Arvell Reese, who appeared to lower his shoulder into the head of wideout Jahmal Banks – a call that had a raucous crowd of heated Buckeye fans throwing trash onto the field – Nebraska was brought to its own 46-yard line. Simon brought the Huskers backward with two tackles for loss, first sniffing out a screen pass to Johnson for a loss of 3 and then bringing down Johnson again on another screen for a loss of 1.

Simon's heroics set up the game-sealer for the Buckeyes, when, on third-and-19, Raiola delivered a wobbly pass that fell into the waiting hands of Jordan Hancock – who started the game at safety in relief of the injured Lathan Ransom – giving Ohio State the ball back with just 1:16 left to set up three kneel-downs for the victory.

While the performance wasn't perfect, those within Knowles' unit felt that their end-of-game heroics could be a sign of better things to come for the group, especially if they can continue to play with the confidence and swagger that earned them their flowers both last season and to start 2024.

“That was huge for the defense,” said senior defensive tackle Ty Hamilton. “I mean, it shows the country all around that we're able to still play defense. You know, we got shaken up. We're still working, but we were able to bounce back. We're still the best defense in the country.”

“In the fourth quarter, it's not easy,” Si-

mon added. “You don't get a lot of chances to do it, especially (at Ohio State). But we know that we have to win the game on defense. It doesn't matter what the offense does. The offense could score zero points, we know we should win the game because of our defense. That's just a mentality we had – never give up, and always defend our end zone.”

Time For Bucks To Regroup

Regardless of Ohio State's late-game successes, Nebraska exposed many cracks within the Buckeyes' foundation that will need to be patched up moving forward this season.

For Day's team, those faults will need to be fixed sooner rather than later, especially with another top-five road matchup looming next week, this time in State College, Pa., against 7-0 Penn State.

The Nittany Lions have not defeated Ohio State since 2016, which was their third year under head coach James Franklin, but this year's Penn State team may pack a much different punch, with the program boasting both its usual stout defense but also a much more potent offense led by junior quarterback Drew Allar and first-year offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki.

Allar was injured in Penn State's 28-13 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 26, but it wasn't reported whether he would be able to play against the Buckeyes by the time BSB went to press.

Knowing the capabilities of this Lions' squad, it didn't take Ohio State long to

start thinking about the upcoming top-five battle, which will come with some high postseason stakes, the winner likely paving its own path to a Big Ten Championship Game matchup – likely against Oregon – in December.

“We can only enjoy this for so long, but we're going straight to Penn State because it's a big game for us, a big matchup for us,” Hamilton said. “We have something to prove to be able to go out there.”

“Penn State is a really good opponent,” Simon added. “They've got really good weapons, a really good tight end over there, good quarterbacks, running backs. They have the full package. This Nebraska team made us learn from our mistakes, so we'll have a better week next week.”

But this matchup takes on a whole different meaning for the Buckeyes' fifth-year quarterback. Howard, a Downingtown, Pa., native, grew up just over 160 miles southeast of Penn State's campus, where he had hoped to gain a scholarship from his home-state program coming out of high school in 2019.

Howard never earned that offer from Franklin and the Nittany Lions, and now with a chance to play at Beaver Stadium in scarlet and gray, he is ready to make the team that overlooked him pay.

“I'm stoked. I cannot wait,” Howard said. “It's going to be a homecoming for me. I grew up a Penn State fan. I wanted to go there my whole life. They didn't think I was good enough, but I guess we'll see next week if I was.”

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Defense Keeps Cool After Controversial Call

Just when Ohio State's chances to win looked as likely as they had in the entire fourth quarter of its 21-17 win over Nebraska, the Buckeye defense had to clear one more obstacle after falling on the wrong side of a controversial call on the Cornhuskers' last offensive drive.

Backed inside their own 15-yard line on first-and-22 and needing a touchdown with just 3:23 to go, true freshman quarterback Dylan Raiola and the Nebraska offense got out of a nearly impossible situation when what at first seemed to be an incomplete pass was actually ruled as targeting on sophomore linebacker Arvell Reese.

It seemed as though the Buckeyes would receive a break when the targeting call was reviewed by officials. As the replay showed, Reese didn't make helmet-to-helmet contact with Nebraska wide receiver Jahmal Banks, but it was likely deemed that Reese made forcible contact to the head or neck area with Banks, and the call on the field of targeting was upheld after the review. As if the Buckeye faithful and head coach Ryan Day couldn't be any more fired up, the lengthy review also revealed that Banks caught the ball before the targeting, giving the Cornhuskers even better field position at their own 46-yard line.

After the officials announced the double whammy that went against Ohio State, an enraged Day ripped his headset off in disgust and berated multiple officials. Ohio State fans expressed their own disappointment

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

with the call, not just with a slew of boos but even bottles thrown on the field, leading to a short delay to clean up the trash on the field.

Day made no comment on the targeting call after the game, which not only disqualified Reese from the remaining few minutes of the game but additionally will have him disqualified from the first half in Ohio State's pivotal matchup on Nov. 2 against Penn State.

Ohio State linebacker Cody Simon was understandably frustrated with the call that went against his fellow linebacker.

"I feel horrible just because that play was just a misread on my part, so I feel responsible for him. So he's going to go back to work, and we'll see him the second half of next week," Simon said. "He's an incredible young player. I know targeting calls, and that didn't seem like one to me. Whatever they call, they call, and we just line up and play again."

The Buckeyes didn't let the call ruin their composure, and after a Nebraska false start, Simon took it upon himself to keep Raiola and the Cornhuskers well beyond the chains with back-to-back tackles for loss. On third-and-19, defensive back Jordan Hancock



SONNY BROCKWAY

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME — Safety Jordan Hancock (7) ensured Ohio State would hold off pesky Nebraska for a 21-17 victory when he intercepted Dylan Raiola at the OSU 45 with 1:16 left in the game. Cody Simon (0) joined the celebration.

sealed the game with a clutch interception with only 1:16 to play, allowing the Buckeyes to run out the clock with three straight kneel-downs.

Hancock Excels In Move To Safety

It wasn't a perfect effort from the Ohio State secondary, but defensive coordinator Jim Knowles has to be somewhat pleased with the progress shown by the back end of his defense given the circumstances. Without starting bandit safety Lathan Ransom, who was ruled out of the game with a lower-body injury, Knowles primarily used usual nickel cornerback Hancock to fill in for his senior teammate. With Hancock out of the nickel spot, redshirt junior cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. took his place to round out the starting 11, rotating consistently throughout the game with sophomore cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr.

Despite a couple of the new faces covering Cornhusker receivers, it was actually veteran cornerback Davison Igbinosun who had a few slip-ups in pass coverage. Often too physical with Nebraska receivers, the Ole Miss transfer was flagged for three pass-interference penalties, with two of them being accepted. The only reason the other pass-interference committed by Igbinosun wasn't accepted was because Banks hauled in a 12-yard pass through Igbinosun's contact to pick up a first down anyway.

Still, Raiola finished the game with only 152 passing yards on 32 pass attempts, which included the game-ending intercep-

tion by Hancock.

It wasn't the most difficult interception in Hancock's career, as he hardly had to move to haul in the errant pass from Raiola, but with the game and perhaps Ohio State's entire season on the line, it may be his most memorable.

"It was good," Hancock said. "It felt like it took like 20 seconds to get there, even though it was like two seconds, but it was awesome. It was a blessing, for sure."

For the game, Hancock finished with five total tackles, a forced fumble, which was ultimately recovered by Nebraska, and of course the first interception of his 2024 season. It may have been his first start at safety in his entire career, but Hancock looked like a seasoned veteran making plays for the Buckeye defense.

"I got moved there last week with Lathan out, but me being a veteran, knowing the whole defense, knowing every spot, I was kind of happy to show off my versatility, and it's huge for me," Hancock said. "I'm happy I got that."

Styles and Mathews didn't have the eye-popping stats that Hancock did, with each cornerback recording only a single tackle and Mathews a half TFL, but likely that had to do with the duo playing great coverage against Nebraska's receivers. It won't be as remembered as Hancock's interception, but Styles had his own moment in the spotlight in the fourth quarter when the Buckeyes were trying their hardest to hold onto a 21-17 lead. On the third-and-7 play, Raiola attempted to find freshman receiver Jacory Barney

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

After a poor performance in the loss to Oregon on Oct. 12, the defense said that it was trying to redeem itself after having to sit with the loss through an off week. It was able to do just that against Nebraska. The unit gave up 17 points – three field goals and a touchdown with a two-point conversion – but when it needed to step up, it did. There were multiple drives by the Cornhuskers that could have changed the tide of the game and completely flipped the momentum, but when there were questions about whether the Buckeyes would be able to come out of a rough team performance with a win, the defense had answers.

In the third quarter after quarterback Will Howard threw an interception that almost went back for a pick-six on the first play of the offensive drive, the Buckeyes had to make a goal-line stand on a Nebraska drive that began at the OSU 7-yard line. The Huskers tried four plays but couldn't convert when Cody Simon and Davison Igbinosun combined for the stop at the 1-yard line on fourth down.

Simon came through multiple times in the fourth quarter as well. On back-to-back plays he had two tackles for loss on the final drive of the game for Nebraska, forcing a third-and-long that led to true freshman Dylan Raiola throwing an interception to Jordan Hancock.

What Didn't Work

The entire offense struggled for most of the 21-17 win over Nebraska, but the major reason that was the case was the offensive line. The Buckeyes lost left tackle Josh Simmons to a season-ending injury in the game with Oregon, and he was replaced by Zen Michalski, who earned the start against the Huskers. More pressure got into the Buckeyes' backfield against Nebraska than in any other game so far this season, forcing Howard to rush throws and giving the offense as a whole a lot of trouble, especially the run game.

Judkins led the team in rushing with 29 yards on 10 carries, followed by Henderson's 25 yards

with the same number of totes. Nebraska came into the game with the 17th-strongest rushing defense in the country, giving up just 102.9 yards per game, and strengthened its résumé by giving up just 64 yards to what was supposed to be one of the strongest rushing attacks in the country. The Buckeyes were not helped by the fact that gaps were not being opened by the offensive line. Ultimately, the Cornhuskers finished with seven tackles for loss and two sacks, both season-worst marks so far for the Ohio State offense.

Play Of The Game

The momentum seemed to be shifting heavily toward Nebraska in the third quarter when Howard threw his interception that was returned 34 yards by Malcolm Hartzog Jr. to the Buckeye 7-yard line. The defense was strong for three plays, forcing the Cornhuskers to try to gain 2 more yards on fourth-and-goal to attempt to take the lead. On the rush by tailback Dante Dowdell, Simon was able to quickly get around the edge and grab Dowdell from behind, pulling his legs back to stop his momentum before Igbinosun finished the stop off by sending the running back to the ground.

It allowed the Buckeyes' offense to take the ball back with the lead, and although they were pinned on the 1-yard line and ended up going three-and-out, the Huskers were kept from scoring on both that drive and the next when Joe McGuire's 36-yard punt started them on the OSU 42. It was a strong stand by Jim Knowles' unit at an important time, keeping more points off the board before Nebraska added a touchdown in the fourth quarter, which would have made it a two-possession game had they already found the end zone on the fourth-and-goal.

— Greg Wilson

Jr., but Styles allowed no window for the pass to be completed, and the Cornhuskers had to subsequently punt.

The pivotal pass coverage rep from Styles certainly didn't go unnoticed by Simon.

"He's a terrific player," Simon said. "He's a great coverage guy. He has a knack for football and for the game. He played really well, and he got a big stop."

True freshman Jaylen McClain also rotated in to fill in for Ransom when Hancock needed breaks. He didn't finish the game with any tackles but did record a pass broken up.

Buckeyes Amp Up Pressure On Raiola

The central theme of the criticism surrounding Knowles' play-calling in the Buckeyes' 32-31 loss to the Ducks was his willingness or lack thereof to blitz Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel. Knowles' defense wasn't without its flaws against Nebraska, but it certainly couldn't be criticized for a lack of aggressiveness. Pretty regularly in obvious passing situations, five, six or even seven Buckeyes were sent after Raiola in blitz looks.

Knowles' aggressiveness as a play-caller was taken advantage of on an occasion or two, but the good plays seemed to outweigh the bad.

The dichotomy of the effectiveness of Knowles' blitzes was best exemplified in a dramatic third quarter.

With the Buckeye offense stalling out on the other side of the ball, Raiola drove the Cornhuskers inside the Ohio State 25-yard line with a chance to tie the game down 14-6. However, on third-and-9, Knowles dialed up a five-man blitz, causing a miscommunication on the Nebraska offensive line that basically allowed senior defensive end JT Tuimoloau a free lane at Raiola. After missing out on Raiola at first, Tuimoloau brought down Raiola with one arm to force Nebraska to kick a field goal.

A couple of drives later, with Nebraska

again threatening in Ohio State territory, Knowles doubled down on his pressure on Raiola. On third-and-10, with the ball at the Ohio State 32-yard line, Knowles rushed Raiola with seven defenders, one more than Nebraska could block, resulting in defensive tackle Ty Hamilton getting to Raiola untouched for a sack, ultimately leading to a Nebraska punt.

In practices leading up to the game, Knowles had the Buckeyes prepared for an aggressive game plan, according to Hamilton.

"It was definitely a major emphasis this week, because there's been a lot of times we haven't blitzed, but being able to show other teams that we can blitz and really show that we can pressure the quarterback is a big thing for us," Hamilton said after the game.

With the Buckeye offense still struggling to move the ball, the Cornhuskers had their fourth second-half possession, and after sustaining success on the ground, Raiola and the Nebraska offense had yet another opportunity in Ohio State territory.

Facing a third-and-7 at the Ohio State 8-yard line, the Nebraska offense seemed to know what to expect from Knowles' defense. Even with sophomore safety Caleb Downs sprinting toward him untouched in a simulated pressure of sorts, Raiola calmly drifted away and fired a dart to wide receiver Isaiah Neyor, who picked up the first down, which eventually led to a go-ahead touchdown one play later.

The Buckeye offense finally got some points on the board on the next drive, and Knowles stuck with his blitzes on third downs on Nebraska's next offensive possession. On third-and-7 from Nebraska's 28-yard line, Raiola faced pressure from the blitzing Simon, and he wasn't able to fully step into his throw to find the well-covered Barney.

Following the game, Simon talked about his trust in Knowles' defensive eye, which was likely only reinforced by his free path to the quarterback on the crucial third-down play.

"Coach Knowles sees a lot of different things out there, and I trust whatever he sees," Simon said. "He felt like we could be more aggressive, and that's what happened. So it worked out pretty well."

No scheme will be perfect, and bringing extra defenders to rush the quarterback always incurs some risk, but at the very least the three sacks forced by the Buckeye defense, which were three more than they forced against Oregon, and a whopping 13 tackles for loss seem to be a step in the right direction.

OSU Offense Fueled By Explosives

Even after the loss to Oregon, there wasn't nearly as much for the Buckeye faithful to complain about on the offensive side of the ball as there was about the defensive side of the ball. With the Buckeyes scoring 31 points and accumulating 467 yards of total offense, starting quarterback Will Howard led an efficient attack in the close loss to Oregon. Still, the always unsatisfied Day wanted the Buckeyes to at least get more reps during practice throwing the ball down the field in preparation for their game against Nebraska. "We'll be launching some balls today," Day said of the Buckeyes' practice plans on Oct. 22.

As early as the first quarter, whatever Howard and the Ohio State receivers were working on in practice seemed to pay dividends.

During the team's third drive of the game, the former Kansas State transfer had one of the easier long completions of his career when sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate executed a double move to perfection, finding himself wide open heading toward the end zone. Even a slightly underthrown pass from Howard couldn't disrupt a 40-yard touchdown that gave the Buckeyes their first lead of the game at 7-0.

Ohio State again went deep through the air one drive later when Jeremiah Smith sprinted past Nebraska defensive back Isaac

Gifford to give plenty of room for Howard to deliver the deep ball before taking it the rest of the way for a 60-yard touchdown.

Not only did the touchdown give the Buckeyes a 14-3 lead, but it also meant Smith had met the first of likely many career milestones. The 60-yard catch and run for a touchdown was his eighth of the season, tying Buckeye legend Cris Carter for the most in a single season by a freshman.

"Deep ball-wise, we hit the ones we had to, and I think it was good," Howard said. "I'm not going to give myself a grade on it until I watch the film. I think I maybe held up Carnell just a little bit. Maybe I need to push him downfield a little more and make it a little bit easier on him. But we got the perfect looks."

The Buckeyes didn't stay hot though and couldn't muster up a single point over their next five drives. Suddenly needing a score to retake the lead in the fourth quarter with 10:47 to go, Howard started the pivotal drive with another explosive pass. A Nebraska coverage bust left Tate not only open but with plenty of room in front of him to continue to gain yardage. By the time Tate was wrestled down at the end of the run, he had the Buckeyes set up at Nebraska's 38-yard line after a gain of 37.

According to Day, the coverage bust from Nebraska was at least partially the product of a perfect play call from offensive coordinator Chip Kelly.

"Coming out (on the final drive), that was a good call by Chip on first down. We were trying to run the ball to set up that play-action pass down on the sideline to Carnell, which got us in plus territory and then allowed us to score. So I thought that part was a positive coming out."

Seven plays after his fourth-quarter completion to Tate, the Buckeyes would score the go-ahead touchdown, meaning Howard's three lengthy completions not only accounted for 137 of his 221 passing yards on the day but also either resulted in a Buckeye touchdown or led to a Buckeye touchdown.

Buckeyes Slip By Upset-Minded Cornhuskers

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Nearly all of the 104,830 fans in Ohio Stadium on a crisp, sunny 56-degree afternoon on Oct. 26 were prepared for another beatdown of Nebraska by No. 4 Ohio State.

With a noon kickoff, they likely thought they could leave the game early knowing the outcome was well in hand and go enjoy the rest of another gorgeous fall day.

Somebody forgot to tell the Cornhuskers they were supposed to be victimized by the Buckeyes for an eighth straight time and in 10 of the 11 matchups for the storied programs. It took Will Howard's late touchdown pass, his third of the game, for the Buckeyes to rally for a 21-17 victory over the upstart Cornhuskers.

Howard threw a 9-yard touchdown to Quinshon Judkins with 6:04 to play to put the Buckeyes ahead after Nebraska (5-3, 2-3) took a 17-14 lead with 10:47 to play on a 1-yard run by Dante Dowdell and a two-point conversion catch by Nate Boerkircher.

Safety Jordan Hancock sealed the win with an interception at the OSU 45 with 1:16 left.

Boom Or Bust

Nebraska muffed the opening kickoff to start from its 9. On third-and-6, Tyleik Williams sacked Dylan Raiola, a former Ohio State commit, for 8 yards to the 5. It was an impressive start for the defense after getting no sacks in the 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12.

After a 31-yard punt by Brian Buschini gave the Buckeyes the ball at the Cornhuskers 36, the offense was less than impressive. On second down, Howard lost 8 yards on a sack. He recovered to find Emeka Egbuka for 9 yards on the next play, setting up a fourth-and-1 at the 27.

The Buckeyes went for it, but TreVeyon Henderson was stuffed for a 1-yard loss to turn the ball over.

Nebraska appeared to have a 30-yard catch by Isaiah Neyor to the OSU 43 on third down of its next drive, but it was overturned via review because he did not maintain possession when he hit the turf.

Late in the first quarter after a Nebraska 52-yard punt to the 9, the Buckeyes capped a 91-yard, six-play drive in 3:02 when Howard connected with Carnell Tate on a post pattern for a 40-yard touchdown to make it 7-0 with 29 seconds left.

Henderson got the ball rolling with a 15-yard rush to the 24, and Egbuka added 8 on a catch. Two plays later, a throw to Egbuka resulted in a Nebraska pass interference to the OSU 43. Henderson ran for 6, and Gee Scott Jr. made a catch of 11 yards to the 40 to set up the score.

Nebraska made it 7-3 on a 39-yard field goal by John Hohl at the 10:21 mark of the second quarter. He entered the game 1 for 5 with a long of 21.

A key play was a pass completion of 12 yards to Jacory Barney Jr. to the Nebraska 47. Hancock forced a fumble, but Nebraska center Ben Scott fell on it.

The recovery became even bigger when on third-and-10, Raiola stepped up in the pocket and raced 38 yards to the 15. On yet another third down, Williams tackled pass-catcher Emmett Johnson for a 2-yard loss to the 21 and



SONNY BROCKWAY

PRETTY GREAT, TATE — Sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate hauls in one of his four catches for 102 yards, including a 40-yard touchdown and a 37-yarder in the fourth quarter on the go-ahead drive.

the Cornhuskers settled for the three points.

Unfazed, the Buckeyes needed just four plays to go 75 yards in 2:00 to make it 14-3 thanks to Jeremiah Smith hauling in a 60-yard pass at 8:21 after Howard converted a third-and-1 with a sneak of 6 yards to the 40.

After stopping Nebraska to gain possession after a punt to the OSU 44, the Buckeyes squandered a 17-yard catch by Tate to the Cornhuskers 26 as the offensive line continued to leak following a season-ending knee injury to left tackle Josh Simmons during the Oregon game. His replacement, Zen Michalski, was constantly overmatched before he left in the second half with an injury.

Following a 4-yard rush by Henderson, Howard was forced to scramble for zero yards. He fumbled, but teammate Donovan Jackson made the recovery. On the next play, Howard was sacked for a 2-yard loss before Jayden Fielding missed badly to the right on a 42-yard field-goal try with 2:02 to go.

Nebraska then marched from its 24 with the help of a pass interference on OSU's Davison Igbinosun on the first play to the 39. From there, Johnson rushed for 14, and Neyor made a catch of 8.

On third-and-5 from the 30, Neyor was flagged for pass interference, setting the ball on the 45. A catch by Thomas Fidone II for 9 yards to the 36 allowed Hohl to drill a 54-yard field goal as time expired.

The Buckeyes (6-1, 3-1) led only 14-6 despite Howard going 9 of 9 for 167 yards, with his long TDs to Tate and Smith.

Ohio State had 197 total yards in the first half, only 30 coming on the ground.

"It's not good enough, and we have to be

able to run the football," head coach Ryan Day said.

Nebraska gained 72 of its 115 yards by rushing.

Down To The Wire

OSU started from the 19 after the kickoff to begin the second half. Howard's first pass of the third quarter went to Smith for 5 yards to make him 10 for 10 before he threw an incompleteness to Smith at the right sideline on third-and-3, resulting in a punt.

Nebraska went to work gouging the OSU defense starting from its 13. Barney had a catch for 14, Dowdell ran up the gut for 14 and then again for 12 to the OSU 45. Jahmal Banks caught a pass for 12 to the 33. On third-and-7, Igbinosun was penalized 6 yards for pass interference to give the Cornhuskers a first down at the 24.

With the Huskers needing 9 yards on third down after an illegal shift, JT Tuimoloau sacked Raiola for 6 yards, and Hohl made a 47-yard field goal for a 14-9 score with 7:29 left in the third.

Nebraska later failed to take the lead despite four cracks from the 7 after an interception and 34-yard return by Malcolm Hartzog Jr.

Dowdell ran for a yard on two carries, and Jaylen Lloyd picked up 4 to set up fourth down from the 2. Dowdell went over the top but was met by Cody Simon and Igbinosun after a gain of 1 to stop the drive.

OSU went three-and-out, and Joe McGuire's 36-yard punt was returned 3 yards by Isaiah Garcia-Castaneda to the Buckeye 42.

Barney opened the series with a 10-yard catch, but after two incompleteness, Raiola was

sacked for 7 yards by Ty Hamilton.

Once the Buckeyes got possession at the 20 after a touchback on a punt, they couldn't make a first down, denied on third-and-1 when Henderson was tackled in the backfield for a 1-yard loss to end a quarter in which OSU had 23 total yards and no first downs.

Nebraska began at its 26 after a 46-yard punt and stunned the crowd by going 74 yards in nine plays, using 4:06, to take a 17-14 lead with 10:47 to play.

Dowdell scored from the 1, and Boerkircher caught the two-point conversion.

The touchdown came one play after Neyor thought he scored on a 7-yard catch on third down, but his knee was ruled down a half-yard shy of the goal line after a review overturned the TD call. Still, Nebraska got a first down out of it.

Dowdell on the first play of the drive ran for 19, and Fidone came back with a 33-yard catch to the OSU 22. Two plays later Barney's reception went for 7, and Fidone had a catch for 8 to the 11. After an incompleteness, Dowdell ran for 3 to the 8 before the 7-yard pass to the 1.

Howard then led the Buckeyes 75 yards in eight plays and 4:43 to take the 21-17 lead. Tate began the possession with a short catch that he turned into a 37-yard gain to the Nebraska 38.

Needing 1 yard from the 29 on fourth down, Egbuka's catch gained 3. Judkins ran for 7 and Howard rushed for 10 before he threw the go-ahead TD to Judkins.

The teams exchanged punts, and Nebraska took over at its 24 with 3:36 left. The Cornhuskers began with a pass interference on them to set the ball back to the 12.

On the next play, chaos ensued. Banks' catch was ruled incomplete at the 31, but Arvell Reese was penalized for targeting. The play went to review, and the incompleteness was overturned. Reese was ejected, and fans threw debris onto the field.

As a result of the targeting, the Cornhuskers were given a first down at their 46. Nebraska was then penalized for a false start, and Johnson's catch went for a 3-yard loss with 2:00 left.

On second down, Johnson made another catch in the backfield and Simon got him for a 1-yard loss before Raiola was intercepted by Hancock on the next play.

Howard took three kneel-downs for minus-4 yards to end the game at the OSU 41.

Howard finished 13 of 16 for 221 yards and an interception to go with his three TDs.

Notes

OSU had 285 yards (221 passing, 64 rushing). Nebraska totaled 273 (152 passing, 121 rushing). ... The Cornhuskers led in first downs (18-11) and time of possession (35:07-24:53). They were 5 of 16 on third down compared to 1 of 10 for the Buckeyes. ... OSU had three sacks for 21 yards and 13 tackles for loss for 39 yards; Nebraska had two sacks for 10 yards and seven TFLs for 24 yards. ... Judkins led the team with 29 yards on 10 carries. ... Tate had four catches for 102 yards and Smith three for 70. ... Simon had eight tackles (four solo), including three tackles for loss for 5 yards. ... Raiola was 21 of 32 for 152 yards and an interception.

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 21, Nebraska 17

Oct. 26, 2024 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
NEBRASKA	0	6	3	8	17
OHIO STATE	7	7	0	7	21

First Quarter

OSU - Tate, 40-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 0:29.

Second Quarter

NEB - Hohl, 39-yard field goal, 10:21.

OSU - Smith, 60-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 8:31.

NEB - Hohl, 54-yard field goal, 0:00.

Third Quarter

NEB - Hohl, 47-yard field goal, 7:29.

Fourth Quarter

NEB - Dowdell, 1-yard rush (Boerkircher pass from Raiola), 10:47.

OSU - Judkins, 9-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 6:04.

Att. - 104,830

Weather - Clear, 56 F

Team Statistics

	NEB	OSU
First Downs	18	11
Rushing	7	4
Passing	8	6
Penalty	3	1
Rushes-Yards	33-121	31-64
Passing Yards	152	221
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	21-33-1	13-16-1
Offensive Plays	66	47
Total Net Yards	273	285
Third Down Efficiency	5-16	1-10
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1	1-2
Punts-Avg.	6-40.8	5-47.0
Fumbles-Lost	2-0	1-0
Penalties	7-62	3-36
Time of Possession	35:07	24:53

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - NEB: Dowdell 14-60; Raiola 9-31; Johnson 8-30; Lloyd 1-4; Haarberg 1-(-4). OSU: Judkins 10-29; Henderson 10-25; Howard 8-14; Team 3-(-4).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - NEB: Raiola 21-32-1-152-0; Team 0-1-0-0-0. OSU: Howard 13-16-1-221-3.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - NEB: Barney Jr. 7-49; Fidone II 4-55; Johnson 4-0; Banks 2-31; Neyor 2-15; Bonner 1-3; Lloyd 1-(-1). OSU: Tate 4-102; Smith 3-70; Egbuka 3-20; Scott Jr. 2-20; Judkins 1-9.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - NEB: Buschini 6-40.8-52. OSU: McGuire 5-47.0-61.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - NEB: Garcia-Castaneda 1-3. OSU: Downs 1-8.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - NEB: Ives 1-0. OSU: Inniss 2-33.

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

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - NEB: Hartzog Jr. 1-34 OSU: Hancock 1-0.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - NEB: Butler 1-8; Sherman 1-2. OSU: Williams 1-8; Hamilton 1-7; Tuimoloua 1-6.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - NEB: Butler 3-13; Sherman 2-3; Wright 1-7; Robinson 1-1. OSU: Simon 3-5; Williams 2-10; Tuimoloua 2-7; Burke 2-2; Hamilton 1-7; Igbinosun 1-4; Downs 1-3; Mathews Jr. 0.5-1; Jackson Jr. 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) - NEB: Singleton 6-4-10; Butler 4-1-5; Bullock 1-4-5; Gifford 1-3-4; Sherman 3-0-3; C. Wright 3-0-3; Robinson 1-2-3; Hartzog Jr. 2-0-2; McGahee IV 1-1-2; Buford Jr. 0-2-2; Thompson 0-2-2; Jeudy 1-0-1; Goldman 1-0-1; Lenhardt 1-0-1; Hutmacher 1-0-1; J. Wright 1-0-1; Gbayor 0-1-1. OSU: Simon 4-4-8; Burke 5-1-6; Downs 4-1-5; Tuimoloua 4-1-5; Hamilton 3-2-5; Hancock 3-2-5; Williams 3-1-4; Igbinosun 3-1-4; Styles 1-3-4; Sawyer 2-1-3; Reese 2-0-2; Jackson Jr. 1-1-2; Curry 1-1-2; Styles Jr. 1-0-1; Fryar 1-0-1; Ferlmann 1-0-1; Mathews Jr. 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - NEB: Raiola, Dowdell, Fidone II, Banks, Evans, Benhart, Lutovsky, Scott, Gottula, Markway, Boerkircher, Hutmacher, Butler, Wright, Gifford, Buford Jr., Gbayor, Sherman, Bullock, Hartzog Jr., Singleton, Robinson, Shavers Jr., Haarberg, Lenhardt, Garcia-Castaneda, Buschini, Jeudy, Bonner, McGahee IV, Barney Jr., Neyor, Lloyd, Johnson, Branch, Charles, Ives, Nelson, Genatone, J. Wright, Lindenmeyer, Jackson, Thompson, Mazzucca, Goldman, Knaak, Maciejczak, Bullock, Williams, Hohl, Wallin, Flege, Parrott. OSU: Tate, Howard, Egbuka, Henderson, Smith, McLaughlin, Michalski, Fryar, Jackson, Tshabola, Scott Jr., Simon, Judkins, Igbinosun, Burke, McClain, Reese, Sawyer, Tuimoloua, Hamilton, Styles, Williams, Inniss, Hicks, Rodgers, Antwi, Thurman, Nelson Jr., Melton, Downs, Simpson-Hunt, Mathews Jr., Styles Jr., Jones, Powers, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Gurd, Montgomery, Padilla, Siereveld, Fitzpatrick, Hancock, Adolph, Christian, Hartford, Curry, Kanu, Moore, Houston, Jackson Jr., McDonald.

Season Statistics

2024 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Aug. 31	(2) AKRON	W, 52-6	102,011
Sept. 9	(2) WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	102,665
Sept. 21	(3) MARSHALL	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	W, 21-17	104,830
Nov. 2	(4) Penn State (3)	12 p.m.	
Nov. 9	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 16	Northwestern	TBA	
Nov. 23	INDIANA (13)	TBA	
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	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	282	83
Rushing	62	34
Passing	87	51
Penalty	5	9
Average Per Game/Rush	188.0	91.3
Average Per Game/Pass	283.9	163.1
Total Offense	3303	1781
Total Plays	448	411
Average Per Game	471.9	254.4
Average Per Play	7.4	4.3
Penalties-Yards	34-313	28-200
Fumbles-Lost	11-4	11-5
Third Down Efficiency	36-82	32-100
Percentage	44%	32%
Fourth Down Efficiency	10-14	4-9
Percentage	71%	44%
Sacks-Yards	20-104	7-46
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:24	29:36

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	59	87	91	45	0	282	40.3
Opponents	16	36	6	25	0	83	11.9

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Quinshon Judkins	81	520	6.4	6	86
T. Henderson	62	449	7.2	4	53
James Peoples	35	153	4.4	2	12
Will Howard	41	153	4.4	2	12
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	8	-12	-1.5	0	0
OSU Totals	242	1316	5.4	18	86
OPP Totals	225	639	2.8	5	38

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Will Howard	134	181	74.0	1795	17-4	183.9
Devin Brown	10	18	55.6	108	1-0	124.3
Julian Sayin	5	7	71.4	84	1-0	219.4
OSU Totals	149	206	72.3	1987	19-4	179.9
OPP Totals	119	186	64.0	1142	4-5	117.3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	43	546	12.7	6	68
Jeremiah Smith	35	623	17.8	8	70
Carnell Tate	19	334	17.6	2	40
Gee Scott Jr.	9	85	9.4	1	25
T. Henderson	8	23	2.9	0	12
Quinshon Judkins	8	76	9.5	1	21
Brandon Inniss	8	92	11.5	0	27
Will Kacmarek	5	58	11.6	0	32
Bennett Christian	2	61	30.5	1	55
Bryson Rodgers	5	46	9.2	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	149	1987	13.3	19	70
OPP Totals	119	1142	9.6	4	69

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jeremiah Smith	9	-	-	-	-	54
Jayden Fielding	-	36-36	-	-	3-4	45
Q. Judkins	7	-	-	-	-	42
Emeka Egbuka	6	-	-	-	-	36
Will Howard	5	-	-	-	-	30
T. Henderson	4	-	-	-	-	24

Carnell Tate	2	-	-	-	-	12
James Peoples	2	-	-	-	-	12
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lathan Ransom	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gee Scott Jr.	1	-	-	-	-	6
Austin Snyder	-	3-3	-	-	-	3
OSU Totals	39	39-39	-	-	3-4	282
OPP Totals	9	6-6	-	1	7-10	83

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	0-0	1-1	2-3	0-0	3-4
OSU Totals	0-0	1-1	2-3	0-0	3-4
OPP Totals	2-2	1-1	3-5	1-2	7-10

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	21	896	42.7	0	61
Nick McLarty	2	65	32.5	0	35
OSU Totals	23	961	41.8	0	61
OPP Totals	44	1905	43.3	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
Jordan Hancock	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	5	105	21.0	1	45
OPP Totals	4	70	17.5	0	36

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	12	109	9.1	0	36
Caleb Downs	1	8	8.0	0	8
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	14	117	8.4	0	36
OPP Totals	3	10	3.3	0	12

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	3	47	15.7	0	18
Jayden Ballard	2	23	11.5	0	23
OSU Totals	5	70	14.0	0	23
OPP Totals	5	69	13.8	0	20

Def. Leaders

	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Sonny Styles	16	27	43	2.5-6	1.0-3
Cody Simon	16	17	33	4.0-12	1.0-7
Caleb Downs	19	12	31	5.5-10	0.5-2
Lathan Ransom	19	10	29	4.5-6	0-0
Ty Hamilton	10	16	26	3.5-14	2.5-10
Denzel Burke	18	8	26	2.0-2	0-0
Jordan Hancock	15	7	22	1.0-1	0-0
Jack Sawyer	12	10	22	2.5-12	2.5-12
JT Tuimoloua	14	6	20	7.0-26	4.0-22
Davison Igbinosun	13	7	20	4.0-14	2.5-9
Tyleik Williams	6	14	20	4.0-14	2.5-9
Arvell Reese	11	8	19	2.0-3	0-0
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
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	6	3	9	0-0	0-0
Jaylen McClain	5	3	8	1.0-1	0-0
Caden Curry	4	4	8	1.0-11	1.0-11
K. Jackson Jr.	5	3	8	1.0-4	0.5-4
J. Mathews Jr.	5	2	7	2.5-6	1.0-3
Tyhone Malone	1	5	6	1.0-1	0-0
Gabe Powers	3	1	4	0-0	0-0
Malik Hartford	-	4	4	0-0	0-0
Calvin Simson-Hunt	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Joey Velazquez	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
John Ferlmann	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Austin Siereveld	1	-	1	0-0	0-0

Nittany Lions Looking To End Streak Vs. OSU

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Since the loss to now-No. 1 Oregon in Autzen Stadium on Oct. 12, much has been made about head coach Ryan Day's inability to win the big game. His 2-6 record against AP top-25 teams in his time at Ohio State has been shared far and wide, and while it is an accurate stat, one thing it completely ignores is every single game Day and the Buckeyes have won over Penn State since he started.

The Nittany Lions have been ranked ninth, 18th, 20th, 13th and seventh in Day's five wins over James Franklin and Co., and while they aren't top-five wins, they have still been important Big Ten clashes each time, all of which have been handled by the Buckeyes.

The game on Nov. 2 will be the first time during Day's tenure that the Buckeyes will be the lower-ranked team against the Nittany Lions, and it will be at Beaver Stadium, which is regarded as one of the toughest places to play at on the road, especially when it's a top-five conference matchup. But Day still goes into the game with the advantage of being 5-0 over Franklin.

It's not only Day whom Franklin has struggled to beat. The Lions' head coach has a record of 1-9 against Ohio State, his only win coming in 2016 in a 24-21 upset in State College, which helped Penn State earn a berth to the Big Ten Championship Game where it would win its first conference title since 2008.

Now the Nittany Lions host Ohio State as the No. 3 team in the country, and they are not only looking to end their losing streak against the Buckeyes but are trying to give themselves the best chance possible in the College Football Playoff, which they will have a good chance of making.

"How do we get ourselves in a position to have a bye?" Franklin said before the season began. "If not a bye, how do we put ourselves in a position to have a home game in Beaver Stadium, which would be an advantageous position with those elements at that time of the year?"

The winner of the Big Ten Championship Game in Indianapolis on Dec. 7 will get one of those coveted byes in the 12-team playoff this year, and with Ohio State's loss to Oregon, this game could very likely be for a spot in the conference title game.

One thing that could be an advantage for the Buckeyes is the familiarity they have defending Nittany Lions junior quarterback and Medina, Ohio, native Drew Allar. In his first matchup against Ohio State last year, he was 18 of 42 passing (42.9 completion percentage) for 191 yards and one touchdown, much of that coming when the game was out of reach in the fourth quarter.

It was a disappointing outing against his hometown team – one that also included the Nittany Lions going just 1 of 16 on third down – that moved Allar to tears after the game.

"I sucked," Allar said when asked about his performance against the Buckeyes. "It sucks to lose like this, especially on the road to a very good team. There are a lot of emotions in the locker room and with good reason."

Outside of that game, and in the first half of the 2024 season, Allar has been a good quarterback for the Nittany Lions. In seven games this season, including a 28-13 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 26, Allar has completed 117 of 164 passes for 1,640 yards and 12 touchdowns to four interceptions.

Allar was injured in the Lions' win over the Badgers and didn't play in the second half of the game, but his status for the game on Nov. 2 was unknown when BSB went to press. Beau Pribula stepped in for Allar, completing 11 of 13 passes for a touchdown, and rushing six times for 28 yards. He is 18 of 23 total this season with three scores and an interception.

Both Allar and Pribula present a rushing threat as well, running for 129 and 133 yards, respectively, Allar adding three scores on the ground to Pribula's one.

Calling the plays for Penn State's offense this season is first-year offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki.

Coming off a 2023 campaign that had Penn State fire its offensive coordinator and

Get To Know ... Penn State

- **2024 Record:** 7-0, 4-0 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 4, Defense 4, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** James Franklin, 11th year at Penn State, 95-39.
- **Series History:** 39th meeting; Ohio State leads 24-14.
- **School Facts:** Location – State College, Pa.; Enrollment – 87,903; Nickname – Nittany Lions; Colors – Navy blue, White; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Beaver Stadium (Surface – Grass; Capacity – 106,572).

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	at West Virginia	W, 34-12
Sept. 7	BOWLING GREEN	W, 34-27
Sept. 21	KENT STATE	W, 56-0
Sept. 28	ILLINOIS	W, 21-7
Oct. 5	UCLA	W, 27-11
Oct. 12	at USC	W, 33-30 (OT)
Oct. 26	at Wisconsin	W, 28-13
Nov. 2	OHIO STATE	Noon
Nov. 9	WASHINGTON	TBA
Nov. 16	at Purdue	TBA
Nov. 23	at Minnesota	TBA
Nov. 30	MARYLAND	TBA
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship	TBA

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Kaytron Allen	101	509	5.0	4
N. Singleton	75	483	6.4	3
Beau Pribula	21	133	6.3	1
Drew Allar	34	129	3.8	3

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Drew Allar	117-164	71.3	1,640	12-4
Beau Pribula	18-23	78.3	200	3-1

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Tyler Warren	47	559	11.9	4
H. Wallace III	22	350	15.9	2
Liam Clifford	14	246	17.6	1
Omari Evans	11	236	21.5	2
N. Singleton	13	150	11.5	4
Julian Fleming	10	148	14.8	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game	– 33.3
Rushing Yards Per Game	– 197.1
Passing Yards Per Game	– 266.6
Total Offense Avg. Per Game	– 463.7

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Jaylen Reed	24	20	44	3.5-30 1.5-18
Zakee Wheatley	23	14	37	1.5-2 0-0
Kobe King	18	16	34	3.5-6 1-3
Tony Rojas	19	11	30	3.5-6 0-0
Abdul Carter	17	13	30	9.5-38 4-16
AJ Harris	11	9	20	1-3 0-0
Zane Durant	11	7	18	6-32 2.5-24

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Jaylen Reed	2	41	20.5	1
AJ Harris	1	20	20	0
Zakee Wheatley	1	0	0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed	– 14.3
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed	– 93.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed	– 174.6
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed	– 267.6

former Buckeye assistant coach Mike Yurcich toward the end of the season following the team's 24-15 loss to Michigan, Allar has been pleased with the culture his new offensive coordinator has created within the unit during the first few months of the season.

"There's just a lot of positive energy on our side of the ball, but also when things aren't going right, we're doing a really good job of washing those plays and learning from those plays and moving on," Allar said after the 33-

30 overtime win over USC on Oct. 12.

Kotelnicki returned the praise on Oct. 16, saying he has liked how Allar has been able to grow throughout the season.

"I've been super pleased with his development and growth," Kotelnicki said. "Fundamentally, it goes down to him wanting to get better. He wasn't sitting and sulking when we threw an interception. He was evaluating what he was going to do the next time that situation came up."

The offensive success that the Nittany Lions have had this season certainly isn't hurt by the running back duo they boast. Juniors Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen were already a feared pair in the backfield in 2023 – allowing them to both be named to the Doak Walker Award watch list this summer, an honor given to the top running back in the country – and now they only have more experience under their belts.

Allen leads the team with 101 rushes for 509 yards and four touchdowns this season after an impressive performance against the Badgers in which he ran for 86 yards and a score on 11 carries. Singleton has 75 attempts for 483 yards and three touchdowns.

In the passing game, Allar does have an obvious favorite target, that being senior tight end Tyler Warren. Warren has caught 47 passes in seven games for 559 yards and four touchdowns, a strong start to his final collegiate season that was headlined by his record-breaking 17-catch, 224-yard and one touchdown performance against USC.

But while Warren is putting together a special season, wide receivers Harrison Wallace (22 catches), Liam Clifford (14), Omari Evans (11), and former Buckeye Julian Fleming (10)

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OHIO STATE VS. PENN STATE

have also been involved as pass catchers.

Kotelnicki has been utilizing a 12-personnel look to begin games with Warren as the pass-catching threat and another tight end as an extra blocker, which has been fairly effective to this point.

The extra blocker has been helpful since the Lions had just one starter return on their offensive line in right guard Sal Wormley. He is joined by left tackle Drew Shelton, left guard Olaivavega Ioane, center Nick Dawkins and right tackle Anthony Donkoh.

Penn State's defense was the strength of its team last season, finishing third in the country in scoring defense and second in total defense. Manny Diaz led the 2023 unit as the defensive coordinator but left over the offseason to become the head coach at Duke, a position OSU defensive coordinator Jim Knowles interviewed for.

Former Indiana head coach Tom Allen has taken Diaz' spot in State College this season, and in seven games, he still has Penn State at fourth in the country in total defense with 267.6 yards per game allowed and eighth in scoring defense with 14.3 points per game allowed.

Like Knowles' unit at Ohio State, the Nittany Lions' defense has had issues starting fast. They allowed 20 first-half points to USC on Oct. 12 and 24 to Bowling Green on Sept. 7. Like the Buckeyes, the Nittany Lions were off the weekend of Oct. 19, and Allen said they used that week to try to fix some of those issues.

"We're just looking at all possible things," Allen said. "We've looked at it from a sports science perspective. The level we play at here, we can't afford to start off slow. Making sure our guys are mentally, physically prepared, everybody's ready to play at a high level right from the get-go, that's on all of us as coaches. We're definitely working on it."

The defensive line is also facing similar struggles as the Buckeyes' front four, getting some pressure on the quarterback but not enough of those leading to sacks. With 14 sacks through seven games, the Lions are far off the pace they set last year when they finished the season with an FBS-leading 49 sacks.

Allen doesn't think the lack of sacks has been the issue that it looks like it might be.

"There's more to it than sacks," Allen said. "It's, 'Does the quarterback feel us?' You would like to have four or five sacks a game, that's awesome, everybody gets excited about that. But are they affecting the game in a positive way? I would say absolutely."

As Allen alluded to, the front four of pre-season All-Big Ten team selection Abdul Carter, Dvon J-Thomas, Zane Durant and Dani Dennis-Sutton have been forcing quarterbacks to get the ball out early with their combined nine quarterback hurries and 8½ sacks. The team

is also top 10 in stopping the run and have been very good getting into the backfield, with the four defensive line starters totaling a combined 21½ tackles for loss.

Carter made the move from linebacker for this season, but Kobe King still returned to be the Mike for the Lions, and he is third on the team in tackles with 34. Alongside King is Tony Rojas, whom Allen has been very pleased with this season, though he does think there are places the sophomore can improve.

"When you have a talented young guy like him, he makes some really elite, high-level plays, and then he also makes mistakes and gets out of position or doesn't finish the tackle a certain way," Allen said. "I will say, I think his tackling has improved to a high level these last several weeks."

Penn State utilizes what it calls the "Lion" position, which is very similar to a nickel cornerback, and Cam Miller has been effective in that role to this point with 14 tackles (one for loss), one pass broken up and two quarterback hurries.

AJ. Harris and Jalen Kimber are the starting two cornerbacks for the secondary, which has been effective in limiting passing yards this season, allowing just 174.6 per game through seven contests. Harris has also brought in one interception and broken up three passes while Kimber has deflected two passes as well.

Jaylen Reed returned to the secondary as a starter at safety and has been emerging as a star for the defense. He is leading the team with 44 tackles, adding 1½ sacks, two interceptions, two passes broken up, a quarterback hurry, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery.

Franklin has been impressed with the improvements Reed has made this year and how much his knowledge of the game has been able to help elevate the play of his teammates on the field.

"I think he's playing really well," Franklin said. "And he's not just a guy who plays really well himself, but he impacts others. You watch him out there running the defense, communicating checks. He just does a phenomenal job when he comes to the sideline. The information he's able to give us is extremely valuable."

Zakee Wheatley will also start at safety against Ohio State, replacing the veteran Kevin Winston Jr., who is out with a long-term injury. With Winston being out since Penn State's Week 2 matchup against Bowling Green, Wheatley has been doing what is needed of him, totaling 37 tackles (1½ for loss), one interception and two passes broken up.

Due to the expansion of the Big Ten, Ohio State and Penn State are no longer going to match up every year, ending an annual series that in recent seasons has come with some high stakes. But the last annual contest between the two teams is still a big one, with a possible spot in the conference title game on the line.



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Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...

FS
6 Zakee Wheatley, 6-2, 200, R-Jr.
14 Tyrece Mills, 6-1, 203, R-Sr.

MIKE
41 KOBE KING, 6-1, 248, R-Jr.
0 Dominic DeLuca, 6-1, 230, R-Jr.

SS
1 JAYLEN REED, 6-0, 212, SR.
10 Dejuan Lane, 6-2, 211, Fr.

WR
4 A.J. Harris, 6-1, 193, So.
9 Elliot Washington II, 5-11, 194, So.

DE
13 Tony Rojas, 6-2, 236, So.
8 Dakaari Nelson, 6-3, 222, R-Fr.

DT
5 Cam Miller, 6-0, 184, Jr.
7 Zion Tracy, 5-11, 181, So.

CB
3 Jalen Kimber, 6-0, 184, R-Sr.
29 Audavion Collins, 5-11, 180, R-So.

WR
11 ABDUL CARTER, 6-3, 252, JR.
15 Amin Vanover, 6-4, 258, Sr.

DE
91 Dvon J-Thomas, 6-1, 305, R-Sr.
50 Alonzo Ford Jr., 6-2, 319, R-Sr.

DT
33 Dani Dennis-Sutton, 6-5, 266, Jr.
92 Smith Vilbert, 6-6, 282, R-Sr.

CB
28 ZANE DURANT, 6-1, 288, JR.
99 Coziah Izzard, 6-3, 305, Sr.

WR
74 DONOVAN JACKSON, 6-4, 320, GR.
68 George Fitzpatrick, 6-6, 313, Jr.

LT
56 Seth McLaughlin, 6-4, 305, Gr.
75 Carson Hinzman, 6-5, 300, Jr.

LG
70 JOSH FRYAR, 6-5, 320, Sr.
68 George Fitzpatrick, 6-6, 313, Jr.

C
77 Tegra Tshabola, 6-6, 327, R-So.
67 Austin Siereveld, 6-5, 320, So.

RG
4 Jeremiah Smith, 6-3, 215, Fr.
9 Jayden Ballard, 6-2, 195, Sr.

RT
17 Carnell Tate, 6-3, 191, So.
13 Bryson Rodgers, 6-2, 185, So.

QB
51 Luke Montgomery, 6-5, 3-8, So.
67 Austin Siereveld, 6-5, 320, So.

P
42 Joe McGuire, 6-2, 212, So.
35 Anthony Venneri, 6-0, 225, Jr.
19 Nick McLarty, 6-7, 255, Fr.

RB
18 Will Howard, 6-4, 237, Gr.
33 Devin Brown, 6-3, 212, Jr.

TE
88 Gee Scott Jr., 6-3, 243, Gr.
89 Will Kacmarek, 6-6, 260, Sr.
15 Jelani Thurman, 6-6, 258, So.

K
33 TREVEYON HENDERSON, 5-10, 208, SR.
1 Quinshon Judkins, 6-0, 219, Jr.
20 James Peoples, 5-10, 203, Fr.

SLOT
2 EMEKA EGBUKA, 6-1, 205, GR.
11 Brandon Inniss, 6-0, 203, So.

K
38 JAYDEN FIELDING, 6-0, 175, JR.
98 Austin Snyder, 5-7, 194, Sr.

— Starters in bold, returning starters in all caps

WHEN PENN STATE HAS THE BALL...

NICKEL
7 JORDAN HANCOCK, 6-1, 195, SR.
24 Jermaine Mathews Jr., 5-11, 189, So.
4 Lorenzo Styles Jr., 6-1, 195, Sr.

MIKE
2 Caleb Downs, 6-0, 205, So.
9 Malik Hartford, 6-3, 194, So.

WILL
6 SONNY STYLES, 6-4, 235, Jr.
11 C.J. Hicks, 6-3, 233, Jr.

BANDIT
8 LATHAN RANSOM, 6-1, 210, GR.
16 Keenan Nelson Jr., 6-1, 195, Jr.

CB
10 DENZEL BURKE, 6-1, 193, SO
22 Calvin Simpson-Hunt, 6-0, 204, So.

DE
44 JT TUIMOLOAU, 6-5, 269, So.
97 Kenyatta Jackson Jr., 6-6, 258, Jr.

DT
91 TYLEIK WILLIAMS, 6-3, 327, SR.
93 Hero Kanu, 6-5, 305, Jr.

NT
1 DAVISON IGBINOSUN, 6-2, 193, JR.
24 Jermaine Mathews Jr., 5-11, 189, So.

DE
58 TY HAMILTON, 6-3, 295, Sr.
98 Kayden McDonald, 6-3, 326, Sr.

CB
33 JACK SAWYER, 6-5, 260, Sr.
92 Caden Curry, 6-3, 260, Jr.

TE
66 Drew Shelton, 6-5, 307, Jr.
74 J'Ven Williams, 6-5, 310, R-Fr.

LT
53 Nick Dawkins, 6-4, 298, R-Sr.
52 Dominic Rulli, 6-3, 295, R-So.

LG
68 Anthony Donkoh, 6-5, 330, R-Fr.
72 Nolan Rucci, 6-8, 308, R-Jr.

C
16 Khalil Dinkins, 6-4, 252, R-Jr.
85 Luke Reynolds, 6-4, 248, Fr.

RG
71 Olaivavega Ioane, 6-4, 348, R-So.
56 JB Nelson, 6-5, 326, R-Sr.

RT
44 TYLER WARREN, 6-6, 261, SR.
16 Khalil Dinkins, 6-4, 252, R-Jr.

QB
77 SAL WORMLEY, 6-3, 327, R-Sr.;
0 Cooper Cousins, 6-6, 316, Fr.

TE
93 Sander Sahaydak, 6-0, 185, R-Jr.
94 Ryan Barker, 6-2, 192, R-Fr.

P
15 DREW ALLAR, 6-5, 235, JR.
9 Beau Pribula, 6-2, 206, R-So.

WR
6 Harrison Wallace, 6-1, 198, R-Jr.
3 Julian Fleming, 6-2, 208, Sr.

WR
2 LIAM CLIFFORD, 6-1, 208, R-Jr.
5 Omari Evans, 6-0, 188, Jr.

K
95 RILEY THOMPSON, 6-1, 224, JR.
99 Gabriel Nwosu, 6-6, 285, R-Jr.

RB
10 NICHOLAS SINGLETON, 6-0, 226, JR.
13 Kaytron Allen, 5-11, 220, Jr.

— Depth charts compiled by Greg Wilson

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
PENN STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Where art thou, OSU running backs? After rushing for 141 yards – 53 on one run by TreVeyon Henderson – for a 4.3 average in the loss to Oregon, the Buckeyes had two weeks to remedy the situation before their 21-17 win over Nebraska. The result? In 31 attempts they had 64 yards (2.1 avg.) against a team that had allowed 215 yards and five – yes, five – rushing touchdowns in a 56-7 loss to Indiana the week before. Quinshon Judkins led the way with 29 yards on 10 rushes with a best of 7 yards. Henderson gained 38 yards on 10 carries but lost 13 for a net of 25, emblematic of a struggling offensive line that badly misses left tackle Josh Simmons, who sustained a season-ending knee injury against Oregon. Replacement Zen Michalski was overmatched vs. the Cornhuskers before he too went out with an injury. Penn State allows 93.0 yards per game to rank in the top 10 nationally after Wisconsin ran for only 81 yards with a 3.0 average. **EDGE: PENN STATE**

PENN STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Nittany Lions ran for a healthy 173 yards (4.9) against Wisconsin, led by Kaytron Allen's 11 runs for 86 yards. He had a 7.8-yard average thanks to a 24-yard run in the fourth quarter. Nick Singleton chipped in with 49 yards (4.1) with a long of 18. Ohio State learned from the Oregon loss to apply more pressure on the pass rush. But at times, that allowed nimble Nebraska quarterback Dylan Raiola to find room up the middle on the scramble, such as his 38-yard run in the second quarter. The Buckeyes gave up 121 yards (3.7) on the ground vs. the Cornhuskers and had a stout third-quarter goal-line stand when they yielded 6 yards on four runs when faced with a first-and-goal from the 7. **EDGE: EVEN**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.
PENN STATE PASS DEFENSE

Will Howard completed his first 10 passes vs. the Cornhuskers. That's the good. The not-so-great news was his perfection resulted in only 14 points, albeit a 40-yard strike to Carnell Tate and a 60-yard bomb to freshman sensation Jeremiah Smith. But the offense got bogged down, again, mainly due to Howard being under constant duress. He threw another interception and had what seems like his weekly fumble. Although he was sacked twice, he managed to throw for 221 yards and three TDs on 13 of 16 completions. Penn State was giving up a stingy 167.5 yards passing, but Wisconsin's Braedyn Locke was 22 of 42 for 217 yards and an interception. Penn State did not have a sack. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PENN STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

The big question will be the status of Drew Allar, who did not play the second half against the Badgers because of a knee injury. Prior to his injury he was 14 of 18 for 148 yards and a TD. Backup Beau Pribula was 11 of 13 for 98 yards and a touchdown plus 28 yards on six carries. Tight end Tyler Warren is a beast. He had 17 receptions for 224 yards and a touchdown against USC on Oct. 12 and added seven catches for 46 vs. the Badgers. Julian Fleming, who transferred to PSU from Ohio State this season, had a catch for 16 yards against Wisconsin, and for the season his 10 grabs have gone for 148 yards. The Buckeyes are capable of making big plays such as Jordan Hancock's pick to seal the win over Nebraska, but they have allowed too many big plays and taken too many pass interferences to be considered an elite defense. On the plus side, they had three sacks vs. the Cornhuskers. **EDGE: EVEN**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Penn State redshirt freshman Ryan Barker made four field goals against USC and is 6 for 6 on the season with a long of 40. OSU punter Joe McGuire averaged 47.0 on five punts with a long of 61 against Nebraska, but Jayden Fielding badly missed a 42-yard field goal. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

The defense came up with some timely stops, and the offense scored when it needed to beat Nebraska. But it never should have been that close to begin with and this team is teetering on becoming one of greatest underachievers in recent OSU history. Coach Ryan Day has a reputation of being close but not good enough in big games. This is a big game. Fortunately, PSU's James Franklin has a worse rep: 1-9 vs. the Buckeyes with seven straight losses. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

It's easy to overreact after the Buckeyes' underwhelming performance against Nebraska, but something is not clicking with this uber-talented group. This is a publication that covers the Buckeyes so picking against them seems wrong, but Penn State – being at home – has to beat them sometime, right? **PENN STATE 30, OHIO STATE 28**

OL Decker Has Heart of a Lion For Detroit

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Patience and perseverance are virtues Taylor Decker has developed in his nine seasons with the Detroit Lions.

The left tackle has endured losing seasons and injuries but has become a pillar of the organization since being selected in the first round (No. 16) of the 2016 NFL draft out of Ohio State.

He made an immediate impact by being the third Lions rookie offensive lineman since 2000 to start all 16 regular-season games. Decker has started 119 games through Oct. 27 to rank fourth in Lions history for offensive tackles.

Barring injuries or other unforeseen situations, he will be an anchor on the line for several more years. On July 29, he signed a three-year extension that runs through the 2027 season. He will be paid a total of \$60 million, including a \$15.74 million signing bonus and \$31.83 million guaranteed.

"It's not lost on me the fact that a lot of guys don't get to spend their whole careers with one team," Decker said at the time. "Hopefully, that's in the cards for me, and from the contract extension it seems like it's in the cards."

"I'm very fortunate and I've had to have some good luck along the way, but there's also a lot that went into it. Sacrifices from myself and from those around me. It just feels good. It just feels special to be able to stay here and be with my friends and get to work with people that I care about and that I love."

"It's just really special and I'm fortunate, and I'm glad that the Lions continue to see the value that I can add to this team moving forward. I'm excited to just see it through," he added. "There's been highs and lows, and it seems like we're on an upswing and I'm going to get to see it through. I couldn't be happier about that."

Decker said in the months after the 2023 season ended that he went to coach Dan Campbell to discuss the status of his contract, which was entering its final year.

"I was like, 'Where are we at?' " Decker said he asked Campbell. "And you know, 'I hear things from my agent, from our salary cap people, and they're talking, and I'm getting that kind of secondhand information. I want to hear it. Tell me where we're at, just so I know. I just want the information, so it's communicated well.'"

Decker's mind was put at ease when Campbell told him the front office planned to extend his contract before the 2024 season started.

"Pretty much what he told me was to a T what happened," Decker said. "I just basically had to stay patient. And for me, it was never going to be to hold out of training camp, 'Oh, if it comes to the season, we're not going to play games.' That's just not me. I'm going to show up and I'm going to play because that's what I do and that's what I'm here to do. So I think it was pretty seamless."

If only the career of the Lions' longest-tenured player was so smooth.

A shoulder injury in 2017 cost him eight games, and he later told the Detroit News that he did not handle it well.

"I think it was detrimental, because I made myself mentally exhausted, on top of

not feeling physically ready to go out there. I came back way too early, and I was watching so much film that I was psyching myself out," he said. "I wasn't going out there confident. A part of that was the mental side, knowing I probably shouldn't be out here but I'm going to do it anyway."

He missed the first eight games of the 2021 season because of a finger injury. He also sustained a foot injury in the season finale against Green Bay. It was the former injury that led to a spat with some of the media who questioned the severity of it and called for him to be traded.

The Sept. 2, 2022, Buckeye Sports Bulletin feature on him recounted his piercing response.

"I shouldn't have to talk to my parents about whether the team and the city that has become my home is going to trade me or get rid of me," he said at the time. "I shouldn't have to talk about that. I just think it's kind of ridiculous. I think people in this building and a lot of the fan base appreciates me, and I do think they know what I can bring to the table."

"But for some reason – and I'm not saying it was 100 percent of the media – but a lot of the media was hammering this narrative of basically get rid of me when I want to be here and I want to help turn this organization into a winning organization. I've said that from day one and I've never faltered on that, and I'll never understand why. Nobody will be able to explain to me why, and it's just frustrating."

The heat has since been lowered on both sides, but Decker's point at the moment was that he was passionately committed to the Lions despite some lean years.

Turnaround

Detroit went 9-7 in his first two seasons, but those were followed by 6-10, 3-12-1 and 5-11 seasons before the arrival of Campbell, who was preceded by Jim Caldwell, Matt Patricia and Darrell Bevell (interim) during Decker's stay.

Campbell was 3-13-1 in 2021, but the rebuild took off the following season with a 9-8 record before last season's 12-5 mark that included a Dec. 24 win over the Minnesota Vikings that clinched Detroit's first division title since 1993.

"Once it was realized, it's just a flood of emotions that you didn't even know was there," Decker said afterward. "Kind of an overwhelming, in a good way, experience."

He told ESPN, "It was just cool to be a part of something like that. Monumental. Thirty years is a long time. That was the first monkey-off-your-back moment. It was something that I hadn't done."

The Vandalia, Ohio, native had grown used to winning at Ohio State, but this was something new and special with the Lions. In four seasons with the Buckeyes, they were 40-4 and won the inaugural College Football Playoff for the 2014 season.

Unfortunately for the Lions, it wasn't a Hollywood ending. In their first NFC title game since 1991, they blew a 17-point halftime lead in a 34-31 loss to the San Francisco 49ers.

That setback has not deterred the Lions from being one of the favorites to reach the Super Bowl this season.

A 47-9 dismantling of the Dallas Cowboys in Texas on Oct. 13 showed their potential as



FILE PHOTO

MOTRING – Former Buckeye Taylor Decker has been a mainstay at left tackle for the Detroit Lions since his rookie season in 2016 and is under contract through the 2027 season.

well as Campbell's sense of revenge.

In a Week 17 controversial loss to the Cowboys in 2023, a game-winning two-point conversion pass to Decker was nullified when the Lions were penalized for an ineligible receiver downfield after referee Brad Allen announced offensive tackle Dan Skipper as eligible instead of the Lions' preferred offensive lineman, Decker.

This time, quarterback Jared Goff made sure the officials knew Decker was eligible and proceeded to run a play-action pass to him from the 2-yard line only to have it fail when Dallas linebacker Damone Clark broke up the throw.

"We tried to get one to Decker, and it didn't work out," Campbell said. "We were close, real close. Didn't quite get there. We try to score a number of different ways, and we didn't get that one. That was about the only one."

By the way, Decker is no stranger to scoring. He is also the only offensive lineman in franchise history to catch two TD passes (Dec. 2, 2018, vs. the Los Angeles Rams and Jan. 2, 2022, at Seattle).

Plenty Of Buckeye Company

Decker isn't the only Buckeye in the Lions organization.

All-America linebacker Chris Spielman, a second-round pick (No. 29) by the Lions in 1988, has been a special assistant to the president/CEO and chairperson since 2021. According to the team media guide, he played an integral role in the hiring of Campbell and executive vice president and general manager Brad Holmes.

J.T. Barrett, a three-time Big Ten Quarter-

back of the Year (2014, 2016-17) and a 2014 Heisman Trophy finalist, is in his third season with the Lions and second as assistant quarterbacks coach.

He joined the Lions in 2022 as an offensive assistant.

Also, Scott Sika, an offensive lineman for OSU from 2006-10, has spent nine seasons as an area scout after three seasons in the player personnel department for the Atlanta Falcons.

His brother, Neil, in addition to calling Major League Soccer matches for Apple TV, is the radio play-by-play voice for Ohio State men's hockey.

The only other Buckeye player on the Lions' roster is offensive tackle Jamarco Jones, who is on the practice squad. He was a fifth-round choice (No. 168) by the Seattle Seahawks in 2018.

Offensive lineman Jonah Jackson was Decker's teammate in Detroit from 2020 until signing as an unrestricted free agent with the Los Angeles Rams on March 15 of this year. He played his final year at Ohio State in 2019 after four years at Rutgers.

He was a Pro Bowl selection in 2021.

"It was kind of like a proud dad moment in a way," Decker said of Jackson joining the Rams. "Not that I'm that much older than him, but I was here when he was a rookie, and I remember his first game we played against the Chicago Bears. He was playing right guard against Akiem Hicks, and he answered the bell and played really well that game. I think everybody was like, 'Oh, oh, we got something here.' He just continued to get better."

Pickerington Pipeline Pays Dividends For OSU

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State football has long dominated in recruiting when it comes to getting prospects in state. Multiple schools are well known for their Buckeye connections, such as Cleveland Glenville, Cleveland St. Ignatius and Lakewood St. Edward, among others which consistently boast top recruits in every class.

Pickerington North and Pickerington Central might not be widely regarded to be in that category, but for the 2024 Buckeyes, perhaps no area has played a more significant role in the makeup of the roster than Pickerington, and that has become a common theme for recent Ohio State teams.

This year, with Pickerington Central alumni such as junior linebacker Sonny Styles, redshirt senior defensive tackle Ty Hamilton, redshirt junior cornerback Lorenzo Styles Jr. and walk-on long snapper Max Lomonico as well as such Pickerington North players as senior defensive end Jack Sawyer and true freshman running back Sam Williams-Dixon, the Pickerington products have made a significant impact on the 2024 season. While Sawyer, Hamilton and Sonny Styles all start for the Buckeyes' elite defense, Lorenzo has and will likely continue to play a vital role as a depth piece at the cornerback position.

The significant contributions made by the Pickerington alumni are part of why Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene views the Pickerington high schools no differently than he does any other Ohio power in producing Division I talent.

"Absolutely they are (on the same level as the top schools in Ohio)," Greene said. "And as that area continues to grow, the suburbs of Columbus are continuing to grow, where if you look at the Cleveland area, the Akron area, they are losing population, so I think it's only going to continue."

To be fair to pundits and recruiting experts alike who don't consider Pickerington among the top pipelines to Columbus, it hasn't always been this way. Pickerington High School was hardly a powerhouse in developing Division I college football talent in the 1980s and '90s before the school split into two.

It wasn't until after the 2003-04 season that it sent its first player to Ohio State since at least 1986. Punter AJ Trapasso, a Pickerington alum and a Buckeye from 2004-08, had quite the football journey that almost didn't happen. Trapasso wasn't even allowed to play football for the majority of his childhood because his father sustained a broken neck in his own playing days.

Instead, Trapasso was an overtly physical soccer player, constantly in the poor graces of referees for his rough play, before his dad finally gave in and allowed him to trade in his shin guards for shoulder pads when he was in seventh grade. Trapasso's father's concession ended up being quite the break for his son, whose talent as a punter earned him a five-year career with Ohio State and a brief career in the NFL.

The Trapasso family moved to Pickerington in the mid-1990s and were far from the only ones to do so. According to the 2000 census, Pickerington's population increased 72.8 percent from 1990 to 2000.

"There's so much that they built since we

moved in 1994 that essentially when we were in high school and even middle school, portable classrooms were a staple," Trapasso said.

The population influx certainly had to be welcomed by longtime Pickerington head coach Jack Johnson, who all of a sudden had a plethora of new talent to work with starting in the 1990s.

In 1999, Johnson put that talent to good use as Pickerington won its first regional championship before a blowout loss to St. Ignatius in the state semifinals. Even though the 1999 Pickerington team didn't come through for a state championship, the program as a whole – with future star coaches such as current Pickerington Central head coach Jeff Lomonico and former head coach Jay Sharrett as assistants along with the population still very much on the rise – was becoming the Ohio powerhouse as it is known today.

In the following seasons, Pickerington continued its regular-season excellence, winning back-to-back Ohio Capital Conference championships in 2000 and 2001. With Trapasso coming into his own as an all-district running back, the Tigers delivered a third consecutive conference championship in Johnson's last year at the helm in 2002.

They didn't win regionals like they had in 1999, but the Tigers still made a decent run in the playoffs to the regional final before being eliminated. Just when the program was turning a corner as a dominant force within Ohio, the growing talent pool was split in two, with the addition of a new Pickerington high school.

"I think my graduating class in 2004 – we did a combined graduation – we had over 700 kids in our class, which was at the time the biggest class in Pickerington. So it was a necessary evil that was coming to split it up," Trapasso said. "They drew imaginary lines in the sand as far as how they were going to separate neighborhoods, and there was so much back and forth."

"The most contentious thing was – and it screwed me over, to be honest with you – I lost Justin Boren as a lineman because he was forced to go to North as opposed to coming to Central. I mean, I lost some really good players younger than me who didn't have a choice of where they went, so it stunk. I think it was something as a community, it was a tough pill to swallow initially, but it was necessary."

Even with the high school split, the Tigers didn't go through a dramatic falloff. Central didn't just have the area's increasing population to thank for that. New head coach Sharrett had a hand in the immediate success as well. In 2003, they picked up right where they left off under Johnson, going 9-2, earning Sharrett Ohio Coach of the Year recognition in his first season.

When the Sharrett era was in full swing, Central became one of the best programs in the entire state of Ohio in the mid-to-late 2000s, winning two regional championships in 2006 and 2008.

The progress made on the field naturally bled into success and opportunities at the next level. After Trapasso's successful punting tenure with the Buckeyes in the 2000s, which saw him start for four years. Boren, who initially went to Michigan where his father had played, and his brother Zach of Pickerington Central, a fullback and linebacker at Ohio

State, became key contributors for Ohio State in the late 2000s and early 2010s, with Justin making the All-Big Ten first team twice.

Although it was a much younger program than Central, North started to find its own footing as a program under head coach Tom Phillips. Starting in 2007, Phillips had just one year under .500 in conference play in his 10 years leading the team. Led by superstar tight end Jake Butt and running back Godwin Igwebuike, North asserted itself as a contender, making it to the state semifinals before ultimately being eliminated in 2012.



Sonny Styles

On the other side of the newborn rivalry, Central had its own standout in four-star recruit Taco Charlton.

Charlton, Jacoby Boren and the Central coaching staff helped propel the Panthers to an 11-win season and another regional championship in 2011.

Charlton, Butt and Igwebuike set forth a bit of a concerning trend for the Buckeye faithful and the coaching staff, as the trio didn't just commit to other Big Ten schools – Michigan for Butt and Charlton, and Northwestern for Igwebuike – but each player ended up performing at an All-Big Ten level at their respective destinations.

It didn't take long for the Buckeyes to get their hat back in the ring for what was starting to become a pipeline for high-end Division I talent. The Buckeyes picked up a commitment from future three-time first-team All-Big Ten offensive lineman Pat Elflein in 2013. One year later, the Pickerington talent in Columbus started to pile up when defensive end Davon Hamilton joined Elflein at Ohio State.

As Pickerington alumni like Butt, Charlton, Elflein, Davon Hamilton and Igwebuike started to play at the highest levels in all of college football, both North and Central started to play at the highest level of Ohio high school football.

In 2017, Central had a loaded team full of future college football players led by safety Xavier Henderson, who would go on to be a four-year starter at Michigan State before being signed by the Washington Commanders, four-star recruit and then Michigan State tight end Trenton Gillison and All-Ohio defensive back and current Ohio University safety Jeremiah Wood.

But even with all of the talent and experience possessed by those three high school seniors, it was a freshman who was turning heads.

"Lorenzo Styles (Jr.) is probably the most explosive player we've ever had," Lomonico said. "He played running back, receiver, corner, returned kicks – I mean, he could do it all. The thing is, he was so quick, and I mean, anytime he touched the ball, he could score."

The 2017 Central team triumphed where their predecessors had failed on the way to the program's first state championship, defeating Mentor, 56-28 in the final.

The emergence of Lorenzo Styles at Central helped solidify the Tigers even after the departure of Gillison, Henderson and Wood to the next level in 2018.

Lorenzo Styles was joined by Davon Ham-

ilton's younger brother and current Ohio State starting defensive tackle Ty Hamilton in 2017 in forming an absolute juggernaut of a high school football team in 2019.

As was often the case, Central's biggest obstacle in its conference was right in its back yard in Pickerington North.

Current North coach Nate Hillerich was in the third year of his tenure as the leader of the program after having taken over for Phillips, who had departed to be the director of player personnel at Cincinnati under Luke Fickell. Hillerich probably didn't have the depth of talent that Sharrett had most years, but he did brandish a not-so-secret weapon in perhaps the best high school football player in the state at the time, a young defensive end named Jack Sawyer.

Hillerich may not have envisioned that Sawyer would go on to be one of the best pass rushers in the country while simultaneously leading the offense as the team's quarterback in Sawyer's junior season but it's safe to say the future Buckeye had shown signs of talent as early as middle school.

"I still remember when I got the job, I met with Tom and he told me, 'Look, I'm just letting you know we have an eighth-grader who's the best player I've ever seen in my life,' and that's just off of having Jake Butt, Elflein, Godwin, who are all NFL players," Hillerich said.

It didn't take long for Hillerich to start to believe what his predecessor had claimed. In fact, Sawyer flashed his strength and athleticism when he was pitted against a player two years older in a game of tug of war with an old car tire.

"We had a tight end, Tyler Foster," Hillerich said. "He went to Ohio University and is actually now at Oklahoma State as a grad transfer. So my first day, Jack's coming to morning workouts with varsity as a freshman, and we end workouts and we go into the gym and I'm just matching guys up. I just want to see guys compete my first day, and I put Jack against Tyler and Jack kills him, I mean just rips the tire, he slams it down, is yelling. I just knew he was different then."

It wasn't long before Sawyer became a fearsome pass rusher as just a sophomore in high school, leading his team with six sacks.

One would think someone as talented as Sawyer, who had a pretty clear path to playing high-level college football, would want to spend time preparing at his best position, but desperate times – North losing its starting and backup quarterbacks – called for desperate measures, and the exceptionally talented five-star was willing to put on the superman cape.

"He always wanted to play quarterback, but at the time, he's a five-star recruit with everything going on. I just wanted to make sure he's good," Hillerich said. "And he even called Ryan Day at the time and Ryan Day was like, 'Look, do whatever to help your team win.' He came in and just dominated at quarterback, running, throwing. He's making checks out there, just making his own stuff up, but it was wild to see."

Moving Sawyer to the most important position in football was mainly successful. Sawyer threw for over 1,000 yards and nine touchdowns while adding 386 yards and six touchdowns on the ground. As a pass rusher, meanwhile, Sawyer had 13½ sacks and was

the OCC Division Ohio Defensive Player of the Year.

Sawyer did just about all he could to defeat his future teammates Lorenzo Styles and Ty Hamilton, throwing for 109 yards and recording a sack and three tackles on the defensive side, but ultimately Central prevailed 16-7. In that game, it was obvious that the two schools were producing players who could move on to compete at a high level.

With perhaps the most high-end talent either Pickerington school had ever seen on both rosters, each coaching staff became well-acquainted with the Ohio State coaching staff, which by the 2019 season was led by first-year head coach Ryan Day. According to Hillerich, the connection between the coaching staffs is still in place today.

"I think it's the trust level," Hillerich said. "You start to know them really well. Not only is it our kids, but some of the teams we play, multiple times there's been coaches or their recruiting personnel who would reach out and say, 'What are your thoughts on so and so that you played against? Do you think he could play at this level?' So I think that's where it's the trust and the comfort. We make sure we bring a bunch of our kids to their camps, and we've gone to their seven-on-seven that they host every year, so we have a great relationship."

It's easy to think that it should be a fairly straightforward process for Ohio State to pick up local kids from central Ohio, but even in the case of Sawyer, someone who seemed to bleed scarlet and gray even before he came to Ohio State, the process can be a little more complicated than the player just showing interest in becoming a Buckeye.

"He always loved the Buckeyes, but I will say he was the ball boy when (the Pickerington North football team) went to the state semifinals in 2012 and he looked up to Jake, and he looked up to Godwin and those guys going to Michigan, and I think he understood how recruiting could work, that maybe Ohio State doesn't happen," Hillerich said. "Obviously that was his goal, but that's why I think he was really open to visiting places."

According to Hillerich, Sawyer's interest in the Buckeyes as a hometown kid isn't at all rare at his program, or anywhere in central Ohio.

"I think that's everybody's goal who grows up in Columbus," Hillerich said. "They want to be a Buckeye. They go and get to see their games and they see how special it is to have a sellout crowd and the tailgate and everything that's going on."

The Buckeyes took no chances with Sawyer and were seemingly in on the talented pass rusher as soon as he started to make an impact as a sophomore.

"I think he was going to bowl practice, and Mark Pantoni and them were like, 'Hey, let him know we don't offer Ohio guys early. We know he's got all these other offers, but we don't offer guys early,'" Hillerich said.

"We don't want to get his hopes up because everywhere Jack had gone on a visit, they had offered. So I told his parents – I was like, 'Look, they told me they're not going to offer,' and then the next day, Jack calls me, and he's like, 'Hey, Ohio State offered.' I'm like, 'Are you kidding me?'"

At that time, Lomonico didn't have a major talent like Sawyer ready to commit to a certain college, although Sonny Styles was certainly on the way, but he and Sharrett maintained a great relationship with the Ohio State

coaching staff as well.

"They do a nice job of keeping in touch and just talking about everything, and then during off periods, keeping in touch with me to check on (former Central players) and things like that," Lomonico said. "They recruited Lorenzo really hard too, and he was thinking academically and things like that and went to Notre Dame, but they kept in contact about him also."

"I know a lot of those guys. I know they've got some new faces and stuff, but I've known those guys for a long time, and they know they can pick up the phone and call anytime."

After Sawyer was the first player from his 2021 class to commit to the Buckeyes, Ty Hamilton went from a rival of Sawyer's to his teammate, committing a few months later in the class of 2020, following in his older brother's footsteps and building a legacy for the Hamilton name at Ohio State much like the Borens had done a couple of years prior.

The relationship between Lomonico, Sharrett and the Ohio State coaching staff proved to be an important one even after the commitments of Hamilton and Lorenzo Styles, when Central had its own superstar athlete progress through high school in Sonny Styles.

Sonny, who had become used to playing at a level above his age after often playing on the same travel football team as his older brother, had an interception in the first game of his sophomore season, helping Central defeat North 35-9.

After that game, the younger Styles immediately caught the attention of the Buckeyes.

"I got a call probably 10 minutes after that game, and at that time, we weren't allowed to go to the locker room," Lomonico explained. "Everybody had to be outside and spread out because of that COVID stuff, and I had my phone blown up from Ohio State, and they said, 'Tell Sonny he was offered,' and I told Sonny and his dad, and he was excited."

Unlike his older brother, who had committed to Notre Dame to play wide receiver, Styles committed to Ohio State, becoming the second five-star and third recruit in as many years to head to Columbus from Pickerington. The three-year time frame that had several high-end Division-I caliber players head to Power Five schools was a far cry from the days of Trapasso, when the punter became the first Pickerington alum to go to Ohio State in at least 17 years.

The increase in population undoubtedly helped Pickerington become the football factory it is today, but according to Columbus Dispatch reporter Dave Purpura, it stems from the organized youth sports in the area that starts when young athletes are in elementary school and junior high.

"The thing that really stands out to me is the youth sports out here are so good and they're so organized," Purpura said. "It starts when these kids are in elementary school and then into junior high."

"It's the local youth organizations called Pickerington Youth Athletic Association, PYAA for short, and the coaching is very good, and the development there that starts, and you get the high school coaches paying attention when these kids are playing when they're young, and then they go into junior high systems."

"There's one junior high that exclusively feeds into Central, and then the other one feeds into North. So you get that coaching there, and then by the time you hit high school,

the sense of the programs is really built into these kids and what they want to do."

Even the population increase, which hasn't stopped since the boom that began in the 1980s, isn't by coincidence. Part of it has to do with an attractive school system in the area.

"There's a lot of families that, if you're looking to move, our schools are really good, but they've seen that there's been great football teams. If they want their kids playing for really good football teams, it's a good place to get your kids developed," Hillerich said. "They know we run our high school programs like they're colleges, so we're preparing them for football, not only school."

It's one thing to be lucky enough to have very talented players, which, as Hillerich said, often goes hand in hand with having a good reputation as a coaching staff, but it also takes some development of that talent for players to be in a position to succeed at the next level.

"Not only have they had good athletes, they've had some good coaches from here," Purpura said. "The defensive coordinator from the (NFL's New York) Giants, Shane Bowen, went to Central. I remember when he played. These guys definitely have great football minds, and it goes back to not only the coaching, but it goes back to wanting to be a part of not only programs, but if you go to Pickerington schools and you do well, you're going to be set up for success."

The quality of the coaching in Pickerington didn't go unnoticed by Sonny Styles, who was coached by two great defensive minds in Sharrett and Lomonico.

"I think the biggest thing that they taught us was accountability, work ethic and then just playing for your brother," he told BSB. "Coach Sharrett was very huge on no selfish intentions. We actually had a thing where no one was allowed to wear No. 1. He felt like you were bigger than the team, so I thought he really got the best out of guys in terms of playing for each other. We always harped on playing for the older guy, playing for the senior as a younger guy, so I feel like he really harped on playing for each other, no selfishness and accountability."

The high-end five-star talent might be slightly new to Pickerington schools, but the high-end coaching is something that has been around since Johnson originally took the reins over 50 years ago.

"From 1973 to 2022, Pickerington Central High School had two head coaches, Jack Johnson and Jay Sharrett. When you have that kind of consistency within the program and people who are so invested in the community, in the youth program, working with these guys, that is what people look for," Trapasso said.

Greene feels as though central Ohio schools in general have done things the right way in developing talent.

"The best compliment I could pay is I'd be

proud to have my kid play in Dublin, Pickerington and Westerville," Greene said. "Those schools, when I was covering them in depth, I always had so much respect for everything – the school, the education, the coaching, the facilities, the development – I thought they were A-1."

In 2021, with Sonny Styles, Sawyer and Ty Hamilton all committed to Ohio State and Lorenzo Styles on his way to Notre Dame, it seemed as though the dust had settled on the recruitment of the stars that in large part led a sort of golden age of Pickerington football. Before Ohio State's 2023 season, Lomonico received one more phone call from the Ohio State coaching staff. This one was from members of the defensive coaching staff, asking about Lorenzo, who had entered the transfer portal after two years at Notre Dame.

Not long after he entered the transfer portal, Styles committed to Ohio State, joining his brother and the other three Pickerington natives on the roster.

In 2024, it is not uncommon to see the four Pickerington natives all on the field, with each player living out every local kid's dream of making plays for the Buckeyes.

"I definitely think it's pretty cool to see a lot of Pickerington guys out there, especially on the defense," Sonny said. "I look out there, I see Jack Sawyer, Ty Hamilton, me and my brother, it's four guys out there, starting on one of the best defenses in the country, so it's definitely pretty cool."

As good as they have been, and each former Tiger has played a pretty significant role on the defense so far, the Pickerington Central alumni don't forget their roots.

"We get to visit every now and then," said the younger Styles. "We're so busy around here, but I'm definitely always watching the guys, just seeing how they're doing."

The same is true for Sawyer, who will go back to his former stomping grounds just to check on his mom, a teacher at North, and maybe even get her some lunch.

"(Sawyer) is here more than probably anybody," Hillerich said. "His mom still teaches at our high school, so he comes and visits her. He's in the building all the time – not now, but in the offseason. Anytime they get a day off, he'll bring his mom lunch or whatever it is. This spring, he spoke to our leadership council. He came in, he brought Tyleik Williams with him. He comes to our youth camp. He's played in our golf outing this summer, signed items. He loves Pickerington North."

As long as Pickerington North and Central have coaches at the helm who are as connected to Ohio State as Hillerich and Lomonico, the pipeline to the talent-rich Columbus suburb will be wide open. If the makeup of the 2024 roster is any indication, the Pickerington pipeline may be Ohio State's most important one.

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Title In '54 Saves Woody's Job As Head Coach

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 1954 season, acknowledged by historians and the coach himself as the team that saved Woody Hayes' job.

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

To truly understand how important the 1954 season was to the Ohio State football program in general, and to the coaching career of Woody Hayes in particular, you have to go back three years to the intrigue and drama that surrounded the hiring of Hayes in the first place.

And even that might not be going back far enough.

Let's begin with a little trivia. What do canine star Lassie, glamour girl Lana Turner and U.S. President Harry Truman have in common with regard to Ohio State football?

Give up? Each of them finished ahead of Woody Hayes in a 1951 poll conducted by the Columbus Citizen newspaper as its readers' favorite to become the next head coach of the Buckeyes. Former coach Paul Brown was the runaway leader of the purely unscientific poll, garnering 2,311 of the 2,831 votes cast.

But there was one thing Citizen readers didn't know. The wildly popular Brown, who had led northeast Ohio's Massillon High School to five state championships before leading Ohio State to the program's first-ever national title in 1942, wasn't ever coming back to Ohio State – at least if new athletic director Dick Larkins had anything to say about it.

When Brown left Columbus to accept a commission with the U.S. Navy in January 1944, he designated longtime assistant Carroll Widdoes as his handpicked successor. Brown was unofficially given the title of "head coach in absentia" with Widdoes serving in his stead until World War II was over and Brown was discharged from military service.

Except Widdoes wasn't exactly comfortable with the arrangement. An intensely private man, Widdoes was unsure that he wanted to subject himself and his family to the white-hot spotlight that accompanied being head coach of the Buckeyes. Additionally, if he was going to accept the responsibility, he wanted no strings attached, and simply being a placeholder for Brown was nearly a deal-breaker.

But out of loyalty to the university, Widdoes became head coach, leading the Buckeyes to an undefeated season in 1944 and a 7-2 finish the following year. But when the war was coming to an end, and Brown accepted a lucrative



FILE PHOTO

THE REST IS HISTORY – The 1954 season brought an unexpected national championship to likely save Woody Hayes from being fired after the previous three seasons produced a mediocre (for the rabid fan base) 16-9-2 record.

deal to coach the Cleveland Browns of the upstart All-America Football Conference beginning in 1946, things really went off the rails.

Widdoes accused Brown of poaching Ohio State's roster of homegrown talent – particularly offensive tackle Lou Groza and fullback Joe Whisler, each of whom had played for the Buckeyes as freshmen in 1942 before enlisting in the U.S. Army.

"Brown is trying to sign players from our '42 freshman team who are now in the service," Widdoes told reporters. "He has also approached some varsity players. When he was here, I heard him in all of his speeches advise boys to get their college educations first and then sign professional contracts. Now that he is in the pro game, he is doing an about-face."

The NFL had a longstanding rule preventing teams from signing a player until his class had graduated, but apparently the AAFC had no such rule.

When informed of the comments made by his former assistant, Brown denied any underhanded tactics.

"My attitude toward boys getting their education first hasn't changed one bit," he said, adding he had no contact with potential players while he was still in the service. "I don't know anything about men being approached with contracts. I haven't talked to any of them."

Meanwhile, longtime athletic director Lynn St. John had begun turning over the reins of his department to Larkins, a three-year letterman in football and winner of the Big Ten Medal of Honor in 1931 who had also spent five seasons as freshman football coach at Ohio State.

During the transition, Widdoes decided the situation of being interim head coach was no longer palatable. He stepped down, returning to his old job as backfield coach with line coach Paul Bixler taking over the head coaching responsibilities. The following year, with St. John officially retired and Larkins taking over, the new AD replaced Bixler with former OSU teammate Wesley Fesler as the new head coach.

Bixler left Ohio State and became head coach at Colgate University while Widdoes stayed on Fesler's staff through the 1948 season, after which he accepted the head coaching job at Ohio University.

Still, Brown continued to cast a large shadow over the Ohio State program as the coach racked up four straight AAFC championships and then a fifth consecutive title when the Browns joined the NFL in 1950. When Fesler

resigned his post at Ohio State shortly after the 1950 season had ended, Brown was not only the overwhelming choice to replace him, but the former OSU coach let it be known that he was interested in returning to Columbus.

Except Larkins had vowed that would never happen.

"The players wanted him, and the fans wanted him," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "But the administration didn't like him, particularly Dick Larkins, who was the director of athletics. Larkins supposedly told more than one person that the only way Paul Brown would come back to be head coach at Ohio State would be over his dead body."

A handful of potential candidates earned official interviews – including Brown – but Larkins' first choice to succeed Fesler was Missouri head coach Don Faurot. However, when Faurot decided to remain with the Tigers, the job fell to Hayes, who was coming off a 9-1 season and Mid-American Conference championship at Miami (Ohio).

Three years later, Hayes wasn't any more popular with Buckeye Nation than he had been in the newspaper poll. In fact, he was less so.

With his first three seasons in Columbus producing a pedestrian record of 16-9-2 with nothing higher than a third-place finish in the Big Ten standings, Ohio State fans were ready to move on.

The summer before the 1954 season, Hayes was enjoying a glass of lemonade in his back yard when he overheard some of his neighbors talking about the upcoming campaign, with one of them proudly proclaiming, "This is the year we get rid of the son of a bitch."

Hayes took a sip from his glass and smiled at his wife, Anne.

"We'll see about that," the coach said. "This son of a bitch might not be so easy to get rid of."

Picked To Finish Fifth

Hayes' record during his first three years in Columbus was only the tip of the iceberg. The Buckeyes had lost two of three games to Michigan during that span, including a 20-0 shutout to end the 1953 season.

So when OSU was picked by most sportswriters to finish fifth in the 1954 conference race behind Illinois, Michigan State, Wisconsin and Iowa, the knives were out in force for Hayes.

"It was seen as a make-or-break season for Woody," Park said. "There was already speculation about who his successor was going to be."

A rather disappointing crowd of 72,703 was on hand at Ohio Stadium to watch the Buckeyes roll to a 28-0 victory against Indiana in the season opener, but that outcome was expected against a Hoosiers team on its way to a 3-6 finish in 1954.

The following weekend, however, 79,524 fans found their way into the Horseshoe when No. 18 California paid a visit. The Bears, led by former Northwestern head coach Lynn "Pappy" Waldorf, were eager for some payback after losing a 17-14 decision to the Buckeyes in the 1950 Rose Bowl.

Ohio State was protecting a 14-13 lead midway through the fourth quarter, but Cal was in possession of the football and driving. That's when junior defensive back Howard

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

“Hopalong” Cassidy grabbed an interception to set up a game-clinching touchdown and the Buckeyes secured a 21-13 win.

The following week, OSU traveled to Illinois and avenged a 21-point loss from the year before by rolling to a 40-7 victory against the Fighting Illini. That was followed by a 20-14 win against No. 13 Iowa to set up a late October battle between a pair of teams with identical 4-0 records.

The Buckeyes had risen from being unranked before the season to No. 4 while Wisconsin sat at No. 2 in the national polls. Ohio State featured one of the country’s top offensive attacks while the Badgers boasted one of the best defenses in college football. It was homecoming in Columbus, a record 400 press passes were issued to sportswriters and broadcasters from all over the country, and an overflow crowd of 82,636 jammed into the Horseshoe to watch the marquee battle.

Wisconsin head coach Ivy Williamson was winless in six previous meetings with Ohio State, and the Badgers hadn’t won in Columbus since 1918. So Williamson had his team overnight in Springfield, Ohio, rather than downtown Columbus in hopes that might change his luck.

That strategy appeared to be working some magic as the Badgers shut down the explosive Buckeyes and took a 7-3 lead into the locker room at halftime, and it remained that way until late in the third quarter when Wisconsin drove to the OSU 20. On second-and-4, Badgers QB Jim Miller faded back to pass, and the game instantly turned.

Cassidy stepped in front of the throw at his own 12-yard line and, behind several key



FILE PHOTO

TWO-WAY STAR — Columbus’ own Howard “Hopalong” Cassidy, a former star at Central High School, was a key player on offense and defense in helping Ohio State win the 1954 national championship. He rushed for 94 yards and a touchdown against Michigan.

blocks, raced 88 yards with the interception as the crowd roar shook Ohio Stadium to its foundation. It was Miller’s first interception of the season and the first second-half points the Badgers had surrendered in five games, and it set the tone for turning what had been a close

game into a 31-14 rout for the Buckeyes.

“At the time, most people agreed the Cassidy interception was the greatest play in Ohio Stadium history,” Park said. “Sixty years later, my opinion is that you could still make that case.”

At about the same time in Ann Arbor, Michigan was handing eighth-ranked Minnesota a 34-0 spanking, leaving the Wolverines and Ohio State as the only remaining undefeated

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Goal-Line Stand Leads To Memorable Win

Continued From Page 25

teams in Big Ten play.

When The Associated Press released its rankings the following day, the Buckeyes had leapfrogged previously top-ranked Oklahoma to grab the No. 1 spot. Hayes and his team celebrated with victories against Northwestern, No. 20 Pittsburgh and Purdue before the traditional season finale against Michigan.

During his weekly meeting with the Quarterback Club before the game, Hayes seemed upbeat until someone asked about the possible ramifications if the coach were to experience another loss to Michigan.

"We don't think in negative terms like you apparently do," the coach replied through clenched teeth before abruptly ending the festivities.

Late First-Half Heroics

The Wolverines boarded a train and headed south to Columbus with one thing on their minds – spoil the Buckeyes' perfect season and steal away a trip to the Rose Bowl for themselves. The 1954 game, played on a blustery Nov. 20 afternoon, marked the 10th time in the 20 most recent meetings between the archrivals that the outcome of the game would determine the Big Ten championship.

A victory by OSU would preserve a perfect 9-0 season, protect its No. 1 national ranking and put it into the Rose Bowl for the first time in five years. A win by Michigan would mean the two teams would share the conference title, but because they would own a win over the Buckeyes, the Wolverines would get their first trip to Pasadena in four years.

Ohio State was still struggling in the overall series against Michigan. Starting with a 34-0 loss in 1897, the Buckeyes had a dismal all-time record of 13-33-4 against the Wolverines and had only one win and a tie to show for the previous nine meetings.

To make matters worse, Cassady had been nursing a variety of injuries over the past few weeks and starting quarterback Dave Leggett

was hospitalized with an allergic reaction to an injection and missed most of the week of practice leading up to the game.

Hayes visited Leggett in the hospital each evening to go over practice plans and game plans, and he said he always believed his starting quarterback would be well enough to play in the game. The problem was kept out of the local newspapers, and The Columbus Dispatch reported in its Nov. 19 edition the day before the game that Leggett had been hospitalized "only a few hours." That was partially correct – it was only a few hours before kickoff that Leggett left his hospital bed and headed for the Horseshoe.

Michigan entered the game ranked No. 12 in the nation despite two losses – an early-season defeat at the hands of a powerful Army team and an inexplicable 13-9 upset loss at home to Indiana. Nevertheless, the Wolverines were a powerful team led by legendary head coach Bennie Oosterbaan and players such as senior tackle Art Walker, who was on his way to a third consecutive All-Big Ten honor, and sophomore end Ron Kramer, who went on to have an 11-year NFL career with the Green Bay Packers and Detroit Lions.

Sophomore quarterback Jim Maddock was an expert at running Oosterbaan's single-wing and T-formation offenses, and senior halfback Fred Baer – who would later be voted by his teammates as the 1954 season's most valuable player – was a dangerous running back.

But with all of the star power in the game and patrolling the sideline for both teams, it was two relatively unknowns and one of the most famous goal-line stands in Ohio State football history that marked the 1954 OSU-Michigan game.

Played on a chilly, overcast day in front of a capacity crowd of 82,438 in Ohio Stadium, the Wolverines won the opening coin toss and elected to receive. It was a strategy that Oosterbaan liked to employ, especially against teams that prided themselves on defense. Reasoning that getting something going early on offense would demoralize the opponent for

the remainder of the afternoon, the Michigan head coach always chose to go on the offensive whenever he could.

The strategy worked to perfection as the Wolverines took the opening drive of the game 68 yards for a touchdown.

The score came on fourth-and-1 at the OSU 7-yard line when Oosterbaan came up with a trick play. Baer took a handoff and plunged into the middle of the line, but before he got to the line of scrimmage, he gave the ball back to quarterback Lou Baldacci, who in turn lateraled back to halfback Dan Cline. The Michigan halfback circled around the right side of a stunned Ohio State defense and into the end zone for the touchdown.

Kramer kicked the extra point, and the Wolverines had a 7-0 lead with 8:32 remaining in the first quarter.

Cassady gave the Buckeyes reasonably good field position off the ensuing kickoff, returning it 23 yards to the OSU 31. But three plays into the drive, Baldacci stepped in front of a Leggett pass and intercepted it near midfield.

The teams traded possessions throughout the rest of the first quarter and early into the second before Michigan again mounted a drive and threatened to score. Taking over at their own 11-yard line, the Wolverines strung together a 17-play drive that took nearly seven minutes.

Michigan pushed all the way to the Ohio State 9, where it had first-and-goal. Baer went into the middle for 1 yard on the first play, but Michigan was called for being offside on second down, pushing them back to the 13. OSU defensive halfback Jim Roseboro nearly intercepted a pass meant for Kramer on second down and then batted away Baldacci's third-down attempt to hit Kramer in the end zone.

Staring at fourth-and-goal at the 13, Oosterbaan decided not to chance going for the touchdown and instructed Kramer to try a short 20-yard field goal. However, when the kick sailed wide to the right, the Buckeyes had dodged a bullet.

Still Ohio State couldn't muster any offense and was forced to punt the ball back to the Wolverines, who took over on the OSU 47 and seemed intent to get more points before halftime. Baldacci's pass to a wide-open Kramer in the flat was poorly thrown, and Oosterbaan decided it was time to go to Maddock at quarterback.

The game may have turned on that substitution.

On the next play, the Michigan QB set up to pass and tried to get the ball to a receiver crossing over the middle. Instead, Ohio State backup defensive halfback Jack Gibbs – in the game only to rest starter Hubert Bobo, who

had been hobbled with a foot injury – reached out and made a one-handed interception of the pass.

Gibbs grabbed the ball at the OSU 43-yard line and streaked the other way as the crowd roared out of its seats. He was finally pulled down at the Michigan 10-yard line, but the Buckeyes had a breath of life with 2:51 left in the first half.

They didn't waste the opportunity.

After taking a 5-yard penalty for delay of game, Leggett crossed up the Michigan defense and threw to little-used split end Freddie Kriss, who gathered in the pass for a 15-yard touchdown. Kicker Tad Weed tacked on the PAT, tying the score at 7-7 and creating a huge momentum swing for the second half.

In that first half, the Buckeyes were fortunate just to be in the game much less be tied. First downs stood at 11-3 in Michigan's advantage while the Wolverines had piled up 190 total yards to just 46 for the Buckeyes. Additionally, OSU had lost the services of three starters to injuries – All-America end Dean Dugger to a dislocated wrist, tackle Dick Hilinski to a mild concussion and right halfback Bobby Watkins to a knee injury.

Stopping Them Cold

Ohio State got some offense going to open the second half, moving into Michigan territory thanks in part to a 17-yard run by Cassady, by far the Buckeyes' longest run of the afternoon. But the drive bogged down, and OSU punted the ball away to the Wolverines, who were determined to make up for their miscue at the end of the first half.

Starting inside its own 15, Michigan got 12-yard runs from Cline and fellow halfback Ed Hickey as well as a 27-yard burst from Baer to push the ball to midfield. Two short runs and a UM offside penalty later, the Wolverines tried the halfback pass from Cline to Baldacci again, and it worked for 16 yards and a first down at the Ohio State 32.

Hickey added 9 more yards on the next play to give Michigan a second-and-1 at the 23, but Baer committed his second fumble of the game and Bobo pounced on the ball to snuff the rally.

The good feeling that Bobo had for coming up with the turnover lasted only a few seconds, however. After a three-and-out series, Bobo's punt went straight up in the air and was caught by Michigan return man Tom Maentz, who was downed at the OSU 14-yard line.

The Wolverines quickly pushed the ball down to the 4, where they had a first-and-goal. And then Ohio State came up with one of the most historic goal-line stands in its history.

Junior fullback Dave Hill rammed the center of the line on first down to punch the ball to

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

the 3 before Cline was stopped for no gain on second down. On third down, it was Hill again, this time over left guard, pushing the ball to the 1-yard line.

Faced with fourth-and-1, Oosterbaan decided to go for broke. He unleashed Hill into the center of the line again, where he was met by the entire OSU front wall in a tremendous pile. Once the referees got to the bottom of the scrum, they determined the Buckeyes had stopped the Michigan fullback just six inches from the goal line with just 54 seconds showing on the third-quarter clock.

But the goal-line stand took on epic proportions when it was followed by what the OSU offense was able to accomplish. After picking up only 68 total yards in the preceding three quarters, the Buckeyes proceeded to march the length of the field and take control of the game.

Leggett called Cassady's number in the huddle on the first three plays of the drive but kept the ball himself each time. The resulting quarterback runs netted 11 yards to give the Buckeyes some breathing room. But when Leggett called his halfback's number a fourth time, this time he handed the ball off and Cassady erupted through the center of the line for a 51-yard gain.

Keeping the ball exclusively on the ground, the Buckeyes kept moving until they got a first down at the Michigan 11-yard line. But after two plays gained only 3 yards, Leggett decided he needed to go to the air. He found senior end Dick Brubaker in the right flat, and Brubaker rolled into the end zone for the touchdown. Weed added the PAT, giving the Buckeyes their first lead of the day at 14-7 with 10:57

remaining in the game.

The next time OSU got the ball, it pushed into Michigan territory again, but Roseboro fumbled and the Wolverines recovered on their own 43. But it took only two plays to get the ball back when Cassady intercepted a pass from Cline and returned it to the Ohio State 39. With 7:13 remaining, and the Wolverines defense now back on its heels, the Buckeyes marched 61 yards for the clinching score.

Bobo had the longest gain during the 12-play drive, breaking over right tackle on a third-and-6 play for 28 yards. The Buckeyes pushed to the 5-yard line before being pushed back to the 10 on a motion penalty, but backup halfback Jerry Harkrader – subbing for Watkins – ran the ball to the 1 on first down, and two plays later, Cassady capped the drive by bolting into the end zone with just 44 seconds left in the game.

Weed added the final PAT for a 21-7 lead, and the Wolverines had time for just three more plays before OSU senior backup Richard Young intercepted Maddock on the final play as the Horseshoe exploded in jubilation.

Hayes was hoisted on the shoulders of his team for a triumphant ride to the locker room, while fans charged the field and tore down the goalposts.

Cassady led the game in rushing with 94 yards and a touchdown on 14 carries, while Leggett had gone from his hospital bed to star of the game after accounting for 100 yards of total offense. He completed 4 of 9 passes for 58 yards and two scores and rushed for 42 yards on 18 tries.

Michigan still held a lead in total offense at the end of the game, rolling up 303 to 254

for the Buckeyes. The Wolverines did most of their damage on the ground as Hickey, Baer and Cline combined for 192 yards on 33 carries, an average of 5.8 yards per carry.

But in the end, it was the goal-line stand at the end of the third quarter and ensuing 99-plus yard march the other way that turned the tide.

“You want to talk about a team effort? That was a team effort right there,” Hayes told reporters after the game. “We stopped them there and then took it right back the other way – all the way. I knew they couldn't stop a ball-club like ours cold for 60 minutes.

“That must be one of the longest touchdown drives in history. It couldn't be much longer, could it? I couldn't be more proud of a team than I am right now.”

As the Buckeyes celebrated their first undefeated regular season in a decade, a reporter asked Hayes if there was a point during the season when he began to believe his team might not lose.

“Every coach thinks at the beginning of the season that he can go all the way even if he doesn't say it,” Hayes replied. “But you need luck. I can look back and say, ‘Gee, if this had happened or that had happened, we'd have been beaten here or there.’ But you'd better expect to win them all or you'd better get out of coaching.”

One day later, the Buckeyes received their official invitation to the Rose Bowl to play Pacific 8 representative Southern California, and two days after that, Ohio State would be crowned the national champion for only the second time in school history. (At the time, national titles were bestowed before bowl

games.)

But Hayes could not have been happier if the season had ended on that crisp November afternoon with the scoreboard showing a 21-7 victory over Michigan. He had proven his critics wrong, critics who said he was in over his head at Ohio State.

In fact, as he was signing autographs after the game, a young boy wandered up and asked, “Mr. Hayes, are you going to be coach here again next year?”

Woody smiled, laughed and answered, “You bet your life I will, sonny.”

The Buckeyes took care of business in Pasadena with a 20-7 Rose Bowl win against No. 17 USC to finish off the program's first 10-victory season in history and only its second unblemished record since 1917. It was the crowning achievement for the second national championship season in program history and the first of five the school counts for Hayes.

Years later, the coach would say that the 1954 season was one of his greatest accomplishments because the way that team performed allowed him to keep his job at Ohio State.

“Woody gave credit to that team many, many times over the years for saving his job,” Park said. “Woody had a lot of people who thought he wasn't up to the job. But that season and the way that team played was what allowed him to keep his job and establish Ohio State as one of the top college football programs in the nation.

“If it hadn't been for the 1954 season, the history of Ohio State football – at least the history of Ohio State football as we know it – would probably have changed dramatically.”

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16 B1G Players Named Midseason All-Americans

The new-look Big Ten has gotten off to a strong start on the gridiron this season, with five teams ranked within the AP top 25 entering Week 10, and those successes have also yielded some individual national recognition for the conference's top players.

BIG TEN NOTES
Patrick Engels

In a midseason poll conducted by The Associated Press on Oct. 17 – with the same media members who choose the AP top 25 each week – 16 players from the 18-team Big Ten were selected as midseason All-Americans, with six featured on the first team and 11 on the second team.

The 16 midseason All-Americans were two shy of the SEC, which led all conferences with 18 players recognized, while the six first-teamers were also second to the SEC's nine.

Three Big Ten players were named first-team midseason All-American on offense, including Iowa running back Kaleb Johnson, Ohio State center Seth McLaughlin and Penn State tight end Tyler Warren.

Johnson has already turned in a sensational junior season for the Hawkeyes, rushing for an impressive 1,144 yards and 16

scores on 132 carries, all marks that rank second in the FBS behind Boise State star running back Ashton Jeanty, who is also on the first team and is the presumed Heisman Trophy favorite through Week 9.

McLaughlin has helped pave the way for an Ohio State offense that has rushed for 188.0 yards per game this season, and Warren has helped elevate Penn State's once-limited passing offense to one of the nation's best through seven games.

The senior is on his way to putting together one of the best all-time single-season performances by a Nittany Lions tight end, hauling in four touchdowns and 559 receiving yards on 47 receptions, numbers that are first on the team rank five, 120 and 10 shy of the single-season records set by Mike Gesicki (nine, 679 and 57) in 2016 and 2017.

His near-record numbers were significantly aided by his 17-catch, 224-yard and one-touchdown output in Penn State's 33-30 overtime win at USC on Oct. 12, the 17 receptions being an FBS single-game record for a tight end.

The Big Ten also had a trio of first-team midseason All-America defenders, including defensive lineman Mason Graham and cornerback Will Johnson of Michigan along with Iowa linebacker Jay Higgins.

Graham and Johnson earn the honor despite not having many eye-popping stats through Week 9. Graham's 3 ½ sacks and 5 ½ tackles for loss rank sixth and 10th in

the Big Ten but second on his team behind senior edge rusher Josaiah Stewart. Johnson, a projected early first-round pick in next year's NFL draft, has 14 tackles, two interceptions and three pass breakups but has missed multiple games due to injury, including Michigan's 24-17 win over in-state rival Michigan State on Oct. 26, which he was held out for due to a lower-leg ailment.

Higgins has served as the catalyst behind Iowa's strong defense this season, totaling a conference-leading 84 total tackles (one for loss), which ranks sixth in the nation through eight games.

As for the second-teamers, five Big Ten offensive players made the list, including quarterbacks Dillon Gabriel (Oregon) and Kurtis Rourke (Indiana) – who tied for the selection – along with Maryland wide receiver Tai Felton and Ohio State offensive linemen Donovan Jackson and Josh Simmons.

Another five were featured on defense, including safeties Caleb Downs (Ohio State), Lathan Ransom (Ohio State) and Jaylen Reed (Penn State) along with defensive tackles Ty Hamilton (Ohio State) and Derrick Harmon (Oregon).

AP voters also gave out some individual midseason Big Ten awards. Gabriel and Graham took home the top offensive and defensive player nods, respectively, while Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith was the top freshman and Rourke was the top transfer and most surprising player.

Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti was named the top Big Ten head coach for the midseason after leading the Hoosiers to a top-15 ranking, while USC's Lincoln Riley was voted to have the "hottest seat."

The Trojans, who were ranked as high as No. 11 in Week 4 before dropping out of the AP top 25 rankings altogether with a 4-4 record were tabbed as the Big Ten's most disappointing team.

Four Ranked Teams In Men's Preseason Poll

The Big Ten was also represented on the national scale in men's basketball, with four teams ranked in the preseason AP top 25 poll released on Oct. 14, including No. 14 Purdue, No. 17 Indiana, No. 22 UCLA and No. 25 Rutgers.

The Boilermakers enter the 2024-25 season 12 spots behind their No. 2 finish last season after losing a number of key contributors from their national champion-runner-up team, none a more significant loss than two-time Naismith Player of the Year and now-Memphis Grizzlies center Zach Edey.

Matt Painter's team does bring back one of its key contributors from last season, though. Junior guard and Big Ten Preseason Player of the Year Braden Smith returns to the lineup after averaging 12.0 points, 7.5 assists, 5.8 rebounds and 1.6 steals per game.

The Hoosiers also look much different on paper this season, with the program boasting seven new scholarship players. That group is headlined by former Arizona center Oumar Ballo, who was named first-team preseason All-Big Ten after averaging 12.9 points, 10.1 rebounds and 1.3 blocks per game with the Wildcats last season.

UCLA, the lone new Big Ten team in the

BIG 2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	5	0	1.000	8	0	1.000
Oregon	5	0	1.000	8	0	1.000
Penn State	4	0	1.000	7	0	1.000
Ohio State	3	1	0.750	6	1	0.857
Illinois	3	2	0.600	6	2	0.750
Iowa	3	2	0.600	5	3	0.625
Michigan	3	2	0.600	5	3	0.625
Minnesota	3	2	0.600	5	3	0.625
Wisconsin	3	2	0.600	5	3	0.625
Nebraska	2	3	0.400	5	3	0.625
Michigan State	2	3	0.400	4	4	0.500
Washington	2	3	0.400	4	4	0.500
USC	2	3	0.400	4	4	0.500
Maryland	1	4	0.200	4	4	0.500
Rutgers	1	4	0.200	4	4	0.500
Northwestern	1	4	0.200	3	5	0.375
UCLA	1	4	0.200	2	5	0.286
Purdue	0	4	0.000	1	6	0.143

Oct. 18 Game
Oregon 35, Purdue 0

Oct. 19 Games
UCLA 35, Rutgers 32
Wisconsin 23, Northwestern 3
Indiana 56, Nebraska 7
Illinois 21, Michigan 7
Maryland 29, USC 28
Michigan State 32, Iowa 20

Oct. 25 Game
USC 42, Rutgers 20

Oct. 26 Games
Ohio State 21, Nebraska 17
Indiana 31, Washington 17
Michigan 24, Michigan State 17
Minnesota 48, Maryland 23
Penn State 28, Wisconsin 13
Oregon 38, Illinois 9
Iowa 40, Northwestern 14

Nov. 2 Games
Oregon at Michigan, TBA
Minnesota at Illinois, Noon
Northwestern at Purdue, Noon
Ohio State at Penn State, Noon
Indiana at Michigan State, 3:30 p.m.
UCLA at Nebraska, 3:30 p.m.
USC at Washington, 7:30 p.m.
Wisconsin at Iowa, 7:30 p.m.

All times Eastern

preseason poll, is poised to make its mark in its new conference this season behind a strong mix of returners and transfer newcomers. The Bruins, led by sixth-year head coach Mick Cronin, have one of deepest backcourts in the conference, which includes returners Dylan Andrews, Sebastian Mack and Lazar Stefanovic and transfers Skyy Clark (Louisville) and Kobe Johnson (USC).

Rutgers is ranked for just the third time in program history (1976-77, 2020-21) and will look to return to the NCAA Tournament behind one of the strongest freshman classes in the nation after a two-year hiatus. The Scarlet Knights will be powered this season by five-star guards Ace Bailey and Dylan Harper, who enter the program as the nation's second- and third-best prospects in the 2024 class. The duo combined for 45



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points in the team's exhibition-game loss to St. Johns on Oct. 17.

While just four Big Ten teams were ranked in the preseason poll, seven programs received top-25 votes, including Illinois (92), Michigan State (29), Ohio State (29), Michigan (19), Oregon (12), Wisconsin (5) and Maryland (1).

Six Teams In Preseason Women's Poll

The Big Ten had six teams ranked within the AP preseason top 25 women's basketball poll released Oct. 15, including No. 3 USC, No. 5 UCLA, No. 14 Ohio State, No. 18 Maryland, No. 23 Nebraska and No. 25 Indiana.

The Trojans lead the Big Ten entering their first year in the conference in large part due to the presence of superstar sophomore guard JuJu Watkins, who is widely considered the best player in the country after scoring 920 total points last year (27.1 average), the most by a freshman in NCAA Division I women's basketball history.

Watkins, who also averaged 7.3 rebounds and 3.3 assists and shot 40.1 percent from the field last year, is joined this season by junior transfer forward Kiki Iriafen, who averaged 19.4 points and 11.0 rebounds per game last year at Stanford.

USC's in-town rival UCLA is also looking to rule the Big Ten behind its own superstar, junior center Lauren Betts. Betts, a preseason All-Big Ten selection, is coming off a strong sophomore campaign with the Bruins in which she averaged a team-high 14.9 points, 9.3 rebounds and 2.0 blocks per contest.

UCLA, which is looking for its third consecutive season of 25 or more wins, is also led by preseason All-Big Ten selection and junior guard Kiki Rice, who totaled 13.2 points, 5.7 rebounds and 4.5 assists per game last year.

The Kevin McGuff-led Buckeyes are the third highest-ranked team in the Big Ten despite losing several key contributors from last season's Big Ten regular-season champion squad, including now-WNBA players Jacy Sheldon and Celeste Taylor. But they are still led by junior forward Cotie McMahon, who started all 36 games for Ohio State last season and was an AP All-America honorable mention.

Maryland features a mostly brand-new roster from the 2023-24 squad that upset Ohio State in the Big Ten tournament and made the NCAA tournament with a 19-14 record.

The Terrapins have 10 new players this season, including Atlantic 10 Player of the Year and graduate guard Sarah Te-Biasu (VCU), but they do return a key contributor in senior guard Shyanne Sellers, who led the team last season with 15.6 points and 5.5 assists per game on 43.4 percent shooting.

Finally, Indiana squeaks into the top 25 after reaching the Sweet 16 last season and losing to the eventual champion, No. 1 overall seed South Carolina. The Hoosiers lost their top two scorers from last season, Mackenzie Holmes and Sara Scalia, but return Yarden Garzon, who averaged 11.7 points, 4.4 rebounds and 3.1 assists per game.

Like in the men's poll, the Big Ten also had several teams just miss the top 25 cut to start the season. Iowa, Illinois and Michi-

gan State each received 37, 23 and 16 votes, respectively.

Ducks' Holden Apologizes For Spit, Ejection

Oregon wide receiver Traeshon Holden issued a written apology on social media on Oct. 13 just one day after he was ejected from the Ducks' 32-31 win over Ohio State for spitting on Buckeye cornerback Davison Igbinosun.

"I want to sincerely apologize for my actions during our recent game," wrote Holden, who addressed the apology to his teammates, coaches, fans and Igbinosun. "My actions were not only disrespectful but also a betrayal of the values of sportsmanship, integrity and respect that I strive to embody as a student-athlete.

"To my Oregon family, I am truly sorry for letting you down. ...To Ohio State, I offer my sincerest apologies for my behavior. It was completely unacceptable and a momentary lapse in judgment. I want to emphasize that this incident does not reflect who I am as a person or the values I aim to uphold."

Holden, an Alabama transfer who started just two games for the Ducks as a junior in 2023, was ejected during the second quarter of Oregon's win over Ohio State after spitting in the face of Igbinosun, who pushed the Ducks wide receiver out of bounds on a first-and-goal play from the Ohio State 9-yard line.

Upon getting ejected, Holden was escorted off the field and into the tunnel, where he threw his helmet down to the ground in frustration.

The 15-yard penalty pushed Oregon back to the 25, forcing it to settle for a field goal on that drive.

On Oct. 14, when asked about Holden's ejection two days after the incident, Oregon coach Dan Lanning said he was "extremely disappointed" in the actions of his senior and that some form of internal discipline would be handed out, and that appeared to be the case the following week when Holden was kept out of the Ducks' 35-0 win over Purdue.

Holden returned for the Ducks' 38-9 blowout win over Illinois on Oct. 26 and caught just two passes for 7 yards while also totaling a single rush that went for 1 yard, putting his season totals at 22 catches for 313 yards and three touchdowns.

Former IU Team Doctor Accused Of Sex Abuse

Former Indiana basketball players Haris Mujezinovic and Charlie Miller sued their alma mater on Oct. 15 alleging their team doctor repeatedly sexually assaulted them and their teammates and the university did not do anything to stop him.

Mujezinovic and Miller, who played for Indiana during the 1990s under legendary Hoosiers head coach Bob Knight – who passed away last fall – said in the lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for Southern Indiana that coaches and trainers within the program were aware that Dr. Bradford Bomba Sr. was subjecting players to unnecessary prostate exams.

"Dr. Bomba Sr.'s routine sexual assaults were openly discussed by the Hoosier men's basketball players in the locker room in the presence of IU employees, including assistant coaches, athletic trainers, and other Hoosier men's basketball staff," the lawsuit

read.

Mujezinovic and Miller alleged they were "routinely and repeatedly subjected to medically unnecessary, invasive and abusive digital rectal examinations" by Bomba, a former Indiana football player in the 1950s who was Indiana's men's basketball team physician for two decades under Knight, beginning in 1979 and lasting until the late 1990s.

According to the lawsuit, Bomba, who also provided medical care to all of Indiana's sports teams from 1962 to 1970, was known around the program as "Frankenstein" due to the large size of his hands and fingers.

"When Mujezinovic's teammates saw that he was assigned to Dr. Bomba Sr., they warned Mujezinovic to prepare for 'the finger,'" the suit says. "Players also commented on the size of Dr. Bomba Sr.'s hands and fingers."

Miller also said he was subjected to rectal exams by Bomba during each of the four physicals he had while playing with the Hoosiers.

The two former players, who both went on to play professionally in Europe after college, are seeking unspecified damages while also urging their former teammates to come forward and join the lawsuit. According to Kathleen Delaney, who represents both Mujezinovic and Miller, there could be "at least one hundred" alleged victims.

"I'm standing up for all student-athletes who have suffered abuse," Mujezinovic said in a statement. "I hope that more of our former teammates will speak out and share their stories publicly."

When NBC News asked Indiana about the lawsuit, university spokesperson Mark Bode sent a link to the statement he made last month regarding the matter, which said that the school had launched an independent investigation into the allegations and hired a law firm.

Bomba, now 88, has yet to offer a public comment on the allegations.

Hobbs Resigned Before Turning In Devices

The reasoning behind former Rutgers athletic director Pat Hobbs' abrupt resignation this summer has become a bit clearer since BSB last went to press.

According to an Oct. 17 report from Steve Politi and Brian Fonseca of NJ Advance Media, Hobbs resigned from his position the same morning he was supposed to meet with a law firm that would have required him to hand over all electronic devices used for university-related business so they could investigate Hobbs' alleged improper relationship with head women's gymnastics coach Umme Salim-Beasley.

Hobbs, who was Rutgers' athletic director for nine years, announced he was stepping down from his role on Aug. 16, citing health concerns as the reason for his decision. Earlier that summer, Hobbs had asked for a raise on his approximately \$1.1 million annual salary, and instead of granting those wishes, Rutgers informed him that they were launching an investigation into his improper conduct and that the university would not be upping his salary.

The investigation centers around what has been called an "improper, consensual" relationship between Hobbs and Salim-Beasley. According to the new report by NJ Advance Media, both Hobbs and Salim-Beasley – who are both married – did not do too

much to hide their relationship, with one former employee telling the outlet that it was an "open secret."

The report stated that Hobbs spent an unusual amount of time around the gymnastics program, even traveling at least five times in 11 months to where Salim-Beasley and the team were staying.

The two even failed to hide their intimate relationship during university events, according to two gymnasts who contributed to the report.

At a tarot card reading during a social event for the athletic department last winter, Hobbs was asked about what the most important thing in life was, which, after looking directly at Salim-Beasley, he answered by saying "love."

Rutgers' discrimination and harassment policy states that they "strongly discourage romantic, dating, intimate and/or sexual relationships between University employees," citing a potential "imbalance of power" if that occurs. But the university reportedly let Hobbs be solely responsible for determining Salim-Beasley's salary.

According to NJ Advance Media, her salary skyrocketed from \$95,000 in her first season in 2019 to \$165,000 this season with a maximum of \$195,000 during the last year of her contract in 2028.

Salim-Beasley signed a five-year, \$995,000 contract last February that made her one of the highest-paid gymnastics coaches in the Big Ten, despite her leading the program to just a 4-50 record in conference dual meets and 55-100 record overall during her tenure.

The gymnastics program is also under a separate investigation over allegations of a culture of bullying, favoritism and revenge fostered by Salim-Beasley that Hobbs allegedly failed to seriously address.

While Salim-Beasley remains in her role as head coach, additional punishments could be handed out after Rutgers' internal investigation – led by former New Jersey state comptroller Matt Boxer – is completed.

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Diebler-Led Bucks Ready For Turnaround

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Last February, Jake Diebler was faced with the steep challenge of taking over as interim head coach of the Ohio State men's basketball program following the abrupt firing of Chris Holtmann. He was tasked with leading a reeling locker room that was shocked over the coaching change and uncertain of the direction the team was headed.

Although some locker rooms might have fractured following a midseason head-coaching change, Ohio State instead came together under the direction of the 37-year-old Diebler. With the Ohio native instilling a new culture built upon fast-paced play and togetherness, the Buckeyes rolled to an 8-3 record in their final 11 games of the season, an impressive stretch that included an upset home win over No. 2 Purdue, a victory over Iowa in the Big Ten tournament and two more wins in the NIT.

Ohio State's strong finish to the 2023-24 season caught the eye of new athletic director Ross Bjork, who officially tabbed Diebler as the program's 15th men's basketball coach last March, citing the leadership he showed throughout his time as interim leader as one of the main reasons for the in-house hiring.

Diebler's quick rise up the ranks in the program may have impressed many in Ohio and nationally, but fast-forward seven months later, and he has a whole new set of challenges in front of him as head coach.

With a roster that features nine newcomers – including five impact transfers and four promising freshmen – and seven returners, the Buckeyes are looking to return to national and Big Ten relevancy and make the NCAA Tournament for the first time in three seasons. It is a feat that Diebler believes his team can accomplish sooner rather than later, and one that he feels he has an obligation to fulfill as head coach at what he thinks is a historic program like Ohio State.

"As a program, we have expectations, and we need to compete for those expectations," Diebler said before the team's first fall practice. "There's a standard in this program traditionally that we have not shied away from. You don't get there by just talking about it. You have to recruit to it.

You have to practice for it and all that. I don't know how long that's going to take, but we're trying to get there as quickly as we possibly can."

Those within the locker room, including All-Big Ten guard and two-time team captain Bruce Thornton, feel that same urgency to succeed.

"I feel like we can accomplish anything we put our mind to," the junior said at Ohio State's team media day. "I believe that. We put in the work each and every day. With the help from my coaches, my teammates, even Buckeye Nation, we just come here and install the Ohio State standard.

"I feel like the last two years I've been here haven't been (the standard), just being completely honest. I feel like (this season) we've got the pieces and a great team, great coaches around us that can make our dreams and big-time runs in the tournament happen."

With the Buckeyes' quest to return to the Big Dance beginning in early November with a neutral-site game against No. 19 Texas in Las Vegas, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has a position-by-position breakdown in alphabetical order of Ohio State's roster – not counting walk-ons and sophomore guard Taison Chatman, who is out for the season with a torn ACL – for the 2024-25 season.

FORWARDS

Aaron Bradshaw, 7-1, 215, So. (4.9 points, 3.3 rebounds per game last season at Kentucky) – Arguably Ohio State's most prized transfer-portal addition this season is Bradshaw, a former McDonald's All-American who enters the program with loads of raw talent but without much noteworthy collegiate experience.

Standing an intimidating 7-1 with a versatile skill set that can stretch beyond the three-point line, the former Kentucky Wildcat has been projected by some outlets to be a lottery pick in next year's NBA draft if he chooses to declare, with CBS Sports' Gary Parrish having him as the No. 14 overall pick in the 2025 mock draft he did in June.

The hype around Bradshaw centers around the fact that he has the potential to play at an elite level both inside the paint and outside on the perimeter, but that was not the case in his lone season with now-Arkansas head coach John Calipari at Kentucky. Despite entering college as the No. 1 center and No. 5 overall prospect in the 2024 class out of Roselle (N.J.) Camden, Bradshaw played a limited role off the bench for the Wildcats, missing the first seven games of his freshman season with a foot injury and eventually playing in 26 games (10 starts).

Although Bradshaw did flash his potential at times in Lexington, Ky., – mostly excelling

above the rim with a number of dunks and put-backs – he is now hoping to unleash his entire arsenal with the Buckeyes this season, when he should be a starter in the frontcourt alongside fellow sophomore transfer Sean Stewart.

Diebler expressed confidence over the off-season that Bradshaw will be able to reach his full capabilities during his time at Ohio State, which he thinks will allow him to emerge as a dominant force who can affect the game in many different aspects.

"His ability to do things at his size has been great," Diebler said. "I would say we're pushing him to maybe do some things he's not used to doing on the court, but he's got the ability to do it. I think a lot of it is just getting reps and experience. But he can shoot it, he can handle it, he can pass it, and to be able to do it at his size is really impressive."

Kalen Etzler, 6-8, 185, R-Jr. (0.0 ppg, 0.7 rpg) – Etzler is one of the longest-tenured Buckeyes on Diebler's new-look roster, having been with the Scarlet and Gray since the 2021-22 season. But the Van Wert, Ohio, native has struggled to make a considerable impact on the team thus far in his career, totaling just seven total points and 17 rebounds in his two eligible seasons.

Although he did appear in nine games for the Buckeyes in 2022-23, Etzler's playing time was reduced last season while sitting behind the likes of Felix Okpara, Zed Key, Devin Royal and Austin Parks. He logged just 13:45 total minutes in seven appearances, failing to record a point during that span.

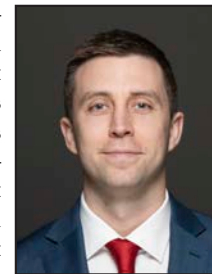
With Bradshaw, Royal and Stewart likely occupying most of the playing time in the frontcourt this season, Etzler will once again play an integral role on Ohio State's scout team during practice, helping the team prepare for upcoming opponents throughout the season. But the redshirt junior feels there is an avenue for him to earn some time on the court this year if he shows he can do some of the dirty work in practice.

"For someone like me, (playing with toughness) is how I'm going to have to earn minutes," Etzler said at the team's media day. "Just toughness plays. I've been trying to improve on defense and still have a long way to go, but that's something I've really been trying to prioritize."

Devin Royal, 6-6, 220, So. (4.7 ppg, 2.4 rpg) – Royal, arguably the only key returner for Ohio State in the frontcourt this season, comes into his second year in the program with loads of momentum after a strong finish to his freshman campaign. The Pickerington (Ohio) Central product, who entered college as the No. 1-ranked prospect in Ohio, got off to a sluggish start to his freshman season playing behind Okpara and Key, averaging just 3.2 points, 1.9 rebounds and 9.0 minutes through his first 22 games.

But Royal seemed to flip a switch once Diebler took the keys from Holtmann after the Feb. 13 loss to Wisconsin. Royal gained more confidence and played with more aggressiveness as Diebler granted him extra playing time at the end of the year, upping his averages to 7.6 points and 3.3 rebounds on 50.8 percent shooting in the final 11 games of the season.

"I feel like I came in and showed a little bit of what I can do, but there is still a lot more to



Jake Diebler

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

2024-25 Ohio State Men's Basketball Projected Starting Lineup

<p>1 • Meechie Johnson Jr. • G Ht: 6-2 • Class: Gr.</p>  <p>Returns to Ohio State after two successful seasons at South Carolina, where he combined to average 13.4 points, 3.9 rebounds and 3.2 assists per game on 38.1 percent shooting.</p>	<p>2 • Bruce Thornton • G Ht: 6-2 • Class: Jr.</p>  <p>Started 35 of 36 games last season and recorded team highs in points (15.7), assists (4.8), steals (1.2) and minutes (33.6) per game.</p>	<p>8 • Micah Parrish • G Ht: 6-6 Class: Gr.</p>  <p>Enters program with 135 games worth of experience with 94 starts, including nine NCAA tournament contests across the last two seasons with San Diego State.</p>	<p>4 • Aaron Bradshaw • F Ht: 7-1 Class: So.</p>  <p>Struggled to find consistent playing time at Kentucky but still flashed his potential as a versatile forward, making 10 starts and notching double figures in seven games.</p>	<p>13 • Sean Stewart • F Ht: 6-9 Class: So.</p>  <p>Averaged 2.6 points and 3.2 rebounds in 33 games for Duke last season off the bench. Is known for his elite athleticism, breaking Zion Williamson's record for standing vertical at 36 inches.</p>
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show for sure," Royal said when asked about his end-of-season successes.

As Royal alluded to, he will need to continue fine-tuning his game if he wants to earn more playing time or possibly play his way into a starting role this season.

That starts with his perimeter shooting, which he said he has devoted much of his time throughout the offseason to improving. Royal made just three of his 20 attempts from beyond the arc last season.

"That's really the main focus point (this season), being able to shoot the ball at a high percentage," Royal said. "Catch-and-shoot, just coming off screens, being able to shoot quicker and more efficiently are my main goals."

Sean Stewart, 6-9, 220, So. (2.6 ppg, 3.2 rpg at Duke) – Like his frontcourt counterpart Bradshaw, Stewart joins Ohio State following a disappointing freshman season at a blue-blood school. The former McDonald's All-American and No. 17 prospect in the nation struggled to earn significant playing time

in a loaded Duke frontcourt, notching just 2.6 points per game on 57.1 percent shooting in just 8.4 minutes per contest.

Stewart's difficult start to his collegiate career prompted him to make what he referred to as a needed change of scenery, leading him to commit to Diebler and Ohio State this spring. Stewart had already established a pre-existing relationship with the program and Diebler, who had recruited him heavily out of basketball powerhouse Montverde (Fla.) Academy in 2023.

While he might not yet possess the lottery-pick potential that his teammate Bradshaw boasts, Stewart still enters his sophomore season with a ton of raw talent and athleticism, which was evident at Duke when he broke former No. 1 overall NBA draft pick and current New Orleans Pelicans forward Zion Williamson's Blue Devils record for standing vertical by jumping 36 inches into the air.

Stewart's next-level jumping ability was evident at times during his freshman season

at Duke, where he soared for 44 offensive rebounds and 16 blocks. But the sophomore is looking to show that he can be more than just an above-the-rim player for the Scarlet and Gray.

"I feel like a lot of people kind of forget that I'm a good player, being at Duke and not playing that much," he said. "So I just want to show that I really can play offense. I can guard the five, do all that stuff, but I'm not a low-post player.

"I want to show everybody that I can step out, shoot the three, shoot midranges, do all that stuff that a lot of people don't think I can do, and I think I'm going to surprise a lot of people."

Stewart flashed some of his all-around abilities during Ohio State's scrimmage at Cincinnati on Oct. 18, totaling nine points, two rebounds, two blocks and one steal in the 80-62 blowout loss. His potential can only be further activated if he starts in the regular season alongside Bradshaw, who sat out of the exhibition due to a concussion.

Colin White, 6-6, 205, Fr. – White, an Ottawa, Ohio, native, joins the Buckeyes as one of the most accomplished high school boys' basketball players in state history.

A four-year starter at Ottawa Glandorf, White joined basketball legend LeBron James as the only high school players in Ohio to start on a state final four team all four high school seasons. And like James, White was a major catalyst behind each of those four championship runs, especially in his junior and senior campaigns.

He was named first-team All-Ohio and Division-III Northwest Ohio Player of the Year in 2022-23 after averaging 20.1 points, 5.8 rebounds and 4.0 assists per contest, and then he took his game to another level in 2023-24, averaging 25.1 points, 8.4 rebounds and 4.0 assists while being named Ohio Mr. Basketball, becoming the 14th Buckeye commit to take home the honor.

White's sensational high school résumé has impressed many of his new teammates

Continued On Page 30

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Meechie Hopes For Many Happy Returns

Continued From Page 29

at Ohio State, which he thinks is a unique development given he has been a Buckeye for only a few months.

"It's really special," White told BSB at media day. "I don't really think of (my accomplishments) as a big deal, but then I come here and guys like Sean Stewart, they figure it out, and it's like, 'Whoa, you know that's really cool.' It's cool that they think it's cool, and it made me realize and appreciate what my high school career was and how special it was."

While some highly accomplished freshmen may come into college with some form of arrogance, those within the program say White has had the opposite mindset since joining the program this summer, working hard each practice to improve upon his game.

"It's been great having Colin in this program," Diebler said. "I just love how much he cares about Ohio State. You feel that in practice. He plays hard every day. He's very coachable. There's an element of toughness to him. I've been really impressed with his summer and start to the preseason here this fall."

GUARDS

Ques Glover, 6-0, 185, Gr. (DNP last season at Kansas State due to injury) – Glover, who is not on scholarship but is being compensated through NIL deals, brings some much-needed experience and depth to an Ohio State backcourt that was looking rather thin this summer following the previously mentioned season-ending injury to Chatman.

This will be his team-leading sixth year of collegiate experience, including two seasons at Florida (2019-21), two at Samford (2021-23) and one at Kansas State (2023-24), along with a brief three-month stint at BYU in the summer of 2023 that was cut short due to an NIL issue.

Glover has spent over a half-decade in college basketball, but during that time he has often struggled to stay on the court. He played in just 20 games as a sophomore at Florida, appeared in 19 games his redshirt junior season at Samford and missed all of last season at Kansas State while dealing with several nagging injuries, ailments that he said at media day are now well behind him.

"I'm really excited to play this season," Glover said. "Last year, being at Kansas State and not being able to add value to the team on the court was kind of hard. Being able to come here with a fresh start and fresh slate is really good for me. I'm really excited, and God-willing, I'll be able to play the whole year."

A healthy Glover could be a welcome sight for the Buckeyes this season. In 99 games played at Florida and Samford, he averaged 10.3 points, 1.8 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game while shooting 46.1 percent from the field and 30.6 percent from three. His best year came at Samford in 2021-22, when he notched a career-high 19.2 points per game on 46.8 percent shooting.

Glover figures to be a key player off the bench for the Buckeyes this season, which was evident during the Cincinnati scrimmage when he scored five points in 19 min-

utes. But Diebler said the impact he makes on the team this season can stretch way beyond the hardwood.

"Ques has a unique perspective because he's overcome some things in his career," Diebler said. "He's been in big games and close games, so we'll lean on his experience. I think his perspective is valuable for us – not just young guys, but even old guys – because he's been through some tough times."

Meechie Johnson Jr., 6-2, 185, Sr. (14.1 ppg, 4.1 rpg at South Carolina) – Johnson, a former 2021 early enrollee for the Buckeyes, returns to Ohio State after spending two years at South Carolina, where he blossomed into one of the top offensive talents in the SEC.

Johnson started all but one game as a Gamecock, becoming a do-it-all guard with averages of 13.4 points, 3.9 rebounds and 3.2 assists in 63 appearances. The Garfield Heights, Ohio, product had his best collegiate season last year, when he led South Carolina to an NCAA Tournament berth by netting a team-high 14.1 points per game on 39.9 percent shooting (32.1 percent from three) along with 4.1 rebounds and 2.9 assists.

Fast-forward to 2024-25, and the veteran Johnson is back in scarlet and gray with what he thinks is unfinished business to accomplish.

"That's why I came back, to win," Johnson said this summer. "I want to do something that hasn't been done here in the last couple years, and that's not just to get into the (NCAA) tournament, but to win it. That's the goal, to make history. And that's why I came back."

In order to accomplish those goals, Johnson said that he needs to continue improving upon his game, mostly working to become a more efficient scorer while also getting better on the defensive end. He was able to work out those kinks before the season in the scrimmage against Cincinnati, where he struggled from the floor early before ultimately hitting on three of his six attempts from long range to finish with a tied-for-team-high 11 points.

A more efficient Johnson could help take his game to another level this season, a year in which he comes in with some lofty personal goals.

"I want to be the best player in college basketball," Johnson said at media day. "I want to be an All-American. That's what I told Coach Diebler when I came back here. I was second-team All-SEC (last season), but I want to be an All-American, and I feel like there is no better place to do that than being at Ohio State."

Evan Mahaffey, 6-6, 200, Jr. (4.3 ppg, 4.2 rpg) – Mahaffey, a Penn State transfer prior to last season, served as somewhat of a do-it-all defensive player in his first season at Ohio State. He started 35 of 36 games for Ohio State and was often called upon to guard both inside the paint and on the perimeter, making him a valuable asset for both Holtmann and Diebler on that side of the ball.

Where Mahaffey was lacking last season was on offense. He scored in double figures in just four of his 36 appearances and logged two or fewer points in 18 of those contests, six of those being scoreless outings. Those

offensive shortcomings often came because of his inability to finish at the rim and dribble effectively, two of many areas on that side of the court that he has devoted much of his time this offseason to improving.

"We had different conversations over time about moving me to the perimeter more," Mahaffey said this summer. "I'm just making sure my abilities, my ball-handling, my shooting, my decision-making are just getting better each day so that the coaching staff can trust me up there."

Even with these improvements, Mahaffey may be limited to more of a rotational role off the bench this year due to the backcourt additions of transfers Glover, Johnson and Micah Parrish along with the true freshman John Mobley. That could mean that Mahaffey will not be required to provide as much on offense this year compared to his first year with the Buckeyes, which was the case against Cincinnati when he did not start and failed to score a point in 19 minutes of action.

John Mobley Jr., 6-1, 175, Fr. – Mobley may not have come into Columbus with the record-breaking high school success and statistics that his freshman counterpart White arrived with, but he does enter the program with some strong offensive skills that may put him on the court before the Ohio Mr. Basketball winner.

Mobley, who holds the nickname "Juni" but prefers to be referred to by his given name "John," is among the most polished three-point shooters in this year's freshman class. He was named "The Sniper" in the 2024 class superlatives by 247Sports, a nickname he earned from his time at Las Vegas Bishop Gorman and Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy where he often scored at will.

In his junior season at Bishop Gorman, he averaged 20.1 points, 4.0 rebounds, 4.0 assists and 2.0 steals per game, a stat line that he only improved upon in his one season at Wasatch, where he notched 21.5 points, 5.4 assists, 2.4 rebounds and 2.0 steals per contest while winning Utah's Max Preps High School Basketball Player of the Year.

While Mobley's high school statistics are impressive, his new teammates at Ohio State have been more complimentary of the fearless and competitive mindset he entered school with, which his teammates think allows him to shoot and score from any given spot on the court.

"I love John," Johnson said. "He kind of reminds me of myself a little bit. He comes in, he takes shots, he's not afraid. He's a great shooter, he's a hard worker, he listens, and he competes, too. I think it was one of the first days of practice, and I was chirping at him, seeing how he would respond. He chirped back and hit a three the next play. It just shows you the type of player Coach Diebler brought in."

Mobley's confidence and scoring prowess may allow him to be a key player in Ohio State's backcourt off the bench this season, which was evident against Cincinnati when he was Diebler's first sub of the game, entering the contest with 16:36 to go in the first half.

Micah Parrish, 6-6, 205, Gr. (9.3 ppg, 4.1 rpg at San Diego State) – Unlike in previous years, Ohio State has a notable veteran

2024-25 OSU Men's Basketball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Oct. 18	at Cincinnati (Exh.)
Nov. 4	Texas*
Nov. 11	Youngstown State
Nov. 15	at Texas A&M
Nov. 19	Evansville
Nov. 22	Campbell
Nov. 25	Green Bay
Nov. 29	Pittsburgh
Dec. 4	at Maryland
Dec. 7	Rutgers
Dec. 14	Auburn^
Dec. 17	Valparaiso
Dec. 21	Kentucky#
Dec. 29	Indiana State
Jan. 3	Michigan State
Jan. 6	at Minnesota
Jan. 9	Oregon
Jan. 14	at Wisconsin
Jan. 17	Indiana
Jan. 21	at Purdue
Jan. 27	Iowa
Jan. 30	at Penn State
Feb. 2	at Illinois
Feb. 6	Maryland
Feb. 9	at Nebraska
Feb. 12	Washington
Feb. 16	Michigan
Feb. 20	Northwestern
Feb. 23	at UCLA
Feb. 26	at USC
March 4	Nebraska
March 8	at Indiana
Mar 12-16	Big Ten Tournament, Indianapolis

* - Hall of Fame Series, Las Vegas

- CBS Sports Classic, New York, N.Y.

^ - Holiday Hoopsgiving, Atlanta

presence on the team this season, and that starts with Parrish, a San Diego State graduate transfer. Since entering the collegiate ranks at Oakland in the 2020-21 season, he has competed in 135 total games with 94 starts, including 76 games and 37 starts with the Aztecs.

Parrish played an integral role in the success of a San Diego State team from 2022-24 that accumulated a combined 58-18 record and made a run to the national championship game in 2023, averaging 8.4 points, 3.8 rebounds and 1.2 assists in that time. With a number of NCAA Tournament games under his belt – the Aztecs also made the Sweet 16 last season – Parrish thinks he can bring a winning mentality to a team that has been unable to have much postseason success in previous years.

"I won a lot (at San Diego State), so coming here I'm trying to take some of the values I learned from winning and instill it here with this program with Diebler," Parrish said. "I feel like this is somewhere you can win. Making that step, it's right here. We just have to get over the hill right now, and I feel like this year can be the year."

Parrish can provide more than just veteran leadership this season. Standing a long 6-6 and 205 pounds, the fifth-year has developed a reputation as an imposing wing defender, a trait that allowed him to be named to the Horizon League All-Defensive team for the 2021-22 season and earn the status of the defensive "tone setter" at San Diego

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

State.

But the Detroit native is also looking to make his mark on offense, an area of his game that he thinks he has yet to fully unlock in his first four collegiate seasons.

"We've been running a lot of zone actions, and I've been getting a lot of opportunities to show my scoring ability," Parrish said. "So I think that I'm going to be able to show a lot of people that I can actually score a lot more than what I showed the last two years at San Diego State. That was big for me. Another reason why I came here is I was able to show off my offensive talent."

Bruce Thornton, 6-2, 215, Jr. (15.7 ppg, 3.7 rpg) – In an offseason full of change for Ohio State, Thornton remains a constant fixture in the Buckeye locker room. After Holtmann's firing, multiple teams inquired about a potential transfer for Ohio State's leading scorer, with some even contacting his mother directly to ask about his availability.

Although Thornton could have easily answered those calls, he instead chose to stay with the Buckeyes and lead his team through a turbulent coaching change, where he successfully guided the group back to relevancy while averaging 15.4 points, 4.6 rebounds and 6.3 assists on 46.4 percent shooting across the last 10 games of the season.

Thornton's efforts toward the end of the 2023-24 campaign capped off an excellent year for the Fairburn, Ga., native. He was the team's floor general all season, leading the team in points (15.7 per game), assists (4.8), minutes (33.6) and steals (1.2) while boasting the second-best assist-to-turnover ratio in the nation of 4.0 (168 to 42).

But as good as his sophomore season was, Thornton has even more lofty goals for his junior campaign.

"Definitely a national championship," Thornton said when asked about his goals for this season. "I feel like that's the reason why I came here, that's the goal. A Big Ten championship (as well). Some of my personal goals, I want to win the Bob Cousy Award (for the nation's best point guard) and be named first-team All-Big Ten. These are goals set for me daily that I look at to make sure that there is a reason why I come here and a reason why I go so hard."

With 70 games and 70 starts already under his belt entering year three at Ohio State, Thornton is the heartbeat of this Buckeyes' squad, and he will likely be named a team captain for the third time in as many seasons. Thornton has a much different cast of characters to lead this season, but that hasn't stopped him from speaking his mind and making sure his new teammates are comfortable in Columbus.

"I'm not ashamed of asking people, like, 'What did you all do there? How did you all prepare and get ready for games as a team?' I'm trying to be a leader so I can understand how to help everybody."

CENTERS

Ivan Njegovan, 7-1, 250, Fr. – Njegovan was one of two late additions to Ohio State's roster – the other being Glover – signing with the Buckeyes in July from Favbet Premijer Liga, the top league in Croatian professional basketball.

Njegovan, a native of Otocac, Croatia, played for KK Bosco last season, where he was one of the club's most productive interior players, recording team highs in rebounds (4.8) and blocks (1.6) while also totaling 8.2

points per game and shooting 56.6 percent from inside the three-point line and 31.3 percent from beyond.

The Croatian teenager's international playing experience expands well beyond KK Bosco. He has also represented his country in the U20 European Championships for the past two summers, most recently averaging 6.1 points, 6.6 rebounds, 1.1 assists and 1.1 blocks in seven games in this year's version of the tournament.

Njegovan's first time in the United States was when he arrived at Ohio State this summer, but according to his head coach, the international big man has transitioned well into the American game, putting him in contention for an important role on the team this season as a versatile big man who can stretch the floor.

"His best basketball is ahead of him," Diebler said at media day. "I love his skill set. He can step out and shoot threes. He passes well. He's getting more mobile. He's really bought into our strength and conditioning program, which in time is going to serve him well. He's embracing the work required."

Njegovan had a rather quiet start in his Buckeye debut, totaling just three points and three rebounds in 15 minutes in the scrimmage against Cincinnati. But the 7-footer, who said he takes inspiration from fellow Croatian center and Los Angeles Clipper Ivica Zubac and Serbian three-time MVP center Nikola Jokic, can still serve as a key rotational piece in a crowded Buckeye frontcourt, a role he is willing to embrace in his first collegiate season.

"I'm the guy who wants to do whatever the coaches tell me to do," he said. "I don't have a problem doing whatever they want from me."

Austin Parks, 6-10, 260, So. (0.3 ppg, 0.6 rpg) – Ohio State's 2024-25 frontcourt will mostly consist of Bradshaw, Stewart, Royal and Njegovan, but the Buckeyes still could benefit from getting some minutes out of the sophomore Parks, who showed last year that he could produce when called upon.

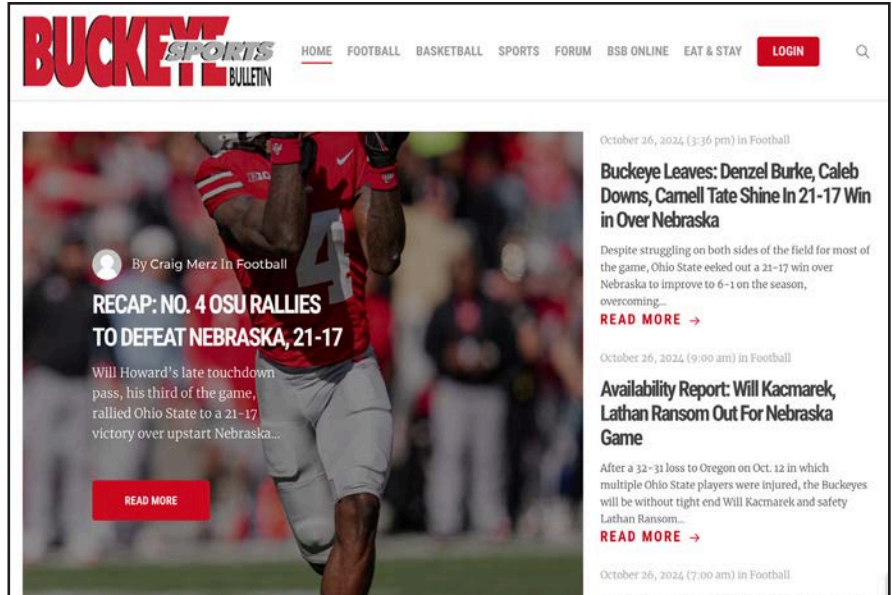
Parks, a four-star prospect out of St. Marys (Ohio) Memorial – where he set 13 school records, including career points (1,528), career rebounds (645) and wins (71) – totaled just 20 minutes in nine appearances last season. But he made the most of his time on the floor, recording three points, five rebounds, a steal and an assist on the year.

Parks proved his freshman season that he can serve as a physical post player for the Buckeyes, an element that was on full display during Ohio State's biggest win last season against Purdue when he went toe to toe with the Boilermaker bigs and scored his only field goal of the season on an end-of-first half layup, all within a span of two minutes of game action.

Whether he is on the court or working in practice on the scout team, Parks' physicality as the heaviest player on the team at 260 pounds could prove beneficial for the Buckeyes this season, something those within the locker room have come to realize over the offseason.

"He didn't play that much last season because we had Felix and Zed," Thornton said at media day. "Now he's the next man up. I'm really on him because (I tell him), 'We're going to need you. You saw it from the bench. Now you've got a little bit of action, and you're in the fire now. We need you to be you. Be a big (man). Be physical.'"

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Buckeyes Make Offers During Idle Week

After its 32-31 loss to Oregon, Ohio State had some time to recruit and during the off week sent out four new offers, each to 2026 prospects.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Those scholarship offers were to Malvern (Pa.) Prep four-star defensive lineman Cameron Brickle (6-2, 305), Mount Olive (N.C.) North Duplin four-star defensive lineman and Texas A&M commit Trashawn Ruffin (6-3, 307), Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star defensive lineman Alexander Haskell (6-3, 230) and Newark (N.J.) Malcolm X Shabazz three-star safety Zaiden McDonald (6-1, 190).

Brickle is considered the No. 348 overall player in the country, the No. 39 defensive lineman and the No. 9 player in the state of Pennsylvania. He received his offer from defensive line coach Larry Johnson on Oct. 17, adding to a long list of scholarship offers that includes Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, Rutgers, Tennessee, Texas, USC and Wisconsin, among many others.

He has already taken multiple unofficial visits to Penn State – most recently on July 26 – which is only a few hours away from his hometown.

Ruffin is the No. 229 player in the nation, the No. 25 defensive lineman and the 11th-best player in the state of North Carolina. His Oct. 16 offer from Johnson is one of 20 that he holds, a list that includes Florida State, Georgia, Michigan, Texas and USC.

Ruffin committed to the Aggies just two days after receiving his offer from the Buckeyes, so it doesn't seem as if they have much chance at getting him at this point. But there's a long way to go until the high school junior signs, so if Johnson wants to continue pursuing the four-star, he could try for the flip.

Through six games this season, Ruffin had accumulated 20 tackles, three of which were

for a loss. As a sophomore, he had 52 tackles, four for loss, four sacks and a fumble recovery.

Ohio State was Haskell's ninth Division I offer, joining Akron, Duke, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Minnesota, Penn State, West Virginia and Wisconsin, so there will likely be more in the future. He is the No. 525 player in the country, No. 47 defensive lineman and the No. 19 player in the state of Pennsylvania.

Like Brickle, Haskell has already taken multiple unofficial visits to nearby Penn State, most recently going on July 27.

Haskell hails from the same high school that has produced a number of former and future Buckeyes such as Marvin Harrison Jr. and Kyle McCord, along with such 2025 Ohio State commits as three-star running back Isaiah West (5-11, 208) and four-star defensive lineman Maxwell Roy (6-3, 285).

McDonald is rated the No. 558 player in the country, the No. 44 safety and the No. 12 player in the state of New Jersey. His offer on Oct. 17 from the Buckeyes was his 15th, a list that includes Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Penn State, Syracuse and Tennessee. He took an unofficial visit to Penn State over the summer as well.

McDonald has 20 tackles through six games in his junior season (three for loss), along with one sack and an interception. He also has produced on offense, totaling 278 rushing yards and two touchdowns and 163 receiving yards and another score.

Offord Pushes Back OSU Visit

Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) has been committed to Ohio State since February, but multiple schools have been trying to flip him since then. Alabama, Auburn and Oregon have each tried to get Offord to commit, and he has taken visits to each of them, including being at Autzen Stadium for Oregon's 32-31 win over the Buckeyes.

He told On3 after the game that he enjoyed the visit to Eugene, Ore., and expected the two teams to match up again in the Big Ten Championship Game in early December.

"Just saw two of the best teams in college football go head to head, and this won't be the last time," Offord said. "It was one of the loud-

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	6-2	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	

est games ever and the best visit so far."

Offord had said that he was going to try to be in Columbus for the game against Nebraska on Oct. 26 but ended up not making the trip, saying that his new plan is to be on campus for the Nov. 30 game against Michigan.

This comes after he initially pushed back his scheduled visit to Ohio State for the Oct. 5 game against Iowa, making it the second straight home game that Offord has rescheduled.

Offord, the nation's 10th-best prospect and No. 3 overall cornerback, was interviewed after one of his games in September wearing an Oregon windbreaker and Auburn colors underneath. He said that he was still committed to the Buckeyes but wanted to represent some of the schools that were still recruiting him at the time.

Offord backed up that statement in an Oct.

16 tweet, where he confirmed that he had not flipped, including three Buckeye emojis in his message.

Still, the five-star's most recent visits were to Oregon on Oct. 12 and Auburn for its season-opening 73-3 win over Alabama A&M. He hasn't made it to Columbus yet during the football season, his last visit coming the weekend of June 21 when he made it for an official visit.

Cornerbacks coach Tim Walton is doing his due diligence in trying to make sure that Offord signs with Ohio State when the time comes. During the off week, Walton was in Alabama to watch Offord play where he was on the sideline to watch him return an interception for a touchdown.

There is still over a month to go until the early signing period, but Walton and the Buckeyes are going to have to keep working hard to try to keep Offord in scarlet and gray.

ASK AN ANALYST with Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

Ohio State and Oregon are always after a lot of the same recruits. Does a big game like the one on Oct. 12 have any impact on those recruiting battles, especially for guys who were on site for the game?

"The good thing is, for fans, they look at games like that, and they're blown away obviously. If somebody you knew went to that game, your neighbor, he would have come back saying, 'That's the greatest thing I ever saw in my life.'

"Kids, they go to Alabama this week, they're going to Oregon next week, they'll be at Ohio State in two weeks. They'll be at Georgia in three weeks. They see it every week. I've never felt that atmosphere at games is that big of a deal. I've been to different places. It's all sweet, it's all awesome. Everybody does home games well. I've never felt that was a big swayer in recruiting.

"I've always felt, and still feel today, that relationships are the key more than the glitz and the glamor and whether a team wins or loses. Ohio State's bringing some really good recruits in for Nebraska, and if they were beaten by Nebraska, it's 'Oh, these recruits will never want to come here.' No. That means nothing. They're not fans. They're looking for business opportunities for what's best for their life.

"Now we got NIL in the picture, so you've added another layer. A loud crowd and a great atmosphere would be pretty far down

the list of why a kid would pick your school. The NIL part is huge, but it's still a relationship-built business. I think atmosphere is way low on the list."

It seems like Opelika, Ala., four-star defensive lineman and Auburn commit Malik Autry (6-6 320) is more serious about looking at Ohio State, possibly looking to take multiple visits to Columbus this season. Have you heard anything new about him in terms of whether the Buckeyes have a chance?

"I feel they absolutely have a chance, but talking about all these visits he's going to make, and he can't wait to come to Columbus – OK, let's go. Get the official visit scheduled. Let's get up to a game. Let's spend some time with you. But I think he's definitely there for the taking."

Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School five-star 2026 quarterback Jared Curtis (6-4, 225) decommitted from Georgia on Oct. 17. Are the Buckeyes in the running for him at this point?

"I haven't heard anything. They've had relationship conversations with him for a while now, but I have nothing specific that he's going to be their guy. They're going to absolutely go after him. He's good. I mean, he is really good. I was shocked by that decommitment, but these guys are young. It was an early commitment, so

we'll see what happens there. But Ohio State would have to be considered by that kid."

Huntington Beach, Calif., five-star 2027 quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200) has said that he wants to commit by the end of the year. He was able to make it to Ohio State earlier in the month for the win over Iowa. What do you make of Edmunds as a prospect, and if you had to predict right now, where do you think he ends up?

"They're so young right now, it's hard to make that prediction. I don't know. I don't have a lot of information on him. I've watched film on him. He's good, I mean, I think he's a stud. With Chip Kelly and Ryan Day and the success they've had – C.J. Stroud is lighting it up right now, look what they've done with Will Howard. Will Howard is playing better football now than he's ever played in his life. Even if you look at Kyle McCord, Kyle McCord was trained by Ohio State. He throws for 300 yards and three touchdowns every week right now. I think the Syracuse passing offense is ranked No. 2 in the country, and it's not like he learned how to throw the football by being in Syracuse for eight months. Ohio State, they're a threat to get anyone. Their staff means that much with what Ryan Day has done and Chip Kelly's reputation, so they're going to be in on any quarterback in America."

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

Top 2026 QB Decommits From Georgia

Quarterbacks are usually the first position to come off the board when it comes to recruiting commitments. Class of 2025 recruit and Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on June 21, 2023, despite still having a year and a half until the early signing period. Huntington Beach, Calif., 2027 five-star Brady Edmunds (6-5, 200) won't sign until December of 2026 but is already nearing a decision, saying he wants to commit to a school by the end of 2024.

But the Buckeyes are late in the 2026 cycle and still don't have a quarterback in the class, with most of the top players they offered at the position already committed elsewhere.

But one of those players became available again on Oct. 17 when Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School five-star quarterback Jared Curtis (6-4, 225) decommitted from Georgia, where he had been committed since March 23.

Despite the Buckeyes potentially boasting a crowded and talented quarterback room next season that could include returners Devin Brown, Lincoln Kienholz, Julian Sayin and Air Noland along with the incoming freshman St. Clair, Ryan Day and Co. will very likely kick the tires and see if they can gain a late pledge from Curtis, the nation's fourth-best prospect and No. 1 overall quarterback in his class.

As a sophomore at Nashville Christian, Curtis was 180 of 321 throwing the ball for 2,522 yards and 25 touchdowns to nine interceptions while adding 543 rushing yards and 13 more touchdowns on the ground in 100 attempts.

Since decommitting, he has set three gameday visits, planning to get to Auburn on Nov. 2 for its game against Vanderbilt, Georgia on Nov. 16 when it plays Tennessee and Alabama on Nov. 30 for the Crimson Tide's Iron Bowl rivalry game against Auburn. Outside of those weekends, Ohio State has home games against Purdue on Nov. 9 and Indiana on Nov. 23, so if he is looking to set up a visit to Columbus, that could still work with his schedule.

247Sports initially reported that Alabama, Auburn, Ohio State, Oregon, South Carolina and USC would be in the running for Curtis after his decommitment.

2026 LB Johnson Talks Recruitment

Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225) – to whom the Buckeyes offered a scholarship while he was on campus for the team's 49-14 win over Marshall on Sept. 21 – told 247Sports that while he has not yet narrowed down a preferred list of schools, he is close to getting to that point, with the Buckeyes seemingly inching closer to that list.

"I talk on the phone with (linebackers coach James) Laurinaitis and (defensive assistant Josh) Chorba," Johnson said. "It's going great. We're building our relationship. I'm watching their season unfold."

During the off week, Day stopped at Glenville on Oct. 18 to see Johnson while the linebacker continues to add to his scholarship offers, a list that is now up to 21 schools, including Florida State, Illinois, Michigan State, Missouri, Notre Dame, Penn State, Purdue, UCLA and Wisconsin.

Johnson is considered the No. 106 player in the country for 2026, the No. 8 linebacker and the fourth-best player in the state of Ohio after a

sophomore season in which he had 121 tackles (four for loss) along with seven sacks and three forced fumbles while playing middle linebacker.

Johnson told 247Sports that he is already targeting another date for his next visit to Columbus, joining many other Buckeye recruits in coming to Ohio State for this year's version of The Game on Nov. 30.

"I want to get back down there for the Michigan game," Johnson said.

Buckeye Huddle recruiting analyst Marc Givler told BSB earlier this season that Johnson is an in-state player he believes OSU should try hard to get.

"He's a very strong, physical kid," Givler said. "He's probably an inside linebacker, not so much an outside guy, but he's one of the guys who likes to play north and south, shoot gaps, get after the quarterback and is a run stuffer. He plays really hard, very physical. He's one of my top guys in Ohio."

Buckeyes Host Crop Of Recruits Vs. Huskers

As the season progresses and the games become more meaningful, Ohio State is getting bigger groups of prospects on campus for its games. The 21-17 win over Nebraska was one of the biggest recruiting weekends of the 2024 season so far. The following list of recruits was compiled using BSB's own information, reports from other outlets and recruits themselves.

The committed prospects who were on campus were St. Clair; West; Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225); Ontario, Ohio, four-star wide receiver Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180); Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290); and Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295).

Joining them in the 2025 class was Georgia Tech commit and Duluth, Ga., four-star offensive tackle Damola Ajidahun (6-6, 280). After missing out on Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 290) when he committed to Tennessee on Aug. 17, the Buckeyes had to turn their attention to the Georgia native, who is one of multiple possible flip candidates they are going after.

Ajidahun has been committed to the Yellow Jackets since Aug. 3, but he earned an offer from OSU on Sept. 12 and has been exploring his options. Along with this visit to Ohio State, he has also taken an official visit to South Carolina since committing. Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told BSB in early October that he doesn't expect Ajidahun to end up at Georgia Tech, despite his commitment this summer.

"He's not going to Georgia Tech," Greene said. "There's nothing this kid has done in the past two or three weeks that even remotely looks like he's committed to anyone, so he isn't going there. I like him as a prospect. He's not a five-star kid, but there's a lot to like there with his foot quickness, he's got length, and I think he's a tackle."

New Orleans Edna Karr five-star defensive tackle Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270) also visited OSU for the first time since reclassifying to the 2025 class. Since making that decision, Stewart has made one visit to Oregon for its Oct. 12 game against Ohio State, and he plans to get back to Eugene, Ore., at some point in November. He will also visit USC and LSU this season.

Stewart has said that he wants to be in Columbus for the game against Michigan on Nov. 30, and there is no indication that he won't still make that visit, so it's obvious that his interest in the Buckeyes is very real. He said as much when he was last on campus in June.

"I feel like I could fit perfectly in the defense," Stewart told Eleven Warriors. "With the technique Coach (Larry) Johnson is teaching and me being the person I am, my second effort, I want it more than a lot of these kids out here. The majority of these kids out here, majority of these men out here, no disrespect, it's going to be a lot of trying to just block me and compete with me for four quarters. And with Coach Johnson's mindset, we'll do great things together."

Also on campus for the win was Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony Rogers (5-8, 190). Rogers has been committed to Alabama since June 2, 2023, but the Buckeyes have been after the tailback since they offered him in April. Georgia has also been pursuing the four-star, and he has been open to exploring his options.

Rogers, the nation's 147th-best prospect, eighth-best running back and 11th-best player in Alabama seems to be the biggest priority remaining in the 2025 class for running backs coach Carlos Locklyn, who already has a pair of running back commits next season in Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) and West.

Each of Rogers, Mathis and Ajidahun were on official visits, while the rest visited campus on their own dime.

In the 2026 class, the Buckeyes hosted Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190); Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park four-star defensive end Rodney Dunham

(6-4, 227); Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star tight end Corbyn Fordham (6-4, 215); Akron Archbishop Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310); Rolesville, N.C., four-star defensive end Zavion Griffin-Haynes (6-6, 220); Mentor, Ohio, wide receiver Justen Hodge (6-1, 180); Montgomery (Ala.) Pike Road four-star running back Ja'Michael Jones (5-11, 185); Saline, Mich., three-star tight end Lincoln Keyes (6-6, 220); Strongsville, Ohio, four-star linebacker Storm Miller (6-3, 220); Carrollton, Ga., four-star wide receiver Ryan Mosley (6-2, 196); Kernersville, (N.C.) wide receiver Jaire Richburg (6-3, 180); Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280); Kernersville (N.C.) East Forsyth four-star offensive tackle J.B. Shabazz (6-7, 295); and Franklin (Ind.) Community defensive lineman Blake Smythe (6-3, 275).

Dunham, the No. 45 overall player in the country, No. 5 defensive end and the No. 6 player in the state of North Carolina, was offered a scholarship by the Buckeyes on Oct. 2, but it wasn't while he was on a football visit. He is also a very talented baseball prospect and was visiting with new baseball head coach Justin Haire, although he was likely still able to take in the football facilities while he was on campus.

Storm Miller told 247Sports that he had enjoyed his visit.

"It was good talking to Coach Laurinaitis and Coach Day before the game," Miller said. "They're heavily interested in me. They said they let one get away in my brother and they don't want that to happen with me. That was great to hear. ...And I got to see Coach Laurinaitis coaching. That was super cool."

Miller is visiting Michigan on Nov. 2 when

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OSU Recruiting QBs Through 2029 Class

Continued From Page 33

it plays against Oregon and also has visits planned to get to Oklahoma, Stanford and Wisconsin, along with a possible Texas A&M trip. But the Buckeyes are a program he's paying close attention to right now.

"Absolutely, I'm interested in Ohio State," Miller said. "They've shown they are highly interested in me, and I'm highly interested (in them). Playing for Coach Laurinaitis and Coach Day would be great."

The 2027 recruits who were on campus for the game against the Cornhuskers were Jefferson, Ga., athlete Max Brown 5-11, 175); Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook linebacker Quinton Cypher (6-2, 215); Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett linebacker Jake Godfree (6-0, 200); Harper Woods, Mich., five-star wide receiver Dakota Guerrant (6-1, 185); Cincinnati Anderson linebacker Antwoine Higgins (6-3, 215); Coatesville, Pa., five-star offensive tackle Maxwell Hiller (6-5, 295); Irvine (Calif.) Crean Lutheran athlete Caden Jones (6-2, 165); Madison (Miss.) Central running back Mikel Stephen (5-11, 185); and Mundelein (Ill.) Carmel Catholic quarterback Trae Taylor (6-2, 175).

Taylor also talked to 247Sports about his time on campus for the game.

"It was good, a good experience. It was my first time ever at a game at Ohio State. I was able to talk to (offensive coordinator Chip) Kelly and Coach Day. I didn't realize how much they throw the football. They throw it a lot. Their pass and run game go hand in hand. I'll get back to Ohio State, I'll be back for sure."

The only 2028 prospect on campus was Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School defensive lineman Asher Ghioto (6-4, 230). Despite being a freshman, Ghioto already holds 18 offers from Division I schools, many of which are national contenders.

The Buckeyes even hosted a 2029 prospect on campus. Westerville (Ohio) North quarterback Winnie Garnett IV (6-3, 200) is currently in the eighth grade and wouldn't be able to play with the Buckeyes until five years in the future, but OSU obviously believes in him enough early on to already bring him to Columbus for a game day.

OSU Loses Top Spot In 2025 Rankings

For a long time, Ohio State has held the

No. 1 spot when it comes to its 2025 recruiting class, but after a long drought of commitments since most of the top prospects have already pledged their services to a program, and after 247Sports shuffled its player rankings, the Buckeyes have fallen from the top spot to No. 2 with 26 commits and 308.43 points.

They are now behind Alabama (23 commits, 310.19 points) and still sit ahead of No. 3 Georgia (24, 303.12), No. 4 LSU (27, 297.85) and No. 5 Auburn (27, 295.94).

If Offord does decide to go to school other than Ohio State, which doesn't seem unlikely at this point, that would hurt the class even further, possibly dropping it in the rankings more.

However, most of the class seems as secure as it could be with still over a month until the early signing period in December, but now the Buckeyes will have to make up some ground if they want to finish the cycle with the top class for the first time since 247Sports began ranking the classes in 2010.

Other Notes And Tidbits

• After putting off his commitment for a while, Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North-

west five-star offensive tackle Andrew Babalola (6-6, 280) pledged his services to Michigan on Oct. 21. Ohio State was not in the running for the 2025 lineman, who is ranked the nation's 21st-best prospect and fourth-best offensive lineman in his class. He chose the Wolverines over Oklahoma, Stanford, Missouri and Auburn.

• Ohio State wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline made a stop when the Buckeyes were on the West Coast for the Oregon game, heading to Santa Ana, Calif., to visit the injured Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205). Henry, the nation's No. 1 overall prospect in the 2026 class who committed to Ohio State last July, suffered a season-ending knee injury earlier this season. The Buckeyes are recruiting several other Mater Dei players whom Hartline visited with, including four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180), four-star linebacker/defensive end Shaun Scott (6-3, 230) – both 2026 prospects – and 2027 five-star tight end Mark Bowman (6-5, 215).

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Talking to Akron Buchtel star running back Ricky Powers left one with the impression that he wasn't feeling any pressure at all. The recruiting, the media attention – it was a real yawner for him.

It was a safe bet, though, that the 6-1, 205-pound back's speed, size and versatility were having the opposite effect on college recruiters. Considered by most recruiting publications to be one of the top prep running backs in the Midwest, Powers possessed the kind of rare talent that could make him an immediate impact player at the college ranks.

He was the kind of running back who made recruiting experts run out of superlatives.

"Many scouts are split on whether Powers or Euclid's Robert Smith is the top back in the Midwest," said recruiting expert Tom Lemming. "(I think) he may just be the country's best back. He is a strong runner with great speed, vision and the ability to cut on a dime."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Peerless Price was truly living up to his unusual name. The Dayton Meadowdale receiver might have been without equal when it came to Ohio's finest prep wideouts.

A 6-3, 185-pound ball of speed, Price caught 29 passes in 1993, averaging 20 yards per catch, and scored seven times. He also added two more end-zone dances via punt returns, his true forte.

He had speed and hands, and he ran precise routes. So was he Peerless? You decide.

"I like being a big-play guy," Price said. "Punt returns are especially fun. They're crazy, though. You have to field the ball, and you see 11 guys coming at you. Make a move here and there, and you can make them look really bad."

After being reminded that they can, on occasion, make you look bad, too, Price responded, "Oh yeah. That happens sometimes. They get you real good if you can't break it."

25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State seemed to be zeroing in on the quarterback prospects it was tracking for the 2000 recruiting class.

The Buckeyes had already offered Arlington (Texas) Pantego Christian's Jon Van Cleave (6-4, 232) a scholarship, and he said he was definitely still interested in OSU.

But BSB had learned that Struthers, Ohio, quarterback Rick McFadden was offered a scholarship during a phone conversation with assistants Fred Pagac and Tim Salem on Oct. 13.

McFadden (6-7, 205) was regarded as the state's top quarterback prospect, playing alongside Walter Reyes, judged Ohio's top tailback.

That duo attended OSU's Oct. 9 home game against Purdue. "We had a good time at the game," McFadden said. "I got to talk to Coach Pagac and Coach Salem at that time. They said they were pretty close to offering me then. Then they ended up calling me and offering me (Oct. 13). I am definitely considering them, but I did not make a verbal commitment."

20 Years Ago — 2004

Following the 2004 season, the Ohio State football team was going to be thin on tailbacks. True freshman Tony Pittman would be the only back on the roster who had game experience with seniors Lydell Ross and Maurice Hall exhausting their eligibility and freshman Erik Haw currently redshirting.

It was clear the Buckeyes would be scouring the nation for running backs in their class of 2005, and perhaps the top name on their list was Jacksonville (Fla.) Sandalwood's Maurice Wells.

A shifty 5-9, 177-pounder, Wells was considered by Rivals.com to be the nation's No. 3 all-purpose back and the No. 14 overall player. He had also long been a holder of an OSU offer and had history in the Columbus area, living there for a short time when he was very young and coming back to visit relatives in the area occasionally.

Wells knew when his next trip to Columbus would be as well: the weekend of Nov. 20, when he would officially visit Ohio State for the annual showdown with Michigan.

"That's a big game for sure, so I want to see the atmosphere and everything," Wells told BSB.

15 Years Ago — 2009

National Signing Day was less than 3½ months away, and Ohio State's class of 2010 continued to sit at 13 verbal commitments. With official visit season in full swing, the question of which players would take up the Buckeyes' remaining available spots grew with each passing week.

When he welcomed the nation's top-ranked class of 2009, head coach Jim Tressel said he expected the 2010 class to number around 17 members. With the deadline approaching, recruiting coordinator John Peterson confirmed that targeted figure had not changed much.

"I think we're still on target for that number," he said. "Seventeen or 18, it's right in that range."

When BSB went to press, the Buckeyes sat at No. 18 in the country in the national recruiting rankings according to Scout.com. In a complicated ranking system that awarded points for landing players at positions of need as well as highly ranked players, OSU had 2,265 points. That was the third-highest total in the Big Ten behind Penn State (No. 2 overall with 3,897 points) and Michigan (No. 16 with 2,477 points).

10 Years Ago — 2014

The night before camping at Ohio State, Macedonia (Ohio) Nordonia three-star cornerback Denzel Ward (5-11, 180) wasn't nervous.

Confident in his game, he formulated a plan of attack for the June 19 camp that would likely determine whether he'd ever receive a scholarship offer from the team he grew up watching. He already had the attention of the Ohio State coaching staff, which had increasingly been monitoring him as a prospect, but Ward wanted to attack every little detail – even when it came to trying to make sure he was first in line for drills.

As the day unfolded, uncertainty set in. Sometimes everything

clicks for athletes, and some days are a battle. For Ward, his Ohio State camp experience was the latter.

"I wasn't quite sure," he told BSB in an interview published in the Nov. 1 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "I didn't have my best day, and I knew I had a lot of stuff to work on, so I wasn't real sure of where the coaches were at and their point of view. I thought I could have done way better."

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer and cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs had seen enough, though. Coombs pulled Ward off the field and moved him into a room where Meyer offered him a scholarship. Ward accepted on the spot, giving the Buckeyes what was at the time their ninth commitment of the 2015 class and third in as many days.

Five Years Ago — 2019

Although Ohio State had privately extended a scholarship offer to Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., four-star quarterback C.J. Stroud several weeks back, he waited until after his unofficial visit for the game against Michigan State to announce it publicly on social media on Oct. 8.

The 6-3, 194-pound Stroud – who was considered the fourth-best pro-style quarterback and the No. 138 prospect overall in the class of 2020 – attended the game with his personal quarterback coach, Quincy Avery, who had notably worked out with former Buckeye signal caller Dwayne Haskins and current starter Justin Fields in the past.

Stroud had been on the Buckeyes' radar since June, but interest in him intensified when Ryan Day and passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich decided they wanted to pursue a second signal caller in the cycle for depth purposes.

"I think the ideal quarterback room is four quarterbacks and young guys that you're developing who want to get on the field and understand how much they love Ohio State and the program and want to be here forever and work through it," Day said on Oct. 14. "Even if they're not the starter, they still want to be here and love their teammates and all those things."

One Year Ago — 2023

McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 210), a 2025 prospect, had started to narrow down his list of scholarship offers, including Ohio State among his top 12 schools on Oct. 19.

Ohio State was joined on the list by Auburn, Colorado, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Michigan, Oklahoma, SMU, TCU, Texas and USC. Pettijohn was the No. 37 overall prospect and fifth-ranked linebacker in the class.

"An athletic defender who can play all three downs, Pettijohn has been the heart of McKinney's defense since moving to inside linebacker his junior year," wrote 247Sports recruiting analyst Mike Roach. "At roughly 6-2, 210 pounds, Pettijohn's frame should have the capacity to play closer to 230 pounds at the college level."

"A highly instinctive linebacker who triggers quickly on the run and shoots gaps well, Pettijohn is an exceptional open-field tackler. He takes good angles of pursuit and fits the run well. Having previously played at safety, Pettijohn is capable in coverage as well."

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (6-1, 3-1)

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, W 21-17

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., Men: 3rd/25, Women: 5th/29.

Nov. 1 Big Ten Championships at Champaign, Ill. **15** NCAA Regional Championships at Norton, Ohio; **18** NCAA Championships at Madison, Wis.

FIELD HOCKEY (13-3, 4-3)

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, W 2-1; **20** at Rutgers, L 1-0; **25** INDIANA, W 2-1 (2OT); **27** IOWA, L 3-0

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., T6th/10 **Oct. 7-8** Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio, 4th/4; **20** Jim West Challenge at San Marcos, Texas, T4th/12; **21** Jim West Challenge at San Marcos, Texas, T4th/12.

MEN'S ICE

HOCKEY (5-0-1, 2-0-0)

Oct. 6 Niagara (exh.) W, 3-2 (OT); **11-12** AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL, T 3-3; W 5-2; **18-19** at Wisconsin, W 2-1 (OT); W 2-1; **25-26** BOWLING GREEN, W 3-1; W 2-0.

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 (9-2-2, 4-2-2)

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, W 5-1; T 3-3 (SOL); **22** MERCYHURST, W 5-1; **25** ICEBREAKER TOURNAMENT vs. STONEHILL, W 11-0; **26** ICEBREAKER TOURNAMENT vs. CORNELL, W 7-3.

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 (11-1-2, 6-1-1)

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, W 3-2; **25** NORTHWESTERN, W 2-0; **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 (11-4-3, 6-3-2)

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, L 1-0; **20** at UCLA, L 1-0; **27** PENN STATE, W, 4-1

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, NTS; **25-27** UT Home Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn, NTS.

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 (8-12, 1-9)

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, L 3-2; **19** NEBRASKA, L 3-0; **23** at Purdue, L 3-0; **27** MINNESOTA, L, 3-2; **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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Rohlik Gets Milestone Victory Over Badgers

Being the coach that he is, Steve Rohlik always has a plan – even though in the moment he didn't realize he needed one.

In the joyous locker room inside the Kohl Center on Oct. 19, the Ohio State players and staff were celebrating a road sweep of No. 16 Wisconsin when goaltender Kristoffer Eberly slowly approached Rohlik. In Eberly's hand was the game puck awarded to him as a player of the game.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Instead of a speech, a post on Instagram by Ohio State men's hockey showed him handing the puck to Rohlik and saying, "The puck goes back to Coach. Let's go."

With that, the players surrounded Rohlik and emptied their water bottles on his head to celebrate the 200th win of his OSU coaching career.

When asked about the unexpected reveling four days later, Rohlik said, "I was lucky. I took my coat off. Otherwise, everything would have been to the dry cleaners."

As is his character, Rohlik quickly deflected any praise heaped on him.

"For me first of all, I was just really happy for the guys to grind out a good weekend on the road and just to be a part of that 200th career win," he said. "I said it right away. It's really about the people, and it's never, ever been about me. It never will be about me."

"It's about this program. It's about the alumni that have put the bricks in the wall, about the people that have come before me. I'm just trying to carry on the tradition, and I've been a very fortunate coach."

Rohlik, 56, is the third coach in program history to reach 200 wins.

Ohio State Hall of Famer and former Buckeye player Jerry Welsh was 328-381-56 (.465 win percentage) from 1976-95. John Markell went 280-267-56 (.511) from 1995-2010.

After sweeping Bowling Green on Oct.

25 and 26, Rohlik has a record of 202-193-44. His winning percentage of .510 trails only Glen Sonmor, who was 9-7 (.563) in 1966-67, and Markell.

The Buckeyes are 5-0-1 overall and 2-0-0 in the Big Ten this season.

"Coach Rohlik knows what he's talking about, and it's an awesome everyday experience to go out and practice with him and just learn from him," said sophomore forward Max Montes.

Rohlik is in the 12th season of his first college head-coaching position. He came to it under difficult circumstances. He was an assistant at Ohio State for three seasons for head coach Mark Osiecki, who was a teammate at Wisconsin when the Badgers won the 1990 NCAA championship.

When Osiecki was fired in April 2013, the players put their support behind Rohlik's hiring. Not only did Rohlik take over a program that had some turmoil, but in the fall of 2013 the Buckeyes entered their first season in the new Big Ten hockey conference. Rohlik and Penn State's Guy Gadowsky are the lone coaches remaining with their schools from the inaugural season.



Steve Rohlik

Rohlik said his 200th win coming at Wisconsin was special. "Obviously, those were four of the best years of my life and I was able to raise a banner there and win a championship," he said. "I tell a lot of people, the most important thing that I won as a player at Wisconsin was my relationships that I still have with the players and the coaches."

"I think that's really one of the most important things that I try to stress with our guys is the relationships that you have."

Sophomore defenseman Nathan McBrayer from the Columbus suburb of Dublin was glad to be a part of the milestone victory at Wisconsin.

"It's just a full-circle moment, honestly," he said. "Growing up, always wanting to come here, putting in the work to get ready

and preparing myself to come in and he's still the coach here. It just shows how good of a coach he is."

Rohlik is a two-time Big Ten Coach of the Year (2018 and 2019) and the runner-up in 2018 for the American Hockey Coaches Association National Coach of the Year award.

The Buckeyes had four straight 20-win seasons from 2017-20. They made the NCAA tournament the first three seasons and would have in 2020 as well except the season was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Buckeyes returned to the NCAA tournament in 2023.

In 2018, OSU reached the Frozen Four for the second time, the other being in 1998 with Markell in charge. The Buckeyes also won the 2019 Big Ten regular-season championship, the school's second regular-season championship of all time (1972, Central Collegiate Hockey Association).

First-year Buckeye forward Riley Thompson, a transfer from Alaska Anchorage, wanted to play for Rohlik when looking for a new team.

"He's been great," Thompson said. "Even when I was in the transfer portal with him, a couple phone calls, I've heard nothing but good things from him."

"I also like how intense he practices. He likes to get after it, so I think it gets everyone dialed in for the weekends. So I love it."

While Rohlik continues to chase a national title, he is also seeking an elusive Big Ten tournament crown. The Buckeyes lost championship games in overtime to Wisconsin in 2014 and Notre Dame in 2018.

Cold Hearted

Thompson spent one season in Anchorage, so he is enjoying the unusually warm autumn. He was asked during media availability on Oct. 23 what the differences in temperatures were.

"Right now, in Alaska, it's like 5 degrees Celsius. I don't know what it is Fahrenheit (41) but you're wearing a winter coat right now, for sure. So, the weather here is amazing, obviously. I mean, I'm in shorts right now and it's the middle of October."

At the end of his interview, he checked his phone and said, "Oh, it's 2 Celsius (ap-

proximately 36 Fahrenheit)."

Then he left to enjoy the 75-degree afternoon.

To The Max

The Buckeyes won all four games since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last printed to run their winning streak to five games.

It was a great homecoming for Hartland, Wis., native Montes, who scored three goals, including game-winners in both games, when the Buckeyes downed the Badgers 2-1 in overtime and 2-1 for Rohlik's 200th victory in the series preceding the games vs.



Max Montes

Bowling Green, His goal in the first period of the opener tied the game before he scored with just 17 seconds left in overtime.

Logan Terness made 37 saves, three in OT, for the Buckeyes.

"We were resilient and found a way to get points on the road," Rohlik said.

In the rematch, Thompson scored 21 seconds into the game, and Montes made it 2-0 at 1:01 of the third period before a late score by the Badgers on Eberly, who made 28 saves.

Montes estimated there were 55 to 60 family and friends there for him for the first game and around 45 the next night.

"I 100 percent was able to just feed off that energy," he said. "Obviously it just makes me a little more motivated that all these people came out to support me so I may as well try to give them a show."

Big D

The Buckeyes' defensive effort continued with a 3-1 home victory over Bowling Green on Oct. 25 followed by a 2-0 shutout the next night on the Falcons' ice. OSU had allowed one or fewer goals in four consecutive games and was holding opponents to 1.33 goals per game on the season.

Defenseman Damien Carfagna scored in each game, Terness made 25 saves in the opener, and Eberly (22 saves) got his first career shutout in the second tilt as the Buckeyes' mastery over their in-state rival continued.

Following an 8-2 home loss to the Falcons on Oct. 26, 2018, the Buckeyes traveled to Bowling Green the next day for a 2-2 tie. Since then, OSU has won eight straight in the series.

Next

The Buckeyes continue nonleague play by hosting Lake Superior State in Value City Arena on Nov. 1 (7 p.m.) and Nov. 2 (5 p.m.).

For complete recaps of the Wisconsin and Bowling Green series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Men's Soccer Relying On Chemistry In Title Chase

By CAMERON MOONE

Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

There's a common phrase in sports that can be used as a motivational tool to reach a common goal called stacking days. Whether it's practice after practice or game after game, teams aim to build on success from the day prior to climb the metaphorical mountain to glory.

The No. 1-ranked Ohio State men's soccer team has been stacking days, but in their case, it has been wins they've piled up.

Opening the season with a red-hot 11-1-2 start, the Buckeyes catapulted to success through strong team chemistry and offensive firepower, averaging 2.71 goals per game – good for fourth in the country.

But the cherry on top of all of that is the top ranking that Ohio State holds, the first time the program has earned that No. 1 next to its name.

"The No. 1 ranking is great for the guys," head coach Brian Maisonneuve told BSB. "But I keep telling them, and they've said the same thing, it doesn't mean anything until the end of the year. It's good recognition for the guys and the work they put in this year. But this time of year, everybody is playing for something. Every game is important, no matter who you're playing. Whether you're battling to get into the Big Ten tournament, battling for the NCAA tournament, every game is so important."

The Buckeyes have taken that motto to heart, winning or tying every game except one, a 2-1 decision to UCLA in Los Angeles on Oct. 11.

The season started on a somewhat odd note, a 1-1 tie with a now-sub .500 Cleveland State on Aug. 22. Following the draw, Ohio State won its next seven games, recording five shutouts across that span and tying the program record for its best start to the season. Much of that success was owed to three core contributors for the Buckeyes: two midfielders in graduate David Wrona and senior Michael Adedokun and redshirt junior goalkeeper Max Trejo.

"They have been huge," Maisonneuve said. "Michael can change games with his technical ability, his tactical awareness and his athleticism. It's so much fun to have him on the field. David brings in a different element in terms of his work rate and his energy. So, when those two are clicking, we're different."

While leading the team in goals with eight, Adedokun said he believes it all starts with the netminder play of Trejo for Ohio State to succeed.

"He is a really good goalkeeper, and we trust him a lot," Adedokun told BSB. "He's been making a hell of a lot of saves. He's really worked himself as hard as possible to put himself in that position to be the top (goalkeeper) for Ohio State, and that's something that I am very proud of."

Trejo has been the most efficient goalkeeper for Ohio State, allowing just 0.58 goals per game and saving 17 shots in his over 621 minutes on the field. In his seven games of action, as BSB went to press, the Mexico City native had tallied four shutouts and boasted an .810 save percentage.

But much like his head coach, Trejo sees the top ranking more like a competitive boost than a sign of accomplishment.

"It's really satisfying to get where we are now, but we know we still have a lot of work to do," Trejo said. "We're not going to hold onto this high forever. We're like, 'All right, this is good for us,' but we just have to keep working. That No. 1 ranking shows that we're a good team, but at the same time it's soccer and anything can happen."

Much like any sport during the season, the Buckeyes have faced adversity throughout their climb to the nation's best men's soccer squad. A 2-0 win over Washington on Oct. 7 wasn't sealed until Wrona and Adedokun scored goals in the final 23 minutes of the game, a contest that had 28 combined fouls and 15 missed attempts on corner kicks.

Those types of games, Adedokun said, are won not by scoring goals but through team chemistry and the appreciation and trust the players have in one another.

"One thing about this team is the love everybody has towards each other," Adedokun said. "Everybody wants to see each other succeed. At the end of the day, we all just want to be able to celebrate."

With additions like Washington and UCLA to the new 18-team Big Ten, it's easy to get lost in the mix of a now highly competitive conference. Growing by four teams, it became one of the tougher spots to achieve that top ranking in men's soccer given the increase in competition.

Those additions, which have allowed for Ohio State to face different teams and play styles before heading into a potential NCAA tournament bid, have been more of a help than a hindrance, Maisonneuve said.

"To add Washington and UCLA, that's just two great programs and two great games," he said. "Anytime you get to play that level of opponent, you get excited about it. Now that they are in our conference and we're going to play them every

year, you're even more excited. Every game is just an absolute battle. That's why these guys come here, because they want that day in and day out."

During their previously mentioned seven-game win streak, the Buckeyes won the Wolstein Classic tournament, an annual tournament held at their home Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium.

Even with the early-season success, Ohio State has stayed on track throughout the middle of the season, winning its next four out of five matches following a 2-2 tie against Indiana on Sept. 27 that snapped the win streak.

That sustained success was all laid out in the blueprints in the preseason, Wrona said.

"Over the summer, texts were sent out to the guys just saying 'Hey, this is a special group. We have a special team here and we have the opportunity to do something great, something that hasn't been done in program history,'" Wrona said. "You know when you have great guys with you. It's not just talent, it's mentality. You can look around the room and every guy has that drive to win."

"So from the summer, we had high expectations. Guys were dedicated to reach those goals, and I think that's been the difference. Every action, on and off the field is in hopes to win a national championship."

Being able to deliver on those expectations is another thing though, but a direction Buckeyes have had no problem maintaining with the start they have had through the first 14 matches of the season.

With highlight wins like the scrappy decision against Washington and a 6-3 trouncing of Michigan in Ann Arbor on Oct. 4, every game has stacked upon one another.

"There's been a ton of different moments where it's built up," Wrona said. "It's momentum that happens (like) a goal-line clearance that ends up winning us the game or a last-minute goal. There was

even one game where a freshman (Nick Skubis against Butler on Sept. 13) scored the game-winning goal. Everyone already has the confidence, but stuff like that, it brings us together."

With all of the wins that have come the Buckeyes' way through the first half of the season, the victories have been an extra boost of confidence for the team each night out. As a mark of a good team, Ohio State has yet to go back-to-back games without a win.

But even when the going has gotten tough, like the loss to the Bruins and during tense moments on the pitch, the team has never wavered in its pursuit of a national championship, Maisonneuve said.

"The confidence definitely comes with us winning games, finding ways to win games, scoring goals and defending, things like that," Maisonneuve said. "But, in terms of this group, they've done a great job at not getting too high on the wins and then when things aren't going our way, not getting too low. It's a really levelheaded group."

The key factor to the wins comes from the team being more than just 11 men who take the field each game. It's the family component that allows for chemistry and trust to build night in and night out, Wrona said.

"It's a family, and you have to rely on the guys around you," Wrona explained. "It's a team sport, and if one guy messes up, it could be the end of the game. This team really counts on one another. You have guys around you that don't want to play for themselves, they want to play for the team."

"It's a big family who cares about each other and works hard for each other. So the pressure, it's welcomed and it's exciting. A lot of the time, we're fighting like brothers, but afterwards, it's all hugging. That's what you need in a team. It's not a selfish group. It's the mentality that 'Together, we will get to the finish line.'"

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Howard "Redemption" Story Helps Buckeyes

When Ohio State obtained the services of quarterback Will Howard through the transfer portal, most fans were happy and most analysts thought it was a savvy pickup. Howard was a veteran with a Big 12 title under his belt and would be just the steady kind of leader the Buckeyes could use, especially with a team so loaded for a championship run.

**THE FACTS
MAN**
Mike Wachsman

The only real concern about Howard was whether he could put a team on his shoulders and win a football game. The referendum has come in the last two games, and there could not have been more wildly different outcomes.

Howard actually played better against Oregon and in fact might have been the Buckeyes' best offensive player on the field at Autzen Stadium. He was dealing the football and making plays when he had to, but he will be remembered for his final moment – when he slid short of a first down and the Buckeyes failed to get a timeout, losing the game by a point. Folks who know football realize Howard wasn't anywhere near the reason the Buckeyes lost, but a faction of the fan base will never forgive him.

Flash-forward to Nebraska, and Howard was really just a bit better than average – which is better than most of the rest of the offense was. But when it counted, when the Buckeyes needed him to engineer something, he came through. Yeah, there was still most of the fourth quarter left to play when Ohio State got the ball at its own 25, trailing 17-14. But given how lackluster the play from the offense had been to that point, any spark was a good one.

Howard engineered an eight-play drive

that ate up 4:43, carrying the ball twice for 14 yards and going 3 of 3 passing, including what proved to be the game-winner on a 9-yard toss to Quinshon Judkins.

"It wasn't perfect, but a win's a win," Howard said. "And we were able to show that when the going gets tough, and when maybe things aren't going our way, we're able to win in the fourth quarter. I think our defense did an unbelievable job of getting some stops, making some really big plays in that fourth quarter and getting us a chance to go down there and put that last one in and give us the lead."

Howard finished with 221 yards passing – 109 of them on touchdown passes – and three scoring strikes, and though his 14 rushing yards on eight carries barely registers, he had some timely totes and picked up some crucial yardage on quarterback sneaks. Howard showed off his arm on a deep throw to Carnell Tate and great timing on a go route that Jeremiah Smith took 60 yards to the house.

"I thought that the execution on the throw and catch to Carnell on the deep ball was big, and then the one to Jeremiah was really well executed," OSU boss Ryan Day said. "The timing was right – good throw and great catch. Coming out in the fourth quarter, that was a good call by (Coach) Chip (Kelly) on the first down. We struggled to run the ball, so setting up that play-action pass on the sideline to Carnell got us into plus territory, and that allowed us to score."

Big-Game Hysteria

Much has been made about Ryan Day's record as it pertains to wins over top-10 and top-five teams. Folks seem to think it's some kind of anomaly that he has struggled, but winning games against top-10 (and especially top five) teams is hard. Those teams are good, too.

After a little research, I thought it might be interesting to compare Day with some of the top coaches in the game, to see if he really is

that far behind.

I looked at years at the school (because the current school is the only one that matters, not what they did someplace else), record vs top 10, record vs top five and losses to unranked teams (which is something Urban Meyer dealt with more often than people care to remember).

Here are the records for some of the top coaches against highly ranked teams.

Steve Sarkisian/Texas (4th year) – Top 10: 2-4; Top 5: 1-3; Unranked losses: 5.

Dan Lanning/Oregon (3rd year) – Top 10: 3-3; Top 5: 1-2; Unranked losses: 0.

Ryan Day/Ohio State (6th year) – Top 10: 8-8; Top 5: 2-7; Unranked losses: 0

Kirby Smart/Georgia (9th year) – Top 10: 19-9; Top 5: 9-6; Unranked losses: 3.

Brian Kelly/LSU (3rd year) – Top 10: 3-4; Top 5: 0-1; Unranked losses: 2.

Dabo Swinney/Clemson (16th year) – Top 10: 19-13; Top 5: 10-11; Unranked losses: 16.

Josh Heupel/Tennessee (3rd year) – Top 10: 2-4; Top 5: 1-4; Unranked losses: 5.

Lane Kiffin/Ole Miss (5th year) – Top 10: 2-6; Top 5 0-4; Unranked losses: 7.

MOST TOP-10 WINS

- Dabo Swinney 19
- Kirby Smart 19
- Ryan Day 8
- Dan Lanning 3
- James Franklin 3
- Brian Kelly 3

MOST TOP-10 GAMES

- Dabo Swinney 32
- Kirby Smart 28
- James Franklin 20
- Ryan Day 16

BEST TOP-10 WIN PERCENTAGE

- Kirby Smart 67.8
- Dabo Swinney 59.3
- Ryan Day 50.0
- Dan Lanning 50.0
- Brian Kelly 42.8

MOST TOP-FIVE WINS

- Dabo Swinney 10
- Kirby Smart 9
- Ryan Day 2

MOST TOP-FIVE GAMES

- Dabo Swinney 21
- Kirby Smart 15
- James Franklin 14
- Ryan Day 9
- Josh Heupel 5

BEST TOP-FIVE WIN PERCENTAGE

- Kirby Smart 60.0
- Dabo Swinney 45.4
- Dan Lanning 33.3
- Josh Heupel 25.0

Quick Hits

- Josh Simmons has been Ohio State's best offensive lineman for most of the season, so when he went out against Oregon, the fear factor going forward was real. Recruiting in the trenches has been substandard for years, leading to lack of depth and true standouts. Simmons (acquired via transfer), guard Donovan Jackson (a five-star recruit) and center

Seth McLaughlin (acquired via transfer) fortified the middle and left side of the line, but the right side has left a lot to be desired.

None of the Buckeyes' current reserves appear up to the task of being dominant – or even adequate – so some tinkering will have to be done because as of now, the way the line is constructed will cost Ohio State a shot at the national championship.

The move of Jackson to tackle after Zen Michalski went out with an injury coincided with the little time the line played well against Nebraska, and going forward he should be the man on the outside. NFL scouts love his quickness and feet and the ability to play pretty much anywhere on the line.

One man's wish list for the Buckeyes' offensive line: LT Jackson, LG Austin Sierveveld, C McLaughlin, RG Tegra Tshabola, RT Luke Montgomery.

- Jeremiah Smith continues to dazzle, and his TD catch against the Huskers tied him with Cris Carter for the most receiving TDs by a freshman in school history – pretty lofty company, no?

Even more impressive to me, however, is that he has scored a TD in every game this year. By now teams are game-planning for him, yet he still finds a way to hit pay dirt. I was driving while the Nebraska-OSU game was on, but the minute Paul Keels called Smith's catch of a Will Howard throw at about the 25, I yelled "gone" in the car. And I had no clue how close a defender was to him. He just keeps coming up with big plays at the biggest moments, and there should be two more years of his playmaking ability on display in Columbus.

Super 16

Folks who have followed this space for any length of time know how I was against the idea of expanding the College Football Playoff. I won't go into all of the reasons why here. Suffice it to say that I believe it should be about excellence and being worthy rather than inclusion.

Be that as it may, with 12 teams now vying for spots, I figured it was time to expand my rankings. So what used to be the Dandy Dozen is now the Super 16.

My rankings use a combination of resumé and team strength, and when things are close, I look at a team's best showing against elite competition.

CFB SUPER 16, OCT. 27

1. Oregon (8-0)
2. Georgia (6-1)
3. Texas (7-1)
4. Ohio State (6-1)
5. Penn State (7-0)
6. BYU (8-0)
7. Miami (8-0)
8. Clemson (6-1)
9. Indiana (8-0)
10. Notre Dame (7-1)
11. Texas A&M (7-1)
12. Iowa State (7-0)
13. Tennessee (6-1)
14. Alabama (6-2)
15. Pittsburgh (7-0)
16. Boise State (6-1)

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It May Sound Corny But This Win Lacked Pop

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Déjà Vu All Over Again

While much of the post-Oregon game discussion seemed to center on the final seconds of the game with the Ducks and the lack of a pass rush by the Buckeyes, somewhat lost in the shuffle has been the perplexing play of Denzel Burke, thought to be one of the best cornerbacks in the country but burned repeatedly in the loss.

While others wondered if Jeremiah Smith had committed pass interference or if there was still time on the clock when Howard went into his fateful slide, something kept gnawing at me about Burke's utter meltdown. Didn't he have a similar meltdown his sophomore year? Did anyone else recall that?

The gnawing turned into a recollection that it might have been against Rutgers. A quick check of the BSB archives, and sure enough, it was vs. the Scarlet Knights. If you recall, Burke burst onto the scene in 2021 with a brilliant freshman campaign but suffered from an epic sophomore slump the following season.

In the game with the Knights – the one where Jesse Mirco took off on a fake punt, setting off a brouhaha between Ryan Day and former Buckeye assistant Greg Schiano – Ohio State won 49-10 in Ohio Stadium behind five touchdowns from Miyan Willaims and outstanding defensive play, including solid performances by linebackers Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg.

But one defender who struggled was Burke. "After missing Ohio State's 52-21 win over Wisconsin with a hand injury (the week before), sophomore Denzel Burke returned to his position as the No. 1 cornerback for the Buckeyes against the Scarlet Knights," Jack Emerson wrote in the Oct. 8, 2022, Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "However, it was more of the same for Burke, who has slumped out of the gate this season.

"Burke was beat on multiple occasions, most notably on Rutgers' lone touchdown strike. Facing a third-and-6 from the Ohio State 14-yard line, (quarterback Evan) Simon took the snap and immediately flipped his hips toward Burke and Rutgers wideout Sean Ryan. From there, Simon underthrew Ryan on a fade route, yet Ryan adjusted to the ball and caught it in front of Burke's face for the touchdown.

"Burke was beat by Ryan again during the Scarlet Knights' first drive of the second half. Burke lined up over Ryan as the nickelback prior to the snap, and despite producing tight coverage on Ryan, he lost sight of him as the ball arrived, allowing Ryan to high-point the ball and pick up a 26-yard gain."

I was clearly not impressed either. "In contrast to the performance of such players as Chambers and Eichenberg, there is the odd case of Denzel Burke," I wrote in this space two years ago. "As surprised as I was last season with his emergence as a stalwart at cornerback while only a freshman, I am even more surprised at his struggles this season.

"One thing working in Burke's favor is that with the paucity of healthy cornerbacks right now, chances are he is going to be given the opportunity to work his problems out on the field. *Whereas last season opponents were throwing away from him, I'm guessing teams this season will test Burke until he forces them to do otherwise.*" (my italics)

Sound familiar?

As a freshman in 2021, Burke had 36 tackles, eighth on the team, an interception with a

23-yard return for a touchdown and an impressive 12 pass breakups. In 2022, with his assorted struggles, he had 34 tackles in 11 games, good for fifth on the team, with three tackles for loss. However, he did not have an interception, and he had only five pass breakups.

Special Teams, Then And Now

As I have said previously, I have been enjoying Mark Rea's series on Ohio State football seasons ending in the number four. In this issue he looks at the 1954 season, and a great season it was, with the Buckeyes making it to the Rose Bowl, where they defeated USC and won the national championship, a title that probably saved Woody Hayes' job.

"Woody gave credit to that team many, many times over the years for saving his job," OSU football historian Jack Park said. "Woody had a lot of people who thought he wasn't up to the job. But that season and the way that team played was what allowed him to keep his job and establish Ohio State as one of the top college football programs in the nation."

If you read Mark's story, notice how many times Hop Cassady's name comes up as far as making big plays. He was obviously the real deal and went on to win the Heisman Trophy the next season. And Hop was making the big plays on both offense and defense.

I've always said there are two Buckeyes I wish I could have seen play – Hop Cassady and Chic Harley.

As I read through the story, I couldn't help but think about how far special teams play has come in the 70 years since (I can't believe it has been 70 years). In Ohio State's pivotal 21-7 victory over Michigan, the Wolverines hurt their cause with a missed 20-yard field goal, and Buckeye Hubert Bobo set up one of the most famous sequences in Ohio State football history when he punted a ball straight up in the air, giving Michigan the ball at the Buckeye 14.

However, Ohio State stopped the Wolverines with a famous goal-line stand and then marched all the way back the other way to take a 14-7 lead at the end of the third quarter after a drive just shy of 100 yards.

Gaffes in the kicking game still happen (think of Ohio State's upcoming opponent, Penn State, which won the 2016 contest with the Buckeyes on the strength of two blocked kicks), but with the introduction of soccer-style kickers and the influx of Australian punters, kicking miscues are less prevalent.

Speaking of which, current Buckeye punter Joe McGuire had one of his better games of the season against the Huskers. He averaged 47.0 yards on five kicks with a long of 61 and two inside the 20 at the 19 and the 13. Nebraska's average starting point after a McGuire punt was its own 28, a number inflated by his 36-yard kick to the Buckeye 42 when he was forced to kick from the shadow of his own end zone in the third quarter. A boomer there and his afternoon would have been pretty much perfect.

On the other hand, a quote from our, "A Look Back at Recruiting From the Pages of BSB" feature reminded me that Ohio State's punt return unit seems to have regressed. Peerless Price, a Dayton native who chose Tennessee over the Buckeyes back in the mid-'90s, told of enjoying punt returns.

"Punt returns are especially fun," Price said. "They're crazy, though. You have to field the ball and you see 11 guys coming at you. Make

a move here and there and you can make them look really bad."

It takes a special player to be comfortable seeing "11 guys coming at you." I thought the Buckeyes had found that guy in Brandon Inniss, who had four returns for 60 yards in the opener against Akron with a 27-yard return called back because of penalty. But since then, he has had just eight returns for 49 yards with none in the last two games. In fact, Caleb Downs had the only punt return against the Cornhuskers for 8 yards. Ohio State has dropped to 67th in the country on punt returns with an 8.4-yard average.

Mail Woes Continue

I will try to be a little briefer this issue.

The mail problems and the relentless phone calls from subscribers continue. We have been told by people within the post office that mail handlers and carriers are under tremendous pressure to move the election mail promptly, which is slowing down the delivery of other mail. When you consider that our mailing problems started around Labor Day, the traditional start of election season, this makes perfect sense. If that is indeed the case, we are hoping the problem corrects itself in just a matter of days.

In the meantime, we are aware that many of you are not receiving your paper in a timely fashion or are not receiving it at all.

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.

If you wait until your allotted day to call us, you will save yourself an extra phone call and eliminate a lot of the wear and tear on the BSB staff.

We are also asking that as many BSB subscribers as possible call the postal complaint number and maybe we will annoy them enough to have someone do something about the delivery. I was concerned that only a handful of subscribers had heeded our call to action until I realized that because of delivery delays, most people hadn't seen my suggestion.

The postal complaint number is (800) 275-8777. The process to make a complaint is tedious. You are put through a series of prompts. Just follow them. 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.

Don't forget to take advantage of the online edition of BSB, which is free to subscribers and posted immediately upon completion of each paper at BuckeyeSports.com, until your paper arrives. You can also upgrade your delivery to first-class mail in an envelope through the Michigan game for what is now only \$20. With Thanksgiving on the Thursday before The Game, even in the best of times many people who receive BSB by periodicals-class mail will not get their paper before kickoff.

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01



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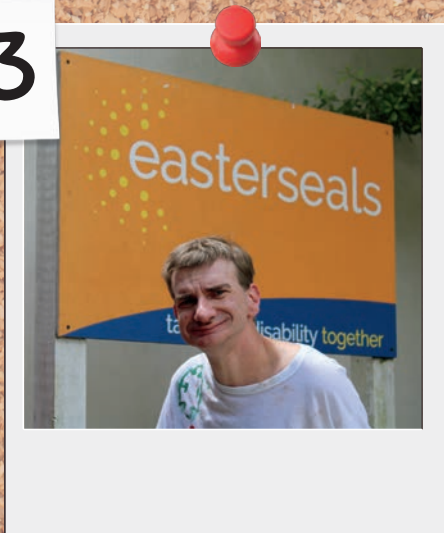
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02



03



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