

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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PERIODICAL NEWSPAPER
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Vol. 44, No. 14

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Jan. 25, 2025



OSU Caps Improbable CFP Run With 34-23 Defeat Of Irish To Win First Title Since 2014

SONNY BROCKWAY

LOOKING UP — What seemed impossible on a bleak Nov. 30 afternoon became a reality on Jan. 20: Coach Ryan Day and his band of brothers in possession of the College Football Playoff trophy, emblematic of the best team in the nation.

By PATRICK ENGELS
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Just under two months ago, on Nov. 30, 2024, Ohio State head football coach Ryan Day stood near the South end zone of Ohio Stadium in an apparent state of shock over what had just occurred to his team on its home field that afternoon.

Day, who was looking into the crowd with a defeated stare next to sophomore cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. and near Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork during the team's "Carmen Ohio" postgame tradi-

tion, had just witnessed his program crater to rock bottom in his six-year tenure as the Buckeyes' leader after suffering an almost unimaginable 13-10 loss to its archrival, 6-5 Michigan.

It was a stunning defeat that — like the previous three losses to the Wolverines in 2021-23 — put them out of contention for an elusive Big Ten championship while also igniting harsh, sometimes over-the-top criticism of Day, his staff and his players for their inability to emerge victorious in The Game.

"Everybody wants to win this game in the worst way, and nobody wants to win it more than we do, and it's our No. 1 goal every year,"

Day said after the loss. "When you don't do that, there's disappointment and frustration. I don't blame anybody for being upset. I'm upset more than anybody, and those players are too, and the coaches and everybody that goes at it. So we know what we're getting ourselves into here."

As Day predicted, what followed after that fateful frigid afternoon in Columbus was one of the ugliest few weeks in recent Buckeye history. The calls for Day's job grew much louder and much more vicious, with many claiming that the 45-year-old coach simply did not have what it takes to handle the pressure that comes with being a head coach of a college football powerhouse such as Ohio State.

Those criticisms also grew louder for the players, many of whom had made it clear both during the offseason and throughout the season that the main reason they came back and opted out of the NFL draft was to finally emerge victorious against their rivals after three straight years of coming up short, only for them to play what was by far their worst collective game of the season against the heavy underdog Wolverines.

As emotions ran high in Columbus and throughout Ohio in the weeks following The Game, Day and the Buckeyes seemed to be at a crossroads in this "natty or bust" 2024 season.

With the first-ever 12-team College Football Playoff bracket quickly approaching and support for the program seemingly dwindling with each passing day after the Michigan loss, Ohio State had two options on how to move forward with its season.

On one hand, the Buckeyes could have rolled over in their first-round matchup against Tennessee on Dec. 21 and ended their season with two straight brutal home losses, which would have undoubtedly increased the calls for Day's job and forever put a sour taste in the mouths of those players who decided to run it back for one last season.

On the other hand, they could use the Michigan loss as a motivating tool heading into the postseason that could springboard them to rewrite their story and forever im-

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

After years of getting close to the mountaintop, Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day finally found themselves at the peak of the college football world on Jan. 20 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium when they handed Marcus Freeman and Notre Dame a 34-23 defeat to secure their first national title since the 2014 season. Here are some choices from Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players, coaches and others who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the championship win.

Patrick Engels, BSB: Throughout this season, Ohio State transfer quarterback Will Howard said one of the main reasons he came to Columbus was to compete for a national championship and play under the spotlight for the Scarlet and Gray.

He got that opportunity in the spotlight on Jan. 20 against Notre Dame in the national title game, and boy, did he make the most of it. The former Kansas State Wildcat was nearly spotless under the bright lights at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, making several tough throws and finding many different receivers to complete 17 of his 21 passes for 231 yards and two touchdowns.

Howard was efficient throughout, but he was flawless at the start, completing each of his first 13 passes to six different receivers, one of those going for a touchdown on an easy 8-yarder to Jeremiah Smith. That stretch was good for the most completions to start a national championship game in CFP history, eclipsing Mac Jones' 12 straight passes in the 2020 title game against Ohio State.

Howard operated smoothly in the pocket and made it look easy at times in the biggest game of his football life, which certainly deserves some praise.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: Senior running back TreVeyon Henderson was the engine behind Ohio State's offensive attack in its previous three playoff games, but in the national championship game, it was junior running back Quinshon Judkins who stole the show. The transfer from Ole Miss rushed for a team-high 100 yards on 11 carries and scored three total touchdowns, one of which was a receiving touchdown.

Judkins' biggest play came on the second play of the second half when he cut through a massive hole created by the Buckeye offensive line for a 70-yard run to get to the Notre Dame 5-yard line.

Judkins capitalized on his huge gain three plays later with a 1-yard touchdown to give the Buckeyes a 28-7 advantage.

The Buckeyes' big lead was in part due to the efforts of Judkins on his previous touchdown run from 9 yards out in the second quarter. On the run, Judkins stiff-armed a Notre Dame defender at the 10-yard line, cut outside and fought through contact in the last 4 yards to get in for the score.

Judkins' 100 rushing yards allowed him to eclipse the 1,000-yard mark for the season.

Cameron Moone, BSB: It's hard to wrap your mind around the maturity that a 19-year-old can have.

Just about a year removed from early enrolling at Ohio State as a quiet, humble kid from Opa Locka, Fla., Jeremiah Smith erased all expectations for what a freshman should be in his first season as a Buckeye, and no performance was bigger than the one he put up during Ohio State's 34-23 victory over Notre Dame in the national championship on Jan. 20.

In a Buckeye Leaf-worthy effort, Smith dealt with quiet stretches throughout games just as well as anybody – another testament to his maturity. It was Smith's play in the crucial moments that catapulted Ohio State into college football legend; an 8-yard touchdown catch to even the game after Notre Dame's opening touchdown and a 56-yard catch on a fade in the closing moments of the fourth quarter.

Smith's lone touchdown of the day benefited from an excellent play design by offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, as the freshman phenom motioned into the backfield and then leaked out for a wide-open catch and leisurely stroll into the end zone.

The fade route? Just a pure man-beater.

All in all, Smith finished the day with five catches, 88 yards and the score to wrap up his fantastic freshman season at 76 receptions for 1,315 yards and 15 touchdowns, all Ohio State freshman receiving records that will be tough to beat for years to come.

Greg Wilson, BSB: My pick is a little unconventional for this exercise, but for the first national championship in the Ryan Day era, the head coach himself gets my Buckeye Leaf. He might not have a helmet to stick it on, but he earned one nonetheless.

He obviously didn't put up a single stat for this team, but after his fourth straight loss to Michigan on Nov. 30, he rallied a squad that was down in the dumps and turned them into the unquestioned best team in college football, and with the way the four games in the College Football Playoff went, there's no arguing with that.

Before the first-round game against Tennessee, a very large group of Buckeye fans were calling for Day's job, but he put his head down, ignored the noise and won a national championship, going through possibly the toughest four-game stretch in college football history in the first-ever 12-team playoff. And in each game – as he asked from his team all season – left no doubt.

BSB Subscribers:

Tiffin Buckeye: Ryan Day and the seniors who came back. I never doubted Coach Day for a second, never wavered and always knew he was the man who could win a national title for my favorite team since I can remember.

What that man has had to endure from a young age to now is insane. A lot of us would've folded after that Michigan game, but he never did and I hope he's here for a long time. He'll always have a supporter in me.

To the seniors who came back and Will Howard – thank you so

much for your loyalty and sacrifice to bring this home to Buckeye Nation. I've never been so proud to be a fan of Ohio State.

Bob Cody: Ryan Day, the entire coaching staff he assembled, Will Howard – passing AND running, Quinshon Judkins – three TDs. Cody Simon. Jayden Fielding – two field goals and all touchback kickoffs. Jeremiah Smith – his fake and touchdown catch in the first half, and the dagger reception he made in the final minutes! There is much joy in Cowtown and Buckeye Nation!!!!

PeyoteBuck: There is no doubt that Howard and Judkins ruled the night and receive my Leaves. And Jayden Fielding for sealing the deal at the end, giving the Bucks a two-score lead. It was a team effort with all the players and coaches. That's how you win a national championship. Congrats Bucks!

Poster That Harley Built: The no longer patchwork offensive line. They were solid from the start of the Tennessee game to the blocking on the bomb to Jeremiah Smith to clinch the Notre Dame game and the national title.

BuckeyeScott: Everyone clearly gets Buckeye Leaves when you win a national championship: players, coaches, staff and Buckeye Nation! I'm also going to add that the staff at BSB should get Buckeye Leaves for keeping us all up to date on the inner workings of The Ohio State Buckeyes!

Byron McNutt: Buckeye Scott is right. It was a total team effort. Everyone gets a Leaf. Irish fans have to wonder why their offensive coordinator didn't open up the passing attack much earlier, especially throwing passes to Greathouse.

John Lanning: Many fine suggestions in the recommendations. A national championship takes many, many people to earn the title. My Leaves go to the unsung people and players who make the sacrifices so the stars can shine. Congratulations to them all.

bstu9: A little unorthodox here but my Buckeye Leaf goes to Devin Brown. With the transfer portal, it is so easy for players to bail on their teammates (see Beau Pribula at Penn State) but Devin Brown refused to do that. His career at Ohio State has not gone as he expected, and he did enter the portal. But he stuck with the team through the playoff run in case his services were needed. A true team player and I wish him nothing but success at Cal.

Carl F Dietz: I give a Buckeye Leaf to the entire offensive line. The group suffered injury losses early and had to plug in new people then began to jell as a unit and played great through the playoffs.

Ohio State capped off an impressive four-game run in the College Football Playoff with a hard-fought 34-23 win over Notre Dame in the national title game to earn its first national championship since the 2014 season. The Buckeyes' postseason run had many memorable moments and storylines that will forever be remembered, and we asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum to offer their favorite moments and plays from the championship run, as well as their overall thoughts on the championship win as a whole.



From The Message Board

"It was a season of contrasts ranging from missed field goals to a scoop-and-score. That's what made it a riveting season, overcoming defeat to rise above the crowd. Favorite moments? All of them!"

– **PeyoteBuck**

"I see a similarity to Capt. Jack Sawyer's sack, fumble, scoop-and-score against Texas and Will Howard's perfect third-down pass to Jeremiah Smith near the end of the Notre Dame game. That could have easily been a touchdown. Both plays were game-winners...the dagger. I'm sure every Buckeye fan breathed a sigh of relief and knew the dream of a national championship was still alive. Finally, something went right at the end of big games for the Buckeyes."

– **Byron McNutt**

"This was a season of many blessings of riches. It also was a learning season of fitting the pieces together. We had a new quarterback. We had to rebuild the offensive line several times. We had a new offensive coordinator. Our defensive coordinator was adjusting to some new players or new positions. It took time. The players decided that after getting embarrassed they would take matters into their own hands and beat the best teams to become national champs. Quite the learning point. When you get knocked down, get back up and fight again. Great season with great coaches and great players. We as fans appreciate this wonderful season."

– **John Lanning**

"To the first question, Jack Sawyer's scoop-and-score will be remembered as

long as Ohio State plays football. Second question, no team in history has had such an impressive run vs. four quality opponents and won all four games by double digits! Unprecedented."

– **Terrier Buck**

"Obviously, the defining moment was Jack Sawyer's scoop-and-score. But my answer is a bit different and is long in scope. How about Quinshon Judkins? He finished his playoff run in his first season with Ohio State with seven total touchdowns, with two rushing touchdowns in three of the four CFP matchups. What an impressive run for the Ole Miss transfer and what an addition for Ohio State. Definitely one of the unsung heroes of the 2024 team."

– **Cameron Moone, BSB**

"Football has always been a lesson learned in life. We cannot tell the story of this year's historic CFP run without remembering where it started. We didn't know it at the time, but from the depth of despair after the attempt by The Team Up North to plant a flag in Ohio Stadium, Ohio State's CFP run started the moment of that angry response by Jack Sawyer when he grabbed that toilet roll flag away from the instigator.

"That was the ignition to the engine that this team needed to recognize that teamwork, perseverance, discipline, accountability and resilience is needed to achieve their championship goals. This has been a legendary season. I will look back on it fondly."

– **BuckeyeScott**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly January through April and monthly May through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
1200 Chambers Road, Suite 206
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
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Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$124.95/year.

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2024-25 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 44)

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The next issue (Feb. 1 cover date) will be mailed on Jan. 28.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.

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Are Wolverines To Thank For Title?

It seems altogether appropriate that the winner of the first incarnation of the College Football Playoff would win the expanded 12-team tournament format.

But make no mistake. The way Ohio State stampeded its way to the 2014 national championship was a far cry from how the Buckeyes navigated their way from a soul-crushing loss to archrival Michigan to a run through four top-five opponents.

The thought process a decade ago for Urban Meyer wasn't very complicated. Lean on a talented offensive line, two members of which would become first-round NFL draft choices, and hand the ball to Ezekiel Elliott. Then watch as a defensive unit populated with three more first-rounders smother the life out of the opposition.

The only doubters to those 2014 Buckeyes were those precious few in Texas who believed TCU or Baylor deserved the final spot in the four-team tournament alongside top-ranked Alabama, No. 2 Oregon and undefeated Florida State. But beginning with a 42-28 win against Michigan, Ohio State bull-rushed its final four opponents by a combined score of 185-83 and rode away with its first national championship since the improbable 2002 season.

This year, the Buckeyes enjoyed a similar run on the way to the title, winning their final four games by a combined score of 145-75. But that came on the heels of a 13-10 home loss to the worst Michigan team in at least 10 years, a fourth straight loss in the series even more inexplicable now than it was when it occurred.

For whatever reason, the team and the coaching staff reserved that particular November afternoon for their poorest performance of the season, reducing a veteran roster overloaded with talent to a cocktail party joke with the word "overrated" as the punchline.

That head coach Ryan Day would be fired wasn't even a question. When would it happen? Most likely after Tennessee invaded Ohio Stadium in the opening round of the playoff and burned down whatever was left after the Michigan debacle.

And then, as those with any kind of mettle in their spine do, the players closed ranks and rallied around themselves. They decided to stop paying attention to the cacophony of criticism leveled at them and their coaches and set about writing their own script regarding how their season should end.

My personal opinion is that Michigan unwittingly did Ohio State a huge favor following its upset victory in November. Rather than simply reveling in something nearly no one thought they could achieve, the Wolverines couldn't help themselves. The same program that cheated – yes, I said cheated – its way to the 2023 national championship couldn't resist showcasing what has become some of the most boorish, unsportsmanlike behavior in American sports today and tried to plant a blue "M" flag on the Ohio State logo in the middle of the Ohio Stadium field.

Had both teams merely left the field for their respective locker rooms, I think it is entirely possible Ohio State would have been left to search its soul and never found whatever was necessary to rebound and beat Tennessee. Instead, Michigan had to try to rub the Buckeyes' noses in defeat, and there is just so much one can take before deciding enough is enough.

In all honesty, I wish someone had tried to plant a blue flag in Jack Sawyer's yard two years ago because the senior defensive end played most of the four-game tournament like the five-star prospect fans had been waiting to see during his entire career. Quite simply, Sawyer played like a man possessed, culminating in his 83-yard fumble return for a touchdown

that slammed the door on any hopes of a Texas comeback in the CFP semifinal.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

The final hurdle in Ohio State's climb to the championship was, of course, Notre Dame – a team arguably not as strong as some of the others the Buckeyes had already defeated, but one whose never-say-die mentality is a mirror image of its youthful head coach.

Marcus Freeman was never the biggest or the fastest linebacker on the field, but he was good enough to register more than 250 tackles during his three seasons as a starter for the Buckeyes in the late 2000s. He was also a thinking man's player as evidenced by his four Academic All-Big Ten selections, and his cerebral approach to coaching has reshaped the roster at Notre Dame into one that can not only win double-digit games every year, it can also compete for championships.

But Freeman met his match in the title game, trying to match wits with Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly.

Willing To Gamble

Following the Michigan game, perhaps Day's seat was the only one hotter than the one under Kelly. To say the game plan against the Wolverines was inadequate would be a gross understatement. But like his players, Kelly redoubled his efforts to make amends during the playoff run, and those efforts paid off in averages of 36.3 points and 447.0 yards per game against four of the nation's better defenses.

An added element that was perhaps missing throughout much of the season – and most definitely in the Michigan game – was Kelly's willingness to gamble. That was never more evident than as the title game moved into its final stages with the Buckeyes trying to stave off a Fighting Irish comeback.

Notre Dame had roared back from a 31-7 deficit midway through the third quarter to make it a one-possession game at 31-23 with 4:15 remaining.

When the Buckeyes got the ball back, it looked to all the world that Kelly had reverted to a mind-numbing brand of coaching not to lose. Tailback Quinshon Judkins was stopped after a 3-yard gain on a first-down counter play before quarterback Will Howard managed to scramble for 8 yards and a first down.

But the ensuing two plays were simple quarterback keepers that combined for minus-1 yard, setting up a third-and-11 at Ohio State's own 34-yard line. Freeman called the second of his three timeouts at the 2:45 mark, hopeful his team could force the Buckeyes to punt and give the Fighting Irish more than enough time to tie the game.

Nearly every member of Buckeye Nation felt that pit inside their stomach that the defense was going to be called upon once again to ensure the victory.

Then Kelly decided to go for broke. While most saw the three straight quarterback runs as a sort of capitulation on the part of the OSU play-caller, there was actually a method to Kelly's madness. Committing to keeping the ball on the ground caused Notre Dame to bring their safeties closer to the line of scrimmage, leaving its cornerbacks on the edge in man coverage.

So instead of instructing Howard to run the ball one more time, Kelly called for his

quarterback to target freshman phenom Jeremiah Smith, who had broken away from Irish cornerback Christian Gray. Smith gathered in the 56-yard bomb, setting up Jayden Fielding's game-clinching 33-yard field goal with just 26 seconds remaining.

In retrospect, the throw to Smith seemed to be a no-brainer. Notre Dame mixed its pass coverage between man and zone throughout the game but was burned almost every time it tried to play man. In reality, however, it was Kelly pushing most of his chips to the center of the table on a play that had a lot of moving parts – a good shotgun snap, protection for Howard, getting the coverage from the Irish that was expected, a good enough throw, and the catch itself. Any of those things go wrong, and the Buckeyes are punting the ball away with more than 2½ minutes to go to a Notre Dame team that has momentum on its side.

I criticized Day and Kelly following the loss to Michigan for exhibiting the mentality of coaching not to lose, a mentality that often leads to losing. During the run to the national championship through Tennessee, Oregon, Texas and finally Notre Dame, they deserve credit for turning that mentality on its ear and going for broke.

The Power Of Faith

There are multiple Bible verses related to rising from the ashes as the Ohio State team did following its loss to Michigan. Perhaps the most appropriate is found in Psalms 116:7, which reads, "He raises ... the needy from the ash heap."

Mixing sports with religion is a turn-off for some, and I apologize if it is for you. I mention it only because several members of the Buckeyes – most notably Howard, receiver Emeka Egbuka, running back TreVeyon Henderson and tight end Gee Scott Jr. – began a locker room ministry of sorts, one that seemed to spread rapidly and strengthen the bond between teammates with disparate backgrounds.

I have covered sports for most the past 50 years and long ago tired of players saying, "First and foremost, I want to give thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," and then committing unspeakable acts of sin in their private lives. In other words, I seldom saw anyone practicing what they were preaching.

This team of Buckeyes seemed different, though. I found that out for myself when I attended a street revival this past fall during which Egbuka and Scott each gave his own testimony, relating what their faith meant to them in a personal as well as a team setting. It didn't seem forced or rehearsed; just two players talking about something that they said changed their lives for the better.

Successful teams often find a rallying point on which to build a foundation. For some, it is channeling outside criticism into strength. For others, it is an us-against-the-world mentality. For this year's Ohio State team, it seemed to be their faith – faith in whatever spirit they chose to worship as well as faith in themselves and their teammates.

There is another Biblical verse contained in Matthew 17:20 indicating that faith can move mountains. Apparently, it can help win national football championships as well.

Series To Continue

Those hoping to read the latest installment of our series involving seasons that ended in the number "4," you will have to wait a little longer.

With all of the football and basketball coverage in this issue, we simply ran out of space. Rest assured, we will complete the series beginning with the next issue of BSB.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Buckeyes Celebration Set For Jan. 26 At Noon

After winning its first national championship since 2014 on Jan. 20, Ohio State has set a celebration date and time for noon on Jan. 26 in Ohio Stadium.

According to Ohio State's website, admission and parking for the celebratory event are both free. Ohio State is expected to release further details closer to the date of the event.

The Buckeyes had a similar event following their last national championship victory a decade ago, when former head coach Urban Meyer and a couple of the players involved in the win spoke to the fans in attendance.

Six More Buckeyes Enter Transfer Portal

Through Jan. 20, Ohio State had six more players enter the transfer portal since BSB last went to press, bringing its total players departing the program to go

to another school to 12.

The newest Buckeyes to enter the portal included redshirt freshman safety Jayden Bonsu, graduate tight end Patrick Gurd, redshirt sophomore offensive tackle George Fitzpatrick, redshirt senior defensive end Mitchell Melton, redshirt junior offensive tackle Zen Michalski and freshman running back Sam Williams-Dixon.

None of the Buckeyes to enter the transfer portal were regular starters, with only Michalski starting one game against Nebraska before suffering a knee injury that caused him to miss the rest of regular-season action. Michalski and Fitzpatrick were the third offensive linemen to depart from the program, joining redshirt freshman offensive tackle Miles Walker, who committed to Boise State on Dec. 30.

Walker wasn't the only player to commit to a new school since BSB last went to press. Redshirt sophomore wide receiver Kojo Antwi (Colorado State, Jan. 14), junior wide receiver Jayden Ballard (Wisconsin, Dec. 18), Bonsu (Pittsburgh, Jan. 4), Michalski (Indiana, Jan. 3) and Air Noland (South Carolina, Dec. 23), each found new homes before the Buckeyes' claimed a national title, while redshirt sophomore quarterback Devin Brown (Cal) and Melton (Virginia) pledged to their new schools the day after the title game on Jan. 21.

Downs, McLaughlin Earn More All-American Nods

Ohio State sophomore safety Caleb Downs and graduate center Seth Mc-

2024 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Aug. 31	AKRON	W, 52-6	CBS	4-8, not bowl eligible
Sept. 7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	BTN	6-7, 30-23 loss to South Alabama
Sept. 21	MARSHALL	W, 49-14	FOX	10-3, 31-3 win over Louisiana
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W, 38-7	Peacock	5-7, not bowl eligible
Oct. 5	IOWA	W, 35-7	CBS	8-5, 27-24 loss to Missouri
Oct. 12	at Oregon	L, 32-31	NBC	13-1, 41-21 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 26	NEBRASKA	W, 21-17	FOX	7-6, 20-15 win over Boston College
Nov. 2	at Penn State	W, 20-13	FOX	13-3, 27-24 loss to Notre Dame
Nov. 9	PURDUE	W, 45-0	FOX	1-11, not bowl eligible
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	W, 31-7	BTN	4-8, not bowl eligible
Nov. 23	INDIANA	W, 38-15	FOX	11-2, 27-17 loss to Notre Dame
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN	L, 13-10	FOX	8-5, 19-13 win over Alabama
Dec. 21	TENNESSEE*	W, 42-17	ESPN	10-3, 42-17 loss to Ohio State
Jan. 1	Oregon#	W, 41-21	ESPN	13-1, 41-21 loss to Ohio State
Jan. 10	Texas^	W, 28-14	ESPN	13-3, 28-14 loss to Ohio State
Jan. 20	Notre Dame**	W, 34-23	ESPN	14-2, 34-23 loss to Ohio State

* - CFP first round
- CFP quarterfinal at Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif.
^ - CFP semifinal at Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas
** - CFP championship game in Atlanta

Laughlin both earned impressive personal honors since BSB last went to press when Downs became a unanimous All-American on Dec. 18 and McLaughlin earned consensus All-American honors on Dec. 17.

Downs earned the honor after being named a first-team All-American by Sporting News on Dec. 18. By also earning that honor from The Associated Press, American Football Coaches Association, The Athletic, CBS/247 Sports, FWA and Walter Camp, he became the 34th different player in OSU history to earn unanimous All-American honors and the fourth safety in Buckeye history to earn the nod, joining Mike Doss (2002), Malik Hooker (2016) and Jack Tatum (1970).

Downs, who is also the first-ever Buckeye transfer to be named a unanimous All-American, served as one of Ohio State's most formidable and consistent defensive players on the roster, totaling 82 tackles (eight for loss), six pass deflections and two interceptions.

With one more guaranteed year of eligibility left, the Alabama transfer can become the sixth-ever two-time unanimous All-American selection at Ohio State. That list currently includes Marvin Harrison Jr. (2022-23), Howard "Hop" Cassidy (1945-55), Bob Ferguson (1960-61), Archie Griffin (1974-75) and Orlando Pace (1995-96).

McLaughlin, meanwhile, became a consensus All-American on Dec. 17 after earning his fifth first-team nod from the FWA. He was also named a first-team All-American by Walter Camp, the AFCA, CBS Sports/247Sports and The Athletic.

Each of these honors came even after McLaughlin missed the last two games of the regular season due to a torn Achilles tendon he suffered before the Indiana game on Nov. 23 that required him to miss the rest of the season.

Downs and McLaughlin weren't the only Buckeyes to earn All-American honors since BSB last went to print. True

freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith received a freshman All-American honor by the Football Writers Association of America on Jan. 14, making him the 12th OSU freshman to take home this distinction since it was created in 2001.

Smith's inclusion on the list is no surprise, as he smashed every freshman program record previously held by Pro Football Hall of Famer Cris Carter in 1984, hauling in 76 catches for 1,315 yards and 15 touchdowns on the year.

Buckeyes The Biggest Ratings Draw In CFP

All eyes were on the Buckeyes during their four-game run to the national championship. Starting in the first round of the first ever 12-team playoff format, Ohio State's 42-17 blowout of Tennessee on Dec. 21 drew an average of 14.3 million viewers and was the most-watched game of the round.

Then Ohio State's 41-21 rout of Oregon in the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day became the most watched non-NFL sporting event since the 2024 CFP national championship, after having an average viewership of 21.1 million viewers and a peak audience of 24.3 million viewers.

Ohio State's Cotton Bowl matchup with Texas didn't draw quite as big a television audience. The Buckeyes' 28-14 win over Texas on Jan. 10 had an average audience of 20.6 million viewers, making it the most-watched Cotton Bowl on record and most watched game of the round.

Ratings details were not yet released from Ohio State's 34-23 national championship win over Notre Dame as BSB went to press.

Meyer To Be Inducted To CFB Hall Of Fame

Meyer will be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame this year as a member of the 2025 class, it was revealed on Jan. 15.

Meyer coached the Buckeyes for seven seasons, leading them to a national championship win in 2014 and three Big Ten title victories in 2014, 2017 and 2018. When he retired after the 2018 season, he held an impressive 83-9 record (90.2 winning percentage) with the Buckeyes, a mark that included a 7-0 record over Michigan, a 54-4 record against the Big



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Ten and an NCAA-record 30 consecutive conference victories.

He also led Ohio State to its sixth undefeated season in program history in 2012, going 12-0, although the program was ineligible for bowl consideration that year due to NCAA sanctions.

Meyer began his college coaching career at Ohio State back in 1986 as a graduate assistant under Earle Bruce and earned his first head coaching position with Bowling Green in 2001 before mov-

ing on to Utah for two seasons (2003-04), Florida for six years (2005-10), then the Buckeyes for the previously mentioned seven. In those stints he compiled a 187-32 overall record – making him the third-winningest head coach in college football history behind only Hall of Famers Knute Rockne and Frank Leahy – and won two additional national championships with the Gators in 2006 and 2008.

Meyer is the eighth Ohio State coach to be elected to the College Football Hall

of Fame, joining Bruce (2002), John Cooper (2008), Woody Hayes (1983), Howard Jones (1951), Francis Schmidt (1971), Jim Tressel (2015) and John Wilce (1954).

He and the rest of the 22-member 2025 College Football Hall of Fame Class will be officially inducted during the 67th NFF Annual Awards Dinner in Las Vegas on Dec. 9. Other notable inductees include former Wisconsin running back Montee Ball, former Alabama head coach Nick Saban and NFL legends Michael

Strahan (Texas Southern) and Michael Vick (Virginia Tech).

Vrabel Lands Patriots HC Job

Former Ohio State defensive lineman and assistant coach Mike Vrabel returned to the NFL head coaching ranks on Jan. 12 when he was named the next head coach of his former team, the New En-

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From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago -1985

The sun rises in the east, California is in the west and Big Ten teams lose Rose Bowls. What else is new? Ohio State coach Earle Bruce took a group of spirited Buckeyes to Pasadena hoping to change the latter.

He didn't.

For the tenth time in 11 years, the Pacific 10 representative in the Rose Bowl whipped its Big Ten counterpart. Bruce's coaching record in the Rose Bowl dropped to 0-2, both losses coming at the hands of Southern California.

Asked to explain the recent dominance of the Pacific 10, Bruce offered no answer.

"I don't know if I can explain any other losses. I just cannot explain this loss. That's the only one I know much about right now," said the sixth-year Buckeye coach.

The defeat was Ohio State's fourth consecutive setback in the Rose Bowl – the other three coming in 1980, 1976 and 1975.

As for why USC prevailed, 20-17, in the 1985 Rose Bowl, Bruce said:

"I think the difference in the football game was mistakes. USC played exceptionally well. Ohio State made a lot of mistakes. Dropped balls and penalties were very costly."

35 Years Ago - 1990

Old demons were back to haunt Ohio State and a new nemesis was a constant thorn in the Buckeyes' side as sixth-ranked Auburn handed OSU a 31-14 defeat in the Hall of Fame Bowl.

The Buckeyes, who repeatedly shot themselves in the foot during an early six-game winning streak, reverted to their old ways against the Tigers.

Leading 14-3 in the waning seconds of the first half, the Buckeyes did cover a punt and allowed Auburn to set up a touchdown with just 11 seconds left in the half.

In the second half, blown assignments, missed tackles and more poor kick coverage led to the Tigers scoring 21 unanswered points.

The new nemesis came in the person of Auburn quarterback Reggie Slack. The 6-2, 211-pound senior completed 16 of 22 passes – including his last 12 in a row – for 141 yards and three touchdowns.

Slack also ran for a touchdown and kept his team alive time and time again by eluding the Buckeyes' pass rush.

The victory improved Auburn's record to 10-2. The Buckeyes slipped to 8-4, still their best finish since 1986, and a ranking of 24th in the final AP poll.

"Our football team played hard," OSU coach John Cooper said. "I told them after the game that I think we lost to a real fine Auburn team. Obviously, we know how good they are on defense. Reggie Slack might have been the difference in the ball game offensively. He's an outstanding athlete. Time after time, he got away from the rush and was able to make big plays."

30 Years Ago - 1995

Ohio State went into the CompUSA Florida Citrus Bowl on Jan. 2 in Orlando, Fla., with little to lose. After all, the Buckeyes were clearly stepping up in class by taking on sixth-ranked Alabama.

And, after extending 'Bama to the game's final minute before allowing the winning score and falling to the Tide 24-17, the Buckeyes had little to be ashamed of.

"I am proud of this football team," Cooper said after his team finished the season 9-4. "I thought we played really hard, and you can't ask a team to give a better effort than they did today.

"We were playing an outstanding football team in Alabama. They find ways to win. They've done it game after game after game."

Alabama, which ended up 12-1 overall and ranked fifth in the final Associated Press poll, found that the surest way to win against Ohio State was to exploit the speed of senior running back Sherman Williams.

Williams was named the game's most valuable player after having a day most superstar players only dream of. He rushed for 166 yards on 27 carries and caught eight passes for 155 yards, including the game-winning 50-yard TD pass from quarterback Jay Barker with 42 seconds left.

"When they found something that hurt us, they just kept run-

ning it," said OSU senior cornerback Marlon Kerner, who posted a team-high nine tackles."

25 Years Ago - 2000

Ohio State's offensive showing during the 1999 season was, well, offensive.

The Buckeyes missed postseason play for the first time in 11 years after finishing 6-6. Worse yet, in just one season, the offense fell from the top of the Big Ten in scoring and yardage to ninth in both categories.

"None of us want to go through another year like we just did," Cooper said just days before he fired offensive coordinator Mike Jacobs.

As part of the coaching shuffle, Cooper promoted Chuck Stobart to offensive coordinator and hired former Indiana and Wake Forest assistant George Belu as the new offensive line coach.

20 Years Ago - 2005

A tearful and self-described "bone-weary" Andy Geiger on Jan. 5 announced his retirement as Ohio State director of athletics, stressing that no one was forcing him out and that the decision was his and his alone.

"It is my decision after months of thinking about this," Geiger told reporters at a packed press conference attended by several members of his staff. "I find that my work is no longer fun and that I don't look forward with enthusiasm to each day. Thus, it is time for Ohio State to seek new leadership for its department of athletics."

Geiger's retirement would become effective June 30. He was set to spend the final months of his tenure restructuring the university's academic advisory program, working on strengthening the compliance office and furthering OSU's work on booster education.

But clearly his main focus would remain the pending NCAA investigations into the football and men's basketball programs.

As the situations surrounding Maurice Claret and the firing of ex-basketball coach Jim O'Brien intensified, Geiger had been under withering attacks from national media outlets, many of them calling Ohio State an athletic program out of control and calling for the athletic director's ouster.

Still, Geiger reiterated that he was leaving the university and approaching retirement on his own terms.

"I'm not running, I'm not hiding," he said. "Rather I am making a management decision that is best for me and my family. It is difficult to block out recent events, but the decision to do this was made a long time ago, controversy is always difficult. Clearly, we are dealing with some difficult issues, and I will work with my colleagues to see them through to conclusion to the very best of my ability."

15 Years Ago - 2010

Ohio State brushed aside the national predictions and put away Oregon by a 26-17 score on New Year's Day in the 96th Rose Bowl Game, putting to an end a grating streak of three straight Bowl Championship Series losses that left fans and media pundits across the country doubting whether the Buckeyes could compete at the national level against a high-caliber opponent.

At the conclusion a picture-perfect day capped by a stunning sunset on the San Gabriel Mountains, the final few moments of the game were just as welcome a sight as the natural beauty to the Buckeyes and their fans.

As the clock ticked toward zeroes and Ohio State held the ball, Buckeye fans – and even some players on the sideline – jumped and cheered to "Seven Nation Army," the White Stripes tune that had become the unofficial team theme song. Flashbulbs popped as it became clearer by the moment that the frustration that had started in Arizona the desert three years previous – a 41-14 loss to Florida in the national championship game – would be coming to an end.

"I can't even begin to describe the feeling," OSU sophomore center Michael Brewster said. "I'm tired as hell and both my ankles are hurting like hell, but I'm also happy as hell. I'm going to wake up tomorrow with a smile on my face."

10 Years Ago - 2015

In amassing 230 yards on 20 carries in an eventual 42-35 win

against Alabama that sent the Buckeyes to the first-ever CFP National Championship game, Ohio State running back Ezekiel delivered one of the signature moments of Ohio State's championship run when he turned the corner to get to the left sideline and broke free for an 85-yard touchdown late in the fourth quarter. His galloping gait sent the Ohio State half of the Superdome crowd into delirium and gave the Buckeyes a 42-28 advantage with 3:24 left in the game.

"I knew after about 20 yards that nobody was catching him," his mom, Dawn Elliott said. "I felt a sense of relief once he got the touchdown, but then Alabama came back and scored again. I was a nervous wreck. But I felt relieved after that touchdown."

Ohio State went on to defeat Oregon, 42-20, at AT&T Stadium, in Arlington, Texas, for the CFP National Championship.

Elliott had another outstanding game, racking up 246 yards on 36 carries and scoring four touchdowns. Elliott's final touchdown came from one yard out with 28 seconds left.

When Elliott lined up in the backfield in the final minute, the crowd – overwhelmingly OSU-friendly by that point – serenaded him with an extended cry before each snap.

"ZEEEEEEEEEEKE!"

Five Years Ago - 2020

There was no doubt fans would debate the controversial calls in Ohio State's 29-23 College Football Playoff semifinal loss to Clemson for years to come, much the same way Miami (Fla.) fans still argued about the defensive pass interference that helped the Buckeyes knock off the top-ranked Hurricanes in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl to win the national title.

But even with cornerback Shaun Wade ejected for targeting, a questionable roughing-the-kicker penalty that allowed a 99-yard scoring drive and safety Jordan Fuller's fumble returned for a touchdown overturned by replay, Ohio State still had a chance to win the game late.

After surrendering the go-ahead touchdown with 1:49 left in the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes quickly drove down the field under the direction of quarterback Justin Fields. But a self-admitted mistake by wide receiver Chris Olave to break off his route led to an interception in the end zone that sent the Tigers to the national championship game instead.

"I thought our guys left it all on the field," head coach Ryan Day said after the game. "We played hard and played bold. But certainly, there were a lot of plays in that game that didn't go our way. It's very hard to swallow right now. We're going to have to really take a look at the film and figure out what really happened on some of those plays, because in a game like this where the margin for error is so tiny, one play can alter the game. It didn't seem like we got any of those plays."

One Year Ago - 2024

If it was not clear after Ohio State was left out of the College Football Playoff that the program had quietly started shifting focus to 2024, then it became crystal clear during the 14-3 loss to Missouri in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29 that the Buckeyes hoped to put the season behind them after a third consecutive 11-2 finish.

"I told them I thought a lot of guys played really hard in this game," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "Nobody wanted to lose this game. You saw guys fighting."

During his postgame press conference, Day was flanked to his left by junior defensive end Jack Sawyer and true freshman quarterback Lincoln Kienholz, the latter forced into action after an early injury to starter Devin Brown left him out for the majority of the contest.

Kienholz finished with just 86 passing yards – with just 203 total yards for the team – but few would blame him for not orchestrating a strong offensive outing.

Beyond missing Marvin Harrison Jr., who opted out of the Cotton Bowl, the Buckeye offense was further hampered by undoubtedly the worst performance by the offensive line on the season after center Carson Hinzman was benched, resulting in Matt Jones sliding over from right guard and fifth-year reserve Enokk Vimahi starting in Jones' place. Missouri took full advantage of Ohio State's new line, totaling 10 tackles for loss and four sacks between Brown and Kienholz.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

gland Patriots.

Vrabel, 49, returns to the NFL on a reported multiyear contract just one offseason after being fired as head coach of the Tennessee Titans. He spent six seasons with Tennessee, leading the team to a 54-45 record with three playoff appearances, including one bid to the AFC Championship Game in 2019.

Vrabel spent this past season as a coaching and personnel consultant with the Cleveland Browns, and he now gets another opportunity in the head coaching chair for the organization that he won three Super Bowls with in the early 2000s. The former Buckeye – who played at Ohio State from 1993-96 and served as an assistant coach with the program from 2011-13 – played eight of his 14 NFL seasons with the Patriots from 2001-07, helping ignite their dynasty by totaling 606 tackles (55 for loss), 48 sacks and 13 forced fumbles while also catching 10 touchdown passes on 14 targets.

Vrabel replaced Jerod Mayo as head coach of New England, who was fired after just one season with the franchise, leading his former team to a 4-13 record. Vrabel will now be tasked with thrusting New England back into relevance in the National Football League after the six-time Super Bowl-winning franchise suffered three consecutive losing seasons.

“I want to galvanize our football team. I want to galvanize this building. I want to galvanize this fan base,” Vrabel said in his introductory press conference on Jan. 13.

Guiton, Other Former Buckeyes Earn New Jobs

Former Ohio State quarterback Kenny Guiton isn't with a new team, but he has a new job. Wisconsin and head coach Luke Fickell announced on Jan. 8 that the program is promoting Guiton from wide receivers coach to quarterbacks coach for the 2025 season.

“After a thorough search of candidates, we realized that we had the best quarterbacks coach candidate right here on our staff in Coach Guiton,” Fickell said. “His familiarity with our program and knowledge of the quarterback position make him a great fit. I'm excited to watch him lead that room and pass along his passion and experience to that group.”

Guiton spent last season as Wisconsin's wide receivers coach, where he helped five different Badger wideouts catch multiple touchdowns for the first time in program history. He also led Wisconsin's quarterback room for the final two games of the 2024 season after Fickell fired former offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Phil Longo on Nov.

Next Buckeye Sports Bulletin Mails In Less Than A Week

There is a very short turnaround between now and the next issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the Feb. 1 issue, scheduled to be mailed on Jan. 28. Even in that short period of time there is bound to be plenty of Buckeye news with follow-up on the national championship, both basketball teams in full swing and the traditional National Signing Day approaching. There is no reason to miss any of the latest news between now and the next print BSB. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be reporting on all the breaking news in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB print subscribers.

The discussion should also be hot and heavy on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, where subscribers and staff members interact, with all this activity.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The BSB staff reports on the breaking stories, plus posts additional features.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays.

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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17.

Guiton will now look to impart some of the knowledge he learned during his five years playing quarterback at Ohio State on Wisconsin's 2025 quarterback room. The Houston native appeared in 22 games while throwing for 893 yards and 16 touchdowns as a Buckeye, 749 yards and 14 of those scores coming in his senior season in 2013 when he filled in for the injured Braxton Miller.

Guiton wasn't the only former Buckeye to land a new position in college football since BSB last went to press. Former assistant offensive line coach Mike Solenne and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis both received positions on Dan Mullen's staff at UNLV, with Solenne being named the program's offensive line coach on Dec. 22 and Dennis becoming the Rebels' offensive coordinator on Dec. 27.

Dennis, the son-in-law of Meyer, joined the Buckeyes in 2015 as an intern but quickly made his way up the staff, eventually earning a role as Ryan Day's quarterbacks coach from 2020-23. In that role he worked with talented quarterbacks like C.J. Stroud, Justin Fields and Kyle McCord, each of whom earned All-Big Ten selections under his guidance.

Since leaving the program last offseason, Dennis has had brief stints as an offensive analyst at Utah and Ole Miss before finding a role as passing game coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Tulsa for the entire 2024 season.

Sollenne first joined the Buckeye staff in 2022 alongside offensive line coach Justin Frye, initially joining in a support role before working his way up the ranks. Prior to his time at OSU, he served as a graduate assistant at Florida from 2020-21, when Mullen was the Gators' head coach.

Hartline Committed To Coaching Buckeyes

Ohio State co-offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline has garnered some head coaching interest in recent years, most recently landing an interview with West Virginia in December for the program's now-closed head coaching vacancy.

Despite this interest, though, it appears the longtime assistant is fully com-

mitted to the Buckeyes.

“Being a head coach is not really on my mind,” Hartline told Eleven Warriors at Ohio State's Rose Bowl media day held in Los Angeles on Dec. 30. “Year-to-year you always have people who reach out and want to speak to you about opportunities. I'm never in a situation where I'm never going to talk to someone about an opportunity, but my focus is – I love being at Ohio State. It's well-documented, and I see it as such.”

Since being named Ohio State's full-time wide receivers coach in 2019, Hartline has firmly established himself as one of the top assistants and recruiters in all of college football.

The former NFL wideout has turned Ohio State into a rich NFL wide receiver pipeline, molding players such as Harrison, Chris Olave, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Garrett Wilson into NFL stars while also putting current players such as Emeka Egbuka, Smith and Carnell Tate in position to become early-round NFL draft selections.

Hartline's efforts at Ohio State not only helped him earn a head coaching interview at West Virginia – one which he declined to comment on when asked about the situation – but also a reported interview with Cincinnati in 2022 after Fickell left the program for Wisconsin.

Kienholz Wants To Stay A Buckeye In 2025

Ohio State's Lincoln Kienholz has been at the bottom of the quarterback depth chart in each of his first two seasons with the Scarlet and Gray, and that could remain the same next year with talented freshman Julian Sayin and incoming five-star Tavien St. Clair likely competing for the starting spot.

With Kienholz seemingly on the outside-looking-in inside Chip Kelly's room next season, he could very well transfer out after the season to find another opportunity to start, where he would become the third OSU quarterback to enter

the portal along with Brown and Noland.

While the opportunity to transfer is there for Kienholz this offseason, the second-year quarterback said on Dec. 30 that although a decision has not been made on his future, he is happy where he is and has no immediate plans to seek other options outside of Ohio State.

“I haven't (decided) yet,” Kienholz said. “We'll see. But I love Ohio State, and I would love to stay here.”

“It's been a blast for me so far,” he added. “Just coming in and learning from Will Howard and Devin again, getting another year to take that in and help boost my career. With Coach Kelly coming in, he's super smart. He's seen things and he's been around the game a ton.”

Kienholz, who had a five-day window to decide on his future that began on Jan. 21, said that regardless of where he ends up next year, he wants to be in a position to start, either as a clear-cut No. 1 quarterback or as a backup who could come in if needed.

“The goal is to either start or be a backup at the position so I'm ready to go,” he said. “It's going to be a long season again, so there could always be something that happens and I have to step up. Beyond that, just playing and getting that field knowledge, too – that will help me move forward with what I want to do.”

Despite these lofty aspirations, it seems unlikely that he will be in that situation next season, especially if he stays with the Buckeyes. He has appeared in only five games in his two collegiate seasons, with his only significant game action being in the 2023 Cotton Bowl when he relieved the injured Brown and completed six of his 17 passes for 86 yards and zero touchdowns.

As BSB went to press, Ohio State had just two other scholarship quarterbacks on its 2025 roster in Sayin and St. Clair but it could still look to add another veteran through the transfer portal to compete for the starting job.

Armstrong Twins Lose Black Stripe

The Ohio State football team gained two more “official” members when twin brothers Devontae and Deontae Armstrong both shed their black stripes on



Lincoln Kienholz

Dec. 28.

The two freshman offensive linemen were the 17th and 18th members of the 2024 class to lose their black stripes this season, making it so all three scholarship offensive linemen in the class have now done so, joining Ian Moore who did so on Aug. 15.

Devontae was recruited by the Buckeyes as a four-star interior offensive lineman, while Deontae was a higher-ranked four-star offensive tackle, both coming out of St. Edward in Lakewood, Ohio.

With four of five offensive linemen leaving the Buckeyes this offseason, the two will have a chance to take the next step and compete for playing time as redshirt freshmen next season, although OSU has already brought in two transfers who will be able to compete in the front five.

Ohio State has just five freshmen who haven't shed their black stripes yet as BSB went to press, with defensive linemen Eric Mensah and Dominic Kirks, cornerback Miles Lockhart, wide receiver Damarion Witten and punter Nick McLarty still yet to lose theirs.

Former Buckeye, Ohio Senator Espy Passes

Ben Espy, a former Ohio State football player and Ohio Senator, died on Jan. 4 at the age of 81 after a brief illness.

Espy earned a political science degree from Ohio State when he graduated in 1965 and went on to obtain a law degree from Howard University in 1968. He used those degrees to serve as the president pro tem of the Columbus City Council from 1982-92 and then minority leader of the Ohio Senate from 1991-2000, becoming the first Black person to hold either of those titles. He left office in 2002.

"Ben Espy was a remarkable leader and advocate for the people of Columbus," Columbus mayor Andrew Ginther said. "His commitment to community and spirit of service changed our city for the better, from championing justice and equality to expanding job opportunities for future generations."

Espy played for the Buckeyes under Hayes from 1962-64 after graduating from Sandusky (Ohio) High School, rushing for 102 yards on 31 carries.

Saban Says OSU Fans Have Psychotic Obsession

Saban, the seven-time national championship winning head coach at LSU and Alabama, was not shy with his criticism of Ohio State fans and their treatment of Day's program since the Michigan loss.

Appearing on ESPN's "The Pat McAfee Show," on Dec. 27, Saban called out the Buckeye faithful for their lack of support and enthusiasm for Day and the program in this year's College Football Playoff, one which he believes stems from the team's "psychotic obsession" with beating archrival Michigan.

"We've kind of gotten on their fans a little bit, but these Ohio State fans, they've got a psychotic obsession with Michigan, and they need to go get therapy or something to try to get it fixed," Saban said. "Because they have a chance to win the national championship, and here you are – nobody's excited about their opportunity to play because they lost to Michi-

gan, which was a tough game. They lost the game, probably, by some of the mistakes they made. Those are correctable things."

Saban's comments were a common critique of Buckeye fans in recent weeks. Just one week previous, the legendary Crimson Tide head coach said that Ohio State fans need to support Day and the program in their chase for a national championship and "quit all this negative bullsh—t" that stems from the Michigan game.

Then, one day later, former Ohio State quarterback and current ESPN college football analyst Kirk Herbstreit poked fun at some factions of the Buckeye faithful who were critical of Day and eager to call for his job.

"I can't speak on behalf of the lunatic fringe," Herbstreit said during ESPN's live broadcast of the Buckeyes' first round game against Tennessee. "I'm not sure how they operate. The lunatic fringe at Ohio State is as powerful as anywhere in the country. I don't know. I'm sure they'll be happy tonight. They'll be fired up about what the Ohio State team did. But God forbid they lose to Oregon. They'd want to fire him again."

Despite all of this noise, the Buckeyes didn't lose to Oregon, instead they played arguably their best game of the season in their Rose Bowl victory, before beating Texas in the Cotton Bowl.

The outspoken supporters of Day, along with Saban, were vindicated after the Buckeyes' triumphant win over Notre Dame to secure the program's first national championship win since 2014.

Howard Gifts TVs To Buckeye Teammates

Before the Buckeyes left Ohio for Pasadena, Calif., for the Rose Bowl, Howard was feeling the giving spirit of the holidays. He showed that by gifting 130 TVs to his teammates for Christmas as a partnership with an electronics brand.

The Ohio State football Twitter account posted a video of Howard telling the team that he was giving them each 55-inch TVs on Dec. 28.

"It felt great to give my teammates something they can enjoy off the field," Howard said. "We've all been grinding, and this is a fun way to show appreciation for the effort we put together."

Perhaps the gift-giving put karma on the side of Howard through the rest of the playoffs, with the Kansas State transfer winning offensive MVP in both of the Buckeyes last two games.

Ransom Accepts Senior Bowl Invite

Graduate safety Lathan Ransom is headed to the Senior Bowl.

Ransom accepted his invitation to the event on Dec. 23 and will join Howard and McLaughlin who also accepted invites. McLaughlin will not be playing due to his Achilles injury, but Ransom and Howard should both get chances on the field.

The 2025 Senior Bowl game will be played at Hancock Whitney Stadium on Feb. 1 in Mobile, Ala., and will present Ransom and Howard an opportunity



Lathan Ransom

to bolster his NFL draft stock against some of the other best seniors in college football.

Ransom earned his spot there with an exceptional season to finish his college career. In 15 games, he recorded 76 total tackles, which included nine tackles for loss, a sack, two pass breakups, three forced fumbles, a fumble recovery and an interception.

Ransom's outstanding regular season garnered him first-team All-Big Ten recognition for the first time in his career, continuing his production through the four-game playoff run.

Former Buckeyes Named To Pro Bowl, All-Pro Teams

While the current Buckeyes were making their run to a national championship win in the College Football Playoff, a quartet of former Buckeyes achieved personal accomplishments by being selected to participate in the NFL's 2025 Pro Bowl Games.

San Francisco 49ers defensive end Nick Bosa, Pittsburgh Steelers defensive tackle Cameron Heyward, Washington Commanders wide receiver Terry McLaurin and Cleveland Browns cornerback Denzel Ward all made their conference's respective Pro Bowl Games rosters as announced by the NFL on Jan. 2.

Each of the former Buckeyes who were named as Pro Bowlers had previously earned the distinction, but Heyward's seven Pro Bowl appearances are the most of the bunch. Heyward, who played for Ohio State from 2007-10, racked up 81 tackles (14 for loss), 20 quarterback hits, 11 pass deflections and eight sacks while playing all 18 games for Pittsburgh in his 14th NFL season.

These stats also earned Heyward his fourth first-team AP All-Pro selection of his career, joining Pro Football Hall of Famer Joe Greene as the only Steelers interior defensive linemen to achieve that distinction.

Bosa's 2024 Pro Bowl selection was the fifth of his career and his fourth consecutive. He finished the season with 52 tackles (15 for loss), 24 quarterback hits, nine sacks and his first interception since his rookie season in 2019. These stats did not translate to team success, however, as the 49ers missed the playoffs for the first time since 2020 with a 6-11 record.

Although his team won only three games this season, Ward was his same consistent self. The Macedonia, Ohio, native finished the season with a career-high and league-leading 19 pass deflections along with 49 tackles (one for loss), two interceptions, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery in 16 games. He earned a Pro Bowl nod for the fourth time in his career, tied for the most ever by a Browns cornerback.

McLaurin, the Buckeyes' only pro bowler on the offensive side of the ball, earned the distinction for the second time in his career. He has had a resurgent season catching passes from No. 2 overall draft selection and former Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Jayden Daniels, hauling in 82 catches for 1,096 receiving yards and 13 touchdowns while leading the Commanders to the NFC Championship Game where they will match up against the Philadelphia Eagles on Jan. 26.

McLaurin was also named a second-team All-Pro selection, the first time he has earned that nod in his career.

McCord To Enter NFL Draft

After three years with Ohio State and one year with Syracuse, McCord's collegiate career is over. The five-star recruit in the 2021 class announced on Jan. 10 that he will no longer pursue an NCAA eligibility waiver for another season and declare for the 2025 NFL draft.

McCord spent his first two years with the Buckeyes behind Stroud on the depth

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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chart but eventually had his opportunity in 2023 as the team's starter. He had a respectable season leading the Scarlet and Gray offense, completing 229 of his 348 passes (65.8 percent) for 3,170 passing yards and 24 touchdowns to only six interceptions. But his campaign had a bitter ending when he threw two costly picks in the team's 30-24 loss at Michigan.

Just nine days after the Michigan game, which gave the Buckeyes their first loss of the year and cost them a chance at a Big Ten or national title, McCord entered the transfer portal. Thirteen days later he committed to play for coach Fran Brown and Syracuse.

That decision seemed to have been a beneficial one for McCord, who completed 66.0 percent of his passes (391 of 592) for an FBS-best 4,779 yards along with 34 touchdowns and 12 interceptions, helping lead the Orange to their first 10-win season since 2018 and a victory over Washington State in the Holiday Bowl.

McCord's 4,779 passing yards – which were also the most in a single season by a quarterback in ACC history – helped him earn a second-team All-ACC selection and 10th place finish in Heisman Trophy voting.

The former Buckeye gunslinger has been predicted to be a mid- to late-round pick in this year's draft, which will take place inside historic Lambeau Field in

Green Bay, Wis., from April 24-26.

Adedokun Wins MAC Hermann Trophy

Senior Ohio State midfielder Michael Adedokun won the most prestigious individual award in collegiate soccer on Jan. 3 when he took home the MAC Hermann Trophy, given annually to the nation's best player. He is the first-ever Buckeye to take home this honor but not the only member of the 2024 team to win the award, as OSU head coach Brian Maisonneuve earned the trophy in 1994 following his senior season at Indiana.

Adedokun, a native of Eruwa, Nigeria, was one of the driving forces behind Ohio State's historic 2024 season, which culminated in the program's first Big Ten tournament title since 2008 and second-ever appearance in the College Cup. He racked up 11 goals and 11 assists (33 points) on the year, three of those goals coming in the postseason.

The MAC Hermann Trophy is just one

of several accolades Adedokun earned this season. He was named the Big Ten's 2024 Midfielder of the Year while also earning first-team all-conference and United Soccer Coaches first-team All-American honors.

Adedokun's strong senior season also allowed him to be selected with the 13th pick in the first round of the 2024 MLS draft on Dec. 20 by FC Montreal. He became the first Buckeye picked in the first round of the MLS draft since Roger Espinoza in 2007 (Sporting Kansas City, 11th).

Adedokun was not the only Buckeye drafted this year. Senior defenseman Anthony Samways was taken by Sporting Kansas City with the 34th overall pick in the second round. Samways, a Loveland, Ohio, native, recorded just four points but anchored an OSU defense that held its opponents to just 19 goals on the year while recording 10 shutouts.

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Championship Earned With Historic Win Over ND

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The story can be told now.

For nearly two months since the inexplicable 13-10 loss to Michigan on Nov. 30, the narrative for Ohio State has been one of redemption, and for three College Football Playoff games in the newly expanded field of 12, the Buckeyes did their job by routing Tennessee, racing past Oregon and overpowering Texas.

But it would have all been for naught without one more victory.

Consider the job (well) done.

Quinshon Judkins had two rushing touchdowns and one receiving score when No. 8 Ohio State held off No. 7 Notre Dame 34-23 in the CFP Championship Game at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Jan. 20 for the Buckeyes' seventh national title and first since the inaugural CFP 10 years ago.

Notre Dame (14-2) used 18 plays on the first possession of the game for a 7-0 lead, but the Buckeyes (14-2) got touchdown catches from Jeremiah Smith and Judkins and a Judkins run for a 21-7 halftime lead before another Judkins TD on the ground and a 46-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding helped OSU to a 31-7 lead.

It was 31-23 when Smith made a 56-yard, third-down catch with 2:29 left to set up a Fielding field goal with 26 seconds left to seal the win to the delight of many of the 77,660 fans.

Perfection

Ohio State won the toss and deferred. The Irish started from the 25 after the touchback, and they used an impressive 18 plays and 9:45 off the clock to take a 7-0 lead on a 1-yard power rush by quarterback Riley Leonard to put the Buckeyes behind for the first time in the playoffs at the 5:15 mark.

Notre Dame collected six first downs with Leonard getting four of those on runs, including 3 yards on a fourth-and-1 to the OSU 42.

From there, he converted a third-and-1 from the 19 with a 5-yard keeper, and then, needing a yard on fourth from the 5, he bulled his way to the 1 before scoring on the next play.

Leonard rushed nine times for 34 yards and completed 3 of 5 passes for another 31 yards in the dominant drive.

Ohio State responded with a methodical series as well, tying it 7-7 at 14:10 of the second quarter on an 8-yard catch by Smith to cap an 11-play, 75-yard, 6:05 drive.

OSU scored on its first drive in all four play-off games.

Smith had two catches for 15 yards on the drive after having only one catch for 3 yards vs. Texas in the 28-14 semifinal win on Jan. 10, and Will Howard was 5 for 5 for 46 yards.

The Buckeyes began from the 25, and Smith gained 7 yards on a third-and-5 to the OSU 37. Later, TreVeyon Henderson rushed for 19 yards to the Notre Dame 40, and on the next snap, Howard passed 15 yards to Judkins. However, Smith was caught for a 5-yard loss on an end-around, moving the ball back to the 30.

Emeka Egbuka followed with a 12-yard reception to set up Howard for a 5-yard run to the 13 for a first down to end the quarter.

Judkins juiced his way for 5 yards on the first play of the second quarter before Howard threw back to Smith at the 15 and he went untouched into the end zone.

The Buckeyes, or more accurately the Irish themselves, forced a punt from the 20 after a false start and a holding penalty, but the Buckeyes still started with subpar field position after

a 46-yard punt that was fair caught by Caleb Downs at the 34 and was moved back to the 24 after a holding infraction with 12:21 left.

Undeterred, the Buckeye went those 76 yards in 6:06, using 10 plays to go ahead 14-7 at the 6:15 mark on Judkins' 9-yard run.

On the first play, Egbuka ran for 13 to give the Buckeyes some room, and Howard found Carnell Tate for 15 to the Notre Dame 48. Henderson had to work for 2 yards, and on a pass Egbuka picked up 3 yards. Howard then scrambled for 11 to the 32 on third down.

Egbuka had another catch for 12 to the 20. Judkins ran for 2, and Egbuka had 6 more on a crossing route. On third-and-2, Howard ran for 3 to the 9. From there, Judkins crashed his way through tacklers and stretched across the goal line.

To that point, Howard was 9 for 9 for 82 yards.

With the ball again, ND faced a third-and-5 from its 30, and the snap went off the hands of Mitchell Evans for a 4-yard loss. James Rendell's 51-yard punt was returned for negative-3 yards by Brandon Inniss to the 20.

OSU made it three scores on three possessions with an 80-yard drive culminating in a 6-yard reception by Judkins, the last of 12 plays in 4:26

On third-and-7, Howard was pressured but threw to his left to Inniss for 19 yards to the 42. Howard was sacked for a 1-yard loss on first down. Henderson rushed for 4 to necessitate another third-and-7 at the OSU 45 leading to the 2:00 timeout. Howard passed 20 yards to Tate at the 35 to make OSU 6 for 6 on third downs and Howard 12 for 12 for 123 yards.

But Howard was sacked again for 3 yards. He then went to Smith for 15 to the 23. Howard finally had an incomplete on a pass to Henderson at the 5 on a breakup by cornerback Xavier Watts.

Howard took off for 11 yards to the 12, Henderson rushed for 6 to the 6, and OSU used its second timeout with 30 seconds left.

That's when Howard felt pressure, rolled right and then found Judkins, who had slipped out of the backfield alone in the middle of the end zone.

Notre Dame took one snap, a 7-yard pass to Beaux Collins to the 32 before the half expired.

Howard was 14 of 15 for 144 yards in the first half and had four runs for 30 yards. Egbuka (33 yards) and Smith (32) each had four catches. The Buckeyes outgained the Irish 231-93.

Nail-Biter

After the hot start, Howard threw an incomplete on the first play of the third quarter from the 25. In a flash, Judkins burst through for a 70-yard run to the 5. Ohio State then took a timeout. Judkins stayed in and earned a yard. Howard ran for 3 to the 1 prior to Judkins scoring on third down for a 28-7 lead at 12:46 at the end of a quick five-play, 2:14 drive.

On its next series, a desperate Notre Dame had a fourth-and-2 from its 33 and tried a fake punt, but backup QB Steve Angeli underthrew the receiver.

With a chance to put the game away, Henderson ran for 4, Howard rushed for 7, and Henderson carried for 3 to the 19. The Buckeyes were called for holding, placing the ball at the 29.

Henderson gained only 1, and on third-and-16, Howard overthrew an open Tate in the end zone, leading to a 46-yard field goal by Fielding to make it 31-7 at the 7:52 mark.

Notre Dame was looking at third-and-19

from its 37 after a Sonny Styles 11-yard sack, but Davison Igbinosun was penalized for pass interference to the OSU 48 to give the Irish new life.

Five plays later, Jaden Greathouse took a short toss at the 29 and weaved his way for a 34-yard touchdown, and the two-point conversion from Leonard to Jeremiah Love made it 31-15 with 3:03 left in the third quarter.

The drive went 75 yards in 10 plays and 4:49.

When Ohio State got the ball back, Howard converted a third-and-1 with a QB shove of 2 yards. On second-and-8, Howard threw an incomplete, but the Irish were assessed 15 yards for roughing the passer to make it a first down at the ND 47. Henderson ran for 2 to end the quarter.

On the first play of the final quarter of the longest season, Egbuka had a spectacular run for 24 yards after a catch but fumbled it away at the 21, and Notre Dame got the break it needed.

A third-and-9 from the 22 became a 30-yard pass reception for Greathouse to the OSU 48, and Igbinosun had a holding call for 10 more yards on the next play. On fourth-and-5 at the 33, Greathouse had an 11-yard catch for a first down and then a 6-yard grab to the 16.

That was followed by a holding on the OSU defense with the ball spotted on the 8. Leonard lost 1 on a run before he threw two incomple- tions.

The Irish then blew a golden opportunity when coach Marcus Freeman controversially opted for a 27-yard field goal but Mitch Jeter clanked it off the left upright back onto the field for a gigantic miss with 9:27 to play.

The Buckeyes started from the 20. Howard on second down ran for 11 to the 32, but that was it, and Joe McGuire had his first punt, a 51-yarder, to the 10 with a 10-yard return with 6:25 remaining.

The Irish went 80 yards in six plays and 2:10 with a 30-yard catch by Greathouse with 4:15 left making it 31-21. Then on a reverse, wide receiver Jordan Faison threw to Collins for the two-point conversion.

On the third play, Evans had a 33-yard catch

to the OSU 31. On the next play, JT Tuimolou administered a 2-yard sack of Leonard.

But two plays later, the Irish were in the end zone.

After a 6-yard kickoff return by Henderson to the 24, the Buckeyes tried to milk the clock, and Howard on second down ran for 8 yards and a first at the 35.

On third-and-11 with 2:45 left, Howard let it fly, and Smith caught it at the 28 and took it to the 10.

After a false start, Judkins ran for 1 as did Howard before OSU used a timeout with 1:13 left. Howard kept the ball on third down for a 2-yard loss before Fielding's 33-yard kick made it 34-23.

Notre Dame took over at the 25 after a touchback, and Leonard lost 2 yards on a pass to Love before Greathouse made a 17-yard grab to the 40 on the final play as the Buckeyes officially became champions.

"The story gets to be told now, and it's a great story about a bunch of guys who have just overcome some really tough situations, and there's a point where there's a lot of people that counted us out and we just kept swinging and kept fighting," coach Ryan Day said.

Howard was 17 of 21 for 231 yards and two TDs, Smith made five catches for 88 yards, and Judkins ran for 100 yards on 11 carries.

Notes

The Buckeyes had 445 yards (231 passing, 214 rushing). Notre Dame totaled 308 (255 passing, 53 rushing). ... OSU was 9 of 12 on third down while the Irish were 5 of 12 on third and 3 of 4 on fourth down. ... The Buckeyes had six penalties for 58 yards. Notre Dame was flagged three times for 30 yards. ... Egbuka made six catches for 64 yards. His third catch was the 202nd in his career to become the OSU all-time leader, surpassing K.J. Hill's 201. ... Howard had 16 rushes for 57 yards. Henderson carried 12 times for 49 yards. ... Leonard was 22 of 31 for 255 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 40 yards. ... Greathouse made six catches for 128 yards and two TDs. ... Cody Simon led the Buckeyes with eight tackles (four solo) and had one TFL.



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Players Meeting Lifts Bucks To New Heights

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mortalize themselves as undisputed national champions.

Ohio State's players were well aware of the options they could take following the Michigan loss, and that was explained in writing by senior defensive end and Buckeye lifer Jack Sawyer in a Player's Tribune article published on Jan. 16.

"Losing to TTUN at home, as these huge favorites, knowing it was our class's last chance to beat them ... I can't even describe it. I won't ever get over that loss," Sawyer wrote. "And honestly, it's the type of loss most teams don't get up from. Everyone blames everyone else, the program just kind of quits on itself, the next game they lay an egg and all of a sudden it's over.

"That could have easily been us against Tennessee, and I'm sure a lot of people expected it. But what those people didn't understand is, for as harsh as some of the criticism was that was coming from the outside, inside our program, it's family.

"Once we were going (to the CFP), we knew we had two options. Option A: We could stay down after taking that punch from TTUN, and already be defeated, and play the way most people expected us to play. Or option B: We could get back up. Be pissed off. Lock in. Go out there. And play our f—ing game. We could quit, like we knew everyone wanted us to, or be the best team in the country, like we know we are.

"We chose Option B."

As Sawyer wrote, the Buckeyes did not take the easy way out and go into the offseason with a sour taste in their mouths.

Instead, they went from being the sport's punching bag into a well-oiled juggernaut in a nearly two-month span, steamrolling their way through four college football titans in the playoff on their way to the program's seventh consensus national title and first since 2014.

Ohio State's historic four-game run – which included two blowout wins against No. 9 seed Tennessee at home and No. 1 Oregon at the Rose Bowl, a last-minute triumph over No. 5 seed Texas and finally a hard-earned 34-23 victory over No. 7 seed Notre Dame in the national championship game in Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium on Jan. 20 – marked a bounce-back that is rarely seen in major sports and a run that had never occurred before in college football.

But even with this improbability, Day and his team never stopped believing in what they could accomplish as a group and their ability to fight through tough times, a mentality that the now first-time national championship-winning coach says helped bring them to the promised land.

"I just can't say enough about our guys and what they've overcome to get to this point," Day said after the game. "And now they have something to show for it. Now the stories of these guys will be told because they've cemented themselves in Ohio State history – the ninth (overall) national championship and the third in the last 50-some years at Ohio State. Great teams, great players. Only three have been national champs, and these guys are one of them."



SONNY BROCKWAY

WHERE THERE'S A WILL — Former Kansas State quarterback Will Howard transferred to Ohio State in search of a national title. He found it with a transformative performance on Jan. 20 in the 34-23 victory over Notre Dame in the CFP championship game.

Long And Winding Road

But how exactly did the Buckeyes go from laughingstock to champions?

Shortly after the stunning loss to Michigan, Ohio State decided to have a mostly players-only meeting in the team room at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, with the only non-player in the room being Day, according to Sawyer.

There, the Buckeyes aired out their frustrations and emotions in an intimate, private setting, engaging in intense discussion over what went wrong against the Wolverines and figuring out how they could move forward from the defeat. Many players on the team said those discussions got heated at times, but that those differing opinions in the room were healthy ones given the state of the program at that time.

"You have to talk," quarterback Will Howard said before the College Football Playoff. "You have to work the issues out, and I think we did. We came in (to the team meeting room) and we hashed some things out."

"At the end of the day, we're a team," safety Caleb Downs added. "You have to go fix that specific thing that caused us to not get the job done. You have to make it right and find a way to grow from that and make decisions and play the best game possible, based on

your strengths and weaknesses and what we have right now."

Those healthy, sometimes heated conversations turned out to do wonders for Ohio State in the postseason.

After coming up short against Michigan due to some questionable offensive play-calling and tentative play, the Buckeyes completely flipped the script in the playoffs.

Ohio State made a concerted effort in its first two games against Tennessee and Oregon to play an aggressive brand of football on both sides of the ball, generating constant pressure on quarterbacks Nico Iamaleava and Dillon Gabriel while also getting the ball more to their offensive skill players in space to make explosive plays.

That plan obviously worked.

The Buckeyes throttled their first two CFP opponents by a combined 45 points (42-17 against Tennessee and 41-21 vs. Oregon), an impressive two-game stretch that reminded those around the world of college football just how dominant this Buckeye team can be if they play to their full potential.

Ohio State wasn't as explosive against Texas, totaling 370 yards on offense and sitting at just 14 points midway through the fourth quarter, but unlike the Michigan loss, the Scarlet and Gray made every winning play down the stretch to advance to the national championship game, none more im-

portant than the 83-yard scoop-and-score touchdown by Sawyer that put the game away with just 2:13 left and gave the Buckeyes the 28-14 win.

While Ohio State seemed to be firing on every cylinder and playing up to its championship potential when it mattered most, there was still one challenge standing in the way of it achieving its final and most elusive goal of the season. That challenge came by way of former Buckeye linebacker Marcus Freeman and his seventh-seeded Fighting Irish, who similarly to Michigan entered the national championship game with a dominant defense – one which ranked second in the nation behind only Ohio State in both scoring defense (14.3 points per game) and passing defense (165.3 yards per game) – and a somewhat limited offense, especially in the passing game.

But as was the case with the game against the Wolverines, none of those statistics mattered when the two teams took the field in front of a crowd of 77,660 fans in Atlanta.

While many were expecting Ohio State to run away with this one in the early going, it was instead Freeman and the Fighting Irish who threw the first punch. They opened the game with a title game-record 18-play, 75-yard touchdown drive in 9:45 that included eight quarterback keepers from Irish quarterback Riley Leonard, the final one being a 1-yard score that put Notre Dame up 7-0 with 5:15 remaining in the first quarter.

"That first drive was kind of uncharacteristic of us," fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon said. "We expected to go out there and dominate that first drive, and they had a good first 15 plays, and they were really getting into second- and third-and-shorts. When you have a running quarterback, especially like our offense, it makes it tough to get those stops."

Facing their first deficit in the College Football Playoff in a winner-take-all game that many expected Ohio State to win, the Buckeyes could have easily felt the pressure and let the underdog Irish gain more confidence as the game progressed. But, unlike the game against the Wolverines, the early deficit proved to be no problem for Day's team.

Instead of letting Notre Dame hang around, Ohio State showed its championship grit by taking total control of the game, scoring with relative ease on each of its next five possessions – four of those being touchdowns – while holding the Irish scoreless in that same span to take a commanding 31-7 lead with 7:52 remaining in the third quarter after a 46-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding.

Howard – who accounted for two of those five touchdowns, first an 8-yard throw to freshman sensation Jeremiah Smith to tie the score at seven and then a 6-yard toss to running back Quinshon Judkins to go up 21-7 – said his team was able to withstand that initial Irish surge by playing with poise and not letting the moment get too big for them.

"When you get into big games like this, whoever is able to have the poise in the noise and be able to overcome adversity prevails because it wasn't always pretty today," he said. "It wasn't always perfect. It's never going to be. But I think the team that we have and the leadership that we have with Coach Day, just the resilience this team has shown

all year, it's just unbelievable."

Smith Closes The Deal On A Title

Although the Buckeyes withstood the initial Notre Dame flurry and turned a 7-0 deficit into a 31-7 advantage, they would still have to face one more set of adversity before they finished the season as national champions.

After Fielding's field goal put OSU up 24 midway through the third quarter, the Irish started to slowly creep their way back into the game when their offense woke up with a 10-play, 75-yard drive that ended with a 34-yard catch-and-run score by Notre Dame wide receiver Jaden Greathouse and a successful two-point conversion pass attempt from Leonard to running back Jeremiyah Love to put the score at 31-15.

The Buckeyes appeared to catch a break on Notre Dame's ensuing drive when it was unable to capitalize on an uncharacteristic Emeka Egbuka fumble and promising offensive sequence due to a missed 27-yard field goal by Orange Bowl hero Mitch Jeter, but the Irish showed some championship grit of their own and did not quit.

They put more pressure on the favored Buckeyes as the fourth quarter moved on, forcing a Buckeye punt on the ensuing possession and then going on a quick 6-play, 80-yard drive that ended with another Greathouse score – this one going for 30 yards – and another two-point conversion, this one going from Jordan Faison to Beaux Collins on a trick play.

"Props to Notre Dame," fifth-year safety Lathan Ransom said of the Irish's

fourth-quarter surge. "We knew going in that no matter what the score is at any point, they are not going to give up, and they didn't. They kept playing, they kept fighting. I think that says so much about their culture and head coach."

With Ohio State holding onto a 31-23 lead with just over four minutes left in the fourth quarter, it likely needed just one more impact play to put the Irish to bed for good and close out a national championship win.

Staring right in the face of a title and Buckeye immortality, Day pushed all his chips toward the middle of the table and looked to his best offensive playmaker to seal the deal.

Facing a third-and-11 from the OSU 34-yard line with just 2:45 left, the Buckeyes decided not to run out the clock more and give Notre Dame the ball with a chance to tie the game but rather put the game away with a long pass attempt to Smith, whom the Irish were defending in loose one-on-one man coverage with sophomore cornerback Christian Gray about 7 yards away from the star wide-out.

"We felt like we had an advantage with Jeremiah on that shot, and we talked about it all week," Day said. "We really hadn't thrown one all game, and it was like, you know what, game on the line, let's just go. Let's be aggressive. I just thought to myself, 'Only one national championship, you only get one opportunity a year to do this. Let's just lay it on the line and put it out there and be aggressive.' And that's what we did."

Like it usually does, that plan to target Smith worked. Howard, facing an all-out blitz from the Irish, delivered a high-arching

lob to the open freshman, who quickly raced past Gray with the ball in the air and hauled in the game-sealing catch near the Irish 30-yard line before galloping all the way to the 10 for a 56-yard gain.

"It's man on man. I've been doing it for a long time," Smith said of the play. "It's football. At the end of the day, I just have to go out there and beat the man in front of me."

From there, the only thing left between Ohio State and a national title was a 33-yard field-goal attempt from the oft-maligned Fielding, and that proved to be no problem for the senior as he drilled the kick right through the uprights to give the Buckeyes the late 34-23 lead.

Vindication For Day And The Buckeyes

Smith's catch and Fielding's kick laid the groundwork for a Buckeye celebration that had been years in the making for Day and his program.

Since taking over in 2019, Day had regularly brought his team close to the finish line only to fall just short in heartbreaking fashion. The heartbreak began in 2019 when the Buckeyes suffered their first loss of the season to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl due to a last-second interception from former OSU quarterback Justin Fields.

Then came the blowout 52-24 loss in the 2020 national title game to DeVonta Smith and Alabama. Then came the 2022 defeat to Georgia in the CFP semifinals that ended on a missed game-winning kick from Noah Rugles that sailed far left to ring in the new year.

And, of course, there were also the four Michigan losses, each of which stung more

than the previous one.

Each of those losses and all of that anguish that came with them created scars that have helped the Buckeyes get to where they are at the start of 2025, where they stand, once again, as undisputed champions.

And Day, who has taken the brunt of the blame for each of those defeats since he took the job from Urban Meyer in 2019, said all of those wounds he suffered along the way were well worth the pain in the end.

"God made it hard for a reason," Day said. "You just never know what's in your path along the way. This game can give you the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. It can take you to your knees some days as a player and as a coach. I've been there before."

"For all those coaches or people who are on a journey to what they're looking to accomplish, if you're trying to achieve greatness, you're trying to become national champs in the most competitive environment there is in the entire world – there's nothing more competitive than college football, in my opinion. It's going to be hard and there's going to be things you learn along the way."

"But if you surround yourself with great people, you're resilient, and you believe in the guys around you and just keep fighting and keep putting one foot in front of the other, you give yourself another chance. And that's really what it was. You think back when we were in this stadium last time, I couldn't quite come to grips for a while with why we just didn't quite finish that game against Georgia. But I understand now. It all makes sense. And here we are. I couldn't feel better."

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Perfect Offensive First Half Leaves Enough Cushion

Throughout the 12-team College Football Playoff, there were many times when it seemed like the Ohio State offense was unstoppable. Will Howard had the best wide receiver group in the country at his disposal along with the duo of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins in the backfield, and those weapons were used well in big wins over Tennessee, Oregon and Texas.

GAME NOTEBOOK Greg Wilson

That momentum carried over into the national championship game when, after Notre Dame opened the game with a touchdown scoring drive, the Buckeyes used 6:05 and 11 plays to go 75 yards and tie the game up at seven apiece, starting what ended up being a perfect first half for the offense.

The first touchdown came on an 8-yard pass to Jeremiah Smith, and the defense had the offense's back, making a quick stop and allowing offensive coordinator Chip Kelly's unit to drive 10 plays for 76 yards in 6:06 for a 9-yard Judkins rushing touchdown, his first score of three on the day.

While the Buckeyes were going up 21-7 in the first half, Howard was on his way to

completing all of his first 13 passes for the night while also adding 19 yards on five rushes before his first incompleting, a wheel route to Henderson that was well defended by the Irish safety on the Buckeye senior back.

Howard said being as efficient as he was against the Irish is something for which he credits Ryan Day and Kelly for helping him.

"Coming into the season, something that Coach Day and Coach Kelly really emphasized to me was completions," Howard said. "Get completions, take completions. There were a couple times early (in the game) where maybe I had to check it down or it wasn't perfectly how it's drawn up, but you want to just keep the ball moving and stay on schedule. It may not always be pretty, and you may have to go pick it up with your legs.

"But I have to give all the credit to my guys, my O-line giving me time, and those guys, my receivers. We have the best receiving room in the country. It's not even close. The running backs did a hell of a job, and everybody stepped up when we needed it."

He finished the night with 231 yards passing for two touchdowns while completing 17 of 21 passes, an 81.0 percent completion percentage that helped him finish with the highest completion percentage in a single season in Ohio State history at 73.0 percent. He passed C.J. Stroud, who set the record in 2021 with a 71.9 completion per-

centage.

Without his performance in the national championship game, he wouldn't have broken that record. It likely wasn't on his mind when he was hoisting the trophy postgame, but he did say that he had Kelly to thank for keeping him calm in such a big situation.

"Even more than coaching me on football things, going into this game, he talked to me about how his quarterback the last time (Oregon's Darron Thomas in the 2010 BCS title game) maybe got a little worked up going into the game, and he said, 'Just be yourself, just be chill,'" Howard said. "He was great for me in calming me down and making sure I took things one play at a time, let the game come to me."

Ultimately, the offense was able to keep up its streak of scoring on every single drive until Emeka Egbuka lost a fumble at the end of what looked like a catch-and-run that would lead to yet another trip to the end zone. Instead, the Buckeyes gave up the ball at the beginning of the fourth quarter for the first time in the game.

They would not score on only two of their drives in the game, punting the ball away on the very next series before Jayden Fielding closed the game out with a 33-yard field goal with 26 seconds remaining, putting the game fully out of reach for the Fighting Irish.

Leonard QB Keepers Hurt Bucks Early

The previously mentioned first drive by Notre Dame was one that might have worried some Buckeye fans at the beginning of the game. Not only was it the first time Ohio State had trailed in the entire College Football Playoff, but the 18-play, 9:45 long drive was the longest drive in CFP national championship history in terms of both the number of plays and how much time was chewed off the clock.

Because of the advantage the Buckeyes had in previous games when they got off to such a fast start, it seemed as if Notre Dame

might have a chance to hang around long enough in this game to keep it close.

During that series, the Irish were able to chip away repeatedly, many times by letting Riley Leonard keep the ball, tuck it and run for a few yards, gaining multiple important first downs. Half of the 18 plays were rushes from the quarterback, Leonard leaving the field two-thirds of the way through the first period with nine rushes for 34 yards and seven points on the board.

But Leonard took some big hits on those runs, most of them going right up the middle into the Buckeyes' burly defensive line with linebackers coming at him full speed to try to make stops. There were a couple of times that he was slow to get up off the turf, and after the score, ESPN sideline reporter Molly McGrath said on the broadcast that the QB immediately ran to the sideline, threw up, and then stumbled to the bench.

Even though that play may have worked so much for them in the first quarter, it might also be possible that it hurt the Irish down the stretch if Leonard was dealing with the hits that he took the rest of the game.

Notre Dame head coach and former Buckeye linebacker Marcus Freeman said he didn't feel like he could keep putting Leonard through that, and not executing with other opportunities was their main problem throughout the rest of the game.

"No, we couldn't run Riley every play," Freeman said. "It's not right for Riley, and it's not going to sustain the success we needed offensively. We ran him a whole bunch that first series, and you look at the second series, we had two penalties which ended up forcing us to punt, and in the third series we had the miscommunication with the muffed snap, and that's the end of the half.


"I think more than anything, it was two series after the first one we didn't execute and we had some self-inflicted wounds that we had to clean up. Second half we drove the ball. I thought we did a good job with some tough situations. But we can't run Riley every single play. That's not what the

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Coming into Columbus as a career 58.8 percent completion rate quarterback, former Kansas State Wildcat turned Buckeye legend Will Howard had his way against a Notre Dame secondary that was fifth in the country in interceptions heading into the national championship game.

Howard's day started off as well as Ohio State could have hoped for, completing every one of his first 13 targets for 138 yards and a touchdown – seven of those completions also going for first downs. Launching wide receiver Emeka Egbuka into Ohio State history books with his now program-leading 205 catches, Howard found Egbuka on three straight pass attempts in the second quarter to help the Buckeyes to a 21-7 halftime lead and 34-23 victory, all while breaking the CFP championship record for most completions in a row.

Much of Howard's success likely resulted from Notre Dame – a heavy man coverage team – not changing up schemes defensively and allowing pass catchers such as Jeremiah Smith, Egbuka and Carnell Tate to run free throughout the field. Smith was the first to benefit from Marcus Freeman and Co.'s stubborn defensive efforts, hauling in an 8-yard touchdown catch on a masterfully executed motion out of the backfield. The passing offense for the Buckeyes continued to flourish throughout the first half, with Howard notching his second passing score after scrambling to the right before finding a wide-open Quinshon Judkins in the middle of the end zone to put Ohio State up 21-7.

The Downingtown, Pa., native continued his success through the air all night, finishing 17 for 21 with 231 yards with the previously mentioned two scores. Howard's ability to create plays in every facet of the game proved to be his biggest strength on the biggest stage of college football.

What Didn't Work

Fans who watched Notre Dame all season knew the threat that Fighting Irish quarterback Riley Leonard possessed with his legs. The former Duke Blue Devil put those skills on full display on the opening drive of the game, notching nine rushes for 34 yards and a touchdown – Notre Dame's only lead of the day.

What a lot of fans didn't take into account was how exceptional a passer Leonard was when it got to crunch time. Leonard went an uncharacteristic 22 for 31 with 255 yards and two touchdowns through the air, outdueling Howard when it came to passing yards. After Leonard was visibly gassed following the opening drive when it took all nine of his rushes and then some to take the

lead, Notre Dame was able to somewhat lean on a style of play it hadn't needed to all playoffs.

Leonard put his arm talent on display when the Fighting Irish needed it most, and Ohio State's secondary was unable to handle the passing threat at times down the stretch. Leonard found Jaden Greathouse on back-to-back touchdown drives, going for 34- and 30-yard scores to put Notre Dame in a position for a chance to tie the game.

Ultimately, the passing threat came too little, too late, and the Fighting Irish were forced to endure a championship game defeat.

Play Of The Game

With their backs against the wall and needing the biggest play of the playoffs so far, it took an entire team effort for Howard to find Smith for a 56-yard completion down the sideline to ice the game and capture Ohio State's first national championship in a decade.

Facing a third-and-11 on their own 34-yard line with 2:29 left on the clock, the Buckeyes needed a first down to end the game on their terms. The first down the now-national champions got was more than emphatic.

With the ball on the right hash and TreVeyon Henderson in the backfield, Howard took a straight dropback and launched the ball over the head of Fighting Irish cornerback Christian Gray, finding the waiting hands of Smith, who stumbled down to the Notre Dame 10-yard line to all but seal the game before Jayden Fielding's field goal to put the Buckeyes up 11.

The throw from Howard to Smith was a microcosm of the season in the most do-or-die moment of the national championship game. It's not often you see a veteran, graduate quarterback connecting with a true freshman wide receiver, but that's been the Buckeyes' bread and butter throughout 2024. All year long, it's been the play of Howard and Smith that has dictated games, with the pair connecting for a touchdown in 11 of the team's 16 games, and no play was bigger than their final connection of the season. The pass likely wouldn't have been possible without some key blocks from Henderson and the entire re-engineered Ohio State offensive line, as Notre Dame sent seven defenders on a blitz.

— Cameron Moone

formula for success is.”

Ohio State senior linebacker Cody Simon – named the defensive player of the game – said he was surprised that Jim Knowles' defensive unit didn't go out and dominate the first drive, but he was happy with how they bounced back the rest of the first half, allowing the offense an opportunity to get out to a 21-7 lead.

“I think we really settled in and were able to get the stops we needed to get the offense to a lead that we wanted, and we still had to get more stops at the end,” Simon said. “Me as a ballplayer, I wish we could have done better down the stretch. But we've just got to do what we've got to do to get the win. I'm just proud of all the guys.”

As Simon alluded to, the defense might have faltered at some points later in the game as well, ultimately allowing the Fighting Irish to score 23 points in the game, the most points any team scored against Ohio State in four rounds of the CFP.

Smith Seals Game By Beating Man-To-Man

In the lead-up to the game, the Notre Dame secondary – one of the best units in the country – made it clear that they were not going to change their game plan due to the talent in the wide receiver room that Ohio State had.

Smith made it clear that he was going to try to take advantage of that, reposting a video online of the Fighting Irish saying they would guard him man-to-man.

He immediately took advantage on his first touchdown that might have looked eerily familiar to Buckeye fans, cutting to the backfield but coming back to the right to a wide-open 15 yards, jogging into the end zone, a similar play call that worked against Ohio State when former Alabama Heisman winner Devonta Smith scored in the national championship between the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide in 2021.

It was also obvious that even with some of the best defenders in the country, Smith couldn't be contained when the game was coming down to the final minutes and Day dialed up a deep shot to the freshman. On third-and-11 from the OSU 34 with the Irish down by just one possession, Smith was left one-on-one on the right side of the field guarded by Christian Gray.

Gray gave Smith close to 10 yards of cushion off the line of scrimmage, but Smith's speed was still too much to handle, and he got open to catch a 56-yard pass from Howard.

Day said after the game that he drew up the pass to Smith because he wanted to stay aggressive with the game on the line, a mentality that got them to this point in the College Football Playoff.

“I talked to the defensive guys, and I talked to the offensive guys that we were going to continue to be aggressive throughout the game,” Day said. “I told the team that leading up to the game. And I had to make sure I followed through with that. But ultimately we have to make the plays. The protection was excellent by the offensive line, and then the throw and catch by Jeremiah and Will was special and, again, a huge play in Ohio State history.”

Smith understands the faith his team has in him and recognizes it has been there since he stepped onto campus.

“They have a lot of trust in me to make

a play,” Smith said. “They trusted me a lot this season. I'm just happy to be a Buckeye.”

Records Broken In Championship

In the national title win, Egbuka etched his name into the record books in the second quarter on a 12-yard catch that made him No. 1 all-time in receptions by an Ohio State player during their time in Columbus.

Not only did he make the catch, but he took the catch, ran down the sideline and trucked over an Irish defender to gain the first down. He passed K.J. Hill's mark of 201 catches from 2016-19 with that catch, adding to his new record the rest of the game with three additional catches.

He was able to break the record despite catching only nine passes during his freshman season in 2021, breaking out in his sophomore season for 74 receptions, 1,151 yards and 10 touchdowns.

He finished the game with a team-high six catches for 64 yards, corralling all of his targets on the night.

Not only did Egbuka make history, but running backs Henderson and Judkins became just the third Buckeye duo ever to rush for over 1,000 yards in the same season, running for 49 and 100 yards, respectively, in the win.

They joined Carlos Hyde (1,521 yards) and quarterback Braxton Miller (1,068) in 2013 and Archie Griffin (1,450) and Pete Johnson (1,059) in 1975.

Much was made about the pair of Henderson and Judkins over the offseason, many claiming they would be the best backfield in the country, and Judkins was out to prove that against Notre Dame, finishing with three total touchdowns, two on the ground and one through the air, helping Ohio State win its first national championship in 10 years.



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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 34, Notre Dame 23

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on how the current College Football Playoff system allowed his team to grow and win a national title: "I think this playoff system allowed our team to grow and learn and build. You can say whatever you want about – people talked a lot about how much money guys were making in NIL and different things like that. That was just because NIL was available. The majority of our team came back. These guys have been here for a long time. Certainly (graduate quarterback Will Howard) was a huge addition, (sophomore safety Caleb Downs) was a huge addition, don't get me wrong. But when you hear that number, that doesn't mean a whole lot other than the fact that the market value for our guys in Columbus at Ohio State is pretty high. That's what it means. When that got tagged on us early, there was a lot of pressure put on our players. But that's nothing new at Ohio State. I think the difference is that we finished the season the right way, and we grew. We built, and we responded to tough times. Man, isn't that what life is all about?"

Day on the adjustments his team made after its loss to Michigan in the regular season finale: "I wouldn't say that it was a reset. It wasn't like at the end of the year we were broken. It wasn't that way. We had an awful day. I don't know how else to describe it. We had an awful day, and we just said we could never do that again. And I think it's the job of the head coach to take the responsibility when something goes bad like that, but then on days like this, make sure that everyone understands it's the warriors and guys on the field that deserve all the credit, not the coach. The coach gets too much attention sometimes. I want to make sure these guys are the ones getting the attention."

Notre Dame head coach Marcus Freeman on his team coming up short in the national championship game: "Obviously a tough moment, a tough outcome. There are reasons why we didn't get the outcome we wanted. Credit to Ohio State and its ability to execute on both sides of the ball. Obviously, on special teams, they made a field goal that mattered at the end of the game. We obviously didn't play the way we needed to get the outcome we want, but as I said to the guys in the locker room, there's not many words to say when everybody is hurting."

Notre Dame quarterback Riley Leonard on his offense's struggles after their 18-play, 75-yard opening drive: "That first drive we just came out and played Notre Dame football, took advantage of our matchups when we had to. We just drove the ball down the field. We had to run the ball a little bit. Everything was just clicking. Then the next couple of drives maybe I got relaxed a little bit, and I can't let that happen. And I apologize to everybody for the way that I played after that drive in the second quarter because it's unacceptable. These are things that aren't necessarily physical but just like the mental side of things that I can't make certain mistakes. I just have to live with that and respond. And that's kind of what the message was at halftime. We have nothing else to lose. It's the last game no matter what. Might as well go out there and sling the rock and trust your guys."

Freeman on his decision to kick a 27-yard field

goal down 31-15 in the fourth quarter rather than going for it on fourth-and-9: "I just thought instead of being down 16, let's try to go down 13. I know it's still a two-score game, but you have a better probability of getting 14 points than you do 16 points. If it was a shorter fourth-and-goal situation, I probably would have gone for it, but I just felt fourth-and-9 was not a great chance for us to make that and decided to kick it, and we didn't make it."

Day on offensive coordinator Chip Kelly's play calling and decision to join Ohio State's staff: "I was very excited to see a big smile on his face after the game. For him to come and leave a head coaching position to come work with me meant a lot because he's obviously someone who's a mentor to me, and I certainly would not be where I am without him. He just has a great feel for the game, and he really helped me this year spend more time outside of the quarterback room. I certainly wasn't involved very much with the offense, but that allowed me to spread out a little bit and spend more time with the guys on defense. Not as much as I'd like to, but still enough to just bounce in and out. I think it brought us all together. I think the guys would agree, we wouldn't have gotten that done without Chip."

Ohio State freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith on his game-sealing 56-yard reception late in the fourth quarter: "I just knew I had to beat the man in front of me. I know Will trusted me. He put the ball out there, and I just had to make the play."

Freeman on Ohio State's third-down conversion to Smith: "It was do or die. It was that type of down. If they run it and they get a first down – we have to get them stopped, and we thought at that moment that the best way to get them stopped is to run zero pressure. We have to have faith at some point that we can make a play. There were times in the second half that we did in man coverage, but (Smith is) a heck of a player. He's difficult to cover. You want to play zone, and they'll find ways to pick you apart. You want to play man, they'll find ways to get him the ball. It's a talented offense."

Smith on sending the seniors out the right way: "I just laid it all on the line for those guys tonight. Those guys came back for a reason. They gave it their all, and I'm just happy for those guys. I just know I had to go out each and every day in practice and each and every game to give it my all to not let those guys down because they came back for a reason."

Howard on staying mentally steady despite the bright lights of the national championship: "I feel like it can be a lot. The lights are bright. It's a spectacle, and the TV timeouts are like four minutes long. It feels like everything is kind of a show, a little bit. You have to block all that out, and we talked about that all week. Eliminate all the distractions. Don't listen to any of the outside noise. Just finish the job."

Ohio State senior defensive end Jack Sawyer on dealing with preseason expectations: "We knew what the expectations were going into this season. We knew that we're at Ohio State and the

job ahead every year is if you're not competing for the national championship, you're not doing your job. So it wasn't ever a burden. It was kind of a motivating factor. To do what we're doing right now, what we just did, and leave a legacy that we just left is something that you can't put into words how much it means. So we never looked at it as a burden. We looked at it as an opportunity, and we did that tonight."

Junior running back Quinshon Judkins on how he was able to contribute to the team alongside fellow 1,000-yard tailback TreVeyon Henderson: "I had a previous relationship with TreVeyon. I knew him before I even came to Ohio State, and I knew he would still be here at Ohio State. That wasn't an issue for me. And just trying to contribute to this team and end up where we are today, that was the most important thing. Just trying to come help and win a national championship, and that's what we did."

Senior linebacker Cody Simon on what drew him to Ohio State: "What drew me to Ohio State was the culture. You don't really know about it before you get here, but when you learn that it's all about fighting and it's all about being the best version of yourself and that's what you fight every day to do. That's our whole team in a nutshell right there. Every day was a grind for us, and especially down the stretch when not everyone was on our side and not everyone believed in us, all our guys just kept fighting. You never want to give up. Even some of those times we were on the goal line on defense and you never know what can happen, you have to keep fighting. I think that's a perfect example of our team."

Sawyer on Day's presence in a players-only meeting after Ohio State's loss to Michigan: "It just speaks to how great of a coach he is. I think a lot of coaches would have had a lot of self-egos going into that meeting, and he didn't at all. He loves all of us like we're his sons, and we felt that for him. That loss we knew that we had to rebound like we did, and I can't say enough about how much he means to me and his family means to me. The way he goes about business – we don't go about it like a lot of teams do, about fear of losing your job. We go about it as a family, and it's about love, and we knew we had to execute, and we did that tonight."

Day on going from the pressure of losing The Game to winning a national championship: "You have to find a way to break through and make it to where we are right now. I think in today's day and age, there's just so much that goes with wins and losses and social media. People have to write articles, and there's a lot of things that are said that certainly have an effect on you and your family. But when you sign up for this job, that's what you sign up for. You have to be strong enough to withstand those storms, to come out the back end. Now it's an even better story. Nothing is guaranteed, but I always in the back of my mind felt that the people of Ohio and all of Buckeye Nation, after going through difficult times and seeing a team and a bunch of coaches go through difficult times to achieve their goal – it would mean even more (to them), and I hope they're all proud of what we've done."

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 34, Notre Dame 23

Jan. 20, 2025 - Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	0	21	10	3	34
NOTRE DAME	7	0	8	8	23

First Quarter

ND - Leonard, 1-yard rush (Jeter kick), 5:15.

Second Quarter

OSU - Smith, 8-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 14:10.

OSU - Judkins, 9-yard rush (Fielding kick), 6:15.

OSU - Judkins, 6-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 0:27.

Third Quarter

OSU - Judkins, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 12:46.

OSU - Fielding, 46-yard field goal, 7:52.

ND - Greathouse, 34-yard pass from Leonard (Love pass), 3:03.

Fourth Quarter

ND - Greathouse, 30-yard pass from Leonard (Collins pass), 4:15.

OSU - Fielding, 33-yard field goal, 0:26.

Att. - 77,660

Weather - Indoor

Team Statistics

	OSU	ND
First Downs	22	19
Rushing	11	5
Passing	10	11
Penalty	1	3
Rushes-Yards	41-214	26-53
Passing Yards	231	255
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	17-21-0	22-32-0
Offensive Plays	62	58
Total Net Yards	445	308
Third Down Efficiency	9-12	5-12
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	3-4
Punts-Avg.	1-51	2-97
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	1-0
Penalties	6-58	3-30
Time of Possession	32:25	27:35

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - OSU: Judkins 11-100; Howard 16-57; Henderson 12-49; Egbuka 1-13; Smith 1-(-5). ND: Leonard 17-40; Price 3-13; Love 4-3; Faison 1-1; Team 1-(-4).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - OSU: 17-21-0-231-2. ND: 22-31-0-255-2; Angeli 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - OSU: Egbuka 6-64; Smith 5-88; Tate 2-35; Judkins 2-21; Inniss 1-19; Scott 1-4. ND: Greathouse 6-128; Evans 4-52; Collins 4-32; Raridon 2-20; Mitchell 2-16; Love 2-5; Faison 1-6; Harrison 1-(-4).

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - OSU: 1-51.0-51. ND: 2-48.5-97.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Inniss 1-(-3)-(-3). ND: Herleman 1-10.0-10.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Henderson 1-6.0-6. ND: None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - OSU: None. ND: Viliamu-Asa 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: None. ND: None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Styles 1-11; Tuimoloua 1-2. ND: Burnham 2-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Tuimoloua 2-3; Styles 1-11; Simon 1-4; Reese 1-4; Williams 1-2; Jackson 1-1. ND: Burnham 2-4; Watts 1-5; Shuler 1-2; Kiser 1-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) - OSU: Simon 4-4-8; Styles 3-3-6; Downs 5-0-5; Tuimoloua 5-0-5; Igbinosun 2-2-4; Williams 3-1-4; Hancock 0-3-3; Ransom 2-1-3; Burke 3-0-3; Sawyer 1-2-3; Styles 1-1-2; Houston 2-0-2; Jackson 2-0-2; Reese 1-0-1; Matthews 1-0-1; Curry 1-0-1; McDonald 0-1-1. ND: Watts 6-2-8; Bowen 7-1-8; Moore 5-0-5; Kiser 4-1-5; Shuler 3-1-4; Viliamu-Asa 1-3-4; Burnham 4-0-4; Clrk 3-0-3; Gray 3-0-3; Rubio 2-0-2; Ausbery 1-1-2; Sneed 1-0-1; Oben 1-0-1; Cross 1-0-1; Heard 1-0-1; Faison 1-0-1; Thomas 1-0-1; Talich 1-0-1; Young 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - OSU: Smith, Howard, Henderson, Montgomery, Siereveld, Fryar, Jackson, Hinzman, Tshabola, Scott, Kacmarek, Simon, Igbinosun, Downs, S. Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Burke, Sawyer, Tuimoloua, Hamilton, Williams, Judkins, Egbuka, L. Styles Jr., Hartford, Hicks, Inniss, Thurman, Tate, Melton, McClain, Reese, Matthews, Williams-Dixon, Pierce, Jones, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Gurd, Mickens, VanSickle, Prater, Padilla, Fitzpatrick, Adolph, Christian, Curry, Kanu, Malone, Houston, Jackson, McDonald. ND: Greathouse, Love, Collins, Mitchell, Leonard, Spindler, Jagusah, Wagner, Schrauth, Coogan, Evans, Watts, Sneed, Shuler, Oben, Moore, Kiser, Gray, Cross, Rubio, Bowen, Burnham, Clark, Colzie, Harrison, Heard, Ausbery, Faison, Raridon, Thomas, Minich, Gilber, Rendell, Angeli, Williams, Young, Ford, Urlacher, Price, Zinter, Viliamu-Asa, Talich, Young, Rezac, Hurleman, Sherwod, Hinish, Tuihalamaka, Terek, Absher, Lambert, Baker, Scheidler, Thomas, Bauman, Mukam, Jeter.

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	MICHIGAN	L, 13-10	106,005
Dec. 21	TENNESSEE	W, 42-17	102,819
Jan. 1	Oregon	W, 41-21	90,732
Jan. 10	Texas	W, 28-14	74,527
Jan. 20	Notre Dame	W, 34-23	77,660

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	332	241
Rushing	135	97
Passing	183	117
Penalty	14	27
Average Per Game/Rush	166.4	87.6
Average Per Game/Pass	263.0	167.0
Total Offense	6870	4074
Total Plays	989	972
Average Per Game	429.4	254.6
Average Per Play	6.9	4.2
Penalties-Yards	72-653	58-467
Fumbles-Lost	15-5	23-9
Third Down Efficiency	81-186	80-29
Percentage	44%	35%
Fourth Down Efficiency	20-28	15-33
Percentage	71%	45%
Sacks-Yards	53-362	16-96
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:18	29:42

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	118	198	166	89	0	571	35.7
Opponents	40	78	31	57	0	206	12.9

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Quinshon Judkins	194	1060	5.5	14	86
T. Henderson	144	1041	7.1	10	66
Will Howard	105	226	2.2	7	19
James Peoples	49	197	4.0	2	18
S. Williams-Dixon	7	53	7.6	0	31
Jeremiah Smith	6	47	7.8	1	19
Emeka Egbuka	8	33	4.1	0	13
Julian Sayin	2	24	12.0	0	19
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	534	2662	5.0	34	86
OPP Totals	530	1402	2.6	13	38

Passing Comp. Att. Pct. Yds. TD-INT Effic.

Will Howard	309	423	73.0	4010	35-10	175.3
Devin Brown	11	20	55.0	114	1-0	119.4
Julian Sayin	5	12	41.7	84	1-0	128.0
OSU Totals	325	455	71.4	4208	37-10	171.6
OPP Totals	267	442	60.4	2672	10-10	114.1

Receiving Rec. Net Avg. TD Long

Jeremiah Smith	76	1315	17.3	15	70
Emeka Egbuka	81	1011	12.5	10	68
Carnell Tate	52	733	14.1	4	40
T. Henderson	27	284	10.5	1	75
Gee Scott Jr.	27	253	9.4	2	34
Brandon Inniss	14	176	12.6	1	27
Quinshon Judkins	22	161	7.3	2	21
Will Kacmarek	8	86	10.8	0	32
Bennett Christian	2	61	30.5	1	55
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	325	4208	13.0	37	75
OPP Totals	267	2672	10.0	10	69

Scoring

	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	-	73-73	-	-	13-17	112
Q. Judkins	16	-	-	-	-	96

Jeremiah Smith	16	-	-	-	-	96
T. Henderson	11	-	-	-	-	66
Emeka Egbuka	10	-	-	-	-	60
Will Howard	7	-	-	-	-	42
Carnell Tate	4	-	-	-	-	24
James Peoples	2	-	-	-	-	12
Jack Sawyer	2	-	-	-	-	12
Gee Scott Jr.	2	-	-	-	-	12
Bennett Christian	1	-	-	-	-	6
Gabe Powers	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	79	76-76	0	-	13-17	571
OPP Totals	24	16-16	0-2	5-6	12-18	206

FG Distance 0-29 30-39 40-49 50+ Total

Jayden Fielding	2-2	4-6	7-8	0-1	13-17
OSU Totals	2-2	4-6	7-8	0-1	13-17
OPP Totals	2-8	1-1	4-4	5-5	12-18

Punting No. Yds. Avg. Bk Long

Joe McGuire	47	1977	42.1	0	61
Nick McLarty	2	65	32.5	0	35
OSU Totals	49	2042	41.7	0	61
OPP Totals	87	3674	42.2	2	68

Interceptions No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Davison Igbinosun	2	45	22.5	0	45
Denzel Burke	2	31	15.5	0	31
Caleb Downs	2	7	3.5	0	7
Gabe Powers	1	29	29.0	1	29
Lathan Ransom	1	24	24.0	0	24
Jack Sawyer	1	12	12.0	0	12
Jordan Hancock	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	10	148	14.8	1	45
OPP Totals	10	109	10.9	1	36

Punt Returns No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Brandon Inniss	14	107	7.6	0	36
Caleb Downs	6	98	16.3	1	79
David Adolph	1	26	26.0	0	26
Caden Curry	1	7	7.0	0	7
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
Emeka Egbuka	1	-1	-1.0	0	0
OSU Totals	24	237	9.9	1	79
OPP Totals	11	71	6.5	0	16

Kickoff Returns No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

T. Henderson	8	67	8.4	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	15	153	10.2	0	23
OPP Totals	11	176	16.0	0	25

Bucks Get Ball To Playmakers Against Vols

Part of the criticism against Ohio State after its stunning loss to Michigan was the lack of usage of the top-level talent in the wide receiver room. Carnell Tate finished that game with six catches and 58 yards as the Buckeyes' leading receiver, but five of those catches and 45 of those yards came in the first half.

GAME NOTEBOOK Greg Wilson

None of Tate, Emeka Egbuka or Jeremiah Smith had a catch in the final 20 minutes of the game. All of that was while the running game gained just 77 yards on the ground with Quinshon Judkins' 12 totes for 46 yards (3.8 yards per carry) leading the way.

That performance had more than half of a month to stew in the minds of college football fans around the country, and it seemed to change the public perception of how good this Buckeye team really was. But whatever it was that got in the way of getting the ball in the hands of the playmakers against the Wolverines was not a problem when Tennessee came to Columbus for the first-ever postseason Buckeye game in Ohio Stadium.

"The first week (after the loss to Michigan) was an identification of the issues," head coach Ryan Day said after the win over

Tennessee. "You don't just move on from the game. You have to identify what the issues are and have real conversations with the players, allow them to speak because they're vested in this. Then coaches have their two cents. Then you give it about a week, and you put a plan together on how we're going to move forward, how we're going to get these things fixed. Then you figure out who your opponent is. We found out it was Tennessee, and that's where the two weeks of work went."

It was obvious things would be different on the first drive of the 42-17 win over the Volunteers when the very first play was an 8-yard completion to Egbuka and the next play was an incomplete pass to the senior receiver. After a face-mask penalty on the Vols and a false start on the Buckeyes, Will Howard was able to find TreVeyon Henderson for a 21-yard gain, which led to the first score of the night.

Howard dropped back from the 37-yard line and found a streaking Smith down the left side of the field, who made an impressive diving catch in the end zone to begin the onslaught of 21 points that Ohio State had in the first quarter.

Smith found the end zone again in the third quarter from 22 yards out after the Buckeyes were scoreless in the second quarter, setting the tone for the second half as well on a fade to the left side to take a 28-10 lead. His six catches and 103 yards were enough to get him past the 1,000-yard mark for the season in receiving yards, becoming the 10th



SONNY BROCKWAY

UNLEASHED — After Ohio State's passing attack stalled in the 13-10 upset to Michigan, the Buckeyes made sure not to make the same mistakes vs. Tennessee in the first round of the College Football Playoff. Emeka Egbuka had an 8-yard reception on OSU's first snap and finished with five catches for 81 yards.

pass catcher in OSU history to reach that milestone in a season. He earned high praise from his quarterback after the win.

"I think all of us can agree that we're not surprised by how good (Smith) is now," Howard said. "He's a dude. I think he's the best receiver in the country. I think we have the three best receivers in the country, but I'm a little biased. But you see what the kid does with the ball in his hands, and what he does with the ball not in his hands. He runs unbelievable routes. He's smart. He works hard. He's just everything you would want in a teammate and a receiver."

Howard being able to find those playmakers on the offensive side of the ball was also obviously a big part of the win. After playing what was his worst game in scarlet and gray against Michigan on Nov. 30, he came back out and had possibly his best performance of the year against one of the best defenses the Buckeyes have seen this year.

He finished the game 24 of 29 passing for 311 yards and two touchdowns while throwing one interception, but even the pick didn't upset his coaches since it happened due to his aggressiveness.

"There was a point there when we had a chance to go up 28-0, and he threw the interception — a great play, and I liked the call," Day said. "I liked how aggressive we were. That's part of it. When you're going to call the game aggressively, something like this happens, and you have to be the one to live with it. We had a chance to score and go up 28-0,

and the game is pretty much in hand at that point, but they fought their way back in."

But Howard's preparation and ability to come back from such a devastating loss were impressive, and offensive coordinator Chip Kelly said as much, crediting the work ethic the fifth-year QB has at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center every day.

"The one thing with Will is he's consistent," Kelly said. "He's the same person every day. He's not too high. He's not too low. He's a lifelong learner. He's got a thirst for learning. He's in every day watching film and studying and trying to get a little bit better on a daily basis. There's a consistency to his approach and there's a consistency to how he is every single day in practice. He's not one of those guys that's low on one day and high on another. He's really steady in his approach in how he prepares for games, and that's what you see when he plays in a game like tonight."

In addition to Smith, Egbuka had five receptions for 81 yards, and Henderson had four catches for 54 yards to go along with his 10 carries for another 80.

Defense Continues Dominating Performance

It wasn't just the offense that was firing on all cylinders for much of the first-round game, though. The defense had a big part in the win as well, beginning with allowing just 16 total yards in the first quarter from the Volunteers' offense while the Buckeyes' offense scored three touchdowns.

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Heading into the game against Tennessee, there was much made about how Ohio State fans would react come Dec. 21 if the Buckeyes were burdened with some early struggles. ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit even went as far to say that Ryan Day and his team were better off playing their first-round matchup away from Ohio Stadium to avoid the awkwardness of being booed on their home field. Because of this potential development, as well as the herd of Tennessee fans who flooded the Horseshoe who were waiting to erupt and steal some of the home-field advantage away from the Buckeyes, it was imperative for the Buckeyes to get off to a quick start – something they had struggled to do all year – and silence both the critics and Vols fans.

Luckily for Day and Ohio State, that's exactly what they did on Dec. 21. From the moment Josh Turbyville kicked off to Emeka Egbuka to start the game, the Buckeyes made sure that their fans stayed engaged and the Tennessee faithful were silent. They began the game on offense with an efficient five-play, 75-yard drive that ended with a 37-yard strike from Will Howard to Jeremiah Smith and then continued the momentum on defense with a quick three-and-out. This set the tone for how the beginning of the game went. From there, Ohio State went on a five-play, 68-yard touchdown drive to go up 14-0 on a 1-yard Quinshon Judkins rush, caused the Volunteers to lose 18 yards on three plays to force another punt, and then went on a seven-play, 58-yard scoring drive to take a resounding 21-0 lead with over three minutes to go in the first period.

Ohio State's first-quarter flurry not only put the Volunteers on their heels early but also put the Buckeye faithful into a frenzy, giving Ohio State a significant home-field advantage that not many thought would be there in the hours leading up to kickoff.

What Didn't Work

As always with blowouts, there is not much to say about what went wrong in the blowout win over the Volunteers. But if there was one thing to critique heading into the Rose Bowl against Oregon, it may have been the defense's inability to contain the shifty Nico Iamaleava in the run game. Ohio State did a great job of limiting Iamaleava's

production in the pocket, forcing him to complete a season-low 45.2 percent of his passes for an also season-low 104 yards and zero touchdowns, but when he got outside of the pocket and looked to run, he became a major thorn in the Buckeyes' side.

Iamaleava carried the ball a team-high 20 times for 47 yards and two touchdowns in the loss, and many of those yards came on scrambles where instead of trying to throw into a tight window he abandoned the pocket, made multiple defenders miss and came away with significant gains. This was most evident during Tennessee's second drive of the third quarter when he easily slithered past Ohio State's best defenders on consecutive plays to rush for 8 yards to gain a first down on third-and-6 followed by another 5 yards on first-and-10. Those two carries did not mean anything in terms of the result of the game, but it did show that the Buckeyes may have needed to devote some more time these next few weeks to pursuing the quarterback in open space and wrapping him up.

Play Of The Game

Although many fans will point to Smith's first touchdown of the game as the play of the game, the freshman's second score may have been the most important one. With the Buckeyes holding onto just a 21-10 lead early in the third quarter following a late first-half surge from the Volunteers, they were in desperate need of another high-impact play that could put momentum back on the home team's side and create some extra separation on the scoreboard.

Ohio State got exactly that on its sixth play of its first drive of the quarter, where on first-and-10 from the Tennessee 22-yard line, Howard found a streaking Smith down the sidelines and delivered one of his best throws of the season. The fifth-year gunslinger threw an impressive, high-arching pass that was lofted over the head of Vols sophomore defensive back Jermod McCoy and right into the arms of Smith, who hauled in the pass in the end zone for the 22-yard score. Howard's pass could not have been placed any better, and it also could not have come at a better time in the game. It gave the Buckeyes a commanding 28-10 lead in the second half, one which they would only expand on en route to the blowout 42-17 victory.

— Patrick Engels

The game plan going in worked, according to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. Tennessee was able to drive down the field for 16 plays and 79 yards for a touchdown late in the second quarter, but that was by design. The Buckeyes wanted to make sure that Tennessee's fast-paced offense wasn't able to come up with a big gain on a single play, which was successful.

The longest play allowed by Ohio State before the second- and third-teamers came in for the latter half of the fourth quarter was a 21-yard pass in the second quarter, the only play over 20 yards they allowed outside of the fourth period.

"No explosive plays," Knowles said about the Buckeyes' game plan. "I think the one drive, it was like a 16-play drive. And we had our shots and a really suspect quarter-back-roughing penalty. Make them go the distance on us. I thought we had a great plan. Early three-and-out, score – that got us out in front."

But that drive still worried Knowles, and he made sure that same thing wouldn't happen in the second half when Ohio State got back onto the field.

"I got after them pretty good at halftime. I did, to be honest with you," Knowles said. "Because I felt like we were rolling at the beginning of the game, and we took our foot off the gas a little bit. So I got after them at half-time and challenged them, because I knew the way the game was going that as long as we did our job, everything was going to turn out all right. So I thought they came out strong in the second half."

A big part of that success was the defensive line and the two senior edge rushers being able to get a lot of pressure on Tennessee quarterback Nico Iamaleava, who finished the game with just 104 passing yards on 14-of-31 passing while running for a net total of 47 yards and two touchdowns as well.

Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau finished the contest with a combined 13 tackles, four for loss, 3½ sacks, a forced fumble and three passes broken up.

"We knew (Sawyer and Tuimoloau) were going to have a good game," Knowles said. "The set of (Tennessee's) quarterback was a lot different – it was a lot tighter. We thought we would be able to change up coverage enough to make them hold the ball. So we expected that they were going to have a good game."

It wasn't a perfect performance from Knowles' unit, but that type of game can't be expected playing against a top-12 team in the country.

"They're playing with confidence, and coming off of the last game, they felt like we had to go win the game," Day said about the defense. "But now when the offense is playing to their potential like they were today, now it's complementary and we can end up with a game like we had tonight."

Patchwork Offensive Line Performs Well

One of the biggest issues against Michigan was the Buckeyes' offensive line and how that front five didn't have a full season of experience playing together since they were playing just their second game without center Seth McLaughlin after he tore his Achilles tendon.

With Austin Siereveld at left guard and Carson Hinzman at center for the Indiana game, the Buckeyes were able to win 38-15,

but Day thinks that win might have been a bit deceiving in terms of how the offense actually performed.

"When you go back and look at the season – we talked about it coming into the game – we were a different team when we lost Seth. We played that Indiana game, and we got that punt return, looking back we got that turnover in the red zone – we really didn't play great on offense in the Indiana game," Day said. "Then we went into the last game, and we still didn't know what the ramifications were of everything that was going on, based on who we had up front. There were a lot of things that played into that game, but certainly one of them was that we called this game more aggressively. There's no question about that."

But when faced with the fact Michigan's defensive line didn't allow the Buckeyes' front five to get any push, Day and OSU had to attack the issue if they wanted the offense to be able to get back to the way it was performing before McLaughlin went down, and he left many options open before the game.

The solution ended up being the same front five starting the game – Donovan Jackson at left tackle, Siereveld at left guard, Hinzman at center, Tegra Tshabola at right guard and Josh Fryar at right tackle. But there was a lot more rotation at the guard positions. Luke Montgomery was able to prove his worth in the win by rotating at left guard while Tshabola also got breaks in the game

with Siereveld playing on that side as well. Day and Kelly were both extremely pleased with what they saw.

"When you don't notice the guards, they're doing pretty well," Day said. "I noticed Luke's energy, toughness and edge. I've got to watch the film and see how he did, but we blocked much better in this game, and (the Volunteers) have a good front. We got some of the gap schemes going, some good double teams. It wasn't all perfect by any means, and we'll have to continue to diversify going into the next game, but we at least focused on the things these guys could do well, and now we have to build on it. They played with confidence. They played with energy. You could see after we scored a couple of touchdowns that they were jacked up and coming off the field with good energy."

"I think our line played outstanding tonight," Kelly said. "That defense, coming in I think they were fifth in the country in total defense and fifth in scoring defense, so we know how difficult they can be. You watch their games, and they got after everybody they played, but credit to our offensive line for keeping Will clean. Will knew if he could be clean and go through his reads and get a chance to go through his progressions that we would have a shot at beating these guys. Our offensive line did an outstanding job tonight in protection for Will."

Tennessee's strong defense left the game with no sacks and just two quarterback hurries, while the Buckeyes were also able to open gaps for the run game as well, finishing with 156 yards on the ground and four touchdowns rushing as a team.

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 42, Tennessee 17

Dec. 21, 2024 - Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
TENNESSEE	0	10	0	7	17
OHIO STATE	21	0	14	7	42

First Quarter

- OSU - Smith, 37-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 12:46.
- OSU - Judkins, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 8:09.
- OSU - Henderson, 29-yard rush (Fielding kick), 3:27.

Second Quarter

- UT - Gilbert, 36-yard field goal, 6:39.
- UT - lamaleava, 2-yard rush (Gilbert kick), 0:20.

Third Quarter

- OSU - Smith, 22-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 9:16.
- OSU - Judkins, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 1:18.

Fourth Quarter

- OSU - Henderson, 24-yard rush (Fielding kick), 10:53.
- UT - lamaleava, 2-yard rush (Gilbert kick), 1:56.

Att. - 102,819

Weather - Clear, 25 F

Team Statistics

	UT	OSU
First Downs	17	24
Rushing	12	8
Passing	4	14
Penalty	1	2
Rushes-Yards	39-152	33-156
Passing Yards	104	317
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	14-31-0	25-31-1
Offensive Plays	70	64
Total Net Yards	256	473
Third Down Efficiency	6-16	4-9
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	1-1
Punts-Avg.	7-40.9	3-39.3
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties	6-50	3-25
Time of Possession	27:10	32:50

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - UT: Lewis 10-77; lamaleava 20-47; Bishop 7-22; Sampson 2-6. **OSU:** Henderson 10-80; Howard 5-37; Judkins 10-34; Peoples 7-6; Egbuka 1-(-1).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - UT: lamaleava 14-31-0-104-0. **OSU:** Howard 24-29-1-311-2; Brown 1-1-0-6-0; Sayin 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - UT: B. McCoy 4-40; Lewis 3-7; Staley 2-11; White 1-17; Thornton Jr. 1-14; Brazzell II 1-8; Kitselman 1-5; Sampson 1-2. **OSU:** Smith 6-103; Egbuka 5-81; Henderson 4-54; Scott Jr. 4-39; Judkins 2-9; Tate 1-18; Kacmarek 1-7; Inniss 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - UT: Ross 7-40.9-53. **OSU:** McGuire 3-39.3-46.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - UT: None. **OSU:** Inniss 1-1; Downs 1-(-4).

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - UT: Lewis 1-24. **OSU:** Henderson 1-0.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - UT: None. **OSU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - UT: Brooks 1-0. **OSU:** None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - UT: None. **OSU:** Tuimoloau 2-20; Sawyer 1.5-12; Hamilton 0.5-3.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - UT: Pearce Jr. 2-2; Herring 1-3; Thomas 1-3; Bailey 1-1; Brooks 1-1; Telander 1-1. **OSU:** Tuimoloau 2.5-20; Sawyer 1.5-12; Ransom 1-5; Hamilton 0.5-3; Williams 0.5-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) - UT: Telander 7-3-10; J. McCoy 4-1-5; Brooks 3-2-5; Perry 2-2-4; Pearce Jr. 3-0-3; Gibson III 3-0-3; A. Carter 2-1-3; B. Carter 1-2-3; Turrentine 2-0-2; Harrison 2-0-2; Tjomas 2-0-2; Herring 2-0-2; Charles 1-1-2; West 0-2-2; Bolton 0-2-2; Thomas 1-0-1; Bailey 1-0-1; Spillman 1-0-1; Wright 1-0-1; McMurray 1-0-1; Josephs 0-1-1; Weathersby 0-1-1; Hobbs 0-1-1; Robinson 0-1-1. **OSU:** Simon 5-7-12; Tuimoloau 5-3-8; Downs 4-3-7; Styles 3-2-5; Ransom 3-2-5; Sawyer 1-4-5; Hamilton 0-4-4; McClain 2-1-3; Reese 1-2-3; Mathews Jr. 1-2-3; Williams 0-3-3; Igbinosun 2-0-2; Hancock 1-1-2; Jackson Jr. 0-2-2; Curry 1-0-1; Hartford 1-0-1; Hicks 1-0-1; Houston 0-1-1; Moore 0-1-1; Melton 0-1-1; Malone 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - UT: Thornton Jr., White, B. McCoy, Heard, Sampson, Mays, Karic, Campbell Jr., Spraggins, lamaleava, Kitselman, Gibson III, Turrentine, Eason, Thomas, Telander, Pearce Jr., J. McCoy, Brooks, A. Carter, Perry, Bailey, Wright, Davis, Simmons, Matthews, Slaughter, Spillman, Staley, Charles, Farooq, Brazzell I, Weathersby, Bishop, Staes, Josephs, B. Carter, Beasley, Lewis, Ross, Herring, Bolton, Bandy, West, Salansky, Harrison, Moi, Purcell, Hobbs, Norman-Lott, McMurray, Davis, Warren, Lampley, Johnson III, Umarov, Thomas, Gilbert, Turbyville, Robinson, Jenkins, Ross. **OSU:** Judkins, Howard, Egbuka, Smith, Siereveld, Fryar, Jackson, Hinzman, Tshabola, Scott Jr., Kacmarek, Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimoloau, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Sayin, Inniss, Hicks, West, Rodgers, Thurman, Nelson Jr., Tate, Melton, McClain, Reese, Peoples, Stover, Mathews Jr., Pierce, Styles Jr., Kienholz, Jones, Henderson, Brown, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Gurd, Scott Jr., Graham, Montgomery, Smith Jr., Wilson, Padilla, Fitzpatrick, Moore, Adolph, LeBlanc, Hartford, Curry, Kanu, Moore, Malone, Houston, Jackson Jr., McDonald.

Howard, Henderson Lead Bucks To Rout

By **CRAIG MERZ**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Will Howard threw for 311 yards and two touchdowns to Jeremiah Smith, and TreVeyon Henderson ran for two scores when No. 8 seed Ohio State defeated No. 9 seed Tennessee 42-17 in frigid Ohio Stadium on Dec. 21 in the first round of the College Football Playoff.

Smith had a TD of 37 yards to make it 7-0 in the first quarter en route to a 21-0 lead and a 22-yarder in the third for a 28-10 margin.

Howard was 24 of 29 for the two touchdowns and an interception while Smith's six catches went for 103 yards.

Henderson's 80 yards on 10 carries included TD rushes of 29 and 24 yards against the Vols (10-3).

The kickoff temperature was 25 degrees with a wind chill of 17 before a crowd of 102,819 that was awash in Tennessee orange, but many Vols fans headed for the exits at the start of the fourth quarter with the score 35-10.

Rocky Vols Start

The Buckeyes took the opening kickoff and with the aid of a penalty went 75 yards in five plays and 2:14 to go up 7-0 at 12:46 of the first quarter on a 37-yard catch by Smith.

On third-and-2 from the OSU 33 after a Buckeye timeout, Howard was sacked for a 13-yard loss by Bryson Eason, but Eason was called for a face-mask infraction for 15 yards to the 48.

OSU then took a 1-yard loss on a run by Quinshon Judkins followed by a false start, but on second-and-16, Henderson came out of the backfield for a 21-yard catch to the Tennessee 37. On the next play, How-

ard went deep to Smith at the goal line for the score.

After a Tennessee three-and-out and a 36-yard punt to the OSU 32, the Buckeyes again used five plays and went 68 yards in 2:39 that ended with Judkins' 1-yard run for a 14-0 lead at 8:09.

The drive opened with a Smith catch for 18 to the 50. Henderson ran for 4 before Howard threw down the middle for 40 yards to Emeka Egbuka to the 6. Judkins carried for 5 and then 1 for the score.

The Vols later punted on fourth-and-28 from their 7, but Caleb Downs muffed the punt only to recover it at the OSU 42.

On second down, Henderson's reception went for 10, and on third-and-5 from the Vols 43, Egbuka made a grab of 16 to the 27. A pass to tight end Gee Scott Jr. lost 2 prior to Henderson starting up the middle then cutting right for a 29-yard score to make it 21-0 at 3:27.

The drive was 58 yards in 3:22 and seven plays. The total yardage at that point was 191 to minus-6.

Tennessee finally moved the ball with quarterback Nico lamaleava rushing for 14 and 12 yards to reach the OSU 49, but a Jack Sawyer sack of 7 yards on the ensuing play would lead to the Vols punting into the end zone.

OSU outgained the Vols 205-16 in the first quarter with

Howard going 10 of 12 for 160 yards.

Early in the second quarter, on third-and-4 from the Tennessee 47, Howard's pass was batted at the line, but he caught it for no gain, setting up a 10-yard catch by



TreVeyon Henderson



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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 42, Tennessee 17

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on the way his team handled adversity: "I'm proud of our seniors for a lot of reasons. One, because of the fact that they were able to finish their last game at Ohio Stadium with a win like that. I'm also proud of the way that they responded. I told them in the locker room that in life, you're going to be defined by the way you handle adversity as a person, as a man, as a dad. So to see how they responded in this game – you could tell from the jump that they had a look in their eye that they were going to win this game. I thought they played that way."

Day on the lead-up to the game throughout the week: "About Wednesday of this week, you could tell these guys just wanted to get on the field. It had been a long lead-up for us – weeks. And to say it doesn't weigh on you, it does. We have a lot of pride in who we are. These guys have a lot of pride. These guys, they love each other, and they're a great representation of Ohio State."

Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly on using the passing game to set up the run: "It just depends on who you're playing. There's always a philosophical approach when you're playing somebody based upon what their strengths are and what their weaknesses are and what you're trying to exploit. I don't think it's necessarily as easy as saying, 'You throw to set up the run.' I've done that before and gone three-and-out, three-and-out, three-and-out, and we haven't gone anywhere with it. It's not just, 'Hey do this, and it works.'" It's about the players executing, and I thought they executed really well tonight."

Day on Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Will Howard's performance: "I thought his footwork was good. We worked hard on some of those throws, and he hit a few of those right on the money. A big thing for Will is his footwork. When his footwork is on point and when he's seeing things well, he's as good as anybody in the country."



Will Howard

Howard on the performance of the offensive line: "I'm so proud of those guys. I had to listen to them get harassed for the last three weeks. I had to sit here and act like it didn't affect me because those are my brothers, and I go to war with those guys every single day. For them to show out and have the performance that they had tonight, it was huge, and it was against a really good front. They're probably the second-best front we've seen all year. For them to come out and do what they did against those guys was huge. I'm just so proud of those guys for not listening to the outside noise and sticking their noses down and really, really getting gritty and working for everything."

Ohio State senior offensive lineman Donovan Jackson on taking criticism after the Michigan loss personally: "To say it lightly, we took it personally about what happened last game. For three weeks everyone in the world was telling us 'You suck.' Half of our fan base was telling us we sucked. Half of – almost every expert and anyone with a podcast was telling us we sucked, and we took it personally. We're like, 'That's not how we're going

to go out.' We know we're better than this s—. We're down a couple of guys, but all of these guys in this room can go."

Howard on how the home fans were during the game: "They were great. I think (Tennessee) thought they were going to take over this place, and we showed them pretty quickly that we weren't going to let that happen. Obviously us jumping out to a pretty quick start helped with that. I have to give credit to Buckeye Nation for showing up and being loud, and the drone show in the third quarter was pretty damn cool."

Tennessee head coach Josh Heupel on junior running back and SEC Offensive Player of the Year Dylan Sampson's hamstring keeping him out of parts of the game: "At the end of the Vandy game (Nov. 30) he got dinged up, and it was soft tissue (injury). He had been out the first couple of weeks and got back with us. We started building him throughout the week. We felt like he was in a good spot and anticipated him not having the same type of load that he normally would have. Just early in the game he kind of retweaked it and wasn't available there for a while."

Heupel on how Ohio State's roster compares to other teams Tennessee has faced: "They played really well. Coming into it, I thought their skill on both sides of the ball was as good as you'll see. Defensively they led the country or were top five in pretty much every category. They did a good job tonight."

Smith on fourth down to the 37.

Smith then had a 10-yard, third-down catch to the 20. The Buckeyes were going in for the kill shot only to have Will Brooks snag a contested interception at the back of the end zone, making the catch while falling out of bounds after the ball was knocked out of Smith's hands. The play stood after a review.

The inspired Vols got catches of 21 yards by Bru McCoy and 17 by Squirrel White to the OSU 38.

Tennessee got a break to nullify an interception by Davison Igbinosun at the 19 when Kenyatta Jackson Jr. was called for roughing the passer, placing the ball at the 19, but a 6-yard pass, a false start and two incompletions resulted in a 36-yard field goal by Max Gilbert with 6:39 left in the half.

After OSU's first punt of 46 yards by Joe McGuire to the Tennessee 21, the Vols made it 21-10.

The Vols faced a fourth-and-1 from the OSU 37 when DeSean Bishop rushed up the middle for 8. On third-and-2 from the 7 with 42 seconds left, Iamaleava gained 3, and Bishop ran for 2 more to the 2 with 24

seconds left. Iamaleava carried it in from there with 20 seconds left.

It was a lengthy drive of 16 plays to go 79 yards in 4:03.

OSU moved to the Tennessee 38 on a 15-yard run by Henderson, a catch of 7 by Scott and a pass to Henderson for 15. With five seconds left, Jayden Fielding was well short on a 56-yard field-goal try.

At the half, Ohio State led in yards 296-147 with 220 of that through the air with Howard completing 17 of 21 and Smith having five catches for 81 yards.

Beat Down

Tennessee's Jackson Ross punted 31 yards to the OSU 35 on its first series of the second half.

The Buckeyes went ahead 28-10 at 9:16 on Smith's 22-yard catch on a perfectly thrown ball by Howard to the right boundary to cap the six-play, 65-yard, 3:14 series.

Egbuka had kept the drive alive with a 7-yard reception to the 50. Henderson then ran for 2, and Scott's 26-yard reception put the ball on the 22 to set up the TD.

After another UT punt, the Buckeyes

methodically marched from their 19, chewing up yards and plays along the way to finish with a 1-yard run by Judkins for a commanding 35-10 lead with 1:18 left in the dominant third quarter.

Judkins had three runs for 16 total and Howard ran for 10 before his pass to tight end Will Kacmarek went for 7 yards to the Tennessee 48. Henderson rushed for 6 followed by Carnell Tate's catch for 18 to the 24. Howard went to Smith in the right corner of the end zone, but Jermod McCoy was flagged for interference to put the ball at the 4. Judkins made a catch and was stopped at the 1, but he bulldozed his way across the goal line on the next play.

The Buckeyes used nine plays and 4:46 to go 81 yards.

Early in the fourth quarter, Tennessee turned the ball over on downs at its own 39, and five plays later, Henderson ran up the gut for a 24-yard TD to up the count to 42-10 with 10:53 remaining. He lost 3 yards before Howard had consecutive runs for 18 yards. An incompleting followed, but Henderson burst through the line on the next

play.

Backup QB Devin Brown, who has entered the transfer portal, entered for a series with 9:45 to play. Julian Sayin took the snaps on the next drive.

Tennessee moved 73 yards to make it 42-17 on a 2-yard run by Iamaleava with 1:56 to play against the OSU backups, and quarterback Lincoln Kienholz ended the game with three handoffs to James Peoples for 5 yards to the OSU 18.

Notes

Ohio State gained 473 yards (317 passing, 156 rushing). Tennessee totaled 256 (104 passing, 152 rushing). ... Howard ran five times for 37 yards, and Judkins had 34 on 10. ... Egbuka gained 81 yards on five catches, Henderson's four grabs went for 54 yards, and Scott made four catches for 39. ... Cody Simon had a game-high 12 tackles (five solo). ... JT Tuimoloau had two of the Buckeyes' four sacks for 20 yards, Sawyer had 1½ for 12 yards, and Ty Hamilton notched a half-sack for 3 yards. The Vols had no sacks.

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Buckeyes Rout Ducks In CFP Rose Bowl

In Ohio State's first-round College Football Playoff game against Tennessee on Dec. 21, it successfully quieted all the noise and criticism surrounding the Michigan loss by getting off to a blazing start. The Buckeyes scored three relatively easy touchdowns on each of their first three drives to jump out to an early 21-0 lead, a tone-setting sequence that catapulted Ryan Day's squad to an easy 42-17 win over the Volunteers.

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Engels

It seemed almost impossible for the Buckeyes to get off to a better start than the one they had against Tennessee, but they did just that on Jan. 1 at the Rose Bowl in their resounding 41-21 win over No. 1 Oregon.

Ohio State made Oregon – which entered the game in Pasadena, Calif., as the unquestioned best team in the country with a perfect 13-0 record, one of those wins being over the Buckeyes on Oct. 12 – look like a team that hardly belonged on the same playing field as the Scarlet and Gray from the moment the game started.

The Buckeyes set the tone on offense on the very first play of the game, completing a pass down the sideline to tight end Gee Scott Jr. that went for 30 yards, and two plays later delivered the first score of the contest on a 45-yard catch-and-run from freshman sensation Jeremiah Smith on a short drag route.

After the two teams traded punts for the next three drives, Ohio State delivered another quick body blow to the Ducks with another three-play drive that ended with a score, this time coming on a well-executed pitch-and-catch from quarterback Will Howard to

senior wideout Emeka Egbuka for 42 yards.

The Buckeyes did not look back after that. They continued to pour it on in the second quarter, scoring on each of their four drives that period on a 46-yard field goal from Jayden Fielding, a 43-yard deep-ball touchdown to Smith, a 66-yard scamper by senior tailback TreVeyon Henderson that became Ohio State's longest touchdown run in the Rose Bowl in program history and then finally a 36-yard make from Fielding.

When the dust settled, Ohio State had jumped out to a stunning 34-0 lead over the vaunted Ducks with just under three minutes left in the first half, a score that no one was expecting in the world of college football.

When asked after the game why his team got out to its blazing start, Day said that his team felt an obligation to play with great passion and aggressiveness on the sports' grandest stage because of the way they fell short the last time around against the Ducks on Oct. 12, a 32-31 defeat that came down to the final play of the game.

"I think our guys came out with an edge," Day said. "They've been that way for a while. And when you come out of a game like (the Oct. 12 Oregon loss), it hurts and it stings. After that game, we talked about how over the next six to seven to eight weeks, it's going to be about who gets better every single week. Nothing flashy about it. I feel like our guys acted that way, and we came out and played that way today."

Smith expressed a similar sentiment while accepting the Rose Bowl's Offensive Player of the Game award on the stage during postgame, telling ESPN's Reece Davis that it was imperative for him and his teammates to come out playing to their best abilities rather than starting slow.

"We just started fast this game," Smith said. "Last game that we played (against Oregon), we didn't play our best game. So we just knew coming in that we had to be our best, and that's what we did."

Playing with a motivated mindset and chip on their shoulders certainly helped the Buckeyes come out with a vengeance during both the Tennessee and Oregon games, but it still didn't fully guarantee that they would be playing at their best, according to the Buckeye head coach. Day said that ultimately came because his players executed at a high level when it was needed most, which he said is a testament to the abilities and mindset of his group.

"You can see the potential of this team," Day said. "When we execute, when we prepare the way that we prepare – I have to give the coaches a lot of credit and the staff. Everybody came together here a couple weeks ago. We have a lot of momentum going, but ultimately, it comes down to the players. They're the warriors on the field that put this thing out there."

Smith Shines In Rose Bowl Spotlight

Just four days before taking the field at the Rose Bowl for the first time in his career, Smith stood in front of the media at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and showed those listening just how confident he is in his abilities as a pass catcher.

"I feel like every ball that's thrown to me, I have to catch it no matter if the defender is on me or not," the soft-spoken Smith said a few minutes before revealing that he wants to be the football version of NBA legends Kobe Bryant and Michael Jordan. "I just feel like I have to make a play no matter what."

It is that type of mentality that has allowed him to chase and eclipse greatness all season, smashing each of Cris Carter's single-season freshman wide receiver records at Ohio State at just 18 years old (19 years old as of Nov. 29). It's also what allowed him to break yet another Ohio State record held by the Pro Football Hall of Famer.

With Carter in attendance and watching on the Buckeye sideline, Smith set the Buckeyes' freshman single-game receiving yardage record with 187 against the Ducks, eclipsing Carter's previous record mark of 172 yards, which was also set in the Rose Bowl in 1985 against USC.

Smith's record yardage, which came on seven catches and included the two previously mentioned touchdowns, marked yet another dominant performance from the freshman in front of a national audience, where he seemingly found himself open almost every time Howard threw it in his direction.

Smith was targeted 10 times and caught seven of them, with four of those going for at least 29 yards. Although those numbers

still fall short of his lofty standards, his performance on one of college football's grandest stages – one which also included acrobatic catches near the sideline and a few long runs after the catch that showed off his track-athlete speed – caught the eye of many, including the opposing team's head coach.

"He attacks the ball in the air as well as any receiver I've seen," Ducks coach Dan Lanning said. "I mean, the guy is NFL-ready. He's that talented. He's very special. Will Howard did a great job of getting the ball to him tonight. He's tough to defend. He's physical. He has all the tools – a really talented player."

Smith's dazzling performance came as no surprise to his head coach, who said that the former consensus No. 1 prospect was building toward this very moment since he first stepped foot on campus, showing a consistent work ethic in practice that is rare among other first-years.

"The way that he came in from the get-go, he had a look in his eye that he wanted to make an impact as a freshman," Day said. "I think his teammates would tell you the same thing, and he's earned the respect of his teammates, not because of his ability – you guys see his ability – but to me, it's the work ethic every day."

"He comes in, he's serious, he doesn't say a whole lot. But when he does, people listen. His maturity – physically, emotionally and mentally – has allowed him to play like this. And remember, he's a freshman, so for him to be playing his best football late in the season speaks to his maturity."

As for Smith himself, he remained as confident as ever in the minutes after his record outing. When Davis asked him if anybody could stop him on the field, the 6-3, 215-pound wideout responded with a simple, "No."

Amid all of this brashness, though, after the game Smith also recognized the magnitude of this type of performance, saying that he was honored to put his imprint on such an iconic and historic game as the Rose Bowl.

"I'm enjoying the moment," Smith said. "It's my first time at the Rose Bowl. You hear all about the historical moments, and I'm just happy to be a part of it."

Knowles' Defense Turns Up Heat Vs. Ducks

Ohio State's regular-season loss to Oregon was in large part due to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' defense playing by far its worst game of the season, giving up

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

From the very first snap of Ohio State's 41-21 win over Oregon on Jan. 1, Ohio State's high-flying passing offense was firing on all cylinders. It took just three passing plays for the Buckeyes to score first against Oregon, thanks to a beautiful play that sprang tight end Gee Scott Jr. wide open for a 30-yard gain and freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith showing he's one of the most – if not the most – talented players at his position in the country on a 45-yard touchdown on a screen pass, with an incompleteness sandwiched in between.

Great play design and Smith's generational talent were the themes of Ohio State's tremendous 34-point first-half offensive performance.

Those themes were perfectly exemplified by a 43-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Will Howard to Smith early in the second quarter. On the play, Ohio State used some misdirection, as Howard rolled to his left while Scott and senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka ran their routes in that direction, allowing Smith to be isolated one on one with Oregon defensive back Tysheem Johnson. Smith faked left before cutting past Johnson in the other direction to become wide open as Howard flipped his hips and threw a solid pass right into Smith's arms for the team's third touchdown of the game.

Howard also deserves credit for Ohio State's efficiency in the passing game. The former Kansas State Wildcat delivered a couple of lengthy passes put in the perfect spot during the win. His best throw might have come on a 42-yard touchdown pass in the first quarter when he threw a line drive pass right in stride into a minuscule window for Egbuka, despite the senior receiver being very well-covered. Howard's pass was even deflected right before getting to Egbuka, but it was no issue for the All-Big Ten receiver, who still was able to score.

Howard ended his day with an impressive stat line. The Downingtown, Pa., native threw for 319 yards and three touchdowns while completing 17 of 26 passes.

What Didn't Work

Ohio State's blowout of Oregon was probably the team's best game of the season, but the middle eight stretch – the last four minutes of

the first half and the first four minutes of the second half – went about as poorly as they possibly could for the Buckeyes.

The Buckeyes started the ending of the first half with a disappointing field goal after having the ball in the Ducks' red zone on first down.

The Buckeye field goal was followed by a 10-play, 75-yard touchdown drive from Oregon to end the first half. What was particularly frustrating for the Buckeyes was that the Ducks picked up a third-and-16 on the drive and scored their touchdown as time expired from the 5-yard line.

The Ducks got the ball to start the second half, and like their closing drive of the first half, they had plenty of success moving the ball down the field. Once again, it had looked like the Buckeyes wouldn't concede points on the drive after backing up the Ducks well behind the sticks to force a third-and-22. However, Oregon quarterback Dillon Gabriel improvised on the play to find receiver Justius Lowe for a 21-yard completion. The Ducks picked up the first down on a 1-yard rush from Gabriel one play later, and they slowly made their way down the field before scoring their second touchdown in as many drives on a 2-yard run by running back Noah Whittington.

Play Of The Game

It's hard to choose one play from the Buckeyes' outstanding performance in their 20-point win, but senior running back TreVeyon Henderson's 66-yard touchdown run stands out as the play that solidified the Buckeyes' dominance over the Ducks.

Up 24-0 on first-and-10 with 8:59 to go in the first half, Howard handed the ball off to Henderson, who – after picking up a couple of great blocks from offensive lineman Donovan Jackson and tight end Bennett Christian – found a huge hole to run through on the right side of the offensive line. After surging through the hole, Henderson easily got past the one defender in front of him with a swift cut toward the sideline. A couple of Ducks had a chance at Henderson, but the senior running back's straight-line speed allowed him to sprint down the sideline untouched for his first touchdown of the game.

Henderson's 66-yard run was not just his longest of the season, but the longest by any Ohio State player in Rose Bowl history.

— Bobby Gorbett

Exorcising some early-season demons was certainly a positive thing for Knowles' unit, especially since the re-engineering was done only because they struggled in that

one game against Oregon. But those who were leading the unit knew that these positive feelings would soon fade away if they weren't able to keep the momentum going.

"We came out here, we wanted to prove something, and we have more to prove now so we have to keep going," fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon said.

496 total yards and a number of explosive plays through the air while also generating zero sacks on star Ducks quarterback Dillon Gabriel.

These failures sparked a significant mentality and scheme change in Ohio State's defense for the rest of the season, one which Knowles, Day and others deemed a "re-engineering" of the unit. This re-engineering paid off in a huge way in the Rose Bowl, where Knowles and the Buckeyes completely flipped the script against the Ducks this time around, giving up 276 yards – including just 139 in the first half – while forcing Gabriel into a whopping eight sacks.

Ohio State's constant pressure on the veteran Gabriel proved to be one of the biggest reasons behind the blowout win. After being comfortable for most of the game in their October win, the Ducks' signal caller was feeling the heat from the Buckeye defensive front throughout the contest, forcing him to rush many throws and complete just 29 of his 41 passes for 299 yards and two touchdowns, not as good as the 341 yards and two scores he had a few months back.

Knowles said these successes came from his unit showing multiple different looks and formations throughout the game, which confused Gabriel and forced him to hold onto the ball too long and allow the Buckeyes' defensive line to feast.

"We just created more looks for the quarterback and changed up some looks that had him hold the ball," Knowles said. "You're not going to see a high-pressure rate or anything because he's a scrambler and he's good at it, and you have to be careful. They have real speed. So I think we just changed up the looks enough to be able to give our guys a chance to rush him."

The one Buckeye who may have benefited the most from this scheme was senior defensive end Jack Sawyer. After having one of his best all-around games against Tennessee, the Pickerington, Ohio, product was once again dominant off the edge for the Buckeyes, recording two key sacks on Gabriel, both of them occurring when the Ducks were trying to mount a late comeback in the third quarter.

Sawyer also made his presence felt in pass defense, where he used his 6-5 frame to jump up and deflect three passes out of the hand of the 5-11 Gabriel. He recorded five pass breakups in the first two playoff games, a new wrinkle to his game considering he had just four career PBUs heading into the College Football Playoff.

Day was complimentary of his senior defensive end after the game, saying he helped set the tone of the defense with his activity and leadership on the field.

"I can't say enough about Jack as a leader, as a person," Day said. "He really stands for what it means to be a Buckeye, and to see him playing at a high level – he's the heart and soul of the front. He brings a hard hat and a lunch pail (every day in practice) and goes to work. He's playing a lot of great football, and he's a big reason we won today."

The Rose Bowl proved to be a cathartic afternoon and night for just about every Buckeye who had struggled in the first matchup against the Ducks, perhaps no one needing that more than the oft-maligned Denzel Burke, who was solid in coverage and recorded a tackle for loss after giving up several explosive plays to Oregon in the regular-season matchup.



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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 41, Oregon 21

Jan. 1, 2025 - Rose Bowl, Pasadena, Calif.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	14	20	7	0	41
OREGON	0	8	7	6	21

First Quarter

OSU - Smith, 45-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 14:00.

OSU - Egbuka, 42-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 7:31.

Second Quarter

OSU - Fielding, 46-yard field goal, 14:50.

OSU - Smith, 43-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 10:28

OSU - Henderson, 66-yard rush (Fielding kick), 8:47.

OSU - Fielding, 36-yard field goal, 2:59.

ORE - Holden, 5-yard pass from Gabriel (Lowe pass from Gabriel), 0:00.

Third Quarter

ORE - Whittington, 2-yard rush (Sappington kick), 8:55.

OSU - Henderson, 8-yard rush (Fielding kick), 2:19.

Fourth Quarter

ORE - Holden, 27-yard pass from Gabriel (Sadiq rush failed), 10:00.

Att. - 90,732

Weather - Sunny, 70 F

Team Statistics

	OSU	ORE
First Downs	20	15
Rushing	7	2
Passing	12	13
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	31-181	28-(-23)
Passing Yards	319	299
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	17-26-0	29-42-0
Offensive Plays	57	70
Total Net Yards	500	276
Third Down Efficiency	4-11	8-19
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	2-3
Punts-Avg.	5-40.4	8-39.9
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties	2-14	3-13
Time of Possession	29:05	30:55

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - OSU: Henderson 8-94; Judkins 17-85; Smith 1-5; Howard 5-(-3). **ORE:** James 7-14; Limar 2-4; Whittington 6-3; Johnson 1-(-1); Gabriel 12-(-43).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - OSU: Howard 17-26-0-319-3. **ORE:** Gabriel 29-41-0-299-2; Moore 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - OSU: Smith 7-187; Egbuka 5-72; Henderson 3-20; Scott Jr. 1-30; Tate 1-10. **ORE:** Holden 7-116; Whittington 6-30; Ferguson 5-71; T. Johnson 5-32; Lowe 2-27; James 2-7; Sadiq 1-10; Bryant Jr. 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - OSU: McGuire 5-40.4-47. **ORE:** James 4-37.0-44; Dunne 4-42.8-44.

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

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Henderson 1-3. **ORE:** None.

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

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

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Sawyer 2-19; Tuimoloau 2-14; Simon 2-13; Curry 1-8; Ransom 1-2. **ORE:** None.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - OSU: Tuimoloau 3-16; Simon 3-14; Sawyer 2-19; Curry 1-8; Hamilton 1-2; Ransom 1-2; Burke 1-1; Williams 1-1. **ORE:** Harmon 2-7; Tuioti 1-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) - OSU: Simon 7-4-11; Ransom 5-2-7; Hancock 2-3-5; Igbinosun 4-0-4; Styles 3-1-4; Williams 3-0-3; Tuimoloau 3-0-3; Hamilton 2-1-3; Downs 2-1-3; Sawyer 2-0-2; Burke 1-1-2; Mathews Jr. 1-1-2; Kanu 1-0-1; Jackson Jr. 1-0-1; Curry 1-0-1. **ORE:** Boettcher 5-2-7; Reed 5-0-5; Muhammad 3-2-5; Bassa 3-2-5; Tuioti 3-1-4; Harmon 3-0-3; Jackson 3-0-3; Savage 2-1-3; Ty. Johnson 2-1-3; B. Johnson 2-0-2; Uiagalelei 1-0-1; Manning 1-0-1; Burch 1-0-1; Caldwell 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - OSU: Judkins, Howard, Egbuka, Smith, Siereveld, Fryar, Jackson, Hinzman, Tshabola, Scott Jr., Kacmarek, Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimoloau, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Inniss, Hicks, Rodgers, Thurman, Nelson Jr., Tate, Melton, McClain, Reese, Mathews Jr., Pierce, Styles Jr., Henderson, Fielding, McGuire, Ferlmann, Gurd, Graham, Montgomery, Padilla, Fitzpatrick, Adolph, Christian, Hartford, Curry, Kanu, Magyar, Houston, Jackson Jr., McDonald. **ORE:** Holden, Te. Johnson, James, Ferguson, Strother, Harper II, Cornelius, Laloulu, Conerly Jr., Gabriel, Herbert, Ty. Johnson, Burch, Uiagalelei, Bassa, Boettcher, Tuioti, Savage, Harmon, Muhammad, Reed, Caldwell, Alexander, Woodyard, Dickey, Lowe, Davis, Purchase, Sadiq, Bryant Jr., Williams, Flowers, Soelle, Lopa, Jackson, Limar, Austin, B. Johnson, Sappington, Breland, Basso, Dunne, Moore, Washington, Mixon, Whittington, Pickard, Rogers, Iuli, Manning, James, Ware-Hudson, Boyle.

OSU Starts Fast In 41-21 Drubbing Of Ducks

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Will Howard threw three first-half touchdown passes, two to Jeremiah Smith, when No. 8 seed Ohio State downed No. 1 Oregon 41-21 in a quarterfinal of the College Football Playoff at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., on Jan. 1.

The Buckeyes (12-2) got off to a dominating start similar to their 42-17 win over Tennessee on Dec. 21 in the first round when they raced to a 21-0 first-quarter lead against the Volunteers.

This time catches of 45 and 43 yards by Smith, a 42-yard TD reception by Eme-ka Egbuka, a 46-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding and a 66-yard run by TreVeyon Henderson left the Ducks (13-1) trailing 31-0 with 8:47 still left in the second period. It was 34-8 at the half.

Howard was 17 of 26 for 319 yards, three TDs and no interceptions. Smith made seven catches for 187 yards with two scores, Egbuka's five receptions were for 72 yards and a TD. Henderson's eight carries went for 94 yards with two TDs, and Quinshon Judkins carried 17 times for 85 yards.

The defense, which had no sacks in a 32-31 loss at Oregon on Oct. 12, recorded eight sacks for 56 yards and 13 tackles for loss.

Thorough And Complete

Ohio State started from the 25 after a touchback on the opening kickoff and needed just three plays and 1:00 to take a 7-0 lead.

Howard found tight end Gee Scott Jr. open for 30 yards down the right sideline. He missed on a pass to Smith, but on the next play Smith made a catch of a short toss at the Oregon 48, broke a tackle at the 30 and sprinted to the end zone for a 45-yard TD.

The defense forced an Oregon three-and-out, and OSU took over at its 22 after a 44-yard punt.

Smith on the first play gained 29 on a catch to the Oregon 49. Quinshon Judkins' run went for 1 yard before Smith moved the ball 12 yards to the 36 on another reception, but an incompleto to Carnell Tate, a scramble by Howard for nothing and his incompleto intended for Henderson resulted in a 36-yard punt by Joe McGuire that went for a touchback.

The Ducks gained 2 yards on three plays from the 20, and a 31-yard punt put the Buckeyes in great position at their 47.

Once again, the Buckeyes used just three plays and 1:05 off the clock to make it 14-0 at the 7:31 mark on a 42-yard catch by Egbuka. He opened the drive with a leaping 7-yard grab, and Henderson rushed for 4 yards. Howard then threw deep over defensive back Brandon Johnson into the arms of Egbuka at the 5. He secured the ball and carried it in from there.

Oregon responded with two first

downs, but the series ended at the OSU 49, and a 40-yard punt went out of bounds at the 9.

Undeterred in the shadow of the goalpost, the Buckeyes made it 17-0 at 14:50 of the second quarter on a 46-yard field goal by Fielding.

On third-and-4 from the OSU 15, Smith made another great catch for 32 yards to the 47. The Buckeyes converted another third down needing 5 yards from the Oregon 48 when Egbuka caught the ball at the 43 and advanced it to the 33 for a 15-yard gain.

Howard had no gain on a run, and Judkins ran 5 yards to the 28 to end a quarter in which the Buckeyes had a 233-37 advantage in yards with Howard 8 of 12 for 212 yards, Smith making four catches for 118 yards and Egbuka adding 64 yards on his three catches.

On the first play of the second quarter, a pass to Smith was broken up, and the maligned Fielding, who had missed two field-goal attempts in the loss to Michigan, nailed his kick.

The Ducks moved the ball to their 48 where, on fourth-and-3, linebacker Cody Simon nearly made an interception, which turned the ball over to the Buckeyes on downs.

Just 43 seconds later, it was 24-0. Judkins rushed for 5 before Howard went duck hunting. With Egbuka in motion to the left, Howard took the snap and rolled that way before spotting Smith wide open to the right at the 3 for the easy score with 10:28 left.

Oregon was stymied by the defense once more, getting just 6 yards to the 31 before a weak Ross James 35-yard punt to the OSU 34 with 8:59 left.

It took OSU just one play to score this time. Henderson added another TD on a counter play on the first snap for a 66-yard score and a 31-0 Buckeye lead with 8:47 left in the half.

That was followed by another three-and-out for the Ducks, and James flailed a 38-yard punt where OSU took over at its 39.

Judkins on the first play ran for 15 to the Oregon 46 and added 4 more on the ensuing snap on first down. Egbuka chewed up 4 on a pop pass, and Howard rushed for 3 for a first at the 35. Smith ran for 5, and Tate had a catch for 10 to the 20.

An incomplete pass to Tate and a Judkins run for 2 set up third-and-8 from the 18 before a pass to Henderson in the end zone was also incomplete to set up a 36-yard Fielding three-pointer for a 34-0 score with 2:59 left.

The Ducks finally put together a drive to make it 34-8 as time expired on the half.

On third-and-5 from the Oregon 30, Dillon Gabriel found Terrace Ferguson for 10 yards. After a JT Tuimoloau sack for 6 yards, Oregon faced a third-and-16 from its 34, but Traeshon Holden made a 44-yard catch-and-run to the 22.

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 41, Oregon 21

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on the win over Oregon: "We believe that when we're executing at a high level that we can play with anybody in the country. We have a lot of respect for Oregon. We have a lot of respect for (Oregon head coach Dan) Lanning and his staff and his players. I think they're a very, very good team and well-coached. We knew we had to be at our best today."

Lanning on the difference he saw in Ohio State's offense in the Rose Bowl and in the first game the two teams played each other: "They were able to find some shot opportunities that caught us in a couple of coverages that gave them the chance to have success. You can try to pressure, and that's going to leave some one-on-ones. They got us into some situational checks, some stuff that was successful, and they have great players. They have some guys that made plays. You have to give those guys credit."

Day on the game that Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly called: "I thought Chip called a great game. The whole offensive staff worked hard to put the plan together, but ultimately it comes down to the players putting it on the field. Sometimes in this game, coaches get too much attention. This is about the players. There were a lot of good players out there. They have to make it work. I thought they really put it on the field and came out aggressive. Chip called an aggressive game, and he certainly had a big smile on his face after."

Day on the struggles he has faced as a head coach and how it felt to beat Oregon in the Rose Bowl after those: "In this game there are ups and downs along the way, and when things are going good you have to hug the guys you love the most, and when things aren't you have to hug them even harder. You just hang in there and you keep swinging. I talked to

the players about it a couple of weeks ago – that's life. This team is resilient, and when you surround yourself with great people with great character, you find yourself working through difficult times. At the end of the day, we wanted to win a national championship, and the way that we got here wasn't the way that we expected. It wasn't what we planned for. Nonetheless, we had an opportunity to come back and play Oregon after we had already played them earlier in the season, and that was the only thing that mattered."

Day on Ohio State freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith and how he compares to former great Ohio State wideouts: "We always want to draw comparisons because that's what we do naturally. Whether it's coaches or players, it's easy for everyone to not quite put him in a box but categorize based on someone who's come before. Jeremiah is his own person."

Smith on his relationship with Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Will Howard: "Will does a great job in practice just trusting us and just throwing the ball out there. We just tell him, 'Just throw it out there. We're going to make a play for you.' It doesn't matter if it's a bad ball or not, we just have to make our quarterback look good. Will playing with that confidence he has, being a leader out there, I feed off his energy. He's a great guy. I love Will to death. I'd do anything for him."

Ohio State linebacker Cody Simon on how he has been able to work with his teammates as a captain to make sure they do things the way Day wants: "That's the biggest thing about football. It's a game about getting your body, mind and spirit right. I think Coach Day does a great job where he wants us to understand the moment and how the steps of each game go."

Day on if the loss to Michigan might have been the best thing for this Ohio State team in terms of providing motivation: "It's hard for me to say something like that, but I know that you're a sum of your experiences. This team has had great wins this season. It's had some tough losses. We have learned from those. You have to grow, and you have to build, and you have to make sure you're focusing on your strengths and making sure you understand what your weaknesses are. That's a big part of it. But ultimately it comes down to our guys. I keep going back to that because these guys are resilient, and we're at a place where you can hear a lot of noise. I'm very, very proud of our staff, and I'm very, very proud of our players, but we're far from done."

Day on his players and how they are able to stick together after tough losses: "When you recruit great people with high character who care about each other, when you go through difficult times you stick together. You don't splinter. Whenever we're in these situations I just fall back on the players. These guys are the ones who are playing, not me. I'm just there to direct them and make sure that we're all going in the right direction. These are the guys who are the warriors doing it on the field."

Day on winning the last two games by blowing out their opponents, and what it means to be able to move on the way they did: "Every game is big at Ohio State, and we knew that when we decided to come to Ohio State. Certainly this game is huge for a lot of reasons, but I think the most important thing for our team is that we get a chance to play together for another week. To me, that's the most important thing. Every game here is important, so when you lose you have to figure out how to move forward."

Needing a yard on third down, Gabriel moved out of the pocket to find Noah Whittington for 8 yards to the 5 with two seconds left. After OSU took a timeout, Holden made a 5-yard catch in the back of the end zone for the first passing TD allowed by the Buckeyes since the loss to Oregon on Oct. 12.

The Ducks then made a two-point conversion on a catch by Justius Lowe.

Ohio State totaled 390 yards (269 passing, 121 rushing) in the first half compared to 139 (126 passing, 13 rushing) for the Ducks. Howard completed 11 of 18 for those 269 yards. Smith made five catches for 161 yards and Egbuka had four receptions for 68 yards while Henderson's two carries went for 70 yards.

Gabriel, a Heisman finalist, was 15 of 23 for 126 yards.

Close It Out

The Ducks got the ball to start the second half and scored the first TD against the Buckeyes in the third quarter this season on an 11-play, 75-yard drive in 6:05 to pull to within 34-15.

Oregon faced a dire situation after a Jack Sawyer sack left the Ducks back at the 13 needing 22 yards on third down. They got 21 on a throw to Lowe, and Gabriel on fourth down ran for the yard to keep the drive alive.

That was followed by a 17-yarder to Ferguson, and three plays later, Holden's catch of 15 yards put the ball on the 28. Gabriel was forced to scramble again and hit Ferguson for 25 to the 3. Jayden Limar carried for a yard before Oregon took a timeout before second down and Whittington pushed his way across the goal

line.

The momentum seemed to completely shift to favor the Ducks after the Buckeyes went three-and-out when Howard overthrew Egbuka on third-and-3 from their 32.

But the defense stood tall when the Ducks started from their 25 following McGuire's 43-yard punt. Gabriel threw an incompletion then was sacked for 7 yards by Sawyer and 6 by Simon back to the 12 to force a 44-yard punt by Luke Dunne to the OSU 44 with 5:35 remaining in the third quarter.

Smith kept the chains moving on third-and-8 with a 10-yard catch, and Howard came back with a 16-yarder to Smith to the 28. Judkins rushed left for 12, and a face-mask penalty on Oregon placed the ball at the 8.

Howard then went under center and handed off to Henderson, who used some power blocking to go left for the 8-yard score to extend the lead to 41-15 with 2:19 left in the third. The drive was six plays, 56 yards in 3:16.

Oregon had to punt from its 41, thanks in good measure to a 2-yard sack by Lathan Ransom on third down, and OSU regained the ball at the 15 off a 44-yard punt. A holding penalty negated a 12-yard run by Judkins to spot the ball at the 9. Judkins carried for 1 yard to end the third quarter. Judkins got 4 more before Howard suffered a 5-yard loss, leaving McGuire to boot the ball 42 yards to the Oregon 49.

The Ducks used 10 plays and, more importantly for the Buckeyes, 3:36 of game time to make it 41-21 with 10:00 remaining. The try for two failed.

On third-and-4 from the OSU 45, Ferguson gathered a pass for 10 yards. Later, after Caden Curry recorded the Buckeyes' sixth sack (8 yards), Gabriel converted a fourth-and-11 for 12 yards to Tez Johnson.

With a third-and-13 from the 27, Holden made the TD catch.

The Buckeyes had to punt again, and McGuire's 47-yarder resulted in a touchback. Oregon punted it back when Simon registered a 7-yard loss, and the Buckeyes started the drive from their 37 with 4:10 to go.

That try ended in a 34-yard punt by McGuire, leaving just 21 seconds on the game clock that Oregon ran out with a 3-yard rush by Limar.

Ohio State finished with 500 total yards on offense (319 passing, 181 rushing) compared to Oregon's 276 (299 passing, minus-23 rushing).

Gabriel finished the game 29 of 41 for the 299 yards and two touchdowns without a pick. Holden had seven receptions for 116 yards and a pair of scores.

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Sawyer Finds Glory With 83-Yard Fumble Return

Over a month and a half before Ohio State's triumphant 28-14 win over Texas on Jan. 10, senior defensive end Jack Sawyer and the rest of the Buckeyes were preparing for their biggest game of the season against Michigan. For Sawyer, a local kid from Pickerington, Ohio, and one of several seniors who hadn't defeated the archrival Wolverines, a win over Michigan would have meant everything.

GAME NOTEBOOK Bobby Gorbett

Sawyer appeared to save his team with a spectacular play.

With less than eight minutes to go in the fourth quarter, Michigan had the ball at the 3-yard line on first-and-goal, but Sawyer read the eyes of Michigan quarterback Davis Warren, and although he made it only to the 12-yard line in his return, he seemed to save the Buckeyes with an interception.

As time wore on though, what had seemed like a fairytale ending for Sawyer developed into a nightmare. The Buckeye offense struggled to move the ball on their next drive, the defense wore down to allow a field goal, one last gasp from the offense went by the wayside, and the 2024 Ohio State team – with preseason national championship expectations – faced a world of criticism from the media and its own fan base.

Rather than crumbling under the intense pressure of an awful loss to Michigan, the Buckeyes banded together to dismantle their first two playoff opponents to set up a huge matchup with Texas in the College Football Playoff semifinal.



Jack Sawyer

The offense, plagued by mistakes and penalties, struggled to put points on the board, and with 15 minutes to go the Buckeyes and Longhorns were tied at 14. An extended offensive drive put the Buckeyes up seven with only 7:02 to go, but the Longhorns appeared to have their answer when they marched all the way down to the Buckeye 1-yard line on first-and-goal in the waning minutes.

Instead of folding and allowing a game-tying touchdown, the Buckeyes forced the Longhorns back to the 8-yard line on fourth-and-goal. It was there that Sawyer had his moment. With Texas starting quarterback Quinn Ewers dropping back to pass, Sawyer came flying around the edge and ripped the ball out of the hand of his former teammate and roommate to put the ball on the ground.

Unlike that fateful late November day, Sawyer's magical moment wasn't ruined by tacklers in front of him or a struggling offense. Instead, the ball bounced perfectly in front of him as he grabbed it and completed

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

It wasn't the first half that we saw from the Buckeyes in the first two games of the College Football Playoff. They scored 14 points in the first 30 minutes of the Cotton Bowl after getting a combined 55 points in the previous two first halves, and they needed a late 75-yard score from TreVeyon Henderson to get there. But while the OSU offense struggled to work through the penalties that were slowing it down, the defense didn't allow the Texas offense to get anything.

The Buckeyes went into the locker room with a 14-7 lead because Jim Knowles' unit was suffocating for quarterback Quinn Ewers and the Longhorns, and that was largely due to the front four of JT Tuimoloau, Ty Hamilton, Tyleik Williams and Jack Sawyer.

In the first quarter, the Buckeyes continued their dominant pass rush with two sacks, adding another in the beginning of the second period. They were also able to keep batting down passes the entire game, an addition to the defense in the past three games that has been extremely important. The defensive linemen had three of the six passes broken up by the Buckeyes in the game, and Sawyer's touchdown in the fourth quarter secured the win.

What Didn't Work

Sometimes it feels cheap to say that the thing that went wrong in a game was penalties. It can be an easy cop-out since penalties are always a bad thing. But in this game, there was nothing that held this Ohio State offense back more than flags. When the Buckeye defense was dominant early in the game, it seemed like OSU should have been

cruising out to a huge lead as it had in the previous two games. But due to many different flags, they couldn't get anything going.

It began with an uncharacteristic 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on Henderson and continued with two holding penalties, two false starts and an unnecessary roughness, adding up to 60 yards lost on six flags for the Buckeye offense and three flags for 15 yards on the defense compared to a total of five penalties for 54 yards on Texas.

Both teams were hurt by penalties, but it seemed that this could have been a bigger win if Ohio State had been more disciplined early on.

Play Of The Game

There were many options for play of the game that continued to top the previous one. Henderson's touchdown at the end of the first half was the first contender before Will Howard ran for a long first down on a late fourth down.

Then after the Buckeyes went up 21-14, Texas drove down the field to the OSU 1-yard line before a 7-yard tackle for loss by Lathan Ransom and a Sawyer tip forced a fourth-and-8 that was likely for the game. That set up the play of the game, where Sawyer rushed around the edge and knocked the ball out of Ewers' hands, scooped the fumble up and ran it back 83 yards for a touchdown, the longest fumble recovery in the history of the College Football Playoff.

It was the signature moment of the nearby Pickerington, Ohio, native's Buckeye career and the nail in the coffin that helped send Ohio State to the national championship game against Notre Dame.

— Greg Wilson

one of the most iconic plays in Ohio State history with an 83-yard fumble return touchdown.

One may have guessed that Sawyer had all sorts of thoughts about fate or irony, or the fact that he was delivering Ohio State its biggest win in a decade, but what actually came into his head when he picked up the loose ball was something much simpler.

"S—t, I guess just don't fall," Sawyer joked about what went through his head when he had the ball in his hands. "I'm kidding, but no seriously I hit about the 30 and I looked back and I'm like, 'I hope I have some blockers. I'm running out of steam here.' But they were running with me side by side."

Sawyer's touchdown and the euphoric celebration after were certainly a far cry from the agony of the heart-wrenching loss to Michigan, but according to Ohio State head coach Ryan Day – who was seen jumping into Sawyer's arms on the sideline after the score – the adversity faced by this team is now a part of its story.

"No great accomplishments are ever achieved without going through adversity," Day said. "That's just the truth. We've gone through our share of adversity, and that's life, and I told those guys that. We're not focused about what's happened in the past, we're focused on right now and being right where we are. Then at the end, we want to be able to tell the story of this team, and that's really what this team is focused on right now."

Whether it was karma, fate or something else, everything lined up perfectly for Sawyer to have his signature moment, and according to Day, it summed up everything about him and the team.

"What happened on fourth down by Jack just symbolizes not only his career, but our team in general, who they are and the toughness," Day said. "The clutch play right there was something that I'm sure the whole city of Columbus was exploding and all of Buckeye Nation during that play."

Screen To Henderson Keeps Buckeyes In Front

Although the Longhorns never had the lead in the semifinals of the College Football Playoffs, there were a couple of instances when they seemed to have all of the momentum. Perhaps the most energized the Texas sideline was all game was after the Longhorns' first touchdown late in the first half, when Ewers found running back Jaydon Blue for an 18-yard pass to tie the game at seven.

After getting the ball back at their own 25-yard line with only 29 seconds left in the first half, Day and the Buckeyes had a decision to make – send the game into halftime tied with Texas feeling good about their chances or keep pushing to try to regain the lead. Day opted against running out the clock and instead dialed up a screen pass.

"The screen, we were laughing a little bit in the locker room, having some fun with it because we do screen drill," Day said. "I think sometimes these guys are like, 'Are we ever going to call a screen?' And I actually said to the coaches, 'We're going to stop doing screen drill because we don't call any big screens.' So sure enough, 'What do you want to run? You want to run the ball? You want to take a knee?' I said, 'No, just run the screen.'"

Day's call to run the screen may have been his best of the season, because when Will Howard dropped back to pass, Texas wasn't at all ready for a convoy of blockers to

get out in front of senior running back TreVeyon Henderson. After catching the pass 6 yards behind the line of scrimmage, Henderson found the hole, burst through it and went untouched for a 75-yard touchdown, the third-longest touchdown reception in playoff semifinal history.

"I don't think anyone thought that was going for 75 yards," Howard said of the play. "I mean that was trying to set something up. That's the kind of a drive start in that two-minute scenario and you run that first play, and we did it in the Tennessee game where we come out, we run the ball and if we get a positive gain maybe we can continue to work on our two-minute drill, but when you have a guy like (Henderson) that can make plays like that – Carson Hinzman made some unbelievable blocks down the field, the receivers stayed on their guys and (Henderson) took off. That was a huge play for us, a huge swing."

A couple of Ohio State offensive linemen made some nice blocks on Henderson's catch and run. Tegra Tshabola started the play with a solid block on Texas linebacker Anthony Hill Jr. before Hinzman pushed aside a pair of Longhorns himself.

A blitz from the Longhorns hurt their ability to cover the screen, but Day was pleased with how his team executed the play.

"Very well-executed," Day said. "The line got out there and (Howard) made a great play because they brought pressure. He just got it off, and TreVeyon went down and caught it. It



TreVeyon Henderson

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 28, Texas 14

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on what propelled his team to a win over Texas at the Cotton Bowl: "I believe that the resilience that we've had to show throughout the entire season and through some of these guys' careers has led us to this opportunity to win this game and go play for a national championship. We talked before the game about how you can leave a legacy. (You do that by) becoming your own legend, and there are some guys on this team today that I believe will become legends in Ohio State history. We also talked about how we want to keep this team together. It's a great team. They've been through a lot. They're resilient, and they're great people. They do everything the right way. And so now they get 10 more days together and an opportunity to tell their story if they go win one more."

More from Day on the team's resilience and character: "We've been through difficult times together. How do you know about someone's character? When you go through tough times with them. Everything is easy when things are going well. Everyone can be a front-runner. So I think we talk about those things because our story has been – the last couple years has been ups and downs. But to see the team play the way that they did in the fourth quarter today, I think that's why that's relevant. That's why we're talking about it. Because I don't think without going through those things, we would have come through the way we did in the fourth quarter. And now we have the opportunity to play for a national championship, and I couldn't be prouder of our guys, I couldn't be."

Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian on his initial thoughts of the Cotton Bowl thriller: "Hell of a football game. Two really good teams balling. They made two big plays. They hit the screen at the end of

the first half and got the sack-fumble on fourth down there for a touchdown. Give a ton of credit to Ohio State. They're a very good football team, well-coached. I'm really proud of our players for the resiliency they showed tonight to fight back to get into the game. As I told them, today's game is the life of a competitor. You put yourself in this arena. You compete your tail off. But we have nothing to hang our heads about because of the way they competed, not only tonight but this entire season."

Ohio State senior defensive end Jack Sawyer on his game-sealing, 83-yard scoop-and-score touchdown: "It just means everything to me. What a play. I kind of blacked out on the run over (to the end zone) when I picked it up, but I was just put into a great position by the coaches. I saw the ball popped out right to me after I tackled (Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers), and I was just thinking, I just need to stay on my feet, because like I said, I almost blacked out when I scooped it and I saw nothing but green grass ahead of me."

Ohio State senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka on Sawyer's touchdown: "It was like something out of a movie or something like that. I was just screaming, everybody was screaming. It was probably the most legendary play that I've ever seen in person. It's going to go down as one of the greatest plays in Buckeye history if we win the one next week."

Ewers on his perspective of his former Ohio State roommate's scoop-and-score: "I felt him. I started drifting away. I thought I was going to be able to get the ball off before he got there, obviously. It's not like I tried to give them the game. But I saw Jack running with the ball down the sideline. It sucks, man. But he's a great player, great individual, great person. We were roommates when I was up at Ohio State. So

it just sucks. It sucks. Jack's a good player, and he made a good play."

Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Will Howard on how motivated he was to beat Texas for the first time in his career: "Yeah, that was a motivation for me. But, man, that didn't mean as much as keeping this team together. That's all we wanted to do. We talked about that this whole playoff. We're fighting for another chance to wear this jersey again and to be with this group again."

Howard on the offense's 13-play, 88-yard drive that gave the Buckeyes a 21-14 lead midway through the fourth quarter: "That was a statement drive. It took a lot – 13 plays, 88 yards. We talked about it before the game. 'We're going to have to work this game, and we're going to have to methodically move the ball down the field.' I'm just so proud of our offense that we were able to get the game – we talk about it all the time – get the game to the fourth quarter, and that's where we'll win it. We leaned back on our training. And all that work that we put in, that's for that time. I'm just so proud of our guys. The O-line played great."

Ohio State senior offensive lineman Donovan Jackson on what the overall message was in the huddle before Howard's key 18-yard rush on fourth-and-2: "We have to have it. I know it's an obvious answer, but in that situation, at that point of the game, we knew we had to have it. Coming off the sideline, Coach Day was like, 'The time is now. If you want to be great, you have to be great now.' So on fourth-and-2, running the ball, obviously Will trips up – I'm going to give him crap for that later – but being able to execute in that situation was a testament to everyone's hard work and drive to be successful."

was another huge play in the game."

Buckeyes Show Composure On The Final Scoring Drive

After being fairly unstoppable offensively in wins over Tennessee and Oregon in the first two rounds of the playoffs, the Buckeyes had more than their share of offensive struggles against Texas. Going up against a stand-out Texas defense, the Buckeyes' first drive of the game was the only one where they had sustained offensive success in the first three quarters.

There were all sorts of issues preventing the Buckeyes from moving the ball down the field. A few drives were derailed by costly penalties that backed the Buckeyes up, one was ended by an interception thrown by Howard, and a couple went scoreless after Texas' defense simply flexed its muscles and made some quality plays.

The Buckeyes' lack of offensive efficiency not only had the game tied at 14 heading into the fourth quarter but left the defense a bit tired, according to Day.

"At that moment I was getting concerned that the defense was getting worn out because we were not on the field very much and we needed a big, long drive, and that's what these guys answered with," Day said.

The Buckeyes' fourth-quarter go-ahead touchdown drive started with 14:47 left to go in the game at their own 12-yard line. They immediately got out of the shadow of their own end zone when Texas cornerback Malik Muhammad committed a pass-interference penalty against Emeka Egbuka, but two plays later they were faced with a third-and-8. The Buckeyes picked up Texas' blitz call on the third down to give Howard enough time to find his favorite target of the night, Carnell Tate, for an 18-yard gain.

Howard found running back Quinshon Judkins for a first down shortly thereafter, but after two plays and a false-start penalty, the Buckeyes had to get past another third-and-long to keep moving the ball down the field. Howard found Gee Scott Jr. well behind the marker on third-and-9, but the tight end fought through Texas defenders to bring up fourth-and-2 rather than fourth-and-5.

The fourth-and-short situation allowed offensive coordinator Chip Kelly to open up the playbook, and what he came up with was a quarterback draw play that worked to perfection. Howard had no defenders between himself and the end zone after picking up the crucial first down, but the former Kansas State transfer fell victim to the turf monster and went down at the Texas 16.

"That fourth down was huge, man, and they came out and gave us a good look for the play and the offensive line blocked it up well. I fell on purpose," Howard said with a laugh. "I'm joking. I didn't fall on purpose. It should have been a dang touchdown, but I was trying to keep a couple of seconds on the clock. No, I'm joking. But it was a great play and a statement drive."

Despite Howard's fall, the statement was officially made four plays later when, unlike Texas, Ohio State was able to punch the ball in the end zone at the goal line when it mattered most.

"We talk about it all the time," Howard said. "Get the game to the fourth quarter, and that's where we'll win it, and we leaned back on our training and all that work that we put in. That's for that time. I'm just so proud of our guys. The offensive line played great on that drive. The guys made some plays, and we were able to punch it in."



OSU Scores Late For Dramatic Win Over Texas

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Jack Sawyer's sack and scoop-and-score of 83 yards with 2:13 to play capped a memorable goal-line stand when Texas was driving for the tying touchdown and provided the insurance needed in a dramatic 28-14 victory for No. 8 seeded Ohio State (13-2) over the No. 5 Longhorns at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Jan. 10 in a College Football Playoff semifinal.

Quinshon Judkins' second rushing TD, a 1-yarder with 7:02 left in the game, put the Buckeyes ahead 21-14 after the Longhorns (13-3) had tied the game in the third quarter.

Late Magic

Ohio State won the toss and deferred to the second half, and Texas took the ball at the 25 after a touchback.

Texas faced a third-and-2 at the 33, but Matthew Golden made a one-handed grab for a 24-yard gain to the OSU 43. Needing 4 yards on third down, Quintrevion Wisner ran for 1. On fourth down, former OSU QB Quinn Ewers threw incomplete, enabling the Buckeyes to get the ball at their 36.

From there, they went 64 yards in 10 plays and 4:18 to take a 7-0 lead at 7:24 of the first period on Judkins' 9-yard run, to make the Buckeyes three for three on their first drives of the playoffs.

Emeka Egbuka made a 5-yard catch on

third down to the OSU 48 to move the chains. Carnell Tate followed with a 14-yard catch to the Texas 38. On first down, Howard went deep to Jeremiah Smith at the 2, but the ball was too high even for the star freshman.

Egbuka made an 11-yard reception to the 23 on third-and-6, and Howard came right back to him for 14 to the 9. Tate then dropped a touchdown in the end zone on a slant before Judkins slipped through the line then powered his way into the end zone.

Texas overcame a 4-yard sack by JT Tuimoloau on the first snap of its next possession to get the yards back and more with a 15-yarder to DeAndre Moore Jr. and a 22-yard screen pass to Ryan Wingo to the OSU 42 that could have been a touchdown except for one-handed tackle by All-America safety Caleb Downs.

On third-and-12 (after a false start), Tuimoloau and Ty Hamilton forced a punt after a sack of 4 yards, and Brandon Inniss made a fair catch of a 40-yard punt by Michael Kern at the 8.

Tate on second down caught a 13-yarder, and Henderson ran for 22 to the OSU 48. Gee Scott Jr. chewed up 14 more with his catch to the 38 before Henderson lost his cool and effectively killed the drive. He ran for a yard then shoved a Texas player in the face, drawing a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty to the OSU 48.

A Howard keeper lost 2, and a pass to Judkins gained only 5 yards to end the first quarter in which OSU held a 122-71 advantage in total yards.

Joe McGuire's 40-yard punt to the 9 was returned 16 yards by Golden, who fumbled it at the 25 but made the recovery. The OSU defense came through again with the aid of a face-mask penalty on Texas. On third-and-11 from the Longhorn 24, Ewers was sacked for a third time, with Sonny Styles doing the honors for 10 yards.

After a 51-yard punt and a minus-1 yard return by Downs, OSU got possession at its 34 with 12:28 left in the half.

Tate had consecutive catches for a total of 12 yards, but a second-down hold on Egbuka torpedoed another drive. Having to go 20 yards, Will Kacmarek made a catch for 12 to the OSU 48 on second down, but a pass to Egbuka was incomplete and McGuire had his 43-yard punt downed at the 9.

Wisner ran for 7 and 4 yards for a first down at the 20. Styles popped Gunnar Helm at the 35 to break up a pass, but after Moore made a catch for 4 yards, Tuimoloau went to the turf holding his ankle. He left the game briefly.

Ewers had an incompleting, and OSU began at the 35 after a 41-yard punt. A holding penalty on Josh Fryar put the Buckeyes in a second-and-20. Scott got 7 yards back, but on third down a false start put them in an untenable third-and-18. Tate made a 15-yard reception, but OSU had to punt again, this time a 43-yarder to the 15.

Isaiah Bond, replacing the injured Golden, turned a short catch into 8 yards, and Jaydon Blue rushed for 3 and a first down before Wisner ran for 5. On third-and-5, Bond was open at the 46 but dropped the pass.

Kern punted 42 yards to the 27 with 3:23 left, and the Buckeyes went three-and-out with Howard suffering his first sack of the playoffs for 7 yards at the 2:00 timeout.

McGuire's punt went for only 39 yards for a fair catch at the Texas 41 with 1:51 left. With good field position for the first time and a fourth-down conversion, the Longhorns tied it 7-7 with 29 seconds left on an 18-yard catch by Blue.

With a third-and-10, Ewers scrambled for 9 to the 50. Ewers came out for heralded back-up Arch Manning. He took the snap, went right and gained 8 yards. The play was reviewed for a fumble at the end, but the first down was upheld with 49 seconds left.

Silas Bolden made a catch at the 36, slipped a tackle and ran to the 18 for a 24-yard gain on the next play. After an incompleting, Ewers threw to the left corner for the score. The seven-play, 59-yard drive took 1:22.

With momentum having swung to the Longhorns, the Buckeyes made a stunning turnaround after the touchback. Howard dropped and tossed a screen pass to Henderson at the 19, and with a convoy of blockers running full steam ahead of him, he was home free from the OSU 40 and sprinted to a 75-yard TD with 13 seconds left for the 14-7 lead.

It was sweet redemption for Henderson. According to ESPN the Buckeyes had gained 118 yards and seven points on 15 plays before Henderson's penalty and 43 yards on 14 plays afterward.

Texas was able to move to its 48 before Ewers' Hail Mary attempt was incomplete to end the half.

OSU had 236 total yards, 200 of it passing. Texas had 133 of its 177 yards through the air. Howard was 14 of 19 for 200 yards. Tate was the leading receiver with five catches for 54 yards while Smith had one for 3 yards. Ewers was 10 of 20 for 133 yards.

Later Magic

Ohio State began at the 25 to start the second half. Egbuka had a catch for 13. Henderson went for 7 then 7 more to the Texas 48, but on the next play, Howard was intercepted by David Gbenda at the Texas 33 and he lost 3 yards on the return.

Wisner's catch went for 10 to the 40, but three plays and a 45-yard punt later, the Buckeye offense went back to work at the 12. On third-and-1, Judkins got nothing as he tried to run left to drop OSU to 2 of 7 on third downs.

Texas took over at the 33 following Mc-



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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 28, Texas 14

Jan. 10, 2025 - AT&T Stadium (Cotton Bowl), Arlington, Texas

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	7	7	0	14	28
TEXAS	0	7	7	0	14

First Quarter

OSU - Judkins, 9-yard rush (Fielding kick), 7:24.

Second Quarter

TEX - Blue, 18-yard pass from Ewers (Stone kick), 0:29.

OSU - Henderson, 75-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 0:13.

Third Quarter

TEX - Blue, 26-yard pass from Ewers (Stone kick), 3:12.

Fourth Quarter

OSU - Judkins, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 7:02.

OSU - Sawyer, 83-yard fumble return (Fielding kick), 2:13.

Att. - 74,527

Weather - Indoors

Team Statistics

	OSU	TEX
First Downs	18	20
Rushing	5	7
Passing	12	10
Penalty	1	3
Rushes-Yards	24-81	29-58
Passing Yards	289	283
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	24-33-1	23-39-1
Offensive Plays	57	68
Total Net Yards	370	341
Third Down Efficiency	3-10	5-15
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-1	1-3
Punts-Avg.	6-42.0	6-43.8
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	3-1
Penalties	9-75	5-54
Time of Possession	31:38	28:22

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) - **OSU**: Henderson 6-42; Judkins 9-36; Howard 7-4; Egbuka 1-0; Team 1-(-1). **TEX**: Wisner 17-46; Blue 4-16; Manning 1-8; Wingo 1-6; Gibson 1-0; Ewers 5-(-18).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) - **OSU**: Howard 24-33-1-289-1. **TEX**: Ewers 23-39-1-283-2.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Tate 7-87; Egbuka 5-51; Scott Jr. 5-30; Judkins 3-22; Kacmarek 2-21; Henderson 1-75; Smith 1-3. **TEX**: Wisner 6-42; Blue 5-59; Moore Jr. 4-31; Golden 2-51; Helm 2-42; Bolden 1-24; Wingo 1-22; Bond 1-8; Davis 1-4.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) - **OSU**: McGuire 6-42,0-46. **TEX**: Kern 6-43.8-51.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Egbuka 1-(-1). **TEX**: Bolden 2-16.

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

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Sawyer 1-83. **TEX**: None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Downs 1-7. **TEX**: Gbenda 1-(-3).

SACKS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Tuimolou 1.5-6; Styles 1-10; Sawyer 1-9; Hamilton 0.5-2. **TEX**: Broughton 1-10; Hill Jr. 0.5-4; Sorrell 0.5-3.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) - **OSU**: Styles 3-13; Tuimolou 2.5-8; Sawyer 1-9; Ransom 1-7; Downs 1-2; Hamilton 0.5-2. **TEX**: Broughton 1-10; Burke 1-2; Guilbeau 1-2; Hill Jr. 0.5-4; Sorrell 0.5-3.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) - **OSU**: Styles 6-3-9; Simon 4-3-7; Tuimolou 3-4-7; Hancock 5-1-6; Igbinosun 4-1-5; Downs 4-1-5; Ransom 4-0-4; Williams 1-3-4; Hamilton 0-4-4. Sawyer 1-2-3; Burke 2-0-2; Reese 0-2-2; Curry 1-0-1; Smith 1-0-1; Styles Jr. 1-0-1; Mathews Jr. 1-0-1; McDonald 0-1-1; Kanu 0-1-1. **TEX**: Barron 4-2-6; Hill Jr. 4-2-6; Mukuba 3-3-6; Taaffe 2-3-5; Lefau 2-2-4; Simmons 2-2-4; Holmes 2-1-3; Muhammad 2-0-2; Blackwell Jr. 1-1-2; Collins 0-2-2; Lole 0-2-2; Moore 1-0-1; Burke 1-0-1; Gbenda 1-0-1; Broughton 1-0-1; Guilbeau 1-0-1; Savea 0-1-1; Roberson 0-1-1; Filsaime 0-1-1; Norton 0-1-1; Vasek 0-1-1; Sorrell 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME - **OSU**: Judkins, Tate, Howard, Egbuka, Smith, Montgomery, Fryar, Jackson, Hinzman, Tshabola, Kacmarek, Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimolou, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Inniss, Melton, Reese, Mathews Jr., Styles Jr., Henderson, Fielding, McGuire, Ferlmann, Siereveld, Fitzpatrick, Adolph, Christian, Scott Jr., Hartford, Curry, Kanu, Jackson Jr., McDonald. **TEX**: Moore Jr., Golden, Wisner, Ewers, Campbell, Williams, Majors, Connor, Banks Jr., Davis, Helm, Hill Jr., Taaffe, Lefau, Guilbeau, Mukuba, Broughton, Muhammad, Barron, Moore, Sorrell, Collins, Simmons, Bolden, Stone, Norton, Manning, Niblett, Filsaime, Johnson-Ribell, Blue, Roberson, McDonald, Smith, Gbenda, Blackwell Jr., Kern, Baxter, Ratliff, Wingo, Hutson, St. Louis, Black, Agbo, Bond, Umeozulu, Baker, Goosby, Shannon, Holmes, Gibson, Burke, Vasek, January, Savea, Lole.

Guire's 46-yard punt. On third-and-10, Ewers was under pressure and about to be sacked by Sawyer when he sent an underhanded pass to Wisner for 14 yards to the 47 a split second before Ewers' knee hit the ground, which would have negated the completion.

Wisner rushed up the middle for 4 yards on third-and-3 to move the chains. Facing a third-and-1 after an 11-yard catch by Wisner, Wisner gained 4 to the 29 as the Buckeye defense wore down. On a third-and-7 from the 26, Ewers found Blue at the 13, and he went in from there to tie it 14-14 at 3:12 for Texas' first third-quarter touchdown in seven games.

The 67-yard drive used 12 plays and 5:18, and the Longhorns were 4 for 4 on third down.

OSU continued to ruin itself with penalties on its next possession from the 25 when a Tate 15-yard catch was negated by unnecessary roughness penalty for 15 yards to offensive lineman Austin Siereveld.

The Buckeyes still had a first down but started again at the 25. Howard lost 10 on a sack, Henderson ran for 5, and an incomple- tion led to a 41-yard punt by McGuire to the Texas 39 with 1:03 left in the third quarter.

Wisner ran for 7 and a pass to him lost 2 yards for the final play of the period to set up another third-down try of 5 yards. This time Ewers overthrew Golden, who returned from an ankle injury. A 44-yard punt placed the ball on the 12.

The Buckeyes, possibly with the season on the line, went those 88 yards on 13 plays in 7:45 to go ahead 21-14 with 7:02 remaining when Judkins scored from the 1.

On the first play, the Longhorns' Malik Muhammad was flagged for pass interference on Egbuka, a 15-yard infraction. Scott's catch went for minus-2, but Howard went back to him for 4, and on third-and-8, Tate got 18 on the catch to the OSU 47.

A deep ball to Egbuka was broken up at the 22 before Judkins' catch went for 11 and a first down. After an incomple- tion, Judkins picked up a 6-yard reception, but a false start made for a third-and-9 from the 41. Scott caught a short pass and gained 7.

On fourth-and-2 from the 34, after a Texas timeout with 9:50 left, Howard kept the ball and burst up the middle for 18 yards to the 16 but could have scored if he hadn't tripped over himself. Howard composed himself and passed 8 yards to Egbuka, and Judkins ran for 6 to the 2 and a first down. Howard ran for 1, and Judkins carried it in from there.

Ewers had a 34-yard pass to Helm to the OSU 25, but the tight end was flagged for taunting Downs, moving the ball back to the 40. No problem. Ewers went to Golden for 27 to the 13. Lathan Ransom later had a pass in- terference for the Buckeyes to the 2. Jermaine Matthews Jr. was also called for PI for a first at the 1.

Jerrick Gibson gained nothing on a run, Ransom made a tackle for a 7-yard loss on Wisner, and Sawyer broke up a pass for Wingo to set up fourth-and-goal from the 8.

Sawyer then got to his freshman roommate at Ohio State and sacked him for a 9-yard loss with the ball popping free into Sawyer's hands for a play that will go down as one of the great moments in Buckeye history.

Texas had the ball one more time, but Downs' interception ended its faint hope.

Ohio State outgained the Longhorns, 370-341, with Howard completing 24 of 33 passes for 289 yards, a score and a pick, while Ewers was 23 of 39 for 283 yards, two scores and an interception. Tate led Buckeye receivers with seven catches for 87 yards, and Egbuka and Scott had five catches each. Smith was target- ed three times but had only the one catch for 3 yards.

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

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BSB PUBLISHER Frank Moskowitz and other members of the BSB staff are available to speak at your business, social or alumni group meetings. Informative and fun. Call (614) 486-2202 for details.

Ohio State Makes 2025 Transfer Additions

The Buckeyes were very active in the transfer portal last year, adding players such as Caleb Downs, Seth McLaughlin, Will Howard and many more by those means, many of whom have been major contributors for Ohio State's national championship-winning team.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

With so many players who will be leaving after this year, it's no surprise that Ohio State has been fairly active again trying to bring established college players to Columbus.

The first of the commitments was former Minnesota offensive tackle Phillip Daniels, who spent just two days in the portal before he decided to sign with the Buckeyes. He visited Columbus on Dec. 17 just one day after entering the portal and then signed with the Buckeyes on Dec. 18.

Daniels, the cousin of former Ohio State and current Arizona Cardinals offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr., started the final four games of the Golden Gophers' 2024 season at right tackle and is a possible replacement for Josh Fryar next year on a line that will be replacing four of five starting linemen.

Joining him on the starting offensive line could be Rice transfer Ethan Onianwa, who

signed with the Buckeyes on Dec. 24. He chose OSU over Florida State, Iowa, Oklahoma and Texas A&M. With Josh Simmons heading to the NFL as well, there's a spot open at left tackle that Onianwa will likely compete for during his one remaining season of eligibility.

Onianwa, who started 34 games at Rice from 2022-24 at either right or left tackle, was considered by 247Sports to be the No. 13 offensive tackle in the portal at the time of his signing after being rated a three-star coming of Cinco Ranch High School in Katy, Texas.

On Dec. 23, the Buckeyes added three more players to their roster – former West Virginia running back CJ Donaldson Jr., former Idaho State defensive end Logan George and former Purdue tight end Max Klare.

Donaldson was the first of the three, coming in as the No. 6-rated running back in the transfer portal at the time of his commitment. He was one of multiple tailbacks whom OSU was targeting in the portal, but they ended up with the former Mountaineer who has spent the last two seasons as a starter in WVU's backfield.

In those two years, he accumulated a combined 1,532 rushing yards on 334 attempts (4.6 yards per rush) and found the end zone 22 times, with 11 touchdowns in each season. As a high school senior, Donaldson was a tight end prospect, but he quickly made the switch to the backfield and has excelled at that position since.

Without TreVeyon Henderson and likely

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	
Bodpegn Miller	WR	6-4	180	★★★★	Ontario, Ohio	
Trajen Odom	DL	6-4	285	★★★★	Matthews, N.C.	
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.	
Anthony Rogers	RB	5-8	190	★★★★	Montgomery (Ala.) Carver	
Maxwell Roy	DL	6-3	250	★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep	
Devin Sanchez	CB	6-2	170	★★★★★	Houston North Shore	
Epi Sitanilei	DE	6-5	220	★★★★	Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco	
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	
Jordyn Woods	CB	6-3	175	★★★	Cartersville, Ga.	

Quinshon Judkins, the Buckeyes will now have a possible duo of James Peoples and Donaldson to split carries with incoming freshmen Bo Jackson, Anthony Rogers and Isaiah West each getting the opportunity to compete for time on the field as well.

George was next to sign with the Buckeyes, coming off a season in which he had 56 total tackles, 18½ for loss, 6½ sacks and six quarterback hurries in 12 games with the Bengals

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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
Corbyn Fordham	TE	6-4	215	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School
Chris Henry Jr.	WR	6-5	205	★★★★★	Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei
Jaeden Ricketts	WR	6-0	187	★★★	Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial
Jakob Weatherspoon	CB	5-10	172	★★★★	Avon, Ohio

gone after this year, George will have a chance to compete for a starting spot on the edge with Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. But even if he doesn't earn one, he provides what will be much needed depth at the position.

George wasn't rated as a prospect by 247Sports composite rankings coming out of high school, but his performance at the Football Championship Subdivision level has been enough to catch the Buckeyes' eye. He has two years of collegiate eligibility remaining.

The Buckeyes also earned a commitment from a former Big Ten star after Klare signed with the team on Dec. 23 and enrolled in January. He was the No. 1-ranked player at his position in the transfer portal after a strong 2024 season in which he caught 51 passes for 685 yards and four touchdowns with the last-place Boilermakers. He also has two years of eligibility remaining.

With starter Gee Scott Jr. not returning, Klare – a former three-star prospect out of Cincinnati St. Xavier in 2022 – adds to the

tight end room as a pass-catching threat, while Will Kacmarek will return as a blocking specialist in the room.

The Buckeyes also added one more transfer player since BSB last went to press, with former Duquesne linebacker Ty Howard – the older brother of 2025 running back signee Bo Jackson – signing with the Buckeyes on Jan. 5 with two seasons of eligibility remaining.

He is coming off a strong season with the Dukes where he recorded 52 tackles, seven tackles for loss, four sacks, three interceptions, two quarterback hurries, a fumble recovery and a pass breakup in just nine games, earning him first-team All-Northeast Conference honors.

He will join a talented group of linebackers at Ohio State, with Sonny Styles possibly returning along with Arvell Reese, C.J. Hicks, Payton Pierce and Garrett Stover competing for playing time as well. Incoming freshmen Riley Pettijohn, Tarvos Alford and Eli Lee will also join the group.

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
Brady Edmunds	QB	6-5	215	★★★★★	Huntington Beach, Calif.

The Buckeyes haven't added anyone else since Howard signed, but there will likely be more. Head coach Ryan Day said he was expecting to add more through the portal than the Buckeyes needed for the 2024-25 season since so many veterans are departing Columbus for the NFL.

"I think every year it's become probably a higher percentage just across the country," Day said. "For us, it will probably be the same thing this year. I think last year we ended up with seven or eight guys. It will probably be higher this year. But I think every year that number is going to go up.

"But as we've talked about before, this sustainability of a program has to be built through high school recruiting and then development and then retention of your roster, that's not going to change here. That being said, we know that there's some positional needs that we have to get addressed, and we're going to work hard to make sure that we do that."

2026 Four-Star CB Commits To Ohio State

Just one day after beating Oregon in the Rose Bowl, Ohio State received more good news when Avon, Ohio, 2026 four-star cornerback Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 172) committed to the Buckeyes on Jan. 2.

"I love the coaching staff," Weatherspoon told 247Sports after he camped at Ohio State in June. "They're all great dudes. And it seems like they think highly of me. (Cornerbacks coach Tim Walton) and (defensive program assistant coach Gerren) DuHart are in touch every day."

He's the fourth commitment in the class, joining Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star tight end Corbyn Fordham (6-4, 215) and Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial three-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187).

Weatherspoon is the first cornerback in the 2026 class for the Buckeyes, and he is the No. 137 overall player in the class, the No.

Continued On Page 30

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1990

The hottest rumor making the recruiting circles had to do with one of the previous year's Ohio prep stars.

Defensive back Carlton Gray of Cincinnati Forest Park narrowed his final choices in 1989 to Ohio State, UCLA and Miami (Fla.) before offering a verbal commitment to the Hurricanes.

Two days later, he changed his mind and signed with UCLA. He broke into the Bruins' starting lineup that season and became the first freshman since Gaston Green to start for UCLA.

The rumor that was being repeated was that Gray had decided that UCLA was a little too far from home and was contemplating a transfer to Ohio State.

Of course, no one from OSU was allowed to comment because of NCAA rules and probably wouldn't if they could have. Nevertheless, if Gray transferred, he would have to sit out the 1990 season under NCAA guidelines.

30 Years Ago — 1995

A winter storm on Jan. 6 stopped some of the nation's top recruits – including All-USA wide receiver Randy Moss of West Virginia – from visiting Ohio State.

But the OSU recruiting effort pushed ahead with four more verbal commitments over the weekend, bringing the school's total to 18.

The biggest news of the weekend was the visit of tight end prospect Steve Wisniewski of Eastlake North. Wisniewski, rated the No. 2 college prospect in Ohio by Bill Kurelic of The Ohio Football Recruiting News, had committed to Wisconsin the previous month. But the OSU coaching staff persuaded him to visit the campus.

Wisniewski was considering OSU and Boston College as his top two choices. He was no longer considering Wisconsin.

Issuing verbal commitments to OSU were Chris Kirk, a linebacker from Westerville (Ohio) South; Greg See, a linebacker from Radnor (Pa.) Archbishop Carroll; Darrin Hester, a linebacker at Dallas Hillcrest; and Mark Willis, a defensive back from Phoenix Community College and a native of the Cleveland area.

25 Years Ago — 2000

Tampa (Fla.) Leto wide receiver Michael Jenkins returned from his official visit to Georgia Tech and committed to the Buckeyes over the Yellow Jackets as well as Notre Dame and Virginia Tech.

It seemed like Jenkins (6-5, 200) could become the kind of receiver who could stretch defenses, a la Michigan State's similarly built Plaxico Burress.

"It was nice at Georgia Tech, and I liked it a lot," Jenkins said. "But I like Ohio State for what it can do for me athletically and academically. I just felt really comfortable there."

He visited OSU on Dec. 10 and told BSB at that time he was close to committing during the visit.

"They were always my childhood favorite," he said.

20 Years Ago — 2005

The first official visit weekend of 2005 was a good one for the Ohio

State football team as it secured a verbal commitment from Cleveland Glendale all-purpose athlete Freddie Lenix (5-11, 195). But it was almost as notable for who was not on campus as for who was.

Originally scheduled to be among the official visitors for the Jan. 7 weekend was Mission Viejo, Calif., four-star offensive lineman Kevin Bemoll (6-5, 295), who had been committed to the Buckeyes since the summer. But the accumulation of allegations and controversies surrounding the program caused Bemoll to rethink his decision, and he called the coaches in the week leading up to his official visit to voice his concerns and let them know that he would be considering other schools.

When asked Jan. 9 by BSB if he still considered himself committed to Ohio State, Bemoll said, "As of now, no. It wouldn't be right for me to say that. That wouldn't be fair to the school."

15 Years Ago — 2010

The Buckeyes offered Vanderbilt verbal commitment Bradley Roby in mid-December, and he was wavering on his commitment to the Commodores.

A 6-1, 171-pound cornerback, Roby hailed from Suwanee (Ga.) Peachtree Ridge, the same high school that produced OSU defensive lineman Cameron Heyward.

Having been timed at 4.34 seconds in the 40-yard dash, Roby was ranked the No. 38 cornerback in the nation. He also played wide receiver in high school.

After landing the OSU offer, Roby said he was also considering Auburn and possibly Georgia although the Bulldogs had not offered. Ohio State was recruiting him as an athlete.

10 Years Ago — 2015

Ohio State walked into the locker room at halftime of the CFP National Championship Game with a 21-10 lead against Oregon and walked out with a five-star commit for the class of 2016.

The Buckeyes took care of the task at hand on Jan. 12, knocking off the Ducks by a 42-20 margin, but also took steps toward an even brighter future. The commitment of Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic five-star running back Kareem Walker (6-1, 210) at halftime was part of a three-commitment day for Ohio State, along with two commitments in the 2017 class.

With OSU head coach Urban Meyer obviously busy when the news broke, some wondered how the commitment process played out. Walker actually called Meyer earlier that day to tell him the news and then waited to make it public.

Walker, who was listed as the No. 1 running back and No. 14 overall prospect for the class of 2016 in Scout.com's rankings, was still more than a year away from signing. However, he felt like he was ready to make his choice – especially given the success that running backs coach Sean Drayton had with Carlos Hyde and Ezekiel Elliot.

"I just felt like Ohio State was for me," Walker said. "That is just where I want to be at, it's where my heart is at. Why not go there? Why wait 13 months when I know where I want to go?"

Two 2017 prospects also committed the same day, with Jackson-

ville (Fla.) Trinity Christian cornerback Shaun Wade (6-2, 175) and Cocoa, Fla., four-star running back Bruce Judson (5-10, 171) pledging that day as well.

Five Years Ago — 2020

Ohio State landed its second commitment in as many days when Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal four-star offensive lineman Donovan Jackson (6-5, 308) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Jan. 8., after Cincinnati La Salle three-star safety Jaylen Johnson committed the day before.

Jackson was considered the top-rated offensive guard and No. 57 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He was named the offensive line MVP at The Opening Finals in the summer and then led the Knights to the 4A state title in the fall. He picked Ohio State over finalists Georgia, Stanford, Texas and Texas A&M.

Jackson's relationship with the Buckeyes dated back to middle school, when he attended a one-day camp in Columbus as an eighth-grader. He landed an offer from offensive line coach Greg Studrawa just a few months later, which marked his first from a Power Five school.

His parents, Todd and Melanie, were originally from Ohio and met while attending Miami University, while his maternal grandmother still lived in Cincinnati. He grew up rooting for Ohio State despite living 1,000 miles away in Texas, and as a result he called his unofficial visit for the spring game in April "a dream come true."

One Year Ago — 2024

What was shaping up to be a fairly quiet first day of the early signing period for Ohio State on Dec. 20 turned out to be the most chaotic yet under head coach Ryan Day.

Things went smoothly in the early morning hours, when letters of intent started to fax in at 7 a.m. and Ohio State began announcing the newest Buckeyes as official signees with the program. But some early-morning news threatened to shake the foundation of Ohio State's recruiting class, with the top-ranked player committed on each side of the ball in jeopardy.

But around 13 minutes into his press conference, Day was interrupted by Ohio State general manager Mark Pantoni to tell him that Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 214) had signed his letter of intent. Day looked to another team spokesperson to confirm the news, and when he was satisfied that he was hearing the truth, buckled in relief at the podium.

Then about 20 minutes later, Day was forced to step away to take a phone call, with athletic director Gene Smith informing him that it was urgent. After about 15 minutes, Day returned – donning an unmistakable smile – as it was reported within a few minutes that Buford, Ga., five-star defensive end Eddrick Houston (6-3, 269) would also sign with Ohio State. Day later confirmed his phone call was with Houston.

"The first beer is going to taste good, I can tell you that," Day joked.

OSU Looks To Beef Up Offensive Line With 2026 Class

Continued From Page 29

9 athlete and the No. 7 player in the state of Ohio.

He recently won a state championship with his team, helping Avon to an undefeated 16-0 season, and recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic of 247 Sports believes he could be a multi-year starter for the Buckeyes when he gets on campus.

"Weatherspoon is a fast and physical cornerback with very good coverage skills and the ability to jam wide receivers at the line of scrimmage as well as run with them in coverage," Kurelic said. "He could play inside or outside corner in college. Weatherspoon has played safety and cornerback for Avon as well as on offense but has been recruited as a cornerback by the Buckeyes."

2026 Ohio OL Will Make Decision Soon

The 2026 offensive line class in the state of Ohio is a good one, with the Buckeyes in on at least four prospects in-state. One of those is Avon Lake four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280), who has played both left and right tackle at his high school, although he made the switch to mainly stay on the left side this season.

Riley announced his top seven in June last year with Ohio State, Alabama, Clemson,

Florida State, Michigan State, Missouri and Oklahoma being included. Ohio State and Clemson seem to be the top two choices right now.

"It's still those seven," Riley told 247Sports in early January. "I've been to all of them. I might get back to Ohio State and Clemson, but that's about it. I'm leaning towards (picking) one of those two schools."

He said that he would like to make his decision in January or February, although he didn't give an exact date. But he did say that he is getting along with Ohio State offensive line coach Justin Frye and that the Buckeyes' offensive line improvement in the College Football Playoff has improved their chances of landing his commitment.

"Ohio State is playing really well. Their offensive line is playing well," Riley said. "It's going well with Coach Frye. We have a great relationship. He tried to call me before the (Oregon) game, but the connection wasn't too good being two or three time zones away."

Another thing that the Buckeyes have going in their favor when it comes to the recruitment of Riley is the fact that he is from Ohio and grew up watching and rooting for Ohio State. Regardless, he knows his decision is going to be a tough one because he does like the Tigers as well.

"I like Clemson's offensive line coach, Matt Luke. He has a good history with offensive

linemen. When he was at Georgia all five of his offensive linemen were drafted in one season."

OSU Makes Top Lists For Prospects

Although recruiting was in a dead period for the majority of time between BSB issues, prospects were still narrowing down their lists of where they might want to be when they eventually sign.

Toledo Central Catholic four-star cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160) released a top five on Jan. 8 that included the Buckeyes along with Illinois, Michigan, Oregon and Texas A&M. Because he is an in-state prospect, OSU is considered the favorite to land the No. 2 cornerback in Ohio, but there is still a lot of time in the process for him to come to a decision.

"When I walk in there, it says, 'Developed here.' I want to go somewhere I can get developed on and off the field," Smith told 247Sports about Ohio State. "They do some amazing things within their program. They have a lot of people, a lot of support, so that interests me about Ohio State. Also, they're a big-time program. They've been elite for a long time."

It was a top-six list for Vero Beach, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 305), with Ohio State included

along with Miami (Fla.), Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee and UCLA. He is the No. 73 player in the country, the No. 6 interior offensive lineman and the No. 12 player in the state of Florida.

Westlake Village (Calif.) Oaks Christian four-star safety Davon Benjamin (6-0, 170) has a top eight. The No. 32 player in the country narrowed his list down on Dec. 22 to Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Ohio State, Oregon, Texas, UCLA, USC and Washington. It could be tough for the Buckeyes to pull Benjamin out of California, though.

"I always think about staying home," Benjamin told 247Sports. "I feel like you can never go wrong being in your own back yard, representing for your family and friends. It's great to have both USC and UCLA as colleges to pick from, but I still want to take my time, see if I want to play at home or go away."

Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School four-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray revealed a top 12 on Dec. 24 of Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon, Penn State, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and Virginia Tech. He visited Columbus for the Michigan game on Nov. 30 and was also on campus for a recruiting camp in June. After that camp, he said that he has big goals for himself.

"My end goal is not to just make college ball, not to just go to the NFL, but I'm trying



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With BuckeyeScoop's Bill Greene

Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) has said that he plans to commit in the next couple of months, and Ohio State and Clemson seem to be his top two schools. Where do you believe the Buckeyes stand with him, and where do they go if they don't get Riley?

"The good thing is, in this class coming up, Riley's the top dog, no doubt about it. I really like him, but there are a ton of tackles that are in-state in this class that I like. I would say they're probably going to get him. I'll be shocked if they don't. But even if they don't, I mean, there are a ton of tackles in that class, so it's not like in other years where you have one or two guys that you almost have to get or you're dead. It's not the case in this one. I like Riley the best of all the tackles, but there are others in there that can play."

The 2026 in-state cornerback class looks to be a strong one this cycle. Do you think OSU will be able to land multiple Ohio corners, and which of them seems most likely to you at this point to end up in Columbus?

"Yeah, you have Akron Hoban four-star Elbert Hill (5-10, 175) and Toledo Central Catholic four-star cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160). Those guys are both really freaking good. I think I like Elbert Hill a little better than Singleton. They're both really special. I think Ohio State probably plans to play Weatherspoon at corner, maybe, but Singleton and Hill are really good players. I think Hill's potential is a little better than Singleton, but I would take both of them in a minute, and I would think Ohio State's in a great position for both those guys."

The Buckeyes have brought in multiple trans-

fers for the 2025 season already. What do you make of the incoming players, and do you see the team still adding more transfers?

"Well, the top guy (to add in the portal) for me would be (Georgia linebacker) Damon Wilson, and I was shocked that he went into the portal. I had no idea. I didn't watch Georgia a lot this year. I did watch him in its game with Notre Dame, but I was shocked that guy got a lot of time in that game. I remember him as a recruit, and it was like, 'This guy's really good.'

"He's young, so I would kill to get that kid. I think they're in great position to get him unless this is just a money play for him and Georgia antes up and he stays there, but I don't know. It doesn't sound like that's the deal here. I would kill to get that guy. I remember he flashed in the Notre Dame game. They lost, but he really looked good, especially rushing the passer.

"I like (former Minnesota offensive tackle and OSU portal pickup) Philip Daniels a lot, and what I like best about him is he has three years left to play. Minnesota does a great job with its offensive line. That's the one thing coming from that program. They do a great job there, so I really like what Daniels can do. I liked him coming out of high school. I thought he was good. I think they've gotten six guys now out of the portal if I'm remembering right. And the only one I would have questioned would have been (former Duquesne linebacker Ty Howard). I don't see where he fits with all the linebackers they have coming back, but they know more than I know.

"But I really like Daniels and (former Rice offensive tackle Ethan Onianwa). Onianwa has played a lot of football. (Former Idaho State defensive end) Logan George

is someone I really like. I think he's going to challenge somebody next year. You would think Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson are probably the favorites to start on the outside. I don't know if they're going to beat that dude out. that dude can play.

"(Former Purdue tight end) Max Klare caught 51 balls this year at Purdue and he's a player, so I like every guy they've gotten. I don't think (former West Virginia running back CJ Donaldson) is a starter next year. I think James Peoples is going to be the guy, but he's going to take a lot of carries where you don't want to beat the crap out of Peoples in his first year with him getting a big load. So Donaldson is going to get inside runs, goal-line runs.

"I didn't understand the Ty Howard thing, but the other five I totally get. Then (former Montana State offensive lineman) Connor Moore, I would take him in a minute. I remember him from his Ohio days.

"Damon Wilson would be at the top of my list. I have no clue why he's in the portal, and I don't care. I would pay. I would do what I had to do to get Damon Wilson. Damon Wilson's a difference maker."

Have you been able to see the Buckeyes' newest 2026 commit - Avon, Ohio, four-star cornerback Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 172) - play? What do you make of him as a prospect?

"I was really shocked that they ended up grabbing this kid. I didn't know much about him. I really was kind of stunned that they landed him. So, I don't know a lot about him, to be honest with you. I've never seen him in person."

to be a Hall of Famer," Gray said. "Ohio State does a great job doing that, at least giving me the opportunity to be in the league. So, it would definitely be at the top.

"Family atmosphere, that's the most important thing," Gray said of the factors in his recruitment. "Just trusting the coaches and players to have your back just as much as I have theirs. I want to major in sports communication. I want to be a broadcaster when I'm done, or at least a coach. So those two things, and I know Ohio State does a great job with sports communication.

"I can't imagine myself being outside of the football world, so keeping me in here, whether that's broadcasting to others or analyzing or coaching, whatever it may be, I'll still be a part of the game."

Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star safety Derrek Cooper's (6-1, 195) list was a little less official, but in a Dec. 29 interview with On3, he said that Ohio State stands out to him in his recruitment along with Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Miami (Fla.) and Texas A&M.

He likely won't make his final decision until much later in the process, specifically after he is able to make official visits to schools in June, but the former teammate of Jeremiah Smith has already taken unofficial visits to each of those schools and will be focused on multiple things when he chooses where he will play.

"When I commit, it will be about how I will be used, how the relationships are between my family and the coaches and the stability of the coaching staff," Cooper told On3. "The fit into the scheme will be important to me too. I want the chance to get on the field and show my ability as quickly as I can."

The Buckeyes might already have two wide receivers in the 2026 class, but wide receivers

coach Brian Hartline is always looking to add more to his impressive group. Destrehan, La., four-star wide receiver Jabari Mack (6-0, 192) narrowed down his scholarship list to a top 10 on Jan. 7, one which included the Buckeyes.

Also on his list are Alabama, Florida State, LSU, Michigan, Nebraska, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Texas A&M. He is ranked the No. 59 overall prospect, the No. 10 wide receiver in the class and the No. 5 player in the state of Louisiana.

With Henry and Ricketts already in the class, being able to add Mack would only add to what is already set to be one of the top position groups for a recruiting class in the country, largely helped by Henry's No. 6 overall ranking.

Bucks Offer Slew Of Prospects

With teams allowed to get back on the recruiting trail on Jan. 6, the Buckeyes took advantage of a dead period coming to an end. Coaches on Ohio State's staff were busy at that time preparing for the Cotton Bowl, but general manager Mark Pantoni and assistant director of recruiting strategy Nick Murphy were able to get on the road, visit some prospects, and offer others.

Pantoni went to Florida to extend offers while Murphy was in North Carolina.

In the 2026 class, Ohio State offered multiple prospects from Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep, the same school that Jeremiah Smith came to the Buckeyes from. Those were four-star wide receiver and Auburn commit Denairius Gray (6-2, 178), linebacker Bryan Julius (6-1, 190), three-star wide receiver Jasen Lopez (5-10, 165) and linebacker Jaiden

Roper (6-1, 207). Other 2026 prospects offered were Fort Myers (Fla.) Evangelical Christian School wide receiver Landon Dowden (6-1, 165); Garner (N.C.) South Garner defensive end Ebenezer Ewetade (6-4, 210); Charlotte (N.C.) West Mecklenburg three-star defensive end Elijah Littlejohn (6-2, 205); and Durham (N.C.) South Garner four-star interior offensive lineman Ekene Ogboko (6-6, 280).

The 2027 recruits offered were Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas quarterback Derrick Baker (6-2, 220), cornerback Jaden Carey (6-0, 165), interior offensive lineman Jayden Dean (6-3, 277), cornerback Zayden Gamble (5-11, 165), five-star wide receiver Julius Jones (5-10, 160) and defensive lineman Mark Matthews (6-6, 270); Hollywood (Fla.) South Broward safety Samari Howard (6-0, 150); Charlotte (N.C.) West Charlotte safety Davion Jones (6-0, 175); and Charlotte (N.C.) Corvian Community defensive lineman Nate Kamba (6-3, 270).

In the 2028 class, Charlotte (N.C.) Providence defensive lineman Cory Cunningham (6-4, 265); Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep wide receiver Peter Pierre (6-4, 210); Pembroke Pines (Fla.) West Broward athlete A'Mir Sears (6-1, 162); and Raleigh (N.C.) Southeast Raleigh offensive tackle Grayson Williams (6-4, 280) were offered by Pantoni and Murphy.

Other Notes And Tidbits

• Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225), a former Ohio State commit, has set up three official visits for the month of Jan-

uary, heading to Florida State, Michigan and UCLA to get a look at more schools before he makes his final decision. After decommitting from the Buckeyes in November, Mathis decided not to sign during the early signing period, but he will be making his final decision by National Signing Day on Feb. 5. Penn State has also been a strong contender, having hosted the nation's 73rd-best prospect and sixth-best edge rusher on many occasions throughout the football season.

• Former Georgia quarterback Carson Beck was rumored to be connected to Ohio State when he entered the transfer portal, but Miami was thought to be the favorite to land him, and the Hurricanes did so on Jan. 10 when he committed to play for Mario Cristobal's team next season. The Athletic reported that Beck is likely to receive "closer to a little over \$3 million" in NIL earnings by Hurricane collectives. It was unclear whether the Buckeyes are actually in the market for a transfer quarterback as BSB went to press, or if they will let Julian Sayin, Tavien St. Clair and Lincoln Kienholz duke it out for the starting spot next season, should all three of them return.

• After Donaldson signed with Ohio State, former Alabama running back Justice Haynes, who was another target for Ohio State in the portal before landing Donaldson, committed to Michigan on Jan. 3. Haynes was the No. 1 running back in the portal according to 247Sports after rushing for 448 yards and seven touchdowns this season with the Crimson Tide. He has two years of eligibility remaining.

Big Ten Performs Well In Bowl Games

While the conversation about SEC teams missing out on the postseason was going on, with Alabama and Ole Miss fans – and coaches, such as Lane Kiffin on Twitter – claiming their teams deserved to be in the College Football Playoff over others, the Big Ten was flexing its muscle in bowl games.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

Including the national championship game in the conference record in bowl games this season, the Big Ten went 11-6 in postseason play, beating some SEC teams along the way.

The most prominent of those wins were Ohio State's four to reach the national title game/win the national title, beating Tennessee and Texas of the Southeastern Conference by a combined 39 points.

Also in the playoff, Penn State beat SMU 38-10 in the first round before taking down Boise State 31-14 in the Fiesta Bowl. The Nittany Lions advanced to the Orange Bowl to play Notre Dame, where they would lose due to a late interception thrown by Drew Allar that allowed the Fighting Irish to get into field-goal range. Fighting Irish kicker Mitch Jeter sent a field goal through the uprights with seven seconds left in the game to end the season of James Franklin and the Lions.

Oregon made the CFP as well after an undefeated regular season and a Big Ten Championship Game win but had the unlucky draw of facing the Buckeyes in the Rose Bowl, getting down 34-0 in the first half and ultimately losing 41-21 as the No. 1-ranked team.

Indiana and Curt Cignetti also lost their first game in the CFP, going down big early to the Fighting Irish in the first-round matchup held in South Bend, Ind., but fighting back to make it a respectable 27-17 loss to the eventual runner-up.

In other Big Ten bowl action, USC beat Texas A&M 35-31 in the Las Vegas Bowl, Nebraska topped Boston College 20-15 in the PinStripe Bowl, Illinois beat South Carolina 21-17 in the Citrus Bowl, Minnesota took down Virginia Tech 24-10 in the Duke's Mayo Bowl and Michigan beat Alabama 19-13 in the ReliaQuest Bowl.

The win for the Wolverines put a cherry on top of a strong finish for Sherrone Moore's program that included beating archrival Ohio State on Nov. 30 to drop the Buckeyes down

in the CFP rankings and force them out of Big Ten title game contention. It also made it two times in the calendar year of 2024 that the Wolverines beat the Crimson Tide, the first coming last New Year's Day when it handed Nick Saban a 27-20 overtime loss in the Rose Bowl in his final game as head coach, allowing the Wolverines to advance to last year's national title game and eventually take home the championship.

It wasn't all success for the conference during bowl season. Rutgers blew a 17-point second-half lead to fall to Kansas State 44-41 in the Rate Bowl, Iowa fell to Missouri 27-24 in the Music City Bowl, and Washington had a close loss to Louisville, 35-34, in the Sun Bowl.

Only six of the 18 teams in the Big Ten finished the season without enough wins to make a bowl game, with Maryland, Michigan State, Northwestern, Purdue, UCLA and Wisconsin looking on from the outside.

Thirteen of the 16 SEC teams made a bowl, with only Auburn, Kentucky and Mississippi State missing the cut.

Rourke, Warren Suffer Torn ACLs

It was revealed after Indiana's playoff loss that quarterback Kurtis Rourke played the entire 2024 season on a torn ACL and underwent surgery after the season to repair it before the NFL draft. He reportedly suffered the injury in August after tearing the same ACL when he was at Ohio University during the 2022 season.

Despite the injury, he led the Hoosiers to their first-ever 11-win season and appearance in the College Football Playoff, passing for 3,042 yards and 29 touchdowns with just five interceptions. Those stats allowed him to receive Heisman Trophy consideration at times throughout the year, although he didn't finish as a finalist. He finished ninth in voting for the award, earning two first-place votes.

Rourke did miss one game in the 2024 season – Indiana's 31-17 home win over Washington on Oct. 26 – due to him undergoing surgery to repair a broken right thumb, but he was able to come back quickly and played his way to a second-team All-Big Ten selection.

Michigan quarterback Davis Warren also suffered a torn ACL this year, his occurring in the second half of the team's bowl win over Alabama. He revealed his injury in a Jan. 4 social media post, where he also announced his intention to return to Michigan next season.

"Celebrating a win and so proud of the way the boys finished this season!" Warren's post read. "I unfortunately suffered a torn

ACL in the bowl game. Thanks to the Michigan faithful for all the support this season. Can't wait to battle to be back on the field with my guys in AA and go blue!"

He finished the season completing 134 of 209 passes (64.1 percent) for 1,199 yards, seven touchdowns and nine interceptions in six starts in nine games played. He initially won the starting job out of camp for Michigan before being benched for Alex Orji, who was then benched for Jack Tuttle, who retired from football after suffering a fifth concussion, allowing Warren to get his starting spot back for the remaining six games of the season.

Warren became the third quarterback in Michigan history to beat Ohio State and Alabama in the same season, joining J.J. McCarthy, who did it last season, and Tom Brady in 1999.

Conference Adds Through Portal

With the transfer portal being as active as it is these days, it would be impossible to cover every transfer who leaves every Big Ten team as well as every transfer who joins a Big Ten team. But there are some players coming into the conference who project to have a major impact on their respective new teams next season.

With Rourke headed to the NFL draft, quarterback Fernando Mendoza joining Indiana for the 2025 season will be an important addition. In 11 games with Cal last year, he completed 265 of 386 passes (68.7 percent) for 3,004 yards, 16 touchdowns and six interceptions while also running for 105 yards and two more scores on the ground.

Many of Indiana's players were transfers for the 2024 season and won't be there next year, but Cignetti has already proved he has the ability to bring in a talented roster through the portal. He is trying to get the pieces together to do it again, likely allowing Mendoza better weapons than he had with the Golden Bears the last two years.

Iowa also added a quarterback after Cade McNamara transferred to East Tennessee State of the FCS. Mark Gronowski, coming from FCS South Dakota State, will join the Hawkeyes after an impressive season with the Jackrabbits in which he completed 206 of 337 passes (61.1 percent) for 2,719 yards, 23 touchdowns and seven interceptions while rushing for 380 yards and 10 scores. He decided to forgo the NFL draft to join Iowa.

Preston Stone, a quarterback from SMU, joined Northwestern through the portal and will spend his final year of eligibility with the Wildcats. He didn't get much playing time during the Mustangs' playoff season but did have 30 completions on 51 attempts with 421 yards, five touchdowns and one interception. Stone did start 12 games for the Mustangs in 2023, throwing for 3,197 passing yards and 28 touchdowns.

Washington made a big addition in its secondary when it added cornerback Tarcario Davis from Arizona. The Huskies, who lost a few defensive backs to the portal, will welcome the addition of Davis, who recorded 44 tackles, six pass breakups and two tackles for loss this season with the Wildcats while earning a second-team All-Big 12

BIG

2024 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Oregon	9	0	1.000	13	0	1.000
Indiana	8	1	.889	11	1	.917
Penn State	8	1	.889	11	2	.846
Ohio State	7	2	.778	10	2	.833
Illinois	6	3	.667	9	3	.750
Iowa	6	3	.667	8	4	.667
Michigan	5	4	.556	7	5	.583
Minnesota	5	4	.556	7	5	.583
Rutgers	4	5	.444	7	5	.583
USC	4	5	.444	6	6	.500
Washington	4	5	.444	6	6	.500
Nebraska	3	6	.333	6	6	.500
Michigan State	3	6	.333	5	7	.417
UCLA	3	6	.333	5	7	.417
Wisconsin	3	6	.333	5	7	.417
Northwestern	2	7	.222	4	8	.333
Maryland	1	8	.111	4	8	.333
Purdue	0	9	.000	1	11	.083

Dec. 7 Game

Oregon 45, Penn State, 37*

All times Eastern

* Big Ten Championship Game at Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis

selection. He was also named a semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe Award, which honors the nation's top defensive back.

Oregon will also reload after its impressive first season in the Big Ten with safety Dillon Thieneman leaving Purdue to join the Ducks and running back Makhli Hughes transferring in from Tulane. Jordan James won't be back for the Ducks, so Hughes will add to that group in Eugene after running for 2,779 yards over the last two seasons as well as catching 30 passes for 243 yards and two touchdowns.

With Warren likely out for the entire 2025 season, Michigan also added a quarterback through the portal despite bringing in the No. 1 2025 recruit in the country in Bryce Underwood, whom they are rumored to have paid upwards of \$12 million to flip from LSU.

The Wolverines added Mikey Keene from Fresno State to compete for the starting job next year. He appeared in 39 games in his career with Fresno State and UCF that dates back to 2021, completing 67.8 percent of his passes (793 of 1170) for 8,245 yards, 65 touchdowns and 28 interceptions.

"I think he's a very talented kid who's accurate on the run," defensive coordinator Wink Martindale said of Keene. "We know he's tough because we hit him. I'm excited that he's part of our squad now."

Keene will hope to improve the No. 130 passing offense in the country (129.1 yards per game), which was dead last out of all Power Four schools.

Iowa To Retire Clark's Jersey

To nobody's surprise, former Iowa women's basketball guard Caitlin Clark, the all-

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BIG Conference Bowl Matchups

CFP First Round Dec. 20 • 8 p.m. ABC  Notre Dame 27 Indiana 17	CFP First Round Dec. 21 • 12 p.m. TNT  Penn State 38 SMU 10	CFP First Round Dec. 21 • 8 p.m. ABC  Ohio State 42 Tennessee 17	Rate Dec. 26 • 5:30 p.m. ESPN  Kansas State 44 Rutgers 41	Las Vegas Dec. 27 • 10:30 p.m. ESPN  USC 35 Texas A&M 31
Pinstripe Dec. 28 • Noon ABC  Nebraska 20 Boston College 15	Music City Dec. 30 • 2:30 p.m. ESPN  Missouri 27 Iowa 24	ReliaQuest Dec. 31 • Noon ESPN  Michigan 19 Alabama 13	Sun Dec. 31 • 2 p.m. CBS  Louisville 35 Washington 34	Citrus Dec. 31 • 3 p.m. ABC  Illinois 21 South Carolina 17
CFP Quarterfinal Dec. 31 • 5 p.m. ESPN  Penn State 31 Boise State 14	CFP Quarterfinal Jan. 1 • 5 p.m. ESPN  Ohio State 41 Oregon 21	Duke's Mayo Jan. 3 • 7:30 p.m. ESPN  Minnesota 24 Virginia Tech 10	CFP Semifinal Jan. 9 • 7:30 p.m. ESPN  Notre Dame 27 Penn State 24	CFP Semifinal Jan. 10 • 7:30 p.m. ESPN  Ohio State 28 Texas 14

time leading scorer in college basketball, will have her No. 22 jersey retired by the Hawkeyes on Feb. 2 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena when the program takes on Juju Watkins and USC, the school announced.

"I'm forever proud to be a Hawkeye, and Iowa holds a special place in my heart that is bigger than just basketball," Clark said. "It means the world to me to receive this honor and to celebrate it with my family, friends and alumni. It will be a great feeling to look up in the rafters and see my jersey alongside those that I've admired for so long."

Clark's 3,951 points set the record for both men's and women's Division I history, overtaking former Washington record holder Kelsey Plum for the No. 1 spot in the women's game and LSU's Pete Maravich for the overall spot.

Clark led Iowa to back-to-back national championship games, losing to LSU in 2023 and South Carolina in 2024, and helped the Hawkeyes secure three straight Big Ten tournament championships (2022-24). She was also named the consensus National Player of the Year in her final two seasons.

Clark's efforts at Iowa allowed her to be taken No. 1 overall by the Indiana Fever in the 2024 WNBA draft immediately following last college season. She made the most of her first WNBA season, winning Rookie of the Year by scoring 19.2 points, 8.4 assists, 1.3 steals and 5.7 rebounds per game and helping the Fever make the playoffs for the first time since 2016.

"Caitlin Clark has not only redefined excellence on the court but has also inspired countless young athletes to pursue their dreams with passion and determination," Iowa athletic director Beth Goetz said. "Her

remarkable achievements have left an indelible mark on the University of Iowa and the world of women's basketball.

"Retiring her number is a testament to her extraordinary contributions and a celebration of her legacy that will continue to inspire future generations. Hawkeye fans are eager to say thank you for so many incredible moments."

Conference Coaches Coming And Going

Former Penn State defensive coordinator Tom Allen, who was with the Nittany Lions for just one season after being fired by Indiana, was hired by Clemson to the same position on Jan. 14. Allen led Penn State to a season in which it was eighth in scoring defense, allowing just 16.5 points per game, and seventh in total defense, with 294.8 yards per game allowed.

Both marks for the team were worse than they were the year before under current Duke head coach Manny Diaz, who had the unit at No. 3 (13.5 points allowed) and No. 2 (247.6 yards), respectively in the 2023-24 season.

Penn State had not hired a replacement yet as BSB went to press.

Michigan hired a new offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach on Dec. 13, taking former North Carolina OC Chip Lindsey from the Tarheels after Bill Belichick was hired in Chapel Hill.

Moore said he spoke to current New England Patriots quarterback Drake Maye, who played for Lindsey for one season at North Carolina, and Maye approved of the Wolverines bringing Lindsey on board.

"He felt like he progressed more in his

career in that year more than at any point in his career," Moore said. "He really felt like without him, he wouldn't have gotten the chance to go so high in the draft. Getting that stamp of approval was really huge for me.

"It was a long process, talking to a lot of different people, a lot of different coaches. Ultimately, (Lindsey was) the best fit from a scheme standpoint. He's done a lot of different things, which we kind of needed."

Michigan's offense in the 2024 season was 113th in scoring (down from 14th last season) with just 22.0 points per game and 129th in total offense (down from 67th) with 286.2 yards per game.

The Wolverines might also have to hire a defensive coordinator later this offseason for the second straight year after Martindale interviewed for defensive coordinator positions at the NFL level with the Atlanta Falcons and the Indianapolis Colts.

Martindale, who was defensive coordinator for the New York Giants from 2022-23 before going to Michigan, had not been hired by any NFL team as BSB went to press.

Minnesota is also losing its defensive coordinator, with Miami (Fla.) hiring Corey Hetherman to the same position on Jan. 11 after he helped the Golden Gophers finish the season ninth in the country in scoring defense (16.9 points) and fifth in total defense (285.7 yards).

Ryan Walters, who was fired from the head coaching job at Purdue after the conclusion of the Boilermakers' season, was hired by Washington to be its defensive coordinator on Jan. 3. He had the same position at Illinois for two seasons before taking

over at Purdue, leading historically good defenses for the Illini. But in two seasons with Purdue, his teams were 5-19 and struggled on both sides of the ball.

Former Oregon WR Arrested On Christmas Day

A former Oregon wide receiver who was with the Ducks for the 2024 season was arrested in Springfield, Ore., in connection with a pistol-whipping that happened in California on Christmas Day.

Ryan Tristan Chance Taylor – who was listed on the Ducks' roster as Ryan Pellum – allegedly used a 9mm pistol to assault someone in his hometown of Long Beach, Calif., over the holidays according to reports from KOIN 6 News.

The report says that Taylor pistol-whipped the victim in the head, causing an injury that required stitches, and allegedly fired two shots from the gun during the assault. A nationwide arrest warrant was put out for Taylor, 19, and he was arrested and booked at the Lane County Jail in Oregon after Eugene police became aware of the warrant and investigated on their own.

He is facing charges of assault with a deadly weapon and is expected to be extradited to Long Beach to face those charges in court on Jan. 23.

Taylor had entered the transfer portal after Oregon lost to Ohio State in the Rose Bowl, and he did not find a new home prior to his arrest. He was originally committed to USC out of high school before flipping to the Ducks.

Taylor did not record a reception on offense for the Ducks this season, but he did earn one tackle on special teams.

Bradshaw Returns To Court After Long Absence

Ohio State received a significant boost to its previously thin frontcourt on Dec. 21 when sophomore forward Aaron Bradshaw returned to the court to take on his old team and help the Buckeyes dethrone then-No. 4 Kentucky 85-65 in the CBS Sports Classic at Madison Square Garden.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Bradshaw, who transferred to Ohio State from the Wildcats this past summer, had missed the previous seven games leading up to that matchup due to the university investigating an incident that occurred at his off-campus home in late November for a reason that could not be explained due to “federal privacy laws.”

Although the university concluded its investigation into the incident – which had still yet to be revealed as BSB went to press – the week of Dec. 9, allowing Bradshaw to return to the team that week, the 7-1 forward did not immediately return to game action, missing the team's next two games against then-No. 2 Auburn on Dec. 14 and Valparaiso on Dec. 17 due to what OSU head coach Jake Diebler deemed a “return-to-play” process.

When Bradshaw finally ramped up enough to return to action against Kentucky, his presence inside was immediately felt. The Buckeyes' big man totaled 11 points on 5-of-6 shooting in the win while adding a pair of rebounds, two steals and an assist, all in 18 minutes of action.

Bradshaw's seamless return to the court – which helped Ohio State hold a 36-24 edge in paint points against the heavily favored Wildcats – was a testament to the persistence and focus he had during the “return-to-play” period, according to Diebler. He also said it served as a reminder of just how impactful Bradshaw can be when he is on the floor and around the team.

“Aaron plays with an intensity and a passion that I thought – we missed that,” Diebler said on Dec. 27. “And certainly his size, his rebound ability, his ability to protect the rim, all of those things were missed. But he's worked hard to get back. He's still building back to where he was at that point to start the early part of the season.”

“He worked hard to get back to where we felt comfortable that he could go into the game and play well. I'm not going to lie to you and say I anticipated he was going to go 5 for 6, but I thought that spoke to his focus these last couple weeks to get back out there.”

Although he has yet to return to the starting lineup – he started each of his first four games with the Buckeyes before his absence – Bradshaw has made some impact on the interior since his return to action. In the last seven games before BSB went to press, he

averaged 6.9 points and 2.4 rebounds, while averaging 16 minutes of play, but he had seen his minutes diminish over the past two games with 7-1 Croatia freshman center Ivan Njegovan seeing more time.

Regardless of his performance on the court, Bradshaw is simply happy to get back on the floor. He admitted after Ohio State's 103-83 win over Indiana State on Dec. 29 that his extended absence from the team was a difficult time for him, one which taught him to stay patient and positive throughout the process.

But he was able to get through those tough times due to the help of his teammates, who he said made a concerted effort to keep him in their thoughts and ensure he was in the right headspace while being away from the team.

“I love my teammates,” Bradshaw said. “They texted me, checked up on me, called me, came to my crib, everything, to just make sure I was OK. And that's all I really needed, just the comfort of my family.”

Johnson Jr. Takes Leave Of Absence

Ohio State gained a major contributor in the frontcourt around the same time it lost another one in the backcourt.

On Dec. 17, it was revealed by an Ohio State team spokesman that fifth-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr. would be taking a leave of absence from the team to address personal matters.

Johnson, who transferred back to Ohio State this summer after spending the last two years at South Carolina, has yet to return to the team since that date, meaning that he missed the last eight games for the Buckeyes.

Diebler has been asked numerous times to provide an update on Johnson's status, but the coach has opted each time to provide little update, saying that while he has been in constant communication with his veteran guard, he is taking time to be with his family.

“No update with Meechie,” Diebler said on Jan. 2. “We're still obviously communicating with him regularly. Thoughts and prayers to him and his family.”

Johnson's absence is a significant one for the Buckeyes, especially from a depth standpoint. He ranked second in the team in minutes played behind only junior guard Bruce Thornton at 28.8 per game, while he also joined Thornton as the only Buckeyes to start each of the team's first 10 games.

From a production standpoint, however, Johnson had gotten off to a bit of a disappointing start to the 2024-25 season. He was averaging 9.1 points, 2.7 assists and 2.5 rebounds per game while shooting just 35.6 percent from the floor and 35.7 percent from three, each of which were lower than the totals he had last season when he earned second-team All-SEC honors while notching 14.1 points, 4.1 rebounds and 2.9 assists per game on 39.9 percent shooting, 32.1 percent from three.

Johnson's absence has forced Diebler to tweak his rotation some, most notably insert-

ing true freshman guard John Mobley Jr. into the starting lineup. Mobley started the last eight games for the Buckeyes and had seen his production diminish some during that span. While he was averaging around the same points he had while on the bench (12.6 as a starter, 12.4 on the bench), he shot just 34.8 percent from the floor and 31.9 percent from three, compared to 48.1 percent and 54.0 percent he was logging in those same three categories across his first 10 games.

Mobley also turned the ball over 11 times in those eight games – five of them coming in the Buckeyes' 73-71 loss to No. 15 Oregon on Jan. 10 – compared to the nine he had in the games he came off the bench.

Glover's Return Helps Fortify Backcourt

In addition to Mobley, Johnson's extended absence has opened up added opportunities for Ohio State's reserve guards to produce in increased playing time, and perhaps no member of the backcourt has benefited from that development more than sixth-year guard Ques Glover.

Since returning to the floor against Kentucky after missing the previous eight games due to an ankle injury, the veteran Glover has been a welcome re-addition to the Buckeyes' backcourt.

Like Bradshaw, Glover made his presence felt as soon as he returned to the floor. His efficiency in the midrange and near the rim was key to the Buckeyes' upset win over the Wildcats, where he connected on four of his six shots while also hitting on his lone three-point attempt to give him a solid nine points along with his three rebounds and one assist.

That efficiency continued for Glover in the ensuing games when he racked up an impressive 15-point, five-assist and one-steal outing against Indiana State and then added nine and 13 points in the next two games against Michigan State on Jan. 3 and Minnesota on Jan. 6.

After the Indiana State game, Glover – who transferred to Ohio State this offseason after an injury-plagued season at Kansas State in which he did not play – said he was able to quickly re-assimilate himself to the court with the Buckeyes after his long injury absence by spending a lot of time in the gym to both recover with the training staff and get back to game speed, a process that he said his teammates also helped him with.

“I feel normal,” Glover said. “It's just been a lot of time with recovery and spending time in the gym with my teammates. My teammates believe in me and push my confidence in me, and they are with me through everything. I'm really appreciative of my coaches and my teammates for being there every step of the way.”

Glover's production dipped dramatically in his last three games, combining for just four points on 0-of-8 shooting while committing four turnovers in that span. But regardless of his offensive struggles, having another capable ball-handler on the court – he had dished out 12 assists since he returned – allows Ohio State's backcourt players to have some more open space to make plays and score off the ball.

This has helped Thornton the most out of anybody on the team. He scored at least 18

points in six of the seven games Glover has been back, including back-to-back career-high outings of 30 and 33 points against Kentucky and Indiana State.

Diebler thinks Glover's ability to divert some of the attention away from Thornton makes not only his star guard but the whole offense run more smoothly, creating a fluid style of offense that he was anticipating when he first put the team together during the off-season.

“I think the vision of playing multiple guards and multiple playmakers is to (give Thornton more flexibility on offense),” Diebler said. “Bruce, he's been extremely efficient (on catch-and-shoot threes), so you need other guys to create those opportunities for him.”

“So when we were putting this roster together, we wanted to play multiple guards and play with pace and play with freedom. Getting Thornton in space on the court with other guys who could create for him at times was part of the vision. And I think we're getting better at it.”

January Lull Hurting Buckeyes Again

In both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 seasons, Ohio State was plagued by sustained stretches of poor play in January, both of which caused it to drop down the Big Ten standings and fall out of NCAA Tournament contention.

These consecutive early-winter lulls – a 1-8 January stretch in conference play in 2022-23 and then a 2-6 period the next season – put somewhat of a stain on the program in recent seasons, and it played a significant role in the firing of former head coach Chris Holtmann last February.

With Diebler now in charge, he is tasked with avoiding those same issues in early Big Ten play. But as of mid-January, he had suffered the same fate as his predecessor. After starting conference play with a 2-1 record, the Buckeyes dropped each of their last three games since BSB went to press, losing at home to Oregon and Indiana on Jan. 17 (77-76, OT) and on the road to then-No. 24 Wisconsin on Jan. 14 (70-68).

Ohio State's last three conference losses have come by a combined five points, which has given Diebler some confidence that his team can get out of this rut and avoid a similar extended losing streak that buried them the last two years.

But he also knows that in order to do that, his team's overall execution must be better, as in each of the last three losses they failed to make the winning plays throughout, putting themselves in inopportune positions down the stretch when the games got close.

“I think the biggest thing for us is it's the little things throughout the game that are putting us in the position that we have to get better at,” Diebler said after the Indiana loss. “In general, we need to play smarter. Our shot selection at times, our turnovers – we're playing hard, we're playing tough, we need to play smarter now. And that's where the attention to detail comes into play.”

Ohio State's lack of execution in those last three games had caused it to crater down the Big Ten standings as BSB went to press. The Buckeyes' 2-5 record put them in 16th place in the new-look 18-team men's hoops conference, which would have them missing the cut



Aaron Bradshaw



Meechie Johnson

for the Big Ten tournament this March if those were the final standings. Under new Big Ten rules, the final three teams in the conference standings do not qualify for the postseason tournament.

The Buckeyes' potential path up the Big Ten standings does not seem like an easy task moving forward this winter. Four of OSU's next five games are against teams inside the top nine of the Big Ten standings, those matchups being at No. 11 Purdue on Jan. 21, home against Iowa on Jan. 27, at Illinois on Feb. 2 and home against Maryland on Feb. 6.

It's a difficult upcoming schedule that has Diebler hoping his team can clean up their mistakes and do it sooner rather than later.

"We have significant room to grow, and we will, because we are working hard," Diebler said. "But we have to start seeing those few possessions result in better decisions, better attention to detail. We have to do it right now."

Russell Traded Back To Brooklyn

Former Ohio State guard D'Angelo Russell's chaotic NBA career continued on Dec. 29 when he was traded from the Los Angeles Lakers back to the Brooklyn Nets in exchange for forward Dorian Finney-Smith and guard Shake Milton. This marks the second time in his career that Russell was dealt coast-to-coast from the Lakers to the Nets, the first occurring in June of 2017.



D'Angelo Russell

Russell, who is in his 10th season in the NBA after being selected by Los Angeles with the No. 2 overall pick of the 2015 NBA draft, had perhaps his best professional years with Brooklyn. In two years with the franchise, he averaged 19.0 points, 6.3 assists and 3.9 rebounds per contest, helping lead the Nets out from the basement of the NBA and into the playoffs by the 2018-19 season.

That season was Russell's career best, where he notched an impressive 21.1 points, 7.0 assists, 3.9 rebounds and 1.2 steals per game while shooting 43.4 percent from the field and 36.9 percent from three, a stat line that earned him his first and only All-Star selection.

Russell's NBA career has taken a bit of a disappointing turn since that season, however. After the Nets acquired perennial All-Stars Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving that offseason, they dealt Russell to the Golden State Warriors, where he played just 33 games before being traded to the Minnesota Timberwolves that season.

He then played two full seasons in Minnesota along with parts of two others, averaging 18.5 points and 6.5 assists per game from 2019-23, before being sent back to the Lakers in February of 2023. Although Russell earned the unique chance to play with Akron native LeBron James for a pair of seasons, his stint in Los Angeles was an unsteady one. He often struggled to shoot at an efficient rate this season, shooting 41.5 percent from the field and 33.3 percent from three, and he averaged just 12.4 points per game before being traded to the Nets.

Russell now looks to revitalize his career in Brooklyn again on a Nets team that sits just 12th in the Eastern Conference with a 14-29 record as BSB went to press. The former

Buckeye – who was a consensus All-American and Big Ten Freshman of the Year in his one-and-done season with Ohio State in 2014-15 – has averaged 13.2 points and 8.0 assists per game while shooting 41.6 percent from the field in his first six games back with the Nets.

Other Notes And Tidbits

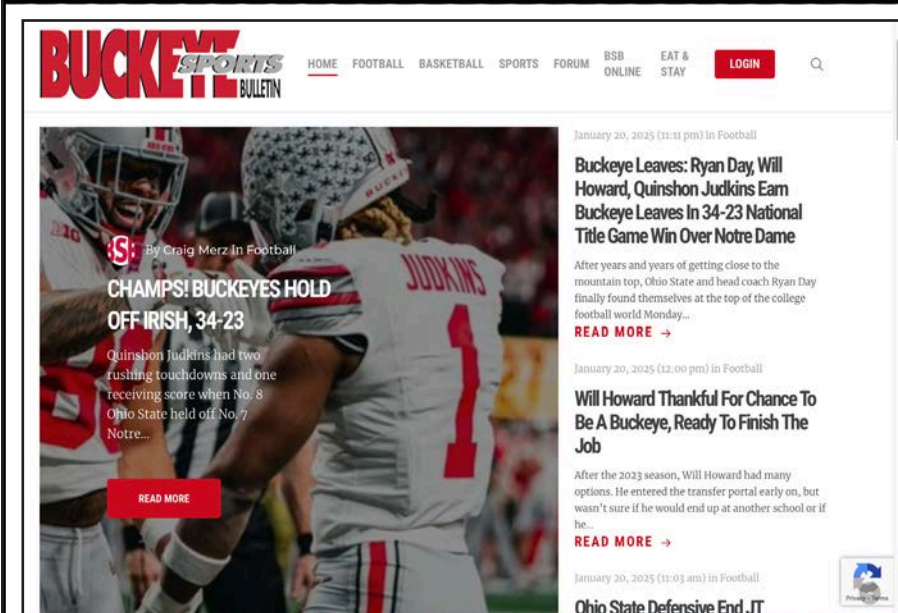
- Another talented former Buckeye, Utah Jazz second-year small forward Brice Sensabaugh, found his groove in the NBA since BSB last went to press. After spending a good chunk of his rookie season with the Jazz's G-League team, the Salt Lake City Stars, the 2023 first-round NBA draft selection has found consistent time with the Jazz off the bench this year, where he has averaged 10.2 points, 1.4 assists and 2.8 rebounds per game while shooting 46.4 percent from the field in 32 games. Sensabaugh most notably flashed outstanding scoring ability at the start of the new year, when he recorded 34 and 27 points in consecutive games against the Miami Heat on Jan. 4 and Orlando Magic on Jan. 5 on a combined 23-of-37 shooting from the field. The second-year pro missed the Jazz's next three games due to an illness, but he returned on Jan. 12 against the Nets and has scored 11 or more points in his last four games.

- In recruiting news, Atlanta Holy Innocents Episcopal School five-star power forward Caleb Wilson (6-9, 205) placed Ohio State in his top three schools on Jan. 17 and announced he would be making a decision on Jan. 23. The Buckeyes have stiff competition in this recruiting race because Wilson will also choose between blue bloods Kentucky and North Carolina. Wilson, the nation's fifth-best prospect and third-best power forward in the 2026 class who took an official visit to Ohio State on Oct. 26, is unlikely to sign with the Buckeyes, with Kentucky being the presumed favorite according to On3's Joe Tipton. But he did speak glowingly of the Buckeyes, telling Tipton that Diebler is a great coach and he is a big fan of Thornton.

- The Buckeyes also lost out on the recruiting battle for Los Angeles Sierra Canyon three-star shooting guard Bryce James (6-4, 190), who committed to Arizona on Jan. 1. James, the nation's 256th-best prospect and 46th-best shooting guard in the 2025 class, is the youngest son of LeBron James, who has been closely connected to Ohio State and the men's basketball program dating back to his time with the Cleveland Cavaliers. Bryce James paid a visit to Ohio State with his mother, Savannah, in November 2023 to take in a Buckeye football gameday but ultimately chose to play for another school a year later, the same thing his older brother, current Los Angeles Lakers guard Bronny James, did in 2023 when he committed to USC.

- Holtmann continues to turn around DePaul's men's basketball program in his first year leading the program. After nearly pulling off a substantial upset of then-No. 7 Marquette on Jan. 14 (85-83, OT), the Blue Deacons secured their first regular-season Big East win in two full calendar years when they went on the road and upended Georgetown 73-68 on Jan. 17. The win snapped a 39-game regular-season Big East losing streak which dated back to Jan. 18, 2023, and gave DePaul its first Big East road victory since Feb. 24, 2022.

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OSU Endures Another B1G Skid In Early January

By PATRICK ENGELS

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State has endured many twists and turns in its season since BSB last went to press in mid-December. The Buckeyes appeared to be in store for a much more positive 2025 when they earned three straight victories from Dec. 17-29, a positive stretch that was headlined by their resumé-building 85-65 win over then-No. 4 Kentucky at Madison Square Garden on Dec. 21 which gave them their second ranked nonconference win of the season.

With key contributors such as sophomore forward Aaron Bradshaw and sixth-year guard Ques Glover returning during that same time span, things were looking up for the Buckeyes entering Big Ten play. But instead, Jake Diebler's team was unable to capitalize on that positive momentum in the new year.

Ohio State went 1-4 in its first five Big Ten games of 2025, its lone victory coming in double overtime on the road against struggling Minnesota on Jan. 6. Each of their four losses was by single digits, while its last three defeats came by a combined five points.

To make matters more dire, Ohio State was still playing without the services of top transfer addition Meechie Johnson Jr. as BSB went to press. Johnson had missed the Buckeyes' last eight games while being away from the team due to personal reasons.

Royal's Career Night Leads OSU Over Valpo

Ohio State (7-4) used a career-best performance from sophomore forward Devin Royal and some strong team defense to get back in the win column on Dec. 17 at Value City Arena, defeating Diebler's alma mater Valparaiso (5-5) by a score of 95-73.

Playing in front of just 8,079 fans – the second-smallest crowd for a men's regular-season game in the venue's history – the Buckeyes received a much-needed energy boost from Royal, who erupted for a career-high 31 points on 11-of-16 shooting while also adding

a career-best 15 rebounds to carry his team to the much-needed win.

"I don't know if it's that easy (to score in the paint), I just make it look that easy," Royal joked after the game. "But I think it's just my teammates putting me in the position to be open. They push me hard in practice, so I feel like it's easier on the court."

Although not as daunting as the early deficit it faced in its eventual 91-53 loss against Auburn on Dec. 14, Ohio State found itself trailing again in the first half, this time a 16-14 deficit with 12:08 left after Valparaiso made three of its first five attempts from three.

But that was the last time the Buckeyes trailed in the contest. They held the Beacons scoreless for the next 7:07, allowing OSU to embark on a long 12-0 run to take a 26-16 lead until freshman guard All Wright ended the scoring drought for Valparaiso with two free throws at 5:01.

A poor offensive sequence from Ohio State, which included two turnovers and a shot blocked, allowed Valparaiso to cut the deficit to just five, 29-24, with 3:24 left after a layup from junior forward Devon Ellis, but Royal scored eight points in the final 3:01 of the half to help OSU take a 41-30 lead into the locker room.

Royal continued his dominance in the second half, scoring six points in the first 3:06 of the stanza to eclipse his previous career high of 22 points and give the Buckeyes a 47-37 lead.

His last basket in that sequence started a 13-4 run that allowed OSU to go up a comfortable 58-41 with 13:51 left after two free throws from Micah Parrish.

After Valparaiso cut the deficit to 13 on two separate occasions in the middle of the half, the Buckeyes put the final nail in the coffin with a 24-6 run that allowed them to go up 85-54 with 5:33 left after a Sean Stewart three-point play.

The bloated Buckeye lead allowed Royal to exit the game to a standing ovation with 4:24 left soon after making his 11th basket of the game and Diebler to empty the benches en

Ohio State 95, Valparaiso 73

Dec. 17, 2024
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	F
Valparaiso (5-5)	30	43	73
Ohio State (7-4)	41	54	95

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Wright	31	8-15	5-6	1-3	3	4	22		
Schwieger	34	5-9	4-4	5-3	0	2	16		
De La Cruz Monegro	29	4-12	7-7	1-2	1	2	16		
Schmidt	24	3-12	0-0	0-2	0	2	7		
Sepp	14	0-0	2-2	2-3	1	5	2		
Ellis	15	3-5	2-2	3-1	0	0	2		
McNair	18	1-6	0-2	0-1	0	1	8		
Shaw	17	0-6	0-0	0-1	0	2	2		
DeAveiro	13	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	2	0		
Scroggins	5	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	2	0		
Totals	200	24-67	20-23	13-20	5	22	73		

Percentages: FG: 35.8%. FT: 87.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-24 (Schmidt 1-5, Shaw 0-4, Wright 1-4, De La Cruz Monegro 1-4, McNair 0-3, Schwieger 2-3, DeAveiro 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Scroggins 2, Wright, Schweiger). **Turnovers:** 10 (Ellis 3, Wright 2, De La Cruz Monegro 2, Schweiger, Sepp, Scroggins). **Steals:** 2 (Schwieger, De La Cruz).

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Royal	34	11-16	8-9	5-10	0	3	31		
Parrish	36	3-10	8-8	0-7	2	1	14		
Thornton	27	6-11	1-2	1-2	6	4	14		
Mobley Jr.	34	3-11	0-0	0-1	5	4	9		
Stewart	14	3-4	1-1	1-4	0	3	7		
Mahaffey	29	6-6	3-5	1-4	1	1	15		
Etzler	3	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	3		
Parks	16	0-1	2-2	0-0	0	4	2		
Baumann	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Nash	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Njegovan	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	33-61	23-27	9-29	14	20	95		

Percentages: FG: 54.1%. FT: 85.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-19 (Mobley 3-6, Parrish 0-5, Royal 1-4, Thornton 1-3, Etzler 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Parrish, Mahaffey). **Turnovers:** 10 (Parrish 2, Thornton 2, Mahaffey 2, Royal, Stewart, Etzler, Parks). **Steals:** 7 (Parrish 3, Mahaffey 2, Royal, Stewart). **Officials:** Dorsey, Riley Sr., Walton. **Attendance:** 8,079.

Ohio State 85, Kentucky 65

Dec. 21, 2024
Madison Square Garden • New York, N.Y.

	1	2	F
Kentucky (10-2)	30	35	65
Ohio State (8-4)	39	46	85

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Oweh	30	4-13	13-13	2-0	0	4	21		
Carr	33	3-9	7-9	2-2	2	2	13		
Robinson	32	3-11	2-2	0-4	0	5	10		
Williams	21	2-6	2-4	2-6	2	1	6		
Butler	27	1-7	2-2	2-1	5	5	4		
Brea	26	3-9	0-0	0-1	0	0	8		
Garrison	16	1-2	0-0	3-2	1	0	2		
Almonor	6	0-0	1-2	0-1	0	1	1		
Chandler	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	2	0		
Perry	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	17-57	27-32	13-19	11	20	65		

Percentages: FG: 29.8%. FT: 84.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-22 (Robinson 2-7, Brea 2-7, Carr 0-4, Butler 0-3, Oweh 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Carr, Williams, Butler). **Turnovers:** 10 (Butler 4, Oweh, Carr, Williams, Brea, Garrison, Team). **Steals:** 6 (Butler 2, Oweh, Williams, Garrison, Chandler).

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D				
Thornton	38	8-13	13-14	0-4	3	0	30		
Mobley Jr.	35	5-13	4-4	0-3	3	1	15		
Royal	16	2-5	3-4	3-3	2	4	7		
Stewart	15	2-4	1-3	2-2	0	4	5		
Parrish	23	1-3	0-0	0-4	0	2	2		
Bradshaw	18	5-6	0-2	1-1	1	4	11		
Glover	16	4-6	0-0	0-3	1	3	9		
Mahaffey	32	3-3	0-0	0-3	2	3	6		
Parks	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Totals	200	30-53	21-27	7-28	12	22	85		

Percentages: FG: 56.6%. FT: 77.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-14 (Mobley 1-7, Thornton 1-3, Bradshaw 1-2, Parrish 0-1, Glover 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Thornton, Royal, Parrish). **Turnovers:** 7 (Parrish 3, Thornton 2, Mahaffey 2). **Steals:** 8 (Mobley 2, Bradshaw 2, Mahaffey 2, Thornton, Royal). **Officials:** Dorsey, Evans, Shows. **Attendance:** 19,812.

route to the 22-point victory.

Royal became the first Buckeye to have at least 30 points and 15 rebounds in a game since Jared Sullinger notched 30 and 19 against South Carolina on Dec. 18, 2010, while he also earned his third double-double of the year and posted his eighth straight double-digit scoring outing.

Evan Mahaffey (15), Bruce Thornton (14) and Parrish (14) also reached double figures in scoring, with Mahaffey hitting all six of his shots from the field.

Valparaiso, which shot just 35.8 percent from the floor (24 of 67) and 20.8 percent from three (5 of 24) was led by Wright with 22 points on 8-of-15 shooting, while sophomore forward Cooper Schwieger added 16 points and eight rebounds.

The Beacons were pummeled on the interior, with the Buckeyes holding a 52-32 edge in paint points.

OSU Upsets Kentucky At Madison Square Garden

Ohio State (8-4) picked up its signature win of the still-young 2024-25 season on Dec. 21 in front of an energized 19,812 fans inside New York's historic Madison Square Garden, upsetting No. 4 Kentucky (10-2) 85-65 in the CBS Sports Classic behind an all-around team effort.

While most of Buckeye Nation was gearing up to watch the football team take on Tennes-

see in the first round of the College Football Playoff, Diebler's team, which returned both Bradshaw and Glover to the lineup following extended absences, was setting the tone on both ends of the floor against the mighty Wildcats.

The Buckeyes connected on 13 of their first 22 shots while limiting Kentucky – which entered the day as the nation's highest scoring offense at 91.3 points per game – to just seven of its first 19 shots to lead 28-21 with 4:27 left after a Mahaffey dunk.

Bradshaw made three of those shots in his return, and he added his fourth in as many tries on a three-pointer with 3:47 left that allowed the Buckeyes to lead 31-23 and eventually go into the half with a 39-30 advantage.

"Not a lot of people who are (7-1) are able to make tough shots in midrange," freshman guard John Mobley Jr. said of Bradshaw's impact. "His energy, his passion is very contagious, and we're just very thankful that he's back. He's going to keep the team getting better."

Ohio State continued to extend its lead after halftime, opening with a 6-0 run to go up 45-30 with 18:14 left after a pull-up jumper by Mobley.

The Buckeyes stayed in firm control of the game until highly coveted transfer guard Koby Brea connected on a triple at 15:25 to ignite a 6-0 Wildcats run that pulled them within six, 51-45.

Kentucky continued to hang around and trailed 59-51 with 12:03 remaining after two



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made free throws by graduate guard Lamont Butler – a former teammate of Parrish at San Diego State – but the Buckeyes began to create more separation with a 7-0 run that spanned 2:48 and put them up 66-51 with 9:15 left in the second half on a layup by Mobley.

After an 8-2 run by the Wildcats, Ohio State put the final nail in the coffin with a 13-4 run that put the underdog Buckeyes up by a commanding 81-63 with 1:30 left in the game.

Ten of those points came via the free-throw line, with Thornton making six straight in that sequence. He added four more free throws down the stretch to help OSU close out the 20-point win and give him a career-high 30 points on 8-of-13 shooting, giving him the most points for a Buckeye against an AP top-five team since Duane Washington Jr. had 32 points against Illinois in the 2021 Big Ten tournament championship game.

Ohio State also received 15 points from Mobley and 11 from Bradshaw, who helped the Buckeyes shoot an efficient 56.6 percent from the floor (30 of 53) with his 5-of-6 shooting. They were equally efficient on defense, limiting Kentucky's high-flying offense to 65 points on 29.8 percent shooting (17 of 57) from the field and 18.2 percent from three (4 of 22), both of which were season lows for Mark Pope's squad.

The Wildcats, who were also outscored 36-24 in the paint, were led by junior guard Otega Oweh with 21 points on a perfect 13-of-13 shooting from the free-throw line, while graduate forward Andrew Carr added 13 points and four rebounds.

Thornton, Bucks Blow Past Sycamores

Ohio State (9-4) ended 2024 with a convincing 103-83 victory over Indiana State (8-5) on Dec. 29 in front of a season-high 14,388 fans inside Value City Arena, one which was powered by a second straight career outing from Thornton and a dominant second half.

It took just eight days for Thornton to eclipse his career-high 30-point outing against Kentucky. He poured in another 33 points on 11-of-16 shooting, including 4 of 7 from three.

Sixteen of those points came in the second half, during which the Buckeyes used efficient offense to turn a 52-47 halftime lead into a resounding 20-point win that gave them their third 100-point outing of the season, a feat that had not been accomplished by the Scarlet and Gray since 2009-10.

"I'm proud of the way we adjusted at halftime," Diebler said. "We didn't execute as well as we wanted to in the first half defensively. They played a part in that, certainly. But for us to be able to hold them to 1-for-8 shooting from three in the second half was critical. We would have liked to be able to do that earlier in the game. But give our guys credit for adjusting coming out of the half."

As Diebler alluded to, the Sycamores stayed within reach of the Buckeyes due to their elite three-point shooting. They showed their skills as the second-best three-point shooting team in the nation (41.8 percent) by making nine of their 20 attempts in the first half (45.0 percent).

The hot shooting allowed them to hang

with the Buckeyes on the road and eventually find themselves in a 46-46 tie with 1:48 left in the period after a Bruno Alocen three pointer. The home team closed the half on a 6-1 run, including a three-pointer by Thornton, to take the five-point lead into the locker room.

Ohio State continued its positive momentum into the second half to finally create some separation on the scoreboard, making 12 of its first 16 shots while holding the Sycamores to zero threes in three attempts in that span to go up 83-68 with 10:19 left after a Thornton bucket.

The Buckeyes didn't make another field goal for the next 5:03, but they still built upon their double-digit lead by making seven free throws and holding Indiana State to one field goal in that span to go up 90-74 with 6:11 left on three free throws from Thornton.

Thornton broke the team's field-goal drought with a driving layup to go up 92-74 with 5:16 left, and he later set his new career high off a three-pointer which allowed the Buckeyes to extend their lead to 20, 99-79, with 1:49 left and the junior guard to exit the game to a standing ovation.

"I'm just so proud of him because I know what he does on a daily basis from a work standpoint," Diebler said of Thornton. "He operates like a pro."

Thornton also added six rebounds, three assists, a block and a steal to his career day. Glover also had his best game as a Buckeye with 15 points on 6-of-9 shooting, his highest scoring outing since Jan. 25, 2023. Bradshaw (13), Royal (13) and Stewart (nine) each helped the Buckeyes hold a 50-24 edge in paint points.

Indiana State was led by sophomore forward Jaden Daughtry with 25 points on 7-of-10 shooting, while senior guard Samage Teel (19), sophomore forward Camp Wagner (13) and graduate guard Kmani Doughty also reached double figures.

The Sycamores committed 28 fouls that led to 41 Buckeye free throws (28 makes, 68.3 percent), the most attempted by the Scarlet and Gray since March 24, 2012, when they went 31 of 42 from the line in their Elite Eight win over Syracuse.

Second-Half Comeback Falls Short Vs. Spartans

Ohio State (9-5, 1-2) had its second-half comeback fall just short on Jan. 3 in front of 13,604 fans inside Value City Arena, falling 69-62 to No. 18 Michigan State in its first game of 2025.

It seemed as if the Buckeyes were in store for a signature home win when they turned a 14-point early second-half deficit into a one-point lead with 8:47 left to play, but Diebler's team lost steam down the stretch. They were outscored 20-12 the rest of the way while committing five turnovers during that final sequence to give Michigan State (12-2, 3-0) and head coach Tom Izzo the hard-fought win.

"I thought we showed some really good signs tonight," Diebler said. "We showed great segments where we went on runs of our own and we played really connected basketball on both sides. But against this team especially, you can't turn it over like this and give them some easy looks in transition."

After Ohio State got off to a 13-9 lead at the 12:19 mark, Michigan State flexed its muscles by scoring 16 of its next 22 points off drives or paint touches to lead 31-23 with 5:12 left in the half following a pair of made free throws by sophomore forward Coen Carr.



Bruce Thornton

Ohio State 103, Indiana State 83									
Dec. 29, 2024 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	F					
Indiana State (8-5)		47	36	83					
Ohio State (9-4)		52	51	103					
Indiana State Total									
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Teel	29	5-9	6-6	0-0	5	4	19		
Wagner	29	3-9	4-5	1-4	0	2	13		
Doughty	15	3-3	2-2	2-2	1	5	10		
Alocen	32	3-5	0-0	0-2	0	0	8		
Harding	17	0-3	0-0	0-4	4	4	0		
Daughtry	20	7-10	11-15	3-2	1	2	25		
Walker	10	1-1	2-2	0-0	0	1	4		
Gray	7	1-3	2-2	1-1	0	4	4		
LeGree	19	0-7	0-0	2-4	3	2	0		
Summers	9	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0		
Vorst	4	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	0		
Cook	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Bean	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Alderink	3	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	23-54	27-32	10-26	14	28	83		
Ohio State Total									
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Thornton	36	11-16	7-8	0-6	3	2	33		
Royal	20	3-5	7-10	2-2	1	4	13		
Mobley Jr.	34	4-12	2-2	1-1	3	4	11		
Stewart	20	4-6	1-3	2-6	1	3	9		
Mahaffey	26	1-3	1-4	0-1	1	3	3		
Glover	26	6-9	2-4	0-3	5	5	15		
Bradshaw	18	4-7	4-5	1-2	0	0	13		
White	16	0-2	2-2	1-1	1	2	2		
Nash	1	0-0	2-2	0-0	0	0	2		
Njegovan	1	1-1	0-1	0-1	0	0	2		
Baumann	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Etzler	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	34-61	28-41	7-23	15	23	103		
Percentages: FG: 42.6%. FT: 84.4%. Three-point field goals: 10-28 (Wagner 3-8, Teel 3-5, Alocen 2-4, LeGree 0-3, Harding 0-2, Summers 0-2, Doughty 2-2, Daughtry 0-1, Gray 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 1 (Harding). Turnovers: 19 (Teel 5, Daughtry 3, LeGree 3, Harding 2, Wagner, Doughty, Gray, Summers, Vorst, Cook). Steals: 1 (Walker).									

Michigan State 69, Ohio State 62									
Jan. 3, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	F					
Michi. State (12-2 3-0)		37	32	69					
Ohio State (9-5, 1-2)		29	33	62					
MSU Total									
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Zapala	23	7-8	1-1	1-1	1	1	15		
Akins	26	4-10	5-6	0-2	0	2	14		
Kohler	20	3-5	2-2	4-6	1	1	8		
Fears Jr.	28	2-7	1-2	1-5	7	3	6		
Holloman	25	1-5	0-0	0-2	1	1	3		
Carr	24	2-3	7-8	3-0	1	1	11		
Booker	16	4-8	1-1	0-3	1	1	9		
Richardson	21	1-5	1-2	1-1	1	1	3		
Cooper	9	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	0		
Fidler	8	0-3	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	24-55	18-22	12-22	13	13	69		
Ohio State Total									
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Parrish	26	5-9	0-0	0-2	0	3	13		
Thornton	36	3-9	4-6	0-3	2	2	10		
Royal	29	2-6	4-6	3-3	2	3	8		
Mobley Jr.	23	3-12	0-0	0-2	1	3	8		
Stewart	23	2-4	0-0	4-4	1	3	4		
Glover	24	3-9	1-2	2-2	1	2	9		
Bradshaw	17	3-8	2-2	1-2	0	1	8		
Mahaffey	19	1-2	0-0	3-0	2	1	2		
White	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Totals	200	22-60	11-16	15-18	9	19	62		
Percentages: FG: 36.7%. FT: 68.8%. Three-point field goals: 7-27 (Mobley 2-7, Parrish 3-6, Thornton 0-5, Glover 2-5, Bradshaw 0-3, Royal 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (Bradshaw, Mahaffey). Turnovers: 16 (Thornton 5, Team 4, Parrish 3, Royal 3, Mahaffey). Steals: 11 (Thornton 2, Royal 2, Mobley 2, Stewart 2, Bradshaw 2, Parrish). Officials: Comer, Harris, Irving. Attendance: 13,604.									

with 3:06 remaining after another Parrish three.

But Izzo's team closed the door on any Scarlet and Gray comeback with six free throws in eight attempts to hold onto the seven-point victory.

Ohio State, which shot 7 of 27 from three (25.9 percent) and committed 16 turnovers that led to 18 Spartan points, was led in the win by Parrish, who scored 13 points on 5-of-9 shooting. Thornton added 10 points on just 3-of-9 shooting – 0 of 5 from three – while committing a game-high five turnovers, which was tied for a career worst for him. The last time he had as many was on Dec. 17, 2022, in an 89-84 loss to North Carolina at Madison Square Garden. Stewart grabbed a team-high eight rebounds to go with four points and two steals.

Michigan State, which held a convincing 38-22 advantage in paint points, was powered by Zapala with 15 points on 7-of-8 shooting. Senior guard Jaden Akins (14) and Carr (11) also reached double figures. Jaxon Kohler led all players with 10 rebounds, as the Spartans held a slight 34-33 edge on the boards.

OSU Prevails In Double-OT Vs. Minny

Ohio State (10-5, 2-2 Big Ten) escaped Minneapolis with an exciting double-overtime victory over Minnesota (8-7, 0-4 Big Ten) on Jan. 6 in front of 7,611 fans inside Williams Arena, coming back from multiple score deficits in both regulation and overtime to hand the Gophers a demoralizing 89-88 defeat.

Continued On Page 38

OSU Unable To Build Momentum From 2OT Win

Continued From Page 37

It seemed on multiple occasions that the Buckeyes were in line for a second straight defeat and third Big Ten loss in four attempts when they trailed the underdog Gophers by seven, 59-52, with just under six minutes left in the second half and then by four, 72-68 with just under a minute left in the first overtime.

But Diebler's team persevered on both occasions.

They first used a game-changing 12-5 run to get back in the game and send the game into overtime and then scored five of the final six points in the first overtime period to force a second extra frame and eventually pull out the hard-earned victory.

"Our team was resilient," Thornton said after the win. "We had a lot of adversity hit us this game, a lot of threes. But our team kept fighting."

Ohio State appeared to draw first blood in this back-and-forth contest – which featured 24 lead changes – going up 27-23 with 2:18 left in the half after two Royal free throws. But the Gophers tightened things back up with a 5-0 run to take a 28-27 lead into the locker room.

After the two teams exchanged leads 12 times in the first 9:38 of the second half to give Minnesota a 49-47 lead with 10:22 left, the Gophers got hot from the three-point line to go up 59-52 with just 5:59 left after a triple from freshman guard Isaac Asuma.

The Buckeyes switched things into a different gear in crunch time, though. Bookended by two Parrish baskets, they exploded on a 10-3 run to tie the game at 62 with just 2:04 remaining.

Ohio State appeared to be in line for a last-second win in regulation when, trailing 64-62 with five seconds left, Mobley delivered a perfect one-handed pass at the top of the key to Royal, who threw down a thunderous dunk and drew a foul.

But Royal missed the free throw, and the Buckeyes then missed two more open paint shots off offensive rebounds to send the game

Ohio State 89, Minnesota 88										
Jan. 6, 2025 Williams Arena • Minneapolis										
		1	2	OT	2OT	F				
Ohio State (10-5, 2-2)		27	37	9	16	89				
Minnesota (8-7, 0-4)		28	36	9	15	88				
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Royal	41	5-14	9-11	3-4	2	2	19			
Thornton	47	4-10	8-9	1-0	3	1	18			
Mobley Jr.	26	3-8	5-6	0-3	4	3	12			
Parrish	40	4-9	2-2	0-7	3	3	11			
Stewart	21	3-4	0-0	0-4	1	5	6			
Glover	31	4-9	4-4	1-2	2	4	13			
Bradshaw	21	3-5	1-1	1-2	0	3	7			
White	7	1-1	0-0	0-1	1	1	3			
Mahaffey	13	0-2	0-0	1-2	1	2	0			
Parks	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Totals	250	27-62	29-33	11-30	17	25	89			
Percentages: FG: 43.5%. FT: 87.9%. Three-point field goals: 6-21 (Parrish 1-5, Thornton 2-5, Mobley 1-4, Royal 0-3, Glover 1-2, Bradshaw 0-1, White 1-1). Team rebounds: 9. Blocked shots: 4 (Stewart 2, Royal, Parrish). Turnovers: 14 (Parrish 4, Thornton 3, Glover 3, Royal 2, Stewart, White). Steals: 4 (Royal, Thornton, Parrish, Mahaffey).										
Minnesota	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Fox	40	8-12	5-7	4-1	1	2	21			
Patterson	47	8-18	1-3	0-6	4	3	20			
Mitchell Jr.	46	6-16	2-6	1-2	4	4	18			
Garcia	29	2-9	0-3	2-4	2	5	5			
Odukale	16	1-2	2-4	1-3	2	2	5			
Asuma	40	7-11	1-2	1-3	3	4	18			
Betts	17	0-1	1-2	0-2	0	2	1			
Edmonds	7	0-0	0-0	0-3	0	4	0			
Mitchell	5	0-0	0-0	1-2	2	2	0			
Rigsby	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	250	32-70	12-27	16-27	18	28	88			
Percentages: FG: 45.7%. FT: 44.4%. Three-point field goals: 12-28 (Mitchell Jr. 4-10, Patterson 3-7, Garcia 1-4, Asuma 3-4, Fox 0-1, Betts 0-1, Odukale 1-1). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 5 (Fox 2, Garcia, Edmonds, Mitchell). Turnovers: 12 (Garcia 4, Mitchell Jr. 2, Edmonds 2, Patterson, Odukale, Asuma, Mitchell). Steals: 5 (Fox, Patterson, Mitchell Jr., Garcia, Asuma). Officials: Carstensen, Ek, Szcel. Attendance: 7,611.										

into overtime.

Ohio State received some better luck at the end of the first overtime. After a missed Gopher free throw gave the Buckeyes the ball down 73-71 with six seconds left, senior guard Mike Mitchell Jr. inexplicably intentionally fouled Mobley about 40 feet away from the basket, allowing the confident freshman to calmly knock down both attempts to tie the game at 73 with four seconds left and send the game into a second overtime.

Ohio State took advantage of this blunder in the second overtime by scoring the first eight points of the period to go up 81-73 with 3:08 left after a Glover layup. Minnesota battled back and cut the deficit to just four points, 83-79, with 23 seconds left, but the Buckeyes made each of their last six free throws, four by Glover, to close out the hard-earned victory.

Ohio State shot 87.9 percent from the line (29 of 33), nine of those makes coming from Royal to help him score a team-high 19 points along with seven rebounds. Thornton (18), Glover (13), Mobley (12) and Parrish (11) all reached double figures in scoring.

Minnesota was led by senior forward Parker Fox with 21 points on 8-of-12 shooting, while the Gophers' leading scorer for the season, Dawson Garcia, was limited to a season-low five points on 2-of-9 shooting before fouling out at the end of regulation.

Bucks Fall Short Vs. Ranked Ducks

Ohio State (10-6, 2-3 Big Ten) suffered

Oregon 73, Ohio State 71										
Jan. 9, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus										
		1	2	F						
Oregon (14-2, 3-2)		27	46	73						
Ohio State (10-6, 2-3)		32	39	71						
Oregon	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Shelstad	36	8-11	4-4	1-1	3	0	24			
Bittle	30	7-14	3-4	0-8	1	2	21			
Bamba	25	3-8	3-5	1-0	2	4	9			
Angel	23	1-3	3-4	2-3	1	2	5			
Tracey	30	1-5	1-2	0-2	2	2	3			
Barthelemy	25	3-8	0-0	1-3	0	1	7			
Evans Jr.	13	1-5	1-1	2-4	0	2	3			
Moss	7	0-0	1-2	0-0	0	3	1			
Cook	11	0-3	0-0	1-2	0	1	0			
Totals	200	24-57	16-22	10-25	9	17	73			
Percentages: FG: 42.1%. FT: 72.7%. Three-point field goals: 9-25 (Bittle 4-8, Shelstad 4-6, Tracey 0-3, Evans 0-3, Barthelemy 1-3, Bamba 0-1, Angel 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Bittle 3). Turnovers: 15 (Bittle 3, Team 3, Shelstad 2, Angel 2, Barthelemy 2, Bamba, Tracey, Evans). Steals: 7 (Shelstad 2, Tracey 2, Bittle, Barthelemy, Evans).										
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.						
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Thornton	37	8-16	2-2	0-1	3	2	20			
Mobley Jr.	25	5-11	5-5	0-1	0	0	16			
Stewart	22	4-5	6-8	1-8	1	1	14			
Parrish	31	4-8	0-0	1-0	2	3	11			
Royal	31	1-7	1-2	4-5	3	3	4			
Mahaffey	10	2-2	0-0	2-1	0	5	4			
Bradshaw	16	0-1	2-2	1-2	0	2	2			
Glover	16	0-6	0-0	0-1	0	1	0			
White	12	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	3	0			
Totals	200	24-57	16-19	10-23	9	20	71			
Percentages: FG: 42.1%. FT: 84.2%. Three-point field goals: 7-18 (Mobley 1-5, Thornton 2-5, Parrish 3-4, Royal 1-2, Bradshaw 2-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Stewart, Royal, White). Turnovers: 15 (Mobley 5, Royal 4, Thornton 2, Parrish 2, Stewart, Mahaffey). Steals: 5 (Stewart 2, Thornton, Parrish, Mahaffey). Officials: Anderson, Floyd, Simons. Attendance: 10,631.										

another gut-wrenching home loss on Jan. 9 in front of 10,631 fans inside Value City Arena, falling to No. 15 Oregon (14-2, 3-2) 73-71 in the two teams' first game as conference foes due to a late second-half collapse.

Fresh off its double-overtime thriller at Minnesota, Ohio State seemed as if it was in for a more comfortable victory when it used efficient shooting and strong defense to build a 61-53 lead with just over six minutes left in the contest.

Instead, it allowed the Ducks to storm back and outscore the home team 20-10 in the final 6:17 while forcing the Buckeyes into 3-of-9 shooting in the final 4:28, squandering their chances at another résumé-building ranked win.

"We were in position to beat a top-15 team in the country, so for me, I'm optimistic, because I think that says where we can get to," Diebler said after the game. "But we have to (get there) very quickly. Because every single game in this league is hard – every single game."

Ohio State's matchup with Oregon started similarly to its previous contest against Minnesota. Neither team got ahead by more than five points in the early going, leading to a 23-all tie before the Buckeyes threw the first punch, going on an 8-0 run to lead 31-23 with 2:35 left after a Parrish layup.

They went without a basket the rest of the half, though, allowing Oregon to finish the period strong and trail just 32-27 at the break. Stewart had 12 points to pace Ohio State in

the first half.

The Buckeyes came out of the half strong, making an efficient seven of their first 10 shots – including three of their four attempts from three – to lead 49-41 with 13:36 left after a Parrish three.

That offensive efficiency stalled some in the ensuing minutes, but the Buckeyes still managed to hold a fairly comfortable lead as the half progressed due to some strong team defense, which had them leading by eight again, 61-53, with 6:17 left after a pair of Bradshaw free throws.

But the game turned on a dime when the Ducks became white hot from the three-point line, making four triples in 3:47 to take a 68-67 lead with 1:35 left following a triple from preseason All-Big Ten sophomore guard Jackson Shelstad.

After Oregon tacked on two more points off a jumper from senior guard TJ Bamba, Ohio State made one last push by scoring off a Mahaffey putback layup, coming up with a steal on the ensuing inbounds pass and then connecting on two Mobley free throws, all of which put it up 71-70 with just 12 seconds remaining.

But Oregon made the final winning play on the ensuing possession when Shelstad drew a foul on Glover on an aggressive drive and made both of his free throws, giving the Ducks a 72-71 lead with just seven seconds left. Diebler elected not to call timeout on the final possession, and it led to Thornton airballing a three-pointer to seal the Ducks' come-from-behind victory.

Ohio State was led in the loss by Thornton, who scored 15 of his 20 points in the second half while adding three assists. Mobley also had a strong second half, scoring 12 of his 16 points in the final period, while Stewart finished with a season high of 14 points and nine rebounds. Royal also pulled down nine off the boards to go with four points.

Oregon was powered by Shelstad, who scored a tied-for-season-high 24 points on 8-of-11 shooting – 4 of 6 from three – while senior center Nate Bittle recorded 14 of his 21 points in the second period and added a team-high eight rebounds.

Poor First Half Dooms OSU Vs. Wisc.

Ohio State (10-7, 2-4) was unable to overcome another poor first-half performance on the road on Jan. 14, falling 70-68 to No. 24 Wisconsin (14-3, 4-2) in front of 14,527 fans inside the Kohl Center after nearly coming back from a 17-point halftime deficit.

Like many times this season, the Buckeyes dug themselves into an early hole on the road when it shot just 9 of 28 from the field (32.1 percent) and 1 of 7 from three (14.3 percent) in the first half while committing nine turnovers to hand the Badgers a comfortable 37-20 lead at the break.

OSU clawed back after halftime and eventually played well enough to trail by one point in the game's final seconds, but the halftime deficit proved to be too daunting as the late comeback fell just two points short at the buzzer.

"That standard we keep fighting for in this program, we'll never let go of that," Diebler said after the game. "It's not going to be perfect, certainly, but I think we have guys who



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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Wisconsin 70, Ohio State 68

Jan. 14, 2025 Kohl Center • Madison, Wis.									
		1	2	F					
Ohio State (10-7, 2-4)		20	48	68					
Wisconsin (14-3, 4-2)		37	33	70					

	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Thornton	37	7-13	6-6	0-2	3	1	21			
Royal	28	4-10	3-3	1-5	2	3	12			
Mobley Jr.	30	2-8	3-4	0-2	1	1	8			
Parrish	31	3-13	0-0	0-6	1	5	7			
Stewart	16	2-4	0-0	1-7	2	4	4			
Mahaffey	15	3-3	0-0	0-0	0	2	6			
Njegovan	10	2-3	1-2	5-0	0	2	5			
Bradshaw	8	2-4	0-0	1-0	0	3	5			
Glover	11	0-0	0-0	1-0	1	1	0			
White	11	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Parks	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
Totals	250	25-59	13-15	9-23	10	24	68			

Wisconsin	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Tonje	35	3-7	10-10	0-4	0	0	17			
Blackwell	31	5-12	4-6	2-4	2	4	15			
Crowl	28	5-10	4-4	0-7	1	3	14			
Klesmit	30	1-5	1-2	0-2	1	2	4			
Winter	19	0-3	4-4	1-5	1	2	4			
McGee	16	3-5	2-2	1-0	0	2	9			
Gilmore	28	2-3	0-0	2-1	1	3	5			
Amos	5	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	3	2			
Janicki	8	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0			
Totals	250	20-48	25-28	6-25	6	19	70			

Percentages: FG: 42.4%. FT: 86.7%. Three-point field goals: 5-17 (Parrish 1-5, Thornton 1-3, Royal 1-3, Mobley 1-3, Bradshaw 1-2, White 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 2 (Parrish, Njegovan). Turnovers: 11 (Royal 5, Thornton, Mobley, Stewart, Glover, White, Parks). Steals: 7 (Parrish 2, Mahaffey 2, Thornton, Bradshaw, Glover).									
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Percentages: FG: 41.7%. FT: 89.3%. Three-point field goals: 5-22 (Tonje 1-4, Blackwell 1-4, Crowl 0-3, Klesmit 1-3, McGee 1-3, Winter 0-2, Janicki 0-2, Gilmore 0-1). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 2 (Crowl, Gilmore). Turnovers: 12 (Tonje 3, Blackwell 3, Klesmit 2, Winter, McGee, Gilmore, Amos). Steals: 2 (Tonje, Blackwell). Officials: Kimble, Pfeifer, Walton. Attendance: 14,527.									
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are really bought in. Because a team that's not bought in doesn't have a second half like we had. Lots of positives, especially in the second half, but it's time to break through and get that result."

Ohio State's first-half struggles began on offense, where it made just three of its first 14 shots to allow Wisconsin to lead 17-6 with 10:38 left after a turnaround jumper by Badgers senior guard Kamari McGee.

The Buckeyes found their rhythm and made six of their next nine attempts to trail 29-20 with 2:54 left in the half after a Royal layup, but they went scoreless the remainder of the period, allowing Wisconsin to close the half on an 8-0 run to lead 37-20.

Ohio State came out of the locker room a much different team, using increased pace and 11 points from Thornton to pull within just four points, 48-44, with 10:18 left following a Royal three.

The Buckeyes continued to thrive on offense but were unable to inch any closer as Wisconsin made each of its next five shots and five free throws to go back up by eight, 65-57, with 4:17 left after a three by graduate guard John Tonje.

Ohio State finally broke through after it held the Badgers scoreless for the next 4:06 and went on a 7-0 run to trail by one, 65-64, with just 16 seconds left after a Parrish layup.

The Buckeyes had a chance at a potential game-winning score when Wisconsin sophomore guard John Blackwell missed the front end of his 1-and-1 free-throw try with 14 seconds left, but they were unable to get the defensive rebound, allowing Wisconsin to earn

Indiana 77, Ohio State 76

Jan. 17, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus									
		1	2	OT	F				
Indiana (14-5, 5-3)		29	42	6	77				
Ohio State (10-8, 2-5)		35	36	5	76				

Indiana	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Goode	41	7-14	5-5	0-3	0	1	23			
Ballo	40	8-14	5-7	8-7	4	3	21			
Mgbako	23	1-5	4-4	1-1	1	1	6			
Rice	15	2-6	0-0	1-0	2	4	4			
Leal	31	0-1	0-0	1-2	1	3	0			
Carlyle	36	5-12	2-5	1-3	1	2	13			
Galloway	34	3-9	0-0	0-5	6	4	7			
Hatton	5	1-3	1-2	1-1	0	0	3			
Totals	225	27-64	17-23	14-25	15	18	77			

Percentages: FG: 42.2%. FT: 73.9%. Three-point field goals: 6-20 (Goode 4-7, Mgbako 0-4, Galloway 1-4, Carlyle 1-3, Rice 0-1, Leal 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 6 (Ballo 2, Goode, Mgbako, Galloway). Turnovers: 10 (Ballo 3, Galloway 3, Mgbako, Rice, Leal, Team). Steals: 4 (Ballo, Rice, Carlyle, Galloway).									
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Ohio State	Total	FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF			
Mobley Jr.	36	7-17	3-3	0-3	3	2	22			
Parrish	39	8-13	2-3	1-3	1	2	19			
Thornton	43	7-15	3-3	1-5	3	1	18			
Mahaffey	34	2-2	0-0	1-5	1	1	5			
Stewart	20	2-6	0-1	1-5	0	5	4			
Glover	18	0-2	4-5	0-1	2	1	4			
Njegovan	13	1-2	0-0	1-1	0	2	2			
Bradshaw	10	1-4	0-0	1-1	0	3	2			
White	12	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	0			
Totals	225	28-62	12-15	9-26	10	18	76			

Percentages: FG: 45.2%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-23 (Mobley 5-11, Thornton 1-6, Parrish 1-3, Bradshaw 0-2, Mahaffey 1-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 6 (Mahaffey 3, Njegovan 2, Mobley). Turnovers: 11 (Mobley 2, Mahaffey 2, Glover 2, Parrish, Thornton, Stewart, White, Team). Steals: 3 (Parrish 3). Officials: Irving, Littlewood, Phillips. Attendance: 13,124.									
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another trip to the line, where McGee made both free throws to go up 67-64.

The Badgers then prevented Ohio State from attempting a potential game-tying three by intentionally fouling on their next two defensive possessions and made three of their last four free throws on the other end to close out the two-point victory.

Ohio State was led by Thornton, who scored 19 of his 21 points after halftime on a 7-of-13 shooting performance for the game. Royal added 12 points and six rebounds, while Stewart grabbed a game-high eight boards.

Wisconsin, which entered the game as the nation's best free-throw shooting team at 85.1 percent, shot 25 of 28 (89.3 percent) from the line. Ten of those makes came from Tonje, who notched a team-high 17 points along with four rebounds.

Ohio State was also solid from the line but had only 15 free throws, making 13 (86.7 percent).

OSU Falls In OT Against I-U

Ohio State (10-8, 2-5) dropped its third straight conference game in crushing fashion on Jan. 17 in front of 13,124 fans at Value City Arena, falling 77-76 to Indiana (14-5, 5-3) in overtime after clawing back from a 10-point second-half deficit.

It seemed like the Buckeyes – playing without Royal, who was out with a wrist injury – were poised for a much-needed bounce-back win against the Hoosiers when they used some late-game heroics from their top players to erase a late 68-58 deficit to force an extra period after tying the game at 71 apiece. Instead, it was another demoralizing loss for Diebler's squad, which took multiple

two-point leads in overtime only for Indiana to exit Columbus with a dramatic one-point win off a game-winning three-pointer from senior forward Luke Goode.

"We're literally right there," Parrish said after the game. "It's the little things. You don't lose a game in the last five minutes. It's the 30, 35 minutes before that. We have to do the little things to get us over the hump. Once we start doing that, we'll win the games that are closer in the end."

Ohio State looked like it was in for a successful night on its home floor when it made 11 of its first 22 shots to help it jump out to a 33-26 lead with 3:12 left in the half after a Glover free throw. The Buckeyes then held Indiana without a field goal the rest of the period to go up 35-29.

The game flipped on a dime early in the second half when Indiana made seven of its first nine shots to go up 50-46 with 12:50 left after a three-pointer from Goode, his third of that sequence. After OSU fought back to reclaim a one-point lead off a Mobley three, the Hoosiers exploded with a 14-3 run that allowed it to lead 68-58 with 5:12 remaining after a Goode turnaround jumper.

The Buckeyes did not go down without a fight, though. Mobley broke a 3:11 scoring drought with a three at 3:57, sparking a ferocious 13-3 run for the home team that allowed it to send the game into overtime off a clutch three-pointer from Mobley with 38 seconds left, his fifth of the game in 10 attempts in regulation.

Ohio State looked like it was in store for a dramatic overtime win when Thornton hit

an old-fashioned three-point play to take a 76-74 lead with 1:26 left. But the Hoosiers made the final winning play, turning an offensive rebound from coveted 7-0 transfer center Oumar Ballo into a game-winning corner three-pointer by Goode to give IU a 77-76 lead with 1:07 left.

Ohio State was held scoreless on its last two offensive possessions, its final miss being a wide-open Thornton three off a loose ball that just rimmed out as time expired.

OSU was led in the loss by Mobley, who broke out of a mini-slump with 22 points on 7-of-17 shooting and added three rebounds and three assists. Mobley scored 19 of his points in the second half. Parrish (19) and Thornton (18) also scored in double figures for the game, while Stewart grabbed six rebounds, tied for the team high with Thornton.

Indiana, which shot an efficient 55.6 percent (15 of 27) in the second half, was led by Goode, who erupted for 23 points on 7-of-14 shooting, 4 of 7 from three. Ballo, meanwhile, added his sixth double-double of the season with 21 points and 15 boards, helping the Hoosiers own a 39-35 advantage on the glass.

Ohio State will play just a single game before BSB next goes to press when it travels to West Lafayette, Ind., on Jan. 21 to take on No. 11 Purdue at Mackey Arena (7:30 p.m., Peacock).



John Mobley Jr.

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Cambridge Excels After Return From Injury

True freshman point guard Jaloni Cambridge missed three games over 2½ weeks for Ohio State, but in her first four games after injury, she looked like her same prolific self.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

At least from a scoring perspective, the five-star didn't get out to the best of starts. Cambridge had a poor 1-of-13 shooting performance in her first game back during Ohio State's 77-63 win over Rutgers on Dec. 29. These struggles followed suit with the offensive struggles she encountered prior to her injury, when she failed to shoot at least 50.0 percent from the field in each of her last five games prior to going down.

In many of those games though, Cambridge found other ways to impact the game, both as a rebounder and as a playmaker, and even in a poor shooting night against Rutgers, Cambridge led the team with seven assists and also tacked on four rebounds.

It didn't take long for Cambridge to find her stroke though. In Ohio State's 92-62 win over Northwestern on Jan. 5, she had one of her best-scoring performances of the

season, scoring a team-high 20 points while connecting on 8 of 12 field goals. Cambridge's scoring prowess didn't affect her do-it-all approach. Instead, she also led the team with three assists and six rebounds.

After the Northwestern game, Cambridge humbly gave credit to the staff and her teammates for her improved play.

"That's just the work and preparation that this whole team has put in towards me to be back on the court," Cambridge said when asked about her confidence level after returning from injury. "The last game I played wasn't my best, but I did what I could, but I just felt more comfortable being out there."

Cambridge's performance in the Buckeyes' dramatic, come-from-behind 84-77 victory over Michigan on Jan. 8 was even better. She scored a team-high 29 points, 22 of which were scored in the second half, and again dished out a team-high four assists to go along with six rebounds.

Perhaps Cambridge's game-saving performance could not have been possible without a vote of confidence from her head coach.

"She's a great kid, she's extremely talent-

ed, she has incredible speed and quickness and just a great feel for the game," Kevin McGuff said after Cambridge's clutch second-half performance against the Wolverines. "I told her at halftime, she had some really good shots in the first half, but she didn't make them. I said, 'You're going to make at least 10 shots in the second half.'"

Cambridge didn't quite make 10 shots in the second half, but her 8-of-12 second-half shooting performance was good enough to fuel her team to the seven-point win.

Cambridge continued to excel in her next two games before BSB went to press. In a 69-60 win over Oregon on Jan. 12, she was Ohio State's second-leading scorer with 13 points before scoring a game-high 27 points in an 80-69 win over Wisconsin on Jan. 16.

Starters Empty Tank In Second Half Vs. U-M

It wasn't just Cambridge who stepped up her intensity in the second half against Michigan. After he made a pep talk of sorts at halftime where he asked his team if they were going to feel sorry for themselves for playing a bad half or if they were going to fight, McGuff pushed all of his chips toward the middle of the table by playing all of his starters for the entire second half.

Other than junior guard Chance Gray, who played 11 minutes in the first half, McGuff's starters – including Cambridge, junior forward Cotie McMahon, graduate forward Ajae Petty and senior forward Taylor Thierry – each received at least 15 minutes in the first half. In the second half though, McGuff gave his best lineup the full 20 minutes of the second half to complete the comeback.

According to Gray, the starters weren't looking for a substitute after things started clicking in the second half.

"We always go back to our starters at the half, and we all knew what we needed to do," Gray said. "After that talk at halftime, we knew we needed to get back to our basketball, Ohio State basketball, and that's what we did. The group out there just kept working, and that's what we did, and it worked."

It's easy to see why McGuff wanted to stick with his starting lineup, considering each player in the usual starting lineup is averaging at least 10.0 points per game. Perhaps the more surprising decision came when McGuff opted to go away from what has become his team's signature full-court press defense.

"We just weren't getting organized at the back end and I thought it was hurting our

ability to challenge them at the three-point line and also our ability to rebound the ball because we weren't getting matched up," McGuff said on why he made that decision.

It's safe to say McGuff's adjustments worked. The Buckeyes gave up just one three-point basket in nine attempts in the second half after previously giving up seven makes in 11 tries from beyond the arc in the first half. The Buckeyes' improved defensive effort fueled one of their most dominant second halves of the season, as they crushed the Wolverines 53-33 in the last 20 minutes.

"I'm really happy because we really showed a lot of resilience, togetherness and some fight, and if you're going to win in the Big Ten – especially on the road – you'd better have that," McGuff said.

McMahon Named To Wooden Watch List

Considering she's been the most reliable scorer on an undefeated top-10 team, it's no surprise that McMahon was named to the Wooden Award's Midseason Top-25 Watch List on Jan. 7. The winner of the Wooden Award, given to the most outstanding player in college basketball, will be announced after the regular season during the NCAA tournament.

Despite dealing with a lower-leg injury, which sidelined her from four games from Nov. 17 to Dec. 8, McMahon, a preseason All-America honorable mention, has been as advertised this season.

As of Jan. 21, McMahon was leading the Buckeyes with 16.6 points per game, on 44.0 percent shooting.

She has been particularly reliable since coming back from her injury. In her first game back against Illinois on Dec. 8, McMahon scored a team-high 25 points to lead the Buckeyes to an 83-74 win. McMahon again scored 20 points in two of her next three games, which included a season-high 29 points in the Buckeyes' 87-39 win over Youngstown State on Dec. 14.

McMahon joins a midseason-top 25 list that includes some high-profile stars in women's college basketball as Lauren Betts (UCLA), Paige Bueckers (UConn), Hailey Van Lith (TCU) and JuJu Watkins (USC).

Gray Eclipses 1,000-Point Plateau

If McMahon has been Ohio State's most reliable scorer this season, her former AAU teammate and current Buckeye teammate Gray has been the most reliable shooter. Making 40.6 percent of her three-point



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shots, Gray ranks third in the NCAA in three-point percentage as of Jan. 21.

In the win over Rutgers, Gray shot her way to 1,000 career points. Needing at least 14 points to reach that plateau, Gray scored 15 to achieve the career milestone.

Gray's 1,000th point came in a somewhat dramatic fashion against Rutgers. After the Buckeyes led by 21 points at half-time, the Scarlet Knights put a little pressure on them with a 9-2 scoring run in the fourth quarter, which dwindled the lead to nine points with 2:12 to go. Gray made a layup on the very next possession to achieve the personal milestone and put her team in a more comfortable spot, up 11, 73-62, with 1:57 to go.

Gray scored the vast majority of her 1,000 points at her previous school Oregon, where she averaged 12.0 points per game over two seasons, but that's not to say she isn't playing her best basketball now.

In her first year with the Buckeyes Gray's 15.9 points per game are so far second only to McMahon. The Oregon transfer has scored 20 or more points in four games this season, which includes a 31-point night in a 94-53 win over Charlotte on Nov. 12 where she tied the program record for most three-pointers made in a single game with nine.

Ohio State Rises To No. 9 In AP Poll

Ohio State continued its gradual rise up the AP poll from the last time BSB went to press. After making the top 10 for the first time in Week 8, the Buckeyes went up a spot to No. 9 in Week 10. Wins over quality opponents such as Michigan and Oregon allowed the Buckeyes to reach their highest

ranking of the season at No. 9 in the AP poll on Jan. 13.

Despite the undefeated record, the Buckeyes still sat behind fellow Big Ten teams UCLA and USC. With a win over defending national champion South Carolina and an undefeated record, UCLA has earned its spot as the No. 1 team in the country.

Although the Trojans already suffered their first loss of the season to Notre Dame 74-61 back in November, their placement in the top five of the rankings is justified by a tough strength of schedule. USC picked up a huge 72-70 road win over UConn on Dec. 21, and the Trojans handed Maryland its first loss of the season on Jan. 8.

The Buckeyes will get their chance at UCLA on Feb. 5 and USC on Feb. 8 on a road trip that will go a long way in determining if they can repeat as Big Ten regular-season champions.

Cotie McMahon Is Plank's Lady Buck For December

Ohio State junior forward Cotie McMahon entered the month of December recovering from a lower leg injury and ended the month as the team's most consistent scorer to win Plank's Lady Buck honors for December.

McMahon scored at least 15 points in five of the Buckeyes' six games, and for the entire month, she averaged 18.8 points, 5.2 rebounds, and 2.8 assists per game on 43.4 percent shooting.

McMahon's return to the lineup in December helped her team win all six of its December games, including two against Big Ten foes.

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Cotie McMahon
Junior Forward
Centerville, Ohio

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Ohio State Wins First Five Big Ten Games

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State remained undefeated in the seven games it played in since BSB last went to press as of Jan. 18. The Buckeyes had two more nonconference games to play before they made their way into the depths of Big Ten play. As they had done throughout the early part of the season, the Buckeyes easily handled Stanford and Grand Valley State.

Ohio State was similarly dominant over Northwestern but faced tougher tests toward the middle of January. The Buckeyes needed a second-half comeback to defeat Michigan and outlasted Oregon back at home to stay unbeaten before going on the road to beat Wisconsin.

McMahon, Gray Combine For 44 Points Vs. GVSU

In its final game against a mid-major opponent in the regular season, Ohio State (11-0) flexed its muscles in an 82-57 win over Grand Valley State (11-1) on Dec. 17 in front of 4,710 fans in Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes' penultimate nonconference game started eerily similar to some of their other routs of inferior opponents. On one end, the tenacious full-court press defense forced six turnovers in the first 3:52, and on the other end junior forward Cotie McMahon attacked the rim on the way to seven points in that time span as her team grabbed a 17-2 lead.

McMahon wasn't alone in pouring it on the Lakers' defense. Her former AAU teammate, junior guard Chance Gray, made her third three-pointer of the game to give Ohio State a 20-4 lead at the 5:33 mark.



Chance Gray

Six combined points from freshman guard Ava Watson and freshman center Elsa Lemmilä helped Ohio State end the first quarter on an 11-6 scoring run and take a 31-10 lead into the second quarter.

After OSU went up by 23 points at the beginning of the second quarter, 33-10, the Lakers strung together a few stops and created a 7-2 scoring run in 3:28 to make it 35-17, but that run was not sustained. Gray and McMahon started a 9-1 scoring run with a pair of buckets before forward Eboni Walker made a layup, and Watson drained a buzzer-beating three-pointer to cap the run and give the Buckeyes a 44-18 halftime lead.

Ohio State started the second half much like it did the first half.

Gray began with a three-point jumper before McMahon made a transition layup. Grand Valley State made its own three-point shot, but graduate guard Madison Greene – who started in place of injured freshman guard Jaloni Cambridge – converted a three-point play with a layup and a free throw to put Ohio State up 52-21 at 8:27.

Despite facing a huge deficit, the Lakers kept fighting and used some strong three-point shooting to mount a 17-7 scoring run in the next 5:04, trailing 59-38 with 3:23 left in the period.

The Buckeyes appeared to put the run behind them with a layup and free throw from McMahon, but the Lakers scored the last five

points of the third quarter to trim Ohio State's lead to 64-43.

Much like the third quarter, Ohio State wasn't perfect in the final period. The Buckeyes made 6 of 13 shots from the field and committed five turnovers, but their defense allowed only 14 points to secure the 25-point win.

McMahon (21 points) crossed the 20-point threshold for the third time in the last four games, making 9 of 14 shots (64.3 percent)

Gray had one of her better shooting performances as a Buckeye, connecting on 8 of 14 shots (57.1 percent), including 5 of 8 from three-point range, for a game-high 23 points.

After the game, head coach Kevin McGuff discussed how Gray's efficiency from beyond the arc makes it easier for the entire offense to function.

"It's important because we're pretty good when we create space to play in, and part of creating space is being able to shoot the ball from the three-point line," McGuff said.

Ajae Petty led the team with eight rebounds while McMahon, senior guard Taylor Thierry and Watson all shared the team high of three assists.

As a team, the Buckeyes had an efficient shooting day, making 31 of 59 shots (52.5 percent).

The Lakers recovered fairly well from a poor 4-of-13 shooting performance in the first quarter (30.8 percent) and ended the game shooting 20 of 57 from the field (35.1 percent).

Senior guard Abrie Cabana was Grand Valley State's leading scorer with 14 points in a 4-of-8 shooting performance.

Ohio State held a decisive 44-18 advantage in points in the paint, despite being outrebounded by a 34-31 margin.

Bucks Bow Out Stanford In Non-Con Finale

Ohio State (12-0) finished its regular-season nonconference slate with an unblemished record with an 84-59 win over Stanford (8-4) on Dec. 20 at the Chase Center in San Francisco in front of 3,766 fans.

It wasn't a pretty offensive start for the Buckeyes, who missed each of their first six field goals, but the defense was strong enough to keep the deficit at 2-1. Greene made the team's first field goal at the 6:28 mark with a midrange jumper to make it 3-2 Buckeyes.

The Buckeye offense found their stride in the last five minutes of the first quarter behind seven combined points from Greene and Thierry, leading the Buckeyes to a 13-4 run in the last 4:53 of the first quarter to take a 16-6 lead.

After the teams traded a pair of baskets each early in the second quarter, the Buckeyes extended their lead to 28-12 with 4:30 to go in the first half with an 8-2 scoring run led by Petty and Gray, who combined for all eight points.

Ohio State's offense cooled down, scoring only five points in the last 4:31 of the first half. Stanford only slightly cut into the lead, though, and the Buckeyes took a 33-19 lead into halftime.

Stanford's offense looked vastly improved to start the second half. The Cardinal scored eight points in the first 2:36 to cut Ohio State's lead to 37-27, but the Buckeyes responded with a 14-4 scoring run to make it 51-31 at the 3:51 mark on a Gray layup.

Stanford scored eight points in the last four minutes of the third quarter, but Watson

Ohio State 82, Grand Valley State 57

		Dec. 17, 2024				
		Value City Arena • Columbus				
		1	2	3	4	F
GVSU (11-1)		10	8	25	14	57
OSU (11-0)		31	13	20	18	82
		Total FT Reb.				
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A PF Pts.
Cabana	19	4-8	4-4	0-0	3	1 14
Kamin	14	1-5	3-4	3-1	0	1 6
Schmidt	15	2-4	0-0	1-1	0	1 5
Bisballe	27	2-10	0-0	2-5	1	2 4
Anderson	14	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	1 3
Zeinstra	19	3-7	0-0	0-3	2	1 8
Vanstee	15	3-8	1-3	2-0	0	4 7
Bisabelle	17	2-7	0-0	1-1	0	2 4
Miller	15	1-2	0-0	0-0	2	1 2
Slagle	4	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1 2
Cherney	3	0-0	2-2	0-0	0	0 2
Plitzuweit	17	0-1	0-0	3-3	3	3 0
Droste	14	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	2 0
White	7	0-1	0-0	2-1	0	2 0
Totals	200	15-46	10-13	14-20	11	22 57

Percentages: FG: 35.1%. FT: 76.9%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-25. (Bisabelle 0-4, Cabana 2-4, Zeinstra 2-4, Kamin 1-3, Schmidt 1-3, Vanstee 0-2, Anderson 1-2, Bisabelle 0-1, Hadley 0-1, White 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Bisabelle 2). **Turnovers:** 26 (Anderson 4, Zeinstra 3, Droste 3, Plitzuweit 3, Team 3, Bisabelle 2, Miller 2, Kamin, Cabana, Vanstee, Slagle). **Steals:** 8 (Anderson, Kamin, Cabana, Schmidt, Zeinstra, Droste, Plitzuweit, Slagle).

		Total FT Reb.				
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A PF Pts.
Gray	29	8-14	2-2	0-0	1	2 23
McMahon	27	9-14	3-5	0-4	3	1 21
Greene	28	3-8	2-3	0-2	1	1 8
Petty	22	3-3	1-1	2-6	0	3 7
Thierry	23	1-3	2-2	2-4	3	2 4
Walker	20	4-6	0-0	2-0	2	0 8
Watson	23	2-6	0-0	0-0	3	2 5
Lemmilä	16	1-4	2-4	2-3	0	2 4
K. Cambridge	12	0-1	2-4	1-1	1	1 2
Totals	200	31-59	14-21	9-22	14	14 82

Percentages: FG: 52.5%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-15 (Gray 5-8, McMahon 0-3, Greene 0-2, Watson 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Lemmilä 2). **Turnovers:** 18 (Petty 5, McMahon 3, Greene 2, Thierry 2, Walker 2, Watson, Lemmilä, Cambridge, Team). **Steals:** 13 (Gray 2, Greene 2, Petty 2, Thierry 2, Walker 2, Watson, Lemmilä, Cambridge). **Officials:** Jamie Broderick, Nykeshia Thompson, Jesse Dickerson. **Attendance:** 4,710

Ohio State 84, Stanford 59

		Dec. 20, 2024				
		Chase Center • San Francisco				
		1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (12-0)		16	17	24	27	84
Stanford (8-4)		6	13	20	20	59
		Total FT Reb.				
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A PF Pts.
McMahon	36	5-15	6-9	2-4	3	2 16
Greene	35	6-12	0-0	0-0	2	3 15
Gray	32	7-14	0-0	0-1	2	1 14
Petty	27	7-10	0-0	2-7	3	3 14
Thierry	35	6-10	0-0	5-4	0	3 12
Watson	13	4-8	0-0	0-1	1	0 11
Lemmilä	13	0-1	2-2	1-1	0	1 2
K. Cambridge	6	0-0	0-2	1-1	2	1 0
Walker	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Totals	200	35-70	8-13	15-21	13	14 84

Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 61.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-21. (Watson 3-7, Greene 3-6, McMahon 0-3, Gray 0-3, Thierry 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Thierry, Lemmilä). **Turnovers:** 6 (McMahon 3, Petty 2, Thierry). **Steals:** 9 (Gray 3, Thierry 2, McMahon, Greene, Petty, Lemmilä).

		Total FT Reb.				
		Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A PF Pts.
Agara	35	6-13	5-7	6-4	0	2 17
Heal	31	3-5	3-4	0-2	2	1 10
Demetre	23	3-6	2-2	0-2	0	3 9
Bosgana	27	4-14	0-0	4-7	0	2 8
Harriel	28	2-8	0-0	2-0	1	1 4
Clardy	31	4-8	0-0	0-5	1	2 8
Ijiwoye	3	1-1	1-1	0-0	0	0 3
Stevenson	8	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0 0
Ogden	8	0-2	0-0	1-3	0	1 0
Peterson	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Papadaki	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Green	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Umeh	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0 0
Totals	200	23-59	11-14	16-24	4	12 59

Percentages: FG: 39.0%. FT: 78.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 2-16 (Bosgana 0-5, Hess 1-3, Harriel 0-3, Demetre 1-2, Clardy 0-2, Ogden 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Demetre 2, Bosgana 1). **Turnovers:** 19 (Agara 3, Heal 3, Bosgana 3, Ijiwoye 3, Clardy 2, Demetre, Harriel, Ogden, Green, Team). **Steals:** 2 (Heal, Ogden). **Officials:** Kyle Bacon, Melissa Barlow, Saif Esho. **Attendance:** 3,766

six for Ohio State) certainly played a role in the Buckeyes' blowout win, but Stanford's 23-of-59 shooting (39.0 percent) also played a factor.

After the game, McGuff was understandably proud of the way his team played defensively.

"I think in general defensively, today was probably the first game all year where we kind of got our full-court defense and our half-court defense working in conjunction, and I think it kind of wore on them as the game went on."

Agara was Stanford's leading scorer and biggest bright spot, finishing the game with 17 points on 6-of-13 shooting and 10 rebounds. Elena Bosgana had a game-high 11 rebounds, to go along with eight points.

OSU Beats Rutgers In First BIG Road Test

After a long nine-day break between games, Ohio State (13-0, 2-0 Big Ten) looked like the same elite team in its 77-63 road win over Rutgers (8-5, 0-2 Big Ten) on Dec. 29, in front of 2,929 fans at Jersey Mike's Arena in Piscataway, N.J.

In her first game back for the Buckeyes since suffering a shoulder injury in Ohio State's 80-48 win over Ball State on Dec. 10, Cambridge capped a game-opening 8-2 scoring run with a layup. Rutgers All-Big Ten guard Destiny Adams briefly stopped the bleeding for the Scarlet Knights with a layup, but the Buckeyes scored seven straight points, capped by a Thierry layup, to take a 15-4 lead at the 6:49 mark of the first

OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

quarter.

Adams scored 10 more points the rest of the first quarter as Rutgers responded with its own 12-5 scoring run, trimming Ohio State's lead to 20-16 with 1:06 to go in the first quarter.

Watson answered with a three-point jumper that gave Ohio State a 23-16 lead heading into the second quarter.

The Buckeye lead was no greater than nine through the first three minutes of the second quarter, but Thierry scored eight points to lead Ohio State on a 19-5 scoring run over the last 6:39 of the first half to increase their lead to 46-25 at the midway point.

The Buckeyes' first field goal of the second half didn't come until 4:22 in the third quarter on a layup from McMahon, a drought that allowed Rutgers to cut the lead to 47-36 with an 11-1 scoring run before OSU's score. McMahon's layup sparked the Buckeyes' own 15-2 scoring run, and they took a 62-38 lead with 1:41 to go in the third quarter.

Adams scored eight points between 1:21 of the third quarter and the first two minutes of the fourth quarter to pull the Scarlet Knights within 11 points of the Buckeyes with 8:00 to go in the game, 62-51, but Ohio State created a little more breathing room with a 7-2 spurt with Gray scoring four of those points. Despite trailing by 16, Rutgers kept battling and cut Ohio State's lead back down to nine at the 2:12 mark, 71-62, on another basket by Adams. The Buckeyes' defense didn't allow a field goal the rest of the game to secure the 14-point victory.

Ohio State was led by Petty and McMahon, who each recorded double-doubles. The pair led the way in scoring with 16 points. Petty was much more efficient, making 5 of 7 shots, while

McMahon shot 5 of 16 from the field. McMahon and Petty grabbed 11 and 10 rebounds, respectively, which were first and second on the team. Cambridge led the team with seven assists, though she scored just two points on 1-of-13 shooting.

Petty said the key to the improvement she showed in the win was the confidence and trust her teammates have in her.

"The number one thing I would say is confidence," Petty said when asked what she's improved upon the most this year. "I'm playing with a lot of other really good players, so just knowing that my teammates trust in me, knowing that the coaching staff trusts in me and the decisions I make on the court and different things like that, I would just say that's the main thing, and everything else is just following along."

As a team, Ohio State had a mediocre shooting performance, making just 28 of 67 field goals (41.8 percent), but defensively the Buckeyes were stingy enough to hold Rutgers to 23-of-64 shooting (35.9 percent).

Despite the loss, Adams was sensational for Rutgers. She had 31 points on 11-of-24 shooting and 17 rebounds, both game highs.

Cambridge Scores 20, OSU Destroys Northwestern

In its first home game in nearly three weeks, No. 10 Ohio State (14-0, 3-0 Big Ten) continued its perfect streak to start the season with a 92-62 blowout of Northwestern (7-8, 0-4 Big Ten) on Jan. 5 in front of 7,190 fans at Value City Arena.

From the very first minute, it seemed as though the sub .500 Wildcats were outmatched

by the undefeated Buckeyes, who forced four turnovers in the first 1:39 of the game. The Buckeyes' high-pressure defense fueled a 7-0 scoring run to begin the contest.

Ohio State struggled to maintain the excellent defensive start it had in the first two minutes, but two three-point jumpers from Watson and 10 first-quarter free throws helped the Buckeyes extend their lead to 27-17 heading into the second quarter.

Despite a pair of baskets made by Northwestern guard Melannie Daley, the Buckeyes managed to extend their lead to 36-21 after a layup from McMahon at the 7:25 mark of the second quarter.

Later, three straight Wildcat points kept the Buckeye lead at 15 points with 2:32 to go in the first half, but Watson forced a steal and found McMahon for a layup before making her third three of the game to give Ohio State a 51-31 lead with less than a minute to go before half-time.

The Wildcats answered with an and-1 layup with 29 seconds left, but McMahon ended the first half on a high note with a layup of her own to give the Buckeyes a 53-34 halftime advantage.

After three early points from Northwestern forward Grace Sullivan in the third, sandwiched around a Cambridge jumper, the Buckeyes scored seven straight points, all of which were scored or assisted on by Cambridge, to take a 62-37 lead early in the second half.

McGuff inserted four players into the game off of his bench at the 3:42 mark of the period with the Buckeyes up 67-41. Thanks to two more three-pointers by Watson and two baskets from Lemmilä, the Buckeyes scored 10 points in the last two minutes to take a 77-43 lead into the fourth quarter.

The backups didn't play with any less intensity than the starters in the final quarter, and although Northwestern had a strong finish to the game offensively, scoring 13 points in the last six minutes, Ohio State wrapped up its 14th straight win with a 30-point advantage.

The Buckeyes had five scorers in double figures in the win. Cambridge led the team with 20 points while shooting 8 of 12 from the field. McMahon wasn't far behind, scoring 16 points on 5-of-11 shooting. Cambridge did much more than just put the ball in the basket, though. She also led the team with six rebounds and three assists. Also in double figures were Watson (15), Gray (14), and Lemmilä (11).

As a team, the Buckeyes connected on 32 of 69 shots (46.4 percent). Despite losing by 30, Northwestern also made 46.4 percent of its field goals and shot 26 of 56 from the field. The turnover battle was not close, with Northwestern committing 29 turnovers compared to Ohio State's 12, and perhaps the biggest reason for that was the Buckeyes' full-court press.

"The press was really good in the first half, but in the third quarter we really talked about kind of merging the two together - the press and then flowing into the halfcourt defense," McGuff said. "I thought we had a really good third quarter with that."

Northwestern had 10 turnovers in the third stanza.

The Wildcats were led by guard Kyla Jones in scoring, who finished the game with 15 points on 6-of-10 shooting.

OSU Mounts Second-Half Comeback To Beat U-M

For the first time in over a month on Jan. 8, Ohio State (15-0, 4-0 Big Ten) was in a legitimate battle on the road against Michigan (10-5,

Ohio State 84, Michigan 77

Jan. 8, 2025
Crisler Center • Ann Arbor, Mich.

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (15-0, 4-0)	18	13	22	31	84
Michigan (10-5, 1-3)	26	18	13	20	77

Ohio State	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
J. Cambridge	36	11-23	6-7	0-6	4	3	29		
Gray	31	5-11	2-2	0-2	1	1	16		
McMahon	39	4-10	5-7	0-2	3	1	13		
Petty	35	5-8	0-0	2-5	3	4	10		
Thierry	35	4-7	0-0	2-5	1	2	8		
K. Cambridge	9	2-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	5		
Greene	4	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	3		
Watson	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0		
Lemmilä	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	1	0		
Walker	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	32-64	13-16	4-22	13	14	84		

Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 81.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-18. (Gray 4-9, J. Cambridge 1-5, K. Cambridge 1-2, McMahon 0-1, Greene 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** (Thierry 2). **Turnovers:** 10 (Petty 2, Thierry 2, Team 2, J. Cambridge, Gray, McMahon, K. Cambridge). **Steals:** 9 (Thierry 4, Gray 2, J. Cambridge, McMahon, K. Cambridge).

Michigan	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Olson	25	8-12	1-2	1-3	2	5	20		
Swords	38	6-14	1-2	2-3	3	3	14		
Hobbs	37	5-13	2-2	0-6	3	3	13		
Kampschroeder	32	5-7	0-0	0-6	4	2	13		
Holloway	14	1-2	0-0	1-1	2	2	2		
Grabovskaia	23	4-9	1-4	3-1	1	1	9		
Q. Daniels	18	1-1	0-0	0-2	3	2	2		
Crockett	8	1-1	0-0	1-2	1	2	2		
Delfosse	5	1-1	0-0	1-2	0	0	2		
Totals	200	32-60	5-10	8-28	19	20	77		

Percentages: FG: 53.3%. FT: 50.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-20 (Hobbs 1-7, Kampschroeder 3-5, Olson 3-4, Swords 1-4). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Grabovskaia, Crockett). **Turnovers:** 18 (Olson 4, Swords 4, Hobbs 4, Holloway 2, Kampschroeder, Q. Daniels, Crockett, Delfosse). **Steals:** 2 (Kampschroeder, Q. Daniels). **Officials:** Tim Daley, Ashlee Goode, Brian Hall. **Attendance:** 5,112

1-3 Big Ten). The Buckeyes trailed by 13 points at halftime before Cambridge scored 22 second-half points to lead the team to an 84-77 win in front of 5,112 fans at the Crisler Center.

Although the first three minutes were evenly matched, the Wolverines created an 18-11 advantage at 3:53 of the first quarter with a 12-5 scoring run.

After facing a 10-point deficit early in the second quarter on a Jordan Hobbs basket at 8:45, Ohio State cut Michigan's lead to six with a layup from Cambridge at the 6:55 mark. Cambridge's make was followed by a 2:33 scoring drought, and the Wolverines took advantage of the Buckeyes' offensive woes with a 7-0 scoring run. Michigan extended its lead to 16 with 33 seconds left in the half, but Greene made a three-pointer right before halftime to make the margin 44-31.

Led by seven points from Cambridge, the Buckeyes opened the second half on a 14-3 scoring run over the first 5:42 to cut Michigan's lead to 47-45.

Gray tied the game with a three-pointer at 1:50, but Michigan scored the last four points of the third to take a four-point lead into the final period, 57-53. The Buckeyes still trailed by five with 5:59 to go in the fourth quarter, but Gray led the team with five points on an 11-2 scoring run to take a 70-66 lead with 2:35 remaining.

Ohio State's lead was pushed down from four points to one after Wolverine freshman guard Olivia Olson connected on a three-point jumper at the 2:26 mark, but McMahon made 1 of 2 free throws before Cambridge made a jumper to increase the lead back to four.

Continued On Page 44

Ohio State 77, Rutgers 63

Dec. 29, 2024

Jersey Mike's Arena • Piscataway, N.J.

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (13-0, 2-0)	23	23	16	15	77
Rutgers (8-5, 0-2)	16	9	20	18	63

Ohio State	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
McMahon	38	5-16	4-7	2-9	5	2	16		
Petty	22	5-7	6-7	6-4	1	5	16		
Gray	31	6-13	2-2	0-2	1	3	15		
Thierry	27	6-9	2-2	2-1	0	2	14		
J. Cambridge	27	1-13	0-1	0-4	7	3	2		
Watson	16	2-5	2-2	0-4	1	0	7		
Walker	16	2-2	0-0	0-3	0	3	4		
K. Cambridge	8	1-1	1-2	1-1	1	1	3		
Greene	13	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	3	0		
Lemmilä	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	28-67	17-23	13-28	17	22	77		

Percentages: FG: 41.8%. FT: 73.9%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-20. (Gray 1-6, McMahon 2-5, J. Cambridge 0-4, Watson 1-4, Thierry 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Petty). **Turnovers:** 20 (McMahon 4, Thierry 4, J. Cambridge 4, Petty 3, Team 2, Gray, Watson, Greene). **Steals:** 15 (McMahon 3, Greene 3, Thierry 2, J. Cambridge 2, K. Cambridge 2, Petty, Gray, Walker).

Rutgers	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Adams	37	11-24	9-18	7-10	2	4	31		
McMiller	27	5-19	2-2	1-4	3	4	14		
Lacey	34	3-7	0-0	2-3	1	4	7		
Thompson	16	1-1	0-0	0-1	1	0	2		
Perkins	29	0-1	1-2	1-1	1	3	1		
Cornwell	10	2-3	1-2	5-2	0	2	5		
Sidibe	35	1-4	1-2	0-3	2	1	3		
Petticord	12	0-5	0-0	1-1	1	1	0		
Totals	200	23-64	14-26	18-27	11	19	63		

Percentages: FG: 35.9%. FT: 53.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-16 (McMiller 2-6, Petticord 0-3, Adams 0-2, Cornwell 0-2, Lacey 1-2, Perkins 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Adams 2, McMiller, Perkins, Cornwell). **Turnovers:** 22 (McMiller 5, Sidibe 4, Adams 3, Lacey 3, Perkins 3, Petticord 2, Thompson, Cornwell). **Steals:** 10 (Adams 5, Lacey 2, Thompson, Perkins, Sidibe). **Officials:** Natasha Camy, Tiara Cruse, Nykesha Thompson. **Attendance:** 2,929

Ohio State 92, Northwestern 62

Jan. 5, 2025

Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Northwestern (7-8, 0-4)	17	17	9	19	62
Ohio State (14-0, 3-0)	27	26	24	15	92

Northwestern	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
Jones	24	6-10	3-4	2-1	0	0	15		
Sullivan	27	6-10	1-3	0-4	1	4	13		
Walsh	20	4-9	4-4	3-4	2	4	12		
Harter	30	1-3	0-0	0-3	1	3	3		
Lau	23	0-3	0-0	0-4	7	1	0		
Daley	32	6-13	0-0	0-0	5	3	12		
Thomas	25	2-5	0-0	3-3	0	3	5		
Ademusayo	8	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	4	2		
Walton	11	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	0	0		
Righeimer	1	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	26-56	8-11	12-24	16	22	62		

Percentages: FG: 46.4%. FT: 72.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 2-11. (Walsh 0-3, Lau 0-3, Harter 1-2, Thomas 1-2, Walton 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 29 (Thomas 5, Jones 4, Harter 4, Daley 4, Walsh 3, Lau 3, Walton 3, Sullivan 2, Team). **Steals:** 6 (Lau 4, Jones, Thomas).

Ohio State	Total				FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D					
J. Cambridge	19	8-12	4-4	2-4	3	0	20		
McMahon	24	5-11	6-9	1-4	1	4	16		
Gray	20	4-9	4-5	1-0	1	0	14		
Thierry	22	2-4	0-2	3-2	1	3	4		
Petty	19	0-3	2-2	1-4	2	3	2		
Watson	22	5-10	0-0	0-0	2	1	15		
Lemmilä	17	4-4	3-3	3-1	1	4	11		
K. Cambridge	20	3-7	0-2	2-1	2	1	6		
Greene	21	0-5	2-2	0-0	2	3	2		
Walker	16	1-4	0-0	1-0	2	2	2		
Totals	200	32-69	21-29	14-18	17	21	92		

Percentages: FG: 46.4%. FT: 72.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-21 (Watson 5-9, Gray 2-6, McMahon 0-2, K. Cambridge 0-2, Greene 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge, McMahon). **Turnovers:** 12 (Greene 3, McMahon 2, Petty 2, Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge, Gray, Thierry). **Steals:** 16 (Watson 4, Thierry 3, K. Cambridge 3, J. Cambridge 2, McMahon 2, Gray 2). **Officials:** Lisa Jones, Brad Maxey, Mark Resch. **Attendance:** 7,190

Buckeyes Keep Rolling In Big Ten Play

Continued From Page 43

Michigan center Yulia Grabovskaia made a jumper that cut Ohio State's lead to 75-73 with just 48 seconds left, but Cambridge answered with a clutch layup eight seconds later.

The Buckeyes came up with three straight stops defensively as part of an 8-0 scoring run to take an 83-73 lead with only 20 seconds left.

Michigan made two more shots in the last 20 seconds, but it wasn't enough to prevent Ohio State from coming away with the seven-point win.

McGuff said he was proud of the way his team responded to the adversity they faced at halftime.

"There were some X's and O's things, but really it was about, 'Who are we going to be?'" McGuff said when asked what his halftime message was. "Are we going to sit around and feel sorry for ourselves because we got our a--es kicked in the first half, or are we going to come out and fight? I liked the resilience we showed. We stayed together, and we really executed at a high level in the second half."

Cambridge was outstanding, leading the team with 29 points on 11-of-23 shooting and also leading the team with four assists, while Thierry and Petty tied for a game-high seven rebounds. Gray (16), McMahon (13) and Petty (10) all scored in double figures.

Ohio State had a very efficient shooting night, making 32 of 64 field goals (50.0 percent). Michigan also shot the ball very well from

the field and made 32 of 60 shots (53.3 percent), but Ohio State forced 18 turnovers while committing only 10 turnovers in the win.

Olson was Michigan's leading scorer in her first game against the Buckeyes, leading the Wolverines with 20 points on 8-of-12 shooting.

Bucks Beat Ducks Behind 27-Point Run

No. 9 Ohio State (16-0, 5-0) didn't have its best offensive outing of the season, but a dominant second quarter fueled a 69-60 home win over Oregon (12-5, 3-3) on Jan. 12.

The Buckeyes immediately struggled offensively when they made just one of their first 10 shots in the game's first 4:55, allowing the Ducks to start the game on a 9-2 scoring run.

OSU appeared to turn the tide with a pair of baskets from McMahon and Cambridge on consecutive possessions, but it went through another scoring drought of more than three minutes to trail 11-8 at the end of the first quarter.

After all of their struggles in the first frame, the Buckeyes completely flipped the game with a gargantuan 27-0 scoring run in the second marked by much-improved shooting and a tenacious effort defensively with the full-court press. There were plenty of highlights for McGuff's bunch, but the biggest came when Thierry wrapped the run with a trio of three-point shots in a 1:52 span.

Thierry's last make put her team up 37-15 with 2:37 left in the half and sent the 8,664 fans in attendance at Value City Arena into a frenzy. Even though the Ducks broke the run with a 7-0 spurt, the Buckeyes took a commanding 39-22 lead into halftime off a pair of Thierry free throws.

The Buckeyes forced seven turnovers in the frame and shot 10 of 17, including 4 of 5 from three. They were also 7 of 8 from the line and held a 12-6 advantage off the glass.

Ohio State continued to pour it on in the second half when Cambridge opened the period with six quick points, and the former Duck Gray hit a three-pointer to give the Buckeyes a 48-27 lead with 7:13 left. Oregon responded with a 10-2 scoring run to trail 50-37 with 4:57 remaining after a layup by Ducks graduate guard Deja Kelly. The lead remained at 13 with 2:41 to go in the third, but Greene scored four points in the last 2:17 of the period to put the Buckeyes up 60-43.

After a Petty layup early in the fourth quarter made it 62-43, the Buckeyes went on a 5:29 scoring drought, and Oregon took advantage with a 9-0 run to trail by 10, 62-52, with 6:18 left after a layup by graduate guard Peyton Scott.

Thierry finally ended the drought with a layup to increase Ohio State's lead to 64-52, but Oregon scored the next four to trim the lead to eight, 64-56 with 3:07 remaining. Petty and McMahon made baskets in crunch time to push the lead back to 10, and defensively the Buckeyes did not allow another field goal until only 49 seconds remained in the game.

Oregon then missed its last four shots of the game, allowing OSU to hold onto the nine-point win.

Thierry powered OSU with 20 points – 15 coming in the second quarter – on 6-of-10 shooting (60.0 percent) along with four rebounds and three steals.

"Taylor was great today," McGuff said after the game. "She played maybe her best game so far this year. I thought she was really assertive

and aggressive, and she's an extremely talented player, and hopefully, this will give her the confidence to continue to assert herself in that manner."

Petty and Cambridge were Ohio State's second-leading scorers with 13 points each, while Petty also had team-leading totals of 14 rebounds and four assists in the win.

As a team, the Buckeyes had a mediocre shooting day and connected on 26 of their 62 field goals (41.9 percent).

Oregon, which shot just 23 of 63 from the field (36.5 percent), was led by redshirt junior guard Nani Falatea and junior forward Amina Muhammad, who each scored 11 points on a combined 8-of-19 shooting.

Cambridge, Gray Help Fend Off Badgers

No. 9 Ohio State (17-0, 6-0) had its hands full with Wisconsin (10-8, 1-6) on Jan. 16, but 49 combined points from Cambridge and Gray were enough to come away with an 80-69 victory at the Kohl Center.

It didn't seem like the Buckeyes were taking on a 1-6 Big Ten team in the opening minute. The Badgers immediately gave the 2,820 fans in attendance something to cheer about by making back-to-back three-point jumpers on their first two possessions to create a 6-0 lead.

The Buckeyes responded when Cambridge and Gray combined for nine points during a 14-2 scoring run. The Buckeyes' 14-8 lead was erased by an 8-2 spurt from the Badgers for a 16-16 tie at the 3:24 mark before McMahon scored four points in the last 1:58 of the first quarter to help give her team a 22-18 lead heading into the second.

Cambridge was virtually unstoppable in the second quarter, making her first six field goals of the period. Her efficient start to the quarter was offset by her teammates missing their first nine field-goal attempts. In the midst of the cold streak, Wisconsin guard Lily Krahn made a three-point jumper to cut Ohio State's lead to 30-27 at the 5:11 mark.

Cambridge answered with her fifth straight make, this one from beyond the arc, and the Buckeyes quickly built the lead back up to eight, 35-27. Thierry scored four points in the last 1:55 of the quarter to give the Buckeyes a 39-32 halftime lead.

On the Buckeyes' first second-half possession, Cambridge scored a layup and free throw just five seconds into the frame. Her solid start wasn't indicative of things to come. Junior forward Serah Williams led the Badgers on an 8-2 scoring run, scoring five points, late in the third quarter to trim the Buckeyes' lead to three, 54-51, with 2:15 left in the period. A pair of baskets from Kennedy Cambridge added breathing room, and Gray provided a gut punch with three clutch free throws right at the end of the period, giving the Buckeyes a 63-54 lead to start the fourth.

After a 22-point third quarter, the Badgers lost their offensive rhythm for the final 10 minutes. Wisconsin made only one field goal in the first 4:51 of the quarter, and the Buckeyes took advantage to create a 73-57 lead on a Gray

Ohio State 80, Wisconsin 69

Jan. 16, 2025
Kohl Center • Madison, Wis.

	1	2	3	4	F
Ohio State (17-0, 6-0)	22	17	24	17	80
Wisconsin (10-8, 1-6)	18	14	22	15	69

Ohio State	Total			FT			Reb.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
J. Cambridge	36	11-16	4-7	0-8	4	1	27		
Gray	35	7-15	3-3	0-0	1	0	22		
McMahon	38	8-19	0-0	3-5	1	1	17		
Thierry	26	1-3	2-2	0-2	0	5	4		
Petty	20	1-6	0-0	1-3	2	2	2		
K. Cambridge	21	3-6	0-0	3-4	0	1	6		
Greene	8	1-2	0-0	1-0	1	1	2		
Walker	7	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	2	0		
Lemmila	5	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0		
Greene	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	32-70	9-12	8-26	11	13	80		

Percentages: FG: 45.7%. FT: 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-18. (Gray 5-9, McMahon 1-3, J. Cambridge 1-2, Thierry 0-1, K. Cambridge 0-1, Lemmila 0-1, Watson 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2 **Blocked shots:** 1 (Lemmila). **Turnovers:** 6 (McMahon 2, Petty 2, J. Cambridge, Walker). **Steals:** 11 (McMahon 3, Gray 2, Thierry 2, J. Cambridge, Petty, Lemmila, Watson).

Wisconsin	Total			FT			Reb.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Williams	36	8-17	4-4	5-12	6	0	20		
Myers	36	6-16	0-0	0-0	1	1	18		
Leuzinger	32	2-5	1-2	0-2	2	2	6		
McCray	23	2-5	0-0	0-6	0	3	4		
Porter	28	1-3	0-0	0-3	4	4	2		
Krahn	27	6-10	0-0	0-3	1	0	16		
Douglass	18	1-2	0-0	1-1	1	0	3		
Totals	200	32-60	5-6	8-28	19	20	69		

Percentages: FG: 44.8%. FT: 83.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 12-29 (Myers 6-14, Krahn 4-8, Leuzinger 1-3, Porter 0-2, Douglass 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 4 **Blocked shots:** 3 (Leuzinger) **Turnovers:** 19 (Porter 4, Williams 3, Leuzinger 3, Team 3, Myers 2, Krahn 2, McCray, Douglass). **Steals:** 6 (McCray 2, Porter 2, Myers, Leuzinger). **Officials:** James Broderick, Kevin Pethtel, Felicia Grinter. **Attendance:** 2,820



Jalonie Cambridge

virtually unstoppable in the second quarter, making her first six field goals of the period. Her efficient start to the quarter was offset by her teammates missing their first nine field-goal attempts. In the midst of the cold streak, Wisconsin guard Lily Krahn made a three-point jumper to cut Ohio State's lead to 30-27 at the 5:11 mark.

Cambridge answered with her fifth straight make, this one from beyond the arc, and the Buckeyes quickly built the lead back up to eight, 35-27. Thierry scored four points in the last 1:55 of the quarter to give the Buckeyes a 39-32 halftime lead.

On the Buckeyes' first second-half possession, Cambridge scored a layup and free throw just five seconds into the frame. Her solid start wasn't indicative of things to come. Junior forward Serah Williams led the Badgers on an 8-2 scoring run, scoring five points, late in the third quarter to trim the Buckeyes' lead to three, 54-51, with 2:15 left in the period. A pair of baskets from Kennedy Cambridge added breathing room, and Gray provided a gut punch with three clutch free throws right at the end of the period, giving the Buckeyes a 63-54 lead to start the fourth.

After a 22-point third quarter, the Badgers lost their offensive rhythm for the final 10 minutes. Wisconsin made only one field goal in the first 4:51 of the quarter, and the Buckeyes took advantage to create a 73-57 lead on a Gray

three-pointer. Jalonie Cambridge scored five more points in the last 5:01, and the Badgers only got as close as 10 points before the Buckeyes ultimately earned the 11-point victory.

Cambridge and Gray were the Buckeyes' two leading scorers with 27 and 22 points respectively. Cambridge was the more efficient scorer, making 11 of 16 shots, but Gray had a solid shooting performance making 7 of 15. Cambridge also tacked on eight rebounds, tied for a team high with McMahon, and added a team-high four assists.

McGuff was encouraged with what he saw from his freshman point guard.

"She was terrific tonight," the coach said. "I think she came out with a really aggressive mindset, and she was getting the ball up the floor very quickly and kind of finding her spots where she can attack the defense and get to the rim, and when she's doing that she's really tough to guard."

McMahon tallied 17 points to go with her eight boards.

Ohio State made 32 of 70 shots (45.7 percent) and defensively held Wisconsin to 26-of-58 shooting (44.8 percent).

Williams was the standout for the Badgers in the losing effort, scoring 20 points and grabbing a game-high 17 rebounds.

BSB's printed coverage of the women's basketball team will resume with a 62-59 Buckeye loss at Penn State on Jan. 19, before they went on to host Big Ten contender Maryland on Jan. 23 at 6 p.m. at home and finally travel to Lincoln, Neb., to face the Cornhuskers on Jan. 26 at 3:00 p.m. at Pinnacle Bank Arena.

Ohio State 69, Oregon 60

Jan. 12, 2025
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Oregon (12-5, 3-3)	11	11	21	17	60
Ohio State (16-0, 5-0)	8	31	21	9	69

Oregon	Total			FT			Reb.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Muhammad	25	4-6	3-4	4-0	0	3	11		
Kelly	27	4-9	2-3	1-3	3	4	10		
Kyei	29	4-8	0-0	3-5	2	3	8		
Scott	23	2-10	3-4	2-6	1	1	7		
Mevius	27	2-5	0-0	0-2	2	1	5		
Falatea	30	4-13	1-2	0-2	2	0	11		
Rambus	11	2-4	0-0	0-2	1	4	4		
Whitfield	8	1-4	2-2	2-1	0	1	4		
Long	11	0-1	0-0	0-3	3	1	0		
Bell	6	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	1	0		
Etute	3	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	23-63	11-15	13-25	15	19	60		

Percentages: FG: 36.5%. FT: 73.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 3-17. (Falatea 2-7, Scott 0-4, Mevius 1-2, Bell 0-2, Long 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 4 (Kyei 3, Whitfield). **Turnovers:** 13 (Mevius 3, Kelly 2, Scott 2, Muhammad, Falatea, Rambus, Whitfield, Bell, Etute). **Steals:** 8 (Kelly 2, Kyei 2, Scott, Mevius, Falatea, Long).

Ohio State	Total			FT			Reb.		
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Thierry	38	6-10	5-6	3-1	1	2	20		
Petty	34	5-9	3-4	2-12	4	4	13		
J. Cambridge	21	6-14	0-1	0-4	0	3	13		
Gray	29	2-10	1-1	0-1	2	1	6		
McMahon	28	3-7	0-0	0-3	1	3	6		
Greene	19	1-3	3-4	1-0	0	1	5		
K. Cambridge	15	2-5	0-0	3-2	0	3	4		
Lemmila	6	1-1	0-0	2-1	1	0	2		
Watson	10	0-3	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	26-62	12-16	13-27	9	17	69		

Percentages: FG: 41.9%. FT: 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-18 (Gray 1-5, Watson 0-3, J. Cambridge 1-3, Thierry 3-3, McMahon 0-2, Greene 0-1, K. Cambridge 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 0. **Turnovers:** 15 (Petty 5, J. Cambridge 3, Gray 2, McMahon 2, K. Cambridge 2, Thierry). **Steals:** 9 (Thierry 3, Greene 2, K. Cambridge 2, Petty, J. Cambridge). **Officials:** Melissa Barlow, Jesse Dickerson, Nykeshia Thompson. **Attendance:** 8,664

Buckeye Grapplers Start Big Ten Duals

The best conference in college wrestling has started league duals since BSB last went to press, with No. 4 Ohio State winning its first two Big Ten matchups, beating Illinois 24-9 on Jan. 10 and Rutgers 17-15

ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

on Jan. 12 with help from Dylan D'Emilio, who has had multiple big wins recently, and Nick Feldman, who proved again that he can put the team on his back late in duals.

It took a couple of upsets to get the Buckeyes the big win over the No. 10-ranked Fighting Illini, with unranked freshman e'Than Birden beating No. 10 Braeden Scoles by decision at 165 pounds, 9-4, and unranked redshirt sophomore Seth Shumate taking down No. 11 Zac Braunagel 11-9 at 197 pounds.

With Bryce Hepner sidelined since the dual against Chattanooga, both Sammy Sasso and Birden have had some time at 165 pounds, Birden also taking that spot against Rutgers and falling 2-1 to Andrew Barbosa. Sasso has since dropped to 157 pounds, where he was against the Scarlet Knights to defeat Conner Harer 3-2.

Of the 10 matches against the Illini, only Nic Bouzakis (133 pounds), Paddy Gallagher (157) and Ryder Rogotzke (184) were defeated, allowing the Buckeyes to take home the win in Champaign, Ill.

Beating Rutgers proved to be a much tougher task for OSU when Brendan McCrone lost the first bout of the night to No. 16 Dean Peterson, an 11-4 decision. That was followed by Bouzakis dropping his bout to No. 17 Dylan Shawver by a 4-3 decision, his only points coming from two escapes and a stalling point.

Down 6-0, Jesse Mendez – who still has yet to lose a bout in a tournament or a dual this season – got the Buckeyes on the board with a 17-2 tech fall win, with his escape at the beginning of the third period being the deciding point that earned the team five points. It was his eighth tech fall of the year of his 18 matches, which also includes



Jesse Mendez

five pins.

D'Emilio stepped up in the 149-pound match to take a 2-1 victory in the second tiebreaker period. Neither wrestler was able to score in the first period and ended regulation with D'Emilio and No. 24 Andrew Clark earning a point each from escapes at the beginning of the second and third periods, respectively.

Neither grappler was able to score in the sudden victory period, sending it to a tiebreaker. In the first tiebreaker period, D'Emilio scored an escape, and in the second period, Clark was unable to score, giving Ohio State its first team lead of the night.

Sasso added to that lead to 11-6 when he beat Harer, but Birden dropped his match against Barbosa that went into tiebreaker periods, during which he was unable to escape in 30 seconds for a point after giving up a point in the first tiebreaker period, making it an 11-9 score.

Carson Kharchla held onto the lead for the Buckeyes again with a 3-2 win over No. 23 Jackson Turley, his only points coming from a first-period takedown.

But Rogotzke and Shumate both lost by decision, making the score 15-14, Rutgers holding onto the lead with the heavyweights left to decide the match.

Feldman and Yaraslau Slavikouski, the No. 7- and No. 8-ranked heavyweights in the country, respectively, had met once before in a match, with the then-redshirt freshman Feldman taking a 4-2 decision win when the Buckeyes beat the Knights on Feb. 4, 2024, at Rutgers.

Both wrestlers were only able to earn an escape point through the first 6½ minutes of the bout, but with just 30 seconds to go, the Scarlet Knight found an opening and went for Feldman's legs. With Feldman's impressive speed for a heavyweight, he was able to avoid the attack, kicking his left leg back and spinning around Slavikouski, grabbing his feet in the process, which tripped up the No. 8 wrestler and sent him to his knees, earning three points for a takedown for Feldman.

With just 11 seconds left in the match, Slavikouski tried desperately to escape so he could have a chance to earn points, but Feldman was able to stay on top, holding onto the 4-1 lead and earning the dual win for the Buckeyes in the process which kept them undefeated this season.

Buckeyes Win Three At Collegiate Duals

On Day One of the Journeyman Colle-

giate Duals on Dec. 21, Ohio State was able to go 3-0 by beating No. 21 North Carolina, Lock Haven and No. 13 Iowa State.

The Buckeyes started with a 23-11 win over the Tarheels in which Kharchla was able to make his return from a season-ending injury he suffered last year. Still ranked the No. 15 wrestler in the country at 174 pounds, he beat No. 16 Joshua Ogunsanya 10-3 with three takedowns during the match to go with an escape point.

He won both of his bouts in the duals



Carson Kharchla

against Lock Haven and Iowa State as well, beating James Lledo 20-5 and Aiden Riggin 8-4.

Freshman Ben Davino also got a chance to get on the mat for two matches during Day One. His first, against No. 12 Ethan Oakley of the Tarheels, ended in a 5-0 shut-out victory, with a first-period takedown and a second-period escape. Keeping Oakley down in the third period earned Davino the riding-time point to give him his fifth point.

Bouzakis was in the lineup for the match against No. 14 Anthony Noto of the Bald Eagles, earning a 16-7 major-decision win in the 36-6 team victory, before Davino defeated Osmany Diversent of the Cyclones 8-5 in the Buckeyes 29-10 win.

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Wrigley Field Proves Friendly To Buckeye Icers

It has been an "eventful" January for Ohio State men's hockey team after earning seven of 12 points against a pair of top-10 teams since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to print.

The highlight was a marquee event that put more eyes than usual on the Buckeyes when they played No. 9 Michigan at Wrigley Field in Chicago on Jan. 3. It was

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

a spectacular setting at the home of the Cubs that was made even more special in the view of the Buckeyes when they scored a dramatic 4-3 comeback win over their rival on Riley Thompson's second goal of the third period with 38 seconds left to collect all points in the standings.

"We talked a lot about it to experience something like this, playing an outdoor game, iconic Wrigley Field, and the best way to enjoy it is to get a win," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik.

Two days later in Ann Arbor, OSU jumped to a 2-0 lead in the first 11 minutes on goals by Gunnarwolfe Fontaine, but the Wolverines rallied to tie it 2-2 in the third period and snapped the Buckeyes' five-game winning streak on a goal by Jackson Hallum 20 seconds into overtime as the Buckeyes earned a point.

"We got off to a good start, just what you want to do on the road," Rohlik said postgame. "We got into some penalty trouble and that allowed them to climb back into the game. It could have gone either way at the end."

Buoyed by those results, the Buckeyes returned to Value City Arena on Jan. 10 and thrashed third-ranked Minnesota 5-1 before the Golden Gophers the next night

exacted revenge with a 6-1 victory.

It's a sign of the standards set by the team that a split with the uber-talented Gophers was not acceptable.

"We're disappointed," Rohlik said after the defeat. "We expect to win every time we step on the ice. You've got to have those expectations. Good teams do, but you've got to be ready and be at your best in this league, otherwise you're going to get beat. And tonight, we weren't at our best."

Despite that setback, Ohio State (15-6-1, 8-4-0) impressed voters in the USCHO poll, climbing from No. 11 to No. 8 nationally for the week of Jan. 13 heading into its open weekend of Jan. 17-18.

It's a remarkable rise considering the conference preseason coaches' poll predicted a last-place finish in the seven-team Big Ten.

Win-dy City

The temperature was 24 degrees with a wind chill in the teens for the late-afternoon drop of the puck at the historic baseball venue with an announced crowd of 25,709 for the OSU-Michigan game as well as the Notre Dame vs. Penn State matchup that followed as part of The Frozen Confines: Big Ten Hockey Series.

"It was cold at first but once you got the adrenaline going it was fine," junior forward Davis Burnside said. "We were fortunate enough to have warmers on the bench, so we stayed pretty warm. But the only thing that was pretty cold was the face, just from the wind."

Burnside grew up in Chicago before moving to Scottsdale, Ariz., so he was thrilled to return home.

"It was awesome," he said. "It was better than I thought it was going to be for sure. A ton of family and friends there, so obviously to come out with a W with all of them there was pretty cool."

Rohlik said the game had more of a tournament feel at a neutral site when technically it was a home game for the

Wolverines.

"I thought it was a great atmosphere," he said. "It didn't really feel like we were on the road. It felt like two crowds out there, so a little bit different than when you're playing in Ann Arbor. They had a good crowd. We had a good crowd. Like going off the ice, all of our fans were there supporting us."

Burnside said he was able to appreciate the setting.

"I'd say the first couple shifts are a little bit just getting used to the ice and getting used to the atmosphere, but after that, it just gets back to another hockey game," he said.

The toughest part was getting to the ice – and back – from the clubhouse.

"Forty-nine steps." That's the number Rohlik counted to get down to field level from where they dressed pregame.

The Buckeyes didn't want to waste time and energy going up to the clubhouse between the periods with their skates on, so they made a makeshift locker room in the batting cages beneath the stands.

"We set up chairs there. We never went back up after warmups," Rohlik said.

This was the Buckeyes' fifth outdoor game with the most recent in February 2023 at Huntington Bank Field, home of the Cleveland Browns.

Unlike past ventures, teams were not allowed to practice on the ice the day before or the morning of the game.

"The only disappointing thing is not having a practice session and then a family skate," Rohlik said. "I think that was a huge part of the event two years ago."

"Winning makes it special, but being able to kind of take it in in a practice and take it in with family and friends I think is a huge part of it."

Added Burnside, "We weren't able to get a pregame skate in, but we went to the rink, or to the field, the day before and we were able to play some catch and kind of just look at it and be like, 'Wow, we're going to play in this tomorrow.'"

Dressed For Success

It was also a mixed weekend for the OSU women as well. The second-ranked Buckeyes were routed 6-0 at No. 1 Wisconsin on Jan. 2, but at Wrigley Field two days later they went seven rounds in a shootout, winning it 1-0 after a 3-3 tie through regulation and overtime.

Amanda Thiele stopped all seven Badgers shooters before Jenna Buglioni scored the deciding goal.

It's customary for teams playing outdoor games to adopt clothing themes for the walk-in to the venue from their buses. The OSU men opted to wear the white home uniforms of the Buckeye baseball team.

"We played in a softball tournament over the summer, so we're like a big softball or baseball team, and to be able to

play (in Wrigley) was pretty awesome," Burnside said. "I think we were the best dressed walking into the stadium."

The Buckeyes for the game wore charcoal gray jerseys and pants with an upward script "Ohio State" across the chest like the baseball uniforms.

The women wore white jerseys with scarlet and black striping with Brutus Buckeye on the front.

They took a different approach for their walk-in gear by wearing Columbus Blue Jackets jerseys with the No. 13 to honor forward Johnny Gaudreau, who along with his brother Matthew was killed Aug. 29 by an alleged drunk driver while riding bikes near their home in Oldmans Township, N.J.

Moving On

It wasn't all positive for the men because freshman forward Noah Powell left the team on Jan. 9 to sign a Scholarship and Development Agreement with the Oshawa Generals of the Ontario Hockey League, one of the top junior leagues in Canada.

Powell, 19, was selected by the Philadelphia Flyers in the fifth round of the 2024 NHL draft. He had two goals and three assists while playing 17 of 22 games for the Buckeyes.

He had his best game of the season at Wrigley Field with a goal and an assist.

The timing of his departure is curious because he could have made the move during the holiday break but stuck around to play in Chicago, where he's from, then returned to campus for the start of classes on Jan. 6.

In fact, he was interviewed by BSB about his Wrigley experience the day before he announced he was leaving.

Under recently enacted rules that permit players from the major Canadian junior leagues to play NCAA Division I hockey, he could play for a school as early as the 2025-26 season.

First Impressions

Jakub Dobeš, who played two seasons for the Buckeyes from 2021-23, made an impressive debut for the Montreal Canadiens on Dec. 28 when he made 34 saves in a 4-0 shutout against the Florida Panthers after his recall from Laval of the American Hockey League.

He became the seventh goalie in NHL history – the third via shutout – to earn a win against the defending Stanley Cup champion in his debut. Also, he is the fourth Canadiens goalie with a shutout in his first NHL game.

Dobeš followed with 19 saves in regulation, three in overtime and two in the shootout in a 2-1 win over the Colorado Avalanche on Jan. 4. He is the first goalie in Canadiens history to allow only one goal in his first two NHL starts.

In his third, he had 15 saves for a 3-2 overtime win vs. the Washington Capitals to become the second Montreal goalie to allow three or fewer goals in his first three starts, joining Bob Perreault (Dec. 17-20, 1955). He won his fourth straight, all on the road, on Jan. 16 with 32 saves in a 3-1



Davis Burnside

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For December



Kristoffer Eberly
Sophomore Goalie
Pinckney, Mich

win over the Dallas Stars.

On Jan. 19, he became the fourth Canadiens goalie in history to win his first five games. He allowed four goals against the New York Rangers but made two spectacular saves in overtime before Montreal won it moments later, 5-4.

In a quirk of the schedule, the Canadiens played the Blackhawks in Chicago the night of the Buckeyes' game at Wrigley Field.

Dobeš met with the Buckeyes at a team lunch the day before.

"It was great to see him," Rohlik said. "Some of the guys have played with him, a lot of guys haven't.

"You couldn't ask for a better start than he's had. I'm really happy for him."

Rally Time

The game in Wrigley Field started ominously with a 2-0 deficit for the Buckeyes. Sam Deckhut made it 2-1 at 15:26 of the second period on a pass from Powell, who tied it at 18:37 with a long shot off a setup by Chris Able.

The Wolverines went up 3-2 at 9:15 of the third period, but Thompson responded with a pair of man-up goals to pull out the victory. He scored 17 seconds into a power play at 12:05 then netted the winner on a redirect of a pass by Fontaine.

"When you go through tough times, that's when you need your leadership," Thompson said. "That's when you need your team to pull together. It's exactly what we talked about on the bench, 'This is when you've got to pull together.'"

In the rematch, Fontaine made it 1-0 at 7:29 of the first period, and less than three minutes later he doubled the lead before the Wolverines cut it to 2-1 late in the second. William Whitelaw, a Columbus Blue Jackets draftee, tied it 2-2 at 3:15 of the third before the Wolverines (12-7-1, 6-4-0) pulled out the win.

Splitsville

Max Montes and Jake Rozzi each had a goal and an assist and Kristoffer Eberly made 29 saves in the 5-1 win over the Golden Gophers on Jan. 10. The Buckeyes were ahead 2-0 in the third period when Fontaine and Nathan McBrayer scored during a five-minute major power play.

Naturally, the Gophers (18-4-2, 9-2-1) responded with a fury in the second game, and the Buckeyes were unable to get the sweep, allowing three goals in the first period in the 6-1 defeat.

By the way, the Gophers played 14 NHL draft picks. Ohio State had two.

The loss was the first at home for the Buckeyes (9-1-1).

Net Results

Eberly, from Pinckney, Mich., is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for December after winning all four starts and stopping 81 of 85 shots (.953 save percentage).

Against Notre Dame he made 18 and 14 saves, respectively, to run his record to 9-1-0 with a 1.35 goals-against average, a .941 save percentage and his first two career shutouts.

For complete recaps of the Michigan and Minnesota series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

FOOTBALL (14-2, 7-2)

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, L 13-10.

Dec. 21 Tennessee, CFP first round, W 42-17.

Jan. 1 Oregon, CFP quarterfinals, W 41-21; **10** Texas, CFP semifinals, W 28-14; **20** Notre Dame, CFP championship game W 34-23.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (10-8, 2-5)

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, W 102-69; **29** PITTSBURGH, L 91-90 (OT).

Dec. 4 at Maryland, L 83-59; **7** RUTGERS, W 80-66; **14** vs. Auburn at Holiday Hoopsgiving, Atlanta, L 91-53; **17** VALPARAISO, W 95-73; **21** vs. Kentucky at CBS Sports Classic, New York, W 85-65; **29** INDIANA STATE W 103-83.

Jan. 3 MICHIGAN STATE, L 69-62; **6** at Minnesota, W 89-88 (2OT); **9** OREGON, L 73-71; **14** at Wisconsin, L 70-68; **17** INDIANA, L 77-76 (OT); **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 (17-1, 6-1)

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., W 70-47; **29** vs. Utah State at Daytona Beach Classic, Daytona Beach, Fla., W 87-51.

Dec. 8 ILLINOIS, W 83-74; **10** BALL STATE, W 80-48; **14** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 87-39; **17** GRAND VALLEY STATE, W 82-57; **20** vs. Stanford at Bay Area Women's Classic, San Francisco, W 84-59; **29** at Rutgers, W 77-63.

Jan. 5 NORTHWESTERN, W 92-62; **8** at Michigan, W 84-77; **12** OREGON, W 69-60; **16** at Wisconsin, W 80-69; **19** at Penn State, L 62-59; **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.

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** CCF C Championships at Detroit.

March 8 NCAA Midwest Regionals, TBA; **20-23** NCAA Championships at University Park, Pa.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS (2-0)

Jan. 10 West Point Open at Army, 1st/6;

17 GREENVILLE, W 319.700-303.150; **25** at Stanford.

Feb. 2 OKLAHOMA; **9** PENN STATE; **21** WINTER CUP; **23** WINTER CUP.

March 8 at Nebraska; **15** at Michigan; **25** ILLINOIS.

April 4-5 Big Ten Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **18-19** NCAA Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS (2-2, 1-0)

Jan. 11 Sprouts Farmers Market Collegiate Quad in Oklahoma City, Okla., vs. Arkansas (W 196.425-195.875), Kentucky (L 196.500-196.425)&UCLA(L139.550-196.425);**18**IOWA, W 196.275-195.200; **24** MICHIGAN STATE; **31** at Michigan.

Feb. 7 at Illinois; **16** MINNESOTA; **22** at Penn State.

March 2 BIG FOUR MEET vs. RUTGERS, NEBRASKA & UCLA; **7** at NC State; **16** WEST VIRGINIA & KENT STATE.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (15-6-1, 8-4-0)

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, L 3-1; L 3-1.

Dec. 5-6 PENN STATE, W 4-0; W 4-2; **13-14** NOTRE DAME, W 2-1 (OT); W 3-1.

Jan. 3 vs. Michigan at Wrigley Field in Chicago, W 4-3; **5** at Michigan, L 3-2 (OT); **10-11** MINNESOTA, W 5-1; L 6-1; **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

(17-5-3, 12-5-3)

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, PPD.

Jan. 2 at Wisconsin, L 6-0; **4** at Wrigley Field in Chicago vs. Wisconsin, T 3-3 (OT SW); **10-11** BEMIDJI STATE, W 6-0, W 4-0; **17-18** at Minnesota Duluth, W 3-1; W 2-1; **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 SWIM & DIVE (4-1, 1-0)

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, L 188-112; **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 (5-1, 1-0)

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, L 197.5-102.5; **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.

TRACK & FIELD

Jan. 10-11 McCravy Invite at Louisville, Ky., Men T-3rd/16, Women 2nd/16; **18** Hoosier Horsepower Classic at Indianapolis; **24-25** Crossroads of America Invite at Indianapolis; **31** Notre Dame Meyo Invite at South Bend, Ind.; Texas Tech Invite at Lubbock, Texas.

Feb. 1 Notre Dame Meyo Invite at South Bend, Ind.; Texas Tech Invite at Lubbock, Texas; **14-15** David Hemery Valentine Invitational at Boston; Clemson Tiger Paw Invite at Clemson, S.C.; **28** Big Ten Indoor Championships at Indianapolis.

March 1 Big Ten Indoor Championships at Indianapolis; **14-15** NCAA Championships at Virginia Beach, Va.; **21-22** USF Invite at Tampa, Fla.; **27-29** Raleigh Relays at Raleigh, N.C.; **28-29** Texas Relays at Austin, Texas.

April 18-19 Tom Jones Invite at Gainesville, Fla.; **25-26** Drake Relays at Des Moines, Iowa.

May 2-3 JESSE OWENS CLASSIC; **16-18** Big Ten Outdoor Championships at Eugene, Ore.; **28-31** NCAA East Prelims at Jacksonville, Fla.

June 11-14 NCAA Championships at Eugene, Ore.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (3-3)

Jan. 3-4 BRIGHAM YOUNG, L 3-1; L 3-1; **10-11** FORT VALLEY STATE, W 3-0; W 3-0; **17** at First Point Collegiate Challenge in Austin, Texas, vs. Stanford, L 3-0; **18** at First Point Collegiate Challenge in Austin, Texas, vs. UCLA, W 3-1; **23** at Penn State; **26** PENN STATE; **31** USC.

Feb. 1 UCLA; **8** LOYOLA; **10** at Purdue Fort Wayne; **15** LINDENWOOD; **20** at McKendree; **22** at Lindenwood; **27** at Ball State.

March 1 PURDUE FORT WAYNE; **7-8** at New Jersey Institute of Technology; **13** QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE; **15** QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE; **20** at Loyola; **22** at Lewis; **27** MCKENDREE.

April 3 BALL STATE; **5** LEWIS; **11-12** at Quincy; **19** MIVA Tournament Quarterfinals.

WRESTLING (11-0, 2-0)

Nov. 3 Clarion Open at Clarion, Pa., NTS; **14** UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA, W 36-6; **17** at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania W 40-4; **24** HOFSTRA, W 38-6.

Dec. 6-7 Cliff Keen Invitational at Las Vegas, 3rd of 10; **13** at Pittsburgh, W 20-17; **21** Collegiate Duals at Nashville vs. North Carolina, W 23-11; vs. Lock Haven, W 36-6; vs. Iowa State, W 29-10.

Jan. 5 OREGON STATE, W 40-3; **10** at Illinois, W 24-9; **12** RUTGERS, W 17-15; **19** PURDUE, W 34-10; **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.

Remembering Buckeyes We Lost In 2024

By **DAVID BREITHAAPT**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Contributor

As happens every year, we lose friends and colleagues who made an impact on our lives. Buckeye Nation was no different, with former players and staffers passing on in 2024. The following is a list of and tribute to those Buckeyes in order of their passing.

Ken Fritz, a former All-America offensive guard for Ohio State who attempted to restrain Woody Hayes following his infamous punch in the 1978 Gator Bowl, died Feb. 6 at the age of 66. Fritz played at Ironton (Ohio) High School, where he lettered three times before enrolling at Ohio State in 1976.

He spent three seasons starting between left and right guard and was named a consensus All-American as a senior in

1979, a year in which the Buckeyes went 11-0 in the regular season before a 17-16 loss to No. 3 USC in the Rose Bowl. Fritz went on to be drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 10th round of the NFL draft in 1980.

Mark Mitchell, former Ohio State women's assistant basketball coach, died unexpectedly on March 26 at the age of 56. Mitchell helped build the Cincinnati-Taft High School's boys basketball program and led them to a 25-1 record and their first state basketball title in 2011.

He was hired by Ohio State as an assistant women's basketball coach under Kevin McGuff in 2013 and held that role until 2018, helping lead the Buckeyes to five NCAA tournament appearances in that span. Mitchell coached his daughters, Chelsea and Kelsey, who was a four-time All-American and Ohio State's all-time leading scorer at 3,402 points, from 2014-18. Mitchell left Ohio State to coach in the

Cincinnati public schools before becoming the head men's basketball coach at Wilberforce University from 2020-24.

Tim Kight, a former Ohio State football coach who worked under Urban Meyer and was instrumental in the Buckeyes' 2014 national championship, died on May 3 following a battle with cancer. He was 71. Kight was a national champion hurdler at Thomas Worthington High School in suburban Columbus and went on to run track at Ohio State and UCLA. After college he attended Princeton Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago before founding a church in San Diego.

Kight, a professional motivational speaker, brought his strong voice and leadership skills to Ohio State for seven seasons as an assistant under Meyer, helping the Buckeyes win three Big Ten titles and the aforementioned national title.

Kight was an avid reader, fisherman and cigar aficionado.

Thomas Williams, a former Ohio State men's basketball captain, died peacefully on Aug. 19 at the age of 93 in his hometown of Lima, Ohio. He graduated from Perrysburg (Ohio) St. Rose High School, where he played baseball, basketball and football, in 1949.

Williams played for the Buckeyes from 1951-53. His three-season career at Ohio State culminated in him serving as captain for the 1953 team. He appeared in 65 games as a forward, averaging 8.4 points per game. He was never defeated by Michigan. After college he joined the finance corps of the Army and was stationed in Nuremberg, Germany. Upon his return home he coached basketball in his hometown of Lima.

Will Sander, who led the Buckeyes in rushing during the 1964 season, passed away peacefully on Sept. 30 in Roanoke, Va. He was 80. Sander was a three-year starter for OSU at fullback following an excellent career at McNicholas High School in Cincinnati from 1958-62. He is a member of the school's Hall of Fame due to his success in both basketball and football.

He rushed for 1,299 yards and 16 TDs for the Buckeyes, totals that at the time ranked among the program's all-time top 10 while earning him a spot in the 1965 Kelly Tires Blue-Gray All Star Football Classic. Sander also excelled in the classroom, earning a 3.81 GPA. After college, he worked for General Electric for 35 years as an industrial engineer, making

significant contributions to the industry.

Jim Kregel, also known as "Big Jim King of the River," passed away unexpectedly on Oct. 6 at his home near Toledo at the age of 72. Kregel was a standout offensive guard at Woodward High School in Toledo before playing for the Buckeyes and becoming a three-year starter for Ohio State at the same position from 1971-73.

Kregel earned first-team All-Big Ten honors in 1973, helping the team to a 10-0-1 finish that culminated in a 42-21 win against USC in the Rose Bowl. Kregel went on to play for the Birmingham franchise in the World Football League for two years. He is also remembered for his stories about the Rose Bowls his teams played in and his college shenanigans.

John Daly, who coached Ohio State's men's tennis team for 28 years, died Oct 16. He was 78. Daly led Ohio State from 1972-99, racking up 431 match wins and producing 31 All-Big Ten selections and six Big Ten singles and doubles champions. He had 449 total wins in his career, including his one season spent coaching at Northern Illinois in 1970.

Daly's Ohio State teams took home top-four finishes in the Big Ten 13 times including a conference title in 1991. After his retirement, he worked for 10 years at the McConnell Heart Health Center where he helped launch the executive wellness program.

Ron O'Brien, a former Ohio State head diving coach who is recognized as one of the most successful diving instructors in United States history, died Nov. 19 at his home in Naples, Fla. He was 86. O'Brien coached eight United States Olympic teams from 1968-96, helping his divers win more than 300 medals at major domestic and international competitions, including 12 at the Olympics.

He also had success coaching at the college level, including at his alma Ohio State. He led the program from 1964-78, helping Buckeye divers win five NCAA one-meter titles and three three-meter titles. O'Brien attended Ohio State as a student from 1957-59, earning six varsity letters in gymnastics and diving and winning the NCAA title on the one-meter board in 1959.

O'Brien was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in 1984 and has also been admitted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame, the International Swimming Hall of Fame and the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame.

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Buckeyes Win Well Earned National Title

The Buckeyes have won their third national championship in three consecutive decades under three different head coaches. It goes to prove the Ohio State football program has attracted talented players and coaches along with having a very special culture which sets high standards. A team and a coaching staff that never gave up and fought through some challenging times came together and played their very best football when it counted, bringing the storied Ohio State football program its seventh national title.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

Ryan Day found out that being the head football coach at Ohio State can be pure hell at times, but when you win the ultimate prize in college football, it is the greatest place on earth.

It would have been easy for the Ohio State Buckeyes to hang up their cleats after the devastating loss to Michigan, ending the season with no Big Ten championship and scoring only 10 points against their archrival. Ending the regular season with a 10-2 record is below standards for Ohio State, and even though the Buckeyes would slide into the 12-team playoff picture, they would end up competing in the toughest half of the CFP bracket.

The coaches and players had a serious heart-to-heart after the Michigan loss and vowed to make amends by making a serious run at the national title. They did just that by knocking off Tennessee, Oregon and Texas, before beating Notre Dame by a score of 34-23.

During the national championship run, the entire team took it up a notch and outscored its opponents 145-75. This Buckeye team would end up playing 16 games, more than any Buckeye team ever. A year that would stretch into nearly a six-month season, counting August camp, was well worth the grind. The grit and determination of this team will be talked about for decades.

Will Howard Steps Forward

Few, if any, college quarterbacks could have put together a postseason display like Will Howard. In the four postseason games Howard threw for over 1,100 yards and eight

touchdowns. It would not be just his arm but also his legs that would make the difference in the championship game against the Fighting Irish.

Howard would lead the Buckeye offense to three first-half touchdown drives, giving Ohio State a 21-7 lead going into the locker room. The drives not only led to touchdowns but took over 16 minutes off the clock and put the Notre Dame offense, after an initial long drive on its first possession, on the bench much of the first half.

It would be Howard, not Irish quarterback Riley Leonard, who kept drives alive with his feet throughout the game. Howard would end up with 57 yards rushing compared to Leonard's 40.

He would also complete 17 passes out of 21 attempts for 231 yards and two touchdowns for the night. Even though Notre Dame's defense mixed up coverages and brought pressure at times, Howard responded to the moment by making crucial plays to sustain drives and maintain possession of the ball.

No play was more important than Howard's third-and-11 strike to freshman superstar Jeremiah Smith late in the fourth quarter. The play covered 56 yards and came at a time when Notre Dame had a chance to get the football back after mounting a valiant comeback effort. The play would put the game on ice for the Buckeyes and secure the national championship.

For his efforts Howard was named the game's most valuable offensive player. The Kansas State transfer sure earned his NIL money this season and upped his stock for the NFL draft. A good bargain for everyone.

Silver Bullets Shine

The Buckeye defense entered the national championship game ranked No. 1 in scoring defense, total defense and passing defense.

They went up against Notre Dame's potent rushing offense that was averaging over 210 yards per game on the ground, a rushing attack that was led by talented running back Jeremiyah Love and Leonard. Leonard was just 219 yards shy of Love's season totals carrying the ball.

The task for the Buckeye defense was to not let Leonard keep drives alive with his feet. Leonard had nearly the same number of touchdowns rushing the football as he did throwing touchdown passes, 17 to 21. Leonard has a decent arm, completing 66.7 percent of his passes, but his real threat to his opponents was his ability to put his head down and bull forward to pick up the neces-

sary yardage to move the chains.

Jim Knowles and his defensive staff held the Irish rushing attack in check after Notre Dame's initial drive, a drive that went 75 yards in 18 plays. Knowles' defense allowed Notre Dame only 18 total yards for the rest of the first half. A Notre Dame offense that took pride in its toughness in the running game was held to just 53 positive rushing yards in the game, well below that 210-yard average per contest.

Once again, the defensive staff had a solid game plan and made the necessary adjustments to take away the main strength of the Irish offense, running the football.

Special Teams Respond

Ohio State also had to be on high alert in the kicking game. Notre Dame was especially dangerous on special teams. The Irish had blocked six kicks during the season, schemed up fakes, and had fooled opponents throughout the year by making late personnel changes in an attempt to confuse their opponents.

The Buckeyes responded when Notre Dame attempted a fake punt from its own 33-yard line trailing 28-7. The Buckeyes would take over on downs deep in Notre Dame territory, and Jayden Fielding would kick a 46-yard field goal to put the Buckeyes ahead 31-7.

Fielding, who had his struggles at times this season, would make amends by going 2 for 2 in field goals for the game as well as doing a steady job on kickoffs.

Credit The Offensive Line

No position group should be more heralded than the Buckeye offensive line throughout the four-game national championship run.

This makeshift band of brothers fought the good fight each game and played at a level no one expected, except themselves. In the national championship game, the Buckeyes ran for 214 yards, about 51 more than their average heading into the title game behind the dominant offensive line.

The Buckeyes would end the season with both TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins topping the 1,000-yard mark for the season. Even though the Irish did get two sacks in the championship game, the Buckeye offensive line kept Howard clean most of the night, allowing him to throw for his 231 yards.

The combination of run blocking and pass protection by the "men up front" was a huge reason the Buckeye offense had such a balanced attack against the fighting Irish.



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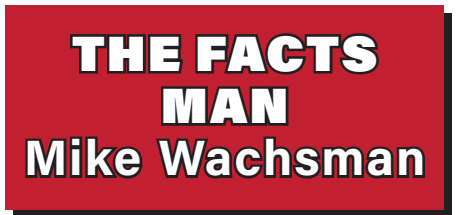


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Bucks Turn Tables On Adversity, Win National Title

Ohio State has won four national titles in football in my lifetime – 1968, 2002, 2014 and now this one. Truth be told, I was a few weeks short of turning three on the first one, so while it counts, it is not etched in my memory. Most of it is from what I have read and watched over the years.



The other three, though? Tangible, exciting memories. But if I had to stack them up, this one would be extra special simply because Ryan Day and company were told in no uncertain terms – inside and outside of Buckeye Nation – that they could not get it done.

Yet here they are, 2024 college football national champions.

“Now the stories of these guys will be told because they’ve cemented themselves in Ohio State history, the ninth national champ and the third really in the last 50 years,” Day said afterward. “There’s been some great, great teams in the last 50-some-odd years at Ohio State. Great teams, great players. Only three of them have been national champs, and these guys are one of them.”

Folks who have followed this space over the years know that I was not a proponent of expanding the College Football Playoff – certainly not to a dozen teams, anyway. My preference was to keep it at four. And yes, I realize that means Ohio State would not have made it this season, and this magical run would have been completely hypothetical. Had it stayed at four, it likely would have been the death knell for Day’s career in Columbus.

But the CFP is what it is, and Ohio State got a second chance. To paraphrase Rocky Balboa, “It’s not about how many times you get hit and go down. It’s about how many times you get up.”

OSU looked broken and battered when it walked off the Ohio Stadium field on Nov. 30, demoralized by a loss to the worst Michigan team in recent memory. Nothing went right for Ohio State on that day, much of it due to its own hand. Few fans seemed excited about the postseason and instead were going over the list of coaches they wanted to replace Day with.

But the Buckeyes blocked out the noise and reinvented themselves, came out swinging in a first-round game against Tennessee and never looked back. They shocked the college football world – well, as much as a team with maybe the most roster talent in the sport can surprise.

“Eliminate all the distractions,” said Will Howard, the championship game’s offensive MVP after going 17 of 21 for 231 yards and a pair of touchdowns, as well as rushing a season-high 16 times, for 57 yards.

“Don’t listen to any of the outside noise. Just finish the job. When you get into big games like this, whoever is able to have the poise in the noise and be able to overcome adversity because it wasn’t always pretty today. It wasn’t always perfect. It’s never going to be. But I think the team that we have and the leadership that we have with Coach Day, just the resilience this team has shown all year, it’s just unbelievable.”

Howard was a big reason the Buckeyes were finally able to break through after years of being close. He may not have the pinpoint accuracy of predecessor C.J. Stroud or the smooth open-field moves of Justin Fields, but when the Buckeyes needed a play, he was not afraid to step up. He led by example, and his teammates listened to him and wanted to win for him. That’s the ultimate compliment a player can be paid.

“It started with me when I first met Will,” Day said. “I saw something in him, a football IQ intelligence. I saw him play on film at Kansas State and win championships and win big games and be able to make an impact with his feet but also throw with accuracy and anticipate throws. And those are things that are hard to find. Then you see a guy, you meet him, and his football IQ and maturity is what kind of captured me.

“I had a feeling that we would be in a situation like this where we needed his feet to go win a game, and that’s exactly what happened in this game.”

College football history is littered with iconic moments from both Ohio State and Notre Dame, and it’s fair to say they are two of the bluest blue bloods in the sport. To their credit, the Irish did not wilt and actually provided some anxious moments for Buckeyes fans down the stretch, but when OSU absolutely, positively had to have a play, it called on two of its best players to provide it.

The third-down pass from Howard to freshman Jeremiah Smith is a play that could have been dialed up on a number of occasions in the second half, as Smith was facing man coverage for much of the night. That the trigger was pulled when it was – on third-and-11 at the OSU 34-yard line – shows that this was indeed a new Day.

“I just thought to myself, only one national championship, you only get one opportunity a year to do this, let’s just lay it on the line and put it out there and be aggressive. And that’s what we did,” Day said.

Notre Dame had done a reasonably good job of defending Smith, but you can only hold him down so long. Irish coach Marcus Freeman knew that it was a big ask to keep such a special talent in check for an entire game.

“There were times in the second half that we did in man coverage, but he’s a heck of a player,” Freeman said. “He’s difficult to cover. You want to play zone, and they’ll find ways to pick you apart. You want to play man, they’ll find ways to get him the ball. It’s a talented offense, with that situation right there.”

OSU exorcised demons from the last time it was in Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Dec. 31, 2022, just as the clock was striking midnight. That’s when a Noah Ruggles field goal went wide left, and the Buckeyes saw what was at the time their best shot at a national title pass by as Georgia walked out with a 42-41 victory. There were calls in that game many have felt were too conservative and allowed the Bulldogs to get back into the game, so Day was not going to make that mistake again.

It’s been said that it isn’t the journey, but the destination that is most important. But these Buckeyes would not have reached this destination – the top of the college football mountain – without encountering some roadblocks along the way.

“You just never know what’s in your path along the way,” Day said. “But this game can give you the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. It can take you to your knees some days as a player and as a coach. I’ve been there before. For all those coaches or people who are on a journey to what they’re looking to accomplish, if you’re trying to achieve greatness, you’re trying to become national champs in the most competitive environment there is in the entire world. There’s nothing more competitive than college football, in my opinion.

“It’s going to be hard and there’s going to be things you learn along the way, but if you surround yourself with great people, you’re resilient, and you believe in the guys around you, and you just keep fighting and keep putting one foot in front of the other, you give yourself another chance. And that’s really what it was. You think back when we were in the stadium last time, I couldn’t quite

come to grips for a while with why we just didn’t quite finish that game against Georgia. But I understand now. It all makes sense. And here we are. I couldn’t feel better.”

Neither can Buckeye Nation. Go celebrate, folks.

Because this was hard. But what is it they say – anything easy is not worth achieving. Right?

One Year Then Forever

As the Buckeyes marched through the CFP, a saying was coined – X minutes and then forever.

It signified how much time was left until a possible national title, and heading into the game with Notre Dame it was “60 minutes, then forever.”

Howard will be a big part of that forever.

He was not the splashiest transfer-portal acquisition, but he was a *fit*. And in this day and age, that could be the most important thing a player brings. The same can be said for Quinshon Judkins, who helped lighten the load for Tre’Veyon Henderson so that both could be beasts late in the year. And they were.

But the quarterback gets the spotlight, and Howard seemed to bask in it. And looking back, no one will care that he was here for only one season.

“I think when you come to Ohio State, the expectations are high,” Howard said. “You can say that the pressure is high and all that stuff. But I think C.J. (Stroud) said it a couple years ago – pressure is a privilege. If you don’t have pressure on you, then are you really doing anything meaningful? I feel like we’ve just embraced that all year, and we’ve kind of blocked out all the noise and just said, man, we just love each other too much, and we’ve embraced it.

“I wanted to be a Buckeye. When I talked to Coach Day, when I first had the opportunity to have some interest in this place, man, it was pretty soon after that first conversation, I was like, ‘Man, I want to be a Buckeye.’ There’s something different about these guys and this place. I’m just so blessed that I made the decision to come here.”

Day was effusive in his praise of the Pennsylvania native.

“I give this guy a lot of credit right here, Will Howard,” Day said at the postgame interview table. “I think he ran the ball 16 times in the game. We knew it was going to be that way. It was the last game we had so we were going to let out all the bullets, and he really put the team on his back and really delivered a huge third-down conversion which sealed the game.

“But what I didn’t know was how special his leadership is and his resilience and his positive mindset. It’s something I learned a lot about – I learn from these guys all the time. I’ve learned a lot from Cody Simon since he’s been here, and I’ve learned a lot from (Howard) in one year. I’ve told stories about some different times in practice when he has such a positive mindset around the players.

“And we decided to go in the huddle this year for the first time since I’ve been at Ohio State because we knew the season was going to be long, and we wanted to be fresh. And I felt like we were fresh in the playoffs, and I think that had a big part to do with it. But what we didn’t understand along the way was the impact that he was going to have, and the offensive line was going to come together, and the offense was going to come together because there’s 11 guys in a huddle, breaking the huddle together. Even in walkthroughs, when we break the huddle together, it was just a crispness to it that they were together on that I think made the difference to these guys on offense.”

Seniors Bask In The Glory

When Ohio State fans scan the record books,

not only will they see that this year’s Buckeyes were national champions, but they will also see the names of some of the most accomplished players in school history.

Henderson finishes his career as Ohio State’s fourth all-time leading rusher – quite the feat given the litany of running backs who have come through Columbus. And when you consider that he battled injuries for much of his career it’s a marvel he finished that high.

Emeka Egbuka may not be the first guy people think of when naming the greatest receivers in OSU annals, but he sits atop the all-time receptions chart with 205 catches. He is an outstanding blocker and does not mind in the least taking a secondary role to frosh phenom Smith. He will go in the first round in the next NFL draft and should have a long, prosperous career.

And then there’s Jack Sawyer. A local kid, he grew up a rabid Buckeyes fan and was the first recruit to get on board when Day took over as head coach. The story was told that Sawyer and his dad returned from a visit to OSU to meet Day, and Dad warned him, “You are not going to commit. You are going to take other visits and let this process play out.” Well, Jack was having none of that. As it was told, the elder Sawyer went upstairs to take a nap, at which point Jack picked up the phone and told Day that he was coming to Columbus, he was a Buckeye.

Even though he didn’t make a ton of plays against Notre Dame, he will always be a legend in OSU lore for his late-game heroics against Texas. A batted pass on third down with the Buckeyes leading but Texas threatening inside the red zone was followed by a sack and a scoop-and-score, which covered 83 yards and put a stake through the Longhorns.

Much as Ezekiel Elliott will be remembered for his late-game 85-yard touchdown that put the nail in Alabama’s coffin in the 2014 College Football Playoff, Sawyer will also have a place in school history.

Buckeyes Beat One Of Their Own

Notre Dame is not high on the rooting list around here, though it would not have been tough to root for the Irish had they been playing any other team.

That’s because Marcus Freeman is a former Buckeye and a highly likeable guy.

Like Ohio State, Notre Dame faced adversity after a shocking September loss at home to Northern Illinois, and even after the Irish began blowing foes out, there remained a lingering doubt about whether they were capable of making a run.

“Week 2, it was a rough outlook,” Freeman said. “You go from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. The reality is we all had a little bit of doubt, but we all chose to work, and we all chose to trust each other, chose to love each other, be selfless and put the team in front of ourselves. And we did it every week and every week, and you still had to trust beyond knowing if your work was going to get you the result that you wanted, and they continued to do it.

“They put this program in a position to play for a national championship.”

Quick Hits

- The first-quarter holding call against Notre Dame was the first one Ohio State had drawn since Sept. 21 against Marshall. Crazy, crazy stat.

- The victory over the Irish was OSU’s fifth of the season over an AP top-five team, the most in college football history. They moved ahead of 2019 LSU, 1967 USC and 1943 Notre Dame, all of which knocked off four top-five schools in those seasons.

Difference In Champion Bucks Was Night And Day

National Champions! It has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?

The team we have watched over the past four games is exactly the team we expected to see – we were promised we would see – at the start the season, or even as far back as when Jack Sawyer (and a little NIL money) convinced a group of NFL-ready Buckeyes to come back for one last shot at beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten championship and then winning it all for the first time since 2014.

The Buckeyes, with talent at every position, would just steamroll the opposition on the way to where they are now – at the top of the college football world. It was certainly a wild ride to get to the summit. Why it took so long for the Buckeyes to reach their potential, maybe even to surpass it, is beyond me. Maybe it was the total team obsession with achieving the first goal – snapping the three-game losing streak to Michigan. I was obsessed with that goal, too – the one that they did not achieve, which eliminated even a chance at the second goal.

Once that first goal was no longer attainable, was a burden lifted and the team was able to just let it all hang out, just be the team that it should have been from day one?

By the time Ohio State crushed what I still believe was a really good Tennessee team and avenged an earlier loss to Oregon – the No. 1 seed (and rightfully so) in the playoffs – with a vengeance, I began to believe that Ohio State was a team of destiny. There were some blips in the games with Texas and Notre Dame, but the Buckeyes ended up winning both those games by two scores. There was just going to be no denying them.

And they won with flair.

Against Texas the Buckeyes won the game with one of their patented goal-line stands, and fittingly, it was Sawyer, the player-architect of the team and its heart and soul, who capped the stand with the game-sealing scoop-and-score.

Against Notre Dame, breakout star receiver Jeremiah Smith, who had dazzled Buckeye fans all season but had been held completely in check by Texas and somewhat in check by Notre Dame to that point, fittingly made the game-sealing play and in spectacular fashion. But why single out just a couple of Buckeyes? Every Buckeye had to be playing at the highest level to have a run where they defeated four playoff-caliber teams by a combined 145-75 score, or an average winning margin of 17.5 points.

Even kicker Jayden Fielding, who had one of the most difficult seasons of any Buckeye, had his opportunity for redemption against the Irish, nailing both his field goals, including the three-pointer with 26 seconds remaining which finally put the game out of reach.

Only Davison Igbinosun seemed unable to rise above his regular-season struggles with two more penalties that might have had an impact on the final outcome if everyone else hadn't been firing on all cylinders, including the no longer maligned offensive line, the unsung heroes of the miracle run.

It was a run that reminded me of another glorious run, the one to wrap up the 2014 national championship, a muscle-flexing march which included a program-altering win over Alabama. So significant was the win over Alabama, when many recall the 2014 run, they think that it was that victory that was for the championship. That win, of course came against Oregon, but my friend Hal Leiner has won many a lunch from people who insist the championship opponent was the Crimson Tide.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

It's ironic that Ohio State won the first CFP four-team affair and then won again in the inaugural 12-team format. Let's hope they expand the field again sometime soon!

I have enjoyed Ohio State's championship run on so many levels, and I don't mean to be a Debbie Downer. Yet even the championship hasn't helped me get completely over the devastating loss to Michigan. In fact, winning the national crown in some ways makes losing to this particular Michigan team even more difficult to swallow. Where was the team we've grown to know and love over the last four games on that fateful Nov. 30?

It's not just losing to Michigan that pains me. I have witnessed 19 losses to that team up north in my 44 years as BSB publisher, and there was another loss when I was with the Madison Press and yet another one when I was with the old Buckeye Leaves. It's just that some losses to our rivals are more painful than others. Think Tim Biakabutuka rushing for 313 yards or the Buckeyes being shut out on the same day it was announced John Cooper's contract was being extended.

But I have to admit, this most recent loss bothered me the most because this was one of the better Ohio State teams in recent memory playing one of the weaker Michigan teams in recent memory. And then there was the play-calling.

But I also have to admit that as the Buckeyes plowed their way through the 12-team playoff bracket, reaching their potential and winning the title, the pain of that Michigan loss seemed to lessen.

It's all part of the changing landscape of college football, where, sadly, the greatest rivalry in sports may end up being just one more game in a longer and longer season.

Is the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry going to become a casualty of this new era in college football? I hope not. But time – and college football – moves on.

Rose Bowl Or Playoff?

One thing about veteran sports fans. We resist change like the expanded playoffs and think most things were better in the good old days.

In advance of Ohio State leaving to face Oregon in the second round of the CFP playoff, I heard a lot of people talking about how the Buckeyes were going to face the Ducks in the Rose Bowl, like it was the traditional New Year's Day bowl game. As I listened to the chatter, it occurred to me that I had never really thought of it as Ohio State going to the Rose Bowl. I barely even thought about the location of the rematch with top-ranked Oregon. It was a quarterfinal game in the first 12-team playoff. It could have been played at Ohio Stadium like the game with Tennessee, in AT&T Stadium, like the game with Texas, or Wrigley Field for that matter. That probably would have been cold. But I never really thought of the rematch with Oregon as the Rose Bowl.

I realized that the Rose Bowl as an event, the Rose Bowl as an entity in and of itself, the Rose Bowl as The Granddaddy of Them All, was dead and had been for several years. The game as we knew it for decades has become just another casualty in the ever-changing college football landscape, and I for one am sad about it.

The Rose Bowl is now just another playoff location, but with more beautiful scenery and a better parade. There is no direct connection to, say, the game played in Pasadena on Jan. 1, 1969, when Ohio State defeated USC for the national championship. The games between the Buckeyes and Trojans and Oregon and Ohio State on Jan. 1 this year are really only connected by the fact they were played in the same venue, though I found it ironic that the recent game was played against a team formerly of the Pac-Number Du Jour, the second pillar in the greatness of the Rose Bowl, along with the Big Ten.

The Rose Bowl was the first postseason college game ever played, dating back to 1902. The agreement between the Big Ten and the various versions of the Pac-8, 10, 12 started with the game in 1947, when UCLA played Illinois. The roots of the changes in the Rose Bowl format started in 1998, when the Rose Bowl joined in the Bowl Championship Series. If you recall, the Rose Bowl did not participate in the previous Bowl Coalition or the Bowl Alliance. The first time the modern Rose Bowl did not host two teams from the Big Ten and Pac 12 was Jan. 1, 2005, when Texas, with quarterback Vince Young, defeated Michigan, 38-37.

I for one am glad I got to attend the Rose Bowl in its heyday. I've been to many bowl games, starting with the Liberty Bowl after the 1981 season. There was no equal to the Rose Bowl back then, certainly not the Liberty Bowl. Today, you could play a CFP game at the Liberty Bowl, and it would still be a playoff game if it was so designated.

The Rose Bowl is kind of like newspapers. When we old folk die off, there will be few memories of the grandeur of that game – an event actually – just as when our generation dies off, there will be very few if any newspapers remaining.

Here's one last thing for you, which some of you may have known but I certainly didn't, or at the least I hadn't given it any thought.

This year the Rose Bowl hosted a quarterfinal playoff game, which was played on the traditional Jan. 1. According to the always reliable Wikipedia, if the Rose Bowl hosts a semifinal game, it won't be played on Jan. 1, but a week later. Sure, the game has been played on Jan. 2 when New Year's fell on a Sunday. But a week later?

It's the end of the world – or at least the Rose Bowl – as we know it.

Oh, Those Penalties

After totally dominating Tennessee and Oregon in the first two rounds of the playoff, some may have felt there was a letdown against Texas, or the Longhorns were a better team than the Vols or Ducks when it took a goal-line stand in the waning minutes, capped by a scoop-and-score to secure the victory and a place in the championship game. The closeness of the game seemed to cause a lot of hand-wringing among Buckeye fans.

Let me remind everyone that if the Buckeyes hadn't committed nine penalties for 75 yards, they would probably have won by four touchdowns, not two – more in line with how the Buckeyes manhandled the Vols and Ducks. Theoretically, a team can correct making too many penalties more easily that it can make up for not having better talent and coaching,

though it took Ohio State awhile to get Igbinosun to do a better job of keeping his hands to himself – until the championship game, anyway.

I'm still trying to figure out what that Longhorn player said to set off the usually mild-mannered TreVeyon Henderson, but it came on a play where Ohio State was looking at a first-and-10 from the Texas 38. They ended up with a third-and-26 before punting.

Against the Irish there was slight improvement, with the Buckeyes being flagged six times for 58 yards, two by Igbinosun.

How Do We Schedule 24 Issues?

Many, many of you called in the weeks leading up to the national championship game, wondering where your BSBs covering the Tennessee, Oregon and Texas games were.

For future reference, the mailing date of the upcoming issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is always listed at the bottom of the credit box on page 3 of each paper. In this case the note read, "The next issue will be mailed on Jan. 14 or Jan. 22." On page 10, under the headline, "Buckeye Sports Bulletin Sets CFP Contingency Print Schedule," it was explained when the next issue was scheduled to be mailed and how we would push it back a week if the Buckeyes made it the championship game so we could include that coverage. I included that same information in this column.

First, let me say that we consider it a compliment that you call looking for your BSB.

Remember, however, that this was our first experience with a 12-team playoff. Just as the playoff committee will look at any possible changes after their first go-around with a 12-team affair, we will review our coverage and see if there are any changes we can make.

The problem is that we have only 24 issues to allocate over the course of a year. Each August the management staff at BSB gets together, looks at the calendar, the various Ohio State schedules, the recruiting signing days, and comes up with what we believe is the most functional schedule. That schedule is also posted in the credit box on page 3. If we added one in late December or early January, we would have to take one away somewhere else.

With the 12-team format, which may still grow even more, chances are a team like Ohio State is going to make the playoffs every year. But what happens if one year they don't? We are stuck with a fairly useless paper that could be better used somewhere else in the publishing year.

We could add another issue to the publishing schedule each year, but while many Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers have made it clear they would pay for 52 issues a year, the average reader has made it pretty clear that he or she doesn't have the stomach for the price increase that would come with adding a 25th issue or more.

My first instinct when thinking about where we could eliminate a paper to schedule one during playoff season would be the July issue. But that would mean 2½ months with no BSB.

Take a look at the schedule on page 3. Let us know where you think a change might be made and email your suggestion to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com. We appreciate your input in making this interesting but difficult decision.

In the meantime, don't forget the electronic BuckeyeSports.com. Our coverage of the Tennessee, Oregon and Texas games began immediately after the end of each game. And there was no waiting for the postman to deliver your paper!

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