

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 30, 2024

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Indiana starting the season 10-0 was one of the biggest surprises of this college football season. Going into the year, Big Ten media had the Hoosiers finishing 17th out of 18 teams, ahead of only Purdue.

But first-year head coach Curt Cignetti just kept winning with his team full of transfers and came into Columbus with a zero in the loss column. The schedule they played to get to that point might not have been as tough as other teams played, but they were prepared to come into Ohio Stadium and prove they were for real by beating the No. 2 team in the country, brushing off comments that it was "the biggest game in Indiana football history" as many were referring to it.

"This is just a football game," Cignetti said on ESPN before the game. "Sixty minutes between the white lines. We have a veteran group. We earned the right to be here. There's no magic wand. We have the largest victory margin in college football. There's a narrative out there that's created another chip for us. People can stick that narrative up their you know what."

He finished that short interview by parrotting his famous quote that was shared all over the college football world when he was initially hired by Indiana.

"Google me," he said. "I win."

The Buckeyes are accustomed to having that type of target on their backs, and head coach Ryan Day seemed like he might have been tired of hearing about just how good Indiana was in the week leading up to the game.

On ESPN's "Pat McAfee Show" on Nov. 22, McAfee finished Day's guest appearance by reminding the coach, "This Hoosiers team is the real deal."

"So are we," Day responded.

That energy bled into the Buckeyes' 38-15 win over the No. 5-ranked Hoosiers the next day with Ohio State dominating every aspect of the football game after Indiana scored the first touchdown to take a 7-0 lead in the first quarter.

OSU seemed to be playing with an edge that wasn't around for most of its games – understandably so for many of the blowouts they have been on the winning end of – and Day understands that is something they are going to need for the rest of this season if



SONNY BROCKWAY

SIMON SAYS STOP – Fifth-year linebacker **Cody Simon** may have had his best game as a Buckeye with 10 tackles and 2½ sacks as part of a dominating performance in the 38-15 win against Indiana on Nov. 23.

they want to reach their goals.

"That's the way you've got to play the game of football," he said. "That's the mentality that we have to have. We know that we want to be playing our best football. We also know what's at stake. If we don't win this game, we have no chance to go to Indianapolis and play in the Big Ten championship. That's real. We've had that approach for a few weeks now, more than that."

It was one of the more complete perfor-

mances by the Buckeyes this season coming against a team ranked in the top five, but what stood out above all else in the win was Jim Knowles' defensive unit, specifically the pass rush.

Finishing with five sacks, eight tackles for loss and a quarterback hurry, the Buckeyes were in the backfield on seemingly every play, causing Ohio University transfer Kurtis Rourke to struggle in a way that he hadn't so far with Indiana.

Fifth-year linebacker and team captain Cody Simon was one of the biggest factors causing Rourke to struggle. After a relatively quiet first half of the season for Simon in which he played well enough, he seems to have been a big part of the re-engineering that Ohio State did after the loss to Oregon. Since then, he has been much more visible on the defensive end and has been extremely effective getting into the backfield.

His 10 tackles against the Hoosiers led the team, as did his 2½ sacks in what may have been the best game of his Buckeye ca-

reer. He came around the left side of Indiana's offensive line for one of his solo sacks, taking Rourke – who never saw Simon coming – down and punching the ball out of the quarterback's hands and into the hands of OSU's Ty Hamilton.

Simon credited both his defensive coordinator and the defensive line for the success he's been having recently.

"Whatever (Knowles) puts up in front of us, we just try to do it to the best of our ability, and I trust everything he does," Simon said. "Whatever he puts in front of us, we're just going to try to execute to the best of our ability and go from there."

"I'm 100 percent thankful for the defensive line because for me to make plays, they have to make plays too," he added. "They're holding gaps off for me. I'm thankful we have them up front because they do the dirty work."

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

No. 2 Ohio State secured perhaps its biggest statement win of the season on Nov. 23, handily defeating 10-0 Indiana 38-15 to move one step closer to a rematch with No. 1 Oregon in the Big Ten Championship Game. 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 fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon has quietly put together a strong season in the middle of the Buckeyes' vaunted defense, and against the Hoosiers, he was by far the most active and most valuable player on the field.

Simon, who had earned the "Block O" and team captain label before this year, further earned his stripes as the unquestioned team leader of the defense by excelling all over the field. He was particularly lethal rushing the passer, often going unblocked both off the edge and on interior blitzes to bring home Kurtis Rourke on three different occasions (one of the sacks was a combined stop with JT Tuimolou), including one in the second quarter that forced a Rourke fumble and set the Buckeyes up in the red zone.

But Simon was almost equally as effective in open space, often catching up to Hoosiers running backs and wideouts to stop them in their tracks before they could gain any more yardage. This was evidenced by his team-high 10 tackles, four of those solo.

Simon was a huge part of what may have been Ohio State's most impressive defensive outing of the year, and he will continue to be a big part of its championship push moving forward.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: My Buckeye Leaf is going to the man who finally ended the Buckeyes' 10-year punt return drought.

Caleb Downs, a sophomore safety and, as of late, the team's punt returner, scored on a 79-yard punt return touchdown to put the Buckeyes up 21-7 early in the third quarter. Downs' long return was marked by a sensational spin move after he fielded the punt following a few bounces. He used his speed to surge through the second line of Indiana's punt team and finished the lengthy return off, cutting back behind his blockers. All Downs had to do the last 20 yards was waltz into the end zone to the delight of head coach Ryan Day.

Downs was also as effective as usual at the safety position where he came up with five total tackles, tied for the third-highest on the team.

Cameron Moone, BSB: The common adage of "big-time players make big-time plays in big-time games" always seems to be applied to the athletes who play on either the offensive or defensive side of the ball, very rarely towards those on special teams units. However, a special teams contributor will receive my Buckeye Leaf this week, as Caden Curry has made an impact on a special teams' play three weeks in a row.

Against Purdue on Nov. 9, the defensive end blocked a punt off of the leg of Purdue's Keelan Crimmins. A week later, Curry disrupted Northwestern punter Hunter Renner, who after a mishandled snap, nearly got the punt off before Curry slowed him down enough for Ohio State wide receiver David Adolph to block the punt.

This week, with just 1:47 to go in the first half, Curry came off the edge during a punt, and after another mishandled snap, brought down Indiana punter James Evans at the 7-yard line to set up Ohio State's second score of the day.

Special teams had been a major point of emphasis after the firing of special teams coordinator Parker Fleming in the offseason, and it appears the work the Buckeyes' have put into the unit is finally paying off.

Greg Wilson, BSB: Indiana came into the game without having to play against a very tough defense, Michigan the best it had gone against. The Hoosiers had not had to deal with a unit that – when it is clicking – is one of the most complete defenses in the country.

That effort was led by an impressive performance from the defensive line, especially Jack Sawyer, who gets my Buckeye Leaf. He was part of a pass rush that gave Ohio University transfer quarterback Kurtis Rourke a lot of trouble in the pocket, sacking him five times as a team and totaling eight tackles for loss along with a quarterback hurry.

Sawyer was responsible for four tackles and 1½ sacks, but as is often the case for the senior team captain, he was involved a lot more than the stat sheet shows. He was also effective at forcing Rourke to get rid of the ball when there were no good options, helping the Buckeye defense get off the field quickly by forcing five punts and allowing just 15 points from a team that was second in the country in scoring offense coming into the contest.

BSB Subscribers:

John Lanning: What a great game. A few red zone miscues,

but overall solid. My Leaves go to Downs for both defense and a great punt return; Carnell Tate for an overall solid performance and Will Howard for a well-managed execution of the game plan. We are rounding into a champion just in time for championship season.

Tiffin Buckeye: The whole defense. Amazing performance!

Bstu9: I'm switching gears and giving my Buckeye Leaf to Tiffin. All week he said this would happen but some of us wouldn't listen. His prediction – 38-14. Kudos Tiffin!

Terrier Buck: I second the motion to Tiffin! Howard played decent. I don't usually do the Buckeye Leaves thing but I must mention Downs for the punt return and a bunch of defensive players for keeping Indiana to 151 yards.

Bob Cody: Buckeye Leaves: Will Howard – despite a fluke INT, he persevered and delivered yet another great performance. The rebuilt offensive line – special mention to Carson Hinzman and Austin Siereveld. The Buckeye Sack Exchange – led by Jack Sawyer, Cody Simon and JTT. Emeka Egbuka. Caleb Downs – ends the no punt return TD drought. Jelani Thurman – his first Buckeye TD. TreVeyon Henderson. And Coach Day – a favorite target of delusional fans, but a deserving, great coach!

gold_pants: Players obviously (deserve Buckeye Leaves) but how about some love for Jim Knowles? He has been bashed a ton. Amazing how much better he coaches when he gets more control.

PeyoteBuck: Carnell Tate, Cody Simon, Caleb Downs and Henderson get my Leaves along with their supporting cast which allowed them to excel.

Poster That Harley Built: It has to be Caleb Downs. He has quietly become the best player on the defense and now he adds punt returns? A huge weakness for this team for years. The whole defensive front seven (or I guess front six with Ohio State) should be lauded as well.

BuckeyeScott: Google It. I'm sure the answer is out there.

Following the season-ending Achilles injury to center Seth McLaughlin, Ohio State has once again been forced to rework its offensive line, moving last year's starter Carson Hinzman from left guard to center and Austin Siereveld from the bench to left guard. With the Buckeyes now likely boasting a starting offensive line that consists of left tackle Donovan Jackson, Siereveld, Hinzman, right guard Tegra Tshabola and right tackle Josh Fryar for the rest of the season, we asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum how they feel about Ohio State's new-look front five after the Indiana game, and if they believe the unit is ready to succeed against a strong defensive line like Michigan on Nov. 30, as well as any other comments they may have regarding the Indiana win or upcoming rivalry game against the Wolverines.

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From The Message Board

"Assuming no one gets injured during the week, the OL should build more chemistry and confidence with Michigan coming to The Shoe. The pass blocking appeared to be good but can get better. The run-blocking definitely needs more work as Michigan has some good DL players, as did Indiana.

"What will the weather be like on Nov. 30? The Bucks need to be able to move the ball with the passing attack. As usual, the defense will need to control the Michigan offense and give the Buckeye offense extra opportunities. It will take a team effort. Just win. Michigan needs to be humbled. This game is why the seniors came back. They will be focused and motivated."

– Byron McNutt

"Both teams will be wound so tight for this match I simply hope our offensive line has a controlled intensity

and performs their plays with precision. I'm not worried. OSU has a bigger chip on their shoulders. Michigan should be cloaked in a cloud of shame. Beat the cheaters!"

– PeyoteBuck

"They will be ready. It's time to win this game for Ryan Day who I will continue to say is an amazing coach who I think many fans don't give enough credit. The players want this more for him than they do themselves. OSU will be ready for battle. I have no doubt."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"All things considered, I thought the patchwork offensive line played decently. But The Game is a step up in intensity and TTUN is the team that has mocked our physicality – and rightfully so – the past few years. They may be down, but they will be ready to play hardball on

Nov. 30 with only one way – and a big one – to salvage their season. In order to win The Game you have to be able to run the football. While the new OL's pass blocking was solid, the run blocking left quite a bit to be desired."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I thought the OL looked okay but not superb vs Indiana. I'm confident about the Michigan game, although I think there have been monumental or minor upsets at least 12 times since 1952. I think worse Michigan teams have upset Ohio State, but maybe not. I estimate that Michigan is only a little worse than Indiana, so a score of 38-15 wouldn't surprise me."

– Terrier Buck

"It seems that the adage "next man up" is true and reflective of this team's

character. How else do you explain the continued success of this offense? With more reps together and timing together, the run game will open up and that is good for the passing game also. This group is focused on success."

– John Lanning

"The Buckeye rush game was a little below average. Now whether that was due to the cobbled together O-Line or the Indiana D-Line, I don't know. What I do know is that the next team on the schedule does have a D-Line that is better than the one we just played. Ohio State will win this game but I think it will be closer than what we would like.

"One final comment on Indiana. This will be the best Indiana team you will see in the Cignetti era. They won't win any more games than they did this year during his tenure."

– BuckeyeScott

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Statement Win Still Had Blemishes

Many of the strengths that make Ohio State a national championship contender were on full display Nov. 23 during a 38-15 statement win against upstart Indiana. Unfortunately, a handful of the bothersome warts that could conspire to throw a king-sized monkey wrench into those title plans also reared their ugly heads.

First and foremost, the second-ranked Buckeyes exposed the weaknesses of the previously undefeated Hoosiers, a team that enjoyed a program-record 10 victories to begin the season under first-year head coach Curt Cignetti, a cocksure 63-year-old Pittsburgh native who has never experienced a losing season in what is now 14 years as a college head coach.

Cignetti used the tools available to him in today's game to assemble a roster that almost overnight turned the Hoosiers from an afterthought in the Big Ten race to the No. 5-ranked team in the nation. But while featuring a transfer-heavy roster from such programs as Ohio University of the Mid-American Conference and James Madison of the Sun Belt Conference, someone should have pointed out to Cignetti that Ohio State is 44-1 all-time against current teams in the MAC and Sun Belt, and the only blemish on that record came 130 years ago.

Indiana put up a game effort, especially during the first quarter when it marched 70 yards to score a touchdown and a take a 7-0 lead. But from there, the Hoosiers were simply outclassed in the categories of talent and athletic ability.

The Ohio State defense put on a performance that could best be described as dominant as it completely stifled Indiana after that opening march. The Hoosiers managed only 81 yards the rest of the way, finishing with 151 total yards after averaging 453.2 yards over their first 10 games, a figure that ranked second in the Big Ten in total offense.

Senior linebacker Cody Simon, a team co-captain who wears the ceremonial Block "O" jersey, had himself a whale of a first half, registering eight of his game-high 10 tackles and 2½ sacks. Simon's 2½ sacks were worth 23 yards of lost yardage, the most by any Ohio State defender since Chase Young had four sacks for losses totaling 25 yards during a 38-7 win against Wisconsin on Oct. 26, 2019.

Simon was a main beneficiary of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles finally deciding that consistent pressure on the opposing quarterback is a winning formula, and the Buckeyes came from a variety of angles to sack IU quarterback Kurtis Rourke five times and limit the Big Ten leader in passer rating to just 68 yards through the air on 8-of-18 passing. Rourke entered the game averaging 267.8 yards through the air.

Conversely, Ohio State QB Will Howard appeared to be everything Rourke was not – calm, comfortable, collected and confident. Howard completed each of his first 14 attempts in the game on his way to a 22-for-26 afternoon, his program-record sixth game this season with a completion rate of 80 percent or better.

With the only possible exceptions of checking down too soon on his team's opening possession, leading to a three-and-out, and a red-zone interception that bounced off the hands of tight end Jelani Thurman, Howard was nearly perfect. He wound up with 201 yards and two touchdowns through the air and scored the final touchdown of the game for his seventh rushing score of the season.

It was also reportedly Howard who was most vocal in his locker-room leadership when starting center Seth McLaughlin went down the Tuesday before the game with a season-ending Achilles tear. More than one of his teammates

reported that Howard carried himself the way a team leader should despite the fact he's a one-and-done player after transferring in from Kansas State.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Perhaps it was what Howard said or did that seemed to assuage the massive loss of McLaughlin, who was playing at an All-America level. Not that the Ohio State offensive line was forced to play untested players against Indiana. Carson Hinzman moved from left guard to the center spot he occupied for nearly all of last season, while Austin Siereveld took over for Hinzman at a position where he had logged a couple of starts earlier this season.

Simply plugging and playing offensive linemen at different positions might sound easy, but it definitely is not. Still, the line protected Howard well, giving up only one sack to the Hoosiers, who started the afternoon as the Big Ten's leading defense in sacks.

Moreover, the line continued its steady play with regard to penalties – or, more accurately, a lack of penalties. Of the eight accepted infractions levied against the Buckeyes in the game, only three were called on offensive linemen. Right guard Tegra Tshabola had one false start, while left tackle Donovan Jackson and Hinzman were each flagged for questionable illegal blocks in the back.

No holding calls, no delays and no bad snaps. In other words, just what the doctor ordered during a big game with an offensive line rebuilt on the fly for the third time since mid-October.

More Positive Takeaways

The tenor of the game actually changed on a couple of special teams plays, most specifically a late second-quarter gaffe committed by Indiana.

With the score tied at 7-7, Simon sacked Rourke and caused a fumble that was recovered by OSU defensive tackle Ty Hamilton at the IU 18-yard line. But the Buckeyes squandered their good fortune when Howard's third-down pass bounced off Thurman and into the hands of Indiana linebacker Jailin Walker.

The Hoosiers managed a couple of first downs, but Simon surprised Rourke with a first-down blitz that resulted in an 8-yard loss, and Indiana was eventually forced to punt. The snap was good enough, but apparently IU punter James Evans took his eye off the football, which slipped through his hands, bounced off his face mask and fell to the turf.

Junior Caden Curry, who has become something of a special teams star for the Buckeyes the past couple of games, swarmed over Evans to give Ohio State possession at the IU 7. Three plays later, TreVeyon Henderson knifed his way into the end zone from 4 yards out to give the Buckeyes a 14-7 lead, an advantage from which they never really looked back.

Later in the game, Ohio State special teams came up big again with something not seen in a decade.

Full disclosure. I have not been a fan of exposing star safety Caleb Downs to the perils of punt returns, especially when Downs is acknowledged by most observers as the best safety in college football. Now, the sophomore transfer from Alabama can add another line to his already impressive résumé – electrifying

return man.

Early in the third quarter, with the Buckeyes still protecting that 14-7 advantage, Downs let a punt bounce in front of him at about his own 30-yard line before deciding to pick it up at the 21. He first split two defenders and then spun away from a third before getting a block from linebacker Gabe Powers that sprung him up the sideline.

Getting another downfield block from linebacker C.J. Hicks, Downs cut back toward the middle of the field, and with Curry waving his arms wildly in the air in celebration, the junior crossed the goal line with a 79-yard backbreaker of a punt return.

With the touchdown, Downs became the first OSU player to return a punt for a touchdown since Jalin Marshall ran one back 54 yards during a 42-27 win against Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014, and his 79-yarder was the longest punt return by a Buckeye since Ray Small ran one back 80 yards (but did not score) during a 42-7 win against Michigan on Nov. 22, 2008.

Maybe had I known Downs returned a punt 85 yards for a touchdown last year while he was still at Alabama, I would never have been so reluctant to see him back there.

About Those Warts

Any victory, especially a dominating one against a No. 5-ranked opponent, is to be savored. Yet, especially at this time of the year, with one supremely huge game remaining on the regular-season schedule, Ohio State should not be repeating the same mistakes it has seemingly made since the opener against Akron.

As dominating as it was for much of the game, the defense started slowly for the second week in a row, allowing an opponent to march almost unabated for an early touchdown. Against Northwestern, it was a 92-yard drive that consumed 13 plays and 5:30 off the clock, and it was a bit of déjà vu against Indiana, which had 70 yards in 11 plays that ate up more than six minutes.

The Buckeyes recovered both times, of course, and another sluggish start might not be fatal against an offensively-challenged Michigan. But I wouldn't bet on that, especially in a game that means so much to Ohio State in terms of getting to the Big Ten Championship Game for a rematch with Oregon, not to mention the overall team psyche with regard to the rivalry game the Buckeyes haven't won since 2019.

Additionally, Howard scored the final touchdown of the game on a quarterback sneak from the 1-yard line, raising this question: Why sneak it for a meaningless score at the end of the game when you lined up in a shotgun formation on fourth-and-1 early in the second quarter only to get turned away?

With a 6-4, 237-pound quarterback behind an offensive line that averages nearly 320 pounds per man, and big backs pushing during the perfectly legal "Tush Push" play perfected by the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles, I would think the Buckeyes would run the quarterback sneak every time they needed a yard or less.

Finally, I'm not sure how long cornerback Davison Igbinosun can keep his job if he is going to continually commit major penalties. Igbinosun was flagged for three more pass-interference calls against the Hoosiers, and the penalties led to both Indiana touchdowns.

Igbinosun, who now has 10 pass-interference penalties, appears to grab on every play, something Indiana certainly targeted at different points during the game, and something for which Big Ten officials are definitely on the lookout from here on out.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

OSU Still No. 2 In CFP, AP Polls

Ohio State remained at No. 2 in the most recent versions of both the College Football Playoff rankings and the AP top 25 poll, released on Nov. 19 and 24, respectively.

Oregon's No. 1 ranking in both remained unchanged after the Ducks' idle weekend. Before Indiana lost to Ohio State on Nov. 23, the Hoosiers were the No. 5 ranked team in the CFP, but they will fall along with No. 7 Alabama and No. 9 Ole Miss, which both lost in Week 13, shaking up what the playoff might look like when the final rankings are released after conference championship weekend.

The Buckeyes were also joined by No. 3 Texas, No. 4 Penn State, No. 6 Notre Dame, No. 8 Miami (Fla.), No. 10 Georgia, No. 12 Boise State and No. 14 BYU in the most recent projected bracket.

Before an expected shake-up in the rankings is released on Nov. 26, the Buck-

eyes were projected to match up against BYU – which could drop out of the playoffs after a 28-23 loss to Arizona State – in the first round at Ohio Stadium with the winner moving on to face off against Boise State, which would have had a bye as the fourth-highest-ranked conference champion. Oregon, Texas and Miami would also receive byes.

With the Crimson Tide falling to unranked Oklahoma 24-3 and the Rebels losing 24-17 to unranked Florida in Week 13, there could be multiple new teams welcomed into the newest version of the bracket when it's released.

As for the AP poll, the Ducks received all 61 first-place votes and were joined by the Buckeyes along with No. 3 Texas, No. 4 Penn State and No. 5 Notre Dame – which took Indiana's spot after it fell five spots to No. 10.

There was a lot of movement otherwise in the top 10, with Georgia jumping two spots to No. 6 after a 59-21 win over UMass, No. 7 Tennessee and No. 8 Miami each moving up three places after wins over UTEP (56-0) and Wake Forest (42-14), respectively and No. 9 SMU jumping four ranks after a 33-7 win over Virginia. Alabama and Ole Miss fell to No. 13 and No. 15, respectively.

McLaughlin Out With Torn Achilles

It was revealed on Nov. 19 that Ohio State center Seth McLaughlin would miss the remainder of the 2024 season due to a torn Achilles tendon he suffered

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	3-8, 38-17 win over Kent State
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	5-6, 16-14 loss to Central Michigan
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	W, 49-14	FOX	8-3, 42-35 win over Old Dominion
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W, 38-7	Peacock	5-6, 24-17 win over Purdue
Oct. 5	IOWA	W, 35-7	CBS	7-4, 29-13 win over Maryland
Oct. 12	at Oregon	L, 32-31	NBC	11-0, idle
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	W, 21-17	FOX	6-5, 44-25 win over Wisconsin
Nov. 2	at Penn State	W, 20-13	FOX	10-1, 26-25 win over Minnesota
Nov. 9	PURDUE	W, 45-0	FOX	1-10, 24-17 loss to Michigan State
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	W, 31-7	BTN	4-7, 50-6 loss to Michigan
Nov. 23	INDIANA	W, 38-15	FOX	10-1, 38-15 loss to Ohio State
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	6-5, 50-6 win over Northwestern

during practice.

Ohio State's offensive line was having a resurgent season, with McLaughlin leading the way. The front five was named one of 10 semifinalists for the Joe Moore Award, which recognizes the best line in college football, on Nov. 12. McLaughlin was also named a semifinalist for the Outland Trophy on Nov. 20. The award recognizes the best interior lineman in the country, and he was the only center among the seven players included on the list.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day has said many times that McLaughlin was the biggest part of the offensive line improvement and has been extremely valuable in the Buckeyes' run game this season. The graduate center received multiple first-team midseason All-American honors for his performance.

Losing McLaughlin is a devastating blow to the Ohio State offense that averaged 183.8 rushing yards per game and 451.4 total yards per game with him as the center. The Buckeye offensive line had also given up only 12 sacks the entire season, which was tied for 24th in the country.

It's the second major offensive line injury the Buckeyes have had to deal with this season after starting left tackle Josh Simmons went down in the loss to Oregon on Oct. 12, causing Donovan Jackson

to slide from left guard to left tackle and Carson Hinzman to take Jackson's spot at left guard.

But against Indiana, Hinzman went back to center, where he started 12 games last season, and Austin Siereveld stepped in as the starting left guard, where he played for two games to begin the 2024 season when Jackson was dealing with an injury.

The group played well against a strong Indiana defense, allowing just one sack – coming on an intentional-grounding penalty on Will Howard – and leading a rushing attack that netted 115 yards, a number Day said was deceptively low due to the lower number of plays the Buckeyes ran on offense compared to usual.

Day said on Nov. 20 that, should anything happen to Hinzman, redshirt freshman Joshua Padilla would be next up at center. But for now, the Buckeyes will be sticking with the front five they sent out against the Hoosiers.

Kacmarek, Melton Return Against IU

After he had been dealing with an injury suffered on the first drive against Oregon, tight end Will Kacmarek was no longer listed on the injury report and ended up playing in the win over Indiana.

He played 18 snaps in the game, according to Pro Football Focus, and while



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he didn't have any stats in the win, his return is a big one with the offensive line health issues the Buckeyes are having. Kacmarek has been a big part of the Buckeyes' blocking game when he's on the field.

Defensive end Mitchell Melton was also listed as out the week before but was back on the field on Nov. 23. He also didn't record any stats in nine snaps.

Zen Michalski – who originally replaced Simmons at left tackle when he first suffered his season-ending injury – was still out after he suffered his own lower-body injury in Ohio State's win over Nebraska on Oct. 26.

NFL Scouts Attend OSU vs IU Game

For the Buckeyes' third top-five matchup of their season, there were nine NFL teams with scouts in Ohio Stadium to take in the game.

The Buffalo Bills and Detroit Lions were represented by two scouts each while there was one on site for each of the Atlanta Falcons, Indianapolis Colts, Jacksonville Jaguars, Carolina Panthers, New England Patriots, New Orleans Saints and Pittsburgh Steelers.

There was plenty of talent for them to see on both teams, with the Buckeyes boasting one of the better potential draft classes in recent memory after so many players decided to return for another year.

The scouts also likely had their eyes on the Hoosiers as well, with players such as quarterback Kurtis Rourke, wide receiver Elijah Sarratt, defensive end Mikail Kamara, defensive tackle CJ West and offensive linemen Carter Smith and Trey Wedig on the field.

Fields Serves As Guest Picker For "College GameDay"

Former Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields returned to Columbus on Nov. 23, serving as the celebrity guest picker for ESPN's "College GameDay" when the show aired live from Ohio State for the Buckeyes' noon game against Indiana.

Fields was able to join the "GameDay" desk – which this year consists of host Rece Davis, longtime analysts Lee Corso, Kirk Herbstreit and Desmond Howard as well as former Alabama head coach Nick Saban and ESPN personality Pat McAfee – because his current team, the Pittsburgh Steelers, were in Ohio on Nov. 21 to play the Cleveland Browns and did not have a game over the weekend.

When Fields was asked to pick the winner between the Buckeyes and Hoosiers, he went with his former team, predicting they would beat Indiana by 50 points. While his margin of victory might have been a little off, the Buckeyes did take home the win.

Fields, who is the current backup quarterback to Russell Wilson in Pittsburgh

after starting for the first six games this season, returned to Ohio State nearly four years after taking his last snap with the Scarlet and Gray. He played two seasons with the Buckeyes from 2019-20, winning Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year each year while combining for 6,240 total yards (5,373 passing, 867 rushing) and total 78 touchdowns.

Ohio State went 20-2 with Fields under center, winning the Big Ten and making the College Football Playoff in each of those seasons and advancing all the way to the CFP national championship game against Saban's Alabama in 2020.

Fields is now the second former OSU quarterback in as many years to serve as guest picker for "College GameDay," joining his former teammate and current Houston Texans starter C.J. Stroud, who was on hand when the show broadcast inside Ohio Stadium before the Buckeyes' 20-12 win over Penn State in October 2023.

Day Turned In Smith Tackle

Ohio State freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith nearly had an injury scare early in the third quarter of Ohio State's 31-7 win over Northwestern. On a 68-yard reception on third-and-5, Smith caught the ball at the OSU 29-yard line and made it all the way inside the Northwestern 20-yard line before being tackled by sever-

al Northwestern defenders. One of the tacklers, cornerback Robert Fitzgerald, grabbed Smith's ankle to take him down and appeared to twist it after Smith was already on the ground.

In the immediate aftermath, Smith limped off the field to the Ohio State sideline where his ankle was taped up. Smith didn't have a catch the rest of the game, but he did have a 2-yard rush on a later drive and was targeted on an incomplete pass.

During his weekly press conference on Nov. 19, Day confirmed that the play was sent to the Big Ten. On the next day, he provided a brief update.

"I haven't heard much back other than it should have been a foul," Day said. "I know there's still some conversation there."

Smith had a bit of a quieter day than usual with three catches for 34 yards in Ohio State's win over Indiana, but he still looked like the uber-athletic true freshman who has taken the world by storm when he had the ball in his hands, seemingly unbothered by the injury.

Smith Named Biletnikoff Award Finalist

Speaking of Smith, the true freshman continued to find himself in elite company on Nov. 19 when he was named a Bilet-

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BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

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

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

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

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

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

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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nikoff Award semifinalist along with 10 other pass catchers in college football.

Smith, the No. 1 recruit in the 2024 class, broke Cris Carter's single-season freshman record for receptions, receiving yards and receiving touchdowns this season, and he still has multiple games to go.

For the season, Smith has 52 catches and leads the team with 899 receiving yards and nine touchdowns, the latter mark tied for the team lead with Emeka Egbuka.

The Biletnikoff Award, given to the nation's best receiver, went to former Ohio State receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. last season. Should Smith win the award, he would be the third in Ohio State history to take home the honor, joining Harrison and Terry Glenn, who won it in 1995, the second year it was given out.

Smith was joined on the list by Alabama wide receiver and fellow freshman Ryan Williams, Colorado wide receiver and cornerback Travis Hunter and Maryland receiver Tai Felton, among others.

The Biletnikoff Award winner will be announced on Dec. 12 on ESPN.

Hicks' Role Could Expand

In the Buckeyes' 45-0 win over Purdue on Nov. 9, linebacker C.J. Hicks saw time at the Jack position, which is a hybrid of the linebacker and defensive end spot, and he saw some success in that role, albeit against a poor offense.

Follow The Buckeyes Daily During Michigan Week And Beyond

The excitement is building now that Michigan Week is finally here. There is no need to miss any of the latest news as the Buckeyes prepare to defeat their rivals and continue their quest for a Big Ten championship, 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.

We want to remind readers that the complete edition of each BSB is posted at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for the readers having continuing mail problems. This electronic service, while not a substitute for your print edition, is a stopgap as your paper winds its way through the postal system and is also free to subscribers.

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Since then, in a since-deleted interview with an Ohio State reporter that was posted to Twitter, Hicks made known his desire to be an edge rusher, and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles seems to be hearing the junior out.

"C.J. has that talent and that skill. So I think his future is going to involve a lot more of that," Knowles said on Nov. 19.

Going into the 2024 season, Hicks and junior linebacker Sonny Styles – who moved to the position after starting at safety last season – were in a battle for the starting Will linebacker spot, with Styles winning that fight. Since then, Hicks has fallen even further down the depth chart with Arvell Reese jumping him and earning consistent playing time, especially when the Buckeyes are in a 4-3 look.

Over the offseason, linebackers coach James Laurinaitis called Hicks very disruptive and said that he was "probably the best blitzer in our room," so the Buckeyes

have long recognized that he has the right skill set to get into the backfield.

Moving Hicks to the edge this season would have been difficult with so much depth at that position and NFL prospects such as JT Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer starting on the defensive line, and he likely would not have had much playing time there either.

It seems as if the experimentation with the Jack position this season was reserved for a blowout game and will no longer happen with every remaining game likely to be more contested, but Knowles thinks Hicks and Melton both could do well in a role like that.

"I like what those two guys do," Knowles said. "I always wanted to get Mitch involved and C.J. involved. They're good players. So I just always think there's a future there for that package for those two guys. I think they can be really good at it."

If Hicks decides to stick around for another year with the Buckeyes and forgo his opportunities to transfer in the offseason, he very well could see a lot more time as an edge rusher, or even in the Jack position next season. Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. will both most likely return for another season and at this point would be the presumed starters, but with how much rotation the Buckeyes have had this season in the front four, Hicks could fight his way into an important role on the edge. Hicks is already getting more reps in practice at that position, according to Curry.

"He's been getting more one-on-one reps. I've been seeing him more on the pass rush, actually," Curry said on Nov. 20. "He's going to make plays, and he's going to cause havoc."

Stover Sheds Black Stripe

Freshman linebacker Garrett Stover became an "official" Buckeye on Nov. 20, shedding his black stripe and becoming the 16th freshman to do so this year.

Stover – the cousin of former Ohio State tight end Cade Stover – came into

Ohio State from Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut, where he was the No. 142 prospect in the country and the 10th-best linebacker.

In the 2024 season, Stover has gotten into four games but has not yet recorded a statistic, getting into the wins over Akron, Western Michigan and Purdue. He made the Buckeyes travel roster for the first time when they went to Wrigley Field and beat Northwestern 31-7, although he didn't see any action in the win.

He joins Payton Pierce in Laurinaitis' room as the only two linebacker recruits in the 2024 class, both of whom have now lost their black stripes after Pierce did so on Aug. 13.

OSU Adding 91 Scholarships In 2025

In an open letter penned to Ohio State fans on Nov. 21, Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork announced that – in light of the expected April settlement of the House v. NCAA antitrust case that will enact roster limits for several sports and pave the way for revenue sharing – the university will add 91 additional scholarships across both men's and women's sports, while also remaining committed to maintaining 36 scholarship sports, though its pistol and rifle teams will transition from co-ed to women's only programs by 2029.

"With support from President (Ted) Carter and our Board of Trustees, we are committed to maintaining 36 intercollegiate sports and athletic scholarships for all 36 programs, while also fully funding the \$20.5 million dollars of direct payments to student-athletes," Bjork wrote in the letter.

"After a thorough review of factors such as Title IX compliance, national and conference sport sponsorship trends, our history of competitive success and a sound fiscal plan, we are excited to announce the addition of 91 new scholarships across both women's and men's sports. We firmly believe this new investment will allow our programs to continue to compete for and win championships and keep excellence at the forefront of



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our mission.”

This announcement comes after Bjork said earlier this year that the athletic department might not be able to continue funding all 36 scholarships sports due to the added expense of revenue sharing, which according to Bjork in the letter, will cost the university \$20.5 million and increase the “allocation of our department’s resources” by 4 percent.

It was also previously reported by NBC4 that the university was eliminating scholarships for its men’s gymnastics team.

But now, Bjork said that they have come up with a more sound strategy – along with the help of Carter’s new six-part strategic plan for the university called “Education for Citizenship 2035,” which lists college athletics as one of the main pillars to the success of the school – to ensure the scholarships of all sports while also providing the full \$20.5 million of direct payments to compensate current student-athletes.

Bjork also wrote that under the new NCAA model all Division I athletes who participated in collegiate sports between 2016 and 2024 are eligible for back pay for NIL earnings.

Bjork, who will begin his sixth month as Ohio State’s full-time athletic director in December, revealed several additional plans he has to better the Buckeyes’ athletic department as a whole. Those proposed changes included expanding the Buckeye Club and Champions Fund to increase funding, revising football sea-

son ticket plans for the 2025 season, increasing corporate scholarships, creating a combined men’s and women’s hockey arena and making several “imminent upgrades” to Ohio Stadium.

“We are committed to being extremely innovative and creative amid these changes to the collegiate sports model,” Bjork wrote. “During these times of immense change, we have an opportunity to show the world what it means to be a Buckeye and lead the way into the future.”

Bjork To Evaluate Noon Kickoffs In Offseason

In the second half of the season, Ohio State played exclusively noon games, including its upcoming 12 p.m. start against Michigan on Nov. 30. With six straight early games, there were conversations about whether that was unfair to the Buckeyes, and Bjork spoke with Eleven Warriors on the matter.

“I think that’s an offseason conversation honestly, but here’s what I’ll say: FOX has the first pick,” Bjork said. “We’re the biggest brand within the Big Ten. We have the most fans who watch our games. The ratings are really high, and I’ll just kind of leave it at that, but that’s really an offseason conversation.”

With Oregon being the other top team in the Big Ten this season, the Buckeyes have been the first choice for FOX so often because a Big Noon kickoff would mean the Ducks would start at 9 a.m. Pacific Time.

“If Oregon’s playing on the West Coast,

they really can’t play a 12 noon Eastern Time game,” Bjork said. “You have us, Penn State, Indiana. We’re the most successful programs this year. If you just look at that piece of it from a time zone standpoint, it kind of makes sense where it’s landed. That’s more of an offseason analysis, more of an offseason conversation.”

The conversation about noon games went hand in hand with another conversation about Ohio Stadium not being loud enough despite there being over 100,000 fans in the stands each of the seven games the Buckeyes had at home this year – four of which were at noon.

That did seem to change when Indiana came to Columbus for the top-five matchup, with Day and Howard both giving credit to the fans for how loud they were throughout the win.

“We need a home-field advantage for the Buckeyes,” Bjork said. “The players don’t care when they play, they’ll show up. We need our fans to have the same mentality that the ‘Shoe should be loud no matter if it’s a night game or a noon game, because we need and deserve a home-field advantage.”

Bjork said that Ohio State is going to look into multiple different changes it could make to help give the Buckeyes more of a home-field advantage in years to come.

“When we play music, how we play music, what’s the script (for entertainment during TV timeouts) look like in-game, all of those things we’re analyzing right now,” Bjork said. “I think we can modernize,

and I think we can be better and do more engagement opportunities, and those are the kind of things that we’re looking at.”

Dewine Signs Executive Order For NIL Equity

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine signed an executive order on Nov. 18 that allows universities in the state to pay student-athletes directly for their name, image and likeness.

The order comes at a time during which college sports is changing in many ways, including the NCAA likely reaching a settlement for multiple antitrust lawsuits and the beginning of revenue sharing coming at the start of the 2025-26 academic year.

Currently athletes are allowed to earn revenue from their NIL, but that money comes from third parties, like collectives such as The 1870 Society and The Foundation – the two largest Ohio State collectives – not the university itself.

The executive order went into effect immediately, allowing schools in Ohio to directly compensate their athletes for their NIL – and is set to expire when the settlement comes into “full operational effect.”

Men’s, Women’s Soccer Advance In NCAAs

The Ohio State men’s and women’s soccer teams experienced different fates in the NCAA tournament on Nov. 24, with

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OHIO STATE

INSIDER

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the top-ranked men's squad advancing to the third round of the bracket following a 2-1 win over Western Michigan in Columbus and the women falling to No. 3 Wake Forest 1-0 in Winston Salem, N.C., to end their season.

Starting with the men, Brian Maisson-

neuve's team – one week removed from its first Big Ten tournament title since 2009 – continued its positive end-of-season momentum by rallying from an early 1-0 deficit to advance past the upset-minded Broncos in front of 1,713 fans at Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium.

The Buckeyes found themselves in an early hole after graduate midfielder Owen Smith found the back of the net at 32:55 to give the Broncos the lead, but they rebounded just over eight minutes later when graduate defender and Iceland native Siggi Magnusson handled a loose ball off a corner kick and wrapped a shot around Broncos goalkeeper Colin Welsh to tie the contest at one apiece.

Ohio State then captured the lead for the first time all game at 64:35 off the leg of senior Big Ten Midfielder of the Year Michael Adedokun, who won a foot race with Broncos senior defender Duarte

Chapelas by crossing him over and making him fall, dribbled past another defender, and squeaked a shot passed Welsh to give the Buckeyes the one-goal lead.

OSU would then allow Western Michigan to attempt just two more shots the rest of the game to come away with the victory and advance to the third round of the NCAA tournament, where they will host Stanford on Dec. 1, with start time set for 5 p.m.

The women's team had a much different day on Nov. 24, having their 2024 season end with a shutout loss to No. 3 seed Wake Forest.

The Buckeyes, led by 28-year head coach Lori Walker-Hock and all-time leading scorer Kailyn Dudukovich, advanced to the round of 16 for just the fifth time in program history after defeating Auburn 2-1 in the previous round, but their chances of advancing any further ended when

senior forward Emily Murphy found the net at 75:38 for Wake Forest.

Ohio State did have two chances to tie the game in the last 13 minutes of the game with a pair of shot attempts from Jacinda Bonham 77:32 and Ava Greco at 86:39, but it was unable to find the net both times due to saves by sophomore goalie Valentina Amaral, her only two of the game.

The loss to the Demon Deacons ends a successful season for the Buckeyes, who went 14-6-3 on the year (6-3-2 Big Ten), just the seventh time the program has earned 14 or more wins in a season. It also marked the end of a sensational career for Dudukovich, who had a program-record 44 goals and 98 points across her four years in scarlet and gray.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1984

Suddenly, there was a scent of roses in the air again. "I've got a sniff of them, but in one more week I hope to get a dozen of them," said Ohio State tailback Keith Byars.

The reason for such an odor around Columbus those days was the wild set of events that took place on Nov. 10. That's when Ohio State pounded Northwestern, 52-3, Michigan State held on for a 17-16 win over Iowa, and Wisconsin thrashed Purdue, 30-13.

At day's end, the Buckeyes had moved back into the front row in line for the Big Ten championship and a trip to Ohio State's long-lost friend — the Rose Bowl.

Waiting in Pasadena was the University of Southern California, the team which Ohio State played in its last trip to the Rose Bowl five years before. In fact, four of Ohio State's last five Rose Bowl appearances had been against USC.

"I'm glad I don't have to watch the scoreboard anymore," Byars said.

35 Years Ago — 1989

With another big Ohio State win over Wisconsin, 42-22, on Nov. 18 and another 309 yards for the team on the ground, you would have thought running back Scottie Graham would have been getting tired of pounding opponents with the run.

Think again. "You never get tired of winning," said the OSU sophomore fullback. "No matter what I have to do, whether it's run or block, as long as we win, I don't get tired of it. Winning is the most important thing and we're still doing that."

Graham was also still picking up large chunks of yardage, gaining a game and career-high 152 yards while tallying two touchdowns against the Badgers.

Graham, who had 791 yards heading into the Nov. 25 showdown with Michigan, had the most yardage by an OSU fullback that decade. Graham's yardage was the most by a Buckeye fullback since John Brockington picked up 1,142 yards in 1970.

30 Years Ago — 1994

With his 166 passing yards in Ohio State's 32-17 road victory over Indiana on Nov. 12, Bobby Hoying became just the fourth quarterback in Ohio State history to eclipse 2,000 yards in one season. But it was Hoying's underrated and surprisingly nimble feet — not his valuable right arm — that may have been the difference in Bloomington.

"We picked up a lot of third downs and that was the key to the second half for sure," Hoying said. "If the pass wasn't there, it seemed like the Red Sea opened up for me. It was just easy for me to pull it down and get the first down sometimes."

Hoying, a 6-4, 223-pound junior, entered the game with only 42 net yards rushing in 41 attempts that season, a deceiving statistic since the NCAA counts sacks against the quarterback's rushing total. But he sidestepped pressure all day and took off on his own six times for 34 net yards, an average of 5.7 per attempt. More important, Hoying's scrambles turned negative plays into drive sustainers.

In a key first-half moment, he escaped the grasp of an IU defender and gained 10 yards to the left. The Buckeyes scored three plays later to forge a 19-10 lead. On third-and-6 from the Ohio State 19, with OSU trying to protect a 25-17 lead in the fourth quarter, Hoying tucked in the ball when fullback Nicky Sualua was covered in the flat and picked up 11 yards.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Ohio State's season from hell became even more of a night-

mare Nov. 13 at Ohio Stadium.

The Buckeyes, who needed a win over Illinois to clinch a bowl berth, fell behind the visiting Fighting Illini 19-0 and after committing a host of costly errors, never figured in a stunning 46-20 defeat.

As if the loss — OSU's worst home defeat in 32 years — wasn't bad enough, the Buckeyes (6-5 overall, 3-4 in Big Ten play) faced the prospect of going to Michigan Nov. 20 needing a win to qualify for a bowl game. A loss to Michigan, ranked 10th nationally after a come-from-behind win at Penn State Nov. 13, would have snapped OSU's string of bowl appearances at 10 years.

"We're not playing very good football right now and we're doing an awful job of handling adversity," OSU coach John Cooper summed up after the defeat.

20 Years Ago — 2004

On the field, Maurice Clarett was one of the major players in Ohio State's march to the 2002 national championship.

Off the field, Clarett continued to be a major pain in the neck to the university.

A little more than a year after he was suspended by the NCAA for 17 separate violations of ethical conduct bylaws, and just one month after his final appeal to join the NFL was denied, Clarett made a number of scathing allegations against Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, assistant coach Dick Tressel and other members of the OSU coaching staff, involving cars, cash and other improper benefits.

The allegations were published in the Nov. 22 issue of ESPN The Magazine and penned by staff writer Tom Friend. Teased on the cover of the magazine with the headline "Did Ohio State Cheat? Maurice Clarett Says Yes," excerpts of the story became available on Nov. 9 on ESPN's website, ESPN.com.

Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger said Clarett's accusations were "nothing new" from a troubled ex-player who threatened last year to "blow this whole program up," while Tressel termed the allegations "totally false."

15 Years Ago — 2009

Tresselball needed a reboot before all was said and done, but at the end, a boot from one of the most unlikely heroes sent Ohio State to the Rose Bowl for the first time in more than a decade.

Devin Barclay, a 26-year-old walk-on and former professional soccer player who was not even the 10th-ranked Buckeyes' No. 1 kicker until one week earlier, made a 39-yard field goal to provide the winning points in overtime to conclude a 27-24 win Nov. 14 against No. 15 Iowa.

The kick gave Ohio State at least a share of the Big Ten title for the fifth season in a row and erased an ugly finish to regulation, but Buckeyes such as senior captain Austin Spitler were not in the mood to quibble about style points afterward.

"We got the win. We're off to Pasadena. We've got Michigan this week, and we're excited about that." Spitler said with a smile. "It's the best week of the season."

10 Years Ago — 2014

J.T. Barrett had quite a day for the Ohio State offense — but what else was new? Well, in the case of Ohio State's 42-27 win over Indiana, a couple of school records.

The redshirt freshman completed 25-of-35 passes for 302 yards and four touchdowns while also tossing a pair of interceptions. The 300-yard passing game was his fourth of the season, which was not a record but was getting there. The only Ohio State quarterback before Barrett to pass the 300-yard mark that

many times was Joe Germaine, who did so eight times from 1996-98, including seven as a senior.

Barrett's third touchdown pass of the afternoon, a 6-yarder to Jalin Marshall in the fourth quarter, broke Troy Smith's single-season record of 30 set in 2006 when Smith won the Heisman Trophy. He broke his own record two more times before the game was over, leaving him with 33 on the season.

That tied Russell Wilson (2011) for second most in a season by a Big Ten quarterback, six behind Drew Brees' record of 39 set in 1998. Barrett had already matched Brees' record of total touchdowns accounted for (rushing and passing) in a season with 42. A week earlier, he broke the Ohio State record of 36 set by Braxton Miller a season before.

Five Years Ago — 2019

The Nittany Lions scored 17 unanswered points in the third quarter thanks to fumbles by quarterback Justin Fields and running back J.K. Dobbins on consecutive drives, and Penn State entered the fourth quarter within one score.

Ohio State marched 44 yards down the field on its opening drive of the fourth quarter in its 28-17 win over Penn State on Nov. 23. With Justin Fields connecting with sophomore receiver Chris Olave for a leaping touchdown that extended the lead to the final margin. Penn State, meanwhile, mustered just 65 yards of total offense in the game, turning the ball over twice on downs and throwing an interception on its only trip past midfield in the fourth quarter.

"Our backs were up against the wall," Day said. "To win a game that was not clean shows the toughness that we have. You walk out of that game thinking, 'Oh, we probably could have won a lot bigger than that.' But Penn State's a great team. They did a really good job."

"At the end of the day, we've got to take care of the ball. And I said it to one of the coaches, maybe it's been a little too easy at times. This was hard today. We learned some lessons, and hopefully, we can go from there."

With the win, Ohio State (11-0, 8-0 in the Big Ten) punched its ticket to Indianapolis for the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 7. But first, the Buckeyes had to travel to Ann Arbor for their annual rivalry game against Michigan.

One Year Ago — 2023

One of the biggest criticisms of Ohio State in 2023 had been special teams and how the unit had often put the other sides of the ball in unfavorable positions. Speaking with the media on Nov. 15, special teams coordinator Parker Fleming took responsibility for the underperformance of the unit.

"There are a lot of plays that we wish we had back for one reason or another," he said. "There's some we're really excited and happy with. Obviously, you could probably point to a bunch of individual plays that we wish we had done differently in one way or another, and those are probably warranted."

There had been several examples of mistakes that continued to add up for Fleming's group that season, including a pair of punts — one each against Maryland and Rutgers — in which they were incorrectly run as fakes or the snap was botched.

"Anything that happens that's not good, that's on me to get it fixed," Fleming said. "The way we look at it around here is we try to put our players in the best position to make plays. When they make plays, that's awesome, that's them making plays. When they don't, I didn't prepare them well enough to make the play."

Downs' Return Provides Spark For Win Over Hoosiers

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Caleb Downs was sensational, Will Howard efficient. The special teams were impactful, and the defense after another slow start was stout.

Put it all together as No. 2 Ohio State did, and it was a convincing 38-15 victory over fifth-ranked Indiana in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 23 to move a step closer to a spot in the Big Ten Championship Game after facing off against Michigan on Nov. 30, the only roadblock to a rematch with top-ranked Oregon.

The special teams came through again when the Buckeyes rallied from an early deficit to score 31 straight points on a gray, 46-degree afternoon.

Ohio State (10-1, 7-1) took a 14-7 lead late in the second quarter on a 4-yard run by TreVeyon Henderson after a fumbled snap on a punt attempt by Indiana (10-1, 7-1).

Safety Caleb Downs energized the crowd of 105,751 with the Buckeyes' first punt-return touchdown (79 yards) in a decade for a 21-7 lead early in the third quarter.

The defense, after allowing a TD on Indiana's first drive, had five sacks for 46 yards.

Slow Going

Henderson returned the opening kickoff 19 yards to the 25. Two passes and a run netted just 8 yards, and Joe McGuire's 49-yard punt was returned 12 yards to the 30.

The Hoosiers showed no nerves on the big stage, marching 70 yards on 11 plays in 6:12 to take a 7-0 lead at 6:52 on a 2-yard run by Ty Son Lawton. The drive was aided by a pair of penalties on cornerback Davison Igbinosun.

Kurtis Rourke's third-down completion to Myles Price gained 13 yards to the IU 44. On second down, Igbinosun per usual was flagged for pass interference to put the ball at the OSU 38.

On third-and-6 from the 34, Elijah Sar-ratt had a 19-yard reception. Justice Ellison had three runs for 11 yards for a first down at the 4, and Igbinosun committed another pass interference on the next snap for 2 yards. Lawton carried it in from there as the Buckeyes' slow starts on defense continued.

The Buckeyes then squandered an up-and-down drive by being stopped 2 yards shy of the goal line.

At the onset, Quinshon Judkins made a 5-yard catch on third-and-2 from the 33 to keep the drive alive. Later, Carnell Tate had a 10-yard catch to the Indiana 35, but a long gain on a catch by Henderson was negated by an illegal block in the back by center Carson Hinzman, moving OSU back to the 45. A 5-yard loss on a pass to Henderson and an intentional-grounding penalty made for a third-and-35 from the OSU 40. Tate gained 25 back on a catch to the original line of scrimmage.

On fourth down, Tate was wide open for a 24-yard catch and a first down at the 11. Judkins ran 2 to end the quarter. He then rammed his way for 5 to the 4, and Henderson rushed for 2 more, setting up fourth-and-1 from the 2. Judkins got the handoff out of the shotgun and was stopped for no gain, turning the ball over to the Hoosiers



SONNY BROCKWAY

TWO EASY — Caleb Downs strides into the end zone with several Indiana players vainly in pursuit to cap his 79-yard punt return - the first for the Buckeyes since 2014 - for a 21-7 lead in the third quarter at Ohio Stadium on Nov. 23.

after a 73-yard drive.

They were forced to punt when on third-and-6 from the 21, Rourke was sacked for 11 yards by JT Tuimoloau and Cody Simon at the 10. Downs' 12-yard return of a 46-yard punt gave the Buckeyes the ball at the Indiana 44 with 9:42 left in the half.

The Buckeyes went the distance using five plays and 2:20 to tie it 7-7 on an 11-yard catch by Egbuka. Howard was 5 for 5 for 44 yards to make him 14 for 14 for 116 yards up to that point in the game.

Emeka Egbuka made a catch for 8, Henderson's grab added 4 yards, and Jeremiah Smith's first catch went for 12 yards to the 20. Egbuka had a 9-yarder before the score on a fade to the left corner.

The Buckeyes would soon be denied in the red zone a second time.

Rourke on third-and-8 from the IU 27 was strip-sacked by Simon for 9 yards, and Ty Hamilton recovered the fumble at the 18.

Howard threw to Smith on the left side of the end zone, but the ball was barely out of his reach for his first incompleteness on his 15th pass. Judkins lost 4 and on third down, Jelani Thurman bobbled a pass and Jailin Walker intercepted it at the 11.

The Buckeyes entered the game No. 1 nationally in red-zone scoring at 97.3 percent (37 of 38) with 33 touchdowns. To this point they were 1 of 3.

For the third straight game, a miscue on a punt snap or blocked punt benefited the Buckeyes, and they took advantage for a 4-yard touchdown run by Henderson for a 14-7 lead with 21 seconds left in the half.

Under rainy conditions, punter James Evans had the ball slip through his hands.

He picked the ball up but was tackled by Caden Curry for a 23-yard loss to the 7. Howard ran for 3 and Judkins gained nothing before Henderson went through the left side of the line.

Ohio State had 138 yards in the first half compared to 53 for the Hoosiers, who had 3 rushing yards.

"After the first drive, we got in a rhythm," defensive end Jack Sawyer said. "We were playing tough, physical football, and that's what we do here at Ohio State."

Off To The Races

After an IU three-and-out after the second-half kickoff, Downs picked up a bouncing 52-yard punt, headed up the right sideline then crossed midfield and zoomed left for the Buckeyes' first punt-return TD since Jalin Marshall against Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014, to make it 21-7 at 12:44 of third quarter.

The Buckeyes got the ball at their 25 after another three-and-out and methodically moved downfield to use 10 plays and 5:45 to extend the lead to 28-7 at 6:02 with Thurman catching a third-down, 1-yard pass at the back of the end zone.

Egbuka began the drive with a 25-yard catch. Smith's reception went for 13 to the IU 34. Henderson ran for 5 and Judkins 8 to the 21 before Smith on an end-around rushed for 12 to the 9. Henderson gained 5 then on the next snap twisted and turned for 3 more before the touchdown.

After an exchange of punts gave Indiana possession at its 41, the Buckeyes got a 7-yard sack by Tuimoloau and Sawyer as well as an 11-yard sack from Sawyer to end

the quarter.

After another Evans punt, OSU held the ball for 11 plays and 5:51 in order to get a 45-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding with 8:56 to play.

The big play was a 25-yard catch by Egbuka to the IU 25 on a fourth-and-1 from the 50.

Indiana proceeded to go 75 yards in 15 plays and 7:03 to make it 31-15 on a 2-yard TD run by Lawton and a two-point conversion with 1:53 left.

On fourth-and-1 from the OSU 43, Rourke ran for 8 yards. Later, Igbinosun was guilty of his third pass interference to place the ball on the 2.

After a failed onside kick, Henderson ran up the middle for 39 yards before sliding to the ground as it appeared the Hoosiers wanted him to score to get the ball back. After a timeout, Howard had no gain before he carried for the score with 35 seconds left.

IU after the kickoff used a Lawton run for 3 yards to the 28 to end the game.

Howard was 22 of 26 for 201 yards, two touchdowns and an interception, and Egbuka made seven catches for 80 yards.

Notes

Indiana has not beaten Ohio State since back-to-back wins in 1987-88. The Buckeyes are 31-0-1 since with 30 straight wins. ... The game was played on the anniversary of the first game in the series on Nov. 23, 1901, with Indiana winning 18-6 in Columbus. ... Tate had four catches for 68 yards and Smith 3 for 34. ... All but 29 of Henderson's 68 yards on nine carries came on his final run. Judkins ran for 36 yards on 14 attempts. ... Rourke was 8 of 18 for 68 yards. ... OSU had 316 yards (201 passing, 115 rushing). Indiana gained 151 yards (68 passing, 83 rushing). ... Simon had a game-high 10 tackles (four solo) and 2½ sacks for 23 yards as well as a forced fumble.

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Buckeye Defense Dialed-In After First Drive

Continued From Page 1

I always try to give thanks to the D-line.”

Simon is right that the defensive line was making plays too. JT Tuimoloau combined with Simon for a sack and teamed up with Jack Sawyer for another one later on in the game, the three of them accounting for all five of the sacks in the game.

After facing criticism stemming from the loss to the Ducks on Oct. 12 – mainly regarding the lack of pass rush the Buckeyes showed in a zero-sack performance – it has seemed like the game plan has changed when it comes to getting pressure into the backfield.

Sending blitzers more often and even utilizing the Jack in some scenarios, Knowles and defensive line coach Larry Johnson seem to have come to some sort of compromise with the pass rush, finding a middle ground that has been extremely effective in the five games since.

“I felt like the plan going in was excellent, and I felt like the defensive staff did a great job with it,” Day said. “I thought Jim had a great plan. I thought Larry’s guys played with their hair on fire. Everybody on the defensive side deserves credit.

“But this game is played by players. Not coaches, players. The players played hard today. The defensive line won the line of scrimmage. I felt like we got after their offensive line in terms of getting to the backfield. I thought the linebackers, at least it looked like it on film, were timing up the blitzes really well and getting into the backfield.”

The defense was also helped out by the Ohio State fans in the stadium, at least according to both Day and Buckeye quarterback Will Howard. As loud as the 105,751 mostly-Buckeye fans inside Ohio Stadium were, Indiana was unable to communicate on offense and had to transition to a silent cadence, which the Hoosiers did seem to struggle with. They had just two penalties the entire game, but they both came in third-and-short situations when the fans were most



SONNY BROCKWAY

QUITE A HAUL — Wide receiver Emeka Egbuka was the favorite of Will Howard with seven catches on seven targets for 80 yards and an 11-yard TD in the second quarter in the 38-15 rout of Indiana on Nov. 23.

engaged, a false start by offensive lineman Bray Lynch and a delay of game in the third quarter.

“I have to say, I thought the crowd was awesome,” Day said. “Our guys played with a great passion. The two of them just played off of each other the entire game. The fact that (Indiana) had to go to a silent cadence did

make a difference in this game. They tried the clap early, they couldn’t, and they went to the silent cadence and that made a huge difference in the game.”

The Hoosiers were able to score on their first drive of the game, helped along by two pass interference penalties on Davison Igbinosun. The drive took 6:12 and 11 plays to make it 70 yards on 38 rushing yards and 32 yards through the air.

It seemed at first like Indiana was making an early statement that it was for real and was going to play the Buckeyes tough in their home stadium. But OSU didn’t waver. Throughout the rest of the game, the Buckeyes allowed just one more score and a total of 81 more offensive yards through 3½ quarters of football, 75 of those coming on the other scoring drive Indiana managed in the fourth quarter to bring the score within 16 points.

“I just think we had to settle in a little bit,” Simon said. “That first drive we didn’t really get off the field that time, but we just wanted to settle in and knock them back up front and really win first down. I think we did a good job. When we’re able to pass rush, a lot of good things happen.”

Opponents have seemed to have an easier time scoring on the Buckeyes early in games, a trend that has been present all season. But Sawyer explained that early score for Indiana was due to the script it had coming into the game, which many teams come prepared with for the first few plays of a game.

“That first offensive drive is always scripted, the first 10-15 plays,” he said. “So they had

some good stuff scripted. And we also could have gotten off the field on a third down, got a flag or something there, but that’s just stuff that happens in the game of football. We just have to tighten it up. And once we did, once we slowed down a little bit – you kind of get amped up from losing yourself there for a first drive or two. So once we settled and just started playing ball, you saw this team go to a different level.”

“After the first drive, I don’t think (Indiana) barely moved the ball 20 yards,” Howard said. “They couldn’t do anything.”

The Hoosiers were second in the country in scoring offense coming into this matchup, putting up 43.9 points per game, and Rourke’s name was being mentioned in the Heisman Trophy conversation, although he was far behind the favorites for the award. In his chance to make up some ground in that race and prove that he and the Hoosiers offense were no joke, he finished with just 68 total passing yards on 8-of-18 passing, looking completely lost at times.

“It was nothing we hadn’t seen on tape, and we practiced all week,” Cignetti said after the game about his team’s struggles with pass protection. “You couple it with the noise and having to go to a silent count, the center couldn’t hear. And the speed of which (the Buckeyes) do it at compared to our scout team, the pressure of the moment, our guys just didn’t respond well. Sometimes we had missed assignments, sometimes we had communication errors, sometimes we got physically beat, but it wasn’t very pretty.

“We couldn’t protect the quarterback,” he added. “We had communication errors in pass pro. Every time we dropped back to pass, something bad happened. It seemed like we were in that end zone to our left for nine years. It was like a nightmare.”

As surprised as Cignetti seemed after the game that his team couldn’t compete at the level the Buckeyes did, it seemed to be the opposite on the other sideline. Senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka said as much after the win.

“This is not a game that we didn’t expect to win,” he said. “We expected to win this game. In fact, we expected to dominate. We’re the better team, bar none. We played more physical than them. We ran the ball better, we executed better, so we won the game.”

Last Chance

A top-five win – the Buckeyes’ second of the season – is usually something a team would celebrate, especially with how convincingly Ohio State beat the Hoosiers. But knowing what’s coming next, Sawyer said that won’t be what the Buckeyes are doing. Instead, the focus goes right to Michigan.

“I don’t think there’s going to be much celebrating going on for anybody because everything that we’ve worked for since I’ve been here, the agony of defeat that we’ve been in the last three years, has pushed us to this moment that we’ve got coming up Saturday,” he said. “It’s for all the marbles. It’s our last shot to play them. There’s no more going back. That’s what we came back to do.”

That attitude is reflected by all of Buckeye Nation, evidenced by the scoreboard in the Horseshoe right after the win. As soon as the band finished playing “Carmen Ohio,” a

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countdown to kickoff flashed onto the screen, with over six days and 20 hours remaining on the clock.

Those are likely going to be grueling hours for the Buckeyes. There isn't a single player on the roster who has a win over Michigan in his Ohio State career. The senior class for the first time since the 1990s doesn't know how beating their archrival feels.

Sawyer – a tried-and-true Buckeye who was the first high school prospect to commit to Day, helping bring in a great 2021 recruiting class while also serving as the catalyst behind so many members of the class returning for one more year – was very clear that Indiana was out of his mind as soon as the clock showed zeros.

“Right now, I couldn't really care less – no offense – talking about (the win over Indiana) because I mean, (Michigan) is the game you come back for,” he said. “This is a game that has impacted so many lives in the last few years, and I want this one so bad for so many different reasons.”

As is always the case in college football's biggest rivalry, that sentiment was echoed by Sawyer's teammates, especially those who have been through the same three crushing defeats that he has been a part of, like Eg-buka.

“I have a lot of emotions toward this game. The adversity that we face as a team, and just seeing all the hardships that people who I love have had to go through, including my teammates, my head coach, the Team Up North's fans being nasty to my parents as we're leaving the stadium,” he said. “There are a lot of emotions I feel towards this mo-

ment. So trying to harness those and just let it all rip on the field on Saturday.”

It's not just the returning Buckeyes who want to beat Michigan this year, but the many newcomers as well who joined through the transfer portal, Howard being one of them. One of his biggest motivators in the game on Nov. 30 is trying to make sure his teammates who have gone through the past three years can say they finished on top.

“This one's for those guys who came back. This one's for Buckeye Nation. I feel it, I can just feel it. There's been that hurt. This rivalry game, it's the first thing that I heard on my visit when I came here: Beat The Team Up North. It's the first goal we have every single year: Beat The Team Up North.

“You can say anything about records – that's going to be a hard game every single year. They're going to bring it; we're going to bring it. I want to do this for Coach Day. I want to do this for the guys that came back, for Emeka, for (TreVeyon Henderson), for JT, for Jack, for all of those guys that came back. Tyleik (Williams), Ty, I could go on. But I want this for them so bad because they've been here.”

The approach to The Game that Howard has is a complete 180 from how the Buckeyes quarterback approached it in 2023. Kyle McCord prepared himself differently, saying that he did want to beat the Wolverines, but the rivalry matchup was “just football.”

Howard, in just one season in Columbus after four at Kansas State, is already treating it like the biggest game of the season, which he said it is.

“I've seen it from a distance, and I feel it,

and I'm a part of it now, and I want this for me too, but I want this for those guys,” he said. “I want it for Coach Day to shut up the haters and be able to say, ‘This is the Ohio State Buckeyes.’ This rivalry game means everything. We talk about it all the time. It's all over the place in our building. I'm just honored to be able to be a part of it. I won't take it lightly. This is the biggest game of our season, and I'm looking forward to it.”

Michigan is coming off a season in which it won its first national championship since 1997, but it has struggled to do much in 2024. With a 6-5 record coming into Columbus, the Wolverines opened as 23.5-point underdogs against Ohio State. But with a 50-6 win over Northwestern in Michigan Stadium on Nov. 23, they seem to be gearing up for the rivalry game the same way that the Buckeyes are.

“Absolutely nothing. It means absolutely nothing,” Howard said when asked if the Wolverines' record this season is important. “This game is as big as they come. It's the Michigan-Ohio State game. I'm sorry I just said that. It's the Team Up North and Ohio State game. It's everything. I can't wait.”

“We're going to attack them. We know they're going to come in here swinging, too,” Sawyer said. “They still have a good team, even though the record doesn't indicate it. This game, it never matters what the records are. It's a battle. It's a war. So, man, I can't wait. I love playing in this game. It's just different playing this game. I love it.”

Even though it seemed like the Buckeyes might have played their best game of football against the Hoosiers, Howard believes they

are going to have to be even better when Michigan steps foot in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 30, which he believes they are fully capable of.

“We're going to need to turn it up. I still don't think you've seen our best. That's the mindset this team has,” Howard said. “When you go into the locker room and you look in the eyes of every single guy, you see it. You see that edge. The last time I saw this edge in people's eyes is when (Kansas State) won the Big 12 (with Howard). I see that and I know we have more in the tank. We're fired up.”

Day is on the same page as each of his players and has his attention turned toward Michigan, but he is still going to take some time to recognize the performance his players put together on Nov. 23 against Indiana.

“The minute it hit triple zeroes on the clock, it was on to The Team Up North, onto the rivalry game,” he said. “We know what's coming and how important this week is for everybody in the state of Ohio and Buckeye Nation and most importantly our team. We have an obligation to play really well next week and to win that game.

“But we also need to make sure we take a deep breath and recognize the things that happened today. We'll do that tomorrow during our champions meeting, celebrate the guys who played really well and then move on. It's easy just to move on, but there's a lot of work that gets put into a win like this. It's a top-five win. We'll get some good rest tonight, make sure we get to bed early, then we'll wake up tomorrow and make sure we get back to work.”

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Downs Gives OSU First Punt Return TD In Decade

Just two days before the 2024 season kicked off with a home game against Akron, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day delivered a strikingly bold prediction for his team on his weekly radio show on 97.1 The Fan, telling the public that the Buckeyes would do something that had not been accomplished in a decade: return a kickoff or punt for a touchdown.

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Engels

"I'm going to guarantee it this year," Day said on Aug. 29. "I'm putting it out there."

Day's proclamation came just a season after the Buckeyes had one of their worst special teams performances in recent memory, ranking near the bottom of the FBS in multiple categories, a reality that led to the firing of special teams coordinator Parker Fleming in the offseason and a changed approach for the program when it comes to who is overseeing the unit.

With Parker no longer a part of the team and Day both taking more of a role within the unit and assigning his assistants to manage the group rather than a single coordinator, the Buckeyes did not necessarily produce immediate results on special teams this year, especially on punt and kick returns.

But in Ohio State's win over No. 5 Indiana, Day's prediction proved correct.

With 13:06 left in the third quarter, the Buckeyes were set to get the ball back off a punt from Indiana's James Evans where they would look to extend their 14-point lead on offense, but Ohio State's Caleb Downs had other plans.

Lining up as punt returner, the standout OSU safety let the football bounce twice before picking it up near the Buckeyes' 20-yard line, spun past a diving IU defender near the 25 and raced away from other Hoosiers down the sideline for about 45 yards before finally cutting to his left and finding his way into the end zone for the game-changing – and streak-ending – 79-yard score.

Downs' sprint toward the end zone electrified the Ohio State crowd of 105,751, giving the Buckeyes a commanding 21-7 lead and the program its first punt-return touchdown in almost 10 years to the day. The last score came by way of former OSU wideout Jalin Marshall on Nov. 22, 2014, against none other than Indiana.

When asked about the score after the game, Day said he had a good feeling his team finally would break through against the Hoosiers with a punt-return touchdown, especially given the talents of their punt returner.

"Give Caleb all the credit he deserves," Day said. "I felt like we had a chance to return it based on what had happened earlier in the game if the jammers gave us a chance. The punt was a little short, and I said, 'Ah, here we go again,' because we've had a lot of short punts. It bounced off the turf, and Caleb decides he's going to return it. He made a few guys miss and then made just a great effort on that play to go turn good into great. A game-changing play."



SONNY BROCKWAY

CENTER OF ATTENTION — Last season's starting center, Carson Hinzman (75), returned to his old spot against Indiana when Seth McLaughlin sustained a season-ending torn Achilles tendon on Nov. 19, forcing another re-shuffling of the offensive line.

Downs said after the game that he didn't think twice about fielding the punt off the turf and was able to keep running and eventually get into the end zone due to some elite blocking by his teammates.

"There was no doubt that I was going to field it," he said. "There was space there, and everybody did a really good job blocking on the punt return unit. And we talked about it all week that we had a real opportunity to do it this week. Just a true blessing from God to be able to put it in the end zone."

While Downs' score was by far the most memorable play of Ohio State's 38-15 win over the Hoosiers, it wasn't the only high-impact play made by the special teams unit.

One quarter before Downs' touchdown, Evans botched a clean snap on a punt attempt on IU's 30-yard line, causing the ball to roll all the way down to the 7-yard line. Evans would corral it, but it wasn't before sophomore defensive end Caden Curry broke through Indiana's shield to bring down the IU punter for a turnover on downs and a loss of 23 yards.

Curry's aggressive stop on Evans – which led to Ohio State's second touchdown of the game three plays later – was at the time the third impact play made by the team's punt return unit in as many games, with the Buckeyes' blocking punts both against Purdue on Nov. 9 and Northwestern on Nov. 16, all of those plays involving Curry.

Day said all of this recent special teams success serves as validation for the hard work and big changes put in by the team during the offseason to improve the unit, ones which are beginning to pay off in the most important stretch of Ohio State's season.

"When you're in the special teams meetings every day and putting the work in that these guys are putting in, it's a great example to the other players that you might not

see the results, but if you trust the process, good things are going to happen," Day said. "Now we've had three weeks in a row a punt block and now a punt return for a touchdown. Those are big plays in matchup games. Those are the things we have got to have."

New-Look OL Passes First Test

Ohio State's offensive line has had to undergo some serious makeovers this year, and none were more drastic than the changes the Buckeyes had to make when Seth McLaughlin went down with a season-ending torn Achilles tendon on Nov. 19, forcing last season's starting center Carson Hinzman to reclaim his role and move over from left guard and backup Austin Sierieveld to take over for Hinzman.

McLaughlin's injury caused many who follow the team to raise major concerns about the state of the Buckeyes' ravaged offensive line heading into the most important portion of the schedule, especially when considering that the next opponent on the schedule, Indiana, came into Columbus leading the Big Ten in both sacks (31) and tackles for loss (73).

Despite these concerns from the Buckeye faithful all week, Ohio State's new-look offensive line, for the most part, passed its first test.

The makeshift group of left tackle Donovan Jackson, Sierieveld, Hinzman, right guard Tegra Tshabola and right tackle Josh Fryar mostly held their own against a formidable Hoosiers' front, paving the way for the Buckeyes to rush for 115 rushing yards on 29 carries (4.0 per tote) while allowing just three tackles in the backfield.

Day said that although it was difficult to make a full evaluation of the group due to the team running only 55 plays on offense, overall he was pleased with the fight and physicality

his group showed for most of the game.

"I'll go off of what I felt I saw on the field, and I felt like guys were getting after it," he said. "I felt like some of the plays, guys were just straining. Indiana's style of defense, there were people just moving every play and shifting and changing the fronts. There were times where there were free guys in a hole."

"I think they played hard, and I thought they protected well when Will (Howard) was in (passing situations)."

Howard echoed a similar sentiment regarding the offensive line, saying that he was proud of the way both Hinzman and Sierieveld performed at their new positions given the circumstances and confident in any combination of linemen the team decides to put out on the field.

"I'm so proud of those guys," he said "For (Hinzman) and Austin to step into new roles – Austin was playing right guard early in the season and now he's playing left guard. For those guys to be able to step in like they did, I was just so proud of them."

"And really all week, I just told those guys, 'Dude, I'm not worried. I'm not worried about you guys. You guys have played a ton of football.' Carson started 12 games last year, and he's a good football player. I wasn't worried about it at all."

Despite this major vote of confidence, the new front five still played far from a perfect game. In addition to there being an obvious step back in the push made by the front on certain run plays, as evidenced by Indiana's fourth-down stop of Quinshon Judkins at the Hoosiers' 2-yard line early in the second quarter, the group also committed three penalties on the day that brought the Buckeyes back a combined 25 yards.

Perhaps the most impactful penalty of the three was the first one, an illegal block in the back foul on Hinzman on Ohio State's second drive of the game that turned a TreVeyon Henderson 26-yard gain to the IU 9-yard line into a 10-yard penalty that brought the Buckeyes all the way back to the IU 45.

Ohio State was able to overcome this flag and eventually get back into the red zone before the previously mentioned turnover on downs. But in the fourth quarter, it committed its second illegal block in the back foul, this time on Jackson that negated a Gee Scott Jr. 3-yard catch.

These types of penalties were uncharacteristic for the group when it had all of its starters healthy earlier in the season, a development that could negatively impact the Buckeyes in The Game on Nov. 30 or in postseason play.

Penalty Struggles Continue For Igbinosun

Ohio State had perhaps its most impressive defensive performance of the season in the win against the Hoosiers, but there was one notable blemish on the group's Week 13 report card, one that has become a common trend in recent weeks.

As was the case in many games down the stretch this year, Ohio State junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun negatively impacted the game with his over-aggression, committing three pass-interference calls on the day – including two on one drive – that resulted in 28 Hoosier yards and three automatic first downs.

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

In their first game against an elite passing offense since a 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12, the Buckeyes had their best game in pass defense all season. Coming into the game, Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke was second in the country in passing efficiency, but against the Buckeyes, the Hoosiers' signal-caller never found a rhythm. Led by fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon as a blitzer, the Buckeye pass rush and the secondary linked up to allow Rourke to throw for only 68 yards in Ohio State's 38-15 win on Nov. 23. Thirty-two of Rourke's yards came on two passes during the team's first drive. Rourke attempted only 18 passes the entire game, in large part because the Buckeyes' pass rush didn't allow him enough time to try to complete a pass.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles had yet another aggressive day as a play caller, dialing up blitz after blitz, and the Buckeyes recorded what tied for a season high of five sacks. Especially in the first half, Simon was the most effective player at wreaking havoc on Rourke. Simon navigated through the Hoosiers' offensive line virtually untouched to bring down Rourke for sacks on back-to-back third downs. The second of the two sacks caused Rourke to fumble the ball, which was recovered by defensive tackle Ty Hamilton. Simon sacked Rourke once more before the first half was over, bringing his total sacks for the game to 2½, a career high for the linebacker.

Simon's team-leading performance will certainly be the headliner, but defensive ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau were strong contributors, finishing the game with 1½ and one sacks, respectively. The Buckeyes' sack production couldn't have been possible without the efforts of their teammates in the secondary. Despite three pass-interference penalties committed by junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun and some issues as a whole on the Hoosiers' first drive of the game, Ohio State's cornerbacks rarely allowed Indiana receivers to create separation. The Buckeye secondary and pass rushers should be licking their chops ahead of a matchup with Michigan, which possesses the 127th-ranked passing offense in the country after its 50-6 win over Northwestern on Nov. 23.

What Didn't Work

In arguably its most well-rounded performance against a great opponent to this point in the season, the only area where Ohio State struggled was in committing penalties. In an uncharacteristically sloppy performance, the Buckeyes committed eight penalties, many of which cost the Buckeyes points on offense or led to touchdowns for the Hoosiers. Starting in the first quarter, Igbinosun was flagged for a 15-yard pass-interference penalty when he made too much contact with Indiana receiver Elijah Sarratt, giving the Hoosiers an automatic first down and the ball inside Ohio State territory. Later in the drive,

Igbinosun made a similar error against Indiana receiver Ke'Shawn Williams. Because the Hoosiers were already at the Buckeyes' 4-yard line on the play, the penalty cost Ohio State only 2 yards, but Indiana scored a touchdown the next play. Two more penalties on the next Ohio State drive – a disputed block-in-the-back call on redshirt sophomore center Carson Hinzman and an intentional-grounding call on quarterback Will Howard – backed the Buckeyes up 35 yards behind the first-down marker ahead of third down. Howard found Tate with two straight passes to pick up the first down, but the drive ultimately stalled at Indiana's 2-yard line.

Ohio State's last two penalties of 10 yards or more were committed in the fourth quarter while the game was out of reach, but they also played a part in the Hoosiers momentarily cutting into the lead. A block-in-the-back penalty from Gee Scott Jr. early in the final quarter put the Buckeyes in a second-and-22 situation, which ultimately led them to settle for a field goal. Right before the two-minute timeout, Igbinosun then committed his third pass-interference penalty of the game to give the Hoosiers the ball at the Buckeyes' 2-yard line. The Hoosiers scored their second touchdown of the game one play later and picked up the two-point conversion on the next play to cut Ohio State's lead to 31-15. Some thought penalty issues could cost the Buckeyes a win over Indiana, and although that was clearly not the case, Day will want those issues patched up with the Big Ten Championship Game and the College Football Playoff looming.

Play Of The Game

With Indiana set to get the ball first to start the second half and Ohio State up only 14-7, the game was far from decided at halftime. The Buckeyes created a much more comfortable lead almost immediately in the second half with a three-and-out and an increasingly common special teams splash play. On fourth-and-8 from their own 27-yard line with 13:06 left in the third quarter, Indiana punter James Evans launched a low line-drive punt that landed at the Ohio State 30-yard line. Sophomore safety Caleb Downs fielded the bouncing football at the OSU 21-yard line before he immediately got through the first wave of defenders by putting an Indiana defender in the spin cycle. Downs found a lane to pick up plenty more yards down the Ohio State sideline. After surging past another defender, the former Alabama transfer broke free on a cutback to take it the rest of the way for a 79-yard return touchdown. That gave the Buckeyes a 21-7 lead, and the program its first punt return touchdown since Jalin Marshall's 54-yard return for a touchdown almost exactly 10 years ago on Nov. 22, 2014, in a 42-27 win over Indiana.

— Bobby Gorbett

The Ole Miss transfer, who had been previously wearing oven mitts in practice to try to learn how to cover pass catchers without grabbing, seemed to leave those positive habits on the practice field on Nov. 23 at Ohio Stadium.

Igbinosun's penalty issues were apparent early and often against the Hoosiers, where he helped them keep moving forward and eventually score the game's first touchdown on an 11-play, 70-yard opening drive with two flags.

His first penalty occurred on a second-and-7 from the IU 47-yard line when Hoosier quarterback Kurtis Rourke targeted the cornerback on a deep ball intended for wideout Elijah Sarratt. Igbinosun had solid coverage on the James Madison transfer, but – like many times this year – he failed to turn his head around and instead made contact with Sarratt to draw the flag.

Igbinosun's penalty set up the Hoosiers at the Ohio State 38, and after they methodically moved the ball all the way to the 4-yard line in seven plays, he put Indiana in an even better position to score with his second interference call in nine snaps.

On first-and-goal from the OSU 4, Igbinosun got beat on a Ke'Shawn Williams slant route and grabbed a hold of the wideout's jersey, causing the officials to throw another flag on the corner, this time in the end zone, giving Indiana a fresh set of downs at the OSU 2-yard line.

The Hoosiers would capitalize on the very next play on a Ty Son Lawton score to give them the 7-0 lead, putting a cap on a scoring drive that continued in large part due to Igbinosun's mistakes.

Igbinosun would be penalty-free until the fourth quarter when he committed his third pass interference on Hoosiers wide receiver Omar Cooper Jr., which put Indiana in position to score its second touchdown of the game one play later on a Lawton 2-yard rush.

Day did not seem pleased with the three pass-interference calls on Igbinosun after the game, saying that these types of fouls simply cannot happen if they want to compete for a championship.

"I thought our guys in the secondary covered well because we knew they were going to take shots downfield," he said. "We still have too many of these pass-interference calls that we have to get cleaned up. That's just the truth."

Day Leaves No Doubt On Last Possession

Throughout the season, Day has been using the motto "leave no doubt" to describe the way the Buckeyes want to play this season, where the team shows no mercy to the opponent by playing with an aggressive and focused mindset from start to finish.

That mentality seemed to be on full display at the end of the Buckeyes' convincing win over the Hoosiers, where, with the team

already up 31-15 with just 1:53 left in the fourth quarter, they left their foot on the gas pedal to find the end zone for the fifth time in the game, scoring on a 1-yard Howard rush to cap a scoring drive that lasted just three plays.

The Buckeyes seemed hesitant at first to extend the lead, with Henderson after a 39-yard gain on first down choosing to give himself up and slide at the 1-yard line rather than run into the end zone for what would have been an easy score. Henderson likely opted to slide in an effort to run out the clock and not give the ball back to the Hoosiers with a potential chance to score, a decision that Howard said would have been a tough one for him to make.

"I said, 'You're a better man than me, dude,'" Howard said of his running back's slide. "If I got that far down the field, I don't know if I would have slid down at the 1, but he's being a smart football player."

Ohio State had a bit of a different mentality at the 1-yard line, however. Instead of running out the clock or taking a knee, the Buckeyes decided to try for the end zone, rushing two times with Howard before eventually getting in on the second attempt.

When asked about this sequence after the game, Howard said that the offense decided to score with the game already squarely in hand to finish on a strong note and show future opponents that the team isn't taking a play for granted at any point this season, blowout or not.

"We wanted to put an exclamation point on that thing and remind them what the Buckeyes are about," Howard said. "You accept what you ask for. I have a ton of respect for (Indiana). That was not in any way disrespectful. We were just trying to put an exclamation point on the game. It was just, 'We're on the 1-yard line, let's go score.'"

Ohio State's late-game showing of confidence – which also included Howard poking fun at Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti by acting out smoking and stomping on a cigarette – did not seem to bother the Hoosiers coach, who said after the game that Day needed to "do what he has to do for his team."

Day had a similar response to Howard after the game, saying he wanted the offense to execute an end-of-game goal-line possession and put an emphatic end to a blowout top-five win.

"At the end of the game, we're in a four-minute drill like you saw in the Penn State game. We call that downtime. Once we get the first down in that moment, we feel like the game is probably over.

"(Henderson broke) free and brought it all the way down to the 1-yard line, and I think maybe it triggered at the last second, 'Oh boy, I've got to get down here,' so we didn't have to put our defense back on the field. Then we decided to milk at least 45 seconds off the clock. We're on the 1-yard line and we just felt like we wanted to put an exclamation point on the win by sneaking it in."

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 38, Indiana 15

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on what he's seeing from fifth-year quarterback Will Howard and his preparation: "I think Buckeye Nation is now seeing, after 11 games, this guy is a winner. He's tough. He cares about his teammates. He's a leader. It was a tough spot when we lost Seth (McLaughlin) the week leading up to the game in practice, and he, along with the offensive line, (Donovan Jackson) and Josh (Fryar), really just raised the spirits of everybody. That's hard to do when you lose somebody who has made such an impact like Seth. But (Howard has) got great resilience, great toughness. He's the heart and soul of our team."

Howard on being the first player in program history to complete 80 percent of passes in six different games: "That's cool, but it really doesn't mean that much to me as long as we're winning games. That's really all that matters to me. If it's a good completion percentage, then that means I'm making good decisions with the football and keeping us on track. As long as we're winning games I'm not really worried about stats."

Howard on the team converting a first down after facing third-and-35: "That one, I don't have many answers for that. You just have to make a play and Carnell (Tate) did a great job on the scramble drill restarting. We had a concept, our third-and-long concept, but 35 yards is damn hard to get. The fact that we were able to get 25 to put us in a situation to go for it on fourth down and get that fourth down, that was huge. That really set the tone for the game and said, 'OK, we're here to play.' I don't really have any answers on how that happened. It's just players making plays and guys getting open for me down the field. Shout-out to Carnell for that. He did a heck of a job on that drive."

Howard on how the offensive line stepped up after McLaughlin's injury: "That was the biggest thing on my heart was that I just hurt for my brother who just lost the rest of his season. I told those guys that you can say whatever you want about who we throw in there, I don't care. It's 'next man up' mentality. It's competitive excellence. I was so proud of those guys, how they stepped up, and I think they did a heck of a job."

Senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka on Ohio State winning the last four minutes of the first half and first four minutes of

the second half: "Coach Day, he doesn't just make stuff up. He does football studies, and he shows us the cut-ups. He shows us the percentages. The team that has the most rushing yards is going to win the game. The team that wins the turnover battle is going to win the game, and the team that wins the middle eight is going to win the game. So it's something that we practice. We practice sudden-change moments. We practice those four minutes entering halftime and those four minutes coming out and just being very dominant in those phases. It's something that we really take to heart. It's part of our culture. It's part of who we are. So we really take pride in the middle eight."

Sophomore safety Caleb Downs on what it felt like to get out in the open field on his punt return: "It felt like it was normal. It felt like it was the right thing for me to have the ball in my hands and be in the field of play. And then (my teammates) did a really good job blocking. C.J. (Hicks) told me that he put somebody on the ground at the end of the play. So I have to go back and look at that."

Downs on the run defense the last four or five games: "(We're just) process-oriented, just truly trying to get prepared every week, trying to get ourselves in the best position and the best mindset to play and really go into the game like, 'They're not going to score. We're dominating the whole game.' At the end of the game, we left them a few plays that we really shouldn't have, so we can't do that again. We have to finish and play the full 60 minutes. But just going into the game, we were saying, 'We're dominating and nobody's going to move the ball and score the ball on us. And that's what we're going to do.' "

Senior defensive end Jack Sawyer on when things started to go Ohio State's way: "I'd say the first sack we had was big. The crowd got into it. The crowd was awesome today. So that was great to see – not that they haven't been, but today was a different level, which we need here in November. I think it really affected (Indiana). We saw them get the delay of game the one time that pushed them back, then we got the sack. Once you had that, our offense goes down and scores, and then we come out and Caleb returns a punt. We were all just feeding off each other, like you do here in late November. So it was good to see."

Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti on if

he was surprised his team didn't handle the crowd noise well: "I thought we'd be able to handle it with our normal cadence based on the reports that we had gotten. Some of the linemen could hear, but the center couldn't. We had to go silent. It wasn't a problem. We had the ball snapped (on the delay of game call)."

Cignetti on the turning point of the game: "We came up with a turnover on defense and a fourth-down stop, and then we got a first down on offense at 7-7 and then we come up third-and-1, and by all indications, they jumped offsides, which would have given us a first down. But we got called for the penalty. I'm not sure they made the correct call. We came up third-and-6 and we got sacked. From that point on, and really, I'm not saying the game would have been different on that call. That's not what I'm saying at all. That's where the game changed. It was around that point."

Cignetti on whether Indiana should still be considered to be one of the 12 teams in the College Football Playoff after this loss: "Is that a serious question? I'm not even going to answer that. The answer is so obvious."

Sawyer on how it feels to be coming off a performance like this heading into the Michigan game: "I think that we're playing our best football right now – all of us, collectively. You saw the defense kind of going through a different gear in this game after the first drive. So that's what we're capable of. And it feels great to be playing like that right now, I just can't wait. It's crazy it's already here this fast, and we've been waiting for this game for 364 days. So I can't wait."

Sawyer on why he can't wait for the Michigan game: "It's everything. This is what you come to Ohio State for, to beat those guys up North. I just can't wait. We have them at home, our senior year, my class. After what has gone on these last few years, you wouldn't want it any other way. We'd play this game anywhere, it doesn't matter. So we're excited. We're excited."

Egbuka on what Nov. 30 is going to be like against Michigan: "It's going to be everything that I've anticipated the last 365 days."

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 38, Indiana 15

Nov. 23, 2024 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
INDIANA	7	0	0	8	15
OHIO STATE	0	14	14	10	38

First Quarter

IU - Lawton, 2-yard rush (Radicic kick), 6:52.

Second Quarter

OSU - Egbuka, 11-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 7:22.

OSU - Henderson, 4-yard rush (Fielding kick), 0:21.

Third Quarter

OSU - Downs, 79-yard punt return (Fielding kick), 12:44.

OSU - Thurman, 1-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 6:02.

Fourth Quarter

OSU - Fielding, 45-yard field goal, 8:56.

IU - Lawton, 2-yard rush (Cooper Jr. pass from Rourke), 1:53.

OSU - Howard, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 0:35.

Att. - 105,751

Weather - Cloudy, 46 F

Team Statistics

	IU	OSU
First Downs	16	14
Rushing	10	5
Passing	3	9
Penalty	3	0
Rushes-Yards	41-83	29-115
Passing Yards	68	201
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	8-18-0	22-26-1
Offensive Plays	59	55
Total Net Yards	151	316
Third Down Efficiency	6-14	4-11
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	2-3
Punts-Avg.	5-42.8	2-47.0
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	0-0
Penalties	3-15	8-58
Time of Possession	30:40	29:20

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - **IU**: Lawton 15-79; Ellison 17-62; Team 1-(-2); Evans 1-(-23); Rourke 7-(-33). **OSU**: Henderson 9-68; Judkins 14-36; Smith 1-12; Howard 5-(-1).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - **IU**: Rourke 8-18-0-68-0. **OSU**: Howard 22-26-1-201-2.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - **IU**: Sarratt 3-40; Lawton 2-9; Williams 2-6; Price 1-13. **OSU**: Egbuka 7-80; Tate 4-68; Smith 3-34; Henderson 3-5; Judkins 2-7; Scott Jr. 2-6; Thurman 1-1.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - **IU**: Evans 5-42.8-52. **OSU**: McGuire 2-47.0-49.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **IU**: Price 1-12. **OSU**: Downs 3-91.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **IU**: None. **OSU**: Henderson 1-19.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - **IU**: None. **OSU**: Hamilton 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - **IU**: Walker 1-0. **OSU**: None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - **IU**: None. **OSU**: Simon 2.5-23; Sawyer 1.5-14; Tuimoloua 1-9.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - **IU**: Mangum-Farrar 1-5; West 1-4; Walker 1-1. **OSU**: Simon 2.5-23; Sawyer 1.5-14; Curry 1-23; Tuimoloua 1-9; Styles 1-3; Williams 1-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) - **IU**: Walker 4-4-8; Carr Jr. 4-3-7; Asbury II 3-4-7; Ponds 4-2-6; Fisher 3-1-4; Ferrell 3-1-4; Jones Jr. 2-2-4; Hardy 1-2-3; West 1-2-3; Carpenter 0-3-3; Kamara 0-3-3; Vanhorse 2-0-2; Tucker 0-2-2; Becker 1-0-1; Mangum-Farrar 1-0-1; Johnson 1-0-1; Bonds 0-1-1. **OSU**: Simon 4-6-10; Styles 3-5-8; Downs 2-3-5; Tuimoloua 0-5-5; Curry 4-0-4; Ransom 3-1-4; Sawyer 2-2-4; Hamilton 0-4-4; Mathews Jr. 2-1-3; Williams 1-2-3; Igbinosun 0-3-3; Reese 1-1-2; Burke 1-1-2; Hicks 1-0-1; Styles Jr. 1-0-1; Thurman 1-0-1; Smith Jr. 1-0-1; Hancock 0-1-1; Kanu 0-1-1; McDonald 0-1-1; Malone 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - **IU**: Sarratt, Cross, Cooper Jr., Horton, Katic, Ellison, Smith, Lynch, Wedig, Stephens, Rourke, Asbury II, Walker, Hardy, Ferrell, Fisher, Carr Jr., Ponds, Kamara, West, Johnson, Carpenter, Coby, Jones Jr., Doss, Lawton, Vanhorse, Sanguinetti, Bonds, Utzinger, Radicic, Price, McCormick, Walker, Jones, Langston, Bomba, Williams, Mangum-Farrar, Jones, Black, Becker, Foley, West, Ndukwe, Burris Jr., Evans, Tucker, Landino. **OSU**: Judkins, Howard, Egbuka, Smith, Sierveld, Fryar, Jackson, Hinzman, Tshabola, Christian, Scott Jr., Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimoloua, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Inniss, Hicks, West, Thurman, Tate, Melton, McClain, Reese, Simpson-Hunt, Stover, Mathews Jr., Pierce, Styles Jr., Henderson, Powers, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Gurd, Montgomery, Smith Jr., Padilla, Fitzpatrick, Adolph, Kacmarek, Hartford, Curry, Kanu, Malone, Houston, Jackson Jr., McDonald.

Season Statistics

2024 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Aug. 31	(2) AKRON	W, 52-6	102,011	
Sept. 9	(2) WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	102,665	
Sept. 21	(3) MARSHALL	W, 49-14	103,871	
Sept. 28	(3) Michigan State	W, 38-7	71,114	
Oct. 5	(3) IOWA	W, 35-7	105,135	
Oct. 12	(3) Oregon (2)	L, 32-31	60,129	
Oct. 26	(4) NEBRASKA	W, 21-17	104,830	
Nov. 2	(4) Penn State (3)	W, 20-13	111,030	
Nov. 9	(3) PURDUE	W, 45-0	103,463	
Nov. 16	(2) Northwestern	W, 31-7	38,147	
Nov. 23	(2) INDIANA (5)	W, 38-15	105,751	
Nov. 30	(2) MICHIGAN	12 p.m.		

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

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	232	157
Rushing	101	65
Passing	124	74
Penalty	7	18
Average Per Game/Rush	177.5	90.0
Average Per Game/Pass	261.5	151.7
Total Offense	4830	2659
Total Plays	690	648
Average Per Game	439.1	241.7
Average Per Play	7.0	4.1
Penalties-Yards	50-462	38-270
Fumbles-Lost	12-5	18-8
Third Down Efficiency	55-127	49-152
Percentage	43%	32%
Fourth Down Efficiency	17-24	8-20
Percentage	71%	40%
Sacks-Yards	35-231	12-75
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:13	29:47

Score						
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot. Avg.
Ohio State	73	143	135	65	0	416 37.8
Opponents	33	43	9	33	0	118 10.7

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Quinshon Judkins	135	759	5.6	8	86
T. Henderson	98	730	7.4	6	53
James Peoples	42	191	4.5	2	18
Will Howard	68	121	1.8	7	19
S. Williams-Dixon	7	53	7.6	0	31
Jeremiah Smith	4	47	11.8	1	19
Julian Sayin	2	24	12.0	0	19
Emeka Egbuka	5	21	4.2	0	13
Devin Brown	7	13	1.9	0	10
Carnell Tate	0	6	0.0	0	6
Mason Maggs	1	3	3.0	0	3
Team	10	-15	-1.5	0	0
OSU Totals	379	1953	5.2	24	86
OPP Totals	366	990	2.7	8	38

Passing						
Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.	
Will Howard	208	281	74.0	2685	26-6	180.5
Devin Brown	10	19	52.6	108	1-0	117.7
Julian Sayin	5	11	45.5	84	1-0	139.6
OSU Totals	223	311	71.7	2877	28-6	175.3
OPP Totals	170	282	60.3	1669	4-7	109.7

Receiving					
Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long	
Jeremiah Smith	52	899	17.3	9	70
Emeka Egbuka	56	692	12.4	9	68
Carnell Tate	35	525	15.0	4	40
Brandon Inniss	12	151	12.6	1	27
Gee Scott Jr.	14	144	10.3	2	34
T. Henderson	7	110	6.5	0	32
Quinshon Judkins	15	109	7.3	1	21
Bennett Christian	2	61	30.5	1	55
Will Kacmarek	5	58	11.6	0	32
Bryson Rodgers	5	46	9.2	0	12
Jelani Thurman	4	42	10.5	1	19
Jayden Ballard	2	18	9.0	0	12
David Adolph	1	10	10.0	0	10
Kojo Antwi	1	8	8.0	0	8
Patrick Gurd	1	6	6.0	0	6
James Peoples	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	223	2877	12.9	28	70
OPP Totals	170	1669	9.8	4	69

Scoring						
TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS	
Jayden Fielding	-	53-53	-	-	8-9	77
Jeremiah Smith	10	-	-	-	-	60
Q. Judkins	9	-	-	-	-	54
Emeka Egbuka	9	-	-	-	-	54
Will Howard	7	-	-	-	-	42
T. Henderson	6	-	-	-	-	36

Carnell Tate	4	-	-	-	-	24
James Peoples	2	-	-	-	-	12
Gee Scott Jr.	2	-	-	-	-	12
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jack Sawyer	1	-	-	-	-	6
Lathan Ransom	1	-	-	-	-	6
Brandon Inniss	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jelani Thurman	1	-	-	-	-	6
Caleb Downs	1	-	-	-	-	6
Austin Snyder	-	3-3	-	-	-	3
OSU Totals	56	56-56	-	-	-	8-9
OPP Totals	13	9-9	-	2	9-14	118

FG Distance					
	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	1-1	2-2	5-6	0-0	8-9
OSU Totals	1-1	2-2	5-6	0-0	8-9
OPP Totals	3-4	1-2	4-6	1-2	9-14

Punting					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long	
Joe McGuire	29	1246	43.0	0	61
Nick McLarty	2	65	32.5	0	35
OSU Totals	31	1311	42.3	0	61
OPP Totals	61	2567	42.1	2	60

Interceptions					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
Denzel Burke	2	31	15.5	0	31
Davison Igbinosun	2	45	22.5	0	45
Lathan Ransom	1	24	24.0	0	24
Jordan Hancock	1	0	0.0	0	0
Gabe Powers	1	29	29.0	1	29
OSU Totals	7	129	18.4	1	45
OPP Totals	6	101	16.8	1	36

Punt Returns					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
Brandon Inniss	12	109	9.1	0	36
Caleb Downs	5	102	20.4	1	79
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
David Adolph	1	0	0.0	0	0
Caden Curry	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	20	211	10.6	1	79
OPP Totals	7	43	6.1	0	14

Kickoff Returns					
No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long	
T. Henderson	4	58	14.5	0	19
Brandon Inniss	3	47	15.7	0	18
Jayden Ballard	2	23	11.5	0	23
Emeka Egbuka	1	16	16.0	0	16
OSU Totals	11	144	13.1	0	23
OPP Totals	8	135	16.9	0	25

Def. Leaders					
Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks	
Sonny Styles	31	40	71	6.5-35	4.0-29
Cody Simon	30	35	65	8.0-49	5.0-44
Caleb Downs	30	21	51	6.5-11	0.5-2
Lathan Ransom	29	19	48	5.5-8	0-0
Jack Sawyer	18				

Wolverines Battered But Still Believing

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Just under 11 months ago, Michigan's football program was standing on top of the college football world.

Despite an NCAA investigation into the team's elaborate sign-stealing scandal looming over Schembechler Hall – one which caused then-head coach Jim Harbaugh to be suspended for the final three games of the 2023 regular season – the Wolverines became just the fourth team in history to secure a perfect 15-0 season following a 34-13 defeat of Washington in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game on Jan. 8, 2024, a resounding victory that gave Michigan its first national title since 1997 and first outright title since 1948.

Sign-stealing or not, the Wolverines' 2023 campaign – which also included a third straight victory over archrival Ohio State, a third straight Big Ten title and a dramatic 27-20 overtime win over Alabama in the Rose Bowl – was one of the more successful college football seasons of all time.

Fast-forward nearly one year later, though, and the Wolverines' historic season feels more like a distant memory than the start of a new dynasty.

In the months following the championship win, Michigan has turned into a skeleton of its 2023 self. A school-record 13 players from last year's squad – including quarterback JJ McCarthy, running back Blake Corum and cornerback Mike Sainristil – were selected in the 2024 NFL draft, with another six signed as undrafted free agents.

The program also lost its bona fide leader in Harbaugh, who bolted to the Los Angeles Chargers just 16 days after the title game and took five of his assistants with him, including defensive coordinator Jesse Minter and strength and conditioning coach Ben Herbert.

When the dust settled, just 10 total starters from the national title team remained, a number that has since dwindled down to eight due to long-term injuries to defensive backs Rod Moore (torn ACL) and Will Johnson (lower body).

The result of this program overhaul is a disappointing season for the defending champions, with the Wolverines – now led by first-year head coach and former offensive coordinator/interim head coach Sherrone Moore – limping to bowl eligibility with just a 6-5 record heading into The Game on Nov. 30.

It is a wash of a season for the Wolver-

ines – who have the same NCAA investigation still hanging over them, having yet to be resolved as BSB went to press – that no one in the program, beginning with Moore, could have expected coming off an undefeated season.

"I'm obviously not happy with the record," Moore said earlier this season. "Not happy with the losses. Really just want our kids to be in a good place mentally and spiritually."

"Nobody likes losing," he added later in the year. "We hate it. The kids don't like it. The coaches don't like it."

Michigan's 2024 struggles start and mostly end with its poor offensive play.

The Wolverines have reached the 30-point mark in just two games of their first 11 games – that coming in the team's season-opening 30-10 win over non-Power Four Fresno State and in the 50-6 beat-down of Northwestern on Nov. 23 – and head into Columbus ranking 107th nationally in scoring offense at 23.1 points per game, 128th (sixth-worst in the FBS) in total offense (299.7) and 127th in passing offense (140.1).

These numbers are in large part due to the team's lack of production from the quarterback position, which has had a carousel of players in and out of the starting lineup throughout the year.

With the two-year starter McCarthy gone to the NFL, Moore looked to fill the void early in the season with senior Davis Warren, who had backed up McCarthy in his two seasons in maize and blue, appearing in eight games in those two years.

Warren, a former walk-on who had survived cancer while in high school, is an inspirational story for the Wolverines and all of college football, but that did not necessarily translate to success on the field early on.

He completed 48 of his 72 passes for 444 yards and just two touchdowns to six interceptions in his first three starts of the year, including a 122-yard, three-interception performance in the Wolverines' 28-18 win over Arkansas State on Sept. 14.

Warren's struggles prompted Moore to make a quick change at the position, inserting former run-specialist Alex Orji as the team's starting signal caller before the Wolverines' Week 4 matchup against USC.

Michigan did defeat the then-11th-ranked Trojans 27-24 at home in what was its biggest win of the 2024 season to date, but it came in spite of Orji, who threw for just 32 yards on 12 passing attempts. He then combined for just 101 passing yards and one score the next two games, leading

Get To Know ... Michigan

- **2024 Record:** 6-5, 4-4 in Big Ten
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 3, Defense 4, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Sherrone Moore, 1st Year at Michigan, 6-5
- **Series History:** 120th meeting; Michigan leads 61-52-6.
- **School Facts:** Location – Ann Arbor, Mich.; Enrollment – 52,855; Nickname – Wolverines; Colors – Maize, Blue; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Michigan Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 107,601).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Kalel Mullings	153	832	5.4	11
Donovan Edwards	124	578	4.7	4
Alex Orji	50	228	4.6	1

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Davis Warren	116-181	64.1	1064	6-7
Jack Tuttle	30-50	60.0	306	1-2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Colston Loveland	56	582	10.4	5
Semaj Morgan	23	134	5.8	1
Tyler Morris	10	234	10.6	2

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game	— 23.1
Rushing Yards Per Game	— 159.6
Passing Yards Per Game	— 140.1
Total Offense Avg. Per Game	— 299.7

2024 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	FRESNO STATE	W, 30-10
Sept. 7	TEXAS	L, 31-12
Sept. 14	ARKANSAS STATE	W, 28-18
Sept. 21	USC	W, 27-24
Sept. 28	MINNESOTA	W, 27-24
Oct. 5	at Washington	L, 27-17
Oct. 19	at Illinois	L, 21-7
Oct. 26	MICHIGAN STATE	W, 24-17
Nov. 2	OREGON	L, 38-17
Nov. 9	at Indiana	L, 20-15
Nov. 23	NORTHWESTERN	W, 50-6
Nov. 30	at Ohio State	Noon

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Ernest Hausmann	47	27	74.0	5.5-21	2.0-9
Jaishawn Barham	37	23	60.0	3.5-17	1.0-14
Makari Paige	22	20	42.0	1.0-3	0.0-0
Quinten Johnson	25	15	40.0	1.0-3	0.0-0
Mason Graham	18	20	38.0	7.0-34	3.5-26
Josaiah Stewart	21	11	32.0	13.0-77	8.5-67
Jyair Hill	23	7	30.0	5.5-9	1.0-1
Zeke Berry	24	6	30.0	2.5-4	0.0-0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed	— 21.5
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 94.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed	— 222.3
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed	— 316.3

Moore to make another change and bench the junior for seventh-year Jack Tuttle in the second quarter of the team's 27-17 loss to Washington.

But the quarterback carousel was only beginning for the Wolverines. Tuttle started just one game for the Wolverines against Illinois on Oct. 19 – throwing for 208 yards and no scores with one interception in a 21-7 loss – before being benched in favor of the Week 1 starter Warren and later medically retiring on Oct. 29 due to a fifth career concussion.

Warren has served as the starter ever since and has completed 62.4 percent of his passes (68 of 109) and thrown for 620 yards and four touchdowns to one interception over the last four weeks.

This instability at football's most important position largely explains the just above. 500 record for the Wolverines thus far, but Moore said it's not just his signal callers who need to bear the full responsibility for the struggles this year.

"You want to win every game," Moore said two days after the team's loss to Illinois. "It's not (the quarterback that has disappointed him the most). We're all in this together. We're not going to point fingers at any position, any people, so, for us, just winning those games and taking care of the football as a whole collective unit."

One of those issues outside of quarterback has been the regressed play of senior running back Donovan Edwards. Coming into the season, Edwards – who graced the cover of the new EA Sports College Football 25 video game alongside Texas' Quinn Ewers and Colorado's Travis Hunter this offseason – was projected to be one of the nation's top running backs in 2024, but that has not been the case.

Edwards does have more yards than he

had last year when he was playing behind Corum, totaling 578 yards on 124 carries compared to the 497 on 119 he finished with in 2023, but he has just four touchdowns, one lower than the total he had as a backup last season.

He has also yet to eclipse the 100-yard plateau in a game this year and has six games this season where he has rushed for less than 50 yards on at least seven carries.

With Edwards struggling most of the year, the leading rusher for the Wolverines has been graduate tailback Kalel Mullings, who has waited his turn through the years in the program to rush for a team-high 832 yards and 11 touchdowns on 153 totes this season, marks that rank sixth, tied for third and tied for seventh in the Big Ten, respectively.

The Boston native is also coming off his best performance of the season, rushing 12 times for 92 yards – a 7.7-yard average – and a career-high three touchdowns against Northwestern.

Edwards and Mullings are still a legitimate duo for whom Ohio State needs to be fully prepared come Nov. 30, but they have likely been unable to reach that full potential due to them running behind an entirely new Wolverines offensive line.

Like most position groups on the Wolverines' roster, the unit experienced a mass exodus over the offseason, with its entire starting five from last year departing for the NFL, including three-time All-Big Ten selections Trevor Keegan (left guard, Philadelphia Eagles) and Zak Zinter (right guard, Cleveland Browns).

The group is even led by a new face this season, with former Michigan offensive tackle Grant Newsome taking the reins from Moore after previously coaching the tight ends from 2022-23.



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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN

Newsome has been tasked with teaching a new-look offensive line consisting of graduate left tackle Myles Hinton, Northwestern graduate transfer left guard Josh Priebe, senior center Greg Crippen, senior right guard Giovanni El-Hadi and sophomore right tackle Evan Link – who came into the year with just eight combined starts for the Wolverines across their careers, five of those coming from Hinton.

This newness on the line has likely played a role in the Wolverines averaging 9.5 fewer yards per game on the ground compared to last year, dropping from 169.1 to 159.6

Newsome suggested in the middle of the season that his group needs to play with added physicality toward the end of the year when they match up against tough Big Ten teams, something the program has been able to do in recent years.

“Anytime you get late in October, November, you’re going to have to be able to run the football,” Newsome said earlier this year. “You’re going to have to be able to be physical. That’s been a hallmark of offensive lines here.”

Although it was against a more inferior opponent and just one game, the Wolverines did return to that physical style of play against Northwestern, rushing for 201 yards on 35 carries in the blowout win. Newsome’s group has another chance to impose their will against a formidable Buckeye defensive line on Nov. 30.

Despite Michigan’s overall offensive ineptitude, it does have some explosive pass catchers who could give Jim Knowles and his defense some trouble in The Game, that is if Warren can get them the ball.

Junior tight end Colston Loveland is the Wolverines’ top pass catcher this season with 56 catches for 582 yards and five touchdowns, and he has given the Buckeyes fits in the past, taking his one reception for 45 yards and a score in 2022 and then recording a team-high five catches for 88 yards in 2023.

Sophomore wide receiver/punt returner Semaj Morgan is also a threat due to his blazing speed, which allowed him to take an 87-yard punt return to the end zone in last year’s Big Ten Championship Game and haul in 23 catches for 134 yards and a score through 11 games this season. He did not play in the Northwestern game, however, due to an undisclosed injury, and his status for The Game was uncertain as BSB went to press.

Michigan’s defense returns just four starters from last year’s championship team, but the unit still heads into Columbus with some star power, even with Johnson and Moore likely to miss the rivalry game.

That stardom begins with the Wolverines’ new defensive play caller, Don “Wink” Martindale, who joined Moore’s staff this offseason after spending the last 20 years in the NFL as a longtime assistant and defensive coordinator.

The 60-year-old last called defensive plays for the New York Giants from 2022-23 but spent the biggest chunk of his NFL career with the Baltimore Ravens from 2012-21, where he served as linebackers coach for Pro Football Hall of Famer Ray Lewis and the Super Bowl-winning Ravens in his first year on staff.

Martindale’s return to college – he began as an assistant for his alma mater Defiance

College in the late 1980s, making four more stops at the amateur level before heading to the pros – did not get off to the best start after then-No. 3 Texas went into Ann Arbor and bullied the Wolverines’ defensive front start to finish on Sept. 7, rushing for 143 yards and a score in the 31-12 win.

But since then he has done an admirable job in his new role, especially when considering the almost entirely new personnel he has been tasked with leading.

Heading into the Ohio State game, Michigan ranks 36th nationally in scoring defense (21.5 points per game), 23rd in total defense (316.3 yards per game), fourth in rushing defense (94.0) and 54th in passing defense (211.5), having allowed 21 points or fewer in four of its last five games.

Each of those statistics jumped significantly after Week 13 due to the Wolverines’ defensive dominance of Northwestern, where they allowed just 10 total rushing yards (127 total), recorded a team-high six sacks and hauled in two interceptions against the Wildcats.

The strength of Michigan’s defense – like many Wolverines units of the past – lies within the trenches, where it boasts one of the more formidable defensive lines in the Big Ten.

Michigan’s front four is led by one of the lone remaining key contributors from last year’s national championship team, junior defensive tackle Mason Graham, a projected top-five NFL draft pick who has shown his pro potential this year by racking up 38 tackles (seven for loss) along with 3½ sacks and three quarterback hurries.

Graham may not have eye-popping stats this season, but those who are around him every day know the future first-round draft pick has impacted the game in numerous ways this season with his unique football knowledge and great instincts.

“Football IQ, he’s one of the best I’ve ever been around,” said Michigan defensive line coach Lou Esposito, who is also in his first year in his role after serving as defensive coordinator at Western Michigan from 2017-23. “Literally, he can recite calls from two years ago when he was a freshman. He can talk about blocking schemes. He can talk about pass protection. He can talk about how people are trying to attack him. Unbelievable how his hand placement is. His IQ is second to none.”

With Graham receiving most of the attention each week on the defensive line from opposing offensive lines, it has opened up added opportunities for the other defensive linemen who start alongside him. This is especially true on the outside, where senior and junior defensive ends Josaiah Stewart and Derrick Moore have racked up a combined 51 sacks, 17 tackles for loss and six quarterback hurries this season.

When also factoring in the talents of junior nose tackle Kenneth Grant (three sacks, six TFLs), the Wolverines could very well find success on an Ohio State offensive line that has been ravaged by injury in recent weeks following the season-ending injuries of center Seth McLaughlin and left tackle Josh Simmons, especially when considering the performance Michigan’s unit had the week prior.

Michigan is also strong at linebacker, with juniors Ernest Hausmann (Mike) and Jaishawn Barham (Will) ranking No. 1 and No. 2 on the team in tackles with 74 and 60

stops, respectively.

Hausmann, who tallied 46 tackles last year for the Wolverines in a reserve role, ranks 11th in the Big Ten in total tackles with 74, while he also has added 5½ tackles for loss, two sacks and one interception on the year.

One area of the Wolverines’ defense the Buckeyes could take advantage of is the secondary. With Moore out for the year and Johnson missing the last five games, Michigan has had to mix and match in the secondary, shuffling players into different positions toward the end of the year.

Taking the All-American Johnson’s spot at outside cornerback is junior Zeke Berry, who shifts over to the outside after playing the first eight games of the season at the nickel. Moving to the nickel to take Berry’s place is graduate Makari Paige, who has earned the last three starts at the position after playing the first eight games of the year at safety.

That means graduate Wesley Walker has filled in for Paige at safety alongside returning starter and fellow graduate Quinten Johnson – who returned to Michigan after originally declaring for the 2024 NFL draft – with either sophomore Jyair Hill or graduate Aamir Hall occupying the other outside cornerback position.

Hill had started there for most of the season but did not play against Northwestern until the second half due to a development that Moore said they were “working through internally,” leading the veteran Hall to earn the start on Nov. 23.

All of these changes do not bode well on

paper for a Wolverine team that heading into its Nov. 23 game against Northwestern had the sixth-worst passing defense in the Big Ten, giving up 232.8 yards through the air per game, but against the Wildcats they did seem to put it all together, limiting the Wildcats to 117 yards passing on 24 attempts, 84 less than the 201 Ohio State gave up to the same team at Wrigley Field on Nov. 16.

Regardless of how Michigan’s patchwork secondary or limited offense has played recently, history has shown the Wolverines will likely enter Columbus on the Saturday after Thanksgiving with a clean slate and a confident attitude, one which can be backed up by the three straight wins it secured against its archrival from 2021-23, including a 45-23 trouncing of the Buckeyes the last time the two teams squared off at Ohio Stadium in 2022.

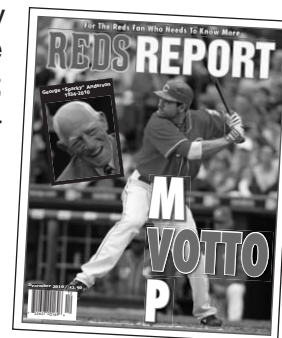
Although there are not many players left on the roster who played a significant role in those consecutive victories, those who have been there and done that against the Buckeyes know a potentially historic upset – one which could create a significant domino effect across the Big Ten and college football – cannot be accomplished without having a team-wide belief that they can get the job done.

“You’ll be wrong if you’re in this profession and you don’t have faith or if you didn’t believe,” Edwards said. “A man without faith is dead. Why wouldn’t you believe? I’m always going to believe, whether we win or lose.”

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Projected Depth Charts

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs.

MICHIGAN RUSH DEFENSE

Working with a reconfigured line offensive line due to the season-ending knee injury to center Seth McLaughlin, the good news was Ohio State did not allow any sacks. The bad news was the Buckeyes could not run against the nation's No. 2 rushing defense that allowed 72.2 yards per game. OSU gained 115 yards on a 4.0 average vs. Indiana, but that was deceptive because TreVeyon Henderson ran for 39 of his 68 yards late in the game when Indiana wouldn't have minded him scoring so the Hoosiers could get the ball back. Quinshon Judkins had 36 yards for a 2.6 average. That's not good enough. The Wolverines went into their Nov. 23 game vs. Northwestern as the No. 10 team in the nation with only 102.4 rushing yards allowed per game and limiting opponents to 3.4 yards per carry. The Wildcats had 10, yes, 10 yards on 25 carries vs. Michigan. So suppressive has the defense been that Northwestern was the sixth team with less than 100 rushing yards, including four others with 60 or less: Fresno State (9 yards), Arkansas State (58), Minnesota (38) and Indiana (40). Illinois gained the most (187). U-M has given up 10 TDs on the ground. **EDGE: MICHIGAN**

MICHIGAN RUSH OFFENSE vs.

OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Wolverines returned only one starter on offense from 2023 in tight end Colston Loveland. It had been tough running the ball with a 155.4 average going into the game, but the Wolverines gained 201 (5.7) against the Wildcats with Kalel Mullings going for 92 yards (7.7) and three TDs with a long of 47. U-M also rushed for 301 vs. Arkansas State and 290 against USC. Donovan Edwards has more than 2,200 yards and 19 touchdowns in his time at Michigan. Indiana couldn't do much against the Buckeyes and had 83 net yards for a 2.0 average. The total includes a minus-23 when the punter fumbled the snap and was tackled. Still, it was an impressive performance. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs.

MICHIGAN PASS DEFENSE

Will Howard completed his first 14 passes but for only 116 yards, and he did not have the deep ball working like it did the previous game vs. Northwestern. Some of it might have been running shorter routes to protect the line. Emeka Egbuka (seven catches, 80 yards, touchdown) was featured for the first time in a while. Howard finished 22 of 26 for 201 yards, two touchdowns and an interception. If Howard has protection, he should be able to exploit a defense that is allowing 222.3 passing yards a game to rank in the bottom third of the nation, although Northwestern managed only 117 yards. What the Wolverines do well is rush quarterbacks. They had a season-high six sacks vs. the Wildcats. Josaiah Stewart leads the team with 8½. Will Johnston is the career leader with nine interceptions, but he was injured and did not play against Northwestern. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

MICHIGAN PASS OFFENSE vs.

OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Using numerous quarterbacks because of injury or poor performances is never good, but that's what's going on in Ann Arbor with Davis Warren taking the opening snaps in the past four games. U-M averages 140.1 passing yards to rank near the bottom of all teams. Against Northwestern, the Wolverines threw 24 times in the first half after averaging 24.2 passes per game. Davis was 26 of 35 for 195 yards, a TD and a pick. Loveland, a semifinalist for the Mackey Award as the nation's best tight end, had a touchdown in the first half but did not play after halftime. The Buckeyes were buzzing around the backfield all game with five sacks against Indiana, and the D-line and linebackers have shown major improvement since the loss to Oregon. Safety Caleb Downs is great, but cornerback Davison Igbinosun had three more pass-interference penalties called on him and could be a liability. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Dominic Zvada has converted a school-record six field goals over 50 yards in as many attempts this season and is 15 of 16 (one blocked). Jordan Marshall had a 63-yard kickoff return for the Wolverines against Northwestern. U-M has two blocked field-goal attempts and one blocked punt. Downs' 79-yard TD was the Buckeyes' first punt return score in 10 years and was impressive. A fumbled punt snap by Indiana led to another score. **EDGE: EVEN**

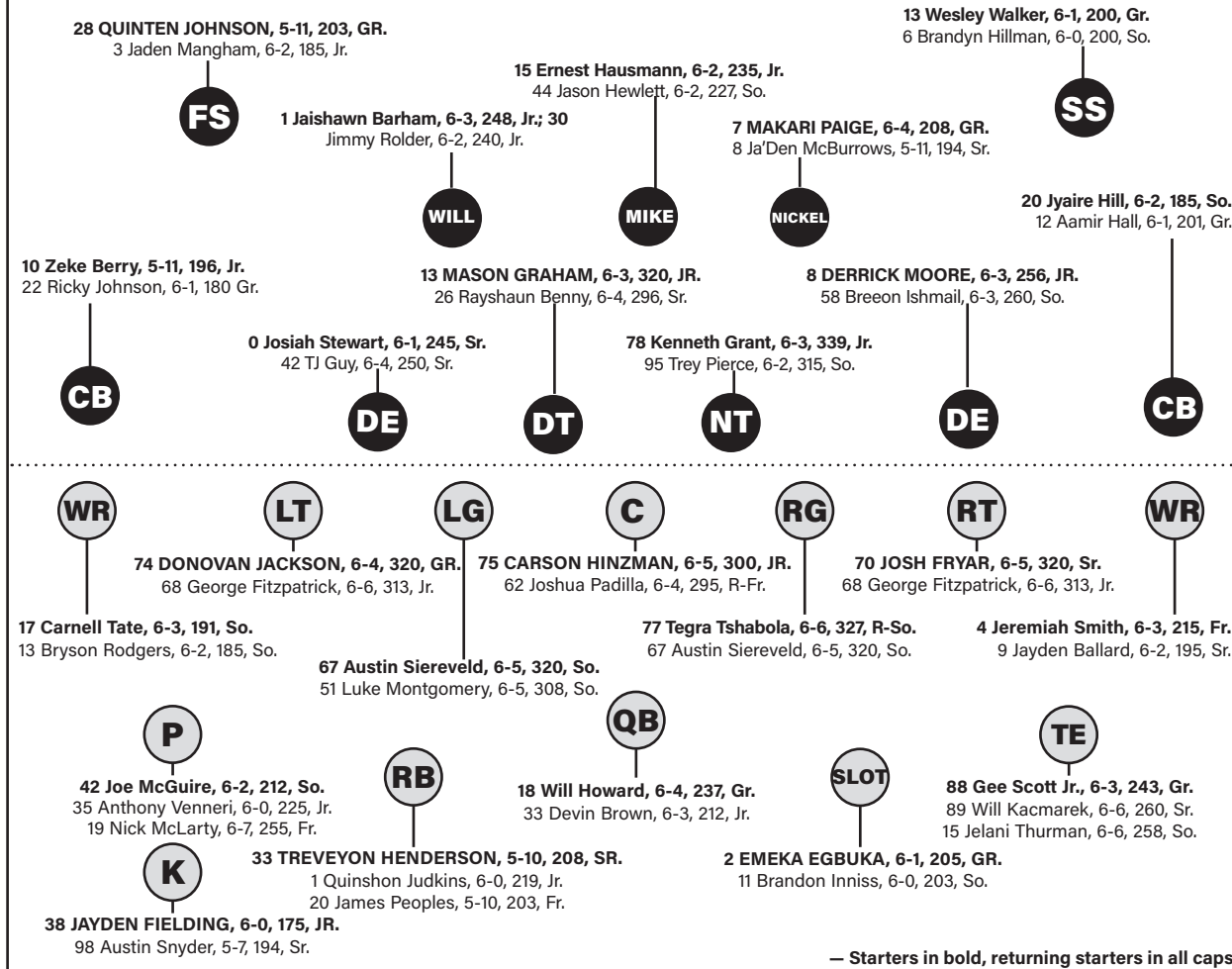
INTANGIBLES

Ohio State believes it can win. Michigan knows it can win. They've done it the past three seasons. The Wolverines love to play spoilers in this series and will use that to their advantage. **EDGE: MICHIGAN**

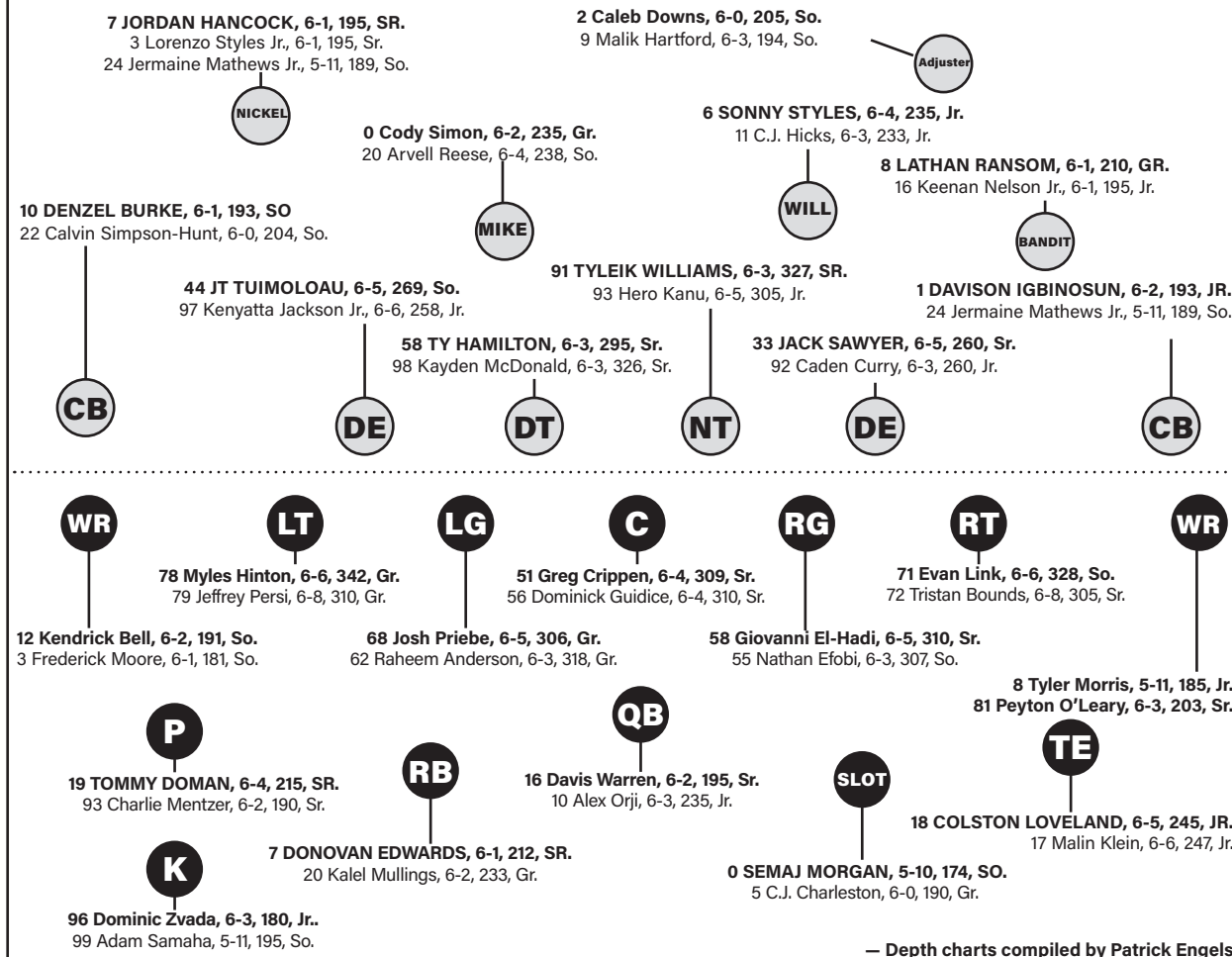
STAFF PREDICTION

The Buckeyes have shown they can overcome slow starts. They just need to stop practicing it every week or this time it could be fatal. **OHIO STATE 31, MICHIGAN 20**

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN MICHIGAN HAS THE BALL...



BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (10-1, 7-1)

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, W 38-15; **30** MICHIGAN.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (4-1)

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, W 80-30; **22** CAMPBELL, W 104-60; **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 (5-0)

Nov. 5 CLEVELAND STATE, W 104-69; **12** CHARLOTTE, W 94-53; **17** at Belmont, W 67-63; **20** at Ohio, W 106-42; **24** BOWLING GREEN, W 96-53; **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., Men 8th/31; Women NTS.

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, Men 2-4, Women 2-4.

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

(13-4-2, 8-4-2)

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, W 2-1; L 4-1.

Dec. 2 at Mercyhurst.

Jan. 2 at Wisconsin; **4** at Wrigley Field in Chicago vs. Wisconsin; **10-11** BEMIDJI STATE; **17-18** at Minnesota Duluth; **24-25** MINNESOTA STATE; **31** at Minnesota.

Feb. 1 at Minnesota; **7-8** ST. THOMAS; **21-22** ST. CLOUD STATE; **28** WCHA Quarterfinals.

March 1-2 WCHA Quarterfinals.

MEN'S SOCCER (15-1-3, 7-1-2)

Aug. 22 CLEVELAND STATE, T 1-1; **25** at Akron, W 2-0; **29** SIUE, W 4-0.

Sept. 1 UNLV, W 3-2; **8** XAVIER, W, 3-1; **13** BUTLER, W 1-0; **17** at Penn State, W 5-0; **22** RUTGERS, W 3-0; **27** INDIANA, T 2-2.

Oct. 4 at Michigan, W 6-3; **7** WASHINGTON, W, 2-0; **11** at UCLA, L, 2-1; **19** at Wisconsin, W 3-2; **25** NORTHWESTERN, W 2-0; **29** MICHIGAN STATE, T 2-2.

Nov. 3 at Maryland, W 2-1; **10** Big Ten Tournament semifinals vs. Washington, W 3-1; **17** Big Ten Tournament finals vs Michigan, W 1-0; **24** NCAA TOURNAMENT VS. WESTERN MICHIGAN, W 2-1.

Dec. 1 NCAA Tournament vs. Stanford.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (14-6-3, 6-3-2)

Aug. 15 DUKE, W 1-0; **22** MILWAUKEE, W 4-0; **25** ASHLAND, W 3-1; **29** SOUTH CAROLINA, T 1-1.

Sept. 5 at Navy, W 4-0; **8** at Auburn, L

1-0; **12** at Indiana, W 3-0; **15** BROWN, W 2-0; **19** IOWA, T 1-1; **22** NORTHWESTERN, W 2-1; **26** MICHIGAN STATE, T 2-2; **29** at Michigan, W 2-1.

Oct. 4 MARYLAND, W 3-0; **10** MINNESOTA, L 3-2; **13** at Purdue, W 4-2; **17** at USC, L 1-0; **20** at UCLA, L 1-0; **27** PENN STATE, W, 4-1; **31** vs. Wisconsin at Big Ten Tournament in Minneapolis, W 1-0.

Nov. 1 vs. Wisconsin at Big Ten Tournament in Minneapolis, W 1-0; **4** vs. USC at Big Ten Tournament in Minneapolis, L 1-0; **15** NCAA TOURNAMENT vs. JAMES MADISON, W 4-1; **22** NCAA Tournament at Winston-Salem, N.C., vs. Auburn, W 2-1; **24** NCAA Tournament at Winston-Salem, N.C., vs. Wake Forest, L 1-0.

MEN'S SWIM & DIVE (4-0)

Oct. 19 KENTUCKY W 191-107; **25** DENISON, W 182-116; **26** ALUMNI MEET, NTS.

Nov. 1-2 at Virginia Tech, W 177-176; **8** PENN STATE, W 173-127; **21-23** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 3RD/2,164 PTS.

Jan. 18 at Michigan; **24** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind.

Feb. 1 at Pittsburgh; **14-16** OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **26-March 1** Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis.

March 9 LAST CHANCE MEET; **10-12** NCAA ZONE DIVING; **13-15** CSCAA National Invitational at Ocala, Fla.; **26-29** NCAA Championships at Federal Way, Wash.

WOMEN'S SWIM & DIVE (5-0)

Oct. 19 KENTUCKY, W 218-80; AKRON, W 224-74; **25** DENISON, W 180-115; **26** ALUMNI MEET, NTS.

Nov. 1-2 at Virginia Tech, W 196-157; **8** PENN STATE, W 243-57; **21-23** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 2ND/2,413.50 PTS.

Jan. 18 at Michigan; **24-25** Tim Welsh Classic at South Bend, Ind.

Feb. 1 at Pittsburgh; **14-16** OHIO STATE WINTER INVITATIONAL; **19-22** BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIPS.

March 2 LAST CHANCE MEET; **10-12** NCAA ZONE DIVING; **13-15** CSCAA National Invitational at Ocala, Fla.; **19-22** NCAA Championships at Federal Way, Wash.

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, NTS.

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, NTS.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (14-14, 7-11)

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, W 3-0; **24** INDIANA, W 3-2; **27** at Wisconsin; **29** at Minnesota.

WRESTLING (3-0)

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, W 38-6.

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.

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Smith Saw Domination In U-M Rivalry

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

After 19 years of serving as the athletic director of Ohio State, Gene Smith has countless memories of the rivalry against Michigan, many of them very favorable ones.

During his tenure in Columbus, the Buckeyes dominated the rivalry. He came in 2005 and immediately saw six straight wins, something that not a single other athletic director in program history can say they oversaw.

In his 19 years, he watched the Buckeyes win 14 games over Michigan and lose just four, and yes, he does have 14 pairs of gold pants.

"I do, or I used to," Smith told BSB. "They go to my wife, and my wife disperses them to our children, so I don't know how many she's got left."

Being from Ohio and being involved in college football for most of his life – a defensive end for Notre Dame from 1973-76 and an athletic director at Eastern Michigan (1986-93), Iowa State (1993-2000) and Arizona State (2000-05) – Smith was already very familiar with the rivalry when he got to Ohio State. He didn't have to familiarize himself with how much the Buckeyes wanted to beat Michigan.

The only initial learning curve came in terms of how he had to be very aware of keeping people in the stadium safe when the Buckeyes hosted The Game since it is such a big draw every year. He got some very early experience with it when in his second football season on campus, the Buckeyes hosted "The Game of the Century."

"I certainly had to learn," Smith said. "I came out of the chute, and I was blessed. (Michigan) had one of their great coaches, Lloyd Carr, and we had Jim Tressel and we were one and two (in 2006).

"I learned a lot about the security of Ohio State because we packed (Ohio Stadium) up. People were in there like sardines. It

was more of an operational learning experience for me, because it was a big one. Then the other thing was it was two great coaches going head to head. It was a phenomenal contest."

Looking back at his 19 years, even with so many competitive games that the Buckeyes won, it's still The Game of the Century that stands out above all of the others for Smith. The No. 1, 11-0 Ohio State team going up against a No. 2-ranked, also undefeated, Michigan team made for an intense battle. Even though the teams had played each other since 1897, it was the first time The Game featured the top-two-ranked teams in the country.

Of course, Ohio State came out on top in a 42-39 win in a game that had so much talent facing off against each other in Columbus.

"The Game of the Century, that was just a beast," Smith said. "A lot of great players on that field. Many of them played on Sunday. That was probably my favorite.

"The atmosphere, two great coaches going at it, and you had great athletes. Football-wise, typically on game day I've got so many things going on because I'm thinking about the safety of 105,000-plus at that time, but when I sit down, I lock into the game. I watched the guard, watched the tackles, so that's a different view that I have. It was great. It was fun to watch."

Despite the dominance Tressel had over the Wolverines while he was at Ohio State, that couldn't last forever. After "Tattoogate" came to light in 2010, Smith and Ohio State suspended Tressel for five games of the 2011 season during an investigation that ultimately ended up with Tressel resigning from his position.

With Luke Fickell leading as the interim head coach in 2011, the Buckeyes lost in the rivalry game for the first time since Nov. 22, 2003. In a 40-34 final score, true freshman Braxton Miller, who had taken over the starting quarterback job in place of Joe Bauserman earlier in the season, had 235



FILE PHOTO

VIEW FROM THE TOP – Former Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith saw the Buckeyes win 14 of 18 games against Michigan during his tenure, but none stands out more than the 2006 "Game of the Century" won by the No. 1 Buckeyes over the second-ranked Wolverines 42-39.

passing yards and two touchdowns along with 100 rushing yards and another score on the ground. But that proved to not be enough to stay on top of the rivalry.

Smith said it hurt losing to Michigan for the first time in his tenure, but he also wasn't in panic mode about how the program might look moving forward in terms of the rivalry.

"It was tough. But I really felt bad for Luke and felt bad for the team more than anything," Smith said. "I knew that we would turn it around at some point, but I understood that situation and I took it from that perspective. I didn't take it as, 'Oh my God, the sky is falling.' It was more from a perspective of, 'OK, we got through this year,' which was the objective, then we had to move on. But it was a tough one."

Smith was right to not be worried about what that game meant. He would hire Urban Meyer as the next head coach for the Buckeyes that offseason. Meyer was already very familiar with the rivalry, having grown up in Ohio and getting his start in collegiate coaching as a graduate assistant with the Buckeyes in 1986.

"Urban understood it right off the bat since he's from Ohio," Smith said about the hiring. "He was coaching at Bowling Green, he's been in rivalry games, in Florida particularly. So that was not something we had to talk about (during the hiring process)."

Ohio State would go on to win seven straight games under Meyer, with a couple of rivalry-defining moments along the way.

One controversial game, which is now referred to as "The Spot," came in 2016, when the Wolverines entered Ohio Stadium looking to upset the Buckeyes and end their four-game winning streak in The Game.

It looked like Michigan and second-year head coach Jim Harbaugh might actually be able to pull that off. The game went into double overtime, and the Wolverines got the ball first in that period, unable to get into the end zone but nailing a field goal to go up 27-24.

When the Buckeyes got their chance, Michigan had them down to fourth-and-1 at the UM 16-yard line and Meyer had a choice to make. Was he going to tie the game back up and give the Wolverines offense another chance in triple overtime, or was he going to go for it all and keep their touchdown hopes alive?

"I remember sitting there watching that game and some of the people around me were like, 'Oh my God, is he going to go for it?' I said, 'Oh yeah, he's going for it. That's Urban.'" Smith said. "I didn't know what he was going to run. I felt like, knowing him, he was going to put the ball in the hands of J.T. (Barrett), who was such a competitor. People don't really recognize how talented he was from a competitor point of view and a toughness point of view."

And that's exactly what Meyer did. Barrett took the snap out of the shotgun with running back Mike Weber and wide receiver Curtis Samuel in the backfield at his sides, faked the handoff to Samuel and took off to the left C gap that the line had opened up for him. But Michigan safety Delano Hill met him at the line of scrimmage, sending Barrett flying through the air into tight end A.J. Alexander, whom he bounced off of right at the line to gain.

The original spot on the field was enough for a first down, which may have ultimately been the deciding factor during the video review since there was no camera angle that

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the referees had that showed indisputable evidence that Barrett didn't make it across the line.

Smith thought at the time, and still does, that Barrett had the first down.

"Everybody was tense and waiting, as I was too, but I thought he made it, and I was pretty confident that he made it, but really excited when they ultimately declared that he made it. It was a big, big moment."

It took just one more play to end the game when Samuel took a handoff at the 15-yard line and ran left untouched into the end zone thanks to his blockers doing their jobs.

Two years later, the Wolverines were back in Ohio Stadium on what they were calling their "revenge tour." In 2017, they lost to Wisconsin, Penn State, Michigan State and Ohio State, and they played all four of those teams again in 2018.

The revenge tour went exactly according to plan for the first 11 weeks of the season. Michigan had beaten the Badgers, Nittany Lions and Spartans by a combined 74 points and came into Columbus with a 10-1 record, hoping for a spot in the Big Ten Championship Game and a possible College Football Playoff bid, which would have been its first since the inception of the four-team format.

But the Buckeyes stopped the Wolverines dead in their tracks. Not only did they beat Michigan, but they put up 62 points behind a 396-yard, six-touchdown performance by quarterback Dwayne Haskins, 192 of those yards and two touchdowns to wideout Parris Campbell in the 62-39 victory.

Smith wasn't at all surprised by that result.

"We just had better athletes" he said. "At the end of the day, we had better athletes during that window of time, and we were just better. There were a number of years where they did not recruit at the same level we did. There were years where I felt confident going in that we were going to win, I just didn't know by how many points. But we just had better athletes.

"The greatest example of that in that particular game was it was the second half, a Parris Campbell reverse up the sideline. The defenders had angles on him. They still couldn't catch him. When you look at that game, there was a window where they just didn't have the players that we had and I felt confident that we would win, but that changed over time."

Campbell had multiple big plays in that game, but Smith is likely remembering an early fourth-quarter play in which Campbell was in motion from the left slot, receiving a quick forward pitch from Haskins who had just taken the snap. He got to the right sideline around multiple Wolverine defenders

and ran 78 yards for a touchdown to put the Buckeyes up by 23 points, 48-25.

That was the second-to-last rivalry win that Smith saw during his time at Ohio State, the last coming in 2019 in Ryan Day's first year as the head coach, finishing a streak in which the Buckeyes had won 15 of 16 against their rivals, 14 of those with Smith as the athletic director.

"It's ridiculous," Smith said of OSU's streak. "I was 14-4 during my tenure there, and I have to give Harbaugh credit. He recruited better. Players make the difference. Coaches put them in position to win. They're the engineers, but you have to have talent."

After The Game was canceled in 2020 due to a COVID-19 outbreak within the Michigan program, the Wolverines were able to turn the rivalry back into their favor, something that seemed impossible during the 2010s.

In a 42-27 Michigan win, C.J. Stroud threw for 394 yards and two touchdowns, but it wasn't enough to overcome the 169 yards and five touchdowns ran for by Wolverines running back Hassan Haskins. They ended up with 297 rushing yards as a team, dismantling the Buckeye defense with their ground game.

In every great rivalry, the teams are very competitive against each other, and while that had still been the case for much of the previous decade, Michigan hadn't been able to break through for an entire decade.

"The rivalry was still there, always, because it was a big game, it was highly televised, highly watched every year. But it's no question that when your opponent wins periodically, it brings a whole lot more tenor to it," Smith said. "I hated losing to them. I really did. I know a lot of people looked at it from a perspective that the rivalry is back, but I'd rather just keep beating them."

Michigan took another win in 2022, but midway through the 2023 season, it was revealed that its program was under investigation for stealing signs for the past couple of years, a scheme led by recruiting analyst Connor Stalions. With the evidence they had at the time, the Big Ten conference decided to suspend Harbaugh for the final three games of the regular season, which included the game against Ohio State that was set to take place in the Big House.

Smith was obviously well aware of the scandal as it was unfolding since it could have an impact on the Buckeyes and what their season would look like, but he was trying to make sure that his program stayed focused on itself since they couldn't change whatever the outcome of the investigation would be.

"It was more about focusing on Ryan Day, focusing on our coaches and players and what we can control," Smith said. "We

couldn't control what was happening with that case and couldn't influence it, so my whole thing was trying to make sure that we stayed focused on what we could control, which was whatever was right in front of us."

Smith has said in the past that he believes that those wins for Michigan during their sign-stealing should have an asterisk next to them, but he still sees the reality that those losses to the Wolverines actually happened, and there's no going back to change that.

"The reality is those games, and the pain of those games, will be with us when we're 80 years old, and there's nothing you can do about it. You can't go backwards," he said. "I spent my time with Ryan and others saying, 'Hey guys, don't worry about what happens up there, because what happens with the NCAA and with the Big Ten doesn't affect us. What affects us is what's next.'"

Michigan won its third game in a row over the Buckeyes that year with then-interim head coach Sherrone Moore leading them to the 30-24 victory in which OSU

and quarterback Kyle McCord had a final chance to drive down the field and win the game, but he was ultimately intercepted in Wolverine territory. That play secured the Wolverines their third straight Big Ten Championship Game appearance and the No. 1 overall seed in the College Football Playoff, which they would go on to win.

It has been five years now since Smith has seen a win over the Wolverines, but he won't be on campus when Michigan comes to town on Nov. 30 this year. That doesn't mean he won't be locked in, however. He didn't want to make any predictions about how the contest is going to go, but he is hoping the Buckeyes are able to finish on top just as much as he was every year he was the athletic director.

"I'm going to watch it and pray that they end up in Indy so I can go to Indy," Smith said. "But I want to stay out of the way and let Ross (Bjork) manage his program. He doesn't need me roaming around and all that. But my family is going to be here for Thanksgiving, and we're going to huddle up, eat leftovers and scream at the TV."

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Michigan Losses Still Hurt DB Ty Howard

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Very few Buckeyes in the 127-year history of The Game had a more heart-wrenching experience against the archrival Wolverines than Ty Howard, a Columbus native and cornerback from the outstanding 1992 Ohio State recruiting class.

Despite being teammates with some of the most talented and accomplished Buckeyes in the history of the program like Eddie George, Terry Glenn and Orlando Pace, Howard managed a satisfying 1994 win over the Wolverines and three devastating losses in 1993, 1995 and 1996, all of which spoiled previously undefeated seasons.

Twenty-eight years later, Howard is still transfixed watching the rivalry he was once a part of. The losses his teams sustained in the 1990s left him with a hatred of Michigan so deep that he wants to see his Buckeyes make their rivals hurt.

"You feel an intensity to go out and kick butt," Howard told BSB when asked what it's like to watch his Buckeyes today. "You want to inflict pain, and you want to see Michigan hurt in a good way. That intensity is there, and you bring in what happened to me with my teams personally when we went on the eight-year streak (2012-2019) – I told the Michigan fans I work with the Michigan rivalry would never change if we won every game until I die, I'd watch every game. You'd get the same intensity, and I wouldn't be less pleased. It's that intense."

One would think Howard's disdain for the Wolverines started in adolescence since he grew up right next to the OSU campus, but according to the former NFL cornerback, who played for the Arizona Cardinals, Cincinnati Bengals and Tennessee Titans in the league, his affinity for the Buckeyes as a child was limited to that, with no strong ill feelings toward the Wolverines.

Caught in a mix of Ohio State and Penn State fans in his family, Howard opted for the Cris Carter-led Buckeyes growing up. But as a receiver prospect in Briggs High School, Howard didn't let his Buckeye fandom stop him from considering an array of options at the next level.

"I was open to going anywhere that I could play as quickly as possible on the biggest stage, and that would give me an opportunity to play at the next level," Howard said.

Howard's open-mindedness and a connection with his grandmother made by Penn State head coach Joe Paterno led him to commit to play for the Nittany Lions.

Howard eventually changed course on his Penn State commitment and ultimately considered Michigan. Michigan's unwillingness for Howard to play any other position, emphasis on run-blocking and some arrogance over their winning ways over the Buckeyes immediately put him off. It wasn't just Howard who was slightly unsettled by his Michigan visit, but many of his future Buckeye teammates.

"That same recruiting season, the exact same group, Korey Stringer, Jimmie Bell, Lorenzo Styles, Buster Tillman, the entire group – LeShun Daniels, DJ. Jones, Rob Kelly, Jayson Gwinn we were all on a visit together and we're just sitting around telling stories about the visits, and to a player, every

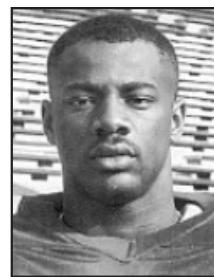
guy said, 'You know what, something about Michigan just didn't sit right with us,' and I think Korey was the first to commit, and then I think I committed, Lorenzo committed that same visit, Jason Gwinn, that kicked off the rivalry for us," Howard said.

It would be years before Howard was a serious contributor for the Buckeyes, but that caused a hatred for Michigan to be born in him and his teammates.

1992: Mixed Emotions

The biggest impact Howard had on Ohio State and Michigan's clash in 1992 wasn't in the game itself, but in leading up to the game in practice. Using his redshirt as a true freshman, Howard was trying to make a name for himself as a disruptor on the scout team.

During Michigan week, Howard's energy was only amplified.



Ty Howard

"I tell you we tried to give our offense hell that week," Howard said. "We were actually rewarded for any big plays, interceptions, anything we could do to be disruptive that week, just to raise the intensity of the game for us."

Howard and the rest of the scout team's effort was somewhat effective. The Buckeyes broke the Wolverines' four-game winning streak in the rivalry with a 13-13 tie in Columbus on Nov. 21.

Considering the Buckeyes faced a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter, a tie really wasn't so bad. However, Ohio State could have opted for a chance to go ahead late in the game with a two-point conversion after scoring a touchdown with 4:24 to go, but head coach John Cooper opted for a game-tying extra point instead.

Looking back, Howard understands what the result meant to Cooper, who, at that time, was 0-4 against Michigan.

"For Coach Cooper and the staff, I'm not going to say it was a good tie, but it wasn't a loss, and that was big," he said.

The result wasn't the cathartic win that the players in the locker room – all of whom were winless against Michigan – were looking for.

"It's kissing your sister," Howard said. "I don't know, we just weren't happy with it. We weren't happy to have a tie. There's no ties. You win or lose, and we had ample time and opportunity to win that game."

The tie cemented the Buckeyes' place that year in the Florida Citrus Bowl against Georgia on New Year's Day. But the 21-14 loss they suffered to the Bulldogs didn't halt the program's momentum going into the 1993 season.

1993: Humiliating Defeat

By the 1993 season, Howard had grown into a special teams contributor who occasionally got into the game at cornerback, but the Buckeyes as a team were borderline national championship contenders.

After winning their first eight games of the season, the Buckeyes suffered their first setback when they tied Wisconsin 14-14 in Camp Randall Stadium. The tie hurt the Buckeyes' chances to win the national cham-

ionship, but a chance at the Rose Bowl and Big Ten championship were right in front of them ahead of the Michigan game.

The Wolverines were ranked the No. 3 team in the country in the preseason poll but stumbled to four losses in the regular season, three of which were in the Big Ten.

Michigan didn't look like a nearly .500 Big Ten team against Ohio State, though. The Gary Moeller-led Wolverines dominated on both sides of the ball to upset previously undefeated Ohio State 28-0 in Ann Arbor.

The Buckeye offense had its worst performance of the season, totaling only 212 yards, but the defense didn't have the requisite physicality either and conceded 281 yards on the ground.

"I buried that one," Howard said with a laugh. "We got beat up. Even though they beat us, we thought we were better. I'm not just saying that. We knew we were a better team. We had better players."

The ugly defeat that ended up giving Wisconsin a place in the Rose Bowl wasn't a product of the special teamer's play. Despite his small stature, Howard gave everything he could in one of the biggest games of his career to that point in the minimal playing time he received.

"I fought my tail off," Howard said. "I mean, I was probably 172 pounds that year and fought my tail off. I recall (linebackers coach Fred Pagac), looking back, giving me a wink, and saying we can win with that guy, with that effort. Even though I got my tail kicked, it was the effort that stood out. And like I said, that was the mentality of not just myself. It's something about that game. It's unspoken. It doesn't need to be coached. You feel the pressure of the intensity, the magnitude of what this may mean, the story you'll tell 15, 20, 30 years down the line."

One of Howard's lasting memories from the dreary defeat occurred when two young Buckeyes, Roedell Dupree and Heath Knisley, were joking on the team bus after the blowout loss and had to find out the hard way that was unacceptable after a tough loss like they had just suffered.

"I recall (Pagac) just losing it saying, 'You guys just got your butts kicked, and we're joking and laughing,' and he looked at all of us, the young guys, and he goes 'This is war. This should hurt to your core. If you don't remember this loss, you remember this moment with me getting on your asses right now.'"

1994: Buckeyes Get Redemption

Even with the likes of defensive tackle Luke Fickell, All-America wide receiver Joey Galloway, George – a Heisman Trophy-winning running back – quarterback Bobby Hoying, linebacker Styles and defensive end Mike Vrabel all returning, the Buckeyes didn't get out to the same hot start as they had the previous year.

The Buckeyes stumbled in a nonconference loss to Washington and suffered ugly losses to Illinois and undefeated Penn State, to head into the Michigan game with an 8-3 record.

In the biggest of ironies, perhaps the worst team that Howard was a part of was the one that finally delivered Cooper his first win over Michigan.

Ohio State's defense helped grind out an enormous 22-6 win, capped by 10 fourth-quar-

Howard vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1993/Fr.	Ann Arbor	L, 28-0
1994/So.	Columbus	W, 22-6
1995/Jr.	Ann Arbor	L, 31-23
1996/Sr.	Columbus	L, 13-9

ter Buckeye points to none for the Wolverines.

Howard was solidified as a backup cornerback that year and, against Michigan, played in a similar role as he had in years past, but even he felt the enormous weight lifted off his coach's shoulders.

"I'm sad to say that was more so just relief," Howard said. "We knew we had the talent, we knew that we had the coaching, the ability to win that game, the bandwidth to win that game, to win any game, not just Michigan. And it just felt good to prove ourselves right."

"From a talent standpoint that wasn't our best team. That's what's scary, but it helped the younger guys – and I was still young at that time – actualize something that we knew."

In the aftermath of the win, Cooper was carried off the field by Ohio State players, and fans stormed the field in celebration of their first win over Michigan in seven years.

"I was so happy for Coop," Howard said. "I think we all were because he was in my opinion in terms of recruiting, raising the level of athleticism and talent for Ohio State, he doesn't get enough credit in my opinion."

The win over Michigan didn't give the Buckeyes a berth in the Rose Bowl. That spot went to undefeated Penn State. Ohio State instead faced off against Alabama in the Citrus Bowl.

Instead of reaching double-digit wins, Ohio State fell 24-17 to the Crimson Tide on Jan. 2.

1995: Season Spoiled Again

Despite the bowl loss, the Buckeyes cruised through a gantlet of a nonconference schedule early in the 1995 season, which included three ranked matchups against No. 22 Boston College, No. 18 Washington and No. 15 Notre Dame.

The Buckeyes continued their streak with big road wins over No. 12 Penn State and No. 21 Wisconsin. Five wins later, heading into a road matchup with Michigan, Ohio State was once again undefeated.

Howard, meanwhile, was a starter at cornerback opposite All-American Shawn Springs, and as a first-year starter, he was making the most of his opportunity.

In 13 games and 12 starts for the Buckeyes, Howard forced four fumbles and intercepted two passes, while recording 51 tackles, to form quite the tandem with Springs to shut down opposing receivers.

Unfortunately against Michigan that year, the elite cornerback duo was rendered relatively useless by the Wolverines' commanding presence at the line of scrimmage.

In a 31-23 win, Michigan running back Tim Biakabutuka ran for 313 yards on 37 carries.

According to Howard, the Buckeyes' problems came from a poor game plan against the ferocious Michigan rushing attack and some overconfidence which was partially rooted in the previous year's blowout.

"I think they had Mercury Hayes and Amari Toomer still out there. They were OK, but Shawn and I were more than confident that

we could do our jobs with those two. But that counter-trey – I'm not doing jabs, Bill Young was our coordinator at the time, and they counter-treysed us. Biakabutuka had (313) yards. We didn't adjust. They kept the ball out of our playmakers' hands, like Terry Glenn – who won the Biletnikoff that year – Eddie. I mean, we had the talent, but their game plan, they were more physical up front. We played a passive defense, and we were outcoached defensively."

The way the Michigan offensive line bullied the Buckeyes and the wasted opportunity to finally defeat the Wolverines in Ann Arbor, tie for the Big Ten crown, and potentially play in the Rose Bowl with such a talented roster make the '95 game hurt for Howard more than any other loss in his career.

"It's demoralizing, man. It's one thing to lose a football game, but when a team – especially in that game – they run the exact same play time after time after time, daring you to stop it. We couldn't stop it," Howard said. "From peewee to Pop Warner, high school, collegiately, professionally, that game for me, it was a nightmare. On that stage it hurts the most because of the talent, because of the opportunity to beat them in the Big House, to redeem some of the losses that we had in previous years. That opportunity that was missed and to lose in that fashion, that hurt."

The loss doomed the Buckeyes to what became an all-too-familiar fate of playing in the Citrus Bowl. In their third game in the Citrus Bowl in four years, the Buckeyes matched up with No. 4-ranked Tennessee, and quarterback Peyton Manning.

Although Howard had one of the best games of his collegiate career with four tackles and a fumble recovery, the Buckeyes' offense let the team down in a 20-14 loss.

1996: Loss Sours Rose Bowl Win

The Buckeyes had the Big Ten championship and Rose Bowl on the line in 1993 and 1995, but then the national championship was on the line for their 1996 game against the Wolverines. With an undefeated record and huge wins over Penn State and Notre Dame, the Buckeyes already had secured a spot in Pasadena, Calif., as Big Ten champions along with the No. 2 ranking before The Game.

Led by a fourth-place Heisman finalist in Pace along with Springs, who became the co-Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year, the Buckeyes weren't just winning games but blowing opposing teams off the field. Even after a 1-1 finish to the season, the Buckeyes finished sixth in scoring offense and second in scoring defense.

As was usually the case in the 1990s, the 1996 Wolverines were far from a pushover. Michigan won seven of its first 10 games and possessed talents such as future Heisman Trophy winner Charles Woodson on defense. Still, Michigan lost its previous two games coming into the matchup with Ohio State, combining for just 20 points in those losses to Purdue and Penn State.

For all of these reasons, the Buckeyes were as much as 17-point favorites over their archrivals in the matchup back in Columbus.

"My senior year – No. 1- or 2-ranked defense nationally, undefeated. You talk about confident. Their receiving corps, they were OK, but we were so dominant back there," Howard said. "We expected to just dominate."

With the defense shutting down Michigan's offensive attack, Ohio State took a

9-0 lead into the halftime break with three straight field goals.

Right out of the locker room in the third quarter, though, things started to flip. On their very first drive of the second half, the Wolverines dialed up a pretty simple slant route. Ohio State was in a decent position in man coverage to shut the play down, but Springs slipped, and Michigan receiver Tai Streets caught the pass and took it 69 yards for the first and only touchdown of the game.

"It's funny, if you go back and watch the film, both Shawn and I slipped," Howard said. "It just so happened that they threw the ball to Tai Streets, Shawn's guy. We both slipped, he caught the pass. That was the first touchdown Shawn had given up. That's the first passing touchdown that we had given up in that game. I recall Shawn running back, and he and I looking at each other, it was like, 'What the hell?' I'm not going to say we were thinking, 'Are we cursed?' but we never got beat."

Cursed or not, the Buckeyes were all of a sudden entrenched in a tight contest, and one of the best offenses in the country picked the wrong time to start slumping. Immediately after the touchdown, Ohio State had no points and only 41 total yards to show for its next five offensive possessions.

"It's like OK, you can feel butt cheeks puckering up, getting a little tight here," Howard said. "We know we're not moving the ball."

With the offense stalling, the Michigan run game got going a little bit, and as time expired in the third quarter, they kicked a go-ahead field goal.

The Buckeye offense didn't handle adversity well, and despite having opportunity after opportunity, it couldn't get on the board in the second half and they remained at nine points.

Although the defense had been solid all game, the Buckeyes gave up a lengthy field goal drive, leaving the offense just one more opportunity to win the game with a touchdown and only 1:19 to go.

The Buckeyes made it all the way to the Wolverine 47-yard line before an intentional-grounding penalty forced the offense into a couple of hail-Mary tries from their own 40-yard line.

An incomplete pass from backup quarterback Joe Germaine left the Buckeyes one last chance with four seconds left.

Germaine's pass was well short of the end zone anyway, but Michigan cornerback and Columbus native Marcus Ray came up with the game-ending interception before sliding down right by the Buckeyes' sideline to secure Michigan's 13-9 win.

The Buckeyes' failed last gasp still sticks with Howard to this day.

"Marcus Ray had a last-minute interception and just celebrated on the field," Howard said. "It's like, 'Maybe we are cursed,' because there's no way in hell with this much talent, there's no way they should have won that game, but they did."

Howard personally had perhaps his best game against Michigan in 1996. The soon-to-be third-round pick in the NFL draft finished the game with four tackles and a pass breakup, but even though he was a starter there wasn't much he could do to change the outcome.

"It's truly a late-November game, because it's cold either way, it's a physical game," Howard said. "Guys make plays here and there, but defensive backs don't get a lot of opportunities other than to make tackles in that

game."

At least on paper, the initial blame goes to the offense which scored only nine points, but according to Howard, the defense didn't do enough either.

"The offense didn't have their best performance, but we believed we were good enough, great enough to overcome that," Howard said. "A fluke slip and we gave up a touchdown, so one of those things you have to live with, but still tough."

The Buckeyes had one more game left to play, which ended up being a date with Arizona State and Heisman Trophy finalist Jake Plummer in the Rose Bowl.

The Buckeye defense held Plummer and the Sun Devils in check as the team won its first and only Rose Bowl under Cooper, 20-17.

As big as that win was, Howard still would have rather had the Michigan win.

"If we beat Michigan that year and go (11-0) as opposed to (losing to Michigan) and winning the Rose Bowl, I'm taking the Michigan win," he said. "That game matters. That's one of the reasons why you go to Ohio State."

Still Burns Strong

As surprising as it seems that the mid-1990s Ohio State teams didn't have more success against Michigan, part of the failures had to do with practice habits, according to Howard.

"In hindsight, I think one of the reasons we didn't have as much success as we should have had against Michigan during my tenure is that – not the players per se – but I would say Coach Cooper, the tone of how he pre-

pared just changed," Howard said. "The pressure of being a head coach in that game, I couldn't imagine the intensity of that, and he's human. But in the same breath, we changed our practice habits. (The team) got tight, and it showed."

Slightly begrudgingly, Howard accepts the weight that his teams' lack of success in the rivalry has on their legacy.

"Honestly, our team was the greatest from a talent perspective. You can't argue against Orlando Pace, Terry Glenn. I mean it's hard to argue against that team in the NFL and the greatness displayed there," Howard said. "But others can say they never lost to Michigan. I can't say that. Even within the Buckeye community, there's bragging rights. There's a pecking order that takes place there."

Still a huge fan of the Buckeyes today, Howard has had to bear witness to the Ryan Day-led Buckeyes' struggle, just like his teams did, to clear the Michigan hurdle. He's not the most unbiased of onlookers, but Howard chalks up the Wolverines' recent success to cheating. Regardless of the results, though, Howard will always care.

"I know two Michigan guys, and I won't call them great buddies, but I respect them," Howard said. "There's mutual respect there. They're all good guys, and like I said, it's a good university, but from a football standpoint, there's no lost love. It killed me I had to see (Jim) Harbaugh and the whole cheating. They had to cheat, they had to cheat to beat us, and it's intense as ever, and so that's one of the games, if not the game, I look to every single year. And I will look to this game until I pass, so it means that much to me."



Harper Shone In Rivalry Despite Losses

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

From 1990-92, former Ohio State safety Roger Harper put his imprint all over the Buckeye football program.

After redshirting as a freshman in 1989, the former multisport Columbus Independence High School standout gradually played his way into more playing time on head coach John Cooper's team, first finding his way onto the special teams unit in 1990 before starting at free safety his last two seasons with the program, earning 131 tackles (nine for loss), 10 pass deflections, seven interceptions and one sack during that span. Harper's decorated career in scarlet and gray – which also included back-to-back All-Big Ten selections – helped him be drafted with the 38th overall pick of the 1993 NFL draft by the Atlanta Falcons, beginning a four-year NFL stint with two teams.

But while all of these football accolades and statistics are ones that Harper is undoubtedly proud of, he still feels that something significant is missing from his football résumé.

"I want a pair of those gold pants, man, and I never got a pair, which sucks," Harper, now 32 years removed from his OSU playing days, told BSB. "That's something that I missed out on, winning The Game. I don't know what that experience is like.

"Even though we've won some games over the years against them – that feels good and all – but personally, I will never get that experience, ever. It came and went, and I don't know what that feels like. And that kind of bothers me. It bothers me that I don't have a pair of gold pants."

Harper's comments are a striking resemblance to the current Buckeyes' team messaging all of this year regarding the importance of winning The Game, with seniors such as Denzel Burke, Emeka Egbuka and Jack Sawyer all stating at certain points this year that they have "unfinished business" after dropping the last three games against the archrival Wolverines.

Unlike the current Buckeyes, though, Harper's chances at securing a win in The Game are long gone, which – when factoring in his long-standing relationship with the rivalry and all the intensity that comes with it – has given the Columbus native a unique perspective on the rivalry.

Harper's first taste of the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry came during his high school days at Independence, where



FILE PHOTO

LEFT WANTING MORE – Even though safety Roger Harper had a stellar career at Ohio State and a four-year career in the NFL, the lack of a pair of gold pants haunts him.

he was a highly successful multisport athlete, earning all-state honors in both football and basketball.

His superb abilities on the football field piqued the interest of schools across the nation, with Harper saying that he could have gone "anywhere in the country."

That list included nearby Ohio State, which hoped to court the in-town prospect by showing up at Independence, even attending some of his basketball games.

Just one problem stood in the way of that goal for the Buckeyes, though. Michigan and head coach Bo Schembechler were also interested in Harper and had a similar strategy to try to recruit him, which, according to the Columbus native, led to some contentious moments between the two rival schools.

"I didn't pick up the rivalry tradition

until I got to high school. Michigan and Ohio State were competing for me to be on the team," said Harper while recounting what he called a "recruiting war" between the two rivals.

"I can remember vaguely (then-Michigan assistant) Gary Moeller and (Ohio State assistant coach) Gary Blackney at one of my high school basketball games. And my parents almost had to come in between those two because they were competing for conversations with my parents, mainly my father because he was at all my sporting events. But I knew it was serious then when I was seeing those guys going back and forth, not in a friendly way."

Harper said that the two coaches' heated encounter was shocking but also "almost flattering," which made him want to be a part of the rivalry in the future.

"The rivalry of Ohio State and Michigan really drove me to one of those schools," Harper said.

Harper recounted that he originally considered Colorado but narrowed his list of preferred schools down to Ohio State and Michigan, going on visits to each of the schools before making his decision. He said that it was Michigan who was in the early lead in the recruiting war especially after longtime coach Schembechler visited him at his Columbus home.

"In the back of my mind, I was going to Michigan, because Bo Schembechler was one of the first coaches at my house,"

Harper vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1989/Fr.	Ann Arbor	L, 28-18
1990/R-Fr.	Columbus	L, 16-13
1991/So.	Ann Arbor	L, 31-13
1992/Jr.	Columbus	T, 13-13

Harper said. "I was his first Columbus recruit during my era, so that (weighed) really heavy on me."

But Ohio State, as competitive as always with the Wolverines, also brought out the big guns in this battle. Harper said that while on his visit to Ohio State, he had the opportunity to meet former Buckeye wideout and future Pro Football Hall of Famer Cris Carter, who had just left for the NFL.

Harper, who was a standout wide receiver at Independence as well as a safety and punt/kick returner, mentioned that meeting Carter was a turning point for him in his recruitment, allowing him to see a future NFL path for him after a career with the Buckeyes.

This, along with some other factors, including his pre-existing relationship with Cooper while he was at Arizona State and the fact that he had a child and a family in Columbus at the time, ultimately compelled him to change tunes and turn his maize and blue in for scarlet and gray.

"(Meeting Carter) was an enlightening experience for me," Harper said. "Those are the reasons why I came. My child, my family and the tradition of Ohio State guys making it to the big leagues, the NFL."

Harper said despite feeling some loyalty to Michigan at the time of his recruitment, he felt his decision to stay home and play for the Buckeyes was the right one. But that didn't make it any less easy for the folks in Ann Arbor who traveled down into enemy territory in hopes of bringing a highly touted recruit up north.

"They were pissed," Harper said when asked how Michigan reacted when he told them his decision to play at Ohio State. "I mean, they were courting me hard, man – coming to games, coming to a lot of my basketball games, coming to the school.

"I mean, I would say it was cut and dry after that. After I let them know, they were upset."

Falling Short But Showing Out

Harper's contentious recruitment gave him a unique perspective on the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry heading into college, but while he was right in the thick of it during high school, it took him some time to get involved at the next level.

In the midst of transitioning to being a full-time safety at Ohio State, Cooper and the Buckeyes decided to redshirt Harper his freshman year, meaning he could not play in the 1989 iteration of The Game, a 28-18 victory for Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Harper then only played on special teams as a redshirt freshman, recording zero stats in Ohio State's gut-wrenching 16-13 defeat that came on a game-winning field goal by Wolverines kicker J.D. Carlson.

It wasn't until Harper's redshirt sopho-

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more year where he would make his first real impact in The Game, a year in which he was a bonafide starter and an All-Big Ten safety in an OSU secondary that also included now-Ohio State secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton.

In this iteration of The Game, played in Ann Arbor, he was right in the thick of the rivalry from the moment he stepped out of the tunnels and onto the field at Michigan Stadium.

"I have a story that I tell everybody all the time," Harper said. "We were up in Ann Arbor, and special teams comes out first. At this time I was a backup kickoff return guy for Robert Smith (in addition to starting safety). We were coming out of the tunnel during pregame, me, my good friend – rest in peace – Chico Nelson, coming through. And we were the big and bad tough guys of the team, me and my man Chico.

"We come through that tunnel at Michigan, and those big linemen are in our way, wouldn't let us go through. And we started talking s—t. I remember (former two-time All-American offensive lineman Greg Skrepenak), he grabbed me by the back of my jersey, back of my playing pants and just tossed me out of the tunnel.

"I was so upset. I was so mad. It was about to be a fight, right in the tunnel, but the coaches got us out of there quick before we got mauled by all those big offensive linemen they had at the time. But that was a crazy situation that happened, and I didn't even see it coming. I got tossed out of the tunnel by my jersey and my pants, man, the dude grabbed me from the back and tossed me out."

Harper said the intensity that came from that moment got his blood boiling, leading to some high emotions before the game even started.

"It's like Mike Tyson biting Evander Holyfield in the ear. You just want to get at him, just get them," he said. "It was intense, man. Talk about going from zero to 10 quick, we were at a 10, on both sides."

Harper soon channeled that anger onto the field, where he put forth one of the better games of his Buckeye career in that matchup, recording eight tackles and one tackle for loss, but it came in a demoralizing defeat, in which the 18th-ranked Buckeyes were blitzed by the fourth-ranked Wolverines early and often, falling 31-3 in the contest, and were outgained 323 to 233 to lose their fourth straight against Michigan, the third with Harper on the roster.

When asked by BSB which of his three losses to Michigan stung the most, Harper was quick to mention the 1991 defeat, pointing out one specific play that he can't stand to watch to this day.

"It's got to be the one where Desmond Howard did the Heisman pose on us on the punt return," said Harper, referring to the 1991 Heisman Trophy winner Howard's 93-yard punt return that put the Wolverines up 24-3 in the second quarter. "Everybody remembers that one. The old infamous Heisman pose by Desmond Howard. It still pisses me off when they show that. Oh man, I don't like it."

Harper said it is all respect between him and Howard – whom he considers his friend – after all these years, though, no matter how angry his touchdown made

him.

"It's all respect," Harper said. "I haven't seen him in quite a long time, but I feel like it would be all respect. It's all respect for those Michigan guys. It's just a game in the end, and we're all humans and have to love and respect each other."

Howard's punt return touchdown and the Wolverines' blowout win was a gut punch for Harper and his teammates, but the safety would get one last opportunity to end the losing streak and earn a pair of gold pants in 1992 at the end of his junior season, this time coming in Columbus.

Harper and the Buckeyes would only accomplish half of that goal, however. Facing off against the sixth-ranked Wolverines – then led by quarterback Elvis Grbac and running back Tyrone Wheatley – Ohio State overcame a 13-3 deficit to tie the game late but ultimately did not have enough to pull off the victory and end the losing streak, settling for a 13-13 tie with the Wolverines. It was just the sixth – and most recent – tie in the rivalry's history.

The historic tie did end up breaking the four-game losing streak, causing then-OSU president Gordon Gee to say that it was "one of our greatest wins ever." But Harper said he and his teammates had a much different outlook on the result in the locker room after the game.

"I wouldn't say it felt like a loss, but I didn't get my gold pants, so I wasn't too satisfied this time against The Team Up North. I wanted to win. It wasn't anything to be happy about. We weren't glad that we just tied it. It wasn't peaches and cream in the locker room. It was still like, 'Damn, we just missed them.'"

Team results aside, Harper did have another strong game against the Wolverines in what turned out to be his final rivalry game – he would declare for the NFL draft after the team's 21-15 Citrus Bowl loss to Georgia as a redshirt junior, taking advantage of a new NFL rule that allowed players to declare with three years of college eligibility under their belt – recording a team-high nine tackles (three solo, six assisted).

Albeit in a losing effort, Harper said he took pride in being able to produce for his team in the biggest moments on the biggest stages in the rivalry during his final two years at Ohio State, a big-game mentality that he wishes more of his teammates could have possessed.

"Playing in that game, it elevated me," Harper said. "Not to throw any of my teammates under the bus, but some of those guys didn't show up. Like I said, that game elevated me. I was (defensive) MVP twice in (1991 and 1992). So that game was exciting, and I loved every aspect of it.

"Knowing the tradition of The Game and knowing the type of player that I was, I knew how to play big in big games. And that was just another stage for me to showcase my talents and my skills. I didn't care who I played against. I came to play every game. That was mainly my motivation."

"(It was) a privilege, man, a privilege to have that opportunity to play in such a big stage, big game, awesome athletes," he added later. "And to be a part of that is incomparable to anything. You can't explain the feeling, the rush, that moment. You

need to be able to be in it to feel exactly what I'm talking about. You never forget playing in that game."

Don't Let The List Of Winless Buckeyes Grow

Having only earned a tie against the hated Wolverines, Harper is one of many former Buckeyes over the years who lack a pair of gold pants, a group that has only grown over the last few seasons with the Ryan Day-led Buckeyes currently holding a three-game losing streak in the rivalry that draws comparisons to the Cooper years in Columbus.

Harper made it clear that he doesn't want this group of gold-pants-less Buckeyes to grow.

"Not at all, not at all," Harper said when asked if his three losses to Michigan still bother him. "It bothered me a little bit when we got our a— whooped the last few years, that bothered me. It still hurts to see us lose like we have recently."

Harper, like many players from the Cooper era, is familiar with the pressure that comes with losing to Michigan, a feeling that could weigh on them as the losses pile up. When asked if he feels this current team has not been able to perform to their standards in The Game due to the pressure of the matchup, the former Buckeye safety said that while that could be the case, what matters, in the end, is the players being able to make plays when it counts.

"That's a possibility," he said. "When it comes to games like this – players make their names for themselves, and you see it

in these games, these big games. You see the ones who rise to the top and the ones who just stay average in this game. And the ones that rise above and make it happen, they'll be rewarded."

Regardless of all the pressure and expectations that come with playing The Game as an Ohio State Buckeye, Harper said that he does feel this current team will end its three-game losing streak and secure that elusive pair of gold pants.

After all, a win over the Wolverines is what Day promised during a candid conversation between Day, Harper and other former Buckeyes during the offseason.

"Coach Day has given us his word," he said. "At the beginning of the year (during fall camp), they invited all the ex-players out. He had us all together and he said, 'Hey, fellas, you guys know that O-H-I-O chant we say? Those last two letters – I owe you guys. This is going to be a different year for us.' So we're going to see how that comes about. We're tired of losing the game. It's just gutwrenching. It hurts. It doesn't feel good."

Harper and his teammates appreciate the strong message, but in the end, what they ultimately want are results. No results could mean chaos, according to the former safety.

"Ryan Day has told us, he stated himself, I owe you guys. So we're going to see come (Nov. 30) where we are at on that. Because if he doesn't win, it's going to be ugly. They're going right for his head."

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Justin Boren Has Unique Viewpoint of The Game

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell wrote “Both Sides, Now” a song popularized by Judy Collins in 1968.

Among the lyrics are:

*“I’ve looked at life from both sides now
From win and lose and still somehow,
It’s life’s illusions I recall
I really don’t know life at all.”*

Justin Boren, who was born in 1988, has nothing in common with Mitchell or Collins, yet he can relate in a way to the meaning of those words when it comes to his collegiate career.

Boren, after two seasons playing at the alma mater of his father, left Michigan disillusioned following the retirement of coach Lloyd Carr after the 2007 season and the hiring of Rich Rodriguez.

After having seen the Michigan side of The Game – two losses to the Buckeyes – he transferred to Ohio State and was there from 2008 to 2010 for three victories, the latter two with his younger brother, Zach, who played his senior season in 2012 with his freshman brother, Jacoby.

It was a Boren mini-dynasty, much to the surprise of their parents – Mike, a linebacker in the early 1980s for Bo Schembechler, and Hope, who competed on the U-M track team. They raised their rambunctious boys in maize and blue in the Columbus suburb of Pickerington, surrounded by tried-and-true Scarlet and Gray fans.

Boren detailed how he went from Wolverine to Buckeye with his family following suit.

He also provided the perspective of being on the losing side of the “Game of the Century” in 2006 when top-ranked OSU defeated the No. 2 Wolverines 42-39 in Ohio Stadium a day after the legendary Schembechler passed away.

Boren, an offensive lineman, also gave his theory of why the Buckeyes dominated the rivalry in the Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer eras.

Taking Sides

“It’s definitely a unique experience, I guess you could say, growing up in Pickerington, obviously Buckeye country down here,” Boren said. “We moved here when I was around a year old. So I grew up my entire life in Pickerington.

“But both my parents had graduated from Michigan, so we grew up big Michigan fans. We were always rooting for Michigan, going up to one or two games a year up there, and met Schembechler and got to know him through the years. So we grew up big Michigan fans but obviously, almost all my friends and everyone I grew up with were Ohio State fans.”

When it came time to pick a college, it seemed natural that Boren would follow his parents’ path to Ann Arbor. Or not.

“When I was getting recruited, I was a five-star recruit, pretty highly recruited, and I had 80-plus scholarship offers and told every school when they offered me, all the big schools back then – USC, Miami, LSU, Alabama – told them right away, the coach would call, I’d be like, ‘I really appreciate it. It means a lot, but I don’t want to waste your time. I’m going to choose Ohio State or Michigan,’” he said.

“Those were always the two schools. Ohio



FILE PHOTO

TRAILBLAZER — Offensive lineman Justin Boren (65) has a perspective on The Game unlike anyone else, having played for both teams. He was more than happy that his Buckeyes prevailed all three times they faced the Wolverines.

State offered me very early. I think it was like after my freshman year. They were actually my first scholarship offer that I got, and I got to know Coach Tressel, Coach (Jim) Bollman, Coach (Luke) Fickell, who was my actual recruiter, very well and had a lot of respect for those guys, but at the end of the day I guess blood’s thicker than water and just all those childhood memories pushed me.”

Zach, in a separate interview with BSB, said Justin was ready to commit to Ohio State until their father made one phone call. It was to a number in Ann Arbor. Hmm.

“I think the weekend that I committed to Michigan we were in Bo Schembechler’s office, that whole thing. I mean, it was a unique experience,” Justin said. “I decided to go to Michigan. I loved my offensive line coach at Michigan. He was awesome, Andy Moeller. He was actually also my offensive line coach for the Baltimore Ravens when I played for them. Andy was great and really made me a better football player. I had two great years up there.

“And then, obviously, when a coaching change happened, stuff went downhill pretty quickly. And there was only one other school that I had ever thought about going to, and that was Ohio State. People thought it was crazy.

“When I was at Michigan, I never had the hatred for Ohio State because I had so much respect for them and I almost went there and I knew the coaches. I knew some of the players. So I didn’t have that hatred at Michigan.

“Now, after everything happened at Michigan and I became a Buckeye, I had a lot of hatred for Michigan because of the current regime that was there and everything that had happened. So it kind of really flipped the switch quickly.”

Front-Row Seat To History

The story of The Game in 2006 is well

known. How Schembechler’s death shocked both sets of fandom and temporarily halted the vitriol between the masses. How the game wasn’t played at the traditional noon start but kicked off at 3:44 p.m. on Nov. 18 in front of a crowd of 105,708 at Ohio Stadium with darkness looming that late fall afternoon.

Boren took it all in from the visitor’s sideline.

“I did start a couple games that year as a true freshman. That game I was like the sixth lineman, so if anyone on the line got injured or came out, I went in,” he said. “So I did not start that game, but I was there and was part of it.”

The build-up for The Game increased throughout the week, and the Wolverines used every available tool to motivate the players.

“The crazy story about that is Bo actually talked to the team after practice the night before he died,” Boren said. “He addressed the entire team (on Thursday). He originally was going to address the team on Friday, and he told Coach Carr that he wasn’t feeling well and he wanted to address the team that night after practice. So he addressed the team.

“I wish. ... God, if you would have known what was going to happen, I wish someone would have recorded the speech because it was a pretty typical Bo. Just a fiery, very motivated speech. And then I woke up the next morning and found out he had passed away.”

The Game went on and was a classic, not decided until a failed onside kick by Michigan allowed the Buckeyes to run out the clock.

“It was probably one of, if not the biggest game in the history of the rivalry and obviously that rivalry is very, very heated, very emotional,” Boren said. “They always say the hits are harder, the emotions are higher. Everything’s on the line for that game.

“Ohio State won a close one, and the fans rushed the field. I remember trying to run off

Boren vs. Ohio State

Year/Class	Location	Result
2006/Fr.	Columbus	L, 42-39
2007/So.	Ann Arbor	L 14-3

Boren vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
2008/So.*	Columbus	W, 42-7
2009/Jr.	Ann Arbor	W, 21-10
2010/Sr.	Columbus	W,37-7

* Ineligible to play due to NCAA transfer rule

the field, fans everywhere. I think that was also the last year, the last game that Ohio State played on grass before they switched to turf so people are grabbing pieces of sod. It was wild.”

Boren played against the Buckeyes in 2007 at Michigan Stadium but came up short again, 14-3, as Ohio State won its fourth straight in the series for the sixth win in seven games for Tressel.

“Like I said, when I was at Michigan, I didn’t have the hatred for Ohio State that guys do,” he said. “That game was a pretty normal game. It gets chippy, but a lot of the guys I played with, a lot of my teammates, grow up hating Ohio State. I just didn’t have that perspective when I was at Michigan, but it was a good game.”

His dad couldn’t have enjoyed seeing his son lose twice to the Buckeyes. Zach has said that Mike didn’t talk much about the rivalry to him. It must have been different with Justin, who is three years older and heard stories.

“He hated Ohio State. He hated Ohio State because he loved Ohio State growing up. He wanted to play there. Woody (Hayes) recruited him and then Earle Bruce told him he wasn’t fast enough to play linebacker in the Big Ten and didn’t offer him a scholarship, so he hated Ohio State,” Justin said. “Growing up he talked about that rivalry a lot. Obviously, we went up to the game most years when it was at Michigan. He was never, never a big fan of Ohio State. ... until now. Now he is.”

Bold Move

The walls crashed down on Boren’s world when Carr stepped aside.

“I had been unhappy ever since the coaching change happened. When we were preparing to play in the bowl game against Florida, they named Rich Rodriguez the coach,” he said. “He came in, they introduced him, and he lined up all our coaches one by one and fired every single one of them. Obviously, one of the main reasons I went to Michigan in the first place is because of my offensive line coach up there, Andy Moeller. I really liked him and had a ton of respect for him – just a great, great coach, great guy.

“So, when they fired him – and the way they did it, that didn’t sit well with me. I had a lot of respect for Coach Carr, that coaching staff. That was the coaching staff that I committed to play for. (Rodriguez) brought in his own coaches; the offensive line coach and I did not see eye to eye. I did not like the guy, just the way he acted, just very arrogant. It just was a whole different atmosphere. So right off the bat it just didn’t start off well, and it continued to get worse.”

While that was going on, Zach was nearing his commitment. The family got together

MICHIGAN MEMORIES — THE BOREN FAMILY

at the Kalahari Resort in Sandusky, Ohio, and contemplated the futures of the two oldest boys.

"I think it was Easter weekend," Justin said. "We were in the middle spring practice. There was an Easter break in between spring practices, and I met my family in Kalahari and had just left that last practice just really miserable, and I pretty much told my family, 'Listen, I'm either going to transfer or I am going to quit. I am. This is terrible. It's not any fun. I hate it,' and that was pretty much it."

The coaches at Michigan tried to persuade him to stay until the end of spring practices before deciding, but Boren knew what he had to do.

He walked into Rodriguez's office and told him he was transferring.

"He pretty much said that they weren't going to sign my release papers," Boren said. "He refused to shake my hand, shut the door in my face and I went and talked to Coach Carr and told him what was going on. Coach Carr realized that the culture that they brought in there wasn't the same culture that was there when he was there, and he completely understood my decision and stood behind me. He was really supportive."

Back in those days, there was no such thing as entering your name in the transfer portal.

"Basically, what ended up happening is some of my good friends that I played with at Michigan were at the (NFL) combine, talking to some guys from Ohio State, and my name got brought up that I wasn't happy at all with the new coaching staff and that I might be considering transferring," Boren said. "So, word got back to Coach Tressel and his staff, and they had actually reached out to my brother's high school coaches and said, 'Listen, we heard some rumors that Justin might not be happy, might be looking to transfer. We just want to let him know that he's always welcome here.'"

"People think it's crazy that I went from Michigan to Ohio State, but really the only other school I thought about going to all along was Ohio State before I picked Michigan. So as crazy as it was, I pretty much had my mind

made up that that's where I was going to go, and that's what I did."

Boren said Rodriguez never asked him directly where he was transferring.

"He goes, 'Well, we handle the releases on a case-by-case basis so when you tell us where you're transferring then we'll decide if we're going to sign the release,'" Boren said. "The problem is you can't talk to any other teams until that release is signed. So he was trying to screw me over, but we ended up getting that worked out. I don't know what ended up happening. There might have been some threats of legal action or whatever. They finally signed the papers and released me from my scholarship."

Zach committed to the Buckeyes soon after, and the family had to find themselves new apparel. Zach said once they returned from Sandusky, the maize and blue clothing had to be discarded.

"Yeah, that's true," Justin said. "Packed it up and sent it to Goodwill."

How did his parents react to suddenly being a scarlet and gray household?

"They took it in stride," Justin said. "They were completely supportive. They turned into Buckeye fans overnight. All they cared about is their kids and supporting their kids."

Sweet Revenge

Justin sat out the 2008 season because of the NCAA transfer rules at the time and had to watch the Buckeyes bury the Wolverines 42-7.

Then came the 2009 game, which was significant for two reasons: Boren got to play with his freshman brother, a running back, and it was his first time in Ann Arbor since his departure. He got the last laugh with a 21-10 victory.

"That was probably the most emotional game I've ever played in," he said. "I had so much hatred towards that coaching staff and some of the coaches that were there that I was fired up for that game. That was a crazy game."

"There's people in the stands yelling at me, you know, 'F—you, you suck.' All kinds of stuff, everything you could think, they were yelling at me. So it was an emotional game, a fun

game.

"Obviously, we got the win. Both games that I played in at Ohio State against Michigan, we won so that was great."

Boren was asked if things had turned out differently and if he had remained for four years at Michigan could there have been a possibility in his final rivalry game he would have played against Zach.

"Honestly, I think Zach was the biggest Michigan fan in the world," he said. "So, if I would have stayed at Michigan, I don't see any way Zach would have gone to Ohio State. When I was getting recruited, when I was even thinking about going to Ohio State, Zach was like, 'How could you even think about going there? How could that thought even cross your mind?' Zach was as true blue as they come."

In 2010, OSU again prevailed, 37-7.

"Senior Day in the 'Shoe, no better way to go out, playing for Ohio State, and then the way we won that game," he said.

Boren received three gold pants medals, emblematic of beating Michigan. His mother has 10 in all with Zach's three and four for Jacoby. She has given one to each of their son's wives when they got married.

"That whole (gold pants) tradition is pretty awesome. The fact that I could say the three years I was at Ohio State we never lost to Michigan, that means something," Justin said. "A lot of people are judged — some of the guys that have had phenomenal careers and gone on and played years in the NFL, there's some of those guys that their biggest regret is not having a pair of gold pants, or not having as many pairs of gold pants as they'd like. So the fact that I never lost the Michigan game is pretty special."

He said "100 percent" there was a difference in how Michigan prepared for The Game compared to the Buckeyes.

"Michigan when I was there, I think that might have changed under (Jim) Harbaugh after he got beat so many years, I think he changed his mindset, but when I was at Michigan they would always say, 'Michigan State, we've got to win our in-state. You can't be the best team in the country if you're not the best

team in the state' so they would have other rivalries," Boren said. "They would not prepare for the Ohio State game near the same. When you're at Ohio State, you prepare for that game 365 days out of the year. It's every day you're in the facility, they have stuff about the game and it's really important to them."

"Things at Michigan might have changed. When I was at Michigan, it was not like that."

He feels the Ohio State way was the reason for the Buckeyes' dominance in the first two decades of this century.

"Without a doubt. I don't think you can argue that," Boren said.

He said there were always special things going on during Michigan week such as senior tackle, the marching band playing after practice and speeches by Bruce.

Boren said he never approached Bruce about his assessment of his father that led the elder Boren to commit to Michigan.

"I never brought it up," he said. "But I'm sure my dad did."

Like all Buckeye fans, Boren wants to avenge three straight losses to the Wolverines when they play Nov. 30 in Ohio Stadium.

"It obviously sucks. I want Ohio State to beat Michigan every year. But at the end of the day, I have three kids. I have a wife. So, as much as I'm watching the game, or if it's at an Ohio State game, I'm really pulling for Ohio State," he said. "I want them to win, but it's a game."

"I'm pretty close with a lot of the coaches and I know a lot of guys that are on staff now, so I am obviously pulling for them and always want Ohio State to beat Michigan and it sucked the past three years, but it's one of those things. Life goes on."

"We've been fortunate. Even those years that we lost to Michigan we were in a top bowl game or made the playoffs, or still in the running. We've been lucky in that regard. I think Coach (Ryan) Day is a great coach, great guy."

"Listen, all Ohio State coaches are going to be defined in what you do in that game, whether you want to or not, but if you look at Ryan's résumé and what he's done, he's a hell of a coach, and I'm confident he's going to beat those guys this year."

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Zach Boren Left His Mark On ‘The Game’

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Zach was not “Boren” to be a Buckeye. Pardon the pun, but by the time he committed to play football for Ohio State, his family of once-rabid Wolverine fans had banished the maize and blue from their wardrobe forever and pledged allegiance to the Scarlet and Gray.

That’s the life of the Borens from the Columbus suburb of Pickerington who were outliers for years in a Buckeye-crazed city before a series of events ultimately led to not one or two, but three Boren brothers playing for Ohio State in The Game against the school at which their parents were athletes.

Zach is three years younger than Justin, who first forged his collegiate career at U-M before a seismic shift. After Zach, Jacoby completed the legacy by helping the Buckeyes win the national title in 2014.

From 2006 to 2015 there was a Boren associated with The Game, and the family remains in central Ohio running several businesses.

As Zach told Buckeye Sports Bulletin in a phone interview on Nov. 21, growing up rooting for Michigan came naturally because his father, Mike, was a linebacker for legendary coach Bo Schembechler from 1980-83, going 2-2 against the Buckeyes. Mike’s wife, Hope, ran track for the Wolverines, but after graduation, they settled in Pickerington near where Mike grew up.

Zach was a star in football and baseball at Pickerington Central but chose the gridiron, and shortly after Justin transferred to Ohio State early in 2008, Zach committed to the Buckeyes.

He played for Jim Tressel in 2009 and 2010 and interim coach Luke Fickell the following season before Urban Meyer took over in 2012 and led the Buckeyes to an undefeated season, with Boren moving to linebacker midway through it.

Zach has fond memories of rooting for Michigan in the rivalry game, but he will be forever immortalized for his sack of U-M quarterback Devin Gardner in the 2012 game and standing over his victim with his arms flexed, a symbol of the Buckeyes’ dominance not only that day but throughout the Tressel and Meyer eras.

The Game obviously is personal for Boren but even more so as he starts his own family, as he will explain later.

In The Beginning

Boren talked about growing up in the Columbus area.

“Really, all we knew was living in enemy territory. I mean, we were the biggest Michigan fans. Michigan family. I remember wearing Michigan clothes to school all the time being the one kid wearing Michigan clothes to school literally every day the week of the Ohio State-Michigan game,” he said.

“Heck, you even run it back to elementary school. They used to do a little food drive with canned goods the week of the Ohio State-Michigan game, and, obviously, Ohio State fans put food in their box and we used to be the only ones putting canned food in the Michigan box as the Michigan fans.

“We were ingrained in the rivalry very quickly. Just being a Michigan family, Michigan



FILE PHOTO

IMMORTALIZED — Zach Boren played in four games against Michigan, but this sack of Devin Gardner in 2012 will forever be remembered as a symbol of the Buckeyes’ dominance. The 26-21 victory gave Ohio State a 12-0 record in coach Urban Meyer’s first season.

fans and living and growing up here in Columbus, you definitely live in enemy territory. You get a grasp of the rivalry a little bit earlier in life than you normally would.”

The family had no problem showing the Michigan colors.

“We had a flagpole, not early on in life, but definitely showed our maize and blue love, and I think, obviously, in Pickerington where we’re from, people knew how much Michigan meant to us, especially my parents. My parents going there, being athletes there, the school just meant so much to us,” he said.

Boren attended many Ohio State-Michigan games both in Columbus and Ann Arbor and remembers as a kid the way the Wolverines took care of the Buckeyes during the John Cooper years in the 1990s before Tressel replaced him for the 2001 season.

“Being in Columbus, Ohio, as a Michigan fan, you never really had to worry about the rivalry too much, but then Coach Tressel came in, and I was in middle school I think, and you have this coach that’s coming in from Youngstown State and you’re like, ‘Who’s this guy?’ And he comes in and takes Ohio State by storm,” Boren said. “And then he wins the national championship (2002) against Miami. That was a huge thing, especially when Miami was the U and they were at the top of college football. You just started to see the tide turn.

“You could definitely feel the energy of the rivalry again, so to speak. That’s the first time I really felt the rivalry because the ‘90s was so leaning towards Michigan, but then being in Columbus and starting to see the tide start to turn and it would really be a heavyweight battle every single year, that’s when the full magnitude of the rivalry kicked in.”

His father didn’t talk much about The Game.

“Not a ton,” Boren said. “I know he was 2-2 (vs. OSU), but his senior year he didn’t play because he had blown out his knee.

“He talked about how big a game it was, especially being from Columbus and wanting to go to Ohio State when he was growing up. He never really talked so much about those games. And to be honest, he never talked a ton about when he played, but he’d always throw jabs at us. Obviously, we’re about as competitive of a family as you can get, so he’d always throw jabs about how he would perform better than us or do this better than us back in the day, but we never truly talked about games, if that makes sense.”

Justin, an offensive lineman, followed his father to Michigan and played there in 2006 and 2007.

“I was all behind it,” Zach Boren said. “I loved Bo Schembechler, loved Lloyd Carr (Justin’s head coach). When I went to Ann Arbor growing up, those are the guys we saw. So when he committed it was obviously a happy moment for our entire family.

“To be honest, I don’t know if he would say this, but the whole reason why he committed was because of Bo. He was about to commit to Ohio State and Coach Tressel and then my dad had to make one phone call and that was to Bo Schembechler to let him know before Justin officially committed. And when my dad called Bo to tell him what was happening, Bo gave the normal Bo answer as you would expect, and the next weekend, we were in Bo’s office for about three or four hours and the following week, Justin committed to Michigan.”

Carr retired after the 2007 season to be

Boren vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
2009/Fr.	Ann Arbor	W, 21-10
2010/So.	Columbus	W, 37-7
2011/Jr.	Ann Arbor	L, 40-34
2012/Sr.	Columbus	W, 26-21

replaced by Rich Rodriguez, who was not a “Michigan Man,” and Justin immediately saw a change in culture and attitude that made him uncomfortable and made the decision to transfer to Ohio State, becoming the first player since at least World War II to switch between the schools.

His Own Path

Zach Boren decided that Michigan wasn’t for him either.

“Coach Carr had offered me after Justin’s sophomore year, then he retired and Rich Rodriguez came in,” he said “At that point, I was a junior in high school so I was in the middle of the recruiting process. Justin was transferring from Michigan. Obviously, I knew at that point kind of the nuances of the Michigan program with Coach Rodriguez, and Ohio State offered me.

“I loved Coach Tressel at that point, had gotten to know him really well through Justin’s recruiting process and then mine as well, and really liked Coach Fickell as well. At that point, it was like the tide started to change in our family of being so maize and blue to then scarlet and gray, so once Justin joined, I followed suit, and the rest is history.

“I wouldn’t say we influenced each other’s decision because it’s kind of weird,” Boren said. “Justin was going through winter workouts and spring football and knew Coach Rodriguez wasn’t the kind of person he wanted to play for, and he obviously has many more details than I do on that. But I remember we had kind of a family meeting, get-together at Kalahari Resorts up in Sandusky and we did a weekend there. Justin came from Ann Arbor, we came up from Columbus, and it was one of those things where we’re going to have fun and we’re going to talk about the direction of where things were going, because when you transfer from Michigan to Ohio State, it’s not a small thing, right? That is a massive, massive undertaking, massive ramifications. Once you do that, the family’s alienated from Ann Arbor, the University of Michigan.

“So, I think we left Kalahari that weekend all very supportive of one another, all very excited that Justin was going to go to Ohio State and I was going to end up committing to Ohio State,” Boren continued. “Right at that moment you change your allegiances from maize and blue to scarlet and gray. And the thing about this rivalry and those teams, it’s not like you’re just kind of an Ohio State person or kind of a Michigan person. You’re all in.

“So it was funny that we came home from Kalahari and literally, I can’t tell you how many Michigan clothes we had, they were all in the garbage within a week.”

Boren’s mother in an interview in 2009 said something like, “No one cares about Michigan anymore. We’re Buckeyes for life.” That was Boren’s sentiment as well.

“Very much. That’s what I mean. That’s the attitude of our family. We don’t do anything half-assed by any means. It’s, ‘If we do something, we fully commit to it, and we’re all in.’ To

that point, that's why I think it was just such a big, big turning point within our family because if we're doing this, we're fully committed to it," he said. "We're all in. Even my parents, who are Michigan grads, were, 'We are now full-blown Buckeyes and we're not turning back.' And that's exactly what happened."

Justin was 0-2 against the Buckeyes. The day before the 2006 classic between No. 1 Ohio State and No. 2 Michigan, the first and only time that's happened in the series, Schembechler died. It was an emotional game in Ohio Stadium won by the Buckeyes, 42-39, to earn a spot in the national title game against Meyer's Florida Gators.

In 2007, the Buckeyes won their fourth straight in the rivalry, 14-3, in Ann Arbor.

Justin was ineligible to play in 2008, a 42-7 Buckeye victory, because he had to sit the season out as a transfer.

But the following season, the junior Justin and freshman Zach got to play together when Justin had a victorious return to Ann Arbor with a 21-10 win.

"It was Justin's first time going back to Ann Arbor. It was a surreal moment," Boren said. "You're playing in a place that you idolize growing up, but then you go into the game with such hatred and emotion and you're so amped up to absolutely destroy those guys in that rivalry game. You can't explain the day of that game."

"As a player, you know the emotions you feel. I won't call it anger, but just the desire to win and just train and go through absolute war to win that game is something you can't describe. So, being there, up in Ann Arbor, and going into that stadium and just being laser-focused on making sure we came out of there with a victory, while also trying to absolutely destroy your childhood team that you idolized — I called it a surreal moment. But it was also so much fun and great to be able to play on that field and come out with a victory, and then come back to Columbus obviously happy."

The build-up to The Game was ongoing.

"You think about that game 365 days out of the year. You do stuff in the offseason with that game in mind, whether it be drills during winter workouts, whether it be drills during spring ball," Boren said. "You do so many things that you work towards that game, then when you get to the week of the game it was by far my favorite week of the year because every single day it's just like the intensity got notched up. Go into the facility on a Sunday and normally it's pretty calm right after a game and you're going in there getting massages, getting treatment, getting a workout in, kind of moving your body around."

"You go in on a Sunday of the Michigan game, it's like the complete opposite. Your music's blaring. It's like, 'Hey, it's time to go.' They just get you so much more ready, I would say, that week of just prepping you for what's to come on that Saturday."

"It just builds up, especially because it's the week of Thanksgiving with the holiday coming up. We had fun with it because we would have players on the team over at my parents' house because we're so close. And then it's once that day hits, you're like, 'Here we go. We're 48 hours out from one of the biggest games of your life.'"

Boren had an interesting answer about the difference in styles for Tressel and Meyer in preparing for Michigan.

"The similarities were they both despised Michigan and had such an intensity for that game that they wanted to win it so bad that they almost demanded that out of their team."

They would make sure you were ready for that game because they wanted it just as bad as you did and they knew what that game meant," he said.

"Now, preparation-wise, they both got that message across doing completely different things. Coach Tressel was very much, 'This is who we are. We need to be great at who we are. Being us is going to win this game. We're going to hit harder than them. We're going to run faster than them. We're going to execute better than them. We're going to do all those things,' whereas Coach Meyer was basically, 'I don't care what it takes. I don't care what we have to do. We're going to scrape. We're going to claw. We're going to throw haymakers. We're going to get in a backyard fist fight and we're going to freaking win this football game.' They had two totally different attitudes towards that game, but in the grand scheme of things, it's the same mission. It's the same execution styles of, 'Hey, we have to do everything we can to win this football game.'"

In 2010, OSU won 37-7.

"To be able to win a game like that and just absolutely blow them out and have so much fun while doing it, that's a memory I don't think people get very often, because in this game, every game is close? It doesn't matter what the records are in this game, and that's what's so great about this rivalry," he said.

"So, it's going to happen again this year. You throw out the previous 11 weeks going into this football game, and you throw out the records because guys are going to play better than they've ever played. Guys are going to execute better than they've ever executed. Every yard is going to be harder than it's ever been in the previous games of that year. So, to be able to blow them out like that, that's few and far between in this rivalry. To be able to do that, especially my first game at home, man, that was an awesome experience."

In 2011, Fickell had replaced Tressel on an interim basis after "Tattoogate," and the Buckeyes wound up 6-7, including a 40-34 loss at U-M to snap a seven-game winning streak in the rivalry.

"It was unlike any other Ohio State season we've seen in such a long time being a part of it. It's just odd. That's the best way I can put it because as a team and as the guys you know in that locker room, nothing changed. We had the same mindset. We're still really confident. It was almost like everything that year that couldn't go your way, it didn't and we weren't getting the results that we wanted," Boren said. "Even at the Michigan game, we competed our butts off, and there were multiple times in that game we thought we were going to win. I think Braxton (Miller) threw a deep pass to DeVier Posey and he had the guy beat and the ball was literally right at the edge of his fingertips and he couldn't get the ball. It's just tiny things that normally go our way, didn't. And then you have (U-M quarterback) Denard Robinson, who just went off in that game (170 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 26 carries and 14 of 17 for 167 passing yards and three TDs).

"There were times that you think you had him bottled up, and then he got out. It was that drive late at the end of the game which won it for him. I remember Denard just got loose a whole bunch of times, and it was almost like everything we tried to do was just backfiring on us. But that was one tough season."

Perfect

Meyer took charge in 2012, and despite

a bowl ban because of the "Tattoogate" infractions, the Buckeyes were 11-0 going into The Game and were looking to finish off the program's sixth perfect season, its first since 2002.

The Buckeyes won 26-21, and the play that Boren will be remembered for occurred in the second quarter with Michigan leading 14-10. Boren blitzed up the middle on a first-and-10 and sacked Gardner for a 9-yard loss before towering over him as if to say, "We've got this."

The Ohio State student newspaper, The Lantern, used a photo of the moment under the headline "Undefeated," and the picture years later adorned the side of the trucks for Boren Brothers Waste Services.

Boren said he had no idea he was posing at the time.

"No idea. That is a pure Michigan game picture, and when I say that I mean by how it happened. I had no idea that pose would have come from what happened until after the game, when someone showed me the picture and I'm like, 'Oh, well, that's cool.' I didn't even think anything of it," he said. "And then it starts picking up on social media, and then the next day, it starts picking up even more. And then people are hitting me up saying, 'Oh my god, we're getting a picture of this, will you sign it?' And I'm like, 'This is really taking off,' but I didn't really think much of it at the time."

"That was an emotional game that was probably the most fun game I've ever played in. There were so many things about that game, and it was so weird because we're 11-0. We got beat the previous year by Michigan. We're going against them again at home. It's Senior Day. It's my Senior Day and the senior class that was so close. Our team was a super close team. And the weirdest thing was that was the last game of the year because of the bowl ban," Boren said.

"So many times you're playing Michigan and. 'Hey, we're going to take care of business, and it's to win the Big Ten championship, to go to Indy,' or 'Hey, it's to win the Big Ten championship and go to the Rose Bowl.' You do all these things."

"But when we're playing that game, when it's done, I remember going to the locker room and you're turning your equipment in the next day. You're showing up to the facility, and it's over. So, the emotions with that game were unlike any game I've ever played just because that was the last game of the year."

"Everything was on the line. Not like, 'We lose this game, we can still salvage the season and go on a run and potentially win the national championship.' We're either 12-0 or 11-1. End of story."

He can't help but wonder how the season could have played out post-Michigan.

"I think about it all the time because at that point we would have played Notre Dame because Notre Dame was undefeated. We were undefeated. Alabama would have been No. 3 and would have been left out. There's no doubt in my mind we would have played Notre Dame and beaten them and won that national championship."

Boren said he has never talked to Gardner about that photo, but he knows friends such as Posey who have.

"I know he's not a huge fan of it for obvious reasons," Boren said.

Two years later Gardner was in another photo from the OSU-Michigan game, but this time he was offering comfort to J.T. Barrett late in the game after the OSU quarterback broke his leg. Of course, Cardale Jones would replace

him and lead the Buckeyes to the national title.

"From everything I've heard, Devin Gardner is a class person, as good as it gets," Boren said. "I know guys that played with him at Michigan that absolutely loved him as a person, as a leader, as a teammate."

"But the crazy thing about this game, and you bring up that picture, is I don't know if there's more of a game that you play during a season where you respect anyone more, and what I mean by that is you get into that game and you hate each other so much, but on the back end, you respect each other so much because it's Ohio State and Michigan. It's the blue bloods of college football, like you are the elite of the elite and you are putting everything on the line. It's one of those games where you have this massive hate for the other team but also such a huge respect for them because of who they are, what they do."

"And that's one thing that I love about it is you just respect the hell out of them, and that's what makes the winning of that game even more special because it's not like you're beating Purdue. It's not like you're being Illinois. You're beating Michigan, and that's the great thing about it is when you have so much respect for an opponent and you actually beat them, there's just no better reward."

Speaking of rewards, what about those gold pants for beating U-M?

"We have a little fun family tradition with this. So, I have three pairs. Jacoby has four pairs, and Justin has three pairs as well from Ohio State. So, whenever we get them, they go to my mom. So, at one point, my mom had 10 pairs of gold pants," Boren said.

"What she does is, the day of our wedding, our wedding days, she gives a pair of gold pants to our wives. So, when Justin got married, his wife got a pair on their wedding day. My wife got a pair on our wedding, and Jacoby's wife got a pair at her wedding day. And then the day that you have your first kid, you get a second pair. So, my wife just got her second pair four months ago."

"And now my mom holds onto the rest. So, my mom's giving away six. Still has four. She wears them around, but she never truly pulls them out until Michigan week."

"She always kind of makes the joke that when she passes, we can have the rest of them then, but the other thing she'll do, I know she hasn't done it yet, but when our daughters get a certain age, and Justin's got a daughter, and Jacoby has a daughter, when they get a certain age, she will give them one as well."

He said three straight losses to Michigan in the last three years have been difficult.

"Very, very tough. The other thing is, I don't know if you know this, I'm married to a Michigan grad. Her dad (Al Sincich) played at Michigan with my dad, so they were good buddies. He was a nose guard, and my dad was a middle linebacker under Bo. Rachel and I started dating in 2020, and obviously, there was no game that year. So it's been a little bit of a contentious issue within the household because Ohio State has not won since I started the relationship with my wife. I told her if Ohio State loses again this year I might need to file for a divorce," Boren joked.

"No, she's a great sport about it, but I have been catching so much flak, not so much from her. It's her family. Her family are massive Michigan fans, like massive Michigan fans. So, yeah, that has been tough."

Youngest Boren Undefeated Against Michigan

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

From being one of the very few brave souls clad in maize and blue in Pickerington, Ohio, to becoming a key piece of Ohio State's 2014 national championship-winning offensive line, former center Jacoby Boren had one of the more unconventional routes to Buckeye stardom, but he got there nonetheless.

Jacoby, the son of former Michigan linebacker Mike Boren, adored his dad's former team, despite growing up right in the Buckeyes' backyard.

"I grew up bleeding maize and blue," Boren told BSB. "We would always go up to Ann Arbor multiple times a year to watch games, and it was just part of my childhood. Specifically with The Game, we were always in Columbus, Ohio, so we all know what that looks like. But being on the outskirts in school and being the young kid that was always rooting for the other side was definitely not a fun experience living in Columbus, Ohio."

Jacoby's journey from die-hard Michigan fan to Buckeye is certainly a rare case, but the precedent was set after 2007 in his own family when his brother Justin transferred from Michigan to Ohio State after two years in Ann Arbor.

Justin, an offensive guard at Ohio State from 2008-10, was joined by middle brother Zach, who joined the Buckeyes in 2009 as a fullback and played there until switching to linebacker midway through the 2012 season.

The addition of the Borens to the Buckeyes' roster gave Ohio State a straightforward path to bring Jacoby into the program.

"By the time I was in high school getting recruited, both Zach and Justin were at Ohio State. To be honest, it was kind of natural," Boren said of his decision to go to Ohio State. "I think I was offered in the beginning of my junior year or end of my sophomore year, something like that. It was pretty early on, somewhere around there, and then shortly after, I committed."

"It was just where I wanted to go. Being on the other side growing up, it was one thing, but especially at the time when I was in high school, obviously, the program up north was not much of a program at that point in time. Naturally, with both my brothers there and it being my hometown, it was a very easy decision for me on where I decided to go."

Jacoby, Justin, Zach and their Ohio State teams all had unconditional support from their parents despite their father's and mother's past Michigan allegiances. Although most of his former teammates understood Mike Boren's support for his sons' Ohio State teams, some were miffed by his changing sides.

"I mean it was a tough change," Jacoby said. "I think even some of the guys he played with, I know overwhelmingly supportive with what happened in the program, and the transition that our family took which was a complete 180. There were some guys that he was there with that I think were not happy, had hard feelings, and probably still do to this day. But it was

Boren vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
2012/Fr.	Columbus	W, 26-21
2013/So.	Ann Arbor	W, 42-41
2014/Jr.	Columbus	W, 42-28
2015/Sr.	Ann Arbor	W, 42-13

an unwavering support for Ohio State and for us and the team (from my parents)."

Boren, like many of the other younger players for Ohio State, was in for a rude awakening in his first year in college in 2012. Every player is going to have to make an adjustment to the demands of collegiate sports compared to those of high school sports, but under first-year head coach Urban Meyer, Boren's transition was intense, to say the least.

"Coach Meyer, a tremendous amount of respect for the way he runs the program, but especially early – I mean, always, but especially early on – he was making sure that he was able to put his stamp on the program and he has a way of doing things," Boren said.

"It was inherently difficult. I'd be lying if I said that wasn't the truth. I graduated early, so my first day on campus was Urban's first day on campus. We were both on day one. So I got to deal with all the fun of practicing outside in January and doing workouts outside in the snow and a lot of chaos, but all which kind of framed the program to do what we were able to do after Urban came on board."

Meyer, who came to the Buckeyes after

multiple national championship wins with Florida, clearly knew what he was doing. The Buckeyes won their first 11 games under his guidance, four of which came either in overtime or by three points or fewer.

Despite the unblemished record, the Buckeyes could not compete in the postseason, as part of a bowl ban following the Tattoogate investigation. That meant the Buckeyes' last game of the season would be their game against Michigan. Wanting to go out in 2012 with a perfect record and send their seniors off right, The Game somehow took on an even greater meaning for the Buckeyes.

"In hindsight, that was it. We knew with finality, that was the last game that we were playing that season," Boren said. "There was definitely a level of – there's always importance – but knowing that it was the last time that team was going to be together, the backstory of just being an undefeated team, and sending the seniors out on a high note when they were punished for something that they really had nothing to do with. It was definitely something really important and had a heightened level of care, importance for the team, more than just The Game."

Boren didn't play in Ohio State's 26-21 victory over Michigan that year as the team's backup center, but after the game, he got to celebrate the win with his brother for the final time as teammates.

"Zach and I, we got to play together one year in high school," Boren said. "When I was a true freshman, he was a senior in college, so

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MICHIGAN MEMORIES — THE BOREN FAMILY

that was a really awesome experience, just being able to see him do what he did and finish out his senior year on a strong note.”

Although the Buckeyes’ 2012 season was abbreviated by the postseason ban, the Buckeyes had everything in front of them in 2013.

Just as they had done the previous year, the Buckeyes defeated all of their opponents heading into the Michigan game. The same was not true for the Wolverines, who had lost three of their last four games heading into the matchup with the Buckeyes. Despite the sizable difference in records, the Buckeyes and Wolverines’ 2013 game came down to just one play.

With Ohio State ahead 42-35, Michigan quarterback Devin Gardner marched his team all the way down the field for a touchdown that pulled his team within one point. Michigan head coach Brady Hoke decided to make the bold decision to go for the win with a two-point conversion. In what was a nightmarish day for the Ohio State secondary, safety Tyvis Powell came up with a game-sealing interception of Gardner’s pass attempt.

“That is just the epitome of execution, doing your job and planning,” Boren said. “He knew what that play was, he puts himself in the right position and then he goes and executes it. That is probably one of the best singular plays from my career, my four games against Michigan.”

Powell’s late-game heroics will certainly stick with Ohio State fans for years to come, but the Buckeyes’ 2013 win wouldn’t have been possible without a herculean effort from the running backs and offensive linemen. Led by senior running back Carlos Hyde with 226 yards, the Buckeyes gained 393 rushing yards on 46 carries for a staggering 8.5-yard average. According to Boren, the Buckeyes’ toughness at the line of scrimmage was an essential aspect of the program and a big reason that Meyer’s teams seemed to excel against Michigan.

“I think some of it really is, you look at that game, it’s a tough, physical game, and almost exclusively you win it in the trenches,” Boren said. “So when you look at it, everything we did, I wouldn’t say specifically for the game, but it was built around running the ball and stopping the run. That’s just the way that our teams were built. When it’s fourth-and-1 or third-and-1, there’s no doubt, we’re running the ball right up the middle, and we’re going to go get 2 or 3 yards, whatever we need to do.

“Everything we did, from offseason training and everything around there was all about it. There would be things that we would be doing throughout the year as soon as January, called ‘Team Up North finishers’ and workouts and everything else. So there were always things. The premise around it was, giving an extra effort and going that extra mile so that you’re doing the things in January, so that come Saturday after Thanksgiving in November, when it is fourth-and-1, you put in that extra effort. You’re going to go do what you need to do, do your job, and execute it so that we win as a team.”

After their undefeated regular season, the Buckeyes had a tough postseason. In the Big Ten Championship Game against Michigan State, Ohio State gave up 14 unanswered fourth-quarter points to lose 34-24. The Buckeyes’ first loss in 25 games cost them a chance at the national championship and relegated them to a matchup against Clemson in the Orange Bowl. The Buckeyes fell short in their bowl game as well, losing 40-35, but the building blocks were in place for a national championship-winning 2014 season.

At least early on the next year, the Buckeyes didn’t look like national championship



FILE PHOTO

FAMILY AFFAIR — Jacoby Boren, the youngest of the three brothers to play for Ohio State, was 4-0 against Michigan and the starting center for the 2014 national championship team.

winner. In their second game of the season, the Buckeyes suffered a stunning 35-21 loss to Virginia Tech at home. In past years, the one loss could have been enough to hold Ohio State out of contention for a national title, but in the inaugural season of the College Football Playoff, the team had a narrow path to win it all.

With the emerging talents of quarterback J.T. Barrett, defensive end Joey Bosa, and running back Ezekiel Elliott among many others, the Buckeyes rebounded from their early-season setback to win their next 10 games.

Playing as well as any team in the country, the Buckeyes’ confidence level remained high against the Wolverines.

“I can say this in absolute certainty, there was never a game that I played at Ohio State where we weren’t confident we could win the game,” Boren said. “The one game where we’re like, ‘We have to be on our s— almost 100 percent,’ is Alabama. That would be the only game I played, where it was like, ‘We have to be borderline perfect and execute, because if there’s any mistakes it’s not going to go in our favor.’ (We had) overwhelming confidence, I would say, in every game that I played (against Michigan), obviously I was fortunate to go 4-0.”

As was often the case under Meyer, Ohio State’s offensive line was a major strength of the team, and for the first time in his career, Boren was a significant part of that. In his first year as a starter, Boren did an admirable job replacing former first-team All-Big Ten center Corey Linsley. Starting for the Buckeyes in The Game in 2014 was a dream finally come true for Boren.

“That’s really what I wanted to do my entire life, so it was definitely special from that end of playing in the game. That was (something I wanted to do) from when I was 3 years old, probably, and I could actually know what I wanted to do. That was definitely a special moment for me, and just being able to actually have a direct positive impact in the game and help the team win was definitely really cool.”

The then-5-6 Wolverines posed more of

a challenge than some may have expected against the eventual national champions, and the game was tied at 21 in the second half. But eventually, the Buckeyes went back out in front 28-21 heading into the fourth quarter. However, on the Buckeyes’ very first play of the fourth quarter, Barrett suffered a devastating broken ankle injury that held him out from the rest of the season. According to Boren, Barrett somehow wanted to try to walk it off.

“J.T.’s injury was just absolutely awful, but the character of J.T. — I still remember being out there, and I think Jeff (Heuerman) was one of the first guys who was out there and saw his leg. It was literally turned right. You could obviously tell it wasn’t good — his leg’s turned the opposite way. This guy’s done. But the toughness, though, of J.T., he literally wanted to get up, he was trying to get up, and we’re like, ‘Dude, you’re not getting up. You’re down, you’re done.’”

Despite being a redshirt freshman that season, Barrett had grown into one of the Buckeyes’ best players and leaders, leaving third-string quarterback Cardale Jones with huge shoes to fill.

“Cardale was always like the goofball on the team,” Boren said. “Him coming in, there were tremendous levels of confidence in his physical abilities and everything along those lines. It was just the mindset kind of was more run first and support him to hopefully make his job a little bit easier, but it proved out that we didn’t need to do that.”

From there, Cardale and the Buckeyes were able to close out a third straight win over Michigan pretty comfortably by a score of 42-28.

In their next game, the Buckeyes showed off what Jones and the rest of the team were capable of in a 59-0 thrashing of Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game. The lopsided affair left an impression on the College Football Playoff committee, and the Buckeyes made the playoffs at the No. 4 spot. The No. 4 ranking gave the Buckeyes a date with No. 1-ranked Alabama in the Sugar Bowl. The

Buckeyes were pretty close to playing the flawless game they were looking for, and they defeated Alabama 42-35. Needing one more win to claim their first national title since 2002, the Buckeyes defeated Oregon 42-20 to become the inaugural College Football Playoff champions.

Heading into 2015, the Buckeyes were again seen as national championship contenders, and through the first 10 games of the season that’s exactly what the Buckeyes looked like, but a 17-14 slip-up against Michigan State a week before the Michigan game cost the team a chance to repeat.

Still, the Buckeyes had the chance to make it four straight wins over the Wolverines. The Buckeyes took out all of their frustrations from the previous week to come up with a 42-13 win over Michigan.

“I think you always want to say the preparation is the same, but there was definitely a difference that season,” Boren said. “Realistically you look at that roster, you look at that team, there was no doubt we were the best team in the country and should have been back-to-back national champions. So losing the Michigan State game on senior day, the last game in the ‘Shoe is just kind of a s— experience. Everyone was pissed off, and we knew that there was a strong reality that we were done. Back then losing that late in the season with the playoffs, you kind of could figure it out.”

Despite the frustrations over losing late in the season, the Buckeyes’ domination over Michigan, which included 369 rushing yards, was a satisfying way for Boren to end his regular-season career, especially considering it meant he finished his career 4-0 against the Wolverines.

“We obviously went out and just absolutely teed off on them in that game, just beat them up really good, so that was definitely a good feeling,” Boren said. “Usually there’s no difference in preparation, but there was definitely something different that game.”

After graduating from Ohio State, the version of Boren that had any support for the Wolverines is gone, but at least for the sake of the rivalry, he wants to see both teams enter the matchup at 11-0.

“I don’t think there’s a tiny part of me that’s OK with Michigan, but with that said I want them to win every game of the season except the last one,” Boren said. “I think that just makes the rivalry that much better. When we have a top-five matchup in The Game, it just means more for both teams. That was always something I hoped for back when I was playing and even now to have that. After The Game, I probably couldn’t care. I definitely didn’t want them to be national champions or anything like that.”

Today, nine years after his last game against Michigan, Boren is often joined by the rest of his family in watching and rooting for the Buckeyes against their archrival. Watching the Buckeyes and Wolverines square off, Boren feels like even with all of the changes to the game, the passion has remained untouched.

“There is a larger and deeper level of importance of playing in that rivalry than, ‘What’s my freaking NIL check,’” Boren said. “I can guarantee you that’s not the mindset. Even the guys that aren’t from Ohio that come to Ohio State, they understand and they know the importance of that game. So I think that same level of preparation, importance, confidence, and respect but also hatred is there and still exists today.”

Father Knows Both Sides Of 'The Game'

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Chris Spielman would never take “no” for an answer. Never the biggest nor the fastest player on the team, Spielman was the kind of blood-and-guts, heart-and-soul type of player who willed himself to become both an immovable object as well as an unstoppable force.

Now, suspend your loyalty for just a few seconds and try to imagine Chris Spielman wearing maize and blue.

That was Mike Boren, a Columbus-born and -bred fan of Ohio State football who wound up an absolute tackle machine during most of his four seasons playing for the legendary Bo Schembechler at the University of Michigan.

Not that Boren ever envisioned as a youngster that he would grow up to play for the Wolverines. A product of the same Eastmoor High School that sent two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin to Ohio State, Boren grew up dreaming of one day playing for the Buckeyes.

“Except they didn’t want me,” Boren told BSB with a laugh. “As a kid, my life’s ambition was to play for Ohio State. I had Woody Hayes’ picture hanging on the wall, and my bedroom was painted scarlet and gray. But I wound up going to Michigan because I didn’t have a choice. Ohio State didn’t recruit me.”

In retrospect, it seems difficult to fathom why Earle Bruce wasn’t interested in a 6-3, 230-pound prospect right in his own back yard. But the OSU head coach already had starting linebackers Glen Cobb and Marcus Marek just beginning their sophomore seasons and a 1980 recruiting class that included such future starting linebackers as Curt Curtis, Orlando Lowry and Rowland Tatum.

There was another reason, too.

Hayes had been in contact with Boren, and the youngster believed it was a foregone conclusion he would play for the Buckeyes. But when Hayes was dismissed following the 1978 Gator Bowl and replaced by Bruce, there was a change in recruiting philosophy.

“Earle was very speed-conscious,” Boren said. “Speed meant everything to him.”

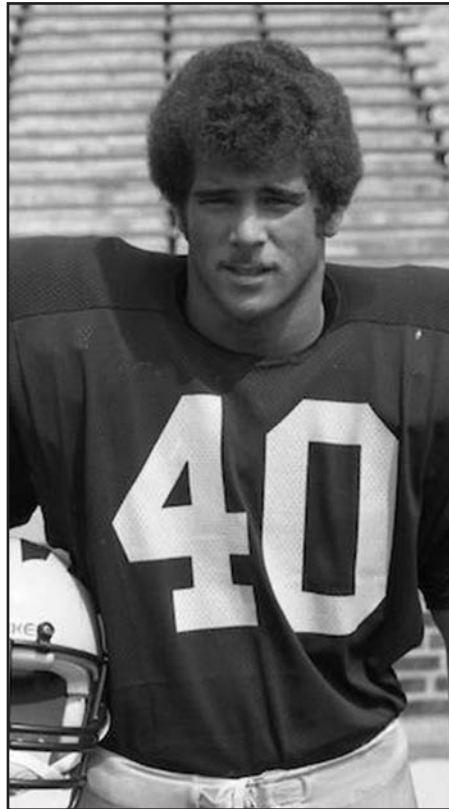
Unfortunately, during a summer camp at Ohio State, an admittedly out-of-shape Boren was timed in the 40-yard dash at a slower-than-normal 5.0 seconds.

“That was it,” he said. “Because of a five-flat 40, Ohio State stopped calling.”

Bob Stuart, Boren’s coach at Eastmoor, tried to intervene with the OSU coaching staff but to no avail. That was when Stuart contacted Michigan assistant coach Jack Harbaugh, inviting him to take a look at his linebacker prospect. Harbaugh, the father of current NFL head coaches Jim and John Harbaugh, was in attendance at a game during which Boren outran an opposing running back with 4.5 speed and threw him for a loss. Apparently, that was all the Michigan assistant needed to see.

“Coaches have stopwatches and charts and all of that kind of junk,” Boren said, “but none of that stuff can measure how smart you are or the size of your heart. It doesn’t matter how big you are or how fast you are. Can you make the play? That’s the bottom line, and I always took pride in the fact that, more often than not, I could make the play.”

Soon after Harbaugh’s recommendation, Boren accepted a scholarship offer from



FILE PHOTO

FULL CIRCLE — Mike Boren was an Ohio State fan growing up, but when he wasn’t offered by the Buckeyes, he went to Michigan. He switched allegiance when his three sons played for the Buckeyes.

Schembechler and packed his bags for Ann Arbor. He saw limited action in three games during his freshman season of 1980, including against Ohio State when he was credited with an assisted tackle during a 9-3 Michigan victory in Columbus.

Then as a sophomore in 1981, Boren led the Wolverines with 152 tackles and increased that total the following season to 171 total stops, a figure that still stands as the second-most tackles in a single season in Michigan program history.

During each of those seasons, Boren recorded double-digit tackles against Ohio State, but his team fell just short of beating the Buckeyes.

The outcomes of each of the preceding four games in the rivalry had been very much up in the air in the second half, and the 1981 game in Ann Arbor was no different. Michigan had been protecting a 9-7 lead since the 2:26 mark of the third quarter and seemed to grab momentum when cornerback Brian Carpenter intercepted OSU quarterback Art Schlichter on the first play of the fourth period.

That triggered a wild fourth quarter that witnessed a combined three turnovers – including one in the red zone by each team – as well as a missed potential go-ahead field goal by the Buckeyes.

But Ohio State finally broke through late in the game when Schlichter capped an 80-yard touchdown drive on a 6-yard scramble into the corner of the end zone. The third-down play, referred to as “Pass Play 21,” was a simple option during which Schlichter was supposed to roll out to his right with the intent of finding an open receiver.

But the Wolverines had the play well-covered in the end zone, forcing Schlichter to improvise. The QB appeared to point toward a

Boren vs. Ohio State

Year/Class	Location	Result
1980/Fr.	Columbus	W, 9-3
1981/So.	Ann Arbor	L, 14-9
1982/Jr.	Columbus	L, 24-14

pair of oncoming defenders as if to tell fullback Vaughn Broadnax to pick one to block, but Broadnax blocked one into the other, allowing Schlichter to squeeze into the end zone just inside the pylon.

“We had it covered pretty well,” Boren remembered. “I was right there. The thing is, I had an outside ‘backer (teammate Carlton Rose) outside of me – in my way, really. Broadnax was blocking Rose, and I lunged for (Schlichter). Got an arm on him, but he got away. If Schlichter had turned back inside, I would have nailed him. I would have taken his (bleeping) head off.”

Schlichter’s touchdown came with 2:50 remaining and turned out to be the game-winner as the Buckeyes closed out the 14-9 victory. Boren finished the game with a team-high 15 tackles.

The following year featured another close encounter where Ohio State scored 10 fourth-quarter points to pull away with a 24-14 victory. Michigan turned the ball over twice during the final period – the first on a fumble at its own 14, and the second on an interception by Marek that the OSU linebacker returned to the Michigan 19-yard line.

Boren got a certain measure of satisfaction by recording 18 tackles in the game armed with the knowledge that his team had already sewn up a Rose Bowl trip regardless of the outcome against the Buckeyes. He would go on to register a team-high 11 tackles during a 24-14 loss to UCLA in Pasadena.

Still, he would have traded those tackle totals for a different result in the traditional regular-season finale.

“Playing for Michigan, you want to beat Ohio State. That’s a given,” Boren said. “But I guess maybe at the time I was thinking that we’d get them the next year at home when I was a senior. But there was no next year – not for me anyway.”

Boren, who had earned second-team All-Big Ten honors as a junior in 1982, was expected to contend for All-America status as a senior. He totaled 36 tackles during his first three games that season and was on his way to another double-digit effort during a 43-18 home win against Indiana.

But during that game, Boren suffered a knee injury so severe that it not only ended his senior season, it marked the end of his football career.

“Before I got hurt, there was never any doubt in my mind I was going to play professional football,” he said. “I took football for granted, and I took for granted that I was going to play in the NFL. Then when I didn’t have football anymore, I just about cried.”

Instead, Boren returned to his native Columbus to start a string of successful businesses. Along the way, he and his wife, Hope, whom he met in Ann Arbor where she was a long jumper for the Michigan women’s track team, raised their family of four children to be Wolverine fans, right in the heart of Buckeye country.

Then, when it came time for his oldest son,

Justin, to begin sifting through college scholarship offers, the reality of the archrivalry returned.

“Justin was seriously considering Ohio State, which was a little weird, to be honest,” Boren said. “Somewhere along the line, I got a phone call from Bo. He said, ‘He’s your son. You tell him where he’s going to go.’ I mean, the intent was obvious. But I told Bo, ‘No, I’m not going to tell him where to go. He has to make that decision for himself.’ And he did.”

Justin eventually chose to follow in his father’s footsteps and play for Michigan, and he was a two-year letterman at guard. But after the retirement of longtime head coach Lloyd Carr following the 2007 season, Justin transferred to Ohio State, eventually becoming a two-year starter at left guard.

Subsequently, brothers Zach and Jacoby also played for the Buckeyes. Together, the trio earned four Big Ten championship rings and won a combined four conference division titles, and Jacoby was the starting center for the 2014 national champions. They racked up an impressive total of 10 pairs of Gold Pants, symbolic of Ohio State victories against Michigan.

“Playing the game is not nearly as intense as watching one of your boys playing,” Boren said. “You get excited and nervous all at the same time. It’s hard to describe, really. You just want your kid to do so well that you almost lose track of what else is going on.”

He also admitted to getting just a little extra charge when Zach switched from fullback to his father’s old position during the 2012 season.

“I knew he always wanted to play linebacker, but he was stuck at fullback,” Boren said. “Then midway through that season, one of the starters got banged up and Urban (Meyer) asked Zach if he could play linebacker. Zach just shrugged and said, ‘Yeah,’ but he’d wanted to play linebacker all along.”

Zach averaged 8.2 tackles per game during the final six games of the 2012 season, including a second-quarter sack of Michigan quarterback Devin Gardner that produced an iconic photo of a flexing Zach hovering over the fallen QB. The Buckeyes went on to post a 26-21 victory that day, beginning a program-record string of eight consecutive wins against the Wolverines.

“When Zach told us that he was going to play linebacker, he was so happy,” Boren said. “As a parent, obviously you’re happy when your kid is happy, but that was just kind of extra-special. And he showed them that he probably should have been a linebacker from the get-go.”

This year will mark the ninth since the last of Boren’s sons played in the Ohio State-Michigan game. But the patriarch of a family that now includes seven grandchildren – four of them boys – might not have to wait that much longer to have another vested interest in The Game.

“Our oldest grandson is 9, and he’s a pretty good player at his age,” Boren said. “There’s a long way between now and college, of course, and he’ll be the one when the time comes who has to decide if he wants to take that kind of path.”

“But if he or any of the others grow up to play in the Ohio State-Michigan game someday, yeah, that would be pretty cool.”

Concussions Leave Olave Pondering Future

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The New Orleans Saints played their 11th of 17 games on Nov. 17, but it had already been a long season and the three Ohio State players on the team have shared in the struggles. Most notably, wide receiver Chris Olave's season and possibly career are in jeopardy after a concussion put him on the injured reserve list on Nov. 9.

Olave has suffered two concussions this season, four in his NFL career and another during the 2020 season for the Buckeyes.

Also, linebacker Pete Werner returned on Nov. 10 to play against the Atlanta Falcons after missing three games with a hamstring injury only to leave in the second half with a hand injury, although he did return for the Nov. 17 game against the Cleveland Browns.

Then there's defensive end Chase Young, the 2020 NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year for the Washington Football Team, who is now with his third team. He was the subject of trade rumors in early November and social media scorn for his poor play, but against the Falcons he had a critical late strip-sack to preserve a 20-17 win, the first for interim head coach Darren Rizzi in his debut.

"Whenever your coach shows confidence in you, you've got to show up for them," Young said afterward. "That's ultimately what I try to do. It happened on that play."

The Saints won their first two games before dropping seven in a row, costing head coach Dennis Allen his job on Nov. 4, one day after a 23-22 loss to the Carolina Panthers. Rizzi was promoted from being the special teams coordinator.

"We're going to have a team that's full of passion and a team that's full of fighters, that I can promise you," Rizzi said upon his hiring. "Now the football's got to get better, the execution (has) got to get better, but we're not going to lack those two things, so we're not going to be boring to watch, that I can promise you."

With the season sinking, the day after Allen's dismissal the Saints traded former Buckeye cornerback Marshon Lattimore to the Washington Commanders.

Concerning

Olave was streaking down the middle of the field against the Carolina Panthers midway through the first quarter on Nov. 3 when quarterback Derek Carr overthrew him. Olave was sandwiched between two defenders and was hit in the head and neck by Panthers safety Xavier Woods and immediately fell to the ground face-first.

Woods was flagged for unnecessary roughness, his ninth such penalty since entering the NFL in 2017 – the most of any player during that span. He was later fined \$16,683 for the penalty.

Medical personnel rushed to Olave. He was placed on a backboard and carted off the field. The Saints later said he was ruled out for the rest of the game because of a concussion.

It was an all-too-familiar feeling for Olave. He sustained a concussion against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Oct. 13 after catching a pass from Spencer Rattler which caused him to miss a Thursday night game against the Denver Broncos four days later.



FILE PHOTO

TOUGH BREAK – Wide receiver Chris Olave, pictured here at Ohio State, is out until at least mid-December because of his fourth concussion in his NFL career with the New Orleans Saints.

He also took a shot to the head area against the Los Angeles Chargers on Oct. 27. Olave was evaluated for a concussion but was allowed to return to the game.

Olave, the No. 11 pick by the Saints in the 2022 NFL draft, sustained his first NFL concussion in his rookie season. He took a pop after catching a ball thrown by Andy Dalton. He had a second concussion with the Saints, his third overall that was documented, in 2023. Then came the two this season.

His most recent concussion reached across the country where former Ohio State receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba opened his post-game media availability for the Seattle Seahawks later that day by wishing the best for Olave: "First, I'd like to give condolences to my friend, Chris Olave. Seeing him go down today, he was just on my mind today. I hope he's doing well. He's a great person and hopefully he's good."

"We play a hard sport, a tough one. Really, all the outside noise of fans and haters, we don't really care what they say because we go out there and risk our lives every day playing this sport, and I just want to say he's doing good."

Doubting Thomas

After the Carolina game, Olave posted on Twitter that he would be OK and thanked the fans for their support, but former Buckeye and Saints receiver Michael Thomas used the platform to suggest that Carr was responsible for the injury: "Dude. Scary and panic and just throw the ball. ... Get him the f out of here he is so ass."

Thomas, who was released by the Saints in March, had taken shots at Carr before, saying on Twitter in January that he was "set up by a bad ball" from Carr that led to Thomas' season-ending knee injury in November 2023.

Also in that same post, Thomas said the Saints weren't trying to get him the ball. Carr, in an interview in February said he wished Thomas would have talked to him private-

ly and that Thomas was frustrated because Olave was getting most of the first-team reps last season.

Thomas, who is a free agent, continued his post-Carolina game rant on Carr: "Dude tried to lie and say I was jealous of them making Chris WR1 (first-team wide receiver) whole time he can't even get him a decent ball. He need his ass whooped."

Carr following the game against the Panthers was asked about Thomas' posts.

"I have love for Mike. And when he does that, I don't really care for it, obviously," he said. "I've had so many teammates over the years, and he's like the one dude that didn't get along with me. I don't know what I did to him. I don't know why he feels that way."

"I'm sorry for whatever he's dealing with to make him feel like he's got to do that. I don't know. But he's never called me during any of this. My phone number has never changed. I've, in fact, called him on different occasions. ... It's unfortunate, especially coming from a player like that, but I wish him the best. I hope he gets on a team and does what he wants to do and loves it."

Carr also addressed the criticism that his throw left Olave vulnerable to injury. Remember that 2023 concussion for Olave? That was also on a ball by Carr.

"It's just something I would never do to a teammate," he said. "It was single high. The ball went to where we talked about it going, and Chris got hit in the head, unfortunately. That happens in our game. I would never do it on purpose. I didn't throw him into a bad look. When it comes to the football aspect of it, I really don't have an answer for it. But when it comes to just the person part of it, I just hope (Thomas) gets what he's looking for."

"(If) what he's looking for is to put blame on me that I got Chris Olave hurt, he can put blame on me," Carr continued. "It's not going to change my day. I have a pit in my stomach any time one of my teammates goes down because I love them that much, no matter if I like

them or not, and I happen to love Chris Olave. We have a great relationship, so anytime that happens I feel sick to my stomach and I hate – and I don't use that word a lot – but I hate moments like that.

"So, to be clear about that part, I hate it happening. It makes me sick anytime that happens, whether they don't get up or they do get up. I don't like that. You try your best to never put someone in that situation."

It wouldn't be a social media feud without family involvement. Olave's brother, Josh, reposted Thomas' post denying he was jealous of Olave with a "100" (percent) emoji.

Also, when Josh was asked on Twitter if he needed to have an "Is it worth it?" discussion with his brother, he replied, "Ain't worth it in Nola, I'll tell you that."

Former NFL quarterback Cam Newton opined on his "4th and 1" podcast that Carr throwing into traffic put Olave in a bad spot.

"It is 100 percent the QBs responsibility to protect any receiver that he's throwing to," Newton said. "Whose fault is it? It's definitely Derek Carr's fault."

Looking Ahead

Olave, who has 32 receptions for 400 yards and one touchdown in eight games this season, was expected to miss at least three more games, beginning against Cleveland, but Rizzi said on Nov. 11 that the team is not ruling out that Olave could return this season.

He has been meeting with concussion specialists to determine a course of action, and Rizzi said, "Everything is on the table" as far as Olave's future.

"We're trying to figure out what's the best now for the long term," the coach said. "There's a process in which he's going through. He met with our people and then there's people outside the building. Chris is going to be out right now for the short term, and then we'll make a decision for the long term. But he is meeting with multiple people and everyone here, our medical staff has been in touch with all of them."

"He wants to go thoroughly through the process and making sure he's making the best decision for Chris Olave, removing football from that equation. What's the best decision for the person?"

"So, my conversations with him and our medical staff, we've been thorough and his family's going to be thorough with the process. I completely support that. I have five kids of my own, and if that was one of my kids, I would want to do the same thing."

Olave had an illustrious career for the Buckeyes from 2018-21. He set the school record with 35 career receiving touchdowns, fourth most in Big Ten history, and ranks third on the OSU list with 176 receptions and fifth in receiving yards (2,711).

In 2021, he teamed with Garrett Wilson (now of the New York Jets) to become the first set of OSU receivers to be named first-team All-American in the same season.

Olave won three straight conference championships (2018-20) and was on teams that qualified for the College Football Playoff in 2019 and 2020.

In 39 career NFL games, he has 191 receptions for 2,565 yards and 10 touchdowns and surpassed the 1,000-yard mark in each of his first two seasons in the NFL.

Byars' Shoeless Run Vs. Illini Highlights 1984 Season

Throughout the 2024 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* will publish historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "4." This week, BSB features the second of a two-part series looking back at 1984, a season that included one of the most stirring comeback victories in Ohio State program history.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

By the middle of October, the race for the 1984 Big Ten championship was up for grabs.

Purdue, picked during the preseason to finish seventh in the standings, was fresh off a 28-23 upset of second-ranked Ohio State and suddenly had a lock on first place with a perfect 3-0 conference record. But lurking just behind the Boilermakers were four teams – Illinois, Iowa, Michigan and OSU – each with just one conference loss.

Things would begin to sort themselves out during the weekend of Oct. 13 when 14th-ranked Purdue hosted Iowa, Northwestern provided the homecoming opponent for Michigan, and the eighth-ranked Buckeyes were hosting the Fighting Illini.

The game was billed as a matchup between Illinois and its high-octane passing attack against what was perceived to be a flawed Ohio State pass defense. During the loss to Purdue the previous week, the Buckeyes had allowed Boilermakers quarterback Jim Everett to throw for 257 yards and three touchdowns. Meanwhile, Illinois QB Jack Trudeau had led the conference in passing yardage in 1983 and was on his way to a league-leading 18 touchdown passes in 1984.

A crowd of 89,937 filed into Ohio Stadium on a comfortable mid-October afternoon for the nationally televised game between the Buckeyes and the two-loss Illini, led by fifth-year head coach Mike White.

Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce rare-

ly disguised his distaste for White, whom he thought sometimes played hard and fast with the rules, an opinion apparently borne out in 1987 when White was forced to resign due to recruiting violations.

The 1984 game had an added bit of juice due to Illinois winning a 17-14 decision against the Buckeyes the season before, an outcome that broke the Illini's 15-game losing streak to Ohio State and effectively ended any chance the Buckeyes entertained of going to the Rose Bowl.

But if revenge was fueling Bruce's team headed into its showdown against Illinois, it didn't show it. Just 13 seconds into the second quarter, Ohio State had turned the ball over twice, Illinois had already piled up 176 yards of offense, and the Illini had raced away with a 24-0 lead, prompting several sportswriters to begin researching the most lopsided OSU loss in stadium history.

The Buckeyes tried to put up token resistance with their next possession, moving from their own 12-yard line to the Illinois 13. But on fourth-and-10, Ohio State QB Mike Tomczak was hit as he threw, the pass falling harmlessly to the turf to force another turnover, this one on downs.

After the defense finally got a stop, Ohio State put together a 91-yard march, a possession capped by 16-yard touchdown run from tailback Keith Byars to make it 24-7 at the 4:13 mark of the second quarter.

It would have been a modest stopping of the bleeding except that Illinois was hit with a personal-foul penalty on the touchdown. Illini safety Craig Swoope was charged with a late hit on Byars, a tackle officials deemed serious enough to eject Swoope from the game.

The extra 15 yards allowed OSU kicker Rich Spangler to execute a perfect onside kick that was corralled by teammate Joe Jenkins at the Illinois 31-yard line.

Two plays later, Tomczak faked a reverse and delivered a strike to freshman receiver Cris Carter down the middle of the field. Carter gathered in the pass for a 30-yard touchdown, and suddenly the Buckeyes had cut their deficit to 24-14 with 3:23 left until halftime.

That was followed by an interception by OSU rover Sonny Gordon to set up his team at its own 38-yard line. Despite a holding call on the first play of the possession, the Buckeyes went on the march again, moving 72 yards in 10 plays, the last of which was a 3-yard touchdown dive by Byars to make it 24-21 with 23 seconds remaining before the break.

As television cameras showed the Ohio State bench following the score, Byars suddenly turned around, faced the camera and with a huge smile declared, "We're coming back!"

OSU's good fortune carried over to the second-half kickoff that Illinois fumbled away at its own 26. Four plays later, Byars scored his third touchdown of the afternoon on a 1-yard plunge to give his team its first lead of the day at 28-24.

The Illini finally righted themselves and got a 46-yard field goal off their next possession to make it a one-point game at 28-27. But then came not only the signature moment of the game but a highlight play



FILE PHOTO

BYARS BEWARE — Keith Byars, here with both shoes on, had one of the most fabled runs in Ohio State history when he lost his left shoe on the way to a 67-yard touchdown in the comeback win against Illinois in 1984.

that became the signature moment of a season as well as a career.

Byars accepted the ensuing kickoff behind the goal line and returned it to the OSU 20-yard line. After Tomczak threw incomplete on first down, Byars ran for 11 yards on the next play, and 3 more on the one that followed. Then came an illegal procedure penalty against the Buckeyes to move the ball back to the Ohio State 29.

Tomczak went to the line of scrimmage but appeared to check off from what he had called in the huddle, instead handing the ball to Byars on what was to be a simple draw play. The junior tailback knifed through traffic at right tackle, broke into the clear and didn't stop until he had crossed the goal line 67 yards later.

Along the way, Byars lost his left shoe but never broke stride, bringing the overflow crowd to a frenzied roar that seemed to lift the Horseshoe off its foundation.

"My mom always told me to make sure you don't have any holes in your socks, and I'm glad I listened to her," Byars said. "That play was just a draw play. I remember cutting to the right and turning upfield, and as soon as I was getting ready to run up toward the end zone, I felt my shoe coming loose. So I just kicked it off and turned it

into high gear.

"I just remember thinking, 'Get to the end zone before anyone steps on your foot,' and I ran faster than I ever ran in my life. I felt like I was running on a cloud. I still don't know how that shoe came off because the shoestring was still tied tightly after they handed it back to me."

Tomczak just sat back and marveled at how his teammate had singlehandedly altered the course of the game.

"I was the one who ran over and picked up the shoe," the OSU quarterback said. "It was like being a member of Keith's pit crew."

The memory for most Ohio State fans is that the game was over at that point, but nothing could have been further from the truth.

Illinois rallied to tie the game at 35 with a touchdown and two-point conversion late in the third quarter. The teams then each turned long drives into field goals in the fourth quarter before Ohio State executed an 80-yard march during the final three minutes, a drive capped by another 3-yard touchdown run from Byars to take a 45-38 lead with just 36 seconds remaining.

The Illini tried one final comeback, but Trudeau's Hail Mary pass on the final play

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

of the game was knocked down by Gordon to preserve Ohio State's come-from-behind win.

"This is the greatest comeback I've ever been connected with," Bruce told reporters after the game. "I've had a team come back from 21 down, but never 24. I'm proud of this team. They had an opportunity to let Illinois take the ballgame, but they didn't do it. They showed a lot of character."

Right guard Scott Zalenski said there was never any panic despite the huge early hole the Buckeyes had dug for themselves.

"There was never a real sense on the sidelines of gloom and doom," he told BSB. "It was more like a sort of resolve. You could just see it in everyone's eyes. I never thought we were out of it. If it had been 24-0 with four minutes to go in the game, that's something else. But there was so much time left, I just thought, 'Hey, we can do this.' We all felt that way."

Byars established a new single-game program record with 274 rushing yards, breaking the mark of 246 set by Archie Griffin during a 55-13 win against Iowa in 1973. Byars also ran for five touchdowns, equaling the record set by Pete Johnson during a 32-7 win against North Carolina in 1975.

Byars' performance and the comeback win helped paper over a poor performance by the Ohio State defense. Trudeau threw for 313 yards and four TDs while tailback Thomas Rooks rushed for 168 yards as part of the Illini's 509 yards of total offense.

But the focus was squarely on Byars, who had thrust himself into Heisman Tro-

phy contention alongside the likes of BYU quarterback Robbie Bosco, Mississippi Valley State receiver Jerry Rice, Pitt offensive tackle Bill Fralic, and Boston College QB Doug Flutie.

"Going into my junior year, I was thinking the Heisman Trophy," Byars admitted to BSB in 2009. "That was my goal because I wanted to be a two-time Heisman winner like one of my idols – like Archie Griffin was. I thought if Archie could do it, I could do it."

Late-Season Disappointments

Byars kept his Heisman candidacy alive the following week at Michigan State, accounting for 202 total yards during a too-close-for-comfort 23-20 victory. The tailback rushed for 121 yards and a touchdown and added 81 yards on four receptions, but the outcome was very much in doubt until MSU kicker Ralf Mojsiejenko missed a game-tying field goal from 43 yards away with six seconds remaining in the game.

The following week, the Buckeyes could not pull off another escape and wound up on the losing end of a 16-14 decision at Wisconsin. Byars did his part with 142 yards rushing and 91 yards receiving, but Ohio State turned the ball over four times while the Badgers totaled 461 yards on 84 plays from scrimmage.

By then, the race for the Big Ten championship was a jumbled mess. Iowa had risen to the top of the standings with a 5-1 league record heading into November, but Ohio State, Purdue and Michigan were just

a game behind at 4-2. Three more teams – Illinois, Michigan State and Wisconsin – were another game back with three losses apiece.

The Buckeyes took out their frustrations during the following two weeks, drubbing last-place Indiana by a 50-7 score and then handing Northwestern a 52-3 beating in front of 31,087 chilled fans at Dyche Stadium in Evanston.

That set up the traditional season finale against Michigan with the conference standings having been scrambled yet again.

The same afternoon Ohio State was rolling over Indiana, Purdue handed Michigan a 31-29 defeat and Iowa fought to a 10-10 tie with Wisconsin. The following week, the Hawkeyes dropped to 5-2-1 in the conference after a 17-16 home loss to Minnesota, and Purdue fell out of the race with a 30-13 loss at Wisconsin.

All of the chaos left the Buckeyes atop the Big Ten with a 6-2 record and needing only to beat Michigan for their first trip to the Rose Bowl in five years. The game was a slugfest for three quarters until Byars scored twice in the final period to give Ohio State a 21-6 victory and outright possession of the conference title.

Unfortunately, that was to be the final high point of the 1984 season. The Buckeyes went to Pasadena to take on Pac-10 champion USC but fell behind by two touchdowns early and could never catch up.

Tomczak connected with Carter for an 18-yard touchdown midway through the fourth quarter to trim the deficit to three

points, but Ohio State got no closer and wound up with a 20-17 loss to mark the end of a fifth consecutive three-loss season.

It was the second disappointment for the Buckeyes in less than a month. In early December, Byars finished a disappointingly distant second to Flutie in the Heisman voting. Although most people believe Flutie's last-second Hail Mary touchdown pass to give Boston College a 47-45 victory against defending national champion Miami (Fla.) won him the Heisman, the reality is that voting had already been completed before the game was played.

Still, it was a bitter pill for Bruce to swallow.

"I will always believe the TV people wanted Flutie to win it because they replayed that Hail Mary pass over and over and over again until the Heisman ceremony, and they never replayed Keith's shoeless run against Illinois," Bruce told BSB in 2004.

"If there was a better player in the nation that year than Keith, I never saw him. And even if I had seen him, I'd still have taken my chances with Keith."

As far as Byars is concerned, he has over the years turned disappointment into good-natured pragmatism.

"Everybody knows who won that Heisman," he said. "It's just that my trophy is sitting in Doug Flutie's living room. When we both played in the NFL, I used to ask him, 'Hey, Flutie, how's my trophy doing?'"

"I should have won it, but things don't always work out the way you want them to."

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Oregon Clinches Big Ten Title Game Spot

After its 16-13 win over Wisconsin on Nov. 16, Oregon officially claimed a spot in the Big Ten Championship Game with no possible scenarios for the rest of the regular season allowing it to finish outside of the top two in the standings.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

The Big Ten confirmed the clinching on Nov. 19.

It is the Ducks' first-ever season in the conference, and they came in with something to prove, currently with an 8-0 record in the Big Ten – including a 32-31 victory over the Buckeyes at Autzen Stadium on Oct. 12 – with only 6-5 Washington in the way of a perfect regular season when the Huskies visit Eugene, Ore., on Nov. 30.

Not only are the Ducks first in the Big Ten, but they have also been ranked No. 1 in the country since Week 9, not giving up that spot in either the AP top 25 poll or the College Football Playoff rankings. It's the first time Oregon has been the No. 1 team in the country since 2012, Chip Kelly's last year as Ducks head coach.

Now that they have a sure spot in the conference title game, which will be played in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Dec. 7 with kickoff set for 8 p.m. on FOX, the Ducks can say that they have been in a conference championship game five out of the last six years, missing only the Pac-12 championship game in 2022. They have gone 2-2 in those games.

Oregon has been led by sixth-year quarterback Dillon Gabriel this season, who has thrown for 3,066 yards on a 73.8 completion percentage, tossing 22 touchdowns

and running for six more, still finding himself in the conversation for the Heisman Trophy.

It is not yet clear whom Oregon will be facing off against on Dec. 7, but Ohio State helped itself out by beating Indiana 38-15 on Nov. 23, although the Buckeyes would still have to beat archrival Michigan on Nov. 30 to secure their spot. If Ohio State loses to the Wolverines, the tiebreaker between Indiana and Penn State will come down to the winning percentage of their conference opponents should both the Hoosiers and Nittany Lions win on Nov. 30.

NU Reveals Plans For Ryan Field

Just days after the Buckeyes' 31-7 win over Northwestern at Wrigley Field, the Wildcats revealed their plans for Ryan Field, which won't be ready to play in until the 2026 season.

The \$850 million stadium reconstruction plans will be the largest project in college football history. The stadium is privately funded, supported mostly by the Ryan family, which has been a significant donor to the university for years and whose members are minority owners of the Chicago Bears.

The previous largest plan to build a new college football stadium was \$310 million – San Diego State's Snapdragon Stadium – although the biggest renovation was Texas A&M's Kyle Field, a \$450 million project.

According to Adam Rittenberg of ESPN, the new Ryan Field will have elements of recently constructed NFL stadiums as well as soccer facilities in MLS and the English Premier League. It will have a capacity of just 35,000, the smallest of all 18 Big Ten schools, but the design considers the experience of each individual spectator, with seats closer to the field than traditional stadiums.

"Our worst seat in this stadium is 100

feet closer to the field than the most expensive seat at the Big House," said Pat Ryan Jr., co-CEO of Ryan Sports Development, referring to 107,601-seat Michigan Stadium. "You're building things up and cantilevering them over instead of going out. It's structurally much more challenging from an engineering perspective, but you've got to create better-than-TV sightlines."

The stadium will have a canopy that covers the entire seating area but not the playing field, and it is designed to maximize sound. The Wildcats student section will be positioned more like a supporters' section at soccer stadiums, with Ryan saying the Columbus Crew's Lower.com Field, constructed in 2021, was the most influential in coming up with the design.

"A lot of people look at first-of-its-kind and say, 'Oh, it's just a mini NFL stadium,' but it's really something specific for college," Ryan said. "Every college we've seen has said, 'We know we need to think about doing something like this, but somebody needed to go first.' Everybody else is saying, 'We're going to watch closely, and if it works, we'll come see it.'"

Before it was demolished, Ryan Field could seat 47,130 fans, so the new plan reduces the seating capacity by over 25 percent. But the building will be 78 percent larger than the one that stood before it, covering an area of 125,000 square feet. That amount of space is necessary to accommodate several club and plaza areas for entertainment and dining. The venue will also host concerts, holiday festivals and other sporting events, potentially championships for other sports.

"We've been a minority owner in the Bears for 34 years, and a lot of those NFL owners were very helpful, so we got a sense of where the world was going," Ryan said. "When we decided to do this, we said, 'It's a 100-year investment. What would you do?' You wouldn't build something for the past, and you wouldn't perfume the pig in the old stadium. You would figure out how you create something that really puts you into the



Dillon Gabriel

BIG 2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Oregon	8	0	1.000	11	0	1.000
Indiana	7	1	.875	10	1	.909
Ohio State	7	1	.875	10	1	.909
Penn State	7	1	.875	10	1	.909
Illinois	5	3	.625	8	3	.727
Iowa	5	3	.625	7	4	.636
Michigan	4	4	.500	6	5	.545
Minnesota	4	4	.500	6	5	.545
Washington	4	4	.500	6	5	.545
USC	4	5	.444	6	5	.545
Nebraska	3	5	.375	6	5	.545
Rutgers	3	5	.375	6	5	.545
Michigan State	3	5	.375	5	6	.455
Wisconsin	3	5	.375	5	6	.455
UCLA	3	6	.333	4	7	.364
Northwestern	2	6	.250	4	7	.364
Maryland	1	7	.125	4	7	.364
Purdue	0	8	.000	1	10	.091

Nov. 22 Game
Michigan State 24, Purdue 17

Nov. 23 Games
Iowa 29, Maryland 13
Ohio State 38, Indiana 15
Illinois 38, Rutgers 31
Michigan 50, Northwestern 6
Penn State 26, Minnesota 25
Nebraska 44, Wisconsin 25
USC 19, UCLA 13

Nov. 29 Game
Minnesota at Wisconsin, Noon
Nebraska at Iowa, 7:30 p.m.

Nov. 30 Games
Michigan at **Ohio State**, Noon
Illinois at Northwestern, Noon
Maryland at Penn State, 3:30 p.m.
Fresno State at UCLA, 3:30 p.m.
Rutgers at Michigan State, 3:30 p.m.
Washington at Oregon, 7:30 p.m.
Purdue at Indiana, TBA
Notre Dame at USC, TBA

All times Eastern

future in a way that the world is going."

Wisconsin Fires OC Longo

The Wisconsin football team had lost its last three games, including the previously mentioned three-point loss to Oregon and capped off by a 44-25 loss at Nebraska, and after the loss to the Ducks, the Badgers decided that they needed to make a change on the staff.

That change was firing offensive coordinator Phil Longo on Nov. 17, who had been with the team for the past two seasons under head coach Luke Fickell. Fickell released a statement to announce the news.

"This morning, I informed Phil Longo that he will no longer serve as our offensive coordinator," it read. "After continuing to evaluate the program, I decided we are not where we need to be and believe this decision is in the best interest of the team. I appreciate Phil's commitment to helping us build our program over the past two seasons and wish him well moving forward. This team still has a lot in front of us, and I am committed to doing everything we can to close out this season with success."

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BIG TEN NOTES

Longo lasted just 23 games with the Badgers, who are 5-6 this season after losing starting quarterback Tyler Van Dyke to a season-ending injury on Sept. 14 against Alabama. In the games with Longo calling plays, Wisconsin's offense was 97th in the country and 11th in the Big Ten in scoring with 23.9 points per game and 89th and ninth in total offense with 363.1 yards per game.

"This is never something I ever, ever envisioned doing or wanted to do, and especially doing it when there's still games to be played in the season," Fickell said on Nov. 18. "But I felt like for all involved and, most importantly, for our program and the kids in that locker room, what we had to do right now was move forward."

As BSB went to press, Fickell had not hired a replacement for Longo, saying that for the time being it would be a collaborative effort between the coaches to fill in the role. Longo was also the quarterbacks coach for the Badgers, and he will be replaced in the immediate future by former Ohio State quarterback Kenny Guiton, who was in his first year as wide receivers coach with the Badgers.

Meyer Talks BIG, SEC Split

In a Nov. 19 edition of "The Triple Option" podcast, hosted by former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, former Heisman Trophy-winning Alabama running back Mark Ingram II and FOX college football reporter Rob Stone, the former Buckeye leader sparked a conversation about the future of college football and what the Big Ten and SEC might be looking for when it comes to a new playoff structure.

"I'm going to throw something out at you," Meyer said. "This might stir a little Internet conversation. Does (SEC commissioner) Greg Sankey and (Tony) Petitti from the Big Ten get together and say, 'This isn't right?' I'm asking, OK, we're playing in a conference, there are teams on (the Week 12 College Football Playoff Rankings) that have not played a ranked team. Every SEC team I've imagined has played at least

three. I'm looking at South Carolina, some of their wins and then I'm seeing some teams in front of them ...

"I get it, and I was at Utah, and they don't (play the same schedule). So don't give me these what-ifs, but they don't. But I can tell you about the SEC. After living there for six years, the SEC cares about the SEC, and the Big Ten has grown that as well. They care about the Big Ten. Do they get together and say, 'Wait a minute. Do we go do our own thing?'"

Everything Meyer said is entirely speculative, but it is an important conversation when it comes to what the future of college football could look like, especially since the two conferences have already been exploring other options for what a new playoff system might look like, although the options that have been made public have not included splitting from every other conference.

The possibilities bandied about have, however, included giving a number of automatic bids to Big Ten and SEC teams and much fewer bids to teams out of other conferences.

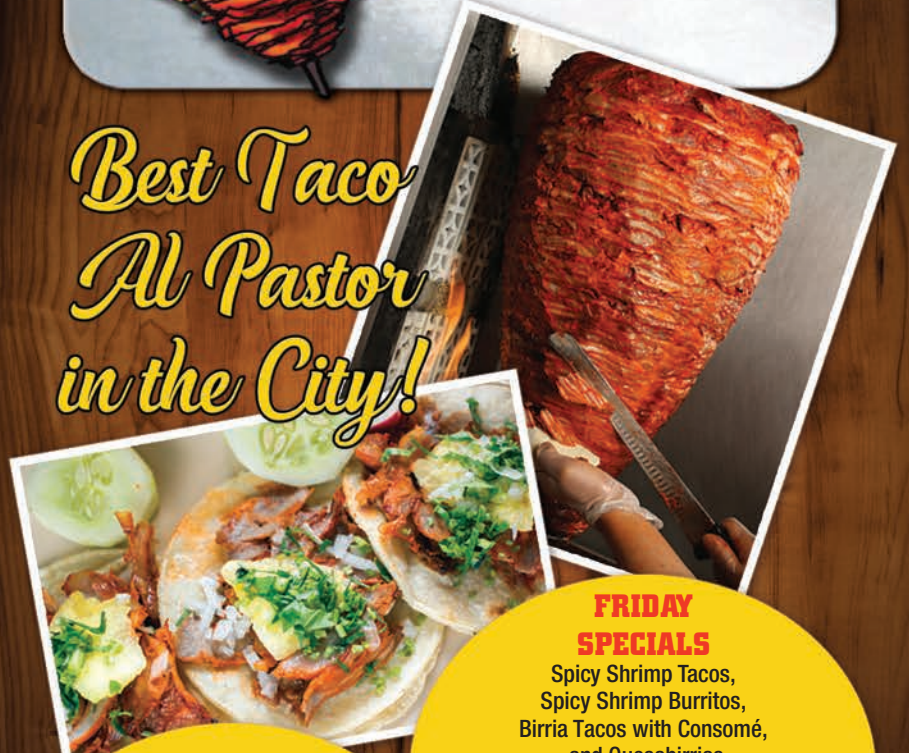
In the most recent College Football Playoff rankings, there were eight SEC teams featured in the top 25, along with five Big Ten teams, four of them in the top five. A team like Georgia, which has two losses this season, has played five ranked teams this season, three of which are currently projected to make the 12-team playoff.

Ohio State out of the Big Ten has played three top-five matchups against Oregon, Penn State and Indiana. Boise State is currently projected to get the fourth bye as the fourth highest-ranked conference leader, and while it did match up against the Ducks earlier this season, losing 37-34 on Sept. 7, its conference schedule is much weaker.

The two conferences seem to want to come up with a system that can more effectively take strength of schedule into account, and Meyer's speculation is just one instance of many different people in the game wondering how the Big Ten and SEC might move forward.



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Four-Star DE Mathis Decommits From OSU

As is always the case when signing day approaches, there are many flips from high school prospects around the country who are committed to one school and decide they want to go somewhere else.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Ohio State was on the wrong end of one of those flips on Nov. 18 when Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225) announced on Twitter that he was going to reopen his recruitment and was decommitting from the Buckeyes' 2025 class.

"After much consideration I've decided to re-open my recruitment and decommit from Ohio State," the tweet read. "I appreciate Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach (Larry) Johnson and all the coaches at Ohio State. They are still a top school for me. This is a life decision. Please respect my decision!"

Mathis had been committed to Ohio State since Jan. 10 but has long been a big target for one of the Buckeyes' Big Ten rivals, Penn State. Mathis' in-state Nittany Lions had ramped up their recruitment of the four-star this season, and the two parties had visited each other multiple times over the past few months, most recently in late July.

Losing Mathis comes as a big blow to the Buckeyes' 2025 class. He is the nation's 76th-best prospect and sixth-best edge rusher and the No. 3 player out of Pennsylvania after totaling 82 tackles and nine tackles for loss over his last two seasons with Imhotep, according to Max Preps. The loss has caused Georgia to bump Ohio State out of the top spot in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings for the 2025 class – a spot it held for months – with the Bulldogs narrow-

ly holding a 304.66-303.93 edge in points.

OSU still has five defensive linemen committed in the cycle, but just one other edge rusher, Enterprise, Ala., four-star Zion Grady (6-4, 235).

The Buckeyes could still look to replace Mathis' spot in the class, and that could be with New Orleans Edna Karr five-star defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270), who reclassified to the 2025 class during the football season. Even after moving up a year, Stewart is still ranked the No. 16 overall player in the 2025 class, the No. 3 defensive lineman and the No. 2 player in the state of Louisiana.

He has a top four of LSU, Ohio State, Oregon and USC and has taken visits to each of those campuses. Stewart also intends to return to Columbus for the Buckeyes' Nov. 30 home game against Michigan.

The fact that he will be on campus for a second game in as many months for the Buckeyes could be a very good sign, but he is also very high on both his in-state Tigers and the Ducks. He took his official visit to Eugene, Ore., on Oct. 12 for Oregon's 32-31 win over the Buckeyes.

2027 Five-Star WR Brown Commits To Ohio State

The Buckeyes received their first commitment in the 2027 class, and to nobody's surprise, it's a five-star wide receiver, which seems to be a free space on the yearly recruiting class Bingo card with Brian Hartline on staff as wide receivers coach.

Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11, 170) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Nov. 23 shortly after the Buckeyes beat Indiana 38-15 in Ohio Stadium.

According to 247Sports composite ranking, Brown is the No. 2 wide receiver in the class and the sixth-best player in the country. He has shown interest in Auburn, Maryland, Notre Dame and Penn State and holds 24 total scholarship offers. But he de-

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	
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	

ecided early on that he knew he wanted to be a Buckeye as an Ohio State fan.

Brown has taken multiple visits to Columbus, coming first for a recruiting camp on June 5 where he received his scholarship offer from Hartline. He was back for a game day when the Buckeyes beat Iowa 35-7, and while he wasn't on campus for his commitment, he still felt he wanted to make it official.

"First off, they have shown me a lot of love," Brown told 247Sports. "They are always talking to me and my family. If we lose, they always tell me what I can do better. Coach Hartline is a good factor (too). He develops the best wide receivers. When I committed, he told me how happy he was."

Hartline has been on a multiyear streak of landing great wide receiver prospects with such players as five-stars Emeka Egbuka, Brandon Inniss and Jeremiah Smith on the roster right now. He has also sent players such as Garrett Wilson, Chris Olave, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Marvin Harrison Jr. to the NFL to be first-round draft picks, so it's no surprise that success in recruiting has continued.

Five-Star OT Sanders Visits OSU

One of the biggest Buckeye targets of the 2025 class had been Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 290), who chose Tennessee over Ohio State on Aug. 17 after a long recruiting process in which OSU went all in on the lineman.

Since then, Sanders hasn't been connected to the Buckeyes much until he was back on campus for a visit during the Indiana game. He is ranked the No. 5 player in the 2025 class and the No. 1 offensive tackle.

The trip to Columbus on Nov. 23 was one of many this year for Sanders, who had been on campus for an official visit in June, his most recent, and had taken unofficial

visits during spring practices.

Offensive line coach Justin Frye has built a strong relationship with the five-star prospect through the recruitment process, and should he be able to flip Sanders, the Buckeyes offensive line class would change drastically.

With Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist four-star interior offensive lineman Jayvon McFadden (6-5, 300) and Westerville (Ohio) North three-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295) committed, the class would look dramatically different with the top offensive lineman in the cycle.

More Flips To Watch For

Mathis isn't the only 2025 commit whom the Buckeyes were keeping an eye on to try to get them to stick around until the early signing period. It could also be a battle up until Dec. 4 for Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185), Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star wide receiver Quincy Porter (6-3, 190).

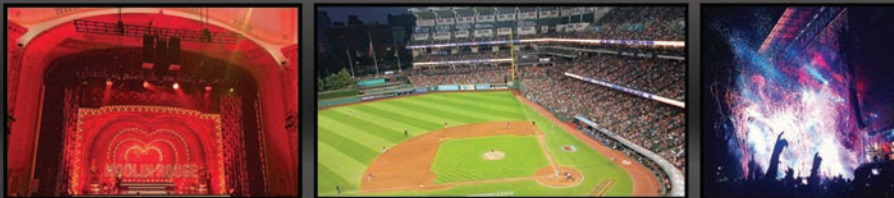
Offord has long been in the news for being a potential flip from the Buckeyes, but as BSB went to press he had remained committed to Ohio State. Auburn is a potential landing spot for the five-star, which would keep him in his home state and likely allow him to earn playing time faster since the 5-6 Tigers seem as if they need immediate help on both sides of the ball.

Oregon has also been pursuing Offord – the nation's 11th-best prospect and No. 2 cornerback – in the months leading up to signing day, and he also recently took an official visit to Florida on Nov. 16 for its 27-16 victory over LSU. Offord visited Auburn – the favorite to flip the cornerback – again on Nov. 23, and told 247Sports afterward that he would make his final decision on Dec. 4.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

OSU Football 2026 Commitments

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

Alford recently received a prediction from On3's Steve Wiltfong to flip to Miami (Fla.) after having been committed to the Buckeyes since March 30. The options Alford has been exploring have all been in-state, other than Illinois, taking official visits to UCF, Florida State, Miami and the Fighting Illini since committing to OSU. Ultimately, if Alford decides the most important thing to him is to be closer to home, there isn't much linebackers coach James Laurinaitis can do about that.

Should Alford – the nation's 103rd-best prospect and ninth-best linebacker – flip, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star linebacker Nathaniel Owusu-Boateng (6-1, 205) could be another option for the Buckeyes to go after late in the process. They have had a mutual interest in the uncommitted prospect, but Michigan is the current favorite to land the services of Owusu-Boateng over his other top choices of OSU, Notre Dame, Texas and USC.

Porter is another candidate to flip from the Buckeyes, with Penn State also to look out for. The nation's 56th-best prospect and ninth-best wideout took an unofficial visit to State College, Pa., on Nov. 9 and was seen being embraced by head coach James Franklin after the Nittany Lions' 35-6 win over Washington.

Penn State does have a need for pass catchers like Porter, who has the ability to make big plays downfield and the speed to get open on deep routes, an element that has been lacking in the Nittany Lions' offense in recent seasons. And like Offord with Auburn, Porter would be closer to home in State College and might be looking at earlier playing time than he would be in the elite wide receiver group at Ohio State.

The Buckeyes aren't on the wrong end of all of their recruiting battles.

They are currently seen as the favorites to land Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony Rogers (5-8, 190), who decommitted from Alabama on Nov. 17, just eight days after taking an official visit to Ohio State for its 45-0 victory over Purdue.

Rogers, the No. 148 player in the class of 2025 and No. 9 running back, would be the third back in the 2025 class for the Buckeyes along with Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star Bo Jackson (6-0, 205) and Philadelphia St. Joseph's three-star Isaiah West (5-11, 208).

However, Ohio State will have to wait until Dec. 4 to find out whether Rogers will sign with the program. He said he would be choosing between the Buckeyes and Georgia on that day.

OSU Football 2027 Commitment

Player(s) in the class of 2027 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jamier Brown	WR	5-11	170	★★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne

The Buckeyes are also still pursuing both Duluth, Ga., four-star offensive tackle and Georgia Tech commit Damola Ajidahun (6-6, 280) and Cartersville, Ga., three-star cornerback and Cincinnati commit Jordyn Woods (6-3, 175).

2025 SAF Delane Ready To Get On Campus

While there are multiple current Buckeye commits who are possibly going to flip, most of the recruits the Buckeyes have secured pledges from seem to be locked in with the program. Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel four-star safety Faheem Delane (6-3, 195) is one of those players.

He talked to 247Sports and said that he is excited to get to Columbus as an early enrollee on Jan. 4 and dive into the playbook.

"I think they see me (playing) where Lathan (Ransom) plays this year," Delane said. "I think he's going to the draft, so I have to work to earn that spot, but that is the goal – to start.

"So just learn the playbook. I get there in January so I will get the playbook and learn the playbook."

Delane, the No. 50 overall player in the 2025 class and the fourth-rated safety, chose the Buckeyes over many different scholarship offers he had received, like Al-

abama, LSU, Maryland and Virginia Tech – where his brother, Mansoor, plays cornerback – but he ultimately chose Ohio State because of how much he likes its defense, among many other reasons.

"I like how they switch up their defenses," Delane said. "Before the Oregon game, I joked around with them that they send a lot of blitzes.

"They sort of changed that from the Penn State game to playing fast and physical. I think they are the best defense."

Day Talks Recruiting Impact Of Noon Games

Ohio State has been scheduled to kick off at noon for each of its final six games, a stretch that began with a Week 8 match-up against Nebraska on Oct. 26 and ends in Week 14 against Michigan.

With high school recruits coming from all over the country, noon games can make it tough for every player to take visits to campus and get there for early games. That's something head coach Ryan Day acknowledged at his weekly press conference on Nov. 19.

"The great news is there's going to be a great environment on Saturday," he said re-

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Noon Games Present Challenge For Recruiting

Continued From Page 39

ferring to the team's Nov. 23 game against No. 5 Indiana at Ohio Stadium. "For our recruits to be able to come in and see that is a huge advantage for us in recruiting, just to see the rewards of the work that you put in, and the fan support and what the game atmosphere is like. For those who are done with their high school year, it's a lot easier for them to come in for a noon game, but for those who are a little bit further away who are still in the playoffs, it's a little bit more difficult for them to get here."

Like Day said, some players are still in their high school playoffs, and for them – especially if they aren't in or around Ohio – it would be very tough to play in a game Friday night then make it to Columbus for a noon start.

The Buckeyes had some late starts at Ohio Stadium earlier in the season – a night game against Western Michigan and a couple of 3:30 starts against Akron and Iowa – but those games don't have as much draw as a top-five matchup against a Big Ten team.

Ohio State is going to be one of the top

recruiting programs in the country regardless of start times for games, but it is still a real obstacle that Day said they are trying to manage.

"We manage it the best that we can. We get great coverage on TV," Day said. "These guys can watch it on TV who are a little bit further away. We'll have a great crowd here. We have a bunch of recruits coming in, so we'll manage it. We don't have anything to do with the times of the games. We just make it work, and those who will be here will really enjoy it."

One example of prospects not being able to make noon kickoffs was when the top quarterback in the 2026 class, Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School five-star Jared Curtis (6-4, 225), wasn't able to make it Columbus for the Indiana game due to having a playoff game on Friday about 390 miles away from Ohio Stadium in Tennessee.

If Curtis is serious about his interest in the Buckeyes after he decommitted from Georgia on Oct. 17, he will likely find another time to visit Columbus, but although OSU is involved in his recruitment, it isn't viewed as one of the favorites to land the nation's fourth-best overall prospect.

Day Talks How Assistant Evaluation Has Changed

The transfer portal and NIL have had some major impacts on the state of college football in recent seasons, but one that isn't talked about much is how those changes have affected each program's evaluation of their assistant coaches.

No longer are assistants graded only on the recruiting classes that they bring in out of high school, but also on how well they are able to retain those recruiting classes throughout the years they are in the program.

Are players in their position group transferring away? Are they able to fill that depth that has left either through the portal or from the high school ranks? These are the types of questions coaches are now asking when evaluating assistants, which Day said is much different than what was being required of his staff during his early days as OSU head coach.

"At the end of the day, as an assistant coach nowadays, you have to make sure that you have a room that has depth and that has production," Day said. "Now what does that look like? It used to be, 'How many

guys did you bring in in the recruiting class?' Now that's a little bit different. One, 'Did you retain the guys that you recruited earlier in the program the year before?' Two, 'Did you have to look into the portal to upgrade your room? How did you create depth with the resources that you're provided?'"

While assistant coaches have to adjust to the new world of college football since it isn't changing anytime soon, Day also recognizes that even though the Buckeyes have more resources at their disposal than many other programs, they can't just have the No. 1 class every year.

"You can't just sign all first-rounders. In the NFL draft, you have a first-round draft pick, you have a second-round draft pick, you have a third-round draft pick. It's the same way in recruiting now. You have to build a room accordingly, and that's the job of the assistant coaches to do that and the position coach to make sure he's got depth.

"You want to bring in guys that you can develop because that's a big part of our culture, but sometimes you have to fill in holes, and that's each guy's job. While it was a little bit easier to identify a few years ago when you were just looking at who they brought in

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1989

Wilbert Brown did not worry about things he could not change. Brown, a 5-10, 182-pound senior tailback from Columbus Brookhaven High School, said he knew his size, or lack of it, presented problems, but he did not worry about it.

"Sure my size is a drawback, but I make up for it by being shifty," Brown said. "When you're my size, you can't take a lot of big hits. You have to make people miss you."

National recruiting expert Tom Lemming named Brown as one of the top 200 players in the country going into the 1989 season. The Brookhaven star's play didn't do anything to change Lemming's mind.

"He is central Ohio's top running back prospect," Lemming said. "Wilbert is a tailback with great feet and agility. He is tough to knock off his feet and uses great upper body strength to break tackles."

Ohio State, Michigan State, Michigan, Colorado, Kansas and Hawaii were the schools Brown said he was considering attending.

30 Years Ago — 1994

After giving a scholarship to sophomore place-kicker Josh Jackson earlier in the year, and giving one to kickoff specialist Mike Malfatt two years before, most recruiting experts figured Ohio State would shy away from recruiting any kickers in 1994.

John Cooper had often been reluctant to sign kicking specialists. In fact, in his seven recruiting classes, only two pure kickers – Malfatt and Tim Williams – had been signed right out of high school.

But that could have changed if the Buckeyes would have been able to find a kicker who they deemed to be extra special. They would have preferred to let Malfatt concentrate kicking off and punting, then give the placement job to someone else when Jackson was done after the 1996 season or even let someone share the duties, at least on long field goal attempts.

Ohio State was reportedly charting the progress of three kickers.

Among those three was Jeff Walker (6-0, 200) of Grenada (Miss.) Kirk, who had one of the strongest legs in the country. He had booted a 57-yard field goal the year before and consistently put his kickoffs out of the end zone. That, more than anything, might have given the Buckeyes more reason than anything to sign him.

25 Years Ago — 1999

Findlay, Ohio, quarterback Ben Roethlisberger had more than some gaudy passing numbers to show for his efforts in 1999.

Roethlisberger (6-5, 195) had recently been offered a scholarship by Ohio State.

His Findlay team was ousted from the Division I playoffs on Nov. 20 in a 59-41 loss to top-ranked Grove City. That game capped a miraculous season that had Roethlisberger establish

new Ohio season passing records for yardage (4,138) and touchdowns (54) as the Trojans finished 10-2.

"I give all the credit to my teammates," Roethlisberger told BSB. "They really helped me reach these goals. Without them I couldn't have done it. It was a team effort."

Even more amazing was the fact that the numbers were put up by a first-year varsity quarterback. He played quarterback on the JV team as a sophomore before moving to receiver last year. There, he caught 57 passes for 757 yards and eight touchdowns.

20 Years Ago — 2004

During the week leading up to Ohio State's game with Purdue on Nov. 13, former Buckeye running back Maurice Clarett used ESPN The Magazine as a forum to publicize allegations that – among other things – OSU head coach Jim Tressel introduced Claret to boosters of the program who would go on to give Claret large amounts of cash, sometimes in the thousands of dollars.

That seemed odd to Cincinnati St. Xavier quarterback Rob Schoenhof, who had already committed to join the Buckeyes' recruiting class of 2005 and yet was still required to pay \$6.50 at OSU games just to partake in the halftime buffet.

"They're the most integrity-filled group that I've dealt with in recruiting," he told BSB of the Buckeye coaching staff.

Those sentiments were echoed from coast to coast by players already committed to the Buckeyes and top prospects still considering Ohio State as one of their college choices. To a man, they expressed disbelief that the coach they had come to admire and trust was coming under character assassination from his former player.

15 Years Ago — 2009

Ohio State had upcoming dates in Michigan and California, but the Buckeyes had suffered recruiting losses in each of those two states in the last week.

Following a key victory on Nov. 7 at Penn State, the Buckeyes were in the running for two four-star defensive backs – Joshua Shaw of Palmdale, Calif., and Cullen Christian of Pittsburgh Penn Hills. As the Buckeyes prepared to take on Iowa a week later, both of those players had removed OSU from their respective lists of schools under consideration.

Shaw, the nation's No. 13 cornerback as ranked by Scout.com, was a serious traveler during the fall. The 6-1, 180-pounder had taken four of his five official visits with the final one scheduled for Dec. 12 at Miami (Fla.). Shaw's first trip was to Ohio State when he took in the USC game during the Sept. 12 weekend.

10 Years Ago — 2014

The days of Michigan reaching into Ohio and snatching some of the best in-state prospects away from Ohio State appeared to be gone – at least for the time being – and Ohio State was beginning to flip the script on the recruiting border war.

With much more talent in Ohio, supply and demand had long

meant Michigan needed to supplement its roster with players from Ohio more than Ohio State did with Michigan prospects.

Under Urban Meyer, though, the Buckeyes used cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs to pull former four-star corner Damon Webb out of Detroit Cass Tech in 2014. The Buckeyes dipped back into that school for the current recruiting class and held a commitment from three-star defensive tackle Josh Alabi (6-5, 290).

"Before Urban got there, I don't know how much of an emphasis Ohio State had put on going up there, not just to Cass Tech, but to Michigan in general, and now they have," Michigan-based Scout.com recruiting analyst Allen Trieu told BSB. "It's definitely paying off. I don't think they're ever going to sign half a class out of Michigan, but picking up a couple of high-level guys says a lot about what Ohio State's been able to do in Michigan the last couple of years. They've turned the tide in a short amount of time."

Five Years Ago — 2019

Just hours after his unofficial visit for the 28-17 win over Penn State on Nov. 23 concluded, Cincinnati Winton Woods three-star running back Miyan Williams (5-10, 210) flipped his pledge from Iowa State to Ohio State.

"I would like to thank God for giving me the talent to play football," Williams wrote in a message he posted to Twitter. "I also want to thank all of the coaching staff at Iowa State, especially coach (Matt) Campbell. I will always have respect for Iowa State, but I would like to announce that I am decommitting and will be going to The Ohio State University."

Williams was considered the 43rd-best running back and No. 618 prospect overall in the class of 2020. He rushed for 5,823 yards and 68 touchdowns in his three-year varsity career with the Warriors. Williams was the 2018 Ohio Mr. Football runner-up and had been named the 2019 Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association Southwest District Division II Offensive Player of the Year.

One Year Ago — 2023

Ohio State had sent out a pair of offers in recent weeks to Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist three-star 2025 offensive lineman Jayvon McFadden (6-3, 270) and Lilburn (Ga.) Parkview five-star 2026 safety Zelus Hicks (6-2, 180).

McFadden was the No. 351 overall prospect and No. 18 interior lineman in his class. He held additional offers from Boston College, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Ole Miss, Oregon and Penn State, among others. He was in attendance for Ohio State's 38-3 win over Michigan State, during which he was offered by offensive line coach Justin Frye.

"Coach Frye offered me and let me know that I'm a priority for him and he wants me there and nowhere else," McFadden told 247Sports. "He wants to develop me, and that's what I'm looking for in a school, which one is going to make me the best man on and off the field."

ASK AN ANALYST

with Allen Trieu of 247 Sports

Philadelphia Imhotep four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225) decommitted from Ohio State on Nov. 18. Are the Buckeyes out of the running for him completely, and where is he most likely to end up at this point?

"Ohio State is still in the running for Mathis. He said it himself that they're still a top school. That said, it's somewhat rare for a recruit to decommit and then recommit to the same school. It's not unheard of, but the vast majority of the time, that recruit then goes elsewhere."

Do you think Ohio State has a replacement in mind for Mathis?

"We have already seen Ohio State offer Warren (Ohio) G. Harding four-star defensive end Chaz Coleman (6-5, 225) who would be a replacement for Mathis. I think they are exploring other options as well if Coleman doesn't end up visiting or flipping from Penn State. The nice thing about

that position is I think there is depth there nationally and you can find some raw athletes who can be developed – of which Coleman is one."

Have you been able to see Ohio State's newest 2026 commit, Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial three-star wide receiver prospect Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) play? If so, what do you make of him as a prospect?

"I saw Ricketts in a camp, and we have watched his film from the year and really liked it. We previously liked him but felt the junior year was an improvement. He's an 89 (rating on 247Sports) right now, which is the highest three-star, but he will have a chance to get into the four-star range. He's very sudden and quick, which shows up in his route-running and after-catch ability. He isn't the biggest guy, but he has ball skills and can make some catches in traffic."

the high school class – I think it's changing a little bit in that way."

Visitors Fill Horseshoe For Hoosiers Game

The Buckeyes played in their third top-five matchup of the season on Nov. 23, but they hadn't been able to take advantage of the increase in visitors those games bring to campus since the other two were away games.

This time around, OSU took full advantage of the game and brought in a large number of recruits, in addition to Sanders, who wanted to take in the 38-15 win over the Hoosiers in person.

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

Committed prospects who were on hand for the game were Mission Viejo, Calif., four-star wide receiver Phillip Bell (6-2, 195); Cook; Akron Hoban three-star linebacker Eli Lee (6-3, 230); Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy four-star tight end Brody Lennon (6-4, 220); Ontario, Ohio, four-star wide receiver Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 180); and Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225).

Other 2025 prospects at the game were flip candidates Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard three-star cornerback and Michigan State commit Aydan West (6-0, 184) and Woods, both on official visits along with Dublin (Ohio) Coffman offensive tackle Max Patterson (6-7, 270); Byesville (Ohio) Meadowbrook offensive tackle Mitchell George (6-6, 285) and Sanders.

2026 prospects on campus were Loganville (Ga.) Grayson five-star linebacker Tyler Atkinson (6-2, 205); Mishawaka (Ind.) Penn wide receiver Tayshon Bardo (6-0, 185); Ashland, Ohio, four-star quarterback Nathan Bernhard (6-5, 227); Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 200); Marietta (Ga.) Walton tight end Jude Cascone (6-1, 220); Douglasville (Ga.) Douglas County four-star wide receiver Devin Carter (6-0, 165); Nazareth, Pa., four-star quarterback and Virginia Tech commit Peyton Falzone (6-5, 200); Xenia, Ohio, wide receiver Shawn Fishwick (6-2, 170); Suwanee (Ga.) Collins Hill four-star defensive lineman Deuce Gerald (6-3, 265); Rolesville, N.C., four-star defensive end Zavion Griffin-Haynes (6-6, 220); Eaton, Ohio, kicker Jonathan Hewitt; Hill; Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225); San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) JSerra Catholic four-star defensive lineman Simote Katoanga (6-5, 240); Newark (N.J.) Malcolm X Shabazz three-star athlete Zaiden McDonald (6-1, 190); Picker-

ington (Ohio) North three-star safety Amar'e Miller (6-1, 175); Wyndmoor (Pa.) La Salle College four-star safety Joey O'Brien (6-3, 185); Wyndmoor (Pa.) La Salle College four-star quarterback Gavin Sidwar (6-3, 190); Vero Beach, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 305); Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star safety Jett Washington (6-5, 200); Fort Gratiot (Mich.) Port Huron Northern three-star tight end Lincoln Watkins (6-4, 221); Avon, Ohio, four-star athlete Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 172); and Copperas Cove, Texas, interior offensive lineman Marques Uini (6-4, 293).

There were also a few 2027 prospects on hand as well, with Franklin (Mich.) Detroit County Day four-star athlete Anthony Cartwright (6-4, 198); Brentwood (Tenn) Academy wide receiver Eli Ferguson (5-11, 165); and Dayton Trotwood-Madison defensive lineman Jeremiah Nash (6-2, 305) each making the trip to campus.

Semifinals On Deck For OHSAA Playoffs

Division I, Region 2 – No. 8 Huber Heights Wayne (8-5) at No. 2 Centerville (11-3): Brown's run at the state title ended on Nov. 22 when Centerville beat the Warriors 23-14, but his weekend improved when he committed to Ohio State the day after his loss. Wayne finished its season one game short of the state semifinals.

Division I, Region 4 – No. 6 Cincinnati Xavier (10-3) at No. 1 Cincinnati Moeller (12-1): Four-star linebacker Jakobe Clapper (6-2, 196), a 2026 target for the Buckeyes, also saw his season come to an end when Cincinnati Xavier was beaten by top-ranked Cincinnati Moeller for a 28-23 loss.

Division II, Region 5 – No. 2 Akron Hoban (11-2) at No. 1 Cuyahoga Falls Walsh Jesuit (13-0): Lee, 2026 targets five-star cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 175) and four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310) all extended their season with Akron Hoban with a 21-7 win over the No. 1-seeded Warriors. The Knights will now face off against Avon in the state semifinals on Nov. 29.

Division II, Region 6 – No. 2 Medina Highland (13-0) at No. 1 Avon (13-0): Weatherspoon, who is a 2026 target for the Buckeyes, also moved on to the next round with a 28-20 win over Highland. The Eagles will meet up with Lee, Hill and Greer in the semifinals when they match up with Akron Hoban looking for a spot in the Division II state championship.

Division III, Region 9 – No. 2 Gates Mills Gilmour Academy (13-1) at No. 1 Youngstown Ursuline (12-1): Lennon's season came to a halt on Nov. 22 when No. 1

Youngstown Ursuline blew out the Lancers 54-0. Gilmour Academy's season is over and Lennon's next time on a football field will be when he comes to Ohio State, should he sign with the Buckeyes come Dec. 4. He has shown no sign of not being locked in.

Division III, Region 10 – No. 7 Parma Padua Franciscan (8-5) at No. 1 Toledo Central Catholic (11-1): Four-star cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160), a 2026 target for Ohio State, kept his chances alive at the Division II state title with a 45-7 win over the Bruins. The Fighting Irish will now have to face off against the Ursuline team that beat Lennon and Gilmour Academy.

Division IV, Region 13 – No. 5 Cleveland Glenville (10-4) at No. 2 Perry (13-1): Johnson, a 2026 target for the Buckeyes, also kept his season alive with a 12-6 win over Perry. The Tarblooders' next matchup will be against Sandusky Perkins on Nov. 29, with a win taking them to the state championship.

Division IV, Region 14 – No. 3 Ontario (12-1) at No. 1 Sandusky Perkins (12-1): Miller's days as a quarterback came to an end when Ontario fell 28-21 to Perkins. Miller seems locked in with the Buckeyes and will convert to be a wide receiver when he comes to Columbus for next football season.

Other Notes And Tidbits

• Ohio State offered Clearwater, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Samuel Roseborough (6-5, 285), who is in the 2026 class. He is the No. 103 overall recruit in that cycle and the No. 8 interior lineman. He has 17 Division I offers, including some from Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Florida State, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma and Penn State.

• The Buckeyes offered Warren (Ohio) G Harding four-star defensive end Chaz Coleman (6-5, 225) on Nov. 20, who is committed to Penn State. He is the No. 417 prospect in the country and is ranked the No. 24 athlete in the class. The Buckeyes were interested in Coleman previously but never extended an offer, and could have done so now because of Mathis' decommitment. In his senior season, Coleman has 68 tackles, 16 for loss, five sacks, 21 quarterback hurries, three interceptions, nine forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries.

• Rumors had been flying for weeks about Michigan's involvement in the recruitment of Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 205), the No. 1 player in the country. The Wolverines had reportedly offered the prospect \$10.5 million over a four-year period in NIL – one

unconfirmed report saying that number was up to \$12 million – which more than doubled what had previously been reported. Underwood had been committed to LSU since Jan. 6, but on Nov. 21, he decided to flip his commitment to Michigan. The Wolverines have been having major issues at the quarterback position this season and seemed to be desperate to fix that through recruiting, and if they are able to keep Underwood until signing day, they successfully will have done so. The flip came after Underwood made a "secret visit" to Michigan on Nov. 19-20 in which he shadowed head coach Sherrone Moore, sat in on team meetings and informed Moore privately that he intended to commit, making it public the next day. The Wolverines were helped in the process by former Michigan quarterback Tom Brady, who recently retired from the NFL. He and Underwood had multiple conversations over Zoom calls according to CBS Sports, which helped convince the prep QB that he wanted to stay in-state.

• Clemmons (N.C.) West Forsyth four-star interior offensive lineman Pierre Dean (6-5, 305), the 30th-best prospect in the 2026 class and the No. 2 interior lineman, narrowed down his scholarship list to a top eight on Nov. 20. He included the Buckeyes alongside Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, NC State, Penn State, South Carolina and Tennessee.

• Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star interior offensive lineman Breck Kolojay (6-6, 310) also narrowed down his scholarship list. The 12 teams included in the No. 257 prospect's list on Nov. 19 were Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.) Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Ohio State, Tennessee and Texas.

• 2027 prospect Mundelein (Ill.) Carmel Catholic quarterback Trae Taylor released his top 12 on Nov. 21. The Buckeyes were included alongside Illinois, Iowa, LSU, NC State, Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia. Taylor was originally offered by the Buckeyes in June after a solid performance at a recruiting camp in front of Day and Chip Kelly, and he visited Ohio State for the game against Nebraska on Oct. 26.



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Bradshaw Not Participating In Team Activities

Ohio State sophomore forward Aaron Bradshaw is not participating in team activities for a reason that, as BSB went to press, could not be shared due to federal privacy laws. The university confirmed the news in a written statement given to each media member attending the Buckeyes' 104-60 win over Campbell on Nov. 22 at Value City Arena.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

"Aaron Bradshaw is not currently participating in team activities," the statement read. "The university is following its established process. Due to federal privacy laws, we cannot share further information at this time."

Bradshaw, who was not seen in the arena during the Campbell win, started each of Ohio State's first four games of the 2024-25 season after transferring from Kentucky in the offseason, averaging 7.8 points and 4.8 rebounds in 23.4 minutes in those contests. The 7-1 former McDonald's All-American selection was also the Buckeyes' leading shot-blocker in that span with seven swats.

Ohio State head coach Jake Diebler remained tight-lipped regarding the situation after the game, referring to the statement the school put out both during his opening statement and for each of the three times he was asked about Bradshaw's status.

"I'm understanding that you guys may have some questions, I just have to refer to the statement that was released and can't have any comment on that. Just know I can't comment on that any further."

"I could just tell you right now that he's not participating currently, and anything else would just have to refer to the statement," he added when asked when Bradshaw stopped participating in team activities.

Although there was little information revealed about the situation as BSB went to press other than Diebler saying that he was going through a "university process," a potential extended absence of Bradshaw would be a significant blow to an Ohio State team that was counting on the forward to take another step in his game and emerge as one of the best interior players in the Big Ten.

The Buckeyes will likely need to rely more on some of their frontcourt reserves for however long Bradshaw is out, including sophomore forward Devin Royal, who earned the start against the Fighting Camels, and sophomore center Austin Parks, who played 14 minutes against Campbell.

Junior guard Evan Mahaffey also started in the frontcourt for Ohio State on Oct. 22 – likely due to forward Sean Stewart also missing the game due to an injury – but he still could be called upon in the paint moving forward.

Diebler Sees Much Room For Improvement

Ohio State's 78-64 loss at Texas A&M on Nov. 15 was by far the sloppiest game of its

still-young 2024-25 season, with the Buckeyes shooting just 20 of 59 from the field (33.9 percent) and 8 of 30 from three (26.7) while also committing 10 turnovers and a season-high 24 fouls that led to 32 made Aggie free throws.

Following a few days of reviewing film and digesting the loss, Diebler said on Nov. 18 that although he was pleased with the fight and togetherness his group displayed against the Aggies, those types of mistakes simply will not cut it for a team that is trying to return to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since the 2021-22 season.

"There are some things that we've done well, maybe even ahead of schedule, and there are some things that we have to get better at, there's no question about that," Diebler said. "We didn't play smart enough, both offensively and defensively. I think we have a team that is capable of sustaining either side of the ball if either side of the ball is just struggling a little bit. Just disappointing we didn't do that better on (Nov. 15)."

The first-year Ohio State coach went on to list several things that his team could have done much better on the offensive end, starting with two-point field-goal efficiency.

Ohio State, unlike the first two games, shot poorly from three – something Diebler said was a product of his team settling for long-range attempts and having poor shot selection – but it also had trouble finishing at the rim and connecting on the midrange shots, missing a number of close-range layups that could have been converted.

Diebler said this type of inefficiency is a product of his group not playing with the right poise needed to finish near the rim as well as his guards not giving their frontcourt teammates enough paint touches, issues he thinks have been present in other games this year along with the Texas A&M loss.

"I thought we've just been a little inconsistent in the paint as far as our poise," Diebler said. "At times we get a little sped up, and that has hurt our field-goal percentage. We're getting there. A lot of our two-point field-goal attempts will come off of ball screens or drops. I think that fits our personnel really well. So we just need to keep being intentional about that."

"And we missed our forwards, particularly (in the Texas A&M game) a few times. We missed giving them the ball when they were in the paint, or had one foot in the paint, where we had to deliver that pass."

Diebler also mentioned several things that his team needs to clean up on the defensive end, mostly with fouling and rebounding. He did say that he liked the aggressiveness they played with against Texas A&M, as evidenced by their 10 steals and 12 forced turnovers, but he felt his players lacked the discipline and proper technique needed to prevent the Aggies from taking advantage on the inside.

"Defensively, it's fouling and rebounding," he said. "Those are two areas where we need to make a significant jump in, and we need to do that quickly. There were a few possessions last game where we bailed them out with some poor technique, and when we're trying to make a run and we're fighting and we're having some good offensive possessions, those can be deflating."

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2025 who have committed to Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
A'mare Bynum	C	6-8	210	★★★★	Branson (Mo.) Link Academy
Dorian Jones	G	6-4	160	★★★★	Richmond Heights, Ohio

"We just have to be smart with our aggressiveness defensively. Texas A&M is a really good offensive rebounding team, but I thought for the most part of the game we did pretty well. But it felt like they made us pay almost every single time. We get three or four more of those rebounds, and we're in a better position. So those two areas defensively, for me, are the areas we have to keep getting better."

Diebler added that many of these issues can be fixed as his mostly new roster gains experience and comfort playing alongside each other. Some added time together – albeit only an extra week or so – may have helped the Buckeyes play more efficiently in the team's last two games against Evansville and Campbell.

In Ohio State's 80-30 and 104-60 wins against the Purple Aces and Fighting Camels, the Buckeyes mostly saw improvements on both sides of the ball, combining to make 64.0 percent of their two-point attempts while also owning a 69-43 rebounding advantage and committing 35 fouls and 18 turnovers.

Bucks Fall Out Of Rankings After Loss

Due to the 14-point loss to the Aggies, Ohio State's return to the AP top 25 poll was short-lived. Just one week after finding themselves inside the top 25 for the first time since the 2022-23 season on Nov. 11 at No. 21, the Buckeyes fell out of the rankings altogether in the latest poll released on Nov. 18.

Ohio State did emerge in the "others receiving votes" category, but it earned fewer points there than it had in the preseason poll, getting just 13 in those rankings – the 10th most out of the schools just on the outside of the top 25 – compared to the 29 (T-7th) it got on Oct. 14.

This big drop-off may be more due to the way in which the Buckeyes lost in College Station, Texas, rather than the actual defeat, struggles of which were outlined in the previous note.

The Buckeyes did bounce back with consecutive blowout home wins over Evansville and Campbell, but that still likely won't move Ohio State back into the rankings due to the quality of those two defeated teams. The Purple Aces and Fighting Aces had records of 1-3 and 3-2, respectively, heading into their games against the Buckeyes.

With another home game against mid-major Green Bay (2-4) on deck on Nov. 25, Ohio State may not get another opportunity to jump back into the polls until after Thanksgiving Day on Nov. 24 when it plays three formidable opponents in a span of 12 days, first at home against Pittsburgh on Nov. 25, then in Big Ten play against Maryland on the road on Dec. 4 and No. 24 Rutgers at Value City Arena on Dec. 7.

The Scarlet Knights are one of five ranked Big Ten teams in the latest poll, a group that also included No. 6 Purdue – which moved up seven spots after a statement 87-78 win over then-No. 2 Alabama at Mackey Arena on Nov.

15 – as well as No. 16 Indiana, No. 19 Wisconsin and No. 25 Illinois. Both the Badgers and Illini are ranked for the first time this season after securing wins over No. 8 Arizona and Oakland, respectively, although the Illini's stint might also be a short one after a 100-87 loss to now-No. 8 Alabama on the road on Nov. 20.

Four-Star Thompson Talks OSU Visit

Diebler and the Buckeyes have already secured the No. 1 player out of Ohio in the class of 2025 – that being Cleveland Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160), who officially signed with the program on Nov. 13 – and they are now looking to accomplish the same in the 2026 cycle.

Ohio State hosted Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Academy five-star small forward Anthony Thompson (6-7, 185) on an unofficial visit earlier this fall on Oct. 13, and over one month after the trip to Columbus, he revealed to On3 that it was an overall enjoyable experience.

"This recent visit was good," he said. "I have been there before and was able to see their facilities and everything. I was able to watch a practice and get a feel for Coach Diebler and his style. He has a high-energy practice, and they play really fast and through their guards. They have a good offense and play the right way with really good players."

As Thompson alluded to, the Oct. 13 visit was the second time he had been on Ohio State's campus. The nation's 17th-best prospect and sixth-best small forward also took an unofficial visit on June 20, making Ohio State the only school that has hosted Thompson twice so far in his recruitment, according to On3. He has also taken unofficial visits to Cincinnati, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and Michigan State.

Thompson, who said he models his game after taller NBA forwards such as Kevin Durant of the Phoenix Suns, Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics and Paul George of the Philadelphia 76ers, has seen an increase in hype in recent months after excelling both at the AAU and high school level. He showed an ability to score from all spots on the floor while playing for the AAU team Indiana Elite this summer and is coming off a strong sophomore season at Lebanon, Ohio, where he averaged 15.8 points, 8.1 rebounds, 1.8 blocks and 1.3 steals per game before transferring to Western Reserve Academy this year.

"I've gotten a lot stronger," Thompson said. "I have more speed and agility, and I have more strength to be able to do more on the court. My game started expanding this summer in AAU, but I can really see myself playing inside and out in (high) school ball."

Thompson's recruitment is far from over. He is just beginning his junior season with the Pioneers, who were 6-0 as of Nov. 16. But the Buckeyes seem to have made a strong first impression on the blossoming in-state prospect, an encouraging sign for Diebler's program as

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

they look to fortify the 2026 class.

Ohio State has just one pledge in the 2026 class, coming from Cleveland Garfield Heights four-star point guard Marcus Johnson, the second-best player in Ohio behind Thompson.

OSU In Five-Star Wilson's Top Five

Ohio State may be already looking to add to the 2026 class, but its 2025 class is still likely incomplete, with Diebler saying earlier in the month that the program would be open to signing more prospects if the right fit is there.

One prospect who could fit that bill is Atlanta Holy Innocents Episcopal School five-star power forward Caleb Wilson (6-9, 205), who on Nov. 18 included the Buckeyes in his top five list of preferred schools, a group that includes Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and UCF.

Wilson, the nation's fifth-best prospect, third-best shooting guard and top-ranked player out of Georgia, is hoping to commit in December or January, according to On3.

Wilson's inclusion of Ohio State on his narrowed list is a positive sign for Diebler and his program, who have been aggressively pursuing him in recent months.

Ohio State first developed interest in Wilson after he excelled at the 2024 Nike EYBL Peach Jam in July, where he averaged 17.3 points, 7.0 rebounds, 2.8 blocks, 2.3 assists and 1.9 steals per contest on 62.0 percent shooting. This led Diebler to build a relationship with Wilson and his family, taking an in-home visit to the Wilson household on Oct. 7, and a few weeks later the Georgia native returned the favor and took his official visit to Ohio State the weekend of Oct. 26.

Wilson's weekend trip to Columbus included watching the Buckeyes' practice, taking in a full game day for the football team's home game against Nebraska and reconnecting with fellow Atlanta native and OSU point guard Bruce Thornton as well as assistant Luke Simons, who had familiarity with Wilson while he was director of operations at Baylor.

"I'm truly glad we did take the visit this weekend," Caleb's father, Jerry, told The Columbus Dispatch following his visit. "More than anything, getting to know Jake and the staff, getting a really detailed look at The Ohio State University – it was a great scene for us."

Although Caleb Wilson and Ohio State seem to be having a blossoming relationship, his recruitment will likely be a difficult one for the Buckeyes to win given that there are a pair of blue-blood schools within his top five and his NIL valuation is worth \$1.3 million, according to On3, which ranks sixth in high school basketball.

This is a development that Diebler and Ohio State are used to, however. Their previous five-star 2025 target, Napa (Calif.) Prolific

Prep five-star combo guard Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195) has an NIL valuation of \$1.4 million (third highest in high school basketball), an aspect that may have contributed to him choosing Kansas over Ohio State on Nov. 1.

Another 2025 Ohio State target, Los Angeles Sierra Canyon three-star shooting guard Bryce James (6-4, 180) – the youngest son of 20-time All-Star and four-time NBA champion LeBron James – has an NIL valuation of \$1.3 million, ranking just ahead of Wilson.

Regardless of the financial aspect of Wilson's recruitment, Ohio State will continue to aggressively pursue the five-star, who would instantly become the headliner of the program's 2025 class if he were to commit.

Ohio State's 2025 class currently consists of just two prospects, Jones and Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star center Amare Bynum (6-8, 210), who both officially signed with the program during the first day of the early signing period on Nov. 13.

Other Notes And Tidbits

• In other recruiting news, Bynum's Link Academy teammate and Ohio State target, four-star 2025 combo guard Jerry Easter (6-3, 183), was set to announce his college decision live on ESPN just after BSB went to press on Nov. 25. The nation's No. 36 overall prospect and fourth-best combo guard had not announced a list of finalists or top schools prior to print date, but he had taken multiple visits in the fall, including Ohio State, SMU, USC and Vanderbilt. Easter hails from northwest Ohio, where he played his first two seasons of high school prep basketball at Toledo Emmanuel Christian. He averaged 32.3 points and 7.5 rebounds per game at Emmanuel Christian as a sophomore before transferring to La Porte (Ind.) La Lumiere for his junior season then moving to Link Academy his senior year.

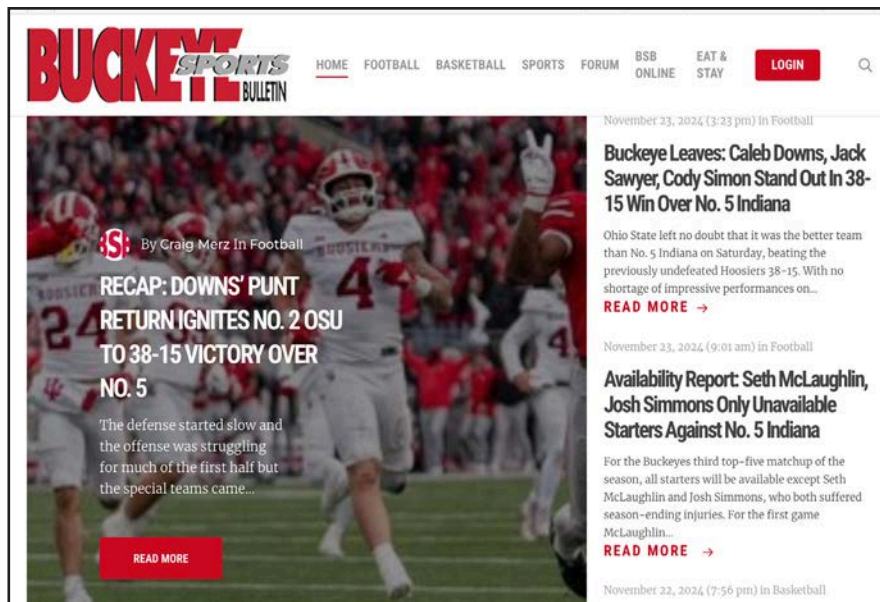
• Ohio State is viewed as the second-best team in the Big Ten so far this season according to the analytics-based site KenPom, with the Buckeyes holding a spot at No. 18 as BSB went to press, just two spots behind Purdue. Ohio State is also highly rated in other categories on the site, including offensive rating (24th nationally, 116.0 points scored per 100 possessions), defensive rating (18th, 94.3 points allowed per 100 possessions), but ranks just 174th in adjusted tempo at 69.1 possessions per 40 minutes.

• Thornton was named on Nov. 19 to the early-season watch list for the Lute Olson National Player of the Year award, which is presented annually to the top Division I player in all of college basketball. Thornton is one of 50 players named to the watch list for the award named after longtime Iowa and Arizona men's basketball coach Olson, a list that includes Rutgers freshman guards Ace Bailey and Dylan Harper, North Carolina's RJ Davis, Kansas' Hunter Dickenson, Duke's Cooper Flagg, Arizona's Caleb Love and Purdue's Braden Smith, among others. The Fairburn, Ga., native is off to a strong start in his third year with the Buckeyes, averaging 13.2 points and a team-high 5.4 assists on 54.1 percent shooting to go with his 3.2 rebounds per contest through five games.



Bruce Thornton

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Bucks Pick Up Two Blowout Wins Vs. Mid-Majors

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State bounced back from its 14-point loss against Texas A&M since BSB last went to press – albeit against highly inferior opponents – securing a pair of convincing home wins over mid-majors Evansville on Nov. 19 and Campbell on Nov. 22 to improve to 4-1 on the season.

With the Buckeyes no longer ranked inside the top 25, Jake Diebler's team first got back on track with a 50-point win over Evansville that was led by a dominant defensive performance that had not been reached since 2008.

It was Ohio State's offense that spearheaded the next blowout win over Campbell three days later, with the Buckeyes making each of their next 10 three-point attempts in a span of 12:49 in the first half to secure the 44-point victory.

Ohio State's positive momentum may be halted for the time being, though, after it was revealed just before the Campbell game that sophomore forward Aaron Bradshaw was not participating in team activities for a reason that could not be shared due to "federal privacy laws," a development that could have a significant impact on the season moving forward.

Bucks Dismantle Evansville On Both Ends

Ohio State benefited from a strong second half and a poor offensive showing from Evansville to improve to 3-1 on the season, demolishing the Purple Aces 80-30 in front of a sparse Value City Arena crowd of 9,824 for its first 50-point win in 10 seasons.

The Buckeyes forced Evansville (1-4) to just 19.0 percent shooting (11 of 58) and 11.1 percent (3 of 27) from long range on the night to secure their largest margin of victory since a 97-43 win over High Point on Dec. 10, 2014. Evansville's 30 points were also the fewest points allowed by Ohio State – which made 21 of its 30 shots in the second half (70.0 percent) to outscore the Purple Aces 52-16 after halftime – since a 59-22 win over Samford on Nov. 29, 2008.

"Tonight, our defense was consistently good, and I thought that was an important thing to note," Diebler said after the game. "I'm glad we were able to figure some things out there offensively. (I'd) like to be able to do that quicker next time."

Much like in the Texas A&M game, Ohio State got off to a sluggish start offensively, missing 12 of its first 15 shots and committing four early turnovers to find itself in a 12-12 tie with Evansville with 6:57 left in the half. The Purple Aces were equally bad offensively, shooting 3 for 18 during that same span.

The Buckeyes soon began to find their groove on offense, making four of their next five field goals to lead 21-14 with 4:40 left after an alley-oop dunk from Bradshaw off a Bruce Thornton lob.

Ohio State did not make another field goal in the half, but it was able to extend the lead with seven straight free throws, six straight by Devin Royal and one by Thornton, capping a 12-0 Buckeye run that put Ohio State up 28-14 at the break.

The Buckeyes held the 14-point lead in large part due to Evansville shooting just 12.9 percent from the field (4 of 31) and 11.8 percent from three (2 of 17) in the half.

Ohio State then received an injury scare just 1:58 into the second half when sophomore forward Sean Stewart took a hard fall while diving for a loose ball, forcing him out of the game and into concussion protocol. He did not return to the game, and Diebler did not have an update on his status after the game.

Although a bit startled by the injury, the Buck-

eyes continued to push forward on the court, making five of their next six field goals, part of a 13-4 run to take a 43-20 lead with 14:16 left. That sequence was highlighted by a thunderous one-handed dunk from Bradshaw off an alley-oop pass from Meechie Johnson Jr.

Ohio State was then able to gradually expand its lead and eventually go up by as much as 30 points, 57-27, with 8:19 left after a Royal layup. One basket before that, true freshman guard Colin White scored his first career points on a corner three, which was followed 1:48 later by his second triple in as many attempts to put Ohio State up 62-27.

"It's a great feeling," White said after the game. "My teammates believe in me, the coaching staff believes in me to knock down those shots. ... It's a great feeling to see those get in and kind of get that out of the way."

White wasn't the only true freshman to score his first career points. With the game squarely in hand and both benches emptied with 2:21 left, freshman center Ivan Njegovan scored the Buckeyes' final seven points of the game off two interior layups and a banked-in three-pointer to cap the 50-point win.

Ohio State was led in the win by Royal, who had a career-best 20 points and 12 rebounds for his first-ever double-double. Johnson (13 points) and John Mobley Jr. (11) also reached double figures, while Thornton had a team-high seven assists.

Evansville did not have a single player reach double-digit points and was led by freshman guard and Rome, Italy, native Gabriel Pozzato, who notched eight points and three rebounds in the loss.

Offensive Clinic Leads OSU To Win Vs. Camels

Ohio State (4-1) used a crisp overall offensive performance and some brilliant three-point shooting in the first half to defeat mid-major Campbell (3-3) 104-60 on Nov. 22 in front of 10,557 fans inside Value City Arena, eclipsing 100 points for the first time since a Dec. 7, 2019, win against Penn State.

Playing without Bradshaw as well as the injured Stewart, the Buckeyes seemed unfazed from the start, making 11 of their 13 shots from three in the first half before dominating inside the paint – scoring 40 of 51 second-half points in the interior – to secure the blowout.

"Our togetherness on both sides of the ball was critical," Diebler said after the game. "I was just really proud how we executed that consistently for the night. I thought that said a lot about our chemistry and our group."

Ohio State and Campbell were entrenched in a track meet early on, with both teams racing up and down the floor to an 11-11 tie with 14:45 left.

The Buckeyes – or perhaps more aptly Mobley – then delivered the first body blow of the game. The true freshman guard scored the next eight points for the Buckeyes off the bench in 1:38 on two threes and a nifty layup to push the lead to 19-13 with 12:31 left.

The Camels started to make a push by scoring four of the game's next five points, but the Buckeyes answered back with a 15-0 run – 12 of those points coming off threes from Johnson, Thornton, Mobley and Micah Parrish – to take a commanding 35-17 lead with 5:42 left, forcing a Campbell timeout.

Campbell broke the run out of the break with a driving layup from Jasin Sinani, but that didn't deter Ohio State, which continued to excel from the three-point line, getting four more triples – two from Mobley, one each from Thornton and Parrish – the rest of the period to help it take a

Ohio State 80, Evansville 30

		Nov. 19, 2024			Value City Arena • Columbus		
		1	2	F			
Evansville (1-4)		14	16	30			
Ohio State (3-1)		28	52	80			
Evansville	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Pozzato	29	3-9	2-3	1-2	0	3	8
Haffner	34	2-11	0-0	0-2	1	3	5
Comer	25	2-8	1-2	0-1	1	4	5
Hughes	28	1-12	0-1	0-6	1	3	3
Cuff	24	0-5	0-0	2-1	0	3	0
Day	24	3-6	0-0	1-5	0	3	7
Berridge	14	0-1	1-2	0-0	0	1	1
Aigner	2	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	1	1
Turnbull	12	0-3	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Battle II	5	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	2	0
Hundley	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Jackson	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	11-58	5-10	7-21	3	20	30

Percentages: FG: 19.0%. FT: 50.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-27 (Haffner 1-8, Hughes 1-7, Pozzato 0-4, Cuff 0-2, Day 1-2, Comer 0-1, Turnbull 0-1, Battle 0-1, Jackson 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Day 2, Comer, Hughes). **Turnovers:** 11 (Comer 4, Berridge 3, Pozzato, Hughes, Cuff, Day). **Steals:** 3 (Haffner 2, Cuff).

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Johnson Jr.	24	5-8	0-0	0-2	2	1	13
Thornton	29	2-8	4-6	1-1	7	2	8
Bradshaw	27	2-6	2-4	0-3	0	1	6
Parrish	21	3-7	0-0	0-1	2	4	6
Stewart	11	0-1	0-0	2-7	0	2	0
Royal	26	7-9	6-8	0-12	0	2	20
Mobley Jr.	19	3-8	4-5	0-3	1	1	11
Njegovan	4	3-3	0-0	0-2	0	0	7
White	12	2-2	0-0	1-3	1	1	6
Mahaffey	20	1-2	1-3	4-3	1	1	3
Etzler	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Baumann	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Nash	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	28-54	17-26	8-40	15	16	80

Percentages: FG: 51.9%. FT: 65.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-21 (Johnson 3-6, Thornton 0-4, Mobley 1-4, Parrish 0-3, White 2-2, Bradshaw 0-1, Njegovan 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Bradshaw 2, Mobley, White, Mahaffey). **Turnovers:** 10 (Johnson 3, Stewart 2, Mahaffey 2, Royal, White, Team). **Steals:** 9 (Parrish 2, Mahaffey 2, Johnson, Thornton, Royal, Etzler, Nash). **Officials:** Burris, Carstensen, Richardson. **Attendance:** 9,824.

resounding 53-27 lead into the half.

Mobley's final three with 1:20 left in the first half was the Buckeyes' 10th made three in their last 10 attempts – the first make of that stretch being the freshman's first triple of the game at 14:09 – making it the first time the program connected on that many three-pointers in a row in five seasons.

"From my point of view, I remember going in for an offensive rebound and being like, 'Dang, bro, what's the point?' " Evan Mahaffey said. "They're all going in." So (the three-pointers are) great to see."

In addition to the 84.6 percent shooting from three, the Buckeyes shot 62.1 percent from the floor (18 of 29) and had 13 assists in the first half. They also had five steals and held the Camels to just 2-of-9 shooting from three (22.2 percent).

Similar to previous games this season, Ohio State looked to establish itself in the interior after halftime by penetrating toward the rim, scoring each of its first 21 points of the half from either drives or free throws off drives to take a 74-40 lead with 12:10 left.

Ohio State returned to the three-point line out of a TV timeout with another Parrish triple with 11:10 left, which – along with a Johnson layup one minute earlier – was the start of an eventual 17-4 run that put the Buckeyes up 89-44 with just 7:26 left after a Royal made jumper.

With the lead squarely in hand, the rest of the game was window dressing for the Buckeyes,

Ohio State 104, Campbell 60

		Nov. 22, 2024			Value City Arena • Columbus		
		1	2	F			
Campbell (3-3)		27	33	60			
Ohio State (4-1)		53	51	104			
Evansville	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Gregory	30	4-9	2-3	0-1	0	2	10
Sinani	29	3-7	2-2	0-4	0	2	10
Frank	23	5-7	0-0	0-3	2	2	10
Dorsey	26	1-2	2-4	0-8	0	1	5
Zurlienne	21	2-8	0-0	0-0	0	4	4
Gudmundsson	17	3-8	5-5	1-1	0	0	12
Cook	14	2-3	0-1	1-1	1	3	4
Duggan	15	1-4	0-2	1-1	1	0	2
Yaw	8	0-1	2-2	0-1	0	0	2
Bidwell	4	0-2	1-2	1-1	1	1	1
Van Der Heijden	8	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	1	0
Mokseckas	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Walsh	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	21-52	14-21	4-22	6	17	60

Percentages: FG: 40.4%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-20 (Gudmundsson 1-4, Sinani 2-4, Duggan 0-3, Gregory 0-2, Zurlienne 0-2, Bidwell 0-2, Dorsey 1-2, Frank 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Zurlienne 2, Yaw 2, Duggan). **Turnovers:** 15 (Sinani 3, Dorsey 3, Gudmundsson 2, Gregory 2, Franj, Cook, Duggan, Bidwell, Van Der Hijden, Team). **Steals:** 3 (Gregory, Zurlienne, Cook).

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Royal	25	7-9	3-4	1-7	1	3	17
Parrish	29	6-9	0-0	1-8	3	2	16
Johnson Jr.	23	5-9	1-2	0-3	4	2	12
Thornton	30	3-7	3-3	0-4	7	2	11
Mahaffey	29	5-7	1-3	2-1	2	2	11
Mobley Jr.	24	8-13	2-3	0-2	2	2	23
White	9	3-4	0-0	2-0	0	2	6
Etzler	5	2-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	5
Parks	14	1-1	1-4	0-1	2	2	3
Njegovan	6	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	0	0
Baumann	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	1	0
Nash	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	40-62	11-19	6-29	22	19	104

Percentages: FG: 64.5%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 16-22 (Mobley 5-8, Johnson 1-4, White 3-4, Parrish 4-4, Thornton 2-3, Etzler 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Mahaffey 3, Njegovan). **Turnovers:** 8 (Mahaffey 2, Mobley 2, Royal, Johnson, Nash, Team). **Steals:** 8 (Mobley 2, Royal, Parrish, Johnson, Thornton Mahaffey, White). **Officials:** Riley, Szcel, Young. **Attendance:** 10,557.

who emptied their bench in the final five minutes and extended their lead to as many as 47 points several times to cruise to their fourth win of the year.

The Buckeyes hit the 100-point plateau off a thunderous dunk from White with 2:44 left, his second throwdown of the night.

Ohio State had six players reach double figures in scoring and five players make at least one three in the victory. Mobley led that group of scorers with 23 points on 8-of-13 shooting, including 5 of 8 from three. He was one three shy of Malaki Branham's program record for most makes in a game by a freshman set in a Jan. 2, 2022, win at Nebraska. Royal added 17 points and eight rebounds, while Thornton had a game-high seven assists to go with 11 points and Parrish led the team with nine rebounds to go with his 16 points.

Campbell, which shot 4 of 20 from three and committed 15 turnovers in the loss, was led by former Penn State forward and Grindavik, Iceland, native Bragi Gudmundsson, who netted 12 points on 3-of-8 shooting.

Ohio State will play two more nonconference home games before BSB next goes to press, first against mid-major Green Bay of the Horizon League – which is coached by longtime sports radio personality and former Oklahoma State guard Doug Gottlieb – on Nov. 25 (7 p.m., BTN) and then against 6-1 Pittsburgh on Nov. 29 (2:30 p.m., Peacock).

Cotie McMahon Suffers Lower-Leg Injury

For the first time in her Buckeye career, Ohio State junior forward Cotie McMahon missed a game due to injury when Ohio State defeated Ohio 106-42 on Nov. 20. McMahon, who played in all 36 games as a freshman, all 32 games as a sophomore and the first three games of Ohio State's 2024-25 season, missed the Buckeyes' battle with the Bobcats due to a lower-leg injury she sustained in practice, according to head coach Kevin McGuff.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

McMahon earned All-Big-Ten honors in each of her first two seasons with the Buckeyes. In her freshman season, McMahon was the team's second-leading scorer, averaging 15.1 points per game with 5.5 rebounds per game. McMahon's scoring went down slightly in her sophomore season as she averaged 14.4 points per game, but she also became the team's leading rebounder with 6.3 rebounds per game.

In three games played in the 2024-25 season, McMahon has averaged 16.3 points per game and 3.3 rebounds. McMahon has been much improved from three-point range through three games, making 6 of 13 attempts from beyond the arc.

McMahon was replaced by redshirt sophomore guard Kennedy Cambridge in the starting lineup. The sister of five-star true freshman point guard Jalon Cambridge, Kennedy Cambridge had a tough night in her first start as a Buckeye. She scored four points on 2 of 9 attempts with six rebounds and fouled out of the game after 28 minutes played.

McGuff also received solid minutes from fifth-year forward Eboni Walker off the bench. Walker scored just two points on 1-of-2 shooting but tacked on seven rebounds, six assists and four steals.

Still dealing with her lower-leg injury, McMahon also didn't appear in Ohio State's 96-53 win over Bowling Green on Nov. 24. McGuff once again went with Cambridge in the starting lineup, and against the Falcons, the Nashville, Tenn., native scored 10 points while making 4 of 5 shots and recorded six rebounds.

Walker wasn't quite as efficient as Cambridge against Bowling Green, but she had another solid performance off the bench, with six points and four rebounds.

Though the Buckeyes didn't seem to miss McMahon's scoring much in the 64-point win over Ohio, her leadership and energy aren't easy to replicate. Ohio State fifth-year guard Taylor Thierry did her best as a leader in McMahon's shoes.

"She brings a lot of energy," Thierry said. "Not having her on the court, I know I had to step up as a veteran on the team, an older person on the team – just stepping up into that leadership role. I knew I had to take on a bigger responsibility since Cotie wasn't on the floor."

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School/Previous Team
Daria Biriuk	G	6-1	★★★★	Bell Buckle (Tenn.) The Webb School

Buckeyes Taking Time To Jell

After back-to-back blowout wins over mid-majors in their first two games of the season, the Buckeyes appeared vulnerable for the first time in a 67-63 win against Belmont on Nov. 17. Ohio State trailed by nine points with 5:21 to go, but the Buckeyes finished the game on a 17-4 run to stay undefeated, facing their first real adversity this season. According to McGuff, it's going to take some time for the group to progress with so many new faces scattered around the roster.

"As I've told people, and hopefully I didn't create a self-fulfilling prophecy, we have a lot of talent and a lot of potential, but with a lot of newcomers, we don't look the same as we looked maybe a year ago at this time with a bunch of veterans. I think this team, it's going to be – I don't want to say slower-developing but for lack of a better term – it's going to be a longer process throughout the year," McGuff said. "But I do think we've got tremendous potential if we stay focused on getting better."

Starting three Buckeyes who weren't on the team last year, McGuff's team is almost unrecognizable from a season ago, but through five games the new faces have been as good as anyone. Jalon Cambridge, despite her age, is the second-leading scorer averaging 17.0 points per game. She also leads the Buckeyes with 2.6 steals and 4.8 assists per game.

Center Elsa Lemmilä, also a freshman, broke out against the Bobcats with 21 points, 14 rebounds and five blocks. Following the 96-53 win over Bowling Green on Nov. 24, Lemmilä is the team's leading scorer off the Buckeyes' bench averaging 7.6 points. She is the leading rebounder on the team with 7.8 per game.

Junior guard Chance Gray and fifth-year forward Ajae Petty have much more collegiate experience over freshmen such as Cambridge and Lemmilä but are also in their first year with the Buckeyes after transferring from Oregon and Kentucky, respectively.

Through five games in a much more crowded offensive room, Petty has seen her scoring average decrease considerably from last year when she averaged 14.2 points per game with the Wildcats. She is averaging 8.2 points per game but has been efficient on the glass as the team's second-leading rebounder averaging 6.8 per game.

After a poor first three quarters as a Buckeye where she went 0 for 5 from the field in Ohio State's 104-69 win over Cleveland State, Gray has found her groove from beyond the three-point line. Gray has shot 47.6 percent from beyond the arc and leads the team with 18 points per game.

Although it's early in the season, Gray has been much more efficient with the Buckeyes than she was with the Ducks, where she made just 34.7 percent of her field goals last season.

Despite the offensive inefficiencies in the Belmont game, where the Buckeyes connected on just 23 of 68 field goals (33.8 percent), the team came together defensively, not al-

lowing a single Bruins field goal for the last 5:21 of the game, allowing only four free throws.

According to Lemmilä, the Buckeyes' chemistry is continuously improving.

"It's gone really well," Lemmilä said after the game against the Bobcats. "I came a lot later than the rest of the freshmen, so I thought it was going to be maybe a little rough in the beginning, and it was, but not for very long. But I think we have pretty good team chemistry, and you can kind of start to see it on the court as well, cheering each other on and giving each other high fives, and I think it helps us a lot playing."

Bucks Stay At No. 12 In AP Poll

Ohio State stayed at No. 12 in the AP top 25 rankings after the update on Nov. 18. In a week without much volatility, the top 12 teams in the rankings remained in their spots. Despite picking up two wins since the last rankings update, the Buckeyes were slotted behind fellow Big Ten teams USC at No. 3, No. 5 UCLA and No. 11 Maryland.

The Terrapins, who have probably been the biggest story of the Big Ten through the first couple of weeks of the season, upset then-No. 11 ranked Duke 85-80 on Nov. 10. The Terrapins followed that performance up with another win over an ACC opponent when they went on the road and defeated Syracuse 84-73 on Nov. 13.

Maryland increased its winning streak to six after a commanding 107-35 win over St. Francis on Nov. 24.

Elsewhere in the Big Ten, Nebraska, Illinois and Oregon made the back half of the rankings at No. 21, No. 22 and No. 23 respectively.

Since making the rankings, Illinois picked up a couple of wins, including an 85-66 win over Oregon State on Nov. 22. Earlier that same day, Nebraska suffered its first loss, an 80-74 defeat at the hands of Creighton.

The two highest-ranked Big Ten teams were both tested against the country's best competition since BSB last went to press. Taking on No. 6 ranked Notre Dame, USC struggled to get much going offensively in a 74-61 loss on Nov. 23.

UCLA faced even tougher competition one day later, going against No. 1-ranked South Carolina. The Bruins pulled off a surprisingly convincing 77-62 win over the Gamecocks. The Bruins' win snapped South Carolina's 43-game winning streak, which dated back to the 2022-23 season.

Powell Adds Recruiting Title

Ohio State assistant coach Jalen Powell added to her job title on Nov. 15, when she was named recruiting coordinator. Powell, who has been with the Buckeyes since the 2021-22 season, first joined the program after one season with Florida A&M. Powell also was a member of the Arkansas coaching staff as a graduate assistant in 2019.

Powell has helped lead the Buckeyes to three straight NCAA tournament appearances and six combined wins in the tourney with at least a share of the Big Ten regular-season crown in two of three seasons.

Powell's addition to her job title came less than a week after the announcement of the additions of former Ohio State alumni Jacy Sheldon to the coaching staff as the director of player development and Katie Smith joining the staff as an assistant coach.

OSU Signs Biriuk

The Buckeyes received good recruiting news for the 2025 class when they officially signed four-star guard Daria "Dasha" Biriuk on Nov. 18.

The signing was announced on the team's Twitter page. Biriuk is from Berdyansk, Ukraine, and committed to the Buckeyes on Sept. 20 from a list of three finalists, including Mississippi State and Vanderbilt.

Standing 6-1, Biriuk will provide the Buckeyes with above-average height for her position.

In 2022 at the U18 European Championships, Biriuk flashed her scoring abilities by averaging 11.7 points per game while shooting 44.7 percent from the field.

Biriuk is a four-star prospect who attends the Webb School in Bell Buckle, Tenn., and is currently ESPN HoopGurlz's No. 74 prospect. McGuff briefly addressed the signing in a statement released to the team's Twitter page.

"We are extremely excited to add Dasha to our program," McGuff said. "She's a terrific player who will immediately impact our ability to score the ball from the perimeter."



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No McMahon, No Problem For Ohio State

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

No. 12 Ohio State was untested in its two games against in-state Mid-American Conference foes since BSB last went to press, winning both contests by a combined 107 points to improve to 5-0 on the 2024-25 season.

In its second road game of the year on Nov. 19 at Ohio University, the Buckeyes held a 40-point lead at halftime and used much of the remaining time to give valuable minutes to bench players as they cruised to a 64-point win. Kevin McGuff's team was similarly impressive when they returned home against Bowling Green on Nov. 24, shooting at an efficient clip from three-point range and playing physical defense in a 43-point win.

Both of these victories came without the services of All-Big Ten junior forward Cotie McMahon, who missed game action all week due to a lower-leg injury.

Buckeyes Bounce Back Against Bobcats

After a tightly contested win over Belmont in its previous game on Nov. 17, Ohio State (4-0) had no issues dealing with Ohio (1-3) in a 106-42 road win on Nov. 20 at the Convocation Center in Athens, Ohio, and the Buckeyes gave many of the 4,820 fans in attendance very little to cheer about.

Good ball movement and lockdown defense allowed Ohio State to take a quick 9-0 lead. The run started with a three-point jumper from fifth-year guard Taylor Thierry on the team's second possession of the game.

Ohio State 106, Ohio 42						
Nov. 20, 2024 Convocation Center • Athens, Ohio						
	1	2	3	4	F	
Ohio State (4-0)	27	32	31	16	106	
Ohio (1-3)	162	7	19	4	42	
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Gray	25	6-12	4-6	1-4	3	1 20
J. Cambridge	18	9-15	0-0	0-4	3	1 19
Thierry	21	5-6	0-0	4-6	1	2 13
Petty	16	6-8	1-1	5-3	1	1 13
K. Cambridge	28	2-9	0-2	3-3	2	5 4
Lemmila	24	9-13	3-4	8-6	0	3 21
Watson	23	4-18	0-0	1-0	0	1 10
Greene	22	1-6	1-2	1-1	5	3 4
Walker	23	1-2	0-0	6-1	6	0 2
Totals	200	43-89	9-15	31-28	21	17 106
Percentages: FG: 48.3%. FT: 60%. Three-point field goals: 11-37. (Watson 2-13, K. Cambridge 0-4, Greene 1-4, Thierry 3-4, J. Cambridge 1-3). Team rebounds: 2 Blocked shots: 7 (Lemmila 5, Thierry, Petty). Turnovers: 16 (Petty 4, K. Cambridge 3, Lemmila 2, Watson 2, Gray, J. Cambridge, Thierry, Greene). Steals: 18 (J. Cambridge 4, Walker 4, Greene 3, Lemmila 2, Gray, Thierry, Petty, K. Cambridge, Watson).						
Ohio	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Tabeling	23	3-9	2-2	0-6	1	1 9
McWhorter	28	0-5	7-10	0-2	2	0 7
Williams	30	1-8	3-6	1-2	1	0 5
Baxter	18	1-4	1-2	2-2	1	3 3
Dennis	21	0-4	0-0	0-0	0	3 0
Barnett	22	3-6	0-0	0-4	0	1 9
Bower	22	3-8	0-0	1-0	0	3 7
Scully	23	1-3	0-0	0-0	1	3 2
Austin	9	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1 0
Lim	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Totals	200	12-47	13-20	8-18	5	15 42
Percentages: FG: 25.5%. FT: 65.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-21 (Tabeling 1-6, Barnett 3-6, Dennis 0-4, Bower 1-4, McWhorter 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Barnett 2). Turnovers: 32 (Tabeling 7, Williams 7, Baxter 5, Bower 4, McWhorter 3, Barnett, Austin). Steals: 8 (Barnett 3, Williams 3, Tabeling, McWhorter). Officials: N/A. Attendance: 4,820.						

A timeout from Ohio head coach Bob Boldon didn't stop the Buckeyes from executing. With the help of their full-court press, the Buckeyes forced four consecutive Bobcat turnovers and scored six straight points to make it 15-0 with 6:44 left in the first.

Replacing McMahon in the starting lineup, redshirt sophomore guard Kennedy Cambridge forced a steal before finding her sister, true freshman guard Jalon Cambridge, for a layup on the other end to make it 17-0 before the Bobcats finally got on the board with 4:52 to go in the first quarter with a three-point jumper from sophomore guard Bailey Tabeling.

Immediately after Ohio's first score, Jalon Cambridge sprinted down the court to connect on her fifth basket of the game.

The Bobcats found their footing slightly with five straight points, but the Buckeyes responded with a couple of their own three-point shots from Thierry and point guard Madison Greene.

Up 27-12 heading into the second quarter, the Buckeyes rolled out all but one of their starters after McGuff gave playing time to several bench players toward the end of the first quarter, and they went on a 9-2 scoring run to take a 36-14 lead with 8:01 to go in the half.

Thierry helped balloon the Buckeye lead to 41-14 after an Ohio timeout, making her third three-pointer of the game.

Even while getting some minutes for backup players, the Buckeyes continued a dominant second quarter. Freshman center Elsa Lemmila made a basket while being fouled with 3:57 left and tacked on the free throw to make it 48-16.

Lemmila, who was strong on the offensive glass with four offensive rebounds before the

Ohio State 96, Bowling Green 53						
Nov. 24, 2024 Value City Arena • Columbus						
	1	2	3	4	F	
Bowling Green (2-4)	12	11	12	18	53	
Ohio State (5-0)	23	24	29	20	96	
BGSU	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Velasco	38	8-16	7-7	0-3	3	4 24
Porter	16	4-8	0-1	1-5	1	2 8
Kohler	37	1-11	1-4	0-7	0	1 3
Harrison	26	1-4	0-0	3-2	1	2 2
Gerken	17	1-5	0-1	3-0	1	2 2
Fearne	8	2-4	0-0	0-1	0	0 6
Moxey	22	2-4	0-0	0-3	0	0 4
Siesel	17	0-1	2-2	1-2	1	2 2
Taya	13	1-3	0-0	1-2	0	3 2
Kulackovska	6	0-1	0-0	0-3	0	0 0
Totals	200	20-57	10-15	11-28	7	16 53
Percentages: FG: 35.1%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 3-15. (Kohler 0-4, Velasco 1-4, Fearne 2-4, Gerken 0-2, Siesel 0-1). Team rebounds: 2 Blocked shots: 2 (Gerken, Ellis). Turnovers: 24 (Velasco 8, Harrison 4, Porter 2, Kohler 2, Moxey 2, Kulackovska). Steals: 2 (Harrison, Moxey).						
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF Pts.
Gray	26	7-14	1-1	0-3	1	1 18
Thierry	27	6-6	3-4	3-3	0	1 17
J. Cambridge	22	6-14	4-4	1-4	6	3 17
K. Cambridge	28	4-5	2-6	2-4	2	1 10
Petty	20	1-5	0-0	0-4	0	4 2
Watson	25	7-14	0-0	0-1	1	2 20
Walker	17	3-7	0-0	2-2	1	0 6
Greene	18	2-4	0-0	0-0	7	1 4
Lemmila	17	1-5	0-0	1-5	2	3 2
Totals	200	37-74	10-15	11-29	20	16 96
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 12-26 (Watson 6-10, Gray 3-8, J. Cambridge 1-4, Lemmilla 0-2, Thierry 2-2). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 4 (Lemmila 2, Thierry, K. Cambridge). Turnovers: 6 (J. Cambridge 2, Gray, Petty, Walker, Lemmilla). Steals: 15 (Greene 5, Thierry 3, K. Cambridge 3, Watson 2, Gray, Lemmilla). Officials: Bryan Enterline, Tiara Cruse, Angelica Suffren. Attendance: 6,600.						

break, scored six more points in the quarter to help the Buckeyes take a 59-19 lead into half-time.

The Buckeyes forced 15 turnovers and allowed only three field goals in a second quarter that they won 32-7.

With a 40-point lead at the half, the Buckeyes continued to rotate younger players in the game. The youth on the court didn't prevent Ohio State from expanding its lead to 78-28 with 4:55 to go in the third quarter on a layup by Chance Gray.

Lemmila's efficiency only continued in the third quarter as she scored seven points while making 3 of 4 shots, and the Buckeyes took a 90-38 lead into the final period.

The fourth quarter had the Buckeyes give almost every minute to players off the bench. Freshman guard Ava Watson's eight points were the highlight of the final period as the team wrapped up the 106-42 victory.

"We had played really hard Sunday vs. Belmont, but we didn't execute very well on either end of the floor," McGuff said after the game on his message to the team following the tight win over Belmont. "It was more of a mental thing with our execution, which I thought we were much better at today."

Ohio State was led by Lemmila with a career-high 21 points on 9-of-13 shooting and career highs in rebounds with 14 and blocks with five. In 25 minutes played, Gray was the second-leading scorer with 20 points and made 6 of 12 field-goal attempts while Jalon Cambridge was just behind with 19. Eboni Walker passed out a game-high six assists, and Greene passed out five.

"She's extremely talented, and she's a great athlete," McGuff said of Lemmila. "She's a very, very bright young woman, which translates in practice and on the court, so she's building great habits. And really, I thought she was great tonight, and I still think she's not anywhere near what her potential is, which is really exciting. And with the way she's working, she's going to, I think, have a really positive impact on our team and in our season."

As a team, the Buckeyes shot 43 of 89 from the field (48.3 percent). Defensively, Ohio State held the Bobcats to 12-of-47 shooting (25.5).

Emma Barnett and Tabeling led the Bobcats with nine points each, and Tabeling led the team with six rebounds.

The Buckeyes held a decisive 59-26 on the boards, with Thierry, who scored 13 points, joining Lemmila in double figures on the glass with 10.

Guards Lead OSU Over Bowling Green

Without McMahon for the second straight game, the backcourt stepped up in the scoring department to lead Ohio State (5-0) to another dominant win on Nov. 24, this time defeating Bowling Green (2-4) 96-53 in front of 6,660 fans inside Value City Arena.

Back in Columbus after a two-game road trip, the Buckeyes started fast with intense full-court press defense and efficient two-point shooting, forcing seven turnovers and making 9 of 16 shots in the first 8:23 to take a commanding 20-9 lead with 1:37 left in the first quarter.

Bowling Green broke a 3:40 scoring drought when senior guard Amy Velasco converted an old-school three-point play with 39 seconds left in the first, and OSU scored the final three

points of the quarter off a Thierry free throw and Gray jumper to lead 23-12 after one.

Gray used her first-quarter closing basket to get into a rhythm in the second quarter, and she scored back-to-back midrange jumpers to give Ohio State a 29-16 lead with 7:54 left in the half.

Then the Cambridge sisters got involved, with Kennedy hitting one of her two free throws and Jalon hitting a three-pointer to give the Buckeyes a 35-18 lead with 6:27 left. Those four points started a 14-0 run for Ohio State to put it up 45-18 after a Watson three with 3:04 left, her second make in 2:22 of game action.

The Falcons finally scored again with 2:43 to go in the first half with a Paige Kohler free throw, which sparked a mini 5-0 run for the road team until Thierry closed the half with a layup to put OSU up 47-23.

With a significant advantage to open the second half, the Buckeyes didn't let their foot off the gas. Instead, they opened on a 21-2 scoring run, led by 12 points from Gray, to go up 68-25 with 4:34 left in the third quarter off a Thierry three-pointer.

Bowling Green had a bit of a response toward the end of the period, scoring 10 of the game's next 16 points to trail 74-35 with 54 seconds left, but Jalon Cambridge brought the Buckeyes' lead back up to 41 points to end the period with a pair of free throws 10 seconds later. Ohio State hit each of its seven free throws in the third period.

The Buckeyes had enough of a cushion to start the final frame to allow McGuff to play most of his backups for the remaining 10 minutes, with Greene, Watson and Walker all playing the entire quarter.

Watson was the biggest beneficiary of this added playing time, scoring 11 points in the fourth on 4-of-7 shooting to help Ohio State wrap up the win and finish with a team- and career-high 20 points on 7-of-14 shooting, including 6 of 10 from long range.

"I've been waiting for something like this because I've been seeing it in practice," McGuff said after the game of Watson's performance. "She just hasn't really caught her rhythm in a game yet, but she did today and she looked great, and I think we all saw what I've been talking about, and what she's capable of doing."

Watson was followed in the scoring sheets by Gray, who finished with 18 points on 7-of-14 shooting, while Jalon Cambridge (6 of 14) and Thierry (6 of 6) each added 17. Those three helped the Buckeyes have an efficient shooting day, making 37 of 74 field goals (50.0 percent) and 12 of 26 attempts from three (46.2 percent). Greene was credited with seven assists and five steals, both team highs, to go along with four points.

Velasco was the biggest bright spot for the Falcons, who shot just 35.1 percent (20 of 57) and committed 24 turnovers that led to 30 Buckeye points. She led the team with 24 points on 8-of-16 shooting.

Ohio State will face two more mid-major opponents before BSB next goes to press, both in Daytona Beach, Fla., as part of the Daytona Beach Classic. The Buckeyes will begin their two-game stint in the Sunshine State against Old Dominion on Thanksgiving Day (11 a.m., Baller TV) before facing off against Utah State (3:30 p.m., Baller TV) the next day on Nov. 29.

Bucks' Good Start Could Lead To Bigger Results

With the first open weekend of the season Nov. 22 and 23, it's a good time to look behind and ahead in what has been a surprisingly successful start for Ohio State.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The Buckeyes went into the break with a 9-2-1 record that included a 2-2-0 mark in the Big Ten, where – after they went 4-18-2 in conference play last season – they were picked to finish last among the seven teams in the conference by the coaches in this pre-season's poll. OSU's overall record last season was 14-20-4.

With that as the background, the Buckeyes were obviously unranked to open the season, but in the most recent USCHO.com poll (Nov. 18) before Buckeye Sports Bulletin printed, they were No. 14.

The Big Ten schools ahead of them were No. 2 Michigan State, No. 4 Minnesota and No. 6 Michigan. Of those, the Buckeyes have played only the Spartans, losing in East Lansing 4-2 and 4-1, on Nov. 8 and 9, respectively.

Those defeats did not hurt OSU in the important PairWise Ranking, the statistical formula the NCAA selection committee uses to pick the 10 at-large bids for the 16-team field (there are six automatic qualifiers).

Through games of Nov. 9, the Buckeyes were No. 11, a spot ahead of Michigan. Michigan State was third and Minnesota seventh. The other Big Ten schools were Notre Dame (26th), Wisconsin (37th) and Penn State (41st).

The Buckeyes were helped early by a road sweep of Wisconsin, which at the time was No. 16 in the polls.

OSU has also swept the following teams, with their current PairWise Ranking (PWR) out of 64 teams: Bowling Green (36th), Lake Superior State (49th) and Lindenwood (54th). In the season opener the Buckeyes won and tied American International University (47th).

The final nonconference games are at Princeton (24th) on Nov. 29-30.

Path Forward

Even getting just one win against Princeton could put the Buckeyes in good position to earn a spot in the NCAA tournament if, and it's a big if, they could split the remaining 20 Big Ten games to give them 20 wins.

It doesn't always work out that way as the Buckeyes found out in the 2021-22 season when a 22-13-2 record wasn't good enough.

OSU was sitting comfortably in the PWR until standout freshman defenseman Mason Lohrei, now of the Boston Bruins, sustained a season-ending knee injury. The Buckeyes lost their final four regular-season games and were beaten by Penn State in the deciding game of the best-of-three Big Ten quarterfinals.

Still, everything fell the Buckeyes' way in the other conference tournaments until Harvard upset Quinnipiac in overtime in the ECAC final, knocking the Buckeyes out of the last

spot by a slim margin.

The following season the Buckeyes were 21-16-3 but made the NCAAs, reaching the regional final before losing to eventual national champion Quinnipiac.

What the Buckeyes need to do is rack up wins vs. the Big Ten teams below them in the PWR and hold their own against the upper-echelon opponents, which includes Michigan despite its current PairWise.

It begins with home games vs. Penn State on Dec. 5 and 6 before facing Notre Dame on Dec. 13 and 14 to wrap up the calendar year.

Fresh Faces

One of the reasons for the turnaround this season, not surprisingly, is the addition of transfers. Three of the top four scorers are from the portal.

Riley Thompson, late of Alaska Anchorage, leads with 15 points (five goals, 10 assists) in 12 games. Junior Davis Burnside has 12 points (six goals, six assists) to tie for second with former Northeastern forward Gunnarwolfe Fontaine (four goals, eight assists). Ex-Rochester Institute of Technology defenseman Aiden Hansen-Bukata is fourth with 11 points (one goal, 10 assists).

Going deeper, defenseman Damien Carfagna, in his second season after transferring from New Hampshire, is fifth with 10 points (four goals, six assists).

Thompson was the Big Ten First Star of the Week for his series at Lindenwood on Nov. 15 and 16 when the sophomore forward had two goals and three assists in the 5-2 and 3-2 wins.

In 34 games for Alaska Anchorage last season, he had nine goals and 15 assists for 24 points.

"Playing up in Alaska, you don't see those guys too much, but they had a lot of success," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik. "As a young guy up there, he was put in a lot of situations, and he produced.

"As a big kid (6-4, 215), I think he brings some size. He brings a lot of different elements to the game, and he has a 200-foot game."

Thompson adjusted quickly on the ice with his new teammates, but the magnitude of Ohio State was another story.

"I've been telling my parents it's like its own little city," he said. "The campus I was on last year had only 5,000 people. It's like night and day, but it's great. You meet new people every day when you're walking to class, and I think that's good, just to create other friendships outside of hockey."

He was looking for a change after one season at Alaska Anchorage and had insider help choosing the Buckeyes.

"I actually had a teammate from juniors (goalie Dawson Labre) who's committed here. He's not here yet, but I talked to him a bit about it," Thompson said. "He told me it's amazing. Then I got on the phone with the coaches. I liked what they were saying, what they had to offer here. It was kind of a no-brainer for me."

What's In A ...

OK, Gunnarwolfe. About that name. "It's definitely an interesting one," he said. "There's no really big story behind it, but my mom, she really loved the name Wolf.

She wanted to call me that, and somehow it turned into Gunnarwolfe.

"Everyone's convinced it's from the Mighty Ducks, the second movie, but I don't know. My mom just came up with it. She was creative. She wanted me to have something outside the box."

For the record, in the 1994 movie "D2: The Mighty Ducks," Team Iceland is coached by Wolf "The Dentist" Stansson, and one of his players is Gunnar Stahl, so take it for what it's worth.

He was asked what kind of reactions he receives when people hear his name.

"I would say nothing crazy. Everyone is just like, 'Holy cow, that's such an interesting name,'" Fontaine said. "I think I've only met one other Gunnarwolfe or something like that. I've met a lot of people that have dogs with the name Gunnar, so that's pretty funny."

Fontaine, from East Greenwich, R.I., comes from an athletic family. His mother, Deborah Tancress, is a special education teacher who played softball at Slippery Rock. His sisters played college hockey as well: Alex Tancress-Fontaine was at Union and Skylar Fontaine played at Northeastern and is now with the Zurich Lions in Switzerland.

He used the same phrase as Thompson when discussing why he chose the Buckeyes after he collected 92 points (30 goals, 62 assists) in 127 games over four seasons at Northeastern.

"It definitely was a big decision," Fontaine said. "We went in with open eyes, me and my family and my advisors, but as soon as I came here on campus and I met the coaches and a

bunch of the guys here, and I knew who was staying, it was kind of a no-brainer. It just felt like another home away from home.

"I loved the facilities, the resources that they have here at Ohio State that you don't really get anywhere else and then, obviously, the coaching staff. They know so much about the game. I just wanted to come here and grow."

An added bonus came over the summer when the Columbus Blue Jackets traded forward Patrik Laine to the Montreal Canadiens for defenseman Jordan Harris, who happened to be Northeastern's captain when Fontaine was a sophomore.

"I'm excited for him this year," Harris said. "I think he's going to have a really good year. He brings so much experience, the amount of big-time goals and the games that he's played in at Northeastern.

"I enjoyed playing with him for sure. He's not a rah-rah guy by any means, but definitely a really good teammate, easy to get along with."

For his part, Fontaine said Harris was an exemplary captain.

"Just the way he was able to approach everyone – he had such great relationships with everyone, and he treated every day like it was a job, and he acted like a pro, and he just kind of passed that along to all the younger guys, and everyone followed his footsteps," Fontaine said. "I really want to just follow in his footsteps, honestly, and just be that guy for the other guys here."

For recaps of all Ohio State series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Tragedy To Triumph: Sasso's Epic Comeback

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

On March 18, 2023, Sammy Sasso suffered a crushing defeat, making it all the way to the national title match at 149 pounds to face off against Yianni Diakomihalis of Cornell in a 4-2 decision, stopping Sasso from his first time winning it all at the college level, a dream that he had his entire life.

Able to return for another year at Ohio State, Sasso's plan was to move up to 157 pounds and compete in that weight class in his chase for a championship, but that dream was stopped in its tracks exactly five months after his title match loss on Aug. 18, 2023.

On that day, Sasso was shot in the abdomen in an attempted carjacking by two teenagers who fled the scene, making his biggest worries much bigger than whether he would be able to come out of NCAAs on top.

He was found in an alley and had to undergo emergency surgeries to repair his colon and remove the bullet that was lodged near his spine, damaging his nervous system. He spent three days in the intensive care unit and, after he made it out alive, needed physical therapy to relearn to walk.

"It's a real dose of life's reality, that things can change on a dime and (you should) be thankful and grateful for what you've got," head coach Tom Ryan told BSB in December 2023.

But the determination and will that had got Sasso to the point where he was one of the best in the country had not disappeared. He vowed that he would get back to the wrestling mat, no matter what that took.

After 454 days, Sasso completed that goal, wrestling at 165 pounds for the Buckeyes in the season-opening dual against Chattanooga on Nov. 14.

Not only did Sasso get back onto the mat, but he was also able to win his first match back, beating Jackson Hurst of the Mocs 12-6, getting three takedowns in the first period. Ryan made it clear after the dual how special the return of Sasso was.

"I've been involved with this sport for a long time, and as an individual, winning is so important as much time as you put into it. It's like, 'I want to win counties, I won the states, I won the nationals.' You've got this focus on winning as an individual, and of course as a coach, you're focused on winning as a team and winning championships.

"Then in the midst of that, there are amazing stories that occur. There are always amazing life moments that occur for each person along the journey. Tonight was amazing. It was one of the most impressive things I've ever witnessed, and that was Sammy Sasso's return to the mat, his will, his determination, just seeing him out there doing what he loves. This guy has been wrestling since he could walk, and to see him back on the mat and embracing what he loved so much was fantastic."

"I feel good that I got the first one out of the way," Sasso added after the match. "I'm definitely knocking some dust off, but it felt good to be competing again and in front of a crowd."

The last time he wrestled, Sasso was

at 149 pounds, so the jump to 165 pounds that he made could have been a tough adjustment, especially considering his circumstances. But he said that wasn't an issue for him, and being at that weight felt good for the match, despite him still seeing much room for improvement moving forward.

"I felt good size-wise," Sasso said. "My scrambling felt really good. Hurst fought hard, but end of the first period, you put him to his back, you let him get a reversal, it's a big two points right there. Then the second period, you have him on his back, don't turn it into back points then give up an escape with 20 seconds left. It was just small mistakes like that."

Sasso walked out to a deafening standing ovation at Covelli Center and scored an immediate takedown when the match began, the first of three in the first three minutes, each of which sent the crowd into another roar that led to multiple "Sammy Sasso" chants that echoed throughout the arena for much of the seven minutes of his match.

Sasso said that recognition from the crowd, especially during his walkout, didn't go unnoticed.

"It was nice. You try to stay focused because you've got seven minutes of wrestling coming up, but I've always appreciated the support and the love that I've gotten from the Ohio State fan base," he said. "I just felt appreciated."

"There's a lot of emotion," Ryan said. "I can't imagine how much emotion that was for him, and he did a really good job managing it pre-match, managing the emotions and the excitement because that can sap you before you ever walk on the mat."

There were some tough times along the way for Sasso when progress slowed to a point that was discouraging for him, or when he had to get follow-up surgeries for some time after the shooting, but he never stopped believing he would be able to make it back.

"It's been a long run, but I just always kept the faith," Sasso said. "Some days were tougher than others, but I always believed in myself that I was going to get to this position. It almost came sooner than I thought. But I just felt thankful and I'm really lucky that I was able to keep pushing past and be able to go and do what I love again, representing the Block O."

Along the way, Sasso was always in the building supporting his teammates when he was out. Seeing him work so hard to try to get back to the wrestler he was before the injuries was something that motivated the team, Ryan said in December 2023.

"Sammy has been really incredible," he said. "He's an incredible example. He's in the room every day. He's helping the guys technically with stuff, he's walking around. He's part of the team. They're watching someone who would be ranked first in the country who's not struggling to walk, but he's not walking the way he used to walk."

"It's incredibly valuable. You can talk about scenarios in life when you're coaching people. 'Imagine this and imagine that.' But when you're walking alongside it, and you're actually experiencing it, and you're witnessing it, it's a powerful thing. Gratitude is a



FILE PHOTO

MIRACLE ON MAT — After surviving being shot in the abdomen during an attempted car-jacking in August 2023, Sammy Sasso made a triumphant return to the mat on Nov. 14.

real thing, and authenticity is real, and love is real, and they're witnessing that firsthand. They're feeling it. It's been really powerful for our team."

Sasso would also go on to win his next two matches after his return, beating Max Kirby of Edinboro 13-9 on Nov. 17, then a week later – after being ranked No. 11 in the 165-pound weight class – won his third straight match, a 14-4 major decision over Kyle Moster of Hofstra. It was his 50th career dual win.

But the reality of Sasso's situation is still with him today even though he has recovered to the point where he can once again compete at the highest level of collegiate wrestling.

The nerve damage he suffered isn't gone quite yet, and he still can't get the same push off of his left leg that he used to be able to. Because of that, he's having to learn new things that he didn't used to have to do on the mat to work around it.

Sasso said it isn't so bad that he wouldn't get onto the mat, but Ryan acknowledged that it is something the wrestler is having to learn how to deal with as he goes, and he is doing well with that.

"We're witnessing someone who's learning what is possible with the body he has now," Ryan said. "We're five, six months away from nationals. I think we're going to continue to see him get better. The nerves are healing a little bit at a time, but they're healing."

"We saw him (Nov. 14) do a couple of things that we hadn't seen him do before, because he's learning new ways to manipulate positions to his strengths now when you can't really drive and push with power with your leg. Technically, we saw some posi-

itive things."

Sasso said that he has been practicing with sophomore 174-pounder Rocco Welsh, who was a national runner-up last season as a true freshman, only losing 2-0 to Carter Starocci of Penn State, the No. 1 pound-for-pound wrestler in the country, in the title match.

Sasso said that he has done well in those matches against Welsh in practice, using those as evidence that his nerve damage isn't slowing him down enough to be a major issue.

Ryan believes that due to the way Sasso wrestles, he is actually not that much worse off since he is good at scoring in situations in which he doesn't need extra push off of his legs.

"If we look at wrestling styles, his style, if you've got a bad leg, he's fortunate that his style of wrestling bodes well for that," Ryan said. "Typically, he often scores when someone's in on his leg. Where, if that was some of our other guys, that would be a problem. Some of them are just really good shooters."

Sasso's goal was to get back to the mat by any means necessary, but he isn't stopping there after he has been through so much. Being the competitor he is, Sasso is setting some high standards for what he wants to do next.

"Just keep scoring points and be ready to win a national title come March," he said. "I wrestled OK (Nov. 14), but I was squeezing a little bit too much, trying to keep things in my control. I'm best when I'm just floating one position to the next. I didn't think I did a good job of that, but it's the first match back, so I'll get it under control."

Londot Gets Net Results For Women's Volleyball

By CAMERON MOONE

Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

For graduate outsider hitter Emily Londot, Ohio State volleyball has been a roller coaster of an experience in her collegiate career.

Coming to Ohio State for the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season, which was delayed until 2021, Londot and Co. went 16-4 while losing in the NCAA regional semifinal to Florida. In 2021, the Buckeyes went 27-6, once again losing in the regional semifinals, this time to No. 8 seed Georgia Tech in a sweep.

Londot, who up to that point had lost only 10 collegiate matches, had considered other schools before coming to Ohio State but always knew she was at the right spot.

"Not necessarily," Londot told BSB when asked if it was always a dream to play for Ohio State.

"In the back of my mind, I knew it was a really cool opportunity, but I definitely looked at other schools in my recruiting process, and it was a tough decision, until it wasn't. Everyone in my family obviously wanted me to go here. It's close to home.

"(My family) can support me, but I was really enamored with all the other schools that were looking at me and until I decided that I wanted to stay here and fight for a spot on Ohio State. That moment was when it became a dream."

Close to home it was for Londot, who grew up less than an hour's drive away from Columbus in Utica, Ohio, where she was a four-year letter winner and four-time All-Ohio honoree, including three first-team nods. It wasn't just state recognition for Londot, though, as the outside hitter also received a 2019 Under Armour first-team All-America honor and was a 2018 and 2019 gold medalist with the U.S. Girls Youth National Team.

In those two previously mentioned collegiate seasons, Londot played a big role despite being just a freshman and sophomore. She played in all 20 matches as a freshman, notching 10-plus kills in every match while being named the Big Ten Freshman of the Year.

As if her freshman campaign couldn't get any more impressive, Londot was selected first-team All-Big Ten by a unanimous vote, another aspect of her career that would become a mainstay down the line.

"When we're playing our best, it's because (Londot is) playing her best," said Ohio State head coach Jen Flynn Oldenburg. "That's the wear and tear of being the person you lean on if you have a down match. I wouldn't even say that she's had a bad match, but a little bit down than what you expect as a player. I think that takes a toll on a younger team, and so when she's playing her best, so are we."

As a sophomore, milestones began to be hit for Londot. The 6-3 Londot tallied her 100th career block vs. VCU on Sept. 11, 2021, and led the team in both kills per set (3.58) and points per set (4.21) while

being second in total kills (379). These stats earned her second-team All-Big Ten honors, a dip from her previous season's hardware but with a better team record to boast of.

In 2022, though, things began to shift for Ohio State women's volleyball in the regular season. After losing just the 10 total games between 2020-21, the team matched that loss total that season, going 22-10. However, it would be the most successful postseason that Londot had seen so far in her collegiate career, reaching as far as the NCAA regional final, a heart-breaking 3-1 loss to top-seeded Texas.



Emily Londot

Londot reached the 1,000th career kill mark against Michigan State on Nov. 5, 2022, and topped 1,100 kills just 21 days later against Wisconsin. Like her earlier seasons, getting 10 or more kills in a match was a common occurrence, reaching the double-digit kill mark in 29 of the team's 32 matches.

Carrying the weight of the team's success was nothing new to Londot, as it was a skill she garnered while playing meaningful time as an underclassman and learning from some of her upperclassmen mentors.

"When I was an underclassman, like when I was a freshman and sophomore, still carrying a decent load, the upperclassmen during those years really put so much confidence and faith in me," Londot said. "Even as a freshman, I could stand out and shine, and I've just carried that through and even built on that in my five years. It comes with a little bit of pressure. I think I put too much pressure on myself sometimes to make those points, but I wouldn't want it any other way."

Some of those mentors, such as middle blocker Lauren Witte (2017-2020) and defensive specialist Kylie Murr (2019-2022), gave Londot the skills and memories that have allowed her to turn into the player that she is today.

"I'd say my freshman year Lauren Witte, she was a middle and she stood out a lot in the lineup," Londot said. "We were next to each other, so in those big games, we would have the most interactions in between points, and she would always just help me get past a mistake and say, 'Let's go get this next block.' I think just her forward thinking has stuck with me all five years.

"Now I'm trying to do that for the younger players, because volleyball is a game of errors, and you can't stick on those too long. Also, Kylie Murr. She's just a badass. She's lifted me up. She just put that confidence in me that I was talking about."

2022 was once again another first-team All-Big Ten season for Londot, who led Ohio State in nearly every statistical category – kills (463), kills per set (3.92), points (527.5) and points per set (4.47).

After the deep postseason run for the Buckeyes, the 2023 season was set up to be just as successful, with Ohio State returning key contributors Londot, Sara Sue Morbitzer and Rylee Rader. But when Gabby Gonzales (388 kills in 2022) trans-

ferred to Oregon and Murr to Minnesota before the 2023 season, Londot could have decided to leave Columbus as well.

Instead, she didn't.

"There's nothing like Ohio State and the people here," Londot said. "Not even in volleyball, but just like the opportunities that Ohio State's given me has been great, and I could not imagine myself on a team with any other group of girls or any other coaches in college. I saw the potential that this group had, and that's why I stayed."

"The impact that I've had this year will help them be great for the next three or four years, when the girls that I've made an impact on are still here and growing in their senior years. I just couldn't imagine myself anywhere else."

Ohio State's 2023 season was less than ideal, going 11-18 and 8-12 in Big Ten play, but Londot remained a strength not just for the Buckeyes but for college women's volleyball, as well. She once again earned unanimous first-team All-Big Ten honors while ranking fourth in the country in kills per set (5.06) and sixth in points per set (5.51).

The Buckeyes failed to reach the postseason that year for the first time in Londot's career at Ohio State, ending the season on a 1-4 stretch, with three sweeps during that span.

But for the now fifth-year Londot, despite the wins and losses, her tenure at Ohio State shifted more to a leadership position and building a legacy than looking for a new start somewhere else.

"I've been carrying a big load for the last two years," Londot said. "I think just me going out there and showing the underclassmen what I can do allows them to go and make their mistakes and be aggressive so they can shine as well. When teams are focused on me, it opens up their blocks so they have more opportunities to score. I think that's one way I've just led through that."

Not only has Londot felt that she's led,

but it's been noticed by the coaching staff as well.

"That's part of just the experience she's had here," Oldenburg said. "It's been a really positive one. So it helps waking up every day knowing that you enjoy going to the gym and you want to get better, but it also speaks to what she wants to do with her career. She's not done playing, and she wants to play pro. Five years of college is certainly a long time, but she has a long career ahead of her if she wants it in the professional world."

"(The 2024 season) was the next step to get her ready for that. I feel like her growth in probably the last three seasons, and the last two especially, she's just really prepared herself for a professional career. (She's just) taking care of her body, understanding what she needs on a daily basis."

Through 2024 as BSB went to press, Ohio State was sitting at 14-14 (7-11 Big Ten) with five or six wins in the previous eight matches. Londot once again looks on track to be an All-Big Ten honoree, as she has recorded 10-plus kills in every match this season while totaling a team-high 480 kills, a number that is 275 more than the closest Buckeye in Rader.

Despite these statistics, Londot's last season in scarlet and gray does not rival her first two in Columbus when it comes to team success. But regardless of the team's record or her all-time statistics, she feels like what has made her college career worthwhile has been what's happened off the court.

"My mind goes straight to after the games, when all the little girls are coming up to you," Londot said. "Win or lose, they are invested in us, and they love to see us out there. That just makes my heart happy, because they dream of one day being where you are, and that used to be us. So I think knowing all we've accomplished and all I've accomplished, they see that."



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Sick Of Appetizers, Bring On The Main Course

There was an occasion in my 20s when I went to a music festival to see a couple of bands I liked. They were late on the card, and none of the lower-rung bands playing before them interested me, but I had to sit through them just the same. When the main act came onstage, my ears perked up and I was as into it as anyone else in attendance.

THE FACTS MAN
Mike Wachsmann

I imagine that's how Ohio State fans are feeling this week now that the "preliminaries" are out of the way. The *raison d'être* for Buckeyes fans is the annual showdown with hated rival Michigan, and the 11 opening acts have left the stage, giving way to the Buckeyes and Wolverines, two acts that can headline any venue in America.

OSU fans have been a salty lot the last 365 days, partly because Michigan won for a third straight time and partly because the Wolverines then went on to hoist the national championship trophy. Yeah, there is still some suspicion about whether they did it on the up and up, but until/unless the NCAA says otherwise Michigan is officially the national champ.

That sticks in the craw of any Buckeyes backer, and rightly so. After winning his first meeting against U-M in convincing fashion – and after the Wolverines backed out in 2020 – Ryan Day has encountered some turbulence. He's lost nine games in his coaching career, a third of them to Michigan. Fans think that cannot happen, and if it continues to, he will not be coaching in Columbus much longer.

Seconds after knocking off Indiana, OSU minds shifted to the Maize and Blue.

"When there were triple zeros on that clock, it was on," Day said. "We know what's coming up and how important this week is for everybody – Buckeye Nation and most importantly our team – and it's our obligation to play

really well next week and win that game."

OSU fans can come up with dozens of reasons why this game is so important, but Day knows there are 20 million reasons why his team has to come through. That's the reported investment that was made into the roster this season, and anything short of a national title will make that investment seem a bad one.

While I differ from many people in believing that a national title would be great regardless of whether Ohio State beat the Wolverines, I also understand that part of the job description is to knock off your rival with some regularity (unless you're Earle Bruce, who had a winning record against the Wolverines but was canned anyway. But I digress.)

That roster, consisting of returning talent and transfer portal acquisitions, is one of the two or three best in college football. But talent alone does not win football games. There has to be a desire, a want to, a moxie to keep driving through when adversity hits.

One new face to the rivalry says that he wants to help the Buckeyes win simply because he loves being around his teammates.

"This one's for those guys that came back," quarterback Will Howard said. "This rivalry game is the first thing I heard when I came here. It's the first goal we have every single year. Beat The Team Up North. You can say anything about records, but that's going to be a hard game every single year. They're going to bring it, and we're going to bring it. I want to do this for Coach Day. I want to do this for all the guys that came back – for Emeka (Egbuka), for Tre (Henderson), for JT Tuimoloau, for Jack (Sawyer), for those guys who came back. I want this for them so bad because they've been here. I've seen it from a distance, and I feel it. I'm a part of it now, and I want this for me, too, but I want this for those guys. I want it for Coach Day. To shut up the haters, to be able to go out there and say this is the Ohio State Buckeyes. This game means everything, and we talk about it all the time. I'm just honored to be a part of it, and I won't take it lightly."

House Of Horrors

Ohio Stadium has in recent years gotten

a lot of criticism for being too placid, for only getting up when Michigan or a name opponent comes to town. To be honest, there is a stark difference between the way the Horseshoe sounds week to week vs. how Penn State's Beaver Stadium or LSU's Tiger Stadium sounds.

So I will hand it to Buckeye Nation – it played a hand in rattling Indiana, and the Buckeyes did the rest.

"I thought the crowd was awesome," Day said. "The fact that Indiana had to go to a silent count made a difference in the game. And they certainly tried to clap early but couldn't. They went to a silent cadence, and that made a huge difference. I give the credit to the fans. They brought great energy."

Downs Is Up

His stats may not scream "super talent," but folks who watch football and know what to look for know that safety Caleb Downs is one hell of a football player.

He's Ohio State's surest tackler, and he is cerebral on the field. He seldom takes a bad angle, and he can fight through traffic on the way to the ball carrier as well as any linebacker can. He is like a second coach in Jim Knowles' system and is a big reason the Buckeye D is tops in all of college football.

Downs is soft-spoken and doesn't look for attention, but his teammates know how good he is.

"He's a special player," Howard said. "He might be one of the best football players I've been around. He's so instinctual, so smart. You see what he does with the ball in his hands. He's special. He's a difference-maker. I can't emphasize how happy I am that he's on my team."

I have the honor of voting for a number of college football awards (though not the Heisman Trophy – yet), and recently submitted my ballot for the Bednarik Award, given to college football's outstanding defensive player. Downs was on the first line of my three selections and was the easiest choice to make.

When Downs entered the transfer portal following Alabama's loss in the CFP semifinals, he was immediately the most coveted player. And why not? As a true freshman for the Crimson Tide, he led the team in tackles (107), broke up three passes, had a pair of interceptions and 3½ tackles for loss. He was all over the field for Nick Saban's final team and was a big reason it achieved so highly.

Jumping aboard the Ohio State train was sure to keep him in the spotlight, and though his overall numbers are not gaudy (51 tackles, third on the team), the way he leads the defense and makes the necessary plays cannot be overstated. He is the Buckeyes' most valuable defensive player and should be in line for consensus All-America honors.

And the best thing? He's back next season.

Earn It First

Part of me likes Curt Cignetti and the fact that he seems genuine and doesn't care what people think. He made waves when he was hired by Indiana, listing his record at other stops and saying, "I win. Google me." For a program screaming for change, he was a breath of fresh air.

But there is also a part of me that dislikes him – the part that thinks maybe you should earn something before spouting off.

Shortly after being hired, Cignetti addressed a crowd at Assembly Hall and said,

"Purdue sucks," which got the fans riled up, of course. He added, "Michigan sucks and Ohio State sucks." It's not difficult to tell what he was doing, and it was certainly calculated.

Fast-forward to this year's game, and the Hoosiers came out ready to play. They marched down the field on their first drive and put it in the end zone, and the natives in Ohio Stadium were restless much earlier than they wanted to be. After that, Indiana was largely shut down and had a self-inflicted wound that turned the momentum when punter James Evans watched a snap go over his head. The Buckeyes recovered and ended up scoring and added a dazzling punt-return touchdown from Downs to make it 21-7 right after halftime instead of 14-7 or even 7-7.

Indiana scored late to close the gap to 31-15, going for two after the touchdown and attempting an onside kick, unsuccessfully, immediately after. The Buckeyes were content to run the ball, and TreVeyon Henderson broke through a gaping hole right up the middle and looked headed for pay dirt but slid down at the 1-yard line to run more clock. OSU could have taken a knee, but decided to run a pair of quarterback sneaks, the second of which was successful and provided the game's final margin.

Cignetti appeared agitated by this, which begs the question – if you're going for two late in the game and attempting an onside kick, isn't anything fair game? Is only one team allowed to score late?


Maybe if Cignetti hadn't flapped his gums so much before the game, the Buckeyes might have been content to walk out with a 31-15 victory. But as Day said, the final score came in an effort to "leave no doubt."

Indiana has been a great story this season and has added some life to what has become a pretty stale Big Ten. It has not, however, arrived, and until it actually wins something of substance Cignetti would be wise to keep his emotions and mouth in check. Otherwise, he may find himself agitated a few more times in the coming seasons.

Super Sixteen

1. Oregon (11-0)
2. Ohio State (10-1)
3. Georgia (9-2)
4. Texas (10-1)
5. Notre Dame (10-1)
6. Penn State (10-1)
7. Miami (10-1)
8. SMU (10-1)
9. Tennessee (9-2)
10. Indiana (10-1)
11. Clemson (9-2)
12. Arizona State (9-2)
13. Boise State (10-1)
14. Alabama (8-3)
15. South Carolina (8-3)
16. Iowa State (9-2)

Some huge rivalry games take place in the final weekend of the regular season, including Georgia/Georgia Tech, Texas/Texas A&M, Notre Dame/USC, Clemson/South Carolina and Alabama/Auburn. It's my favorite weekend of the season as it is primed for upsets, as well as being full of tradition and pageantry. On the downside, it means that there are precious few Saturdays left to enjoy college football. But that can be pushed to the side for now, as it is Rivalry Week and, specifically for Ohio State, Michigan week.



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Blue In The Face Until Buckeyes Win Again

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Some of you may remember that back in August, when we put out our annual Football Preview issue, I passed on previewing the 2024 edition of the Ohio State football team to go on a personal rant of sorts instead. There would be plenty of other analysis of the team throughout the paper, I promised.

Now we reach the Michigan preview, and I am going to do the same thing. There is plenty of coverage of the Indiana game in this issue. I am going to use my space to go on the same rant I did back in August. In fact, I am going to simply reprint an edited (for length) version of the that column because I feel exactly the same way in late November.

As we approach the 2024 version of The Game I am completely obsessed with one thing:

I CAN'T TAKE A FOURTH STRAIGHT LOSS TO MICHIGAN!

Why this obsession?

Well for one thing, I arrived in Columbus in 1976, in the heart of the famed 10-Year War. It was hard not to get caught up in the rivalry if you were around back then. The Buckeyes lost the first three editions of The Game after I got here, and even an outsider like me could tell that Buckeye fans were getting edgy. By the time they lost the third straight game, 14-3, in 1978, I was savvy enough to believe that if Woody hadn't been on a three-game losing streak against Michigan he might have survived smacking that kid in the Gator Bowl. But people were ready to make a move. That's the environment in which I was indoctrinated to The Game.

It has stuck with me ever since.

Some of my current obsession has to do with a hangover from the John Cooper years. That wasn't a particularly pleasant time to be a Buckeye fan, or the publisher of an Ohio State newspaper that had to *listen* to Buckeye fans. Once Jim Tressel replaced Cooper in 2001 and 310 days later started the Ohio State onslaught on Michigan with a win at the Big House, I wanted to pour it on. A reciprocal 10-2-1 record against the Wolverines was not going to be enough for me. And Tressel and Urban Meyer did not disappoint. The two legendary coaches went a combined 16-1 against the Wolverines, with Luke Fickell losing once and Ryan Day winning once before COVID interrupted the series. And I loved it (the winning, not COVID). I knew the Buckeyes would have to lose at some point, but three in a row? That just isn't for me. But I don't think the ending of the magical run is what makes me so on edge about possibly losing a fourth in a row.

Jim Harbaugh has something to do with it.

Anyone who has read this column through the years knows I'm not wild about Harbaugh dating back to 1986, when as quarterback of the Wolverines, he guaranteed a victory over the Buckeyes. You just didn't do that back then. It was disrespectful to The Game. What really annoyed me is he backed it up! That was 38 years ago, and I still hold a grudge.

He comes back to take over his alma mater in 2015, and the man who is now suddenly dubbed one of the best coaches in the nation, college or pro, promptly loses five games in a row to the Buckeyes and most likely would have lost a sixth had he not chickened out of the 2020 game because of the pandemic. How quickly people forget that the Michigan favorite son was struggling so badly that he was forced to take a pay cut.

But it's not really my grudge against Harbaugh that makes me dread a fourth straight loss, though he is a part of my issue. It's the arrogance of the team, the school and its fans, which was on full display last season. Michigan fans probably think Ohio State fans are obnoxious. But by school tradition Wolverine fans are arrogant. If I had my choice, I'd take being obnoxious.

First of all, even if the Wolverines *do* win a fourth in a row, they would still have a long way to go to equal the 17 wins in 19 outings that the Buckeyes had posted previously. But they conveniently forget that up north.

Their fearless leader served two different suspensions in one season in 2023, and they act as if this is nothing out of the ordinary.

The first suspension concerned recruiting violations during COVID, charges that Harbaugh simply denied, even though the facts in the NCAA investigation said otherwise.

"By denying his conduct, which was plainly supported by the record, Harbaugh violated NCAA ethical conduct legislation and thereby amplified the severity of his case," the NCAA decision on the recruiting violations read.

This is somebody to look up to? But there was more, and another suspension.

A huge sign-stealing scandal breaks out in the middle of the season, and they just ignore it up there. They had a championship to win, by hook or by crook.

Did cheating have anything to do with Michigan winning the championship? We may never know. But I don't see how Harbaugh could not have known what was going on. After all, he was on the headset. If someone was changing Michigan plays upon reading the opposition's signals, how could he not have known that? And if he *didn't* know about the stolen signals, then he is guilty of either stupidity, deceit or lack of control of his program. Yet no one up there seems to care. The national championship seems tainted, but again, no one cares. They are above it all.

"I do not apologize," Harbaugh said when asked about the NCAA's sign-stealing notice to the Wolverines. "I did not participate. I was not aware nor complicit in those said allegations."

You are the head man of the operation. You are responsible for the entire program. You are arrogant and they love you for it – love that and the possibly tainted championship that Wolverine Nation seemed so desperate to win.

I tried to step back from my clearly biased view and figure out if I was being unfair.

Then a bombshell dropped. Michigan was going to have Harbaugh return to serve as honorary captain for its opener against Fresno State on Aug. 31. Decisions like that aren't made quickly by just a few people. A lot of people had to have signed off on that decision and *no one* apparently thought that was inappropriate.

In fact, the athletic director himself seemed excited about his rules-violating former coach – who abandoned his program ahead of surefire sanctions – returning to Ann Arbor.

"I look forward to seeing him," AD Warde Manuel said during a podcast appearance. "He'll be an honorary captain for our first game. I look forward to having him back in Ann Arbor for that game."

Ultimately, cooler heads prevailed, though it is unclear exactly who figured out this was utterly inappropriate. Was it Michigan? Was it his new team, the L.A. Chargers? Was it Harbaugh himself? But the fact there was the *possibility* of Harbaugh being honored was – well, arrogant.

Hopefully, you understand why I *deeply* don't want to lose to this team and its backers a fourth time.

There seems to be a split along age lines among Buckeye fans, I would say at about 50 years old. Those over 50 – like me – think beating Michigan is the most important thing each season.

Beat the rivals and everything else will fall in place.

Those under 50 are often of the school that it's national championship or bust. With the new 12-team playoff formula, the Buckeyes could lose to the Wolverines and still win the crown. So, what's the big deal if we lose a fourth in a row they wonder?

If you don't win the national championship, but you win The Game, you still have your win over Michigan. Lose the national championship *and* lose to Michigan and what do you have? A new coach?

Michigan Memories

I love the Michigan Memories Issue of BSB. Over the years we have interviewed dozens upon dozens of Buckeyes, from Heisman Trophy winners to guys on the bench. The passion and intensity, the jubilation over victories, and agony of defeat come out in each Michigan Memory, and as you read them you understand why this is the greatest rivalry in sports.

For several years now I have had this dream of doing a Michigan Memory feature with the Boren family, starting with father Mike, a Michigan great, and running through Jacoby, a member of Ohio State's 2014 national championship team. The family is able to provide a unique perspective of both sides of the rivalry and I have always been fascinated by the way the family executed a complete pivot from being a family all-in with Michigan to a family completely all-in with the Buckeyes, and they did that pivot on a dime.

I was never able to pull off my vision.

Enter Zach Boren. This year I sold him on the idea, and he was relentless in getting the rest of the family to participate. It is not easy to get busy people to find the time to be interviewed, but Zach stayed at it. He finally lined up Mike and brothers Justin and Jacoby. I think the result is a unique feature in the long line of Michigan Memories.

Thanks, Zach, for not giving up on me and this project.

You can read all four features for yourself, but I wanted to point out two interesting thoughts from Zach.

Playing for both of them, he was in the unique position to observe how both Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer, two of the most successful coaches in the storied rivalry, handled The Game.

"The similarities were they both despised Michigan and had such an intensity for that game that they wanted to win it so bad that they almost demanded that out of their team. They would make sure you were ready for that game because they wanted it just as bad as you did and they knew what that game meant," he said.

"Now, preparation-wise, they both got that message across doing completely different things. Coach Tress was very much, 'This is who we are. We need to be great at who we are. Being us is going to win this game. We're going to hit harder than them. We're going to run faster than them. We're going to execute better than them. We're going to do all those things,' whereas Coach Meyer was basically, 'I don't care what it takes. I don't care what we have to do. We're going to scrape. We're going to claw. We're going to throw haymakers. We're going to get in a backyard fist fight, and we're going to freaking win this football game.' They had two totally different attitudes towards that game, but in the grand scheme of things, it's the same mission. It's the same execution styles of, 'Hey, we have to do everything we can to win this football game.'"

Zach also did a nice job of summing up the

rivalry.

"I don't know if there's more of a game that you play during a season where you respect anyone more, and what I mean by that is you get into that game and you hate each other so much, but on the back end, you respect each other so much because it's Ohio State and Michigan. It's the blue bloods of college football, like you are the elite of the elite and you are putting everything on the line. It's one of those games where you have this massive hate for the other team but also such a huge respect for them because of who they are, what they do.

"And that's one thing that I love about it is you just respect the hell out of them and that's what makes the winning of that game even more special because it's not like you're beating Purdue. It's not like you're being Illinois. You're beating Michigan, and that's the great thing about it is when you have so much respect for an opponent and you actually beat them, there's just no better reward."

And finally, I can't capture the Boren family without including a quote from patriarch Mike.

One of the most iconic plays in Ohio State-Michigan history came in the 1981 game, when Art Schlichter scored the winning touchdown running behind fullback Vaughn Broadnax, who took out two Wolverines to facilitate the score. After all these years, it is interesting to hear a description of the famous play from a Michigan point of view.

"We had it covered pretty well," Boren remembered of the play. "I was right there. The thing is, I had an outside 'backer (teammate Carlton Rose) outside of me – in my way, really. Broadnax was blocking Rose, and I lunged for (Schlichter). Got an arm on him, but he got away. If Schlichter had turned back inside, I would have nailed him. I would have taken his (bleeping) head off."

And altered Ohio State-Michigan history.

By the way, just so you don't think that Boren was some slouch for the Wolverines, after all these years he still holds the second (171, 1982) and seventh (152, 1981) highest tackle totals for a season in Michigan history.

While Ty Howard is not a Boren, he had an interesting entry into the Michigan Memories collection. He played in the heart of the Cooper era, earning a pair of Gold Pants in 1994. He offered his perspective on why the Buckeyes struggled in The Game during the Cooper years.

"In hindsight, I think one of the reasons we didn't have as much success as we should have had against Michigan during my tenure is that – not the players per se – but I would say Coach Cooper, the tone of how he prepared just changed," Howard said. "The pressure of being a head coach in that game, I couldn't imagine the intensity of that, and he's human. But in the same breath, we changed our practice habits. The saying of buttholes getting tight, buttholes got tight, and it showed."

Howard, with his victory over the Wolverines, was luckier than fellow Columbus native Roger Harper, who never experienced a victory over the rivals.

"I want a pair of those gold pants, man, and I never got a pair, which sucks," said Harper, now 32 years removed from his OSU playing days. "That's something that I missed out on, winning The Game. I don't know what that experience is like.

"Even though we've won some games over the years against them – that feels good and all – but personally, I will never get that experience, ever. It came and went, and I don't know what that feels like. And that kind of bothers me. It bothers me that I don't have a pair of gold pants."

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