

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 44, No. 8

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 9, 2024

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ryan Day has won a lot of games as head coach at Ohio State – 63 of them to be exact – but he might not have ever been more jubilant about one than he was after taking down No. 3 Penn State on Nov. 2 in front of a Beaver Stadium-record 111,030 fans.

After the 20-13 win, Day walked around the field with a giant smile spread across his face, hugging every Ohio State coach and player in sight to celebrate the big victory, embracing his offensive coordinator and mentor Chip Kelly as soon as he emerged from the tunnel and excitedly shaking him around before wrapping him up in another hug.

After the loss at Oregon on Oct. 12, there was a lot of talk about Day's ability to win "the big game" – specifically top-five matchups, in which the head coach had a 2-7 record coming into State College – and how he was leading one of the most talented teams in recent college football memory to an underwhelming season.

Like Day and most other head coaches normally do, he tried to ignore the outside noise and continue to push forward, but it was obvious after the game that the win against the Nittany Lions had a major impact on him, and he acknowledged that when he spoke to the media.

"There's probably a lot there to unpack and I'm not going to get into all of it, but there's a lot that goes into being the head coach at Ohio State," Day said. "You can say you ignore everything that goes on, but your players read it, your coaches read it, your staff members read it, your families read it, and you have to stay strong in those moments. But that entire team, our families, they all believed."

"To go do that, to accomplish that in this game, a top-five victory, it feels good right now. We still have a lot of football ahead of us, but right now it feels good. I'm proud of our team and I'm proud of our coaching staff."

That feeling extended to the entire team for many reasons. After losing to the Ducks, the game against the Nittany Lions had a lot riding on it, including a probable spot in the Big Ten Championship Game



Something to Prove

Day, Defense Lead No. 4 OSU To 20-13 Win Against No. 3 Penn State

SONNY BROCKWAY

LION TAMERS – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day (left) left Happy Valley with one of the biggest wins of his tenure, a 20-13 victory over Penn State. Among the offensive leaders was running back Quinshon Judkins (1), who rushed for 95 yards on 14 carries.

if the Buckeyes win their last four games of the regular season. Day and the players all felt as if it was an extremely important game for them.

"We were at a crossroads, and it was

a big game for us," Day said. "We didn't want to publicly say that, but we said that behind closed doors. This was a big game for us for a lot of reasons."

Had the game gone differently and Ohio State lost, the Nittany Lions would have had a leg up in the race to the conference title game, and with two losses there would be questions about whether the Buckeyes would even be able to make it into the College Football Playoff, despite the fact that each of those two losses would have been against top-five teams.

Assembling the expensive, superstar roster that marches out onto the field for the Buckeyes every Saturday might have been for nothing, at least as far as their three

main goals go. But now Ohio State controls its own destiny, and Day believes the way this season is unfolding is going to be good for the team as a whole down the road.

"Guys came back on this team for a reason – to win the rivalry game, win the Big Ten championship and win a national championship," Day reminded listeners. "Along the way, there was this conversation about the expectations and all of those types of things, and I said to the team, 'There's no great accomplishments that happen without going through adversity,' and that's the truth. You don't just walk into the season and think you're just

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State came away with a signature road victory on Nov. 2, defeating No. 3 Penn State 20-13 in front of a record Beaver Stadium crowd of 111,030 to put itself in a favorable position for a berth to the Big Ten Championship Game, improving to 7-1 on the season and 4-1 in the conference. Here are some choices from Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the win.

Patrick Engels, BSB: Ohio State's Jayden Fielding has experienced an up-and-down season so far – a year that is still highlighted by his kickoff gaffes against Marshall that caused him to be benched – but in the biggest game of the season to date against Penn State he played his best game.

Fielding hasn't had a lot of opportunities this season to make pressure-packed kicks, but that opportunity arose in the third quarter when the Buckeyes' drive stalled at the PSU 28-yard line after Will Howard was sacked by Penn State linebacker Kobe King on third down. This required Fielding to line up for a tough 46-yarder in front of a raucous Penn State student section, which he drilled with ease to give the Buckeyes the 17-10 lead.

If Fielding missed that field goal, it would have given Penn State and its crowd some much-needed momentum heading into the fourth quarter. Instead, he only extended the Buckeyes' lead and did it again a few drives later on a 39-yarder to put them up 20-13.

Fielding also did not boot any of his five kickoffs out of bounds, which is always a plus.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: Ohio State junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun turned a bad drive into a great one when he made a potentially game-saving interception in the end zone at the end of the first half. Igbinosun's outstanding interception is the primary reason for my Buckeye Leaf, as he ripped the ball from Penn State receiver Harrison Wallace III in the end zone to turn what could've been a 17-14 halftime deficit into a 14-10 lead.

Igbinosun committed a defensive holding penalty and gave up a reception on the previous play that put the Buckeyes' backs against the wall. The spectacular interception in the end zone completely redeemed his previous slip-up and allowed the Buckeyes to carry a four-point lead into halftime.

In the first quarter, Igbinosun made a similarly important stop on third-and-2 when he was left one-on-one with Penn State receiver Liam Clifford. Nittany Lion quarterback Drew Allar lobbed a decent pass to Clifford, but Igbinosun made a key pass breakup to get the Lions off the field.

Igbinosun finished the game with four tackles and one pass breakup along with his interception.

Cameron Moone, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf will go to running

back Quinshon Judkins, the hammer to the nail in Penn State's coffin in Ohio State's 20-13 win.

The former Ole Miss ball carrier had a somewhat quiet first half, totaling eight carries for 47 yards, but stamped his name into Ohio State lore with his superb play in the Buckeyes' final drive of the game, notching 32 yards on four carries.

Judkins had three straight runs during the stretch, including a long of 15 yards that moved the ball from the OSU 20 to the 35 – an emphatic scamper that would be a piece to Ohio State running the clock out on the Nittany Lions to capture a top-five road victory.

Finishing the day with 14 carries for 95 yards – good for 6.8 yards per carry – Judkins now sits with 615 yards on 95 attempts with seven touchdowns (one receiving).

Greg Wilson, BSB: After what might have been his strongest game as a Buckeye against Nebraska on Oct. 26, Cody Simon responded against Penn State with another impressive showing. In a game that had the Ohio State defense give up just six points, Simon was a big part of making stops throughout the entire 60 minutes.

He delivered in a big way when the Buckeyes were up by just four points late in the third quarter. Needing a big stop after the Nittany Lions got themselves into good field position via a punt return, Simon led the charge on a second-and-8 play, splitting the offensive line and taking quarterback Drew Allar down for a 9-yard sack.

He also had an ever-important stop on the Nittany Lions' last drive of the game when the Buckeyes allowed them to get down to the OSU 3-yard line in the fourth quarter. Simon set the tone inside the 5 with the first stop of that series, combining with Lathan Ransom to take down running back Kaytron Allen for no gain, a drive that would end up with Ohio State keeping Penn State out of the end zone.

Simon finished the game with a team-leading 10 tackles (five solo) and the sack that came at an important point of the game for Ohio State. He has now been able to put together two straight good games and could be taking the next step to becoming exactly what the OSU defense needs in the middle of its unit.

BSB Subscribers:

Bob Cody: I'm giving my Buckeye Leaves to the revamped offensive line, the coaching staff, the ENTIRE DEFENSE – especially Cody Simon and Davison Igbinosun – and Will Howard, a true leader who overcame his own in-game adversity. And a leaf to the Columbus radio pregame crew – Tim May, Andy Katzenmoyer and Anthony Rothman, who unlike the print media "experts," including BSB, picked the Buckeyes to notch win No. 8 in a row over PSU!

John Lanning: I've been hard on the defense over the past year. Today you are a MAN. Great job. Everyone did their job. And all is good. This was a team win if I ever saw one.

Otis Johnson: Justin Frye. I've been as critical of him as anyone, but I'll always give credit when due. We lost two left tackles in two games and still managed to field a unit that actually dominated. That doesn't happen in one week. That comes from preparation and development throughout the season.

Even though we'll be losing four starters from this year's line at the end of the season, I'm now excited about next year's group.

R1TBDBITL: The O-line. Besides the push they had all day long, did they even have one false start?

Terrier Buck: Jelani Thurman is likely to be overlooked, but his fourth-down catch in the first half was huge.

Byron McNutt: It seems every player and coach contributed to this victory. It is hard to single out just three. While it wasn't perfect, the players were focused. They faced adversity a number of times but still executed. They handled the record crowd noise and didn't have any false starts or motion penalties. The defense made stops and was prepared for the Penn State trick formations. When was the last time you saw the offense hold the ball for 5:13 at the end of the game?

It was a team victory in a hostile environment. Therefore, everyone gets a Buckeye Leaf. The win takes a weight off their shoulders and gives them confidence. It was great to see them celebrate together and with the Buckeye Nation fans in attendance.

BuckeyeScott: I think we should give some Buckeye Leaves to those brave fans who took on the trip to Happy Valley and rooted the Buckeyes to victory. They were a small but mighty contingent of scarlet and gray faithful who were pushed into the extreme edges of Beaver Stadium but did not back down and made their presence known. "WE ARE; HAPPY!" "WE ARE; HAPPY!" WE ARE; HAPPY!"

Tiffin Buckeye: Caleb Downs, Quinshon Judkins, the entire O-Line! And Jayden Fielding.

PeyoteBuck: Judkins gets mine. He was a steady work horse plowing through the Lions. He was quiet and efficient.

Mcarr: At first I was going to say everyone on the offensive line. But I'm going to go all in and say everyone on the team, from the coaches right down to the ball boy. Great win. It wasn't always pretty, but a great win.

Poster That Harley Built: How about somebody a little more obscure. Jayden Fielding. He takes as much criticism as Jim Knowles, and frequently rightfully so. But he nailed both of his field goals. Take those away and it's 14-13 and Penn State can win with a field goal. That changes the complexion of the whole game.

Ohio State seemed to get its 2024 season back on track following its signature win over No. 3 Penn State in Happy Valley on Saturday, but the Buckeyes' year is still far from a finished product with four more regular-season games left and a potentially long postseason to follow. We asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what they think is the next step Ohio State needs to take in order for it to best position itself for a potentially special finish to the year, as well as what they believe is the biggest strength and biggest weakness of the team through the first eight games of the season.

"Finish strong and keep fighting. Use the next two weeks to build for the last two."

–Tiffin Buckeye

"Use the next two games to keep building the new-look offensive line so it will be humming the way it was before Josh Simmons went down when we get to upstart Indiana and TSUN. As for weaknesses, I'd still like to see more pressure on the opposing quarterback. As far as strengths, there are so many,

but after watching the last quarter of the Nebraska game and the entire Penn State game, I am going to say, first and foremost, 'grit.' And the grittiest is Will Howard."

– Mcarr

"We have run the gauntlet and survived. But an upstart sits in our way...Indiana. Don't dismiss the Hoosiers and look ahead. TTUN will still be there. One game at a time."

– John Lanning

"The next step is to beat the next team on the schedule. One game at a time and grind it out. I believe the greatest strength of this Buckeye team appears to be the team playing as a team. In other words, someone different steps up when needed.

It's not just always the same player making all the plays. As far as the greatest weakness, it's miscues; penalties and turnovers. They need to play clean and take care of the ball if they want this to be that special

season."

– BuckeyeScott

"Play one game at a time. There were many upsets and scares in yesterday's slate of games."

– R1TBDBITL

"Momentum. They made big steps against the Lions, on foreign turf no less. They need to build on that and move forward."

– PeyoteBuck

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2024-25 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 44)

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| No. 12 | Dec. 7 | No. 24 | August |

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Critics Silenced – At Least For Now

Everything is sunshine and roses again throughout Buckeye Nation because the so-called World-Famous Ohio State Buckeyes did what their ever-increasing number of critics believed they could not do.

The Buckeyes went into the belly of the beast Nov. 2 and brought home an extremely hard-earned 20-13 victory against No. 3 Penn State in front of a record Beaver Stadium crowd of 111,030.

The last time the team went on the road to take on a top-five opponent resulted in a disappointing 32-31 loss at Oregon, a defeat that triggered a cacophony of criticism of a team that was supposed to march unabated to a national championship. But as that defeat had disapproving fingers pointing in several different directions, the victory in Happy Valley was a total team effort by players, coaches and units who have had their mettle tested since returning from Eugene.

Transfer quarterback Will Howard went back to his home state and notched his first signature victory as a Buckeye, overcoming two glaring mistakes to do it.

A defensive line that hadn't come close to its preseason star-studded billing came up with a crucial second-half, goal-line stand for second week in a row.

A cobbled-together offensive line, with a two-time All-Big Ten guard starting his first game at tackle and a former starting center filling in at guard, closed out the game with physicality, allowing a stagnant running attack to bull its way out from its own 1-yard line in the final five-plus minutes to put away the victory.

And head coach Ryan Day got the monkey off his back – at least temporarily – with a big-time, regular-season victory on the road against a top-five opponent for the first time in his head-coaching career. The Buckeyes hadn't gone on the road to knock off a top-five opponent during the regular season since a 24-7 win at No. 2 Texas in 2006.

There had been a lot made about Howard's homecoming to a place where he wanted to play his college ball, a place that apparently wasn't interested in him. And during a ragged first half, it looked like Penn State had made the right choice.

Howard's first pass attempt of the afternoon was perhaps his laziest in an Ohio State uniform, a telegraphed throw that was easily jumped by Nittany Lions defensive back Zion Tracy, who turned it into a 31-yard interception return for a touchdown. The pick-six left the Buckeyes in an early 10-0 hole with that record crowd screaming for scarlet and gray blood.

Howard quickly got his team out of that hole, however, leading the Buckeyes to touchdowns on their next two possessions to grab a 14-10 lead. But Ohio State missed an opportunity to put a stranglehold on the proceedings when Howard lost a fumble as he was racing for the end zone, the loose ball flying over the goal-line pylon for a touchback.

In the second half, though, when his team needed him most, Howard rose to the occasion. In addition to completing 6 of 9 attempts for 64 yards, he rushed for two first downs on the final possession, including the game-clinching, 7-yard keeper on a third-and-3 play with the clock winding under a minute and Penn State out of timeouts.

Howard's final run put the capper on a textbook example of how to close out a victory.

After the defense had come up with a goal-line stand, stopping the Nittany Lions after they had first-and-goal at the 3-yard line, the offense chewed up the final 5:13 of the game with the kind of solid running attack that had gone largely MIA since a 203-yard effort in early October against Iowa.

Veteran left guard Donovan Jackson, a first-team All-Big Ten performer during each of the past two seasons, made his first-ever start at the left tackle position vacated by injuries to starter Josh Simmons and backup Zan Michalski. In Jackson's guard spot was Carson Hinzman, who started all 12 regular-season games at center last season.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

There were a few early hiccups, and Howard was sacked a season-high three times. But by the time the game had reached crunch time, the Buckeyes leaned on the offensive line, and it responded like it had been playing together for years. OSU gained 78 of its 176 rushing yards in the fourth quarter, including 58 of that total on the final drive.

Of course, that drive would never have been possible without the goal-line stand that preceded it, the second game in a row the Ohio State had come up big when it mattered most.

The week before, the Buckeyes stuffed Nebraska on fourth down at the 2-yard line in the third quarter. But that was against a team ranked 14th in rushing and 11th in scoring in the expanded Big Ten. This time, it was against Penn State that entered the game as the conference's No. 3 rushing offense and No. 4 scoring offense.

And it came with sophomore Kayden McDonald filling in at one of the defensive tackle spots for a hobbled Tyleik Williams.

The meaning of getting the victory certainly wasn't lost on Day, who probably hadn't allowed himself such a wide smile since, well, maybe since the 49-28 win against Clemson in the 2020 College Football Playoff semifinal.

"We were at a crossroads," Day admitted, "(but) all of our goals are in front of us now."

Maybe Ohio State goes on to win the national championship and maybe it doesn't. There are a lot of hurdles remaining between now and the end of the season. But if a championship is truly in the cards for 2024, the Buckeyes need look back only at the signature win at Penn State to find where the title march actually started.

Two More Standouts

In addition to all of the aforementioned plays, there were two others – both on defense, and made by players of whom I have been more than critical in the past – that deserve recognition.

The first came at the end of the first half when cornerback Davison Igbinosun made a spectacular interception in the end zone to keep Penn State from a late score. Igbinosun seems to me like a walking advertisement for pass interference much of the time, but his play on Penn State receiver Harrison Wallace III – with Wallace grabbing the OSU defensive back's face mask, no less – helped keep the Buckeyes in front at 14-10 heading to halftime.

The second came late in the third quarter with Ohio State clinging to a 17-13 advantage. The Nittany Lions had just crossed midfield when OSU defensive coordinator Jim Knowles finally decided to dial up the pressure on Penn State quarterback Drew Allar.

Allar, who was a game-time decision because of a knee injury, had to that point in the game been able to gash the Ohio State defense with six scrambles totaling 40 yards, including

three for first downs. Just as importantly, the OSU pass rush had been unable to make Allar uncomfortable in the pocket.

But on a second-and-8 play at the Ohio State 47, linebacker Cody Simon came free on a delayed blitz and sacked Allar for a 9-yard loss. Simon had racked up a bunch of tackles this season, but there have been times when he seems to be chasing opposing ball-carriers rather than engaging them. Not on this one, though. Simon ran right through Allar and dropped him on his backside.

It was a play that so fired up the Buckeyes that defensive ends Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and JT Tuimoloau shared a sack on the next play, forcing the Nittany Lions to punt.

After that, Penn State got only one fourth-quarter possession – the one that ended in being denied at the goal line.

Money, Money, Money

Not a fan of big games at noon? Tough.

They aren't going anywhere as long as the money train keeps chugging along.

Mike Mulvihill, whose title is president of insights and analytics for the Fox Sports Network, understands marquee games played at noon might not be popular with those in actual attendance, but the revenue networks can reap from national telecasts means the early Saturday kickoffs are here to stay.

"It's our job to put the schools that we're partners with in front of as many people as possible," Mulvihill told The Athletic on Oct. 31. "If we can provide our schools as much exposure as possible, that should not just benefit Fox, but that should benefit those programs. What we've found over the last six years is that it's very clear that putting our best game on at noon is what delivers the biggest audiences for these games."

Fox discovered that the Penn State-Ohio State matchup in 2022, which was the network's "Big Noon" game the last time the Buckeyes visited State College, performed about one-third better ratings-wise than a game aired in prime time.

"There's a belief that prime time is somehow inherently better," Mulvihill said, "but that's not really matched up by the analysis."

Mulvihill added that he understands the desire of students and fans who want to sleep in before diving into the game in prime time. But ratings and television money are still king.

"I think there's a less vocal part of the fan base that appreciates the daytime starts because we've heard from coaches and ADs throughout the conference that they like the logistics of the daytime starts," Mulvihill said. "When you play a night game on the road, your team may not get home until 3 o'clock in the morning."

The other piece to the puzzle is advertising money, especially this year. As fans at home settled in to watch the game, viewers in Ohio and Pennsylvania – two key states in the U.S. presidential election – were bombarded with campaign ads during commercials. I lost count early in the second half when the ads were divided at six each for Donald Trump and Kamala Harris.

"The election piece was absolutely part of it," Mulvihill said, admitting that money is a driving force in how his network schedules its sports programming. "I'm sure there's fatigue around campaign advertising in Pennsylvania because it might be the most important state in the election, but we did take that pretty seriously. The game is three days out from Election Day, and we knew it would be one of the biggest games of the season, so we wanted to capitalize on that advertising opportunity."



OSU Moves Up To No. 3 In AP Poll

Following its statement 20-13 road victory at Penn State, Ohio State moved up one spot to No. 3 in the latest AP top 25 rankings released on Nov. 3.

This is the highest Ohio State has been ranked since its Oct. 12 loss to Oregon, which is ranked No. 1 in the poll for the third straight week, receiving all 62 first-place votes. In between the two Big Ten foes is No. 2 Georgia, which scored 14 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to get past unranked Florida with a 34-20 victory.

Rounding out the top five are No. 4 Miami (Fla.) and No. 5 Texas, each moving up one spot in the rankings following the Hurricanes' 53-31 win over Duke and the Longhorns' off week.

Texas moves back into the top five in large part due to Penn State's loss, which caused the Nittany Lions to drop three spots to No. 6. But while one team in the Big Ten dropped in the rankings, another one shot up, with Indiana moving up five spots from No. 13 to No. 8 – just behind Tennessee – after its convincing 47-10 win at Michigan State. The 9-0 Hoosiers are off to their best start in program history and are ranked within the top 10 for the first time since November 2020.

Joining Indiana in the top 10 entering Week 11 are No. 9 BYU, which did not move after its off week, and No. 10 Notre Dame, which fell two spots following its off week.

The top 25 featured some high risers, none more than No. 13 SMU. The Mustangs jumped up seven spots from No. 20 following their blowout 48-25 home win over now-No. 23 Pittsburgh. With the win, SMU has positioned itself well for a potential ACC regular-season championship, especially following Clemson's surprising 33-21 loss to previously unranked Louisville at home.

The Tigers' loss dropped Dabo Swinney's team down eight spots to No. 19, while it also brought Louisville back into the top 25 at No. 25 after previously falling out in September.

The Jeff Brohm-led Cardinals are one of two newcomers in this week's poll, join-

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

| Date | Opponent | Result/Time (ET) | TV | Record, Last Result |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|---------|--------------------------------------|
| Aug. 31 | AKRON | W, 52-6 | CBS | 2-7, 41-30 loss to Buffalo |
| Sept. 7 | WESTERN MICHIGAN | W, 56-0 | BTN | 5-3, idle |
| Sept. 21 | MARSHALL | W, 49-14 | FOX | 5-3, 28-23 win over La.-Monroe |
| Sept. 28 | at Michigan State | W, 38-7 | Peacock | 4-5, 47-10 loss to Indiana |
| Oct. 5 | IOWA | W, 35-7 | CBS | 6-3, 42-10 win over Wisconsin |
| Oct. 12 | at Oregon | L, 32-31 | NBC | 9-0, 38-17 win over Michigan |
| Oct. 26 | NEBRASKA | W, 21-17 | FOX | 5-4, 27-20 loss to UCLA |
| Nov. 2 | at Penn State | Noon | FOX | 7-1, 20-13 loss to Ohio State |
| Nov. 9 | PURDUE | Noon | FOX | 1-7, 26-20 (OT) loss to Northwestern |
| Nov. 16 | at Northwestern | TBA | TBA | 4-5, 26-20 (OT) win over Purdue |
| Nov. 23 | INDIANA | TBA | TBA | 9-0, 47-10 win over Michigan State |
| Nov. 30 | MICHIGAN | Noon | FOX | 5-4, 38-17 loss to Oregon |

ing No. 24 Vanderbilt, which is back in the rankings after a brief one-week hiatus following its 17-7 win at Auburn.

After BSB went to press, the College Football Playoff selection committee was scheduled to reveal its inaugural top 25 rankings of the 2024 season, allowing fans to get their first glimpse at the new 12-team playoff bracket. The rankings were set to be released live on ESPN on Nov. 5 at 7 p.m.

Michalski, Kacmarek Out, Williams Injured At PSU

Ohio State was without a pair of key offensive contributors in its win against Penn State, with tight end Will Kacmarek and

offensive lineman Zen Michalski among the five Buckeyes listed as inactive prior to kickoff in State College, Pa.

Michalski's injury status was perhaps the most significant. The redshirt junior had been named the team's starting left tackle for the remainder of the season following the season-ending knee injury to Josh Simmons against Oregon, but a lower-body injury he suffered himself at the end of the Nebraska game kept him out of the top-four matchup with the Nittany Lions.

With Michalski out, Ohio State had to mix and match on the offensive line, sliding veteran left guard Donovan Jackson to left tackle and inserting redshirt sophomore

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.

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Former OSU Lineman, Fullback Pass Away

BSB has learned about a pair of recent passings of former Ohio State football players.

Jim Kregel, a three-year starter for Ohio State at offensive guard from 1971-73, passed away Oct. 3 at his home near Toledo at the age of 72.

Kregel was an All-Ohio guard out of Woodward High School in Toledo before playing for the Buckeyes. He was the starting left guard on lines that featured such All-Americans as Kurt Schumacher and John Hicks, and he blocked for the likes of Archie Griffin, Cornelius Greene, Brian Baschnagel and Champ Henson.

Kregel earned first-team All-Big Ten honors in 1973, helping the team to a 10-0-1 finish that culminated in a 42-21 win against USC in the Rose Bowl. The Buckeyes outscored their opponents that season by a 413-64 margin.

Kregel went on to play for the Birmingham franchise in the old World Football League.

Will Sander, who led the Buckeyes in rushing during the 1964 season, passed away Sept. 30 in Roanoke, Va. He was 80.



Will Sander

Sander was a two-year starter for OSU at fullback following an All-Ohio prep career as a running back and defensive end at McNicholas High School in Cincinnati. He is a member of the McNicholas Athletic Hall of Fame.

He rushed for 1,299 yards and 16 TDs for the Buckeyes, totals that at the time ranked among the program's all-time top 10.

After college, he worked for General Electric as an industrial engineer for more than 35 years. According to Sander's obituary, he also "spent countless hours during his free time coaching and refereeing little league and high school basketball and baseball games, fostering a love for sports in the next generation."

— Mark Rea

Carson Hinzman at left guard for his first start of the season. That plan proved successful against the Nittany Lions, where the new-look front five helped set the tone for the Buckeye offense all game, allowing them to rush for 176 yards on 40 carries, though they did let up three sacks.

Kacmarek has been absent from Ohio State's lineup ever since going down with an injury after his first-quarter catch against Oregon, and there is no timetable for his return. The Buckeyes received production from a number of Kacmarek's teammates against the Nittany Lions both in the running and passing game, none more than redshirt freshman Jelani Thurman, who had a 19-yard catch on a fourth-and-1 during the second quarter.

But while the Buckeyes were without the services of two key offensive players, they did return a key defensive starter in safety Lathan Ransom, who was inserted back into the lineup after missing just the Nebraska game with a foot ailment he suffered in practice. The fifth-year safety made

his presence felt in the win, recording seven tackles and a pass breakup.

Ohio State did not leave Beaver Stadium unscathed, though, as star defensive tackle Tyleik Williams went down with an ankle injury in the fourth quarter that caused him to miss the rest of the game. Williams, who had previously missed the Marshall game with an undisclosed injury, appeared to tweak his ankle after a group of Nittany Lions offensive linemen and Ohio State defensive linemen rolled up on his leg.

Head coach Ryan Day did not seem too worried about the health of his All-Big Ten senior after the game, however.

"He was fine," Day said when asked about Williams' status. "I just grabbed him (in the locker room). He said he was fine."

Three Freshmen Added To Travel Roster

A trio of freshmen made their first road trip of their respective collegiate careers on Nov. 2 when tight end Max LeBlanc

and offensive linemen Ian Moore and Gabe VanSickle were each added to Ohio State's travel roster for Penn State. They were added due to the injuries to Kacmarek, Michalski and Simmons.

LeBlanc and VanSickle made their first road trips not long after losing their black stripes, with LeBlanc shedding his on Oct. 17 and VanSickle Oct. 23, respectively. Moore, a four-star prospect out of New Palestine, Ind., lost his black stripe in the middle of fall camp on Aug. 15.

Those three help make up a group of 12 freshmen who traveled to State College, Pa., which also included running backs Sam Williams-Dixon and James Peoples, wide receivers Mylan Graham and Jeremiah Smith, defensive end Eddrick Houston, linebacker Payton Pierce, quarterback Julian Sayin, cornerback Aaron Scott and safety Jaylen McClain.

With the game being so tightly contested, only three first years – Houston, Smith and McClain – entered the game, with only Smith appearing in the stat sheets with a

team-high four catches for 55 yards.

The only other Buckeye who made the travel roster for the first time this season was senior Max Lomonico, who replaced Collin Johnson as Ohio State's backup long snapper.

16 NFL Teams On Hand For OSU-PSU

Ohio State's marquee matchup with No. 3 Penn State had a number of players on each roster who are bound to play at the next level, and that was made evident when 24 NFL scouts representing 16 teams were on hand to take in the top-four matchup.

The Washington Commanders had the most scouts taking in the game with four, while the New York Giants were next with three, followed by the Baltimore Ravens, Carolina Panthers and Houston Texans with two.

Ten teams sent just one scout to State College, including the Chicago Bears, Cincinnati Bengals, Denver Broncos, the Super Bowl-winning Kansas City Chiefs, the Las Vegas Raiders, Los Angeles Rams, Miami Dolphins, New York Jets, Pittsburgh Steelers and Tennessee Titans.

The Buckeyes' game against Penn State featured a plethora of future NFL talent. Ohio State has multiple players who are projected to go in the early rounds of next year's NFL draft this spring, including cornerback Denzel Burke, wideout Emeka Egbuka and defensive linemen Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau and Williams, each of whom contributed in the win.

Penn State has a number of pro-ready prospects itself, including quarterback Drew Allar, running backs Kaytron Allen and Nick Singleton, defensive end Abdul Carter and safety Jaylen Reed.

Meyer Impressed With OSU After Win At PSU

Former Ohio State coach and current Fox Sports analyst Urban Meyer had high praise for the Buckeyes after their win over

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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Penn State. On Fox's postgame coverage, Meyer compared the win to some of Day's other achievements as the head coach of Ohio State.

"This is one of the most impressive wins in the Ryan Day era," Meyer said.

Ohio State's coach from 2012-18 was specifically impressed by the Buckeyes' run game against Penn State, after they totaled 176 yards on the ground on 40 carries for an average of 4.4 yards per tote.

It wasn't always pretty for the Buckeyes on the ground, as they went for 53 yards on 18 carries combined in the second and third quarters, but they came through when it mattered, with a 58-yard game-sealing drive, which ate up the remaining 5:13 on the clock. The drive started at Ohio State's 1-yard line and featured only run plays, with Ohio State picking up four first downs.

"You get questioned about your toughness. You get questioned about your offensive line," Meyer said. "All you have to do is show a 58-yard drive, 11 straight runs against a Penn State team in this stadium to close out a game. Their toughness was there. The offensive line, to me, won this football game."

Purdue Set For "Big Noon Kickoff"

The game time for Ohio State's matchup against Purdue on Nov. 9 was revealed shortly after the win over Penn State.

After four Week 11 Big Ten game times were held back earlier in the week as part of a six-day selection process, the confer-

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 \$26, will be just \$16, 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.

ence announced that the Buckeyes are slated for another "Big Noon Kickoff" on FOX in Columbus against the 1-7 Boilermakers.

It will be the third straight week Ohio State will be playing in the main noon slot

on FOX, with its last two games against Nebraska and Penn State also being televised on the network at that time. Ohio State's Sept. 21 home game with Marshall was also a "Big Noon Kickoff."

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

The Buckeyes had their best shot at the Rose Bowl since 1980, and Earle Bruce was making every effort to ensure they did not let the chance slip away.

The events of Oct. 20 moved Ohio State into the position of being able to decide its own fate. Ohio State's win over Michigan State, combined with Iowa's shutout of Michigan and Illinois' win over Purdue, made the race simple.

Iowa and Ohio State stood on top of the standings with 4-1 league records. If both Ohio State and Iowa won the rest of their games, the Buckeyes would go to the Rose Bowl because of their 45-26 victory over the Hawkeyes — simple as that.

Left on the slate were Wisconsin (4-3, 2-3), Indiana (0-7, 0-5), Northwestern (2-6, 2-4) and Michigan (5-3, 3-2). Ohio State would be the favorite in all of those games, as it had been in every game that year. Its job was to go out and win them.

35 Years Ago — 1989

Cut this one out and put it in the scrapbook.

Ohio State's electrifying resurrection from the dead against Minnesota on Oct. 28 ranked right up there with the 1935 game against Notre Dame, the 1969 Rose Bowl, Archie Griffin's first game, the time Art Schlichter and Dave Wilson combined to pass for 10 TDs and almost 1,000 yards and Keith Byars' five-touchdown performance against Illinois.

The Buckeyes made every mistake in the book in the first half against the Gophers, falling into a 31-0 hole with 4:29 left in the second quarter.

But the team that had its character questioned time after time during the 1989 season peeled itself off the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome carpet and made the second-biggest comeback in major-college football history.

It was Ohio State's biggest comeback ever, surpassing the 24-point deficit the Buckeyes had wiped out in a 45-38 victory over Illinois in 1984. That was the game in which Byars scored five TDs.

30 Years Ago — 1994

Imagine being a freshly scrubbed 18-year-old kid, just thrown out of the nest for a new home at a sprawling university, one that might be larger than your hometown.

That, in itself, might make the noggin do a few turns. But when you add in the news that "you're going to be playing Big Ten football this year," well, making like a cartoon animal — eyes bugging out, chin trembling, the works — would not be entirely unexpected.

This was how things went for true freshmen sometimes, and at Ohio State, five had gone through this potentially life-changing experience.

However, the contributions had been anything but small.

Offensive tackle Orlando Pace, guard and center Eric Gohlstein and offensive guard-turned-defensive tackle Winfield Garnett joined running backs Pepe Pearson and Jermon Jackson in the Buckeyes "Baby Brigade" in the fall.

"They have all done a good job for us," OSU offensive coordinator Joe Hollis said. "We had some questions coming into the season about the offensive line, but Orlando and Eric have helped us out."

25 Years Ago — 1999

In recent weeks, Austin Moherman had become the forgotten Buckeye.

Sure, he still traveled with the team, and he had suited up for all of OSU's games. But except for one play against Penn State, Moherman had hardly seen the field since Steve Bellisari wrestled the starting job away from him with a strong performance in OSU's second game, a Sept. 11 win over UCLA.

That all changed on Oct. 23 in a 20-17 win at Minnesota, when Moherman was summoned in the second half after Bellisari and the OSU offense couldn't get anything going.

Moherman immediately helped OSU go on a scoring drive to take the lead, although his fumble later in the half paved the way for a Gophers touchdown as well.

"We've talked off and on about that," head coach John Cooper said regarding the quarterback switch. "Steve just needs to settle down. We were taking too many negative plays. We figured, 'Hey, let's make a change here and see what happens.'"

20 Years Ago — 2004

Ohio State senior co-captain Lydell Ross was suspended from the team on Oct. 22 following an incident at a Columbus nightclub the day after the team lost at Iowa. Ross was not allowed to dress for the homecoming game against Indiana on Oct. 23 and was not seen on the sidelines.

He was suspended after managers of the Pure Platinum strip club in northern Columbus filed a complaint with police alleging that Ross passed fake money to a female dancer sometime after midnight on Oct. 17.

The club manager told reporters that Ross admitted to using the fake bills from the club's in-house currency system and said that the phony money was given to him. The manager, who intimidated one Columbus television station that Ross was a frequent visitor to the club, filed the complaint only after the tailback would not say who gave him the fake money.

15 Years Ago — 2009

Terelle Pryor proved to be a prophet, at least for one autumn Saturday in Ohio Stadium as No. 18 Ohio State crushed Minnesota 38-7 on Oct. 24 on homecoming.

The Ohio State quarterback had endured a personal nightmare of a game one week earlier in an upset loss at Purdue then had to hear from a chorus of critics that included reporters on both the local and national scene, a vocal faction of his team's disgruntled fans and delighted backers of other teams around the country. But he looked and talked like a new man as the Buckeyes prepared for the Golden Gophers to come to town, and he said he intended to play like one, too.

"I've just been calm this week," he said. "I feel real calm. When I started relaxing this week, everything came with me, and now I'm just taking what the defense gives me, and eventually, it's going to lead to big plays and maybe we can put together some drives and get this thing going again."

With 239 yards passing and 104 rushing against the Golden Gophers, Pryor delivered the type of performance college football followers had been awaiting since his breakout game against an overmatched Toledo squad roughly a month earlier, and no one was happier than his teammates to see him follow his worst Big Ten game with his best.

10 Years Ago — 2014

The Buckeyes came in at No. 16 in the first-ever College Football Playoff committee rankings released on Oct. 28. Rankings factoring results on Nov. 1 would not be released until Nov. 4.

The rankings, decided by a 12-member selection committee made up mostly of current and former college administrators, were released in a half-hour show on ESPN with Mississippi State claiming the top spot.

The committee was directed to emphasize team records, strength of schedule, conference championships won, head-to-head results and results against common opponents. It appeared the committee emphasized wins against quality opponents in its initial rankings, and committee chair Jeff Long said the Buckeyes would have a chance to move up as the season progressed.

"I wouldn't call (the Virginia Tech loss) an albatross, but it was not a good loss," said Long, who was Arkansas' director of athletics. "Ohio State has opportunities on its schedule to play up, as many of these teams do. We're still early in the process. While I wouldn't get that excited about Ohio State's placement, we do think that based on the other teams they have played to this point, this is where they deserve to be ranked."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Ohio State true freshman Dawand Jones had turned heads during the 2019 season because of his whopping 6-8, 360-pound frame. It was his play on the field against Northwestern that had drawn attention most recently, however, as he cleared a massive hole on Master Teague's 73-yard touchdown run. The Indiana native was expected to be a bit of a project and had been an assumed redshirt candidate for months. In a press conference on Oct. 22, head coach Ryan Day spoke to the contrary on that assumption.

"He'll probably go more than four (games) just because he is very talented," Day said of Jones. "We want to get him in some of these games when we can. His ceiling is very high. We want his development to continue."

"We're going to play him if it makes sense. We also don't want to be foolish."

One Year Ago — 2023

The Mount Rushmore of Ohio State wide receivers was often debated, but the general list included the likes of David Boston, Cris Carter, Chris Olave and Santonio Holmes, among some other difficult choices. But after the 2023 season, it might have been time to get the chisel out.

In Ohio State's 24-10 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 28, Marvin Harrison Jr. not only cemented himself among the greatest receivers to come through Columbus, but he continued to build upon his blossoming campaign for the Heisman Trophy, an accomplishment that was becoming more and more probable with each passing week.

There were those who didn't believe that Harrison could win the Heisman, becoming the first receiver since Alabama's DeVonta Smith in 2020 and just the sixth all-time to do so. But Day wasn't one of them.

"I say it every week, he's just tremendous," Day said after the win. "I believe he's the best football player in the country."

Harrison finished the game with 6 catches for 123 yards and two touchdowns.



SCOTT STUART

UPON FURTHER REVIEW — A targeting call on linebacker Arvell Reese late in the game vs. Nebraska was overturned after Ohio State filed an appeal to the Big Ten Conference. Reese was originally suspended for the first half against Penn State, but his eligibility was restored.

It will also be the 60th all-time matchup between Ohio State and Purdue, with the Buckeyes holding a convincing 42-15-2 record over their longtime Big Ten foes.

Big Ten Reverses Targeting Call

After its 21-17 win over Nebraska on Oct. 26, Ohio State filed an appeal to the Big Ten Conference regarding linebacker Arvell Reese's ejection for targeting late in the fourth quarter, which resulted in the conference reversing the call.

On the Cornhuskers' last offensive drive of the game, wide receiver Jahmal Banks made a catch and was hit by Reese, knocking the ball out of his grasp to the turf where the Buckeyes would recover it. After a video review of the play, officials ruled that not only was it an incomplete pass and not a fumble but also targeting, leading Day to become incredulous with the officials and fans to start throwing bottles onto the field.

After Ohio State appealed the call a few days later, the conference went to the NCAA Football Secretary Rules Editor and after review, the call that was made on the field was reversed on Oct. 28. Day commented on the play the next day when he met with the media at his weekly press conference, saying that he believed when Banks was ruled to have caught the ball, he was no longer a defenseless player, but a ball carrier.

"Without getting into details of all the conversation, it's very difficult to try to coach these players on what exactly to do in that situation," he said. "And so I think what Arvell did in that situation is about what we'd expect someone to do and react in that moment right there trying to go win the game with the game on the line. I believe he keeps his head out of the tackle.

"Now, I give the league credit. I think the easiest thing to do would have been

just to say no, but they did at least stand up and say, 'No, that should not have been targeting in that moment.' "

Because of the reversal of the call, Reese – who originally was suspended for the first half of the Penn State game due to his hit occurring after halftime – was available for the entire win over the Nittany Lions. He didn't contribute on the stat sheet with any stops but did play 17 snaps in the win.

So far this season, Reese has 19 tackles (two for loss) and has been an important part of the Ohio State defense as the third linebacker in the lineup behind Cody Simon and Sonny Styles.

Day Wants More D-Line Rotation

Ohio State's defensive line has not quite lived up to the expectations bestowed upon them before the season. With highly talented pass rushers like Sawyer and Tuimoloau and All-Big Ten caliber interior defensive linemen such as Ty Hamilton and Williams, some have been left scratching their heads after the Buckeyes' underwhelming sack numbers. As a defense, Ohio State is tied for 22nd in the country with 2.75 sacks per game after the Penn State game.

One change that Day wanted to see ahead of the Penn State game was an increased rotation of some of the team's backup defensive linemen.

"I definitely think we want to rotate guys," Day said on Oct. 29. "But when the game is on the line like that, we've got to make sure that we're getting stops. We did that. We'll have to do that again this week. But we've got to get (Kayden McDonald) mixed in more, Hero (Kanu) mixed in more, Kenyatta (Jackson Jr.), Caden Curry, and make sure that our guys are fresh in the fourth quarter."

According to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, longtime defensive line coach

Larry Johnson plays a role in how reps are divided up at the position.

"I'm comfortable with whatever Coach Johnson deems appropriate," Knowles said. "He's around those guys all the time. He manages those guys, and he knows what he's doing."

Although the Buckeyes didn't light up the box score with a multitude of sacks, against PSU the defensive line did get fairly consistent pressure on Allar. In the second half, the Buckeyes finally did get to him, and he was sacked on back-to-back plays in the third quarter resulting in a Penn State punt.

While one sack was recorded by Simon, the other was a combined sack from Jackson and Tuimoloau, in part a product of the Buckeyes' rotation of defensive linemen in the win.

Williams-Dixon Loses Black Stripe

Williams-Dixon shed his black stripe on Oct. 30, becoming an "official" member of the Buckeyes and the 14th player in the 2024 recruiting class to do so.

Williams-Dixon was one of two freshman running backs the Buckeyes brought in this season, coming from Pickerington (Ohio) North as a three-star prospect along with Peoples, who was a four-star recruit out of San Antonio Veterans Memorial.

Of the two young ball carriers, Peoples has had the larger impact early on with 153 yards rushing on 35 carries with two touchdowns, but Williams-Dixon got slightly involved in early-season blowouts as well, totaling four totes for 44 yards in four appearances.

Williams-Dixon was the No. 661 overall prospect coming out of high school but was able to prove his worth early on when he was the leading carrier in the spring game with 78 yards and a touchdown on 11 car-

ries.

However, since getting into both of the first two games against MAC opponents Akron and Western Michigan, Williams-Dixon has yet to see the field with Peoples, Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson assuming all the carries.

The Pickerington native joins fellow freshmen LeBlanc and VanSickle as players who shed their black stripes in the month of October. Nine freshmen have yet to lose their black stripe, a group including cornerbacks Miles Lockhart and Bryce West, linebacker Garrett Stover, defensive linemen Dominic Kirks and Eric Mensah, offensive linemen Deontae and Devontae Armstrong, punter Nick McLarty and wide receiver Damarion Witten.

Downs Named Thorpe Award Semifinalist

Ohio State safety Caleb Downs has been named a semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe Award, one of 15 players in consideration for the honor that goes to the nation's top defensive back.

Downs has started all eight games for the Buckeyes this season after joining the team as a transfer from Alabama. He leads all Ohio State defensive backs with 5½ tackles for loss (35 overall) while also adding three pass breakups, one quarterback hurry and a half sack.

Downs, the former 2023 SEC Freshman of the Year, is part of an Ohio State unit that is eighth in passing defense, allowing just 161.5 yards per game through the air, second in total defense (256.4 yards per game) and third in scoring defense (12.0 points per game).

This is the third straight year the Buckeyes have had a semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe Award, with Burke making the list last season and Ransom being recognized in 2022.

The Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame and Jim Thorpe Association will announce the finalists for the award on Nov. 26 as part of a special presentation by ESPN.

Howard Named To Unitas Golden Arm Top 10

Will Howard's excellent 2024 campaign has him in contention for national recognition at the end of the season. On Oct. 31, Howard was named as one of 10 top candidates for the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award, given to the nation's best upperclassman quarterback each year. The winner will be announced on Dec. 6.

In his first year with the Buckeyes after transferring from Kansas State, Howard has led the offense to a total offense and scoring offense that rank among the best in the country with 457.6 total yards (14th) and 37.8 points per game (15th).

Howard has played some of the best football in his collegiate career with Ohio State, throwing for 1,977 yards, 19 touchdowns and five interceptions. Even in a 32-31 loss to Oregon, Howard completed 28 of 35 passes for 326 yards and two touchdowns.

The other most notable candidates on the list in addition to Howard were Allar, former Ohio State and current Texas starting quarterback Quinn Ewers, Oregon

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quarterback Dillon Gabriel and Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke.

McMahon Put On Naismith Award Watch List

Junior forward Cotie McMahon added to her list of preseason recognition on Oct. 28 when she was named to the Naismith Watch List, an award given to the women's college basketball Player of the Year.

In the 2022-23 season, McMahon was one of the best freshmen in the country, averaging 15.1 points per game on 51.0 percent shooting with 5.5 rebounds and 2.4 assists. Following the season, McMahon was named the Big Ten Freshman of the Year and was included on the All-Big Ten second team.

McMahon was just as reliable as a sophomore on a regular-season Big Ten champion Ohio State team. Her shooting numbers were slightly down in 2023-24, shooting 46.0 percent from the field and scoring 14.4 points per game, but she improved her rebounding numbers with 6.3 rebounds per game.

With Jacy Sheldon off to the WNBA and others gone, McMahon, who was also named to the preseason All-Big Ten team in September, could take on an even bigger role this year.

Simon Earns Honors After Nebraska Game

Simon had quite the performance in

Follow The Bucks Daily In Their Quest For The Playoffs

The excitement is building now that Ohio State has defeated Penn State and re-established itself as one of the top teams in the country. There is no need to miss any of the latest news on the Buckeyes' quest for the playoffs and a national championship. The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability throughout each 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.

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Ohio State's win over Nebraska. Ohio State's Block "O" recipient recorded a team-high eight tackles, three of which were for loss, and most importantly he arguably made the play of the game at the goal line to help his team turn the Cornhuskers over on downs.

With the ball at the Ohio State 2-yard line on fourth-and-goal in the third quarter, Cornhuskers running back Dante Dowdle attempted to jump over his offensive line and reach for a touchdown, but forward progress was stopped just short of the goal line when Simon grabbed his legs to keep him from heading towards the end zone.

Simon's heroic efforts on that play and on Nebraska's last drive, in which he recorded back-to-back tackles for loss, undoubtedly fueled his recognition as the Defensive Player of the Game for the Buckeyes, grading out as a champion at 92 percent.

Simon's performance was also rec-

ognized by Reese's Senior Bowl, which named him their Defensive Player of the Week.

Ohio State Men's Soccer Wins Share Of B1G Title

The No-1-ranked Ohio State men's soccer team added another accomplishment to its already special season on Nov. 3 when the Buckeyes clinched a share of the Big Ten regular-season title and the No. 1 seed in the Big Ten tournament following a 2-1 win at No. 10 Maryland.

The Buckeyes – who finished the 2024 regular season an impressive 12-1-3 (7-1-2 Big Ten) – won or shared their first Big Ten regular-season title since 2015 and their fifth league title overall by staving off a late comeback by the Terrapins (8-4-5, 5-3-2).

After Ohio State took a 2-0 lead in the first half off of goals from senior defender Thomas Gilej (13:49) and junior midfielder

Ashton Bilow (33:08), the Terrapins cut the deficit in half in the 51st minute off a score by junior Luca Costabile. But the Buckeyes remained unfazed, allowing Maryland to attempt just three shots the rest of the way and blocking all three to hang onto the one-goal victory.

Ohio State, led by sixth-year head coach and former Columbus Crew midfielder Brian Maisonneuve, now earns a bye to the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament, with the first two rounds held at SeatGeek Stadium in Bridgeview, Ill., from Nov. 7-10. The Buckeyes will play the winner of No. 4 seed Washington (8-4-5, 4-3-3) and No. 5 seed Michigan State (5-7-4, 4-4-2) on Nov. 10 at 4:30 p.m. on Big Ten Network.

The Big Ten tournament championship match will be held on Nov. 17 (2 p.m., Big Ten Network) at the home field of the highest remaining seed, putting Ohio State in position to hoist a trophy at Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium if it is to advance.

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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 20, Penn State 13

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day if this was the "angry" version of his team against Penn State: "Yeah, I think so, especially at the end. We're going to go back and watch this and see a lot of things and break it down. We realize that the game probably could have been in a different spot, but at the end of the day, the way that we've been talking about it is, 'Go win the game.' We had to get a stop on defense. We went all the way to the 1-yard line and we got that stop. Tyleik (Williams) goes out and we had to send (Kayden McDonald) into the game and a few other guys to get that stop."

Penn State head coach James Franklin on Ohio State's final offensive drive of the game: "They had a championship drive right there at the end. We did not play well in an obvious running situation. We did not handle, I think, the fact that the offense didn't score in that situation well."

Ohio State senior defensive end JT Tuimoloau on his defense's fourth-quarter goal-line stand: "It just shows the leadership we have on this team. Coach Mick (Marotti) always says that the important guys are the guys behind you. Tyleik has been chasing his goals, pulling along (McDonald) – Ty (Hamilton) has been pulling them as well. Just pulling on the young interior guys, so when they get up there, they're not surprised by anything that comes their way because they're meant for this moment. They're made for this moment. I'm proud of them, all the young guys, from (McDonald) to Eddrick (Houston) to Jason Moore to Caden Curry and Kenyatta (Jackson), I can go all the way down the list."

Tuimoloau on if he had a feeling the defense was going to stop Penn State at the goal line: "If you don't have the idea that you're not going to let them score, that's the wrong idea to have. When it's a game like this on the goal line, those are moments you build for. Those are the moments you dive in. Those are the moments you make a name for yourself."

Penn State junior quarterback Drew Allar on what he was looking for on the fourth-and-goal play at the end of the game: "We wanted to get it to (Tyler) Warren. The safety or nickel did a good job of playing over the top of it and driving it. It would have been a bang-bang play, short of the goal line or incomplete. I was looking at (tight end Khalil Dinkins). We just didn't connect on it."

Tuimoloau on if he and his teammates won this game for Day: "Yeah. He coaches hard for us, and we have to pay it



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN THE ZONE — A 21-yard touchdown reception by wide receiver Brandon Inniss early in the second quarter put Ohio State ahead to stay, 14-10, and would be the final TD of the game.

back. And I think we did just that."

Day on the numerous twists and turns that happened in the first half: "Last night at the hotel, I went back and picked out probably 50 plays from the game two years ago (at Penn State). If you remember that first half, that was almost as crazy. I said to the guys at halftime, I don't know what's going to happen, but there's going to be a score, and it's probably going to be around 14-10 or 17-14. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. You get to halftime and you're like, 'Woah.' It was the same way two years ago."

Ohio State junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun on his interception at the end of the second quarter: "I want to say I did something crazy, but it was God who put the ball in my hands. I didn't really do much, to be honest with you."

Igbinosun on if he was surprised he came away with the catch: "Not

surprised. They didn't think that I actually caught it, so I was just trying to tell them that I got the ball. It was a catch."

Ohio State senior offensive lineman Donovan Jackson on redshirt sophomore offensive lineman Carson Hinzman's performance at left guard: "We all knew he had it. He played 12 games last year, so we knew he was going to be fine. There were no concerns whatsoever with Carson at left guard. We knew he was going to dominate. It's almost like having a second coach on the field with him in the set. It makes things a lot easier."

Hinzman on how he prepared to have success against Penn State: "We talk about competitive excellence, playing your game when your number is called. The last 10 months prepared me immensely for that. So I'm just glad to help with the team in any way I can."

Jackson on what he learned about fifth-year quarterback Will Howard after the victory: "If he does make a bad play, he overcomes that and goes to the next play and he leads our team to victory. The couple of plays that he did have, we were like, 'Man, it's all right. We drove down the field once, we'll do it again.' We weren't dogging on him. We were just like, 'Hey man, let's do it again, like we did it once.' We can go out there and do it again."

Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Brandon Inniss on what it means for the wide receiver unit that they can get production out of six or seven players in a game: "We're the best in the world. Everybody knows that."

Jackson on what this win means for this football team: "Being able to win late, we knew that this game was going to be won in the fourth quarter. It has been for many years now. So we weren't surprised at halftime when it was close, and we weren't surprised when it was a close one in the fourth quarter. We just knew we had to keep fighting."

Penn State redshirt junior linebacker Kobe King on a potential rematch with Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship Game: "We definitely, hopefully, get another chance to see those guys again and make things different. To go where we want to go, we have to do everything right, get better every day and learn from our mistakes in the past. We want to play them again. We can play them at 7 p.m. (on Nov. 2). We can do it over again."

Buckeye Defense, Day Answer Critics In 'Prove It' Win

Continued From Page 1

going to go reach your goals. It doesn't work that way. That's just not the way life works.

"So when you get backed up against the wall, you have to respond. That's life. All of our goals are in front of us now. We've been through a lot and now we have to continue to build as we head into the back half of the season."

It was a "prove it" game for Day, and it wasn't only the coach feeling those emotions after the win. Quarterback Will Howard was as animated as ever during his postgame appearance, and both defensive end JT Tuimoloau and wide receiver Brandon Inniss made sure to make it clear they are fully behind their head coach.

"There are a lot of things on us, and I feel like that just motivates us more because we understand what we're capable of and we know what we have to do," Tuimoloau said. "Just to be on the long side with Coach Day and this whole coaching staff, I wouldn't want to be with any other coaching staff ever. These are the guys I want, these are guys I love playing for."

"Definitely, man. We knew we needed this win coming into this game," Inniss added when asked if the win felt good for his coach to get people off of his back. "We needed it more than anything this season right now. I mean, he's an unbelievable coach. I wouldn't have any other coach as my head coach."

But it wasn't only Day who went into the game with a "prove it" mindset. The defensive unit also felt like it had something to prove after losing at Oregon and going down to the wire with Nebraska two weeks later.

Though there were many things to critique during the loss to the top-rated Ducks, the biggest downfall of the team in that game was the defense, which allowed multiple explosive plays and long drives that turned into scores, ultimately giving up 32 points.

Jim Knowles' unit was able to respond fairly well against the Cornhuskers, making a stand when the game came down to the final drive in which a targeting call put them into unfavorable field position before linebacker Cody Simon and fill-in-safety Jordan Hancock ended true freshman QB Dylan Raiola's hopes of coming into Columbus and upsetting one of the top teams in the country.

But coming into Penn State was a dif-



SONNY BROCKWAY

SCARLET SWARM — Ohio State's defense, including senior safety Lathan Ransom (8) and junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun (1), held Penn State to 270 yards of total offense. All PSU ball carriers, including Nicholas Singleton (10), were held to less than 50 net yards apiece. Singleton rushed six times for 15 yards.

ferent story than facing Raiola and a 5-2 Nebraska team. The Nittany Lions aren't known as one of the better offenses in the country, but they also aren't a pushover.

Last season, the Buckeyes were able to fight to a big win over the seventh-ranked Lions, 20-12, a game that saw the defense hold Penn State to just one third-down conversion in 16 attempts and one touchdown, both of which came late in the fourth quarter to make the game look closer than it was. But the defense did still allow a touchdown.

This year, that wasn't the case. Penn State did score one more point than it was able to last year at Ohio Stadium, but the touchdown came on a Howard pass in which he misread the defense, and cornerback Zion Tracy was able to jump a Jeremiah Smith route and take an interception back for a score.

Other than that, the Lions were able

to drive down the field and threaten but weren't able to get into the end zone all game, settling for two field goals. Tuimoloau said he was very proud of the team's performance as a whole, especially the fact that they were able to keep the offense from scoring a touchdown.

"I think it just shows who we are. It shows what the Silver Bullets can be and what we're capable of," he said. "There's a lot more left in the tank. I think this is just a preview of what is to come."

Another common criticism of the Buckeyes under Day has been that they aren't tough enough, memorably a topic bandied about last year when former Notre Dame head coach Lou Holtz challenged the culture that Day has built at Ohio State, claiming the Buckeyes had lost so many big games because the team has never been tough enough.

But when push came to shove against the Nittany Lions, the defense stood tall with two big-time stands that changed the outlook of the game, both coming toward the end of each respective half.

The first was at the end of the first half with the Buckeyes holding onto a 14-10 lead. Junior quarterback Drew Allar was leading Penn State down the field on a drive that featured a 14-yard rush by Allar — who did a great job escaping the pocket all game, finishing with 45 yards on the ground on eight attempts, adjusted for two sacks.

Cornerback Davison Igbinosun was beat on a go route down the right sideline

and was called for holding, although that was declined since wide receiver Harrison Wallace III had caught the pass from Allar for a 21-yard gain, bringing the Nittany Lions to the OSU 3-yard line.

Igbinosun's penalties were an issue during the win against the Cornhuskers as well, being called for pass interference three times in the game, enough for cornerbacks coach Tim Walton to suggest that the corner wear mitts in practice throughout the week so he couldn't rely on holding when he got beat.

But even though he was beaten by Wallace the play before, Igbinosun was able to immediately respond. On a nice throw by Allar in the end zone, Igbinosun was able to tip the pass, forcing Wallace to struggle to secure it, and then catch the ricochet off the receiver and plant one foot inbounds with a hand in his face, bringing in his second — and by far his bigger — interception this season.

It was one of many plays that seemed to change the momentum in the first half, the type of game that has become familiar for the Buckeyes and the Nittany Lions when the two teams match up with each other.

"We were sort of prepared for a crazy game that way," Day said. "This happens here against Penn State. We're going to go back and look at ways that we felt like maybe we could have won by multiple scores and all of that, but ultimately, you have to go win the game in the fourth quarter regardless of the score. That was

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SONNY BROCKWAY

TRENCH WARFARE — Ohio State senior defensive linemen Tyleik Williams (91) and Jack Sawyer (33) and junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun (1) helped the Buckeye defense play arguably its best game of the season.

another one of those crazy games.”

The next stop featured a classic goal-line stand, and it came with a little more than five minutes remaining in the game. Two second-half field goals by Jayden Fielding had given the Buckeyes enough of a cushion that a touchdown and extra point would have only tied the game, but the Lions were able to drive down the field again.

Penn State's best playmaker, tight end Tyler Warren, was the main catalyst in getting down the field. Warren, who is on pace to break Penn State's single-season tight end records in receiving yards, touchdowns and catches this year, was held mostly in check until the final 15 minutes. He had a 31-yard catch to get into OSU territory, and a 33-yard run out of a Wildcat formation, taking a direct snap and nearly bulldozing his way into the end zone before being stopped at the 3-yard line.



Tyler Warren

But with the game on the line, the Buckeyes stepped up in a big way yet again. Cody Simon and Lathan Ransom set the tone at the goal line, stuffing running back Kaytron Allen for no gain for first down.

Nittany Lions head coach James Franklin would not let that deter him from trying again, though, sending Allen up the middle once more. This time, Ty Hamilton and Jack Sawyer combined for the second-down stop after only 1 yard.

Franklin and his offensive staff must have been influenced largely by The Sporting News midseason All-American defensive tackle Tyleik Williams going down with an injury just a few plays before because they attacked the interior of the OSU defensive line yet again on third

down, but Allen was held to just 1 yard again, brought down by Hamilton and Williams' replacement Hero Kanu.

Then on fourth-and-goal at the 1-yard line, the Nittany Lions tried a pass that was well-defended. Ransom blanketed primary receiver Warren near the goal line, so Allar tried to get the ball to his other tight end Khalil Dinkins in the back of the end zone, but the pass fell incomplete.

The Buckeyes took over on their own 1 with 5:13 remaining, the defense saving the game for the second straight week.

“There is a lot of great communication out there,” Tuimolou said. “With the goal-line stand, we're expecting everything. We're just alerting everybody for all the plays that we watch on film and just keeping everybody on their toes and not getting complacent. Once that complacency creeps in, that's when a lot of things can go wrong. But there's a lot of communication, a lot of great physicality in there, and I'm proud.”

Day thought the goal-line stand said a lot about the defense as a whole, players and coaches included.

“It shows you that there's a grit, there's a toughness, there's a never-give-up, give-me-an-inch-and-I'm-going-to-defend-it mentality,” he said. “You have to give Jim and the entire staff credit for the preparation going into this game. Penn State does an excellent job of changing formations, motioning, different looks.

“I mean, they've got Warren back there at quarterback and it looked like he was about in (the end zone) but he was just short, and we found a way to get the stand. But it comes down to the players.

Coaches can put you into a situation, but the players have to go do it. They did it and I'm proud of them.”

The goal-line stand was much appreciated by Howard, who admittedly didn't have his best game with the pick-six and a fumble out of the end zone that gave Penn State the ball back when OSU could have gone up by two scores during the second quarter.

“There's no feeling like it,” the OSU quarterback said. “It wasn't pretty. I probably played my worst game of the year. That's just my feeling walking off the field. But we willed that game. We talk-

ed about it earlier in the week. We said, ‘We're going to have to will ourselves to win this game. There's no way we're going to be able to lose.’ The defense stepped up. Two huge stops right on the goal line. That changed the game.”

Players and coaches both were animated after the win – with even Day, Knowles and running backs coach Carlos Locklyn seen dancing with their team in the locker room after the game in a video posted on the team's official X (formerly Twitter) page – and those emotions likely came out because they know that all they have to do now is win four more games for a likely rematch against Oregon.

But they are trying not to think that far ahead, living in the moment for now and remembering how hard they worked for the win in Happy Valley.

“I can tell you, coming out of that locker room right there, that there's a lot of guys that are excited,” Day said when he met the media. “It's probably the most animated locker room I've been in in a long time. Now what are we going to do with it moving forward? We are going to enjoy this tonight – coaches, players, staff, everyone involved – because this was a moment that we have to enjoy. There's a lot of work that's been put in for this game.”

It was already obvious that the Buckeyes could compete with the nation's best teams. They had done it time and time again, although many of those chances ended with losses. But in State College on Nov. 2, Day and his defense proved they could come out of those games with wins as well.

“One of the things we talked about this week was that in life you're going to have these opportunities where you have to go will yourself to win, and you have to go take something and you have to find a way to get that thing done,” Day said. “Whether it's with your family, in your career or in the game of football, and our guys did that today.”

“I'm really happy for this team, I'm happy for the seniors, and I think this is going to springboard us moving forward.”

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Howard Refused To Let Buckeyes Lose At PSU

Moments after Ohio State's 21-17 triumph against Nebraska on Oct. 26, starting quarterback, former Penn State fan, and Downingtown, Pa., native Will Howard had clearly already turned his attention to the Nittany Lions.

"It's going to be a homecoming for me," Howard said. "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."

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

Howard, by his own admission, didn't prove the Nittany Lions wrong the way he wanted to, delivering what he described as probably his worst game of the season. Still, Howard did just enough for the Buckeyes to come up with a 20-13 win.

"We willed ourselves to win that game," he said. "I can't give enough credit to my teammates. They bailed me out."

Howard's less-than-stellar performance against the Nittany Lions got out to just about the worst start imaginable. Just two plays into their first drive of the game, Howard and the rest of the offense were faced with a third-and-5, forcing him to attempt his first pass of the game on a pivotal down in front of 111,030 raucous Penn State fans. The fifth-year senior made a freshman mistake as Penn State cornerback Zion Tracy read Howard's eyes beautifully, jumping in front of Jeremiah Smith to not just intercept Howard's pass but return it for a touchdown.

Howard didn't panic after the lapse in judgment, though. Instead, he kept a positive frame of mind and moved on to the next series.

"I was just like, 'Hey, I made this a little harder than it should have been on myself and us.' But the mind-set can't change," Howard said. "If you let that play affect the next play, that's when it becomes a problem. As much as I'd like to go back and change that play, and see it was a zone and not throw that ball, I would, but it's how you respond and how you come back."

Howard's composure proved to be vital on the Buckeyes' next offensive drive, when he completed all three of his passes for 34 yards, including a 25-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Emeka Egbuka.

Howard appeared to find himself in a groove later in the half when he helped the Buckeyes move the ball down the field with an 8-yard completion to Carnell Tate. A few plays later, though, the former Kansas State signal-caller missed Tate on a wide-open deep throw down the field. If the ball was thrown accurately, Tate might have scored on the play, but as it was Howard's pass led the OSU receiver out of bounds for a harmless incomplete pass.

In a theme that continued the rest of the afternoon, Howard's teammates and coaching staff picked him up and rendered his inaccuracy to Tate meaningless. How-



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOMECOMING HERO — Ohio State senior quarterback and Pennsylvania native Will Howard (18) grew up a fan of Penn State football but led OSU to a big victory over the Nittany Lions.

ard again had a wide-open teammate four plays later. This time, it was backup wide receiver Brandon Inniss breaking free past Penn State defenders and Howard was able to accurately deliver him the ball to give the Buckeyes their second touchdown in as many drives.

After leading yet another impressive drive, Howard and the Buckeyes seemed to be in position to deal a potentially fatal blow to the Nittany Lions as early as the second quarter on a possession seemed destined for the end zone.

With an open path ahead of him, all Howard had to do on his 13-yard keeper was get through one Penn State defender to get into the end zone. Howard completed the hard part of beating Penn State safety Zakee Wheatley to the pylon, but the easy part of hanging onto the football was not accomplished, and Wheatley forced Howard to fumble the ball off his knee and out of the end zone for a touchback.

The seven points that were virtually erased from the board on Howard's run was a brutal turn of events for the Buckeyes.

"Having him as a weapon running the ball, you saw the run that he had when the ball squirted out," OSU head coach Ryan Day said. "That was a really well-executed play. TreVeyon (Henderson) had an unbelievable block on that play. It was gut-wrenching because it was so well executed and guys were going after people and finishing people to the ground and the ball squirts out at the 1-yard line. It's literally like taking a shot right to the stomach."

With the offensive line struggling to stay in front of standout Penn State edge rusher Abdul Carter, the second half was more of a grind for the offense. Howard still had his chance to get the Buckeyes' third touchdown of the game in the second half when Smith broke wide open down the field. How-

ard's pass was within arm's reach of Smith, but was a little too much toward the outside shoulder of the star freshman and the ball fell incomplete.

Clearly not at his best as a passer, Howard helped put the game away with his legs. With the offense backed up inside their own 1-yard line following a pivotal fourth-quarter, goal-line stand from the defense, Howard gained 4 yards on a QB sneak to get the Buckeyes some room to breathe.

The running backs then drained the clock inside two minutes. On the cusp of an elusive top-five win, Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly dialed up another quarterback run for Howard on third-and-2. A great block from running back Quinshon Judkins gave Howard a hole to run through, and the fifth-year quarterback fell forward for one of the most important 3-yard gains of the Day era.

A few plays later, Howard made the Buckeyes' landmark win official with a game-sealing 7-yard run.

Howard's 182 passing yards were a season-low and his two turnovers created a 14-point swing, but his willingness to do whatever was necessary was an important part of the victory, according to Day.

"That's the sign of somebody who's resilient, who's been through it before, and he willed it to happen," Day said. "He had a look in his eye all week that he was not going to lose this game. Whether it was because it was a top-five team or it was because it was in the state of Pennsylvania in a place that he grew up – he wanted to be a Nittany Lion – I think all of that probably played into it. He refused to lose, and that mentality helped us win today."

O-Line Rises To Occasion

Howard's gains on the ground wouldn't

have been possible without the heroic efforts of a banged-up offensive line unit.

In their first game without star left tackle Josh Simmons against Nebraska, Ohio State had its worst rushing output of the season and regularly couldn't protect Howard.

On paper, the offensive line issues looked like they could multiply after replacement left tackle Zen Michalski suffered his own injury against Nebraska.

With many outsiders fearing how the unit would fare against Penn State with Donovan Jackson moving to left tackle and 2023 starting center Carson Hinzman replacing Jackson at left guard, the unit held its own for much of the afternoon. By the end of the game, the offensive front overpowered one of the best defensive lines in the country on the way to a game-sealing, five-minute drive. Howard was appreciative of the way the unit closed out the game.

"The O-line, for all of the stuff they took during the week and all of the flak that they were getting, for them to step up the way that they did, and for us to run the ball and keep the ball in our hands – win the game with the ball in our hands – that's unbelievable," the OSU quarterback said.

Hinzman, who at least to those outside of the program was not seen as the frontrunner to fill in for Jackson at the left guard position, didn't have the best season in 2023. Despite serving as Ohio State's starting center for the entire regular season last year as a redshirt freshman, Hinzman was benched for the team's Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri due to an undisclosed reason.

The Hammond, Wis., native did enough in practice to get back in the starting lineup this time around, though, and according to Day, the decision ultimately came down to his experience.

"We went with experience," the head coach said. "That was the decision we made in this environment. We went with experience."

Before the Buckeyes rolled over the Nittany Lions in the fourth quarter, the unit unsurprisingly had its poor moments. In his first start of the season at left tackle, Jackson conceded two sacks of Howard. To be fair to the All-Big Ten guard, he was going against one of the best defenders in the country in Carter, and according to Hinzman, the move from guard to tackle isn't the easiest switch to make.

"Donovan is a freak of nature," Hinzman said. "That guy is an absolute ... if I could be anyone else, it'd be Donovan – the way he moves, the way he plays, the kind of guy he is on all fronts. He works hard. He does the right things. I think, today, he really showed it on the field that even though obviously it's a big transition deal from the phone booth to an island, I think he did a really great job."

Ohio State wasn't necessarily consistent with its running game, and the team only ran for 53 yards on 18 carries (2.9-yard average) during the second and third quarters, but the offensive line found its groove enough in the first and fourth quarters to fend off the Nittany Lions.

It's never easy to decipher which offensive linemen are the generators for the running game's success, but according to Day,

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Ryan Day has been preaching the motto “leave no doubt” all season, meaning that when the opportunity is there for his team to pounce and take control of the game, they need to take full advantage of it. The Buckeyes have struggled to pounce on those opportunities in recent games, but against undefeated Penn State, they made all the winning plays down the stretch.

Ohio State first shut the door on a potential Penn State comeback on defense. With the score at 20-13 in favor of the Buckeyes in the final quarter, it looked as if Drew Allar and the Nittany Lions offense were nearing a game-tying score, finding themselves at the OSU 3-yard line with just under eight minutes left after a 33-yard rushing gain by tight end Tyler Warren.

But the Buckeyes had other plans.

Facing a first-and-goal with time ticking in the fourth quarter, Jim Knowles’ defense buckled down when it mattered most. With the help of multiple players across the defensive line and linebacker units, Penn State running back Kaytron Allen was only able to rush for zero, 1 and 1 yards on three straight plays to set up a critical fourth-and-1. Then it was time for the secondary to save the day. Safety Caleb Downs blanketed tight end Khalil Dinkins to force an incompletion from Allar and turn the Nittany Lions over on downs with just 5:13 left.

Ohio State’s goal-line stand was impressive, but the Buckeyes still had some work to do to finish the job on offense, and Chip Kelly’s unit did just that by playing smash-mouth football to run out the clock. With the Buckeyes still backed up on their own 1-yard line following the turnover on downs, Ohio State slowly worked its way up the field with 11 straight rushes for 58 yards to end the contest, including two that extended the drive on third down.

Both of those third-down conversions came by way of Howard, who – with the help of a bruising block from Quinshon Judkins in the open field – gained 3 on a third-and-2 keeper before tucking and running for another 7 on third-and-3 to put a stamp on the seven-point win with just 1:07 left on the clock.

Ohio State’s late-game execution made the difference in this contest, and it should give the team more confidence as they likely prepare for more close games down the stretch.

What Didn’t Work

Ohio State secured a much-needed signature top-five road win against the Nittany Lions, but the victory certainly did not come without its early lumps. The Buckeyes may have won much more convincingly if it was not for turnovers, particularly the questionable decision-making of Howard.

Howard continued his trend of about one interception per game in the early going of this one. Facing third-and-5 from the OSU 30 with 5:44 left in the first quarter, he tried to find wideout Jeremiah Smith on a slant route but instead threw the ball right into the

hands of Penn State’s Zion Tracy, who jumped the freshman’s route and took the ball 31 yards to the end zone for the pick-six.

Howard never appeared to see Tracy on the play – he successfully faked out the OSU QB by acting as if he was in man coverage and following Emeka Egbuka – and the blunder proved costly early, giving Penn State a 10-0 lead and the record Beaver Stadium crowd of 111,030 a reason to roar.

The costly interception was not Howard’s only blunder in the first half. With Ohio State holding a 14-10 lead after two straight scores in the second quarter, the offense was on the verge of extending its advantage to 21-10 before halftime. But those plans were quickly washed away when a rushing Howard was stripped by Nittany Lions defensive back Zakee Wheatley just before he entered the end zone, causing the ball to bounce off the quarterback’s knee and go out of bounds through the end zone for a touchback.

Howard would play a much more clean game in the second half, completing six of his nine pass attempts for 64 yards and no interceptions or fumbles, but if he had just taken care of the ball in the first two quarters, Ohio State may have walked out of Beaver Stadium with a more convincing double-digit victory, which would look much better to the eyes of the College Football Playoff selection committee.

Play Of The Game

Ohio State’s fourth-quarter goal-line stand may be the obvious choice for this one, but there was another crucial play that happened much earlier in the game that also deserves some recognition.

Late in the first half, it looked as if Penn State was poised to take a 17-14 lead into the locker room at halftime, finding itself at the OSU 3-yard line with just 14 seconds left in the second quarter after a 21-yard pitch-and-catch between Allar and Harrison Wallace III.

But Davison Igbinosun, who was the defender on Wallace’s completion and also committed a holding penalty on the wide receiver, made sure the Nittany Lions wouldn’t get into the end zone a play later.

Allar attempted to challenge Igbinosun again by throwing a fade to Wallace to the right, but the former Ole Miss transfer won the battle this time around. Not only did he prevent the touchdown from happening by tipping the ball away from Wallace’s hands while being grabbed by the facemask, but he also came away with the football and kept one foot in bounds for the improbable interception.

Igbinosun’s interception was not only the most impressive play of the afternoon, but it was also among the most impactful. If not for his play, Penn State could have taken a four-point lead into the half or at least cut it to one point, which could have changed the entire tenor of the game.

— Patrick Engels

the fact that Hinzman didn’t do much harm is a good thing.

“I don’t know how he’s going to grade out, but you didn’t notice him much, which is a good sign for a guard when you don’t notice him much,” Day said. “We’ll get on the film and see how he did, but I think his experience paid off and he was a big part of this win today.”

On the final drive, the offensive line was spectacular. Howard’s QB sneak on the first play of the drive was almost entirely a product of the push created by the line. Immediately afterward, the offensive line created holes for Judkins and Henderson to run through, resulting in consecutive gains of 9 yards, 6 yards, 15 yards and 6 yards to run the clock all the way down to the two-minute timeout.

From there, Howard had the grit to pick up two consecutive third-down conversions to end Penn State’s chances, but none of it would have been possible without the timely run-blocking of an offensive line that was thought by some to be in crisis before the game. The strong ending by the offensive line has Day hopeful for what is to come for the unit.

“We get the ball back there with over four minutes to go, and to finish that drive the way that we did is just going to spring-

board our physicality, our toughness as we head into the back half of this season,” Day said. “But these guys want it.”

Kelly’s Creativity Sparks First-Half Run

It might not take a genius to call run plays when you have an offensive line that started to dominate as Kelly’s did, but at least in the first half, the former Oregon and UCLA head coach put his play-calling skills on full display. After the slow start to the game, which included Howard’s pick-six, Kelly hit the overzealous Penn State defense with some misdirection, leading to a touchdown.

After Ohio State’s offense was previously successful on the drive with runs up the middle, Kelly called a speed option to the outside. With only one Nittany Lions defender in front of both Howard and Judkins on the first-and-10 play, the call worked to perfection. Howard simply tossed to Judkins and watched the star running back go 22 yards before being touched as the Buckeyes moved into Penn State territory.

OSU capitalized on the Judkins run two plays later on another great call from Kelly. The 25-yard touchdown throw from Howard to Egbuka was set up when Howard rolled to his left and every other receiver went in that direction except for Egbuka.

With the Penn State defense all looking toward the left side of the field – where Smith was headed – Egbuka slipped behind them and found himself wide open as Howard flipped his hips and made the easy pass for the touchdown at the 1:59 mark of the first quarter.

The second touchdown pass from Howard came just one drive later, and it was at least partially the result of another great call from Kelly.

On second-and-9 from Penn State’s 21-yard line, Howard began the play with a fake toss to Henderson, moving the Penn State linebackers in that direction.

With the linebackers’ momentum flowing in the opposite direction, Inniss was able to speed past them and jog into the end zone after receiving the pass from his quarterback to give Ohio State a 14-10 lead early in the second quarter.

Smith Breaks Carter’s Freshman Yardage Record

Any play-caller will tell you having good players is the key to success, and Kelly has had the luxury of calling plays for the supremely-talented Smith.

Smith, the No. 1 overall recruit in the 2024 class, put his historic freshman season in the record books during Ohio State’s

win over Penn State when he broke Cris Carter’s single-season school freshman receiving yards record of 648 yards.

Carter burst onto the scene for the Buckeyes 40 years ago in 1984 when he set single-season freshman records for OSU with 41 catches and eight touchdowns in addition to a then-record amount of receiving yards.

Smith needed just 26 yards to surpass Carter’s receiving yards total coming into the game, and he officially broke the record in convincing fashion on the last play of the third quarter.

With the Buckeyes only up, 17-13, Smith lined up on the left side of the field before going back to the right as he got open enough to haul in an 18-yard reception from Howard. Smith’s grab brought his receiving yards total for the game to 41 and his season total to 664.

He ended the game with one more catch, a 14-yard gain, that put his season total at 678 receiving yards.

Smith, who currently has eight touchdown receptions in just eight games, also tied Carter’s receiving touchdown record against Nebraska and is just two receptions short of Carter’s single-season record with 39 on the season.

OSU Gets Statement Win Over Nittany Lions

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With the outcome in doubt and the clock winding down, Ohio State did not rely on a star quarterback, standout receivers or a grinding running game to turn a possible defeat into victory. Instead, the fourth-ranked Buckeyes relied on a stout defensive effort that for the second straight game produced a goal-line stand at a most opportune time.

The 20-13 win at No. 3 Penn State on Nov. 2 in State College, Pa., was more gritty than pretty when the Buckeyes (7-1, 4-1) once again established themselves as a contender for a national title.

Needing a late score for the tie, Penn State (7-1, 4-1) had a first-and-goal from the 3 but three runs produced only 2 yards and a pass to Khalil Dinkins was incomplete with 5:13 left in the game.

OSU started from its 1 and was able to run out the clock for an eighth straight win over the Nittany Lions and the 12th win the past 13 meetings before a Beaver Stadium record crowd of 111,030.

Give And Take

Ryan Barker hit a field goal from 29 yards on the game's first drive for a 3-0 Nittany Lion lead at 6:54. PSU used 14 plays to consume 8:00.

Penn State started at its 27 after a 25-yard kickoff return by Nick Singleton. He gained a yard on a third-and-1 from the 36 and later quarterback Drew Allar had three consecutive runs for a combined 20 yards to the OSU 34.

Two plays later, he stepped up in the pocket and found Singleton for 19 yards to the 12 only to have an ineligible receiver downfield infraction help stall the drive, forcing the 3-pointer.

With left tackle Josh Simmons and his replacement, Zen Michalski, both out with injuries, the Buckeyes had to deal with a makeshift offensive line for their opening series.

Disaster struck on third-and-5 from the 30. Will Howard was intercepted by Zion Tracy and he returned it 31 yards for a 10-0 score at 5:37.

Ohio State responded with a 25-yard TD catch by Emeka Egbuka with 1:59 left in the first quarter to make it 10-7. The drive was 74 yards on seven plays in 3:32.

The Buckeyes got a 16-yard kickoff return by Caleb Downs to the 26. Howard's sneak for 2 yards kept the drive alive at the OSU 37 and Quinshon Judkins had consecutive carries for 11 and 22 yards to the 30. TreVeyon Henderson ran for 5 before the TD toss.

A 43-yard punt by Penn State and a holding penalty on the Buckeyes put the ball at the OSU 19.

A pair of PSU penalties helped the Buckeyes go ahead 14-10 at 11:54 on a 21-yard catch by Brandon Inniss to complete an 81-yard, 10-play, 3:42 series.

Carnell Tate had an 8-yard reception for a third-and-2 to end the first quarter. Howard then drew an offside penalty to the Nittany Lions for a first down.

Needing 11 yards on third down at the OSU 31, Tate made a grab for 7 but an unsportsmanlike conduct for taunting to

PSU's Elliott Washington II gave the Buckeyes a first down at the Penn State 47.

Howard completed a third-down pass of 20 yards to Henderson to the 22. Henderson gained 1 on the ground prior to Howard flipping a short pass up the middle to Inniss and he did the rest of the work.

The Buckeyes came within inches of a possible 21-10 lead before Howard fumbled the ball at the goal line, resulting in a turnover.

After a Penn State punt, the Buckeyes faced a fourth-and-1 from the Penn State 49. Following an OSU timeout, Howard escaped the rush, rolled left and floated a pass to tight end Jelani Thurman, who twice bobbled the ball but made a catch of 19 yards to the 30.

Judkins ran for 7, Howard lost a yard before Henderson ran for 11 to the 13. Then Howard committed another miscue running along the left sideline toward the goal line. He appeared to score, but defensive back Zakee Wheatley punched the ball away at the 1. After a review it was determined the ball went over the pylon and out of the end zone for a touchback.

The Buckeye defense stiffened, but starting at their 20 after a punt, Howard was sacked for an 8-yard loss to the OSU 15 on third down with 2:00.

Tracy had a 7-yard return on a 41-yard punt by Joe McGuire and the Nittany Lions were in business at the OSU 49. On a fourth-and-1 with 31 seconds left, Singleton rushed for 2 yards for a new set of downs with 26 seconds remaining and two timeouts for the Nittany Lions at the 38.

Allar couldn't find a receiver and ran for 14 yards to the 24. Harrison "Tre" Wallace caught a pass for 21 to the 3. Then it got weird again.

Just as it was the case at the other end a few minutes earlier, Penn State thought Wallace had a TD catch along the right boundary but a review showed cornerback Davison Igbinosun snatching the ball from the falling Wallace. He was able to get his right foot down for an interception with 11 seconds left.

Howard took a knee to end the bizarre half.

To The End

The Buckeyes received the second-half kickoff and took a 17-10 lead at 10:40 on a 46-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding.

On the first two plays, Howard ran for 11 and passed 14 yards to Jeremiah Smith to the 50. Henderson had a 16-yard rush two plays later to the 29 but a 3-yard sack on third-and-6 from the 25 forced the field goal.

Back came the Nittany Lions with the aid of a 24-yard catch for Wallace to the OSU 41. Penn State reached the 29 but the defense tightened and Barker made a 44-yard field goal to make it 17-13 at 5:03 of the third quarter.

Tracy's 14-yard return after McGuire's 53-yard boot placed the ball on the PSU 38. From there, Singleton made a catch for 13 to cross midfield by a yard. Consecutive sacks of 9 by Cody Simon and 4 from JT Tumolouau led to a punt of 45 yards by Riley Thompson to the OSU 15.

The Buckeyes got three points back with



SONNY BROCKWAY

TAKE A BOW — Ohio State senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka (2) poses after scoring a first-quarter touchdown that cut the Nittany Lions lead to 10-7. OSU would go on to win a hard-fought battle, 20-13, at No. 3 Penn State.

a Fielding 39-yarder to make it 20-13 with 10:13 left in the game.

Smith on the first play gained 18 yards on a catch to end the third quarter.

On the second snap of the fourth, Judkins ran for 14 to the OSU 49 but on the next play Smith was a step shy of making a catch inside the 5-yard line. Inniss then made a reception for 12 yards for a first down at the Lion 39.

The Buckeyes almost turned it over when Judkins made a catch and was immediately hit for a fumble that PSU recovered but a review overturned the call, resulting in an incompleteness at the Penn State 43. On third down, Smith's catch for 14 resulted in a first down at the 24.

Henderson ran for 1, Howard for 2 and a third-down pass to Gee Scott Jr. was incomplete to set up the field goal.

Penn State roared back on a 31-yard catch by Tyler Warren to the OSU 40.

Three plays later, Warren, a tight end, took a direct snap and ran 33 yards to the 3. Kaytron Allen rushed for no yards, a yard and a yard and on fourth down, Allar's pass was incomplete with 5:13 to play.

The goal-line stand was similar to against Nebraska the previous game when the Cornhuskers had four tries from the 7 without scoring in the Buckeyes' 21-17 win.

Taking the ball on the 1, the Buckeyes ran 11 straight times against the Nittany Lions for four first downs to close out the game.

Howard turned a quarterback sneak into a 4-yard gain and Judkins lowered his shoulders and gained 9 for a first down at the 14. He followed with carries of 6 and 15 to the 35.

Henderson gained 6 with 2:00 left. Judkins later ran for 2 to face a third-and-2 from the OSU 43. Howard kept the ball and ran left for 3 yards and a first down. Henderson ran up the middle for 7 and PSU used its second timeout.

Henderson gained nothing on second down before the final timeout. Howard, the Pennsylvania native, ran for 7 before sliding to the grass to seal the win. He took a knee to end the game.

"There's no feeling like it," Howard said. "It wasn't pretty. I probably played my worst game of the year, but man, we willed that game."

Howard, the Pennsylvanian spurned by the Nittany Lions, was 16 of 24 for 182 yards with the two first-half touchdowns for the Buckeyes. He rushed 12 times for 24 yards.

Judkins chipped in with 95 yards on 14 carries.

Notes

OSU had 358 yards (182 passing, 176 rushing) compared to 270 for Penn State (150 passing, 120 rushing). ... The Buckeyes converted six of 13 third downs after going 1 for 10 vs. Nebraska. The Nittany Lions were 3 of 11. ... OSU also made its lone fourth-down try... Henderson gained 54 yards on 10 carries as the Buckeyes averaged 4.4 yards per rush. ... Smith led the Buckeyes with four catches for 55 yards. ... Allar was 12 of 20 for 146 yards and an interception. ... Simon had 10 tackles (five solo) and a sack. Sonny Styles had four solos and five assisted.

OHIO STATE VS. PURDUE

ter a 28-10 loss to Nebraska on Sept. 28.

"It was not easy," Walters said when asked about the firing. "I feel like if I didn't do anything right now, it would be kind of like waving a white flag on the season. We haven't played complementary football, and that's why I made the decision."

Replacing Harrell as offensive coordinator was analyst Jason Simmons, a longtime Indianapolis-area high school coach who spent last season coaching at Miami (Ohio). But after Simmons was the play-caller for just one game during Purdue's 52-6 loss to Wisconsin, the main play-calling duties went to Walters himself, who admittedly never led an offense before as a college coach.

Walters' decision – one which also caused him to relinquish main defensive play-calling duties to Kane – was an unorthodox one, but it produced immediate results.

During the Oct. 12 game against No. 23 Illinois, Purdue's offense – led by backup and red-shirt freshman Ryan Browne, who was filling in for the injured Card – went toe to toe with Walters' former team, and totaled 536 yards (297 passing and 239 rushing) and 49 points despite a one-point, 50-49 overtime loss to the Fighting Illini.

Walters' last act as the offensive play-caller in that game was a failed decision to go for two after a touchdown during the first overtime, but regardless of that decision, those who played in the game viewed it as a strong step in the right direction for the unit.

"We just put in new plays that really attacked the defense the way we wanted to," Klare said. "And we executed at a pretty high level today. I'm super-proud of (Browne) because he played his (bleep) off and left everything out there for us. He gave us a chance to win that game."

Browne's valiant effort against the Illini, when he completed 18 of his 26 passes for 297 passing yards, three touchdowns, zero interceptions and added another 118 on the ground, has sparked a quarterback controversy for the Boilermakers in recent weeks.

After Browne filled in again for the injured Card on the road against then-No. 2 Oregon, completing just 9 of 19 passes for 93 yards and an interception during the 35-0 shutout loss, Walters declared during the off week that both Browne and Card would earn starting snaps against Northwestern on Nov. 2.

Both passers did get into the game against Northwestern, but Walters' two-quarterback strategy did not necessarily come to fruition. Card earned the majority of the reps in Purdue's 26-20 overtime loss to the Wildcats and had his best game since Week 1, completing 21 of his 37 passes for 267 yards and one touchdown to zero interceptions, while Browne attempted just three passes, completing each of them for 15 yards, and added another 8 on the ground.

Regardless of the plan at quarterback moving forward, Walters thinks his group can pull off having both Card and Browne play meaningful snaps due to the selflessness of both players.

"There was a play in practice where Hudson hit a long one, and you see Ryan Browne throwing his hands up in the air behind the huddle," Walters said on Oct. 29. "A couple of series later, Ryan escapes the pocket and hits like a 60-yard run for a touchdown, and Hudson's back there high-fiving and putting his hands up. So, I think that's why it works."

Although Purdue's passing offense might be a huge question mark entering the Ohio

State game, its running game has been a stable force all year.

Even with a season-low 47-yard outing on 23 carries in their last game against Northwestern, the Boilermakers have averaged 149.0 yards per game on the ground this season, which ranks 75th nationally and ninth in the Big Ten, respectively, while they have also totaled eight touchdowns.

The bulk of those yards have come from 2023 honorable mention All-Big Ten junior tailback Devin Mockobee, who is leading the Boilermakers for the second straight season with 539 yards on 91 attempts

Mockobee, who also has three touchdowns, attributes his successes this season to the added weight he gained during his time at Purdue. He has gone from around 185-190 pounds early in his career to 207 this season, which he thinks can allow him to rush with more force and physicality.

"I've always had that kind of mentality to want to run through a guy, but obviously I didn't have the size to do that last year or the year before," Mockobee said during the offseason. "It will make a big difference with the weight that I have this year to actually be able to run how I was more comfortable running versus trying to get away from stuff."

Also making a big impact in Purdue's running back room is senior Reggie Love III, who has rushed for 325 yards and two touchdowns on 60 carries in his first year with the Boilermakers since transferring from Illinois this past offseason.

Those rushing successes could be attributed to Purdue's veteran offensive line, which consists of senior left tackle Corey Stewart, junior left guard Mahamane Moussa, senior center Gus Hartwig, senior right guard DJ Wingfield and junior right tackle Marcus Mbow. But while the front five might have paved some open holes this season for Mockobee and Love, the group has struggled to protect both Card and Browne, giving up 20 sacks (2 ½ per game), which is 15th in the Big Ten.

The line has also struggled with penalties all season, committing numerous pre-snap flags that have made the Boilermakers the third-most penalized team in the conference with 53 flags worth 521 yards, 65.1 yards per game.

"There will be drives where we start moving the ball, and then there will be pre-snap penalties in there," Love said after the Oregon loss. "So, I think the biggest thing that really messes us up is just the self-inflicted wounds. If we get rid of those, I feel like we'll make a lot of plays and score a lot of points."

Purdue's up-and-down offensive line serves as a microcosm of what has turned into a lost season for Walters and Purdue, one which likely will only get worse following difficult November matchups against Ohio State, Penn State and Indiana.

Regardless of this nightmarish finish to the schedule, one which could put them at only one or two total wins on the season, Walters knows his team will continue fighting to the very end, no matter what record they may end up with.

"I'm not having to need to beg them to continue to play or continue to be bought in," the coach said. "When you have failures, you need to be able to point to why you failed and come up with solutions on how to improve. When you can do that and point out something tangible, it gives a sense of hope and an explanation on how to get better."

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The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, SPORTS, FORUM, BSB ONLINE, and EAT & STAY. A 'LOG OUT' button is visible in the top right. The main content area features a headline: 'BUCKEYE LEAVES: FIELDING, IGBINOSUN, SIMON STAND OUT IN 20-13 WIN OVER NO. 3 PENN STATE'. Below the headline, it says 'By Greg Wilson | November 2, 2024 (3:24 pm) | Football'. There's a 'No Comments' button. A large image of a player in a white jersey with the number 38 is shown. To the right, there's a 'LATEST ADDITIONS' section with three items: 'Ohio State-Purdue To Kick Off At Noon On Fox', 'Recap: Defense Leads #4 Buckeyes to 20-13 win over #3 Penn State', and 'Buckeye Leaves: Fielding, Igbinosun, Simon Stand Out In 20-13 Win Over No. 3 Penn State'.

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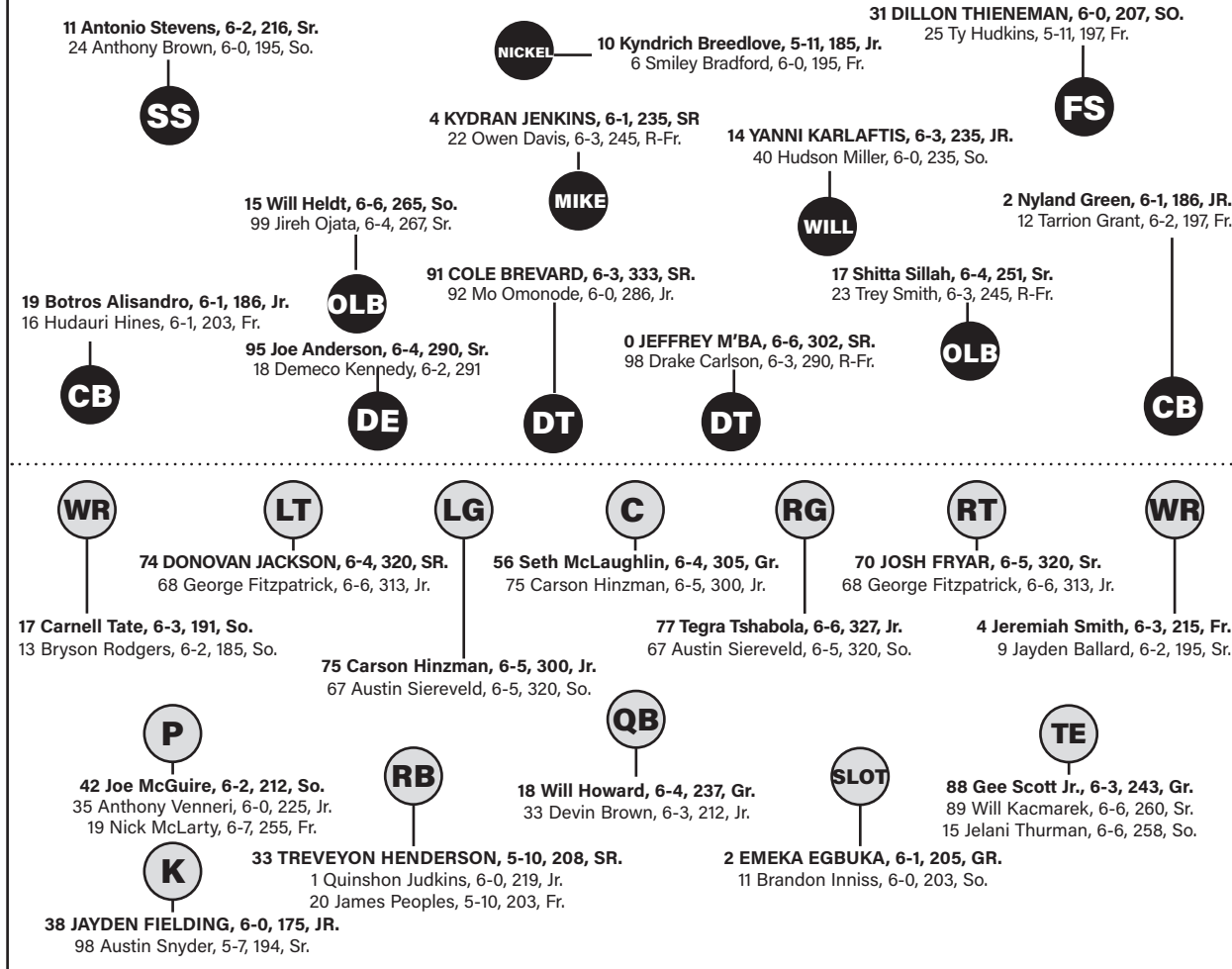
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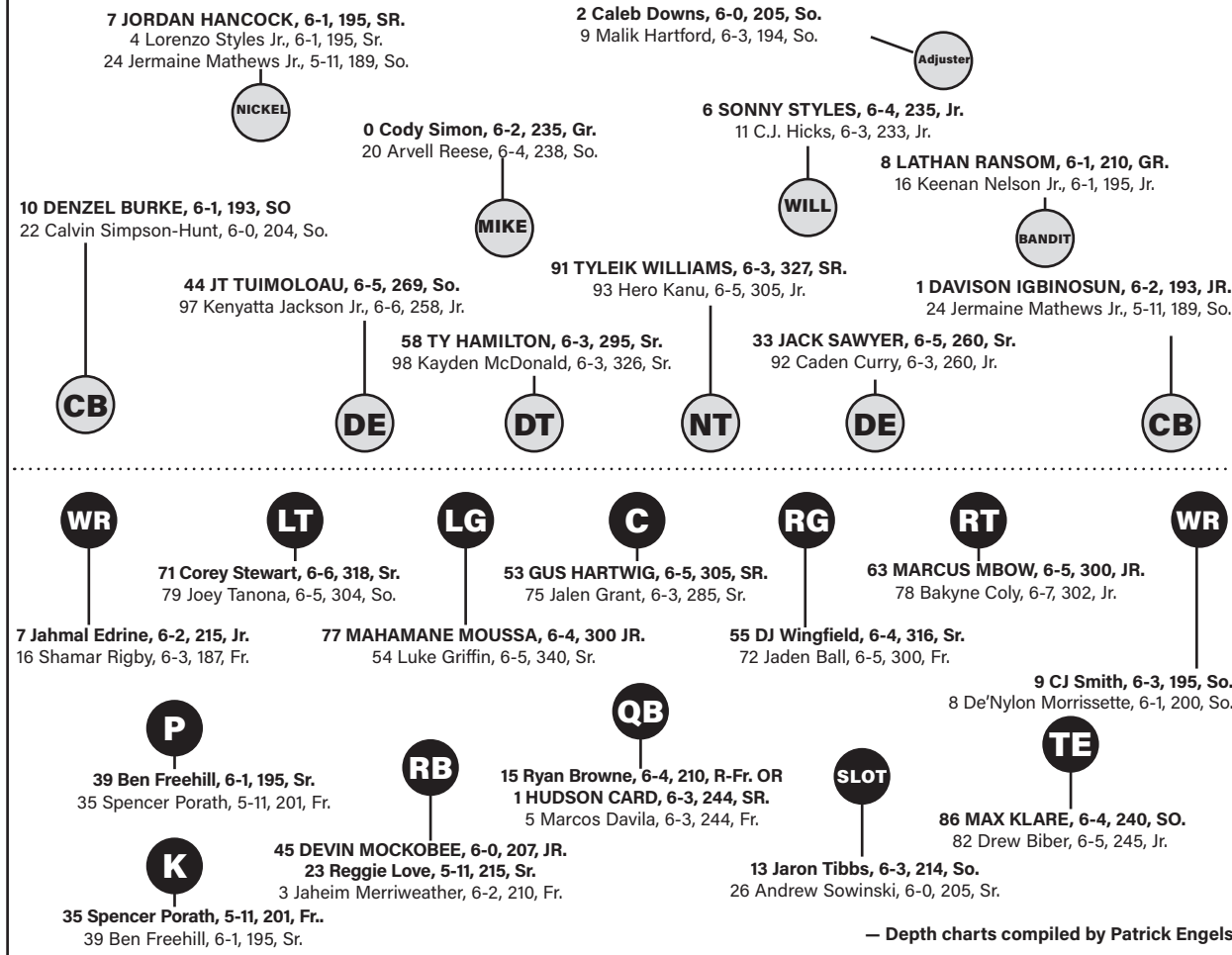


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN PURDUE HAS THE BALL...



— Depth charts compiled by Patrick Engels

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
PURDUE RUSH DEFENSE

Exhale. It's going to be OK. In the aftermath of rushing for 64 yards with a 2.1 average vs. Nebraska and losing two left tackles to injuries to completely discombobulate the offensive line, Ohio State showed it can be physical and grind out the yards when needed as evidenced by its performance during a 20-13 win over Penn State. The Buckeyes posted a solid 176 yards for a 4.4 average, which is notable considering the opposition. Penn State had a top-10 rushing defense at 93.0 yards per game, and had limited Wisconsin to only 81 in its previous game. Most impressive was the final drive for the Buckeyes when they started from their 1 with just over five minutes left and ran out the clock with 10 straight rushing plays. Quinshon Judkins battered his way to a game-high 95 yards and TreVeyon Henderson added 54 on 10 carries. Quarterback Will Howard picked up key first downs among his 12 runs, but he has to hold onto the ball. All in all, it was a good day for the running game, which is bad news for the woebegone Boilermakers after a 26-20 overtime loss to Northwestern. The Wildcats had been the worst offense in the Big Ten. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PURDUE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Boilermakers ran for just 47 yards vs. Northwestern with Devin Mockabee gaining only 29, far below the eight 100-yard games in his career. QB Hudson Card had the longest run against the Wildcats at 9 yards. It doesn't really matter how many yards the Buckeyes allowed to the Nittany Lions. They limited PSU to 2 yards on three attempts from the 3-yard line with the potential tying score at stake late in the game. For the record, the Buckeyes gave up 120 yards on the ground, with 33 of that coming off a direct snap to tight end Tyler Warren. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.
PURDUE PASS DEFENSE

As much as Howard deserves credit for guiding the Buckeyes back from a 10-0 deficit, he takes the blame for getting there with an egregious pick-six. His turnovers will come under more scrutiny as the games get bigger. Nonetheless, the passing attack was streamlined a bit to compensate for the patchwork line so the deep ball was not a weapon, other than a toss to Jeremiah Smith that failed. Howard finished 16 of 24 for 182 yards and two touchdowns and that ugly INT. Smith had four catches for 55 yards while Emeka Egbuka and Brandon Inniss each had TDs. One area where Purdue can be dangerous is in the pass rush with Kydran Jenkins getting 5½ sacks and Will Heldt with 5. Defensive back Dillon Thieneman led the team with nine tackles (six solo) and a pass breakup against the Wildcats. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PURDUE PASS OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Card made his first start against Northwestern after missing the previous two games with injuries. He went 21 of 37 for 267 yards and a TD, while Ryan Browne completed all three of his attempts, albeit for only 15 yards. The Boilermakers got eight receptions for 98 yards out of their tight ends. On the OSU side, Caleb Downs shut down Warren for most of the game and made some critical tackles. Davison Igbinosun probably got away with a few holds in the secondary, but made a spectacular end-zone interception that was a game-changer. The Buckeyes also produced two sacks of Allar, who was 12 of 20 for 146 yards and Igbinosun's pick. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

A plus for the Boilermakers is that they lead the Big Ten with three blocked kicks (two field goals, one punt). OSU's Joe McGuire punted twice for a 47.0-yard average against Penn State with a long of 53, and Jayden Fielding earned his keep with field goals from 46 and 39 yards to beat the Nittany Lions. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

If the game was being played in West Lafayette, stories about past Boilermakers upsets of the highly-ranked Buckeyes would be as prevalent as discarded campaign yard signs. The best thing for Ohio State is to get a big lead early and work on their depth. Purdue has been outscored, 295-113, by FBS opponents, and the heat is on second-year head coach Ryan Walters, who eschewed a 38-yard field goal attempt in overtime against Northwestern to go for it on fourth-and-6. The pass was incomplete and Northwestern later scored for the win. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

The Buckeyes owe the fans a romp after the lethargic nail-biter against Nebraska and the grind-it-out victory at Penn State. They should deliver. **OHIO STATE 49, PURDUE 7**

Styles Jr. Finding His Place On OSU's Defense

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The 2023 season was one in which Lorenzo Styles Jr. was spending just making adjustments.

He was making multiple big changes, transferring to Ohio State from Notre Dame after 2022. It wasn't only a change of scenery, though. Styles was also making the switch from being a wide receiver – where he accumulated 54 catches for 684 yards and two touchdowns in two seasons with the Fighting Irish – to play cornerback with the Buckeyes, where he would serve as a backup that whole year behind the likes of starters Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and Davison Igbinosun.

It was a tough process for Styles, who wasn't used to not being on the field during big games, which he ultimately thinks helped him.

"I mean, that was kind of tough," Styles said in the spring. "Because early on in the season, I knew that I was redshirting. I talked about that with Coach (Ryan) Day and he was all for it and he helped me with that process. But there were some games where I could have potentially got in and I feel like that was, wanting to be out there, I feel like that kind of hurt. "I had to stay on the grind even though I knew that week I wasn't playing in the game. So I feel like that just really helped me develop patience."

Since he redshirted, Styles had two seasons of eligibility remaining at the beginning of the 2024 season, but it was unclear how much of an impact he would be able to make on a defense that was returning so many high-level defensive backs who started last season for one of the top defenses in the country.

Despite that, Styles was getting a lot of time with special teams early on along with late-game blowout time on the defense, and he said earlier this season that he was having a great time just doing that much.

"This is the most fun I've had since I've been in college playing football," Styles said on Sept. 18. "I love BIA. I love the defense. I love really the whole organization in general, so I'm having fun with it right now."

But he was able to climb his way up the depth chart with his play and earned a start Oct. 26 against Nebraska.

Styles started in place of usual nickel cornerback Hancock during the 21-17 nail-biter win against the Cornhuskers after Hancock moved to safety to fill in for the injured Lathan Ransom.

A year ago, when Styles was redshirting, and to begin the 2024 season, that backup duty would have likely gone to sophomore cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr., who was a four-star prospect at the position coming out of high school and earned a backup role early on as a young defender who stood out.

But it didn't take long for Styles, who had only been playing the position at the college level since he transferred to Ohio State and hardly had any in-game experience doing so, to take over that position and prove that he could fill in for the Buckeyes in big situations.

After the game, his teammates were clear about how much of an impact they

believe Styles can make when he's in the game.

"He brings a lot to the defense," senior defensive tackle Ty Hamilton said. "In practice, he works hard on special teams. To make plays is special for him, especially being from Pickerington, just like me. Me and him playing on the same team, it's special to see him out there making plays. It's good for him."

"He's a terrific player," fifth-year linebacker Cody 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."

It was a quick route to playing time for Styles, who was getting more and more action in close games as the season progressed before he finally was able to start against the Cornhuskers, one which he thinks may have occurred due to his experience on the offensive side of the ball.

Styles said previously being a wide receiver at Notre Dame helped him make a seamless transition to cornerback because he already had a familiarity with many route concepts, something that a lot of receivers-turned-cornerbacks have benefited from when making that change.

"I get a feel for routes early on," he said. "I think just in my training, understanding the route combination of what they want to run on different downs and distances, it's helped me out."

Styles was the only non-starting defensive back to get any defensive snaps during the 32-31 loss at Oregon on Oct. 12, earning three snaps, still a small number compared to the 64 played for each of Burke, Igbinosun and Hancock.

Like many of his teammates, Styles is trying to put the loss to the Ducks behind him but at the same time use it as a motivator, especially since the Buckeyes didn't give themselves much room for any more mistakes for the rest of the season.

"I don't really think it took the Oregon game to wake us up like that, but it was part of our season," he said. "So we've got to just go bounce back overall as a defense, as a team, and use that to ignite a fire in us, for sure."

Special teams has been a weak point for the Buckeyes for years now, as evidenced in the Oregon game, and while they did show improvement at the beginning of the season, they seem to have regressed to where they were during the 2023 season.

As a main part of the special teams unit this season, Styles knows that there is still a lot of room for improvement in that facet of the game, as they have yet to make a true difference on the field this season.

"I think we've got to continue to get better," Styles said. "We don't really have any blocks yet, we don't have any touchdowns on special teams. We have to be game-changers in that space."

While the special teams unit as a whole still has yet to make much of a positive impact this season, Styles himself has taken his own advice to heart.

He earned Special Teams Player of the Game honors after Ohio State's Week 2 contest against Western Michigan by making two big tackles during the 56-0 win, one



SCOTT STUART

STYLE POINTS — After a year of changes in 2023, former Notre Dame wide receiver Lorenzo Styles Jr. is contributing to the Buckeyes as a cornerback, starting against Nebraska on Oct. 26.

coming on a kickoff return at the 20-yard line and the second bringing down Broncos punt returner Jordin Parker for a 5-yard loss.

He turned that into some late-game playing time on the defensive side of the ball as well, getting another tackle and also the first pass breakup of his Ohio State career against the Broncos.

Styles' early efforts on special teams has earned him more playing time this season, according to Day.

"Any time you play well on special teams, you're earning more and more trust with the staff. And that's something that we've always preached here," Day said. "So, the more and more trust you're building, you're just earning an opportunity to play more. We'll see how that all shakes out game to game and based on the scheme going in that week or what we're seeing in terms of our opponent."

"But (Styles is) somebody who's competing every day in practice. He's giving great effort on special teams. You see him show up in coverage, getting his hands on balls, effort, and that's big for us right now in terms of how we want the hardest-playing guys in the country. And he's shown he'll do that."

The son of former Ohio State linebacker Lorenzo Styles, who played three seasons for the Buckeyes and was starting middle linebacker in 1993 and '94 before embarking on a six-year career in the NFL, Styles Jr. has set high expectations for himself no matter where he is on the field, whether it's at receiver, cornerback or on special teams.

"As a man, as a football player, I just hold myself to a certain standard," he said.

"Whether I'm starting, whether I'm the backup, whatever it is, I just hold myself to a certain standard."

A native of Pickerington, Ohio, Styles is also getting the opportunity to play with his younger brother, Sonny, who is now the Buckeyes' starting Will linebacker after playing all of last season at safety.

But Lorenzo isn't holding back when it comes to his younger brother. Earlier in the season, when asked about how Sonny was doing at his new position, Lorenzo said he wanted his brother to improve, only wanting the best from him.

"I think he's playing decent so far, but he has to continue to improve," he said. "He's doing his job. But I want him to take it to the next level and really be that best linebacker in the country type."

The two brothers got to start alongside each other for the first time since high school during the win against the Cornhuskers. But that dream scenario for the Styles family didn't last long as Ransom was back in for the 20-13 win over Penn State on Nov. 2. Still, the elder Styles got into the game for 17 snaps, but recorded no stats while his younger brother had nine tackles.

Although Styles didn't get the start against the Nittany Lions, and might not the rest of this season without injuries taking his teammates out of the game, he is still going to be giving it everything he has whenever he's on the field.

"The way I practice, the way I show up every single day is going to be the same, whether I'm starting or I'm not," he said.

OSU Defense Shows Improvement Against PSU

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With several returning All-Big Ten caliber defenders and a big addition in the form of former SEC Freshman of the Year safety Caleb Downs, perhaps no defense in college football was more well-respected than Ohio State's before the 2024 season.

But through much of the first seven games of the season, some things felt missing at times for the Buckeye defense, even if the unit ranked among the best in the country before the Penn State game in total defense and scoring defense, allowing 254.4 total yards and 11.9 points per game.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin talked with 247Sports' Steve Helwagen, former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin and Kevin Noon of Buckeye Scoop before the 20-13 win over the Nittany Lions on Nov. 2 to hear their thoughts on how the unit was performing.

"I think when you have so many guys coming back that played last year and you add a potential All-American like Caleb Downs from Alabama, I thought it was going to be much better than it's been," Helwagen said on Oct. 30. "It just is weird that even in the early games against (Akron and Marshall), the first team had some issues at times early in games."

The peculiar issues surrounding the Buckeye defense, which first surfaced in the nonconference games against the Zips and Thundering Herd, as Helwagen said, popped up again in the first half of the 38-7 win over Michigan State, in which the defense gave up 186 yards. The common theme between all three games was that the Buckeyes figured out whatever issues they were having by halftime at the latest. In a 32-31 loss to Oregon, that wasn't the case.

"Generally in those games they worked their issues out pretty quickly and dominated the second, third and fourth quarters in most of those games," Helwagen said. "And then maybe in some of the early games, the



SONNY BROCKWAY

HERE'S THE PLAN — Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, here talking to defensive end JT Tuimoloau (44), came under criticism for not putting more pressure on Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel. A goal-line stand against Penn State may have quieted some critics.

opponent would get a late score, maybe against the backups, and so they may have given up seven or 10 points or whatever, but they played pretty good defense.

"I think then you get to Oregon, and I don't think they respected the speed of the Oregon wide receivers. They didn't get any pressure on the Oregon quarterback (Dillon Gabriel), and then late in the game they let him run the ball for a touchdown, and that was one of the worst defensive performances probably (dating) back to 2022 against Michigan, where they gave up all of those big, long plays."

The Buckeyes defense gave up a total of 496 yards against Oregon, the most yards allowed by the unit since the team's 42-41 loss to Georgia in the College Football Play-

off in 2022. Although the run defense wasn't great against the Ducks, the real problems came for the Buckeyes in slowing down Gabriel and the passing attack. Gabriel completed 23 of 34 passes for 341 yards, two passing touchdowns and a rushing score in the win, as the Buckeyes failed to generate any pass rush and subsequently failed to stay in front of receivers.

"I don't think they're getting to the quarterback enough," Laughlin said. "They're not getting enough hits on the quarterback."

With 2.86 sacks per game as a team through seven contests, the Buckeyes' numbers on the season were respectable and tied for the 21st most in the country with Marshall, but against the toughest offense on their schedule in Oregon, the vaunted Buckeye defensive line was nowhere to be found. In the one-point loss, they failed to sack Gabriel and rarely generated pressure.

"I think the lack of being able to get a pass rush with four guys," Noon said on Oct. 31 when asked what the biggest weakness of the defense is. "I don't know if I'm going to say that's a case of not subbing enough, or what it really is, but Ohio State has a lot of depth on the line, and I would think that Ohio State would be able to get home more often than it is."

"I know part of it is by design. It's more of a contain defense than it is a go and crush the quarterback defense, but I think that there's a place for both, and Ohio State is going to need to find that pass rush here as we enter the final stretch of the regular season."

Whatever is holding back the Ohio State pass rush from being among the best front four in the country, it certainly isn't talent. Not only are defensive ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau both former five-star recruits, but they are both thought to be early picks in the upcoming NFL draft.

Starting defensive tackles Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams haven't had the same

first-round buzz that Sawyer and Tuimoloau have had, but they still are NFL prospects, Williams projecting to go just one round later. One issue brought up by Helwagen was the number of snaps given to each player.

"I think one problem that they maybe haven't taken advantage of is their depth up there to split up the reps," he said. "Too often you see guys like Sawyer and Williams and Hamilton and Tuimoloau playing 50 and 60 plays and the backups only playing 15 plays. I think if that was a little bit more of an equitable split, you would get a great 40 or 50 plays out of Sawyer and Tuimoloau as opposed to just an OK 60."

The way the defensive line has been managed has caused rumors to spread about some friction between defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

"I don't know what to make of it," Noon said. "I think that you bring in Jim Knowles as the head coach of the defense, you need to give Jim Knowles the right to make the changes that he wants to make, and I don't think anybody should be able to hold that up."

"I think that we get bits and pieces and may not know the complete picture when it comes to these reported differences that are there, so I hate to leap to any conclusions. But I would hate to see anybody holding up the vision of the defensive coordinator when you brought him in and are paying him over \$2 million to run the unit."

Helwagen believes any differences between Johnson and Knowles aren't as big a deal as some make them out to be.

"I think a lot of that is blown out of proportion," Helwagen said. "I think that Jim Knowles calls something and the defensive line has to execute it to the best of their ability. Has there been some unwillingness to go to some of the other fronts, a three-man front, or a five-man front? I don't know, but I don't think that there's a true rift there."

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SONNY BROCKWAY

HOLDING THE LINE — There are rumors that longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson (above) doesn't see eye to eye with defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, especially in light of the 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12.

The talented secondary, consisting of veteran cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Davison Igbinosun, hasn't done the defensive line many favors when they don't get home. Burke, a first-team All-Big Ten cornerback in 2023, was exposed in the Buckeyes' loss to Oregon.

In that game, Burke was the victim of multiple well-executed double-move routes by Oregon receivers, which led to explosive gains of 69 yards and 48 yards over the top of the defense.

Burke had a much-improved performance in Ohio State's 21-17 win over Nebraska but still nearly gave up a long completion on Nebraska's second drive of the game. For someone who is usually as reliable and talented as Burke, even one long gain would have been a surprise, let alone the repeated ugly reps he had against Oregon.

"You don't know if he was 100 percent healthy or if something was wrong with him or once he got beat if it became a mental thing to where he was second-guessing himself and not going with his instincts," Helwagen said. "His keys and his technique and he just kind of panicked a little bit, because boy, he really struggled, and you hate to see that. You know he's a much better player than that because we've watched him for 3½ years, and we know how good he can be in those one-on-one situations."

Igbinosun has had issues of his own. In the narrow win over Nebraska, he nearly cost his team the game with two accepted pass-interference penalties, another that was declined, and some difficulties in covering Nebraska wide receiver Jahmal Banks.

One solution Noon had for the secondary was for the pairing of Burke and Igbinosun to play a little closer to the line of scrimmage.

"Members of the secondary are always going to have a confidence about them, and I think that sometimes they get a little too overconfident, but I also think sometimes they're put in bad positions," Noon said. "Sometimes you see defensive backs lining

up 6, 8, 10 yards off the line of scrimmage instead of playing press corner. I think that they have a secondary that would benefit from playing a little bit more press man."

Knowles, the man in charge of putting the Ohio State defense in position to succeed, faced all sorts of criticism following the unit's poor performance against Oregon. Specifically, Knowles drew criticism for his unwillingness to blitz and get pressure into the backfield. Helwagen was a little bit skeptical of the overall game plan against the Ducks.

"I just feel like they didn't have a good plan for that game. Their blitz packages were nothing," Helwagen said. "Too often, I'm watching through the binoculars, knowing that the blitz is coming and nobody ever impacts the quarterback, and when you blitz and can't impact the quarterback, he's going to pick you apart."

Knowles has had his fair share of bad calls, but in all fairness, he's also had his good calls, which at least in part led to Ohio State coming up with back-to-back stops against the Nebraska offense to hang on to a narrow win. It seems like at times Knowles has received more criticism from outsiders for the bad calls than he has received praise for the good calls. According to Noon, dealing with detractors is just a part of the job.

"Jim Knowles is the first one to say that when things go well, it's for the players, when things go wrong, it's on him, so he's kind of getting what he wants there, and I think that's the right leadership that you have to do as a defensive coach, a defensive coordinator, to put that stuff on you," Noon said.

According to Laughlin, the criticism faced by any coach is often a product of wins and losses.

"He probably gets too much blame," Laughlin said. "Guys have to make plays. Especially in the fourth quarter, these close games, you have got to come up and make the plays. So I mean we get a couple extra seconds in that Oregon game, well, we're undefeated. Nobody's complaining. We have

a kicker in that Georgia game, we win the national title, and then nobody's complaining."

But against then-No. 3 Penn State on Nov. 2, there was hardly anything to complain about for the Ohio State defense. The Buckeye defense allowed just six points while coming up with two goal-line stands to earn a 20-13 victory, the Nittany Lions' touchdown coming on a Will Howard pick-six.

"The defense really stepped up," Noon said. "It was a major improvement. There were a lot of new wrinkles that Jim Knowles was able to call, and the team executed well. Ohio State only had two sacks, but they came in the same series and really seemed to break the back of the Nittany Lions. I think that everybody, once they go back and really review the game, will come to a similar agreement that the defense led the way. Not to take anything away from the offense, but it was a defensive-led effort."

It was a team effort for the Ohio State defense that allowed only 270 yards and held the opposing offense to just three third-down conversions on 11 attempts. In the first of their two goal-line stands, Igbinosun ripped the ball from Penn State receiver Harrison Wallace III, after the Nittany Lions had advanced the ball to the OSU 3-yard line right before halftime.

The second goal-line stand was arguably the most impactful series of the game. With Ohio State leading 20-13, the Nittany Lions were at the Buckeye 3-yard line with first-and-goal. Three straight runs moved Penn State only to the 1-yard line, setting up the play of the game on fourth-and-goal. Rather

than running the ball up the middle, Penn State elected to go for a play-action pass. The Buckeyes were not fooled at all, and they blanketed the Nittany Lions receivers, forcing an incompleteness that gave OSU the ball back on its own 1-yard line.

"When you can stop the opposing offense twice after they've had first down inside the 5-yard line and not allow them to score, that's about as good a game as you are ever going to play defensively," Helwagen said following the Penn State game.

It was perhaps the defense's best game of the season, but the defensive line still brought PSU quarterback Drew Allar down only twice. Nonetheless, according to Helwagen, the defensive line did put up a strong effort in getting after him.

"The pass rush was good because as I watched the game, there were a number of times where they didn't sack the quarterback, but they forced incompleteness, like on the goal line, the fourth-down play," he said. "Allar had to kind of eat that football and throw it. Otherwise he was going to take a sack."

For the defense as a whole, the issues that at times plagued them throughout the first seven games could still come back to haunt them in future matchups against efficient offenses like Indiana or a potential rematch against Oregon, but their shut-down performance against Penn State was a strong sign to Helwagen.

"The jury may still be out if they can cover all the bases against a great offense like Oregon or Indiana, but definitely it showed there is a physicality to this defense," Helwagen said.

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Bucks Struggle To Remain Relevant In Mid-1960s

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 1964 season as Woody Hayes wages wars on several fronts to keep his program relevant on the national stage.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Woody Hayes always had a fighter's mentality. After all, he had spent part of his youth as an amateur boxer, participating in bouts put together by his older brother Ike.

But Hayes had never experienced opposition coming from all sides like he endured during the mid-1960s as he fought heated recruiting battles to retain homegrown Ohio talent while his own university waged war against the fear that football was becoming more important on campus than academics.

The latter battle had begun when Hayes was hired in 1951 over the objections of longtime OSU Alumni Association secretary Jack Fullen, who favored giving the job to one of the Ohio high school coaches that had interviewed for the position. Fullen reasoned that Hayes – after three years at Denison and two more at Miami (Ohio) – was too heavily invested in athletics and presented too much of a challenge with regard to academics.

Even before Hayes' arrival in Columbus, faculty members at Ohio State had been worried about academics taking a back seat

to athletics. Fullen was eagerly their mouthpiece, often talking publicly about the tail (football) wagging the dog (academics), and he finally saw an opening during the 1959-60 academic year.

Ohio State had held a symposium attended by a handful of U.S. senators, and during a tour of the campus, when asked his thoughts about the school, one senator reportedly replied, "Well, I don't know much about Ohio State, but I do know you have a good football team here."

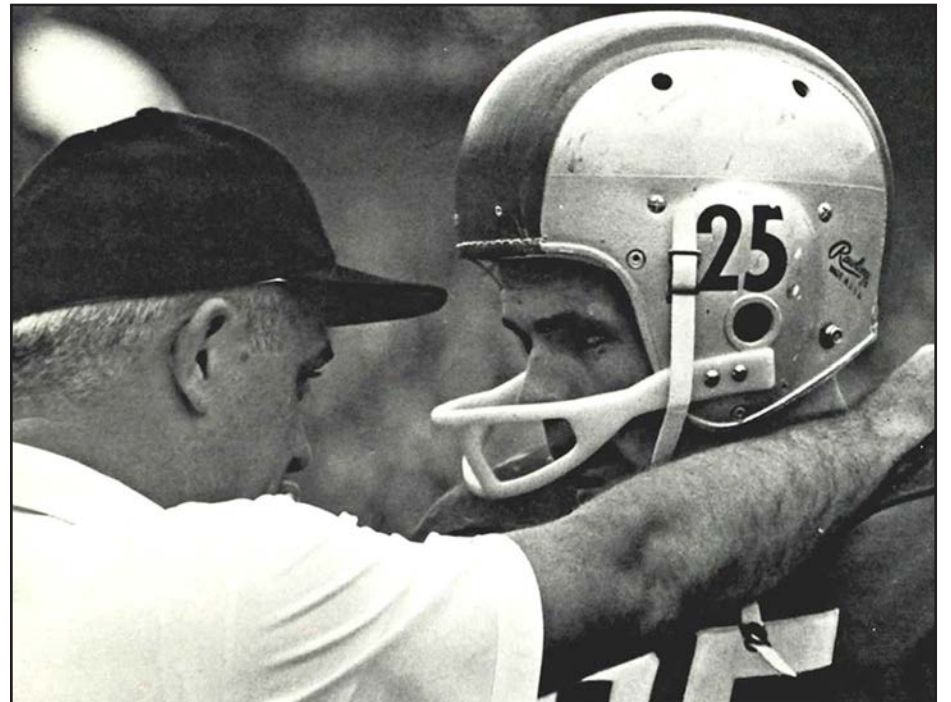
Faculty members did not hide their displeasure with that assessment.

"We're upset over the fact that the image of Ohio State is that the school is merely an appendage to the football team," one department head said. "When we go away for meetings, we're kidded about this by people from other schools. We don't dislike football, but the feeling is that things are out of proportion."

The following year, Fullen decided to make his play.

The Buckeyes had finished the 1961 season with an 8-0-1 record, and were ranked No. 2 in the country in the major national polls behind undefeated Alabama. But the Big Ten's longtime contract with the Rose Bowl had lapsed the year before, meaning the bowl invitation had been sent directly to the school rather than the league office. Conference rules at the time said the university's faculty had sole control over the bid.

With Fullen fanning the fire against play-



FILE PHOTO

TURBULENT TIMES — The early 1960s were difficult for coach Woody Hayes after the Faculty Council voted in 1961 not to send the team to the Rose Bowl, enabling opposing coaches to use that decision as a recruiting tool against him.

ing in the Rose Bowl, the Ohio State Faculty Council met as a group, and after considerable debate, voted 28-25 to turn down the invitation to Pasadena.

The decision triggered several days of protests that spilled from the campus to downtown Columbus. Straw figures meant to be representations of Fullen were burned in effigy, but if the alumni association secretary was concerned about his personal safety, it didn't show.

"All I want is balance," Fullen said. "We have small-time support for the true mission of the university and big-time support for athletics. You aren't going to have a very good house if you put all of your money in the game room and ignore the rest."

Dr. Marvin Fox, an associate professor in Ohio State's department of philosophy since the late 1940s, went even further.

"We are going off the deep end by admitting that these athletes are professionals," Fox said. "(They are) being paid to play football, so that we can fill up the stadium and draw huge sums of money from football attendance."

Hayes obviously disagreed, reiterating his belief that a Rose Bowl appearance brought "favorable attention for the university," while playing in the game was a "dream of each player and that this honor was earned by winning the (conference) championship."

The coach might also have known that dark days were coming for him and his program.

"After the faculty council voted the way it did, opposing teams used that as a recruiting tactic against Ohio State," longtime OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "Other coaches, especially those in the Big Ten, told prospective players that Ohio State was anti-Rose Bowl and that Coach Hayes didn't really have the support of his school. That hurt Woody very deeply, both personally and professionally."

"There is no doubt that it hurt his pro-

gram. Just look the team records immediately after 1961. Ohio State lost at least three games in four of the following six seasons, and in one of those seasons (1966), the Buckeyes had a losing record. That happened only twice in the 28 years that Woody Hayes was head coach at Ohio State."

Ready For Redemption

Ohio State experienced back-to-back seasons with three losses in 1962 and '63, the first time that had happened in more than a decade. What's more, the Buckeyes seemed to be losing their footing on the national scene.

Between the 1960 and 1962 seasons, the team had spent 19 consecutive weeks ranked among the nation's top 10 teams, according to *The Associated Press*. But the Buckeyes had dropped completely out of the rankings midway through the '62 season, and after that had spent 14 agonizing weeks playing as an unranked team through the end of the 1963 campaign.

But when the 1964 season began, Ohio State had returned to the upper regions of the AP poll, installed at No. 5 in the preseason rankings. Part of the reason was because the roster had been restocked with star power on both sides of the ball.

Defensive back Arnie Chonko was on his way to first-team All-America honors as was linebacker Dwight "Ike" Kelley. Also earning All-America status was offensive tackle Jim Davidson, who anchored an impressive offensive line in front of quarterback Don Unverferth, halfbacks Tom Barrington and Bo Rein, and fullback Will Sander.

Ironically, Unverferth, who went on to set almost every passing record at Ohio State, was not Hayes' first choice as Ohio State's quarterback. The coach had heavily pursued Tommy Myers of Troy High School, considered one of the top high school quarterbacks in the nation. But Myers was reportedly turned off by the faculty decision not to go to

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the Rose Bowl, and signed with Northwestern.

Myers became a star for the Ara Parseghian-coached Wildcats, and led them to back-to-back victories against Ohio State in 1962 and 1963. It marked the first time in more than 20 years that Northwestern had enjoyed two consecutive wins against the Buckeyes, a feat the Wildcats have not achieved since.

Despite the successive losses to the Wildcats, however, losing out on the services of Myers might have been a blessing in disguise for the Buckeyes. Unverferth was eager to get into the pre-med program at Ohio State, and his strong-armed skills as a quarterback helped bring Hayes and his ground-oriented offense out of the dark ages. His 871 passing yards during the 1964 season might not sound like much today, but at the time, it ranked third all-time on the program's single-season list.

With Unverferth at the controls, the Buckeyes made a convincing statement during their 1964 season opener, taking a 27-8 victory against SMU. Barrington and Sander each scored on long touchdown runs, defensive end and team co-captain Bill Spahr scooped up a fumble and returned it 31 yards for a score, and kicker Bob Funk added field goals of 39 and 27 yards.

The Mustangs were on their way to a dismal 1-9 season as well as a last-place finish in the Southwest Conference under third-year head coach Hayden Fry. It was the worst season during the College Football Hall of Fame coach's 37-year career at SMU, North Texas State and Iowa.

Ohio State kicked off Big Ten play the following week by hosting Indiana, a team on its way to a 2-7 finish in 1964 and one that hadn't beaten the Buckeyes since 1951. But the upstart Hoosiers pulled out all the stops before succumbing to a 17-9 decision.

IU held edges in several categories, including first downs (18-16) and total yardage (322-289). But the Hoosiers turned the ball over three times – each on Chonko interceptions. The three interceptions tied an OSU single-game record first set in 1951 by Fred Bruney against Illinois, and equaled several times since.

The victory against Indiana set up an early-season road test against defending Big Ten and Rose Bowl champion Illinois. Led by All-American center/linebacker Dick Butkus and fellow All-American George Donnelly at defensive back, the undefeated Fighting Illini were ranked No. 2 in the nation, but hadn't beaten the Buckeyes in Champaign since a 14-7 win in 1950.

Ohio State set the tone from the outset. Defensive back John Fill intercepted a pass and returned it 47 yards to the Illinois 24, and on the Buckeyes' first offensive play from scrimmage, Unverferth faked an option pitch and scampered 24 yards for a touchdown.

The Illini never recovered from the early haymaker, and OSU marched to a convincing 26-0 victory in front of 71,227 fans, at the time the largest crowd ever to watch a Big Ten game at Memorial Stadium. Illinois gained only 140 yards, averaging just 2.2 yards on its 65 offensive plays, and never advanced past the OSU 31-yard line.

"They had about 18 or 20 returning lettermen," Kelley remembered about the Illini that year. "Butkus was quoted as saying something like, 'Ohio State's my meat because they run straight at me. That's what I

love.'

"Well, Woody got hold of that and used it. He got up in front of us before the game and said, 'That SOB won't know where we're coming from!' He had us so sky-high for that game, some of the guys were throwing up from excitement. Then, we went out and just drilled 'em."

The Buckeyes returned home the following week and never missed a beat, getting some payback against USC for a humiliating 32-3 loss at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum the year before. The Trojans committed five turnovers, and accounted for only 197 total yards during a 17-0 shutout loss. USC, under fifth-year head coach John McKay, went on to win five of its final six games, including a 20-17 upset of top-rated Notre Dame in their final game, and wound up as the nation's No. 10 team in the final AP poll of the season.

Meanwhile, Ohio State was elevated to the top spot in the polls after its victory against the Trojans, and celebrated with two more late-October victories.

The Buckeyes moved to 5-0 with a dominating 28-3 win against Wisconsin in front of a homecoming crowd of 84,365 – then the third-largest crowd in Ohio Stadium history – and then notched a sixth consecutive victory with a hard-earned 21-19 decision against Iowa despite being outgained by a 315-189 margin.

Iowa quarterback Gary Snook directed a 67-yard scoring drive that pulled his team within two points of the Buckeyes with just two seconds remaining in the game, but the QB's naked reverse on the subsequent two-point conversion try was stopped by Kelley just short of the goal line.

The pollsters were unimpressed with the victory, however, and dropped Ohio State a notch in the national rankings to No. 2 despite its perfect 6-0 record. But the Buckeyes still stood atop the Big Ten standings as they returned home for what was supposed to be a breather against nonconference opponent Penn State, a team that had begun the 1964 season by losing four of its first five games.

Since that ugly start, the Nittany Lions had strung together back-to-back wins, but were still just 3-4 when they invaded Columbus for the second year in a row. South Pennsylvania native Charles "Rip" Engle, in his 15th of 16 seasons as head coach in Happy Valley, had guided his team to a 10-7 win against the Buckeyes in 1963, a victory that was attributed to the excellent quarterback play of Pete Liske, who threw for 168 yards and a touchdown against the Buckeyes.

Liske had graduated after the 1963 season, but Penn State didn't need him. Engle and top assistant Joe Paterno devised a game plan that thoroughly dominated the Buckeyes and resulted in a shocking 27-0 upset. During the first half, Ohio State had minus-14 yards of total offense, and totaled just 63 yards for the game while the Nittany Lions amassed 349.

The Buckeyes rebounded from the embarrassing loss with a 10-0 win against Myers and Northwestern to set up the traditional season finale against Michigan, a game that would determine the Big Ten championship. The Wolverines hadn't won a league title since 1950 – the year before Hayes was hired at Ohio State – and the coach had often said that if he had any say in the matter, "it

would be a cold day in hell" before they won another one.

Little did Hayes know just how soon that cold day would come.

The Freezer Bowl

In a game many observers compared to the 1950 Ohio State-Michigan game, also known as "The Snow Bowl," the Buckeyes and Wolverines faced off under brutally cold conditions nearly 14 years to the day later.

This time, instead of playing in a blinding snowstorm, the skies above Ohio Stadium were crystal clear. But the afternoon temperature never rose above 20 degrees while steady 20- to 30-mph winds kept everything in a deep freeze. Official wind chills were estimated at around 5 degrees below zero, but the participants said it felt much colder.

"I was never so cold in my life, and I've never been that cold since," Sander told BSB in 2021. "Nowadays, they have special gloves, bench warmers and those gas-powered heaters on the sideline. We had none of that. It's pretty hard to grip a football when your fingers are so numb you can't feel them."

The frigid conditions weren't limited to the field of play. In the press box, reporters were fighting their own battle against the elements.

According to Roger Stanton, the longtime publisher of Football News, the Ohio Stadium press box was so cold that the copy machine used to provide statistical information to reporters stopped working. A variety of solutions was tried until someone tried pouring vodka onto the machine's gears and the unusual lubricant allowed the copier to, according to Stanton, "hum along reasonably during the remainder of the afternoon."

The first quarter was scoreless with neither team able to get a grip on its offense mainly because they couldn't get a grip on the football.

The first break of the game came when Michigan quarterback Bob Timberlake fumbled on his own 29-yard line. But the Buckeyes couldn't cash in because Unverferth's third-down sideline pass attempt to receiver Bob Stock was knocked away by Michigan defensive back Rick Volk, who would go on to enjoy a 12-year All-Pro career in the NFL, mostly with the Baltimore Colts.

Michigan got its first break late in the second quarter when Rein fumbled a punt return and the Wolverines recovered on the Ohio State 20. They pushed ahead to the 17 before Timberlake pulled off what was ultimately the play of the game.

The Michigan QB tried to roll to his right, but met a wall of Ohio State defenders that caused him to reverse his field. Timberlake had wanted to get the ball to split end John Henderson, who was sprinting down the sideline. But Henderson was double-covered, so Timberlake stopped and found wide-open wingback Jim Detwiler, who managed to gather in a wind-swept spiral at about the Ohio State 3 before turning into the end zone.

Michigan kicker Forest Evashevski, son of the legendary Iowa head coach of the same name, tacked on the PAT and Michigan had a 7-0 lead with just 44 seconds remaining in the first half.

The second half was nearly a carbon copy of the first with Arctic winds whipping

through the stadium and Hayes never wavering from his original game plan. The Buckeyes ran an unbalanced line for most of the game, sending Sander on straight off-tackle dives and occasionally trying to spring Barrington wide or Rein on a misdirection play. But the defensive game plan devised by Michigan head coach Chalmers "Bump" Elliott and his first-year line coach, Ohio native Tony Mason, countered nearly everything OSU tried and limited the Buckeyes to just 122 yards on the ground.

Sander was the game's leading rusher with 65 yards on 14 carries, but Barrington and Rein combined for only 9 net yards on 10 attempts. Meanwhile, Unverferth struggled with the frigid, windy conditions and completed only 6 of 20 pass attempts for 59 yards with two interceptions.

Michigan tacked on a 27-yard field goal from Timberlake early in the fourth quarter and went on to post a 10-0 victory. It marked the first time the Buckeyes had been shut out by their archrivals since a 19-0 loss in 1956, snapped the Wolverines' four-game losing streak in the series, and sent Michigan to the Rose Bowl for the first time in 14 years.

The Wolverines went to Pasadena and came home with a 34-7 rout of Oregon State, and finished the 1964 season ranked No. 4 in the national polls.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes finished No. 9 in both the writers' and coaches' polls, marking the third straight season they had polled behind one or more Big Ten rivals in the final rankings of the season. That streak would extend through the 1967 season as Hayes and his program struggled to remain on solid footing with regard to recruiting.

"There is no doubt that the 1961 decision not to go to the Rose Bowl was used against Ohio State," Park said. "The proof can be plainly seen when comparing the records of the team before and after the decision."

Between the eight-year period from 1954 to 1961, the Buckeyes posted a 56-14-4 record (a .789 winning percentage), won four Big Ten championships, and earned three national titles. Over the six years following the 1961 decision not to go to the Rose Bowl, Ohio State had a 35-18-1 record (.657) with zero conference or national championships.

"That kind of forced Woody to rethink his recruiting strategy," Park said. "Always before, the bulk of his rosters were from Ohio high schools. But in that 1964 game, Michigan's entire starting backfield was from Ohio."

"So, Woody understood that he had to make some changes. As a result, he began to expand his recruiting focus outside Ohio with that change in philosophy ultimately resulting in the class that became the 'Super Sophomores' in 1968."

Park's point is a salient one. While only 9.1 percent of the official 1961 roster featured players from outside Ohio, by 1968 that percentage had nearly doubled to 17.4 percent. Just five years later, it had doubled again to 35.1 percent.

"I'm sure Woody would never have admitted it," former OSU sports information director Marv Homan told BSB in 2011, "but it's entirely possible Jack Fullen did him a favor when he influenced the Faculty Council vote in 1961."

"There were definitely some leaner seasons in the wake of that decision, but I think there is an argument to be made the future of the Ohio State football program was changed ultimately for the better."



Don Unverferth

Heyward 'Steel' Going Strong For Pittsburgh

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Being a good person, a role model in the community and a positive influence in the locker room are wonderful attributes but they don't get you to the level of being among the greatest players on one of the NFL's most storied franchises.

It takes a long and productive career to set a record for games played by a defensive player for the Pittsburgh Steelers. That's the mark former Ohio State defensive tackle Cameron Heyward set Oct. 28 during a 26-18 Monday Night Football win against the New York Giants.

Heyward, 35, appeared in his 202nd game (167 starts) to surpass Hall of Fame defensive back Donnie Shell.

"Cam is a great, great guy," Shell said. "He does a lot in the community and he's an awesome player."

Heyward's accomplishment was met with an ovation by Steelers fans after a tribute on the video board at Acrisure Stadium.

"I wasn't expecting that," Heyward said. "It was nice. I would have been fine if we had never acknowledged it."

Heyward is fourth all-time on the Steelers' career games list behind quarterback Ben Roethlisberger (249), center Mike Webster (245) and receiver Hines Ward (217).

"It's a testament to being with the same team," Heyward said. "Not a lot of people can say that. There are very few on that list, and I have respect for all of them."

"Like in any sport, you see the guys in one jersey, and there is a level of respect there. It means you didn't run. You didn't go chasing anything. You were serious about your craft where you were, and your focus was on trying to get better. You weren't looking for an easy way out."

Heyward appreciates the history of the Steelers. He spent some of his youth in the city where his father, the late Craig "Ironhead" Heyward, was a star running back at Pitt before playing 11 years in the NFL.

"I know the players that are around that (career record), and I have so much respect for them," he said. "I don't take this game lightly. There's a lot of luck involved. There's a lot of staying healthy when everybody said I was hurt all the time. I appreciate it."

Only nine active NFL players – excluding punters, kickers, long snappers and special team specialists – have appeared in more games than Heyward. Just three are defensive linemen: Miami defensive end Calais Campbell (252 games), Houston defensive end Jerry Hughes (222) and New Orleans defensive end Cameron Jordan (218), who is the only one of the trio still with the team that drafted him.

Heyward is not close to winding down his NFL career after being drafted in the first-round (No. 31) by the Steelers in 2011.

He played in 52 games (46 starts) at Ohio State from 2007-10. Heyward recorded 37½ tackles for loss and 15½ sacks, recovered two fumbles with one in the end zone for a touchdown. He also had an 80-yard interception return against Miami (Ohio) in 2010, and was named first-team All-Big Ten that same season.

He rewarded the Steelers for picking him by being named to the Pro Bowl six

times and is a three-time first-team AP All-Pro.

In 2023, Heyward was the recipient of the Walter Payton Man of the Year award that recognizes a player's community service as well as playing excellence. He's been nominated six times by the Steelers and is so respected that he has been team captain since 2015.

"You could tell by all the gray hairs in his beard that he has been here forever," Steelers outside linebacker T.J. Watt said with a smile. "He's done amazing things. He's the true epitome of a Pittsburgh Steeler, on and off the field – a guy that we can all look to as a role model teammate, Pittsburgh citizen and also player. I have so much respect for Cam and he's still doing it at a very high level."

Heyward signed a three-year, \$45 million contract Sept. 3 that runs through 2026. The Steelers showed faith in him even though a groin injury that caused him to miss six games last season limited him to just two sacks and caused some to wonder if his better days were behind him.

"I've had to eat (criticism) and absorb it," he said during the preseason. "Everybody's entitled to their opinion, but I want to make their opinion wrong, and I think I just look forward to playing good football."

"I play with a chip on my shoulder. If I get knocked down, I'm going to get back up even stronger."

Pittsburgh head coach Mike Tomlin likes that attitude and isn't concerned about Heyward's age.

"It's who he is," Tomlin said. "That's why we were attracted to him. He brought that with him from Columbus, Ohio. In terms of why he's able to be uniquely effective for a long period of time, he's a power player who happens to be athletic."

"Those power players grow old more gracefully than the oversized athletes. I imagine at 45, you couldn't move Cam out of a gap. The power players generally age more gracefully, and he is a power player."

Having A Season

Heyward is making his point. He earned a spot on Pro Football Focus' Midseason All-Pro Team, helping the Steelers to a 6-2 record through Oct. 28.

According to PFF, he had 29 total pressures and three sacks. He also has 21 run stops and currently holds a grade of 91.0 overall, including an 84.4 run defense and an 87.9 pass rush grade.

"The 35-year-old Heyward isn't slowing down," PFF's Gordon McGuinness wrote. "He boasts 80.0-plus PFF grades in pass rushing and run defense as arguably the best player at the position in the league."

Heyward's 83½ career sacks are a record by a Steelers lineman.

Defensive coordinator Teryl Austin said Heyward's longevity comes from preparation.

"He's not one of the guys that comes back here and tries to work himself into shape during the course of the offseason or whatever," Austin said. "He is always working, always in shape."

Defensive lineman Montravius Adams scoffed at critics who thought Heyward was finished after last season.

"People felt like he slacked because of the injury last year," Adams said in mid-October. "They'd better watch these first six games."

"I've been with guys who have been able to do it, but they were doing it in year eight or year nine. This dude is on Year 14, and he's still doing it. I just think it's impressive. I truly don't believe there is another guy who can do it. And I'm glad he's on our team."

Heyward, in his role as the ultimate leader, is quick to defend his teammates. Such was the case when Giants right tackle Jermaine Eluemunor, who was playing for his fourth team in eight seasons, taunted Watt and his pass-rushing abilities by saying that he wanted to be left on an island against him, meaning he could handle the star player by himself.

Watt had two sacks and a strip-sack fumble recovery that helped Pittsburgh seal the victory.

"That island sank," Heyward said on his "Not Just Football With Cameron Heyward" podcast. "There is no island anymore. It was washed up in Hurricane Watt. And then Alex (Highsmith) got a sack over there, too. It is not a good feeling when you poke the bear. I'm petty. I send (Watt) stuff in the group chat. I make sure he knows, make sure he is circling it. But it's nice to see T.J. just destroy that and make sure the kid knows, 'Don't be calling me out if you don't want the smoke.'"

"Last time they played each other, I think T.J. had two sacks there. So, he could be all for the competition. But shoot, you'd better be ready to perform in those moments."

Heyward is not above self-criticism on his podcast when he discussed the Steelers' rush defense. "I'm not happy about that," he said. "Going into the (Giants) game, I thought we were doing a good job stopping the run. You watch that game, yards after contact, you give props to them, but man we've got to wrap up."

"We've got to tackle, especially giving up explosion runs. That's not allowed. And you know multiple teams are going to try and duplicate that. They're going to go back to that formula and see if they have more success with it."

Care Of Others

Heyward is beloved in Pittsburgh not only for his football but his charity work, such as "Cam's Kindness Week" that includes visits to children in hospitals, clothing drives and donations to the athletic department of his mother's high school.

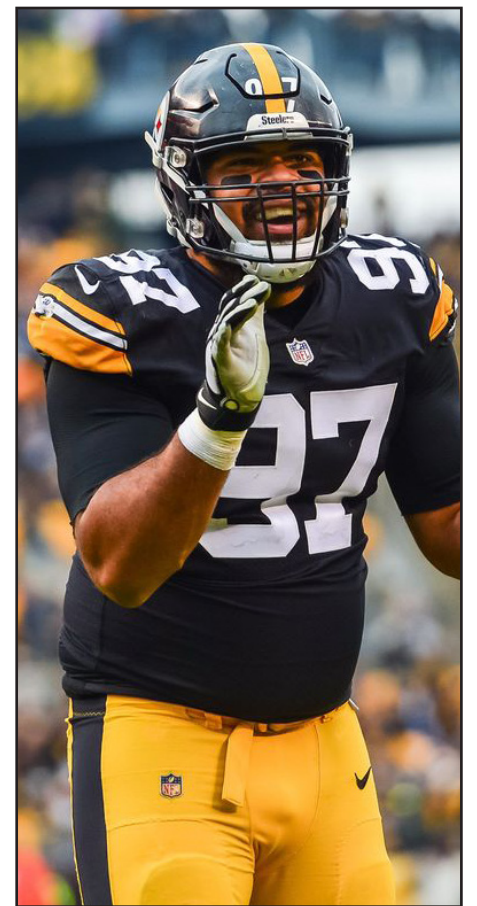
He credits her for instilling the value of giving back.

"She wasn't just going to settle for us just going about our way and not caring about our community," Heyward said.

He established a foundation – The Heyward House – in 2015 to cover a wide range of services and programs such as Kids Voice, which provides resources for abused, neglected and at-risk kids, as well as the Boys & Girls Club and American Cancer Association.

Heyward's father died in 2006 of brain cancer at age 39. Cameron was a senior in high school at the time and felt the burden of taking care of brothers, Corey and Connor, who was drafted as a tight end from Michigan State by the Steelers in 2022 and is in his third year with the team.

"He definitely was the man in our house,"



FILE PHOTO

CANTON CALLING? – Former Buckeye Cameron Heyward might someday find himself being honored with induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but getting the Pittsburgh Steelers back to the Super Bowl is his priority.

his mother, Charlotte Heyward-Blackwell, told Steelers.com. "But Cam then went off to college. I think he had that responsibility in his head, but how much can you do when you're in college and you're trying to get on the field and start playing as a freshman at Ohio State? It was kind of crazy. That summer, Connor was playing in the AAU nationals in Florida, he comes down and stays for a week and watches. You could feel it was more than brotherly support. It was 'I'm here as the man of our family.'"

For all the accolades and records for Heyward, he is still in search of the ultimate prize.

"Super Bowl," Heyward said. "That's the main thing I play for. That's the one thing I'm looking forward to. The only way you get a Super Bowl is if you have the playoff wins. When you look at my career, I want to make noise in the playoffs."

The Steelers haven't won a playoff game since 2016 – and he was on injured reserve at the time.

"Cam is a simple guy," Adams said. "I think that's his ultimate motivation. It wasn't about the money. Cam just wants to get a Super Bowl, and he's going to give us everything he can to get us there."

It has been mentioned to Heyward the possibility of someday being elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

"I think so," he said when asked if he'll merit serious consideration for the Hall of Fame. "But it's not like you get to the Hall of Fame when you're still playing. The focus is on trying to win a Super Bowl."

Mathis 'Not Sure' If He Will Schedule More Visits

Ohio State has been very successful so far with its recruitment of defensive linemen during the 2025 cycle, landing commitments from six prospects, including Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225). Mathis has been committed to the Buckeyes since January, but that has not stopped him from taking visits to other schools. That includes Big Ten rival Penn State, who has long been interested in the edge rusher.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Mathis was on Ohio State's campus for the Buckeyes' 21-17 win against Nebraska and told 247Sports that he enjoyed his time in Columbus, but he wasn't sure whether he would schedule more visits to other schools after the trip.

"I am actually not sure," he said. "Currently there is nothing, but I am not sure."

The Nittany Lions have pushed hard for Mathis, including during the summer when he made several visits to State College and head coach James Franklin went to Mathis' high school to watch him play early in October.

But on the visit with the Buckeyes, Mathis said he enjoyed getting to hang out with the players most, being hosted by freshman defensive end Eddrick Houston, who was also a flip candidate up to the time he signed on the dotted line during the early signing period, ultimately committing to defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

"The love from the players, that kind of stood out to me the most," Mathis said. "I got a lot of love from the players and the bond was already getting built."

"(Houston and I) hung out," he added. "We went out a little bit and we had a good time. They were showing me around the area. It was pretty dope spending time with those guys."

Mathis did say that he got to meet with Johnson, which sounds as if it was productive in terms of keeping the relationship the two have built to this point, but didn't get to spend as much time with head coach Ryan Day, who was presumably busy with his preparation for the Cornhuskers.

"We did have our meeting and it went real well," Mathis said of Johnson. "He gave me a couple of tips and keys on my assignments and my alignment with getting off the ball. That went good. It was some tips on how I can use my speed, my power, use my length on the field – just be more physical."

"I didn't get that much time with Coach Day, but when I did get to spend time with him, it was all love. It was love. He had a conversation with me and my family and it was good. The conversation went really well."

Hiller Calls Visit To OSU 'Great'

During the nailbiter that was Ohio State's four-point win against Nebraska on Oct. 26, the Buckeyes hosted many recruits on visits, ranging from players in the soon-to-sign 2025 class all the way to a 2029 quarterback prospect in Westerville (Ohio) North Winnie Garnett IV (6-3, 200).

One of the prospects on campus was Coatesville (Pa.) Area five-star offensive tackle Maxwell Hiller, a 2027 prospect, who said in a conversation with 247Sports that he and his father enjoyed their time on campus.

"It was great," Hiller said. "It was my first time ever at Ohio State. I went with my father and he loved it. I definitely liked the atmosphere. The fans were great. It was a fun game to watch."

"I thought they would win by a lot, but that happens. A win is a win. I talked to Coach (Justin) Frye and Coach (Mike) Solenne. I talked to some players after the game. They were great. Everyone was really nice."

Hiller stayed in Columbus until Oct. 27 where he met with both Day and Frye that day, and said that the Buckeyes are "up there" when it comes to his recruitment.

It has been a struggle to land some of

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 | ★★★★ | Ontario, Ohio |
| 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 |

the top offensive line prospects for the Buckeyes in the past few years outside of Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), who is considered the No. 55 player in the country. But other than with Lowe, OSU and Frye have repeatedly missed on top prospects dating back to the commitment of now-senior Donovan Jackson in the 2021 class, recruited at the time by former offensive line coach Greg Studrawa.

With that drought likely in the back of their minds, Frye and the Buckeyes have been very active with the 2026 offensive line class, especially since the in-state talent is better than it has been in years past. Ohio boasts such players as Avon Lake four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) and Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310).

But for Hiller, the Buckeyes will have to compete against at least 12 other schools that have offered him already, includ-

ing Alabama, Maryland, Michigan, Penn State, Pittsburgh, and Oklahoma. Being such a highly-regarded prospect – the No. 29 player in the class, the No. 4 offensive tackle and the No. 1 player in the state of Pennsylvania – there will likely be many more offers to come.

Hiller has already taken many visits to Penn State, including three over the past summer and one for the Nittany Lions' 34-27 win against Bowling Green on Sept. 7, making the in-state school the likely favorite to land his services in the coming years. But the Buckeyes will still try to put up a fight.

2026 QB Curtis To Visit For Indiana Game

Most of the top-ranked quarterbacks in the 2026 class have already committed to a school, and Ohio State has yet

Continued On Page 26

ASK AN ANALYST with Garrick Hodge of Eleven Warriors

New Orleans Edna Karr five-star defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270) was in Columbus for the game against Nebraska and still plans to get back when Michigan comes to visit on Nov. 30. What do you think are Ohio State's chances at landing him and which program would they have to beat out?

"I'm not overly optimistic. I don't doubt Stewart has a strong interest in Ohio State. He wouldn't be making these visits if he didn't. And obviously, the interest is reciprocated from OSU considering there's unlimited potential with Stewart considering his talent and frame. But this is modern football recruiting, and if it comes down to the bottom line, I don't know that OSU will be the high bidder compared to Oregon or his home-state LSU Tigers. If it plays out that way, I wouldn't necessarily blame them either considering Stewart has played around eight high school football games and has now essentially missed 1½ seasons after his reclassification. He could be a star one day, but he also is going to need a lot of development. The same holds true for most 18-year-olds at this level, but most schools probably want a guy as high-profile as he is

to start right away or at least play meaningful snaps, so it's a tough ask."

The Buckeyes have been going after Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony Rogers for a while now. Do you think they have a real chance at flipping the Alabama commit?

"Yes, I think so. He and Carlos Locklyn have developed a very strong relationship, and I think that could be beneficial for Ohio State here. A lot will depend on how Rogers' official visit goes, which is still supposed to be sometime this fall. Ohio State will have plenty of competition for Rogers, and not just Alabama, but there's definitely a chance they can win this recruitment."

Duluth, Ga., four-star offensive tackle Damola Ajidahun was also on campus for the game against Nebraska and saw a poor offensive-line performance from OSU. Does that affect his recruitment and his idea of Ohio State at all?

"I guess it could go either way depending on how he views it. On one hand, maybe he'll be concerned the performance

wasn't up to par. On the other hand, he could also look at it as a situation where he could come in and play right away if he has a quick acclimation period. Ohio State will continue to pursue him, along with Georgia Tech, Georgia and South Carolina. I expect he makes his final decision sometime in December."

There has been some rumored friction between Jim Knowles and Larry Johnson about how to handle the defensive line. Do you think something like that being public has any effect on defensive line recruitment?

"Not as it pertains to traditional defensive tackles and defensive ends, I don't think so, no, or at least I haven't heard anything like that be a major concern with those recruits. But with guys that are sort of that stand-up edge or what would be the Jack in Jim Knowles' scheme – think Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star defensive end Justin Hill (6-3, 220) – yeah, there's a big glaring red flag with OSU for those types of players. Though I would say that primarily stems from OSU not showing much of that position within the last two years rather than any perceived friction between Johnson and Knowles."

Five-Star 2026 QB Plans Visit To Ohio State

Continued From Page 25

to earn a pledge. But on Oct. 17, things opened back up for the Buckeyes when Nashville Christian School five-star quarterback Jared Curtis (6-4, 225) decommitted from Georgia to further explore his options.

Ohio State seems to be one of those options for the No. 4 player and No. 1 quarterback in the country. He has officially planned a visit to Columbus for the Buckeyes' Nov. 23 game against Indiana, according to On3's Steve Wiltfong.

"Talking to Coach Chip Kelly and Coach Ryan Day and going on a visit there a couple of times, that builds my relationship with them and I'm excited to get back up there," Curtis told On3 of his relationship with the Buckeyes.

As Curtis said, it won't be his first time visiting the campus, but he is also looking elsewhere around the country. He visited Auburn for its loss to Vanderbilt on Nov. 2, and is also set to visit Oregon on Nov. 9, Georgia on Nov. 16 and Alabama on Nov. 30.

Many recruiting experts consider the Ducks to be the favorite to land Curtis, but the Buckeyes could have a chance due to their relationship with the five-star prospect and the fact that Day and Kelly have

done fairly well developing quarterbacks.

So far in his junior season, Curtis has thrown for 2,263 yards, 29 touchdowns and three interceptions while completing 70.6 percent of his passes, also running for 444 yards and 12 more scores on the ground.

U-M Ready To Spend Big For Top 2025 QB

Michigan had seemed to have its 2025 quarterback locked up this cycle, with Fort Myers (Fla.) Bishop Verot four-star Carter Smith (6-3, 185) committed to the Wolverines since November 2023, but there have been recent reports they are now looking to upgrade shortly before the early signing period, and could be spending big to do so.

According to On3's Pete Nakos, Michigan is going after Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205) and has reportedly approached him with a sizable NIL package that is worth north of \$5 million, which is similar to the amount offered by LSU, the team to which he is currently committed.

Underwood pledged his services to the Tigers in January, and now will have a large amount of money to consider from his in-state school, one which has had major issues at the quarterback position

this season. The Wolverines have already benched two different players in Alex Orji and Davis Warren for the now medically-retired Jack Tuttle.

While the news of Michigan pursuing Underwood was going around, Smith announced his decommitment from LSU on X (formerly Twitter), which has now made the Wolverines' pursuit of the five-star prospect even more important for the future of the signal-caller position.

If Underwood does decide to remain in-state, it would be an important flip for the Wolverines. He is the top-rated 2025 prospect in the nation, according to 247Sports.

Barstool Sports owner and avid Wolverines fan Dave Portnoy said in September that he would be willing to spend up to \$3 million in NIL to get Michigan a quarterback, and that could be a big part of the package that has been offered to Underwood.

"Michigan, I will be your quarterback guy," Portnoy said. "I'll talk to (head coach) Sherrone (Moore), 'Who do you guys want? Who's in there? Give me a group. I'll go get him. I will sign them. A million, two million, whatever it is."

"I'm going to get us a top-10 quarterback in the portal coming out every year. A top-10 quarterback."

2026 WR Dixon-Wyatt Has OSU In Top 10

Another highly-rated pass-catcher is considering the Buckeyes.

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180) put OSU in his top 10 schools on Oct. 30, a list that includes Alabama, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M, and UCLA.

The 2026 prospect attends the same school as current Ohio State commitment and five-star wideout Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), who is considered the top player in the country but is out for the remainder of his high school season with a leg injury. Both Henry and Dixon-Wyatt visited Ohio State earlier this fall for the season opener against Akron.

Dixon-Wyatt is considered the No. 139 player in the nation, the No. 24 wide receiver and the No. 17 player in the state of California. So far in his junior season, he has caught 32 passes for 459 yards and three touchdowns but has recently gained a more important role in the offense since Henry went down with his injury.

OHSAA Playoffs Begin For Commits, Targets

The Ohio High School Athletic Association football playoffs began Nov. 1, with

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Standing 6-4, weighing 221 pounds, and having state championship speed, Jon Roberts clearly had the potential to be a sideline-to-sideline playing linebacker for an NCAA Division I football team.

But also quickly evident to a new acquaintance was the new Yellow Springs (Ohio) High School senior's potential to become an outstanding student.

You would expect him to get an "A" in citizenship if that attribute was graded at the college level.

You just shouldn't have looked for him to take any electives in Shakespeare.

Asked if it bothered him to be let out of class to be interviewed, the amiable Roberts answered, "No, especially when we are learning 'Hamlet.'"

30 Years Ago — 1994

Beating Purdue in front of the 12th-largest crowd in Ohio Stadium history, coupled with a festive Homecoming atmosphere, probably would go a long way in the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts in the winter.

As usual, close to a dozen Ohio high school seniors were on hand for the home game, many of them considered among the best players in the state. They saw a packed Ohio Stadium crowd cheer the squad on and off the field, then watched the Ohio State marching band pen Script Ohio before returning to the southwest tower for a few words from head coach John Cooper.

Among the Ohio prospects who made official visits to the game were linebackers Matthew LaVrar of Maumee and Rich Abramowski of Solon. Abramowski came to his second Ohio State home game of the season, but LaVrar made his first trip to the Horseshoe since childhood. Both were considered major college prospects by The Ohio Football Recruiting News.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State had already had nine players in for official visits, and the Buckeyes seemed to be in very good shape with at least one of those players.

Toronto (Ont.) Central Tech defensive end Nautyn McKay-Loescher (6-4, 245) was considered Canada's top football prospect. He visited OSU for the Wisconsin game.

He said OSU and Miami (Fla.) were his top two.

McKay-Loescher also said he planned to visit Boston College on Nov. 12 and Michigan on Dec. 3. He had planned to see Illinois on Dec. 10 but said he would likely visit Penn State or Notre Dame that weekend instead.

"I thought they would do better in the Big Ten," he said of the

Illini. "I am basing most of my decision off tradition. Michigan, Ohio State, Miami and Boston College all have great tradition."

20 Years Ago — 2004

Coming off a three-game losing streak and facing a lowly Indiana team, it probably would have been understandable if many of the top prospects who generally crowd the Ohio Stadium sidelines remained at home for Ohio State's homecoming festivities on Oct. 23.

Despite the Buckeyes' recent struggles and the uninspiring opponent, several prospects still made the trip to the Horseshoe, including a couple of the team's top targets from out of state.

Topping that list was Chino, Calif., safety Shawn Oatis, who was in Columbus along with his parents for his official visit. The 6-2, 205-pounder had recently moved up to No. 6 among safeties nationally according to Rivals.com and was considered the No. 22 prospect overall in the state of California.

"It was great," Oatis told BSB upon his return to Southern California. "I had a very good time."

15 Years Ago — 2009

According to his high school head coach Ron Cohen, the initial plan for the weekend for Philadelphia George Washington five-star defensive tackle Sharrif Floyd (6-3, 310) was to take an official visit to South Carolina. But the trip was scrapped in favor of a trip to Columbus because Floyd had already visited the Gamecocks a few times that year.

The Buckeyes had been involved with Floyd for some time, Cohen said, but their interest in him had picked up in recent weeks. Ohio State was in Floyd's top five, and he held offers from some 60 schools, including OSU, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Penn State, USC and Michigan.

Before his star player embarked on his trip to Columbus, Cohen listed what Floyd was looking for in a school.

"First, the feel of a family," the coach told BSB. "That's important to him because we preach that here at Washington. He's used to that. Certainly the classrooms. Education is the most important thing."

"Then when it comes down to football, the coaching and the defensive line coach are very important - what type of technique do they teach and where do they look at him playing?"

10 Years Ago — 2014

Ohio State was still all in on top defensive tackle prospects such as Canadian four-star Neville Gilmore (6-3, 311), but there might have been a backup plan if the Buckeyes were not able to reel in the No. 10 DT and No. 87 overall prospect.

Pickerington (Ohio) Central three-star defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton (6-4, 285), a Pittsburgh commit, could have been in play for the Buckeyes.

"My coach said Ohio State was in the school and also calling him, and they've been asking about me," Hamilton said. "Coach (Luke) Fickell is recruiting me for Ohio State. If they wanted me to visit, I would definitely do that, and Ohio State would get some serious consideration from me."

"They have all my film, and they have my transcript, so I'm just sitting back and waiting to see what might happen from here."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Steilacoom, Wash., five-star athlete Emeka Egbuka (6-1, 190) trimmed his list of nearly three dozen scholarship offers to 10 schools, listing Ohio State along with Alabama, Clemson, LSU, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oregon, Stanford, USC and Washington.

Egbuka was considered the top-rated athlete and No. 10 prospect overall in the class of 2021. And while some schools were recruiting him as a defensive back, most coaches - including Ryan Day and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline - saw his 4.42-second 40-yard dash and 35.1-inch vertical leap as potential assets on the offensive side of the ball.

Egbuka, who was a close friend of 2020 four-star wide receiver commit Gee Scott Jr., planned to take all five of his official visits in the spring and summer before he made a final decision on his future. Most prognosticators believed it to be a two-team battle between the Buckeyes and the Huskies, with the Cardinal and the Fighting Irish also hoping to make an outside push for Egbuka, who held a 4.0 grade point average.

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State added a commitment on Oct. 25 from Akron Hoban three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 215). He became the first linebacker in the team's 2025 recruiting class.

Lee's commitment came fresh off a visit for the Buckeyes' 20-12 win over Penn State, his first since being offered by Ohio State on Oct. 4 and one of several visits he had taken to the school over the past year.

"I picked Ohio State because I've felt since the beginning they've just been the best fit for me," Lee told 247Sports. "I've been very impressed with their program, staff and players."

He was the No. 438 overall prospect and No. 44 linebacker in the class, and he held additional offers from Akron, Central Michigan, Iowa State, Massachusetts, Toledo and West Virginia. He lined up primarily as an inside linebacker for Hoban, with middle linebacker as a potential landing spot once he was set to arrive on campus.

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 |

448 teams – seven divisions split into four regions each with 16 teams per region – competing for the state football championship in their respective divisions.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is tracking Ohio State's commitments and targets through their playoff journeys, whether they end in the first weekend or with a state championship. Here are the results from games played on Nov. 1.

Division I, Region 1 – No. 15 Cleveland John Marshall (2-8) at No. 2 Toledo Whitmer (8-2): Offensive tackle Lowe, a 2025 commitment for Ohio State, and Whitmer rolled to an easy win over John Marshall 49-0. The Panthers will now host Lakewood St. Edward on Nov. 8 at 7 p.m.

Division I, Region 1 – No. 16 Cleveland St. Ignatius (1-9) at No. 1 Mentor (10-0): A Buckeye commit in 2025 four-star safety Cody Haddad (6-1, 175) and Buckeye target 2026 four-star interior offensive lineman Will Conroy (6-3, 275), who holds an offer from OSU and visited recently, saw their season come to an end in a 31-7 loss against the No. 1 seed in the region.

Division I, Region 1 – No. 9 Cleveland Heights (6-4) at No. 8 Strongsville (6-4): 2026 prospect, four-star linebacker Storm Miller (6-3, 220) helped Strongsville to a 31-14 win over Cleveland Heights. The win was the first playoff victory for the Mustangs since 2008, advancing to take on the Mentor team that beat Haddad's and Conroy's squad in the first round.

Division I, Region 2 – No. 9 Middletown (5-5) at No. 8 Huber Heights Wayne (5-5): Ohio State offer and the No. 6 player in the 2027 class five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 160) and the Wayne Warriors were able to leave the game against Middletown with a 26-20 win. Their next game will be a tougher one when they go to visit the No. 1 seed in the region, Kettering Fairmont.

Division I, Region 3 – No. 10 Westerville North (6-4) at No. 7 Pickerington North (8-2): Another 2025 Buckeye offensive lineman commit played in the first round, but three-star Jake Cook (6-5, 295) and Westerville North weren't able to extend their season one more week, losing to No. 7 Pickerington North, 45-23, which will move on to play its cross-town rival Pickerington Central, the No. 2 seed.

Division I, Region 3 – No. 15 Watkins Memorial (3-7) at No. 2 Pickerington Central (8-2): Pickerington Central beat a 2026 Buckeye target in wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187), with him and Watkins seeing their season come to an end after a 69-13 blowout loss.

Division I, Region 4 – No. 11 Milford (4-6) at No. 6 Cincinnati St. Xavier (7-3): It was an easy road to a win for four-star linebacker Jakobe Clapper (6-2, 196), who helped Cincinnati St. Xavier to a 41-0 win over the No. 11 Milford Eagles. Clapper and the Bombers now move on to play against Cincinnati Winton Woods, the No. 3 seed in the region.

Division II, Region 5 – No. 15 Akron Firestone (5-5) at No. 2 Akron Hoban (8-

2): Akron Archbishop Hoban started its playoff run with an easy win over Akron Firestone 45-6. 2025 commit three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 230), and 2026 Ohio State targets five-star cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 170) and Greer all will get to play at least one more week of football when they match up against No. 7 Uniontown Lake on Nov. 8.

Division II, Region 6 – No. 16 North Olmsted (6-5) at No. 1 Avon (10-0): The No. 185 player in the 2026 class, four-star athlete Jakob Weatherspoon (5-11, 172) and Avon move on with a 47-12 win over North Olmsted in the first round. The Eagles move on to play No. 8 Olmsted Falls.

Division II, Region 6 – No. 10 Toledo St. Francis de Sales (7-3) at No. 7 Avon Lake (6-4): Riley and Avon Lake were on the wrong side of a 34-31 upset against No. 10 Toledo St. Francis de Sales on Nov. 1, seeing their season come to an end earlier than they had hoped.

Division III, Region 9 – No. 9 Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph (7-2) at No. 8 Gates Milles Hawken (8-2): Even though four-star running back and Ohio State commit Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) isn't able to play the rest of the season due to an injury he suffered early on, his 2027 teammate tight end D'Angelo White (6-5, 235) and the Vikings were still able to take down Hawken 52-21.

Division III, Region 9 – No. 15 Akron East (7-4) at No. 2 Gates Mills Gilmour Academy (10-1): One of two Buckeye tight end commits in the 2025 class, four-star Brody Lennon (6-4, 220) led his team to a 45-12 win over Akron East. They will move on to face No. 10 Maple Heights, which took down No. 7 Chagrin Falls Kenston in the first round by a score of 16-7.

Division III, Region 10 – No. 16 Rocky River Lutheran West (2-8) at No. 1 Tole-

do Central Catholic (9-1): Four-star cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160) and the No. 1 Central Catholic Fighting Irish cruised to a 49-14 win over Rocky River. They move on to play No. 9 Richfield Revere in the second round of the playoffs.

Division III, Region 12 – No. 9 Washington Courthouse Miami Trace (7-3) at No. 8 St. Mary's Memorial (8-2): Four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285) will have to wait until next season to play any more football with Miami Trace, losing in the first round 28-24 to St. Mary's.

Division III, Region 12 – No. 12 Dayton Chaminade Julianne (5-5) at No. 5 Bellefontaine (9-2): The season also came to an early finish for the Buckeyes' future quarterback, five-star Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225), suffering a big upset to No. 12 Chaminade Julianne of Dayton by a score of 44-28.

"I don't like having this feeling at all so for me I always tell myself I never want to feel this pain again," St. Clair told cleveland.com. "I think that's just going to drive me and motivate me this offseason while I'm (in Bellefontaine) finishing up and when I get to Ohio State. I'm just going to work and be the best version of myself I can be."

Division IV, Region 13 – No. 12 Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin (5-6) at No. 5 Cleveland Glenville (7-3): Four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225), a 2026 target for the Buckeyes, helped his Glenville team to a 47-20 win in the first round. The Tarblooders now move on to play against No. 4 Beloit West Branch.

Division IV, Region 14 – No. 14 Bellville Clear Fork (4-6) at No. 3 Ontario (9-1): Four-star wide receiver Bodpegn Mill-

er (6-4, 180) and Ontario moved on to the next round of the postseason with a 24-2 win. The Warriors now match up against the No. 6 Clyde Fliers.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Another prospect has set Nov. 30 as his visit date when the Buckeyes match up against Michigan. Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy five-star safety Bralan Womack (5-11, 185) will be in Columbus, along with a long list of other recruits who have already made clear their intentions to take in The Game in person. Womack was on campus during the summer for a recruiting camp, where he got his scholarship offer from OSU. He is ranked the No. 19 player in the country and the No. 2 safety in his class.

- Just one day after announcing a top five on Oct. 26 that included Ohio State along with Auburn, Miami (Fla.), Penn State and Tennessee, Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park four-star cornerback Camdin Portis (6-0, 165) committed to the Hurricanes. Portis, the No. 291 player in the country, earned an OSU offer this summer at a recruiting camp, but his commitment to Miami (Fla.) is not surprising because his father, nine-year NFL running back Clinton Portis, also played for the Hurricanes from 1999-2001, helping the team to a national championship in 2001.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to visit BuckeyeSports.com, available for free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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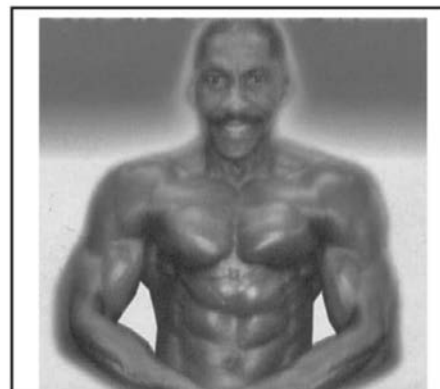
TIM POND, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein University Basketball Halls of Fame, recently offered his publication entitled "Coaching Youth Basketball: Coaching the Coaches" for sale on Amazon.com. Access to this instructional manual was previously limited to attendees of his basketball clinics and camps only.

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Hoosiers Off To Best Start In Program History

A magical season for Indiana football continues to roll on, with the Hoosiers picking up their ninth consecutive win to begin the year after a 47-10 victory at Michigan State on Nov. 2.

BIG TEN NOTES Braden Moles

With the win, Indiana is now 9-0 (and 6-0 in the Big Ten), the first 9-0 start in program history, and one more win would be the most in a single season. The Hoosiers started 8-0 in 1967 before dropping two of their last three (including the program's lone trip to the Rose Bowl) and started 1-0-1 in 1945 before finishing 9-0-1.

Indiana – led by quarterback Kurtis Rourke, who returned after missing the team's previous win over Washington – trailed for the first time this season, down 10-0 early against the Spartans before rattling off 47 unanswered points. With games remaining against Michigan (Nov. 9), at Ohio State (Nov. 23) and home against Purdue (Nov. 30), the Hoosiers are in position for their best season in program

history under first-year head coach Curt Cignetti.

"I knew at some point we'd be behind, and I knew we'd be fine," Cignetti said after the game. "Now we've been behind, and we responded."

Hired away from James Madison this offseason, Cignetti – who had a career 52-9 record with the Dukes from 2019-23 – has transformed the roster through the transfer portal, adding talent such as Rourke that has helped the Hoosiers compete in the expanded Big Ten.

"I think they're buying into the main thing, how we approach the main thing, what's important to us and how we want to play," Cignetti said of his roster. "They're older. They've got good character. There's good leadership on this team. They're hungry for success. A lot of these guys came from (Group of Five) level. Even nose guard (CJ West) came from Kent (State). We've got some guys that came from Wake Forest, Texas Tech, Wisconsin.

"We've got a good leader at quarterback. We've got a lot of guys that can be good leaders. We're balanced on offense. We spread the ball around, got a lot of guys that can make plays. And defensively, we create havoc up front. We swarm the ball. They've got a little edge about them. The whole team has got a little edge. They're relentless. They



Kurtis Rourke

continue to play very consistently, never perfect, and they're never satisfied."

With winnable games against Michigan and Purdue along with the tough contest at Ohio State, the Hoosiers – even if they drop a game at some point – are likely in the conversation for the 12-team College Football Playoff as an at-large bid. According to The Athletic's Austin Mock, he gives Indiana an 87.0 percent chance of being included in the field following games played on Nov. 2, with those odds trailing only Penn State (88.0), Notre Dame (90.0), Georgia (92.0), Miami (96.0), Ohio State (99.0) and Oregon (greater than 99.0).

No Repercussions From Michigan, MSU Fight

The Big Ten has declined to dish out punishment following a postgame scuffle between Michigan and Michigan State on Oct. 29.

After the Wolverines' 24-17 win over the Spartans, players from both teams started pushing and shoving after Michigan tight end Colston Loveland and MSU defensive lineman Anthony Jones went helmet-to-helmet, with Loveland even headbutting Jones during the confrontation. After players from both sidelines got involved, Michigan running back Kaleb Mullings appeared to stomp his foot onto someone or something, though video made it difficult to see where his foot landed.

Following the skirmish – not the first in recent years between Michigan and Michigan State at Michigan Stadium – Spartan athletic director Doug Hallar called for the conference to look into the fight and determine if there was any wrongdoing.

"This is a sportsmanship policy situation, and the conference will look at it," he said. "It's my wish that the same standard everyone's held to, (Michigan) be held to the same standard."

Following review by the conference, the Big Ten determined that no further action would be taken against either team for their role in the scuffle.

"The Big Ten Conference thoroughly reviewed video of the incident that occurred at the conclusion of Saturday's Michigan-Michigan State football game," the statement read. "Amidst the confrontation student-athletes from both teams were on the ground and surrounded by so many individuals that both players were completely obscured from view.

"The video review was inconclusive as to whether individual discipline was appropriate for anyone in the immediate vicinity of the two players who were on the ground. While the confrontation was a disappointing conclusion to the contest, the Conference appreciates the efforts made by staff from both teams, security personnel, and game officials to rapidly de-escalate the incident, as well as the responses by both head coaches. The Big Ten discussed the situation with both institutions and determined that no further action will be taken."

Michigan QB Tuttle Retiring

Michigan quarterback Jack Tuttle announced his retirement from football on

BIG 2024 Standings

| | Conf. | | | All | | |
|-------------------|-------|---|-------|-----|---|-------|
| | W | L | Pct. | W | L | Pct. |
| Indiana | 6 | 0 | 1.000 | 9 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Oregon | 6 | 0 | 1.000 | 9 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Ohio State | 4 | 1 | .800 | 7 | 1 | .875 |
| Penn State | 4 | 1 | .800 | 7 | 1 | .875 |
| Iowa | 4 | 2 | .667 | 6 | 3 | .667 |
| Minnesota | 4 | 2 | .667 | 6 | 3 | .667 |
| Illinois | 3 | 3 | .500 | 6 | 3 | .667 |
| Michigan | 3 | 3 | .500 | 5 | 4 | .556 |
| Washington | 3 | 3 | .500 | 5 | 4 | .556 |
| Wisconsin | 3 | 3 | .500 | 5 | 4 | .556 |
| Nebraska | 2 | 4 | .333 | 5 | 4 | .556 |
| Michigan State | 2 | 4 | .333 | 4 | 5 | .444 |
| Northwestern | 2 | 4 | .333 | 4 | 5 | .444 |
| UCLA | 2 | 4 | .333 | 3 | 5 | .375 |
| USC | 2 | 5 | .286 | 4 | 5 | .444 |
| Maryland | 1 | 4 | .200 | 4 | 4 | .500 |
| Rutgers | 1 | 4 | .200 | 4 | 4 | .500 |
| Purdue | 0 | 5 | .000 | 1 | 7 | .125 |

Nov. 2 Games
Ohio State 20, Penn State 13
 Oregon 38, Michigan 17
 Minnesota 25, Illinois 17
 Northwestern 26, Purdue 20 (OT)
 Indiana 47, Michigan State 10
 UCLA 27, Nebraska 20
 Washington 26, USC 21
 Iowa 42, Wisconsin 10

Nov. 8 Game
 Iowa at UCLA, 9 p.m.

Nov. 9 Games
 Purdue at **Ohio State**, Noon
 Minnesota at Rutgers, Noon
 Michigan at Indiana, 3:30 p.m.
 Maryland at Oregon, 7 p.m.
 Washington at Penn State, 8 p.m.

All times Eastern

Oct. 28, citing a recent concussion – the fifth of his career – and a continued throwing-arm injury.

"Today, I am announcing my retirement from college football," he said in a statement. "This decision, though difficult, comes after deep reflection and heartfelt conversations with my family, doctors and loved ones.

"This past year has been challenging, marked by a UCL repair in my throwing arm that I didn't fully recover from, which has caused ongoing issues. And unfortunately, the recent experience of enduring my fifth concussion has brought forth the painful truth: that I need to start prioritizing my health. Throughout my college career, I've battled numerous injuries, culminating in this difficult choice to step away from playing the game I love."

Tuttle, a seventh-year senior who began his career at Utah before playing at Indiana and Michigan, appeared in two games for the Wolverines this season (with one start). He completed 60.0 percent of his passes (30 of 50) for 306 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions.

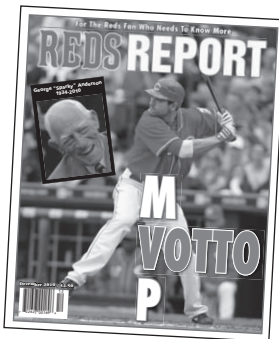
"College football has given me a bunch of memories in my life with amazing people, and it has shaped my character," he continued. "I am immeasurably thankful for every chance I've had to step onto the field, and for the unwavering support of

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BIG TEN NOTES

those who have stood by me through triumphs and tribulations.”

Tuttle intends to remain with the team for the rest of the season and plans to pursue a role in coaching after this season. With the injury to Tuttle and poor play from quarterback Alex Orji, the team has turned back to Davis Warren under center. Through nine games, he has thrown for 731 yards and just five touchdowns to six interceptions.

Coaches Talk Lack Of Big Ten Success In Men's Basketball

In a story for the upcoming men's basketball season by The Athletic's Brendan Marks and CJ Moore, the writers asked several questions to current coaches from all five major conferences, including why the Big Ten has struggled nationally to make an impact, and the coaches had no shortage of explanations.

The last time the Big Ten won a national championship in men's basketball was 2000, with Tom Izzo's Michigan State claiming the title. Since then, just eight teams that were active members of the Big Ten have made it to the national championship game, with all eight (Indiana, 2002; Illinois, 2005; Ohio State, 2007; Michigan State, 2009; Michigan, 2013; Wisconsin, 2015; Michigan, 2018; and Purdue, 2024) suffering a loss.

“They've had some good teams – they were in it this year – but they just haven't been quite good enough,” said one coach, who also called the conference overrated.

“That tournament is hard, because a lot of times the best teams don't end up win-

ning it. I think their style of play is a little slow, and I think once you get in the tournament, they're a little predictable. It's a bump-and-grind league that maybe doesn't translate to the tournament.”

The lack of national and tournament success has not been for a lack of trying. The Big Ten is among the highest-bid leagues in the NCAA Tournament, including either the most or second-most bids in each of the last five tournaments, and has had four No. 1 seeds in the last four tournaments.

Of course, the most notable storyline for the Big Ten in recent years is that one of those top seeds – No. 1 Purdue in 2023 – was upset in the first round by No. 16 Fairleigh Dickinson, becoming just the second No. 1 seed (along with Virginia in 2018) to lose in the first round.

“Style of play,” another coach added. “Usually the slowest high-major league every year. I think their style of play is conducive to getting upset. Fewer possessions. Teams run on them. They don't play a very modern style, so teams shoot a lot of threes in the tournament, and they're not used to guarding it. I think it's the most traditional, old-school, last to adapt to playing modern basketball in the country.”

While some point to the style of play, others believe it's just a matter of time before the conference gets back over the hump.

“It was close last year,” another coach said. “I mean, Purdue ran into one of the hottest teams that the sport has seen in a long time (Connecticut). But Purdue obviously gave it a chance, and it's just a matter of time before they win it again.”

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Five-Star Peterson Picks Kansas Over OSU

Ohio State and Jake Diebler lost out on a potentially program-altering recruit on Nov. 1 when Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star combo guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195) committed to Kansas over Ohio State, Kansas State and USC.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Peterson, the nation's third-best prospect and top-rated combo guard in the class, would have been Ohio State's highest-rated recruit since two-time All-America forward Jared Sullinger, but instead, he will play for Naismith Basketball Hall of Famer Bill Self and blue blood Kansas for what will likely be a one-and-done 2024-25 season.

Sitting at a table in front of his brother, sister, mother and father in Napa, Peterson took a sip of water for dramatic effect before putting on a Jayhawks bucket hat and announcing his college decision live on 247Sports' YouTube page.

"I'll be taking my talents to the University of Kansas," Peterson said. "Go Jayhawks."

The recruiting loss will sting for Diebler and the Buckeyes, as the program had been in relentless pursuit of Peterson, a Canton,

Ohio, native, for the past several years. Ohio State, then led by former head coach Chris Holtmann, first offered the guard a scholarship just before his freshman year of high school at Cuyahoga Falls (Ohio) Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy in August 2021, becoming the first of what turned into 23 offers for the guard.

The program maintained contact with him throughout his eventful high school career, hosting him on unofficial visits in September 2022 and October 2023 before bringing him in for an official visit in August for Ohio State's football season opener, his first trip to Columbus since Diebler was hired as full-time head coach.

Peterson and his family had said throughout his recruitment that he valued the long-term relationship he had built with Ohio State and Diebler, who served as his primary recruiter and made it a point to re-offer him a scholarship when he took over as head coach. But that still did not prove to be enough to lure him away from the presumed favorite Jayhawks, who have now secured their first commitment of the 2025 class.

"I just felt like it aligned perfectly with my academic, athletic goals," Peterson said of his decision to go to Kansas. "Kansas has a strong history of development and success, which are two huge things for me during this process."

Although the history and championship pedigree of Self's Kansas program was an

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

| Player | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | High School |
|--------------|------|-----|-----|-------|----------------------------|
| A'mare Bynum | C | 6-8 | 210 | ★★★★ | Branson (Mo.) Link Academy |
| Dorian Jones | G | 6-4 | 160 | ★★★★ | Richmond Heights, Ohio |

obvious allure for Peterson, he was also likely swayed by factors outside of basketball.

Kansas is outfitted by Adidas, the clothing brand that signed Peterson to a lucrative NIL deal last season, their first-ever for a high school player, while Ohio State – along with Kansas State and USC – is outfitted by Nike.

Regardless, the loss of Peterson is a significant one for the Buckeyes. The five-star prospect is viewed as a big, versatile guard with a potential NBA skill-set that could transition him well into the next level.

With Peterson off the board, and Davidson (N.C.) Day four-star combo guard and Ohio State target Isaiah Denis (6-5, 175) also committing to North Carolina over the Buckeyes on Nov. 2, Ohio State will pivot to other names to fill out its 2025 recruiting class, which it hopes will be a three or four-man class.

Ohio State has already secured pledges from Richmond Heights, Ohio, four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 180) and Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star center A'Mare Bynum (6-8, 210), but it is still heavily interested in prospects such as Peterson's Prolific Prep teammate and five-star power forward Niko Bundalo (6-10, 215), Bynum's Link Academy teammates, four-star combo guard Jerry Easter (6-3, 183) and four-star shooting guard Davion Hannah (6-5, 175), and Atlanta Holy Innocents Episcopal School five-star power forward Caleb Wilson (6-9, 205), each of whom has taken official visits to Ohio State this fall.

Five-Star SF Wilson Enjoys OSU Visit

Speaking of Wilson, the five-star prospect's father, Jerry, talked about his son's recent visit to Ohio State on Oct. 26 in an interview with The Columbus Dispatch, in which he said it was an enjoyable and eye-opening trip from start to finish.

"I'm truly glad we did take the visit this weekend," the elder Wilson said following the visit. "More than anything, getting to know Jake and the staff, getting a really detailed look at The Ohio State University – it was a great scene for us."

Caleb Wilson, the nation's fifth-best prospect, third-best power forward and No. 1 player out of Georgia in the 2025 class, had a busy weekend on Ohio State's campus that his father said was – like many of his son's official visits this fall – not "for the faint of heart."

The Wilsons first arrived in Columbus on Oct. 25, where they toured the campus, saw the academic and athletic facilities and watched the Buckeyes practice.

Wilson then experienced a full football gameday in Columbus on Oct. 26 for the Buckeyes' home game against Nebraska, where, among other things, he attended the Skull Session at St. John Arena and took in pregame warmups on the Ohio Stadium field alongside Diebler and six other recruits who were on unofficial visits.

"We were able to experience the football game, which was quite amazing," the elder Wilson told The Dispatch. "Getting to see everything about it, the pep rally leading up to it, the walkthrough, the scene, the aura, the glitz, the glam – we had a chance to tailgate and everything. It was pretty beautiful."

But while the time inside Ohio Stadium was one to remember, Jerry Wilson said they were also impressed by what Diebler and his staff had to offer. He came away from the visit impressed with the coaching staff Diebler has assembled during his first offseason as head coach, a group that he thinks has brought a winning culture back to the program.

"Those guys seem to be really in tune, really locked in," he said. "I've enjoyed over this weekend getting to enjoy every last one of them. They seem to have one main, focused goal of getting Ohio State University back to the powerful tradition of high-level basketball where it should be."

Wilson's visit – which also included re-connecting with fellow Atlanta native and Ohio State star point guard Bruce Thornton along with assistant Luke Simons, who they got to know while he was director of basketball operations at Baylor – was just another step forward in what has turned into a blossoming relationship between the five-star prospect and Diebler's program.

The Buckeyes originally expressed interest in Wilson after he burst onto the scene at the 2024 Nike EYBL Peach Jam held in Augusta, S.C., in July, where he led his AAU team Nightrydas Elite to the tournament championship against 26 other talent-rich programs by averaging an impressive 17.3 points, 7.0 rebounds, 2.3 assists, 2.8 blocks and 1.9 steals per contest on efficient 62.0-percent shooting.

The performance compelled Diebler to head to Atlanta to spend time with Wilson's family and see Caleb work out, before taking another in-home visit at the Wilson household on Oct. 7.

Although the feeling appears to be mutual between Diebler and Wilson, the five-star prospect is a highly-coveted and most likely one-and-done prospect with multiple different options. He released a top 12 earlier this summer that included Alabama, Arkansas, Auburn, Duke, Georgia Tech, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio State, Oregon, Tennessee, UCF and USC, and is not expected to pick a school before the early signing period this November.

Former AD Said Diebler Exceeded Expectations

Former Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said Diebler exceeded expectations filling in for Holtmann as interim head coach for the final two months of the 2023-24 season.

In a 2023-24 men's basketball performance review obtained by Buckeye Sports Bulletin via a public records request, Smith



OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2026 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

| Player | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | High School |
|----------------|------|-----|-----|-------|------------------------|
| Marcus Johnson | G | 6-1 | 175 | ★★★★ | Garfield Heights, Ohio |
| Alex Smith | F | 6-9 | 195 | N/A | Upper Arlington, Ohio |

– who retired from his role June 30 – noted on his way out that Diebler did a masterful job in the head coach's chair following the abrupt firing of Holtmann on Valentine's Day, making several sound management and leadership-related decisions that helped get the program back on track.

After Smith relieved Holtmann of his duties and promoted Diebler to interim head coach on Feb. 14, Ohio State went 8-3 the remainder of the season, making it to the NIT quarterfinals and finishing with a 22-14 record and a 9-11 mark in the Big Ten. It was a strong finish to the year that compelled new athletic director Ross Bjork to take the interim tag off Diebler before the NIT began March 17, a decision Smith also supported and participated in.

"Jake did an exceptional job in the transition managing the entire program," Smith wrote in the review, which was dated June 17. "His staff hires, management of the team during the remaining part of the season and communication with support staff has been exceptional."

Smith continued by listing reasons why he rated Diebler's performance as "exceeds expectations," specifically lauding the coach's impressive work ethic and commitment to serving the program the right way.

"Work is consistently efficient, accurate, reliable and timely; is of superior quality and goes beyond the expectation of the performance objective or core competency," Smith wrote. "(His) work is a model for reflecting and supporting the values of The Ohio State University and Department of Athletics."

Diebler also provided some commentary on his own performance in the review. He wrote that his time in the interim head coaching chair was a valuable experience for him, and that the way the 2023-24 season ended gives his program some positive momentum heading into this new era of Buckeyes basketball.

"Excited about the direction of the Ohio State basketball program," he wrote. "The experience throughout the end of last season was beneficial and that momentum helped move us forward and position us for exciting things ahead. Thankful for the leadership of Gene and Ross during the transition, which proved critical during that time."

Diebler was the only full-time coach to receive a performance evaluation for the 2023-24 season. Recruiting coordinator Terence Dials, NIL/community relations coordinator Nick Kellogg, director of basketball operations David Egelhoff and creative video designer Ben Majors did receive evaluations as support staff members, though, with each of them earning an "exceeded expectations" review from Diebler.

Thornton, Johnson Named To Preseason Watch Lists

Thornton and Meechie Johnson Jr. are expected by many to form one of the Big Ten's top backcourts this season, and those expectations are reflected in some notable preseason recognition for the two OSU guards.

Thornton and Johnson were each named

to preseason watch lists for national awards since BSB last went to press, with Thornton being selected to watch lists for both the Bob Cousy and Naismith awards, presented annually to the nation's top point guard and best player, respectively, and Johnson earning a spot on the watch list for the Jerry West Award, given annually to the nation's best shooting guard.

Thornton earned the honors due to his status as Ohio State's unquestioned best player and team leader as well as one of the best all-around point guards in the Big Ten. Last season, the Fairburn, Ga., native was named third-team All-Big Ten after leading the Buckeyes in points (15.7 per game), assists (4.8), steals (1.2) and minutes (33.6).

He also finished the year with the nation's second-best assist-to-turnover ratio (168-42), and was one of three Buckeyes ever to have more than 100 assists and fewer than 50 turnovers in a season.

Thornton is looking to become Ohio State's first-ever Cousy Award winner (the honor was created in 2003-04) and second-ever Naismith Award winner, joining Evan Turner in 2010. He has also been named this offseason to the 10-member preseason All-Big Ten team released Oct. 1, and landed at No. 8 on NCAA men's basketball analyst Andy Katz's top 18 list of Big Ten players for the 2024-25 season.

Johnson received his preseason honor before he begins his first season back with the Buckeyes since transferring to South Carolina after the 2021-22 campaign.

The Cleveland native was one of the top offensive talents in the SEC during his two seasons with the Gamecocks, combining for 13.4 points, 3.9 rebounds and 3.2 assists per contest while shooting 38.1 percent from the field during that span. He also helped lead South Carolina last year to its first NCAA tournament appearance in seven seasons by producing a team-high 14.1 points per contest on 39.9-percent shooting, taking home second-team All-SEC honors in the process.

Johnson hopes to be the second-ever Buckeye to win the West Award, joining D'Angelo Russell in 2014-15, the first year the honor was created.

Notes & Tidbits

- According to The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio State defeated Ohio University in a "secret" scrimmage held Oct. 27. No final score was revealed, as spectators and reporters were not allowed to watch the scrimmage, but the victory is a positive sign for the Buckeyes since the Bobcats were picked to win the Mid-American Conference in the league's preseason coaches' poll.

Not many details were revealed regarding how the game went, but The Dispatch reported sophomore center Aaron Bradshaw, who missed Ohio State's first exhibition against Cincinnati on Oct. 18 due to a concussion, returned to action. Two "rotational players" were held out, though, but as BSB went to press were expected to return for the season opener against Texas.

It was also reported that each of Ohio

State's four projected transfer starters – Bradshaw, Johnson, wing Micah Parrish and forward Sean Stewart – played well, but Johnson had a particularly strong game. The Buckeyes also played with much more pace and moved the ball better than they did during their first scrimmage, but struggled with turnovers and shot "good, but not great" from beyond the arc.

- In other recruiting news, the previously-mentioned Hannah placed Ohio State in his top four along with Alabama, Cincinnati and Missouri on Oct. 25. Hannah, the nation's 31st best-prospect, seventh-best shooting guard and No. 2 player out of Missouri, is expected to choose between the four schools sometime during the early signing period set for Nov. 13-20.

The Wisconsin native took his official visit to Ohio State the weekend of Sept. 21, and has also been to Alabama (Aug. 31), Missouri (Sept. 6) and Cincinnati (Oct. 4) this fall. The Buckeyes may have the upper hand on the other three schools considering they have already secured a pledge from his Link Academy teammate Bynum and are aggressively pursuing Easter. Link Academy was also the

school that produced former Ohio State and current Tennessee center Felix Okpara.

- Several former Ohio State players have had some early success this season for their respective NBA teams. Perhaps the most surprising success story is forward Jami-son Battle, who has appeared in six of seven games for the Raptors so far this season on a two-way deal, averaging 6.7 points, 3.2 rebounds and 0.8 assists on 46.4 percent shooting (38.1 percent from three).

A couple of other recent Buckeyes are also contributing, including San Antonio Spurs third-year guard Malaki Branham, who has totaled 9.3 points and 2.0 rebounds in six games off the bench, and second-year Utah Jazz guard Brice Sensabaugh has totaled 38 points and 13 rebounds through six games in a reserve role.

A few longtime NBA Buckeyes have also excelled in the early going this season, including veteran guards Mike Conley of the Minnesota Timberwolves and Russell of the Los Angeles Lakers, who are both starting for their respective teams and are averaging 7.3 and 12.3 points and 4.3 and 5.8 assists per contest, respectively.

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Bucks Look To Take Next Step Under McGuff

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's 2023-24 season was a tale of two parts: the regular season and the postseason. In the regular season, McGuff's Buckeyes were not only the Big Ten regular season champions but appeared to be a contender to win the national championship. As soon as postseason play started, though, the Buckeyes looked and played like a whole different team.

Starting in the first round of the Big Ten tournament against a middle-of-the-pack Maryland team, the Buckeyes were not only upset but blown out by the eighth-seeded Terapins by a score of 82-61. It was a stunningly poor performance that may have cost them a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament.

Still, as the No. 2 seed in the Portland region, the Buckeyes had a clear path to at least make the Sweet 16 with homecourt advantage on their side and, on paper, inferior opponents in their way. Instead, the Buckeyes had yet another disappointing finish to a tournament when they fell 75-63 to No. 7 seed Duke in front of a shocked Value City Arena crowd.

Even with the disheartening end to the 2023-24 season, McGuff's 12-year tenure with the Buckeyes has been as successful as any other period in the program's history. With four Big Ten regular season championships and seven NCAA tournament appearances, the Buckeyes have been consistent Big Ten contenders for the vast majority of McGuff's time leading the program.

If McGuff wants to take the Buckeyes to their first Final Four since 1992-93, he will have to do so with eight new faces, and perhaps more importantly without All-American point guard and all-time program great Jacy Sheldon, who scored a team-high 17.8 points per game last season to cap off a highly-accomplished Buckeye career.

In replacing Sheldon's consistent offensive production, McGuff may turn to newcomers like five-star point guard Jaloni Cambridge and junior Oregon transfer guard Chance Gray, but in replacing her leadership, which with seven newcomers will become as important as ever, McGuff will need to turn to his seasoned veterans, like senior guard/forward Taylor Thierry, graduate guard Madison Greene and junior forward Cotie McMahon.

"I think when you guys watch us play early on, you're going to see a lot of talent out there and a decent amount of depth," McGuff said this offseason. "But with so many newcomers, it's just a matter of when are we going to kind of get that chemistry. Everybody has to feel comfortable doing what we do, No. 1.

"Probably more important than that, you lose somebody like Jacy Sheldon, who is one of the best leaders we've had here in a long time, how do you replace that? And that's where you've got Taylor, Madison, Cotie, they've got to step up and provide some leadership."

The Buckeyes will attempt to take their first step towards the NCAA tournament and beyond on Nov. 5, when they take on Cleveland State at the Schottenstein Center.

With the regular season inching closer, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has a position-by-position breakdown in alphabetical order of Ohio State's roster 2024-25.

Forwards

Seini Henry 6-0, Fr. – One of many athletic newcomers for the Buckeyes, Henry is unlikely to have the impact of someone like Cambridge in year one but should at least provide some depth at the wing position. Like many of her teammates, Henry comes from quite the athletic family. Her late father, Chris, was a former NFL wide receiver and her brother, Chris Henry Jr., is a five-star wide receiver recruit from the 2026 class committed to Ohio State.

At West Clermont High School in Cincinnati, Henry excelled as a do-it-all player, averaging 12.8 points, 9.7 rebounds, 2.3 steals and 1.6 blocks per game as a junior. That season, Henry had 11 double-doubles and set the school record for most rebounds and blocks in a single season in school history, as West Clermont went undefeated in the regular season and won its first Eastern Cincinnati Conference Championship.

Henry then transferred to nearby Cincinnati Purcell Marian for her senior season, but she played just nine games and averaged around nine points per game before moving to North Carolina with her family.

Henry's high school accomplishments, size and athleticism have her in a great position to make an impact for the Buckeyes in the future, even if it isn't as immediate as some of the other newcomers.

Ella Hobbs 6-4, Fr. – As is the case with some of the other new additions for the Buckeyes at forward and center, Hobbs provides the team with valuable size. Listed at 6-4, tied for the second tallest on the team, she was the No. 2 ranked recruit in the state of North Carolina and the No. 83-ranked recruit in the country by ESPN.com.

She played at Concord (N.C.) Jay M. Robinson her freshman year before transferring to 1 of 1 Prep School in Indian Trail, N.C. her sophomore and junior years, where she averaged 16.1 points, 6.1 rebounds and 1.4 blocks per game.

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

| Player | Pos. | Ht. | Stars | High School/Previous Team |
|--------------|------|-----|-------|-------------------------------------|
| Daria Biriuk | G | 6-1 | ★★★★ | Bell Buckle (Tenn.) The Webb School |

Unfortunately, Hobbs suffered an ACL injury that cut her senior year short while also pushing back her availability for the Buckeyes until midway through the season. McGuff confirmed this offseason that she wouldn't be available at the beginning of the season, which could put her in position for a redshirt.

"It most likely will be (a redshirt year)," McGuff said. "I think by the time she could get back, it just probably wouldn't make sense to burn the year."

Cotie McMahon 6-0, Jr. (14.4 points, 6.3 rebounds per game) – Ohio State's most vocal leader and likely best player is McMahon. From the second she walked through the doors for the 2022-23 season as a true freshman, McMahon has been a cornerstone of McGuff's operation. Ranked as the No. 23 recruit in the country prior to joining the Buckeyes by ESPNW Hoopgurlz, McMahon exceeded expectations when she averaged 15.1 points per game on 51.0 percent shooting along with averages of 5.5 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.6 steals as a freshman.

McMahon's excellent campaign earned her Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors and a second-team All-Big Ten recognition. Considering the outstanding numbers recorded by McMahon in her first collegiate season, she perhaps had a slightly disappointing sophomore campaign. In 32 games, McMahon's scoring numbers and overall efficiency dipped slightly, averaging 14.4 points per game on 46.0 percent shooting. She did increase her output on the glass, though, recording a team-high 6.3 rebounds per game. McMahon's slightly decreased scoring numbers stemmed from an ugly stretch in December where the 2024 honorable mention AP All-American failed to score ten points in four straight games.

This year, McMahon hopes for no growing pains in the early months of her junior season.

"I feel like we struggled last year to kind of just make sure that we're stringing together days and making sure that we're really making the days count," McMahon said of her slow start in 2023-24. "I think this year, it's just making sure that we're stringing days together, making sure that every day we come in the gym, we're giving our all so that when the time does come and when games do finally come, it's nothing to us because we practice how we play in games."

As the Buckeyes got into the thick of Big Ten play, McMahon gradually got back to her efficient freshman form, eventually leading to one of her best performances as a Buckeye in a matchup against a Caitlin Clark-led Iowa team on Jan. 21 when she erupted for a career-high 33 points and 12 rebounds in 41 minutes to lead Ohio State to a huge upset win over the eventual national runner-up Hawkeyes.

In the postseason, McMahon struggled in the blowout loss to Maryland in the Big Ten tournament but bounced back in the NAAs. After a solid 13-point performance in Ohio State's first-round win over Maine, McMahon

did all she could to lead the Buckeyes to a win over Duke, scoring 27 points on 9-of-17 shooting while adding five rebounds. McMahon's big scoring day went to waste, though, as the team shot just 40.7 percent from the floor.

Without someone like Sheldon by her side, McMahon will take on a bigger role on the court but also off the court as she attempts to acclimate the seven new additions to the team.

"I've always been in a leadership position, but never one like this," McMahon said. "I would say it's challenging. I mean it's not easy. I've just had to work on a lot of things as far as my patience and just really trusting the process, especially with a new team, making sure that I keep in mind that everyone is new to this."

Ajae Petty 6-3, Gr. (14.2 ppg, 10.6 rpg last season at Kentucky) – More often than not, the best teams in college basketball or sports in general are those that have the best combination of size and speed. For the Buckeyes' up-tempo offense and full-court pressing defense to operate, speed is understandably a huge priority of McGuff's system.

The speed over size element can sometimes get in the way of the team's ability to rebound, which has been a bit of a thorn in the side of McGuff's teams in recent years. Petty, a fifth-year transfer forward from Kentucky, undoubtedly will help the Buckeyes in this department.

A bit of a late bloomer, having only averaged 5.7 points per game with 4.7 rebounds per game as late as her junior season at LSU, Petty broke through as a senior at Kentucky to average a double-double, leading the Wildcats with 14.2 points per game and 10.6 rebounds per game.

With a plethora of talented scorers around her, it's not likely Petty will be asked to lead her team in points per game like she did at Kentucky, but instead will be expected to carry quite a load as a rebounder.

"That's what I was recruited here to do," Petty said of her rebounding. "So I'm just coming in and making sure I'm doing my job and trying to focus on it in practice every day." For Petty, the key to her rebounding excellence is certainly a matter of hard work and effort but also a skill mastered by practice.

"As soon as the shot goes up, you have to put yourself in a great position," Petty said. "One of the things that helped me do a lot better with rebounding last year was watching film and watching some of the great people rebound. Like when people put their shots up – for instance if Chance is shooting, just getting in a good position in order to get that rebound. It's a lot of doing your work early, and then half of it is just like, I want the ball more than the other person."

As skilled as Petty is as a rebounder, she figures to be a perfect schematic fit for the Buckeyes given the speed with which she can run the floor. Petty's athleticism has contributed to her fitting in more smoothly than even she thought she would in the full-court

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

2024-25 Ohio State Women's Basketball Projected Starting Lineup

22 • Jaloní Cambridge • G
Ht: 5-7 • Class: Fr.



Comes to Ohio State as the former No. 2 overall ranked recruit in the country by ESPN. Cambridge averaged 20.7 points, 9.0 assists, 7.3 rebounds, and 3.7 assists at Montverde High School as a senior.

21 • Chance Gray • G
Ht: 5-9 Class: Jr.



Transfers to Ohio State after two years as a starter at Oregon, where she averaged a combined 12 points, 2.5 rebounds and 2.6 assists per game.

2 • Taylor Thierry • G
Ht: 6-1 Class: Sr.



One of only two returning starters, Thierry led the team in field goal percentage in her sophomore and junior seasons with field goal percentages of 62.5 and 61.0, respectively.

32 • Cotie McMahon • F
Ht: 6-0 Class: Jr.



Highest returning scorer, averaged 14.4 points per game, 6.3 rebounds per game and 2.1 assists per game. Started in all 68 of Ohio State's games since joining the team as a true freshman

1 • Ajae Petty • F
Ht: 6-3 Class: Gr.



Started her career at LSU, before transferring to Kentucky. Petty broke out as a senior with the Wildcats, where she averaged 14.2 points, 10.6 rebounds and 1.0 assist per game

press defense the Buckeyes play.

"I thought it was going to be a little harder, but (the guards) are doing all the work up there," Petty said. "The only thing I have to do is communicate and tell them that I just have their back back there."

Eboni Walker 6-0 Gr. (2.4 ppg, 2.4 rpg) – Although Walker is only in her third year of being a Buckeye, she has as much college basketball experience as anyone else on the team. After starting her career at Arizona State from 2019-21, Walker transferred to Syracuse where she spent one year before ultimately coming to Ohio State.

In her senior season with Ohio State, Walker was a reliable and effective option off the bench, averaging 4.9 points, 3.6 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game. In what appeared to be her last season in college basketball, Walker took a bit of a step back. She averaged just 2.4 points and 2.4 in 10.5 minutes per game and took a temporary three-game absence from the team towards the end of the year due to an undisclosed reason.

Walker will get a chance to end her Buck-

eye career on a more positive note this season, though, as she was granted a medical redshirt due to her playing just six games her one season (4.2, 3.6) at Syracuse in 2021-22 before suffering a season-ending injury.

"I think I would want to thank Ohio State and just the program because it made it all seamless," Walker said. "Unfortunately I did not get to play at Syracuse, so being able to get that year back and make the best of it, especially at Ohio State for a third year, I feel like I really got to live out my college basketball dreams. Of course, I want to finish out this last year the best that I can, but they made it really easy for me to come back."

Guards

Jaloní Cambridge 5-7, Fr. – No incoming freshman in any sport will have the hype and subsequently live up to the hype as well as freshman Ohio State football wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, but Cambridge will try her best to do just that in her first year with the Buckeyes.

"Of course," Cambridge said when asked if she took inspiration from Jeremiah Smith's

spectacular freshman season. "Knowing the potential that I have, just coming from high school, what I can be. Of course, it's always inspiring to be the next greatest player to be in any sport here, so I'm just taking the opportunity, whatever I can get. I'm going to earn that and just roll with it."

The No. 2-ranked overall recruit in the country, Cambridge comes into Ohio State as one of, if not the most talented player on the entire roster.

It's never easy to predict the immediate production a freshman may have on a team in their first year of collegiate basketball, but Cambridge had just about as many accomplishments as a high schooler can have.

After making the varsity team at Nashville (Tenn.) Ensworth as an eighth grader, Cambridge led her team to back-to-back state championship appearances and was named Division II-AA Miss Basketball three times.

She was named tournament MVP her sophomore year when Ensworth won the state championship, and then almost willed her group to another title as a junior, scoring 41 points in a 64-59 state final loss.

Cambridge then transferred to Montverde (Fla.) Academy as a senior, where she became the Florida MaxPreps Athlete of the Year after averaging 20.7 points, 9.0 assists, 6.9 rebounds and 3.7 steals for the Eagles.

"Jaloní is a special talent," McGuff said of his five-star freshman. "I mean, she can really play. I think she'll have a chance to help us right away." Cambridge will have quite the difficult job as she attempts to replace Sheldon, but her speed and playmaking abilities, traits of which were specifically pointed out by McGuff, should give her the opportunity to shine when she's on the court.

McMahon, who had the type of success as a freshman that Cambridge will shoot for, has full belief in the young point guard.

"As far as helping her, I'm just making sure that her confidence is there because we're going to need a lot out of her this year," McMahon said. "We lost Jacy, but I feel like Jaloní is perfectly capable of filling in that role that Jacy had and really leading this

Continued On Page 34

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Thierry Expects Bigger Leadership Role

Continued From Page 33

team in the right direction.”

“She’s very quick, very skilled, very smart at her age, so I’m just making sure that I instill the confidence in her so that she knows that we all trust her to do whatever she’s capable of on the court.”

Kennedy Cambridge 5-8 R-So. (DNP last season at Kentucky, redshirted) – Jaloni’s older sister Kennedy may be brand new to the Buckeyes, but she does have experience playing with two Buckeyes in Petty and her younger sister.

Cambridge began her career at Kentucky alongside her current teammate Petty, where she averaged 2.7 points and 2.3 rebounds per contest in 19 games played in her freshman season. She did not play all of last season with the Wildcats while taking a redshirt.

Given the strong basketball family that also includes Jaloni and their brother Devan, who is a sixth-year senior at Texas Tech, it’s no surprise that Kennedy was a four-star recruit in the 2022 class. Although the elder Cambridge sister might not have the hype that her younger sister does, Petty believes she will play with a high level of intensity.

“I think everyone should expect someone who’s going to come in and sacrifice her body,” Petty said. “(She is) going to give everything that she has. That’s just the type of player that she is. She doesn’t take plays off. She plays hard every single time, so you’re going to see a lot of her finishing. She’s going to be really good in the press because she’s aggressive. She can rebound the ball as well. She’s athletic, just like Jaloni.”

Chance Gray 5-9, Jr. (13.9 ppg, 2.9 rpg last season at Oregon) – If Petty was the Buckeyes’ most significant transfer portal addition, Gray was a close second. Gray showed why she was the No. 7-ranked prospect in the country out of high school as soon as her freshman season.

In 2022-23, Gray averaged 10.3 points, 2.2 assists and 2.1 rebounds on 34.2 percent shooting from the field and 33.1 percent shooting from three-point range, all impressive numbers that allowed her to be named to the Pac-12 All-Freshman team. Gray’s athleticism and effort also showed up on the other end on defense, and she was an honorable mention on the Pac-12 All-Defensive team.

Gray’s numbers only improved her sophomore year, giving the Ducks 13.9 points, 3.0 assists and 2.9 rebounds per game.

While those are strong numbers, her biggest weakness through two years has been her inefficiency as a shooter. Although she increased her scoring in 2023-24, Gray did so connecting on just 34.7 percent of the shots she took, which, to be fair to Gray, was partially due to the high volume of three-point attempts attempted (59 of 175, 33.7 percent).

Gray’s shot-making has only improved with McGuff’s guidance, according to the Oregon transfer herself. “My confidence has grown a lot here,” Gray said. “If you miss a shot, it’s never a bad shot. (McGuff) always tells you something strategic to help you with the next shot to make it.”

If Gray can patch up some of the slight flaws she has had with efficiency, she should be able to provide the Buckeyes with the ex-

perience and three-point shooting that they may lack at the guard spot without Sheldon and Celeste Taylor.

Madison Greene 5-8 Gr. (2.7 ppg, 0.9 rpg) – The most unsung of the former All-Big Ten inclusions on the Buckeyes’ roster will hope to finally have a fully healthy season in 2024-25. Greene had the worst bit of injury luck after a breakout sophomore season in 2020-21 in which she scored 13.4 points per game and averaged a team-high 4.3 assists per game on her way to an honorable mention All-Big Ten nod.

Two long-term knee injuries allowed Greene to play in only 12 games from 2021-23. She first went down with a season-ending knee injury just one day before the start of her junior season in 2021-22, and then suffered another season-ender after she had fully recovered and played 12 games with seven starts in 2022-23.

That injury prevented her from playing right away next season in 2023-24, where, after making her debut midway through the season, she notched just 2.7 points, 1.6 assists, 1.0 steals and 0.9 rebounds in 24 games.

Greene is hoping that her latest stretch of healthy play will give her some momentum heading into the 2024-25 season.

“This year, preseason, I’ve been feeling way more comfortable,” Greene said. “I don’t have that big brace on anymore, so not only mentally but physically, I feel better, so I’m excited.”

McGuff is optimistic Greene can give the Buckeyes the playmaking and experience in a backcourt full of veterans and youngsters.

“Madison is like a calming presence when she’s out there,” McGuff said. “She makes everybody around her better, so we’ll need that from her, especially (because) Jaloni is a very talented young player but also inexperienced.”

“I think the combination of the two of them can really put us in a good position at point guard. (Greene) is also a great defender as well, so I think I’m optimistic that she could have an outstanding year, especially if she stays healthy.”

Kaia Henderson 5-6, Jr. (0.8 ppg, 0.7 rpg) – One of the best players in the history of New Hartford, N.Y. Senior high school basketball, Henderson will try to get much more playing time than she had as a freshman or as a sophomore with Ohio State.

Despite cutting her high school basketball career short to join the Buckeyes as an early enrollee, Henderson is the all-time leading scorer in New Hartford history with 2,092 career points.

She has yet to replicate that success at the collegiate level, though. Through 28 career games played with the Buckeyes, Henderson has averaged 0.9 points, 0.5 rebounds and 0.3 assists per game.

At just 5-6 – the shortest on the team – and without a ton of game experience in her first two seasons, it is hard to see Henderson getting serious minutes out of the Buckeyes’ backcourt. Still, Henderson provides the Buckeyes with some depth at a position full of new faces.

Taylor Thierry 6-1, Sr. (11.3 ppg, 5.3 rpg) – One of very few seniors on the reshaped roster, Thierry should provide the Buckeyes with some much-needed leader-

ship, experience, efficiency and defense. Thierry seemed to make improvements season after season to become the All-Big Ten-caliber player she is today.

The constant for the 6-1 guard/forward has been her efficiency. Even as a freshman in 2021-22, Thierry connected on 54.1 percent of her 61 shots. She followed that up by finishing her sophomore season with the fifth-best field goal percentage in school history at 62.5 percent, while also scoring 13.5 points per game, starting in all 36 games and earning second-team All-Big Ten and All-Big Ten defensive team honors.

Thierry’s scoring numbers dipped some as a junior while part of a somewhat crowded group of scorers, notching 11.3 points per game, but still led the team with a field goal percentage of 61.0 and added 5.3 rebounds per contest.

Over her last two seasons, Thierry has also added a three-point shot to her game. While she may not take the volume of threes as someone like Sheldon or Clark, Thierry has been as reliable as anyone on from beyond the arc, connecting on 44.8 percent of her three-pointers in 2023-24, a number that was the highest on her team by a wide margin.

Thierry’s biggest obstacle this season may be off-the-court, where the soft-spoken veteran has been challenged by McGuff to become a more vocal leader as one of the longest tenured Buckeyes on the roster.

“It’s definitely been an interesting process,” Thierry said. “Looking back when I was a freshman, the seniors and the grad players were really good leaders that I could look up to. I just want to kind of use what they used this year and just help the freshmen and all the newcomers get acclimated and comfortable and everything.”

Ava Watson 5-8, Fr. – It’s rare for a player as talented as Watson to go a little under the radar, but when one considers the fact that Watson is in the same class as the talented Cambridge, it makes more sense.

At least to McGuff, the No. 43-ranked prospect in the ESPN rankings of the 2024 class, is squarely on his radar.

“Ava Watson’s been really good,” McGuff said on Sept. 30. “She shoots the ball extremely well. She’s got a very high basketball IQ.”

Watson did not have all of Cambridge’s accomplishments or honors, but she still made quite the name for herself at Buford, Ga., where she averaged 24.0 points, 6.0 rebounds, 5.2 assists and 4.3 steals in 2023-24.

Watson – despite her young age – is one of a few players that McGuff expects to help the team’s three-point shooting. Her teammates believe Watson’s quickness and athleticism will also be a perfect fit for the Buckeyes’ full-court press defense.

“I think Jaloni and Ava are going to be especially helpful with us in applying that pressure,” Thierry said. They’re really quick and everything. I’m just excited to have them when we press other teams.”

Centers

Faith Carson 6-4, So. (0.6 ppg, 1.1 rpg) – As a returning sophomore, Carson is technically not a newcomer at Ohio State, but considering the lack of playing time she received throughout her freshman season, which was in

2024-25 OSU Women's Basketball Schedule

| Date | Opponent |
|---------|----------------------------------|
| Nov. 5 | Cleveland State |
| Nov. 12 | Charlotte |
| Nov. 17 | at Belmont |
| Nov. 20 | at Ohio |
| Nov. 24 | Bowling Green |
| Nov. 28 | Old Dominion* |
| Nov. 29 | Utah State* |
| Dec. 8 | Illinois |
| Dec. 10 | Ball State |
| Dec. 14 | Youngstown State |
| Dec. 17 | Grand Valley State |
| Dec. 20 | Stanford# |
| Dec. 29 | at Rutgers |
| Jan. 5 | Northwestern |
| Jan. 8 | at Michigan |
| Jan. 12 | Oregon |
| Jan. 16 | at Wisconsin |
| Jan. 19 | at Penn State |
| Jan. 23 | Maryland |
| Jan. 26 | at Nebraska |
| Feb. 2 | Washington |
| Feb. 5 | at UCLA |
| Feb. 8 | at USC |
| Feb. 13 | Minnesota |
| Feb. 17 | Iowa |
| Feb. 20 | at Indiana |
| Feb. 23 | Purdue |
| Feb. 26 | Michigan State |
| March 2 | at Maryland |
| Mar 5-9 | Big Ten Tournament, Indianapolis |

* - Daytona Beach Classic, Daytona Beach, Fla.
- Invisalign Bay Area Women's Classic, San Francisco

part due to an injury she sustained before the year, she may feel new to some Buckeye fans.

Behind a veteran lineup of Buckeyes, Carson was on the court for only 12 minutes last season, but she did total four points, eight rebounds and three assists in that time.

At 6-4, Carson has the requisite size to make it as a Big Ten center. She put her imposing frame on full display at Buchanan, Mich., where she racked up an impressive 20.5 points, 12.5 rebounds and 5.8 blocks per game.

Elsa Lemmila 6-6, Fr. – One thing the Buckeyes haven’t always had on the interior in previous seasons is size, and Lemmila provides just that. Standing at an intimidating 6-6, the tallest on the team by two inches, the Espoo, Finland native is an imposing figure in the frontcourt, a trait that was on full display when she recorded 15.8 points per game, 10.0 rebounds, 3.4 assists and 2.4 blocks for the Tapiolan Honka Club in her hometown.

It’s never a certainty how much someone without any college basketball experience will contribute in year one, but McGuff is hopeful that Lemmila can at least help the Buckeyes in the paint sooner rather than later.

“Elsa will give us great size and length and athleticism around the basket,” McGuff said. “Now, she’s coming off an injury her last year of high school in Finland, so she’s practicing, but she’s still kind of getting comfortable out there because she didn’t really start going live here until a couple weeks ago. So it’s going to take her a while to get comfortable, but I think she’s got a very bright future.”

Dunlap Brothers Savor Every Moment Together

There is something special playing alongside a sibling, especially as the level of the competition increases.

Playing together in peewee hockey, Little League baseball or any other youth sports provides a bond that goes beyond being teammates.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

But as brothers and/or sisters get older, they might go their separate ways whether it be different colleges, playing different sports or no athletics at all for one or both of them. Others, such as Ohio State forwards Jake and Joe Dunlap, accomplish their goals, albeit in a circuitous route.

"It's such an honor, obviously, for myself and Joe and my parents as well," Jake, the younger of the two, said. "Growing up, Joe and I always talked about playing college hockey together, and our goal always was to play Division I hockey. We're doing it. We're living our dreams. It's awesome that we're seeing it through and making it happen."

Jake, 22, played one season at New Hampshire prior to transferring to Ohio State for the 2023-24 season to join Joe, 24, a graduate student in his fifth season with the Buckeyes.

"I love playing with my brother," Joe said. "I live with him as well. It's been really great for my parents, too, to be able to come out here (from Windham, N.H.) and see both of us. It's really just the best of both worlds."

The brotherly love and the opportunity to play together is not lost on them, particularly because of the tragedy that rocked the hockey community in late summer.

Columbus Blue Jackets star forward Johnny Gaudreau, 31, and his brother, Matthew, 29, died Aug. 29 when they were struck by a car driven by an alleged drunk driver while riding bicycles near their home in Salem County, N.J., the day before their sister's wedding.

Johnny helped Boston College win the Frozen Four in 2012 as a freshman and contemplated signing with the Calgary Flames after his sophomore season but opted to stay so he could play the 2013-14 season with his freshman brother.

Even though "Johnny Hockey," as he was known, would become one of the best players in the NHL, first with the Flames and then after signing with the Blue Jackets in July 2022, he remained very close to Matt, who played several seasons of minor-league hockey.

Being hockey teammates and living in Columbus, the Gaudreaus' deaths hit home, literally, for the Dunlaps.

"It's devastation. I mean, just for the whole hockey world it's so shocking," Joe said. "For me personally, I can't imagine. I can't imagine my parents ... I don't even really want to think about it. Just keep your family close and love them every day. I feel like that's really the takeaway."

"It's such a great moment every day we're on the ice together, just looking at each other in the locker room and creating these memories together that we're going to have for a lifetime. When we have kids, we'll be telling them about it, so it's pretty amazing."

Brothers as teammates are nothing new for the program. The most famous are twins Paul and Perry Pooley (1980-84). Paul is in the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame and has his No. 22 retired. Both were All-Americans.

Twins Sean and Stacey Hartnell (1988-91) soon followed the Pooleys. Other brother sets who played concurrently for at least one season were Roger (1964-65) and Dale (1965-67) Hartsock; Andy (1975-78) and Peter (1977) MacKay; and Al and Warren Ware (1964).

There have been other instances of brothers playing separately – John (1966-67) and Tom (1969) Chaney; Pierre (1994-97) and Jean-Francois (1998-2001) Dufour; David (1969) and Doug (1978) Jones; Max (2012-14) and Sam

(2017-20) McCormick; and Tom (1968-70) and Les (1971-74) Swearingen.

"How special is that?" Ohio State head coach Steve Rohlik said. "The first thing I talk about here all the time is family – families over hockey, over everything – and then, ironically, to have a chance to play with a brother, to be around a brother, every day is special. I'm not in their shoes, but man, to have that opportunity, that's a chance of a lifetime."



Jake Dunlap

Helping Hand

An unexpected positive of Jake transferring was his ability to provide support for Joe as he underwent three surgeries over the past two years.

Joe played only 13 games last season after hip surgery. He didn't debut until the second half of the season but sustained a season-ending shoulder injury in the second-to-last, regular-season series against Michigan State on Feb. 24 that also required



Joe Dunlap

surgery.

"I can't think of a worse day in my entire life, to be honest," he said of the shoulder injury. "It sticks with me. It's a good memory to keep me motivated. But at the end of the day, it's just like, 'When am I going to get back and when am I going to get back on the ice?' That was my whole thought process the whole time."

He had chronic pain in both hips for a while, so he opted to have the other hip repaired as well.

"Once my shoulder got hurt, and I knew I needed shoulder surgery, it was kind of like, 'I might as well just kill two birds with one stone here. Get the other one done.' So, I just got them both done," he said. "I'm very happy with my decision."

Jake marvels at the strength of his brother.

"Obviously, he's been through a lot in the past couple of years," he said. "It's been, actually, probably around a three-year injury ordeal that he's been going through. He showed an incredible amount of resilience and passion for Ohio State and this program, to not only come back, but to be an impact player for this team. And now he's representing us as a captain, which is huge."

"But I was right there with him after his double surgery. When he got his shoulder done and his hip done, he was pretty much in a wheelchair and not able to move," Jake added. "I lived in his house. I actually slept in his bed and he slept in the recliner because it was easier for him to sleep."

"I was just trying to look out as a younger brother and take care of him. I'm happy to see that he's improving and finally getting his stride back, and he's looking like he's in full motion."

Joe said he is fortunate.

"I've got a great support system around me," he said. "I have two loving parents and a loving brother. They're my whole world. Without them, I'm probably not here right now."

Taking The Fifth

Once the surgeries were behind him, Joe decided he wanted to return for a fifth season afforded by the NCAA because of the 2020 pandemic. The 2024-25 season is the last season for an extra year of eligibility.

"This is probably for the best for me," he

said. "Get another year under my belt and show pretty much everybody what I can really do and getting a full year of healthy hockey is really important to me. I felt like I had some unfinished business."

Rohlik is glad to have him.

"I'm a true believer in things happening for a reason, good or bad, and maybe in the end, this is going to put him in a good spot," the coach said. "He's worked awfully hard to get where he is right now. It's exciting to see him come back and I think the team sees that."

"Sometimes we wake up with aches and pains and might not feel our best. Well, we've got someone that's been through three surgeries and is still out there and being a huge contributor. He wanted to put in the work in the summer. He wanted to get healthy. He wanted to play a full year. All those things are aligned right now."

Jake said it wasn't all sunshine and roses for Joe during his rehab.

"You don't want to be away from the team and the boys," Jake said. "He kind of felt excluded in that sense. We were playing in a slow-pitch softball tournament. He came as a coach, but obviously he'd want to be involved in something like that as an athlete and a competitor."

Joe made it all the way back from his double surgeries and was ready for the season opener Oct. 11 vs. American International. He had two assists the next night.

Playing in all eight games, he has one goal and five assists. Jake has an assist in five games.

More importantly, Joe has not had any setbacks and once again is among the fastest skaters on the team.

"When I get going, I feel like I definitely have another gear that a lot of kids can't get to," Joe said. "So, I feel like that's what separates me from a lot of people."

He credits his mother, Lori, for helping him and Jake.

"My mom was a track star. My dad (Joe) was a good athlete, too," Joe said. "She was a sprinter and in relays, too. When we were younger, we worked on sprinting and jumping, all the athletic parts of sports. We got really good at a young age."

But even the best athletes have to rest once in a while. Like when it comes to keeping up on the household chores. Mind you, Joe lives on the second floor of the house they rent while Jake is a floor above.

"Our kitchen was becoming a mess, so he installed a camera there that he could talk through his phone so if you miss your dishes or anything," Jake said. "Joe's the first guy on you about getting those done. You could be upstairs and instead of him coming up, he's yelling at you through the camera. It's funny, but yeah, we've actually done a great job this year of keeping the house clean, and he's definitely been a big part of holding us accountable."

Superior Quality

The No. 15 Buckeyes (7-0-1) ran their winning streak to seven games with 9-3 and 6-2 nonleague victories over Lake Superior State at Value City Arena on Nov. 1-2.

Riley Thompson led the scoring with six points (one goal, five assists) in the series. Davis Burnside extended his goal streak to three games by scoring in each and has a four-game point streak (four goals, three assists).

The games followed similar paths. The

Continued On Page 37

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For October



Max Montes
Sophomore Forward
Hartland, Wis.

OSU's Red-Zone Defense Tamed Nittany Lions

Going to Happy Valley and coming away with a victory is always tough. It wasn't a "white out" but the Penn State crowd did its best to get the Buckeyes unnerved in a very hostile environment. Both teams were attempting to keep a Big Ten championship and a berth in the 12-team national playoff picture within their grasp. Penn State was hot off a huge win at Wisconsin while the Buckeyes, still licking their wounds from the Oregon loss, came off a subpar offensive performance to escape with a victory over the Nebraska Cornhuskers in Ohio Stadium a week before.



Among the Ohio State woes in the previous week's game was a 10 percent (1-10) third-down conversion rate and a running game that was atrocious. A Buckeye team that was firing on all cylinders early in the season was underperforming and not showing the fire and intensity it had displayed early on. There was a lot at stake in this big game against the Nittany Lions, and the Buckeyes had to come to life and not dig themselves in a hole they might not be able to pull themselves out of with another loss.

Not only did the Buckeyes come to play on Nov. 2, but they played at a level that hasn't been seen since the Notre Dame victory a year ago in South Bend, Ind. The Buckeye offense, with a makeshift offensive line, showed the run-to-pass balance that made the home team have to defend the field. The Buckeye special teams were solid in protection, coverage and returns. Jayden Fielding's two field goals in the second half were crucial.

As good as the Ohio State offense and special teams were, it was the Buckeye defense that stepped it up to a new level by denying the Nittany Lions offensive touchdowns in the red zone twice. Penn State had the ball first-and-goal from the 3-yard line when Ohio State corner Davison Igbinosun made an acrobatic interception of a Drew Allar pass right before the end of

the first half of play, ending the touchdown threat.

It would be at the 3-yard line again, this time late in the fourth quarter, when the stout Buckeye defense put on a goal-line stand for the ages, again keeping a very good Penn State team out of the end zone. There would be zero offensive touchdowns for the Nittany Lions on the day.

Defense Excelled

For two weeks in a row, the Jim Knowles defense played to a high level. Going into the game, Penn State was ranked fourth in the Big Ten and 13th nationally in total offense. The Nittany Lions were averaging four touchdowns and 33.3 points per game. Behind the play of experienced quarterback Drew Allar and "Mr. Everything" tight end Tyler Warren, the Penn State offense seemed unstoppable. To keep the Nittany Lions out of the end zone would be nearly impossible.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and staff put together an outstanding game plan, and the players executed that plan. By mixing up zone and man-to-man coverages along with a heavy "silver bullet" pass rush, Drew Allar found getting yardage via the airways difficult. Allar threw for only 146 yards, almost 100 under his average, with no touchdowns. The Buckeye secondary was intimidating in its tight man coverage while holding Tyler Warren to just four receptions for the afternoon.

The aggressive defensive front stepped it up by sacking Allar twice and forcing him out of the pocket on several occasions. Linebackers Cody Simon and Sonny Styles combined for 19 tackles, making the Penn State running attack as unproductive as its passing game. This was the type of defensive performance that wins Big Ten championships.

Howard Responds

Buckeye quarterback Will Howard proved he could respond to a pressure situation in Happy Valley after he threw a pick-six on the Buckeyes' first offensive possession of the game, giving Penn State a 10-point lead. Refusing to succumb to the hostile environment in a stadium he had longed to play in as a young athlete from Downingtown, Pa., Howard led the Buckeye offense back from that deficit to

give Penn State its first loss of the season.

Howard put up a respectable 182 yards in the air on 16 completions with two touchdowns while rushing the football 12 times. Even though those dozen rushes netted only 24 yards, they came in crucial situations in the fourth quarter.

Will Howard is not the flashiest quarterback in the country, but his ability to keep his poise in the pocket, even in the face of a heavy rush, along with his ability to slide or escape from the pocket when necessary, makes him the type of field general coaches look for in a quarterback. There are a lot of big games left in the season but, at this point, no one can say Will Howard hasn't earned his NIL money.

Four-Minute Drill Was Perfect

After the Buckeye defense made the goal-line stand with just over five minutes left to play in the game, the Ohio State offense had to start its drive from its own 1-yard line. If the offense could not sustain the drive, Penn State could get the ball back in plenty of time to score.

All offenses practice the "four-minute drill" to attempt to bleed the clock of valuable time in keeping the football from the opponent. Most coaches believe the drill, in a true game scenario, is successful if the offense can get two first downs, then punt the ball downfield, giving the opponent a long way to try to score in a little bit of time. For an offense to keep the football for the entire rest of the game is extremely difficult because offensive coordinators are reluctant to put the football in the air risking the chance of an interception.

Chip Kelly and Ryan Day's offense was masterful in running the clock down, forcing the Nittany Lions to use all three of their timeouts. When Will Howard kept the football for 7 yards on third-and-3 for a first down, Penn State's fate was sealed. The Buckeye offense was able to run the entire 5:13 off the clock by holding onto the

ball for 11 plays, getting four first downs, and securing the victory in Happy Valley. A "four-minute drill" became a "five-minute 13-second" drill run to perfection.

Offense Line Showed Grit

Offensive line coach Justin Frye did a masterful job of getting his troops ready to play. Despite injuries to offensive tackles Josh Simmons and Zen Michalski, the Buckeye offensive front was able to get push at the line of scrimmage and establish an impressive run game against a strong and physical Penn State defensive front.

The move of Donovan Jackson from left guard to left tackle and the insertion of Carson Hinzman to that left guard position was a patchwork of success. Although Jackson was beaten a couple of times in pass protection by the quickness of edge rusher Abdul Carter, he played well at the toughest position of all to play on the offensive line. The Buckeye offensive front especially showed its toughness, leg drive and determination by executing the quarterback sneak, now called the "tush push," in two crucial situations.

Coaches Deserve Credit

No one in Columbus gets more criticism than the Ohio State football staff, especially the head coach. That's the way it is, and do not look for it to change anytime soon. Ryan Day has an excellent group of talented and knowledgeable coaches. They spend countless hours away from their own families to make their football family successful. Things don't always go as planned, but when a coach's players execute to near perfection and achieve at a high level in a big game like they did against PSU, the hours put in make their pressure-filled job seem worth it. Every member of the coaching staff deserves a Buckeye Leaf for the victory over Penn State.

Continued From Page 36

Buckeyes jumped to big leads by scoring in bunches before the Lakers (1-5-0) closed the gap.

In the opener, OSU led 4-0 before the Lakers scored three straight, but three goals in a 1:39 span of the third period were part of a five-goal response by the Buckeyes.

The next night, OSU expanded a 1-0 lead with three goals in the first 3:27 of the second period and were up 5-0 before the Lakers scored twice to make it 5-2.

Next

The Buckeyes play their next three series on the road beginning with Big Ten tilts at Michigan State on Nov. 8-9, followed by games

vs. Lindenwood on Nov. 15-16 and Princeton on Nov. 29-30.

They return home for Big Ten series vs. Penn State on Dec. 5-6 and Notre Dame on Dec. 13-14.

Maximum Effort

Sophomore forward Max Montes is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for October.

The Hartland, Wis., native scored five goals in six games and had game-winners in both games at Wisconsin on Oct. 18-19. He scored nine goals in 37 games last season.

For a complete recap of the Lake Superior State series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Help BSB Grow

Loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers frequently ask us what they can do to help keep BSB vibrant in this increasingly electronic age. One of the things readers can do is introduce BSB to new readers who might find our Ohio State sports content interesting.

In order to help you do that, we are offering an opportunity to send four free trial issues to potential subscribers. We will then offer your potential subscriber a very special offer to get them to join the fold of loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers.

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Buckeyes Make Statement, Improve Playoff Hopes

Whew. That was a heart-stopper.

Chalk me up as one who thought the Buckeyes were still in line for the playoffs, even with a close loss to Penn State.

But losing would have left the Buckeye fans extra nervous for both the Indiana and Michigan games. Now, they have breathing room. I think they're in, even with two regular-season losses.

**EXNER
POINT
Rich Exner**

But, playoff or not, who wanted to see Ohio State go 0-2 in the two big games so far this season?

Yes, things didn't look good early. Yes, Ohio State was imperfect at State College. But, overall, that was a solid, hard-fought win on the road against a legitimate top-six or so team.

So now, after eight games, the only blemish is a one-point loss to the nation's No. 1 team – a team the Buckeyes may see one or two more times before this season is over.

The Epic Final 15 Plays

The final 15 plays were something to remember, starting with Penn State's first-and-goal from the 3-yard-line after Tyler

Warren had run 33 yards to apparently set up the tying score for Penn State.

That's when Ohio State clamped down the way a national championship contender needs to clamp down.

Four tries at the end zone for Penn State: no gain, 1-yard-gain, 1-yard gain and then from the 1-yard-line on fourth down, an incomplete pass.

Stifling defense, both on the run plays and on the one attempted pass that fell incomplete between three OSU defenders after a fourth defender shut down the primary pass option on the play.

Then, just as impressive, Ohio State ran out the final 5:13 without ever throwing a pass – 11 straight runs, including the kneel down at the end.

The first message that Ohio State would mean business was the 4-yard quarterback sneak on first down from its own 1-yard line. Penn State was either over-matched or out of steam.

Penn State knew Ohio State was going to run every time and could do nothing about it.

Nine yards by Quinshon Judkins, 6 more by Judkins, 15 more by Judkins, 6 yards by TreVeyon Henderson and so on.

That's the way you close out a win on the road.

Key Blocks

A shoutout to two blockers on the 7-yard run by Will Howard that sealed the

victory on a third-and-3 with 1:11 left in the game.

Howard had an easy path for three reasons. The first was that nine Penn State defenders bit on the fake handoff to Judkins.

But two defenders were left.

Credit tight end Gee Scott Jr. for sealing one defender inside. And on the outside, credit wide receiver Jeremiah Smith for safely sealing the cornerback away from Howard's path.

Switch At Tailback

An interesting change in the OSU offense came on the first drive. It was Judkins, not Henderson, who took the first turns at running the football.

My theory? Henderson is the superior player when it comes to picking up blitzes as a blocker. Ohio State's line was iffy heading into the game with the moving pieces up front.

It's logical to me that this move was made to get Henderson more naturally on the field for more third-down passing situations. Just a hunch.

Packed Formation, Long Passes

Ohio State rarely threw deep, perhaps because of blocking concerns with the changes on the line.

So it was interesting that on three longer pass plays, including touchdown passes of 25 yards to Emeka Egbuka and 21 yards to Brandon Inniss, the Buckeyes lined up in bunch formations – receivers packed in tightly, cutting down on the outside lanes for PSU rushers.

Three-For-Three On The Replay

Officiating is suspect on any given Saturday these days in college football, but credit the replay crew for getting it right on three critical and very tight crucial plays, overturning the call on the field each time.

The call was right on Howard's fumble into the end zone. (As an aside, if his foot was about an inch farther outside as the ball bounded off his leg, it would have been considered out of bounds before tumbling into the end zone. But Howard's foot was barely inbounds.)

The call was right on Davison Igbino-sun's incredible interception in the end zone just before the half.

And the call was right on the incomplete pass to Judkins late in the game, originally ruled a fumble.

Good Enough For Howard?

Howard was the first to admit in the postgame interview on TV that he made some mistakes.

I say, get used to it, and that might be just fine.

Ohio State is good enough to win if Howard plays above average.

He's not going to be a top draft pick like C.J. Stroud. But he doesn't have to carry

this team. He just has to lead it. And so far, he's been an upgrade for OSU at the position.

After all, he entered the Penn State game ranked second nationally in passer rating.

Will OSU And Ducks Play 3 Times?

As it looks now – before Ohio State plays Indiana and a reeling Michigan team, and before Oregon goes to Wisconsin and then hosts Washington – OSU and Oregon appear on a collision course for what could be the second of three encounters this season.

Should OSU and Oregon play for the Big Ten title, odds are the winner will be the No. 1 seed in the college football playoffs and the loser will be the top-seeded nonconference champion.

The top-seeded nonconference champion gets the fifth seed, playing the 12th-seeded team. Win that game and the fifth seed will then play the worst conference champion, which could be Miami or BYU as it stands now.

The fifth seed would be favored in both of those games. Then next up would be the top-seeded team (if it advances), and I'm assuming the Big Ten champion will be the top-seeded team.

Thus, a potential third Ohio State-Oregon matchup.

This Week's Top 11


Here's my stab at a top 11 this week. Why 11, as I've been doing all season? Because I presume 11 major conference schools will land playoff spots. One of the 12 spots is guaranteed to go to a school in one of the lesser conferences.

1. Oregon, 9-0 – Latest victim, Michigan, 38-17.
2. Ohio State, 7-1 – Only loss to the No. 1 team and a better win (over Penn State) than anyone else who should be considered for this second spot.
3. Georgia, 7-1 – Rallied to beat 4-4 Florida. Lost to a two-loss Alabama team. Best win against Texas, 30-15. Mixed thoughts.
4. Miami (Fla.), 9-0 – I was slow to warm up to Miami, in part because of two escapes earlier in the season, but at 9-0, credit is due for still being undefeated. That's not easy.
5. Penn State, 7-1 – No signature wins but played No. 2 tough.
6. Texas, 7-1 – The Longhorns easily could swap spots with Penn State.
7. Tennessee, 7-1 – Lost to Arkansas. Otherwise solid this season.
8. Indiana, 9-0 – All easy victories. Closest games have been 14-point wins over Washington and Maryland.
9. BYU, 8-0 – Not as impressive as Indiana, but still undefeated this deep into the season
10. Notre Dame, 7-1 – Boy, the Irish would like to have their Northern Illinois game back, a 16-14 loss in Week 2.
11. Iowa State, 7-1 – Finally toppled, losing by a point to Texas Tech, 23-22.



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Not Lion When Saying Bucks Needed This Win

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

When this ballyhooed Ohio State football team finally put it all together, I figured it would be some sort of 42-0 type win over a quality opponent. When the Buckeyes finally *did* put it all together, it was a mistake-filled, always tight, one-score victory, but over a quality opponent.

Boy, did Ohio State finally put it all together in its 20-13 victory over Penn State before 111,030 sometimes rabid, sometimes subdued fans. What an impressive victory!

I know some of you are out there thinking, “Frank, how can you say the Buckeyes put it all together when they made a plethora of potentially costly mistakes and were unable to put the Lions away until late in the fourth quarter?”

Well, I’m going to tell you how I can say it.

The Buckeyes were playing a quality opponent, a team possibly every bit as good as Oregon. It’s not going to be all sunshine and roses against a team like that on its home field. But every time the Nittany Lions made a gambit, Ohio State had the personnel and the execution to counter it. It didn’t make a difference if it was on offense or defense. Ohio State had the answer. Ohio State has had the personnel all season. But the execution?

The Buckeyes demonstrated in the first half that they had an answer for anything Penn State would throw at them.

I feel a pivotal moment in the game came in the very first quarter.

Penn State took the opening kick and marched unfettered against the Buckeye defense for 14 plays, converting four first downs, and consuming 8:00. The Buckeyes scored a minor victory by holding PSU to a field goal.

The worst was yet to come.

The Buckeyes didn’t even register a first down on their initial possession before Will Howard threw an uncontested pick-six, and Penn State was up 10-0 before some people had even found their seats. The legendary Penn State crowd was ramped up to full volume and excitement level.

Now here is where the Buckeyes made their first response of the game.

Instead of panicking, they calmly marched 74 yards for a touchdown of their own, keyed by consecutive runs of 11 and 22 yards from Quinshon Judkins and a 25-yard scoring pass from Howard to Emeka Egbuka. Suddenly the Buckeyes are down by only three with over three quarters to play.

If Penn State had forced a three-and-out there, the Beaver Stadium crowd might have taken over the game. Instead, it was Penn State that went three-and-out, and Ohio State went on another lengthy drive, marching 81 yards to a touchdown on a Howard to Brandon Inness pass for a 14-10 lead, and the crowd was muted and the early 10-0 deficit was rendered irrelevant.

But it was getting worse for the home team. The Lions were held to another three-and-out, and the Buckeyes started driving again. However, a funny thing happened on the way to the end zone. Howard was on his way to yet another touchdown with a well-executed run when he fumbled the ball out of the end zone, resulting in a touchback and the ball and the momentum swinging back to Penn State. However, the Lions could not convert their good fortune into points against the stout OSU defense.

They had one more shot at changing the tide of the game when they got excellent field position at the OSU 49 following a Buckeye punt with 1:51 to play. The Lions promptly moved to the 3, when the Buckeyes again had the personnel and the execution to thwart the drive and maintain control of the game. Davison Igbinosun, the human penalty flag, made a dazzling interception to send the Buckeyes into the locker room maintaining their 14-10 lead.

Igbinosun’s interception negated Howard’s fumble, a tit-for-a tat.

From that point on, I always felt the Buckeyes were in control, despite the fact that the Nittany Lions were always within one score.

Penn State had one last shot to tie or win the game in the fourth quarter. That’s when the really good stuff came from the Buckeyes.

True, they let Penn State march 74 yards to the 1-yard-line, but they had the personnel and the execution to not only stop them there, but head the other way on an 11-play drive made up of 10 runs, including four first downs, and a kneel-down to eat up the final 5:13 of clock with the Nittany Lions helpless to stop them and a stunned crowd looking on.

Did anyone besides me appreciate the irony of Howard sliding at the end of his 7-yard run to convert the final first down that sealed Penn State’s fate?

It was good old-fashioned, smash-mouth football at the end. Nothing fancy, and I loved it. Those last two possessions proved, at least to me, that Ohio State had finally put it all together.

Hats Off To The Big Guys

In my job, people are always asking me about the Buckeyes, and this past week was no different, with everyone wanting to know what I thought about the upcoming Penn State game. After the debacle along the offensive line against Nebraska, I told anyone who would listen to me that if the coaching staff could fix the problems with the offensive line – an awfully tall task in one week – the Buckeyes had a good shot at winning. If the big guys played like they did against the Cornhuskers – well, you can use your imagination.

Ohio State moved All-Big Ten guard Donovan Jackson to left tackle, a position he had never played before, and inserted Carson Hinzman, who started last year at center, into Jackson’s guard slot. The Buckeyes passed the offensive line test with flying colors. They helped more than double the Buckeyes’ average per carry from the Nebraska game, from 2.1 to 4.4, and they showed the ultimate flex of offensive line muscle, when they led the 5:13 ground march to seal the victory.

Most were monitoring Jackson as they watched the revamped line’s play. Hinzman had high marks for his linemate’s performance at his new position.

“Donovan is a freak of nature,” Hinzman said. “That guy is an absolute – if I could be anyone else it would be Donovan, the way he moves, the way he plays, the kind of guy he is on all fronts. He works hard. He does the right things. I think today, he really showed it on the field that even though obviously it’s a big transition deal from the phone booth to an island, I think he did a really great job.”

I’m not a sophisticated offensive line observer but I couldn’t help noticing that I *wasn’t* noticing Hinzman. I’ve always been led to believe that not noticing an offensive lineman can be a good thing. You tend to notice offensive linemen only when they are struggling. Think Zen Michalski against Nebraska.

After the game, Ryan Day backed me up about not noticing Hinzman.

“I don’t know what he’s going to grade out at, but you didn’t notice him much, which is a good sign for a guard when you don’t notice him much. We’ll get on the film and see how he did, but I think his experience paid off and he was a big part of this win today.”

The revamped line is bound to only get better

as they play more together and the big games approach.

Someone’s Else’s Penalties

It was nice for once to see the other team committing frequent or inopportune penalties – or both – something the Buckeyes have been guilty of all too often, not just this year, but in seasons past. Against Penn State, Ohio State was guilty of just two penalties for 15 yards, while the Nittany Lions were flagged five times for 45 yards. The Lions aided Ohio State’s second touchdown drive with an offsides penalty and an unsportsmanlike conduct violation, helping set up Inness’ touchdown.

Quote Of The Week

After a loss to now top-rated Oregon that featured a struggling OSU defense and a flawed final drive to try to win the game, followed by an uninspired win over Nebraska – this all from a team that was presented as potentially one of the best ever but has struggled to win the “big game” in recent years – Day and his Buckeyes came under fire in the past few weeks.

After the win over the Nittany Lions, Day was asked about the situation, and for a coach who frequently communicates with the media via “coach-speak,” I thought his response was quite eloquent.

“There’s probably a lot there to unpack and I’m not going to get into all of it, but there’s a lot that goes into being the head coach at Ohio State,” he said. “You can say to ignore everything that goes on, but your players read it, your coaches read it, your staff members read it, your families read it, and you have to stay strong in those moments. But that entire team, our families, they all believed.”

“To go do that, to accomplish that in this game, a top-five victory, it feels good right now. We still have a lot of football ahead of us, but right now it feels good. I’m proud of our team and I’m proud of our coaching staff.”

Quote Of The Week II

Wide receiver Brandon Inness was asked how his unit felt about the depth in their room. His answer was short, sweet and to the point.

“We’re the best in the world. Everybody knows that.”

It made me think of the late Muhammad Ali, who famously said, “It ain’t bragging if you can back it up.”

Inness, No. 4 in the Buckeye receiving rotation, had a strong game against the Nittany Lions with a pair of receptions for 33 yards, including his sweet 21-yard catch and run for a touchdown to give OSU its first lead, 14-10, in the second quarter.

However, I’m still trying to figure out what happened to Brandon Inness the punt returner, who teased us with his returns in the first game of the season. Ohio State had no returns on Penn State’s four punts, and Inness hasn’t returned a punt since he returned one for 3 yards against Iowa back on Oct. 5.

Battle Of The Dynamic Duos

We have been told for months that Ohio State has the best running back duo in the country with Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson. But after the two combined for 20 carries for just 54 yards and a 2.7-yard average against Nebraska, it occurred to me that Ohio State would be facing Penn State, which had a dynamic duo of its own in Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton.

Heading into the top-five matchup between the two powers, Judkins had 81 carries and 520 net yards for a 6.4 average with six TDs and a 74.3 average per game. Henderson had 62 carries, 449 net yards, a 7.2 average, with four TDs, and a 64.1 average per game.

On the opposing sideline, Allen had 101 carries, 509 net yards a 5.0 average, four TDs, and a 72.7 average per game. Singleton had 75 carries for 483 net yards, a 6.4 average, three TDs and an 80.5 average per game in one fewer game.

While the numbers were somewhat comparable, I gave the edge to Henderson and Judkins before the game. The Buckeye duo proved me right in the big win over the Nittany Lions.

Judkins carried 14 times for 95 yards (6.8), Henderson 10 times for 54 yards (5.4), Allen 12 times for 27 yards (2.2) and Singleton six times for 15 yards (2.5). Singleton did have six receptions for 54 yards. Interestingly, none of the four scored a touchdown.

Thanks For The Calls

Readers continued to call us about mail delivery in the week after the Nebraska game, but in a pleasant change of events, they were calling to tell us they had received their paper in a timely fashion, most for the first time in weeks. One longtime reader from California indicated he had his fastest delivery *ever* receiving his BSB in two days.

I know I speak for everyone here when I say how touched we were that so many of you took the time to call and report your prompt delivery. Readers seemed genuinely excited not only that they got their paper, but excited for us. I think I have babbled on so much in this space that most people figured out what a difficult time it has been for us with the relentless onslaught of complaints.

The sudden improvement in delivery seemed to confirm what we had been told – that the post office had been prioritizing election mail, a problem that is obviously winding down. The big games are coming. Time to prioritize Buckeye Sports Bulletin!

By no means do we think we are out of the woods yet, especially with Veteran’s Day coming up on Nov. 11. So here are a couple of reminders.

We are still asking that as many BSB subscribers as possible call the postal complaint number. 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. 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 Aug. 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.

We have had a strong uptick in readers taking advantage of the online edition of BSB, which is free to subscribers and posted immediately upon completion of each paper at BuckeyeSports.com. You can also upgrade your delivery to first-class mail in an envelope through the Michigan game for what is now only \$16. With Thanksgiving on the Thursday before The Game, even in the best of times many people who receive their BSB by periodicals-class mail would not get their paper before kickoff.

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