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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 23, 2024

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Conversations in the week leading up to Ohio State's 31-7 win over Northwestern on Nov. 16 revolved around the game taking place at Wrigley Field, the field dimensions in the stadium not being very conducive to a football game and the Buckeyes starting at noon once again – the fourth of six noon starts in a row for OSU.

It seemed that, at least publicly, no eyes were actually on the Wildcats team that the Buckeyes were going to have to face off against for 60 minutes. Instead all of them focused on everything else surrounding the game.

When game time came around and scarlet and gray flooded the stands at Wrigley, filling most of the 38,147 seats, it seemed like all of that talk from media and fans might have also had the Buckeyes a little distracted as well.

Early in the season in the nonconference schedule, Ohio State settled into a pattern. For whatever reason, the defense consistently got beaten early in the game before coming out in the second half and shutting the game down, a discouraging trend that at least had occurred against inferior competition. Such was the case in Chicago on Nov. 16 against 4-5 Northwestern again.

The first drive of the game had the Wildcats pick apart Jim Knowles' unit piece by piece, finding holes with the run while also finding open spots to complete passes. It seemed inevitable that Northwestern would walk away from that march down the field with points on the board until quarterback Jack Lausch kept the ball for a run to the left, allowing defensive end Jack Sawyer to knock the ball out, which was recovered by Davison Igbinosun and returned 17 yards to the OSU 33, bailing Ohio State out of a disaster of a start.

After the ensuing Buckeye drive stalled out at the Wildcat 37-yard line following an overturn of a long Jeremiah Smith touchdown, Joe McGuire stuck Northwestern at its own 8-yard line with a short punt, putting the Buckeye defense in great field position to get the offense back on the field quickly, something they were once again unable to do.

On Northwestern's second drive of the



Buckeyes' Goals Still Ahead Of Them After Northwestern Win

SONNY BROCKWAY

IN THE WAY - Linebacker Sonny Styles (6) seemed to be everywhere when the defense, with the help of defensive tackle Tyliek Williams (91) and linebacker Cody Simon (0), shut down Northwestern after an early touchdown in the 31-7 victory at Wrigley Field on Nov. 16.

game, OSU again had no answers for what had been a very underwhelming Wildcats offense, allowing them to embark on a 92-yard drive that took 13 plays and another 5:30 off the clock, finishing with a Lausch

run up the middle for an 8-yard touchdown. More than two minutes into the second quarter, Northwestern led Ohio State 7-0.

"We struggled getting off the field on third down on that first drive," head coach Ryan Day said after the game. "It was third-and-extra long, and they ran it for a first down. Then they converted a couple of other third downs. Then we settled down a bit. We went right down the field and took a negative play on the first down (on offense). I thought we had a touchdown with Jeremiah. It got called back. Then they went down the field and scored."

The Buckeyes answered with a 12-play drive that ended with a Quinshon Judkins 1-yard touchdown, his first since the Buck-

eyes 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12.

Then the switch flipped on the ensuing Wildcats drive, but not without some help. Northwestern looked to still have some sort of momentum in the tie game, with Lausch having all kinds of time to throw the ball on the first play and a 6-yard rush on the next. But Northwestern's center, Jackson Corsello, made a bad snap, forcing Lausch to dive on the ball and the Wildcats to line up at their own 27-yard line to punt the ball away.

On the next play, long snapper Will Halkyard had a bad snap of his own, sending the ball flying over the head of Wildcat punter

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Buckeye Leaves

No. 2 Ohio State once again overcame a slow start on defense to come away with a 31-7 victory over Northwestern on Nov. 16 at Chicago's Wrigley Field, improving to 9-1 on the season and 6-1 in the Big Ten with a top-five matchup against No. 5 Indiana on deck. 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 Quinshon Judkins may not have had the best outing of his career, but he may have turned in one of his more efficient games this season at historic Wrigley Field with 15 carries for 76 yards and two scores.

Judkins seemed to run with force from the onset, as evidenced on his second carry of the game when he ran over Wildcat defensive back Damon Walters to keep the chains moving for Ohio State. He carried that type of physicality for the rest of the game, gaining positive yardage on each of his next 13 totes, including two tough 1-yard scores at the goal line that helped give Ohio State a 21-7 lead in the first half.

The Ole Miss transfer seemed to be moving forward and churning his legs on every run against the Wildcats, a hard-nosed mentality that could suit him well the rest of the season against Indiana, Michigan and beyond.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: In his hometown of Chicago, Ohio State wide receiver Carnell Tate had one of his best games as a Buckeye. Tate's statistics for the game might not have been eye-popping, finishing the game with four catches for 52 yards, but each of the sophomore receiver's receptions came at key moments in the 31-7 win, two of them ending up as touchdowns.

Tate first got on the stat sheet on a third-and-6 pass from fifth-year quarterback Will Howard in the first quarter which came up 1 yard short of the first-down marker but put his team in position to convert the first down a play later. He then put the Buckeyes right on the goal line on the team's next drive on a 14-yard reception made through heavy contact issued by Northwestern defenders.

After putting his team in position to score their first touchdown of the game, Tate got on the board himself with a 25-yard touchdown reception late in the second quarter.

Tate scored his second touchdown in a single game for the first time in his career on the Buckeyes' opening second-half drive on a beautifully run slant route. He hauled in the pass and dove in the end zone for the 8-yard score.

Cameron Moore, BSB: After myriad issues throughout the 2024 season, including losing tackle Josh Simmons and having to fill the absence of guard Donovan Jackson (who now plays in Simmons' spot) earlier in the season, the Ohio State offensive line appears to have finally figured it out, and they'll get my Buckeye Leaf this week.

A couple of slugs in the middle of the schedule caused fans and beat writers alike to question the unit on whether it could have sustained success, but the group, which was recently named to the Joe Moore Award watchlist, put those concerns to bed against Northwestern.

Blocking for an offense that passed for 247 yards and rushed for 173 more, the Buckeye front five paved

the way en route to the victory over the Wildcats, keeping Ohio State undefeated in November and bringing it one step closer to an appearance in the Big Ten Championship Game.

The lineman group, with blockers like Jackson and center Seth McLaughlin, has transformed from a unit that had massive question marks coming into the season. After sitting at 26th in the country in sacks allowed at 1.2 per game heading into Northwestern, the offensive line surrendered just one sack to the Wildcats.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf goes to defensive end Jack Sawyer, who was in the backfield countless times over the course of the win over Northwestern. The way he was coming off of the edge against the Wildcats made it seem like there is a late-season breakout coming akin to the one he had last season.

He had just three tackles for loss (all sacks) this season coming into the contest, and while he wasn't able to add another one to his stats for the season, he did force quarterback Jack Lausch to rush his passes and scramble out of the pocket many times.

Sawyer finished the game with a career-high seven tackles, two of them solo, along with three quarterback hurries and a forced fumble that bailed the Buckeye defense out of early Northwestern points when it was driving in the first quarter.

BSB Subscribers:

Poster That Harley Built: It has to be Carnell Tate. To be in such an emotional situation and respond with a big game is an inspiration to us all. I don't think that I have the maturity to respond to such a tragic situation with the grace that he has. Have a great rest of the season and career, Carnell.

Bob Cody: Buckeye Leaves for David Adolph (blocked punt), a bevy of Leaves for the special day for Chicagoan Carnell Tate. Buckeye Leaves for Will Howard, TreVeyon and Quinshon, Jack Sawyer, Cody Simon, Sonny Styles and Jeremiah Smith.

BuckeyeScott: I thought Arvell Reese had a good game, tying Sawyer with a team high in tackles. Also, Jayden Fielding had a solid kicking game. Let's also give Buckeye Leaves to Caleb Downs, "The Boogeyman"

Tiffin Buckeye: Carnell Tate for sure. Lost his mother and this was the first time he was back in the area since then.

Terrier Buck: Considering the opponent, I am not inclined to award Buckeye Leaves, but I would give one to Carnell Tate without misgivings.

PeyoteBuck: Carnell Tate, for sure. What a great homecoming. I know he was thinking of his mother who died in a drive-by shooting recently. Happy for him.

John Lanning: Sawyer had a great game. Tate had a nice day for the Bucks. And Downs is stirring the pot for a strong finish. Leaves to these three.

From The Message Board

No. 2 Ohio State will face one of its toughest opponents of the season in Week 13 when it welcomes head coach Curt Cignetti and 10-0 Indiana to Ohio Stadium in what should be a top-five matchup with significant Big Ten and College Football Playoff implications. With the Hoosiers having some additional time to prepare for the Buckeyes while on an off week in Week 12, we asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum to offer their thoughts on their undefeated season so far, as well as whether they are contenders or pretenders on both a Big Ten or national scale, and if they pose a legitimate threat to the Buckeyes come Nov. 23.

"They should change their name to The Indiana Transfers. Give Cignetti credit – he has used the portal and NIL to build a solid team that will give the Buckeyes all they want. With a win, they knock us out of the BIG championship, as their last game is with weakling Purdue. Playing us the week before TTUN gives them a great chance to pull it off. I give them a 40 percent chance."

– R1TBDBITL

"If Ohio State comes out of Chicago with no or minor injuries, I expect Ohio State to beat Indiana by at least 10-14 points. Indiana is currently overrated because of its schedule. I estimate that there are at least 10 teams who would beat the Hoosiers on a neutral field right now."

– Terrier Buck

"As much as I hate to admit it, Indiana appears to be a very good football team. However, it should be noted that in four of their games, they were ahead by seven points or less going into the fourth quarter. It just so happened that these were all B1G teams: Maryland, Northwestern, Washington and Michigan."

"The final score in these games does not indicate just how close the games really were. Clearly, the most physical team they have played was Michigan, and the final score, 20-15, showed that. They have not played a team that has the combination of offensive explosion and physicality that the Buckeyes bring to the

table. Ohio State bursts their bubble on Nov. 23."

– BuckeyeScott

"I do think they're legit good for sure, but I also agree their schedule lacks challenging opponents."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"They could have been a contender. Until the Buckeyes came along. Anyone who has seen 'Road Warrior' remembers the scene where Max hits the nitro button which makes his car take off like a rocket. That's what Indiana will need when they come to the Horseshoe. And I believe they will have their own version of it because everyone wants the Buckeye head on their mantle for a trophy. They will be gunning for a takedown, but I don't think they've got the juice. A good team, the Hoosiers, but maybe overhyped."

– PeyoteBuck

"To be perfectly honest, I really don't know. It has been argued that they haven't played the toughest schedule, but they currently have the largest average margin of victory in the Big Ten, are seventh nationally in points allowed, and second nationally in points scored. Guess we'll find out on Nov. 23 if they're for real."

– Bstu9

"No question that they are a contender. Their new coach is focused and driven. The team was built with portal and NIL offers. Ten straight wins has built confidence against every team. It was acceptable in the past to play football in the fall, but Indiana was a basketball school. Now they can do both."

– John Lanning

"I find this question a tough one to answer. As everyone says, they didn't choose their conference schedule, and they have pretty much beaten all comers soundly. But when they got to a mediocre TTUN team they were not as dominant against arguably the best team they have faced this season. This game is a big one for both the Hoosiers and Ohio State. IU needs a 'signature' win to prove without a doubt it is a contender, and there is no team more 'signature' than Ohio State."

– Poster That Harley Built

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

No More TTUN

Something has been bugging me for quite a while, and I've finally decided to speak up. Relating to the University of Michigan football team as "TTUN" is not only childish, but it is disrespectful! It was bad enough when well-meaning fans were doing it, but when the staff of Buckeye Sports Bulletin begin to routinely use the term, it needs to be called out! I remember Woody, in one of his classes, saying "never disrespect your opponent publicly – it will certainly come back at some point to bite you in the a-!"

Can anyone be naive enough to believe that refusing to call the Michigan football team by their team name somehow gives us

an edge on the playing field? This is junior high school behavior, not befitting of one of the premier college programs in the nation. I don't pretend to know what transpires in the Buckeye locker room, but I'd be willing to bet a lot that no one on the coaching staff, or among the players, relate to Michigan football as TTUN!

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

Publisher's Note: For 44 years we have tried to hold to the highest of journalistic standards. The only place I can envision TTUN in Buckeye Sports Bulletin is in a quote, in a post from a reader in our Fan Forum on page two, or in a column, where,

immature or not, we would allow the columnist to express his or her opinion in their own way. Things do slip through, however, so please feel free to point out any slip-ups on our part.

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

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Put Up Or Shut Up Time Has Come

We will know in a few weeks' time whether Ryan Day is the actual heir apparent to Urban Meyer and Jim Tressel, or if Day is the second coming of John Cooper.

Ohio State must run its end-of-the-season gantlet of undefeated Indiana and prideful Michigan before it gets a chance to avenge a mid-October loss to Oregon in the Big Ten Championship Game. Get through that three-game obstacle course, and Day can go chase his national championship ring. Stumble, and the coach will be relegated to the same status that befell Cooper – an affable guy and excellent recruiter, but one who was unable to take all the talent he hoarded and win when the spotlight was at its hottest.

After an uneven performance that produced a 31-7 win against a five-loss Northwestern team at Chicago's iconic Wrigley Field, I'll admit to having some doubts whether Day and his team can pull off their season-ending trifecta.

While it's true the Wildcats were limited to no points and only 84 total yards in the second half, it was the problematic opening 17½ minutes of the game that most concerned me. The injury-ravaged Northwestern offense entered the game ranked 131st in the nation and dead last in the 18-team Big Ten in terms of both scoring and total offense, and yet it seemed to move the ball almost at will against the Ohio State defense.

Only the fifth forced fumble of Jack Sawyer's career prevented the Wildcats from scoring on the first possession of the game, and when Northwestern got the ball back, it marched 92 yards in 13 plays for a touchdown.

It was a drive that featured – stop me if you've heard this before – Denzel Burke getting beat twice by Wildcats receiver Bryce Kirtz, once for 21 yards and then for 12 yards on third-and-10. It was a drive that featured Wildcats receiver A.J. Henning getting in between defenders for a 22-yard catch on second-and-8. And it was a drive that featured Ohio State defensive linemen and linebackers leaving the middle of the field wide open long enough for Wildcats QB Jack Lausch to waltz 8 yards untouched into the end zone for the game's first score.

With 12:34 remaining in the second quarter, Northwestern had 151 total yards to 30 for Ohio State and had engineered a masterful keep-away game plan that boasted a time of possession differential of 12:26 to 5:00. Along the way, the Wildcats had run 24 plays, seven of which had gained 11 yards or more.

Yes, the Buckeyes regrouped and locked things down after that. Thanks to a bad snap on a punt that was exacerbated by an even worse decision on the part of Northwestern punter Hunter Renner, Ohio State scored a pair of touchdowns inside a 2:40 span late in the first half to take a 14-7 lead and never looked back.

There were most definitely highlight moments in the game, including a blocked punt for the second game in a row, the first time that's happened since 2019. Will Howard was right on the money on several deep balls, including an early touchdown pass to Jeremiah Smith that was overturned on review and a 25-yard touchdown strike to Carnell Tate just before halftime.

Smith once again showcased his high-level athleticism on a 68-yard catch-and-run that set up Ohio State's final touchdown, and tight end Gee Scott Jr. reverted to his old days as a wide receiver when he executed a beautiful seam route to gather in a 34-yard reception, the longest of his career.

Scott's catch came on another pinpoint strike from Howard, who finished the afternoon with 247 yards and two more touchdowns to give him 24 for the season. That matches the

total Howard had all of last season at Kansas State.

But I keep returning to the way the defense started the game and wondering if it was a product of playing to the level of the competition or something else more concerning.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Say what you will about Indiana, its heretofore weak schedule, and the fact the Hoosiers haven't beaten the Buckeyes since 1988. That team is legit.

Only one team in the Big Ten has a better scoring offense than Ohio State, and it's Indiana. Only one QB in the league has a better passer rating than Howard, and it's IU's Kurtis Rourke. Only one team in the conference has more sacks than the Ohio State defense, and it's Indiana.

Want a little more juice? It's the first time since 1960 that the Buckeyes have played a top-five opponent the game before Michigan, and that one didn't go very well. Third-ranked Ohio State traveled to No. 5 Iowa and came home on the business end of a 35-12 loss.

Even if the Buckeyes get past the Hoosiers, please don't tell me Michigan is ripe for the picking this year. The old cliché that records mean nothing in that game is often painfully true. There were so many times during the Cooper era that Ohio State had the better talent and still came up woefully short against the Wolverines.

So, that's a lot of words just to say that it's put up or shut up time. Win the next two games to set up the rematch with Oregon and cement one kind of legacy, or come up short and cement an entirely different one.

Liability To Strength

Exactly how did the Ohio State offensive line go from question mark to exclamation point in the span of 3½ games?

Not exactly seen as a team strength when the season began, the line appeared to have become a full-blown liability after left tackle Josh Simmons blew out his knee against Oregon and was lost for the remainder of the season.

The OSU coaching staff inserted Zen Michalski into Simmons' spot during the off week, but Michalski struggled mightily against Nebraska before sustaining his own injury that has kept him sidelined ever since.

But when the staff decided desperate times called for desperate measures and moved two-time All-Big Ten guard Donovan Jackson into the left tackle position and inserted former starting center Carson Hinzman into Jackson's vacated guard spot – the Buckeyes have fired on all cylinders.

Over the three full games the current starting line of Jackson, Hinzman, center Seth McLaughlin, right guard Tegra Tshabola and right tackle Josh Fryar has been together, Ohio State has outscored its opponents by a 96-20 margin and averaged 174.0 yards rushing as well as 4.8 yards per carry (522 yards on 108 carries).

While the running attack has benefited from the O-line suddenly exerting its will, so, too, has Howard, who is beginning to look like a quarterback who doesn't feel the need to force the issue by himself anymore. During the wins against Penn State, Purdue and Northwestern, Howard completed 70.3 percent of 74 attempts for 689 yards and seven touchdowns against only one

interception.

Howard has also benefited from excellent protection provided by the reconstituted line. Sacked twice against Nebraska and three more times by Penn State, Howard has been sacked only once since.

Maybe the best thing about the members of the Ohio State offensive line is their poise. How do you determine such a thing about an offensive line? Check the numbers – specifically penalty numbers.

How many times have you watched a college or NFL offense get a rhythm going only to have a false start or holding penalty ruin a possession? That simply hasn't happened with the Buckeyes this season. OSU is one of the least-penalized teams in the Big Ten – just 4.2 flags per game – and that begins with the offensive line.

Through 10 games, offensive line members (including backups) have committed only 10 penalties. The current starting five has been flagged only six times. Additionally, no one has more than one holding penalty for the season, and only Tshabola has more than one false start, and he has just two. I'd say that is more than respectable for a guy who has logged nearly 500 snaps this season.

The linchpin for the line, at least in my estimation, is McLaughlin, who transferred in after starting 25 games over the last three seasons at Alabama. Probably miffed at being snubbed last year with regard to All-SEC honors, McLaughlin has played so far at an All-America level for the Buckeyes.

Extremely smart – he graduated summa cum laude from Alabama in just 2½ years with a 4.00 grade-point average before going on to secure his master's degree last December – McLaughlin doesn't hurt his team with mental mistakes. He has logged somewhere in the vicinity of 550 snaps so far this season and has been penalized exactly once, and that was for simulating a snap. No holds, no false starts, no being caught downfield illegally.

If Ohio State does indeed make a run at the national championship this season, part of the reason will be the offensive line – a statement no one dared believe at the beginning of the season.

Tying Up Loose Ends

Despite the quiet campaign to push Howard's name into the Heisman Trophy conversation, a 247-yard performance against a Northwestern pass defense that was ranked 99th nationally isn't exactly going to scream for attention. But those 247 yards allowed Howard to jump past some fast company as far as the career passing yardage list at Ohio State is concerned.

Howard now has 2,484 yards which pushed him up four spots on the program's career passing list and into the all-time top 20.

You've probably heard of the quarterbacks on the list whom Howard just passed – Cardale Jones (2,323, 2013-15), Cornelius Greene (2,348, 1972-75), Kirk Herbstreit (2,437, 1989-92) and Rex Kern (2,444, 1968-70).

Also moving up was TreVeyon Henderson, whose 74 yards against Northwestern gave him 3,407 for his career and pushed him past Chris "Beanie" Wells (3,382, 2006-08) into sixth place on OSU's all-time rushing list.

Finally, if you thought the OSU-Northwestern game went by quickly, you weren't dreaming. It was finished in just two hours and 55 minutes, the shortest Ohio State game since last year's 37-3 win against Minnesota was also two hours and 55 minutes. The Buckeyes haven't played a quicker game since a 48-7 win at Nebraska in 2019. That one clocked in at two hours and 54 minutes.



OSU No. 2 In Latest CFP, AP Polls

Ohio State stayed at No. 2 in both the most recent College Football Playoff and AP polls released on Nov. 12 and Nov. 17, respectively.

The Buckeyes found themselves as the second-best team in the nation in the CFP poll again behind No. 1 Oregon and ahead of No. 3 Texas, No. 4 Penn State and No. 5 Indiana, a top five that will likely look the same in the Nov. 19 rankings after each of the teams – except Indiana, which was on an off week – took care of business against inferior opponents in Week 12.

As was the case last week, Ohio State was the No. 2 team in the nation but the No. 5 seed in the projected CFP bracket because Oregon still occupied the top spot and two teams from the same conference cannot be placed within the top four of the rankings. Because of this, Ohio State is still slated to host star running back Ashton Jeanty and No. 12 seed (No. 13 in the rankings) Boise State in the first round. The Broncos were projected as the highest-ranked non-Power Four conference champion.

Joining Oregon – which had a scare at Wisconsin before ultimately beating the Badgers 16-13 – as the teams that would receive byes were No. 2 seed (No. 3) Texas of the SEC, No. 3 seed (No. 6) BYU of the Big 12 and No. 4 seed (No. 9) Miami (Fla.) of the ACC. Although Texas and Miami will likely still receive the byes in the next rankings release, BYU is in jeopardy of losing the top-four seed and a spot in the 12-team bracket altogether after falling 17-13 to a

Kansas team that was below .500 at home on Nov. 16.

BYU's loss, along with No. 16 Kansas State's 24-14 road defeat at the hands of unranked Arizona State, opens the door for Deion Sanders and No. 17 Colorado to potentially be the highest-ranked Big 12 team in the CFP rankings and earn the top-four seed and bye.

Another development in the CFP poll is Georgia falling from No. 3 to No. 12 after its Nov. 9 loss to now-No. 11 Ole Miss. Although this caused the Bulldogs to fall outside the 12-team bracket, Kirby Smart's team is expected to jump back in after a bounce-back 31-17 win over No. 7 Tennessee.

As for the AP poll, Ohio State is ranked second behind No. 1 Oregon, which earned all 62-first-place votes, for the second straight week after it took care of Northwestern 31-7 at Wrigley Field. Behind the Buckeyes in the top five are No. 3 Texas, No. 4 Penn State and No. 5 Indiana, followed by No. 6 Notre Dame, No. 7 Alabama, No. 8 Georgia and No. 9 Ole Miss, each jumping up following now-No. 10 Tennessee's loss to the Bulldogs.

Williams Returns, Three Key Players Out Vs. 'Cats

Ohio State welcomed back a key defensive starter for its win over Northwestern, with All-Big Ten senior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams returning to the lineup after missing Ohio State's 45-0 win over Purdue on Nov. 9 with a lower-body injury he had suffered during the team's win against Penn State on Nov. 2.

Williams, who exited the Buckeyes' game against the Nittany Lions in the fourth quarter, was available against the Boilermakers but was held out by head coach Ryan Day for precautionary reasons. Day told reporters outside the team's hotel in Chicago on Nov. 15 that Williams was a "full go" for the Northwestern game, and that was the case when he logged the most snaps out of anyone on the defensive line with 40, according to Pro Football Focus, albeit recording just one tackle on

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	2-8, 29-16 loss to Northern Illinois
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	5-5, 31-13 loss to Bowling Green
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	W, 49-14	FOX	7-3, 31-19 win over Coastal Carolina
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W, 38-7	Peacock	4-6, 38-16 loss to Illinois
Oct. 5	IOWA	W, 35-7	CBS	6-4, idle
Oct. 12	at Oregon	L, 32-31	NBC	11-0, 16-13 win over Wisconsin
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	W, 21-17	FOX	5-5, 28-20 loss to USC
Nov. 2	at Penn State	W, 20-13	FOX	9-1, 49-10 win over Purdue
Nov. 9	PURDUE	W, 45-0	FOX	1-9, 48-10 loss to Penn State
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	W, 31-7	BTN	4-6, 31-7 loss to Ohio State
Nov. 23	INDIANA	Noon	FOX	10-0, idle
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	5-5, idle

the day.

While Williams returned, three Buckeye contributors were listed as out due to injury before the matchup, including tight end Will Kacmarek, left tackle Zen Michalski and defensive end Mitchell Melton. Kacmarek and Michalski were expected on the injury list as they both continue to recover from their respective injuries, but Melton's status was a bit of a surprise.

Melton has been a key rotational piece on the defensive line so far this season, and the extent or type of his injury was unknown.

Ohio State also received an injury scare in the third quarter of the game when true freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith got his right ankle rolled up by Wildcats defensive backs Robert Fitzgerald and Damon Walters on his 68-yard reception, causing him to limp to the sidelines and later have his ankle taped up. Smith returned to the game but was seen after the win with ice wrapped around his ankle when he left the ballpark.

Seven New Players Make Trip To Wrigley

Ohio State's 74-man travel roster against Northwestern featured seven different players from the team's last road trip to Penn State on Nov. 2, including five Buckeyes who were added to the road team roster for the first time this season.

Among the five first-timers who earned the opportunity to make the trip to historic Wrigley Field were defensive end Joshua Mickens, safety Leroy Roker III, defensive tackle Will Smith Jr., linebacker Garrett Stover and cornerback Bryce West, who became the 14th true freshman to lose his black stripe this season after practice on Nov. 13.

They replaced cornerback Calvin Simpson-Hunt, Melton and cornerback Aaron Scott Jr., who were all unavailable due to injuries along with safety Keenan Nelson Jr. and defensive lineman Jason Moore.

Three of those five players received playing time against Northwestern, with Mickens, Smith and West all getting into the game. West earned 11 snaps at cornerback, and Mickens and Smith earned four and seven on the defensive line respectively. Neither of the linemen recorded a statistic, but West had one tackle in the win, the first of his career. West earned the highest grade out of the three at 66.5 according to Pro Football Focus.

The other two new players added to the travel roster were specialists, with true freshman punter Nick McLarty and backup long snapper Collin Johnson replacing

Anthony Venneri and Max Lomonico, respectively, who were both on the roster for Penn State. Neither McLarty nor Johnson entered the game.

"College GameDay" Visiting Columbus For OSU-IU

ESPN's "College GameDay" is headed to Columbus in Week 13 for Ohio State's top-five battle with Indiana, the network announced on Nov. 16.

This will mark the third time this season the show will be on hand for an Ohio State game and the second this month, the other two being for the Buckeyes' 32-31 loss at Oregon on Oct. 12 and their 20-13 win over Penn State on Nov. 2. It will be the first time the show will be in Columbus this season. "College GameDay" last traveled to Columbus on Oct. 21, 2023, when it broadcast live from Ohio Stadium prior to the Buckeyes' 20-12 win over the Nittany Lions.

Although the Buckeyes have a 1-1 record with the show on hand in 2024, "College GameDay" has been kind to them over the years, with Ohio State boasting a 41-20 record in their 61 all-time appearances, which dates back to 1996. Longtime ESPN analyst Lee Corso has donned Brutus Buckeye's headgear a record 44 times in his 28 years as GameDay's eccentric game picker, including on Nov. 2 in State College, Pa.

As for Indiana, Corso's former team, this marks the second time this season the show will be on hand for a Hoosier game, the first occurring in Bloomington, Ind., for the team's 31-17 win over Washington on Oct. 26. That marked the first time the show was on Indiana's campus in seven years.

Day Sees Benefits Of "Jack" Position

Toward the middle of the season, there were some rumored disagreements between the Buckeyes defensive coaching staff, with many believing that longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles were at odds regarding how they wanted Ohio State to rush the passer.

The conversation was at its loudest after the loss to Oregon, and Day said the coaches were "re-engineering" the defense. That was shown against Purdue when the Buckeyes reintroduced the hybrid linebacker-defensive end Jack position with some success, putting both Melton and C.J. Hicks in the role at times during the game.

When asked about the position on Nov. 13, Day said that what he saw on the field was enough for him to continue looking at what the Jack could provide for the team.

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"When Tyleik was in question early in the week, we felt like it was something that was an option for us to go to, where you take one of the tackles out and put the Jack in the game, Mitchell or C.J. Jim has done this in the past," Day said. "We looked at it, and we're going to continue to look at it."

The Buckeyes were able to get into the backfield faster when the Jack was being used, but there were some plays that the Boilermakers were able to take advantage of the formation, too. With the Buckeyes using the Jack in a 3-3-5 formation on the Boilers' third drive of the game, Ohio State gave up 41 rushing yards and five first downs, by far the most successful drive for Purdue that day.

Despite those struggles, Day thinks the position does give the opposing offense something different to deal with, that is if Ohio State can utilize it effectively.

"It gives us a little different spacing up front and provides our guys an opportunity to be a little more aggressive in terms of not as much reading but hitting the gap and they try to get some penetration on things.

"We'll see how it fits moving forward. There were some things that we did that were good, but some other things that we can execute better. But that was the first time we put it out there, so we'll look to build on it from here and see where it goes."

Brown Still Backup, Sayin Third String

The insurance plan for Ohio State starting quarterback Will Howard facing injury will still be junior backup Devin Brown, Day announced on Nov. 12.

"(He) and Devin are both working hard every day in practice," Day said. "Devin right now is our backup, but Julian (Sayin) is pushing hard, and so we'll continue to evaluate it every week and see where those guys are at."

Day's remarks on Brown's place as the team's second-string quarterback came only three days after Day replaced him with the true freshman Sayin late in Ohio State's win over Purdue.

With the game already decided, Day rotated at the quarterback position and inserted Brown and the rest of the backups on offense into the game with 9:50 to go. Facing a third-and-3 from the Buckeyes' own 38-yard line on his first drive as the team's signal-caller, Brown failed to complete a pass to Brandon Inniss, and the Buckeyes were forced to punt.

On the Buckeyes' next drive, Brown and true freshman running back James Peoples combined for two unsuccessful run plays to prompt a third-and-12.

Day then opted to give Sayin the opportunity, and the Alabama transfer took advantage by picking up 19 yards on the ground to move the chains.

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Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be mailing its Michigan Preview issue, including the popular Michigan Memories, on Tuesday, Nov. 26. With Thanksgiving two days later, there is a good chance many of you getting your paper via regular mail will not receive your BSB before The Game. We are offering the opportunity to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail in an envelope for the pre- and post-Michigan issues for

just \$7 total. For credit card orders, give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 or send your check or money order to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. You must mention the "Michigan Upgrade."

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Sayin followed up his successful scramble with four consecutive incomplete passes, and the Buckeyes turned the ball over on downs.

"We'd like to get both of those guys reps, and in that moment it felt like it was a third down, we wanted to give Julian that opportunity to go ahead and take a third-down opportunity. He used it as an opportunity to scramble and make a play and then didn't quite keep the thing moving," Day said. "We wanted to throw the ball a little bit with Julian to see how he did, because he hasn't really done that a bunch in games. He just

missed one, and he and Brandon didn't connect. We'd like to see him get a first down there, but I think that was a great opportunity for him."

Clarett's Visits Brings Value To Program

Twenty-two years removed from his Ohio State football playing days, former running back Maurice Clarett is back at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center helping the team at least once a week.

Continued On Page 6

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.

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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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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

Day said the former freshman star has been a big help to the program this year.

"I have a lot of respect for Maurice and where he's gone in his life. He's helped out other programs. He's done a great job with UConn basketball, and he's a guy that I like having around our players. I like talking to him. I love his mindset. He brings a toughness, a seriousness and a credibility with our players that I think gives us an edge. I think he's an asset to our program."

Clarett, now 41, had a tremendous freshman campaign with the Buckeyes in their national championship-winning 2002 season, rushing for 1,237 yards and 18 total touchdowns. In the national title game, a 31-24 overtime win over Miami (Fla.) at the Fiesta Bowl, he had 47 yards on the ground and a touchdown on 23 carries, along with a key strip of Sean Taylor, who was returning an interception thrown by Craig Krenzel out of the end zone in the third quarter.

But after that season, Clarett was suspended from the team for receiving benefits, which made him declare for the 2004 NFL draft. There was a dispute over his draft eligibility with him not being three years removed from high school, and he had to wait until the 2005 draft to be selected with the final pick of the third round by the Denver Broncos.

Clarett's NFL career was cut short by legal issues, and he has been mostly away from the game of football since, but now he is helping the Buckeyes out weekly.

"I have a lot of respect for the things that he's been through and overcome and the success he's having in his life now," Day said. "So once a week he'll come around and watch some practice, then come to the games. I think our guys have really latched onto him."

Follow The Buckeyes Daily In Their Quest For The Playoffs

The excitement is building now that the big games with Indiana, Michigan and beyond are here for the Ohio State football team. 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.

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

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

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Bjork Vows To Improve Fan Atmosphere At OSU

Despite having one of the largest fan bases and stadiums in all of college football, many who follow the program have often been critical over the years over the lack of energy and enthusiasm inside 102,780-seat Ohio Stadium on game days, with many arguing that the fan experience and overall atmosphere in the venue is lacking compared to some of its Big Ten and national counterparts.

That criticism seemed to have caught the attention of first-year Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork, who, on a radio appearance with 97.1 The Fan's Skip Mosaic during halftime of the Purdue game, acknowledged that the fan experience at Ohio State's sporting events, football included, can make "a lot of improvement."

"Our players deserve it," he said. "The fans want to be entertained, the fans want to have fun, and that's really what we're after. You want to walk away from there and – forget the game, you want to say, 'Boy, I had fun. Boy, that was entertaining.' That's what we want to create."

Bjork, who took over for longtime athletic director Gene Smith this July, went on to say that he and his staff are in the midst of a comprehensive review of all of Ohio State's

sporting venues, which includes "secret shoppers" attending certain athletic events and taking notes on the fan experience before sharing them with Ohio State.

"We have somebody that comes in that nobody knows they're there," Bjork said.

One of those venues that are a part of this comprehensive review is Value City Arena, which is the home arena to the men's and women's basketball programs as well as men's hockey.

Bjork said that because both the men's and women's basketball teams play an exciting brand of basketball, with the men's team ushering in the Jake Diebler era and the women's squad featuring highly touted five-star guard Jalonni Cambridge, there should be energetic crowds inside the Buckeyes' home arena, an atmosphere that he thinks was evident during the men's team's run to the NIT quarterfinals last season.

"To me, that's kind of the blueprint of how our fans can be engaged, how our students can be engaged," Bjork said. "We need that every game."

Buckeyes Earn Midseason National Recognition

The Buckeyes didn't earn just a top-two CFP ranking on Nov. 12 for their 8-1 start to the season but also midseason recognition on both sides of the ball.

The Ohio State offensive line, which suffered adversity and injuries in the loss to Oregon and the 21-17 win over Nebraska on Oct. 26, was named a Joe Moore award semifinalist.

The Joe Moore Award, given to the nation's best offensive line, released a list of 10 teams as semifinalists. Besides Ohio State, the other teams included were Alabama, Army, Indiana, Iowa, Notre Dame, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Tulane.

Despite the injuries to left tackles Simmons and Michalski, Ohio State ranks 17th in the country in total offense, averaging 451.4 yards per game, and 12th in the country in scoring offense, averaging 37.8 points per game.

On the defensive side of the ball, sophomore safety Caleb Downs was named a

semifinalist for the Chuck Bednarik Award.

The Bednarik award, given to the nation's best defender, will be announced live on ESPN on Dec. 12.

Downs, who transferred to Ohio State from Alabama last year, became accustomed to being the recipient of major awards when he was named the SEC Freshman of the Year with the Crimson Tide after recording 107 tackles, two interceptions and a forced fumble, also earning national recognition with the Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Award.

Downs hasn't had quite the flashy numbers with Ohio State, which has more to do with a shift in role than anything else, but the Hoschton, Ga. native, has been a reliable force for the Buckeyes.

In 10 games, Downs has recorded 46 tackles, including one half sack, 6½ tackles for loss, and three pass breakups.

Downs was one of 20 semifinalists named to the latest Bednarik watch list. Notables on the list include Colorado defensive back Travis Hunter, Indiana defensive end Mikail Kamara, Iowa linebacker Jay Higgins, Michigan defensive tackle Mason Graham and Penn State defensive end Abdul Carter.

McLaughlin Accepts Invite To Senior Bowl

Seth McLaughlin has been at the center – both literally and figuratively – of the Buckeyes' offensive line successes this season, and those efforts were recognized at the national level on Nov. 12 when he accepted an invite to the 2025 Senior Bowl.

McLaughlin, who joined Ohio State in the offseason after transferring from Alabama, has served as a stalwart on a Buckeye offensive line this season that has experienced some instability of late due to injury. He has started all 10 games for Ohio State, helping the Buckeyes rush for 183.8 yards per game (40th in the nation, third in Big Ten) and allow just 12 sacks on the season (24th, sixth).

McLaughlin's efforts this season have earned him a spot on multiple midseason



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All-American lists, including AP, The Athletic, CBS Sports and Sports Illustrated, all of which were first-team honors. Now, he earns more national recognition from the Senior Bowl, which, according to the organization's executive director Jim Nagy, was given out due to the significant improvements he has shown since his senior season at Alabama.

"Based on our recent calls with NFL teams about (the Senior Bowl) roster, a strong case could be made that Ohio State OC Seth McLaughlin is the most improved player at any position in this year's draft class," Nagy wrote in a Nov. 13 Twitter post. "Numerous director-level execs said they graded (McLaughlin) as a low UDFA (undrafted free agent) last fall at Alabama and now most have him as a solid mid-rounder. That's an incredible jump."

McLaughlin will look to further boost his draft stock the rest of the season before heading to the Senior Bowl this winter at South Alabama's Hancock Whitney Stadium in Mobile, Ala. The game will take place on Feb. 1, 2025, with a few Senior Bowl practices occurring in the days

beforehand.

Howard, Smith Honored After Purdue Win

Ohio State's passer and receiver duo of Howard and Smith were both given Big Ten recognition for their performances in the team's shutout win over Purdue.

While Howard was named the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week after passing for 260 yards and three touchdowns, Smith was named the Big Ten Freshman of the Week after going for six catches, 87 yards and a touchdown.

With another solid performance, Smith broke former Ohio State receiver Cris Carter's (1984-86) freshman reception and touchdown records.

Howard has emerged as one of the Big Ten's best quarterbacks in his first and only season with the Buckeyes. Through 10 games, Howard has thrown for 2,484 yards, 24 touchdowns and five interceptions with a 72.9 completion percentage.

Smith, meanwhile, has been one of the nation's best receivers regardless of class and has hauled in 49 catches for 865 re-

ceiving yards and nine touchdowns.

Men's Soccer Wins Big Ten Tournament

The No. 1-ranked Ohio State men's soccer team's magical 2024 season continued on Nov. 17 when it secured the Big Ten tournament crown in front of a packed Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium home crowd of 8,938 fans, a record for the program, by blanking archrival Michigan 1-0.

The shutout win marked the program's fourth-ever conference tournament crown and the first since the 2009 season.

"It's hard to put this into words," Ohio State head coach Brian Maisonneuve said after the win. "It's just such a great group of guys. Unbelievable support (from the fans). It wasn't the prettiest, but the guys battled together, stayed with our game plan and just had each other's backs.

"These guys just fought, fought and fought, and I'm so proud of them."

Ohio State, which secured its first regular-season conference title since 2015 earlier this season, secured the championship win off the leg of senior midfielder Parker Grinstead, who, at 72:02, controlled a de-

flected header by Michigan defenseman Noah Miller on a Buckeyes corner kick and delivered a strike off his left foot into the back-left corner of the goal to give his team the lead.

After Grinstead and his teammates celebrated the goal with a contingent of Ohio State students near the sideline, the Buckeyes refocused and allowed just one more shot for Michigan, an attempt from Jason Bucknor at 78:43 that sailed wide left, and commanded the time of possession in the match's final minutes to hold onto the one-goal win.

The Buckeyes will now begin their chase for a first-ever national title in the NCAA tournament, where they will likely be the No. 1 overall seed when the bracket is announced after BSB goes to press. The 48-team single-elimination tournament will begin on Nov. 21, with the second round starting on Nov. 24, third round on Nov. 30/Dec. 1, quarterfinals on Dec. 6/7, semifinals on Dec. 13 and the championship on Dec. 16.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

It took a while, but the Ohio State football team finally exploded to record another one of those old-fashioned routs. This one came at the hands of helpless Indiana, 50-7, Nov. 3 in Ohio Stadium.

It had been since Ohio State's impressive 44-0 blanking of Washington State Sept. 15 that the Buckeye fans had been treated to such a thrashing.

First-year Hoosier coach Bill Mallory, a former Ohio State assistant, found himself still looking for victory number one at Indiana. The Hoosiers were 0-9.

"It was a long afternoon — seemed like seven or eight," Mallory said. "We played lousy, and you don't do that against a team like Ohio State. We made umpteen mistakes."

35 Years Ago — 1989

After two straight lackluster performances, Ohio State freshman linebacker Alonzo Spellman figured he needed something to get himself back on track.

So the 6-6, 265-pounder got himself a new haircut, a new name and a new attitude.

The haircut involved shaving one side of his head except for one thin line which ran to the back in the shape of an arrow. The arrow pointed to the letters "Z" and "O." Hence, the new nickname Spellman had styled for himself: "The Zo-Man."

"I just wanted sort of a new name," he said. "Alonzo and Spellman are kind of getting worn out. It's kind of getting old. So I think I'd rather be the Zo-Man."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Salvos came from nearly all corners, beginning just hours after Ohio State's 63-14 loss to Penn State and continuing right up until game time in a 24-3 win over Wisconsin on Nov. 5.

Fans vented their frustration on radio call-in shows all week, many of them calling for head coach John Cooper to be dismissed.

Then, a story published in The Lantern's gameday tabloid quoted an unnamed source close to the program as saying, among other things, that there was dissension on the team, a lack of leadership and a burgeoning feud between Cooper and offensive coordinator Joe Hollis over play selection.

Cooper responded to such criticisms by calling the reports "completely off base" and having "absolutely no truth whatsoever." He also closed the team's practice sessions for the remainder of the season and made a conscious effort on his weekly radio call-in show to do some damage control, taking fewer calls from fans while trying to put a positive spin on the rest of the season.

When all was said and done, though, it was the players who reacted to the loss and made a 180-degree turn in just a week's time.

"I think it was a matter of pride for us," said OSU defensive end Matt Finkes. "I mean, I came to Ohio State because I have respect for the tradition and for what has gone on before me. I don't want to let any part of that down. But after last week's game, I came off the field and just couldn't believe what had happened. I think a lot of the other players thought the same way."

25 Years Ago — 1999

After nearly everything went Ohio State's way in a 41-11 win over Iowa Oct. 30, many believed the Buckeyes — at long last — had resolved many of their lingering problems.

After all, they had reeled off a season-high 534 yards in rolling

over the Hawkeyes.

A week later, though, Ohio State barely figured in a 23-7 loss at Michigan State.

The Buckeyes, who fell to 6-4 overall and 3-3 in Big Ten play, managed just 79 yards of total offense against the Spartans. That yardage figure was the lowest by an OSU offense in 35 years.

Afterward, Cooper was asked whether he was disappointed in his offense's progress this season.

"Without a doubt. What can I say?" he replied.

20 Years Ago — 2004

He ran the ball. He caught the ball. He returned punts.

As it turned out, Ted Ginn Jr. dabbled in prophecy, too. The wunderkind admitted as much after his three-touchdown performance that sparked Ohio State to a 32-19 win over Michigan State on Nov. 6.

"It's kind of odd," Ginn said, "because I told my coach during practice this week that I was going to try to get three touchdowns."

And what did Darrell Hazell, the man who tutored Ginn both at the wide receiver position and on kick returns, say in response?

"He said, 'OK, Ted,'" Ginn said.

15 Years Ago — 2009

After making what amounted to a victory lap along the northern portion of the stadium following Ohio State's 24-7 win over Penn State on Nov. 7, Terrelle Pryor and his teammates made their way through the tunnel into the bowels of the steel and iron structure en route to the locker room. At that point, the few thousand fans remaining inside the stadium were primarily dressed in scarlet and madly congratulating their team for the victory.

But leaning over the railing as Pryor approached was one middle-aged Nittany Lions fan, clad in a gray Penn State sweatshirt and dark blue hat adorned with the team logo. This fan had seen the Buckeyes play a near-flawless game by committing zero turnovers, outrushing the home team by a 3-to-1 margin and controlling the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball.

This fan was going to let Pryor have it.

"Hey, Terrelle!" he bellowed. "Terrelle!"

With junior offensive lineman Bryant Browning following Pryor, the sophomore came to a halt as the man's words reached the ears of his intended target. Pausing for a second — long enough for Browning to nearly run into him — Pryor looked up and saw the man's finger pointed at him. Smiling back, Pryor simply waved as the fan got in his parting shot.

"You'll never win here again!"

After a game like the one he had just witnessed, it was all the Penn State fan had left to hang his hat on. The native son had returned home and done what he could not do in his own stadium one year earlier in a 13-6 loss to the Lions. Pryor engineered a key victory and put the Buckeyes in the driver's seat for an outright Big Ten championship.

10 Years Ago — 2014

With the advent of the College Football Playoff, each team attempting to make the first-ever final four had 12 specific people to impress each week.

No longer were there hundreds of poll voters and six different computers making the decision about how the season would end. In 2014, college football's postseason would be decided by 12 ob-

servers on the CFP committee instructed to weigh certain criteria but not given a directive to follow any specific blueprint when selecting the quartet of teams that would vie for the trophy.

Since those voters were human — and because it made for good copy — reporters across the country had taken to asking the teams in contention every week why their squad was deserving of a potential bid into the playoff.

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer had already been asked that question numerous times before Nov. 15, but his answer after the No. 8 Buckeyes' 31-24 win at Minnesota was delivered with a little extra bit of emphasis.

The takedown of the Golden Gophers, who entered slotted 25th in the CFP rankings, was OSU's second in a row against a ranked team, and it certainly wasn't easy. The Buckeyes battled turnovers, frigid weather, stubborn snow, an early start time and, most of all, a pretty darn good football team to improve to 9-1 and win their eighth game in a row, and Meyer had a message for those who detracted from his team and the other Big Ten programs the Scarlet and Gray beat on a weekly basis.

"I'd like to see anybody in the country come up here and do this, come up here in November on Nov. 15," Meyer said. "I challenge any team in the country that wants to go ahead and schedule this one in November against a very good team. Have at it. That's our message."

Five Years Ago — 2019

During a season in which Ohio State had thoroughly dominated its opponents week in and week out, head coach Ryan Day could have viewed his team's 56-21 win over Rutgers on Nov. 16 as both underwhelming and full of correctable mistakes.

After all, the Buckeyes were favored to win by more than 52 points yet failed to convert on fourth-and-goal with the first-team offense on the field early in the game while the backups allowed big play after big play late in the contest.

But Day understood the bigger picture.

"We're not going to put too much stock into it," Day said after the game. "We're just going to move right on and obviously make the corrections off of the film. We've got a lot to focus on moving forward."

One Year Ago — 2023

"Our goal is simple: to play our best football in November," defensive line coach Larry Johnson said in front of the gathered crowd at the St. John Arena at Skull Session. "That is our goal. That is what we're going to do tonight in front of you: play our best game."

You could call it an educated guess by Johnson or call him a prophet, but you couldn't call him wrong.

Ohio State came out in front of 105,137 fans under the lights at Ohio Stadium, wearing gray alternate uniforms for the first time since 2017, and played the team's unquestioned most complete outing of the season, delivering a 38-3 beatdown of visiting Michigan State after leading 35-3 after the first half.

"I think that's the kind of start we've been shooting for all year, getting out of the gate, putting points up on the board and being consistent that entire (first) half," quarterback Kyle McCord said. "They took some of the starters out pretty early in that second half, but I think this was a pretty complete game."

Rotation May Have Caused Early Struggles

Continued From Page 1

Hunter Renner, who was able to pick the ball up backed up near the end zone and tried to punt it away. But David Adolph was able to get a hand on it, knocking the ball out of bounds at the Wildcat 1-yard line.

Judkins' touchdown two plays later closed the door on any momentum Northwestern had, with Ohio State fully taking advantage of the mistakes made by its Big Ten opponent.

"Northwestern really controlled the first quarter of the game," Day said. "I thought about taking the ball early in this game because I knew that would be their plan, and I decided to continue with what we've been doing. We did a nice job at the end of the first half and going into the third quarter. But a couple of those turnovers certainly helped us in the first half."

The defense had some small issues early in the second half as well, with the Wildcats taking 13 plays to go 54 yards, helped along by a 15-yard face-mask penalty committed by Ty Hamilton and a spot-foul pass-interference call on Igbinosun that brought Northwestern to the OSU 21. But down three touchdowns, Northwestern head coach David Braun and Co. decided to go for it on fourth-and-10 instead of kicking a field goal, giving Ohio State the ball back for a field-goal drive.

The Buckeyes defense picked it up for the rest of the game, ultimately giving up just 251 total yards, only 50 of them on the ground on 30 totes for the Wildcats (1.7 average). Day said it was the team's performance on third downs that changed, allowing the defense to make more stops.

"I just think we got off the field on third down," he said. "We only (gave up) 50 yards rushing, but we started getting off the field on third down, got some nice sacks. A couple of those third downs were third-and-extra longs. One was a run. The other one was a bubble screen. That continued some drives, but overall I thought we settled down once those first couple of drives hit."

"Early on, we're just eager to go out there and make plays and have fun and attack," Sawyer added. "They did some things. We missed a couple tackles here or there, busted some coverages. We just had to tighten it up and settle down, and that's what we did."

OSU was likely never going to lose this game against Northwestern, no matter how close it was well into the second quarter of action. Even when the Wildcats were playing their best game and the Buckeyes playing one of their worst, it was still tied up midway through the second quarter with a lot of time for OSU to turn it around.

Part of the reason the Buckeye defense might not have been on its A-game as it has been so many times this season was that

Day was making a point of rotating starters out of the game throughout the entire contest, the same thing he did from the beginning of the 45-0 win over Purdue the week before.

Day believes being able to play down the depth chart throughout the whole game in mismatched games like this one has been good for the team's attitude going into the last few games of the season and thinks it will help keep their top players healthy for when they are needed most down the stretch.

"We did it last week, too, and we'll continue to do that when we feel like it's appropriate to play depth," Day said. "We've been trying to get that done. We've gotten more and more guys reps the last couple weeks. I think it's helped the overall morale of the team, it helps with practice, it helps with our depth. I think it's healthy for us. We'll keep looking at it and make sure we're doing it right. We want our guys to be able to play their best in the fourth quarter and play their best at the end of the season."

Another reason for Ohio State's less-than-perfect game was Northwestern trying to run out as much clock as it could to try to dominate the time of possession, keeping an explosive OSU offense off the field as long as possible. Graduate center Seth McLaughlin said he thinks that was the exact strategy Northwestern – which had an extra week to concoct a game plan for the Buckeyes – was trying to deploy.

"When you play a team like Northwestern, they try to milk the clock on you, and we only had one drive in the first quarter," he said. "When you can run the ball and control the game, get your defense a little rest on the sidelines, it's really important."

Whether it was the game plan for the Wildcats or not, the Buckeyes' top defense should not have many issues against an offense that was 131st out of 133 qualified teams in the country in yards per game (288.1) before the contest at Wrigley Field.

That did end up being the case when the defense was dominant for much of the rest of the game.

But an off week can be very helpful, and that much was obvious to cornerback Jordan Hancock early in the game.

"They came out there, they hit on plays, maybe that we got beat on earlier in the season, and then that's what they kind of schemed us up and everything," he said when asked whether he thought the off week helped the Wildcats. "Coach Knowles made adjustments for us."

Big Games On Deck

Against teams in the bottom half of the Big Ten such as Purdue and Northwestern, which Ohio State combined to outscore 76-7 in their last two games, the Buckeyes usually can count on their opponents to commit unforced mistakes and Ohio State subsequently capitalizes on them.

But Northwestern is the last team they play this year that will give them an easy out.

The Buckeyes have been tested multiple times this season already. They lost to now-No. 1 Oregon in Autzen Stadium by one point with a chance to win the game. Then on Nov. 2, they went into Beaver Stadium to win a top-five matchup against now-No. 4 Penn State.

"I do feel right now in the middle of the season, probably more than in years past, that we've been tested more," Day said on Nov. 5. "Our players have been tested more. The team has been tested more. We're a little bit more resilient than maybe we were in the past when we played against teams or had games that were a little bit lopsided. You don't really get tested. You don't get put in those tough situations. We're counting on that to be a difference."

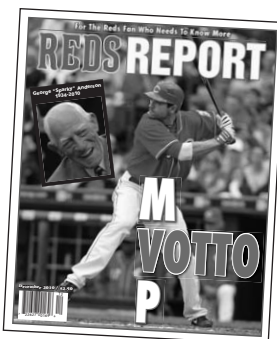
Now Ohio State will have its third top-five game of the season against No. 5 Indiana, but this time it will be on its home turf. First-year head coach Curt Cignetti and the

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COVER STORY

Hoosiers come into Columbus with a 10-0 record – just a season removed from being 3-9 (1-8 Big Ten) – and a flood of transfers leading the way.

McLaughlin believes home-field advantage is going to be a big factor for the Buckeyes when the Hoosiers come to town.

“It’s going to be exciting,” he said. “Top-five matchups are always fun to compete in, and I’m happy that we’re home in front of our fans. I know they’re going to show up and show out and really make a home-field advantage for us.”

“When you get into November, you start playing the bigger games,” Sawyer added. “So we’re really excited for this challenge coming up with Indiana. They’re a good ballclub, undefeated, have some momentum heading its way. And we’re excited to meet them in the ‘Shoe this weekend coming up.”

A year full of tests is going to be the case more and more with the expanded Big Ten. The conference welcomed four new competitive teams in Oregon, Washington, USC and UCLA, and with the goal of being at the top every single year, the Buckeyes are going to have to be at their best every year. This season is the perfect test to see whether Day can have his team ready for such a grueling stretch of football.

Not only do the Buckeyes have to find out if Cignetti’s Hoosiers are for real on Nov. 23, but after that, they go directly into The Game, looking for revenge after a three-year win streak from Michigan was capped off last year with Sherrone Moore on the sideline as the interim head coach

at the time.

Should the Buckeyes get past those two games with wins, the next one would be in Lucas Oil Stadium for the Big Ten title in a rematch against the Ducks, which is much closer to home than Eugene, Ore.

After that is the College Football Playoff if all goes well the rest of the way, and those three or four games will be against the best of the best. The new format is going to test the ability of this team to be ready for big games every single week since it could be seven in a row coming up for the Buckeyes, starting with the top-five duel with undefeated Indiana.

“We’ve got some really big games ahead of us, and we know that,” Day said. “We want to be playing our best football in November. I’ve said that a million times. I feel like we’ve done a better job of getting to the quarterback. I feel like we are playing better technically and fundamentally. We have to continue to do that and understand situations and all of the above.”

It’s a good thing that the Buckeyes – outside of the first quarter and change of the game – didn’t get caught looking forward against Northwestern, but now they are going to have to be at their best the rest of the way. Sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate – who had a strong two-touchdown performance in his return to his hometown of Chicago – said they are treating the next two games as they would any other week and are trying to be as ready as they can be.

“The next two weeks are going to be regular games. We just have to play Buckeye football. We have to play our complete

game as a whole. We determine the rest of our season.”

So many players returned to this team because they wanted to complete their three goals of beating Michigan, winning a Big Ten championship and winning a national championship. As good as Ohio State has been with the roster it has right now, there isn’t a single player on it who has completed a single one of those three goals.

Indiana is going to be looking to spoil the Buckeyes’ chances to complete at least one of those goals with the winner of the Nov. 23 game likely to end up the second representative at the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 7. But the Buckeyes like that they have a target on their backs, according to Sawyer.

“They’re having a great season, most wins in program history,” he said. “That coach is doing a hell of a job, and we know they’re going to come in here looking to try to upset us. There’s no way around that.

We love that, though, and we’re going to defend our home. We can’t wait for that heavyweight battle this weekend.”

The Buckeyes have themselves in a situation where they control their own destiny, which is all they can ask for this late in the regular season. Should they lose at any point moving forward, their fate will be in the hands of the College Football Playoff committee, something they don’t want to be the case.

To avoid that reality, Day knows that the team is going to have to take the rest of the season one game at a time and not get caught looking ahead, just like they did this year.

“Each week is a new season,” he said. “What you’ve done in the past has nothing to do with what’s going to happen moving forward, other than the fact that you’ve learned things. You have to use those experiences to help you moving forward. What really matters is what we do moving into this game next week.”

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Tate Tallies Two Touchdowns In Homecoming

In his first and perhaps only collegiate football game in his hometown of Chicago, sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate lived up to the promise he showed as a highly touted high-schooler out of Marist High School. In Ohio State's 31-7 win over Northwestern on Nov. 16 at Wrigley Field, Tate finished the game with four catches, 52 receiving yards and a career-high two touchdowns.

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

Any homecoming means a lot to a player in college football, but Tate's was especially meaningful. Months before the start of Tate's freshman season with the Buckeyes on July 16, 2023, Tate's mother was tragically killed in a drive-by shooting in Chicago's Garfield Park neighborhood.

A few days before the game against Northwestern – which marked 16 months since the shooting – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day indicated he wanted his team to pick up the win for Tate.

"I just cannot say enough about Carnell Tate," Day said earlier in the week. "I'm not going to get into it right now, but I just have so much respect for who he is as a person, what he's been through, and the fact that he's going back to Chicago.

"I want to win this game personally for him. I know this team respects the fact that he's going home – and it means a lot to him. He's not a guy who speaks a lot or says a lot or tries to bring a lot of attention to himself. He's a team player. I know the team loves who he is. I know Buckeye Nation appreciates him."

Despite being overshadowed as the other receiver in a room with standout fresh-

man Jeremiah Smith and two-time All-Big Ten receiver Emeka Egbuka, Tate has been one of the Buckeyes' best pass-catchers over the past few weeks. In Ohio State's 21-17 win over Nebraska on Oct. 26, Tate had what ended up being four pivotal receptions for 102 yards and a touchdown.

He was similarly efficient with six receptions for 56 yards two weeks later against Purdue on Nov. 9, but back in his hometown in front of what he said was "30 or 40" of his own friends and family, it seemed more like Tate winning the game for the Buckeyes rather than his more talked about teammates.

The sophomore first impacted the game with Ohio State trailing 7-0 in the second quarter when he made an impressive tightly contested 14-yard catch that brought the offense down to the Northwestern 1-yard line. He managed to hang onto the ball despite two Wildcat defenders doing everything they could to challenge his grip.

Tate's catch led Ohio State to punch it in from the 1-yard line on a Quinshon Judkins rush, putting a bow on a bounce-back 12-play, 85-yard drive that tied the game at 7.

With less than a minute to go in the first half, Tate scored his first points in his hometown. On second-and-8 from the NU 25-yard-line, he found himself one-on-one against defensive back Josh Fussell.

The sophomore receiver didn't create much separation, but Will Howard delivered a perfect pass and Tate made a beautiful diving catch to score his third touchdown of the season.

With Ohio State back in the driver's seat of the game at the beginning of the third quarter, leading 21-7, Tate made his mark again at the Northwestern 8-yard line when, on second-and-1, he got open with a slant route, hauled in the pass from Howard and broke a tackle before diving into the end zone.

Tate said his two touchdown receptions weren't anything special, but rather him just making plays for his team when they need-

ed him to do so most.

"I pretty much knew the ball was coming my way on the first touchdown," Tate said after the game. "I had to go out there and make a play. Will put a ball out there for me to go get. And then the second touchdown, the ball was supposed to go to Emeka, but the ball somehow came to me again. So when the ball is in your hands, you have to make the best of the opportunity."

Following the game, Tate's coaches and teammates understood what it meant for him to play so well in the homecoming game.

"Carnell's not someone who talks about himself, or really would want me talking about him right now and everything he's been through," Day said, "But we all know that he lost his mom, and he does not show that every day when he's here. We say it all the time that the game doesn't care at all what you've been through. When you cross that line, when you go on the field, the game doesn't really care, but we do. His teammates do, his coaches do. The people that know Carnell care about him.

"The way that he's handled himself has been an example to everybody. We care a lot about him, and to see him hit two touchdown passes in his hometown in front of a big – I think he had over 25 people here watching him – I know it means a lot to him, but it also means a lot to us. We're really happy for him today."

With so many of his loved ones in attendance, Tate didn't just flex his talent but also his maturity in not letting his emotions get the best of him on the field.

"It was a lot of high emotions and stuff like that, but I had to manage it. It means a lot to be playing back in my city, especially my first time being back since my freshman year of high school. And especially being able to play in front of my family and friends."

It's been a difficult 16 months for Tate following the passing of his mother, but his first game back in Chicago since his freshman year of high school gave him and his family something to smile about.

"It was definitely a sense of high emotions right there, being able to see all the smiles on my family's faces," Tate said after the game.

Buckeye Faithful Paint Wrigley Field Scarlet

Because the Wildcats have been at best a middle-of-the-pack Big Ten team to this point, more pregame attention for this game seemed to go toward the venue rather than the matchup itself. Wrigley Field has been the iconic home of the Chicago Cubs for over 100 years and at least for this season will be one of two temporary homes for the Northwestern football team while Ryan Field is being rebuilt.

The dimensions of the field for the game between the Buckeyes and the Wildcats weren't perfect. The football field stretched from near the stands on the third baseline to directly in front of the right field wall, causing some wall tightness on the sides and backs of both end zones.

Regardless of the dimensions, the Buckeyes were more than satisfied with the fan turnout they received.

"We expected to have a great presence,

but to see the way it was today was exciting," Day said. "We kind of felt it as the buses were going around the stadium. You're driving through Wrigleyville and you just see all this red, all this scarlet, and people were fired up early on. You could tell they were just coming out of the bars after opening at like 7 a.m., and people were fired up so it kind of got us fired up, too."

"We said early on, we wanted to give them something to get fired up about. They were loud, even on third down. It was great to see Buckeye Nation traveling like this. I even looked up and saw the stands across the street and it was red up there. We just really appreciate them supporting us in an environment like this."

In what was technically considered a home game for Northwestern, the vast majority of the 38,147 in attendance were clad in scarlet and gray.

"It was awesome," said Ohio State center Seth McLaughlin. "The crowd here was great. It ended up being like 90 percent Buckeye fans. There was only like one section of Northwestern fans. Scoring, running around to your home crowd is awesome when you're so many miles away from home."

The big home-field advantage for the Buckeyes aside, the baseball fan and ballplayer in Howard cherished the opportunity to play at the historical ballpark, even if it was as a signal-caller rather than a slugger.

"It was awesome," Howard said. "I felt like I just had to take it in for a little bit before the game because we came over here yesterday. It's a historic place. The 8-year-old kid in me would be giddy. I was a baseball kid growing up. I had to wear this (baseball hat) because you know, baseball, and I loved it growing up. This place is one of the most historic places in baseball and in sports, and being able to be out here and play a game on it was awesome."

Howard Pitches Solid Game From Pocket

It's safe to say Howard wasn't overcome by the mystique of Wrigley Field as the Buckeye passer. For the second straight game, Howard had an efficient performance leading the Buckeye offense, throwing for 247 yards and two touchdowns while completing 15 of 24 passes.

"I felt really good," Howard said of his performance against Northwestern after the game. "I have no idea what the stats were. I'm not really worried about it. The completion percentage is maybe the only one I care about. I had to throw a couple of balls away today, but I think those were good decisions, just throwing the ball away.

"Sometimes, they showed some new stuff, and they come off an off week, credit to them. They schemed up. They did some good things, did some things that we hadn't seen. I think I did a pretty good job being able to take my checkdowns when I needed to, and not forcing things, and just kind of letting the game come to me. When I'm able to do that, good things happen."

Although the offense was held scoreless in the first quarter, Howard definitely wasn't to blame. On third-and-9 from Northwestern's 37-yard line during Ohio State's first



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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

It may not be the top story coming out of Wrigley Field, but Ohio State's dynamic rushing duo of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins turned in one of their more efficient games of the season against the Wildcats. It seemed like both star tailbacks ran with an edge and gained positive yardage on just about every rush, as evidenced by their combined 5.8 yards per carry and 150 rushing yards. This was especially evident early on when Judkins set the tone for the offense with a number of tough runs, none more tough than his second rush of the game when he ran over Wildcats defensive back Damon Walters near the line of scrimmage to shed the tackle and rush for 8 yards and a first down. That run didn't mean much for that drive, but it set a physical tone for the rest of the game for the junior back, who tacked on two scores later in the half. Henderson also ran with force with 11 carries for 74 yards, an impressive 6.7-yard average, adding to the strong outing for the Buckeye backs that should give them some confidence heading into the most important portion of the season.

What Didn't Work

The scoreboard at the end of the game showed a convincing 31-7 victory for the Buckeyes, but in the beginning of the game there was nothing convincing about how Ohio State was playing. In what has turned into a common theme this season, the Buckeyes seemed a bit sluggish out of the gate – or in this case out of the Cubs' visiting team dug-out – during their fourth straight noon kickoff, especially on defense. Jim Knowles' unit let a limited Northwestern offense methodically drive down the field on the first drive of the game, giving up a pair of third-down conversions and a few big plays up the middle to allow the Wildcats to get all the way down to the OSU 18-yard line.

The 11-play, 59-yard drive did not end with points for Northwestern due to Jack Sawyer forcing a fumble on quarterback Jack Lausch, but on the Wildcats' next drive it was a different story. After an overturned Jeremiah Smith touchdown forced the Buckeyes to punt,

the Wildcats' offense took control of the game again, this time going on a long 13-play, 92-yard drive that included two more third-down conversions and an 8-yard rushing score from Lausch on a keeper to put the "home" team up 7-0 with 12:34 left in the second quarter. These two drives caused Northwestern to dominate the game early on in nearly every category – especially time of possession, with the Wildcats having the ball for 12:26 and OSU just 5:00 – which nobody at BSB was fully expecting early on.

Play Of The Game

In what is one of the more surprising developments of the season, a high-impact special teams play is BSB's play of the game for the second straight week. Last week against Purdue, it was Caden Curry's blocked punt that took the honor, and this week that nod goes to Dublin, Ohio's own David Adolph, who sneaked through the Wildcats' special teams front late in the first half for Ohio State's second blocked punt in as many games. Tied 7-7 with 4-5 Northwestern with just under 5½ minutes left in the half, the Buckeyes' needed a major momentum swing to turn the tide back in their favor, and that is exactly what they got due to Adolph and the special teams unit. Ohio State did receive a gift when the Wildcats' long snapper sailed the snap over punter Hunter Renner's head, leading the redshirt junior to frantically pick up the ball near the goal line, but what transpired after was all due to the efforts of Ohio State. Although Renner did corral the loose football, it wasn't long before he was met by a group of aggressive Buckeyes. Curry got to Renner first and almost knocked him to the ground, and then Adolph finished the job by jumping up to deflect the punt with his right hand, causing the football to land out of bounds right at the 1-yard line for the turnover on downs. Adolph's block led the Buckeyes to take a 14-7 lead two plays later off a Judkins 1-yard rushing touchdown, a lead they would never relinquish.

— Patrick Engels

offensive drive, the former Kansas State quarterback delivered one of his better long passes of the season over Fussell and into the arms of Smith.

At first glance, it appeared as though Howard threw his first touchdown of the game, but after a review it was revealed that Smith allowed the ball to hit the ground, taking the six points off the board and forcing Ohio State to punt.

Howard didn't let the Smith drop get him out of his groove, and on the very next Ohio State drive – with the Buckeyes trailing 7-0 – he fired a bullet to Egbuka for a 20-yard gain over the middle on what felt like a pretty important third-and-8 at that point in the game. A few plays later on fourth-and-3, he delivered another sharp pass into a tight window to Smith for a 14-yard gain.

Tate's aforementioned grab was probably the hardest part of the 14-yard completion that brought the Buckeyes to Northwestern's 1-yard-line, but it was yet another well-thrown spiral from Howard, who said he was feeling comfortable in the pocket all day, especially on passes to the middle of the field.

"It's just kind of getting into that mode, getting into that flow state, feeling good, trusting my guys and knowing that they're going to be there," Howard said. "I'm getting more comfortable just dealing out there and feeling my reads and feeling comfortable in the pocket. Overall, it's just reps, and trusting my guys that they're going to be in the right place and trusting my O-line to give me time, and then they did that today."

According to Day, Howard's precision throwing over the middle against the Wildcats is in part due to the work he put in with offensive coordinator Chip Kelly on improving his footwork in the practices leading up to the game.

"Coach Kelly and all those guys in that room have been working hard on the footwork and making sure that it's timed up right," Day said. "I thought that it was better this week, and we'll keep working on it."

Howard's accuracy on intermediary passes was only part of one of his best performances as the Buckeye quarterback. Starting with the well-thrown ball to Smith in the first quarter, Howard had one of his best days throwing the ball deep against the Northwestern defense.

This was evident on Ohio State's two-minute drill to end the first half, where on the second play of the eventual scoring drive he lofted a perfect pass right over Wildcats linebacker Greyson Metz' head and into the outstretched hands of Gee Scott Jr. for a 34-yard completion.

A few plays later, Howard fired the 25-yard touchdown pass to Tate to give the Buckeyes a comfortable 21-7 lead going into halftime.

After the game, Day was impressed with Howard's deep-ball passing but, as usual, withheld his satisfaction.

"I feel like there were some really good ones in there," Day said. "We pushed the ball down the field and got some of our play-makers the ball in space, which was great. I think there are other things that we have to do a little better job of. We know that we want to have balance and want to stretch the field vertically and horizontally. I felt like there were times we did that today. We'll watch the film and get on it."

OSU Pass Rush Active Against 'Cats

As has been the case all season, the Ohio State pass rush was the center of focus once again during a game. Luckily for Buckeye fans, in this game, the pass rush was noticeable for its effectiveness rather than medi-

ocre play.

In Ohio State's 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12, the Buckeyes failed to record a sack on quarterback Dillon Gabriel, causing fans to question the effectiveness of rushmen Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau and others while also criticizing the coaching of longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson. Since that game, though, the Buckeyes' pass rush has been perhaps not as consistent as some fans would hope, but undoubtedly improved.

After coming away with nine sacks in the last three games against Nebraska (three), Penn State (two) and Purdue (four), the gradual improvement of the Buckeyes' pass rush since that nightmarish defensive performance against Oregon only continued in Week 12.

Led by another aggressive approach from Knowles, Ohio State sacked Northwestern quarterback Jack Lausch four times and hurried him on another four occasions.

Ohio State's pass rush brought down Lausch as early as the second play of the game when Sawyer discarded Northwestern tight end Thomas Gordon and disrupted Lausch. Sawyer couldn't quite bring Lausch down, but linebacker Sonny Styles finished the job to sack the Wildcats thrower.

Ohio State's defense failed to bring down Lausch in the second and third quarters, but it wasn't for a lack of pressure. Sawyer practically had a penthouse apartment in the Wildcats' backfield with numerous pressures, but despite generating a team-high three quarterback hurries, he never managed to bring Lausch down.

"It definitely is frustrating," Sawyer said when asked if his lack of sacks frustrated him. "But the plays are going to come. We're not worried about that. We know that we're going to make that tackle nine times out of 10, and for whatever reason that's not happening. We don't know why yet. So you just have to keep playing, keep trusting the guy

next to you. Just be thankful to be out here. It's a fun time. And Wrigley Field was awesome. It was cool to see."

The beat went on for the rest of the Buckeye defensive line in the fourth quarter. Although the Buckeyes' lead was basically out of reach for the Wildcats at that point, Styles got home once again for a sack of Lausch which brought Northwestern back 11 yards, forcing a punt.

Styles finished with a career- and team-high two sacks along with six tackles (five solo) and two pass breakups, a strong outing that Day viewed as an encouraging sign for his safety-turned-linebacker.

"We need Sonny to be as productive as he was today," Day said. "When you can do it in man coverage, you can do it in zone coverage, you can blitz – you start to mix in all these different things you can do, then you just become more of a weapon. You saw (Styles) get after the quarterback today. That's something that we've been working on with linebackers, DBs, everybody blitzing a little better and more efficiently with some of the tools that they need."

Fellow junior linebacker C.J. Hicks had a productive day in his own right rushing the passer and helped stymie the Wildcats' last chance to score by combining with linebacker Arvell Reese for a 10-yard sack of Lausch late in the fourth quarter.

Although he wasn't credited with a statistic, Hicks also played a part in the Buckeyes' previous sack of Lausch, when he evaded Northwestern running back Cam Porter on a blitz to help bring Lausch to the ground.

Against the highly efficient Indiana passing attack, which awaits the Buckeyes at home on Nov. 23, the Buckeyes will need their improved pass rush to be on full display if they want to come up with a top-five win.

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 31, Northwestern 7

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on Northwestern's football program and the Buckeyes' win over the Wildcats: "I think (Northwestern head coach David Braun) is doing a good job. I like the way his team plays. They are physical. They had two weeks to prepare, and it's the same thing with the team we are going to play next week (Indiana). (Northwestern) had two weeks to prepare. They had a bye week coming into this. They had a week to game-plan us and a week to rest up. We knew we were going to get their best shot, and that's the way we want it. I thought they did a nice job with some of the things they did early on, and I think they have a good team. It's good to have a businesslike win, and now it's time to move on."

Braun on the state of his program: "We need to evaluate everything within our program that needs to happen to consistently show up against teams like Ohio State and play winning football. We're not there. Clearly, we're not close right now. But this group's going to keep competing."

Day on improving to 47-0 against unranked teams in his six years as Ohio State's head coach: "Something I've really tried to learn during my time as a head coach is to be consistent and to make it about the process, not about your opponent. Now, you have to know everything about your opponent and certainly some games are different than others, but it's about our process, and the coaching staff has embraced that. I think the leaders have embraced that. We have to continue with our process this week. We have to get after these guys and make sure that they are having a great week of practice and preparation. We're going to keep our routine as the routine. I believe that's going to lead to consistency."

Ohio State senior nickel cornerback Jordan Hancock on Northwestern's second-quarter touchdown that gave the Wildcats a 7-0 lead: "We didn't like them scoring. It wasn't like a one-play touchdown. It was a long drive too, so it definitely tested our manhood for real. It's good we went out there and got those stops and they didn't score any more from there."

Hancock on what changed for the defense after the slow start: "We had to go out there, play physical, play fast, not get too

caught up in the moment with being at Wrigley Field and everything like that. That's really what we did."

Ohio State senior defensive end Jack Sawyer on the defense not getting a shut-out against Northwestern and his overall thoughts on the unit's mentality: "Getting shutouts is awesome. That was our standard coming in this year. It still is. But we're playing good teams. This is November football, and they're going to make plays here and there. We can't really focus on that in the midst of the game. So we just have to regroup and keep playing good team defense."

Sawyer on his career-high seven-tackle performance: "I just thank God for putting me in this position to make plays. I give him all the credit and all the glory. Seeing the ball coming your way is exciting. Sometimes the ball is running the opposite way from you all game, so I was in the position to make plays, and I made them."

Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Will Howard on the team's performance in the "middle-eight" at the end of the first half and beginning of the second: "It changed the game, and today we really won it at the end of the second quarter, beginning of the third quarter. We had some opportunities to really put the game truly – I mean it was out of reach – but really step on their throats a little bit. In the fourth quarter there are maybe a couple throws I want back, but overall we did a really good job with that middle eight, and that kind of put the game out of reach for them."

Ohio State junior linebacker Sonny Styles on junior wide receiver David Adolph's blocked punt and the team's back-to-back games with a blocked punt: "It definitely gets you going. Special teams are huge in the game. You get a blocked punt and things like that, you have a pretty good chance of winning the game. So those are huge. We just want to keep making more plays on special teams."

Styles on Adolph's development as a player during his Ohio State career: "I think Adolph has earned his stripes as he's gone on each year. I think he's reliable, and that's why you see him on so many different units. They know they can throw a lot on him and he can handle it."

Ohio State fifth-year center Seth McLaughlin on if the offense "ran the damn ball" against Northwestern: "Yeah. I'm not sure what the final rushing yards are, but you can always be more consistent in the run game. There are a lot of things that we can clean up from that because we (were faced) with a ton of pressure and stuff that (Northwestern) put in over the off week, I guess. There's a lot of stuff to clean up, but we got our rushing yards when we needed to."

Day on the team's run game: "Northwestern, like so many teams in the Big Ten, does such a great, great job against the run. We did make some adjustments there. I thought we finally got that run game going. The run game takes time in certain games. We'd love to be hitting those 4-, 5-, 6-, 7-, 8-, 9-yard runs earlier, but it takes a little time and you have to make those adjustments. (Offensive coordinator Chip Kelly) did a good job of coming back to some stuff that we did make adjustments for. So did (offensive line coach Justin Frye) and the guys with the offensive line. There were some good things there overall."

Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Carnell Tate on what it means to play for Ohio State: "It's a blessing to be an Ohio State Buckeye. The great tradition that runs through Ohio State – the Ohio State Buckeyes represent the state of Ohio. It's an honor for me to play for my dream school."

Tate, a Chicago native, on if he had ever been to Wrigley Field as a child and whether he is a baseball fan: "No, I've never been to a Cubs game as a kid. I've been around in the area, but I've been to a White Sox game. I don't really watch baseball. I'm a Cubs fan today."

Styles on his initial thoughts on No. 5 Indiana: "They're a great team, and it's no surprise, (because) they have a great coach. They brought in some great players. I'm excited to play. I think it's going to be a great matchup."

Sawyer on if it is good to play No. 5 and archrival Michigan before entering post-season play: "I think it is good. This is when we're playing our best ball, and you want to play your best ball in November when it gets tough. All the games coming down the line are all big-time matchups. So we're excited for it."

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OSU Finds Confines Friendly For Win Over NU

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State looked nothing like the No. 2 team in the country for the first 15 minutes, but when the offense started clicking and the defense got, well, defensive, the chances for an upset by pesky Northwestern diminished.

The Buckeyes started slowly, but two receiving touchdowns by Chicago native Carnell Tate and a pair of 1-yard runs by Quinshon Judkins powered the Buckeyes to a 31-7 victory over Northwestern at Wrigley Field in Chicago on Nov. 16 before a pro-Buckeye crowd of 38,147.

In the first quarter, Ohio State (9-1, 6-1) was stymied by the inability to get Northwestern (4-6, 2-5) off the field and had just one drive, which resulted in a punt.

But after the Wildcats took a 7-0 lead early in the second quarter, the Buckeyes scored 31 unanswered points. Judkins' second TD made it 14-7 after a bad snap on a punt led to a block to give Ohio State the ball at the 1.

Tate (four catches, 52 yards) followed with TDs of 25 and 8 yards.

Ohio State has won 11 straight vs. Northwestern since 2004.

Slow Start

Northwestern started from the 25 after the opening kickoff. The Wildcats converted two third-down tries and ran nearly seven minutes off the clock but produced no points thanks to a turnover when Jack Sawyer forced a fumble by quarterback Jack Lausch at the OSU 16 and Davison Igbinosun picked it up for a 17-yard return at the 8:04 mark.

It was a dream drive for the Wildcats beginning with a third-and-12 from the NU 23 after a 5-yard Sonny Styles sack. Cam Porter then rambled for 12 yards for a new set of downs. Later, needing a yard, Lausch hit Bryce Kirtz for 20 to the OSU 36.

It was third-and-7 from the 18 when Sawyer made the big play to give the Buckeyes the ball.

The Buckeyes converted a fourth-and-1 from the Northwestern 42 on a 4-yard run by Judkins and came tantalizingly close to scoring on a third-and-9 from the 38 with Jeremiah Smith (four catches 100 yards) making a diving one-handed catch in the end zone. However, the TD call was reversed upon review because the ball hit the ground, and Joe McGuire punted 29 yards to the 8 with 3:04 left.

Northwestern moved the ball freely from there, and Lausch completed a masterful 92-yard, 13-play, 5:30 drive with an 8-yard run to make it 7-0 at 12:34 of the second.

Kirtz had a 21-yard catch along the left sideline, and A.J. Henning grabbed a pass on the right boundary for 22 to the OSU 42. Two plays later, Lausch ran for 9 yards to complete a dominant quarter.

The Wildcats led in yards (118-30), plays (17-10) and possession (10:00-5:00).

On the first play of the second quarter, Porter gained 2 for another third-down conversion to the 31. On third-and-10 from the OSU 31, Kirtz beat Denzel Burke for 12 yards to the 19.

After a Styles pass breakup, Porter rushed for 11 before Lausch scored.

To that point the Wildcats were 4 of 5 on third down and had 151 yards (97 passing, 54



SONNY BROCKWAY

SWEET HOMECOMING - Chicago native Carnell Tate returned home to play Northwestern and rewarded his family and friends at Wrigley Field with two touchdown receptions, including this 25-yarder late in the first half to make it 21-7.

rushing).

The OSU offense responded with an 85-yard drive in 5:29 consisting of six runs and six passes, culminating in a 1-yard run by Judkins at 6:59.

An 11-yard kickoff return by TreVeyon Henderson gave OSU a start at the 15. Then the Buckeyes got a third-down catch of 20 yards by Emeka Egbuka and a Henderson run of 11, and on fourth-and-3 from the NU 45, Smith had a reception of 14 to the 31.

Henderson ran for 4, and Smith had another catch for 12 to the 15. Tate made a contested catch across the middle for 14 yards to the 1 to set up Judkins' TD.

Back-to-back screw-ups allowed the Buckeyes to take a 14-7 lead on a 1-yard run by Judkins at 4:19.

On third down-and 4 from the NU 31, a bad center snap resulted in a 4-yard loss on a fumble recovery by left tackle Caleb Tiernan. The ensuing snap went over the head of punter Hunter Renner and was blocked by David Adolph at the 1.

Will Howard gained nothing on first down, but after a timeout Judkins powered his way for the needed yard.

Following a Northwestern punt to the OSU 23, the Buckeyes were on the move with a 34-yard toss to Gee Scott Jr. to the NU 39. After an incompleteness, Henderson went up the middle for 12 then 2.

Tate then went full extension to pull in a 25-yard TD pass to make it 21-7 with 47 seconds left in the half. The six-play, 77-yard drive took 1:57.

The halftime numbers started skewing toward the Buckeyes, who had 193 yards (138 passing, 55 rushing) compared to 167 for the Wildcats (105 passing, 62 rushing).

Howard was 9 of 14 for 138 yards, and Tate's three catches went for 44 yards.

Cruising

The Buckeyes began the third quarter at the 10 after a holding penalty on Henderson's 10-yard kickoff return. Five plays, another sensational Smith play and 2:44 later it was 28-7 on an 8-yard reception by Tate at 12:11.

On third-and 5 from the 15, Smith caught the ball in the middle at the OSU 29 and took

off to the Wildcats 17 for a 68-yard gain. He limped off the field to have his left ankle taped but was able to return later in the game.

Howard threw to Brandon Inniss for 9 yards, and Tate did the rest from there on the next play, making the grab at the 3 before crossing the line.

Northwestern then drove to the 19, but Porter lost 2 yards on a third-down run and Igbinosun, who had a pass-interference penalty earlier in the drive, broke up a pass intended for Kirtz to end the threat.

Henderson was featured early on the next drive with runs of 3 and 19 yards and a 12-yard catch before being spelled by Judkins, who ran for 17 and 14 yards to the 14.

Henderson returned for 2 yards, and Smith rushed for 2 more before an incompleteness intended for Smith led to a Jayden Fielding 28-yard field goal for a 31-7 lead with 44 seconds left in third quarter.

Late in the game, Northwestern drove to the 6. Kirtz had a 20-yard catch to the Buckeye 32 on fourth down to keep the drive alive, and Calvin Johnson II had a 23-yard catch to the 6, but on third down C.J. Hicks and Arvell Reese combined for a 10-yard sack. Lausch then threw incomplete to the end zone on fourth down.

Devin Brown replaced Howard with 1:53 left, and James Peoples gained 25 yards on three carries in the final drive to end the game at the OSU 41.

Howard finished the game 15 of 24 for 247 yards with two scores and no interceptions.

Notes

Ohio State had 420 total yards (247 passing, 173 rushing); Northwestern finished with 251 (201 passing, 50 rushing). ... The Wildcats were 6 of 16 on third-down conversions; the Buckeyes went 4 of 10. ... Judkins gained 76 yards on 15 carries. Henderson had 74 on 11 attempts. ... OSU had four sacks for 36 yards. Howard was sacked once for 5 yards. ... Styles had two sacks for 16 yards. ... Reese and Sawyer each had seven tackles (two solo).

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Projected Depth Charts

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.
INDIANA RUSH DEFENSE

Northwestern presented a stiff challenge to the Ohio State running game, at least in the first half of the Buckeyes' 31-7 win. Quinshon Judkins (25) and TreVeyon Henderson (35) combined for 60 yards on 14 carries (4.3 average) before halftime, but they were able to wear down the Wildcats. The Buckeyes ran for 118 in the second half, and Judkins finished with 76 yards (5.1) and two touchdowns while Henderson had 74 (6.7). These aren't the Hoosiers of old who have not beaten the Buckeyes since 1988 (0-30-1) with 29 straight losses, at least not on paper. Being 10-0 for the first time ever brings notice. Indiana has held opponents under 100 rushing yards seven times, the most in a season for the program since at least 1950. In fact, the Hoosiers lead the nation with 72.2 yards given up per game, about 18 fewer yards a game than the Buckeyes. Indiana has allowed eight rushing TDs, and opponents are averaging 2.5 yards per carry. In their most recent game, a 20-15 win over Michigan on Nov. 9, the Wolverines netted 69 yards for a 2.0 average and didn't have a run longer than 8 yards. **EDGE: EVEN**

INDIANA RUSH OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Indiana is barely in the top 50 with 176.7 yards a game, but the Hoosiers have made the most of their attempts with 32 rushing touchdowns to rank among the five best. Indiana averages 4.7 yards a carry, but Michigan shut them down to the tune of 40 yards (1.4). Justice Ellison leads the Hoosiers with 686 yards (5.7) with nine scores. Ty Son Lawton follows with 508 yards (4.8) and nine touchdowns as well. Indiana will have to run against the Buckeyes, who are coming off a dominating performance. Northwestern gained 50 yards on 30 carries (1.7). The Buckeyes, who have allowed one touchdown or less seven times, concede an average of 90.7 yards to place in the top five. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.
INDIANA PASS DEFENSE

It's a good day for the Buckeyes when Jeremiah Smith can have a 68-yard catch and he's not the star of the game. That title goes to Carnell Tate for his four catches for 52 yards and two touchdowns during his homecoming to Chicago for the game at Wrigley Field. Smith, by the way, had 100 yards from four catches and nearly had another highlight TD only to have it overturned on a review. Will Howard threw for 247 yards and two touchdowns without an interception. Indiana is solid against the pass with 183.3 yards allowed on average for a top-25 ranking with eight touchdowns allowed. The Hoosiers are also among the best with 31 sacks. Mikail Kamara has 9½ for 73 yards, and James Carpenter has four sacks for 31 yards. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INDIANA PASS OFFENSE vs.
OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Ohio transfer Kurtis O'Rourke is lighting it up for the Hoosiers and is a semifinalist for the Walter Camp Award as the national player of the year. He is the highest rated passer (92.3) per Pro Football Focus and has the second-best passing efficiency (182.7) in the nation. Completing 71.8 percent of his passes, he has thrown for 2,410 yards with 21 touchdowns against four interceptions. There's a reason Indiana's 57 offensive touchdowns are its most in a season since 2013 (61). The top receiver is Elijah Sarratt with 38 catches for 685 yards and six touchdowns. He has a pass reception in 35 straight games. OSU looked shaky early against the Wildcats with Denzel Burke having another subpar outing and Davison Igbinosun, Mr. Magnum PI, incurring his weekly pass interference but also having a key pass breakup and fumble recovery. Northwestern's Jack Lausch was 21 of 35 for 201 yards and was sacked four times. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Nicolas Radicic has made all eight field-goal tries for the Hoosiers with a long of 41. James Evans is averaging 43.8 yards per punt. Indiana has three blocked punts. The Buckeyes got one of their own vs. Northwestern thanks to a high snap, but there was a holding infraction on a kickoff return. **EDGE: EVEN**

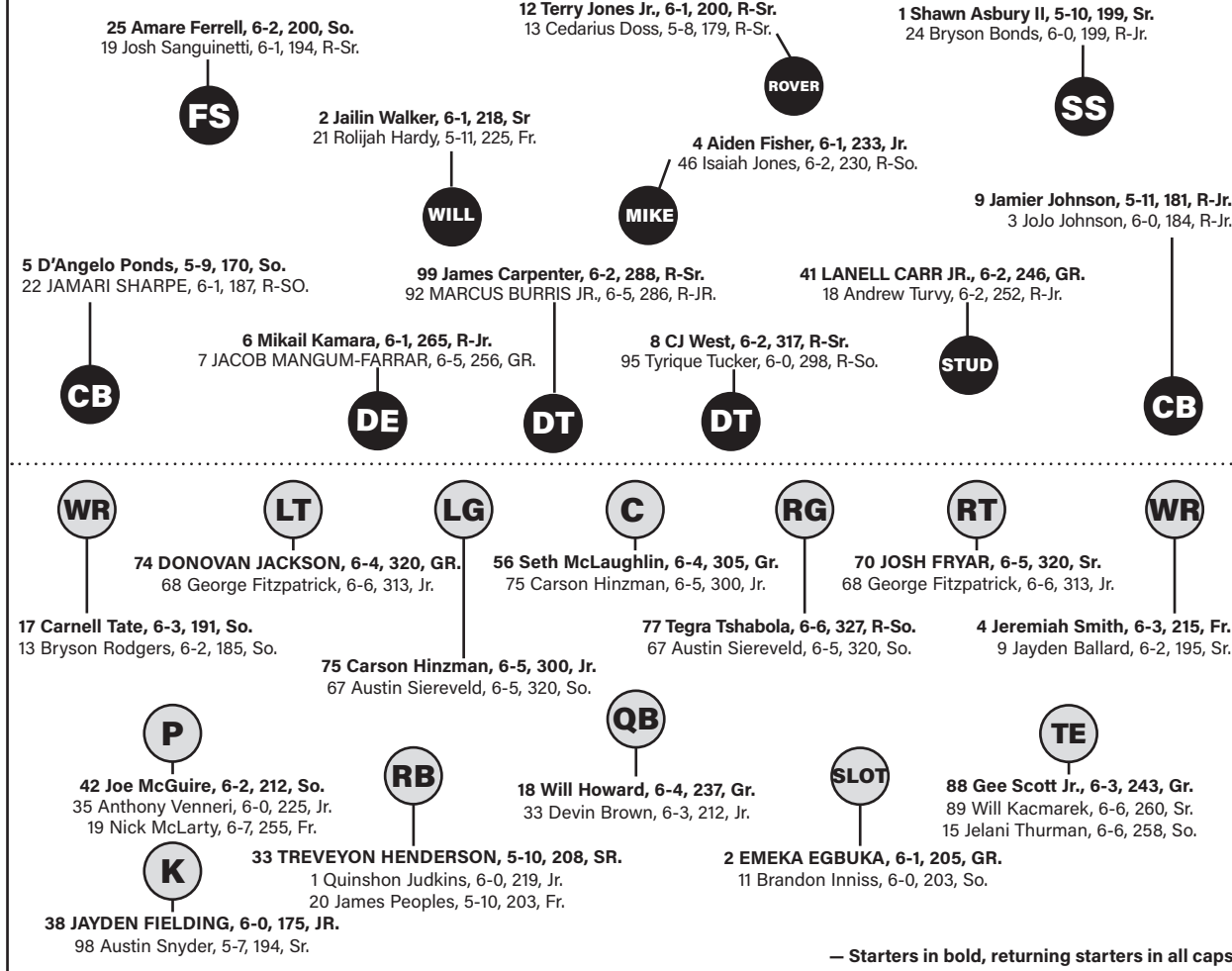
INTANGIBLES

For what it's worth, Indiana is the fourth opponent to have an open weekend before playing the Buckeyes, who are 3-0 against them. Yes, the Hoosiers are historically bad vs. OSU, but they had only 10 wins in 72 games vs. Michigan before beating them. From the Buckeyes' perspective, the magnitude of the matchup ensures they won't be looking ahead to the Wolverines. If they do, good luck with that. **EDGE: INDIANA**

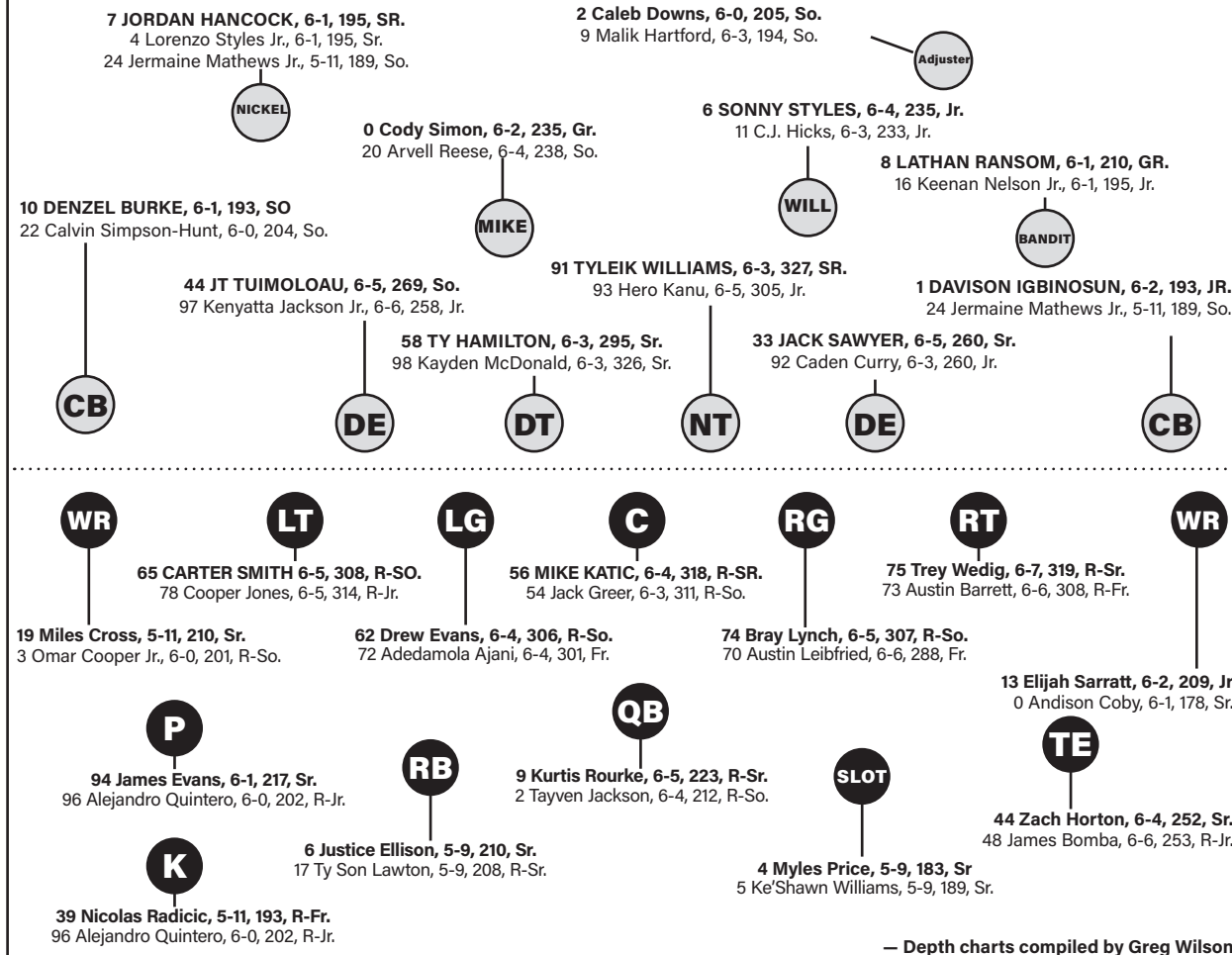
STAFF PREDICTION

The Buckeyes need to prove they are capable of a fast start after so many frustrating outings where opponents keep hanging around and building their confidence. The longer the Hoosiers stay in the game, their chances of an epic win increase. **OHIO STATE 28, INDIANA 17**

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN INDIANA HAS THE BALL...



Cignetti Creating Winning Culture With IU

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

When Curt Cignetti was hired by Indiana after the 2023 season, he had a very memorable quote that has been brought up time and time again in his short tenure in Bloomington, Ind.

"It's pretty simple," he said in December. "I win. Google me."

It might have seemed like an overconfident answer at the time, taking over for a program that had not long ago become the first Division I football program to lose 700 games. The Hoosiers were also fresh off a 3-9 record in the 2023 season, one of those nine losses coming to Ohio State in their season opener.

But Cignetti did have the facts backing him up when he said that. He had only two seasons coaching football at the FBS level with James Madison moving up from the FCS before the 2022 campaign, and he had a 19-4 record in those two years. In all of his head coaching opportunities combined, he had a 119-35 record.

Now 10 games into another season in his head coaching career, with tougher competition in the Big Ten, the 63-year-old is immediately proving his claim right. All he has done with the Hoosiers is win.

Indiana will enter Ohio Stadium on Nov. 23 with a 10-0 record, and although it hasn't played some of the top teams in the conference yet, it has been able to beat every oppo-

nent by two possessions or more up until a 20-15 win over Michigan on Nov. 9.

Because of that, the Hoosiers are ranked fifth in the College Football Playoff rankings released on Nov. 12 in a season that they were projected by conference media to be 17th in the Big Ten, ahead of only Purdue. They also present a major threat to Ohio State's chances at making the Big Ten Championship Game in Indianapolis on Dec. 7, with the winner of the Nov. 23 matchup – set to kick off from Columbus at noon on FOX – likely getting to be featured in the matchup against No. 1 Oregon. This will be Ohio State's third top-five matchup of the season after losing to Oregon at Autzen Stadium on Oct. 12 and beating Penn State in Beaver Stadium on Nov. 2.

While the Buckeyes saw Indiana last year and didn't have much trouble winning that game, this is a different team, quite literally.

The quick turnaround wasn't due to some otherworldly developmental abilities that Cignetti was able to bring in to immediately make the Hoosiers' players better. It was due to him going out and being extremely aggressive in the transfer portal, bringing in 30 players, many from Cignetti's former team. He came out of spring practices with an aggressive mindset toward the portal.

"I'm looking for the best I can get," Cignetti said. "I'm not looking for any third-teamers."

Get To Know ... Indiana

- **2024 Record:** 10-0, 7-0 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation Multiple 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 2, Defense 1, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Curt Cignetti, 1st year at Indiana, 10-0.
- **Series History:** 98th meeting; Ohio State leads 80-12-5.
- **School Facts:** Location – Bloomington, Ind.; Enrollment – 48,952; Nickname – Hoosiers; Colors – Crimson, Cream; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Memorial Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 52,626).

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	FIU	W, 31-7
Sept. 6	WESTERN ILLINOIS	W, 77-3
Sept. 14	at UCLA	W, 42-13
Sept. 21	CHARLOTTE	W, 52-14
Sept. 28	MARYLAND	W, 42-28
Oct. 5	at Northwestern	W, 41-24
Oct. 19	NEBRASKA	W, 56-7
Oct. 26	WASHINGTON	W, 31-17
Nov. 2	at Michigan State	W, 47-10
Nov. 9	MICHIGAN	W, 20-15
Nov. 23	at Ohio State	Noon
Nov. 30	PURDUE	TBA
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship	TBA

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Justice Ellison	120	686	5.7	9
Ty Son Lawton	106	508	4.8	9
Kaelon Black	39	217	5.6	2

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Kurtis Rourke	171-238	71.8	2,410	21-4

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Elijah Sarratt	38	685	18.0	6
Myles Price	30	377	12.6	2
K. Williams	27	341	12.6	4
Miles Cross	25	289	11.6	3
Omar Cooper Jr.	24	527	22.0	5

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 43.9
 Rushing Yards Per Game – 176.7
 Passing Yards Per Game – 276.5
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 453.2

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Aiden Fisher	37	61	98	3.5-10 1.5-5
Jailin Walker	28	31	59	4-9 0.5-4
Shawn Asbury II	21	33	54	3.5-22 1.5-12
D'Angelo Ponds	29	16	45	3.5-6 0-0
Mikail Kamara	18	21	39	14.5-84 9.5-73
Isaiah Jones	12	25	37	2.5-6 0.5-3

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Amare Ferrell	4	35	8.8	0
D'Angelo Ponds	2	67	33.5	1
Rolijah Hardy	2	18	9.0	1

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 13.8
 Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 72.2
 Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 183.3
 Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 255.5

It seems that he got what he wanted. Of the Hoosiers' 22 usual starters on offense and defense, 16 of them weren't with the program the year before.

It was a statement made by Cignetti over the offseason that he was going to try to be as competitive as possible as soon as possible, and that has paid off in a big way for him.

"We had so many holes to fill," Cignetti admitted. "In the spring, we took care of some defensive needs. We were able to bring in two defensive linemen, a lineback-

er, a corner, a safety and a rover, which we needed to do. We feel good about it."

In the matchup between the Buckeyes' two remaining regular-season opponents on Nov. 9, there were some signs that Indiana is beatable, being held to just 40 rushing yards on 28 carries (1.4-yard average) and 206 passing yards in the game by the Wolverines, but they were able to come out with the win nonetheless.

"It tells you a lot about the resiliency of this team, its competitive character," Cignetti said after the game. "At the end of

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the day, they all count as one, whether it's 72-6 or 3-2. They count as one. You know what? We're going to take the win over the Michigan Wolverines, and the Indiana Hoosiers will enjoy being undefeated for 24 hours.

"I think this team understands that no matter – we can find a way to get it done. But I think if you polled them, they would all prefer to execute at a much higher level and score more points."

It's been an effort on both sides of the ball for the Hoosiers, starting with a defense that is seventh nationally in points allowed this season, giving up just 13.8 points per game, and third in total defense with 255.5 yards per game allowed.

Possibly the biggest impact transfer on the team is junior linebacker Aidan Fisher, who leads the team with 98 tackles, almost 40 more than senior linebacker Jailin Walker, who is second on the team with 59 stops. Both starting linebackers in defensive coordinator Bryant Haines' 4-2-5 system came to Bloomington from James Madison, as did Haines.

Fisher has 3½ tackles for loss and 1½ sacks to go with three quarterback hurries and three pass breakups while Walker has four tackles for loss, one half sack, a forced fumble, two quarterback hurries and a tied-for-team-high six pass breakups.

Those two have helped transform Indiana into the strongest run defense in the country entering the Ohio State game, allowing just 72.2 yards per game on the ground. The Buckeye duo of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins have been proven to not be an impossible task to defend, but the Ohio State ground game, including Will Howard's ability to tuck and run, will undoubtedly be the best that the Hoosiers have seen this season.

The Hoosiers' defensive line has also been a big part of stopping the run so effectively. Redshirt junior edge rusher Mikail Kamara – also a James Madison transfer – has the most impressive 2024 résumé of the four starters with 39 total tackles and an impressive 14½ tackles for loss, which is tied for fourth in the nation and second in the Big Ten behind Penn State's Abdul Carter with 17½. Kamara also has a team-high 9½ sacks along with four quarterback hurries, two forced fumbles, three fumble recoveries and a pass breakup.

To his side are sixth-year redshirt senior James Carpenter and redshirt senior CJ West (Kent State), who have combined for 55 tackles this year and 13 tackles for loss.

Fifth-year senior Lanell Carr Jr. is one of the few returning starters for the Hoosiers and occupies the Stud position, which is similar to what Ohio State calls the Jack. As a hybrid defensive end and linebacker, Carr has accumulated 28 tackles, 3½ of them for loss, and 1½ sacks.

The Hoosiers don't have any big weaknesses on the defensive side of the ball, but relative to the rest of the unit, the passing defense lags slightly behind the rest. Through 10 games, it ranked 20th in the nation and seventh in the Big Ten with 183.3 passing yards allowed per game.

Like many modern college defenses, they utilize five defensive backs for much of their game. Sophomore and redshirt junior cornerbacks D'Angelo Ponds (James Madison) and Jamier Johnson have combined for 78 tackles and three interceptions while

redshirt senior and Old Dominion transfer Terry Jones Jr. – who plays the Rover for Indiana, similar to the nickel position – has 27 tackles, five of them for loss, along with a sack.

Safeties Shawn Asbury II and Amare Ferrell lead the way in the secondary. Asbury, a senior transfer from Old Dominion, is third on the team with 54 tackles and has a 78-yard interception return this season, while the sophomore Ferrell leads the Hoosiers with four picks.

Cignetti has been very happy with how his defense has been able to come away with turnovers. The group is tied for 12th nationally in turnover margin with 17 take-aways and seven turnovers lost.

"When you fly around, good things happen on defense," Cignetti said. "And we're flying around, and a lot of good things are happening – tackles for loss, sacks and take-aways."

"We're normally pretty high in that turnover ratio. We're doing a good job of protecting the ball on offense, which is where it all starts. Quarterbacks are making good decisions in the pass game, and the ball carriers and receivers are tucking it away nicely. On defense, we're swarming the football."

The player who is largely responsible for Indiana's low turnover rate on the other side of the ball is sixth-year quarterback Kurtis Rourke, a transfer from Ohio University whom Cignetti went after during the off-season for his final year of eligibility.

Rourke had to sit for a game with an injury but has still completed 171 of 238 passes for 2,410 yards, 21 touchdowns to just four interceptions, earning him some Heisman consideration, though his odds aren't high to win the trophy.

The Hoosier offense isn't quite as strong as their defense in terms of yards gained, 23rd in passing offense (276.5), 47th in rushing offense (176.7), and 15th in total offense (453.2), but they still rank second behind only Miami (Fla.) in scoring at 43.9 points per game.

The scoring has been pretty spread out throughout the offense, but running backs

Justice Ellison (Wake Forest) and Ty Son Lawton (James Madison) lead the team with nine touchdowns each. The two running backs have formed a solid one-two punch this season, with Ellison's 120 attempts turning into 686 yards and the seventh-year Lawton totaling 106 attempts for 508 yards.

They have been helped along by an offensive line that returned two starters from last year's team in redshirt sophomore left tackle Carter Smith and fifth-year redshirt senior center Mike Katic. Redshirt senior right tackle Trey Wedig (Wisconsin) and fifth-year senior left guard Tyler Stephens (James Madison) were portal additions, while redshirt sophomore Bray Lynch earned a starting spot at right guard this season after being further down the depth chart last year.

Rourke has done well spreading the ball through the air to receivers Elijah Sarratt, Omar Cooper Jr. and Myles Price as well as tight end Zach Horton, who has also proved to be a capable pass catcher when needed.

Sarratt, another James Madison transfer, leads the way with 38 catches for 685

yards and six scores while Cooper Jr. has 24 receptions for 527 yards and five scores. Backup slot receiver Ke'Shawn Williams (Wake Forest) rotates into the game enough to be third in receptions with 27 for 341 yards and four touchdowns.

The Buckeyes have the advantage going into this game in multiple ways. It will be on their home turf, and they are – on paper – the better team, with more players likely to move onto the next level. But OSU will have to play with urgency to beat the Hoosiers, who have proved to be able to not only stick around in big games but win them.

As Cignetti said he does, all he has been doing at Indiana is winning football games, and he and the Hoosiers are going to come ready to spoil the Buckeyes' chances at a Big Ten title come Nov. 23.

"The only thing that really matters is you get the result when you play," he said, "and to do that you have to keep the main thing the main thing and eliminate the noise and the clutter and stay focused on what's going to help you play your best on Saturday to give you the best chance to get the result."

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Hoosiers' Mallory Brought Buckeyes Darkest Days

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On Oct. 8, 1988, Ohio State suffered its second humiliating loss in as many years to Indiana, in a game now known to Buckeye faithful as "Darkest Day II." The 41-7 loss was the first home win for Indiana over Ohio State in 84 years, and then-first-year Ohio State coach John Cooper was left dumbfounded about how it happened.

"I don't think I have ever been so puzzled about a team in all my life," Cooper said of his Buckeyes. "I don't know what you have to do to get a team ready. I really don't want to sit here and rip our players, but you saw the game. I don't know what else I can do. I can't play. Our coaches can't play."

While the Ohio State football program was at one of the lowest points in its history, then-Indiana head coach Bill Mallory had his program reaching its apex through discipline, recruiting and most importantly hard-nosed football.

A little over 20 years earlier as an assistant under legendary Ohio State coach Woody Hayes, the recruiting part was still a work in progress.

As the recruiter of the Cleveland area, Mallory was responsible for coaxing former Ohio State quarterback Ron Maciejowski (1967-70), among many others, to join the Buckeyes. A high school basketball player at the time, Maciejowski's weekends were clogged up as he played on the hardwood. Mallory's idea was to get the future Buckeye down for a Monday night basketball game instead. Unfortunately for Mallory and Maciejowski, the future Colorado, Indiana and Miami (Ohio) coach sent him to the wrong airport.

"I hustled over there, got on a flight, I got in late, and the game was halfway over," Maciejowski said. "He put me in with Tom Backus and another guy Dwight Fertig from Ravenna, and he forgot to tell me it was finals week. These guys are studying for finals, and it was like a horrible visit."

Entrenched in a recruiting battle with then-Navy defensive backs coach Lee Corso, later one of his predecessors at Indiana, Mallory picked up ground by making a better impression with Maciejowski's mother.

"(Corso) comes over one day after I played a basketball game, and I played really well at the end," Maciejowski said. "We won the game, and he told my mom what a great player I am, and everything. You can imagine Lee Corso at 30 years old. I mean, oh, what a piece of work. Dark, wavy hair, (fashionably) dressed, sunglasses, of course. I mean, he was a piece of work. And my mom said to me after he left, she said, 'You know that Lee Corso guy? I don't trust him. I like that Bill Mallory at Ohio State a lot,' I said, 'OK, Mom.'"

In the end, the misstep in Maciejowski's visit or his mother's vote of confidence in Mallory didn't move the needle much for a kid like Maciejowski, who had the Buckeyes as his top school for the entire process. By the time the signal-caller was being recruited to Ohio State in the mid-1960s, Hayes had already led the Buckeyes to recognized national championships, and he was in the process of assembling one of the greatest coaching staffs in the program's history.

When Ohio State's 1968 national champi-

onship season rolled around, a highly talented group of players was led by Mallory as the interior defensive line coach, future national championship-winning Notre Dame coach Lou Holtz as the defensive backs coach, and future Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce in charge of the offensive line.

"They were all extremely talented," said Bill Conley, former Ohio State offensive lineman from 1968-71 and an assistant coach at OSU from 1984-1987 and 1992-2003, of the coaching staff. "And like, Woody, they were tough guys. We practiced hard, and the demands were very high. They all just were super teachers of the game, because that's what you've got to be. To be a good coach, you have to be a teacher of the game, and they were all great teachers of the game."

"I mean, even getting down to our freshman coach was Tiger Ellison, who came from Middletown (Ohio) High School, and Tiger Ellison was a guy who really invented what became the run-and-shoot offense. So it was a strong coaching staff. Almost every one of them went on to be a coach somewhere else."

Like Hayes, Mallory prioritized toughness and hard-nosed football for the interior defensive linemen he coached, and he would do just about anything to get a message across, whether it be getting in the grill of one of his players or simply telling them what to do.

"He would get down in the trenches with the guys, put a helmet on," Maciejowski said. "He was a pretty tough guy, and the guys would always make fun of him because he'd get in their face, and he started drooling, saliva would be coming out of his mouth, and he was spitting everywhere because he was so worked up. He was great, and he also could calmly say, 'Hey, here's what we're going to do.'"

Despite his sheer intensity on the field coaching his players, Mallory took the time to connect with Maciejowski's parents off the field.

"He was just nice enough," Maciejowski said. "Every now and then, I think he might have done it twice. After games, my parents would always take me out to dinner, and he joined us at least once. It was nice for my parents to get to talk to Bill, and he was just such a nice guy."

Under the leadership of the legendary coaching staff and, of course, the play of the "Super Sophomores," the 1968 Ohio State team won all of its regular-season games, including a dominant 50-14 win over Michigan to win the Big Ten.

The Big Ten championship gave the top-ranked Buckeyes a golden opportunity to not just win the Rose Bowl but to firmly establish themselves as the best team in college football going up against No. 2 USC.

The Buckeyes used two fourth-quarter touchdowns to win the contest 27-16 and capture their first Rose Bowl win in 11 years.

Onward And Upward

Coming off a wildly successful season with the Buckeyes, Mallory decided to go back to his alma mater at Miami to serve as the head coach.

Mallory led his alma mater to four consecutive seven-win seasons before he broke through for an 11-0 season in his fifth and final year there.

After leaving the RedHawks, he made it to

the Big Eight conference as the head coach of Colorado. With the Buffaloes, Mallory enjoyed similar success and even took his team to the Orange Bowl in 1976 to square off against Ohio State. In a matchup against his former boss Hayes and the rest of the Buckeyes on Jan. 1, 1977, Colorado lost 27-10.

Despite a 35-21-1 record with the Buffaloes, Mallory was fired after his fifth year with the program. The former Buckeye assistant took a year off from coaching and in 1980 became the head coach at Northern Illinois. In his fourth year as the program's leader, the Huskies won 10 games and the MAC championship.

The success enjoyed by Mallory at his previous stops earned him his first chance to become a head coach of a program in the Big Ten with Indiana in 1984.

The problem for Mallory was that Indiana wasn't exactly cut out to have sustained success in football like other powerhouses in the conference. Corso had mixed success from 1973-82, with the Hoosiers posting only two winning seasons but winning their first bowl game in program history in 1979.

The Hoosiers replaced Corso with Sam Wyche, who was the Hoosiers' head coach for one season before he took the Cincinnati Bengals' coaching job. The Hoosiers went 3-8 under Wyche, and as the third different head coach in as many years at Indiana, Mallory had quite a job ahead of him to try to build the Hoosiers into a competitive Big Ten program.

Mallory's first season was a difficult one, to say the least. The Hoosiers finished the year 0-11, and the pessimism surrounding the program only persisted.

"I think early on with somebody new there's a little bit of excitement, but also that initial 'here we go again' sort of feeling when you start off that way," said former Inside Indiana publisher Rick Notter. "But as you know, Indiana doesn't have a history of winning college football games, and you want to be patient with people as you bring them in."

In defense of Mallory, the Hoosiers weren't a complete dumpster fire in his first season in 1984. Despite losing 11 games, seven of them were by one score.

In 1985, Mallory started to make progress within the program, and the Hoosiers won their first four games of the season, but in a poor finish to the season, the team lost its final seven games, starting with a 48-7 blowout loss to Ohio State on Oct. 12.

In 1986, Mallory seemed to have fully turned around the program. With another four-game winning streak to start the season, the Hoosiers had a great opportunity to establish themselves as a threat within the Big Ten when they hosted the Buckeyes in Week 5. One year removed from a humiliating loss to the Buckeyes in Columbus, the Hoosiers stood their ground at home and competed with Ohio State for the full 60 minutes before coming up just short in a 24-22 loss.

The close loss was not the result Mallory was looking for, but it was also a testament to the progress he had made within the program. That progress was shown when the Hoosiers pulled two more wins together in the regular season, which allowed them to qualify for their first bowl game since 1979. Indiana lost the All-American Bowl to Florida State 27-13 on New Year's Eve, but the momentum within the program was undeniable.

"I think he brought in that experience from his coaching days back at Ohio State," Notter said of how Mallory managed to shape Indiana into a Big Ten contender. "(He) brought some of that discipline that maybe they had lacked under some of the other coaches, that they were not necessarily strong of that as he was, having come from a top program. I think that was very helpful, and just the way he handled everybody around the program, that he was genuinely a good guy and that he wanted to see that program succeed."

"He was very loyal to his players and to his other coaches, doing all those things I think you need to do if you want to have success in the Big Ten. Again, Indiana had intermittent success, but he wanted to build a program that would be consistently successful for many years to come."

Burgeoning Rivalry

Heading into the 1987 matchup with the Buckeyes, the Hoosiers were again off to a strong start to the season, and since the previous year's matchup was only a two-point-win for Ohio State, the anticipation of that game, at least internally, must have felt like that of a true rivalry.

It's hard to call a matchup a rivalry when any team had as dominant a stretch as the one Ohio State had against Indiana from 1952-1986, as the Buckeyes went 30-0-1 in the series during that span. However, at least in the late 1980s, the Buckeyes and Hoosiers had a lot of the key characteristics of a heated rivalry. For starters, Mallory and then-Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce were well-acquainted with each other. Not only were Mallory and Bruce assistants together on the same staff in 1968, but they were basically adversaries every day in practice because Bruce was the interior offensive line coach while Mallory was the interior defensive line coach.

More importantly, a 36-year-old proclamation at that time made by Hayes cast a shadow over the entire matchup.

After the Buckeyes' 32-10 loss to the Hoosiers in Hayes's first year as the head coach in 1951, the program's leader vowed that he would never lose to Indiana again. Despite his continued success over the Hoosiers over his 28-year career, his dislike of Indiana continued for much of his tenure.

"I'm sure in preparation for whenever they played Indiana, that crept in," said BSB managing editor emeritus Mark Rea. "Earle and Bill were both on the staff, so I'm sure that was trickled down to them. When Earle got the Ohio State job and when Bill got the Indiana job, they were just coming at it from two different directions."

As tough as the 1986 Hoosiers were for the Buckeyes to get past, the 1987 team was even better. Led by star running back Anthony Thompson, the Hoosiers were a perfect representation of their coach, who was willing to put on a helmet in the trenches with his players to get his message across.

"They really were a physical football team, good hard running backs," Conley said. "The linemen were good blockers. They were their most physical team probably in the history of modern football at Indiana."

The physicality that the Hoosiers became known for under Mallory culminated in absolute domination in Columbus, as the Hoosiers defeated Ohio State 31-10 on Oct. 10,

the first time in 36 years they beat the Buckeyes.

Thompson led the Hoosiers with 126 yards on 34 carries, which included a 3-yard touchdown run in the first quarter, and Indiana quarterback Dave Schnell passed for 200 yards while completing 15 of 23 passes for two touchdowns.

Ohio State quarterback Tom Tupa threw two costly interceptions in the fourth quarter, contributing to the Hoosiers outscoring the Buckeyes 21-0 in the second half. The team's overall effort left Bruce devastated after the game.

"They did what they wanted to offensively and defensively against Ohio State in the second half," Bruce said after the game. "That's about it. I've been associated (with Ohio State) since I came in as a freshman in 1949, and it's got to be the darkest day I've seen in Ohio State football."

Bruce's brutal assessment of the impact of the game is still remembered by Buckeye fans today, and the game is still known as "Darkest Day I." Bruce's description didn't quite sit well with Mallory, and in the week after the game, the two assistants of the 1968 team shared a phone call.

"I think the only time they ever got crossways was when Earle called it the darkest day," Rea said, "and the way I remember, Mallory called Earle the next week and said, 'I don't appreciate that. We're trying to win over here too.' And I think Earle apologized, but he was just frustrated, Earle was."

On the Indiana side, the reaction was not just jubilation from at-best a deprived football fan base, but a sense of validation for what Mallory was building.

"It was almost one of those shock factors. Is this real? Not unlike (the 2024 Indiana season). It's like, 'What, we're 10-0? Is this real? Am I dreaming?'" Notter said. "But to be able to do that, to play the type of football they were able to play against the perennial powerhouse and come away with a win, it showed that, one, he was a good coach, and two, that Indiana could play that kind of football, and that's what made everybody have a real good feeling about Bill Mallory and about the program and what he could do for that program going forward."

"So without a doubt, a signature win. Probably his biggest signature win in his entire coaching career in Indiana, but also one that gave Indiana fans an opportunity to walk around with their heads held a little bit higher than they have been in the past."

Not only was the Ohio State loss monumental given its past dominance over Indiana, but it virtually eliminated any chance for seniors such as three-time All-America linebacker Chris Spielman to be named national champions. After the game, his only hope was that his team could win its remaining games.

"That's gone," Spielman said of his dream of winning a national championship. "Yeah, it's gone. There's still the Big Ten championship and the Rose Bowl – 10-1-1 isn't so bad."

The Buckeyes didn't go 10-1-1 though. Instead, they lost three of their next five games, and Bruce was fired on Nov. 17, four days before the team's matchup against Michigan. Bruce and the Buckeyes prevailed 23-20, but by 1988, Ohio State had a new coach in John Cooper.

In the aftermath of their win over the Buckeyes in 1987, the Hoosiers rattled off another signature win, beating Michigan 14-10

on Oct. 24 en route to an 8-3 regular-season record.

Their best regular-season finish since the 1967 season earned the Hoosiers a spot in the Peach Bowl against Tennessee. The Hoosiers fell 27-22 to the Volunteers in Atlanta, but the 1987 Hoosiers were a far cry from where they were when Mallory took over the program.

With Schnell and Thompson both returning, and Thompson specifically improving to become one of the best running backs in the entire country, it wasn't a huge surprise that Mallory's Hoosiers came into their Week 5 matchup with the Buckeyes undefeated in 1988.

What was surprising, at least to Ohio State fans, was the fact that Indiana beat the Buckeyes by an even bigger margin of 41-7 on Oct. 8.

"The 1987 game was supposed to be a fluke, and I think everybody at Ohio State regarded it that way," Rea said. "Earle called it the darkest day, and Bill Mallory certainly wasn't very happy about him calling that the darkest day. But then in '88 when Anthony Thompson just went crazy, it was the first time in my life – I hadn't been in that many press boxes, college press boxes – but that's the first time I ever heard cheering in a press box."

Thompson gained 190 yards on the ground on 32 carries with four touchdowns, and as a team, the Hoosiers gained 315 yards on 58 carries, in what was basically summarized by Cooper as physical domination by Indiana at the line of scrimmage.

"Their offensive line completely controlled the line of scrimmage and ran the ball right at us," Cooper said after the game. "They didn't do anything we hadn't worked on all week long. We played an eight-man front. They played a two-tight-end offense, and we took a defensive back out and played another linebacker, and they still ran the ball right down our throats. I thought we would at least slow them down a little bit, but we didn't seem to."

Mallory led the Hoosiers to a 7-3-1 regular season the rest of the way, while the Buckeyes sputtered to finish 4-6-1 in Cooper's inaugural season.

Mallory finally captured his first bowl win as the leader of the program, a 34-10 win over South Carolina in the Liberty Bowl. With the win, the Hoosiers had their first back-to-back eight-win seasons in the history of the program.

As legitimately good as Indiana was in those years and as poor as Ohio State was, the Hoosiers seemed to peak against the Buckeyes.

"I think, first of all, he knew Woody, and Earle was the head coach, of course, who replaced Woody and their history went back as assistants together here at Ohio State," Conley said of Mallory's track record of success against Ohio State. "He was a typical Big Ten coach. Big Ten coaches back then emphasized the running game a lot, and he recruited hard running backs."

According to Notter, it wasn't just familiarity with the Buckeyes that gave him a leg up, but also a sense of confidence that he instilled in his players because he used to coach for Ohio State.

"I think that also gave his team a little bit of confidence," Notter said. "I know our team,

and I know we can beat them. I think that mindset is going to help a group of football players, as opposed to somebody that just comes in bragging about what they think they know. But he actually knew."

As much confidence as Mallory's experience with the Buckeyes gave the Hoosiers, the head coach also might have given his players an extra chip on their shoulders that week.

"Mallory had a special affinity for Ohio State because he was an assistant coach there," Rea said. "And the whole Woody thing, and those two years, '87 and '88, he

probably had his best teams, and they just geared up for Ohio State. Like I said, in '87 I think they caught them unaware, but in '88 they were clearly the better team."

The edge that Mallory coached with when he did battle with his former team wasn't out of some vindictiveness but rather an eagerness to prove himself, according to Notter.

"You could see the fire in his eyes every time, he'd want to play them or play Michigan," Notter said. "He wanted to prove that he belonged in that same genre of those coaches and those teams, that he could coach a team and put together a team that could compete with those teams that he saw up close and firsthand."

In the 1989 game between the Buckeyes and Hoosiers, Cooper led Ohio State to its first win over Indiana since 1986, a 35-31 win on Oct. 14 in Ohio Stadium.

Mallory continued to be the thorn in Ohio State's side when he forced a 27-27 tie the next year on Oct. 13, but after that, he failed to beat the Buckeyes for the rest of his tenure as the Indiana coach.

Mallory's program faced some downturns in the second half of his reign. The Hoosiers were sub .500 in the Big Ten play in all but one of his final five seasons, with his last two seasons leading to his firing in 1996. The Hoosiers went 5-17 in those years and combined for just one Big Ten win in that time.

According to Notter, Mallory suffered from a few issues in those final years, including perhaps too much loyalty to his assistant coaches. What really doomed Mallory, though, was something that doomed the Indiana football program as a whole for decades: the basketball team.

"He was overshadowed by Bob Knight," Notter said about the fundraising generated by Mallory. "Everything was centered around Bob Knight. You had some really good coaches there. You look at Jerry Yeagley with the soccer team at that point. They were a perennial powerhouse, and Jerry had some success there, without a doubt, but it was still Bob Knight school."

Regardless, Mallory finished his 12-year tenure with the Hoosiers as the winningest coach in the program's history. He made six bowl games and had a winning percentage of .473, the highest of any Indiana coach since Bo McMillin (1934-1947). Mallory did so by competing against the likes of Notre Dame and Purdue for what talent there was in Indiana.

"Remember, he was in Indiana, and there's a lot of colleges in Indiana," Conley said. "You've got Notre Dame, you've got Indiana, and Ohio State and Michigan traditionally got the best players out of the Midwest. That was a time when you didn't go out of state a whole lot like they do now. Now it's a completely dif-

ferent game with the portal and everything like that. He exemplified what coaches were like in the Big Ten at that time: tough, hard-nosed guys who were good teachers and expected a lot from their players."

Indiana's ceiling has come into specific question in 2024 with first-year head coach Curt Cignetti at the helm. With key additions through the transfer portal such as quarterback Kurtis Rourke, wide receiver Elijah Sarratt and linebacker Aiden Fisher, the Hoosiers have won each of their first 10 games and come to Columbus on Nov. 23 looking to spoil the Buckeyes' season as they were able to do multiple times under Mallory.

It won't be easy for a school with the reputation of a basement dweller within the conference to become a legitimate contender for years to come, but according to Notter, it starts with keeping the current coaching staff around.

"I think for this to be sustained, one, you have to keep the coaching staff around. Indiana has always been seen as one of those potential steppingstone schools, where you come here, you have some success, and then you go on to bigger and better things," Notter said.

"Indiana needs to be a destination for someone to stay for a long period of time. I think with the way the game has changed because of NIL and the money that's now flowing into it, you can potentially keep someone like Cignetti around for a while and have that sustained success that then can continue on for years, rather than him having great success here for this year, maybe one or two more, and then some other big-time program snatches him up."

According to Rea, the ball is in the Hoosiers' court to determine what their ceiling looks like.

"The proof of that will be in what they do from here on out," Rea said. "It looks to me like they've got the coach they need. He obviously embraces the portal. I just think once again in a reconstituted Big Ten, it's going to be hard for an Indiana to compete with Ohio State, Penn State and USC – once they get it figured out – and the big-name teams. You think of Indiana, you think of basketball. You don't think of football. That's the minefield ahead of them. If they can navigate that, then they'll be fine, but looking at history, I have my doubts."

As of right now, Hoosier fans aren't focused on how good their team will be in five years, and who can blame them considering their team is a Big Ten championship and college football playoff contender. According to Notter, Mallory deserves a lot of credit for the new heights the program has reached.

"You've got a situation where the stadium is bigger, holds more people, and they're selling out with Indiana fans, and people aren't leaving at halftime to go out and tailgate, and people aren't giving their tickets away, just buying them maybe to see one or two games. People want to be there for every game now, because of the excitement around it, and that's where I think that ceiling can be lifted."

"But I also think you need to give credit to Bill Mallory. The old saying 'building on the shoulders of giants,' I think in a way, Bill Mallory was a giant for Indiana football, and what's happening today is building on some of that structure that he put in place 40 years ago."



Bill Mallory

Twists, Turns, Drama Punctuate '84 Season For OSU

Throughout the 2024 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* will publish historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "4." This week is part one of two in BSB's look back at the star-crossed 1984 season that included exciting victories and agonizing defeats.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

College Football Hall of Fame coach Lou Holtz has become famous for many sayings over the years – some of his own making and others he co-opted. For example, Holtz's quote that "Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you respond to it" is simply a takeoff on Thomas Edison's famous proclamation that "Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration."

But the Holtz homily that hit particularly close to home came in late 1978 when the former OSU assistant was on the short list of candidates to replace Woody Hayes after 28 years as head coach of the Buckeyes.

Holtz, who was coming off two successful seasons as head coach at Arkansas, was admittedly torn about whether he wanted to take on the challenge that came with succeeding such an iconic coach.

"You don't necessarily want to be the guy who follows the legend," Holtz reportedly said. "You'd probably rather be the guy who follows the guy who follows the legend."

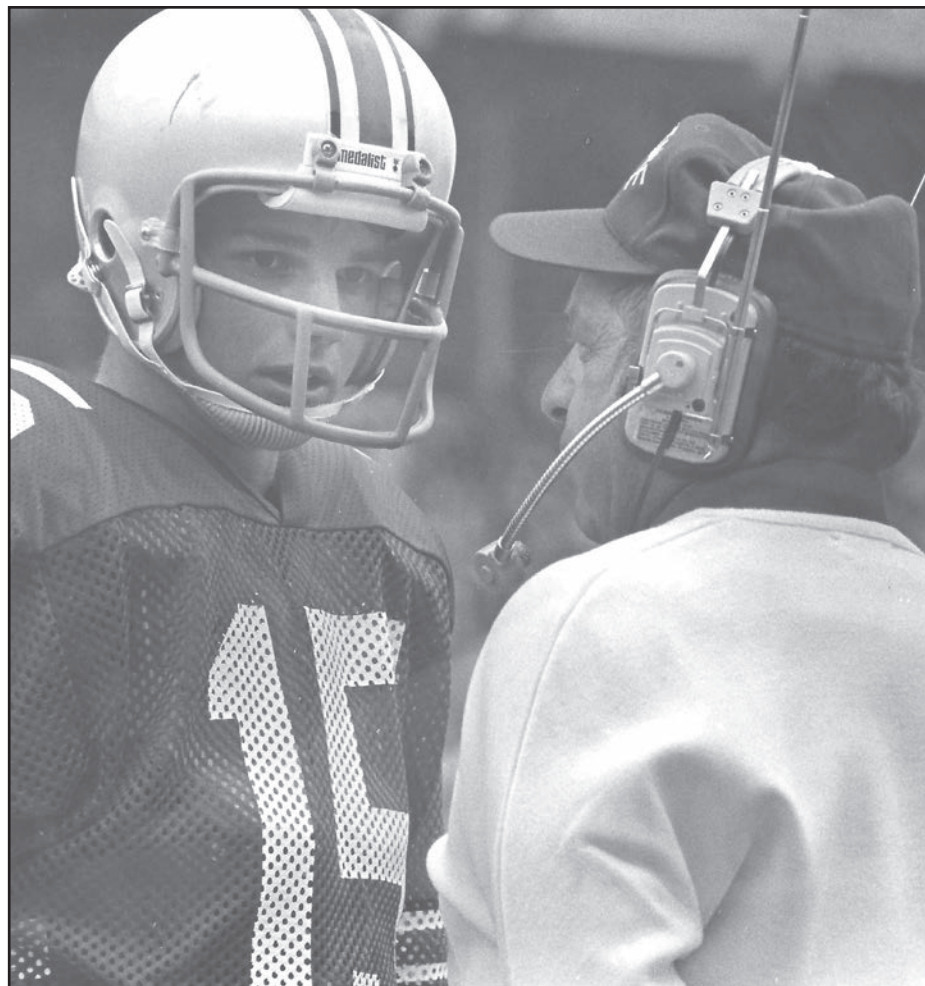
Earle Bruce didn't give a rip about legends or legacies or stepping into a spotlight with the huge specter of Hayes never far away. He just wanted to coach football at his alma mater, and when he was offered the job, he eagerly accepted.

"I realize it's a tremendous challenge to follow Woody Hayes, who is a legend in coaching," Bruce told reporters at his introductory press conference. "I guess I'm a guy who goes after challenges."

During his first season as head coach, Bruce took a roster mostly put together by his predecessor and came within a few inches (both literally and figuratively) of a national championship. The Buckeyes ran the regular-season table in 1979, ascending to the No. 1 ranking before losing a 17-16 decision to third-ranked USC in the Rose Bowl.

Unfortunately, Bruce's teams never again seriously challenged for college football's brass ring. After the 1979 season that ended with Ohio State in the No. 4 spot in both national polls, the Buckeyes retreated into a string of three-loss seasons that earned Bruce the derisive nickname of "Ol' 9-3 Earle."

Most pundits believed Bruce's team would be fortunate if it made it through the 1984 season with only three losses. The Buckeyes returned only eight starters from the previous year – three on defense and five on offense – and one of the returning offensive starters was quarterback Mike Tomczak, who had broken his leg during the



FILE PHOTO

UNDER CENTER – Senior quarterback Mike Tomczak, in discussion here with head coach Earle Bruce, returned from breaking his leg in the spring game to guide the Buckeyes in the 1984 season.

second quarter of the annual spring game.

"That was a huge blow," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "It was very uncertain at the time how quickly Tomczak would be able to recover and how effective he would be when he did come back."

"That team had some very good veteran players – Jim Lachey, Kirk Lowdermilk, Pepper Johnson and Keith Byars – as well as a tremendous freshman class that included Chris Spielman and Cris Carter. But going into the fall without their starting quarterback made for a huge question mark."

Lachey, on his way to consensus first-team All-America honors at guard in 1984, said the team was confident heading into the season even with their starting quarterback on the mend.

"You always go into a season with high hopes, and that one wasn't any different," said Lachey, who after an All-Pro career in the NFL has been color analyst on Ohio State football radio broadcasts for nearly 30 years. "We had lost some starters from the year before, and we didn't know how long Mike was going to be out."

"But the year before, we'd lost three games by a total of 13 points. We thought we were very close to becoming a Big Ten championship team, and ultimately we were. There were a few bumps along the way, of course."

As to Lachey's point, the 1984 season became a typical one during the nine-year Bruce era – one that featured big victories, heartrending losses, and just enough drama

to keep Buckeye Nation on the edge of its seat from start to finish.

Ohio State began the season with sophomore Jim Karsatos at quarterback, and despite falling into a 14-3 halftime hole against Oregon State in the opener, the Buckeyes rallied for a 22-14 victory. Carter made his collegiate debut with two receptions for 20 yards, while Spielman registered 10 tackles in a relief role after repeatedly pestering Bruce to allow him to play.

Tomczak returned the following week to lead a 44-0 blowout of Washington State and then engineered a 45-26 win against 14th-ranked Iowa to avenge a loss to the Hawkeyes the previous year. OSU took advantage of four turnovers by the Hawkeyes, including a 25-yard interception return for a touchdown by linebacker Larry Kolic to give his team a 24-10 lead midway through the second quarter.

The fact Kolic was even in the game, much less making a key pick-six, was somewhat ironic. The junior linebacker had quit the team for personal reasons following the season opener before changing his mind and returning the Monday following the Washington State game.

The Buckeyes went on the road for the first time in Week Four to take on a rebuilding Minnesota team with Holtz in his first season as head coach. The Gophers, who were on their way to a 4-7 finish that year, were no match for Ohio State, losing a 35-22 decision that was not as close as the final score indicated.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

OSU ran out to a 21-0 lead in the second quarter and then put things on cruise control. Byars rushed for 164 yards and three touchdowns, Tomczak threw for 181 yards and two scores – both to Carter – and Johnson registered a game-high 13 tackles along with an interception.

Then just as the Buckeyes had jumped out to a 4-0 start that included rising to No. 2 in the national rankings, the inexplicable happened.

Fourth-Down Gaffe

By all rights, the early-October road trip to Purdue should have been uneventful. The Boilermakers, picked to finish seventh in the 1984 Big Ten race, already had their signature win with a 23-21 upset of eighth-ranked Notre Dame in the season opener. Plus, Bruce was undefeated in three previous meetings against Purdue.

The Buckeyes got off to a sluggish start but early in the third quarter took a 17-7 lead on a 14-yard touchdown run from Byars. The OSU tailback was on his way to a dominating performance that included rushing for a then career-high 191 yards and catching nine passes for another 102 yards.

But the Buckeyes turned the ball over twice during the game – a pair of crucial Tomczak interceptions in the second half.

Purdue executed an 88-yard scoring march to close within 17-14 at the 5:26 mark of the third quarter, but Ohio State quickly countered on its next possession. Fullback John Woolldridge broke loose for an 18-yard gain immediately followed by a 22-yard scamper by Byars to push into Purdue territory.

Tomczak kept the onslaught going by picking up 19 yards on a keeper around right end, but then disaster struck. Two plays later, Purdue cornerback Don Anderson intercepted Tomczak and made a short return to his own 20. Eight plays later, the Boilermakers were in the end zone, sitting on a 21-17 lead with 14:03 remaining in the game.

Eager to make up for his mistake, Tomczak led the Buckeyes back to near midfield, converting a couple of third-down situations along the way. But facing a third-and-12 at his own 45-yard line, the Ohio State QB got greedy. As Tomczak tried to get a pass to wideout Doug Smith, Purdue safety Rod Woodson jumped the route, snatched the ball from Smith's grasp, and raced 55 yards down the sideline with the interception.

Suddenly, the Boilermakers had a 28-17 lead with 10:03 left to go.

Still, the Buckeyes had three more chances to score. The first opportunity ended when Purdue cornerback Cris Dishman batted away a fourth-down pass in the end zone, but the second resulted in a 5-yard touchdown pass from Tomczak to Carter that pulled Ohio State within five points at 28-23 with 2:38 remaining.

The OSU defense followed by forcing a three-and-out possession from Purdue, which punted the ball back to the Buckeyes.

Taking over at his own 17 with 1:23 on the clock, Tomczak tried to mount a last-ditch effort that had more twists and turns than a roller coaster. He completed his first two passes of the drive for a total of 25 yards and then misfired badly on his next two attempts. That was followed by an intention-

al-grounding penalty that gave the Buckeyes a seemingly insurmountable fourth-and-25 at their own 27 with just 47 seconds remaining.

But somehow Tomczak found Carter along the sideline and connected with his freshman receiver for 27 yards to keep Ohio State in the game.

The Buckeyes advanced as far as the Purdue 34-yard line, but faced with another fourth down and time ticking away, Tomczak experienced what could only be described as a brain freeze. Eager to save precious seconds, the QB took the snap and quickly flipped the ball out of bounds before realizing it was fourth down.

Sinking to the ground with both hands on his helmet, a dejected Tomczak watched as Purdue took over with just five seconds remaining and closed out the 28-23 upset win.

"You get caught up in the game of football," the OSU quarterback told reporters after the game. "What can I say? I'm human, so I'm subject to error every once in a while. I made an example of it today."

Inside a delirious Purdue locker room, Woodson explained his upset-minded team was out for a measure of respect.

"At the Big Ten preview in Chicago, (Bruce) forgot to mention us," the Boilermakers DB said. "Maybe he thought there were only nine teams in the Big Ten. Hopefully, he'll remember us now."

Everyone in the conference was getting to know the Boilermakers. By virtue of its victory against Ohio State, Purdue now led the Big Ten standings with a perfect 3-0 league record with four teams – Illinois, Iowa, Michigan and OSU – each lurking be-

hind with just one conference loss.

That set up what amounted to an elimination game in Columbus the following weekend between Ohio State and Illinois. Advance billing had the game as a matchup between the Fighting Illini and their high-octane passing attack against what was perceived to be a flawed OSU pass defense.

What transpired was one for ages.

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2025 RB Rogers Decommits From Alabama

One of Ohio State's top remaining targets in the 2025 class, Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony Rogers (5-8, 190) decommitted from Alabama on Nov. 17.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Rogers was on campus for Ohio State's 45-0 win over Purdue on Nov. 9 for an official visit after the Buckeyes had spent months trying to flip the four-star prospect.

He said that he will not commit to another school yet, but he did specify when he would, telling On3 that he will be choosing between Georgia and Ohio State on Dec. 4, when prospects will be signing with schools.

The back had been committed to the Crimson Tide since June of 2023 but had been exploring his options, taking multiple visits elsewhere while he was pledged there, including an unofficial visit to Columbus in May of this year.

Running backs coach Carlos Locklyn seems to have built a strong relationship with Rogers since he started recruiting the back, Locklyn sending an offer to Rogers just 12 days after he began in his new position.

In nine games his senior season, Rogers has 221 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 36 carries along with 42 catches for 478 yards and four touchdowns through the air. He is the No. 141 player in the class by 247Sports composite and the No. 8 running back.

If Rogers does join Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class, he would be the third running back, joining Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star Isaiah West (5-11, 208).

2026 WR Ricketts Commits to Ohio State

Ohio State earned its second commitment in the 2026 class from Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) on Nov. 16.

Hours after the Buckeyes beat Northwestern 31-7 at Wrigley Field, Ricketts decided he wanted to be a Buckeye and pledged his services to wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, who has become the top wide receiver recruiter in the country.

"Coach Hartline was a big factor," Ricketts told 247Sports. "He's the man. I love Coach Hartline. And working with all the great coaches there, at Ohio State, they can develop me to where I want to be.

"It's Receiver U. They will develop me as one of the best receivers. I think they can really develop me."

Ricketts doesn't have a ranking by 247Sports composite, but he had eight other offers, seven of which were from MAC schools, along with one from Illinois, but ultimately he decided to stay close to home.

"They have a lot of success at Ohio State," Ricketts said. "And it's a great education. There were a lot of people in my ear telling me Ohio State is great. Staying close to home, my family is happy."

He joins Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), the top player in the 2026 class, as the only two

Ohio State commits in the cycle to this point.

Ohio State originally offered Ricketts in June after he had an impressive performance at a recruiting camp in front of Hartline, showing off his speed that he boasts as a track star for Watkins Memorial, recording a time of 10.88 seconds in the 100-meter dash as a senior.

Hartline is already off to a great start in the 2026 recruiting cycle, but he will continue to go after more top players, with offers out to 12 other receivers in the class already.

Penn State Trying To Flip WR Porter

When it comes to recruiting during the football season, a lot of focus goes into trying to keep committed players from flipping to other schools and hoping to hold onto them until the early signing period.

Ohio State has been successful so far keeping all of its prospects committed, but there are multiple players whom other schools are trying to go after. Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star wide receiver Quincy Porter (6-3, 190) is one of those players, who paid a visit to Penn State during its 35-6 win over Washington on Nov. 9.

After the game, a video was posted to Twitter showing head coach James Franklin talking to and embracing Porter – seen sporting a blue Penn State coat in the video – which started conversations about whether the Nittany Lions would be able to pull off the flip.

The visit was significant because Porter's school primarily plays its games on Saturdays, and with Bergen Catholic off from play that week before the NJSIAA tournament, this was his first open Saturday since Oct. 5, and he decided to use that to take an unofficial visit to State College, Pa.

Porter had gone on an official visit to Penn State before he officially committed to the Buckeyes on May 31, a week before his official visit to Columbus, and at that point, he talked with 247 Sports about how the visit with Nittany Lions offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki and wide receivers coach Marques Hagans went.

"Coach Hagans and the OC explained how they would use me," he said. "We spoke with them and had good conversations. They told me how they would use me in their offense."

Ohio State and Penn State ended up being the only official visits Porter made since he canceled trips to Michigan and Oklahoma after he pledged his services to the Buckeyes.

Before Bergen Catholic's state quarterfinal 41-10 win over Seton Hall Prep on Nov. 16, Porter had 47 catches for 823 yards and 10 touchdowns his senior year. He was one of 100 selections for the Navy All-American Bowl, along with many other Buckeye commits.

It's starting to seem like Porter's recruitment, along with multiple others, could be one that comes all the way down to Dec. 4 when the early signing period begins.

Alford Invited To Navy All-American Bowl

Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) is another 2025 Ohio State commit who was invited to the Navy All-American Bowl that will be played in San Antonio on Jan. 11, 2025. He told 247Sports that he was excited to get that recognition as one of the top high school players in the country.

"It was an exciting moment, a grateful moment," he said. "It's something you dream

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

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
Jaeden Ricketts	WR	6-0	187	NA	Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial

about finally coming through."

His goal in the game is to "ball out" so that he can jump in the recruiting rankings, looking to a player who did so last year as motivation.

"I watched it last year," Alford said. "I remember (Minnesota freshman Koi Perich) came in as a three-star and he just balled out. He had two picks, and (some recruiting services) jumped him in the rankings so much."

Alford, the No. 103 player in the country and the No. 9 linebacker, might not have as much opportunity to move up the rankings as Perich was able to, but he can still show that he is ready to compete with some of the best competition at the national level before he gets onto a college campus.

But before he plays in that game, Alford will have to make a decision about where he is ultimately going to sign. Like Porter, he is another possible flip candidate who has been exploring other options. Alford visited Columbus earlier this season for a game day but has also made two in-season visits to Miami (Fla.) and an official visit to Florida State, and he has also reportedly been talking with Illinois.

"I am trying to make up my mind before Dec. 4," he said. "Once my mind is made up, everybody else will find out on Dec. 4.

"I just want to go wherever God leads me to," Alford said. "I feel like all of them have their pluses and minuses. At FSU and Illinois and Miami and Ohio State, I feel like I would get early playing time and things like that. I feel like at FSU and Miami, I would probably be able to show my skill set more because I feel like they allow their linebackers to be more athletes more than Ohio State does."

Alford told 247Sports that he is not going on another visit and is making his decision this month based on the information he already

has, but most recently he said he was locked in with the Buckeyes and was planning to enroll early for classes in January to be around for spring practices.

However, on Nov. 17, On3's Steve Wiltfong made an expert prediction that the Miami Hurricanes would pull off the flip for Alford, taking him from the Buckeyes' 2025 class. If Alford does flip, it would hurt what is the current No. 1 class in the country.

OSU Offers 2027 RB Kimble

Locklyn has been extremely busy on the recruiting trail ever since he arrived on campus in April. Immediately he began handing out scholarship offers to players he was recruiting when he was at Oregon, and he hasn't slowed down much during the football season.

He's been the busiest of the Buckeye position coaches when it comes to looking forward to the 2027 class, offering 10 running backs who are currently high school sophomores, including his most recent to Buffalo (N.Y.) Canisius running back Elijah Kimble (5-10, 180).

Kimble told 247Sports after he received the offer from Locklyn that he was waiting on the Buckeyes to offer him.

"The offer means a lot," Kimble said. "This is the big one I was waiting for considering I've already visited twice prior to this.

"I love the culture of OSU from the historic team all the way to the amazing band."

Even though Kimble seems very high on the Buckeyes, Bill Greene, a recruiting analyst at Buckeye Scoop, told BSB it's still much too early to be making any predictions about where Kimble will end up, especially since Ohio State has offered so many running backs in the class already.

ASK AN ANALYST with Buckeye Scoop's Bill Greene

Carrollton, Ga. four-star cornerback Dorian Barney (6-1, 175) visited for the game against Nebraska and recently decommitted from Alabama. How involved will the Buckeyes be in the 2026 prospect's recruitment, and will they be one of the favorites to land him?

"I don't know about favorites, but they're definitely involved, because he was at Ohio State before. He's been there a couple of times. In this era of recruiting, he's going to have offers from everyone. He probably already does have offers from everyone. He's a 6-1 corner, long arms, plays great competition at Carrollton. Everybody's going to want him. You have to look at the NIL part of this. I mean I would if I were that kid. He's crazy if he doesn't because he's going to get a ton of money in NIL wherever he goes. Texas A&M kind of sticks out to me a little bit, but then he's a Georgia kid. Do they let him get out of there? Does he want to come north? He's been to Ohio State a couple of times already.

"I don't think you're going to see anything soon out of him. I don't care if he commits again somewhere else, you know this kid's going to take all of his visits. He's not going to make a commitment soon, take one official visit, and stick with that school. That is not going to happen. I've seen this movie before.

"I would bet this kid is going to be a late decision, a late-fall into December decision, just trying to read the tea leaves with him. He's been to Ohio State twice already, so he's interested. But I really think his recruitment is going to get good a year from now. So it's fun to follow. It's going to be fun to follow him, that's for sure. The summer visits will be great to see where he goes, and then the official visits next year will be great. But it's a little too soon to get hepped up on this guy.

"I know Ohio State will be in it, and then you have to outfight Alabama, Georgia, A&M. A&M with its money – and he's been there – is one to watch. Everybody's one to watch. But Ohio State's definitely in it, and I would take that kid today, especially if I could sign him today. He's a dude, there isn't a doubt. He's a Denzel Burke type to me when I watch his film. The guy could maybe play early. So, yeah, you fight that one to the death."

With so many Ohio and Midwest offensive line prospects in the 2026 class, are you expecting Ohio State to have a great offensive line class that cycle, and who are some of your favorites out of them?

"Well, I mean, if you go on history, it's hard to predict a great offen-

sive line class for Justin Frye because he's just not proven to be a great recruiter at this point. He's done OK. If you look at the 2025 class, you love Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), but after that, it's OK. But the advantage for him next year is that there are at least three offensive linemen in Ohio that have shown interest in Ohio State – high interest in Ohio State – that I would take in a minute.

"Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive lineman Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) is the highest rated in the group, and I don't know that he's head and shoulders above Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310). I would take both of those guys so quick, and I would take Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285). I would take those three kids today if I could get them, and then branch out nationally or regionally, but I'd want to lock those three up.

"I think they're all dudes. I think Guthrie could move inside potentially, but they need tackles right now. When you look at that roster, I don't like the tackle situation at all, and in the current class Carter Lowe's definitely a tackle, but they need more. I would take these three and start my recruiting with those three, and then I'd worry about national, regional, out-of-state, whatever.

"But those are three Ohio State-caliber recruits, in my opinion, and in any other year any of these three would be standalone recruits the way Carter Lowe is this year. But you have three of them in one class and you need that position group desperately. So I'm killing right now to get those three locked up in the hopper early and then branch out from there."

Penn State has been after Philadelphia Imhotep four-star defensive end and Ohio State commit Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225) for a long time and has seemed to ramp that up even more during football season. What have you heard on Mathis and how likely is he to flip?

"He took the Ohio State official visit recently and everything sounds good. Everybody's optimistic. They're cautiously optimistic. The key for him is what does he do in the next month – are all of his visits done? I'm not taking any more visits. I'm locked in with Ohio State. I'm not talking to any other schools. Is that the way it is? He's not saying that, and I think that is something that Ohio State would love to hear out of him.

"I think I read a comment from him where he said more visits could

be possible, and that is not what you want to hear. I would look at this the way. Ohio State's probably looking at this cautiously optimistic and I think he's a hell of a talent. I mean, I would fight for him.

"You're going to lose Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau after this year. I would put a lot of NIL money into that guy. You're almost done with the 2025 offensive line, so Mathis would get the bulk of the NIL money from me. I think they need a big-time pass rusher, which they really don't have even on the roster now. I mean, Sawyer's a heck of a player, JT is a heck of a player. They aren't 10-12 sack guys. That's not who they are. They're really good players, but they're not a Bosa or a Chase Young type where Mathis could be. I would fight hard for that kid, and I'm cautiously optimistic that they land him."

With the high school playoffs in full swing, who are some prospects you have been able to watch and who have you been most impressed with?

"Well, there's another tackle – and it's kind of weird that these things go in bunches. It's Mentor, Ohio, three-star Landry Brede (6-5, 280). I don't think he's as far along right now as Riley or Greer or Guthrie are, but he has a ton of upside – tall, long arms, real thin frame right now, so he's going to fill out. You almost hate to take four tackles in one class, but I don't know, move somebody inside. I would not be as high on him as I am on the previous three 2026 tackles, but this guy's one to watch for sure. He's going to be a Power Five player for someone, so you'd rather it be you.

"There's a 2026 cornerback that everybody knows about – Akron Hoban five-star Elbert Hill (5-10, 175). He has a chance to be a superstar. I mean, he's as talented to me as Jordan Hancock, Denzel Burke or Davison Igbinosun. Anybody they put on the field. Elbert Hill's got a chance to be really something. Then there's Strongsville, Ohio, four-star linebacker Storm Miller (6-3, 220), who I think is the next Tommy Eichenberg. And they have offered him, they know about him. His brother (Blake Miller) plays at Clemson. This won't be a layup for Ohio State by any means, but I really like Storm Miller. I think he's way better than what he's rated.

"Those three right there have really stuck out toward the end of the year for me. I love the 2026 class overall, especially the offensive linemen. I mean, my God, if you could lock them up, it takes so much pressure off having to go get a kid out of California or Texas who you're fighting the world for. So I would probably offer Brede and take him."

"I haven't seen him play, but you watch his film and he's good," Greene said. "But he's 2027, so he's a baby and his recruitment is 100 miles away. Ohio State has offered a ton of running backs in the 2027 class. To me, this offer is more of, 'We know who you are, we're aware of you, we like you. Let's get this relationship going over the next couple of years.'

"I don't think this kid could call today and throw his hand up and say, 'Hey, I'm in.' I don't think that could happen. But he's definitely someone that you want to track."

Kimble was on campus for the Buckeyes' 45-0 win against the Boilermakers and liked what he saw from the offense.

"I love how physical the offense is and everybody is involved," he said. "Everybody is a threat when it's their turn to get going."

He was able to make the visit because Canisius had a bye in the playoffs that weekend. He had 154 carries for 1,211 yards and 21 touchdowns in the regular season, following up a big freshman season in which he ran for 1,821 yards and 19 touchdowns.

Henry Talks Oregon Visit

Prior to Ricketts' pledge, Ohio State had just one commitment in the 2026 class. Henry (6-5, 205) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on July 28, 2023. Since then, he has maintained that he is committed to the Buckeyes and intends to be in Columbus for college, but he has also not shied away from taking visits elsewhere, Oregon being one of those places.

Henry took another visit to Oregon for its 39-18 win over Maryland on Nov. 9 and talked with On3 about how that visit went.

"The atmosphere was crazy at the Maryland game," Henry said. "What keeps taking me back to Oregon is how close I am with the

coaches and how they are doing something special there.

"I'm really close with (co-offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Junior Adams)," Henry said. "I love the culture there. My interest in Oregon is really high. Oregon will be one of my official visits."

Although the interest in Oregon seems real, Henry did visit Ohio State for a game this season along with a couple of his high school teammates and was also on campus for a recruiting camp in June, where he told reporters that he is "locked in" with Ohio State. He is also planning on going back to Columbus for the Buckeyes' Nov. 30 matchup against Michigan.

"I'm always locked in," Henry said. "I'm just still enjoying the process of just being a recruit because this is only happening one time. So, you know, I'm still going to just enjoy it. The other schools, I tell them, 'Yeah, it's going to be really hard to try and get me to flip, because it's Ohio State. This is where I want to be.'"

Those comments were made after Henry had already moved to California from Cincinnati, where he attended Withrow High School for his freshman and sophomore seasons. Now, Henry has played a season of football in Southern California that was cut short due to a knee injury.

No matter how hard Oregon or other schools push to flip Henry – it might be possible to do – it's going to be hard to pull him away from Hartline, who has proved that he can take prospects and not only help them have a great college career but also prepare them well for a future in the NFL.

"I enjoy (working with Hartline) every time. Just being out here, learning from him, picking up new things, it's just been great. I always enjoy coming out here," Henry said after the camp. "I feel more fluid and more smooth every

time I come out here."

Stallions Coaching Michigan QB Target

The man at the center of the Michigan sign-stealing scandal, Connor Stallions, has found a new coaching position in the high school ranks. He is now a member of the coaching staff at Belleville, Mich., which is where five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205) plays.

Underwood, the No. 1 overall prospect in the entire 2025 class, is committed to LSU and has been since January, but recently his name has been in recruiting news as a possible flip to the Wolverines since it was reported that they were preparing to offer the prep quarterback a \$10.5 million NIL deal over four years, an increase from the initial report of an offer that was over \$5 million.

Those rumors seemed to be quashed – at least for the time being – late on Nov. 14 when the consensus top 2025 prospect reposted, then deleted, a graphic on his Instagram story that said he was "likely to decline Michigan's \$10.5 million offer."

Regardless, the Wolverines are still likely to aggressively pursue the in-state quarterback, and now Stallions will coach the five-star for the remainder of what is left of his high school career.

Stallions, who resigned from Michigan last November due to the NCAA investigating his involvement in the sign-stealing scandal, previously served on the football staff at Detroit Mumford earlier this season. He joined the Belleville staff after the regular season, and Tigers co-head coach DeJuan Rogers believes he has been a valuable addition.

"Connor – he's been a great tool for us in enhancing how we attack opposing defenses,"

Rogers told CBS Detroit.

Whether it flips Underwood or not, Michigan has been having recent success on the recruiting trail, landing commitments from Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley Northwest five-star offensive tackle Andrew Babalola (6-6, 280) on Oct. 21 and Chester (Va.) Thomas Dale four-star cornerback Shamari Earls (6-2, 180) on Nov. 1, both of the 2025 class. The Wolverines have the 11th-ranked 2025 recruiting class by 247Sports with 264.47 total points, third in the Big Ten behind Ohio State (No. 1 in the nation, 308.67) and Oregon (No. 9, 271.71).

OHSAA Playoffs Head To Quarterfinals

Division I, Region 2 – No. 8 Huber Heights Wayne (7-5) at No. 5 Hilliard Davidson (8-4): Five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 160) – a 2027 Buckeye target – and the Wayne Warriors continued their run through the region with a 31-7 win and now need just one more win to make it to the state semifinals. They match up against No. 2 Centerville in the regional finals.

Division I, Region 4 – No. 6 Cincinnati Xavier (9-3) at No. 2 West Chester Lakota West (11-1): Four-star linebacker Jakobe Clapper (6-2, 196) continued his run through the postseason as well when Xavier beat Lakota West 16-13. The Bombers will match up against No. 1 Cincinnati Moeller to try to get to the final four.

Division II, Region 5 – No. 3 Macedonia Nordonia (10-2) at No. 2 Akron Hoban (10-2): Three star-linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 230), a 2025 Ohio State commit, as well as five-star

Continued On Page 24

5-Star CB Commit Offord Target For Flip

Continued From Page 23

cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 175) and four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310) – both 2026 targets – moved onto the regional final as well, beating Nordonia 48-13 and moving on to play No. 1 Cuyahoga Falls Walsh Jesuit on Nov. 22.

Division II, Region 6 – No. 5 Wadsworth (11-1) at No. 1 Avon (12-0): Four-star athlete Jakob Weatherspoon (5-11, 172), who is a target in the 2026 class for the Buckeyes, and Avon eased to a 41-10 win over Wadsworth to move on to play No. 2 Medina Highland in the regional finals.

Division III, Region 9 – No. 3 Cuyahoga Falls Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy (10-2) at No. 2 Gates Mills Gilmour Academy (12-1): Four-star tight end Brody Lennon (6-4, 220) moved on to the regional finals when Gilmour Academy won 35-28 on Nov. 15. The Lancers play No. 1 Youngstown Ursuline next.

Division III, Region 10 – No. 12 Lexington (7-5) at No. 1 Toledo Central Catholic (10-1): It was another easy win for four-star cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160) and the Fighting Irish, cruising to a 35-7 victory over Lexington. The next matchup for Central Catholic will be No. 7 Parma Padua Franciscan.

Division IV, Region 13 – No. 5 Cleveland Glenville (9-4) at No. 1 Mentor Lake Catholic (12-0): Four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225), a 2026 target for OSU, handed Lake Catholic its first loss of the season in a big 28-0 upset, moving on to the regional final in which it will play No. 2 Perry.

Division IV, Region 14 – No. 3 Ontario (11-1) at No. 2 Shelby (12-0): Four-star wide receiver Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180), who is committed to the Buckeyes as a wide receiver, also won over a previously undefeated team, taking down Shelby 49-48. The Warriors now play No. 1 Sandusky Perkins in the regional finals.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- A new challenger has emerged in the sweepstakes for Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185), after he went to Florida on Nov. 16 for the Gators' game against LSU. It has mainly been Auburn and Oregon that have been trying to pull Offord away from his Ohio State commitment, but visiting Gainesville shows that Offord is exploring even more options. With the early signing period quickly approaching, Offord's final decision will be coming soon.

- Carrollton, Ga., four-star cornerback

Dorian Barney (6-1, 175) decommitted from Alabama on Nov. 10 after having been in its 2026 class since May 19. The Buckeyes have been interested in the No. 83 player in the country and will undoubtedly be involved in his recruitment moving forward now that he has reopened it. He was at the Ohio State game against Nebraska on Oct. 26 and could visit Columbus again before the season ends, making the Buckeyes a strong contender for Barney.

- With the Indiana game on Nov. 23 turning into must-watch Big Ten football due to the Hoosiers coming into Columbus with a 10-0 record, more visitors have been scheduling visits to Ohio State for that weekend. One of those players who intends to make it for the game is Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 200). He is the No. 16 player in the class of 2026 and the No. 1 safety and will be making his first trip to Columbus since he was on campus for a recruiting camp in June, when he was initially offered by the Buckeyes. In August, Bradford released a top-five list of Alabama, LSU, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Oregon.

- Along with Kimble, the Buckeyes also sent out scholarship offers to Willis, Texas, four-star interior offensive lineman Day'jon Moore (6-3, 305) and Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School three-star offensive tackle Gabriel

Osenda (6-7, 320), both of the 2026 class. They are the No. 260 and 384 prospects in the country, respectively.

- A 2026 offensive lineman narrowed down his scholarship list to nine since BSB last went to press. Davison, Mich., four-star interior lineman Ben Nichols (6-5, 315) put the Buckeyes in that nine along with Alabama, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Penn State, Tennessee and Wisconsin. He is considered the No. 246 overall prospect in the class, the No. 16 interior lineman and the No. 3 player in the state of Michigan.

- A new Big Ten rival lost its 2025 quarterback commit. Carrollton, Ga., five-star Julian Lewis (6-1, 185) – formerly a USC pledge – decommitted from the Trojans after he received a "Crystal Ball" to flip to Colorado from 247Sports national recruiting analyst Tom Loy. Lewis visited Colorado earlier in the season and was supposed to visit Indiana on Nov. 9, but those plans fell through. Lewis had been committed to USC since the summer of 2023. Shortly after the decommitment, the Trojans were able to replace Lewis with Corona (Calif.) Centennial five-star quarterback Husan Longstreet (6-2, 195), who is the No. 34 prospect in the 2025 class and the No. 6 signal caller.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Recruiting can be a confusing thing, especially for young high schoolers who become the darlings of major college coaches. Take Lorain (Ohio) Admiral King's Brian DeMarco for example.

Rated by many recruiting experts as one of the top offensive line prospects in the Midwest, DeMarco was sure of his talents on the football field. As to his choice of where he might have liked to play college ball, he was a little less sure.

In early October, DeMarco told the Ohio Football Recruiting News, "I've had a really hard time just narrowing my college possibilities down. I finally narrowed it down to Michigan, OSU, Michigan State, West Virginia, Nebraska and UCLA.

"I guess I would say right now Michigan and Michigan State have a slight lead. They already have established programs, which I like, but on the other hand, I like OSU a lot too.

"I went to one of (the Buckeyes') practices this year and was very impressed with their program. They're building a program that will be very good."

30 Years Ago — 1994

Perception is everything, especially when you are talking about recruiting. But when the perception turns into speculation, an anticipated bumper crop could turn into a poor harvest.

Ohio State appeared to have reached a crossroads similar to the one it had faced four years previous. After missing out on a trip to the Rose Bowl that season by a narrow loss to Michigan on Nov. 24, 1990, the Buckeyes suffered a disastrous loss 23-11 in the Liberty Bowl to Air Force and practically had to beg high school players to sign with them.

As a result, top-notch players such as Westerville South running back Ki-Jana Carter left for other schools and were now coming back to haunt Ohio State.

The Buckeyes were able to rebound from that recruiting fiasco, ascending to the Big Ten throne the year prior and putting together strong recruiting classes three years in a row.

But with the 1994 season winding down and speculation flying around regarding John Cooper's future as head coach as it did in late 1990, the potential for another outstanding recruiting season appeared to be up in the air.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Burton (Ohio) Berkshire offensive lineman Dan Taylor had been to OSU for a game that season, but he was awaiting scholarship offers.

"I don't get a lot of publicity playing for a small Division V school in northeast Ohio," Taylor told The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer. "Nobody knows where Burton is. I think Kent and Tennessee are the only schools that have been to see me play."

Taylor (6-6, 320) had received more recognition for his track and field exploits. He won the state discus title in Division III in 1998 and had competed nationally in both the shot and discus.

Football staffs at OSU, South Carolina, Minnesota and several MAC schools had stayed in contact. OSU and South Carolina had also offered track scholarships. Taylor attended the OSU summer football camp.

20 Years Ago — 2004

When asked about his star wide receiver, Brian Robiskie, Chargin Falls (Ohio) High School head coach Mark Iammarino practically gushed.

"He's a solid citizen and a very polite, very mature young man," Iammarino said. "Everybody who comes across his path, whether it's a coach or a teacher or a classmate, he makes a positive impression, and that goes a lot of the way to how he was brought up by his mom and dad. He's polite and he's a good citizen and a good student."

These kinds of plaudits were common in the recruiting process. Most every coach holds some sort of affinity for his star player, and everyone wants to portray that player in the most positive light possible.

In the case of Robiskie, however, Iammarino turned out to not be exaggerating in the slightest. The high school senior came off as a polite, articulate young man, traits not always found among the country's top prep athletes, particularly those who weren't even old enough to view R-rated movies.

15 Years Ago — 2009

They would be teammates, but for at least one weekend, a number of future Ohio State football players found themselves lining up on opposite sidelines.

State high school playoffs had begun in Ohio, and two of the first week's pairings had OSU verbal commitments squaring off against one another. Toledo Whitmer junior four-star strongside defensive end Ken Hayes (6-4, 245) and his teammates hosted Canton McKinley and junior four-star defensive lineman Steve Miller (6-5, 218) on Nov. 7.

Farther east, two other OSU verbal commitments were in action. Cleveland St. Ignatius with senior four-star linebacker Scott McVey (6-0, 218) took on Youngstown Boardman featuring three-star defensive end J.T. Moore (6-1, 246).

In the end it was Miller and McVey who lived to play another day.

10 Years Ago — 2014

The difficulties that had marked putting together the 2015 class were still being experienced, with Ohio State still hoping to climb into the top 10 of the Scout.com team rankings from its perch at No. 12, but the 2016 class was already close to making those problems a distant memory.

Commitment No. 4 for Ohio State's class of 2016 was announced Nov. 14, when Gahanna (Ohio) Lincoln four-star defensive end/linebacker Jonathon Cooper (6-3, 234) pledged to the Buckeyes. It had technically arrived weeks earlier, though, when Cooper silently committed to OSU head coach Urban Meyer.

"I actually committed to Ohio State at the Rutgers game a month ago but didn't want it public so it wouldn't be a distraction to my team," Cooper said. "I told Coach Meyer before the Rutgers game in person, and he was really excited. He gave me a big hug and welcomed me into the Buckeye family, so it was a great moment.

"Ohio State was an easy choice because it's right here at home, and I love the coaching staff. I've grown up here, so I see this as a 40-year decision, not a four-year decision."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Though it was arguably Ohio State's biggest game of the season, the game against Penn State was set to kick off at noon on FOX.

It marked the Buckeyes' sixth noon start of the season to that point, with the Nov. 30 game at Michigan also scheduled for the early time slot. And while Meyer had pushed for more night games during his tenure for recruiting purposes, head coach Ryan Day believed start times had little to no impact on Ohio State's recruiting efforts in the fall – particularly as that staff had placed a renewed emphasis on the state of Ohio.

"If someone doesn't have an off week or is playing on a Friday night, it's hard to get them in if they live a little farther away for a noon game," Day said during his weekly press conference on Nov. 7. "If it's a night game it's a little easier. But for local schools and recruits from Ohio that live within a three- or four-hour radius of campus, they can get here for a noon game, which is good."

Of course there were some who believed that a night game created a better atmosphere than a noon kickoff. But a majority of Ohio State's premier games in recent seasons started before the sun went down, and the Buckeyes had still recruited at an elite level regardless.

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State sent out an offer on Nov. 6 to Coopersville, Mich., three-star interior offensive lineman Gabe VanSickle (6-5, 283), who had been committed to Northwestern since May.

VanSickle was the No. 860 overall prospect and the No. 61 interior lineman in the class, and he held additional offers from Bowling Green, Central Michigan, Indiana, Miami (Ohio), Northern Illinois and Western Michigan.

It had been a rapidly developing recruitment, but Ohio State's pursuit of VanSickle had little bearing on Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287), considering that VanSickle was strictly an interior prospect and Seaton could be a guard or tackle.

Plus, with the decommitment in September of Toledo Central Catholic three-star Marc Nave (6-5, 315), the Buckeyes were looking at adding at least one or two more recruits on the offensive line to join four-stars Devontae (6-5, 297) and Deontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong of Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward and New Palestine, Ind., four-star Ian Moore (6-5, 295).

OSU Ranked For First Time Since 2022-23

Ohio State's 80-72 upset win over No. 19 Texas to open the season on Nov. 4 turned the heads of many in the college basketball world, including AP voters.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

For the first time since the beginning of the 2022-23 season, the Buckeyes were ranked within the AP top 25, sitting at No. 11 in the Week 2 poll released on Nov. 11.

Ohio State earned 29 points in the AP top 25 voting system in the preseason poll – tied with Michigan State for the seventh most by any unranked team to start the year – but after the upset win over the Longhorns, it is ranked for the first time since Jan. 2, 2023, when the Buckeyes were slotted at No. 24 after a 73-57 win over Northwestern the day before, which improved their record to 10-3.

That was the final time they were ranked that season, with the team losing 14 of its next 15 games and ending the season 16-19 and 5-15 in the Big Ten. Ohio State then flirted with a return to the polls after an upset win over then-No. 17 Alabama last November before sputtering again at the beginning of conference play, a sequence of events that led to the firing of Chris Holtmann and elevation of Jake Diebler last February.

This season, with Diebler now in charge as full-time head coach, the Buckeyes are back in the polls and hoping to stay there for good. Ohio State's chances of staying in the polls took a significant blow since BSB last went to press after it fell on the road to No. 23 Texas A&M 78-64 for its first loss of the season. It was unclear if Ohio State would be ranked in the next top 25 poll set to be released on Nov. 18.

Regardless, Diebler said during a Nov. 14 media availability that although he has not thought much about what the ranking means to him and his team, he does feel it gives his players some validation for the efforts they have put in so far this season.

"I'm just happy our guys get some sort of validation publicly for the work they put in and what we feel is a really good team that has the potential to be a good team," Diebler said. "It's good to be rewarded for quality wins, but I hadn't really given that a lot of thought."

Ohio State was one of four Big Ten teams in the top 25 poll, joining No. 13 Purdue, No. 16 Indiana and No. 24 Rutgers. Kansas held the top spot for the second straight week, followed by No. 2 Alabama – which fell to Purdue 87-78 on the road on Nov. 15 – No. 3 UConn, No. 4 Gonzaga and No. 5 Auburn.

Bynum, Jones Put Pen To Paper On Signing Day

Ohio State officially added two members to its 2025 recruiting class on Nov. 13 when Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star center Amare Bynum (6-8, 210) and Cleveland

Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160) signed with the Buckeyes on the first day of the men's basketball early signing period.

Bynum is the higher-rated of the two early signees, joining Ohio State as the nation's 104th-best prospect, 18th-best center and sixth-best player out of Missouri. The Omaha, Neb., native committed to the Buckeyes on Oct. 22 over finalists Iowa, Colorado, LSU and Xavier, also holding offers from Creighton, Iowa State, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas Tech, among others.

The 6-8 Bynum is listed as a center but will likely transition to power forward at Ohio State. He is described by Ohio State as a "versatile forward who can defend either position and has an emerging offensive game," a set of skills that was on full display his junior season at Omaha Bryan where he averaged 21.1 points, 9.0 rebounds, 2.0 assists and 2.3 blocks per game before transferring to basketball powerhouse Link Academy for his senior year.

"I'm excited to welcome Amare to our Buckeye family," Diebler said. "He has great energy and great enthusiasm for the game, and he's someone that you just love to be around. Amare embodies what our program is about on and off the court."

"His versatility is what makes him special. He can handle the ball, he is comfortable both on the perimeter and inside, while being able to guard multiple positions. Buckeye Nation is going to enjoy watching him in scarlet and gray."

Jones was Diebler's first 2025 commit, pledging his services to the Buckeyes on July 1. He chose Ohio State over finalists Michigan, Rutgers and Missouri and held offers from Georgia Tech, Miami, Michigan State and Syracuse, among others.

The Cleveland native has been a highly sought-after recruit for Ohio State for a long time, getting an offer from the Buckeyes in July of 2022, and he comes into the program as the top-rated prospect out of Ohio and No. 108 overall prospect and No. 18 shooting guard.

Jones is already an accomplished player, helping lead Richmond Heights to a combined 73-13 record and three consecutive OHSAA Division IV state championships in his first three high school seasons. He averaged 14.1 points per game his junior year while earning first-team All-Ohio Division IV honors and was even more dominant as a sophomore, totaling 20.1 points per contest on his way to a Division IV Player of the Year honor.

"I've built a great relationship with Dorian and am glad that he's now officially a Buckeye," Diebler said. "There is a rich tradition of players from northeast Ohio in our program, and Dorian continues that. He has enormous potential as both a scorer and as a defender. He also comes from a great high school program in Richmond Heights that has won three consecutive state titles. Dorian knows how to win, and I'm excited for him to join our family."

Following the official signings of Bynum and Jones, the Buckeyes now own the 51st-best recruiting class for the 2025 cycle with 44.73 total points according to 247Sports, a mark that is 10th in the Big Ten. The Buck-

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
Amare Bynum	C	6-8	210	★★★★	Branson (Mo.) Link Academy
Dorian Jones	G	6-4	160	★★★★	Richmond Heights, Ohio

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

eyes are likely looking to add to that ranking by signing at least one more member to the 2025 class. Diebler said on Nov. 14 that they will add another player "if the right fit is there." But that addition likely won't come until the next signing period this spring, which will take place from April 16 to May 21.

Johnson Still Looking To Turn It On

Ohio State has experienced some early success this season despite getting less-than-stellar play from one of its top backcourt players.

In the Buckeyes' first two games against Texas and Youngstown State, fifth-year senior guard Meechie Johnson Jr. struggled to make a significant impact for his home-state team, scoring just six points on 2-of-11 shooting in the season opener against Texas before cracking double figures with 11 points on 4-of-7 shooting but adding four turnovers to his stat line against Youngstown State.

Although Johnson did begin to find his groove on offense against the Penguins, his numbers through the first two games were still short of the expectations those who follow the program have for the South Carolina transfer this season. Last year with the Gamecocks, Johnson earned second-team All-SEC honors by leading his team in scoring with a career-high 14.1 points per game on 39.9 percent shooting (32.1 percent from three) along with his 4.1 rebounds and 2.9 assists.

According to his head coach, Johnson's inefficiency through those first two games – which included a combined 33.3 percent shot percentage and a team-high seven turnovers – may have stemmed from his lack of control while driving to the rim, something that will need to be shored up as they get deeper into their season.

Johnson has missed several contested layups so far this year while making aggressive drives at the rim.

"I like Meechie's aggressiveness," Diebler said. "I like him driving the ball to the paint, like he did in the second half of the Texas game. He has to slow down a little bit. But we want him to be aggressive and want him to attack."

Johnson's ultra-aggressiveness has come back to bite him at times early on, creating

an underwhelming start for the Ohio native in his return to Columbus, but Diebler is confident that his veteran guard has much better outings in store in the near future.

"He's really done a good job in practice of reading the paint, and his assist numbers in practice have been really good. So I think it's only a matter of time until that gets cleaned up."

Despite Diebler's confidence, Johnson still has yet to get going for the Buckeyes. In the game against the Aggies, he scored just six points on 2-of-8 shooting and committed four more turnovers, putting his turnover total at a team-high 11 through three games.

Bates-Diop Making Team USA Debut

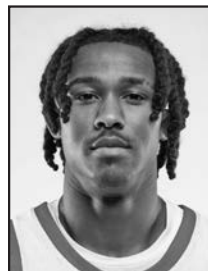
Former Ohio State forward Keita Bates-Diop will represent Team USA on the hardwood later this month as a member of the 12-player 2024 FIBA Men's AmeriCup qualifying team.

Bates-Diop, who is over six years removed from his playing days at Ohio State, will play for Team USA for the first time in his basketball career on Nov. 22 when the U.S. qualifying team hosts Puerto Rico in Washington, D.C., followed by another game against the Bahamas in the nation's capital on Nov. 25. Both games will be streamed on the website Courtside 1891, free to all users who register.

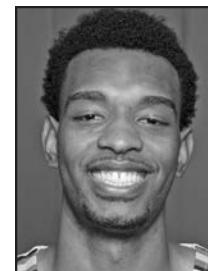
Bates-Diop will look to bring the United States one step closer to the

2025 FIBA AmeriCup held in Managua, Nicaragua, from Aug. 23-31, 2025, by creating some separation from the other three teams in their group, which also includes Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Bahamas. Team USA already holds a 1-1 record in Group D qualifying play after splitting games against Cuba back in February, when Bates-Diop was not on the roster.

Bates-Diop earns the chance to play for Team USA this fall after failing to make an NBA roster in camp. After being traded from the New York Knicks to the Minnesota Timberwolves – the team that drafted him in the second round of the 2018 NBA Draft – on Oct. 2 as part of a blockbuster deal that sent All-Star forward Karl-Anthony Towns to the Knicks, Bates-Diop was left off Minnesota's regular-season roster, leaving him unsigned with a team for the



Meechie Johnson Jr.



Keita Bates-Diop

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

year.

It was a final blow to what has been a difficult year for the former Buckeye at the professional level. He was traded three times in a span of eight months, first from the Phoenix Suns to the Brooklyn Nets in February, then from the Nets to the Knicks in July and finally from the Knicks to the Timberwolves in October.

Now, Bates-Diop, a former All-American and Big Ten Player of the Year winner at Ohio State in 2017-18, will get a chance to show his worth at the FIBA level with hopes of getting back into professional basketball play.

He joins a Team USA roster that has several journeymen players, including former Wisconsin star and eight-year NBA veteran Frank Kaminsky and former Philadelphia 76ers forward and 11-year veteran Robert Covington.

Notes And Tidbits

- In other recruiting news, Ohio State lost out in the recruiting battle for Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star shooting guard Davion Hannah (6-5, 175), who committed to Alabama on Nov. 15. Hannah, the nation's 33rd-best prospect, seventh-best shooting guard and No. 2 player out of Missouri, placed Ohio State in his final four along with Cincinnati, Missouri and the Tide, and it was previously reported by On3 that the Buckeyes had reportedly "made a push" for the Wisconsin native in recent weeks. On3 also reported that Ohio State is "losing momentum" in the recruitment of Hannah and Bynum's Link Academy teammate, four-star combo guard Jerry Easter (6-3, 183), whom the Buckeyes have been aggressively pursuing in this recruiting cycle. On3 still predicted Easter, the No. 36 overall prospect and fourth overall combo guard, will commit to either Ohio State or Vanderbilt, but a source told the outlet that USC has been gaining traction in the race. He is expected to announce his commitment sometime after signing day.

- Holtmann is off to a strong start at his new school. He has DePaul boasting a perfect 4-0 record as BSB went to press, leading the Blue Demons to wins over Southern Indiana on Nov. 4 (80-78, OT), Prairie View A&M on Nov. 7 (92-59), Mercer on Nov. 11 (95, 64) and Duquesne on Nov. 15 (84-58). With four wins on the year already, DePaul has already exceeded its win total from all of last season, when it went 3-29 overall and 0-20 in the Big East. "When is this program going to be relevant again? I don't have a crystal ball. I would not have come here if I didn't believe that is going to happen," Holtmann told CBS News Chicago earlier this season. "What I can tell those who love basketball in Chicago and have followed DePaul or maybe kept an eye on DePaul, we're going to get there. We are going to get there. It's going to take some time. What that timeline is going to look like, I'm not sure."

- Ohio State has hired a new public address announcer for the 2024-25 season. According to The Columbus Dispatch, Nick Wiget, who is also an in-stadium host for the Cincinnati Bengals and FC Cincinnati, among other teams, was behind the mic during the team's home opener against Youngstown State. Also on the mic inside Value City Arena that night was former Ohio State guard and fan favorite Joey

Lane, who made the call for the Big Ten Network alongside play-by-play man Connor Onion. Lane, who played at Ohio State from 2015-19 and was best known for his bench celebrations during games, is in his second year calling college basketball

games for the network.

- Ohio State made 14 and 10 three-pointers in its first two games of the season, respectively, the first time the program has ever connected on double-digit threes in consecutive games to open the

year. The Buckeyes, who were shooting 40.0 percent from long-range through three games after making 8-of-30 from beyond the arc against Texas, have five players shooting above 33.0 percent from the three-point line.

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (9-1, 6-1)

Aug. 31 AKRON, W 52-6.
Sept. 7 WESTERN MICHIGAN, W 56-0;
21 MARSHALL, W 49-14; **28** at Michigan State, W 38-7.
Oct. 5 IOWA, W 35-7; **12** at Oregon, L 32-31; **26** NEBRASKA, W 21-17.
Nov. 2 at Penn State, W 20-13; **9** PURDUE, W 45-0; **16** vs. Northwestern at Wrigley Field, W 31-7; **23** INDIANA; **30** MICHIGAN.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (2-1)

Oct. 18 at Cincinnati (Exh.), L 80-62.
Nov. 4 vs. Texas at Hall of Fame Series, Las Vegas, W 80-72; **11** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 81-47; **15** at Texas A&M, L 78-64; **19** EVANSVILLE; **22** CAMPBELL; **25** GREEN BAY; **29** PITTSBURGH.
Dec. 4 at Maryland; **7** RUTGERS; **14** vs. Auburn at Holiday Hoopsgiving, Atlanta; **17** VALPARAISO; **21** vs. Kentucky at CBS Sports Classic, New York; **29** INDIANA STATE.
Jan. 3 MICHIGAN STATE; **6** at Minnesota; **9** OREGON; **14** at Wisconsin; **17** INDIANA; **21** at Purdue; **27** IOWA; **30** at Penn State.
Feb. 2 at Illinois; **6** MARYLAND; **9** at Nebraska; **12** WASHINGTON; **16** MICHIGAN; **20** NORTHWESTERN; **23** at UCLA; **26** at USC.
March 4 NEBRASKA; **8** at Indiana; **12-16** Big Ten Tournament, Indianapolis

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (2-0)

Nov. 5 CLEVELAND STATE, W 104-69; **12** CHARLOTTE, W 94-53; **17** at Belmont, W 67-63; **20** at Ohio; **24** BOWLING GREEN; **28** vs. Old Dominion at Daytona Beach Classic, Daytona Beach, Fla.; **29** vs. Utah State at Daytona Beach Classic, Daytona Beach, Fla.
Dec. 8 ILLINOIS; **10** BALL STATE; **14** YOUNGSTOWN STATE; **17** GRAND VALLEY STATE; **20** vs. Stanford at Bay Area Women's Classic, San Francisco; **29** at Rutgers.
Jan. 5 NORTHWESTERN; **8** at Michigan; **12** OREGON; **16** at Wisconsin; **19** at Penn State; **23** MARYLAND; **26** at Nebraska.
Feb. 2 WASHINGTON; **5** at UCLA; **8** at USC; **13** MINNESOTA; **17** IOWA; **20** at Indiana; **23** PURDUE; **26** MICHIGAN STATE.
March 2 at Maryland; **6-10** Big Ten Tournament, Indianapolis.

CROSS COUNTRY

Aug. 30 Tommy Evans Invitational at Norton, Ohio, Men: 1st/8, Women: 2nd/10.
Sept. 20 Roy Griak Invitational at Minneapolis, Men: 5th/17, Women: 7th/17.
Oct. 4 Loyola Lakefront Invitational at Chicago, Men 9th/15, Women: 10th/16; **19** Wisconsin Pre-Nationals at Madison, Wis., Men: 3rd/25, Women: 5th/29.
Nov. 1 Big Ten Championships at Champaign, Ill., Men 10th/15; Women

8th/18; **15** NCAA Regional Championships at Norton, Ohio, Men 8th/31, Women 5th/32; **23** NCAA Championships at Madison, Wis.

FENCING

Sept. 28 OSU Open, NTS; **29** OSU Duals, Men 5-0; Women 5-0.
Nov. 2-3 West Invitational at La Jolla, Calif. Men 5-1; Women 7-1; **17** Elite Invitational at Philadelphia.
Jan. 18 St. John's Duals at Queens, N.Y.; **19** Philadelphia Invitational at Philadelphia.
Feb. 1-2 Northwestern Duals at Evanston, Ill.; **22-23** CCFC Championships at Detroit.
March 8 NCAA Midwest Regionals, TBA; **20-23** NCAA Championships at University Park, Pa.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (9-2-1, 2-2-0)

Oct. 6 Niagara (exh.) W, 3-2 (OT); **11-12** AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL, T 3-3; W 5-2; **18-19** at Wisconsin, W 2-1 (OT); W 2-1; **25-26** BOWLING GREEN, W 3-1; W 2-0.
Nov. 1-2 LAKE SUPERIOR STATE, W 9-3; W 6-2; **8-9** at Michigan State, L 4-2; L 4-1; **15-16** at Lindenwood, W 5-2, W 3-2; **29-30** at Princeton.
Dec. 5-6 PENN STATE; **13-14** NOTRE DAME.
Jan. 3 vs. Michigan at Wrigley Field in Chicago; **5** at Michigan; **10-11** MINNESOTA; **24-25** at Penn State; **30-31** MICHIGAN STATE.
Feb. 7-8 at Notre Dame; **14-15** WISCONSIN; **21-22** at Minnesota; **27-28** MICHIGAN.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (12-3-2, 7-3-2)

Sept. 21-22 MINNESOTA DULUTH, L 2-1; L 4-3; **27-28** at Bemidji State, W 8-2; W 3-0.
Oct. 4-5 at St. Lawrence, W 3-2 (OT), W 5-3; **11-12** MINNESOTA, W 4-3; T 1-1 (SOW); **18-19** at St. Cloud State, W 5-1; T 3-3 (SOL); **22** MERCYHURST, W 5-1; **25** ICEBREAKER TOURNAMENT vs. STONEHILL, W 11-0; **26** ICEBREAKER TOURNAMENT vs. CORNELL, W 7-3.
Nov. 1-2 at St. Thomas, W 5-1; W 1-0 (OT); **15-16** WISCONSIN, L 4-2, W 3-2; **22-23** at Minnesota State.
Dec. 2 at Mercyhurst.
Jan. 2 at Wisconsin; **4** at Wrigley Field in Chicago vs. Wisconsin; **10-11** BEMIDJI STATE; **17-18** at Minnesota Duluth; **24-25** MINNESOTA STATE; **31** at Minnesota.
Feb. 1 at Minnesota; **7-8** ST. THOMAS; **21-22** ST. CLOUD STATE; **28** WCHA Quarterfinals.
March 1-2 WCHA Quarterfinals.

MEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 9-15 Las Vegas Challenger, NTS; **16-22** COLUMBUS CHALLENGER, NTS; **21-29** ITA All-American Championship at

Tulsa, Okla., NTS.

Oct. 7-13 Louisville 25K Futures at Louisville, Ky., NTS; **10-15** ITA Midwest Regional Championship at East Lansing, Mich., NTS.

Nov. 7-10 ITA Sectional Championship at Fort Worth, Texas, NTS; **7-10** ITA Conference Masters Championship at San Diego, NTS; **19-24** NCAA Singles & Doubles Championship at Waco, Texas.

WOMEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 13-15 Debbie Southern Furman Fall Classic at Greenville, S.C., NTS; **21-29** ITA All-American Championships at Cary, N.C., NTS.
Oct. 4-6 Notre Dame Invitational at South Bend, Ind., NTS; **10-14** ITA Midwest Regionals at Columbus, Ohio, NTS; **25-27** UT Home Invitational at Knoxville, Tenn, NTS.

Nov. 1-3 Spartan Invite at East Lansing, Mich., NTS; **7-10** ITA Central Section Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; **7-10** ITA Conference Masters Championships at San Diego, NTS; **19-24** NCAA Singles and Doubles Championships at Waco, Texas.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (12-14, 5-11)

Aug. 30 at Dayton Flyer Invitational vs. Florida International, W 3-0; **31** at Dayton Flyer Invitational vs. Northern Iowa, W 3-1.
Sept. 6 at Florida Tournament vs. Southern Indiana, W 3-1; **7** at Florida Tournament vs. South Florida, L 3-2; **8** at Florida Tournament vs. Florida, L 3-1; **13** MIAMI (FL), W 3-0; **14** BUFFALO, W 3-2; **15** WRIGHT STATE, L 3-1; **20** at Bowling Green, W 3-1; **22** BOWLING GREEN, W 3-0; **27** at USC, L 3-2; **29** at UCLA, L 3-1.
Oct. 3 OREGON, L 3-0; **6** at Indiana, L 3-1; **10** at Northwestern, W 3-0; **13** MICHIGAN, L 3-1; **18** PENN STATE, L 3-2; **19** NEBRASKA, L 3-0; **23** at Purdue, L 3-0; **27** MINNESOTA, L, 3-2; **31** IOWA, W 3-0.
Nov. 3 at Michigan State, W 3-1; **8** at Michigan, W 3-2; **9** at Illinois, L 3-0; **15** MARYLAND, L 3-1; **16** RUTGERS, W 3-0; **22** WASHINGTON; **24** INDIANA; **27** at Wisconsin; **29** at Minnesota.

WRESTLING (2-0)

Nov. 3 Clarion Open at Clarion, Pa., NTS; **14** UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA, W 36-6; **17** at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania W 40-4; **24** HOFSTRA.
Dec. 6-7 Cliff Keen Invitational at Las Vegas; **13** at Pittsburgh; **21** Collegiate Duals at Nashville.
Jan. 5 OREGON STATE; **10** at Illinois; **12** RUTGERS; **19** PURDUE; **25** at Iowa.
Feb. 1 at Michigan; **7** MINNESOTA; **9** at Indiana; **14** PENN STATE.
March 8-9 Big Ten Championships at Chicago; **20-22** NCAA Championships at Philadelphia.

OSU Legends Named To Coaching Staff

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff bolstered his coaching staff on Nov. 11 with the additions of two of the best players in the history of the program, former All-America guard Jacy Sheldon and former three-time first-team All-Big Ten guard Katie Smith, All-American and Big Ten Player of the Year in 1996.

Sheldon, a current point guard for the Dallas Wings of the WNBA, was hired to the staff as the team's director of player development, where, according to the school, she will "play a pivotal role in enhancing student-athlete growth both on and off the court" by working closely with the staff to "develop and implement comprehensive, individualized player development plans."

Smith, meanwhile, will serve as an assistant on McGuff's staff after spending over a decade coaching in the WNBA, including this past season as an assistant for the WNBA finals runner-up Minnesota Lynx.

"I'm extremely excited to add both Jacy and Katie to the staff," McGuff said. "As former Buckeyes they both possess a passion for this program that will be instrumental in helping us continue to compete at the highest level of women's college basketball. Together they will have a big presence in the community as we proceed with growing our already incredible fan base."

Just a few hours after the school announced the two hirings, McGuff, Smith and Sheldon were made available in an impromptu press conference held at Value City Arena, where the two new coaches each shared why they made the decision to return to their alma mater.

Smith's Return Years In the Making

Despite still residing in Columbus during the WNBA offseason in the years leading up to her joining the Buckeyes, it wasn't necessarily an easy decision for Smith to come back to her alma mater.

Since graduating from Ohio State in 1996 as one of the best players in the history of the program, Smith enjoyed an illustrious 25-year career as a player and coach in the WNBA, one which she said was hard to walk away from.

"The biggest thing is leaving Minnesota and leaving the W," Smith said when asked about the difficulty in making her decision. "Literally my whole adult life, I've played in the WNBA or been associated with it, so that's probably the biggest thing."

Smith propelled herself to legend status in the WNBA in her 16-year playing career, securing seven all-star appearances and two WNBA championships – both with the Detroit Shock – along with a Finals MVP nod in 2008. Smith, whose 6,452 career points also rank 11th all-time, then turned to the coaching ranks, spending the last 11 seasons as an assistant, associate head coach or head coach for both the New York Liberty and Lynx, including the last four as the lead assistant for the Lynx.

But even with this long and decorated WNBA coaching and playing career, Smith said she was always well connected to her alma mater.

"We're very excited to reconnect and also just be a part of the program, one that's treated me so well, has given me a lot," she said.

"To be able to give back to the players that are here now, but also the fans, the alumni, all of it, is just going to be a lot of fun to kind of reconnect. So I'm really pumped to have this opportunity to be back."

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

The connections to Ohio State aside, Smith didn't seem like the easiest coach for McGuff to lure into the program considering she was thought to be a head-coaching candidate for WNBA teams after the Lynx' successful 2024 season. Although a potential head coaching position is an enticing opportunity, Smith said it was ultimately her family that played the biggest factor in her decision to come home.

"I got married a year ago. I have a seventh grader. I have a freshman here at Ohio State. My parents are getting older," Smith said when asked why she left the WNBA. "It was more just a personal decision and time of life."

On McGuff's end, he believes the Buckeye legend can make the most impact by accelerating the developments of his team's forwards and centers – a major area of weakness for the Buckeyes in recent years – while also helping generate funding for the program.

"We have a really talented young post player (Elsa Lemmälä), we have a veteran in (Ajae Petty) who's in her first year here, and then a veteran in (Eboni Walker) who kind of knows what we're doing," McGuff said. "But I think if she could really impact our post players, and they can have a great year, it's going to have a huge effect on our season."

"Then also, we've really grown the program in recent years, and we're doing well in the community, but I also wanted with this world of NIL and all that type of stuff someone that could really help us continue to make further inroads in this great community."

No matter what role she takes on with the Buckeyes, Smith said she is excited to get to work with what she thinks is a talented and coachable Ohio State team, one which has its eyes set on returning to the Final Four for the first time since Smith's freshman season in 1992-93.

"I think they're great basketball players," Smith said. "The fun part is you're not having to teach really basic stuff. You're really able to coach some details in high-level things, and so you're around potentially pro-basketball players in a sense, and they have great basketball IQ, they have a great skill set."

"I get to work with Petty a good bit. Elsa, she's young. But anything I can contribute – little things that coaches are looking for in the WNBA or what we do, especially in the offseason (that we) work on – I'm willing to share. I just want them to be able to have success in whatever they want to do."

Sheldon Happy To Return In New Role

When Sheldon was selected by the Wings with the No. 5 overall pick in the WNBA draft in April, it seemed like the two-time All-Big

Ten selection had said goodbye to the Ohio State program, at least for the foreseeable future.

Her chances of a potential return turned even slimmer when she found success her rookie season, starting 26 of the 40 games she played for Dallas and averaging 5.4 points, 2.1 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game.

Sheldon looked this offseason to build off her strong rookie season by playing for the Townsville Fire of the WNBL, a professional basketball league in Australia, but a lower-leg injury she suffered during the WNBA season caused her to have different plans. Instead of spending her fall and winter months Down Under, Sheldon opted to not only stay in the States but return to her alma mater in a coaching role for the offseason.

"I found out the last two months of the WNBA season that I was worsening an injury. I got home and was about to leave for Townsville, and I found out about it, so I had to miss out on that opportunity," said Sheldon, who was wearing a walking boot on her left foot. "I had to prioritize my health and recovery – super bummed about that because they're an amazing organization that I was looking forward to playing with. But in a way it led me to this opportunity that I'm really grateful for."

"Once I found out about (the injury), I did reach out to McGuff. I wanted to try to be a part of this group, and honestly in any way I could, whether it was on staff or not. So I'm really thankful for the opportunity he gave me and even more excited to work with these girls."

It's no surprise that with a now open schedule in the offseason Sheldon wanted to return to Ohio State, a place where she spent half a decade playing from 2019-23.

According to McGuff, the experience and familiarity Sheldon has with the program make her a valuable addition to the staff this season. Her coach-turned-boss said she will provide a unique voice in the locker room due to her youth as a coach but experience as a player at Ohio State, an interesting dynamic that Sheldon is looking forward to being a part of.

"The great thing about having Jacy is that she knows what we do," McGuff said. "She'll be fantastic with our players. The ones that have already been here, they love and they trust her, and I think she'll really have a great opportunity to mentor them. But from an X's and O's standpoint, when she's talking to the player, she knows exactly what we do, and I think that will be great as well."

"I hope they were excited," Sheldon said when asked about her former teammates' reaction to her being added to the staff. "I think they were. I have great relationships with every single girl, and I'm happy to be back and kind of help them in a different role,"

"I know what those girls can do and obviously the whole coaching staff does. But playing with them, I think it's a little different, and now watching them, it's also a different perspective for me, but I'm going to stay on them."

Sheldon will continue to impart wisdom to many of her former teammates this season, including longtime backcourt-mate Madison Greene and fellow 2023-24 starters Cotie McMahan and Taylor Thierry. But it is one of the new Buckeyes who may benefit the most from Sheldon's voice, that being standout true

freshman guard Jalonni Cambridge.

Cambridge, the No. 2 overall-ranked recruit in the 2024 recruiting class, burst onto the scene in her first collegiate game with Ohio State, totaling 31 points, six rebounds, six assists, five steals and two blocks Nov. 5 before going down with a lower-back injury in her second game against Charlotte on Nov. 12.

McGuff said after the game that he didn't think Cambridge's injury was going to be long-term, so it's more than likely Sheldon will get a chance to coach her potential heir apparent sooner rather than later. But at least so far, there hasn't been much to coach, according to Sheldon.

"She's special," Sheldon said. "It's been one game, and you guys already see what she's about and she's got so much more potential too. She's only going to continue to get better every day, but an amazing player. I think her speed is something that makes her so good and able to be that fast and to stop on a dime, very few players can do that, and it's been cool to watch her."

"Even the couple of days I've been here already, things are starting to click, and she's learning every day, and she's just going to continue to pick up on what we do here. I just want to be guidance for her, and someone who can help her through this system."

OSU Press Effective Through Three Games

It's only been three games, but even with a plethora of new faces on the court, the Buckeyes' full-court press has been mightily effective.

Before the Nov. 17 win, Ohio State's 52 combined turnovers forced against Cleveland State and Charlotte – good for an average of 26 turnovers forced per game – was the 21st most in the country.

The Buckeyes have been their stingiest early in games. Charlotte turned the ball over 20 times in the first half, which included 11 steals from the Buckeyes.

Against Cleveland State, Ohio State was nearly as effective, forcing 17 turnovers before halftime, including a stretch where it forced eight turnovers in the first five minutes. Then against Belmont, they forced the Bruins into 11 turnovers before halftime and 20 for the game.

The Buckeyes' press has specifically benefited from the efforts of the speedy Cambridge, who came up with a team-high five steals against Cleveland State, and in just 15 minutes played against Charlotte, Cambridge tacked on two more steals to her season total.

As expected, Thierry, an All-Big Ten defensive team selection in 2023, has been a major factor in disrupting opposing offenses as well. She has used her long arms and basketball IQ to get into passing lanes and come up with six total steals through three games.

As early as it may be, McGuff has been pleased with the work his team has put in on the defensive end of the floor.

"Our effort, our intensity is really good," McGuff said after the Charlotte game. "I think there's still a ways to go with some of our execution, but effort and intensity through two games have been really good."

OSU Survives Late Road Scare To Stay Undefeated

By BOBBY GORBETT
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State picked up two wins over mid-major opponents to improve to 3-0 on the young season. The Buckeyes, despite an injury scare for true freshman guard Jalon Cambridge, cruised to a 41-point win over Charlotte on Nov. 12 to pick up their second win in as many tries this year, but their third victory certainly didn't come easy.

Down by eight points on the road to upset-minded Belmont on Nov. 17, Ohio State needed a late-fourth-quarter surge to stave off the Bruins and leave Nashville, Tenn., with a last-second four-point win.

Gray's Historic Night Leads OSU To Win

No. 12 Ohio State's 94-53 win over Charlotte on Nov. 12 at Value City Arena was marked by a historic night from junior guard Chance Gray, who tied the program record for most threes made in a single game, going 9 of 14 from beyond the arc for a game-high 31 points.

It wasn't all good for the Buckeyes, though, as standout freshman guard Jalon Cambridge suffered a lower-back injury early in the third quarter and didn't return to the game.

Before the injury, Cambridge was the motor behind the Buckeyes' strong start. She scored or assisted on 15 of Ohio State's 25 points in the first quarter – including an early jumper

and a three for the team's first five points of the game – allowing the Buckeyes to hold a commanding 25-6 lead through one.

Gray also led this early burst, hitting on all three of her attempts from beyond the arc in the quarter for nine early points. Ohio State's four makes from beyond the arc through one were two more than the two field goals Charlotte made all period.

Ohio State did not make a three in the second quarter, but that didn't stop the Buckeyes' lead from growing due to some disruptive play on defense. Fifth-year guard Taylor Thierry and Cambridge combined for four steals in the first five minutes, and then the Buckeye reserves had four more swipes in the final 2:38 of the quarter to help Ohio State to a 43-17 lead at halftime.

Any positive energy from the Buckeyes' excellent first half was taken out of the crowd of 4,531 when a driving Cambridge was fouled by junior forward Keanna Rembert on the very first possession of the third quarter, causing her to fall on her back and exit the game for good.

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after the game that the injury was not long-term.

The Buckeyes struggled without their star freshman guard on both ends of the floor in the immediate aftermath, and the 49ers scored 15 of the game's next 22 points to pull within 18, 50-32, after a Hayleigh Breland three with 5:27 left.

Gray helped steady the ship by answering with a three on the very next possession, and after the 49ers cut it back down to 19, 57-38, with 2:47 left, she hit three more triples in 2:34 to help the Buckeyes fully take momentum back and lead 69-43 entering the fourth.

Gray scored 14 of the team's 26 points in the third on 4-of-7 shooting from beyond the arc to give her 25 points entering the fourth quarter, surpassing her career high of 22 points set last January while playing for Oregon.

"She's a really terrific scorer from the perimeter, and obviously she really shot it well tonight," McGuff said of Gray's outing. "She's been working really hard on shots. She shows up every day in full practice and works with (associate coach Carla Morrow) and (assistant coach Jalen Powell), so it's great to see that work pay dividends."

Gray continued her magical night just 11 seconds into the fourth quarter when she hit her eighth three to put Ohio State up 29, 72-43, and the junior was one triple away from Kelsey Mitchell's single-game record of nine threes made.

After two misses, Gray finally broke through to tie the record when she received a ball screen from freshman center Elsa Lemmila, stepped back, and drilled her ninth three-pointer of the game to give the Buckeyes an 83-51 lead with 4:23 left in the game.

"I was confused while I was still in the game," Gray said after the game when asked if she knew about the record during the game. "And then towards the end, they were like, 'You have one minute to make one more three,' so I kind of went in there and just pulled something, and it went in."

Gray was taken out of the game for the final time shortly after her record-tying shot and was subsequently greeted with a big round of applause from the Buckeye faithful.

Ohio State, which finished the game on a 14-2 run with Gray's three to cruise to the 41-point win, shot 32 of 61 from the field (52.5 percent) and 10 of 24 from three (41.7 percent).

Gray's 31 points easily led the team, while graduate transfer Ajae Petty had 12 points on 4-of-7 shooting and Lemmila secured a game-

and career-high seven rebounds.

Charlotte, which shot just 35.2 percent from the field (19 of 54) and had 28 turnovers, was led in the loss by junior guard Alexis Andrews, who scored 15 points on 5-of-15 shooting.

Late Scoring Run Fuels OSU Win

Ohio State (3-0) capped its 67-63 win over Belmont on Nov. 17 at the Curb Event Center in Nashville, Tenn., with a 17-4 scoring run to overcome a nine-point deficit with 5:21 to go.

At least at the beginning of the game, it didn't seem the Buckeyes were going to be entrenched in a nail-biter in the fourth quarter. After getting out to a 20-16 lead at the end of the first period, Ohio State opened the second quarter with a 9-0 scoring run to take a 29-16 lead with 7:10 to go before halftime.

However, the Bruins responded with back-to-back three-point jumpers, sparking an 11-0 Bruins scoring run in 2:31 to trail 29-27.

Ohio State's defense got into a rhythm before the end of the half, though, and the team held Belmont scoreless for the final 2:37. That allowed the Buckeyes to score the final five points of the half off an Ava Watson three and a Petty second-chance basket to take a 36-32 lead at the break.

The Bruins' offensive and defensive intensity only increased to start the second half, and junior guard Emily La Chapell made three consecutive Bruin baskets to tie the game at 38.

Despite an extended offensive lull, the Buckeyes found success from the free-throw line to take back a 47-42 lead with 3:59 left in the third.

But Ohio State's shooting struggles continued, with McGuff's team going scoreless the rest of the way to give Belmont a 50-47 lead heading into the fourth quarter. Ohio State was 2 of 16 from the floor in the period.

The Buckeyes broke a 7:50 field-goal drought with a layup by Thierry just 47 seconds into the fourth to leave Belmont up 50-49, but momentum quickly swung back to Belmont after the Bruins exploded on a 9-1 run to take a 59-50 lead with just 5:21 left in the game.

With the 1,814 fans in attendance smelling an upset, junior forward Cotie McMahon quieted the crowd with a layup and a foul. McMahon missed the free throw, but Ohio State – helped by a strong defensive sequence – continued its comeback with threes from Gray at 4:28 and Thierry at 3:18 to trail just 59-58.

With Belmont feeling the pressure – both literally and figuratively – from the Buckeyes, Gray swiped the ball from Belmont graduate guard Tuti Jones and raced the other way for a layup to take a 60-59 lead with 3:00 left.

After another two Buckeye stops, Gray crossed over a Belmont defender before finding Kennedy Cambridge for a wide-open corner triple that gave the Buckeyes a 63-59 lead, capping off a 13-0 run for Ohio State that lasted 2:54.

Upset-minded Belmont did not go away without a fight, however. A Kennedy Cambridge foul followed by a Jalon Cambridge turnover helped the Bruins score four straight points, all from free throws, leaving the game tied at 63 with 33 seconds remaining.

The true freshman did not let that mistake deter her, however. Instead, she put the team on her back when it mattered most. With just 13 seconds left, Cambridge crossed over a Belmont defender, drew a foul, made a layup and sank the subsequent free throw to put Ohio State back on top 66-63.

Cambridge wasn't done after that play. She drew an offensive foul on Jones on the ensuing possession then drew a foul on Belmont guard Kendall Holmes on the other end and made one of her two free throws with two seconds left to

Ohio State 67, Belmont 63

Nov. 17, 2024
Curb Event Center • Nashville, Tenn.
Ohio State (3-0) vs Belmont (2-2)
Final score: OSU 67, Belmont 63

Player statistics for Ohio State vs Belmont, Nov 17, 2024. Includes columns for Min, M-A, M-A, O-D, A, PF, Pts.

Percentages: FG: 34.3%. FT: 52.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-23. (J. Cambridge 1-6, Gray 2-6, McMahon 2-5, Watson 1-3, K. Cambridge 1-2, Thierry 1-1). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 4 (Lemmila 2, J. Cambridge, K. Cambridge). Turnovers: 14 (J. Cambridge 6, Gray 4, McMahon, Thierry, Petty). Steals: 9 (Gray 4, Cambridge 2, Petty 2, Thierry).

Player statistics for Belmont vs Ohio State, Nov 17, 2024. Includes columns for Min, M-A, M-A, O-D, A, PF, Pts.

Percentages: FG: 36.1%. FT: 85.7%. Three-point field goals: 7-28 (Holmes 3-7, Jones 1-6, Cheesman 0-4, La Chapell 1-3, Fuller 1-3, Feltner 0-2, Busick 0-1, Banks 1-1). Team rebounds: 9. Blocked shots: 3 (Harrison, Feltner, Tripp). Turnovers: 21 (Jones 5, La Chapell 4, Holmes 3, Banks 3, Cheesman 2, Feltner 2, Tripp). Steals: 9 (Banks 3, Jones 3, La Chapell 2, Harrison). Officials: Brown, Kirkland, Niemiera. Attendance: 1,814.

Ohio State 94, Charlotte 53
Nov. 12, 2024
Value City Arena • Columbus
Final score: OSU 94, Charlotte 53
Detailed player and team statistics for OSU vs Charlotte, Nov 12, 2024.

Cignetti Earns New Pay Day With Hoosiers

Indiana first-year head coach Curt Cignetti has been financially rewarded for guiding his team to a program-record 10-0 record and No. 5 ranking in the College Football Playoff entering Week 13.

BIG TEN NOTES
Patrick Engels

Just hours before the Week 12 Saturday slate started on Nov. 16, Indiana agreed to a new eight-year contract extension with the 63-year-old Cignetti that runs through the 2032 season and will pay him an average of \$8 million per year with an annual \$1 million retention bonus. The total value of Cignetti's new contract is \$72 million.

"I am beyond appreciative for the tremendous commitment, confidence, and support from President Pam Whitten and Athletic Director Scott Dolson," Cignetti said in a statement released on Nov. 16. "(My wife Manette) and I love Bloomington and are grateful for how the IU community has embraced us. I look forward to leading this outstanding program and doing my part to continue the momentum for Hoosier football."

Cignetti originally received a six-year, \$27 million contract when he was hired by Indiana in December from James Madison, where he led the Dukes to an 11-1 season in just their second season as an FBS program. He made just \$677,311 at James Madison but will now be among the Big Ten's highest-paid coaches after leading the Hoosiers to a historic start in 2024, putting them in reach of their first College Football Playoff berth in program history and first share or win of the Big Ten title since 1967.

"We were confident IU could become a winning program, and we love what he's building here," Dolson said. "We love the student-athletes that he's bringing here. We

love how our fan base has rallied around this team and made Memorial Stadium the place to be on Saturday afternoons. And now, we love the fact that he's going to be doing all those things right here in Bloomington for a long, long time."

"We're the emerging superpower in college football," Cignetti said on FOX's "Big Noon Kickoff" on Nov. 16. "Why would I leave?"

Four B1G Teams In Top Five Of CFP Poll

The Big Ten continues to dominate the College Football Playoff rankings.

After Georgia dropped to No. 12 following its Week 11 loss to Ole Miss, the Big Ten made up four of the top five teams in the College Football Playoff rankings released Nov. 12, the most top-five teams from one conference in the history of the CFP.

Leading that historic charge was No. 1 Oregon, which stayed in the top spot for the second week in a row after taking care of Maryland 39-18 at home. As the highest-ranked Big Ten team in the rankings, the 10-0 Ducks also earned the No. 1 overall seed in the projected CFP bracket, joining No. 2 seed Texas (No. 3 in rankings) of the SEC, No. 3 seed BYU (No. 6) of the Big 12 and No. 4 seed Miami (Fla.) (No. 9) of the ACC as the four teams who received byes.

Ohio State also stayed at No. 2 following its 45-0 blowout win over Purdue. Because two teams from the same conference cannot earn byes, the then-8-1 Buckeyes earned the No. 5 seed in the projected bracket, matching up with the No. 12 seed and 13th-ranked Boise State at Ohio Stadium. The Broncos earned a berth in the bracket as the projected highest-ranked non-Power Four conference champion, way ahead of No. 24 Army and No. 25 Tulane, both of the American Athletic Conference.

With the Longhorns occupying both the No. 3 ranking and No. 2 seed, the next two Big Ten teams in the rankings were No. 4 Penn State and No. 5 Indiana. The Nittany Lions, whose only loss this season came to Ohio State at home on Nov. 2, jumped two spots from No. 6 after beating Washington 35-6 at home. They were projected to earn the No. 6 seed, hosting No. 11 Ole Miss in a first-round matchup.

Indiana jumped three spots into the top five after taking care of Michigan 20-15 at home. Cignetti's team was projected as the No. 7 seed in the CFP bracket, hosting No. 10 seed Alabama in what would be an intriguing David vs. Goliath matchup in Bloomington, Ind.

The Hoosiers will have the opportunity to shake up the rankings after their off week when they travel to Ohio State on Nov. 23 in a top-five matchup that has major Big Ten championship and College Football Playoff implications.

USC Fined, On Probation For Violations

USC's football program has been fined \$50,000 and placed on a one-year probation due to a violation of "on- and off-field coaching activities," the NCAA announced on Nov. 12.

According to their release, the NCAA found in their investigation that the Trojans

exceeded the permissible number of "countable" coaches by six during both the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

"Eight analysts for the football program engaged in on- and off-field coaching activities during spring 2022, fall 2022 and spring 2023, resulting in the football program exceeding the permissible number of countable coaches by six for two academic years," the NCAA said in its release. "As a result of the violations, the parties also agreed that football head coach Lincoln Riley violated head coach responsibility rules."

Although Riley is mentioned in the report and both parties agreed he violated head coach responsibility rules, the third-year Trojan leader will not be suspended because the NCAA changed its rules restricting the number of coaches and their duties in January 2023.

USC will also face minor penalties this season restricting how many staff members can attend practices and film sessions. The program said in a statement that the university has known about these violations since May of 2023 and has worked cooperatively with the NCAA to find a resolution.

Riley, who is in the midst of a disappointing season with the Trojans holding a 5-5, 3-5 Big Ten record, said his program is well past this issue when asked about it during a Nov. 12 press conference.

"We've had that behind us now for multiple months and have been past it," Riley said. "I think you see, with the level of penalties that were levied, in this day and age, that the head coach responsibility thing has really - it's a big deal, and we get it. If it's something really big, they're going to suspend the head coach, so I think that kind of says what it is. We don't take it lightly. We own the things that we have to correct, and we move forward."

Wisconsin's Del Rio Resigns After OWI Arrest

Jack Del Rio, the former longtime NFL head coach who was hired this season to serve as Luke Fickell's senior advisor at Wisconsin, resigned from his role on Nov. 11 after he was arrested early on Nov. 8 for operating a vehicle while intoxicated following a crash in Madison, Wis.

"I'm grateful to Coach Fickell and the University of Wisconsin for the opportunity to work with such a talented coaching and support staff and some of the best young football players in the country," Del Rio said in a statement released on Nov. 11. "I have decided to step away from my position with the team, so they can focus all their attention on the remainder of the season."

Del Rio, 61, was arrested shortly after midnight on Nov. 8 after he drove his vehicle into a street sign, broke a fence and came to rest in a yard west of Wisconsin's campus and Camp Randall Stadium, according to a Madison Police incident report. After officers arrived at the scene at 12:35 a.m., witnesses directed the officers to Del Rio, who was seen walking away from the area.

According to the report, Del Rio "showed signs of impairment" and admitted to driving the vehicle while speaking with police. He was then promptly arrested for first-time OWI (operating while intoxicated) and released to a "responsible party." No injuries

BIG

2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Oregon	8	0	1.000	11	0	1.000
Indiana	7	0	1.000	10	0	1.000
Ohio State	6	1	.857	9	1	.900
Penn State	6	1	.857	9	1	.900
Illinois	4	3	.571	7	3	.700
Iowa	4	3	.571	6	4	.600
Minnesota	4	3	.571	6	4	.600
Washington	4	4	.500	6	5	.545
Rutgers	3	4	.429	6	4	.600
Michigan	3	4	.429	5	5	.500
Wisconsin	3	4	.429	5	5	.500
USC	3	5	.375	5	5	.500
UCLA	3	5	.375	4	6	.400
Nebraska	2	5	.286	5	5	.500
Michigan State	2	5	.286	4	6	.400
Northwestern	2	5	.286	4	6	.400
Maryland	1	6	.143	4	6	.400
Purdue	0	7	.000	1	9	.100

Nov. 15 Game
Washington 31, UCLA 19

Nov. 16 Games
Ohio State 31, Northwestern 7
Illinois 38, Michigan State 16
Penn State 49, Purdue 10
USC 28, Nebraska 20
Rutgers 31, Maryland 17
Oregon 16, Wisconsin 13

Nov. 22 Game
Purdue at Michigan State, 8 p.m.

Nov. 23 Games
Iowa at Maryland, Noon
Northwestern at Michigan, 3:30 p.m.
Indiana at **Ohio State**, Noon
Illinois at Rutgers, Noon
Penn State at Minnesota, 3:30 p.m.
Wisconsin at Nebraska, 3:30 p.m.
USC at UCLA, 10:30 p.m.

All times Eastern

were reported at the scene.

Wisconsin released a statement on Nov. 11 saying that they were aware of the incident and "take matters like this very seriously." Fickell, who hired Del Rio as a special advisor before the season on Aug. 30, confirmed to the media the same day that his now-former staffer has resigned and faced the consequences of his actions.

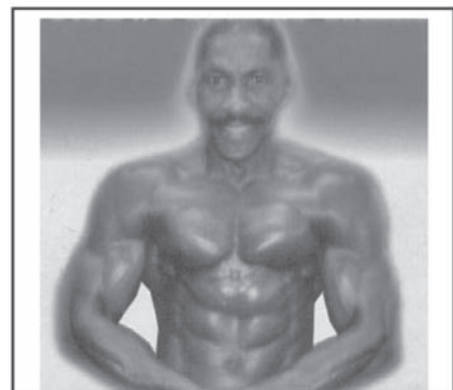
"He's going to move forward, and he's going to resign and move on," Fickell said. "But it's a tough situation, decisions that all of us have to be able to take full responsibility for. So that's what Jack will do, and we'll continue to move forward."

The Badgers will now be without a key veteran voice in their locker room in Del Rio, who had spent 15 years as a head coach in the NFL, nine with the Jacksonville Jaguars and three with the Oakland Raiders.

In its first game since Del Rio's resignation, Wisconsin nearly pulled off an upset of No. 1 Oregon at home on Nov. 17 but ultimately fell to the Ducks 16-13.

Holgorsen Tabbed As Nebraska OC

Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule announced on Nov. 11 that former Houston and West Virginia head coach Dana Hol-



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gorsen will take over as the program's offensive coordinator for the remainder of the season, just one week after being hired by the Cornhuskers as an offensive consultant.

"This is not about next year," Rhule said of the move. "This is about right now. It's unique, but it's probably what's needed. It's the right thing."

Holgorsen, who was an offensive consultant for TCU before joining Rhule's staff, is replacing Marcus Satterfield as the Huskers' offensive play-caller. Satterfield had been calling plays at Nebraska for the past two seasons while also holding the role of tight ends coach, and now he will only coach the tight ends for the remainder of the season.

Nebraska's offense failed to produce consistently under the direction of Satterfield. The Huskers ranked 120th in scoring of offense last year at 18.0 points per game, and after a solid start to 2024 under the direction of five-star freshman Dylan Raiola, they struggled in Big Ten play, averaging just 18.3 points in the final six games with Satterfield in charge.

Holgorsen ran several successful air-raid offenses in his eight seasons at West Virginia (2011-18) and five years at Houston (2019-23), and Rhule hoped that type of play could provide a spark to Raiola and Nebraska's offense in its final three games of the season. That has yet to occur so far, with Holgorsen's offense totaling 20 points and 310 total yards (119 rushing, 191 passing) in the Huskers' 28-20 loss at USC on Nov. 16.

Holgorsen will have two more chances to put his stamp on the unit this season against Wisconsin at home on Nov. 23 and Iowa on the road on Nov. 29.

PU Big Man Likely Out For Year

Purdue head men's basketball head coach Matt Painter announced on Nov. 10 that true freshman center Daniel Jacobsen will likely be out for the remainder of the 2024-25 season after fracturing his right tibia during the 13th-ranked Boilermakers' Nov. 8 home game over Northern Kentucky.

"You don't want to say it's for the year, but I would definitely think so," Painter said of Jacobsen's injury. "You would like it to be around two to four months, but I think it's probably closer to four to six months."

Jacobsen, who stands at an imposing 7-4 at just 18 years old, suffered the likely season-ending injury just one minute into Purdue's 72-50 win over the Norse when his right leg got tangled up with Northern Kentucky junior forward Keeyan Itejere, causing him to grab his right knee and be helped to the sidelines by his teammates.

Jacobsen walked to the locker room without assistance but returned to the Purdue bench later in the game on crutches and with an ice wrap below his knee. He was scheduled to undergo surgery on Nov. 13.

The loss of Jacobsen is a big one both literally and figuratively for the reigning national champion runner-up Boilermakers. He was likely slated to be the team's starting center for the entire 2024-25 season, replacing two-time All-American and now-Memphis Grizzlies center Zach Edey in the role, and started in each of the Boilermakers' first two games against Texas A&M-Corpus Christi on Nov. 4 and Northern Kentucky.

Jacobsen totaled 13 points, seven rebounds and three blocks in his collegiate

debut against the Islanders, a 90-73 Boilermaker win, before going down with the injury.

"You feel bad for Daniel," unanimous preseason Big Ten Player of the Year and Purdue junior guard Fletcher Loyer said. "He's worked really hard. He's proven that he deserves to start and eventually go on and be a great player here. Obviously, it's a little setback for him, but I know his mentality and he's going to rehab and he's going to get ready to go."

With Jacobsen no longer in the picture this season for Purdue, Painter and his staff will now likely turn to sophomore center Will Berg to assume the starting role at the five.

The 7-2 Stockholm, Sweden, native started each of Purdue's last two games against Yale on Nov. 11 and No. 2 Alabama on Nov. 15, combining for just four points and three rebounds in 25 minutes of action.

PU Threatens Ejections For Walters Chants

Speaking of Purdue, the Boilermakers' basketball student section, "The Paint Crew," sent an email to its members the weekend of Nov. 10 saying that it would not tolerate any type of negative chants directed toward head football coach Ryan Walters, even threatening to revoke the memberships of students who choose to do so.

"We have a strong reputation, and we are well respected around college basketball for having class," the email read. "That being said we will not participate in any chants slandering our own coaches/players or the other teams' coaches/players.

"Anyone participating in any such chants, including chanting about our own football coach, may be removed and have their membership revoked for the season."

This message comes after a "Fire Walters" chant broke out in Mackey Arena in the final minutes of the team's win over Northern Kentucky. Walters has led the Boilermakers to a 1-9 record and 0-7 mark in the Big Ten in his second season in charge of the program, and since those chants were made on Nov. 8, Purdue has lost to both Ohio State and Penn State by a combined score of 94-10.

When asked by The Indianapolis Star to provide clarification on their message, representatives of The Paint Crew said that Purdue Athletics "advised us to put out a message to our students condemning the negative activity that a chant like that brings."

But they also confirmed it was ultimately their own student leadership who led the efforts in putting the message out, saying that the "Fire Walters" chants went against their principles, which were outlined in a form each member is required to sign before the year. The form urges them to "be respectful" toward Purdue Athletics employees and both Boilermakers and opposing coaches and players, and failure to do so could result in removal from the event, a multi-game suspension or dismissal for the remainder of the season.

PSU's Kieger Accused Of Misconduct

Penn State women's basketball coach Carolyn Kieger has been accused by over 10 former players – both at Marquette and Penn State – of fostering a toxic culture within her program that negatively impacted players' mental health, made multiple play-

ers suicidal and included aspects of racism, body shaming and bullying, among other things.

In a Nov. 11 article written by Joe Lister of Onward State – a student-run news website that is not affiliated with Penn State – several of the interviewed subjects from both schools shared similar negative experiences from their time playing for Kieger.

Two former Marquette players told Onward State that they had suicidal thoughts during their playing days under Kieger, who coached at her alma mater from 2014-19. A pair of Penn State players added that several of their teammates went into therapy as a result of their experiences.

One anonymous Penn State player said she abused alcohol "a lot" due to the negative impact playing for Kieger had on her mental health, while she also briefly entered therapy after leaving the program for good.

Kieger was also accused in the article of being "obsessed" with molding her players' weight and body types into what she thought was the ideal figure for a women's basketball player.

"I feel like every comment that she made to somebody – either being overweight or underweight – it was always about physique," an anonymous former Marquette player said. "It was always like she wanted this dream athlete, and she wanted to mold everybody into that person."

Kieger also reportedly crossed the line from a racial standpoint. Multiple Black players who spoke with Onward State said that while the coach wasn't directly racist, she often made them feel uncomfortable by

making racial statements around them and labeling Black players as a specific prototype different from their White teammates.

"She always referred to her African American athletes as more of dirty work players," said Kayla Thomas, who played for Kieger at Penn State from 2021-23 before transferring to Georgia State. "We get the rebounds. We get on the floor for loose balls, but then Makenna (Marisa) or Anna (Camden) or anybody else takes the shots."

When asked about these allegations – which also featured accusations of bullying, including occasions where she cursed out a former Marquette player and tried to turn players against each other in an act of "physiological damage" – Kieger said she was disappointed by the allegations but at the same time encouraged by some of the positive comments also made.

"I read the story, and I was disappointed and sad that a few of my former athletes didn't have a positive experience," Kieger said. "However, I am proud that many of my former players did have a positive experience and remain close to me to this day. I tell our players every day that every opportunity, whether it's good or disappointing, is an opportunity to learn and grow and elevate and get better, and this is what that opportunity presents myself."

In response to the story, Penn State said in a statement that they are taking these allegations seriously and are thoroughly reviewing any of the reports made. They added that Penn State's current players said Kieger and her staff have provided "a positive and inclusive environment."

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New Rule Presents Opportunities, Challenges

Changes such as the transfer portal, NIL (name, image and likeness) and realignment have created major shakeups in college athletics, particularly football, and now men's hockey is about to embark on a radical change as well.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The Division I Council on Nov. 7 cleared the way for players from three major junior hockey leagues in Canada, operating under the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) umbrella, to be eligible to compete in the NCAA for the first time.

Unlike the top-tier junior league in this country, the United States Hockey League (USHL), and the lower-level North American Hockey League, among others, the CHL for years has been deemed by the NCAA as a "professional" league because some of its players were drafted and signed by NHL clubs but were allowed to return to their respective junior clubs to develop.

Because of those signees, the entire league and its players were "tainted" by professionalism and thus ineligible to play for a U.S. college program.

That is no longer the case, and more than 1,000 players have become eligible for U.S. colleges beginning with the 2025-26 season. However, any CHL player who signs a pro contract is still ineligible for the NCAA. An unsigned draftee is eligible.

Much like rules regarding revenue sharing payments to athletes and NIL payments in football, there are a lot of gray areas involved in the hockey decision.

"I was meeting with our compliance (office) yesterday about a certain situation, and we're kind of just scratching our heads," Ohio State assistant coach JB Bittner said on Nov. 13. "We're like, 'You know what, as the rule reads now, it's one way.' He's like, 'But I need to get some confirmation on how the rules are.' So, I think there's probably a lot of discussions that are still going to happen, and every case is going to probably be a little bit unique.

"We've got to figure out a way to wrap our heads around it and move forward, and if there's a good player, wherever he's playing, we want him. It's just going to be kind of managing that and going through that."

The CHL is composed of the Western Hockey League, the Ontario Hockey League and the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League.

The new rules allow its players to enroll at a U.S. college as long they "did not receive above actual and necessary expenses to compete in the CHL."

Those expenses include such items as meals, lodging, transportation, equipment and health insurance. CHL players are also paid a monthly stipend that's capped at \$250.

Bittner was asked by Buckeye Sports Bulletin if it felt like hockey was catching up to other sports in realizing that amateurism in college sports no longer exists.

"The way the (new) rule was proposed

and written, I think skiing was actually the impetus because they have kids that are professionalized," he said. "But I don't know if it's catching up. I think there's been talk for a long time about kids that are playing major junior that aren't getting paid, they're just getting per diem, or they're getting a living stipend.

"It's not much different than some kids playing in (other sports) in the States, but I don't think anybody really dove in and looked at it until the NIL and these kids in college are able to get money."

Bittner said the new rule is fairer.

"There were some kids that did sign (pro contracts) and then went back to juniors, so then that taints the whole team," he said. "That was kind of the rub; the whole team is ineligible just because of one kid."

Proponents of changing the CHL pointed to some well-compensated athletes in other sports such as Olympic swimmers who kept their NCAA eligibility. Also, there have been cases where some college hockey programs enrolled players who played professionally overseas without recrimination from the NCAA.

Full-Court Press

The NCAA hockey coaches earlier this year at their annual meeting were largely against the proposed rule change, so what happened? As has often been the case, the NCAA yielded rather than fight a lawsuit.

In August, 19-year-old Canadian junior hockey player Rylan Masterson filed a class action lawsuit in New York alleging the NCAA rules banning CHL players from U.S. colleges violated U.S. antitrust laws.

Masterson, from Fort Erie, Ontario, claimed he lost NCAA eligibility two years prior when as a 17-year-old he played in two exhibition games in 2022 for the Windsor Spitfires of the OHL.

In his suit against the NCAA and 10 schools, he said there was a "group boycott" of Canadian junior players which "prevents competition between the CHL and NCAA for top-end players and thus artificially suppresses compensation for players and artificially creates less competitive leagues."

Shortly after the suit was filed, another landmark was reached when Braxton Whitehead of the WHL's Regina Pats verbally committed to Arizona State for the 2025-26 season.

He was confident at the time that the restrictions would be lifted before he enrolled.

"(Arizona State's) slogan is 'Be the Tradition' and I think they love the idea of me being a trailblazer throughout all this and paving the way with NCAA and CHL relations," Whitehead told ESPN at the time. "I'm very hopeful that (the rules) will turn over before the 2025-26 season."

The NCAA saw the writing on the wall and acquiesced.

"I think there was a lot of things that once (the NCAA) started to dig into the weeds, there were more and more questions," Bittner said. "I think at the end of the day, the NCAA just said, 'Hey, we're doing it, and we'll kind of figure it out as we go.' And here we are."

Several leagues issued statements when the NCAA ruling was announced:

"The USHL remains the world's premier

development path. All aspects of the league are focused on preparing athletes for collegiate and professional hockey, inclusive of on-ice, academic and character development. The USHL claims more than half of NCAA Division I men's ice hockey players, while producing more NHL draft picks than any other league in the world over the past eight seasons."

From the CHL: "While we will take time to fully review this rule change, we believe this is a positive development that will provide our players with more opportunities to continue their hockey and academic careers following their time in the CHL. It will also give young players and their families more options in choosing their development path, which includes opening up the CHL – the best development hockey league in the world for players aged 16-20 – to more players worldwide."

CHL players currently receive one year of tuition for every year they play in major junior hockey.

Ontario Hockey League commissioner Bryan Crawford expressed support for the rule change: "This is a landmark decision that gives OHL players additional avenues and opportunities to pursue their hockey, academic and life goals upon graduation from our league. It also opens the OHL's doors to talented young student athletes with NCAA aspirations, providing them the opportunity to take their game to the next level in the number one development league in the world.

"The OHL will continue to maintain a high standard as the leading supplier of talent to the National Hockey League while emphasizing the same blend of on-ice excellence with an off-ice commitment to character development and academics that has made the League what it is today."

Wide, Wide World

The ability to recruit CHL players increases the talent pool exponentially.

The CHL has 51 Canadian teams and nine more in the United States. During the 2023-24 NHL season, of the 1,000-plus players, more than 430 came through the CHL. At the 2024 NHL draft, 88 CHL players were selected, including 14 of the 32 in the first round.

"We've started recruiting some kids there," Bittner said. "Every league's different. The USHL is different from the OHL and different from Quebec, so we're still looking at every kid. If there's a kid that we feel wants to go to college, we'll dive in and go watch them and do our homework on those kids."

The recruiting footprint with a CHL that stretches from coast to coast will be daunting, Bittner acknowledged.

"For sure, it's doubled," he said.

But it's unlikely the NCAA will approve another assistant coach per team next season after having done so last summer.

"I don't know the way that the landscape is right now that they'd be jumping to add another one," Bittner said. "It's just going to be more work on our plate, more phone calls and connections and doing homework that way because we do a lot of work in the USHL and once the season starts going, we feel like we have a pretty good handle on that league."

But you can't do that with five leagues."

One issue that needs to be resolved is the retention rights of draftees. Currently, NHL teams that draft players in the CHL have about two years to sign them to an entry-level contract or the players become free agents. The rights of NCAA draftees belong to NHL teams for four years, allowing longer time to develop.

The discrepancy likely won't be resolved until a new NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement is negotiated after the current one expires on Sept. 15, 2026.

"I don't know what the answers are going to be," Bittner said. "But if I'm an NHL team and a (CHL) kid's close but we're not sure we want to sign him, if he goes to college for two or three more years and we keep his rights, that's a longer development path for those kids. That would be a big change."

While Bittner expects an influx of players from the CHL, possibly high draft picks, he worries that late bloomers from the USHL and other leagues will be left behind.

Adding to his concern is the NCAA edict for the 2025-26 season that limits men's hockey teams to 26 players if they participate in the NCAA revenue sharing for athletes. All Big Ten teams are expected to do so. Ohio State has 28 players this season.

Also, American International University on Nov. 13 announced that after 27 years as a Division I program, it will drop to Division II next season. There are 64 Division I teams this season.

"The hard thing is, some kids that maybe would have had a chance to play Division I aren't going to now," Bittner said. "And maybe there's some of those kids down the road that because there hasn't been enough college hockey programs added to meet the amount of kids added, that they're not going to play college hockey.

"I think 10 or 15 years from now we'll look back on this ruling and it be like, 'Man, this really changed the landscape.'"

Take Two

No. 14 Ohio State skated to 5-2 and 3-2 nonconference wins at Lindenwood on Nov. 15-16 in Maryland Heights, Mo.

Riley Thompson topped the series scoring for the Buckeyes (9-2-1) with five points (two goals, three assists). He leads the team with 14 points, including five goals.

Gunnarwolfe Fontaine scored twice in a four-goal second period in the opener after Lindenwood (2-9-1) took a 1-0 lead. Freshman Noah Powell scored his first goal, and Kristofer Eberly made 23 saves.

Lindenwood scored first in the rematch before Fontaine and Sam Deckhut made it 2-1. After Lindenwood tied it at 13:07 of the second period, Davis Burnside scored the winner 39 seconds later. Logan Terness made 26 saves.

Next

The Buckeyes, after an open weekend Nov. 22-23, play at Princeton on Nov. 29-30.

For a recap of the Lindenwood series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Sasso Makes Long-Awaited Return To Mat

On Aug. 18, 2023, Sammy Sasso was shot in a carjacking in Columbus, forcing him to get emergency surgery to repair his colon and leaving him to have to relearn to walk after he suffered nerve damage.

Nearly 15 months later, the former All-America wrestler returned to the mat triumphantly against Chattanooga for Ohio State's first dual of the season, winning his match 12-6 over Jackson Hurst of the Mocs.

"I feel good that I got the first one out of the way," Sasso said after the match. "I'm definitely knocking some dust off, but it just felt good to be competing again and be in front of a crowd."

ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

The last time Sasso wrestled for the Buckeyes was in the 2023 NCAA tournament when he lost to Yianni Diakomihalis of Cornell in the 149-pound title match, finishing in second place, his fourth time finishing a season as an All-American.

He was set to move up to 157 pounds last year before the injury and moved up to 165 pounds for the match against the Mocs. Head coach Tom Ryan said Sasso's return made it a great night for not only Sasso and the Buckeyes but for all of the wrestling world.

"Winning is just so important as much time as you put into it," he said to open his press conference after the dual. "You have this focus on winning as a team and winning championships. But in the midst of that, there's amazing stories that occur. There are amazing life moments that occur for each person along their journey. Tonight was amazing. It was one of the most impressive things I've ever witnessed, Sammy Sasso's return to the mat."

"His will. His determination. Seeing him out there doing what he loves. This guy has been wrestling since he could walk, and to see him be back on the mat embracing what he loves so much, it was fantastic."

Whether Sasso will continue to start for the Buckeyes was still a question as BSB went to press, but the projected starter, Bryce Hepner, moved up to 174 pounds for the match against the Mocs and suffered an injury, being forced to medically forfeit in the first period of his match.

Sasso did get another shot in the Buckeyes second dual on Nov. 17 against Edinboro. With a 13-9 win over Max Kirby, he pushed himself to a 2-0 start for the year, scoring a takedown in each of the three periods.

Should Hepner be out for an extended period of time, it could open up an opportunity for Sasso to continue to try to get back to the level he was at before his injury.

Welsh, Davino To Redshirt

In the middle of the 2023-24 season, Ryan was put into a situation where he needed to make a tough decision to keep the Buckeyes competitive. When Carson Kharchla was injured at 174 pounds, ending his season, Ryan had to decide whether then-true freshman Rocco Welsh would take his place.

The plan from the beginning of the season was to redshirt Welsh and let him have a year to get acclimated to college wrestling before letting him loose for the 2024-25 season, but he ended up replacing Kharchla, stripping his ability to redshirt.

He immediately adjusted, making it all the way to the NCAA finals at 174 pounds, losing to the No. 1 pound-for-pound wrestler in the country, Penn State's Carter Starocci, just 2-0 in the title match.

Ryan was faced with a decision this year again and has decided to sit Welsh at 184 pounds, along with true freshman Ben Davino at 133 pounds.

"We've made pretty much a final decision at 33 and 84," Ryan said. "We're going to sit Davino and we're going to sit Rocco. We'll use Ryder (Rogotzke). (Seth) Shumate's available as well. Shumate is on his way down from (197 pounds), so Ryder and Shumate will fight out that (184) weight class."

Davino immediately proved he could compete, going into the Clarion Open and winning the title by a 5-3 decision at 133 pounds over Ohio State redshirt sophomore Nic Bouzakis, who started at that weight last year and will do so again this season.

Both No. 18 Bouzakis and No. 17 Rogotzke won their first dual matches against Chattanooga, Bouzakis beating No. 24 Blake Boorman 12-7 and Rogotzke taking down Kamdyn Munro 19-12.

Should either of those two get injured, Davino and Welsh would be the first choices to replace them since both have shown that they will be able to keep the Buckeyes very competitive if they are in the lineup.

2015 National Champs Honored

The Buckeyes' first dual against Chattanooga ended up as a 36-6 win over the Mocs, and the beginning of the season officially marked the 10 years since the 2015 national championship season began for the Buckeyes.

Ohio State recognized the members of that team during an intermission of the dual win, and Ryan said it was great to see his former team back in the building, although he was surprised that so much time had already passed.

"It felt really good," he said. "It's just a good group of guys, and it's hard to believe – I mean it's kind of disappointing a little bit that it's been 10 years. I thought we'd have a lot more (titles). We've got a lot of seconds. But it was great to see those guys. It brings back floods of memories."

Nathan Tomasello and Logan Stieber – who is now a coach for the Buckeyes – won individual titles that year at 125 pounds and 141 pounds, respectively, and Ohio State had a total of five All-Americans with Kyle Snyder (second place, 197 pounds), Kenny Courts (fifth, 184) and Bo Jordan (third, 165) – who is also a current Ohio State coach – on the podium. The team finished with 102 points at the event, topping second-place Iowa (75.5) and third-place Edinboro (73.5).

Since then, the Buckeyes have been searching for another national title, and although they have come close as Ryan alluded to, coming in second place in each of the 2017-19 events, they haven't been able to climb that mountain again.

Beating Penn State, which has won 11 of

the past 13 national championships with Cael Sanderson at the helm, is going to be a very tall task for the Buckeyes this year, but the Buckeyes have been able to do it once before. The Nittany Lions have a much better team this season than they did in the Buckeyes' title year, so Ryan acknowledges that will make it harder.

"(The 2015 national championship team) didn't have eight guys in the top five (of the rankings)," Ryan said. "The landscape at that time, in that season, there was a lot of parity. There was a lot more parity. We had five All-Americans that year. ... The similarities (between that team and this year's OSU team) are just day after day, you stick to the principles of developing people. Those are the only similarities, I think, in general. Just day after day, get in that room and work."

Mendez, Feldman Wrestle At NWCA All-Star Meet

Sixth-ranked Ohio State's top two wrestlers, junior Jesse Mendez and redshirt sophomore Nick Feldman, competed at the NWCA All-Star Classic on Nov. 16 at Penn State, an event that features the best collegiate grapplers in the country each year.

Mendez faced off against Penn State's Beau Bartlett, the No. 3 wrestler in the country at 141 pounds, beating him 4-1, with just one takedown the entire match, which has been a common theme when the two face each other, this one coming at the buzzer of the first period.

Feldman lost his match 8-3 to No. 9 Tye Ghadiali of Campbell, being taken down once in the first period and once in the third.

Mendez and Bartlett have been seeing a lot

of each other lately as two of the top wrestlers in the country at 141 pounds. The two faced off last year in OSU's dual meet against the Nittany Lions, with Bartlett coming out of it with a 4-3 sudden-victory win.

But that would be the only time Bartlett got the best of Mendez during the college season. The two faced off at the Big Ten championships in the title match with Mendez taking it by a 4-1 decision for his first conference title.

Mendez also had to go through Bartlett on his way to the 141-pound national title, winning by another 4-1 decision due to a late scramble takedown to give him the lead.

Feldman and Ghadiali's bout was the first time the two had gone up against each other.

Ryan said it was exciting for the two Buckeyes to be able to compete in the historic event.

"It's an event that's been around for a long time, the All-Star meets. I think it used to be called the East-West All-Star meet," Ryan said. "They've transformed it and now it's just No. 1 vs. No. 2. It's a good early-season test, and it's a fun event. To have Buckeyes in the event is good."

Neither Mendez nor Feldman wrestled in the 40-4 win over Edinboro on Nov. 17, replaced by redshirt juniors Andre Gonzales and Hogan Swenski. Gonzales got out to an early lead with a takedown and ended the match quickly with three straight four-point near-falls to win 15-0. Swenski earned a major decision 14-4 win over Aden Rae of the Fighting Scots to give the Buckeyes four team points.

Both Mendez and Feldman will be back with the Buckeyes for the Nov. 24 dual against Hofstra at the Covelli Center.

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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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'Quiet' Howard Season Deserves Notice

Admit it Buckeye fan, Will Howard has made you cringe at times.

That missed deep ball. Falling to the ground with no one around while on the run. Tossing the football into coverage.

Yes, there have been those moments.

**EXNER
POINT
Rich Exner**

But here's the thing. With Howard at the controls, the Buckeyes are the No. 2 team in the country, well positioned to make a run at the national title – if not the odds-on favorite.

He's No. 3 in the country in passing efficiency, behind Ole Miss's Jaxson Dart and Indiana's Kurtis Rourke. He has thrown just five interceptions. Among top-25 passers nationally with at least 200 attempts, only two have fewer interceptions (four each).

Critics sometimes suffer from watching every play "their" quarterback makes while only seeing the highlights of the others.

Is Howard a C.J. Stroud, Justin Fields or Dwayne Haskins? No. I don't expect him to go as high in the NFL draft as any of those guys, though there is time for him to prove me wrong.

But he's an upgrade over Kyle McCord and J.T. Barrett when it comes to throwing the football, and, despite our memories of that wonder-

ful title run in 2014, even over Cardale Jones.

Let's look at quarterbacks for the nation's top 10 teams (rankings heading into the Northwestern game, stats through the weekend's play).

- No. 1 Oregon – Dillon Gabriel, 73.8 percent completion rate, 22 TDs, 6 interceptions, 164.4 rating.
- No. 2 Ohio State – Howard, 72.9 percent, 24 TDs, 5 interceptions, 181.9 rating.
- No. 3 Texas – Quinn Ewers, 68.4 percent, 21 TDs, 6 interceptions, 156.2 rating.
- No. 4 Penn State – Drew Allar, 71.9 percent, 16 TDs, 5 interceptions, 172.3 rating.
- No. 5 Indiana – Rourke, 71.8 percent, 21 TDs, 4 interceptions, 182.7 rating.
- No. 6 BYU – Jake Retzlaff, 58.6 percent, 19 TDs, 8 interceptions, 140.9 rating.
- No. 7 Tennessee – Nico Iamaleava, 64.6 percent, 11 TDs, 4 interceptions, 143.4 rating.
- No. 8 Notre Dame – Riley Leonard, 64.7 percent, 12 TDs, 4 interceptions, 135.2 rating.
- No. 9 Miami – Cameron Ward, 66.8 percent, 32 TDs, 6 interceptions, 174.0 rating.
- No. 10 Alabama – Jalen Milroe, 67.5 percent, 15 TDs, 6 interceptions, 162.4 rating.

Howard looks pretty good, doesn't he? Appreciate the position he has the Buckeyes in through 10 games.

And just maybe, like Craig Krenzel and Jones, he'll eventually be known as a national champion quarterback, a select list for Buckeye QBs.

The Best I've Seen

Fox broadcaster Joel Klatt dropped an in-

teresting statement during the Purdue game, saying Jeremiah Smith is the best receiver in the sport. Interesting because he said "sport," not college football. Did he mean football at any level? We don't know.

But, in giving that some thought it reminded me of my belief of Keith Byars' talent during his junior season in 1984. As Byars was en route to leading the country in rushing yards, yards from scrimmage, touchdowns, points and more, I contended the only better running back in the country at the time was Walter Payton of the Chicago Bears.

I don't know where Smith rates college and pro as a receiver this year, but I do have an idea of where he stacks up among OSU receivers in the 50 or so years I've been watching the team.

Setting aside stats, and going with the eye test, because stats from era to era aren't comparable, I place Smith at the top. Here's my top five.

No. 1: Smith – He goes and gets the ball like no one I can remember for the Buckeyes, plus he's strong, fast and runs precise routes.

No. 2: Marvin Harrison Jr. – You felt like he could/would score every time he got his hands on the football. Fourth pick of the 2024 NFL draft.

No. 3: Cris Carter – As a freshman in 1984, Carter was the first receiver I remember who would come back and high point the ball, making sure he was the first to lay his hands on it, instead of waiting for the ball to come to him. Instantly, like Smith, he played college football like a veteran. Chosen in the 1987 supplemental draft after being ruled ineligible his senior year because he signed with agent Norby Walters, he eventually became a Hall of Famer.

No. 4: David Boston – At 6-foot-2 with a giant frame, in his era Boston looked like a big tight end playing wide receiver. Like all three names listed above, he looked NFL-ready while still at Ohio State. Eighth pick of the 1999 NFL draft.

No. 5: Garrett Wilson – Showed incredible leaping ability to go after the football, even as a freshman when his numbers were not that big. Tenth pick of the 2022 NFL draft.

The Best On The Team

Ten games into the season, without hesitation I believe Caleb Downs is both the best and most valuable player of this Ohio State football team.

He makes spectacular plays look routine. He's rock solid as a tackler in open space. And you get the feeling watching him that from the safety position he's the glue that keeps the Ohio State defense together, a defense that heading into the Northwestern game was the stiffest in the country in terms of yards allowed.

One play stood out in particular in Chicago. A big Northwestern tight end caught the ball in open space. Downs closed on him and made a sure tackle, as he always does. But this time he also drove the tight end backwards, step by step, from his knees. I don't remember ever seeing a football player drive his opponent backwards, step by step, from his knees.

On offense, I view Smith as the best player, but maybe not the most valuable. There have been so many key players spread out across the offense.

The biggest addition to the offense may just be Quinshon Judkins. You have to believe Judkins' play is a big reason why TreVeyon Henderson looks so fresh – and injury-free – this late in the season.

Henderson is averaging 7.4 yards a carry in

racking up 662 yards; Judkins 6.0 a carry for 723 yards. Quite a tandem.

Worries Going Forward

One worry coming out of the Northwestern game is the health of Smith. He didn't look the same after injuring his ankle, getting it taped up and re-entering the game.

I'm not a doctor or a health trainer, and I'm not privy to the information the coaching staff had about Smith after the injury. But in sitting from afar, I wish he hadn't played another down – out of precaution.

Wrigley Thoughts

Wrigley game day. Not impressed.

Aerial views showed hoards of people – mostly wearing red – waiting to get in moments before kickoff. Many seats were far from the field. The teams had to make do with weird half-time venues, with the locker rooms too far away.

As a baseball field, Wrigley is hard to beat.

For college football, mark me down for preferring football venues. Of course, an on-campus venue was not an option this year as Northwestern builds a new stadium.

But I prefer old Ryan Field over playing in Wrigley. And during construction of a new stadium that won't be ready until 2026, I wish Northwestern would have lined up the use of Soldier Field if campus facilities weren't adequate for bigger games.

This Week's Top 11

Ranking the top 11, because one playoff spot will go to a school not from one of the four major conferences, regardless of whether that team is among the top 12 nationally. Here's my top 11

1. Oregon (11-0) – This is an easy pick. Considering the options, I was planning to keep Oregon No. 1 even if it had lost a close game to Wisconsin. Off until playing Washington on Nov. 30.

2. Ohio State (9-1) – Clear No. 2 at this point.

3. Texas (9-1) – Only loss was to Georgia, 20-15. Kentucky and Texas A&M wrap up the regular season.

4. Indiana (10-0) – We shall learn about the Hoosiers with this week's game at Ohio State. Then Indiana finishes at home against Purdue.

5. Penn State (9-1) – Still no signature win, but looked pretty good against No. 2. Season wraps with Minnesota and Maryland.

6. Miami (9-1) – Wraps regular season against Wake Forest and OSU's old friend, Kyle McCord and Syracuse. If one or more of the two-loss teams closes strong, I'm prepared to have them jump Miami.

7. Georgia (8-2) – Up and down, the Bulldogs both seem dangerous and overrated. UMass and Georgia Tech await.

8. Alabama (8-2) – What I said about Georgia, but feeling less upside. Oklahoma and Auburn are next up.

9. Tennessee (8-2) – I feel like Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee could almost be tied for seventh. UTEP and Vanderbilt close out the schedule.

10. Notre Dame (9-1) – Considering the lack of quality wins and a loss to now 6-4 Northern Illinois, I'm thinking ND is overrated here, but is there a better choice? Army and USC are left.

11. BYU (9-1) – A loss to Kansas does not look good, yet the rating really doesn't matter. Consider this playoff spot going to whoever ends up winning the Big 12. Arizona State and Houston close out the schedule.

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The Name Of 'D' Game Is Playing Winning Football

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

After more than four decades of doing this, it's hard to believe I am eagerly anticipating a football game between the Ohio State football team and Indiana. Basketball with the Hoosiers, maybe. I loved the rivalry during the Bobby Knight era, and Ohio State's overtime win over IU in 1991 is still the greatest basketball game I have ever witnessed. The noise level at St. John Arena was ear-splitting.

But football? Who would have guessed?

Yet here we are. In terms of assorted championship implications, the game is more important for the Buckeyes than even The Game, which will be played a week later. For Indiana, the game has the same championship implications, but it also gives the Hoosiers a chance to finally validate their season, which continues to be questioned due to a weak schedule.

I'm sure many Ohio State fans are thinking, "Just wait until you face the Buckeyes." I am a little more cautious.

I was listening to a group of talking heads after the Northwestern game, and they were minimizing Ohio State's defensive failures in the first quarter against the Wildcats.

"Forget the first quarter," one talking head said. "You have to focus on the finished product, the game as a whole."

But I *can't* forget the first quarter.

True, in the end Northwestern scored only seven points and the Buckeyes allowed only 251 yards – just 84 in the second half – but this was the 131st-ranked offense in the country (one place behind No. 130 Michigan) cutting through the Buckeye defense like a warm knife through butter, not a team like the Hoosiers, who enter the upcoming game second in the country in scoring offense at 43.9 and 16th in total offense at 453.2 yards per game.

Now some of that ranking may be related to the Hoosiers' questionable schedule, but that's still more than 100 spots ahead of Northwestern in both categories.

And don't forget it was the Wildcats themselves who derailed their impressive offensive start with a fumble and a series of bad snaps that set up the game-changing blocked punt, not the Buckeye defense. No blocked punt to make it 14-7 Buckeyes and change the momentum of the game, and the Wildcats might still be marching up and down the field, which they did once more in their first possession of the second half, going 54 yards in 13 plays, converting a third and a fourth down before turning the ball over on downs at the OSU 21.

I'm not suggesting that Northwestern might have won the game, or that the Buckeye defense would not have come around against the over-matched Wildcats. I'm simply expressing caution.

Just as Indiana has to prove that it is not a product of a weak schedule, I believe the Buckeyes still need to validate their defense. You know, the Buckeye schedule was not that power-packed either. Unlike Indiana, Ohio State *did* play two marquee games with Oregon and Penn State. Against Oregon, the Buckeyes gave up 496 yards and 32 points. Hard to pin that loss on Will Howard for sliding too soon. Against the Nittany Lions, the defenders hung their hats on two goal-line stands.

But there is a flip side to a goal-line stand. In order to make one, the other team has to get to the goal line. That can happen in two ways. You can turn the ball over deep in enemy territory. Against Nebraska, the Buckeyes stoned the Huskers after they took over at the OSU 7 on a Howard interception.

Or a team can get to the shadow of the end zone by marching down the field. Penn State got into scoring position in a two-minute drill by marching 46 yards on seven plays in just 1:40, before Davison Igbinosun snuffed the drive with

his interception.

Later, with the Nittany Lions trailing by only a touchdown and a full 10:13 left to play, the OSU defense let the Lions march 74 yards on nine plays to the Buckeye 3 before Ohio State stopped them on four straight plays. Wouldn't it have been easier to stop them somewhere earlier in the march? A field goal was of little use to the Lions. For the Buckeyes, apparently it wasn't easier.

The Buckeye offense, of course, ran out the final 5:13 to win the game.

Every game for Ohio State from here on out will be against a quality team that will statistically punch it in from short range more often than not – or at least settle for a field goal.

If goal-line stands were easy, they wouldn't be the big deal that they are. As fans, we remember such stands, not mundane stops in the middle of the field. But mundane stops are what the Buckeyes need.

Or here's a novel idea. How about a string of three-and-outs?

Am I being a pessimist? No, a realist. For all the flash in today's football, defense still wins championships.

Is It A Matter Of Time?

Speaking of Igbinosun, I disagreed with the same group of talking heads after the rout of Purdue the week before. A listener had checked in via social media and suggested that the outstanding cornerback, the human penalty flag, needed to tone down his aggressiveness. The talking head was incredulous.

"Tone down his aggressiveness?" the head questioned almost mockingly. "Take away what makes him so good?"

Well, you'll have to mock me too.

Pass interference is like offensive holding. It can be called on almost every pass play, but Igbinosun is so obvious about it. Is it only a matter of time before a critical Buckeye game – and they are all critical right now – swings on an Igbinosun penalty? Then what will the talking head say?

A player can be aggressive without being foolish. There are times when, if you are beat, taking an interference call is better than giving up a long gain or a touchdown. But Igbinosun is good enough that, even without contact, he shouldn't be in a position where he has to grab a receiver.

I'm not a Jim Knowles or Tim Walton, but frankly I am surprised Igbinosun has not been benched at some point during the season. Is that how they teach you to play pass defense these days?

On The Mark

I thought Howard was as accurate with his passing as he has been all season against the Wildcats. One of the benefits of having such a good corps of receivers is that the veteran signal-caller doesn't have to be precisely on the mark. Get it in the neighborhood and Ohio State's pro-caliber receivers will do the rest. But that didn't seem necessary against Northwestern. Howard seemed on the mark.

In fact, when the final stats were posted, I was surprised that Howard was only 15 of 24 passing, completing 62.5 percent of his throws. I would have thought his percentage would be higher.

Howard had a logical explanation for his lower success rate.

"The completion percentage is maybe the only stat I care about," he admitted. "I had to throw a couple of balls away today, but I think those were good decisions, just throwing the ball away."

That's the sign of a mature quarterback. His percentage was also hurt by the completion he lost when Jeremiah Smith was unable to hold on to what should have been a long touchdown on Ohio State's very first possession.

But as alluded to previously, receivers like Smith have also padded Howard's numbers with their many acrobatic or difficult catches.

I have to ask, once again, what Howard was doing out there late in the fourth quarter with the Buckeyes leading 31-7. This late in the season, and with the big games coming up, it is hard to believe that the veteran Howard needs the reps. But the Buckeyes need Howard if they are going to make their run. So, I continue to wonder, why expose him to unnecessary injury?

TreVeyon Coming On

When Ohio State signed running back Quinshon Judkins out of the portal, I took a wait-and-see attitude as to whether having two studs in the running backs room would work. One of the purported selling points on bringing Judkins in was it would help keep the injury-prone TreVeyon Henderson healthy and fresh as the season progressed.

Here we are 10 games into the season, and it looks like Henderson is getting stronger by the game, rather than being laid up on the bench.

In the three games since Ohio State's disastrous rushing outing against Nebraska, when the dynamic duo combined for 54 yards on 20 carries for a 2.7-yard average, Henderson has rushed 27 times for 213 yards and a sparkling 7.9-yard average. In addition, he has caught six passes for another 82 yards and a 13.7-yard average. How long before Henderson finally breaks a long one?

Speaking of TreVeyon breaking a long one, anyone who reads this column regularly knows how much I dislike runners leaping over defenders, which Henderson did midway through the fourth quarter against Northwestern and with the game completely under control. How many times have you seen a leaper gain any more yards than he would have had if he had just put his shoulder down to gain more yards? And have any of you ever seen someone leap over a defender and take off on a lengthy run? I don't recall a time. Leaping just seems like a recipe for injury to me, and as you can tell, I have a real thing about injuries right now.

Injuries are inevitable in football. Why increase the odds? In fact, why was Henderson even in there at that point? Keeping Howard company?

And while we are on the subject, why is the notoriously brittle Henderson returning kicks? I know some past Ohio State coaches have insisted on playing their best players on special teams, but I have to think that in Brian Hartline's room filled with speedsters who aren't playing much, there has to be someone who can return kicks. Henderson isn't even particularly good at it, averaging 13.0 yards on three returns.

Here's hoping for no Buckeye injuries in the big games to come!

Ike Reynolds Passes

Ike Reynolds never played for the Buckeyes. To my knowledge he never coached at Ohio State either. Yet thousands of Buckeye fans from around the state and across the nation knew who he was. Reynolds passed away on Oct. 23 at the age of 82 after a brief illness.

Through his own Reynolds Travel and several other travel agencies before that, he was arguably the leading purveyor of Ohio State sports travel,

including road games and bowl games, for many years.

Reynolds was born in Louisville, Ky, in 1941 and came to Columbus in 1968 while working for American Airlines, eventually earning a bachelor's in business administration from Ohio State while working and raising a family.

He left American to work for the local Arlington Travel and in 1994 started Northwest Travel Market, which was eventually sold to Peoples Travel in 1998. Along the way, he helped launch one of the first travel agent schools, AMES Travel School.

Ike and his late wife, Faye, took a leap with their loyal client base and their extensive athletic travel experience to open Reynolds Travel in 2002.

Many of his friends became customers, and his customers almost always became friends. Count me among the latter group.

I'm not sure how long I had been doing business with Ike, nor which agency he was with when we first hooked up, but we were definitely friends as much as business associates. We loved talking about the Buckeyes but more importantly how Buckeye wins and losses affected Buckeye-oriented businesses such as Reynolds Travel and Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

I wanted to thank BSB VIP subscriber Alan Lord for alerting me to Ike's passing.

I told Alan that one of the highest compliments I can pay to somebody is that they are a gentleman, and Ike was a gentleman.

"Interesting you should say that," he said. "I've always said that Ike was a gentleman's gentleman."

Indeed.

I know I speak for many of our readers when I say, rest in peace, Ike. Wouldn't it be fitting if the Buckeyes brought home a national championship this season in his honor?

Business Notes

A heads-up: We will be mailing our Michigan Preview issue on Tuesday, Nov. 26. With Thanksgiving two days later, there is a good chance many of you getting your paper via regular mail will not receive your BSB before The Game. We are offering the opportunity to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail in an envelope for the pre- and post-Michigan issues for just \$7 total. For credit card orders give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 or send your check or money order to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. You must mention the "Michigan Upgrade."

I strongly suggest you phone in your Michigan Upgrade request to make sure we have it in time to get your order processed before publishing.

For those of you who want to help BSB, we are still offering gift subscriptions to libraries, barber shops, active military Buckeyes and anyone under the age of 35 for just \$19.95, a rate we rarely use anymore because it does not cover the annual cost of printing and mailing the paper. However, it increases our advertising base and introduces new readers to BSB. Simply send your check or money order or credit card information to the previously mentioned address or call one of the listed phone numbers. Mention any of the special gift offers.

Also, this is a great time to send four free trial issues of BSB to any Buckeye fans you know. If you act now, the trial issues would include the Michigan issues. Just send us the names and addresses of any potential subscribers. *Please* do not send us names you have already submitted. We periodically reach out to names you have already sent with special introductory offers, so if they are interested, they will subscribe on their own.

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