

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 44, No. 16

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Feb. 15, 2025

## Bright Days Ahead

### OSU Boasts 4th-Ranked Recruiting Class, Makes Coaching Staff Changes

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

As every aspect of college football is ever-changing, so is National Signing Day, and it has never been as obvious as it was for the 2025 class, at least for Ohio State.

Every single one of the 26 members of the Buckeyes' 2025 recruiting class was already signed before Feb. 5, each of them inking their names on the dotted line during the early signing period that lasted from Dec. 4-6. Even without later additions, Ohio State still ended up with the fourth-best class in the 2025 cycle according to 247Sports, the sixth year in a row that head coach Ryan Day has been able to bring in a top-five class, something that Urban Meyer was unable to do during his time in Columbus, although he did come close.

The class was ranked behind No. 3 Alabama, No. 2 Georgia and No. 1 Texas and was able to beat out No. 5 Oregon and No. 6 Michigan to be the top team in the Big Ten for the sixth straight year (not including Oregon's third-ranked 2024 class).

The Buckeyes are one spot lower when looking at it per recruit, as they are boasting an average rating of .9246, behind Georgia (.9303), Alabama (.9342), Texas (.9363) and Oregon (.9437).

In Ohio State's fifth-ranked 2024 class, there was just one prospect to sign in February, with defensive lineman Dominic Kirks joining the class later than the other 20 prospects who had signed in December of 2023, so this is nothing new to the sport or to Ohio State.

With no recruits signing on Feb. 5, Ohio State opted not to have a press conference for the 2025 class, though the many coach-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**RYAN'S EXPRESS** — Even with several changes to his coaching staff, head coach Ryan Day is eyeing a future bolstered by the No. 4 recruiting class in 2025 that could help win his second national title, something that in the fabled history of Ohio State has been done by only one coach, Woody Hayes.

ing changes — which will be discussed later — likely had something to do with that as well.

But with nothing to do on signing day in terms of recruits, Day and the program were still looking far into the future, despite

just coming off their celebration for winning Day's first national title as the coach in Columbus.

The unbelievable four-game run through the first-ever 12-team playoff that Day was able to oversee earned him a seven-year contract extension, worth \$12.5 million annually, keeping him with the program through the 2031 season. That keeps him in Columbus three years longer than when his previous contract was set to expire.

"Ohio State football has long been defined by excellence, and under Ryan Day's leadership, that tradition has not only continued, but thrived," Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork said. "As a leader, mentor and coach, Ryan has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commit-

ment to the success and well-being of our players, both on and off the field. His leadership has maintained our position of national prominence each year, and winning the 2024 national championship validated his program's culture of excellence, integrity and perseverance."

In an appearance on "The Joel Klatt Show" after his extension, Day also talked about trying to repeat as champions in the 2025 season, which he said starts with making sure he gets a new coaching staff in place.

"I need a few weeks just to catch my breath, though, before I put the pedal to the metal, because, we have to get this staff

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Still Not Satisfied

There's one more thing you can add to the list of things I never thought I'd see: an Ohio State football team finish fourth in the Big Ten out of 18 teams, get humiliated at home by a 6-5 Michigan team, and be universally referred to as "great."

2024 will forever be remembered as the season the greatest rivalry in the history of sports came to an end. JC2 (Ryan Day) and the ridiculous College Football Playoff has reduced The Game to irrelevance. JC2 did what Cooper never could – if you can't beat Michigan, the next best thing is to make them no more important than any other opponent.

At the start of 2024 JC2 said the goals for this season were to beat Michigan, win the Big Ten and win the national championship. Ohio State accomplished one of the three. JC2 is the new Bart Simpson – "Underachiever and proud of it." Ross Bjork and JC2 are modern men – when you don't achieve your high but realistic goals you don't admit the truth and say you came up short. Never. You simply lower the bar.

I'm looking forward to seeing JC2's goals for next season. I can't imagine they will include beating Michigan and winning the conference. Why have goals that don't matter?

Another season completed and

true Buckeye fans are left to wonder what could have been, what should have been. With an NFL roster, they could have and should have finished no worse than 15-1. This could have and should have been truly one of the greatest teams in the history of college football. A truly great team would have beaten a vastly inferior Michigan team. A truly great team wouldn't have needed to lose to Michigan to motivate them to win the national championship. But sadly, for the rest of time, when anyone looks back on the 2024 Ohio State team, eventually they will ask the same question that gets asked of so many other underachieving Ohio State teams: "How in the hell did they lose to Michigan?"

**Michael Walrath**  
Three Forks, Mont.

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



## From The Message Board

**After holding the No. 1 spot for a good portion of the season, Ohio State finished with the fourth-best recruiting class in the nation per 247Sports, bringing in a 26-commit haul that includes three five-stars and 18 four-star players. With the 2025 recruiting cycle wrapped up, we asked readers and staff writers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum to offer their overall thoughts on Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class, as well as some of the positions that they think the Buckeyes did or did not hit on this year and which players they think will make the most impact in the short- and long-term future.**

"I thought the class was very good overall but I am concerned with both sides of the ball up front. Now, in the past I'd probably say we have to make up for it in the next class but with how the portal is, you can just supplement pieces where you need them. I'd expect the two to make an immediate impact to be Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 185) and McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 220).

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I probably could ask the same question dating back to the time before Greg Studrawa. Where are the offensive linemen? Ohio State signed just three and one of them was a three-star. Maybe I have been reading too much Bill Greene, but this just doesn't seem to cut it. You need not only talent but depth. Kudos to the rag-tag bunch who led Ohio State to the national championship this year, but you can't expect to do that every season. Maybe the new offensive line coach can raise the profile of Ohio State's offensive line recruiting."

– Poster That Harley Built

"The least surprising thing is that Brian Hartline brought in yet another five-star receiver. But overall, I think this has the potential to be one of, if not the best class Ryan Day has brought in yet. It's no secret that he's been an impressive recruiter, but now he's had six consecutive top-five recruiting classes, and that seems likely to continue now that he has some national title momentum behind him."

– Greg Wilson, BSB

"Years ago, there was a gentleman named John Cooper who coached at Ohio State and he once said, 'Ideally, you'd like to take one player at each position every year.' I don't know if Mr. Cooper knew anything about recruiting but I suspect he did. Teams that succeed on the national level stack one top-five class on top of another, year after year. It appears that Ohio State has done that again and now there's a transfer portal to fill in the gaps.

"Now, roster construction is like the NFL with a draft and free agency. Any misses in recruiting can be corrected in the college game with the transfer portal."

– Terrier Buck

"I think it's an outstanding class. I think the Buckeyes could have done better at the offensive line, where they only signed three recruits. Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 320) was the only one of those three newcomers to rank inside the top 300. The cornerback room is probably a little thin as Ohio State signed only two prospects and one of them, Cartersville, Ga., three-star Jordyn Woods (6-4, 190) isn't ranked in the top 1,000. But other than that it's a great class.

"I think the strength of the class was with the linebackers, where the Buckeyes signed a pair of top-150 prospects in Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) and Riley Pettijohn."

– Bobby Gorbett, BSB

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No. 5	Oct. 12	No. 17	March 8
No. 6	Oct. 26	No. 18	March 22
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No. 8	Nov. 9	No. 20	April 19
No. 9	Nov. 16	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 23	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 30	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 7	No. 24	August

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## Era Of Good Feeling Didn't Last Long

Pity poor Buckeye Nation.

Its Era of Good Feeling lasted exactly 36 days – from the College Football Playoff opening-round win against Tennessee on Dec. 21 to the national championship celebration attended by some 30,000 well-wishers at Ohio Stadium on Jan. 26.

All of the national title euphoria that washed away the anger, angst and anguish associated with a fourth consecutive loss to Michigan effectively ended when defensive coordinator Jim Knowles was conspicuous by his celebration absence at the Horseshoe, an absence later revealed due to Knowles returning to his home state to take over as defensive coordinator at Penn State.

A full-throated chorus of “Traitor!” had scarcely gained volume before offensive line coach Justin Frye left the program to take a similar position with the NFL’s Arizona Cardinals. And finally, the coup de grâce when offensive coordinator Chip Kelly returned to the NFL after an eight-year absence, agreeing to take over offensive play-calling duties for new Las Vegas Raiders head coach Pete Carroll.

Immediately, inquiring minds wanted to know what in the name of Chic Harley was going on, and lacking any concrete reason, they decided to make up supposition on their own. Knowles had a long-standing gripe with defensive ends coach Larry Johnson, Frye had been on thin ice long before his offensive line finally meshed during the title run, and Kelly had long ago tired of the recruiting required on the college coaching level.

And, of course, there was always the old standby that if Ryan Day was any kind of coach, his assistants wouldn’t be looking for other jobs.

The nature of the beast in football – in both the college and pro ranks – is that success breeds the poaching of assistant coaches. Nick Saban won seven national championships during his college coaching career – one at LSU and six more at Alabama – and accomplished that feat with six different offensive coordinators and four different defensive coordinators. During his 17-year run in Tuscaloosa, Saban employed 14 different coordinators. It’s just the nature of the business.

Not that winning a second straight national championship was ever going to be easy for Day and Ohio State anyway. During the poll era (since 1936), only seven schools have earned back-to-back consensus titles, and Georgia (2021-22), Alabama (2011-12) and Nebraska (1994-95) are the only ones to have done it since the 1950s.

The Buckeyes have had eight previous chances to win a second consecutive national championship, but something, someone or some team has always thrown a roadblock in their way. (Here at BSB, we don’t recognize the titles the university claims in 1961 and 1970, but that’s a discussion for another day, so we’re using them in the following recap.)

World War II intervened with Ohio State’s first chance to win back-to-back championships. On the heels of the 1942 crown, a war-depleted roster led to a 3-6 season in 1943. That campaign included a four-game losing streak – the longest in 20 years – and ended with a 45-7 loss at Michigan.

The next time OSU defended a national championship was in 1955, and dreams of repeating quickly evaporated with losses at Stanford and at home to No. 11 Duke by mid-October. The team went on to go undefeated against six Big Ten opponents, but the conference’s no-repeat Rose Bowl rule was a further impediment. The Buckeyes finished fifth in the final Associated Press poll and sixth in the final United Press International rankings.

Ohio State defended its 1957 title by winning its first four games of the 1958 season before a 7-7 tie with No. 13 Wisconsin and a 21-0 loss at 11th-ranked Northwestern derailed any hopes of a repeat. The win by the Ara Parseghian-coached Wildcats snapped a nine-game losing streak to the Buckeyes and

propelled them to a No. 4 national ranking. But Northwestern dropped out of the final rankings after losing each of its final three games of the season.

There wasn’t much to celebrate after winning the Football Writers Association of America’s version of the national championship in 1961. The university’s Faculty Council voted against sending the team to the Rose Bowl, and it triggered a downturn in recruiting for Woody Hayes and his program. During a six-year period beginning in 1962, the Buckeyes posted a record of 35-18-1 with no Big Ten championships.

That drought changed with a perfect 10-0 record in 1968, and OSU stamped its way to eight more victories to begin the 1969 season, outscoring its opposition by a lopsided 371-69 margin. But Hayes inexplicably changed his run-heavy game plan against Michigan and its first-year head coach Bo Schembechler, a blunder that led to seven turnovers – including six interceptions – and a 24-12 upset for the Wolverines.

Two years later, the Buckeyes were defending the 1970 national title bestowed upon them by the National Football Foundation. But the talented group known as the “Super Sophomores” from 1968 had exhausted their college eligibility, and the 1971 team finished with a 6-4 record that included losses in each of its final three games. The Buckeyes hadn’t ended a season with three straight defeats since 1924.

Ohio State waited more than three decades to defend another title and was the odds-on favorite to follow its improbable 2002 run with a repeat championship. But those hopes exploded before the 2003 season began amid allegations of program-wide academic malfeasance from star running back Maurice Claret and Claret’s subsequent suspension. Claret’s absence rendered the OSU running game a shadow of its former self, and the Buckeyes absorbed road losses at Wisconsin and Michigan.

Perhaps the closest the Buckeyes have gotten to successfully defending a national championship came in 2015. On the heels of the 2014 campaign that ended with 13 consecutive victories and a win in the first-ever College Football Playoff, Ohio State rattled off 10 more wins to begin the 2015 season before a 17-14 home loss to Michigan State dropped the Buckeyes out of the playoff race.

The Buckeyes held a 14-7 lead in the game late in the third quarter, but the Spartans came back with 10 unanswered points in the final period, getting a 41-yard field goal as time expired for the victory. Ezekiel Elliott, who finished the 2015 season with 1,821 yards rushing on an average of 6.3 yards per carry, got only two second-half carries against Michigan State – a head-scratching strategy from Urban Meyer that continues to be debated almost as much as the pass-happy one utilized by Hayes against Michigan in 1969.

### Fun With (Title) Numbers

Before the 2024 national championship excitement fades too far from memory, I wanted to make sure you don’t forget some of the incredible numbers associated with the title run. For instance:

- The Buckeyes broke their personal 0-for-14 streak of failing to win the national championship after occupying one of the top two spots in the annual AP preseason rankings. Since the AP’s first preseason poll in 1950, Ohio State had held the No. 1 or 2 ranking in 1958, 1962, 1969, 1970, 1980, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2022, and had never brought home the national title in any of those seasons. This year, the AP ranked the Buckeyes at No. 2 in the preseason poll behind Georgia.

- Ohio State became the first team during the poll era to defeat five different top-five opponents in the same season. Only three teams before the Buckeyes had beaten as many as four top-five opponents during the same year – LSU in 2019, USC in 1967 and Notre Dame in 1943.

- When the Buckeyes take the field next fall, they will be on a mission to accomplish a feat that hasn’t been done by a Big Ten team in more than 80 years. Minnesota was the last conference team to win back-to-back national championships, taking home titles in 1940 and 1941.

- Will Howard became the first transfer quarterback to lead his team to a national title in his first year with the team since Cam Newton led Auburn to the 2010 title. Newton began his college career at Florida before transferring after the 2008 season one step ahead of expulsion. He spent the 2009 season leading Blinn College in Texas to the national junior college championship before transferring to Auburn.

- A total of 21 catches for 268 yards over the four-game playoff allowed Emeka Egbuka to become the Buckeyes’ all-time leader in receptions, finishing his career with 205. That topped the previous record of 201 held by K.J. Hill (2016-19). Egbuka came up just 30 yards short of becoming the career leader in receiving yardage, finishing with 2,868 yards. Michael Jenkins (2000-03) remains the OSU record-holder in that department with 2,898.

- Egbuka finished his career with a streak of catching at least one pass in 40 consecutive games. That is the third-longest streak in program history, trailing Hill and Gary Williams (1979-82), who each caught passes in 48 straight games.

- Jeremiah Smith shattered the program receiving records for freshmen, all held since 1984 by Cris Carter when he caught 41 passes for 648 yards and eight TDs. Smith finished his freshman season with 76 receptions for 1,315 yards and 15 touchdowns.

- Smith’s 15 touchdown catches rank second on the program’s single-season list. Only Terry Glenn, with 17 in 1995, has had more.

- TreVeyon Henderson finished his OSU career with 3,761 rushing yards, good enough for fifth on the all-time list just 7 yards behind Eddie George (3,768, 1992-95). Henderson also finished with 590 career carries, just 10 shy of joining an elite group of only eight other Buckeyes with 600 or more career rushing attempts.

- With his 83-yard scoop-and-score against Texas, Jack Sawyer now owns the longest fumble return for a touchdown by an Ohio State player since 1960. The previous mark was held by Rob Kelly, who had a 79-yard return during a 42-14 win at Purdue in 1996.



# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Knowles, Kelly Comment On Departures

Former Ohio State defensive and offensive coordinators Jim Knowles and Chip Kelly both offered their first public comments since accepting new positions with Penn State and the Las Vegas Raiders, respectively, in the days after BSB last went to press.

Perhaps the most shocking part of either coordinator's departure was Knowles' choice to accept the same position at Penn State, a team he helped Ohio State defeat three times during his three years in Columbus.

According to Knowles, the decision to go to a different Big Ten team for the same role ultimately came down to his roots as a Pennsylvania native.

"I'm grateful for my time at Ohio State and the opportunity that Coach (Ryan) Day gave me," Knowles said during his introductory Feb. 4 press conference. "We had the No. 1 defense in the country. We won a

national championship. I had great relationships with the players and with Coach Day and the administration, felt supported.

"You reach a point in your career where you're given opportunities based on past performance, and Penn State, for me, growing up in inner-city Philly, was the epitome of college football when I was a kid. I was never talented enough to make it to Penn State as a player, but given the opportunity to do it now as a coach, it's really where I want to be to continue my career and bring any expertise that I can to the organization."

Knowles, who helped Ohio State go from No. 59 in the country in total defense in 2021 to No. 1 in 2024, will now be tasked with trying to push Penn State over the hump to its first Big Ten championship since 2016.

Kelly, on the other hand, will be part of a large rebuild with the Raiders, who hired Pete Carroll to be their next head coach after three straight losing seasons under both Josh McDaniels and Antonio Pierce.

Despite the issues the Raiders have faced of late – which also include bottom-10 scoring offense finishes in 2023-24 – Kelly is optimistic about the direction the organization is headed under Carroll.

"I would only go somewhere where I felt really confident in the alignment from the ownership to the personnel to the head coach," Kelly said during his introductory press conference on Feb. 5. "I really felt that when I met with Pete."

As for his time at Ohio State, Kelly, who returns to the NFL to become the league's highest-paid coordinator, earning \$6 million

## 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, <b>34-23 loss to Ohio State</b>

\* - CFP first round

# - CFP quarterfinal at Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif.

^ - CFP semifinal at Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas

\*\* - CFP championship game in Atlanta

per year – said he is grateful he was able to play a part in the Buckeyes' historic national championship season.

"We had an amazing experience," Kelly said. "The fact that I could be a small part in that team winning a national championship was really cool. Getting a chance to watch some players that were amazing, that persevered, showed great resiliency and got a chance to say they're champions for the rest of their life was pretty cool."

## Day Makes Promotions, Hopes To Finalize Staff

Ohio State made a few adjustments to its 2025 coaching staff following the departures of Kelly, Knowles and offensive line coach Justin Frye since BSB last went to press.

On the offensive side of the ball, the Buckeyes promoted Brian Hartline to offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach, while tight ends coach Keenan Bailey added a co-offensive coordinator title to his position.

Hartline earns the promotion after having loads of success both as a recruiter and coach since being named wide receivers

coach in 2019, while Bailey's promotion comes in his ninth year on staff and just two years after being promoted from his previous role as special assistant to the head coach and offensive line quality control coach.

Bailey has experience coaching each of the five offensive position groups at Ohio State since he joined the program 2016, which will certainly aid him as he looks to gain a bigger voice on the offensive staff.

"Probably the most unsung hero on our staff, the hardest worker in the building," Day said of Bailey during the team's championship celebration on Jan. 26.

Day also promoted offensive analyst Billy Fessler to quarterbacks coach since BSB last went to press.

Fessler, a former Penn State quarterback (2014-17) who previously served as the quarterbacks coach and offensive coordinator for Akron in 2023, already has several years of experience coaching under Day. In addition to his offensive analyst role this season, he was a graduate assistant for the Buckeyes from 2020-21.

Hartline, Bailey and Fessler are part of an offensive staff that also includes offensive

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line coach Tyler Bowen, who joins the Buckeyes after serving as Virginia Tech's offensive coordinator from 2023-24.

Ohio State had yet to make a decision on a defensive coordinator as BSB went to press, but during a presentation with the Ohio High School Football Coaches Association Clinic on Feb. 7, Day said the coaching staff will be finalized sooner rather than later.

"We're still putting the finishing touches on it," Day said. "I'm hoping by this week-end or the beginning of next week, we'll have everything out there. We're making good progress. We obviously have a bunch of really good guys on staff, but a bunch of other guys who are obviously interested in the positions, so we're going to work hard to get this thing kind of ironed out here in the next few days."

**OSU Releases Spring Practice Schedule**

Ohio State announced its schedule for 2025 spring camp on Feb. 10, which will begin on March 17 and end on April 12 with a "Spring Showcase."

The Buckeyes have decided to push back spring practice two weeks later than usual, a move that Day said earlier this month was made to give his team some rest following their extended 16-game season and historic four-game run through the College Football Playoff.

Ohio State's season ended on Jan. 20 with its 34-23 win over Notre Dame and began on Aug. 30 with its season-opening win over Akron.

As for the "Spring Showcase," the team has yet to provide full details regarding what the event will exactly entail, but it appears the Buckeyes will deviate from their regular spring game plan, which has the players split up into "Scarlet" and "Gray" teams and play a scrimmage at Ohio Stadium in front of fans.

Ohio State will also hold a Buckeye Gameday Fan Fest before the spring showcase in Remembrance Park – located on the corner of Woody Hayes and Archie Griffin Drive on campus – which will feature live entertainment, food and beverages and fan activities and giveaways from 9 a.m. to noon.

The Buckeyes' four-week spring practice schedule will begin shortly after Ohio State students return from spring break – which is March 10-14 – and will have the Buckeyes practicing three times during the first week of practice and four times in each of the following three weeks, all culminating with the spring showcase April 12 that will be considered Ohio State's 15th and final spring practice.

Day said on "The Joel Klatt Show" on Feb. 3 that because of the longer season he wants to give Ohio State's veteran players fewer reps in spring practices, allowing them to rest and some of the Buckeyes' younger players who didn't get as much time on the field this season to show their worth early on.

"We also have young guys who need the work," Day said. "It's going to be a unique year."

**27 Newcomers Enroll At Ohio State**

Ohio State's incoming freshmen are eager to get to work for the 2025 season. Of the Buckeyes' 26-man 2025 recruiting

class, 21 have enrolled in the program early and will participate in winter workouts.

The only five players yet to enroll in the program are Gates Mills (Ohio) Gilmour Academy four-star tight end Brody Lennon (6-4, 225), Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony Rogers (5-8, 190), defensive tackle Maxwell Roy (6-3, 285), Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star defensive end Epi Sitanilei (6-4, 225) and Cartersville, Ga., three-star cornerback Jordyn Woods (6-4, 190).

The Buckeyes' 21 members of the 2025 class to enroll in the program early are six more than there were for the class of 2024 and 10 more than there were for the class of 2023.

The 21 freshmen are also joined by the six transfers the Buckeyes picked up in the winter portal, with offensive tackles Phillip Daniels and Ethan Onianwa, running back CJ Donaldson, defensive end Logan George, linebacker Ty Howard and tight end Max Klare all joining the team on campus, ready to participate in spring practices.

**Tressel Nominated For Ohio Lt. Gov.**

Former Ohio State coach Jim Tressel was nominated for the position of lieutenant governor by Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine on Feb. 10.

During a press conference held at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, DeWine announced his nomination of Tressel, who would replace former lieutenant governor Jon Husted if his nomination is approved by the Ohio House and Senate. Husted left his position to fill a senate seat vacated by U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance.

"He has the requisite skill sets, he has the criteria that I outlined," DeWine said. "He knows Ohio. Jim Tressel, I trust his judgment. He is a born leader."

Tressel, who retired as president of Youngstown State University last year, said DeWine's offer for the job was a "surprise for sure," one which came when DeWine visited Tressel in his northeast Ohio home earlier this month.

"I thought he was just coming to watch a couple grandkids play basketball," Tressel said of the visit.

The 72-year-old Tressel now finds himself one step away from becoming governor of Ohio if the 78-year-old DeWine is unable to lead at some point during the final two years of his term.

Although DeWine said he and Tressel have not discussed whether the former Buckeye coach would run for the governor position in 2026 to replace DeWine, who must step down from his role after his term expires due to term limits, DeWine did say that he believes Tressel is ready to take over as governor if needed.

"He will enable me to be assured that if something happens to me he can walk in and be governor that day," DeWine said.

Regardless of whether he will need to take over DeWine's role, Tressel will look to bring the athletic and academic leadership qualities he developed from his time at Ohio State and Youngstown State to the political sphere as lieutenant governor.

Tressel served as Ohio State head coach from 2001-10, leading the program to a national title in 2002 and two more champion-

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**Buckeyes In The Super Bowl**

Super Bowl (Year)	Player	Position	Team
I (1967)	Jim Tyrer	OT	Kansas City Chiefs
III (1969)	Tom Matte	RB	Baltimore Colts
	Matt Snell	RB	New York Jets
	Bob Vogel	OT	Baltimore Colts
IV (1970)	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
	Jim Tyrer	OT	Kansas City Chiefs
V (1971)	Bob Vogel	OT	Baltimore Colts
VI (1972), VII (1973)	Paul Warfield	WR	Miami Dolphins
VIII (1974)	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
	Paul Warfield	WR	Miami Dolphins
IX (1975)	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
XI (1977)	Morris Bradshaw	WR	Oakland Raiders
	Neal Colzie	DB	Oakland Raiders
	Jim Marshall	DE	Minnesota Vikings
	Jack Tatum	S	Oakland Raiders
	Lenny Willis	WR	Minnesota Vikings
XII (1978)	Randy Gradishar	LB	Denver Broncos
XIV (1980)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Los Angeles Rams
	Doug France	OT	Los Angeles Rams
XV (1981)	Morris Bradshaw	WR	Oakland Raiders
XVI (1982)	Archie Griffin	RB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Pete Johnson	RB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Ray Griffin	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
XVII (1983)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Miami Dolphins
	Tom Orosz	P	Miami Dolphins
XIX (1985)	Bob Brudzinski	LB	Miami Dolphins
	John Frank	TE	San Francisco 49ers
	Pete Johnson	RB	Miami Dolphins
XX (1986)	Shaun Gayle	DB	Chicago Bears
	Mike Tomczak	QB	Chicago Bears
XXI (1987)	Pepper Johnson	LB	New York Giants
	William Roberts	OG	New York Giants
XXIII (1989)	John Frank	TE	San Francisco 49ers
XXV (1991)	Pepper Johnson	LB	New York Giants
	William Roberts	OG	New York Giants
XXVI (1992)	Jim Lachey	OT	Washington Redskins
	Joe Staysniak	OT	Buffalo Bills
XXX (1996)	Mike Tomczak	QB	Pittsburgh Steelers
XXXI (1997)	Keith Byars	FB	New England Patriots
	Terry Glenn	WR	New England Patriots
	William Roberts	OG	New England Patriots
	Tom Tupa	P	New England Patriots
XXXIII (1999)	Tito Paul	DB	Denver Broncos
	William White	DB	Atlanta Falcons
XXXIV (2000)	Eddie George	RB	Tennessee Titans
	Joe Germaine	QB	St. Louis Rams
	Orlando Pace	OT	St. Louis Rams
	Chris Sanders	WR	Tennessee Titans
	Lorenzo Styles	LB	St. Louis Rams
XXXV (2001)	Joe Montgomery	RB	New York Giants
XXXVI (2002)	Orlando Pace	OT	St. Louis Rams
	Ryan Pickett	DT	St. Louis Rams
	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XXXVII (2003)	Rickey Dudley	TE	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
	Tom Tupa	P	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
XXXVIII (2004)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
	Nick Goings	RB	Carolina Panthers
XXXIX (2005)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XLII (2008)	Mike Vrabel	LB	New England Patriots
XLIII (2009)	Santonio Holmes (MVP)	WR	Pittsburgh Steelers
XLIV (2010)	Malcolm Jenkins	CB	New Orleans Saints
	Will Smith	DE	New Orleans Saints
XLV (2011)	Will Allen	DB	Pittsburgh Steelers
	A.J. Hawk	LB	Green Bay Packers
	Ryan Pickett	DT	Green Bay Packers
	Matt Wilhelm	LB	Green Bay Packers
XLVI (2012)	Jake Ballard	TE	New York Giants
	Jim Cordle	C	New York Giants
XLVII (2013)	Alex Boone	OT	San Francisco 49ers
	Larry Grant	LB	San Francisco 49ers
	Ted Ginn Jr.	WR	San Francisco 49ers
	Donte Whitner	S	San Francisco 49ers
XLIX (2015)	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
50 (2016)	Corey "Philly" Brown	WR	Carolina Panthers
	Kurt Coleman	S	Carolina Panthers
	Ted Ginn Jr.	WR	Carolina Panthers
	Andrew Norwell	OG	Carolina Panthers
	Bradley Roby	CB	Denver Broncos
LI (2017)	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
LII (2018)	Malcolm Jenkins	DB	Philadelphia Eagles
LIII (2019)	Jake McQuaid	LS	Los Angeles Rams
	Nate Ebner	DB	New England Patriots
	John Simon	DE	New England Patriots
LIV (2020)	Nick Bosa	DE	San Francisco 49ers
	Darron Lee	LB	Kansas City Chiefs
LVI (2022)	Eli Apple	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Vonn Bell	DB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Joe Burrow	QB	Cincinnati Bengals
	Sam Hubbard	DL	Cincinnati Bengals
	Isaiah Prince	OL	Cincinnati Bengals
	Jordan Fuller	DB	Los Angeles Rams
LVII (2023)	Trey Sermon	RB	Philadelphia Eagles
LVIII (2024)	Nick Bosa	DE	San Francisco 49ers
	Chase Young	DE	San Francisco 49ers
LIX (2025)	Parris Campbell	WR	Philadelphia Eagles



# OHIO STATE INSIDER

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ship game appearances in 2007-08 during that span. After resigning in 2011 following "Tattoogate," Tressel progressed into an administrative career and ultimately became the president of Youngstown State, a position he held for almost nine years before retiring in early 2023.

## Day Appears On Kelly Clarkson, Tonight Show

Before getting into full work mode for the 2025 season, Day spent his late January fully soaking in the program's first national championship win since the 2014 season by making the rounds on talk shows.

During an appearance on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" on Jan. 27, Day talked about several topics including the end of the win over Notre Dame when he launched his headset into the stands before his players dumped Gatorade on him.

"When you're at the end of the game, you're so close you want to see it end," Day said. "Then all of a sudden when you realize you've won, it's like, 'Get this headset off of me,' and I threw it. I'm lucky I didn't hit anybody in the crowd because there's weight on that too. Then I turned around – and I forgot about the Gatorade bath, because you're not thinking about any of those things – and then they surprised me with it and it was a great feeling."

The biggest topic of discussion during a couple of Day's talk-show appearances was a golf cart mishap after the game. With Day, quarterback Will Howard and linebacker Cody Simon riding in a cart on their way to postgame press conferences, a worker crashed the cart into a wall outside the locker room.

Luckily, everyone riding on the cart was fine, and while he made an appearance on "The Kelly Clarkson Show" on Jan. 29, Day got a good laugh from the audience while reharsing the postgame crash.

"Talk about coming down to earth," Day said. "I was more stressed on the cart ride than at the end of the game."

## No Buckeye Sports Bulletin Print For Three Weeks

The next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the March 8 issue, is not scheduled to be mailed until March 4, three weeks from the mailing of this issue. There is bound to be plenty of Buckeye news between now and that next issue, with spring football and the men's and women's basketball postseason rapidly approaching. Just a reminder, the complete print schedule for BSB, including the mailing date of the next issue, is always printed at the bottom of the credit box on page three.

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

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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 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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If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access. If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com or the BSB print schedule, feel free to call us at the above number

## "Champions Way" Placed On Campus

The Buckeyes' national championship has been recognized with a new "Champions Way" street sign, which was officially placed on the intersection of Lane Avenue and High Street on Ohio State's campus on Jan. 30.

The street sign was presented to the team along with a key to the city from Columbus mayor Andrew Ginther during the Buckeyes' championship celebration.

The university started the tradition of renaming the intersection after a Buckeye football championship win in 2002 following Ohio State's BCS national title game victory over Miami (Fla.) when it was renamed "Champions Lane."

"Champions Lane" then turned into "Undisputed Way" after the Buckeyes' 2014 national title win, which had stood for a decade up until Day and Ohio State's recent championship.

## Clark, Phillips Leave For SEC Jobs

Ohio State lost two more members of its 2024 national championship support staff since BSB last went to press. Former graduate assistant LaAllan Clark was hired by Texas to serve as the program's outside linebackers coach, while the Buckeyes' former director of recruiting and special events, Morgan Phillips, was hired by LSU in a senior recruiting role.

Shortly after the news was first reported by CBS Sports' Matt Zenitz on Feb. 2, Clark made a farewell post to Ohio State on Twitter.

"Thank you Ohio State for these past two years and all the relationships that were made!!" Clark said in a post that included two pictures of him with the College Football Playoff national championship trophy. "Thankful God gave me a chance to become a Buckeye!!"

Clark leaves Ohio State after spending two years as a defensive line graduate assistant, where he helped mold a talented defensive front that helped the team finish the 2024 season ranked third in rushing defense at 87.6 yards allowed per game and second in team sacks with 53.

The former college defensive end at Grambling State and Northwestern State began his coaching career in 2019 at Prairie View A&M

Clark – who is the CEO of LC Performance, a football training organization that has helped mold some of the NFL's best pass rushers such as Danielle Hunter, Ed Oliver and Jeffrey Simmons, among others – will bring his expertise to a Texas defense that ranked third in the country in scoring defense last season after giving up only 15.3 points per game.

As the director of recruiting and special events, Phillips was responsible for overseeing all on-campus recruiting activities at Ohio State, which included executing all unofficial visits, official visits, gameday recruiting, junior days, recruiting ambassadors and special events according to her bio.

Phillips previously spent the 2023 season with LSU as a recruiting operations coordinator before her one-year tenure with the Buckeyes.

Clark and Phillips are two of seven departures from Ohio State's coaching and support staff this season including fellow graduate assistant Mike Sollenne (UNLV), offensive assistant Riley Larkin (New England Patriots), Frye, Kelly and Knowles.

## Former OSU Coach Ash Hired By Irish

Less than two weeks after losing to Ohio State in the national championship game, Notre Dame hired former Buckeye co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash as its defensive coordinator.

Ash, who helped make the Buckeyes' defense a championship unit in 2014 along

with fellow co-defensive coordinator Luke Fickell, left the program after the 2015 season to become Rutgers' head coach.

Ash had only an 8-32 record as the leader of the Scarlet Knights' program and was fired midway through his fourth season.

The former Buckeye assistant landed on his feet as a defensive analyst at Texas in 2019 and became the Longhorns' defensive coordinator the next year. Since then, Ash has spent four seasons in the NFL and most recently was a scout for the Jaguars in 2024.

Ash will now take over for Al Golden, who accepted the same position with the Cincinnati Bengals after leading the Fighting Irish to a top-five finish in scoring defense (15.5 points per game, tied for fourth) and 11th in total defense (307.4 yards per game) under former Buckeye linebacker and current Notre Dame head coach Marcus Freeman.

"Chris' experience of coordinating and leading great defensive units at multiple places really resonated with me," Freeman said. "His experience both in the NFL and as a head coach are valuable assets he can bring to our program. Chris has a great reputation of being a coach who builds strong relationships, while simultaneously developing his players, and that makes him a great fit for this role."

## Former Buckeyes Find New Homes

A pair of former Buckeyes found new homes out of the transfer portal since BSB last went to press.

Former Ohio State defensive lineman Hero Kanu, who spent the last three years in Columbus, announced his commitment to Texas on Jan. 29 while former Buckeye tight end Patrick Gurd stayed in-state by committing to Cincinnati on Jan. 27.

Kanu, a former four-star recruit out of Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif., played in 15 of the Buckeyes' 16 games in 2024 but was stuck behind starting defensive tackles Ty-leik Williams and Ty Hamilton. He received only 123 defensive snaps for the season.

Kanu recorded 14 total tackles and a sack during his tenure with Ohio State, and four of those tackles came this season as a redshirt sophomore.

Despite Kanu's departure from the program and Hamilton and Williams headed to



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

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

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

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

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

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the draft, the Buckeyes will still have options in the middle of their defensive line including five-star Eddrick Houston, Kayden McDonald and Tywone Malone Jr. among others.

Gurd will have one year of eligibility remaining at Cincinnati after spending five seasons with the Buckeyes. Most of his playing time was spent on special teams over that span, but he did catch one pass for 6 yards in 2024 and also got in for occasional blocking situations near the goal line.

He joins another former Buckeye in the tight end room with the Bearcats after Joe Royer – who has spent one season with Cincinnati catching 50 passes for 521 yards and three touchdowns – transferred away from Ohio State after last season.

He also joins former Ohio State running back Evan Pryor and safety Kye Stokes, who both also transferred to Cincinnati last offseason.

## Ohio State Reports \$38 Million Deficit In 2024

According to an annual financial state-

ment sent to the NCAA, Ohio State's athletic department reported a nearly \$38 million deficit for the 2024 fiscal year.

Ohio State reported \$292,670,315 in expenses compared to \$254,933,664 in revenue. That marks a nearly \$25 million decline from the school-record \$279,549,337 it brought in during the 2023 fiscal year.

One factor for the Buckeyes' lack of revenue in the 2024 fiscal year (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024) was that Ohio Stadium hosted just six Buckeye football games that season. Ohio State's ticket sales represented \$58.8 million of its reported revenue, according to the report.

Ohio State said in its report that it expected the deficit and planned to cover it with past earnings, reserve funds and anticipated future earnings.

Helping with the budget in the 2025 fiscal year will be the nine home football games the Buckeyes played during the 2024 season, which included a College Football Playoff game and an increase in TV, radio and digital media revenue going into effect

because of the new seven-year, \$7 billion media rights deal the Big Ten signed with Fox, CBS and NBC.

"While last year's budget impact is not ideal and there were unique circumstances at play, we have a robust expense and revenue plan that has been implemented and have made great progress in this ever-changing landscape of college athletics," Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork said to reporters after the championship celebration. "We will make sure we operate with a balanced budget moving forward."

Bjork alluded to the Buckeyes' athletic department having a \$300 million budget in the 2025 fiscal year, when schools will be permitted to share revenue with student-athletes. Bjork said previously that the school plans to share \$20.5 million annually in revenue with student-athletes.

## Three Buckeyes Named Academic All-Americans

Three national championship-winning Buckeyes, offensive lineman Donovan Jack-

son, running back Quinshon Judkins and center Seth McLaughlin, were rewarded for their success in the classroom on Jan. 28 when they were each named Academic All-Americans by the College Sports Communicators.

McLaughlin, who graduated summa cum laude from Alabama in 2½ years with a 4.0 grade-point average, was a first-team Academic All-American along with Jackson, while Judkins earned second-team honors.

Jackson and McLaughlin join a list of just two other Buckeyes who were named first-team All-American and Academic All-Americans in one season, joining Bob White in 1958 and Randy Gradishar in 1973. They were also the seventh-ever tandem to earn those distinctions, with the last duo to do so being center Jacoby Boren and kicker Jack Willoughby in 2015.

Jackson earned the academic honor after finishing with a 3.68 overall GPA and graduating with a degree in sport industry in December. He completed his academic

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career at Ohio State with three Academic All-Big Ten honors and three OSU Scholar-Athlete awards.

McLaughlin – who also took home the Rimington Award as the nation's top center in his one season with the Buckeyes before going down with a torn Achilles late in the season – earned his second straight Academic All-American honor while working on his third degree in human development and family services at Ohio State. He earned an undergraduate degree in finance and then a master's degree in sport hospitality management during his time at Alabama.

Judkins also excelled both on the field and in the classroom in his one year at Ohio State. The former Ole Miss Rebel had a 3.64 GPA as a human development and family sciences major this past fall before declaring for the 2025 NFL draft on Jan. 24.

Will Howard, wide receiver Brandon Inness and punter Joe McGuire were also honored for their academic efforts by making the Academic All-District team. Nominees for that honor must be at least a sophomore

academically and carry a cumulative grade-point average of 3.50.

### Campbell Earns Super Bowl Ring

Former Ohio State receiver Parris Campbell won his first Super Bowl ring on Feb. 9 when the Philadelphia Eagles defeated the Kansas City Chiefs 40-22 at the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans.

Campbell, who played at Ohio State from 2014-18 and totaled 143 career catches for 1,768 yards and 15 touchdowns, did not record a statistic in the Eagles' win but did receive some snaps.

He becomes the 33rd different Buckeye to win a Super Bowl and the first to play snaps for the winning team in the game since Nate Ebner and John Simon suited up for the New England Patriots during their win over the Los Angeles Rams in 2019.

Campbell did not play a significant role in the Eagles' championship run this season, totaling just six catches for 30 yards and a touchdown in five games, but he reaches the pinnacle of his football career during a season that began with him contemplating

retirement after the Eagles placed him on their practice squad in August.

"I've seen it all the way through," he told the Akron Beacon Journal on Feb. 4. "And now we're here in the Super Bowl.

If Campbell decides to keep playing next season, he will look to earn his second championship in his seventh NFL season. The former second-round draft pick has totaled 123 catches for 1,117 yards and six touchdowns in his first six seasons with three different teams.

### OSU Staffer Placed On Administrative Leave

Ohio State placed defensive quality control coach Joe Lyberger on administrative leave in late December following an investigation by the university's Office of Institutional Equity, which handles complaints of harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct.

A letter sent to Lyberger on Dec. 27 from Ohio State's human resources department – which was obtained by Buckeye Sports Bulletin on Jan. 29 via a public records request – said his leave was to take effect immedi-

ately and he would not be allowed in Ohio State's facilities while on leave. This means that he wasn't with the program for Ohio State's final three College Football Playoff games.

The letter did not offer further details on the allegations that led to the investigation.

"My client and I take any allegation of wrongdoing very seriously," Sam Shaman-sky, an attorney representing Lyberger, told The Columbus Dispatch. "We respect the process whereby those who are accused have the opportunity to defend themselves, and we look forward to the opportunity."

Lyberger, whose salary was \$72,100 in 2024 according to university salary data, has been placed on leave with pay.

He was in his fourth year on Ohio State's coaching staff after previously serving in defensive assistant roles at Bucknell and Ohio Dominican University. The Slippery Rock graduate and former Olentangy High School assistant wrestling coach worked primarily with the linebackers while with the Buckeyes.

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago – 1985

After defeating Minnesota 64-58 in front of 784 Gopher fans in Minneapolis, Ohio State coach Tara VanDerveer took her eighth-ranked Buckeyes to Iowa City and stood up to a challenge of 22,157 fans in attendance, a crowd that never before had been seen in women's collegiate basketball, or for that matter any level of women's basketball. Ohio State won the game 56-47, improving to 9-0 on the season.

The game pitted the Big Ten's first- and second-place teams and Iowa coach Vivian Stringer had decided early in the week that an attempt to break the women's NCAA attendance record was in order.

The previous record had been 10,622 for a game played between Kentucky and Old Dominion on Feb. 5, 1983, in Rupp Arena at Lexington, Ky. Iowa's own home attendance record was 7,130, set against Northwestern the previous season.

"Vivian (Stringer) wrote a letter to the newspapers and made it a challenge," VanDerveer said of the record-breaking scheme. "Maybe the guys (Big Ten men) are used to it, but the place was wall-to-wall people. We had kind of been preparing for it. When we were here last year, I told our kids we would have 10,000 next year. But I never expected this."

### 35 Years Ago – 1990

Ohio State junior 134-pounder Mark Marinelli didn't find wrestling. Wrestling found him.

Marinelli was the seventh of eight boys in a family of 10 children. All the boys wrestled at one time or another, but only one brother made it to the collegiate level.

Mark tried other sports early in his career such as soccer and baseball, but once he stepped on the mats to wrestle for Columbus DeSales High School, he was hooked.

"When I was younger, I took to wrestling more than the other sports I played," Marinelli said. "I was all right at the others. I was too small to play football, and when I got to high school I was too small to play anything else. But I wrestled at 119 pounds and liked it immediately, from about ninth or 10th grade."

Marinelli was slowly but surely turning into one of the great ones. His two-year record coming into the season was 50-22-2, while that season, his record stood at 20-3-1 through Jan. 20.

### 30 Years Ago – 1995

Ohio State head football coach John Cooper filled one of the vacancies on his coaching staff by hiring a familiar face on Jan. 17.

Lovie Smith, a former player and coach under Cooper at Tulsa, was hired as OSU's new defensive backs coach. Larry Coker, who had held that post the previous two years, moved over to take the quarterbacks coaching spot vacated by the firing of Ron Hudson earlier that month.

Smith, 36, had served as defensive backfield coach at Tennessee the previous two years. Prior to that, he was an assistant coach at Kentucky in 1992, Arizona State from 1988-91, Wisconsin in 1987 and Tulsa from 1983-86. Smith played under Cooper at Tulsa from 1977-79.

"Lovie and I go back a long time, and I'm glad we'll be working together again," Cooper said. "He is a talented young coach who has gained a lot of experience since his playing days, and I look forward to him joining our staff."

### 25 Years Ago – 2000

Men's basketball head coach Jim O'Brien's suddenly formidable wrecking crew dumped 10th-ranked Michigan State in Value City Arena on Jan. 20, 78-67, then rubbed out No. 19 St. John's on Jan. 22, 65-64. The latter victory, especially considering it was the product of an unforeseen blitz in the final minutes, seemed like icing to the Buckeyes (13-3, 4-1 Big Ten). The win over league rival MSU – which had previously won 21 straight Big Ten games – was the real treat.

"This says that the preseason hype about us being contenders in the Big Ten is true," OSU point guard Scoonie Penn said moments after dribbling out the clock in the win over the Spartans. "I really think we're one of the teams that's going to be around the top throughout the Big Ten season. To remain there we're going to need to win big games like this tonight."

### 20 Years Ago – 2005

Several members of the Ohio State football team were still picking brightly colored confetti out their hair after the Alamo Bowl win when free safety Nate Salley streaked by on his way to the locker room.

"Rose Bowl next year, baby!" Salley screamed to no one in particular. "Rose Bowl next year!"

Obviously, winning the Big Ten championship and earning the right to represent the Big Ten in the Rose Bowl was always the goal for any Ohio State team. But a year later, the game would take on even more meaning. The Rose Bowl would be the site of the Bowl Championship Series national title game.

Salley might have been forgiven for a bit of youthful exuberance in the wake of the Buckeyes' manhandling of Oklahoma State on that late December evening in San Antonio. But a quick look at the depth chart of returning players for 2005 revealed that Salley might not be that far off-base, with eight players who started for the Buckeyes on offense in the Alamo Bowl and nine more who started on defense returning for the 2005 season.

### 15 Years Ago – 2010

In his first interview since a performance many viewed as his coming-out party, Ohio State quarterback Terelle Pryor opened up about his burgeoning role as a leader as well as a lingering injury.

"I think it's time for me to be a leader on and off the field," Pryor told The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer on Jan. 24. "Off the field during workouts and stuff, I need to take the reins, and when we get back on the field, I need to take the reins of the offense."

"We have to move the tempo a little bit more and get the coaches to trust us throwing the ball and put points on the board like we did our last game."

That kind of talk fired up Buckeye fans who reveled in Pryor's performance during his team's 26-17 Rose Bowl win over Oregon when Pryor completed 23 of 37 passes for 266 yards and two touchdowns against the Ducks and added another 72 net yards on the ground on 20 carries.

### 10 Years Ago – 2015

Ohio State's hire of quarterbacks coach/co-offensive coordinator Tim Beck in mid-January knocked off all of the check marks Meyer was looking for in replacing former offensive coordinator

Tom Herman on the staff.

An innovative offensive mind with experience running the spread offense? Check.

An Ohioan with an intimate knowledge of Ohio State's traditions? Check.

Someone with recruiting ties in Texas, where Herman had successfully set up roots for Meyer's program? Check.

"He's an Ohio guy, No. 1, so I don't have to explain the rivalry to him," Meyer said of the Youngstown native during his signing day radio show. "I've known him for quite a while. He's got Texas roots in recruiting. He has northeast Ohio roots, obviously, because that's where he's from. He ran a very good offense, borderline great at times, at Nebraska, and I loved watching his teams play."

### Five Years Ago – 2020

Ohio State had an unusually high number of its 2020 signees enroll in January, with 14 of the 25 members of the class joining the program at the start of the year rather than the traditional June start. The early enrollees got the benefit of winter workouts, which were under way since early January, much to the delight of Mickey Marotti, Ohio State's director of strength and conditioning.

"They came mentally ready for what's coming," Marotti said. "They came focused. They're into it. It's a really good group. We just had a meeting, and everybody in our department talked about how well the freshmen were doing taking care of their business. You're talking about the largest midyear group that I've ever been a part of."

While the extra time on campus could serve as a way for Ohio State to work new players in the program at a slower pace than usual, the learning curve of a new workout regimen was still steep for the true freshmen.

"They're definitely challenging," cornerback Lejond Cavazos said. "They push you to a level that you didn't know you had. It's really intense, and it's really competitive."

### One Year Ago – 2024

As rumors began to emerge in early February about former offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Bill O'Brien leaving Ohio State for Boston College, head coach Ryan Day said on Feb. 7 that he and the program had plans to retain the longtime offensive coach but had plans in place should he depart.

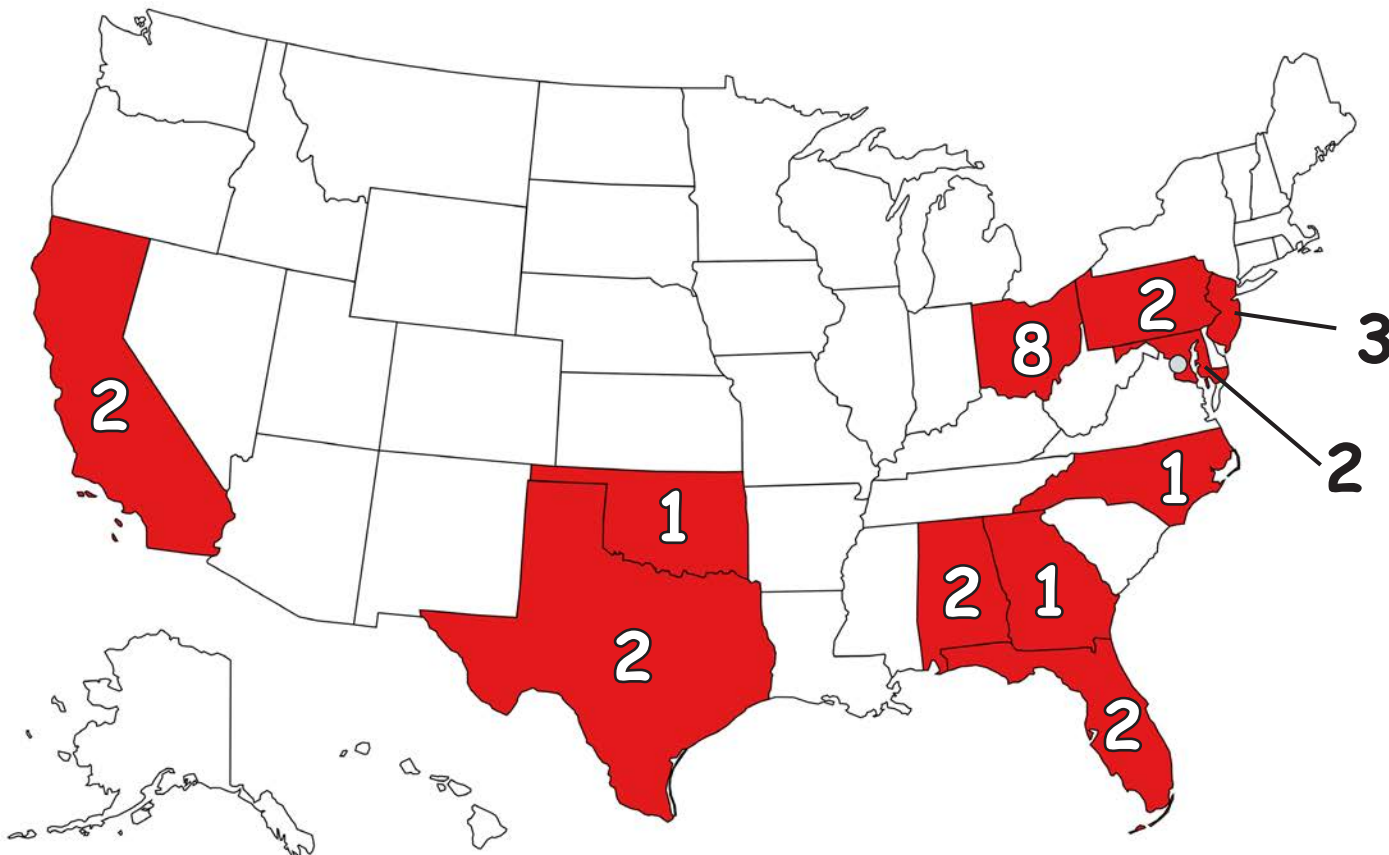
"It isn't just one of those situations where you just take out one guy and put another guy in there and it's like, 'OK, move on.' It doesn't work that way," Day said. "We did talk to different people for that position, and we'll have contingency plans in place. Hopefully, we don't have to go down that road. But if we do, then we'll adapt."

That plan became obvious in the hours following the news of O'Brien's departure to become Boston College's head coach, when the team quickly pivoted and hired the longtime offensive-minded coach and former UCLA head coach Chip Kelly to fill the position with the team officially announcing the hiring – which included a three-year deal through 2026 – later that night.

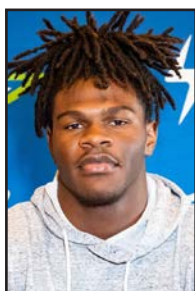
"We are extremely excited to have Chip and his wife, Jill, joining our program," Day said. "His experience as a head coach at Oregon, UCLA and in the NFL will bring immediate value to our entire team. I am really looking forward to reconnecting with Chip, introducing him to our staff and team and chasing a championship together."



# OSU's Class Of 2025



All rankings from the 247Sports composite. All statistics provided by Ohio State and MaxPreps.



## TARVOS ALFORD

LB • 6-2 • 210  
Vero Beach, Fla.  
Rank: LB 13, Overall 143, FL 22



**ACCOLADES:** Had 112 tackles in 12 games in his senior season, 12 for loss, 4½ sacks, 16 quarterback hurries, two pass breakups and a fumble recovery. Was TC Palm's Defensive Player of the Year his junior season and led Vero Beach to the regional semifinal of Florida's 4A playoffs.

**ALFORD SAYS:** "Everybody that wants to be great sees what I see, that if you come to Ohio State it's not going to be easy. It's not going to be the easy way out. You're going to have to work for everything you have, but you're going to know at the end that you came out a better person and a better football player."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Tackle machine that floats around the second level looking for opportunities to shoot in and make stops. Follows his blocking keys to the action and will meet ball carriers with plenty of force in the hole, usually unloading through the hips. Has proven to be an above-average athlete on passing downs that can drop back and cover up a zone. Projects as a potential multi-year starter and possible impact player at the Power Four level that can stuff the stat sheet and help slow down the run." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Also ran track in high school, qualifying for regionals as a sophomore. He ran personal bests of 11.67 seconds in the 100-meter dash and 23.88 seconds in the 200-meter dash. Parents are Barbara Minnis and Tarvos Alford.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 30, 2024.



## PHILLIP BELL

WR • 6-1 • 195  
Mission Viejo, Calif.  
Rank: WR 35, Overall 274, CA 23



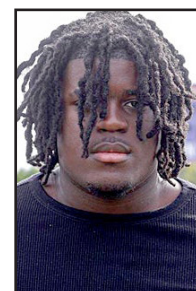
**ACCOLADES:** Caught 56 passes for 644 yards and seven touchdowns as a junior. Helped his team win the CIF Division 1-AA title.

**BELL SAYS:** "I really love the coaching staff. Coach (Brian) Hartline has produced multiple first-round picks at receiver the last three or four years, and that's exciting. Ryan Day is a great head coach, an offensive-minded head coach, and they always have great quarterback play at Ohio State. You know every year there they're going to have a five-star quarterback running the offense, and that's big for me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He has an athletic frame with plenty of length, excellent ball skills and high-level body control. Is more quick than fast but is an extremely good route runner and is able to get easy separation down the field. Uses his strength to body smaller corners and does a nice job catching the ball through contact. Runs well after the catch and has always been very strong in the red zone because of his jump-ball ability." – Greg Biggins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Posted an 11.83 second time in the 100-meter dash in track as a freshman. His late mother is Samantha Barnes and aunt is Serena Chao.

**COMMIT DATE:** Aug. 31, 2024.



## JARQUEZ CARTER

DL • 6-2 • 285  
Newberry, Fla.  
Rank: DL 18, Overall 197, FL 31



**ACCOLADES:** Finished his senior season with 84 tackles, 48 tackles for loss, 17 sacks, 25 quarterback hurries and four passes defended.

**CARTER SAYS:** "I'd say I'm a pass-rush first type of guy. I get off the ball really fast and use violent hands. I'm not going to stop until the play is over with."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Equipped with shorter arms but makes up for the lack of length with his active hands and short-area movement skills. Quick to get into blockers and flashes some impressive knock-back power for someone his size. Keeps the legs pumping and is the type of defender that's always looking to take out the trash as he's frequently making stops in pursuit. Projects best as a 3-technique in a 4-3 front that can provide valuable minutes in a Power Four rotation after a few developmental years." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Carter was a multi-sport athlete at Newberry, also competing in basketball along with football. He is the son of Jillisa Carter.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 18, 2024.





**JAKE COOK**

IOL • 6-5 • 295  
Westerville (Ohio) North  
Rank: IOL 23, Overall 376, OH 16



**ACCOLADES:** Has played all five positions on the offensive line in high school, helping Westerville North to back-to-back winning seasons in his last two years.

**COOK SAYS:** "Ohio State is a huge school for development. You play against the best. You go in and be developed by the best. It's every kid's dream who grows up an Ohio State fan to play football at Ohio State."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Has experience at tackle, but projects to the inside in college, with center a very likely landing spot. Has done an excellent job of re-shaping his body and getting quicker. Plays with tenacity, demonstrates violence with his hands and plays to the whistle. Still can continue to work on explosiveness and agility but has made great strides in those departments. Has excellent intangibles and those qualities along with his development trajectory should make him a safe bet to contribute in college and work his way into a starting position." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Was a two-sport athlete at Westerville North, playing football and wrestling. Was an all-conference wrestler as a junior. Played for former Ohio State quarterback Stanley Jackson, the coach at his high school. He is the son of Kelly and Anthony Cook.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 23, 2024.



**FAHEEM DELANE**

SAF • 6-3 • 205  
Olney (Md.) Our Lady Of Good Counsel  
Rank: SAF 5, Overall 55, MD 2



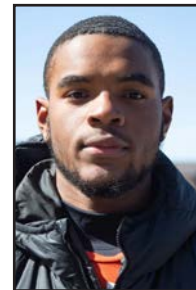
**ACCOLADES:** Named the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference Player of the Year as a senior with 97 tackles, seven for loss, two sacks and three interceptions in 12 games.

**DELANE SAYS:** "I was really excited (to get an offer), because Ohio State, that's definitely one of the DBUs. Jeff Okudah, Marshon Lattimore and Malik Hooker all came from there. So many more in the history of the program with DBs going to the NFL. To get that offer was just an honor."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "An aggressive back-seven defender that can cover the pass, defend the run, and get home on the blitz. Quick to trigger and tends to play with tons of confidence. Has been utilized primarily as a box safety and a slot corner at the prep level and found plenty of success in both roles. Physical more times than not and always looking to deliver a blow. Serviceable in man-to-man situations." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Has an older brother, Mansoor Delane, who is a defensive back at Virginia Tech and was a freshman All-American in 2022. His parents are Medina and Jafau Delane.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 9, 2024.



**ZION GRADY**

DE • 6-4 • 240  
Enterprise, Ala.  
Rank: DE 9, Overall 81, AL 5



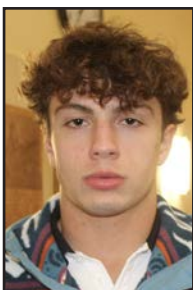
**ACCOLADES:** Played his junior season at Charles Henderson High School, helping the team to a state runner-up finish with 87 tackles, 24 for loss, 11 sacks and an interception. Played in the 2025 Navy All-American Bowl after adding another 54 tackles, 10 tackles for loss and 11 sacks.

**GRADY SAYS:** "Coach (Larry) Johnson really impressed me with his presentation and knowledge. He really has high expectations for me and a plan to help me achieve that. The coaching staff is A-1, the facility is great and people in Ohio are great."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Grady has a quick first step and the power to complement his speed, making him a mismatch for the majority of offensive tackles he's faced in the Alabama prep circuit. He's lined up both as a standing edge and in the traditional three-point stance with his hand in the ground. There are no shortage of pass-rush moves in Grady's arsenal, as he consistently sends offensive linemen scrambling following his spin moves." – Garrick Hodge, Eleven Warriors

**PERSONAL:** Originally committed to Alabama on Nov. 12, 2023, but decommitted after head coach Nick Saban announced his retirement. He is the son of Yunaka Brown.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 24, 2024.



**CODY HADDAD**

SAF • 6-0 • 175  
Cleveland St. Ignatius  
Rank: SAF 45, Overall 518, OH 19



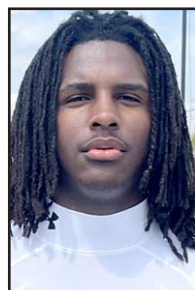
**ACCOLADES:** As a two-way player at St. Ignatius, playing wide receiver, safety and taking punt and kick returns, Haddad had 167 receiving yards and three touchdowns along with 32 tackles and four interceptions in just four games in his junior season. In five games in 2024, he had 45 tackles, a pass break up and a forced fumble.

**HADDAD SAYS:** "I like coming down hill and fitting holes and just having space to roam and do my thing. I kind of like being the brains of the defense. I like being the one responsible for everything. If a touchdown happens, it's also on me because they got past me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Shows good instincts and will come into the box and support the run but also shows he can match-up on receivers and play some man. Has a track background and that shows up with his ability to close on the ball. Receiver background shows up with ball skills. Plays physical football but still needs to add more weight and strength which will aid in playing that style in college." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Was a three-sport athlete in high school, also playing baseball and running track. His father, Drew Haddad, was drafted by the Buffalo Bills as the 233rd overall pick in the 2000 NFL draft (seventh round) after setting records as a wide receiver at the University of Buffalo.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 13, 2024.



**BO JACKSON**

RB • 6-0 • 210  
Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph  
Rank: RB 10, Overall 160, OH 6



**ACCOLADES:** In four games in his senior season, Jackson had 588 yards and 10 touchdowns before he was injured. Ran for nearly 1,700 yards and had 29 total touchdowns in his junior year.

**JACKSON SAYS:** "I didn't know if I was going to commit, really. But then I got here, and I felt the family atmosphere with the players and the coaches. The location is right down the street, and I love what they've got going on in the program. I'm real comfortable here."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Jackson is both a powerful runner and a talented pass catcher and will bring a mean streak to Ohio State's rushing attack. He's talented enough that he could vie for early playing time in 2025, though James Peoples will be one year ahead of him. Jackson has elite acceleration and can run between the tackles or in an outside zone. Arm tackles aren't going to get the job done against Jackson, who scored nearly 30 touchdowns and ran for 1,700 yards in his junior season." – Garrick Hodge, Eleven Warriors

**PERSONAL:** Was a three-sport athlete in high school, also running track – a sport in which he was a regional qualifier – and playing baseball. He is the son of Andria and Lamar Jackson.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 4, 2024.



**DE'ZIE JONES**

WR • 6-0 • 195  
Wayne (N.J.)  
DePaul Catholic  
Rank: WR 51, Overall 368, NJ 8



**ACCOLADES:** Totaled more than 3,000 receiving yards throughout his high school career, highlighted by a senior season in which he scored 15 touchdowns and averaged a career-best 17.0 yards per reception, helping lead his team to a state championship. Set the DePaul Catholic record for receiving yards in a season when he was a sophomore with 1,003 yards through the air.

**JONES SAYS:** "You have to be smart. You have to be able to get open, route running too. At a high level, you have to catch and you have to be able to block because you're going against linebackers in that slot position. You have to be strong. They produce the best receivers over there. They prove that. And they produce nice DBs, so going against top DBs every day will get me better."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "We signed him early. We think he's another versatile guy that can line up inside and line up outside. He does a lot of great things." – Ryan Day, Ohio State head coach

**PERSONAL:** Was teammates with fellow 2025 signee DeShawn Stewart at DePaul Catholic. He is the son of Noyshemah Mann and Frank Jones Jr.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 30, 2024.





**ELI LEE**

LB • 6-3 • 230

Akron Hoban

Rank: LB 64, Overall 588, OH 23



**ACCOLADES:** Was the Division II co-Defensive Player of the Year for the Northeast Ohio Inland District his senior season with 119 tackles, 19 for loss, 7½ sacks, four pass breakups, two forced fumbles and an interception in the regular season.

**LEE SAYS:** "You have to make plays. But you have to know that it's a team sport, so it's kind of more so you have to be vocal, but honestly lead by example. I mean, you've got their back, you've got to have your defense's back especially because you're the quarterback of the defense if you're the Mike. They are relying on you."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Lee is a hard-hitter who runs to the ball very well and is a good tackler. He plays the game hard and with a good motor. He has a chance to get game reps as a freshman. By his second season I think he can at least be in the two-deep and possibly be a starter. I think Lee has the ability and the potential be a key contributor on the Buckeyes' defense and a 'difference maker' and eventually play in the NFL." – Bill Kurelic, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** He is the son of Cassie and Ben Lee.

**COMMIT DATE:** Oct. 25, 2023.



**BRODY LENNON**

TE • 6-4 • 225

Gates Mills (Ohio)  
Gilmour Academy

Rank: TE 17, Overall 324 OH 11



**ACCOLADES:** Lennon hauled in 30 catches for 601 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns during his senior season at Gilmour Academy. He led the Lancers to a 12-2 record and was the No. 1-ranked tight end in Ohio.

**LENNON SAYS:** "Getting an offer at Ohio State was definitely special. It's always been on my bucket list to play for Ohio State. When I first went to camp, I didn't know if I was going to get an offer or not. But it was definitely exciting to get the offer because it's been my dream school ever since I was a little kid and I've grown up watching them my entire life."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Brody is very, very talented, can do a lot of things. He has a great skill set. He has a really big upside, we feel. So again, another upgrade there in the tight end room, which we know is a huge part of our offense." – Ryan Day, Ohio State head coach

**PERSONAL:** Lennon was a multi-sport athlete at Gilmour Academy, competing in the 200-meter, 400-meter, discus and shot put events as a track athlete. He also was a two-way player during his high school days and tallied 13 sacks and 25 tackles for loss in his junior season. He is the son of Michelle and Patrick Lennon.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 27, 2024.



**CARTER LOWE**

OT • 6-5 • 320

Toledo Whitmer

Rank: OT 11, Overall 74, OH 4



**ACCOLADES:** Lowe was named first-team All-Ohio by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association as a senior after helping lead Toledo Whitmer to a 9-3 record and a trip to the second round of the state playoffs. He helped pave the way for a Panthers offense that averaged 36.5 points per game in 2024.

**LOWE SAYS:** "The day they offered they really made me feel like a priority as soon as they offered. They never let up. They really made me feel like a 'must-get target.' I really appreciate that from them."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "First off, he can play a couple of different positions. He's got good size. He played basketball, he's got good feet. Very competitive and wants to be at Ohio State and knows what it means to be a Buckeye. All those things add up." – Ryan Day, Ohio State head coach

**PERSONAL:** Lowe played basketball in high school and helped lead Whitmer to the Division I state semifinals as a junior. He also recorded a junior-year best shot put score of 48-8 while competing for Whitmer's track team. His parents are Latonya and Christopher Lowe.

**COMMIT DATE:** Jan. 27, 2024.



**JAYVON MCFADDEN**

OL • 6-4 • 285

Upper Marlboro (Md.)  
Riverdale Baptist

Rank: IOL 24, Overall 389, MD 11



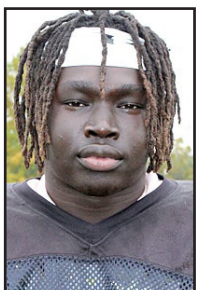
**ACCOLADES:** McFadden helped lead Riverdale Baptist to an undefeated 10-0 season, with its offense averaging 520.5 yards per game and 30.0 points per game. McFadden was the top-rated offensive lineman out of the state of Maryland.

**MCFADDEN SAYS:** "I'll be up there Jan. 1, just getting settled in. Then I start classes on Jan. 6th. I'm very excited. It will be time to get to work."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "I could see McFadden possibly working into the two-deep no later than his second season with the Buckeyes. I see McFadden as someone who has a chance to eventually be an All-Big Ten player and NFL draft choice after four years at Ohio State," – Bill Kurelic, 247 Sports

**PERSONAL:** McFadden was coached by former NFL running back Olandis Gary at Riverdale Baptist. He is the son of Tara McFadden.

**COMMIT DATE:** Aug. 24, 2024.



**BODPEGN MILLER**

WR • 6-4 • 185

Ontario, Ohio

Rank: ATH 11, Overall 282, OH 8



**ACCOLADES:** Miller will play wide receiver at Ohio State, but as a quarterback he threw for 2,216 yards and 20 touchdowns and rushed for nearly 2,000 yards and 21 more touchdowns as a senior. He was a finalist for the Ohio Mr. Football Award this year and holds Ontario school records for career passing yards, career passing touchdowns, career rushing yards, single-season passing yards and single-season rushing yards.

**MILLER SAYS:** "They really have a great group of guys on the staff. Their tradition, culture and people, everything about it makes it a special place. It's also been my dream school since I was about 6 years old. Ever since I picked up a football, I grew up a Buckeye fan. I've been looking for this one for a while now."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "The one guy that's intriguing to me is Bodpegn Miller. If you're going to gamble on someone and roll the dice, this guy's an athlete that has size, he's got speed, he's got athletic ability playing high school quarterback," – Bill Greene, Buckeye Scoop

**PERSONAL:** Miller is a versatile athlete, also playing basketball and competing for his track and field team in high school. He was adopted as a child from Ethiopia and is the son of Deanna and Allan Miller.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 21, 2024.



**TRAJEN ODOM**

DL • 6-3 • 285

Matthews (N.C.)  
Weddington

Rank: DL 61, Overall 519, NC 13



**ACCOLADES:** Odom recorded 38 tackles and one sack during his senior season, helping lead Weddington to a 13-1 record. He made the Charlotte Observer 2024 Preseason All-Observer team. Odom recorded 54 tackles, 22 tackles for loss and four sacks during his junior season.

**ODOM SAYS:** "Once I really made the decision and locked in with Coach Day and Coach Johnson, all the support from the fans, I just got a chill off the recruitment and everything."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Odom can overwhelm interior offensive linemen with his sheer power, tossing aside guards and centers like rag dolls occasionally to bring down opposing ball carriers or quarterbacks. His instincts are superb and he often uses quick block-shedding techniques to disrupt running lanes. His 6-4, 285-pound frame is a good starting point for Odom, but he'll likely need at least a year to put on additional weight before he's ready to see meaningful snaps." – Garrick Hodge, Eleven Warriors

**PERSONAL:** Odom transferred from Panther Creek High School to Weddington before his senior season. He is the son of DeWayne and Trisha Stafford-Odom.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 28, 2024.





**RILEY PETTIJOHN**

LB • 6-2 • 220  
McKinney, Texas  
Rank: LB 2, Overall 42, TX 11



**ACCOLADES:** Pettijohn was a finalist for the Butkus High School Award, given to the nation's best linebacker, after a senior season in which he recorded 136 tackles, 13 ½ tackles for loss and 5½ sacks. He also earned an invite to the 2025 Navy All-American Bowl.

**PETTIJOHN SAYS:** "Ohio State feels like home and I'm ready to come in and compete for a national championship and Butkus award."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Athletic volume tackler who can fit multiple off-ball linebacker roles in varying schemes. Well-developed build with a stout, athletic base. Early on, looked like a candidate to ultimately play off the edge, but now clearly belongs as a traditional linebacker who exhibits broad pursuit range with excellent verified athleticism to bolster his long-term projection." – Gabe Brooks, 247 Sports

**PERSONAL:** Pettijohn also competed for McKinney's track and field team and recorded a 100-meter dash time of 10.77 seconds as a junior. He is the son of former two-time All-Big East defensive lineman Duke Pettijohn, who played at Syracuse from 1997-2000.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 6, 2024.



**QUINCY PORTER**

WR • 6-3 • 205  
Oradell (N.J.)  
Bergen Catholic  
Rank: WR 5, Overall 23, NJ 1



**ACCOLADES:** Porter hauled in 57 passes for 969 yards and 11 touchdowns during his senior season, helping lead Bergen Catholic to an 11-1 record and a state championship. Porter finished his career at Bergen Catholic with 2,624 receiving yards and 38 receiving touchdowns.

**PORTER SAYS:** "Everybody here is good, so you're going to compete. Not just people across from you, but the people lined up next to you."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "I think Quincy really is a bigger receiver that is a different style than we've probably had. Obviously Jeremiah (Smith) is big, but Quincy really – we loved his film going into last year. We felt like the game that he had against Jeremiah's team (in high school) was the one that really separated him for us. He really competed well, played well, and then you saw the season he had for Bergen Catholic this year." – Ryan Day, Ohio State head coach

**PERSONAL:** Porter also played defense for Bergen Catholic as a junior and finished with five interceptions. He ran 100-meter dash times of 11.12 and 11.30 as a junior competing for his track and field team. He is the son of Fran and Darrin Porter.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 14, 2024.



**NATE ROBERTS**

TE • 6-5 • 235  
Washington, Okla.  
Rank: TE 10, Overall 202, OK 4



**ACCOLADES:** Roberts caught 52 passes for 978 yards and 14 touchdowns as a senior, and was similarly productive in his junior season with 38 receptions for 816 yards and eight touchdowns.

**ROBERTS SAYS:** "I'm super excited about the decision I've made. The relationships I have with (tight ends coach) Keenan Bailey and Coach Ryan Day are the best relationships I have out of anyone (who was) recruiting me. I just feel the most comfortable at Ohio State."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "When you watch him as a receiver, he plays a lot in the slot. He plays a lot outside as an outside receiver too, so is he Cade Stover or maybe a better blocking Cade Stover? Cade Stover came to Ohio State as a linebacker. I like Nate Roberts. I think he's highly underrated." – Bill Greene, Buckeye Scoop

**PERSONAL:** Roberts also played baseball in high school. He is the son of Cristin and Brian Roberts and brother of former Oklahoma tight end Jake Roberts.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 13, 2024.



**ANTHONY ROGERS**

RB • 5-8 • 190  
Montgomery (Ala.) Carver  
Rank: RB 5, Overall 97, AL 7



**ACCOLADES:** Rogers totaled 221 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 36 carries as a senior while also serving as the Wolverines' leading receiver with 478 yards and four touchdowns on 42 receptions. He also was the team's kick returner.

**ROGERS SAYS:** "Ohio State is the best place for me to develop as an athlete and a man."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "(Rogers) kind of gives us a little bit of that hybrid where he can line up a receiver, he can come into the backfield, he can return kicks. We haven't had a ton of those guys. Xavier Johnson was probably the guy that was probably the best comp that way." – Ryan Day, Ohio State head coach

**PERSONAL:** Rogers, who goes by the nickname, "Turbo," originally committed to Alabama before flipping to Ohio State on the first day of the early signing period. His mother is Alandria Long.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 4, 2024.



**MAXWELL ROY**

DL • 6-3 • 285  
Philadelphia  
St. Joseph's Prep  
Rank: DL 36, Overall 355, PA 9



**ACCOLADES:** Roy earned a four-star designation from all the major recruiting services after a senior season in which he helped lead St. Joseph's Prep to a third straight PIAA Class 6A state title. He also earned a spot on 247Sports' 2025 "Freaks List."

**ROY SAYS:** "Why I chose to be a Buckeye starts with the great relationship our high school has with Ohio State. From Isaiah West to Marvin Harrison Jr. to Kyle McCord, we have a great connection with the people at Ohio State. Then for me, it is where I feel I can be my best. Going to play for Larry Johnson, he has the stats that back up him developing me as a player and making me the best I can be."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Roy is another ideal fit with what Ohio State wants to do defensively. He is a defensive line prospect who can play three-technique or nose tackle. Roy has the strength to win against centers and guards at the college level. He also has the power to hold his ground at the point of attack." – Mick Walker, On3

**PERSONAL:** Roy was also an All-American wrestler at St. Joseph's Prep and made the podium at last year's Pennsylvania state wrestling championships. He also competed in track and field throwing events for the Hawks. He is the son of Roxanne Jackson and Ron Roy.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 1, 2024.



**DEVIN SANCHEZ**

CB • 6-2 • 185  
Houston North Shore  
Rank: CB 1, Overall 8, TX 4



**ACCOLADES:** Sanchez helped lead North Shore to its fifth consecutive Texas 6A Division I state championship game appearance this season while starting at cornerback for the third straight year with the team. He combined for 57 tackles, 29 pass deflections, nine interceptions and two forced fumbles from 2022-23, and excelled again this year to earn him an invite to the Navy All-American Bowl on Jan. 11.

**SANCHEZ SAYS:** "I know me and how I am. I don't want to be on the bench. I don't want to be behind anybody. I want that starting spot, so I'm going to do whatever I can to get that starting spot and keep it, because college is not like high school."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He fit the culture we're looking for. We have a great group of guys here and we try to bring guys in that already fit the mold of what we have established here. We saw that in him from Day One, the way his parents raised him, the foundation he has for work ethic, honesty, talent and love for the game. Those things really fit what we're looking for. And he's about his business. He'll be a great addition and fit in with the guys that we have here." – Tim Walton, Ohio State secondary/cornerbacks coach

**PERSONAL:** Sanchez comes from an athletic family. His parents, Deetra and Daniel Sanchez, both were college athletes and his brother played college football at Texas A&M Kingsville.

**COMMIT DATE:** Jan. 6, 2024.





**EPI SITANILEI**

DE • 6-4 • 225  
Bellflower (Calif.)  
St. John Bosco

Rank: DE 27, Overall 252, CA 21



**ACCOLADES:** Sitanilei made the most of his one and only starting season at St. John Bosco, stuffing the stat sheets with 59 tackles, six tackles for loss, four pass breakups and ½ sack. His strong freshman season allowed him to be selected to play in the 2025 Polynesian Bowl in Honolulu, Hawaii, on Jan. 17. Yahoo Sports ranked him as the eighth-best performer in the game.

**SITANILEI SAYS:** "(Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson) is the best coach to do it in college football. For me to get in there – I want to learn, I want to know what he has next for me. Being at a top school in the nation in high school and then translating to college, I have to see what that next level is like. And I feel like he's the best coach to do that."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Sitanilei really came into his own as a senior in what was his first year as a starter. He's a player who always had the physical traits you wanted to see in an edge rusher and was able to show out on the field as well. He has an ideal edge frame and will have no issues packing on as much weight as needed. He shows some natural pass rush ability with a quick get-off and the ability to win with speed and power." – Greg Biggins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Sitanilei originally committed to UCLA but flipped to Ohio State on the first day of the early signing period. He is the son of Sylvia West Mapuoleuli and Sione Stanley.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 4, 2024.



**TAVIEN ST. CLAIR**

QB • 6-4 • 225  
Bellefontaine, Ohio

Rank: QB 3, Overall 7, OH 1



**ACCOLADES:** After throwing for 2,536 yards and 38 touchdowns as a senior at Bellefontaine, St. Clair was named the Marcus Dupree National Player of the Year by the National High School Football Hall of Fame Board of Governors and a finalist for Ohio's Mr. Football Award. St. Clair also was an Elite 11 finalist last season and won the event's accuracy challenge after throwing for another 3,083 yards and 37 touchdowns as a junior.

**ST. CLAIR SAYS:** "I chose to come to Ohio State to win things like the national championship. That's what the Ohio State standard is. For me to be here only three or four weeks and watch everything unfold, I'm really excited to see what the next three or four years holds for us."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He knows what he's stepping into because he's around the facility as much as he is. It's an easy ride for him to get here. And he's going to come in and look to compete right away. I think he's excited to get here. He feels like it's been a long recruiting process now because it has been a while (since he committed). And we're obviously very excited to build around him." – Ryan Day, Ohio State head coach

**PERSONAL:** St. Clair, who is a lifelong Buckeye fan, is the first Ohio high school quarterback to sign with the Buckeyes since Joe Burrow in 2015. He is also Ohio State's first in-state five-star quarterback commit since Braxton Miller in 2011. St. Clair is the son of Patricia and Marcus St. Clair.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 21, 2023.



**DESHAWN STEWART**

S • 6-1 • 195  
Wayne (N.J.)  
DePaul Catholic

Rank: SAF 34, Overall 378, NJ 10



**ACCOLADES:** After primarily playing cornerback early in his high school career, Stewart played safety his senior season and was fourth on his team in total tackles before suffering an injury towards the end of the year that caused him to miss the rest of the season. He recorded 56 tackles and 19 pass breakups as a junior.

**STEWART SAYS:** "I see myself playing anywhere in the back end – cornerback, strong safety or nickel. But I'd definitely describe myself as a free safety. My strongest attributes are my eyes, discipline and knowing where receivers are lining up and how to get leverage. Also reading the quarterback and knowing where the ball is going to go. I'd say I have pretty good tackling skills, too."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Stewart has good size, good athleticism. This is a guy who reminds me a little bit of Jordan Fuller. Jordan Fuller coming out was about the same size, about the same type of athlete. Played corner (in high school). Stewart has tremendous ball skills, a very physical kid. He uses his length and size to get his hands on a lot of passes. And I think he's probably best suited for safety. Maybe he does not quite have the explosiveness you might get out of a Devin Sanchez who is a similar-size athlete. But I like the film." – Marc Givler, Buckeye Huddle

**PERSONAL:** Stewart was a teammate of fellow 2025 signee De'Zie Jones at DePaul Catholic. Stewart is the son of Latoya Bradshaw.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 31, 2024.



**ISAIAH WEST**

RB • 5-11 • 210  
Philadelphia  
St. Joseph's Prep

Rank: RB 58, Overall 728, PA 18



**ACCOLADES:** West experienced an injury-riddled senior season but was a standout for St. Joseph's Prep as a junior in 2023, leading the team to a 13-1 record and PIAA Class 6A state championship by totaling 1,107 yards from scrimmage and 12 touchdowns. Those stats allowed him to become a Philadelphia All-Catholic selection and all-state honoree.

**WEST SAYS:** "I knew about Ohio State as a kid and they have a lot of history at running back. Archie Griffin, Eddie George, Ezekiel Elliott, J.K. Dobbins and some others are great that have broken some records. It is a blessing that I get to go to a place like Ohio State. I have always wanted to be a big fish in a big pond and play against the best. Ohio State gives me that opportunity."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Muscle-up running back with a favorable blend of suddenness and power. Might lack a true top-end gear, but hits the gas with a heavy foot and is able to maximize yardage after contact. Could pick his lanes a little quicker, but will make dynamic cuts to evade tacklers near the line of scrimmage and then again at the second level." – Andrew Ivins, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** West originally committed to Kentucky last March but decommitted just three days after visiting Ohio State on May 10 before committing in June. He will join forces with his former St. Joseph's Prep teammate Maxwell Roy. West is the son of Veronica West-Yates and Bryon Smith.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 16, 2024.



**JORDYN WOODS**

CB • 6-4 • 190  
Cartersville, Ga.

Rank: CB 107, Overall 1140, GA 133



**ACCOLADES:** Woods was a first-team All-Region 7-AAAA selection this year after totaling 41 tackles (one for loss), five pass breakups and two forced fumbles. He also registered 41 tackles his junior season at Cartersville and helped the program go 25-2 overall and 11-0 against conference opponents in the regular season from 2023-24.

**WOODS SAYS:** "Being able to play in an atmosphere like Ohio State in the Big Ten is unmatched."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He has some legs and some athleticism. He's a developmental dude that if it works, it works. If it doesn't, it doesn't. But he's one of your main dudes, He's the No. 2 cornerback to (Devin) Sanchez." – Bill Greene, Buckeye Scoop

**PERSONAL:** Woods originally pledged to Cincinnati in June but flipped his commitment to Ohio State just two days after visiting for the Buckeyes' Nov. 23 home game against then-No. 5 Indiana. He was a track star at Cartersville, recording personal bests of over five feet in the high jump and over 40 feet in the triple jump. Woods is the son of Amanda Young and Willie Woods.

**COMMIT DATE:** Nov. 25, 2024.



**CLASS OF 2025**



# QB St. Clair, CB Sanchez Headline Freshman Class

Continued From Page 1

right,” Day said. “And then I do need a little bit of time, because even since the (national title) game, there’s been a lot. We had recruiting, we were on the road doing different things. We have to make sure we get the staff organized.”

After defensive coordinator Jim Knowles left for the same position and a pay raise at Penn State, offensive coordinator Chip Kelly also left Ohio State to head back to the NFL, taking the offensive coordinator position with the Las Vegas Raiders on Feb. 2 for \$6 million yearly, making him the highest-paid coordinator in the pros.

One day before Kelly left, offensive line coach Justin Frye also moved on to the NFL, taking a position with the Arizona Cardinals on Feb. 1.

As BSB went to press, the Buckeyes had filled Frye’s spot with former Virginia Tech offensive coordinator Tyler Bowen and officially promoted wide receivers coach Brian Hartline to offensive coordinator.

Hartline earned the title in 2023, but Day didn’t give up play calling that year, and he had the title of co-offensive coordinator when Kelly was on staff during the 2024 season. It was unclear as BSB went to press whether Hartline will be calling plays moving forward, but with a national title under his belt, Day might be more willing to give Hartline an opportunity to do so in 2025.

Amid all of these new additions and changes on the coaching staff and on the roster following the national championship season, Day said the Buckeyes’ future – even as far as next season – is still looking very bright.

“We have to recharge a little bit, but that’s all right,” Day said. “Once you recharge, then it’s all systems go, and then you move forward. We have a really good group of guys coming back – I mean, a really good group of guys coming back. It’s exciting.”

That roster next year is going to include the fourth-ranked 2025 recruiting class, which includes three five-star players according to 247Sports’ composite rankings. The highest-rated of the class is Bellefontaine, Ohio, quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225), the No. 7 ranked player in the class, followed by Houston North Shore cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 185) and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic wide receiver Quincy Porter (6-3, 205).

St. Clair – who threw for over 2,500 passing yards and 25 touchdowns his senior season on his way to winning the 2025 Marcus Dupree National High School Football Hall of Fame Player of the Year award – was the very first commit in the 2025 class all the way back on June 21, 2023, and has firmly stuck with the Buckeyes ever since, something that Day said he appreciates out of both him and Sanchez.

“This has the chance to be one of the best classes in the country, and it starts off with loyalty,” Day said on Dec. 4 at his early signing period press conference. “A lot of guys have been loyal along the way. On offense, it starts with Tavien, and on defense with Devin. Both of those guys have been leaders in this class.”

St. Clair made a meteoric rise through the rankings during his time in high school, and Day sees traits in him that were very encouraging throughout the recruiting process.

“First off, he’s from Bellefontaine, Ohio, and that’s important here,” Day said. “I think he started coming here as an eighth-grader, then came in as a freshman, then every year he’s growing and growing to the point where he’s continued to improve. And we just saw some traits in him that were unique.

“We felt like he separated himself from the class, and (from the time he committed), he was focused on recruiting the class. You can see the leadership skills in him. He came down for almost every student practice to get around the guys and see what’s going on in terms of meetings on the field and what it looks like. So he knows what he’s stepping into because he’s been around the facility as much as he has, and he’s going to come in and look to compete right away.”

While the Buckeyes’ first five-star signal caller from the state of Ohio since Braxton Miller in 2011 wasn’t No. 1 at his position in the cycle – that title goes to Michigan signee and Belleville, Mich., five-star Bryce Underwood (6-4, 208) – he wasn’t far off and was one of the options to earn that rating according to 247Sports national recruiting analyst Allen Trieu.

“A lot of headlines go to Bryce Underwood, but Tavien St. Clair, I think he’s right with him,” Trieu said. “He was in the discussion to be the No. 1 quarterback in the country. He had an illustrious high school career, put up a ton of stats going back to his sophomore year.”

Sanchez – a Navy All-American Bowl invitee this winter – was the top player in Ohio State’s class for a long time until the most recent re-grading of prospects that the recruiting websites did.

According to Buckeye Huddle recruiting analyst Marc Givler, the five-star is someone who could make it onto the field early in his college career, even with the depth that cornerbacks coach Tim Walton has been able to build at the position.

“It’s a lot to put on a guy, but if there’s one guy in this class that I think can pull

it off, it’s Devin Sanchez,” Givler told BSB. “For my money, he’s the best player they signed. I think he’s the best corner in the country. I think he’s almost a carbon copy of Jeff Okudah. He may even be more athletic than Okudah. He may be a faster kid. He’s got high-level maturity, a high-level work ethic. He’s coming in early, and he’s built out of a lab physically. There are some parallels there with Jeremiah (Smith) in terms of their physical profile, maturity and work ethic that I think would allow Devin to play.”

Porter was upgraded to be a composite five-star player late in the process, and since he finished with that rating, he’s now the seventh five-star recruit for Hartline and the third in just the last two years, joining Jeremiah Smith and Mylan Graham on the current roster.

But even though he’s the 23rd-ranked player in the country, Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop doesn’t expect him to immediately burst onto the scene like Smith was able to this season when he set Ohio State and Big Ten freshman receiving records.

“I like Quincy Porter, and I think he’s the best (of the four receivers in the 2025 class). Is he JJ Smith? No, he’s not,” Greene told BSB. “I don’t look for Quincy Porter to be the No. 1 receiver on the field next year for Ohio State the way JJ Smith is now, but Quincy Porter is a dude. I think he will probably get some time next year.”

Among the 18 four-stars and five three-stars in the class, the one position some have said the Buckeyes came up short in again was the offensive line, with Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 320) leading the way as the No. 74-ranked player in the country.

Beyond Lowe, though, only two other offensive linemen were added by Frye to the front five this year – Westerville (Ohio) North four-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295) and Upper Marlboro (Md.) Riverdale Baptist four-star interior offensive lineman Jayvon McFadden (6-4, 300).

“You hate to sign three. You have to take four or five every year,” Greene said. “If that gives you a glut at the position and they’re not developing, then you give them their papers and tell them it’s time to go to Kent State or Miami of Ohio. Not enough quantity, not enough quality.

“You have two developmental guys in McFadden and Cook, and then a dude in Lowe. I was thinking in this class the way that they were set up six, seven months ago, I thought it was going to be three dudes and then maybe a Jake Cook.”

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SONNY BROCKWAY

**ADDED ROLE** — Wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, renowned for his ability to recruit and develop NFL first-round draft picks, was named offensive coordinator to replace Chip Kelly, who joined the Las Vegas Raiders.

Even though Lowe might not have earned a five-star rating, Trieu believes that he is still an elite prospect as a tackle.

“He’s a guy who was a little bit late to football,” Trieu said. “He played basketball. That story usually turns out pretty well at offensive tackle. He’s very athletic and I think has really picked up the game quickly since coming over to the sport.

“Ohio State’s done a great job with in-state offensive tackles – Thayer Munford, Paris Johnson. I think Carter is the next one.”

But as is always going to be the case in college football these days and moving forward, the transfer additions have to be included in the equation. The tackle position was addressed in the portal, with Frye recruiting former Rice offensive tackle Ethan Onianwa and former Minnesota tackle Philip Daniels.

The portal is where much of the recent success OSU has seen on the line has come from, with Josh Simmons and Seth McLaughlin proving that much over the past two seasons.

But now that Bowen – a former offensive recruiting coordinator when he was with Penn State (2018-20) – has taken over for Frye, the offensive line recruiting could change as well, as proven by how many great prospects on the front five the Nittany Lions brought in during that time, such as five-star Landon Tengwall, current NFL players Olu Fashanu and Rasheed Walker and a few more.

“I love Bowen, the way he built the relationships, just the way he knows how to

talk to kids and it’s a talent,” Tengwall told On3 after Bowen was hired by Ohio State. “It’s a skill. I’ve been around a lot of coaches. There are a lot of coaches that do not know how to talk to different kids from different backgrounds. Bowen, I think, is the best that I dealt with. And I met a lot, a lot of different coaches.”

The 2026 recruiting class has many different offensive linemen the Buckeyes are already in good standing with, and Bowen’s addition could be big in getting a solid class on the front five with four or more recruits, something Ohio State has had some trouble with in recent years.

But even with the lull when it comes to recruiting the offensive line, the argument can be made that Day has somehow improved Ohio State’s recruiting as a first-time head coach coming off the heels of the tenure of Meyer, who was known as one of the best recruiting head coaches in the country.

Day’s first official recruiting class was signed in 2019, immediately after he had taken over for Meyer, and the transition to a first-time coach can likely be blamed for the 14th-ranked class the Buckeyes had that year.

However, since then his classes have been ranked – in chronological order – fifth, second, fourth, fourth, fifth and fourth, and winning a national championship is only going to help with the momentum he has been able to build toward the future, regardless of who is coaching alongside him.

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# Recruits React To Assistant Coaches Leaving

After the Buckeyes won the national championship, the services of their coaches were in high demand around the country, and that resulted in defensive coordinator Jim Knowles leaving for the same position at Penn State, offensive line coach Justin Frye leaving for that same position with the Arizona Cardinals and offensive coordinator Chip Kelly also going to the NFL to become the offensive coordinator for the Las Vegas Raiders.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

Since those coaches were heavily involved in recruiting, many commits and other prospects had thoughts on what those moves meant in terms of how they were feeling about Ohio State.

One of the Buckeye commits in the 2027 class, Huntington Beach, Calif., four-star quarterback Brady Edmunds (6-5, 215), said Kelly leaving does make his outlook a little different, but he still remains committed to Ohio State.

"It changes things a little, but not much," Edmunds told 247Sports. "I feel like I'm in a really good spot with Ohio State. I'm still confident in my decision. I talked to (quarterbacks coach Billy) Fessler (after the Kelly news broke). I have a good relationship with him and everyone in the quarterback room. Whether someone gets promoted or someone comes in, Coach (Ryan) Day will have a good offensive coordinator."

Edmunds already knows when he will be back in Columbus since one of the Elite 11 regional sites is in Massillon, Ohio, on April 13. He will be spending the two days prior to that on campus, which will be during Ohio State's spring practices, likely around the time when the spring game will be held.

He also told 247Sports that he is continuing to help the Buckeyes recruit its 2027

## Final 2025 247Sports Composite Ohio Rankings

Rank	Name	Position	High School	College
1.	<b>Tavien St. Clair</b>	QB	<b>Bellefontaine</b>	<b>Ohio State</b>
2.	Justin Hill	DL	Cincinnati Winton Woods	Alabama
3.	<b>Carter Lowe</b>	OL	<b>Toledo Whitmer</b>	<b>Ohio State</b>
4.	Trey McNutt	SAF	Shaker Heights	Oregon
5.	Ryan Montgomery	QB	Findlay	Georgia
6.	<b>Bo Jackson</b>	RB	<b>Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph</b>	<b>Ohio State</b>
7.	Noah King	CB	Hamilton	Kansas State
8.	Shaun Terry	WR	Ironton	Missouri
9.	<b>Bodpegn Miller</b>	ATH	<b>Ontario</b>	<b>Ohio State</b>
10.	Chaz Coleman	DL	Warren G. Harding	Penn State
11.	Marquise Davis	RB	Cleveland Heights	Missouri
12.	Dawayne Galloway	CB	Columbus Marion-Franklin	West Virginia
13.	Luka Gilbert	TE	West Chester Lakota West	Miami
14.	Kuol Kuol	OL	Centerville	Iowa State
15.	Grant Beerman	LB	West Chester Lakota West	Illinois
16.	<b>Brody Lennon</b>	TE	<b>Gates Mills Gilmour Academy</b>	<b>Ohio State</b>
17.	Nolan Davenport	OL	Massillon Washington	Wisconsin
18.	Dante McClellan	LB	Canton McKinley	Missouri
19.	Jayquan Stubbs	DL	Cleveland Heights	Minnesota
20.	Josh Johnson	CB	Ironton	Penn State

class, saying he has been talking to Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star cornerback

Duvay Williams (6-1, 155), Coatesville (Pa.) Area four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Hiller (6-5, 300) and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star tight end Mark Bowman (6-5, 225).

Ohio State's offensive line was trending in a positive direction this year when it came to recruiting, especially with how Frye was able to turn three linemen being injured into a national championship-winning front five.

But now that Frye is no longer with the Buckeyes, there are questions at the position yet again.

Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) is down to two schools, Ohio State competing with Clemson to land the in-state prospect's services. As recently as a few days before Frye left, recruiting experts were predicting that Riley would end up in Columbus, but now they are not so sure.

"Coach Day called and told me about the possibility (of Frye leaving)," Riley told 247Sports before the news came out that Frye was headed to Arizona. "He said, 'Don't jump the gun on anything. Let things play out,' and that if it were to happen, he'll be calling me back."

Riley, the nation's eighth-best offensive tackle and third-best player out of Ohio, said that the plan is to be patient with his decision and let the coaching vacancies at Ohio State fill out, giving the new position coach time to reach out and make his pitch.

Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285) said the same thing. But before he moves forward with the Buckeyes, he wants to be sure that he will like the new offensive line coach. However, Guthrie did receive a "crystal ball" to commit to Clemson from 247Sports' Allen Trieu on Jan. 31.

Along with Frye, graduate assistant Mike Sollenne – who worked with the offensive line with Ohio State for the past three seasons – is no longer with the program, taking the offensive line coach position at UNLV, where former Ohio State quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis was named the new offensive coordinator.

Vero Beach, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 305) wasn't happy about the news but noted on Twitter that he understands it's "a part of the business."

## Superlatives For Ohio State's 2025 Recruiting Class

**Most Likely To Succeed:** This is a very good recruiting class for the Buckeyes, and there is some great development that happens at Ohio State, so many of the recruits will go on to have some level of success. But Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 320) seems to have what it takes to play at the next level.

It would be a surprise to see him on the field in a consistent role during his freshman year as it would any true freshman offensive lineman, but at 320 pounds he already is at the right size. He has shown the ability to move a defensive line and get to the second level along with having the athleticism that helped him as a basketball player and a shot put thrower.

His physicality and power project well, which helped him become the No. 74 player in the country and the No. 11 offensive tackle. 247Sports recruiting analyst Allen Trieu said on the Big Ten recruiting wrap-up show on signing day that he believes Lowe is next in line to be one of the great tackles who have gone through Columbus, likening him to Paris Johnson Jr. and Thayer Munford Jr.

Head coach Ryan Day spoke highly of the four-star when he signed on Dec. 4.

"He can play a couple of different positions," Day said. "He's got good size. He's got good feet, very competitive, and wants to be at Ohio State. He knows what it means to be a Buckeye. All those things added up, along with him being tough and physical – again he could play a couple different positions. He can play tackle, he can play guard. He's got the size to do that. He's got the feet to do that. We're hoping he can make that difference early on."

**Future Captain:** It's another offensive lineman the Buckeyes signed in the 2025 class who seems likely to be a future captain. Westerville (Ohio) North four-star interior offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295) might not be a blue-chip prospect like Lowe is in the front five, but one common insight into his game that prospects had is that he was a great leader on his prep team.

Many coaches and players say that being a leader is a trait that some people have and others don't, and that won't disappear for Cook when he gets to the college level. On and off the field he can be a leader both vocally and by example, and as a center with the Buckeyes, he is going to need that.

**First To The Field:** With Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock gone to the NFL, there are two spots open at cornerback and nickel, and while a freshman is very unlikely to earn the starting spots, the Buckeyes did have a fairly healthy rotation at times last season. Jermaine Mathews Jr. rotated in when necessary, as did Lorenzo Styles Jr. at nickel, and true freshman Aaron Scott even saw some time on the field. Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 185) could enter that rotation in 2025.

Sanchez comes out of the talent-rich state of Texas, and his maturity and athleticism give him the ability to come to Ohio State and have the chance to compete for a spot early on, and there are many different people who are confident in his ability to do so.

"It's a lot to put on a guy, but if there's one guy in this class that I think can pull it off, it's Devin Sanchez," Buckeye Huddle recruiting analyst Marc Givler told BSB. "For my money, he's the best player they signed. I think he's the best corner in the country. I think he's almost a carbon copy of

Jeff Okudah. He may even be more athletic than Okudah. He may be a faster kid.

"He's got high-level maturity, a high-level work ethic. He's coming in early, and he's built out of a lab physically. There are some parallels there with Jeremiah (Smith) in terms of their physical profile, maturity and work ethic that I think would allow Devin to play."

**Fan Favorite:** Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225) could have been the choice for many of the superlatives for the 2025 class. He comes to Ohio State with a game that should translate well to the college game. He committed a year and a half before he signed with the Buckeyes. He had been trying to be seen by Ohio State since he was in eighth grade and shot up the rankings throughout his time in high school because of the extra work he put in, and he hung around the program as much as he possibly could before he was even officially a part of it.

It couldn't be more obvious that St. Clair already loves being a Buckeye, and being present for the national championship win likely only strengthened that love and the drive he has shown. He seems to have the demeanor and the confidence of a player who, if he does well, will be remembered by fans for a long time. And he is the first five-star quarterback from Ohio that the Buckeyes have signed since Braxton Miller in 2011.

**Biggest Recruiting Win:** Going into Texas and pulling major prospects into Ohio is never easy, but the Buckeyes had success with multiple players this year, bringing in both Sanchez and McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 220). However, with how committed Sanchez seemed to Ohio State the entire recruiting process, it was a little more surprising at the time of his commitment that they were able to land Pettijohn.

He might be a four-star, but he is still one of the better recruits in this class. There was a point when he was a composite five-star, and he came close to that rating when it came down to it, and he finished as the No. 2 linebacker in the class. He chose the Buckeyes over Texas A&M, Texas and USC, and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis got two big wins with Pettijohn and Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210), who was a flip candidate at one point.

**Underrated:** There might be some four-star prospects the Buckeyes landed who could be considered "underrated" by some, but the most underrated could be Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star running back Isaiah West (5-11, 210). Ohio State signed three running back prospects in Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star Anthony Rogers (5-8, 190) and Cleveland Villa Angela St. Joseph's four-star Bo Jackson (6-0, 210), who were the 97th and 160th prospects in the class. West was ranked No. 728.

While there likely isn't much time for him in the backfield this upcoming season with transfer C.J. Donaldson and James Peoples likely leading the way, West's power projects well for short-yardage situations and he has been great at breaking tackles and picking up yards after contact, which helps make up for what could be seen as a slight lack of speed. He can cut hard and can also be involved in the passing game as well, making him a valuable future asset.

— Greg Wilson



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

Since Knowles wasn't as active on the recruiting trail as Kelly and Frye, it's unclear what the effect might be on defensive recruiting, if there will be any. But the Buckeyes will want to find replacements for those three vacancies as soon as possible to try to get the new coaches on the recruiting trail as quickly as they can.

**Bucks Add Legacy Walk-On QB**

The Buckeyes made one final addition to their 2025 class before National Signing Day when Westerville (Ohio) Central three-star quarterback Jaystin Gwinn (6-1, 175) committed to Ohio State on Feb. 3.

"You can say I'm going there as a preferred walk-on, but they want to make room for me on the 85-man roster, and if they do, I can go on scholarship," Gwynn told 247Sports. "If not, they can put some type of package together."

The Gwinn name might be familiar to Buckeye fans since his father, Anthony Gwinn, was a defensive back for Ohio State from 1993-96. His uncle, Jayson Gwinn, was also a Buckeye and seemed to likely have a role ready for him in the early 1990s before he was killed in a car accident near the

Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Dec. 12, 1993, at 20 years old.

Earlier that season as a redshirt freshman, Jayson Gwinn tied the Buckeyes' single-game tackles for loss record with five against Indiana.

Now Jaystin Gwinn, named in honor of Anthony's late brother, will get his chance to be a Buckeye.

"I know you're looking down on me proud of me," Jaystin tweeted on Feb. 3, referring to his late uncle.

Jaystin started at safety during his freshman season in high school before moving to wide receiver and running back, ultimately finishing his career at quarterback. However, he was able to play in only two games this past season due to pulled hamstrings in both legs.

Even without a scholarship offer, Jaystin still decided to sign with the Buckeyes over scholarship offers from Akron, Eastern Kentucky, Kent State, Kentucky and Wofford.

He also talked about the plan that Ohio State has for him when he gets on campus, starting him in the quarterback room but also giving him the chance to move around some.

"Basically, what they are doing is having me be in the quarterback room and giving me

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 opportunity to develop there, but I'll do a little bit of everything," Jaystin said. "I'll also be in the wide receiver room and maybe a little bit in the defensive back room. It's a Travis Hunter-type opportunity. I might practice at all of those positions. I want to be a quarterback, but if the opportunity presents itself to play at another position, I would do that."

The composite ranking on 247Sports has Jaystin as the 1,905th-best prospect in the country, the No. 111 quarterback and the No. 80 player in the state of Ohio.

**Coaches Make Visits, Extend Offers**

Coaches didn't get much of a break after the national championship celebration on Jan. 26 since most of them immediately were on the recruiting trail making visits to prospects right after they took in the last of their official recognition for winning the title.

Day made it obvious who his biggest priority in the 2026 class is this cycle when his very first visit was to Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell (6-8, 300). Frye was also there to pitch the Buckeyes to the No. 1 recruit in the country according to 247Sports composite rankings.

That fact that he was the first recruit on the minds of Day and Frye was not lost on Cantwell. He tweeted on the day of the visit to

thank the two coaches.

"Thank you to (Day) for coming to Nixa, Mo., before seeing any other schools!" the post made by Cantwell read. "Always a pleasure to have him and (Frye) come in. Means a lot that the National Champs came here first."

He added later on that it is "hard to beat being the first stop."

But the Buckeyes have been in on top offensive tackles for multiple years now and missed out on them, with David Sanders Jr. choosing Tennessee over Ohio State in the 2025 class after Brandon Baker and Jordan Seaton in the 2024 class chose Texas and Colorado, respectively.

In those two years, the pitch of being the reigning national champion wasn't one that Day and company could make, so this time around the Buckeyes have somewhat of a leg up on the competition. But Frye departing for the NFL could throw a wrench into things for the Buckeyes.

In addition to the aspect of Frye leaving, the competition is going to be very strong when it comes to pursuing the top player in the country. Cantwell has already had visits from Alabama, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan and Texas A&M as well, and there are bound to be many more after him.

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2024



NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

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# Buckeyes A Top Choice For In-State Safety

Continued From Page 17

Just one day after Frye took the job with the Cardinals, Cantwell revealed his top six schools, still including the Buckeyes on that list along with Georgia, Michigan, Miami, Missouri and Oregon.

The fact that Day was also there to build a relationship with Cantwell on the visit is valuable to Ohio State since Frye isn't the only connection the five-star has to Columbus now.

The Buckeyes have also been trying to fill out the quarterback position in their 2026 class, extending offers to Folsom, Calif., five-star Ryder Lyons (6-3, 215); Celina, Texas, four-star Bowe Bentley (6-2, 200); and North (Texas) Forney three-star Legend Bey (5-10, 180), the No. 9, 292 and 602 players in the country, respectively. Kelly also made a stop to see Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School five-star Jared Curtis (6-4, 225) on Jan. 29 just four days before he departed for the Raiders, but he was joined by Fessler, so there still could be a relationship there.

Curtis, the nation's fourth-best player, second-best quarterback and top-ranked player out of Tennessee in his class, decommitted

from Georgia on Oct. 17 and put OSU on his list of top schools on Jan. 15.

Bey's offer was extended by running backs coach Carlos Locklyn on Jan. 31, and that might be a hint that the Buckeyes are looking at him at a position other than quarterback.

The other 2026 recruits who got offers since BSB last went to press are Southlake (Texas) Carroll four-star wide receiver and TCU commit Brock Boyd (6-1, 165); Frisco (Texas) Panther Creek four-star wide receiver Jalen Lott (6-0, 170); Marietta (Ga.) Kell four-star linebacker Brayden Rouse (6-3, 210); Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225); and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star defensive lineman and Oregon commit Tomuhini Topui (6-3, 320).

In the 2027 class, Ohio State extended scholarship offers to DeSoto, Texas, four-star wide receiver Ethan Feaster (6-1, 175); Libertyville, Ill., tight end Brock Williams (6-5, 210); and Duvay Williams, one of the players Edmunds said he has been in the ear of.

Williams might be listed as a cornerback by all of the recruiting outlets – and he is highly rated as the No. 2 corner in the country – but it was wide receivers coach Brian Hart-

line who made the visit to see him and offer him. Williams is a two-way player for his high school and told 247Sports that Hartline saw his offensive film and offered him as a wide receiver.

"I would love to play both," Williams said. "I feel like and I know I can play both at a high level. I'm most definitely interested (in Ohio State). I would want to visit Ohio State soon, mostly around spring ball."

Ohio State also made an offer to a 2028 prospect, giving one to Vero Beach, Fla., quarterback Wonderful Monds IV (6-2, 224).

## 2026 SAF Gebhardt Down To Top Four

An in-state prospect who has been on Ohio State's radar for a while now has narrowed his scholarship list down to four teams. The Buckeyes were included on Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star safety Kaden Gebhardt's list when he revealed it on Jan. 28.

The 6-2, 200-pound prospect also had Clemson, Penn State and Wisconsin on his list along with Ohio State.

Gebhardt was originally offered by Ohio State on Nov. 30 and has been to campus multiple times, making several gameday vis-

its throughout the 2024 season and also attending a spring practice. He was also one of the few recruits who were able to make it to Ohio Stadium for the championship celebration.

The three-star could be making a decision soon despite not making any official visits yet.

In his junior season, Gebhardt had 76 tackles, five for loss, two interceptions, four pass breakups and a fumble recovery. Those stats earned him first-team All-Ohio Capital Conference and all-district honors along with the title of OCC Defensive Player of the Year.

He and Sanna were both visited by Day, safeties coach Matt Guerrieri and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis the week after the celebration, during which Sanna received his scholarship offer.

"It went well. I had a good conversation with Coach Guerrieri," Gebhardt told 247Sports. "And I had a good conversation with Coach Day too. They emphasized how much they want me at Ohio State."

Gebhardt is ranked the No. 576 player in the country, the No. 51 safety and the No. 25 player in the state of Ohio according to 247Sports composite rankings, but 247Sports' standard ranking is much higher

## A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago — 1985

Recruiting expert Tom Lemming felt that quarterbacks Mark Kamphaus (6-2, 195) of Cincinnati Moeller and Tom Bolyard (6-3, 195) of Orrville were leaning toward Ohio State. In fact, he felt that Bolyard had already committed to Ohio State but hadn't made it public yet.

Among other top quarterbacks in the state, Lemming felt that Michael Taylor (6-1, 190) of Cincinnati Princeton was headed to Michigan or South Carolina and Scott Crawford (6-4, 190) of Cory Rawson might have been headed for Michigan as well.

Other top Ohio players who appeared headed elsewhere were linebackers Mike and John Sullivan of Mentor Lake Catholic who appeared headed for Michigan.

"I think if Ohio State had wanted them, they could have had them in a second," Lemming said.

### 35 Years Ago — 1990

Ohio State's 1990 recruiting class doubled in size in a week after the Buckeyes grabbed commitments from three prep football stars, and the class should have been increasing by one more before another round of weekend visits that would make or break OSU's recruiting effort.

The week began when the Buckeyes received a verbal commitment from wide receiver Chris Sanders of Montbello High School in Denver.

That was followed by weekend commitments from a pair of blue-chip prospects, quarterback Johnny Mattress of Cincinnati Princeton and offensive lineman Aaron Jackson of Penn Hills High School in Pittsburgh.

Then just before press time, BSB learned that one of the top-rated defensive backs in the country, Larry Kennedy of Riverview High School in Sarasota, Fla., was set to publicly announce that he would play college football at Ohio State.

### 30 Years Ago — 1995

In a surprise move, the Buckeyes were courting Curtis Enis, the 1993 Ohio "Mr. Football" who committed to Penn State a year earlier before enrolling in a Pennsylvania prep school. OSU tentatively had Enis scheduled for a visit Jan. 20, but he did not make it.

Enis, who played for Kiski Prep the season after racking up nearly 5,700 yards for Union City (Ohio) Mississinawa Valley, was apparently looking at Ohio State despite earlier reports that had him set on fulfilling his verbal commitment to Penn State.

It seemed that the 6-2, 220-pound Enis was interested in possibly enrolling at OSU for the spring quarter so he could participate in spring football. But before he could enroll, he had to first receive a passing score on a college entrance exam – the reason he attended Kiski Prep in the first place.

### 25 Years Ago — 2000

Worldwide pop star Will Smith had put out some megahits. Ohio State, however, was hoping another Will Smith – this one a

promising defensive end from Utica, New York's Proctor High – would put some megahits on opposing quarterbacks.

Smith committed to Ohio State on Jan. 17, picking the Buckeyes over the likes of Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Virginia Tech and Boston College. He committed after returning from a visit to OSU over the weekend of Jan.14.

"I see Ohio State as a good opportunity," said Smith, rated the nation's eighth-best defensive end by Rivals100.com. "I really liked the facilities there and the city. I liked everything about it. It was getting kind of late, and I wanted to make a decision. I just felt like now was the time to do it. Ohio State is one of the top schools in the country."

### 20 Years Ago — 2005

Jason Gwaltney, the star running back out of Long Island (N.Y.) North Babylon, had hoped to have his decision made already, but continued wooing from major-college coaches only served to make his choice that much more difficult. He planned to announce either in the hours leading up to or on National Signing Day itself.

With attention pouring in from coaches, media members and fans nationwide, North Babylon head coach Terry Manning was doing his best to deflect attention from his star.

"It's nuts," Manning told BSB. "It's out of control. Obviously he's getting pressured and squeezed from every side trying to get a decision done. He had a date with Tom Lemming and ESPN (Jan. 19, 2005), and we had to cancel it because he wasn't 100 percent sure of what he wanted to do as of that date. It's a pretty stressful time right now for him."

### 15 Years Ago — 2010

With the Feb. 3 National Signing Day rapidly approaching, OSU was set to welcome its second-lowest rated class in the Jim Tressel era. With 17 verbal commitments through Jan. 25, the Buckeye class was ranked No. 19 nationally by Scout.com.

Only Tressel's class of 2003, which finished No. 25 in the nation, was ranked lower. Of the eight previous full classes the coach had assembled, three were of the top-10 variety.

The obvious question was what had the Buckeyes done differently in this year compared to the previous two seasons, but the answer may have been a simple one.

"If you keep bringing in good kids, kids don't want to wait behind those good kids," Bob Lichtenfels, East recruiting manager for Scout, told BSB. "Playing time is a big issue for most of them. You're going to have kids that love Ohio State because it's Ohio State, but kids aren't all like that. They want somewhere they can play right away."

### 10 Years Ago — 2015

Finishing is an art, and Urban Meyer was painting masterpieces in 2015.

The Ohio State head coach shook off an early loss to Virginia Tech in the 2014 season, developing an unstoppable machine that

ran through the likes of Wisconsin, Alabama and Oregon in consecutive games to bring home a national championship.

Likewise, a slow start on the recruiting trail yielded to a furious finish. It took until May 27, a time at which most elite programs were already hitting double digits on commit totals, for OSU to collect its third verbal commitment. But when the final fax rolled in around 11 a.m. on Feb. 4, Meyer had compiled the nation's No. 8 class headlined by Cincinnati Xavier five-star outside linebacker Justin Hilliard (6-0, 225) and the top group of recruits in the Big Ten.

### Five Years Ago — 2020

Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was named the national recruiter of the year by 247Sports on Feb. 5 for his efforts during the 2020 cycle.

"I purely got into coaching because I love helping young men reach their dreams," Hartline told 247Sports. "I realize what happened for me and how my life changed with such a great coach (former Ohio State wide receivers coach Darrell Hazell) that helped me get where I'm at today in more ways than one. I try to use the recruiting period as a time to forge good relationships because to me the relationship tells you how hard you can coach a young man.

"I can only coach him as hard as the relationship allows. I want to build relationships that are meaningful and have a great foundation so when the young man shows up, we're off and running."

Hartline landed Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Columbia five-star Julian Fleming; Rockwall, Texas, four-star Jaxon Smith-Njigba; Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic four-star Gee Scott; and Maryland Heights (Mo.) Pattonville Senior four-star Mookie Cooper.

### One Year Ago — 2024

Ohio State was building a strong secondary in 2025, adding a commitment on Feb. 4 from Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185).

Offord was the fifth-ranked overall prospect in the class – the highest-rated so far for the Buckeyes – as well as the top-ranked cornerback in the cycle. He committed during a weekend visit to Ohio State, pledging to the Buckeyes over Alabama, Auburn and Georgia, among others.

It was Offord's second visit to Ohio State dating back to July 2023, a time during which he had built a strong relationship with cornerbacks coach Tim Walton.

"I wanted to get coached by the best (defensive backs) coach in college football," Offord told On3 after committing to Ohio State. "I know 100 percent if I do what I'm supposed to with the technique that he's teaching me, if I do everything he's telling me to do in the classroom and with my work and life, if I do all of that the right way, I know I'm going to be successful. He's going to push me to that level to be successful."



# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Allen Trieu of 247 Sports

**With former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles leaving for the same position at Penn State, how do you expect Ohio State's recruiting to be affected in the immediate future?**

"When you lose coordinators, I think it's important to first have other staff members step in, which Ohio State is very capable there, especially when it comes to the head coach being involved in recruiting and having great off-field support. This is common for schools with great success so I think the recruits know that, but it will be important for the right guys to come in and hit the ground running. I think they've already gone through that at the running back position, and Carlos Locklyn handled that seamlessly. So this isn't uncharted territory."

**Former offensive line coach Justin Frye faced some criticism for his high school recruiting in the past. After the way his offensive line performed in the playoff, do you expect O-line recruiting to heat up?**

"Anytime you have the success Ohio State has had, I think that all of that benefits recruiting. Specifically, they have such a powerful offense, that should be attractive to offensive linemen. I also think they've had a good

amount of NFL success recently. They had three from that unit drafted in 2023 and two in 2022.

"There's no reason they can't turn that into a good offensive line class this year. I think development is the most important part of the next hire, but recruiting should definitely be a piece of it."

**How realistic do you believe the Buckeyes' chances are at landing Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell (6-8, 300)?**

"Ohio State is going to be a factor for sure for Cantwell, but I would not have that as overly likely. There's tough competition there, and I could see him either staying in-state with Missouri or heading further south. Either way, it's going to be an extremely tough battle. It's one I think the Buckeyes are in, but I don't think there's a clear leader right now."

**How do you assess the in-state talent in Ohio for the 2026 recruiting cycle?**

"The in-state 2026 class probably lacks the star power of some of the other recent Ohio classes. There's not a Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225), but I do think it's very deep with power-four recruits and it's strong at important positions like

the front seven, offensive line and defensive back.

"So I think there will be a lot of talent for Ohio State to choose from and they've shown a willingness to dig deep with local recruits as they did last year with Westerville North three-star offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-5, 295), Ontario four-star Bodpegn Miller (6-4, 185) and others. And I see a lot of potential camp takes like those guys in this class."

**Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200) put Ohio State in his top four schools recently. Have you been able to see him play, and if so, what do you make of him as a prospect?**

"Kaden is a really strong prospect. I think we have him a little bit higher than the other services, and it doesn't take long in watching his film to be impressed. He hits like a truck. I think he's one of the hardest hitters I've seen on film in the entire region. And you see the way he can also play in space. I think hybrid-type defenders like him who can play in the box as well as the deep part of the secondary are very important in today's game, and that is evidenced by the variety of schools that are offering him."

on him, ranking him No. 215 in the country and the No. 17 safety, as well as bumping his rating up to four stars.

### 2026 QB Smigiel Decommits From FSU

While the Buckeyes' seemingly never-ending hunt for a 2026 quarterback continues, Newbury Park, Calif., four-star signal caller Brady Smigiel (6-5, 205) decommitted from Florida State one day after he was visited by Kelly.

Smigiel was one of the many quarterbacks whom Kelly visited while he was on the road recruiting before he left for the Raiders. He is rated the No. 63 player in the country, the No. 5 quarterback in the 2026 class and the No. 10 player in the state of California.

It's unusual for the Buckeyes to not have a quarterback committed in the class this late in the cycle with signal callers normally committing early on in the process, but with the trio of Julian Sayin, Tavien St. Clair and Edmunds committed to Ohio State, it might not be as appealing to some recruits since the competition for the starting spot for the next few years seems like it will be very tough.

Still, Smigiel could consider the Buckeyes now that he said he is going to be starting his recruitment process over from the beginning.

The decommitment from the Seminoles likely was not only due to the Buckeyes' interest in the four-star but rather Florida State hiring a new offensive coordinator, seemingly changing its offensive scheme in the process of bringing former Auburn head coach Gus Malzahn on board.

But it does still seem likely that Ohio State will be in the running for Smigiel going forward, along with Michigan, Michigan State, South Carolina, UCLA and Washington, which are all schools he told On3's Hayes Fawcett stood out to him.

In his junior season, Smigiel completed 219 of 336 passes for 3,521 yards and 49 touchdowns with just three interceptions, also running 89 times for 435 yards and 11 scores on the ground.

### Other Notes And Tidbits

- Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star safety Zech Fort (5-10, 190), an Ohio State target, committed to Georgia on Jan. 30. He is the No. 104 player in the country, the No. 8 safety and the No. 17 player in the state of Florida.

- Red Oak, Texas, 2026 four-star wide receiver Brayden Robinson (5-8, 160) has already decided that when June comes around, one of his official visits will be to Ohio State. The No. 212 player in the country has also said that he will make sure he gets to Miami (Fla.) and Notre Dame as well, with his visit to Columbus coming the weekend of June 13-15. "Coach Hartline has a track record of developing wideouts into first-round picks," he told 247Sports. "The winning culture at Ohio State is huge." Robinson was already at Ohio

State last summer and said he will also take an unofficial visit this spring.

- Toledo Central Catholic four-star cornerback Victor Singleton (6-0, 160) committed to Illinois on Feb. 1 over Michigan and Texas A&M. Ohio State was once a contender for the in-state corner's services, but he didn't mention it as a finalist when he made his commitment. He wasn't visited by Buckeye coaches during the week they were on the road, which was telling in terms of how that recruitment was going.

- Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225), who decommitted from Ohio State in November and decided to wait until National Signing Day to make his decision, signed with Maryland on Feb. 5. The No. 122 prospect in the country was deciding between the Terrapins and Florida State, with the Buckeyes and

Penn State falling out of contention in the past few months, the two schools that were once thought to be favorites to earn a pledge from Mathis.

- The No. 55 player in the country, Alexander City (Ala.) Benjamin Russell four-star wide receiver Cederian Morgan (6-4, 210) put Ohio State in his top 10 list of schools on Feb. 2 alongside Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Miami, Oregon and Tennessee. It could be tough to pull the Alabama prospect out of his home state, but with the success Hartline has had in recruiting, the Buckeyes can't be counted out of the running for any wide receiver recruit. Last season, he caught 70 passes for 1,162 yards and 14 touchdowns. He is ranked the No. 7 wide receiver in the 2026 class and the No. 2 player in the state of Alabama.

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# Ohio State Finishes No. 4 In Consensus Poll

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day signed the fourth-best class nationally in this year's edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin's consensus poll.

The Buckeyes – who did fall one spot from last year's No. 3 ranking but still finished in the top five of the poll for the sixth straight season – brought in 26 scholarship signees, a diverse group that includes three five-stars, 18 four-stars and five three-stars.

Day's class begins at quarterback, where the Buckeyes signed their potential gunslinger of the future in Bellefontaine, Ohio, five-star Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 225). St. Clair, the nation's seventh-best prospect, third-best quarterback and top-ranked player out of Ohio, is Ohio State's first in-state quarterback signee since Joe Burrow in 2015 and the first Ohio five-star quarterback pickup since Braxton Miller in 2011.

St. Clair is paired in Ohio State's 2025 class with fellow five-star Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic five-star wide receiver Quincy Porter (6-3, 205), who bumped from a four-star to a five-star prospect just before National Signing Day, along with other top-100 offensive players Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 320) and Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony "Turbo" Rogers (5-8, 180).

St. Clair, Porter and Lowe make up three

## National Recruiting Experts' Rankings

### 247Sports

1. Texas
2. Georgia
3. Alabama
- 4. Ohio State**
5. Oregon
6. Michigan
7. Auburn
8. Florida
9. Texas A&M
10. LSU

### Rivals

1. Texas
2. Georgia
- 3. Ohio State**
4. Alabama
5. Oregon
6. Michigan
7. LSU
8. Florida
9. Auburn
10. Texas A&M

### On3

1. Texas
2. Georgia
3. Alabama
4. Oregon
- 5. Ohio State**
6. Michigan
7. Texas A&M
8. Auburn
9. LSU
10. Tennessee

### ESPN

1. Texas
2. Georgia
3. Oregon
4. Alabama
- 5. Ohio State**
6. Auburn
7. Michigan
8. LSU
9. Texas A&M
10. Florida

of Ohio State's eight top-100 signees this recruiting cycle. That group includes Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 185), the Buckeyes' top-rated defensive prospect, as well as the nation's No. 1 cornerback and No. 8 player overall; McKinney, Texas, four-star linebacker Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 220); Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel four-star safety Faheem Delane (6-3, 205); and Enterprise, Ala., four-star edge rusher Zion Grady (6-4, 240).

The Buckeyes once again added an exciting group of incoming freshmen, but the 2025 consensus poll – just like any year in recent history – belongs to the SEC. The new-look 16-team conference occupies the top three spots with No. 1 Texas, No. 2

Georgia and No. 3 Alabama. The rankings for Texas and Georgia were unanimous across the four major recruiting services – 247Sports, ESPN, Rivals and On3.

While Georgia and Alabama routinely find themselves at the top of the rankings – this marks the seventh straight year that they are both in the top three – Texas enters the ring as the new challenger in the poll after its first season in the SEC.

The Longhorns signed a talented class that includes five five-stars along with 14 four-stars and six three-stars. That helped them earn 312.27 total points in this year's class by 247Sports, which is by far the highest of any other program.

Texas' loaded class is headlined by Galveston (Texas) Ball five-star safety Jonah Williams (6-3, 203), the nation's 10th-best overall prospect and No. 1 safety. According to ESPN, Williams – who will also play baseball for the Longhorns – is Texas' highest-rated commit since quarterback Arch Manning in 2023.

Williams is one of six top-50 prospects for the Longhorns, a group that includes a familiar name for Buckeyes fans in Jacksonville (Fla.) Mandarin four-star wide receiver Jamie Ffrench (6-1, 185), a one-time Alabama commit and Ohio State target who signed with Texas on the first day of the early signing period despite rumors of him flipping to Florida.

Georgia head coach Kirby Smart brought in a nearly equally impressive 27-prospect haul of five five-stars, tied for the FBS lead of 20 four-stars and also signed two three-stars, giving the program a .9303 average player rating.

The Bulldogs, who claimed the top spot in last year's poll, made a concerted effort to fortify the defensive side of the ball – an area in which they regressed last season – by signing two of the top three defensive prospects in the class.

Savannah (Ga.) Christian Prep five-star defensive lineman Elijah Griffin (6-5, 300) and Warner Robins, Ga., five-star edge rusher Isaiah Gibson (6-4, 255) will look to make an immediate impact with the Bulldogs, both coming in as the No. 1 prospects at their respective positions and the nation's third- and ninth-best overall prospects.

Griffin and Gibson are two of 10 top-150 prospects signed by Georgia, a list that includes former Buckeye target and Findlay, Ohio, four-star quarterback Ryan Montgomery – the brother of Ohio State offensive lineman Luke Montgomery.

Despite it being the first season with-

out legendary head coach Nick Saban pacing the sidelines in Tuscaloosa, Ala., since 2006, Alabama still managed to keep up with the big boys under the leadership of first-year head coach Kalen DeBoer. The Crimson Tide's No. 3 class was powered by three five-stars, 16 four-stars and two three-stars for an average player rating of .9342.

Alabama managed to win the sweepstakes for Duncanville, Texas, five-star quarterback Keelon Russell (6-3, 175), the nation's second-best overall prospect and quarterback who flipped to the Tide from SMU on the first day of the early signing period. Russell threw for over 3,500 yards and 50 touchdowns as a senior, and he figures to be in the thick of Alabama's starting quarterback competition this spring.

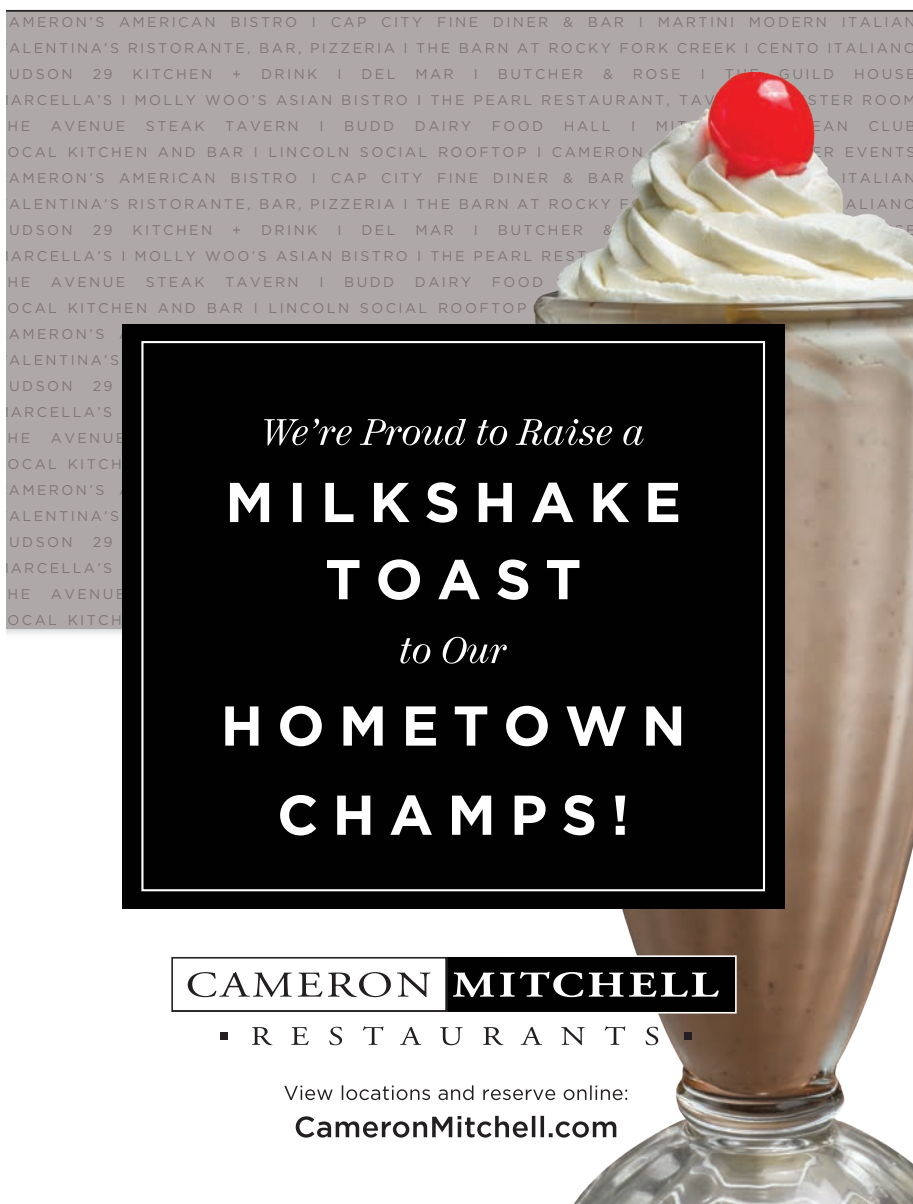
Russell was not the only highly coveted prospect DeBoer signed in his first recruiting class at Alabama. The Tide grabbed six top-60 prospects this winter, headlined by Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star interior offensive lineman Michael Carroll (6-6, 315), the top-rated player at his position and No. 2 player out of the talent-rich state of Florida.

Rounding out the top five was Oregon, which trailed Ohio State by one point despite earning the highest 247Sports average player rating in the nation at .9437, .0074 points above top-ranked Texas.

The Ducks – who are fresh off a Big Ten championship in their first year in the conference – brought in four top-100 prospects in their 20-man class, winning the bidding war with Ohio State for a few of those players. Dan Lanning's squad went into the state of Ohio and picked up Shaker Heights five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) and also signed Conroe, Texas, four-star cornerback and Ohio native Dorian Brew (6-0, 200), while also flipping Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) on the first day of the early signing period.

In total, the top five programs in our consensus poll signed 23 of the top 50 prospects and 41 of the top 100 prospects, both of which were higher than last year's totals of 22 and 39. The rest of the top 10 is rounded out by No. 6 Michigan, No. 7 Auburn, No. 8 LSU, No. 9 Texas A&M and No. 10 Florida.

Michigan and Texas A&M are both back in the top 10 for the first time since 2022, when the Wolverines were ranked No. 9 and the Aggies No. 1. Sherrone Moore's team gathered one of its best classes in recent program history in large part due to the



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**BSB Consensus Poll**

Rk.	Team	Pts.
1.	Texas (4)	100
2.	Georgia	96
3.	Alabama	89
<b>4.</b>	<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>88</b>
5.	Oregon	87
6.	Michigan	77
7.	Auburn	74
8.	LSU	71
9.	Texas A&M	70
10.	Florida	67
11.	Tennessee	60
12.	Notre Dame	53
13.	Miami (Fla.)	52
14.	Penn State	47
15.	USC	45
16.	Ole Miss	41
17.	Oklahoma	35
18.	South Carolina	29
19.	Florida State	23
T-20.	Missouri	20
T-20.	Nebraska	20
22.	Georgia Tech	18
23.	Washington	14
24.	TCU	7
25.	Wisconsin	6

*Teams received points based on their placement in four top-25 polls. Points assigned to teams are inversely proportional to their placement in a poll (25 points for first, 24 for second, etc.) First-place votes are in parentheses. Others receiving points: Mississippi State (4), Clemson (3), Kentucky (2), Arkansas (2).*

signing of Belleville, Mich., five-star quarterback Bryce Underwood (6-4, 208), the nation's consensus No. 1 prospect who flipped to the Wolverines from LSU just before the start of the early signing period.

The Wolverines also received a late boost when they added Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley Northwest five-star offensive tackle Andrew Babalola (6-6, 300) on National Signing Day, giving them their second five-star and third top-100 player in the class.

The Aggies, meanwhile, snagged an impressive 25-commit class of one five-star, 20 four-stars and four three-stars for an average player rating of .9188. Their class is headlined by Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon five-star wide receiver Jerome Myles (6-2, 220), the nation's third-best wideout and No. 19 player overall, and Cocoa, Fla., four-star quarterback Brady Hart (6-4, 185), who flipped from Michigan to Texas A&M after Underwood flipped to the Wolverines.

Florida and LSU both did an admirable job fencing in the top players from their respective home states. The Gators added four of Florida's top 10 prospects, including five- and four-star wideouts Vernell Brown III (5-11, 175) of Orlando Jones and Dallas Wilson (6-3, 195) of Tampa Bay Tech, while the Tigers signed the top-ranked and fourth-best players out of Louisiana, Metairie St. Martin's Episcopal School five-star running back Harlem Berry (5-11, 188) and Alexandria four-star running back JT Lindsey (5-11, 185).

**Consensus Poll Fast Facts**

- The SEC once again dominated the consensus poll with 12 of the league's 16 teams in the top 25, the most out of any conference. Only Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi State and Vanderbilt missed the cut, but the Razorbacks, Wildcats and Bulldogs still received two, two and four points, respectively.
  - Texas – which joined the SEC for the 2024 season – finished on top of the consensus poll with a unanimous 100 points, making it the eighth straight season an SEC team has held the top spot in the rankings.
    - In a season dominated by conference expansion, the entire top 10 was represented by either the 16-team SEC or 18-team Big Ten, with the SEC having seven teams and the Big Ten three. The two conferences also accounted for 20 of the 25 teams in the poll.
      - The Big Ten had the second-most teams represented in the poll with eight, a three-school increase from last season. Ohio State led the way at No. 4, followed by No. 5 Oregon, No. 6 Michigan, No. 14 Penn State, No. 15 USC, T-No. 20 Nebraska, No. 23 Washington and No. 25 Wisconsin.
        - Despite finishing with an 8-5 record, Michigan earned its highest rating in the poll in the last eight years. The Wolverines have had three other top-10 finishes in that span, with their highest rating in that span coming in 2019 when they finished at No. 8.
          - Ohio State's No. 4 ranking is the third-lowest finish in the poll by a national champion since 2018. Michigan was ranked No. 16 last year, while Clemson finished No. 7 in 2018 and LSU at No. 4 in 2020. The rest of the champions finished in the top three, with Alabama at No. 1 in 2019 and 2021 and Georgia at No. 3 and No. 2 in 2022 and 2023, respectively.
            - The ACC had three teams in the consensus poll for the second straight season. No. 13 Miami (Fla.) was once again the conference's highest-ranked team after signing 16 four-stars and five three-stars, followed by No. 19 Florida State and No. 22 Georgia Tech. Clemson missed the cut for the first time in eight seasons.
              - The Big 12 had just one team represented in the poll in No. 24 TCU, the conference's lowest total since 2021. It had three teams in last year's poll, although two of them were Texas and Oklahoma, which are both now in the SEC.
                - Notre Dame was the only non-Power Four team to make the top 25, coming in at No. 12. The Irish dropped two spots from last year but are inside the top 12 for the fifth straight season.
                  - Of the teams that appeared in both this year's and last year's polls, Michigan experienced the highest jump, going from No. 16 to No. 6 after reeling in a pair of five-stars and 15 four-stars. Oklahoma endured the biggest drop from No. 7 to No. 17 after signing one five-star and 11 four-stars.
                    - Three newcomers joined this year's poll, including No. 22 Georgia Tech, No. 23 Washington and TCU. Clemson, Texas Tech and Kentucky each dropped out of the poll after being ranked last year.

— Patrick Engels

The two conference rivals combined to bring in nine top-100 prospects and three five-stars.

The SEC once again dominated the middle of the poll, accounting for five of the teams ranked Nos. 11-20. This includes No. 11 Tennessee, No. 16 Ole Miss, No. 17 Oklahoma, No. 18 South Carolina and T-No. 20 Missouri.

The Volunteers experienced their highest ranking since 2020 after securing a strong 25-man class of one five-star, 16 four-stars and eight three-stars. Their rise in the rankings was in large part due to their success in reeling in one of the country's most coveted 2025 prospects in Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. (6-6, 285), beating out Ohio State. Sanders is the nation's sixth-best prospect and second-best offensive tackle.

Perhaps the biggest surprise among that group is Oklahoma, which dropped 10 spots from No. 7 last year, the largest fall among any of the teams in the top 25.

Coming off a disappointing 6-7 season that included a 2-6 mark in their first season in the SEC, the Sooners collected just one top-100 player, three fewer than last year. That one player is a talented one, however, in Lewisville, Texas, five-star offensive tackle Michael Fasusi (6-5, 295), the nation's fifth overall prospect and top-ranked tackle.

Sooners head coach Brent Venables also signed just 18 players in his third year leading the program, 10 fewer than last season.

Mixed in with those SEC teams were No. 12 Notre Dame, No. 13 Miami (Fla.), No. 14 Penn State, No. 15 USC, No. 19 Florida State and T-No. 20 Nebraska. The Fighting Irish, despite dropping two spots from last year's poll, still compiled a strong 24-player

class after reaching the national championship game for the first time since 2012, adding four top-100 players and seven top-200 players for an average player rating of .9102.

Head coach Marcus Freeman also added the second five-star and highest-ranked prospect of his tenure after securing the services of Wallingford (Conn.) Choate Rosemary Hall five-star offensive tackle Will Black (6-7, 292), the nation's 26th-best overall player and fourth-best tackle.

While Miami, Penn State, USC and Florida State are regulars in this area of the poll, Nebraska finds itself in the top 20 for the second straight year after not making the cut in the previous two. Matt Rhule's Cornhuskers failed to bring in a five-star this year after striking gold with quarterback Dylan Raiola in the 2024 cycle, but they still brought in a solid 20-commit class of 12 four-stars and eight three-stars.

That group includes a potential dynamic pass catcher for Raiola in Homestead, Fla., four-star wide receiver Cortez Mills (6-0, 175), who recorded 2,106 receiving yards and 24 touchdowns during his junior and

senior seasons and was invited to the 2025 Navy All-American Bowl.

In the back end of the poll, No. 25 Wisconsin was the only returner from last year, although it fell two spots from its No. 23 spot last year. Luke Fickell's program did not bring in a five-star but did sign seven four-stars and 16 three-stars, a group that is headlined by Gainesville (Fla.) Buchholz four-star edge rusher Nicholas Clayton (6-4, 215). Clayton, the nation's No. 236 prospect, is Wisconsin's top-rated recruit for this year, meaning the Badgers have failed to bring in a top-200 prospect in two of the last three seasons.

No. 22 Georgia Tech, No. 23 Washington and No. 24 TCU were all newcomers to the poll. The Yellow Jackets continued their upward trajectory by securing the best recruiting class under head coach Brent Key, a 24-player group of six four-stars and 17 three-stars.

Each of Key's top-four prospects is from the state of Georgia, including Cedartown four-star cornerback Tae Harris (5-11, 190). Harris, the nation's 49th-best prospect, third-best cornerback and sixth-best player from Georgia, is Georgia Tech's third highest-ranked prospect in program history, two spots behind Pro Football Hall of Fame wideout Calvin Johnson.

While TCU returns to the poll after a one-year hiatus – it was ranked No. 19 in 2022 following its national runner-up season – Washington is back in the top 25 for the first time in five years in its first season in the Big Ten. In Jedd Fisch's first full year as head coach, the Huskies signed a 28-player class of eight four-stars and 20 three-stars, good for an average player rating of .8801.

Washington signed just one top-100 player in Spanaway (Wash.) Bethel four-star linebacker Zaydrius Rainey-Sale (6-3, 225), the No. 1 player out of Washington and fifth-best linebacker. Another notable signing is La Verne (Calif.) Bonita four-star running back Dylan Robinson Jr. (6-3, 190), who is the sixth-best running back in the 2025 class and No. 139 overall player.

The 25 teams in our consensus poll combined to sign 91 of the top 100 prospects of the class – five fewer than last season – with Clemson, Colorado, Duke, Iowa, Kansas State, Maryland, SMU and North Carolina as the only programs outside the top 25 to sign a top-100 recruit.

Clemson was viewed favorably by On3, earning a No. 23 ranking after hauling in a pair of top-100 players, including Florence (S.C.) South five-star defensive lineman Amare Adams (6-4, 285). Adams was the first top-rated player out of South Carolina to sign with in-state Clemson since cornerback Jeadyn Lukus in 2022.

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# Buckeyes Look To Pick Up Pace In 2026 Class

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State didn't add any more scholarship players on National Signing Day after signing all 26 of its incoming freshmen during the early signing period, five more players than the program brought in for its 2024 class a year before.

Now that recruiting the 2025 class is in the rearview mirror, the Buckeyes have already moved onto the 2026 class being the main focus and are off to somewhat of a slow start relative to what the program is used to. As of Feb. 5, they were ranked No. 19 in the country with their four pledges, trailing directly behind Rutgers (No. 15), Iowa (No. 16), Illinois (No. 17) and Arizona State (No. 18), which is unfamiliar territory for a Ryan Day recruiting class.

However, there is still much time to go when it comes to this recruiting cycle, and Ohio State is already near the top of lists for many different highly rated prospects.

The Buckeyes have commitments from Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205); Avon, Ohio, four-star cornerback Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 172); 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).

But the low-rated class likely won't last very long for Ohio State, and with 10 months left to go before the next early signing period, there is a lot of time to make up ground. Here's a look at some top-150 prospects whom Ohio State is expected to be involved with throughout this cycle. All ratings come from the 247Sports composite rankings, and prospects are listed alphabetically.

## Tyler Atkinson, LB Loganville (Ga.) Grayson

The Buckeyes had great success in the 2025 recruiting class at the linebacker position. Both Vero Beach, Fla., four-star Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) and McKinney, Texas, four-star Riley Pettijohn (6-2, 220) were top-150 players in the cycle, and OSU was able to go into Texas and bring Pettijohn out to the state of Ohio.

But going into states with successful football programs and convincing a prospect to become a Buckeye instead is always tough, and getting Atkinson (6-2, 205) away from the Bulldogs could prove to be too tall a task for OSU.

He is the No. 10 player in the country, the No. 1 linebacker and the No. 1 player in the state of Georgia, and he has already revealed that he has a top seven schools that includes Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Georgia, Ohio State, Tennessee and Texas.

But Atkinson did like what he saw from the Buckeyes during their four-game run to a national championship win after losing to Michigan.

"This win showed resilience," Atkinson told 247Sports. "I can relate after coming off a state championship win at Grayson while being overlooked and counted out by many. As a team, you have to come together and play for each other and the program. That is exactly what Ohio State did this year and in these playoffs."

Atkinson doesn't have any official visits scheduled yet, and it's unclear what his timeline is on his decision. But the Buckeyes seem

## Class Of 2026 National Prospects

Ten of the top players OSU is pursuing in the 2026 class from around the nation, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

| Overall Rk. | Player                | Pos. | Ht.  | Wt. | Stars | High School                     | Top Colleges                      |
|-------------|-----------------------|------|------|-----|-------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1.          | Jackson Cantwell      | OT   | 6-8  | 300 | ***** | Nixa, Mo.                       | UGA, MIA, MICH, MO, OSU, ORE      |
| 10.         | Tyler Atkinson        | LB   | 6-2  | 205 | ***** | Loganville (Ga.) Grayson        | ALA, AUB, CLE, UGA, OSU, TENN, TX |
| 16.         | Blaine Bradford       | SAF  | 6-1  | 207 | ***** | Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic      | LSU, OSU, ORE                     |
| 17.         | Savion Hiter          | RB   | 5-11 | 182 | ***** | Mineral (Va.) Louisa County     | UGA, MICH, OSU, PSU, TENN         |
| 18.         | Cederian Morgan       | WR   | 6-4  | 210 | ***** | Alexander City (Ala.) Russell   | ALA, AUB, OSU                     |
| 27.         | Bralan Womack         | SAF  | 6-0  | 195 | ***** | Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Acad. | ALA, OSU, TENN, TAM               |
| 34.         | Aiden Harris          | DL   | 6-3  | 240 | ****  | Matthews (N.C.) Weddington      | AUB, OSU, SC                      |
| 64.         | Brady Smigiel         | QB   | 6-5  | 205 | ****  | Newbury Park, Calif.            | MICH, MSU, OSU, SC, UCLA, WASH    |
| 80.         | Micah Smith           | IOL  | 6-6  | 305 | ****  | Vero Beach, Fla.                | NA                                |
| 142.        | Zavion Griffin-Haynes | DE   | 6-6  | 235 | ****  | Rolesville, N.C.                | NA                                |

to still be in the running, although Georgia does seem to be the favorite to land him.

## Blaine Bradford, SAF Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic

Ohio State has already started adding to its secondary in the class with Weatherspoon, but safeties coach Matt Guerrieri will want to put together another solid class in his second year in his position with the Buckeyes after bringing in Olney (Md.) Our Lady of Good Counsel four-star safety Faheem Delane (6-3, 205) in the 2025 class.

Bradford (6-1, 200) is ranked the No. 20 player in the country, the No. 1 safety and the No. 2 player in the state of Louisiana. He has a top four of Alabama, LSU, Ohio State and Oregon.

The Buckeyes have missed out on multiple secondary prospects recently to the Ducks, with Conroe, Texas, four-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-0, 200), Cleveland Shaker Heights five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) and Birmingham, Ala., five-star Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) each signing with Dan Lanning in the 2025 class, and they will be looking to turn that around.

But it might not be Oregon that is the biggest competition for Bradford since LSU is his hometown team.

"I am super interested in (LSU)," Bradford said. "They are the hometown team. They have a program that is built up. That 2025 class coming in is great too, and LSU has real potential. I have been there so many times, and they are so consistent. The staff wants what is best for their players, and their legacy is strong."

Bringing in Bradford would be a significant win for Guerrieri and the Buckeyes' 2026 class.

## Jackson Cantwell, OT Nixa, Mo.

Offensive line has been one of the positions that hasn't been recruited quite as well for the Buckeyes in recent years. Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290) was very close to being rated five stars, but since he didn't quite make the cut, Donovan Jackson remains the last five-star offensive lineman the Buckeyes have recruited.

Ohio State is after many different offensive linemen in the 2026 class, but none more than Cantwell (6-8, 300), the No. 1 prospect in the nation. Day's first visit after his post-championship media tour was to see the five-star in Nixa, which Cantwell noticed and appreciated.

"Tall, big-framed offensive tackle prospect with a stellar athletic profile and pedigree who's an advanced mover at this stage of development," Gabe Brooks of 247Sports wrote. "Quick off the ball and flashes hand violence

and general power at the point of attack. Further ahead as a run blocker than in pass protection, but displays encouraging footwork in the latter with immense potential in that category."

Cantwell recently came out with a top six schools of Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Missouri, Ohio State and Oregon, and while he hasn't scheduled his official visits for the summer yet, it wouldn't be surprising to see him in Columbus when that time comes around.

If he does visit, he will have to form a relationship with new Ohio State line coach Tyler Bowen, who has a strong résumé as a recruiter from his time at both Penn State and Virginia Tech.

Cantwell told 247Sports that he knows "pretty much nothing about" Bowen but is doing some research on him.

## Aiden Harris, DL Matthews (N.C.) Weddington

Harris (6-3, 240) comes from the same school as 2025 signee and four-star defensive lineman Trajen Odom (6-3, 285). They played next to each other on the Warriors' front four. But Harris is much higher rated than his former teammate as a four-star who is ranked 34th in the country and the first overall defensive lineman in his class.

It's quite possible that he might come as a package deal with his brother and teammate – four-star defensive lineman Andrew Harris (6-2, 235) – which would also be a positive for any team that might be able to land both of them.

But Aiden understands what Ohio State brings to the table when it comes to developing defensive linemen since Larry Johnson has had so much success doing so, with Nick and Joey Bosa, Chase Young, Zach Harrison and Tyleik Williams a few of the many examples.

"I was sitting in the room with him one day, and he showed us a list of all the players that he put in the draft," Harris told Buckeye Huddle. "It's mind-blowing. As a person, he's really cool."

But Johnson's age could play a factor as it has in some other recruitments over the past few years. Depending on how close the long-time coach is to retiring, Harris might want to seek other opportunities. But Harris currently has a top three of Auburn, Ohio State and South Carolina and received a "crystal ball" to commit to the Buckeyes back in August.

## Savion Hiter, RB Mineral (Va.) Louisa County

Since Carlos Locklyn joined the Ohio State staff as running backs coach last March, he has been extremely active on the recruiting trail, sending out many different offers, and the 2026 class is no different for him.

But Hiter (5-11, 182) is the highest-rated of those recruits in this cycle as the 17th-best prospect in the country and the No. 1-rated running back, and he has Ohio State in his top five.

Locklyn will be competing with the coach who had his position before him at Ohio State, with Michigan and Tony Alford also in the top five along with Georgia, Penn State and Tennessee. He made it clear that the Wolverines were the leader in his recruitment since Alford had a previous relationship with him when he was with the Buckeyes, but he also likes Locklyn.

"Coach Locklyn is just a straightforward guy," Hiter told 247Sports. "He doesn't lie about anything. He doesn't beat around the bush. He tells you straight up how you are and what you need to improve on and what you need to do."

As a sophomore, Hiter ran for 1,187 yards and 11 touchdowns, taking back two kickoffs for touchdowns as well.

## Cederian Morgan, WR Alexander City (Ala.) Russell

Ohio State already has the top wide receiver in the 2026 class with Henry committing on July 28, 2023, but receivers coach and new offensive coordinator Brian Hartline has always been aggressive when it comes to recruiting pass catchers, and he has had major success with that. He has been able to send many of those receivers to the NFL as high draft picks, something that keeps the Buckeyes in the conversation for most top receivers they are involved with, and the five-star Morgan (6-4, 210) is no exception.

As is always the case, pulling an Alabama prospect out of the state is tough to do, but without Nick Saban to compete with, OSU had some success with that in the 2025 class, landing Enterprise, Ala., four-star defensive end Zion Grady (6-4, 240) and Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star running back Anthony Rogers (5-8, 190), both of whom are top-10 players at their position.

Morgan has a top three of Alabama, Auburn and Ohio State and is rated the No. 18 recruit in the country, the No. 3 wide receiver and the No. 2 player in the state of Alabama.

## Brady Smigiel, QB Newbury Park, Calif.

It's unusual that the Buckeyes don't have a quarterback at this point in the recruiting process, but it doesn't seem likely that they will completely pass up an opportunity to add someone at the position.

With Smigiel decommitting from Florida State soon after he was visited by Chip Kelly, it's possible that meeting could have had some effect on him. He told On3's Hayes Fawcett



that six schools were standing out to him, with the Buckeyes along with Michigan, Michigan State, South Carolina, UCLA and Washington on that list.

It might not end up being Smigiel whom the Buckeyes add, but who ends up as the quarterback of the 2026 class will be something to watch as this cycle goes on.

“Smigiel is a big, strong-armed pocket passer who has put up huge numbers since his freshman season,” Greg Biggins of 247Sports wrote. “He’s very accurate down the field, knows how to change speeds and throws with really nice touch but can put plenty of heat on his throws when he needs to. He’s a tough kid, will stand in and take a shot and not flinch. Great natural leader, locker room guy and teammate.”

**Micah Smith, IOL Vero Beach, Fla.**

Smith (6-6, 305) is another offensive lineman in the top 100 whom the Buckeyes have been going after this cycle. Former offensive line coach Justin Frye visited the 80th-best player in the country on Jan. 30 before he left for the Arizona Cardinals.

Smith wasn’t happy with both Frye and former graduate assistant Mike Sollenne leaving, something he made known on Twitter, but the Buckeyes were trending in a positive direction with him before those changes to the OSU staff were made. So if Day has any sort of relationship with Smith, there could still be a connection with the program.

The four-star doesn’t seem to be as far along in his recruitment as some other prospects as he hasn’t revealed any of his top schools to this point, which will give Bowen more time to try to build up his own relationship with Smith.

Smith has already taken multiple visits to Columbus, and there will likely be more this year, especially since he told Eleven Warriors last spring that he was pretty high on Ohio State.

“They’re up there,” Smith said. “They’re probably No. 1 right now. They’re going to be hard to beat when it comes to commitment day.”

**Bralan Womack, SAF Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Acad.**

Guerrieri is also involved heavily in the Womack (6-0, 195) sweepstakes, trying to land at least one of the top safeties in the 2026 cycle, and he seems to be in a pretty good position.

Womack included Ohio State in his top four along with Alabama, Tennessee and Texas A&M. After a visit to Columbus over the summer for a recruiting camp, he made it clear that the Buckeyes were No. 1 on his list at that point after getting an offer directly from Day.

“The way they develop and produce players to help them get to the NFL,” Womack told Eleven Warriors about what he likes the most about Ohio State. “But not only produce players, they keep them in the NFL. Marshon Lattimore, Denzel Ward, Jeff Okudah, Eli Apple, Malcolm Jenkins. Those are all guys playing like six-plus years – more than the average NFL career.”

Womack, the No. 27 player in the country, the No. 2 safety and the No. 2 player in the state of Mississippi, will likely commit over the summer after he has made his official visits.

**Zavion Griffin-Haynes, DE Rolesville, N.C.**

Griffin-Haynes (6-6, 235) has already committed and decommitted from a school during

**Class Of 2026 In-State Prospects**

The top 10 players in the state of Ohio for the 2026 class, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

| Overall Rk. | Player             | Pos. | Ht.  | Wt. | Stars | High School                 | Top Colleges                |
|-------------|--------------------|------|------|-----|-------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 20.         | Elbert Hill        | CB   | 5-10 | 175 | ***** | Akron Hoban                 | ALA, UM, OSU, ORE, PSU, USC |
| 63.         | Victor Singleton   | CB   | 6-0  | 160 | ****  | Toledo Central Catholic     | Committed to Illinois       |
| 109.        | Maxwell Riley      | OT   | 6-5  | 280 | ****  | Avon Lake                   | CLE, OSU                    |
| 114.        | Cincere Johnson    | LB   | 6-3  | 225 | ****  | Cleveland Glenville         | NA                          |
| 139.        | Shahn Alston       | RB   | 5-9  | 205 | ****  | Painesville Harvey          | Committed to USC            |
| 153.        | Adam Guthrie       | OT   | 6-7  | 285 | ****  | Washington CH Miami Trace   | CLE, OSU                    |
| 171.        | Favour Akih        | RB   | 6-0  | 190 | ****  | Delaware Rutherford B Hayes | ISU, MSU, PITT, PSU         |
| 175.        | Jakob Weatherspoon | CB   | 5-10 | 172 | ****  | Avon                        | Committed to Ohio State     |
| 197.        | Sam Greer          | OT   | 6-7  | 310 | ****  | Akron Hoban                 | MO, OSU                     |
| 205.        | Brayden Fogle      | TE   | 6-3  | 225 | ****  | Mansfield Lexington         | NA                          |

his recruiting process. He pledged his services to North Carolina on Sept. 8, but that lasted only until Nov. 26 when former head coach Mack Brown was fired.

He is the No. 142 prospect in the country, the No. 13 defensive end and the No. 9 player in the state of North Carolina. Since longtime NFL head coach Bill Belichick took over for the Tar Heels, he has remained in touch with Griffin-Haynes, but the Buckeyes could remain a factor in his recruitment.

He was at a camp in Columbus over the summer, and he talked about his connection with Ohio State and how Larry Johnson has been able to send many different edge rushers to the pros where they have had successful careers.

“Being coached by Coach Johnson, he coached Nick Bosa, Joey Bosa, so I wanted to experience that for myself,” Griffin-Haynes said. “Chase Young and Nick Bosa, those are two guys I really looked up to, so I hope to be like them one day.”

**Another Good Class Of In-State Talent**

Just like it’s tough for the Buckeyes to pull top talent out of other states with major football programs, it’s the same way for Ohio, with the Buckeyes dominating in recruiting when it comes to in-state prospects.

Weatherspoon and Ricketts have already committed to the Buckeyes as in-state players, and when Henry pledged his services he was still at Cincinnati Withrow High School before moving to California.

The Buckeye State boasts two top-100 players this cycle, five in the top 150 and 18 total four-star recruits. While the top-end talent might not fully compare to last year’s class, the overall numbers are still similar to 2025 when there were four top-100 players, seven in the top 200 and 18 players who were rated four stars or better, with Ohio State landing six of those prospects.

Only two top-20 recruits in the state – Toledo Central Catholic four-star cornerback and Illinois pledge Victor Singleton (6-0, 160) and Painesville Harvey four-star running back and USC pledge Shahn Alston (5-9, 205) – were committed to other schools as of Feb. 5.

Here’s a look at some of the top uncommitted prospects in the state of Ohio in 2026.

**Sam Greer, OT Akron Hoban**

Part of the reason that the outlook on the 2026 offensive line recruiting process has been more positive this cycle is the in-state talent when it comes to front-five prospects. Greer (6-7, 310) is the lowest-rated of the three at No. 197 in the country and the No. 16 offensive tackle, but he is still someone the Buckeyes would love to have.

It seems that battle is going to be between just two teams for Greer, with him saying that Ohio State and Missouri are the top two for him. He is going to wait until after making official visits over the summer to make his decision, but it will likely be soon after that, and he has already decided the Buckeyes will be one of those visits.

If you ask Greer’s mom, she would like for him to be in Columbus when he goes to college.

“My mom wants me to stay close to home, so that’s another big factor,” Greer told Cleveland.com in September. “My brother, he’s at West Point right now playing football, so she’s very sad that he’s gone. So I mean, I want to go play where the best football’s at and where my best opportunity is at.”

But with Frye gone, Bowen is going to have to make a strong impression.

“It definitely has changed my interest just because of how much I thought of Frye,” Greer told 247Sports.

He took multiple visits to Ohio State during the season, and it wouldn’t be a surprise to see him back on campus in the spring as well.

**Adam Guthrie, OT Washington CH Miami Trace**

Guthrie (6-7, 285) is another big-bodied in-state tackle whom the Buckeyes would like to have on their roster for years to come. He is the No. 153 player in the country, the No. 13 offensive tackle and the No. 6 player in the state of Ohio.

He has a top three schools of Clemson, Georgia and Ohio State, but soon after Frye left he received two different “crystal balls” on 247Sports to commit to the Tigers from Cory Fravel, a Clemson insider, and Allen Trieu, a national analyst.

Guthrie told 247Sports before the Bowen news broke that he is waiting to see who is hired before he moves forward with the recruiting process. It was unknown as BSB went to press how he felt about the Buckeyes’ new position coach.

“I will wait to see who’s hired and go from there,” he said.

**Elbert Hill, CB Akron Hoban**

The highest-ranked player in the state of Ohio in the 2026 cycle is Hill (5-10, 175), a cornerback who is No. 20 in the country and the No. 1 corner in the cycle. Secondary/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton has done well in recruiting recently, with his name starting to be mentioned along with Hartline’s when it comes to how well they have done.

Had Offord not flipped to Oregon during the early signing period, Walton would have had two of the top 10 players in the country in 2025 with Houston North Shore five-star Devin Sanchez (6-2, 185) signing with the Buckeyes.

Hill has already gotten a “crystal ball” to commit to Ohio State but has a very impressive top-six list of Alabama, Michigan, Oregon, Penn State, USC and the Buckeyes, so Walton will need to keep going after him hard, but that likely won’t be an issue based off what Hill said about the coach over the summer.

“One thing that makes Coach Walton special is that if he wants you, he’s going to consistently keep coming after you. He’s not going to give up. He’s not going to back off you. He’s going to keep coming after you and talking and just having fun with it.”

**Cincere Johnson, LB Cleveland Glenville**

The Buckeyes are big favorites when it comes to Johnson’s (6-3, 225) recruitment since they have long had a connection with Glenville High School in Cleveland, with many different Tarblooders ending up at Ohio State such as Troy Smith, Ted Ginn Jr., Cardale Jones, Marshon Lattimore and many more.

Johnson is the No. 114 prospect in the country, the No. 9 linebacker and the No. 4 player in the state of Ohio. He has said that he plans to be back in Columbus for spring practices and will take an official visit as well.

The Buckeyes currently have a linebacker from Glenville with Arvell Reese moving up the depth chart over the 2024 season, and Johnson told Buckeye Huddle the two have a good relationship and he gets compared to Reese as a player a lot.

“I always get that comparison, and I have no problem with it,” Johnson said. “But yeah, me and Arvell always talk. We were actually just working out together. That’s my guy.”

**Maxwell Riley, OT Avon Lake**

Riley (6-5, 280) is the highest-rated of the Ohio offensive line prospects at No. 109 in the country, and he could end up being a tackle at the college level or move inside to guard if he needed to.

Like Guthrie, he seems to be closer to making a commitment, saying he wants to do so somewhat soon, and he is between Ohio State and Clemson for that decision.

Before Frye left, analysts favored the Buckeyes in his recruitment, but he is going to give Bowen a chance to win him over as well. He told On3 that he is expecting Bowen to be a great hire for Day and the Buckeyes, even if he knows little about him.

“I personally don’t know him or a lot about him, but if Coach Day is hiring him, he must be the real deal,” he said.

Riley has taken multiple visits to both schools, and he plans to make at least one more before his final decision comes, but Bowen will likely make Riley an early priority.



# OSU, Oregon, U-M Lead The Way For Big Ten

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Despite facing new competition against such former Pac-12 powers as Oregon and USC, Ohio State had the highest-ranked recruiting class in the Big Ten for the sixth year in a row.

Unlike 2024 though, there was some competition for that title. The Buckeyes' team score of 297.72 according to 247Sports ranked fourth in the country, just high enough to stay ahead of Oregon, which totaled 296.10 points, the second highest in the Big Ten and fifth highest in the country.

Ohio State's 92.46 average player rating was second in the Big Ten to the Ducks, whose average player rating of 94.37 led the entire nation.

Elsewhere in the Big Ten, Michigan was right behind Ohio State and Oregon with the No. 6-ranked class. No. 14 USC, No. 15 Penn State, No. 22 Nebraska, No. 23 Washington and No. 25 Maryland also made the top 25-ranked classes of the cycle.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin broke down the recruiting class of each of the other Big Ten schools outside of Ohio State, and a more in-depth report on Michigan's recruiting class is featured on page 26. The teams are ordered by the final composite rankings, with the number of signees in parentheses. Player and team rankings are as of Feb. 7.

## 5. Oregon (20)

Eugene, Ore., may be over 2,000 miles away from Columbus, but Oregon has quickly become a major recruiting rival of Ohio State.

Oregon's class included five top-50 players, a group led by Duncanville, Texas, five-star wide receiver Dakorien Moore (5-11, 182). Moore, who finished the year as the No. 4 player in the country, No. 1 wide receiver and No. 2 player in Texas, initially committed to LSU early in his recruitment before flipping to the Ducks in July.

The Ducks' highest-ranked player is at wide receiver, but the heart of their class is in the secondary.

Birmingham (Ala.) Parker five-star cornerback Na'eem Offord (6-1, 185) led a very talented group of cornerbacks signed by head coach Dan Lanning's coaching staff. The nation's 13th-best prospect and third-best corner was committed to the Buckeyes until the first day of the early signing period when he flipped and signed with Oregon.

Shaker Heights, Ohio, five-star safety Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) didn't go as far as committing to the Buckeyes, but he still flirt-

## Big Ten Team Rankings

| Overall Rk. | Team           | Signees | Avg. Player Rating |
|-------------|----------------|---------|--------------------|
| 4           | Ohio State     | 26      | 92.46 (2)          |
| 5           | Oregon         | 20      | 94.37 (1)          |
| 6           | Michigan       | 24      | 92.18 (3)          |
| 14          | USC            | 24      | 89.85 (5)          |
| 15          | Penn State     | 27      | 90.09 (4)          |
| 22          | Nebraska       | 20      | 89.65 (6)          |
| 23          | Washington     | 28      | 88.01 (10)         |
| 25          | Maryland       | 21      | 88.11 (9)          |
| 27          | Wisconsin      | 23      | 88.36 (7)          |
| 33          | Rutgers        | 27      | 87.68 (11)         |
| 38          | Iowa           | 16      | 88.33 (8)          |
| 45          | Illinois       | 22      | 86.88 (14)         |
| 46          | UCLA           | 19      | 86.99 (12)         |
| 47          | Indiana        | 23      | 86.61 (15)         |
| 50          | Minnesota      | 22      | 86.23 (16)         |
| 56          | Michigan State | 18      | 86.89 (13)         |
| 65          | Northwestern   | 20      | 85.90 (17)         |
| 98          | Purdue         | 14      | 85.09 (18)         |

\*247Sports composite rankings

ed with his in-state team before signing with the Ducks.

Rounding out an elite group of defensive backs was Conroe, Texas, four-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-0, 200) and Owings Mills (Md.) McDonogh School four-star cornerback Brandon Finney Jr. (6-2, 185).

On the offensive side of the ball, Moore is joined by a trio of four-star offensive linemen, including Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day interior offensive lineman Ziyare Addison (6-5, 290) and Las Vegas Bishop Gorman teammates and offensive tackles Alai Kalaniuvalu (6-4, 300) and Douglas Utu (6-4, 317).

The Ducks also enhanced their skill positions by adding top-250 prospects such as Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star running back Jordan Davison (6-0, 216), Scottsdale (Ariz.) Notre Dame Preparatory four-star wide receiver Cooper Perry (6-1, 185), Fullerton (Calif.) Troy four-star tight end Vander Ploog (6-6, 223) and San Diego Lincoln four-star quarterback Akili Smith Jr. (6-5, 200), whose father of the same name also played quarterback for Oregon and was a first-round draft pick of the Cincinnati Bengals.

Overall, Oregon finished with three five-star recruits – the same amount as Ohio State – and 16 four-stars, two fewer than the Buckeyes.

## 14. USC (24)

Not too far behind fellow Big Ten newcomer Oregon, USC possessed the fourth-best class in the conference. The Trojans' 24-man class had a team score of 257.02 and an average player rating of 89.85.

The class was led by Corona (Calif.) Cen-

ennial five-star quarterback Husan Longstreet (6-2, 200), the No. 25 player in the country, the No. 4 quarterback and No. 2 player out of California.

USC hasn't been known as a defensive juggernaut under head coach Lincoln Riley, but his program might be headed in the right direction after acquiring some solid pieces on that side of the ball.

The Trojans' highest-rated defensive recruit, New Orleans Edna Karr four-star defensive lineman Jahkeem Stewart (6-6, 270), considered Ohio State throughout his recruitment and even took an official visit on Nov. 29, but he ultimately committed and signed with the Trojans one week later on Dec. 4. Stewart is the nation's 34th-best prospect and fifth-best defensive lineman.

In addition to Stewart, USC added another top-150 ranked defensive player in San Clemente, Calif., four-star linebacker Matai Tago'ai (6-4, 190).

The Trojans also signed four offensive linemen, including top-200 players Spanish Fork, Utah, four-star offensive tackle Aaron Dunn (6-8, 290) and Gainesville, Ga., four-star offensive tackle Alex Payne (6-5, 265).

In all, USC's 24-man recruiting class was made up of one five-star, 11 four-stars and 12 three-stars.

## 15. Penn State (27)

The Nittany Lions haven't been a recruiting powerhouse necessarily the last three cycles, but they have been consistent. Head coach James Franklin also inked the nation's 15th-best class last season as well as the 14th-best class in 2023.

Franklin's 2025 class starts in Pennsylvania with Center Valley (Pa.) Southern Lehigh four-star tight end Andrew Olesh (6-5, 210), the nation's 57th-best prospect, third-best tight end and No. 1 player out of Pennsylvania.

Elsewhere in the northeast, the Nittany Lions signed Paramus (N.J.) Catholic four-star interior offensive lineman Malachi Goodman (6-6, 310); Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional four-star cornerback Jahmir Joseph (6-0, 180); Greater Latrobe, Pa. four-star linebacker Alex Tatsch (6-3, 215); and Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star running back Jabree Wallace-Coleman (6-0, 200).

In total, four of the Nittany Lions' six highest-rated recruits came from either New Jersey or Pennsylvania.

The Nittany Lions' class was unusually deep at the tight end position. They signed five tight ends in the class, including three four-stars.

Penn State didn't bring in a five-star, but its 19 four-star signees were the most signed by any team in the Big Ten.

## 22. Nebraska (20)

There was a bit of a gap in quality between the Big Ten's top-five recruiting classes and the classes of the other 13 programs, but Nebraska still brought in a solid class.

The Cornhuskers' 20-man class was made up of 12 four-stars and eight three-stars to garner a team score of 237.38 and an average player rating of 89.65, each of which ranked sixth in the Big Ten.

Unlike last year, when they signed five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola, the Corn-

huskers' class wasn't led by a blue-chip prospect. Their highest-ranked prospect was Homestead, Fla. four-star wide receiver Cortez Mills (6-0, 167), the nation's 112th-best prospect, 15th-best wide receiver and 16th-best player out of Florida.

Nebraska further solidified its future at the skill positions by signing Orange (Calif.) Lutheran four-star quarterback TJ Lateef (6-2, 190) and Lee's Summit (Mo.) North four-star wide receiver Isaiah Mozee (6-1, 200), but the strength of its class was at linebacker.

Head coach Matt Rhule's program signed three linebackers in 2025, including top-200 prospects Stilwell (Kan.) Blue Valley four-star Dawson Merritt (6-3, 210) and Omaha (Neb.) Westside four-star Christian Jones (6-2, 230).

## 23. Washington (28)

In his first full cycle as head coach at Washington, Jedd Fisch signed a quality class in 2025.

Fisch's 28-man class started in-state with Spanaway (Wash.) Bethel four-star linebacker Zaydrius Rainey-Sale (6-3, 225), the No. 100 player in the country, No. 5 linebacker and No. 1 player from Washington.

Rainey-Sale is one of five players to sign in Fisch's class from Washington and one of 21 players from the West Coast.

The Huskies signed two more top-200 players to their class including Phoenix (Ariz.) Mountain Pointe four-star safety Rylan Dillard-Allen (6-0, 180) and La Verne (Calif.) Bonita four-star athlete Dylan Robinson Jr. (6-3, 195).

Two of the Huskies' eight four-stars were wide receivers. Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver Marcus Harris (6-1, 185) was the highest-ranked player at the position for Washington and the No. 352 player in the nation.

Joining Harris in Seattle is his high-school teammate, three-star quarterback Dash Beierly (6-1, 215). The nation's No. 540 prospect threw for 2,175 yards, 26 touchdowns and only two interceptions while at Mater Dei.

## 25. Maryland (21)

Maryland's recruiting class wasn't quite as well-rounded as some of the other teams ranked above them in the Big Ten, but it was still among the conference's best.

Although the Terrapins signed only six players ranked inside the top 500, three of them were ranked inside the top 150. Maryland's highest-ranked player was Severn (Md.) Archbishop Spalding four-star quarterback Malik Washington (6-4, 215).

The nation's 99th-best player and 10th-best quarterback threw for 2,089 yards and 24 touchdowns while completing 64.4 percent of his passes during his senior season.

That trio of top-150 players also included Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star edge rusher Zahir Mathis (6-6, 225), who signed with the Terrapins on National Signing Day after previously decommitting from Ohio State in November.

Like Penn State, Maryland made its hay in its own back yard. All six of the Terrapins' four-star signees came from the Mid-Atlantic region. The top-rated player in that group

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## RECRUITING WRAP-UP: BIG TEN WRAP-UP

other than Washington and Mathis was Virginia Beach (Va.) Salem four-star interior offensive lineman Jaylen Gilchrist (6-5, 295), the nation's 110th-best prospect and seventh-best player at his position.

The Terrapins rounded out their class with 15 three-stars to receive a team score of 228.43 and an average player rating of 87.71.

### 27. Wisconsin (23)

Although head coach Luke Fickell has struggled to lead the Badgers to consistent success on the field, off the field he signed his second straight top-30 class.

Wisconsin finished the cycle with a team score of 227.06, which was ninth in the Big Ten, but its 88.36 average player rating was ahead of both Washington and Maryland at seventh best in the conference.

The Badgers' 23-man class was made up of seven four-stars and 16 three-stars, a group led by Albuquerque (N.M.) La Cueva four-star linebacker Mason Posa (6-3, 210), the nation's 220th-best player, 24th-best linebacker and top-ranked player from New Mexico.

Unsurprisingly given Fickell's own playing experience as a defensive lineman with Ohio State, Wisconsin had success signing talent in the trenches, where they inked two top-300 defensive linemen, including Gainesville (Fla.) Bucholz four-star defensive end Nicholas Clayton (6-5, 215) and Palatine, Ill. four-star defensive lineman Jaylen Williams (6-6, 265).

One position Fickell has struggled to recruit well so far in his tenure with the Badgers is at quarterback, but Fort Meyers (Fla.) Bishop Verot four-star Carter Smith (6-3, 185) could potentially become the star quarterback Fickell has been searching for.

Smith, the No. 285 player overall and No. 24 quarterback, threw for a Lee County-record 8,460 career passing yards and 87 touchdowns while also rushing for 2,260 yards and 56 scores, an impressive stat line that helped him win 2023-24 Florida Gatorade Player of the Year.

### 33. Rutgers (27)

After stringing together consecutive winning seasons for the first time in over a decade, the Scarlet Knights also improved their future off the field. Rutgers' final composite ranking of No. 33 equaled head coach Greg Schiano's highest-ranked class since he returned as the leader of the program in 2020.

Rutgers' class of three four-stars and 24 three-stars was led by Washington (D.C.) St. John's four-star safety Tariq Hayer (6-0, 190), the No. 307 player in the class, No. 27 safety and No. 3 player out of the District of Columbia.

Hayer was one of five top-500 defensive signings for Rutgers, a group that – in addition to Hayer – is headlined by Jersey City, N.J., four-star linebacker DJ McClary (6-1, 210) and Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett three-star defensive lineman Braxton Kyle (6-3, 325).

On offense, Rutgers' strength was at wide receiver, where it picked up three prospects, including Toms River (N.J.) Donovan Catholic four-star Michael Thomas III (5-11, 205). He is Schiano's second highest-ranked signee at No. 377 nationally, helping Rutgers finish with an average player rating of 87.68, 11th best in the Big Ten.

### 38. Iowa (16)

It wasn't a deep 2025 class for the Hawkeyes, as their 16 signees were the second fewest in the conference, but head coach Kirk Ferentz still added some high-end talent.

The Hawkeyes' class included four four-stars and 12 three-stars. Among the four-stars was Edwardsville, Ill., edge rusher Iose Epenesa (6-4, 270), who was by far the Hawkeyes' highest-ranked player as the No. 33 player in the class, No. 5 defensive lineman and No. 2 player out of Illinois.

Epenesa, the brother of current Buffalo Bills defensive end and former two-time first-team All-Big Ten Hawkeye A.J. Epenesa, made first-team all-state as a senior after recording seven sacks and 11 tackles for loss.

Right around the time when Iowa's Jay Higgins was named the Big Ten's linebacker of the year, the Hawkeyes signed a pair of top-300 linebackers in Oswego, Ill., four-star Carson Cooney (6-3, 215) and Sycamore, Ill., four-star Burke Gautcher (6-3, 200).

As well as Iowa has done recently at developing linebackers, nationally they are more known as "Tight End U" for their ability to manufacture NFL-caliber tight ends.

Clear Lake, Iowa, four-star Thomas Meyer (6-5, 210) may be the next Hawkeye to carry on that legacy. He is the nation's 268th-best player, 14th-best tight end and top-ranked player out of Iowa.

### 45. Illinois (22)

Illinois has yet to sign a top 35-class under Bret Bielema after it ranked 45th nationally and 12th in the Big Ten in this year's cycle.

West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star linebacker Grant Beerman (6-4, 220) was Illinois' lone four-star recruit in the class, coming in as the 422nd-best prospect and 47th-best linebacker in the class.

Outside of Beerman, the Fighting Illini did well at the skill positions, signing top-700 prospects such as Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional three-star running back John Forster (5-11, 185); Mt. Zion, Ill., three-star wide receiver Brayden Trimble (6-1, 175); and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas three-star running back Cedric Wyche II (5-10, 195).

To go along with a solid running back class, the Fighting Illini signed two top-1000 quarterbacks in Clearwater (Fla.) Central Catholic three-star JerShaun Newton (5-11, 205) – the brother of former Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year Jer'Zhan Newton – and St. Louis Cardinal Ritter College Prep three-star Carson Boyd (6-0, 185).

These players gave the Illini an average player rating of 86.88, which ranked 14th in the Big Ten.

### 46. UCLA (19)

After signing the 90th-ranked recruiting class in 2024 in large part due to the departure of former head coach Chip Kelly to Ohio State, the DeShaun Foster-led Bruins bounced back with a 19-man class which included two four-stars and 17 three-stars.

UCLA's highest-ranked player was Hesperia (Calif.) Oak Hills four-star running back Karson Cox (6-0, 205), the nation's No. 289 overall prospect, No. 20 running back

Continued On Page 26

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# Hoosiers' Success Doesn't Lead To Prospect Bonanza

Continued From Page 25

and No. 24 player out of California.

Including Cox and the only other four-star signed in the class, Pittsburg, Calif., safety Jacy Hudson (6-2, 185), 13 of the Bruins' 19 signees hailed from California.

UCLA's class included a pair of three-star quarterbacks in Hughson, Calif.'s Robert McDaniel (6-2, 200) and Arlington Heights (Ill.) John Hershey's Colton Gumino (6-1, 190), the No. 32 and No. 87 quarterbacks in the class.

The Bruins also loaded up on defense by signing five top-700 players, including Pasadena (Calif.) John Muir three-star edge rusher Cole Cogshell (6-3, 240) and Corona (Calif.) Centennial three-star cornerback LaRue Zamorano (6-2, 185).

## 47. Indiana (23)

The Hoosiers weren't quite able to parlay their berth in the College Football Playoff into an elite recruiting class, but head coach Curt Cignetti signed a talented group that included one four-star and 21 three-stars.

Indiana's top prospect in this year's class was Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star safety Byron Baldwin Jr. (6-2, 195), the nation's 257th-best overall prospect, 20th-best safety and sixth-best player out of Maryland. Baldwin is the only four-star and only top-300 player in Indiana's class.

The Hoosiers did have an impressive defensive end class, though, signing a pair of top-600 edge rushers in St. Louis Christian Brothers College three-star Triston Abram (6-3, 230) and Indianapolis Warren Central three-star Tyrone Burrus Jr. (6-3, 245).

Cignetti's class was also marked by a trio of wide receivers, two of those being top-1,000 signees in Indianapolis Lawrence Central three-star Davion Chandler (5-11, 180) and Norfolk, (Va.) Maury three-star Lebron Bond (5-9, 175).

## 50. Minnesota (22)

One year after signing his highest-ranked



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## Michigan Finishes With Top-10 Class

Michigan's worst season since 2020 did nothing to discourage recruits from coming to Ann Arbor.

After a recruiting surge in November that had the Wolverines win several key recruiting battles with only weeks to go before early signing day, head coach Sherrone Moore earned the third-best recruiting class in the Big Ten and the sixth-best class overall, bringing in a pair of five-stars, 15 four-stars and seven three-stars

Michigan's 24-man class had an average player rating of 92.18 and overall score of 290.87, both of which ranked third in the Big Ten and sixth nationally.

By far the most important battle the Wolverines won was at the quarterback position, where they flipped and signed Belleville, Mich., five-star and former LSU commit Bryce Underwood (6-4, 208).

Underwood, the No. 1 ranked recruit in the country, threw for 2,508 passing yards and 32 touchdowns to six interceptions while completing 71.8 percent of his passes as a senior, allowing him to earn comparisons to NFL MVPs Josh Allen and Cam Newton from Charles Power, On3's director of scouting and rankings.

The Wolverines paired Underwood with a loaded offensive line class that includes Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley Northwest five-star offensive tackle Andrew Babalola (6-6, 300)

and Denton (Texas) Ryan four-star offensive tackle Ty Haywood (6-5, 285) – the Wolverines' final signing of their class on Feb. 5 – the nation's 39th-best prospect and sixth-best tackle.

Michigan didn't ignore the defensive side of the ball, signing seven top-300 defenders, including five in the secondary.

Chester (Va.) Thomas Dale four-star cornerback Shamari Earls (6-2, 203) was the Wolverines' highest-rated defensive back out of that group, coming in as the No. 88 overall player and No. 13 corner of the class.

Earls, who was previously committed to both South Carolina and Georgia before ultimately landing with Michigan, was joined in the class by a trio of top-130 safeties, including Underwood's high school teammate, four-star Elijah Dotson (6-2, 171).

Michigan wasn't quite as good along the defensive line as it was in the secondary. Of its five defensive line signees, only one of them ranked inside the top 300, but Oak Park (Ill.) Fenwick four-star defensive lineman Nathaniel Marshall (6-3, 240) was the Wolverines' highest-rated defender, coming in as the No. 43 overall prospect in the country as well as the No. 3 defensive line prospect.

In total, the Wolverines signed 10 top-150 prospects, six more than they did in 2024.

— Bobby Gorbett

recruiting class as head coach of the Golden Gophers, P.J. Fleck's 2025 class was a slight step back. The Golden Gophers' 22-man class finished with a final score of 200.95, the 15th best in the Big Ten, and an average player rating of 86.23 (16th-best).

Still, the Golden Gophers managed to sign three four-stars, Robbinsdale (Minn.) Cooper defensive end Emmanuel Karmo (6-4, 222); Naples (Fla.) First Baptist Academy wide receiver Bradley Martino (6-3, 165); and Laguna Beach, Calif., quarterback Jackson Kollock (6-4, 215).

Outside of the four stars, only four others from the Golden Gophers' 22-man class were ranked inside the top 1,000.

The true strength of the class came along the defensive line, where Minnesota signed six players including Karmo. Avon, Ind., three-star edge rusher Enoch Atewogbola (6-4, 215) and Cleveland Heights, Ohio, three-star defensive lineman Jayquan Stubbs (6-6, 265) were two of those three other top-1,000 players, coming in at No. 709 and No. 631, respectively.

Osseo (Minn.) Heritage Christian Academy three-star defensive lineman Abu Tarwallie finished just outside the top 1,000 at No. 1,003, but he was ranked the fifth-best player from his state and the 111th-best overall defensive lineman.

## 56. Michigan State (18)

Michigan State's 18-man class was its lowest-ranked group since 2003. It consisted of no players inside the top 300 and received a team score of 196.1, coming in at 16th in the Big Ten.

Head coach Jonathan Smith's lone four-star addition was Frankenmuth, Mich., defensive end Derrick Simmons (6-3, 270), who held other Big Ten offers from Illinois, Northwestern and Purdue.

Michigan State's team score was in part dragged down by the fact that it signed only

18 prospects. The Spartans' average player rating of 86.89 was 13th best in the Big Ten, and 10 of their 18 signees ranked inside the top 1,000.

A couple of Smith's top-1,000 signees came at the linebacker position, where he signed Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary's three-star Charles White (6-2, 200) and Macomb (Mich.) Dakota three-star DiMari Malone (6-1, 220).

The Spartans struggled adding talent at offensive line, where they signed just three players, only one of those ranking inside the top 1,000.

Michigan State will hope to make up for the mediocre recruiting class through the transfer portal. Its current 16-player transfer haul ranks 21st in the nation.

## 65. Northwestern (20)

The Wildcats had a slightly improved recruiting class from last year, but that isn't saying much. Northwestern's 2024 recruiting class ranked last in the Big Ten and No. 77 nationally.

Northwestern and second-year head coach David Braun got out of the very basement of the Big Ten this year, but its team score of 187.75 ranked 65th nationally and 17th in the Big Ten. The Wildcats 85.90 average player rating wasn't much of an improvement, also ranking 17th in the conference.

Northwestern was one of just two teams in the Big Ten to not sign a top-500 prospect, with its top signing being Bryant, Ark., three-star running back Daniel Anderson (5-11, 195), the nation's 640th-best player and 54th-best running back.

Anderson was one of only three top-1,000 signees in the class, a group that included three-star defensive linemen Mason Mayne (6-3, 275) of Lawton, Mich., and Caden O'Rourke (6-5, 230) of Frankfort (Ill.) Lincoln-Way East.

On offense, none of Braun's four wide receiver signees was a top-1,000 player, but it nearly had a top-1,000 player at tight end in Westerville (Ohio) South three-star Tyler Kielmeyer (6-6, 235), who was the nation's 1,003rd-best prospect and 50th-best tight end.

## 98. Purdue (14)

Although it wasn't the fault of new head coach Barry Odom, Purdue finished the 2025 cycle with not only the worst recruiting class in the Big Ten but by far the worst class in the power four.

Purdue finished the 2025 cycle with only 14 signees, the lowest of the Big Ten, and a team score of 147.08, 40 points lower than Northwestern. The Boilermakers' average player rating of 85.09 was a bit better, but it was also last in the Big Ten.

Purdue's lone top-1,000 signee were Franklin (Tenn.) Battle Ground Academy three-star cornerback Zyntreacs Otey (5-11, 180) and Elhart, Ind., Concord Community three-star running back Jaron Thomas, the No. 706 and No. 974 players in the nation, respectively.

The Boilermakers' class wasn't deep at any position, but it was especially problematic on the offensive line, a position where they failed to sign a single player.

They did sign a quarterback, though, in Fayetteville, Ark., three-star Garyt Odom (6-2, 165), the son of Barry Odom. He signed with his father's previous school UNLV on Dec. 4 before flipping and signing with Purdue on Dec. 12 after Odom accepted the Purdue job.

Barry Odom will have to hope that his 28-man transfer class will make up for the lackluster recruiting haul. His transfer haul ranks No. 48 in the nation.

# Stroud Ready To Move On From Second Season

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

C.J. Stroud threw for more than 3,700 yards with 20 touchdowns in leading the formerly inept Houston Texans to a second straight division title with the same 10-7 record as in 2023.

Some “sophomore slump,” huh?

Yet, that’s what many are saying about the ex-Ohio State quarterback after he regressed in some statistical categories following a spectacular season in which he was named 2023 AP Offensive Rookie of the Year.

Apparently, the Texans’ front office agreed with the assessment because offensive coordinator Bobby Slowik was fired after two seasons on the job on Jan. 24, as was offensive line coach Chris Strausser.

Former Los Angeles Rams tight ends coach and pass game coordinator Nick Caley was named the new offensive coordinator on Feb. 3.

It was a mind-boggling fall for Slowik, who was credited with mentoring Stroud to one of the best seasons ever by a rookie quarterback. The Texans in 2023 ranked No. 12 in total yards per game (342.4) and 13th in points per game (22.2) but this past season fell to 22nd in yards (319.7) and 19th in points (21.9).

Adding to the woes, Stroud was sacked 52 times compared to 38 as a rookie, and the Texans produced a league-low scoring average in the second half of games of 7½ points.

Eight days before he was fired, Slowik was interviewed for the head coaching job for the New York Jets, and after the 2023 season, five teams spoke to him about becoming their head coach.

But the weak offensive line and injuries in part led to his dismissal soon after the 23-14 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs in an AFC divisional-round game on Jan. 18 in which Stroud was 19 of 28 for 245 yards.

In September when there appeared to be cracks in the offense as teams gained more data on Stroud, he expressed his support for Slowik.

“We all have faith in him, and we know that he is trying to put us in the best positions, and we have to buy into the system just as much as he has to call good plays,” Stroud said. “We all talk about how we have each other’s back, and we are going to keep holding each other accountable and have each other’s back.”

But the numbers were telling. Stroud finished the 2024 regular season with 3,727 passing yards, 20 touchdowns and 12 interceptions while completing 63.2 percent of his throws in 17 games.

He had 381 fewer yards, three fewer touchdowns and seven more interceptions while playing in two more games than his rookie season when he popped for 4,108 yards, 23 TDs, five picks and a 63.9 percent completion rate.

Stroud’s passing yards per game (219.2) and per attempt (7.0) dropped from the previous season’s 273.9 and 8.2, respectively.

Obviously, the Texans were not going to part with Stroud, so Slowik was the fall guy.

“He was a hot head-coaching name a

year ago, but there was a lot of frustration – some from QB C.J. Stroud himself – on offense in Houston this year,” Albert Breer of Sports Illustrated wrote.

The Texans, who were 11-38-1 and failed to reach the playoffs in the three seasons prior to making Stroud the No. 2 pick in the 2023 draft, realized their star signal caller needed help and before the 2024 season added running back Joe Mixon and wide receiver Stefon Diggs as reinforcements.

Diggs tore his ACL and played just eight games. He had 47 catches on 64 targets for 496 yards with three touchdowns. He is a free agent.

“That’s my boy,” Stroud said on Jan. 20. “I would love to have Stef back. And man, I think we were just getting started. You see he was having so much fun, and me and him were starting to build a rapport.”

There were also the intangibles that Diggs brought.

“Stef came in with ‘I just want to win. I don’t care how it looks. I don’t care how many catches I get,’” Stroud said. “He really meant that too, and you could see in how much joy he had being around the guys.”

There were other injuries to the receiving corps with Nico Collins missing five games and Tank Dell three.

“Our team has been resilient all year,” Stroud said. “We’ve been battling tough scenarios, injuries and some of our best players going out week to week. I’m not making excuses but just being honest. I think this has been one of the most resilient football teams I’ve ever been a part of. The next guy was always stepping up and playing as good as you can. It’s not always perfect.”

## Taking Another Step

Stroud said he is looking to add to his game by adding yards on the ground. He was never a threat to take off and run under pressure at Ohio State, although he had 12 carries for 34 yards in the 2022 CFP semifinal loss to Georgia.

In his 32 NFL regular-season games, he had 91 rushes (2.8 per game) for 400 yards (4.4 yards per carry), and his three TDs came as a rookie.

He’s had five-plus carries in just six of those games but in two playoff games this past season he had six runs for 42 yards in each, including a 27-yarder vs. the Los Angeles Chargers and a 28-yard gain against the Chiefs.

“I don’t think it’s a secret anymore that I can run a little bit,” Stroud said two days after the loss to the Chiefs. “So I have to get my body right to make sure I can take some of those hits and be ready for next year.”

Before looking too far ahead, he reflected on his second season.

“Just like anything in life, when things knock you down and don’t break you, they make you a lot tougher,” Stroud said. “I’m learning to be resilient with everything. I think those tough times on the field for me are definitely going to pay off in the long run. I’m excited because if this is a down year with another playoff win and going head-to-head with the Chiefs (23-14 loss), I’m not saying I’m happy with it, but I’m definitely encouraged and motivated.

There’s more for the Texans on the other side of the hump.”

That the Texans made the playoffs in what was considered a disappointing season can be invaluable moving forward.

“I think we grew tremendously I would say as a collective and personally,” Stroud said. “This year has had ups and downs, but I’m grateful for it all. It’s hard to learn on the mountaintop and in the wilderness. The valley is where you get your learning experiences. God is teaching you things at that time. This year has been one of those tough years. I learned more than ever that my rock is Jesus Christ. Whenever I hit rock bottom, I know I can lean on him.

“That’s what I’ve learned this year. To have another playoff win, there’s things to hold your head high for. I’m not going to hold my head down but, at the same time, it sucks to come out here and lose in the divisional round again. I’m super grateful for the tough and good times.”

Most importantly, he has the trust of his teammates.

“We have C.J. as our quarterback, and he’s the best,” said defensive end Will Anderson Jr.. “I believe in him, and I think he’s going to lead us to a Super Bowl one day.”

## Buckeye Connection

In the aftermath of Slowik’s firing, some interesting names were tossed around by the media for the next offensive coordinator until the Texans picked Caley, a native of Canton, Ohio.

Of course, Ohio State OC Chip Kelly was at the forefront of the list, especially due to his relationship with second-year Texans head coach DeMeco Ryans, who was a linebacker for the Philadelphia Eagles when Kelly was head coach from 2013-15.

Kelly was named offensive coordinator for the Las Vegas Raiders on Feb. 4.

Another name out there was Kevin Wilson, the former Tulsa head coach who was Stroud’s offensive coordinator for his two seasons as a starter at OSU.

An Ohio State tie is mentioned when it comes to adding help for Stroud, this time through the 2025 draft by picking wide receiver Emeka Egbuka. He ended his career with the Buckeyes with six catches in the 34-23 win over Notre Dame in the College Football Playoff Championship Game to become the school’s career leader in receptions with 205.

“With the long-term uncertainty around Stefon Diggs and Tank Dell, the best thing the Texans could do is give their talented young quarterback a reliable and effective second wide receiver to complement Nico Collins,” Pro Football Focus wrote. “Selecting Ohio State wide receiver Emeka Egbuka gives the Texans a dangerous WR2 who not only makes the Texans’ offense harder to defend but also aids in C.J. Stroud’s development.

“In their last season playing together at Ohio State, Egbuka posted a 74-catch, 1,151-yard and 10-touchdown season. The pre-existing chemistry and history of production between Stroud and Egbuka would make a valued addition to the Texans offense and provide C.J. Stroud with a pass-catching weapon for the intermediate level (between 10-19 yards downfield), where the bulk of their yards and touchdowns came together.”

Stroud wouldn’t mind re-creating his Ohio State success with a familiar formula.

“Just compete, that’s one thing that Coach (Ryan) Day taught me in college,” Stroud said. “These types of games aren’t going to be perfect. I might call out the perfect play and the guy might be wide open, but you have to make a play for me, make somebody miss or do something. I’ll just keep being a competitor and put my team in position to win.

“There are times where I probably shouldn’t have done that and thrown the ball. There’s a balance, and I think I try my best to do that today. I think I made a lot of plays in general. I carry that from college.”

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# Sawyer, Day Redeemed During Playoff Run

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

In the Dec. 21 issue of the paper, Buckeye Sports Bulletin reached out to three former Ohio State players who have made game-sealing plays in the rivalry game against Michigan to talk to them about Jack Sawyer's fourth-quarter interception in this season's version of The Game.

Since the Buckeyes ended up losing the game 13-10, the shared thought between Vaughn Broadnax, Jim Laughlin and Tyvis Powell was that Sawyer's play – even though it seemed at the time that he had saved the game at a pivotal moment – would be forgotten as time goes on since the eventual result was so disappointing to OSU fans.

"That was a great play, and everybody thought it was going to be the turning point," Laughlin told BSB. "Everybody thought, 'OK, now here we go,' and it just didn't happen. People forget if you lose. They only remember if you win. They remember you forever if you win the game."

But because of the new 12-team playoff format, the season didn't end there for this year's Ohio State team, and it went on to win the program's seventh consensus national championship after an impressive four-game run through No. 9 seed Tennessee, No. 1 Oregon, No. 2 Texas and No. 7 Notre Dame.

Along the way, Sawyer had another game-saving play, this one actually sealing

a win in the Cotton Bowl against the Longhorns, which secured the Buckeyes a spot in the national championship game against the Fighting Irish.

Texas drove its way down to a first-and-goal with just 1 yard to go, and with a goal-line stand, the Buckeyes were able to bring the Longhorns back to fourth-and-goal from the 8 after Sawyer hurried a throw by his former roommate and Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers. On fourth down, Sawyer was able to get into the backfield nearly untouched and knock the ball out of Ewers' hand, grab the loose ball and sprint 83 yards to the end zone to put OSU up by two touchdowns with just over two minutes left in the game.

BSB reached back out to the same three former players to talk about both Sawyer's and the Buckeyes' redemption in the playoffs. Powell thinks Sawyer's scoop-and-score will go down as one of the very best plays in program history, and both Broadnax and Laughlin agreed.

"A lot of people were talking like it was top five," Powell said. "It was a pivotal moment in the game. It helped seal the game to send them to the championship. All of that stuff added to it makes it a top-five play of all time. It's definitely one of those plays that I'm going to remember for the rest of my life."

Each of the plays made by Broadnax, Laughlin and Powell were made against the Wolverines, ensuring OSU fans will remem-



FILE PHOTO

**RUN TO RENOWN** – Even though defensive end Jack Sawyer made a critical interception against Michigan, he will forever be remembered for his sack of Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers and the subsequent scoop-and-score to seal the victory in a 28-14 win in the CFP semifinal on Jan. 10.

ber those former Buckeyes their entire lives, and that's something they are all extremely thankful for.

"I love it. It's what you dream of," Laughlin told BSB in December about being remembered for his blocked punt in the 1979 win over Michigan. "I really didn't play until my senior year. I sat for three years and was a special teams guy, but I don't regret it at all. I wouldn't trade it for anything because it all worked out. My senior year, I got to be captain, made that play and the rest is history, and they can't change that."

Even though Laughlin has that memory and a forever spot in Buckeyes' history, he still wishes he could have accomplished one more thing, and that is winning a national championship. That's why he believes Sawyer's play is up there with the best the OSU program has seen.

"If you gave me a choice, I'd rather lose to Michigan and win the national title than the other way around," Laughlin said. "It still sticks with me – we were ranked No. 1 and were undefeated and we lost in the last two minutes to USC. That sticks with you forever. As much joy and satisfaction as I got out of (this year's team) winning the national title, it still sticks in my craw more the fact that we lost one. I mean, it's a national championship. It's everything."

Powell and Broadnax both agreed that the stage of a national championship is different from that of the rivalry game.

While beating Michigan is so important to fans in the state of Ohio and taking down the Buckeyes holds the same importance to Wolverines fans, Sawyer's play was in front of a national audience.

"A play like that against your rival is something that everybody's going to remem-

ber in the state of Ohio. When you do it on a national stage to make it to the national championship, that's much bigger because everybody's watching that," Powell said. "It's not just a rivalry game. Those probably hold a ton more weight outside of the state of Ohio, but to Ohio State fans, I would imagine a rivalry play might hold a little more weight."

"You've got to look at the stage," Broadnax told BSB. "The rivalry has a stage itself. A lot of people outside of Michigan and Ohio don't understand the importance of that stage. But when you're on the grand stage of a playoff game and you have eyes across the country on you, this game is going to either compete for the championship or eliminate you, that's the importance of this game. We have a lot of victories over Michigan. We don't have as many championships as we do Michigan victories."

What Sawyer and the Buckeyes were able to do in the 2024-25 season – that being losing to Michigan and still getting a chance to compete for the national title – is a new phenomenon.

In almost every year in the past, with The Game being the last one of the regular season, it would be the decider of who would play in the Rose Bowl, be named the national champion or make the playoffs.

Now it's likely going to become more common that either the Buckeyes or Wolverines could lose that game and still make the 12-team CFP, and Laughlin believes that could lead to The Game losing some of its relevance.

"I think all (regular-season games) have lost a little bit," he said. "A 10-10 tie in 1973 cost Ohio State the national title because Alabama and Notre Dame were undefeated.

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

It takes a little luster off the regular season.

“Back in the day before BCS, you had to win every game. Even if you lost to a good team – like (the 2024 team) did to Oregon by one point on the road – your national title hopes were over. Now you can be a two-loss team and still win the whole thing like we did this year.”

But Broadnax disagrees with that. He believes that as long as there are Ohio State and Michigan football fans, there will still be a strong rivalry, and it has been obvious to him already this year how Wolverine fans have reacted to Ohio State winning the title.

“If you check out the message boards from Michigan fans, that rivalry is not going to change,” Broadnax joked. “Whoever wins that game wears a crown still, despite you winning the national championship. I don’t think that game is going to lose its importance.”

The reality is still that Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day have lost four straight years to Michigan now, resulting in fans calling for Day’s job in the weeks between the loss and the first-round game against Tennessee.

Now that Day has won a championship, those calling for his job were silenced, and the 45-year-old coach received a seven-year extension on his contract, taking him through the 2031 season with Ohio State.

“People think (those fans) need to apologize. I don’t think they need to apologize,” Powell said. “I understood why they felt the way they felt. I felt the reason why fans were calling for his job. When they lost the way that they lost, that’s why everybody was frus-

trated.

“I understood why people were calling for his job. I knew they wouldn’t (fire him). I didn’t want him to be fired for that, but I understood why people said it.”

But even though Powell didn’t believe that Day deserved to be fired after Nov. 30, he still learned something new about the coach in the four games that followed, although he always believed some of Day’s big losses were due to unfortunate circumstances.

“I think everybody’s opinion (on Day) had to change. I always thought Ryan Day was a good coach,” Powell said. “He lost some bad games and got into some unfortunate situations. You think about the Georgia game. He was winning that game, then Marvin (Harrison Jr.) got knocked out, Cade Stover gets knocked out, you lose your running backs. Clemson in 2019, you get a fumble that doesn’t go your way then, boom, you lose that game. Then in 2020, that Alabama team was one of the best teams assembled in college football.”

Powell credits Day’s ability to get the players to forget the past and play for each other, saying that Day is very good at bringing his players together in that way.

“At the end of the day, what mattered most is the love the players have for him and he had for the players,” Powell said. “They could have easily gone out there against Tennessee in the first round and flamed out. I think (Day) did a really good job of getting them to understand their legacy was on the line and he was in the same boat with them.

“To me, that’s why he’s a special coach

because when you can get players to become selfless, that’s the best thing you can do as a coach. That’s how you really make a team go far, if you can make them see, ‘It’s not about me. It’s not about my personal accolades. It’s about not letting the guy next to me down.’”

If the 12-team playoff didn’t begin this year, Day would have had to go into the off-season carrying that loss to Michigan until Nov. 29, 2025, the next time the two teams face off in Ann Arbor. Sawyer would also head to the NFL knowing he had never accomplished any of the program’s top three goals – beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten and winning a national championship.

But both the coach and the players got the chance to redeem themselves, something that reminded each of the former Buckeyes about the 1990s teams that John Cooper led that always came up short due to his 2-10-1 record against the Wolverines.

“They had some great teams and some great talent,” Laughlin said. “Orlando Pace, Luke Fickell, all of those guys. Ohio State wouldn’t have gotten in in 2014 and we wouldn’t have got in this year (without expanded playoffs), and yet we won them both. It does take away from the regular season a little bit, but the best team won, no doubt.”

“I tell people all the time, you have to play the game,” Broadnax said. “If you play the game, the ball bounces in different ways. Sometimes it bounces in your favor, other times it doesn’t. So absolutely we could have competed for national championships if there was a playoff then.”

Broadnax was a fan of the expanded

postseason since the FBS was the only major football division that didn’t have a playoff that was larger than four teams.

“The argument over the past few decades has been, ‘Well, they’re going to have 14, 15, 16 games in a season.’ I say, ‘Well don’t other divisions have that many games?’ That was always a weak argument to me. It also gives teams a chance that didn’t have one in the past to compete for a national championship. And who knows, I can look back at some Ohio State teams, had there been a playoff, there might be additional national champions.”

Ultimately, though, each of Broadnax, Laughlin and Powell agreed that the loss to Michigan doesn’t change their overall feelings about the season too much since the Buckeyes can call themselves the best team in the country, and now Sawyer and his play against Texas will be remembered by Ohio State fans for the rest of his life.

“You’re national champs,” Laughlin said. “That’s the thing. You’re national champs for the rest of your life. I see my teammates every week at the games and we all talk about, ‘Man, we were this close. We could have been national champs.’ But no, we didn’t get it done.”

“They’ll say you lost to your rivals, but nobody cares about that,” Powell said. “You care that you’re a national champion. They were able to put a banner in there. When you come back 10 years later, you can show your kid, ‘Hey, we did this.’ That team is going to be friends for the rest of their lives. They’re going to have each other’s backs for the rest of their lives.”

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# OSU Battles Adversity On Improbable 2014 Title Run

Throughout the 2024 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* has published historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "4." In this issue, BSB begins the completion of the series with the first of a two-part look back at the 2014 national championship season.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Nearly every organized sport being played today offers a rich history of individuals or teams overcoming almost insurmountable odds to win championships. That is especially true as it pertains to football teams when a backup quarterback is forced into action.

Starting in 1972 when 38-year-old Earl Morrall took over for an injured Bob Griese and helped the Miami Dolphins to the only perfect season in league history to sixth-round draft pick Tom Brady replacing an injured Drew Bledsoe and leading the New England Patriots to a Super Bowl XXXVI victory, the NFL has a rich tradition of backup quarterbacks engineering storybook endings.

The same is true in college where national championship runs were finished by a backup QB three times within a five-year span beginning in 2017.

Freshman Tua Tagovailoa took over for a benched Jalen Hurts at halftime of the championship game to lead Alabama to the 2017 title. Freshman Trevor Lawrence supplanted two-year starter Kelly Bryant midway through the 2018 season to lead Clemson to the championship, and while J.T. Daniels started at quarterback early in 2021 for Georgia, it was Stetson Bennett under center when the Bulldogs raised the title trophy after beating defending champion Alabama.

Even with all of that history, though, there has never been a season quite like the one experienced by Ohio State in 2014 when the Buckeyes made a championship run with a third-string quarterback.

"The story of that season, in my opinion,



FILE PHOTO

**THIRD DEGREE — The 2014 Ohio State season was as unlikely as it was successful with the Buckeyes having to overcome an early-season home loss to unranked Virginia Tech before turning to third-string quarterback Cardale Jones (12) for a resounding three-game postseason run.**

is nothing short of remarkable," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "When you look back at the way the season before had ended with two losses and then move forward through the summer and fall, your starting quarterback goes down right before the season begins, and you lose a home game by two touchdowns to an unranked opponent.

"Then, after all that, you have to go to your third-string quarterback in the Big Ten Championship Game just to try to make the playoff. Remarkable is the only word I can think of when a team can go through that much adversity and still win a championship. Just remarkable."

There was no denying the talent Ohio State had at its disposal in 2014. Urban Meyer was set to begin his third season as head coach with a star-studded roster that included running back Ezekiel Elliott, offensive linemen Billy Price and Taylor Decker, defensive end Joey Bosa, linebacker Darron Lee and defensive backs Gareon Conley and Eli Apple, each of whom would become first-round NFL draft choices.

Meyer also had at his disposal Braxton Miller, the ultra-talented quarterback who was coming off back-to-back Big Ten Most Valuable Player awards. But heading into his fourth season as a starter, Miller was beginning to show the wear and tear of being a dual-threat quarterback and playing 36 games at the most elite level of college football.

Miller had missed a couple of games during the 2013 season due to a sprained knee and then was physically mauled during a 40-35 loss to Clemson in the Orange Bowl. He initially injured his throwing shoulder when he was sacked by Tigers defensive end Vic Beasley on the fifth play of the game, and the injury worsened as Miller tried to play through the pain he later described as 9.5 on a scale of 10.

The OSU quarterback somehow finished the game with 234 yards and two touch-

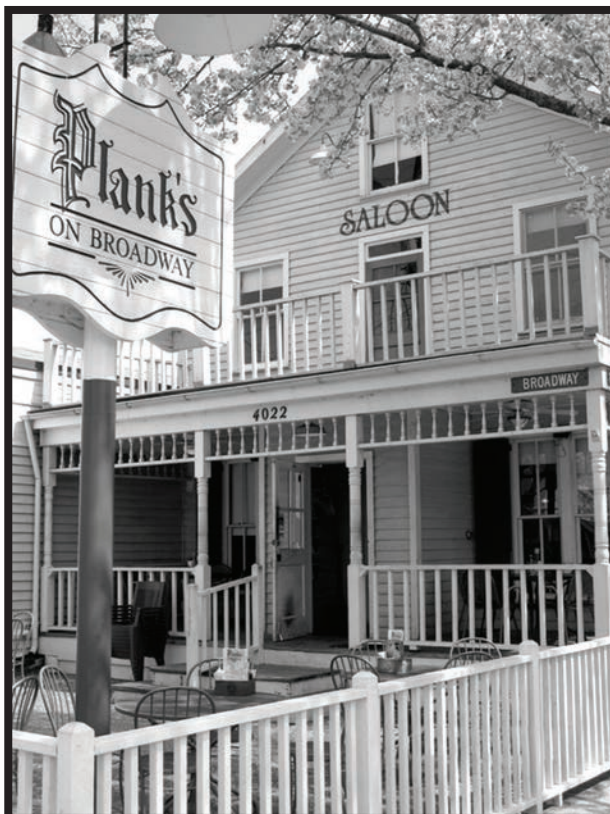
downs through the air and rushed for two other scores. But Miller was sacked five times, fumbled away a fourth-quarter possession and pitched an interception at the Clemson 39-yard line with just 1:18 remaining in the game.

Seven weeks after the Orange Bowl, Miller underwent surgery on his right shoulder that was described at the time as "a minor procedure" that would likely "limit his activity during spring practice." The injury was later revealed to be a partially torn labrum.

Miller sat out nearly all of the spring practice drills, including the annual spring game during which redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett appeared to take a slight lead over sophomore Cardale Jones in the race to become Miller's backup. Barrett threw for 151 yards while leading the Gray team to a lackluster 17-13 win after which Meyer lamented, "We're not where we need to be."

Part of that, of course, was because the starting quarterback was on the sideline in street clothes. But Miller was his characteristic cheerful self when asked about his prognosis for the fall.

"The shoulder feels good. No setbacks," he told reporters with a smile. "And I don't expect any, either. I'll be ready to go when the season gets here."



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Indeed, when fall camp opened in August, Miller was back under center and operating with what seemed to be a full range of motion. Then during an Aug. 18 practice at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, the quarterback threw a pass and immediately crumpled to the ground with an agonizing shriek of pain.

An MRI the next morning revealed a complete tear of the quarterback's surgically repaired labrum in his right shoulder. It was a season-ending injury with the opener against the U.S. Naval Academy less than two weeks away.

"Braxton's in tears, and I'm there holding his hand, hoping for the best but fearing the worst," Meyer told BSB. "A little while later, the realization hit me. Our best player was going to miss the entire season. I remember calling my wife, Shelley, and telling her about Braxton's injury. I told her we were headed for a very difficult season.

"At the time, we didn't know what we had at the quarterback position other than one guy who had played a handful of snaps and another guy who hadn't played at all. I remember thinking there was a chance we were staring at something like a 7-5 season, the kind of season in Columbus that gets a coach fired."

During fall camp, Barrett had strengthened the slight lead he enjoyed over Jones coming off his spring-game performance. But he hadn't played a single down of college football and was coming off an injury of his own – a torn ACL that had wiped out most of his senior season in high school.

Meanwhile, Jones was in his third year at Ohio State but had attempted only two passes while taking 39 snaps during blowouts of Florida A&M, Penn State and Purdue in 2013, games which the Buckeyes won by a combined score of 195-14.

Jones had also tested Meyer's patience during his redshirt year in 2012 after posting on Twitter, "Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain't come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS." That got Jones a formal reprimand as well as a one-game suspension.

"So, we've got a kid who has never taken a collegiate snap and another one who'd had some issues in the past," Meyer said. "I wasn't feeling that great about our situation at that particular time."

Nevertheless, no one was feeling sorry for a coach whose two-year record with the Buckeyes was a sparkling 24-2, the best mark of any coach in Ohio State history after his first 26 games.

Meyer bettered that record to 25-2 when the Buckeyes overcame a sluggish start before rolling to a 34-17, season-opening win against Navy in a game played at M&T Bank Stadium, the home of the NFL's Baltimore Ravens. Lee scored Ohio State's first touchdown of the 2014 season on a 61-yard fumble return in the third quarter, and Barrett threw for 226 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

With voters perhaps still uneasy about Miller's absence, the Buckeyes dropped from their No. 5 spot in The Associated Press preseason poll to No. 8, but the team still seemed upbeat.

"I thought I did OK," Barrett said. "There were some good things and other things we still need to work on. For a first game with a lot of new guys in there, I thought we did OK. It's something to build on."

The schedule seemed favorable enough

for breaking in a new starting quarterback with three straight home games against unranked opponents beginning with Virginia Tech, a team coming off a five-loss season and a program that was 2-44 lifetime against top-eight opponents.

## Disaster Strikes

Ohio State hadn't lost a home opener since a 19-0 defeat to Penn State in 1978, but an unrelenting Virginia Tech defense set the tone early on the way to a 35-21 upset victory.

While Penn State had sacked freshman QB Art Schlichter twice and forced him into a school-record five interceptions in that game in '78, the Hokies sacked Barrett seven times and grabbed three interceptions, including a late fourth-quarter pick returned 63 yards for a back-breaking touchdown by safety Donovan Riley.

"There are some weaknesses right now on our team, and it was rather obvious what they are," Meyer told reporters. "We can play better on both sides."

The loss sent the Buckeyes into free fall in terms of the national rankings with the AP dropping them to No. 22 while the AFCA coaches' poll was a bit more generous by placing them at No. 18.

Perhaps the best medicine for the ailing team was its schedule. The next four opponents – Kent State, Cincinnati, Maryland and Rutgers – were on their way to a combined record of 26-24 in 2014, and the Buckeyes took out their frustrations by scoring 50 or more points in each of the four games. Ohio State had never before in program history scored at least 50 points in four consecutive games.

In addition to averaging 56.0 points and 614.0 total yards during the four-game stretch, it provided Barrett a chance to get his sea legs under him. He completed 71.7 percent of 120 pass attempts for 1,170 yards and 17 touchdowns against only one interception. He also notched the first 100-yard rushing game of his career, totaling 107 yards and two touchdowns during a 56-17 rout of Rutgers, averaging 15.3 yards on seven carries.

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"There were some things we definitely needed to work on after the loss to Virginia Tech," Barrett said, "and those games allowed us to do those things. They set us up for what was going to be our next big challenge."

The challenge to which Barrett referred came at the end of October against Penn State. The Nittany Lions were in their first season under head coach James Franklin, who had breathed life into a dormant program at Vanderbilt before arriving in Happy Valley.

Franklin presided over a team in transition that eventually lost six games in 2014. But four of those losses were by seven or fewer points, and the Nittany Lions gave Ohio State all it wanted during a game that needed two overtimes to be decided.

Despite a record Beaver Stadium crowd of 107,895 during one of Penn State's annual "White Out" nights, the Buckeyes jumped out to a 17-0 halftime lead thanks to a 10-yard touchdown run from Elliott, a 1-yard scoring pass from Barrett to tight end Jeff Heurman, and a 49-yard field goal from Sean Nuernberger that appeared to have been kicked well after the play clock showed zeroes.

Penn State clawed its way back, though, getting a 40-yard interception return for a touchdown from defensive tackle Anthony Zettel right after the break. The Lions made it 17-14 early in the fourth quarter on a touchdown set up by another Barrett interception and then tied the game on a 31-yard field goal from kicker Sam Ficken with just nine seconds left in regulation.

During the first overtime, Penn State

tailback Bill Belton took a direct snap in the Wildcat formation and scored on a 1-yard run. But the Buckeyes countered when Barrett carried twice – the first on a perfectly executed run-pass option for 17 yards, and the second on a 5-yard bolt through the heart of the Penn State defense for the tying touchdown.

The Nittany Lions were called for a personal foul penalty on the touchdown, giving Ohio State the ball at the 12-yard line to start the second overtime. The Buckeyes pushed the ball to the 4 before Barrett took a quarterback draw and powered his way across the goal line.

As the Beaver Stadium clock ticked past midnight, Penn State was stuffed for no gain on its first play of the second extra period before picking up 4 yards on a short second-down pass completion. On third down, Nittany Lions QB Christian Hackenberg rolled to his right but threw incomplete in the end zone, setting up fourth down just outside the 20-yard line.

On what proved to be the final play of the game, Bosa exploded off the line, split a pair of offensive linemen, and steamrolled his way over running back Akeel Lynch. Bosa's bull rush immediately knocked Lynch off-balance, driving him into the back of Hackenberg, who went down for the game-ending sack as the Buckeyes escaped with a 31-24 victory.

The euphoria from the victory was short-lived, however.

*Part II of BSB's 2014 Flashback will appear in the March 8 issue.*



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# U-M Contesting NCAA's Notice Of Allegations

More than five months after the NCAA sent Michigan its notice of allegations revealing the program committed 11 infractions and six Level I violations related to Connor Stalions' elaborate sign-stealing operation, the school has offered a response.

## BIG TEN NOTES Patrick Engels

According to a Jan. 28 report by Yahoo Sports' Ross Dellenger, the Wolverines have refuted many of the alleged rules violations and are accusing the NCAA of "grossly overreaching" and "wildly overcharging" the program without credible evidence that Michigan staff members knew of Stalions' impermissible sign-stealing system.

In the 137-page document – which was partially obtained by Yahoo Sports – Michigan reveals that it will not enter into a negotiated resolution with the NCAA over the alleged wrongdoings and claimed that many of the 11 allegations against the school are without "merit or credible evidence."

The allegations they are fighting include those against former head coach Jim Harbaugh, current head coach Sherrone Moore, several other staff members and Stalions, who was the leader of the sign-stealing scheme. Michigan is arguing that Stalions' sign-stealing system offered "minimal relevance to competition," was not credibly proven by NCAA investigators and should be treated as a minor violation.

Perhaps the most notable statement made by Michigan in the document is that the NCAA became aware of Stalions' sign-stealing system by an unnamed source who appeared to have worked at the school at one point and helped the NCAA produce at least some of the charges in the notice of allegations. The Wolverines are using this development to claim

that the NCAA can present evidence and infractions based only on "information that can be attributed to individuals who are willing to be identified."

Regardless, the NCAA is still looking into the alleged infractions made by Michigan, including Moore's act of deleting 52 text messages between him and Stalions on the very same day that news broke of the NCAA investigating the program for allegedly violating rules related to scouting and sign-stealing. Michigan and Moore acknowledged the deleted texts, but the school contends that the messages – one of which was a message from Stalions to Moore saying that the Wolverines should change their signals ahead of their 2022 game against Ohio State – were not specifically about the sign-stealing system.

Michigan added that Moore, who took over as Michigan head coach this season after Harbaugh left for the Los Angeles Chargers, fully cooperated with the investigation – even turning in his phone for imaging – and Moore told officials that he deleted the messages because he was angry that Stalions would receive credit for the Wolverines' success during their 2023 national championship run.

As for Stalions – who is accused of engaging in the in-person scouting of 52 games from 2021-23, many of them involving scheduled opponents of Michigan – the school argues that the former staffer attended just one of those games and only eight more were attended by a then-Michigan staff-member.

Michigan is refuting three of the four NCAA allegations that argue Stalions impeded the NCAA investigation, those three being that he declined to produce his phone for personal imaging, withheld or removed hard drives from his office and put relevant information into a backpack. The only allegation that they are not refuting is that he instructed a staff member to bring it to an unpaid intern's house where Stalions could pick it up.

Michigan also claimed that the NCAA's allegation against Harbaugh that he failed to cooperate with the investigation by not producing text and telephone records from his

personal call phone prior to his departure from the school are "without merit." Harbaugh, along with former linebackers/special teams coach Chris Partridge, former assistant director of player personnel Denard Robinson and Stalions are accused of committing Level I violations, the most serious category in the NCAA's enforcement process.

Now that Michigan has offered a response, the case will now be heard before the Division I Committee on Infractions, which can set and conduct hearings as well as prescribe penalties. The hearing could take place before BSB next goes to press, but Michigan is requesting a "pre-hearing conference" to discuss the origins of the tipster who leaked the allegations to the NCAA and their role in the charges against the school.

## Poggi Returning As U-M Associate Head Coach

Around the same time Michigan was contesting its allegations of impermissible sign-stealing to the NCAA, it also brought back a familiar face to Moore's coaching staff.

According to Alejandro Zúñiga of 247Sports' The Michigan Insider, the Wolverines have rehired Biff Poggi to serve as associate head coach, a title he held with the program under Harbaugh from 2021-22.

During his two-year stint with the Wolverines, Poggi, 65, was said to have played a pivotal role in turning Michigan's program around following a 2-4 record in the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season, with many lauding his work as Michigan's and Harbaugh's "consigliere."

Michigan went a combined 25-3 and 17-1 in the Big Ten with Poggi on staff, although those years were when Stalions was allegedly implementing his sign-stealing operation.

"Biff has been a tremendous asset to our University of Michigan Football program, providing support and mentorship to our coaching staff and players," Harbaugh said in 2023. "He has a great football mind, knows how to prepare a team during the week and on game day, and is a coach that aims to change the lives of his players in a positive way. Biff is a trusted agent and known friend."

Poggi rejoins Michigan – where he also served as an offensive analyst in 2016 working primarily with the offensive line – after two underwhelming seasons as head coach at Charlotte. He led the 49ers to just a combined 6-16 record and 4-10 mark in the American Athletic Conference from 2023-24 before being relieved of his duties on Nov. 18.

Poggi will now look to serve as a veteran voice to a U-M head coach in Moore who is entering just his second season as the team's full-time leader. Poggi referred to Moore as an "old friend" in a social media post earlier this season.

## Woodson Stepping Down At I-U After Season

Indiana head men's basketball coach Mike Woodson will be stepping down from his role as Hoosiers leader at the conclusion of the 2024-25 season, he informed athletic director Scott Dolson on Feb. 5.

Dolson released a statement on Feb. 7 to confirm the news – which had been reported by multiple outlets a day earlier – where he urged Hoosiers fans to be fully supportive of

Woodson and his team for the remainder of the season.

"(Woodson) said it had been weighing on his mind for a while and that it was an emotional and difficult decision," Dolson said. "We have had subsequent thoughtful conversations about his decision and his desire to ensure that the program is in the best position it can be moving forward."

"It's clear to me from our discussion in the last several days that his No. 1 priority is for the attention to be off him and instead focused on uniting Hoosier Nation in support of our student-athletes, coaches and, most importantly, the program. We still have much to play for this season."

Woodson's imminent departure from Indiana comes after two straight disappointing seasons in Bloomington with the former Hoosiers guard and NBA head coach at the helm. After leading Indiana to consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances in his first two years as head coach in 2021-22, the Hoosiers missed postseason play last season with a 19-14 record and 10-10 mark in the conference.

The program seemed to be trending in a positive direction this season when it brought in a monster transfer haul that included former Arizona big man Oumar Ballo and jumped out to a 13-3 record at the beginning of conference play, but since then it has lost seven of its last eight games as BSB went to press.

That difficult stretch was headlined by a blowout 94-69 home loss to then-No. 19 Illinois on Jan. 14 that ended with Ballo and his teammates skirmishing with Illini players and frustrated Indiana fans chanting, "Fire Woodson."

"We're just not a tough team right now," Woodson said after IU's 76-64 loss to then-No. 21 Wisconsin on Feb. 4. "We're not. Mentally we're not tough."

With Indiana trending toward missing the NCAA Tournament for the second straight season – it is not even listed among the "Next Four Out" on ESPN's latest Bracketology – the program will look to find a new face voice to lead the Hoosiers back to national prominence.

Indiana has made the NCAA Tournament just nine times in the last 20 years, with its last Final Four appearance coming in 2002.

As for Woodson, he would be owed more than \$8 million if he were fired, but if he comes to a formal resignation with the school as he intends to, the financials of his departure could be reduced.

## Assistant Coaching Carousel Continues In B1G

Poggi is one of many assistants who have either left or joined the Big Ten coaching ranks since BSB last went to press.

Besides the departures of Ohio State offensive coordinator Chip Kelly to the Oakland Raiders and offensive line coach Justin Frye to the Arizona Cardinals, another notable Big Ten coach to leave his college position for the NFL is UCLA assistant head coach and offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, who was hired by the Chicago Bears on Feb. 1 to be the team's running backs coach.

Bieniemy – who coached several years as an assistant in the NFL, most notably as offensive coordinator for the Kansas City Chiefs



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from 2018-22 – spent just one season with the Bruins, working on a Deshaun Foster-led team that went just 5-7 and 3-6 in the Big Ten.

Bieniemy's offense struggled mightily in 2024, scoring 20 or more points in just four of their 12 games and finishing with the eighth-worst scoring offense in the nation at 18.4 points per game.

Also leaving for the NFL is Minnesota defensive line coach Winston DeLattiboudere III, who departed for the same position with the Cardinals. DeLattiboudere, a former defensive lineman for the Gophers from 2015-19, helped Minnesota's defense emerge into one of the nation's best in 2024, ranking fifth nationally in total defense (285.7 yards allowed), ninth in scoring defense (16.9 points allowed) and 12th in rushing defense (109.6 yards allowed).

The Big Ten also welcomed in some noteworthy assistants for the 2025 season, starting with Maryland and head coach Mike Locksley naming longtime NFL and collegiate assistant Pep Hamilton as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach on Feb. 4.

Hamilton returns to the sideline for the first time since 2022, when he served as the Houston Texans' offensive coordinator. He also called plays for the Indianapolis Colts (2013-15) and Stanford (2011-12) and worked as a quarterbacks coach for numerous different professional and college teams, most recently with the Texans in 2021 and Los Angeles Chargers in 2020.

Hamilton also has experience coaching in the Big Ten, having spent two seasons as Michigan's assistant head coach and passing game coordinator in 2017-18.

Rutgers and head coach Greg Schiano also added a veteran name to their coaching staff, rehiring Robb Smith as co-defensive coordinator/linebackers coach on Feb. 4. He will lead the defense alongside former James Madison assistant Zach Sparber, replacing Joe Harasymiak after he left for UMass in December.

This will mark Smith's third stint as Rutgers' DC and his fourth stint working for Schiano. He also worked as his linebackers coach for the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2013, Schiano's final year leading the franchise.

**Coogan, Spindler Find New Homes In B1G**

Two of Notre Dame's top offensive linemen have decided to play in the Big Ten for the 2025 season.

Center Pat Coogan and right guard Rocco Spindler – who both entered the transfer portal following the conclusion of the Fighting Irish's run to the national championship game – committed to Indiana and Nebraska on Jan. 31 and Feb. 2, respectively.

Starting with Coogan, the Hoosiers and head coach Curt Cignetti will be adding one of Notre Dame's most vocal team leaders and veteran players for the 2025 season. He joins the program after starting 13 games at center for the Fighting Irish his senior season, filling in admirably for starter Ashton Craig after he tore his ACL in Week 3, allowing just eight quarterback pressures and one sack on the year.

Coogan's veteran experience and leadership will be welcomed on an Indiana team that is losing several of its top upperclassmen starters, especially on offense.

Spindler joins Matt Rhule's program after starting 23 games over the last two seasons for the Irish at right guard and playing 1,325

snaps during his four-year Notre Dame career. The former four-star recruit and Clarkston, Mich., native was a prime candidate to commit to the Wolverines, who instantly emerged as a favorite to land him, but he never visited Ann Arbor, instead choosing the Huskers over Indiana, Pittsburgh and Virginia.

He will now spend his fifth and final collegiate season trying to protect rising sophomore quarterback Dylan Raiola, who led Nebraska to its first bowl win since 2015 by throwing for 2,819 yards and 13 touchdowns his freshman season.

Nebraska is poised to have one of the more formidable offensive lines in the conference next season with Spindler joining former Alabama right tackle Elijah Pritchett, who committed to the program on Jan. 8 after starting 10 games last season at right tackle for the Crimson Tide. Pritchett was named to the watch list for the Outland Trophy this season, an award given annually to the nation's top interior offensive lineman.

**Iowa Retires Clark's Jersey, Stuns No. 4 USC**

Former Iowa guard Caitlin Clark was officially immortalized in Hawkeye women's basketball history on Feb. 2 when her No. 22 jersey was raised to the rafters at Carver-Hawkeye Arena after Iowa's 76-69 upset win over No. 4 USC.

It was a memorable Sunday afternoon for the nearly 15,000 Hawkeye and Clark fans inside the building. Just minutes after Iowa pulled off its biggest win of the season, knocking off then-19-1 USC and superstar point guard JuJu Watkins by forcing 18 Trojan turnovers and getting 28 points, four rebounds and four assists from senior guard Lucy Olsen, Clark took center stage on the court.

With several of her former teammates – including standouts Kate Martin and Gabbie Marshall – her former coach Lisa Bluder, her immediate family, the entire Iowa team and even the entire USC team watching on, Clark addressed the Hawkeye faithful after her jersey was raised, saying that she is thankful for all of the people who supported her throughout her historic four-year career at Iowa.

"I'm pretty overwhelmed right now, but there are just a lot of people to thank," Clark said. "My teammates, I wouldn't be here without any of you. A lot of you came back, and you have busy schedules, so I think that just speaks to the culture of this place – so selfless.

"I know my number is up there, but it wouldn't be if it wasn't for all of you. So to the ones that were my teammates when I was here, I really appreciate you guys, and I love you."

Clark, who became the NCAA's Division I all-time leading scorer with 3,951 career points, led the Hawkeyes to consecutive national championship game appearances and earned two Naismith Player of the Year honors during her time at Iowa, obviously brought some good luck back to the program against the Trojans.

It was a perfect Day for Clark and Iowa that first-year Hawkeyes coach Jan Jensen – who served as one of Clark's primary recruiters out of high school – said her former player certainly deserved based on how much she gave to the program and the game of women's basketball during her college years.

"I wanted to have Caitlin's day be good, top to bottom," she said. "I think all the people in women's basketball now, they really appreciate what Caitlin did. Caitlin is one of one."

**Barnhizer Out For Season With Foot Injury**

Northwestern head coach Chris Collins announced after the Wildcats' 75-69 home loss to No. 17 Wisconsin on Feb. 1 that All-Big Ten senior guard Brooks Barnhizer would be out for the remainder of the 2024-25 season with a foot injury he had been dealing with the majority of the year.

"The decision was made to shut him down," Collins told the media. "So he's not going to be with us the rest of the year. It's the right decision. But he left it all out there – I'm sorry I'm getting emotional. I love that kid. Not seeing him be able to get out there today just sucks. But we're going to play our butts off for him, and he's going to be better for it."

As Collins alluded to, Barnhizer had been trying to play through foot injuries throughout the year. He missed the first four games of the season while recovering from an off-season foot ailment, then after battling back and recording at least 20 points and 10 rebounds in seven of his first 10 games of the year, suffered a different foot injury during the Wildcats' 78-68 loss to Michigan State on Jan. 12.

Barnhizer returned for Northwestern's next game against Maryland on Jan. 16, but after his production and usage slowly began to decrease as the games went by at the end of January, Collins made the final decision to sit him against Wisconsin and declare him out for the season following the game.

Barnhizer's departure is a significant loss for a Northwestern team that holds a 13-11 overall record and 4-9 mark in the Big Ten as of Feb. 9. The Lafayette, Ind., native was Northwestern's second-leading scorer at 17.1 points per game as well as the team's leading rebounder at 8.8 boards per contest.

"It's a huge void," Collins said. "Brooks is a first-team All-Big Ten player. He was our leader. He's like a gladiator. We fed off that nature."

Barnhizer, whose injury is not career-ending according to Collins, averaged a combined 11.1 points, 6.1 rebounds and 2.2 assists per game during his four seasons at Northwestern while earning third-team All-Big Ten and Big Ten All-Defensive Team honors in 2023-24.

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# Road Trip To LA Provides Issues For OSU

The weather in Los Angeles is much nicer than it is in Columbus in February, but that doesn't mean the Buckeyes were happy they had to stay in Southern California for an entire week for their games against UCLA on Feb. 5 and USC on Feb. 8.



With Oregon, UCLA, USC and Washington all joining the Big Ten this year, all other members of the conference will average two games on the West Coast every year in men's and women's basketball.

The Big Ten's solution to that travel challenge has been to send every team out West to play consecutive games against either UCLA and USC or Oregon and Washington.

That scheduling quirk means all of the teams from the Midwest or the East Coast have to make only one trip, but it still makes things difficult for the student-athletes, according to Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff.

"It's hard because it's a really long week to be away and it's tough on every-

## 2024-25 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

### 20-3 Overall (9-3 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Feb. 8

| Player           | G-GS      | Min.-Avg.   | FG-FGA          | Pct.        | 3P-3PA         | Pct.        | FT-FTA         | Pct.        | Rebounds       |                 |               | A          | TO         | BS        | ST         | Pts.-Avg.        |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
|                  |           |             |                 |             |                |             |                |             | O-D            | T-Avg.          | PF-FO         |            |            |           |            |                  |
| MCMAHON, C       | 19-19     | 619-32.5    | 111-263         | .422        | 19-60          | .317        | 67-100         | .670        | 15-75          | 90-4.7          | 44-0          | 42         | 39         | 4         | 26         | 308-16.2         |
| CAMBRIDGE, J     | 19-19     | 491-25.9    | 110-251         | .438        | 13-49          | .265        | 48-67          | .716        | 9-79           | 88-4.6          | 43-1          | 74         | 44         | 4         | 37         | 281-14.8         |
| GRAY, Chance     | 23-23     | 664-28.9    | 109-265         | .411        | 54-149         | .362        | 50-58          | .862        | 9-37           | 46-2.0          | 27-0          | 35         | 27         | 3         | 38         | 322-14.0         |
| THIERRY, Taylor  | 23-23     | 693-30.1    | 91-158          | .576        | 19-40          | .475        | 42-62          | .677        | 53-74          | 127-5.5         | 60-2          | 29         | 30         | 11        | 56         | 243-10.6         |
| PETTY, Ajae      | 23-23     | 511-22.2    | 95-170          | .559        | 0-0            | .000        | 28-46          | .609        | 59-102         | 161-7.0         | 60-1          | 40         | 53         | 8         | 21         | 218-9.5          |
| WATSON, Ava      | 22-0      | 310-14.1    | 39-128          | .305        | 25-86          | .291        | 10-10          | 1.000       | 3-17           | 20-0.9          | 17-0          | 18         | 11         | 0         | 27         | 113-5.1          |
| LEMMILÄ, Elsa    | 23-0      | 334-14.5    | 37-71           | .521        | 0-5            | .000        | 29-42          | .690        | 38-79          | 117-5.1         | 39-0          | 18         | 18         | 42        | 18         | 103-4.5          |
| CAMBRIDGE, K     | 21-4      | 344-16.4    | 39-93           | .419        | 4-29           | .138        | 12-29          | .414        | 24-37          | 61-2.9          | 33-1          | 24         | 18         | 7         | 33         | 94-4.5           |
| GREENE, Madison  | 23-4      | 406-17.6    | 28-77           | .364        | 10-28          | .357        | 32-41          | .780        | 5-19           | 24-1.0          | 38-0          | 38         | 25         | 3         | 31         | 98-4.3           |
| WALKER, Eboni    | 20-0      | 231-11.5    | 24-55           | .436        | 0-1            | .000        | 0-0            | .000        | 24-14          | 38-1.9          | 9-0           | 25         | 10         | 4         | 15         | 48-2.4           |
| Team             |           |             |                 |             |                |             |                |             | 36-38          | 74              |               | 16         |            |           |            |                  |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>23</b> | <b>4600</b> | <b>683-1531</b> | <b>.446</b> | <b>144-447</b> | <b>.322</b> | <b>318-455</b> | <b>.699</b> | <b>275-571</b> | <b>846-36.8</b> | <b>370-5</b>  | <b>343</b> | <b>291</b> | <b>86</b> | <b>302</b> | <b>1828-79.5</b> |
| <b>Opponents</b> | <b>23</b> | <b>4600</b> | <b>515-1328</b> | <b>.388</b> | <b>128-462</b> | <b>.277</b> | <b>227-328</b> | <b>.692</b> | <b>269-622</b> | <b>891-38.7</b> | <b>422-10</b> | <b>272</b> | <b>541</b> | <b>80</b> | <b>129</b> | <b>1385-60.2</b> |

body, and it's tough on the student-athletes for a variety of reasons, academics and so forth," McGuff said. "But the alternative is to go out there and play a game and come back and then to do it again, which is probably worse to have to take two trips. So I get why they do it, and given the nature of our conference now it's probably the best-case scenario."

The Ohio State men's hoops team will have to deal with the same issues that a weeklong trip across the country provides in late February when it travels to USC and UCLA, but one difficulty unique to the women's basketball team is how elite

the Bruins and Trojans are.

UCLA and USC are not only the two best teams in the Big Ten, but two of the best teams in the country. Having to play both of those teams on the road in a span of three days is less than ideal for McGuff's squad.

"It's interesting because this obviously is a very difficult trip, and we turn around and play another great team in USC and we have to get our minds right and get mentally prepared," McGuff said after Ohio State's 65-52 loss to No. 1 UCLA. "There's probably no other way to do it realistically because two trips coming this way probably wouldn't make sense.

"But it does put the teams coming here at somewhat of a disadvantage having to play two of the best teams in the confer-

ence. We'll see over the long term how the league office handles that because you could have UCLA coming to us and Maryland next year if they want to."

The long road trip didn't treat the Buckeyes well, as they lost both games to the top-10 foes by a combined 34 points to fall to 9-3 in the Big Ten and possibly drop out of contention for a second straight regular-season conference championship.

### Trio Of Bucks Named To Watch Lists

As Ohio State was gearing up for its road trip, three of the team's biggest stars were named to watch lists for national awards.

On Feb. 3, freshman point guard Jaloni

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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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Cambridge and junior forward Cotie McMahon were both named to the midseason watch list for the Ann Meyers Drysdale National Player of the Year award, while McMahon was named one of 10 finalists for the Cheryl Miller Award, given to the nation's best small forward, on Feb. 5.

Senior guard Taylor Thierry also earned midseason recognition on Feb. 5 after she was named one of 15 finalists for the Naismith Women's Defensive Player of the Year watch list.

Cambridge and McMahon were two of 50 finalists for the Ann Meyers Drysdale National Player of the Year award mid-season watchlist.

Cambridge earns her honors after bursting onto the scene her freshman season with the Buckeyes, averaging 14.8 points, 4.6 rebounds and a team-high 3.9 assists per game while shooting 43.8 percent from the field.

McMahon, who was also named one of five finalists for the Cheryl Miller Award last season, has continued to be a reliable force this season for the Buckeyes, averaging a team-high 16.2 points and 4.7 rebounds along with 2.2 assists. She is shooting 42.2 percent from the field and a career-high 31.7 percent from three.

Thierry earns her recognition after continuing to be a stalwart on the defensive end for the Buckeyes. She leads the team with 2.4 steals per game, and her 0.5 blocks per game are second only to freshman center Elsa Lemmilä's 1.8.

Thierry's inclusion on the watch list is just another defensive accolade for the senior. She was named to the All-Big Ten defensive team in 2023, and her 213 career steals rank 11th in program history.

**Sheldon Traded To Connecticut Sun**

Former Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon has found a new WNBA team.

Sheldon was a piece of a four-team, 13-player trade that sent her from the Dallas Wings to the Connecticut Sun on Feb. 3.

In the trade, the Connecticut Sun sent Dijonai Carrington and Ty Harris to Dallas and Alyssa Thomas to the Phoenix Mercury, and in return they received the No. 8 overall pick from the Indiana Fever, Rebecca Allen and Natasha Cloud from Phoenix and Sheldon from Dallas.

Sheldon joins a Sun team that went 28-12 in the regular season and made it to the second round of the playoffs, but the subtractions of Carrington, Harris and Thomas, each of whom were starting players last season, could signal that the team is headed for a rebuilding year.

Sheldon, who is entering her second season in 2025, averaged 5.1 points, 2.1 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game in her rookie season with the Wings after being selected by the franchise with the No. 5 overall pick.

Sheldon's departure from Dallas comes a few months after she re-joined her alma mater on Nov. 11 to serve as director of player development with Ohio State. She returned to Ohio State – where she was an All-American and three-time All-Big Ten guard from 2019-23, averaging 15.6 points, 3.3 rebounds and 3.1 assists in her career – after suffering a lower-leg injury that prevented her from playing in the Australian Women's National Basketball League for the Townsville Fire over the off-season.

Sheldon's current position with the Buckeye coaching staff will not interfere with the start of the WNBA season, which for Sheldon will begin on May 18 when she suits up for her new team against the Washington Mystics.

**Mitchell Signs Extension With Fever**

While Sheldon is on the move from the Wings to the Sun, Ohio State's all-time leading scorer, Kelsey Mitchell, appears to be committed to the Indiana Fever in the immediate future.

The 29-year-old Mitchell signed a supermax contract with the Fever on Jan. 29 to return for her eighth season with the team.

Mitchell, whose salary for the 2025 season will be \$249,244, averaged a career-high 19.2 points, 2.5 rebounds and 1.8 assists per game while playing alongside superstar rookie guard Caitlin Clark in the backcourt last season, a stat line that allowed her to earn her second consecutive all-star selection.

Mitchell's new head coach, Stephanie White, was excited to have the star player back with the team.

"I'm thrilled that Kelsey is returning to Fever," White said. "She has been an integral part of this franchise from the moment she was drafted. I have watched her journey from the sideline since her time in college and have always admired her work ethic, approach to the game, and the way she interacts with her teammates. I

can't wait to work with her on a daily basis."

As prolific as she has become as a scorer with the Fever, Mitchell was even better with the Buckeyes. She averaged 24.5 points per game on 43.8 percent shooting over her four-year career with the Buckeyes (2014-18), earning All-America nods in each of those seasons.

With 3,402 all-time points scored, Mitchell was not just Ohio State's all-time leading scorer, but the Big Ten's all-time leading scorer. A few years later, though, her current teammate and then Iowa guard Clark shattered her all-time Big Ten scoring record with 3,951 points.

Now, Mitchell and Clark – who won WNBA Rookie of the Year honors last season – will look to team up again in 2025 and help lead the Fever to a second straight playoff appearance. The two were instrumental last season in the Fever's first playoff berth since 2016, a year that ended with a 2-0 series loss to Connecticut.

**OSU Moves Up Four Spots In AP Poll**

After defeating nationally ranked Maryland and surviving a tough road test against Nebraska in late January, Ohio State reached its highest ranking of the season in the AP top 25 at No. 8.

The Buckeyes moved up four spots from No. 12 to No. 8 in the Jan. 27 poll, making them the third highest-ranked Big Ten team behind No. 1 UCLA and No. 7 USC. OSU played only one game before the next release of the poll on Feb. 3 – defeating Washington at home 66-56 on

Feb. 2 – and stayed at No. 8.

After being ranked as high as No. 7 in the AP top 25 earlier in the season, Maryland has tumbled outside of the top 15 to No. 16 in the Feb. 3 poll following four losses in its previous six games.

The Terrapins have struggled to deal with a season-ending injury to guard Bri McDaniel, who tore her ACL prior to the Ohio State game in a 99-92 win over Minnesota on Jan. 14.

Michigan State was the only other Big Ten team featured in the Feb. 3 poll, slotting in at No. 20. The Spartans were ranked No. 16 in the previous poll, but a 63-59 home loss to Oregon on Jan. 30 knocked them down four spots.

Ohio State fell one spot to No. 9 in poll released Feb. 10. after losing both games of its difficult road trip against UCLA and USC.

**Cambridge Is Plank's Lady Buck For January**

After playing in only three games in December because of an injury to her shoulder, Cambridge was honored with Plank's Lady Buck of the Month award for her strong play in January.

Ohio State's freshman point guard averaged 18.2 points per game on 53.0 percent shooting along with 5.7 rebounds and 2.7 assists in six games played.

Cambridge helped the Buckeyes win all six games she played in, as their 62-59 loss to Penn State on Jan. 19 came without her services when she missed the game due to an illness.



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# Ohio State Fails Test Against Big Ten's Best

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In arguably their most important three-game stretch of the regular season, the Buckeyes failed to rise to the occasion against the Big Ten's stiffest competition.

After picking up a home win over Washington on Feb. 2, Ohio State made a road trip to Los Angeles to take on top-10 foes No. 1 UCLA and No. 7 USC and suffered its first two-game losing streak of the year. The Buckeyes lost to both the Bruins and Trojans by double digits, with their 21-point loss to the Trojans being the largest of the season.

The two convincing defeats significantly decreased Ohio State's chances of securing its second straight regular-season title and earning a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament with six games left to play before postseason play.

## Defense Shines In Win Over Washington

Ohio State (20-1, 9-1 Big Ten) didn't have its best offensive outing, but head coach Kevin McGuff's bunch made the big plays in crunch time to pick up a 66-56 win over Washington (13-9, 4-6 Big Ten) on Feb. 2 in front of 8,602 fans inside Value City Arena.

Despite shooting just 25 of 61 from the field (41.0 percent) and 2 of 11 from three (18.2 percent), Ohio State created an advantage by forcing 25 turnovers to the Buckeyes' 14.

"I thought our press bothered them," McGuff said after the game. "We turned them over quite a few times, and we were able to turn those turnovers into points."

The Buckeyes came out of a week-long break in between games rusty, committing two turnovers and giving up three layups in the first 2:09 to trail 7-0. The game continued to be a struggle until they forced a pair of turnovers in the last 1:28 and scored the last four points of the quarter

to trim Washington's lead to 15-14.

After the Huskies scored on their first two possessions of the second quarter, Ohio State scored six straight points to take a 22-19 lead. Washington bounced right back with a quick 5-0 spurt to go back up 24-22, but it was followed with a 14-2 Buckeye scoring run that lasted the final 5:54 of the first half and allowed them to lead 36-26.

OSU didn't allow a field goal during the surge, which was capped by a buzzer-beating midrange jumper from Jaloni Cambridge.

The Huskies opened the second half strong with two triples in the first 1:47 as part of a third-quarter opening 8-2 scoring run, but that momentum was short-lived when Ohio State scored six straight points to take a 46-36 lead with 5:14 left in the period after a jumper from Cambridge.

Ohio State's lead grew to as high as 12, 50-38, after a Cotie McMahon jump shot at 2:22, but two Buckeye turnovers in the final 1:26 helped Washington close the period on a 7-0 run to trail 50-45.

The Buckeyes' offensive struggles continued into the final period when they committed two early turnovers and missed their first three shots, allowing Washington to creep closer and trail 50-48.

OSU handled that adversity well. Graduate forward Ajae Petty made a layup, and Cambridge had back-to-back transition baskets to go back up 56-48 with 6:43 left, but Washington responded by making two triples in 1:42 to trail by five, 59-54, with 4:10 remaining.

But in the closing minutes, Ohio State turned to McMahon to close out the win. She made two baskets in 1:27 to bookend a game-sealing 6-0 spurt that put the Buckeyes up 65-54 with 2:25 left. Ohio State then dug in defensively and conceded just one more field goal the rest of the game to secure the 10-point victory.

The Buckeyes were outrebounded by

| Ohio State 66, Washington 56                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|
| Feb. 2, 2025<br>Value City Arena • Columbus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1          | 2            | 3            | 4            | F         |           |           |  |  |  |
| Washington (13-9, 4-6)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 15         | 11           | 19           | 11           | 56        |           |           |  |  |  |
| Ohio State (20-1, 9-1)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 14         | 22           | 14           | 16           | 66        |           |           |  |  |  |
| Washington                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Total      | FT           | Reb.         |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |  |
| Stines                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 35         | 8-14         | 0-0          | 0-4          | 0         | 1         | 17        |  |  |  |
| Daniels                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 27         | 6-8          | 1-2          | 2-5          | 4         | 5         | 13        |  |  |  |
| Sellers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 40         | 2-19         | 0-0          | 0-3          | 4         | 2         | 5         |  |  |  |
| Briggs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 29         | 2-2          | 0-0          | 0-3          | 0         | 1         | 5         |  |  |  |
| Ladine                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 30         | 1-8          | 1-2          | 4-7          | 3         | 4         | 4         |  |  |  |
| Coppinger                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 22         | 3-4          | 0-0          | 1-1          | 0         | 1         | 8         |  |  |  |
| Eke                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 7          | 1-2          | 2-2          | 1-0          | 0         | 2         | 4         |  |  |  |
| Brown                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 7          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 1-1          | 0         | 1         | 0         |  |  |  |
| McDonald                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 3          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 2         | 0         |  |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>200</b> | <b>23-57</b> | <b>4-6</b>   | <b>12-24</b> | <b>11</b> | <b>19</b> | <b>56</b> |  |  |  |
| <b>Percentages: FG: 40.4%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 6-25 (Sellers 1-10, Ladine 1-6, Stines 1-5, Coppinger 2-3, Briggs 1-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 6 (Daniels 4, Stines 2). Turnovers: 25 (Daniels 5, Stines 4, Sellers 4, Briggs 3, Ladine 3, Team 3 Eke 2, Brown). Steals: 5 (Sellers 3, Stines, Briggs).</b>                                                                                                                              |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
| Ohio State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Total      | FT           | Reb.         |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |  |
| McMahon                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 38         | 9-16         | 1-3          | 1-4          | 1         | 2         | 19        |  |  |  |
| J. Cambridge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 34         | 6-17         | 1-4          | 2-3          | 2         | 3         | 13        |  |  |  |
| Gray                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 31         | 2-9          | 6-6          | 1-2          | 0         | 3         | 11        |  |  |  |
| Petty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 21         | 3-7          | 2-2          | 3-0          | 2         | 2         | 8         |  |  |  |
| Thierry                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 33         | 2-6          | 2-2          | 3-3          | 3         | 2         | 6         |  |  |  |
| Lemmilä                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 16         | 1-1          | 2-3          | 2-5          | 1         | 2         | 4         |  |  |  |
| Watson                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 6          | 1-2          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 1         | 3         |  |  |  |
| K. Cambridge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 15         | 1-3          | 0-0          | 0-2          | 0         | 1         | 2         |  |  |  |
| Greene                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 6          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 1         | 0         | 0         |  |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>200</b> | <b>25-61</b> | <b>14-20</b> | <b>14-20</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>66</b> |  |  |  |
| <b>Percentages: FG: 41.0%. FT: 70.0%. Three-point field goals: 2-11 (Gray 1-5, J. Cambridge 0-2, McMahon 0-1, Thierry 0-1, K. Cambridge 0-1, Watson 1-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (K. Cambridge). Turnovers: 14 (J. Cambridge 4, Gray 3, Thierry 2, Team 2, McMahon, Lemmilä, Greene). Steals: 10 (Lemmilä 3, Gray 2, Thierry 2, K. Cambridge 2, J. Cambridge). Officials: Xiomara Cruz-Johnson, Kalei Enterline, Michael Price. Attendance: 8,602</b> |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |

| UCLA 65, Ohio State 52                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |            |              |             |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|
| Feb. 5, 2025<br>Pauley Pavilion • Los Angeles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |            |              |             |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 1          | 2            | 3           | 4            | F         |           |           |  |  |  |
| Ohio State (20-2, 9-2)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 16         | 8            | 18          | 10           | 52        |           |           |  |  |  |
| UCLA (22-0, 10-0)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 18         | 12           | 14          | 21           | 65        |           |           |  |  |  |
| Ohio State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Total      | FT           | Reb.        |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Min        | M-A          | M-A         | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |  |
| J. Cambridge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 34         | 7-20         | 4-6         | 1-7          | 6         | 3         | 21        |  |  |  |
| McMahon                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 38         | 6-15         | 2-2         | 0-3          | 0         | 1         | 14        |  |  |  |
| Gray                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 30         | 2-9          | 2-2         | 1-1          | 1         | 2         | 6         |  |  |  |
| Thierry                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 32         | 1-5          | 1-2         | 1-1          | 0         | 3         | 3         |  |  |  |
| Petty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 23         | 0-5          | 0-4         | 4-4          | 2         | 3         | 0         |  |  |  |
| Lemmilä                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 17         | 4-7          | 0-0         | 4-2          | 2         | 1         | 8         |  |  |  |
| K. Cambridge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 15         | 0-4          | 0-0         | 0-0          | 1         | 0         | 0         |  |  |  |
| Greene                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 6          | 0-1          | 0-0         | 0-0          | 0         | 0         | 0         |  |  |  |
| Watson                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 5          | 0-2          | 0-0         | 1-0          | 0         | 1         | 0         |  |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>200</b> | <b>20-68</b> | <b>9-16</b> | <b>14-19</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>52</b> |  |  |  |
| <b>Percentages: FG: 29.4%. FT: 56.3%. Three-point field goals: 3-18 (J. Cambridge 3-5, Gray 0-4, Thierry 0-3, K. Cambridge 0-3, Watson 0-2, McMahon 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Lemmilä). Turnovers: 11 (McMahon 5, Gray 2, J. Cambridge, Petty, Lemmilä, Team). Steals: 15 (McMahon 4, J. Cambridge 2, Petty 2, Lemmilä 2, Watson 2, Gray, Thierry, K. Cambridge).</b>                                                      |            |              |             |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
| UCLA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Total      | FT           | Reb.        |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Min        | M-A          | M-A         | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |  |
| Betts                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 34         | 8-13         | 3-5         | 3-11         | 1         | 1         | 19        |  |  |  |
| Jaquez                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 35         | 7-11         | 2-2         | 3-3          | 1         | 0         | 17        |  |  |  |
| Rice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 32         | 5-10         | 2-2         | 0-3          | 4         | 0         | 12        |  |  |  |
| Dugalic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 18         | 1-6          | 0-0         | 1-9          | 3         | 2         | 3         |  |  |  |
| Jones                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 15         | 1-5          | 0-0         | 0-1          | 0         | 4         | 3         |  |  |  |
| Barker                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 19         | 3-3          | 0-0         | 3-6          | 1         | 3         | 6         |  |  |  |
| Gardiner                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 15         | 1-4          | 0-0         | 0-2          | 4         | 1         | 3         |  |  |  |
| Aarnisalo                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 28         | 0-4          | 2-2         | 0-2          | 5         | 2         | 2         |  |  |  |
| Dudley                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 4          | 0-1          | 0-0         | 0-0          | 0         | 1         | 0         |  |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>200</b> | <b>26-57</b> | <b>9-11</b> | <b>10-39</b> | <b>19</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>65</b> |  |  |  |
| <b>Percentages: FG: 45.6%. FT: 81.8%. Three-point field goals: 4-16 (Dugalic 1-4, Jones 1-4, Gardiner 1-4, Jaquez 1-3, Aarnisalo 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 5 (Betts 3, Dugalic 2). Turnovers: 23 (Rice 6, Dugalic 4, Betts 3, Jaquez 2, Jones 2, Gardiner 2, Barker, Aarnisalo, Dudley, Team). Steals: 7 (Jaquez 2, Rice 2, Betts, Aarnisalo, Dudley). Officials: Kyle Bacon, Kevin Pethel, Gina Cross. Attendance: 6,822</b> |            |              |             |              |           |           |           |  |  |  |

the Huskies 36-34 and made four fewer threes than the away team – 6-of-25 shooting (24.0 percent) for Washington – but they converted the Huskies' 25 turnovers into 35 points, while the Huskies scored only 10 points off Ohio State's 14 turnovers.

McMahon finished the game as Ohio State's leading scorer with 19 points on 9-of-16 shooting along with five rebounds. Freshman center Elsa Lemmilä came off the bench to lead the team with seven rebounds to go along with four points, while senior guard Taylor Thierry dished out a team-high three assists and added six points and six boards.

Junior guard Hannah Stines led the way for Washington with 17 points on 8-of-14 shooting. Elle Ladine led all players with 11 rebounds.

## OSU Falts Late In Loss At UCLA

No. 8 Ohio State (20-2, 9-2) went toe-to-toe in a road battle with No. 1 UCLA (22-0, 10-0) on Feb. 5 in front of 6,822 fans at Pauley Pavilion in Los Angeles for the first 31 minutes of the game, but a fourth-quarter scoring drought was ultimately too much to recover from in its 65-52 loss.

Despite some shooting issues, Ohio State was in position to pull the upset over UCLA when it tied the game at 44

with 9:26 remaining, but a 7:17 field-goal drought allowed the Bruins to mount a 19-1 scoring run, pulling ahead 63-45, to remain unbeaten.

The Buckeyes were more than holding their own against the No. 1 team in the country early on, forcing UCLA into five turnovers in the first 5:17 of the game to help them take an early 13-6 lead. The Bruins responded from a 2-for-8 shooting start by knocking down a pair of three-pointers, fueling a 12-3 scoring run that allowed them to lead 18-16 after one.

UCLA's run only continued in the second. The Buckeyes committed four turnovers in the first 3:52 and led by star junior center Lauren Betts, the Bruins began the period on a 10-2 run to lead 28-18 with 4:19 left in the half, with Betts scoring eight of those points.

But Ohio State dug deep defensively and allowed only one field goal, also by Betts, the remainder of the half, which – along with four points from Lemmilä – helped it trim UCLA's lead to 30-24 at halftime. Betts had 13 points and 10 rebounds in the first 20 minutes.

Ohio State's defensive intensity persisted into the third quarter despite some continued shooting woes – the Buckeyes shot 23.5 percent (8 of 34) in the first half – and after forcing the Bruins into a pair of three-point misses by Londynn Jones midway through the period, McMahon



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# OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

## USC 84, Ohio State 63

Feb. 8, 2025  
Galen Center • Los Angeles

|                        | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | F  |
|------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Ohio State (20-3, 9-3) | 11 | 15 | 19 | 18 | 63 |
| USC (21-2, 11-1)       | 14 | 20 | 25 | 25 | 84 |

| Ohio State    | Total      |              |              |             | A         | PF        | Pts.      |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|               | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D         |           |           |           |
| Petty         | 25         | 4-10         | 0-0          | 0-4         | 4         | 3         | 8         |
| McMahon       | 32         | 4-15         | 4-4          | 0-3         | 3         | 3         | 13        |
| Thierry       | 30         | 3-5          | 8-9          | 1-4         | 1         | 5         | 14        |
| Gray          | 35         | 4-15         | 3-3          | 0-3         | 1         | 3         | 12        |
| J. Cambridge  | 34         | 5-15         | 1-4          | 0-5         | 3         | 3         | 11        |
| K. Cambridge  | 4          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 1-0         | 0         | 1         | 0         |
| Lemmila       | 12         | 0-1          | 1-2          | 1-1         | 1         | 1         | 1         |
| Walker        | 10         | 0-4          | 0-0          | 0-0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Greene        | 11         | 0-0          | 4-4          | 0-4         | 0         | 3         | 4         |
| Watson        | 7          | 0-2          | 0-0          | 0-0         | 1         | 1         | 0         |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>200</b> | <b>20-68</b> | <b>21-26</b> | <b>6-24</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>23</b> | <b>63</b> |

**Percentages:** FG: 29.4%. FT: 80.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 2-11. (Gray 1-5, Watson 0-2, McMahon 1-2, Thierry 0-1, J. Cambridge 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3 **Blocked shots:** 6 (Lemmila 4, Gray, K. Cambridge). **Turnovers:** 10 (Thierry 2, J. Cambridge 2, McMahon, Gray, K. Cambridge, Walker, Greene, Team). **Steals:** 15 (Thierry 5, Gray 3, McMahon 2, Petty, J. Cambridge, Lemmila).

| USC           | Total      |              |              |              | A         | PF        | Pts.      |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|               | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          |           |           |           |
| Marshall      | 19         | 5-7          | 0-0          | 5-3          | 0         | 4         | 10        |
| Iriafen       | 35         | 8-18         | 8-8          | 6-7          | 4         | 5         | 24        |
| Smith         | 37         | 4-6          | 2-3          | 5-8          | 5         | 3         | 13        |
| Watkins       | 36         | 5-21         | 6-8          | 1-9          | 3         | 2         | 17        |
| von Oelhoffen | 30         | 1-4          | 5-6          | 0-8          | 3         | 1         | 8         |
| Heckel        | 16         | 2-5          | 2-2          | 0-3          | 0         | 0         | 6         |
| Howell        | 18         | 2-6          | 0-0          | 0-4          | 0         | 3         | 6         |
| Akunwafo      | 6          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-3          | 0         | 1         | 0         |
| Iwuchukwu     | 2          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 1         | 0         |
| Samuels       | 1          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>200</b> | <b>27-68</b> | <b>23-27</b> | <b>19-43</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>84</b> |

**Percentages:** FG: 39.7%. FT: 81.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-19 (Watkins 1-6, Howell 2-6, Smith 3-3, von Oelhoffen 1-2, Heckel 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 3 **Blocked shots:** 10 (Marshall 4, Smith 2, Iriafen, Watkins, von Oelhoffen, Akunwafo). **Turnovers:** 23 (Iriafen 5, Marshall 4, Watkins 4, von Oelhoffen 4, Smith 3, Heckel 2, Howell). **Steals:** 5 (von Oelhoffen 2, Marshall, Iriafen, Smith). **Officials:** Julie Krommenhoek, Mitch McConnell, Ken Nash. **Attendance:** 8,892

scored consecutive baskets to cut UCLA's lead to 38-35 with 3:21 left in the period.

A midrange jumper from Bruins' junior guard KiKi Rice did little to halt Ohio State's momentum. Cambridge drained a three-pointer just 20 seconds later to trim the deficit to 40-38. The Bruins' lead stayed between two and four points until Cambridge tied the game at 44 with a floater at the 9:26 mark of the fourth quarter.

However, it was then that UCLA completely took control of the game with the 19-1 run to lead by 18 points with 3:16 left. The sequence was defined by an 0-for-8 shooting stretch by Ohio State and 15 combined points from UCLA guards Gabriela Jaquez and Rice, who worked together to doom any chances of a state-

ment Buckeye victory.

OSU ended the game on a 7-2 spurt, but it did nothing to affect the outcome, and UCLA cruised to its 22nd straight win to open the season.

Ohio State shot a season-low 29.4 percent from the field (20 of 68) and just 3 of 18 from three (16.7 percent) to post its lowest scoring total of the season.

"As I told the team afterward, I thought our competitive character was great tonight and I thought we really played hard against a great team, but you're not going to go on the road at UCLA and shoot 29 percent and expect to win," McGuff said. "We had our chances. We didn't take advantage of it, and to their credit they did."

Cambridge scored 21 points on 7-of-20 shooting, tied Petty for the team high with eight rebounds, and tallied a game-high six assists. McMahon added 14 points.

Betts led UCLA with 19 points and 14 rebounds – her 12th double-double of the season – shooting 8 of 13 from the floor, while Jaquez (17) and Rice (12) both scored in double figures. Angela Dugalic added 10 rebounds to help the Bruins post a 49-33 edge on the boards.

### Poor Rebounding Dooms Bucks Against USC

In its second game of a road trip to Los Angeles, No. 8 Ohio State (20-3, 9-3) suffered its second straight loss by a score of 84-63 against No. 7 USC (21-2, 11-1) in front of 8,892 fans at the Galen Center on Feb. 8.

Despite the loss, Ohio State stifled star USC guard JuJu Watkins for most of the game, forcing her to miss each of her first 11 shots and finish the game with 17 points on 5-of-21 shooting.

But Ohio State was ultimately doomed – as it was against UCLA – by its poor shooting, making only 20 of its 68 attempts from the field (29.4 percent) and two of its 11 threes (18.2 percent). The Buckeyes were also dominated on the glass, with the Trojans getting 19 offensive rebounds to help them hold a 62-30 rebounding advantage.

"We got our (tails) kicked on the boards," McGuff said. "If we're not going to compete and fight better than that, we're not going to beat a team like USC."

A blowout didn't appear to be in store for the underdog Buckeyes when they led 7-2 early, but USC quickly responded with a 12-4 run to hold a 14-11 advantage at the end of the first quarter.

The Buckeyes went cold to start the second quarter, missing four of their first five field goals, but they managed to keep the Trojans in check to only fall behind 19-

13. Thierry got the Buckeyes back within three, 19-16, when she converted an and-one layup at 6:39, but that didn't do much to swing the momentum back in their favor.

Ohio State struggled to guard the Trojans without fouling, and the home team made eight free throws during a 15-8 scoring run that put them up 34-24 with 1:06 remaining in the half before Thierry made two free throws to put the score at 34-26 at the break. The Trojans were 13 of 14 from the stripe in the half, with Watkins making all four of her free shots for her only points in the first 20 minutes.

USC's lead stayed between eight and 10 points at the start of the second half until Trojans freshman guard Avery Howell drained a three-pointer with 6:50 left in the period to spark a quick 5-0 run that put the home team up 45-32.

Ohio State responded with an 11-5 spurt to trail 50-43 at 2:14 after a Gray three, but a Watkins three-point play on the ensuing possession sparked a 9-2 Trojans run that lasted the remaining 2:02 of the third quarter and put them up 59-45 heading into the final period.

The Buckeyes' hole only became deeper early in the final frame when they allowed several second-chance points in the first 3:18 of the fourth quarter to trail 66-49 with 6:42 left. Ohio State got a pair of layups from Cambridge and McMahon to

trail by 13 with 5:08 to go, but USC responded with a game-sealing 18-6 run to lead 84-59 with 1:21 remaining.

The Buckeyes scored the last four points of the game, but it didn't matter as they lost by more than 20 points for the first time all season.

Ohio State was led by Thierry in the loss. She scored 14 points on 3-of-5 shooting – 8-of-9 from the free-throw line – to go with her team-high five rebounds. McMahon (13), Gray (12) and Cambridge (11), who tied Thierry with five rebounds, also notched double figures in scoring, while Petty added a team-high four assists.

Graduate forward Kiki Iriafen led USC in the dominant win with 24 points along with 13 rebounds, including six off the offensive glass, and four assists.

Ohio State will wrap up its regular season with four home games and two road games before BSB next goes to press. At home, the Buckeyes will face Minnesota on Feb. 13 (7:30 p.m., Peacock), Iowa on Feb. 17 (12 p.m., FOX), Purdue on Feb. 23 (12 p.m., BTN) and Michigan State on Feb. 26 (7 p.m., B1G+).

In between the Iowa and Purdue games, Ohio State will travel to Bloomington, Ind., to face Indiana at Assembly Hall on Feb. 20 (7 p.m., Peacock), and the Buckeyes will wrap up their regular season with a rematch against Maryland at the Xfinity Center (4:30 p.m., FS1).

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# “Connected” Buckeyes Beginning To Hit Stride

After losing four of its first five conference games in January, it seems Ohio State has begun to turn the corner on its 2024-25 season. Since a heartbreaking 77-76 overtime loss at home to teetering Indiana on Jan. 17, the Buckeyes have racked up four wins in their last six games as BSB went to press, including two double-digit victories.

## COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

It's a strong winter stretch that has allowed Jake Diebler's team to climb up the Big Ten standings – where they sit in a tie for eighth place as of Feb. 9 – and re-enter NCAA Tournament consideration, projected as a No. 9 seed in ESPN “Bracketologist” Joe Lunardi's latest projected bracket.

Ohio State's winning stretch has been defined by improved efficiency on both sides of the floor, one which currently has it ranking 32nd nationally in offensive rating by Ken-Pom (117.9 points per 100 possessions) and 31st in defensive rating (96.6 points allowed per 100 possessions).

According to Diebler, this crisper style of play can be attributed to his team coming together as one unit and growing more comfortable in his system.

“I think what we're starting to see now is – and sometimes I forget this – it takes time as you put in a new system, guys are experiencing it for the first time,” Diebler said on Jan. 28. “You want immediate results, but it takes time. What we're seeing now is guys are more comfortable. Our attention to detail, because of the experience, is better.

“You forget that as a coach because you want it now. ‘Well, we just practiced that, why is it not (translating to games).’ But it takes time to build. We're at a point where guys – we've grown, now we can kind of play off instincts, and it's helping.”

As Diebler alluded to, many players on Ohio State's roster have had to adjust to an entirely new system with new teammates, with transfers Aaron Bradshaw, Micah Parrish and Sean Stewart and freshmen John Mobley Jr. and Ivan Njegovan all in their first year with the Buckeyes and contributing to this winning stretch.

With three months of play now under their belts as a team, Diebler said his players are finally starting to play like the cohesive unit he had hoped for at the start of the season, which is a testament to their work ethic and patience.

“We're getting better and better. There's so much newness. New system, new team, new staff. And you're seeing just how committed our guys are to growing and getting better, and we're starting to see the fruits of that labor.”

### Bucks' Defense Also Turning Corner

Ohio State's increased connectedness has helped the team grow in many aspects, and perhaps an aspect of the group has benefited more than its team defense.

## 2024-25 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

### 14-10 Overall (6-7 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Feb. 9

| Player           | G-GS      | Min.-Avg.   | FG-FGA          | Pct.        | 3P-3PA         | Pct.        | FT-FTA         | Pct.        | Rebounds       |                 | PF-FO         | A          | TO         | BS        | ST         | Pts.-Avg.        |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
|                  |           |             |                 |             |                |             |                |             | O-D            | T-Avg.          |               |            |            |           |            |                  |
| THORNTON, Bruce  | 24-24     | 855-35.6    | 137-266         | .515        | 47-103         | .456        | 95-115         | .826        | 9-73           | 82-3.4          | 37-0          | 102        | 36         | 4         | 24         | 416-17.3         |
| ROYAL, Devin     | 23-19     | 635-27.6    | 111-208         | .534        | 10-40          | .250        | 84-111         | .757        | 53-117         | 170-7.4         | 65-1          | 27         | 39         | 9         | 20         | 316-13.7         |
| MOBLEY JR., John | 24-14     | 637-26.6    | 100-254         | .394        | 58-142         | .408        | 56-62          | .903        | 3-37           | 40-1.7          | 46-1          | 55         | 29         | 2         | 16         | 314-13.1         |
| PARRISH, Micah   | 23-23     | 699-30.4    | 98-216          | .454        | 38-106         | .358        | 44-57          | .772        | 16-90          | 106-4.6         | 62-1          | 33         | 46         | 6         | 26         | 278-12.1         |
| JOHNSON, Meechie | 10-10     | 288-28.8    | 32-90           | .356        | 20-56          | .357        | 7-14           | .500        | 0-25           | 25-2.5          | 16-0          | 27         | 23         | 2         | 11         | 91-9.1           |
| BRADSHAW, Aaron  | 16-5      | 279-17.5    | 40-82           | .488        | 4-25           | .160        | 19-26          | .731        | 17-30          | 47-2.9          | 43-1          | 1          | 5          | 13        | 9          | 103-6.4          |
| STEWART, Sean    | 22-22     | 399-18.0    | 52-100          | .520        | 1-2            | .500        | 21-38          | .553        | 26-100         | 126-5.7         | 79-5          | 13         | 25         | 19        | 17         | 126-5.7          |
| GLOVER, Ques     | 16-0      | 280-17.5    | 27-80           | .338        | 8-23           | .348        | 15-20          | .750        | 8-19           | 27-1.7          | 34-2          | 21         | 15         | 1         | 5          | 77-4.8           |
| MAHAFFEY, Evan   | 24-3      | 469-19.5    | 44-65           | .677        | 1-2            | .500        | 12-29          | .414        | 36-47          | 83-3.5          | 52-3          | 21         | 14         | 22        | 17         | 101-4.2          |
| NJEGOVAN, Ivan   | 16-0      | 104-6.5     | 13-23           | .565        | 2-7            | .286        | 3-5            | .600        | 12-14          | 26-1.6          | 13-0          | 2          | 0          | 8         | 0          | 31-1.9           |
| ETZLER, Kalen    | 6-0       | 15-2.5      | 4-5             | .800        | 2-2            | 1.000       | 0-0            | .000        | 0-3            | 3-0.5           | 1-0           | 0          | 1          | 0         | 1          | 10-1.7           |
| PARKS, Austin    | 12-0      | 105-8.8     | 7-13            | .538        | 0-0            | .000        | 3-7            | .429        | 5-6            | 11-0.9          | 17-0          | 5          | 5          | 1         | 2          | 17-1.4           |
| WHITE, Colin     | 13-0      | 109-8.4     | 6-16            | .375        | 3-9            | .333        | 3-6            | .500        | 5-9            | 14-1.1          | 16-0          | 7          | 5          | 3         | 5          | 18-1.4           |
| NASH, Braylen    | 8-0       | 13-1.6      | 1-1             | 1.000       | 1-1            | 1.000       | 2-2            | 1.000       | 0-0            | 0-0.0           | 1-0           | 0          | 1          | 0         | 1          | 5-0.6            |
| BAUMANN, Colby   | 8-0       | 16-2.0      | 0-2             | .000        | 0-1            | .000        | 0-0            | .000        | 0-1            | 1-0.1           | 0-0           | 2          | 0          | 0         | 0          | 0-0.0            |
| Team             |           |             |                 |             |                |             |                |             | 33-42          | 75              |               | 16         |            |           |            |                  |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>24</b> | <b>4900</b> | <b>672-1421</b> | <b>.473</b> | <b>195-519</b> | <b>.376</b> | <b>364-492</b> | <b>.740</b> | <b>223-613</b> | <b>836-34.8</b> | <b>482-14</b> | <b>316</b> | <b>260</b> | <b>90</b> | <b>154</b> | <b>1903-79.3</b> |
| <b>Opponents</b> | <b>24</b> | <b>4900</b> | <b>572-1391</b> | <b>.411</b> | <b>154-534</b> | <b>.288</b> | <b>422-568</b> | <b>.743</b> | <b>249-564</b> | <b>813-33.9</b> | <b>446-8</b>  | <b>268</b> | <b>280</b> | <b>80</b> | <b>94</b>  | <b>1720-71.7</b> |

Since that loss to Indiana, the Buckeyes have been strong on that side of the floor, limiting their opponents to 70 or fewer points in four of their next six games on a combined 46.4 percent shooting while also forcing 59 combined turnovers.

Ohio State's defensive prowess was on full display during its two wins against Iowa on Jan. 27 and Penn State on Jan. 30. Facing off against the Big Ten's first- and third-best scoring offenses at the time of those two games, the Buckeyes held the Hawkeyes to a season-low 65 points on 39.3 percent shooting then limited the Nittany Lions to their second-worst scoring output of 64 points on 45.7 percent shooting three days later.

Diebler said on Jan. 28 that his team's recent defensive triumphs come from his players developing more trust in one another as the season goes on, which has allowed them to have more communication and be more aggressive on that side of the court.

“It's really important,” Diebler said when asked about how team chemistry helps on defense. “Because there are multiple opportunities for a possession to break down. Key No. 1 (to prevent that) is communication. That's been a pointed area of improvement for us. We've been very intentional about improving in that area. And as we've started to communicate better, we've defended better.

“We're asking guys to call out coverage that maybe they've been trained completely differently for the last however many years. But I think being connected and us being able to trust each other defensively – like if I trust the guys behind me, I may be able to pressure the ball a little bit more. So I think all that stuff is connected. That chemistry is really important.”

The Buckeyes have also developed a knack in this stretch for shutting down the opposition's best offensive player. During the team's three wins over Purdue, Iowa and Penn State, they held preseason All-Big Ten guards Braden Smith, Payton Sandfort and Ace Baldwin Jr. to 12, 13 and 10 points, respectively, on a combined 10-of-38 shooting (26.3 percent) while also forcing them into seven combined turnovers.

Although a lot of the credit for these low scoring outputs could go to the Buckeyes' defense as a whole, it may ultimately be at-

tributed to the elite play of Ohio State's top two perimeter defenders, veterans Parrish and Bruce Thornton. Diebler said they can take opposing offenses out of their rhythm with their high basketball IQ and leadership.

“Their defensive instincts and their experience are really important,” he said. “There will be – maybe the casual eye can't see it – but there will be multiple possessions in a game where one of those guys just completely disrupts the other team's action with the anticipation and their understanding of the scouting report.

“And then as far as leadership goes, it becomes contagious when guys who have been through it before can turn around and get us connected (and say), ‘Hey, we need one more of this. Watch out for this coming.’ That's the kind of leadership and flow of the game that I think we're improving on and we're seeing real tangible benefit from.”

### Njegovan Showing Promise Inside

The Buckeyes have shown promise on both ends of the floor in recent weeks, but they can take their play a step further with improved production in the frontcourt, an area that has been a weakness for the team all year.

Ohio State has yet to see former five-star forwards Bradshaw and Stewart blossom into the stars they were touted to be coming out of high school – with the two sophomores combining to average just 6.1 points and 4.3 rebounds through Feb. 9 – but it has received some promising play of late from the 7-1 true freshman and Otocac, Croatia, native Njegovan.

Njegovan, who signed with Ohio State on July 30 after playing last season for the Croatian Premier League team KK Bosco, has jumped sophomore center Austin Parks in the frontcourt depth chart in recent weeks and is making the most of those extra opportunities.

After totaling just 14 points and nine rebounds in 30 minutes of action in his first eight collegiate games, he has notched 17, 17 and 72 in his last eight contests, while also tacking on seven blocks on defense during that span.

When asked on Feb. 3 about the Cro-

atian freshman's play, Diebler said he has been happy with his production and that he has taken great strides to advance his game since joining the program in the summer.

“I've been so impressed with Ivan,” he said. “Just the commitment he has to being a good player right now is as good as anybody on our team. He's spending extra time. His body's changing. He told me he's grown a little bit since he's been here. So we'll take that.”

Diebler added that he noticed Njegovan's improvements well before this recent stretch of positive play, where he first turned heads going toe to toe with the Buckeyes' bigs in practice while playing for the scout team before slowly working his way up to eventually earn significant playing time during games. This rise, according to the Buckeye coach, is a credit to the patience and consistency his big man has shown all year.

“You have to remember, he didn't have a summer, so give him credit. He stayed consistent,” he said. “And really in the last six weeks, he's kind of taken it even up a level when he wasn't getting minutes, and I think it speaks a lot to who he is and how much he cares and how much it shows he wants to be a really good player. He's earned the right to play well.”

With Ohio State still set to face off against many formidable frontcourts in the Big Ten this season, it will need Njegovan to continue providing a strong presence inside, which Diebler thinks his freshman is more than capable of doing the rest of the way.

“We have trust in him, and I think he knows that,” Diebler said. “And now he has some confidence, too.”

### Chatman Progressing Well From Injury

Diebler provided an update on the health of sophomore guard Taison Chatman during his Jan. 28 radio appearance with 97.1 The Fan, saying Chatman – who went down with a season-ending torn ACL in his left knee during a practice in June – is doing well with his recovery and fighting through this difficult situation.

“He's been very disciplined in his recovery and progressing well,” Diebler said. “It tests you, right? The resources we have



surrounding mental health and support and sports performance support, utilize all those in any circumstance needed. We're fortunate to have that."

Chatman, a former highly touted four-star prospect out of Minneapolis Totino-Grace, underwent season-ending surgery on his knee on June 18, giving him yet another injury hurdle he has had to cross during his still-young Buckeye career.

He was held out of most of last season's preseason as a freshman while recovering from an unrelated surgery he had on his left knee in high school, which forced him to miss the first four games of the year. The early-season absence slowed his development and limited him to just 17 total points, eight rebounds and six assists in his 17 games played.

Even with this disappointing freshman season, though, Chatman was expected to be a key contributor off the bench for the Buckeye backcourt this year, but the latest knee injury derailed any type of momentum he had built during the offseason.

"I feel like I was playing the best basketball I had played (before my injury)," Chatman said during the team's media day on Oct. 8. "I was putting the work in, and I was doing everything I needed to do to get to where I wanted to be."

Even with this major setback, Diebler thinks his sophomore guard is in a solid place both physically and mentally and has the capability to make an impact on the court as soon as 2025-26.

"It's just some unfortunate circumstances," Diebler said. "He's a really talented player who we were counting on playing an important role for us this year. He's been strong. He's been progressing. We're really excited for him."

## Thornton Rises Up All-Time Scoring List

Thornton continued to etch his name in Buckeye record books since BSB last went to press when he passed some familiar names to climb up the program's all-time scoring list.

After scoring 92 combined points in Ohio State's last five games against Iowa, Penn State, Illinois, Maryland and Nebraska, the Buckeyes' three-time team captain ranked 29th all-time in program history in scoring with 1,337 career points, a mark that sits just ahead of former Buckeyes guard Marc Loving (1,338, 2013-17).

Thornton, who became the 61st player to eclipse the 1,000-career-point plateau on a three-pointer during Ohio State's 102-69 win over Green Bay on Nov. 25, passed several notable Buckeyes during this last stretch of play, including All-Big Ten and All-America forwards Keita Bates-Diop (1,272, 2014-18), Jared Sullinger (1,282, 2010-12) and Clark Kellogg (1,285, 1979-82) and All-Big Ten guards Ron Stokes (1,240, 1981-85), Jamar Butler (1,313, 2004-08), Aaron Craft (1,314, 2010-14) and Jim Clemons (1,335, 1968-71).

While Thornton will almost certainly not catch Dennis Hopson's record of 2,096 career points this season, he could find himself within the top 20 of the all-time scoring list if he maintains his 17.3 points per game average during the Buckeyes' final seven games of the regular season, which would put him at around 1,458 career points.

Thornton's total could increase even

more if the Buckeyes qualify for postseason play this season and if he elects to use his final year of collegiate eligibility at Ohio State for 2025-26.

## Johnson Still Away From Team

Ohio State continues to play without the services of fifth-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr., who has missed the last 14 games while being away from the team due to personal reasons.

As BSB went to press, it was still unclear whether Johnson would return for the 2024-25 season or why he remains absent from the team. Diebler has maintained throughout his absence that he is still in communication with the veteran and that he and the program are keeping him and his family in their thoughts.

Prior to his departure, Johnson was one of the top contributors on the team, starting each of the team's first 10 games and averaging 9.1 points, 2.7 assists and 2.5 rebounds per game while shooting 35.6 percent from the floor and 35.7 percent from three. He also played the second-most minutes on the team during that span behind only Thornton with 28.8 per game.

Filling in for Johnson in his starting role during the last 14 games has been Mobley, who has performed admirably, averaging 13.6 points, 3.1 assists and 1.9 rebounds while shooting 35.3 percent from the field and 33.7 percent from three.

## Battle Signs Three-Year Deal With Raptors

Former Ohio State forward Jamison Battle earned a long-term deal with the Toronto Raptors on Feb. 7 after the franchise converted his two-way contract into a three-year standard NBA deal, according to ESPN's Shams Charania.

Battle's deal is worth a total of \$5.2 million (\$1.8 million per year) and includes \$1.98 million guaranteed, according to Spotrac.

Battle receives the new contract after becoming a reliable bench player for Toronto this year as an undrafted free agent, averaging 5.4 points and 1.8 rebounds per game while shooting 46.1 percent from the field and 42.1 percent from three. He has appeared in 37 of the Raptors' 53 games, logging 12.7 minutes per contest.

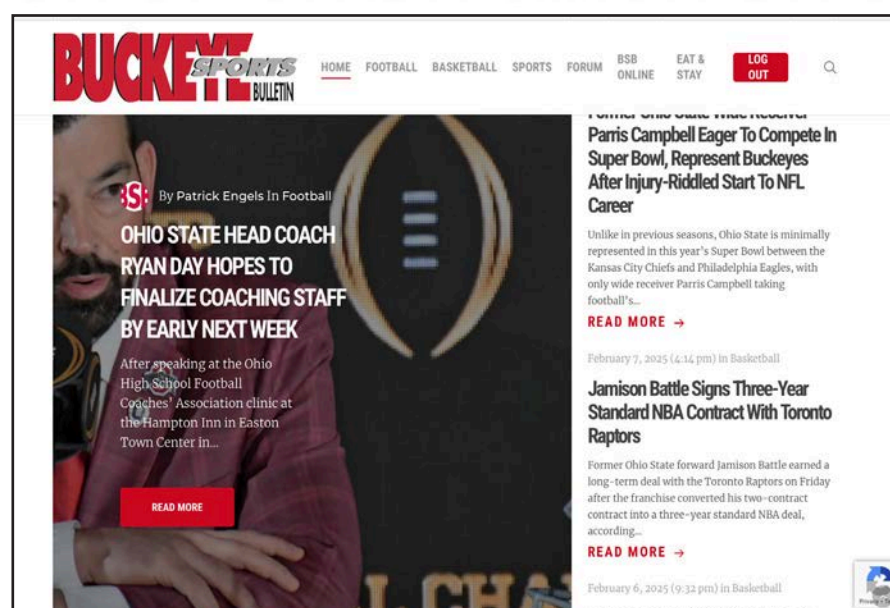
The Robbinsdale, Minn., native was originally signed on a two-way deal by the Raptors in October after showing his worth as a professional player during the preseason, meaning that he was simultaneously rostered on Toronto's NBA team and its G League affiliate, Raptors 905.

Battle was also limited to a maximum of 50 games and could not be on the playoff roster on his previous deal.

But the former OSU forward will now be able to finish out the season with the Raptors on his new deal, although he will likely not be seeing any playoff action with Toronto boasting just a 16-37 record as BSB went to press, good for 13th place in the Eastern Conference.

Battle averaged 15.3 points, 5.2 rebounds and 1.4 assists per game while shooting 46.9 percent from the floor and a career-high 43.3 percent from three in his lone season with the Buckeyes last season.

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# OSU On Right Track With 3 Wins In 5 Games

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State turned its 2024-25 season around since BSB last went to press with a stretch that included three wins in five games, with each of those victories coming against tough conference opponents.

After their shocking 73-70 upset victory at No. 11 Purdue on Jan. 21 that ended a 1-4 stretch, head coach Jake Diebler and the Buckeyes continued to ride the positive momentum with decisive wins over Iowa at home on Jan. 27 and Penn State on the road on Jan. 30 as well as a dramatic come-from-behind victory over No. 18 Maryland on Feb. 6 that ended on a game-winning banked in three-pointer from junior guard Bruce Thornton.

The recent winning stretch has been defined by strong defensive play. The Buckeyes limited their opponents to 66.3 points per game in those wins on 42.0 percent shooting while they also forced a combined 28 turnovers that led to 30 points.

Ohio State's recent stretch wasn't perfect, as it did suffer disappointing road losses to No. 18 Illinois on Feb. 2 and Nebraska on Feb. 9 in which it squandered 11- and eight-point second-half leads. But the Buckeyes still accomplished enough to put themselves in position to possibly make the NCAA Tournament for the first time in three seasons.

## Suffocating Defense Leads OSU To Win Over Iowa

Ohio State (12-8, 4-5) continued its positive momentum on Jan. 27 at Value City Arena with an 82-65 blowout win over Iowa (13-8, 4-6) that was powered by an elite defensive performance.

Ohio State limited Iowa – which entered the contest as the nation's fourth-best scoring offense (86.8 points per game) and third-best shooting team (50.5 percent) – to a season-low 65 points on 39.3 percent shooting (24 of 61), a dominant showing that allowed Diebler's team to outscore the Hawkeyes 52-39 after halftime and cruise to the 17-point win.

"I thought our guys did a great job (on defense)," Diebler said after his team's first double-digit win since Dec. 29 against Indiana State. "We played with great physicality, aggressiveness, and really, really connected. We knew communication was going to be critical defensively this game, and I felt like we did a really good job communicating."

As Diebler alluded to, Ohio State was connected on both sides of the floor early. It held Iowa to eight makes in its first 26 attempts (30.8 percent) while making 12 of its first 24 shots to jump out to a 28-18 lead with 4:29 remaining in the first half after a three-pointer from Devin Royal.

That efficiency stalled at the end of the half, though. The Buckeyes made just one field goal, a tip-in by Ivan Njegovan, the rest of the way on eight tries while giving up a

pair of threes to help Iowa close the half on an 8-2 run and trail 30-26.

After Iowa cut the deficit to two with a Payton Sandfort layup just 11 seconds into the second half, Ohio State took full control with a 20-4 run to take a commanding 50-32 lead with 12:26 remaining after a steal and slam by Sean Stewart.

Stewart's dunk put a cap on a dominant defensive stretch for the Buckeyes in which they limited Iowa to one field goal in eight attempts and forced three turnovers.

"You have to credit their defense," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffrey said after the game. "They played really hard. They played really well defensively. They seemed to be connected."

Stewart forced another steal on the next possession and missed his dunk, but that didn't halt any Scarlet and Gray momentum. They continued to swarm Iowa and shoot efficiently in the ensuing minutes to lead by as many as 25, 76-51, with 4:32 left after a layup from Thornton.

With the lead squarely in hand, Ohio State's only worry the rest of the game was whether or not it could gift the 11,261 fans in attendance free Chick-Fil-A sandwiches or biscuits by eclipsing 16 assists on the night. The Buckeyes weren't able to pull through, however, as they did not earn an assist in the final 5:09 of game action, leaving them with 15 and leading to some playful boos from the crowd.

"(The fans) let us know," Stewart joked

when asked about the situation after the game.

Chicken aside, the Buckeyes still cruised to their second straight win behind the efforts of Micah Parrish and Thornton, who scored 18 and 15 points, respectively, with Thornton hitting on five of his eight shots, including 3 of 5 from distance. John Mobley Jr. tacked on 12 points and a game-high eight assists, while Royal tallied eight rebounds go along with his 12 points to help OSU hold a 43-31 advantage on the glass and 42-32 edge in paint points.

Iowa was led by graduate guard Drew Thelwell with 20 points on 8-of-10 shooting, while sophomore forward Owen Freeman had 14 points and eight rebounds.

## OSU Dominates Again In Win At PSU

Ohio State (13-8, 5-5) used another dominant all-around performance to improve its winning streak to three games on Jan. 30, defeating Penn State (13-9, 3-8) 83-64 in front of 6,198 fans inside historic Rec Hall.

Just three days after stifling Iowa's dynamic offense, the Buckeyes held the Nittany Lions – who entered the game tied for the 19th-best scoring offense in the nation at 83.2 points per game – to their second-lowest scoring total of the season on 45.7 percent shooting (21 of 46).

That strong defense once again translated to success all over the court, where OSU held a 41-23 edge in rebounds and an 18-4

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# OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

| Ohio State 82, Iowa 65                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| Jan. 27, 2025<br>Value City Arena • Columbus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |            | 1            | 2            | F            |           |           |           |  |  |
| Iowa (13-8, 4-6)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |            | 26           | 39           | 65           |           |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State (12-8, 4-5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            | 30           | 52           | 82           |           |           |           |  |  |
| Iowa                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Thelwell                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 34         | 8-10         | 1-2          | 0-3          | 2         | 2         | 20        |  |  |
| Freeman                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 24         | 6-13         | 2-5          | 3-5          | 1         | 3         | 14        |  |  |
| Sandfort, Pa.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 31         | 5-16         | 0-0          | 1-3          | 1         | 2         | 13        |  |  |
| Dix                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 25         | 0-7          | 0-0          | 0-2          | 3         | 2         | 0         |  |  |
| Harding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 18         | 0-3          | 0-0          | 0-2          | 2         | 1         | 0         |  |  |
| Traore                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 20         | 3-5          | 7-10         | 0-3          | 0         | 2         | 13        |  |  |
| Kingsbury                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 6          | 1-1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 1         | 3         |  |  |
| Sandfort, Pr.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 26         | 1-4          | 0-0          | 2-3          | 3         | 1         | 2         |  |  |
| Mulvey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 11         | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 1         | 3         | 0         |  |  |
| Dembele                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 5          | 0-2          | 0-0          | 0-1          | 0         | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>200</b> | <b>24-61</b> | <b>10-17</b> | <b>7-24</b>  | <b>13</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>65</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 39.3%. FT: 58.8%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 7-25 (Sandfort 3-10, Thelwell 3-4, Dix 0-3, Freeman 0-2, Harding 0-2, Sandfort, Pr. 0-2, Dembele 0-1, Kingsbury 1-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 3. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 2 (Traore, Mulvey). <b>Turnovers:</b> 7 (Sandfort 3, Thelwell 2, Harding, Team). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Harding 2, Sandfort, Pr. 2, Thelwell, Kingsbury).                          |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Parrish                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 32         | 5-13         | 6-7          | 1-5          | 1         | 2         | 18        |  |  |
| Thornton                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 35         | 5-8          | 2-4          | 0-7          | 3         | 1         | 15        |  |  |
| Mobley Jr.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 33         | 4-13         | 2-2          | 0-2          | 8         | 2         | 12        |  |  |
| Royal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 31         | 5-6          | 1-1          | 3-6          | 1         | 4         | 12        |  |  |
| Stewart                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 14         | 2-5          | 2-3          | 0-6          | 0         | 3         | 6         |  |  |
| Bradshaw                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 16         | 4-4          | 1-1          | 0-2          | 0         | 3         | 9         |  |  |
| Glover                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 21         | 2-8          | 0-0          | 5-0          | 2         | 1         | 4         |  |  |
| Mahaffey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 12         | 2-4          | 0-1          | 2-1          | 0         | 2         | 4         |  |  |
| Njegovan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 6          | 1-1          | 0-0          | 0-1          | 0         | 0         | 2         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>200</b> | <b>30-62</b> | <b>14-19</b> | <b>11-32</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>82</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 48.4%. FT: 73.7%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 8-26 (Mobley 2-9, Parrish 2-7, Thornton 3-5, Glover 0-4, Royal 1-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 1. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Stewart 2, Bradshaw, Njegovan). <b>Turnovers:</b> 11 (Parrish 3, Mobley 3, Royal 2, Thornton, Bradshaw, Glover). <b>Steals:</b> 4 (Stewart 3, Mobley). <b>Officials:</b> Harris, Oglesby, Smith. <b>Attendance:</b> 11,261. |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |

advantage in second-chance points and had four players score in double figures in the 19-point win.

"I'm proud of the way our guys battled," Diebler said after the game. "We've continued to talk about getting better on the glass and taking care of the ball better, and we've done that. We did just enough to hold onto a lead."

Ohio State enforced its will early, making 10 of its first 18 shots and disrupting the rhythm of Penn State's explosive offense to jump out to a 23-14 lead with 8:24 left in the half after a Mobley three, his second of the game on four tries.

Penn State found some life and went on a 7-2 run to trail by four, 25-21, but momentum turned back to the Buckeyes when 7-0 junior forward Yanic Konan Niederhauser was called for a flagrant foul on Parrish at 6:07, igniting an 18-7 sequence that put Ohio State up 43-28 with 1:08 left in the half after a Royal fastbreak layup.

Nine of those points during the run came from Parrish and Mobley, who had 21 combined points in the half.

Penn State closed the half strong with five straight points – including a thunderous Konan Niederhauser tomahawk dunk over fellow 7-footer Ivan Njegovan – to trail 43-33 at the break, and it cut that deficit down to six points, 45-39, early in the second half after making two straight threes.

But that was the closest the Nittany Lions got the rest of the game.

After Penn State's second three, OSU relinquished just one field goal in the next 5:51, helping it go back up 56-45 with 12:22 left after Mobley knocked down two free

| Ohio State 83, Penn State 64                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| Jan. 30, 2025<br>Rec Hall • State College, Pa.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |            | 1            | 2            | F            |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State (13-8, 5-5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |            | 43           | 40           | 83           |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Penn State (13-9, 3-8)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |            | 33           | 31           | 64           |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A                                                 | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A <td>PF</td> <td>Pts.</td> <td colspan="2"></td> | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Mobley                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 35         | 6-14         | 4-5          | 1-4          | 8                                                 | 2         | 19        |  |  |
| Thornton                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 37         | 6-13         | 0-0          | 0-1          | 2                                                 | 2         | 17        |  |  |
| Royal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 30         | 5-9          | 5-7          | 2-7          | 1                                                 | 3         | 15        |  |  |
| Parrish                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 30         | 4-10         | 4-5          | 1-1          | 0                                                 | 3         | 12        |  |  |
| Stewart                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 13         | 3-4          | 1-2          | 2-3          | 0                                                 | 5         | 7         |  |  |
| Bradshaw                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 14         | 3-4          | 0-0          | 0-2          | 0                                                 | 5         | 6         |  |  |
| Njegovan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 13         | 1-4          | 2-2          | 2-4          | 0                                                 | 4         | 4         |  |  |
| Glover                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 14         | 1-3          | 0-0          | 1-0          | 2                                                 | 2         | 2         |  |  |
| Mahaffey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 11         | 0-1          | 1-2          | 1-3          | 0                                                 | 0         | 1         |  |  |
| Baumann                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-1          | 0                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| Nash                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| Etzler                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>200</b> | <b>29-62</b> | <b>17-23</b> | <b>13-28</b> | <b>13</b>                                         | <b>26</b> | <b>83</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 46.8%. FT: 73.9%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 8-22 (Mobley 3-8, Thornton 5-7, Parrish 0-4, Royal 0-1, Njegovan 0-1, Glover 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Royal, Parrish, Bradshaw, Mahaffey). <b>Turnovers:</b> 10 (Team 3, Parrish 2, Stewart 2, Mobley, Thornton, Glover). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Thornton 2, Glover 2, Parrish, Njegovan).                                           |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Penn State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A                                                 | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A <td>PF</td> <td>Pts.</td> <td colspan="2"></td> | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| K. Niederhauser                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 33         | 8-14         | 5-9          | 1-4          | 0                                                 | 2         | 21        |  |  |
| Hicks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 34         | 4-8          | 2-2          | 0-5          | 1                                                 | 3         | 13        |  |  |
| Baldwin                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 39         | 2-8          | 4-4          | 0-1          | 6                                                 | 2         | 10        |  |  |
| Kern                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 33         | 4-4          | 2-7          | 0-1          | 4                                                 | 4         | 10        |  |  |
| Dillione                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 17         | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-1          | 1                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| Dunn                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 26         | 2-8          | 3-4          | 0-3          | 2                                                 | 1         | 8         |  |  |
| Nzeh                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 7          | 1-1          | 0-1          | 0-1          | 0                                                 | 1         | 2         |  |  |
| Stewart                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 7          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-1          | 0                                                 | 3         | 0         |  |  |
| Carter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 2          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| Goodman                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 1          | 0-1          | 0-2          | 1-0          | 0                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| Ward                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0                                                 | 1         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>200</b> | <b>21-46</b> | <b>16-29</b> | <b>4-19</b>  | <b>14</b>                                         | <b>17</b> | <b>64</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 45.7%. FT: 55.2%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 6-19 (Hicks 3-6, Dunn 1-5, Baldwin 2-5, Konan Niederhauser 0-1, Dillione 0-1, Carter 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 2 (Konan Niederhauser, Hicks). <b>Turnovers:</b> 9 (Baldwin 3, Konan Niederhauser 2, Kern, Dillione, Dunn, Nzeh). <b>Steals:</b> 1 (Kern). <b>Officials:</b> Breeding, Richardson, Walton. <b>Attendance:</b> 6,198. |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |

throws. Penn State was able to stay within striking distance in the ensuing minutes until Thornton turned hot from three, making three triples in 3:59 to help the Buckeyes extend their lead to 18, 74-56, with 6:35 left.

Ohio State increased its lead to 20 on three different occasions, the last at 1:39 on a Parrish dunk, giving Diebler's team enough cushion to cruise the rest of the way and empty their bench during the game's final minute en route to their second straight conference win of at least 17 points.

Ohio State was led in the win by Mobley, who scored 19 points on 6-of-14 shooting (3 of 8 from three) and added a game-high eight assists and a career-high five rebounds. Thornton had 17 points on 5-of-7 shooting from three, while Royal finished with 15 points and a game-high nine rebounds.

Penn State – which forced Ohio State into a season-high 26 fouls but made only 16 of its 29 free throws (55.2 percent) – was powered by Konan Niederhauser with 21 points on 8-of-14 shooting, while preseason All-Big Ten guard Ace Baldwin Jr. was limited to 10 points on 2-of-8 shooting but had a team-high six assists.

## OSU Falts Late In Loss To No. 18 Illinois

Ohio State's three-game winning streak was snapped on Feb. 2 with a heartbreaking 87-79 defeat against No. 18 Illinois (15-7, 7-5) in front of 15,544 fans inside the State

| Illinois 87, Ohio State 79                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| Feb. 2, 2025<br>State Farm Center • Champaign, Ill.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |            | 1            | 2            | F            |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State (13-9, 5-6)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |            | 42           | 37           | 79           |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Illinois (15-5, 7-5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |            | 36           | 51           | 87           |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A                                                 | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A <td>PF</td> <td>Pts.</td> <td colspan="2"></td> | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Royal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 35         | 10-18        | 6-6          | 3-4          | 0                                                 | 3         | 29        |  |  |
| Thornton                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 39         | 7-18         | 4-5          | 3-5          | 5                                                 | 0         | 22        |  |  |
| Mobley                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 35         | 6-21         | 2-2          | 0-1          | 1                                                 | 5         | 18        |  |  |
| Parrish                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 30         | 1-5          | 2-2          | 1-4          | 0                                                 | 4         | 4         |  |  |
| Bradshaw                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 19         | 1-3          | 0-0          | 2-0          | 0                                                 | 3         | 2         |  |  |
| Glover                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 16         | 1-5          | 0-0          | 1-2          | 0                                                 | 5         | 2         |  |  |
| Njegovan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 13         | 1-2          | 0-0          | 1-0          | 0                                                 | 1         | 2         |  |  |
| Mahaffey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 11         | 0-1          | 0-0          | 2-1          | 0                                                 | 4         | 0         |  |  |
| White                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 2          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>200</b> | <b>27-73</b> | <b>14-15</b> | <b>13-18</b> | <b>6</b>                                          | <b>25</b> | <b>79</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 37.0%. FT: 93.3%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 11-23 (Mobley 4-8, Thornton 4-7, Royal 3-6, Parrish 0-2). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 1. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 2 (Bradshaw, Njegovan). <b>Turnovers:</b> 5 (Royal 4, Mobley). <b>Steals:</b> 3 (Thornton, Mobley, Parrish).                                                                                                                                                                      |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |
| Illinois                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A                                                 | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A <td>PF</td> <td>Pts.</td> <td colspan="2"></td> | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Johnson                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 31         | 6-8          | 2-3          | 7-8          | 0                                                 | 2         | 14        |  |  |
| Ivisic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 28         | 5-11         | 1-1          | 1-9          | 1                                                 | 0         | 12        |  |  |
| Gibbs-Lawhorn                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 24         | 3-7          | 4-4          | 1-1          | 0                                                 | 4         | 10        |  |  |
| Jakucionis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 32         | 2-8          | 4-8          | 0-3          | 7                                                 | 1         | 8         |  |  |
| White                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 14         | 0-2          | 0-0          | 0-2          | 0                                                 | 1         | 0         |  |  |
| Riley                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 30         | 7-9          | 9-12         | 0-3          | 1                                                 | 0         | 24        |  |  |
| Boswell                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 22         | 5-8          | 3-3          | 0-2          | 0                                                 | 3         | 14        |  |  |
| Humrichous                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 17         | 2-4          | 0-0          | 1-2          | 1                                                 | 3         | 5         |  |  |
| Davis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 2          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0                                                 | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>200</b> | <b>30-58</b> | <b>23-31</b> | <b>11-32</b> | <b>10</b>                                         | <b>14</b> | <b>87</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 51.7%. FT: 74.2%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 4-20 (Jakucionis 0-5, Ivisic 1-5, Boswell 1-3, Humrichous 1-3, Gibbs-Lawhorn 0-2, Davis 0-1, Riley 1-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 3. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 3 (Johnson Jr., Jakucionis, Humrichous). <b>Turnovers:</b> 11 (Jakucionis 4, Ivisic 3, Riley 2, Boswell 2). <b>Steals:</b> 2 (Gibbs-Lawhorn, Humrichous). <b>Officials:</b> Carstensen, Kimble, Irving. <b>Attendance:</b> 15,544. |            |              |              |              |                                                   |           |           |  |  |

Farm Center in which it struggled on offense late and got pounded in the paint to squander an 11-point second-half lead.

In a back-and-forth affair that included numerous momentum-swinging runs by both teams, it was the favored Illini who prevailed and delivered the final blow of the game.

Trailing by five with 7:43 left in the contest after a Thornton three, the Illini forced OSU to miss 14 of its last 18 shots and scored 24 of the game's final 35 points – including a back-breaking 15-0 run that consumed nearly five minutes – to hand Diebler's team their first loss in 16 days.

"We didn't quite play smart enough at times in the second half both offensively and defensively," Diebler said after the game. "But I'm proud of the way we battled. I thought we really stayed together. There are some good things to take from this, but I am certainly disappointed in the result."

Ohio State (13-9, 5-6) knew it was entrenched in a rock fight from the start when

it saw its early 14-6 lead turn into a 23-19 deficit due to a 17-5 Illini run that was capped by a Morez Johnson Jr. dunk with 11:44 left in the half.

The Buckeyes reclaimed momentum by holding the Illini without a field goal for the next 6:49 and going on a 15-2 run to lead 34-25 with 5:08 left in the half following a Thornton steal and transition layup. But Illinois climbed right back with a 10-0 sequence that put it ahead 35-34 with 2:44 left.

Ohio State drew last blood in the hectic first half with an 8-1 closing run that put it up 42-36. Five of those points during that final stretch came from Royal, who scored 19 first-half points on 8-of-12 shooting.

Ohio State extended that run to 18-6 after Thornton and Mobley combined for eight of its first 10 points to put it up 52-41 with 15:53 left. But just like they were in the first half, the Illini weren't deterred by the Buckeyes' blitz. Instead, they made eight of their next nine shots to tie the game at 59 following a three-point play by freshman forward Will Riley at 10:48.

Ohio State seemed poised to take back control when it went back up 68-63 with 7:43 left after the Thornton three – his fourth of the afternoon – but things flipped on a dime when Illinois ran away with the game with the 15-0 run to take a 78-68 lead with just 2:45 left. With the Buckeyes scrambling to close the gap and make one final push, Illinois closed out the eight-point win by making nine of its final 12 free throws down the stretch.

Ohio State, which shot just 11 of 36 (30.6 percent) from the field in the second half, was led by Royal, who had the second-highest scoring outing of his career with 29 points on 10-of-18 shooting along with seven rebounds. Thornton (20) and Mobley (20) anchored the backcourt and accounted for each of the Buckeyes' six assists while Thornton had a team-high eight rebounds. For the game OSU shot 37.0 from the floor (27 of 73).

Illinois was powered on the stat sheets by Riley with 24 points on 7-of-9 shooting, but the win was also in large part due to the efforts of Johnson, who had 14 points and a career-high 15 rebounds to help the Illini hold a commanding 43-31 advantage in rebounds and a 52-30 edge in the paint.

## Thornton's Heroics Lift OSU Over Terps

Ohio State (14-9, 6-6) used a sensational second-half performance from Thornton to erase a 17-point deficit and pick up an impressive 73-70 upset win over No. 18 Maryland on Feb. 6 in front of an energized Value City Arena crowd of 10,155.

Continued On Page 42

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# Thornton's Three Leads Ohio State To Upset

Continued From Page 41

The Buckeyes – playing thin in the front-court without sophomore Aaron Bradshaw due to an illness – appeared to be headed for their second straight conference defeat when they started poorly on both ends to go down 39-22 with 3:30 left in the first half and 61-50 at 7:15 of the second half.

But things changed on a dime in front of an unenthused home crowd due to the heroic efforts of Thornton, who put the team on his back with 17 points in the game's final 6:59 and banked in a game-winning step-back three-pointer with just seven seconds remaining to give the Buckeyes a significant NCAA Tournament résumé-boosting victory.

“(This win) took everything we had from a toughness and a togetherness standpoint to come back and win this game against a really good team who’s arguably playing some of the best basketball in the league right now,” Diebler said after the win. “I’m just so thankful for players stepping up and making plays.”

It didn't appear like OSU was going to come away on the winning side of this conference battle when it missed five of its first 21 shots from the field and allowed Maryland to make 15 of its first 23 shots to give the Terps a 39-22 lead after a layup from senior forward Julian Reese.

But the Buckeyes gained some confidence at the end of the half with a 10-2 run – eight of those points coming from Thornton – to trail 41-32 at the break.

Ohio State continued that positive momentum into the second period by limiting Maryland to just one make in its first 10 attempts helping cut the deficit to five, 47-42, after a Stewart steal and layup with 12:35 left.

The Terrapins answered with a Rodney Rice three and then later scored five straight points to go back up 11, 57-46, with 8:48 left following another triple from fifth-year guard Selton Miguel.

Maryland's lead stayed between nine and 11 points until Thornton took over, scoring 11 points to spark a 15-5 run that put Ohio State up 67-66 with 2:10 remaining after he swished in a three-pointer.

The Terrapins responded by scoring on back-to-back possessions to negate another Thornton three-point play and tie the game at 70 with 36 seconds left, but the Buckeye junior was not to be outdone.

Coming out of a timeout with 28 seconds remaining, Thornton dribbled around the perimeter for around 18 seconds, dribbled through his legs, stepped back and banked in a long three over Rice to give the Buck-

| Ohio State 73, Maryland 70                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| Feb. 6, 2025<br>Value City Arena • Columbus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |            | 1            | 2            | F            |           |           |           |  |  |
| Maryland (17-6, 7-5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |            | 41           | 29           | 70           |           |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State (14-9, 6-6)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |            | 32           | 41           | 73           |           |           |           |  |  |
| Maryland                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Reese                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 35         | 7-9          | 10-11        | 4-9          | 1         | 1         | 24        |  |  |
| Rice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 38         | 7-15         | 2-2          | 1-2          | 3         | 2         | 18        |  |  |
| Queen                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 36         | 3-7          | 7-13         | 1-7          | 2         | 2         | 13        |  |  |
| Miguel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 35         | 3-9          | 0-2          | 0-1          | 0         | 2         | 7         |  |  |
| Gillespie                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 27         | 3-11         | 0-0          | 1-4          | 4         | 4         | 6         |  |  |
| Young                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 12         | 0-1          | 2-2          | 0-1          | 0         | 2         | 2         |  |  |
| Harris-Smith                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 7          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 3         | 0         |  |  |
| Gapare                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 5          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-1          | 0         | 3         | 0         |  |  |
| Geronimo                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 3          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| Palmer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 2          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0         | 1         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>200</b> | <b>23-55</b> | <b>21-30</b> | <b>11-25</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>70</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 41.8%. FT: 70.0%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 3-13 (Miguel 1-4, Rice 2-4, Gillespie 0-3, Young 0-1, Harris-Smith 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Reese 2, Queen 2). <b>Turnovers:</b> 12 (Reese 4, Miguel 3, Rice, Queen, Gillespie, Young, Team). <b>Steals:</b> 2 (Queen, Gillespie).                                                                                                              |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.         | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D          | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Thornton                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 40         | 11-18        | 7-8          | 0-5          | 6         | 3         | 31        |  |  |
| Parrish                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 36         | 5-9          | 2-3          | 3-3          | 0         | 2         | 13        |  |  |
| Mobley                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 32         | 3-12         | 1-1          | 0-0          | 3         | 1         | 8         |  |  |
| Royal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 34         | 3-7          | 1-2          | 3-8          | 1         | 3         | 7         |  |  |
| Stewart                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 15         | 1-3          | 0-0          | 1-1          | 0         | 5         | 2         |  |  |
| Mahaffey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 20         | 2-3          | 2-2          | 0-3          | 0         | 5         | 6         |  |  |
| Glover                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 13         | 1-6          | 2-2          | 0-1          | 0         | 0         | 4         |  |  |
| Njegovan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 10         | 1-1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 1         | 1         | 2         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>200</b> | <b>27-59</b> | <b>15-18</b> | <b>8-22</b>  | <b>11</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>73</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 45.8%. FT: 83.3%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 4-16 (Mobley 1-7, Thornton 2-4, Parrish 1-3, Royal 0-1, Glover 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 2. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 5 (Thornton, Royal, Mahaffey, Glover, Njegovan). <b>Turnovers:</b> 9 (Royal 3, Thornton 2, Parrish 2, Mobley, Team). <b>Steals:</b> 7 (Thornton 3, Stewart 2, Parrish, Mahaffey). <b>Officials:</b> Anderson, Pfeifer, Sciroto. <b>Attendance:</b> 10,155. |            |              |              |              |           |           |           |  |  |

eyes a 73-70 lead with seven seconds left and send the home crowd into a frenzy.

“Players make plays, ultimately,” Diebler said. “But that was exactly what the coach drew up, right?”

Maryland had two more chances to tie the game with a three but missed both attempts, allowing the Buckeyes to secure their fourth ranked win of the year and fourth victory in the last five games.

Thornton – who played all 40 minutes of regulation for the first time this season – scored 21 of his 31 points in the second half on 8-of-11 shooting and added a game-high six assists and five rebounds. Parrish scored eight of his 13 points after halftime and added six boards, while Royal had just seven points on the night but a team-high 11 rebounds.

Maryland was led by Reese, who had

10th double-double of the year with 24 points and 13 rebounds, while Rice added 18 points and Derik Queen had 13 and eight off the glass.

## Second-Half Struggles Doom OSU Vs. Huskers

Ohio State (14-10, 6-7) found itself on the losing side of a back-and-forth affair on Feb. 9 in front of 15,633 fans inside Pinnacle Bank Arena, falling 79-71 to Nebraska (16-8, 6-7 Big Ten) 79-71 due to a poor second-half outing.

The Buckeyes appeared like they were in line for another résumé-boosting road win when they held an eight-point lead early in the second half, but that opportunity quickly went by the wayside when Nebraska went on a 24-8 run to go up eight with just under 7:24 left in the game.

Ohio State tried to mount a comeback and eventually cut the deficit to two with 3:49 remaining due to the efforts of Parrish, who finished the day with a career-high 30 points, but another second-half stretch, this time a 17-11 closing run for Nebraska, doomed the Buckeyes for good and gave the Huskers their fourth straight win.

“No loss feels good or doesn't hurt, but especially one we feel like we should've had on the road that would've given us even more of a momentum swing going into this home stretch, it hurts,” junior guard Evan Mahaffey said. “You can't dwell on it too long. We play again (on Feb. 12).”

Nebraska seemed like it was in store for a fairly easy afternoon at the office when it made 11 of its first 15 shots to take a 25-17 lead with 10:48 left in the half, but the Buckeyes buckled down defensively – forcing three turnovers and allowing just two field goals in the next 6:48 – to spur a 15-4 run that put them up 32-29 at 4:00 following a Mobley jumper.

Nebraska tied the game at 32 on the next possession with a three-point play from senior center Braxton Meah, but Mobley responded on the other end with a deep three – his third of the half – to help OSU head into the break up 39-34.

Thirty-three of the Buckeyes' 39 first-half points were scored by the backcourt trio of Mobley, Parrish and Thornton, with Parrish leading the way with 14 points on 5-of-11 shooting.

Parrish continued his hot streak out of the break with his third triple of the game at 19:08 to put the Buckeyes up 42-34 before Nebraska responded with a quick 8-0 run to tie the game up on a contested three by sophomore forward Berke Buyuktuncel.

Ohio State went back up by four points twice in the ensuing minutes due to the strong play of Parrish, who added another six points in that stretch, but it was followed by a 14-2 spurt for the home team that put them up 58-50 with 7:24 left after another Buyuktuncel three.

The Buckeyes bounced back by getting three combined triples from Mobley and Parrish to trail 62-60 with 3:49 left, but that comeback stalled when they were held to just three field goals and allowed Nebraska to score 17 points the rest of way to give the home team the win.

In addition to Parrish's career high and Mobley's 21 points on 7-of-15 shooting, in-

| Nebraska 79, Ohio State 71                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |            |              |              |             |           |           |           |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| Feb. 9, 2025<br>Pinnacle Bank Arena • Lincoln, Neb.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |            |              |              |             |           |           |           |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |            | 1            | 2            | F           |           |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State (14-10, 6-7)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            | 39           | 32           | 71          |           |           |           |  |  |
| Nebraska (16-8, 6-7)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |            | 34           | 45           | 79          |           |           |           |  |  |
| Ohio State                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.        | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D         | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Parrish                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 35         | 11-21        | 3-4          | 1-3         | 1         | 1         | 30        |  |  |
| Mobley                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 31         | 7-15         | 2-2          | 0-1         | 2         | 4         | 21        |  |  |
| Thornton                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 39         | 4-10         | 1-2          | 0-3         | 6         | 1         | 9         |  |  |
| Stewart                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 21         | 1-3          | 1-2          | 0-3         | 0         | 5         | 3         |  |  |
| Royal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 15         | 1-4          | 0-0          | 2-2         | 0         | 1         | 2         |  |  |
| Mahaffey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 23         | 2-3          | 1-3          | 3-2         | 1         | 3         | 5         |  |  |
| Bradshaw                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 14         | 0-2          | 1-2          | 1-3         | 0         | 2         | 1         |  |  |
| Glover                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 13         | 0-2          | 0-0          | 0-1         | 0         | 1         | 0         |  |  |
| White                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 6          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-2         | 0         | 1         | 0         |  |  |
| Njegovan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 3          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-0         | 0         | 1         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>200</b> | <b>26-61</b> | <b>9-15</b>  | <b>7-21</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>71</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 42.6%. FT: 60.0%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 10-25 (Parrish 5-12, Mobley 5-10, Thornton 0-1, Royal 0-1, Njegovan 0-1). <b>Team Rebounds:</b> 1. <b>Blocked Shots:</b> 1 (Bradshaw). <b>Turnovers:</b> 6 (Stewart 2, Bradshaw 2, Mobley, Royal). <b>Steals:</b> 5 (Parrish, Mobley, Stewart, Glover, White).                                                                                      |            |              |              |             |           |           |           |  |  |
| Nebraska                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Total      | FG           | FT           | Reb.        | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Min        | M-A          | M-A          | O-D         | A         | PF        | Pts.      |  |  |
| Williams                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 38         | 9-16         | 5-5          | 1-9         | 4         | 0         | 24        |  |  |
| Gary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 26         | 7-12         | 4-6          | 2-3         | 1         | 4         | 19        |  |  |
| Buyuktuncel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 31         | 5-9          | 2-2          | 0-6         | 3         | 3         | 15        |  |  |
| Worster                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 27         | 2-3          | 0-0          | 0-4         | 3         | 4         | 5         |  |  |
| Hoiberg                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 30         | 0-2          | 4-4          | 1-1         | 3         | 2         | 4         |  |  |
| Essegian                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 25         | 2-6          | 0-1          | 0-4         | 0         | 0         | 5         |  |  |
| Meah                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 7          | 1-1          | 3-3          | 0-2         | 0         | 1         | 5         |  |  |
| Morgan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 13         | 1-2          | 0-0          | 2-1         | 1         | 2         | 2         |  |  |
| Ulis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 2          | 0-1          | 0-0          | 0-0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| Jacobson                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 1          | 0-0          | 0-0          | 0-1         | 0         | 0         | 0         |  |  |
| <b>Totals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>200</b> | <b>27-52</b> | <b>18-21</b> | <b>6-31</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>79</b> |  |  |
| <b>Percentages:</b> FG: 51.9%. FT: 85.7%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 7-21 (Williams 1-6, Buyuktuncel 3-6, Essegian 1-4, Gary 1-3, Hoiberg 0-1, Worster 1-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 0. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 1 (Gary). <b>Turnovers:</b> 10 (Hoiberg 2, Buyuktuncel 2, Morgan 2, Worster, Williams, Meah, Team). <b>Steals:</b> 2 (Gary, Morgan). <b>Officials:</b> Oglesby, Phillips, Walton. <b>Attendance:</b> 15,633. |            |              |              |             |           |           |           |  |  |

cluding 5-of-10 shooting from three, the Buckeyes had a difficult day on offense. The remaining Buckeyes who entered the game combined for just 20 points on 8-of-25 shooting (32.0 percent), including 0-of-3 shooting from three.

Ohio State also struggled inside, with Nebraska holding a 37-28 advantage in rebounds and 40-26 edge in paint points. Those discrepancies were in large part caused by Buyuktuncel and senior guard Brice Williams, who combined for 39 points and 16 rebounds.

Ohio State will look to boost its NCAA Tournament résumé further in its five conference games played before BSB next goes to press. The Buckeyes will begin that stretch with a three-game homestand that includes games against Washington on Feb. 12 (8:30 p.m., BTN), No. 20 Michigan on Feb. 16 (1 p.m. CBS) – which will mark the return of former Ohio State guard Roddy Gayle Jr., who transferred to the Wolverines in the offseason after two seasons with the Buckeyes – and Northwestern on Feb. 20 (6:30 p.m., FS1).

OSU will then embark on its first-ever Big Ten West Coast trip when it travels to California to take on UCLA on Feb. 23 (3:45, CBS) and USC on Feb. 26 (10:30 p.m., BTN).





# OSU Splits B1G Duals With U-M, Minnesota

The Buckeyes were back home at Covelli Center on Feb. 7 to take on No. 7 Minnesota and lost their second dual of the season 20-17 in a contest that went down to the final match of the night.

They were looking to keep momentum

## ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

going after beating Michigan 25-14 on Feb. 1 in Ann Arbor but were unable to do so. With the win and loss, Ohio State had a 12-2 record and 4-2 mark in the Big Ten as BSB went to press with two regular-season duals remaining against Indiana on Feb. 9 and Penn State on Feb. 14.

Against Minnesota, No. 4 Ohio State began the dual with the 197-pound bout with redshirt sophomore Seth Shumate, who was able to keep the match scoreless through the first three minutes. He ultimately would fall to No. 9 Isaiah Salazar in sudden victory, giving Minnesota an early lead.

No. 9 Nick Feldman was next up against some tough competition in the heavyweight match. No. 1 Gable Steveson came in with an 8-0 record this season, two NCAA titles in the 2021 and 2022 seasons and five gold medals from international competition, including a win at 125 kg freestyle in the 2021 Tokyo Summer Olympics. He also spent multiple years wrestling in the WWE.

Feldman was taken down soon after the match began, escaping after 40 seconds. After Steveson earned another takedown, it was a battle for Feldman not to allow any bonus points for the Golden Gophers. He ultimately lost that battle, falling 13-4 and giving Minnesota a 7-0 team lead. It was the 61st straight win for the accomplished Steveson.

"Nick wrestled tough," head coach Tom Ryan said. "Gable is pretty special, and I thought Nick did a good job of fighting back, staying alert in the match and making some good decisions. It was a tough loss, but it's a chance to grow and learn."

No. 18 Brendan McCrone struck first for the Buckeyes at 125 against No. 9 Cooper Flynn with 30 seconds left in the first period with a takedown. After starting on bottom in the second, he had a quick reversal and another takedown in the third period, winning 9-0 and earning the bonus point right back for the Buckeyes to trail 7-4.

"I was really proud of McCrone tonight," Ryan said. "He did a great job. He wrestled really well, really stingy and smart. We knew we needed that one. They were ranked higher than us, so that was a big win."

Ben Davino was in the lineup in place of Nic Bouzakis at 133 pounds against Minnesota, still with another match to burn if Ryan still plans to redshirt the true freshman. After a scoreless first against No. 18 Tyler Wells, Davino escaped to begin the second and nearly had a takedown to finish the same period, but time had run out on him as well, keeping his lead at 1-0. That lead disappeared soon after when Wells es-

caped at the beginning of the third.

Davino had leverage on Wells to finish regulation, nearly scoring again before time ran out to send the bout to sudden victory. Both wrestlers traded advantages on the ground for over a minute and a half in extra time, but a stalemate was called, and it went to overtime.

The freshman chose bottom and escaped 10 seconds into the 30-second period, and Wells chose to start neutral. Davino earned a point after two potentially dangerous moves called by the referees on Wells, and after he avoided a takedown for the remaining 20 seconds, he took a 3-1 win to tie the dual up at seven-all.

It was Davino's fifth dual match this year, so he won't be able to get on the mat anymore since Ryan is still trying to keep his redshirt, but the coach thought it was necessary since Bouzakis was hurt in practice leading up to the dual.

"Anytime you have Ben on the mat, you feel very confident. That's the last time we can use him, though," Ryan said. "But Nic will wrestle (against Indiana). He looks like Daffy Duck right now. His lip is pretty big, and we didn't want to put him out there in terms of having it cut back open."

It was No. 8 Vance VomBaur who struck first against No. 1 Jesse Mendez at 141 pounds with a takedown, but Mendez answered quickly with an escape and a takedown of his own. VomBaur tied it up at four with an escape, sending it to the second period even. VomBaur also earned the only point of the second with an escape, and Mendez tied it back up in the third.

Mendez' bout was the third of the night to go to a sudden-victory period. With no points, the grapplers went into overtime, and Mendez started the first overtime period with an escape. VomBaur chose neutral and was almost able to take Mendez down, but they were ruled out of bounds and Mendez was able to run the rest of the clock out for a 6-5 win. It was the reigning national champion's 33rd straight win.

Despite the win, Mendez still wasn't pleased with his performance.

"That kid's tough, but I didn't wrestle a great match," Mendez said. "I'll be the first person to tell myself that. But the sport wouldn't be fun if you didn't have problems to fix. I've got some things to fix, and that's a good thing. Whether it's hand-fighting or shot finishing, or cardio, I'll be ready by March."

"It's special when you're off and you can still find a way to win against somebody of (VomBaur's) caliber," Ryan added. "That kid was all over him tonight. He was on his legs a lot fighting, and fighting somebody off you like that is extremely tiring. But Jesse is a gladiator, and it's really important from a thought standpoint to know that just because you felt like that tonight doesn't mean you'll feel like that next week. And he's not allowing that to carry into the next match, because things like that can stay with you if

your mind allows them to."

No. 8 Dylan D'Emilio had a takedown just 15 seconds into his match against Drew Roberts at 149 pounds, earning nearly a minute of riding time. It didn't take long for D'Emilio to earn his second three-pointer of the match, and he left the period with a 6-2 advantage.

After trading escapes, D'Emilio had a takedown with 10 seconds left in the bout and had over two minutes of riding time to earn a major victory, 11-3, and take a 14-7 team lead.

"Dylan is wrestling really well," Ryan said. "He really wrestled tough tonight and did a good job finishing."

Redshirt freshman Brandon Cannon was in the lineup at 157 pounds and was taken down near the end of the first period by No. 8 Tommy Askey, who earned two more takedowns in the match and a riding-time point, beating Cannon 11-2.

No. 11 Andrew Sparks had a takedown on OSU's redshirt freshman Brock Herman in the first period of their 165-pound dual, and with an escape and another takedown in the second, he had a 7-0 lead before a four-point nearfall. Herman scored only a point with an escape that Sparks allowed to try to get the tech fall, which he got with 25 seconds remaining, giving Herman an 18-1 win. Minnesota led 16-14 with two matches left to go.

No. 5 Carson Kharchla took the mat at 174 pounds with the Buckeyes down by two, and he was able to take a 4-1 lead over No. 22 Clayton Whiting at the beginning of the third after a takedown and an escape. He put a bow on his 7-1 win with a takedown as the clock ran down to zero to give Ryder Rogotzke a 17-16 lead in a winner-take-all final match.

The 19th-ranked Rogotzke faced off against No. 4 Max McEnelly. McEnelly got out to a fast start with two takedowns in the first and a third in the second period. After another two takedowns in the third period, McEnelly won the match, 15-5, and the dual for the Golden Gophers for the final 20-17 team score, giving Ohio State its second loss of the season.

Despite the loss, Mendez is still confident about where the team is with just two regular-season duals remaining.

"We lost the dual match, which sucks, but I just like the trajectory we're at," Mendez said. "I think these guys are going to peak at the right time. You don't want to peak in February. We just have to be tougher in some spots. A lot of the matches we lost are winnable matches, and a lot of those

really close matches, I think we could blow open."

## Doctors Who Saved Ryan Named Honorary Coaches

At the dual against Minnesota, the doctors who performed surgery on Ryan over the offseason after he was pulled out of a car accident were named honorary coaches and were recognized on the mat between the heavyweight and 125-pound bouts.

Ryan underwent 22 hours of surgery under anesthesia to repair fractures in his femur, tibia, a shattered kneecap and a torn rotator cuff under the care of Dr. Angela Collins and Dr. David Nash. They saved Ryan's left leg by using a skin graft from his right leg.

After he was pulled from his Subaru Outback by the jaws of life on April 23, Ryan wasn't released from the hospital until May 6, but he has been able to make a full recovery.

"I'm still close with (Dr. Collins and Dr. Nash)," Ryan said. "When you go through what I went through, and you have people who poured their life into that expertise and you're blessed that they're in the region that you're in when you need them, it's amazing."

"The fact that Dr. Collins and Dr. Nash are masters at what they do – and I needed a master – that I went to them was a blessing. It was great to have them tonight. I'm grateful they came, and we've become good friends."

## Bucks Beat U-M On The Road

As previously mentioned, Ohio State also beat the Wolverines, 25-14, since BSB last went to press. The Buckeyes were led in the rivalry win by McCrone, Bouzakis, Mendez, and D'Emilio, who started the dual with four straight wins.

After Sammy Sasso and e'Than Birden lost, Kharchla and Rogotzke got the Buckeyes back into the win column, securing the team win for the Buckeyes. Shumate and Feldman ended the dual with two losses.

For a more in-depth recap on the dual against Michigan, check out [Buckeyesports.com](http://Buckeyesports.com), free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



Tom Ryan



Jesse Mendez

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# Defenseman Achieves Goal Of Being Buckeye

Chris Able is decisive.

Following his hometown Chicago Blackhawks as a kid, he decided hockey was for him even though there was little history with the sport in his family.

As a 13-year-old, Able set a goal of playing for Ohio State and made a commitment that seven years later has come to fruition for the freshman defenseman from Libertyville, Ill.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

That straight-on approach has also aided him on the ice. Controlling the puck along the boards with a player looking to check him through glass, he must make quick decisions that could be the difference between a breakout for the Buckeyes or goal for the opposition.

"He's steady, and I think that's a great attribute," coach Steve Rohlik said. "It's not this or that. It's going about his business and keeping things simple and not playing outside of himself. Those are really good qualities."

Playing in 20 of 28 games through Feb. 9, Able (6-1, 198) has seven assists and is a plus-12.

While defensemen are expected to be active in the offense, he knows that scoring is not his top priority.

"If that comes sometime this year, I'd be happy with that, and if it comes next year, that's also fine," he said. "I understand my role for this year, and it's not necessarily for point production. It's more for defending and trying to lock down some of the top lines, and I'm perfectly OK with that."

"But yes, in practice, I want to keep developing outside of my game as it is now, and I get more comfortable and I'm here longer. I think that side will come naturally."

## In The Beginning

Able loved the Blackhawks and in particular forward Patrick Kane and defenseman Duncan Keith. He was six when they won the 2010 Stanley Cup, and the Blackhawks won it again in 2013 and 2015.

"The Hawks were actually kind of the inspiration of me to play hockey, because no one in my family has really ever played hockey at a remotely high level," Able said. "When I was super young, I watched the Blackhawks on TV and was kind of mesmerized."

"I've got to give credit to my parents. They were willing to take me out onto the ice and that's how I started playing hockey. I started skating when I was 4 and then got into my first actual hockey league when I was 5."

He quickly developed a passion, and by the time he had barely turned a teenager he knew his path and let OSU assistant coach JB Bittner know he wanted to be a Buckeye.

"I was also lucky enough to talk with Coach Bittner before they put the rule in place where now colleges can't talk to kids until after their sophomore year," Able said. "They got me pretty early, and I'm happy they did because I love it here."

Why?

"I've been a Big Ten person through and through. My whole family believes in the Big Ten, and we believe in kind of the entirety of what the school encompasses," he said. "We believe that no matter the sport they pursue, they only strive for excellence and anything less is not acceptable. And then there's the balance of having a good personal life, along with academics and athletics. I don't think we could have found a better school anywhere else."

Before he came to Columbus, Able stayed close to home in his career playing for Chicago Mission AAA youth programs and three seasons in the United States Hockey League with the Chicago Steel.

There was some adjustment going to college.

"My parents come out here enough to

where I don't really feel homesick," Able said. "I've been committed here for a long time so, it's not that it was some huge going away thing. I felt like I'm truly ready for this, and I feel like I'm exactly where I need to be and where I belong."

Still, he was thrilled to return home for the outdoor game in Wrigley Field vs. Michigan on Jan. 3.

"That was unbelievable," he said. "Like a loss for words. I can't really put into words how much that meant to me. The lead-up, I thought one thing, and then actually doing it, it was like, 'This is better than anything I could have ever imagined.'"

"I had a lot of family friends there. I was able to talk to most of them after the game. And then to get to hear the Cubs announcer and the national anthem with all the fireworks and everything, that was also pretty special."

The Buckeyes rallied from a 2-0 deficit to win 4-3 in the final minute. As a bonus, Able assisted on the second goal.

"I don't think there could have been a better scripted night on Jan. 3," he said.

Having dreamt about playing at Ohio State for years, he thought he knew all about the level of play in the Big Ten, but it was more competitive than he imagined.

"I'm really impressed at how good our conference is. We may have teams that don't have good conference records or good records overall, but they're still very good hockey teams," Able said. "If you don't show up, they can beat you on any given night."

"And then another thing that I think is awesome, I played at Chicago Steel. They didn't have the greatest fan base but playing here and playing at some of these away rinks, like at Penn State with the student section, I think it's pretty sweet."

## This Blue Is OK

The NHL Stadium Series between the Columbus Blue Jackets and the Detroit Red Wings will be March 1, at 6 p.m., in Ohio Sta-

dium, and details are coming out for the Blue Jackets' first outdoor game.

It definitely will have an Ohio State feel to it, NHL President of NHL Events and Content Steve Mayer said at a press conference on Feb. 6. The field design, those areas surrounding the rink, will leave no doubt to the TV audience where the game is being played.

"It's very unique and it's very Ohio State and very Columbus Blue Jackets," he said. "You'll get it the second you see it. You're going to see some very obvious ties to Ohio State."

Among other connections, the Blue Jackets will be feted at the NHL Stadium Series Pep Rally, which will be similar to football's pregame "Skull Session" in St. John Arena.

"It will feature a concert from O.A.R. before the game," Mayer said of the band whose members have ties to OSU. "And not only will it feature the concert, but it will also feature the Ohio State athletic band and an appearance from the Columbus Blue Jackets. The Blue Jackets will stop in St. John Arena and then make their way from St. John Arena to the stadium."

During the first intermission, rock band Twenty One Pilots, consisting of Columbus natives Tyler Joseph and Josh Dun, will perform.

Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork said the university is well equipped to manage large events at Ohio Stadium outside of football, such as the annual Buckeye Country Fest concert each June.

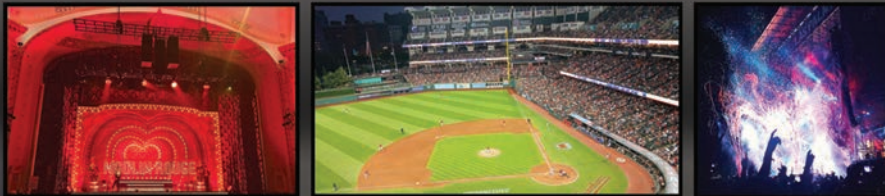
"We view ourselves, in many ways, as the gateway to Columbus, so attracting these type of events, being able to put them on, being able to have the wherewithal to pull them off and make sure that people walk away going, 'Wow, that was big time' and then they come back," he said. "We really pride ourselves on making sure that we have the wherewithal to do that. So we're really proud to partner with everyone who's involved in this event, everyone within the city, within the NHL environment, the Columbus Blue Jackets."

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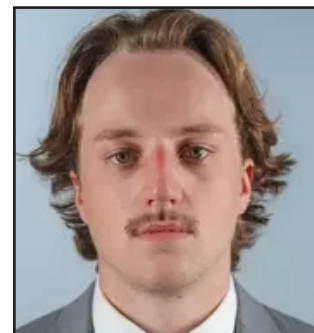
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## VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For January



**Gunnarwolfe Fontaine**  
*Graduate Forward*  
*East Greenwich, R.I.*



Mayer said installation of the ice will begin the week of Feb. 17.

**Downtown**

Speaking of OSU and the Blue Jackets, if the Buckeyes host a best-of-three quarter-final series of the Big Ten tournament, they will have to play at Nationwide Arena from March 7-9 because Value City Arena is occupied by the high school state wrestling championships.

Complicating the schedule is the state hockey final four is also at Nationwide Arena, home of the Blue Jackets, on March 8 (11 a.m. and 2 p.m.) and the final on March 9 (1 p.m.).

The Big Ten regular-season winner receives a bye to the semifinals while teams two through four host.

Ohio State (18-8-2, 11-6-1 Big Ten) is third in the conference with 34 points, four behind second-place Minnesota and six ahead of Michigan, who've played two more games.

The Buckeyes are home against Wisconsin on Feb. 14 (7 p.m.) and 15 (8:30 p.m.), play at Minnesota on Feb. 21 and 22 and end the regular season hosting Michigan on Feb. 27 (8 p.m.) and Feb. 28 (6 p.m.).

**Winning Feeling**

The Buckeyes won three of four since BSB last went to press.

They split with No. 2 Michigan State at Value City Arena, winning 4-2 on Jan. 30 before losing 4-1 the next night.

At Notre Dame on Feb. 7 and 8, they had carbon-copy 5-1 wins, allowing the first goal in each before scoring the next five. They split with No. 2 Michigan State at Value City Arena, winning 4-2 on Jan. 30 before losing 4-1 the next night.

In the MSU opener, Riley Thompson scored twice and had an assist, Gunnarwolfe Fontaine had a goal and an assist, and Max Montes added two helpers. The Spartans took the second game by scoring three times in the second period for a 3-1 lead. Freshman James Hong had the lone Buckeye goal.

Davis Burnside had five points (two goals, three assists) in the series against the Fighting Irish, and Logan Terness stopped 68 of 70 shots for a .971 save percentage, including 41 saves in the second game.

Ryan Gordan was the unexpected source for goals in the first game at Notre Dame when he had two. He entered with three goals in 55 career games. Theo Wallberg had two assists, and Terness made 27 saves.

Burnside led the way in the rematch with a goal and two assists, and Fontaine added a goal and an assist. Like the first game, the Buckeyes scored twice in the second and third periods.

**Happy New Year**

Fontaine, a graduate transfer from Northeastern, is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for January after getting nine points (five goals, four assists) in eight games.

In the Wrigley Field game against the Wolverines, he had two assists, and two days later in Ann Arbor he scored twice. He also scored a goal in each of the two games vs. No. 3 Minnesota on Jan. 10 and 11.

*For complete recaps of the Michigan State and Notre Dame series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*

**BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD**

**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 (14-10, 6-7)**

**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, W 73-70; **27** IOWA, W 82-65; **30** at Penn State, W 83-64.  
**Feb. 2** at Illinois, L 87-79; **6** MARYLAND, W 73-70; **9** at Nebraska, L 79-71; **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 (20-3, 9-3)**

**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, W 74-66; **26** at Nebraska, W 72-66.  
**Feb. 2** WASHINGTON, W 66-56; **5** at UCLA, L 65-52; **8** at USC, L 84-63; **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** Philadelphia Invitational at Philadelphia, Men 4-1, Women 5-0; **19** St. John's Duals at Queens, N.Y., Men 1-3, Women 0-4.  
**Feb. 1** Schiller Duals at Northwestern in Evanston, Ill., Men 5-0, Women 4-1; **2** Schiller Duals at Northwestern in Evanston, Ill., Men 4-0, Women 4-1; **22-23** CCFC Championships at Detroit.  
**March 8** NCAA Midwest Regionals, TBA; **20-23** NCAA Championships at University Park, Pa.

**MEN'S GYMNASTICS (4-1)**

**Jan. 10** West Point Open at Army, 1st/6;

**17** GREENVILLE, W 319.700-303.150; **25** at Stanford Open, 1st/3.

**Feb. 2** OKLAHOMA, L 322.900-316.300; **9** PENN STATE, W 325.000-323.850; **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 (2-5, 1-3)**

**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 (L 139.550-196.425); **18** IOWA, W 196.275-195.200; **24** MICHIGAN STATE, L 196.800-195.750; **31** at Michigan, L 196.600-196.025.  
**Feb. 7** at Illinois, L 196.150-195.475; **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 (18-8-2, 11-6-1)**

**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, T 6-6 (OT, SL), L 3-2 (OT); **30-31** MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-2, L 4-1.  
**Feb. 7-8** at Notre Dame, W 5-1, W 5-1; **14-15** WISCONSIN; **21-22** at Minnesota; **27-28** MICHIGAN.

**WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY**

(23-6-3, 17-6-3)

**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; **21** at Mercyhurst W 5-1; **24-25** MINNESOTA STATE, W 5-2, W 4-1; **31** at Minnesota, L 3-1.  
**Feb. 1** at Minnesota, L 7-3; **7-8** ST. THOMAS, W 5-4, W 5-1; **21-22** ST. CLOUD STATE; **28** WCHA Quarterfinals.  
**March 1-2** WCHA Quarterfinals.

**MEN'S SWIM & DIVE (5-1, 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., NTS.  
**Feb. 1** at Pittsburgh, W 181-114; **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 (6-1, 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., NTS.  
**Feb. 1** at Pittsburgh, W 161.5-131.5; **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, NTS; **24-25** Crossroads of America Invite at Indianapolis, NTS; **31** Notre Dame Meyo Invite at South Bend, Ind.; Texas Tech Invite at Lubbock, Texas, NTS.  
**Feb. 1** Notre Dame Meyo Invite at South Bend, Ind., NTS; Texas Tech Invite at Lubbock, Texas, NTS; **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 (3-6)**

**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; **31** Big Ten Challenge vs. USC, L 3-1.  
**Feb. 1** Big Ten Challenge vs. UCLA, L 3-1; **8** LOYOLA, L 3-1; **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 (13-2, 5-2)**

**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, L 24-13.  
**Feb. 1** at Michigan, W 25-14; **7** MINNESOTA, L 20-17; **9** at Indiana, W 27-13; **14** PENN STATE.  
**March 8-9** Big Ten Championships at Chicago; **20-22** NCAA Championships at Philadelphia.



# Changes Show That There Really Is No Offseason

There's a section of "Carmen Ohio" that mirrors almost exactly what things are like in Buckeye Nation right now.

The iconic alma mater has a line about time and change, and Ryan Day has had a great time in the days since winning the national championship over Notre Dame, procuring a new seven-year contract that will pay him around \$12.5 million per season, the second-highest total among all college coaches – only Georgia's Kirby Smart makes more (roughly \$14 million per season).



Athletics director Ross Bjork felt that locking up Day was the right thing to do, especially after the somewhat embattled coach finally broke through the national championship ceiling.

"Ohio State football has long been defined by excellence and, under Ryan Day's leadership, that tradition has not only continued, but thrived," Bjork said. "As a leader, mentor and coach, Ryan has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the success and well-being of our players, both on and off the field. His leadership has maintained our position of national prominence each year and winning the 2024 national championship validated his program's culture of excellence, integrity, and perseverance."

It should not be any kind of surprise that shortly after the contract announcement, Day pledged one million dollars to mental health programs at Ohio State. It's now pretty well known that Day lost his father to mental health issues, and in his time in Columbus Day has been a huge advocate for that cause. Bravo to him.

Day now has more time, but there is also some change within the program, change that will need to be navigated if the Buckeyes want to be in position to defend their championship crown.

On offense, coordinator Chip Kelly and offensive line coach Justin Frye left for the NFL, to the Raiders and Cardinals, respectively, while defensive coordinator Jim Knowles whittled it to conference rival Penn State.

Kelly made headlines after leaving the head coaching spot at UCLA to be coordinator for the Buckeyes. His longstanding relationship with Day from their time at New Hampshire, and beyond, had a lot to do with it, and the way Ohio State played in the postseason says that Kelly was a rousing success.

Frye endured more than his share of dejection, mostly for an inability to corral big-time offensive line recruits. That seemed to hit home when five-star tackle David Sanders Jr. opted for Tennessee over Ohio State, even though the Buckeyes would have openings at both tackle spots in 2025. After tackle Josh Simmons and center Seth McLaughlin went down with injuries, many in Buckeye Nation forecast gloom and doom.

But Frye had other ideas.

All-America guard Donovan Jackson was moved to left tackle and made himself a ton of money at the next level with exemplary play on the outside. Carson Hinzman helped out at guard and center and proved invaluable, and the rotation system of Luke Montgomery, Austin Siereveld and Tegra Tshabola at guard paid dividends as the line held up quite well during Ohio State's title-game run. That hammered home the fact that Frye's teaching and development were seldom questioned.

The most discussed departure was Knowles to Penn State. All he did in his time in Columbus was improve the defense – which in his first season of 2022 was 36th in yards per play (a slight bump from 44th in 2021), and then a meteoric rise to third in 2023 and first this season. It should be noted that over the past two seasons, OSU has allowed just 4.18 YPP, a good distance ahead of the second-place Nittany Lions (4.42). Now Knowles heads back to his home state, to guide the defense for the team he grew up following. While the split was a bit messy on both sides, Knowles will not receive much criticism from this space. He was brought in to reshape the Buckeyes defense and did just that.

He will have a fairly big challenge in Happy Valley. Penn State does not have nearly the same level of defensive talent the Buckeyes possessed. Knowles' defense is seldom mastered in the first season, so there could be some growing pains. It does appear that James Franklin is taking the same "all in" approach that Day took this season, with a number of important players returning for 2025 – chief among them quarterback Drew Allar. Most of the offensive line is back, dynamic runners Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen return, and the receiving corps has been remade through the transfer portal. It's possible that Penn State enters the 2025 season as the favorite to win the Big Ten.

Day wasted little time finding replacements for Kelly and Frye, elevating receivers coach Brian Hartline to offensive coordinator and hiring Virginia Tech offensive coordinator Tyler Bowen as offensive line coach. Bowen appears to be the polar opposite of Frye as he has proved to be a dynamic recruiter, bringing in top-100 players Landon Tengwall and Rasheed Walker – and hidden gem Olu Fashanu – to Penn State. Oh, he also recruited a kid named Tyler Warren, who at the time rated as the nation's 22nd-best tight end and 543rd overall prospect. All he did was become Penn State's top offensive weapon and win the Mackey Award as college football's top tight end.

So Bowen has recruiting chops and will be put to the test immediately as there is a very good class of 2026 offensive line recruits interested in Ohio State. It will be interesting to see how many the Buckeyes can land.

There was also some buzz that LeCharles Bentley might be brought on board in an advisory role, and that would be a home-run hire. While I am not a proponent of having nothing but former Buckeyes on the coaching staff, the right ones can make a difference. We have seen that with Hartline,

corners coach Tim Walton and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis. Bentley was the ultimate tough guy up front in his time at Ohio State, when he won the Rimington Award, symbolic of the nation's top center, in 2001. He has been training college and NFL linemen who are looking to improve their skills.

It will be interesting to see whether Hartline is ready to assume play caller duties. He was given the coordinator role in 2023, but Day was the chief play caller. He ceded that role to Kelly, and the word is that Hartline was a sponge when listening to Kelly and Day discuss offensive philosophy. We already know that Hartline is one of the premier recruiters in all of college football. Can he also become an upper-echelon coordinator?

A replacement for Knowles had not been made official as this edition of BSB went to press, though there appeared to be a lot of smoke around Kansas City Chiefs defensive line coach Joe Cullen getting the nod. Cullen loves versatility up front, with players having the ability to play anywhere across the front. That can create mismatches with speed and strength and makes for a more productive defensive line, which in turn helps the back seven. He was last a coordinator at the college level in 2004 at Indiana but has been with the Baltimore Ravens and Chiefs, and helped both teams finish in the top 10 in the NFL in sacks, pressures and rushing yards allowed. If he is brought in, he could team with safeties coach Matt Guerrieri in a co-coordinator role. Guerrieri, who also spent time at Indiana, is familiar with the way Knowles ran things as they were on the same coaching staff at Duke, and allowing him to be a coordinator would mean very little structural change in the scheme for Ohio State.

The coaching turnover and new players in feature roles should make for an interesting spring.

## You're Sayin There's A Chance?

While there will be plenty of new names for Ohio State fans to learn this spring, the most important is quarterback Julian Sayin.

A five-star talent who originally signed with Alabama, Sayin left Tuscaloosa after the retirement of Nick Saban and ended up in Columbus. He said getting to play for Day, a noted quarterback mind, was a big part of the allure, as was having fellow Crimson Tide teammates Caleb Downs and McLaughlin around for familiarity.

Blessed with a quick release and precision ball placement, Sayin will be under the microscope from the first day of spring camp. He's different from Will Howard in that he isn't nearly as adept with his legs, though he does have a keen sense of pocket awareness and can step up to extend the play. He will need to add size (he currently weighs in at a little less than 210 pounds) and get used to being a leader on a team full of stars, and if he can do that then the Buckeye offense could be a strength next season.

When asked about the chance to solidify himself as the Buckeyes' starter in spring camp, Sayin proved to be a cliché machine.

"I'm just taking it one day at a time and trying to get better," Sayin said. "Obviously, I'm excited to compete in spring and com-

pete in fall camp, but I'm just taking it one day at a time. It will be exciting."

The transfer was not something Sayin thought about until the moment Saban told the team he was retiring, but things moved quickly after that as he and others were up against the clock.

"It happened pretty fast," Sayin said. "I entered the portal, and I had to go somewhere because classes were about to start and if I didn't I wasn't going to be able to participate in spring practice. So it happened pretty fast, but I couldn't have ended up in a better spot."

Stylistically, Sayin felt Alabama was perfect for him, but when it was time to find a new home, he knew he wouldn't have to look very far to find a similar scheme.

"When I was getting recruited, I wanted to play for Coach Saban," Sayin said. "He had won seven national championships, and I wanted to go play in that style. And then when he ended up retiring, I hit the portal. And Coach Day is obviously a great quarterback coach and coaches the position well. So I really felt like this could be an ideal fit, and it has been."

But Sayin is not the only new face.

The embarrassment of riches in the backfield with TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins is no more as both have moved on to the pro ranks, but another duo could be forming with sophomore James Peoples and West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson. A four-star talent from Texas, Peoples has shown flashes of star power in limited action. The last Lone Star back the Buckeyes had – J.K. Dobbins – was a pretty good one, and if Peoples is anywhere near as productive, Ohio State has stability at the position for the next couple of seasons at least. Donaldson is more of a hammer type, a 6-2, 240-pound battering ram who reminds more than a few people of former Buckeye back Carlos Hyde. He can combat contact but also has a little bit of wiggle for a big guy. He has a real nose for the end zone, scoring 30 touchdowns in three seasons for the Mountaineers and averaging nearly 5 yards per pop in that time.

There will be a few new faces up front with transfers Ethan Onianwa (Rice) and Phillip Daniels (Minnesota) coming in to fortify things at tackle, and don't be shocked if recruit Carter Lowe gets into the mix early. Purdue transfer tight end Max Klare has the ability to stress defenses down the seam, and he picks up a first down on nearly 58 percent of his grabs so he can be a real chain-mover.

On defense, cornerback Devin Sanchez could be this year's Jeremiah Smith. He is likely to be on the field early – maybe even starting – this season. Another Texas stand-out, Sanchez plays sticky coverage and isn't afraid to get physical with receivers. Linebackers Riley Pettijohn and Tarvos Alford will throw their talents into a unit that lacks depth, and signee Zion Grady could be a force on the defensive line sooner rather than later.

It won't just be the status quo for Ohio State when spring practice opens in March, and that should make things interesting and worth watching.



# If You're Reading This Issue, Thank God!

I'm not going to beat around the bush. I'm not going to bury this note at the bottom of the column where I usually put postal or business notes.

I'm just going to come right out and say that in 44 years of being Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher, this is probably as miserable as I have ever been. Oh, there have been sometimes when we had cancerous employees who made the environment around here toxic, but in terms of minute by minute, hour by hour action, this has been the worst.

It started about six or seven weeks ago, when subscribers started calling in, wondering where their paper covering the playoff game with Tennessee was. The phone calls increased when subscribers started wondering where their Tennessee and Oregon and Texas issues were, as well. All this even after we had explained in three places in the Dec. 21 issue of BSB, including in this column, that there was no Tennessee, Oregon or Texas issue. As was stated, if the Buckeyes made the championship game, the next issue of BSB would be mailed Jan. 22.

But the worst was yet to come.

It was an ambitious goal to get a championship paper out that quickly, but just over 24 hours after the final gun of Ohio State's 34-23 championship win over Notre Dame – and with an eight-hour drive for the boys in the middle – we were sending the pages off to the printer. Many thanks to the people at the AIM Media Indiana printing plant for getting the paper printed and mailed the next morning. I was at the post office in London, Ohio, when the paper was mailed – on Jan. 22, as promised.

What happened after that within the postal system, I can't tell you. With people still calling wondering where their pre-championship issue was, a few days later, the calls started about the championship issue. As scheduled, readers had not received any BSBs since mid-December. Now, in their championship euphoria, people were looking for some BSB, any BSB. About five days after the Jan. 22 mailing a subscriber called, and I was the one who answered.

"I haven't gotten my paper and I don't think you mailed it," he said.

"Sir, don't say that," I quietly replied.

Talk like that was so hurtful given how hard everyone here worked to get BSB out as promised and after days and days of answering phone calls trying to explain our schedule and trying to explain where people's papers were (tough to do when you don't know yourself). I'll give the guy credit. He identified himself and said it to my face, not hiding behind a computer like Ryan Day's critics after the loss to Michigan.

Little did he or I know that this was still early in the delivery process. The days went by, the relentless phone calls continued, and finally, after nine days, we started getting calls from first-class subscribers who were starting to get their papers. As I write, it has been nearly three weeks since the championship issue was mailed, the Feb. 1 issue has been mailed since then and we are putting the finishing touches on the Football Recruiting Wrap-up which you are now reading, and the onslaught of calls from people who still haven't received that elusive championship issue continues. And the problem is everywhere, not just in traditional problem areas like the Youngstown-Warren area, the Toledo area, or our worst mail state, Indiana.

How the postal service managed to offer their worst service in recent memory on the most anticipated issue since 2014 is beyond me. It hurts all of us here. We worked so hard to put a quality issue out in a timely fashion, and we end up spending our days answering phone calls from people who just want their Buckeye

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Sports Bulletin. We try and take it as a compliment, but that doesn't make responding to the legitimate queries any easier.

Let me just speak for everyone here. We deeply apologize for the tardiness of your paper. In addition to trying to put out a quality product, we also take customer service very seriously – thus a live person answering the phone, as opposed to you being faced with a series of prompts, which ultimately lead you to having to record a message that nobody ever answers.

As our mail service continued to deteriorate during this past football season, one reader accused me of "whining" about the situation. Maybe he was right. I'm just telling you that the continued phone calls over something that we have proved powerless to fix can really wear on you.

I'm giving you a heads-up right now. The next BSB does not mail until March 4, a quirky three-week gap in the schedule. And here's a heads-up that we have given to hundreds of callers in the last six weeks. The date of the next BSB mailing is always listed at the bottom of the credit box on page 3.

With any luck, by the time that paper with a March 8 cover date is mailed, you will have your championship issue and the phones at BSB World Headquarters will have quieted.

### Is Fanatics Issue Overblown?

I mentioned above the Ryan Day critics who went over the line after Ohio State's fourth straight loss to Michigan. I have always maintained that in today's computer age, people will say things from the anonymity of their computer or cell phone that they would never say to someone's face, although some of the stuff they used to yell at John Cooper as he was leaving the field after losses as early as his second game as Buckeye coach were downright ugly.

The reason I question if the problem is overblown is this: There are hundreds of thousands of Buckeye fans out there. Sure, there are plenty of fans who may have wanted Day fired after that ugly loss to the team's rival. But how many went over the line, said things that were completely inappropriate? A hundred? A thousand? Less than one percent, I'm sure. And anyone who mentioned suicide – I'm left wondering how did your parents raise you? Is that the example you are setting for your kids?

Most of us are just passionate about our favorite teams, but not evil.

When you are in the public eye, especially if you are a coach or a politician, you are always going to be the target of overzealous fans or critics. In the case of Day, he is well compensated to deal with that. But I have always had a rule of thumb and a problem with people who violate that rule. Families, especially children, are off limits. They have nothing to do with their parents' profession. Again, I have to wonder how some people have been raised and what their parents would think if they knew some of the things their adult kids were saying.

A note to former Alabama coach Nick Saban, who was critical of Ohio State's fanatical fans.

"These Ohio State fans have a psychotic obsession with Michigan, and they need to go get therapy or something to try to get it fixed," Saban said.

I don't think I have ever been to Alabama, but I just have a sneaky feeling there are 'Bama fans who are every bit as out of control as that crazed segment of Buckeye fans. Let's see how those

Crimson Tide fans respond if their team misses the playoffs for a second straight year under Kalen DeBoer.

By the way, I was one of those fans who was extremely unhappy with Ohio State's fourth straight loss to Michigan. I didn't necessarily want to fire Day, but anyone who reads this column knows how much I wanted to beat those arrogant rivals from the North. It wasn't just that we lost for a fourth straight time (I lived through 2-10-1 so I've got a ways to go), it was how the Buckeyes lost. I was pleased to see that former Buckeye and Michigan beater Tyvis Powell was able to articulate elsewhere in this paper how I – and I'm sure many others – felt after the loss to an inferior Michigan team.

"People think those fans need to apologize. I don't think they need to apologize," Powell said. "I understood why they felt the way they felt. I felt the reason why fans were calling for his job. When they lost the way that they lost, that's why everybody was frustrated."

Thank you, Tyvis.

### A Different Look At Knowles

I hope most of you take the time to enjoy our Reprint Thursdays, posted every – yes – Thursday at our BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all BSB subscribers. Each week we post reprints from the BSB archives, and frequently we try to make those reprints relevant to some person or topic of the day.

When defensive coordinator Jim Knowles left to take the same position at Penn State, we ran BSB stories from when he was first hired. In one of the stories, this quote was included:

"Jim's interesting," Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy, who was Knowles' boss, told The Athletic. "He's kind of like a mad scientist. He goes in his office on Sunday and closes his door. You don't see him until Sunday night when we go to practice. I mean, he's in his office right now (Monday morning) with his door closed. I really won't see him much today until late in the afternoon. And then you don't see him a lot Tuesday until practice. That's really the story that's interesting with him. He goes in and puts on that mad scientist hat and comes up with things he wants to do, and you just don't see him much until usually Tuesday at practice."

At the time of the story, at the time of his arrival in Columbus, I thought, "Oh, the mad scientist. This is great. He is going to mix up the formula for a national championship."

Now, I look at the quote completely differently.

The fact that Knowles left for a heated rival has made many wonder if there wasn't friction between Knowles and Day or others on this staff.

Being on a football staff is like being on the team itself. There is a certain camaraderie. After all, coaches frequently spend more time with their fellow coaches than with their own families, especially in season. Was Knowles stand-offish behind a closed door? Did that create friction?

I'm not at the WHAC, so I don't know. I know that a closed door can send a bad message. What do you think? Am I reading too much into the quote?

### Get Off To A Fast Start

Once Ohio State was officially announced as being in the CFP 12-team bracket and set to play what I still think was a really good Tennes-

see team, I kept telling anyone who would listen, "The Buckeyes have to get off to a fast start. They have to get off to a fast start."

The implication was that the Buckeyes hadn't been getting off to fast starts. I don't know that I had any evidence that they hadn't been getting off to fast starts. I can't remember from one game to the next these days. I may have just felt like they weren't getting off to fast starts.

After the Bucks roared through the playoffs, I finally looked into the matter.

Did you know that in the regular season, the Buckeyes did not score more than seven points in the first quarter in any game but Western Michigan, where they scored 21 points on the way to a 56-0 victory? Not only did they not score more than seven points, but they also scored only three against Michigan State and Michigan and were skunked in the first quarter two weeks in a row against Northwestern and Indiana, meaning they scored just three points total in the first quarter of the last three regular-season games.

Any worries were eliminated in the first quarter of the game with Tennessee, when Ohio State opened with 21 points. That may have been the key to not just beating the Vols but giving the Buckeyes the confidence and the momentum to sweep through their four postseason games.

Ohio State scored 14 in the first quarter against Oregon and 34 in the half and 7 against Texas and 14 in the first half. Notre Dame shut OSU out in the first 15 minutes, but OSU rallied for 21 points in the second. In all, Ohio State outscored its playoff opponents 90-32 before halftime.

That's a fast start.

### Hal Leiner Passes At 86

BSB lost a friend and I personally lost a friend with the passing Hal Leiner on Feb. 3 at the age of 86.

Hal occasionally sold advertising for us but mostly just came by to kibitz. He could be loud and cantankerous, but he somehow pulled it off. He loved Ohio State sports and had an amazing ability to retain trivia, dating back to his days at OSU in the late '50s and early '60s. I learned early on in our friendship (I don't recall how we got hooked up) that if Hal wanted to make a bet with you on an Ohio State trivia question (usually a bet for lunch), don't take the action. He rarely lost those bets. In fact, with his passing there are probably any number of people who had existing lunch debts expunged.

I have mentioned Hal many times in this column, usually for his frequent lunch-earning bet with those who maintained that Ohio State defeated Alabama for the national championship in 2014. I used Hal's bet wins to illustrate the significance of that Buckeye win over the Crimson Tide.

I knew Hal's health was failing when I actually caught him on an Ohio State football fact from the '90s (no, I didn't make a bet with him). I sent him a BSB from 30-odd years ago to prove my point, and he still didn't believe me.

Speaking of Hal's lunch bets, one of the things Hal, a man of normal build, was known for was his voracious appetite and love of buffets. The only thing Hal loved more than the Buckeyes and buffets was his family. He was completely devoted to his two sons, Matt and Dan, and four grandchildren, Madison, Brandon, Sophia and Emilia.

One other thing he loved was Elvis Presley. In closing let me say that Hal was the only person I have ever known who preferred the older Las Vegas Elvis to the younger surly, hip-swiveling Elvis.



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