

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

\$3.00

PERIODICAL NEWSPAPER
CLASSIFICATION
DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE RUSH!!



Vol. 44, No. 17

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 8, 2025



Bubble Trouble

Recent Skid Puts OSU's NCAA Tourney Hopes On Thin Ice

SONNY BROCKWAY

MARCHING ORDERS — If the men's basketball program under coach Jake Diebler (above) wants to participate in March Madness for the first time since the 2021-22 season, it will need to make a strong push to end the regular season and build momentum into the Big Ten tournament.

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Since being hired as Ohio State's 15th men's basketball head coach last March, Jake Diebler has often told those willing to listen that he is committed to bringing the program back to the winning standard that was established by Buckeye teams that had come before his.

Before Diebler's time, Ohio State was a consistent player both in the Big Ten and nationally, winning 22 Big Ten regular-season titles, making 11 Final Fours and earning one national championship in a nearly nine-decade span. But in the last decade or so, that stable success has eroded.

The Buckeyes have not appeared in the Final Four since 2012, the same year as their last Big Ten regular-season crown. Even worse, the program last made the Sweet 16 in 2013, and it hasn't appeared in the 68-team

NCAA Tournament field since the 2021-22 campaign, the latter shortfall proving to be a significant factor in the firing of seven-year head coach Chris Holtmann last February.

As a credit to Diebler — who has been entrenched in basketball in the Buckeye State for most of his life as a Gibsonburg, Ohio, native and son of a longtime high school basketball coach — he is well aware of this history and is trying hard to return the program to national relevancy.

"As a program, we have expectations, and we need to compete for those expectations," Diebler said before the team's first official practice of the season on Sept. 23. "There's a standard in this program, traditionally, that we have not shied away from. You don't get there by just talking about it. You have to recruit to it. You have to practice for it and all that. So I don't know how long that's going to take, but we're trying to get there as quickly as we possibly can.

"I want our former players and the people who have come before us to be really proud

of the way we play. With a toughness, with an urgency, with a togetherness, that when they turn on the TV, or they come to The Schott to watch us, they look out there and are like, 'Those guys are representing us well.' That's important to me."

It seemed Ohio State and Diebler took a small but promising step toward getting back to that standard in early February when after an up-and-down start to the year — one which included an all-too-familiar 1-4 early January swoon — they racked up an impressive five wins in seven games.

The winning stretch, which included résumé-boosting ranked wins over No. 11 Purdue on Jan. 21 and No. 18 Maryland on Feb. 6, helped improve their overall record from 10-8 to 15-10, putting them right into the thick of the NCAA Tournament consideration in the middle of February for the first time in three seasons.

"We've been playing our best basketball in the last month or so, and we have to continue to do that," Diebler said on Feb. 14. "I don't feel like we've peaked yet. I feel like we still have some room to continue to grow to reach that next level."

Just over two weeks and four Big Ten games after that statement, though, that peak Diebler mentioned still had yet to be reached. As BSB went to press, it appeared the 2024-25 Buckeyes' peak may have been that 5-2 stretch, as since then, they dropped three of their last four games to drop to an uninspiring 16-13 and 8-10 in Big Ten play.

The losing stretch — which was headlined by a narrow three-point home loss to then-No. 20 Michigan on Feb. 16 and a shocking 21-point defeat to Northwestern in Columbus four days later — has Ohio State in danger of missing the Big Dance for the third consecutive season, something the program has not done since 2002-05.

According to bracketmatrix.com — which tracks 108 projected brackets across the Internet from reputable outlets such as ESPN, CBS and FOX Sports, among others — the Buckeyes are projected to get in the tournament as a No. 11 seed but are featured in just 55 of the brackets on the site (50.9 percent) as of Feb. 27, by far the least amount of any at-large team in the field.

One of the sites that has the Buckeyes in the field is ESPN, which has them as one of their "Last Four In," in their Feb. 28 "Bracketology," earning a No. 12 seed and playing against Texas in the First Four round in Dayton. But other sites, including CBS, have Diebler's team on the outside looking in in their latest projections.

Regardless of who has them in and who doesn't, being squarely on the bubble with just two regular-season games left to play is far from a comfortable situation for Diebler and his squad, one that no one on the team

**Your Mailing Label Goes Here
Call (614) 486-2202
Today To Subscribe**

Continued On Page 10

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An Apology

I am 85 and have subscribed to Buckeye Sports Bulletin over 30 years. I love BSB. When it arrives I first read in succession the columns by Frank Moskowitz, Mark Rea and Bill Conley. The latter is my favorite writer because in my opinion he is the oldest, wisest, and least judgmental by events.

After the win over Notre Dame on Jan. 20, I was starved to read the next issue of BSB, which always tells in the previous issue when the next issue will be sent out. That date was January 22. A week and a half after that date, and I still hadn't received the issue, I lost patience and called the office of BSB. The fellow that took my call was very friendly, and when I asked him to please check to see if my subscription had run out, he did so and told me I was good until April and not to worry, the issues had been sent out.

Days later I called the local post office and the postmaster said, "I know what those magazines look like and I haven't seen any yet." Then I relaxed and waited with patience until it finally arrived. Sorry, BSB, for the call. You have always delivered on a promise to submit issues on a certain date.

The issue was a memorable keepsake. I have read and reread some of the columns to soak up the joy of a national championship by the Buckeyes. Publisher Moskowitz and his team do a wonderful job of whetting my appetite for detailed information on all Buckeye sports. Thank you and Go Bucks!!!

Bill Herr
Bluffton, Ohio

CFP No Thorn In Rose Bowl's Side

RE: Jan 25 issue. Frank's lament on the Rose Bowl's demise (The View From 15th & High). I say – not so fast. The Rose Bowl has petitioned the CFP to always host a quarterfinal game in order to retain their 5 p.m. Jan. 1 slot. Never a semi-final. CFP has been receptive to this. Next year it will be a quarterfinal game again with the traditional 5 p.m. EST kickoff. Look for this to be permanent.

Also the CFP has designated quarterfinal sites to align with the bowl that the conferences have been traditionally aligned with. Thus the Big Ten champion will always play in the Rose Bowl at 5 p.m. on Jan. 1. While the Rose Bowl will never be quite the same, there will be some Big Ten champion tradition continuing.

Phil Haas
Marion, Ohio

Kudos to Frank & The BSB Team

I have been a subscriber to BSB for a long time, and the product that Frank and his team put out is first class. Yes, there are sometimes hiccups with the delivery, but anyone who has ever owned their own business knows that there are problems from time to time.

I had the honor to speak with Frank personally when I called to order a subscription for my granddaughter's fiancé and increase my membership to an Elite Donor. I had a great conversation with him as we discussed the BSB. Frank is a true gentleman.

The only member of his team that I have met is Coach Bill Conley, when he coached at Ohio Dominican. My grandson was being recruited by Coach Conley. Bill is the real deal, as was his brother Dean, whom I had the privilege of serving with in the Ohio Legislature. Frank, you and your team at BSB, keep up the great work.

Hon. Bob Doyle
Beavercreek, Ohio

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



From The Message Board

Due to inconsistent play and a recent losing stretch, the Ohio State men's basketball team is in danger of missing the NCAA Tournament for the third consecutive season. With the Buckeyes sitting squarely on the bubble, we asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum to offer their thoughts on the job Jake Diebler has done in his first year as Ohio State's head coach and how the season has gone overall. We also asked whether they think the program has taken a step forward, backward or stayed the same this season and what areas the Buckeyes need to improve upon in order for them to take the next step.

"So far I think Diebler has done a creditable job and my view might improve if the team wins the remaining games and has a nice run in the B1G tournament. The problem is not with the coaching but with several new players not performing up to expectations.

"Overall, I would say the program has made slight, but definite, steps forward even if it doesn't show up in the win-loss record this year. I'm optimistic about future recruiting."

– Terrier Buck

"I think Diebler has done just about everything he can do with this group of players. The program is comparable to the last 2-3 seasons under Holtmann. Ohio State's problem for years has been the lack of a big man who can score and rebound consistently well. When you face Purdue or Michigan, they have two or three 7-footers who can move well and score and rebound.

"When your tallest guy is 6-9 because the 7-footer fouls out every game, you will never win, not when the other team has second-chance opportunities left and right. Their perimeter scoring drastically needs to improve as well. They only have one guy who can semi-consistently hit shots from the outside. The roster needs an overhaul with better talent that is recruited."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I think Diebler has done a good job with only one year under his belt. It's tough with NIL, transfers and injuries. I think his youth resonates with players very well and hope it carries over to recruiting and transfers."

– R1TBDBITL

"Obviously it's too early to tell with Diebler. One thing I will be watching is if

they have another mass exodus after this season like they did last. I was stunned when the players left last year because I thought team chemistry was one of the reasons Ross Bjork hired him. As far as things to improve, I would work on the inside game. It seems that competent big men eat the Buckeyes alive. For an example, see the game with TTUN."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I think Diebler is doing fine for as long as he has been at the wheel. It is a bit soon for any substantial judgment, but I like him. Onward and upward!"

– Peyote Buck

"The Big Ten schedule is a meat grinder. This season, 16 teams have at least five or six losses. Jake Diebler needs more time to find the right players and develop them. Program critics have always complained that the Buckeyes don't recruit the best Ohio high school talent. Diebler is working on that, but that might not be enough. To be a national contender, Jake needs to encourage the four/five bench practice players to move on and then use the portal to build the roster depth. Yes, get more big 7-footers to protect the rim and score. Parrish has been a positive. Sean Stewart and Ivan Njegovan need development and can help next season.

"Thornton, Mobley, Royal and Mahaffey along with Stewart, Bradshaw and Njegovan are a good nucleus for 2025-26. But Jake needs to replace Parrish. Then add three more veteran players from the portal. Are White and Parks Big Ten players? They are Ohio-raised players. Do fans expect the Buckeyes to compete with Duke and other top-10 elite teams? That might be asking too much."

– Byron McNutt

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

Columbus Sports Publications
1200 Chambers Road, Suite 206
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$124.95/year.

PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Patrick Engels Greg Wilson

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

CONTRIBUTORS
David Breithaupt Cameron Moone
Bill Conley Bob Roehm
Rich Exner Steve Siegfried
Bobby Gorbett Jeff Svoboda
Craig Merz Mike Wachsman
Braden Moles

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Paula Serra Ron Friedman

2024-25 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 44)

No. 1	Sept. 7	No. 13	Dec. 21
No. 2	Sept. 21	No. 14	Jan. 25
No. 3	Sept. 28	No. 15	Feb. 1
No. 4	Oct. 5	No. 16	Feb. 15
No. 5	Oct. 12	No. 17	March 8
No. 6	Oct. 26	No. 18	March 22
No. 7	Nov. 2	No. 19	April 5
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

The next issue (March 22 cover date) will be mailed on March 18.

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

Wachsman Elite Donor:



Time And Change Reveal New Normal

Time and change.

Those words are contained at the end of the first verse of "Carmen Ohio," the song written by freshman athlete and Men's Glee Club member Fred Cornell in 1903 and adopted by Ohio State three years later as the university's official alma mater.

The older I get, the more time – and the change that unfortunately accompanies it – passes quickly. No matter how hard we try to cling to the past, hardly anything ever stays the same. Friends and family pass on, institutions once believed to be rock-solid invariably crumble and fall, and age-old tradition is replaced by something someone somewhere thought was better, and then it becomes tradition to a new generation.

That seems to be what is happening with the seismic changes in college football, and some of us who grew up loving and cherishing each Saturday in the fall still cling to the intrinsic facets that made the sport what it was. Rivalries based upon geography, the smell of freshly mowed grass combined with the bright colors of changing leaves against a bright blue sky, listening to a game through a crackling radio broadcast as deep-voiced men describe the action.

If you've ever walked through the gates of the old Cotton Bowl stadium for the Red River Shootout, traversed Lake Washington by boat to arrive at Husky Stadium, marveled at the majesty of the San Gabriel Mountains adjacent to the Rose Bowl, made your way down Fraternity Row to get to Camp Randall Stadium or strolled by the Olentangy River on your way to your favorite tailgate party, you know the romance of college football.

Time will not change any of those things, of course. What has changed, however, is the game itself with regard to how rosters are structured, how conferences are aligned, and how championships are determined.

As Hamlet once said, "There's the rub." Those who cling too tightly to the past risk losing any remaining joy they might derive from following their favorite player, team or conference.

Mike Wachsman, a longtime colleague here at BSB, has worked himself into something of a lather regarding the College Football Playoff. More accurately, Mike's perturbation stems from the fact the Big Ten and Southeastern Conference are about to take over the playoff to the point of effectively shutting out most of the other schools from the national championship race.

Veteran sportswriter Stewart Mandel, now in the employ of The Athletic, broke it down succinctly in mid-February when he wrote, "Two indisputable ruling parties are controlling (college football): the Big Ten and SEC. And they're about to light the whole thing aflame."

According to a proposal from the Big Ten and SEC, the playoff tournament field would, beginning in 2026, expand to 14 or 16 teams, with the two conferences receiving four automatic bids each. The ACC and Big 12 would each get two while the Group of Five receives one, leaving just one at-large bid in a 14-team playoff and three if the field expands to 16.

"This is going to turn into an SEC/B1G showcase, with others simply along for the ride," Wachsman wrote on social media. "It won't be a meritocracy by any means, which was the fear all along for those who were not in favor of expansion. As it expands even more – and it will – the SEC and B1G will hold even more sway over things. Some of us saw this coming."

That seems to me to be stating the obvious. Once the SEC welcomed Texas and Oklaho-

ma to the fold, and the Big Ten thought it was a good idea to ignore its Midwestern roots by adding Washington, Oregon, UCLA and USC, the pretense of preserving college football and its geographical rivalries became as outdated as a Model T. Free agency (parading as the transfer portal) and bottomless pockets of NIL dollars further underscored that fact.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Sure, there are going to be outliers such as Indiana this past season, a program that benefited greatly from the portal during the regular season until getting exposed in late November by Ohio State and again in the playoff by Notre Dame.

But it's time to stop pretending that teams outside the Big Ten and SEC have any legitimate claim to a national championship. ACC champion Clemson? According to ESPN's calculations following the season, the Tigers' strength of schedule was ranked No. 28 in the country. How about SMU, the team Clemson defeated in the ACC title game? The Mustangs had the 41st-toughest schedule.

Big 12 champion Arizona State, which ranked No. 39 in strength of schedule, defeated Iowa State, ranked 42nd in SOS, in their conference title game.

Of the top 22 teams ranked in strength of schedule in 2024, 21 were either Big Ten or SEC teams. The lone exception was Notre Dame at No. 4.

The only conference champion from the Group of Five – which includes the American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, the Mid-American Conference, the Mountain West and the Sun Belt – to finish among the nation's top 65 teams in strength of schedule was Sun Belt champ Marshall at No. 64. That was the same Thundering Herd team that dropped a 49-14 decision to Ohio State in September. Tell me how Marshall deserved consideration for a spot in the playoff to determine the national championship.

So, let's just call things for what they are. Right now, and for the foreseeable future, the Big Ten and SEC are the gold standards for college football. And you know the old takeoff on the Golden Rule: Those who have the gold make the rules.

Now ... About Michigan

While Mike was decrying what he obviously believes is a bloodless coup by the Big Ten and SEC to take over college football, many Ohio State fans including BSB subscriber Michael Walrath continue to believe that any season without a victory against Michigan is not one to be celebrated.

"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.'" That was part of a letter Walrath wrote to BSB that was published in the Feb. 15 issue.

He refers to Ryan Day as JC2, an obvious reference to John Cooper, calling Day "the new Bart Simpson – underachiever and proud of it," before opining that beating Michigan and winning the conference championship are goals that don't matter anymore to either Day or new Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork.

"This could have and should have been truly one of the greatest teams in the history of college football," Walrath continued. "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?"

I single out Walrath only because he put his thoughts to paper. I'm sure there are countless others who agree.

CBS Sports college football writer Chip Patterson posted in mid-February that next year's rivalry game in Ann Arbor will be one to circle on the calendar.

"It does not even matter that Ohio State lost this game and went on to win the national championship because the implications stemming from a win or loss for both teams exceeds the limits of any postseason format," Patterson wrote. "Ohio State has to beat Michigan, and Michigan wants nothing more than to beat Ohio State for a fifth straight season."

ESPN.com writer Jake Trotter went even further, saying the game against Michigan in late November will define Ohio State's season much more than the Texas rematch in the opener or the Nov. 1 matchup against Penn State and its new defensive coordinator, Jim Knowles.

"Neither of those scintillating matchups will trump 'The Game' for the Buckeyes, who have lost four in a row in the series, including last season's stunning 13-10 defeat at home," Trotter wrote. "Losing once to the Wolverines is unacceptable for Buckeye Nation, much less four straight. Ohio State can defeat Texas and Penn State, but if the Buckeyes lose yet again to Michigan, the season will seem like a disappointment for those in Columbus – short of it ending with another national championship."

To be sure, hardly anyone derives more pleasure out of beating Michigan than me. But let's be real. The new normal moving forward is simply that beating Michigan will cease to be the No. 1 priority for Ohio State. In years to come, as it is with basketball's March Madness, the measuring stick for college football will not be how many times you beat your rival. It will be how many national championship banners you can raise.

You probably know that Nick Saban won six national titles at Alabama, but did you know that his Crimson Tide team in 2017 lost to archrival Auburn – a four-loss team that season – before going on to win the championship?

There will come a time in the not-too-distant future when Ohio State and Michigan play perhaps as many as three times in a single season – the regular-season meeting, a showdown in the Big Ten Championship Game and in the playoff tournament. Are you honestly telling me that if the Buckeyes win the national championship, they will have to sweep all three games from Michigan to make that title legitimate? If that's how you see it, I've got a bridge in Brooklyn that I can let go real cheap.

I have never intimidated the residents of Buckeye Nation had to like any of this, but not liking it and refusing to accept it are two vastly different things. Time and change will surely show that nothing ever stays the same, and the quicker you embrace the way things are now, the quicker you can go back to enjoying your fall Saturday afternoons.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Patricia Named Defensive Coordinator

Ohio State found its replacement for former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles by hiring former New England Patriots defensive coordinator and Detroit Lions head coach Matt Patricia on Feb. 12, giving head coach Ryan Day and Ohio State another veteran voice to call defensive plays.

Patricia, 50, joined Ohio State's staff just two days after interviewing for the position. His last coaching stint came in 2023 as a senior defensive analyst with the Philadelphia Eagles, but he is most known for the nine years he spent calling defensive plays for the Bill Belichick-led Patriots.

Patricia helped the franchise win two Super Bowls in 2014 and 2016, also leading eight top-10 scoring defenses, including a No. 1 finish in 2016 when New England allowed 15.6 points per game.

"I have been aware of and followed Matt's successful NFL career for the past 15 years, or when he first started calling plays for those outstanding New England teams," Day said about Patricia. "I have also gotten to know him and, aside from his creative and outstanding abilities as a defensive coach, I think Matt is going to integrate into our program's culture and values, which are the essence of who we are, very well."

Patricia's nearly two-decade-long stint in the NFL also included the head coaching position with the Lions from 2018-20, a tenure that did not pan out well for him, with the Lions going just 13-29-1 in those three seasons before the franchise fired him 11 games into the 2020 campaign.

His teams ranked 16th, 26th and 32nd out of 32 NFL teams in scoring defense in his three years leading the franchise.

Patricia also has a complicated history off the field. In March of 1996, he was arrested on one count of sexual assault of a 21-year-old woman while on a college spring break trip to South Padre Island, Texas, and was later indicted.

Although Patricia, who was then a football player at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., was arrested, charged and indicted by a grand jury, he never stood trial and was not convicted after the case was dismissed because the victim was unable to "face the pressures or stress of a trial."

Patricia will look to begin the next chapter of his coaching career at the collegiate level with the Buckeyes, who are coming off a national championship season in which they finished No. 1 in the nation in total defense and scoring defense under Knowles, who left for the same position at Penn State in January.

Patricia, who last coached in college as an offensive graduate assistant at Syracuse from 2001-03, will lead an Ohio State defense in 2025 that will likely include several first-time starters. Only unanimous All-America safety Caleb Downs, linebacker Sonny Styles and cornerback Davison Igbinosun are set to reclaim their roles from 2024.

OSU Finalizes Coaching Staff

Day officially announced the additions of two new members of his coaching staff and the promotions of five other assistants for the 2025 season on Feb. 20.

In addition to Patricia, the Buckeye coach also announced the hiring of Tyler Bowen as offensive line coach/run game coordinator. Ohio State hired Bowen from Virginia Tech on Feb. 5, where he had spent the last three seasons as offensive coordinator, tight ends coach and quarterbacks coach.

"I am really pleased to announce the addition of Tyler Bowen, and his family, to our coaching staff," said Day. "He's a terrific coach who will bring experience to the staff along with an excellent record as a recruiter."

Day also announced the five coaches who

2025 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2024 Record, Bowl Result
Aug. 30	TEXAS	TBA	TBA	13-3, 28-14 loss to Ohio State (CFP Semi.)
Sept. 6	GRAMBLING	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Sept. 13	OHIO	TBA	TBA	11-3, 30-27 win over Jax State (Cure)
Sept. 27	at Washington	TBA	TBA	6-7, 35-34 loss to Louisville (Sun)
Oct. 4	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	8-5, 24-10 win over Va. Tech. (Duke's Mayo)
Oct. 11	at Illinois	TBA	TBA	10-3, 21-17 win over South Carolina (Citrus)
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 1	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	13-3, 27-24 loss to Notre Dame (CFP Semi.)
Nov. 8	Purdue	TBA	TBA	1-11, not eligible
Nov. 15	UCLA	TBA	TBA	5-7, not eligible
Nov. 22	RUTGERS	TBA	TBA	7-6, 44-41 loss to Kansas State (Rate)
Nov. 29	at Michigan	TBA	TBA	8-5, 19-11 win over Alabama (ReliaQuest)

have received promotions and additional roles/responsibilities. Those include Brian Hartline to offensive coordinator (previously wide receivers/co-offensive coordinator), Billy Fessler to quarterbacks coach (program assistant/quality control coach), Keenan Bailey to co-offensive coordinator (tight ends coach), Matt Guerrieri to pass game coordinator (safeties coach) and Tim Walton to co-defensive coordinator (secondary/cornerbacks coach).

Bailey, Fessler, Guerrieri and Walton are all set to reclaim their previous roles in addition to their promoted positions, while Hartline will still serve as wide receivers coach.

Out of those five promoted assistants, Day provided a public comment on only Hartline, who has worked his way up the coaching ladder in his eight seasons with the program, starting as a wide receivers quality control coach in 2017.

"Brian did some of his best coaching this past season," Day said. "His loyalty and patience are going to pay off, and I think he's going to be the best coordinator in the country."

These moves were each made due to the key departures of Knowles, offensive coordinator Chip Kelly and offensive line coach Justin Frye, who each left the program to assume the same roles with the Nittany Lions and the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders and Arizona Cardinals, respectively.

The Buckeyes also rounded out their support staff with the addition of five new coach-

es including Charlie Dickey and Marcus Johnson, who are expected to help Bowen, who hasn't coached an offensive line since 2017. Dickey and Johnson have a combined 46 years of collegiate coaching experience (Dickey 37, Johnson nine). Ohio State also hired former Western Illinois wide receivers coach Colin Keanu to work as an offensive analyst, former Dartmouth associate head coach and Penn State offensive lineman Wendy Laurent as an analyst and former UCLA defensive line/outside linebackers coach Tony Washington Jr. as assistant defensive line coach.

"Spring Showcase" Format Still Unclear

In an interview with The Columbus Dispatch in late February, Day expressed uncertainty about how Ohio State's "Spring Showcase" will look on April 12.

"To sit here and tell you I know exactly what the format is going to be, I don't know right now," Day said.

Day's comments on the Buckeyes' spring game format come after his team played 16 games in its 2024 season, leaving it with under two months until spring practices after the team's national championship game win over Notre Dame on Jan. 20.

The Nebraska and Texas programs have already canceled their spring-game events, citing concerns that other programs might try to poach their players with the portal opening back up after spring ball.

Although he isn't sure about the format of the spring event, Day still wants his players to have something to get a feel for the regular season.

"We want to do the best we can to put our guys in the stadium on that day and let them feel what it's like to play in a game," he said. "Because until we kick off against Texas in the first game, that will be the only other opportunity for those guys to feel what a game is like. We have a lot of younger guys that haven't played a lot of football. I don't want to lose that opportunity."

According to Day, the nature of the Buckeyes' spring event will be dependent upon their health early in spring ball.

"I think we have to see how the first couple weeks of spring practice go," Day said, "see how healthy we are, and go from there."

Tate Never Thought About Leaving OSU

A few days after Ohio State's title-game win over Notre Dame, a report from On3's Pete Nakos said that Ohio State was working hard to keep its core returning players on the roster for 2025 by entering negotiations with the school's top NIL collective, The



REFLECTIONS OF SPAIN ■ EVERY DISH, EVERY SIP, EVERY MOMENT.

Lunch ■ Dinner ■ Happy Hour

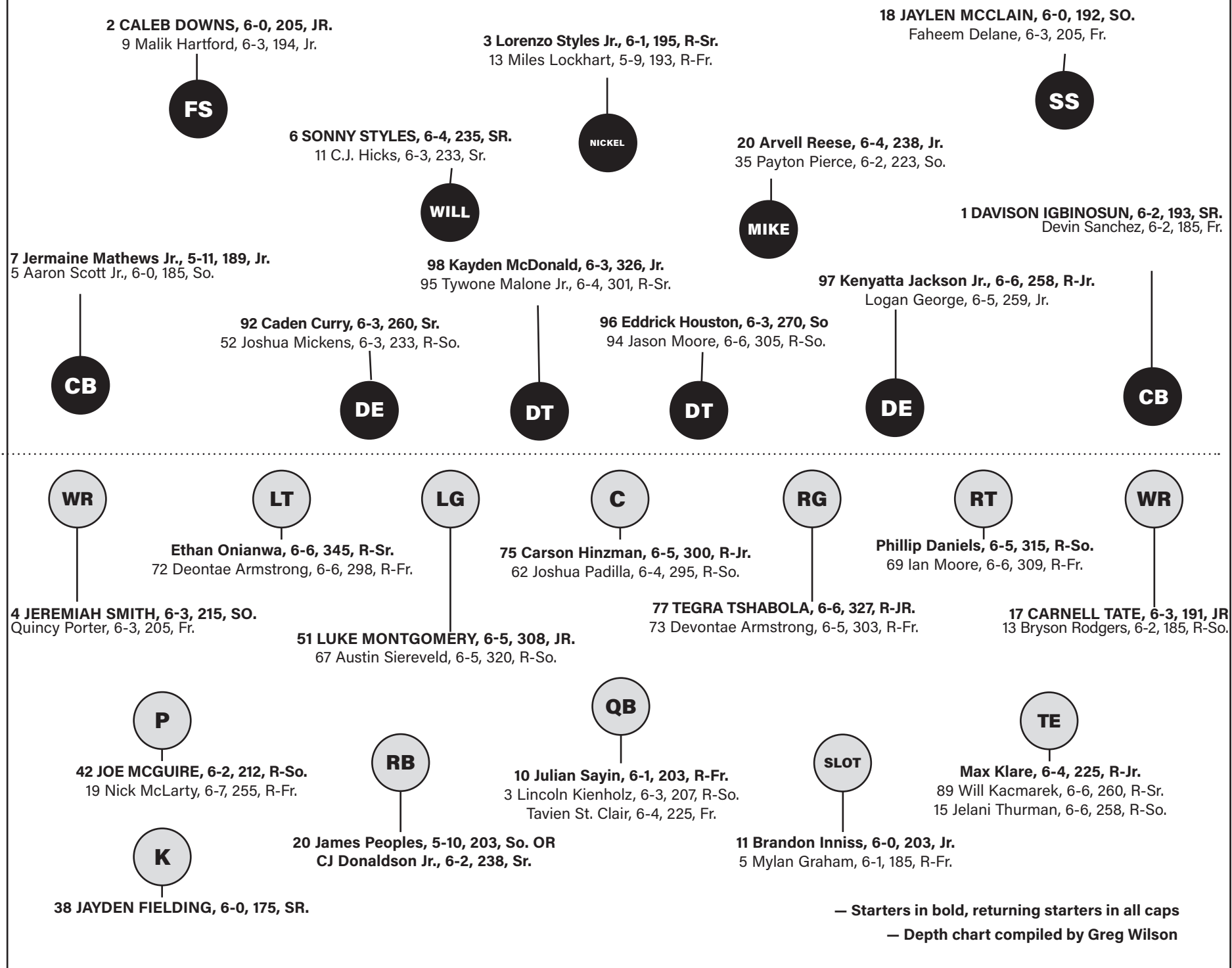
www.barcelonacolumbus.com ■ 614-443-3699

Historic German Village ■ 263 E Whittier St, Columbus





OHIO STATE PRE-SPRING DEPTH CHART



Foundation.

Among those players whom Ohio State was reportedly trying to retain was junior wide receiver Carnell Tate, who – after emerging as one of the Buckeyes’ top pass-catching targets last season with 52 catches for 733 yards and four touchdowns – was rumored to have been fielding offers of more than \$1 million from other schools.

Tate refuted those rumors in an interview with 10TV on Feb. 22, saying that he never thought about leaving Ohio State and is committed to the program for the long haul.

“The plan was never for me to leave,” Tate said at Lower.com Field after he served as the Columbus Crew’s match igniter for their season opener against the Chicago Fire. “I don’t know where that came from, where that started. I bleed Ohio State.”

Tate, a former four-star prospect out of Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, will likely begin the 2025 season as the No. 2 wide receiver on the depth chart for the Buckeyes behind sophomore sensation Jeremiah Smith, although many people who follow col-

lege football believe Tate would be a surefire No. 1 option on many other teams who do not have a receiver like Smith on their roster.

Williams-Dixon Withdraws From Portal

Redshirt freshman running back Sam Williams-Dixon is returning to Columbus for the 2025 season after withdrawing his name from the transfer portal on Feb. 12.

Williams-Dixon – a three-star running back out of Pickerington (Ohio) North – had previously put his name into the transfer portal on Jan. 6, four days before Ohio State’s Cotton Bowl matchup with Texas, but after spending over a month in the portal he decided to remain with the Buckeyes.

In his true freshman season, Williams-Dixon had 53 rushing yards on seven carries. With the Buckeyes’ two leading rushers from 2024, Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson, headed for the NFL draft, Williams-Dixon will have an opportunity for more playing time in 2025.

With Williams-Dixon returning, the Buck-

eyes will have ample depth at running back which also includes James Peoples, CJ Donaldson Jr. – a senior transfer from West Virginia – and freshman running backs Bo Jackson, Anthony Rogers and Isaiah West.

Future NFL Bucks Speak Highly Of Sayin

Former Ohio State cornerback Denzel Burke will not be with the Buckeyes in the 2025 season as he prepares for an NFL career, but during an interview session at the NFL Scouting Combine on Feb. 27, he gave some insight on the Buckeyes’ future at the quarterback position.

During his session, the always candid Burke said he has very high expectations for sophomore quarterback Julian Sayin after watching him perform at a high level in practice last season and is excited to see a potential quarterback competition play out between him and redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz.

“I think (Sayin) is that guy, to be honest with you,” Burke said. “And Lincoln is pretty

good too. I’m ready to see this little matchup they’re going to have. Julian is a great player and puts great zip on the ball, has great pocket presence and he’s going to have a great career. Just the way he’s throwing the ball, he’s himself and I could tell he’s all about ball.”

Sayin, the five-star who transferred to Ohio State from Alabama last winter following the retirement of Crimson Tide head coach Nick Saban, completed five passes in 12 attempts for 84 yards and a touchdown in four games played last season. But he apparently did enough to impress Burke, who said he knew Sayin would live up to his five-star rating after seeing him throw when he first arrived in Columbus.

Former Ohio State wide receiver Emeke Egbuka also had high praise for the second-year OSU quarterback during his NFL Combine interview session, telling the media that Sayin’s arm talent is unlike any he’s ever seen for someone his age.

“I saw the same thing (as Burke). Julian’s

Continued On Page 6

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

'that guy,' Egbuka said. "I've been around a lot of talented freshmen, Jeremiah included, and Julian definitely falls into that same category. His arm talent is something that I've never really personally experienced at such a young age, so I think he has a really bright future."

As Burke alluded to, Sayin will be battling for the starting job with Kienholz, who didn't complete a pass in 2024 but threw for 111 yards while completing 10 of 22 passes in 2023 as a true freshman, along with freshman Tavien St. Clair, who enters the program as the top-rated player out of Ohio and No. 3 quarterback in this year's recruiting class.

Playoff Opponents Impressed By Smith

After a record-breaking freshman season, Smith received loads of praise from some of his former opponents at the NFL combine.

Former Tennessee defensive tackle Omarr Norman-Lott didn't have to line up against the Miami Gardens, Fla., native himself but simply had to watch from the trenches as Smith went for six catches, 103 yards and two touchdowns to end Tennessee's season in the first round of the playoffs.

"He's not to be messed with," Norman-Lott said. "You're rendered powerless. You're doing anything you can to stop him, but it's a man vs. man game sometimes, and that day he was the better man."

In Ohio State's next game against Oregon in the Rose Bowl, Smith was somehow even better, hauling in seven catches for 187 yards and two touchdowns.

According to former Oregon cornerback

Jabbar Muhammad, Smith's combination of intelligence and athleticism makes him tough to contain.

"I think he's a pretty smart player as well," he said. "But all the physical attributes that he has, definitely catching the ball,"

Smith didn't have the same impact in Ohio State's 28-14 win over Texas in the Cotton Bowl and finished the game with only one catch for 3 yards, but his skill set and abilities were not lost on former Texas safety Andrew Mukuba, who credits the Longhorns' game plan for their ability to slow Smith down.

"We knew what kind of player he was. Obviously, he's a good player, and we knew what kind of a threat he was, a deep threat he was," Mukuba said. "I feel like our game plan, what our coach had put together, what we had put together that week – we executed our game plan by stopping him."

Meyer Predicts Smith To Win Heisman

The praise for Smith didn't stop at former opponents. It also continued with former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who said during a Feb. 26 episode of his "Triple Option Podcast" that he believes the sophomore can win the Heisman Trophy one year after helping his team win the national championship.

"Well, the best player in the country in maybe the last decade is Jeremiah Smith," Meyer said. "I'm going to say Jeremiah Smith's going to be the first receiver in a while to win the Heisman Trophy."

In order for Smith to become the first full-time wide receiver to win the Heisman Trophy since Alabama's DeVonta Smith in 2020, he will likely have to improve upon his production from his freshman season, when he caught an OSU freshman single-season record 76 catches for 1,315 receiving yards and 15 touchdowns.

According to Meyer, Smith's success in the 2025 campaign will partially depend upon not just the Buckeyes' quarterback play but also their ability to find a solid second option at the receiver position.

"I will say this, for everyone to understand. As important as a quarterback is, that is No. 1. But who's the Emeka on the other side? You can take away a good receiver. You

can't take away two," Meyer said. "When I had Louis Murphy and Percy Harvin (at Florida), when I had Terry McLaurin and Michael Thomas (at Ohio State), you can't take away two because you can't rotate the coverage. So, will Carnell Tate develop enough to take the heat off Jeremiah?"

Regardless of whether Tate or others can take the load off Smith, the Buckeye star wideout is one of the early betting favorites to take home the award. According to Draft Kings, Smith has the fifth-best odds to win at +1600, trailing only quarterbacks Arch Manning (Texas, +700), Garrett Nussmeier (LSU, +900), Drew Allar (Penn State, +1000), Cade Klubnik (Clemson, +1400) and Sayin (+1500).

Day Talks U-M Rivalry With Meyer

In a Feb. 19 interview with Meyer during an appearance on the former coach's podcast, Day discussed many different things, including the loss to Michigan on Nov. 30.

At least in the immediate aftermath of Ohio State's 13-10 loss, the postseason wasn't on Day's mind.

"When you don't win that game, you don't just wake up the next day and move on," Day said. "Literally, there's like a mourning phase and a grieving phase you have to go through. It's just the way it is. There's a lot that comes with that. You have to take a step back and let the emotion clear."

That loss moved Day to 1-4 against the Wolverines in his career as head coach. The Buckeyes' latest loss to their archrival was certainly the most shocking of the Day era, as the eventual national champions were nearly 20-point favorites leading up to the game.

Day, who in an interview with 10TV on Nov. 25 described his previous three losses to Michigan as one of the worst things to happen to his family, eventually helped the Buckeyes move forward from the loss in a meeting with his players.

"We got everybody together because at that point, there's narratives being thrown out everywhere," Day said. "There's all types of things going on, talking about players, talking about coaches. What's going to happen? Are guys going to get fired? Who made mistakes in this area? Who's to blame? The first thing you had to do is bring everybody to-

gether to make sure you set the narrative for what it is – the truth. The truth is there were certain things that were done in that game that caused us to lose the game.

"We brought everybody together and identified what those things were. Guys have to take accountability. There were guys challenging each other. There was conflict. There were groups going at each other. But at the end of the meeting, it was guys walking arm-in-arm outside the room because we talked about 'Here are the things we're going to do to get these things fixed.' As players, they want to see their leader be like 'OK, what are the answers? What did we do wrong? What are we going to do to get this fixed?' It was a bunch of dudes who stood up and said, 'Do you still believe that we can win a national championship? Because if you don't, get out of this room because we all believe.'"

Day Reflects On Title-Game Run

Day's message to the Buckeyes clearly worked, as they outscored their first two playoff opponents 83-38. It wasn't until the end of Ohio State's semifinal matchup against Texas – when defensive end Jack Sawyer stripped Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers and returned the ball for an 83-yard touchdown to put Ohio State up 28-14 with 2:13 to go – that Day had a strong inkling his team would win the national championship.

"The ball bounced right up to him," Day said on Meyer's podcast. "That ball hadn't bounced that way in previous games in those moments for us. When it bounced right up into him and he started running, it wasn't then – it was when I looked back to make sure there were no flags on the ground. I said, 'You know what? I think we're going to win the national championship.' That ball just hadn't bounced for us in the Georgia game (in 2022), or in the Clemson game (in 2019)."

The Buckeyes still had a strong test ahead of them in the form of Notre Dame in the national championship game. The Buckeyes got out to a 31-7 lead over the Fighting Irish in the second half, and Day again felt like the national championship was on the horizon. However a fumble from Egbuka in the fourth quarter momentarily put the celebration on hold.

"In the national championship, there was a moment where we were up 31-7. I was doing the math on this, like, 'We've got this game. We just have to eat up clock. We have to run the ball. There's no way they can win the game,'" Day said. "Well, we call a reverse to Emeka (in the fourth quarter), and – Emeka is one of my favorite players of all time – and I said, 'No matter what, you come back with that ball and hand the ball to the official.' Somehow, the ball got punched out, and I said to myself, 'Oh, my gosh. Now this thing is in the balance. Now, it's panic mode.'"

The thrill of the championship victory finally kicked in for Day when the Fighting Irish let the clock run on the second-to-last play of the game.

"But we call the shot to Jeremiah and he catches it. But it wasn't then. It wasn't even after we kicked the field goal. It was when (Notre Dame) ran that first-down play and the clock kept running and I finally took off my headset and said, 'Get off of me!' and threw it away."

BSB Print Returns To Traditional Biweekly Schedule

After a quirky three-week gap, Buckeye Sports Bulletin returns to its traditional winter/spring biweekly schedule. The next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the March 22 issue, is scheduled to be mailed March 18. With spring football on the way, there is bound to be plenty of football news, and the men's and women's basketball teams, along with the wrestling team plus the men's and women's hockey squads, will be in the middle of postseason action.

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.

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

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

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye

Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays.

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

If you are not already taking advantage of BuckeyeSports.com, simply email your name, address and preferred email address to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com, and we will send back easy instructions on how to access the site. Don't forget, subscriptions@buckeyesports.com is our email address, not the website. We will send you directions on how to access the site.

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.

BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

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

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

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

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

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

Those who add \$100 to their subscriptions will have their names and cities listed in all 24 issues each year as BSB Scarlet patrons. Those who donate \$125 will be designated as Elite patrons in each issue.

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

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

The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite-Plus, Elite, Scarlet and Brutus VIP subscribers.

Woody Level Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman): Roosters Foundation.

Elite Wachsman Donors (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman): Beth Wachsman, Columbus; B2, Reston, Va.; Jim Walton, Naples, Fla.; Don Kersey, Springboro, Ohio;

Elite-Plus Donors: Roger Albrecht, Columbus; Fredrick Bradshaw, Columbus; Brian Bucher, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.; Thomas E. Farish, Port St. Lucie, Fla.; Terry T. Farmer, Lancaster, Ohio; Sander Flaum, New York; Mike Heimann, Ashland, Ohio; Freddie and Joe Huber, Walpole, Mass.; Gregory Jones, Cal-

abasas, Calif.; Noreen Kenney-Campbell, Mount Pleasant, S.C.; Kris Kersey, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Fred Krisch, Cleveland; Larry Larson, Ladera Ranch, Calif.; Dan LaVille, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Jerry Lawhun, Rio Verde, Ariz.; Alan Lord, Reynoldsburg, Ohio; W. Lee Mackewiz O.D., Bear, Del.; Allen McMillin Jr., Logan, Ohio; Jeff Montgomery, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.; In memory of Hugh and Dixie Rea, Washington Court House, Ohio; In memory of Lisa Rea, Greenfield, Ohio; Bob Redfield, Dublin, Ohio; Jim Reichler, Toledo; The Russell Group United, Columbus; Jim Shindler, Sylvania, Ohio; John Thomas, Kentfield, Calif.; Dominic Verrilli III, Columbus, Ohio; Bob Weber, Mishawaka, Ind.; Richard Yoss, Woodsfield, Ohio.

Elite Donors: Robert Ankerman, Holland, Mich.; Marshall Beck, Sarasota, Fla.; Phillip Blue, Prior Lake, Minn.; In memory of Norwin Brovitz, Oakmont, Pa.; David Cobb, Tipp City, Ohio; Iris Cremean, Walbridge, Ohio; Bob Doyle, Beavercreek, Ohio; Richard Dunkelberger, Groveport, Ohio; Fred Fingerhut, Phoenix; Chalk Fry DDS, Sarasota, Fla.; Raminder Gill, Colusa, Calif.; Laura Granich, Columbus; Paul E. Hackett, The Villages, Fla.; James Hamilton, Murrysville, Pa.; Joe Helmer, Westerville, Ohio; Curtis High, Beavercreek, Ohio; Carl R. Jeffery DDS, Van Wert, Ohio; Frank Klaus, Pepper Pike, Ohio; John Krepop, The Villages, Fla.; Paul Lappert, Columbus; Tom Leggett, Dublin, Ohio; Brian Livingston, Louisville, Ky.; Dr. Jonathan Lucas, Portsmouth, Ohio; Robert Maddux, Cincinnati; George Massad, Bowling Green, Ohio; Mike from Marietta, Ga.; Col. George R. Nelson, New Albany, Ohio; Theodore Pegram, Eden Prairie, Minn.; Greg Place, Greenville, Ohio; Robert Risher, Celina, Ohio; James Robinson Jr., Council Bluffs, Iowa; Charlie Shaffer, Edison, Ohio; Bill Short, Sparta, Ohio; Mark Skinner, Columbus; Kyle Smith, Marietta, Ga.; Dr. Earl Strimple, Washington, D.C.; James Thomas, The Villages, Fla.; Chuck Underwood, Miamisburg, Ohio; Dan van Blaricom, Dublin, Ohio; Elliott S. Wettstein, Waverly, Ohio; J.D. Wientjes, Moberg, S.D.; Kenny Wright, Westerville, Ohio; David J. Young, Supply, N.C.; Edwin Zechman Jr., Sarasota, Fla.; Anonymous, Columbus; Anonymous, Council Bluffs, Iowa; Anonymous, Lancaster, Ohio; Anonymous, Lewisburg, W.Va.

Scarlet VIPs: William Adams, Willoughby, Ohio; Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Donald Collins, Kenton, Ohio; Joseph A. Cusma Sr., Massillon, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Julie Ellis, Apple Valley, Calif.; Mike Freeburn, Columbus; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Fred Grace, Utica, Ohio; Dave Hamilton, Canton, Ohio; Richard G. Hannan Jr., Chillicothe, Ohio; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, Ohio; Dave Palmer, Washington, Mich.; Theodore Pegram, Eden Prairie, Minn.; In memory of Ike Reynolds, Columbus; Lawrence Romanoff, Powell, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; Dr. William Thomas, Gallipolis, Ohio; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Gaffney, S.C.; Anonymous, Girard, Ohio; Anonymous, Norwalk, Ohio.

Day Not Happy With Current CFP Format

Despite Ohio State's historic national championship win, Day thinks the College Football Playoff format could use some work.

The Buckeye coach said that he believes college football's decision-makers should re-examine whether the conference champions should receive byes.

"I think that if you win your conference, sure, you should get in," Day said. "But you get a bye? I think that's a little much."

Under the current 12-team format, the five highest-ranked conference champions get into the field, with the four-highest ranked conference champions receiving automatic first-round byes. Last year, each of the four conference champions who received first-round byes lost in the second round, including Boise State and Arizona State, which were only ranked No. 9 and No. 12, respectively, in the final CFP rankings but earned No. 3 and No. 4 seeds in the bracket.

The entire final four was composed of teams who played in the first round and knocked off teams who earned byes, includ-

ing No. 5 Texas, No. 6 Penn State, No. 7 Notre Dame and the eighth-ranked Buckeyes.

To Day's delight, a new CFP format appears to be on the horizon as early as the 2026. Yahoo Sports' Ross Dellenger reported on Feb. 16 that the SEC and Big Ten are weighing expansion to 14 or 16 teams in the bracket. It looks unlikely that the format will change in 2025 because the conferences have a contract for the season, meaning each league would have to come to an agreement on any seeding change.

According to a report from ESPN's Heather Dinich on Feb. 24, leaders of the group of five conferences will not be eager to allow any changes to seeding.

"I don't see a willingness to do that," a source told Dinich. "I don't see the incentive for the (group of five) schools to agree to do away with the current seeding – just a self-interest thing – unless there's something else that's being committed to them for next year."

Ransom Told Bailey To Go After Klare

During an interview at the NFL Scouting

Combine, former Ohio State safety Lathan Ransom revealed he gave his coaches a tip on new Buckeye tight end Max Klare. Months before he entered the transfer portal, Klare went up against the Buckeyes as a member of Purdue. Klare caught only two passes for 13 yards in his team's 45-0 loss to Ohio State on Nov. 9, but he did enough to catch the attention of Ransom, who alerted Bailey about Klare's talent.

"It's funny. I actually went to (Bailey) after we played Purdue and was like, 'Man, if he enters the portal, he's a guy we should get,'" Ransom said. "He's one of the best tight ends that stood out on tape immediately every time we studied for them and prepared for them, so I'm excited how we're going to use him next year."

Bailey, who has since been promoted to co-offensive coordinator, took Ransom's advice and received a commitment from Klare out of the transfer portal on Dec. 23.

Klare, who transferred out of Purdue after head coach Ryan Walters was fired from the program, is an easy candidate to start for the Buckeyes next year after recording 51

catches for 685 yards in 2024 while earning third-team All Big-Ten honors.

One thing is for sure. Klare has the full belief and support of Ransom.

"I feel that Purdue tight end, Max Klare, is going to be a baller and is probably one of the best tight ends that we played," Ransom said. "And I think he's going to be the best tight end coming into the college football season next year."

McCord Happy For Former Teammates

Former Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord said during his media session at the NFL Scouting Combine on Feb. 28 that he was happy to see the Buckeyes win the national championship a year after he transferred to Syracuse, a move that he believes worked out for both parties.

"It was awesome," McCord said when asked about the Buckeyes' title-game win. "Obviously, those are my guys, so seeing them accomplish that goal was sweet, know-

Continued On Page 8

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 7

ing how (hard) they worked for it. I had a great year and they had a great year, so it was just cool to see everybody win, to be honest.”

McCord set an ACC passing yards record in his one season with the Orange, throwing for 4,779 yards and 34 touchdowns to elevate his NFL draft stock. He is now projected to go in the middle rounds of the draft in April.

McCord, who finished 10th in Heisman Trophy voting this season, preferred not to get into the details of his transfer from Ohio State at the combine but did say that he still has a lot of respect for Day.

“Obviously it wasn’t an easy conversation, and he’s someone that I respect a ton. So I’m going to keep the details of that private,” McCord said. “But like I said, it was cool seeing him win. Then his son, RJ Day, reached out to me and congratulated me on a great season as well. I know people try to make it seem like we hate each other or whatever, but that’s not the case at all. I know I was rooting for him all season long, and I know he was rooting for me as well.”

He said it wasn’t an easy decision to leave Ohio State, but it’s one he’s ultimately glad he made.

“When you pour three years of blood, sweat and tears into a program and you create a lot of great relationships there with the players, the coaching staff and the support staff, it wasn’t an easy decision to leave,” he said. “But I think it worked out for me, it worked out for them, so I think all-around it was the right thing to do.”

Pepper Spray Justified In OSU-UM Brawl

Two separate investigations by Ohio agencies concluded that police were justified in their deployment of pepper spray and other de-escalation methods during the on-field brawl between Ohio State and Michigan after The Game. The fight resulted in one officer being hospitalized and one fan being placed in handcuffs.

The review by the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office determined that it was unclear

which agency first deployed the pepper spray. One version of events said it was an officer from the University of Michigan Police Department based on “imminent/immediate officer safety” concerns, while another said a Franklin County deputy used it almost simultaneously.

Douglas Cunningham, a detective for The Ohio State University Police Division, said he used a short burst of pepper spray because initial attempts to suppress the “aggressive, combative and growing crowd” were unsuccessful. Three department officials, including the school’s chief of police, agreed that those actions were reasonable.

“Several people were on the ground, police officers were being pushed and shoved by large, highly trained and skilled Division-I football athletes in full football game attire,” Cunningham wrote in his department’s report. “The players had the advantage in both size, strength, conditioning, protective gear and they outnumbered the police presence trying to suppress the growing threat.”

Most of the actions by the sheriff’s office were deemed appropriate, including a threat to use a Taser by Lt. Shawn Pak and a strike and burst of pepper spray by Deputy Thomas Bellamy after he saw a Michigan player standing over an Ohio State police officer. Pak wrote that he threatened to use the Taser because a player – who body-cam footage shows was a 300-plus pound lineman – tried to charge past him, while Bellamy said that he struck a player’s neck area in an effort to force him off the pile and bring the cop to safety.

The review also revealed that one person was arrested during the brawl, that being 45-year-old Abraham Clark from Florida, who told police that he ran on the field “to prevent Michigan from planting their flag.” Clark was charged with criminal trespassing and is set for trial on March 11.

No Ohio State or Michigan player was charged or disciplined, although the Big Ten fined both schools \$100,000 for their roles in the incident.

Kellogg Honored With Curt Gowdy Media Award

Former Ohio State basketball star forward Clark Kellogg was honored on Feb. 14 for his distinguished media career when The Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame named him one of four recipients of the 2025 Curt Gowdy Media Award.

The award is presented annually to members of the print, electronic and transformative media whose efforts have made a significant contribution to the sport. Also receiving the award this year are Detroit Pistons play-by-play announcer George Blaha, veteran women’s basketball writer Michelle Smith and former NBA insider and current

St. Bonaventure general manager Adrian Wojnarowski.

Kellogg earns the award in the midst of his 31st season covering men’s college basketball for CBS, where he has served as both an in-game color commentator and studio analyst during both the regular season and NCAA Tournament. He has been CBS’ lead college basketball analyst since 2008, calling the Final Four and national championship games alongside Hall of Fame play-by-play broadcaster Jim Nantz each year until he returned to the studio in 2014.

Kellogg, 63, also had broadcasting stints with the Big East Network, Cleveland State University, ESPN and the NBA’s Indiana Pacers, beginning his career with the Pacers as a radio analyst shortly after ending his basketball career in the late 1980s.

Kellogg, a Cleveland native, played at Ohio State from 1979-82, averaging 14.9 points, 10.1 rebounds and 1.9 assists per game during his career while earning All-Big Ten honors in 1981-82. He was then selected with the eighth overall pick in the 1982 NBA draft by the Pacers, where he played five seasons (1982-87) and logged 18.9 points and 9.5 rebounds per game before retiring due to injury.

Kellogg will be recognized for the award during the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame Enshrinement Weekend on Sept. 5-6.

Brewster Hired As U-W’s Assistant OL Coach

Former Ohio State center Mike Brewster was hired by Washington to serve as its assistant offensive line coach, as first reported by ESPN’s Pete Thamel on Feb. 13.

Brewster, 35, earned the new role after spending one season as the offensive line coach at Valparaiso. He has been in the collegiate coaching ranks for the past seven seasons with five different programs, including a two-year stint working under former Ohio State nose guard Luke Fickell at Cincinnati from 2020-21 and a one-year stop as running backs coach for former Ohio State running back Eddie George and Tennessee State in 2022.

Brewster will now look to impart his offensive line expertise on the staff of Washington head coach Jedd Fisch, whom he played under while Fisch was Brewster’s offensive coordinator with the Jacksonville Jaguars in 2013.

Brewster spent just two seasons with the Jaguars after being signed as an undrafted free agent in 2012 and had brief stints with the Miami Dolphins and New Orleans Saints in 2014 following a highly successful four-year career with Ohio State from 2008-11 in which he was a four-year starter and Football Writers Association of America first-team All-American in 2010. He was a team captain for the Buckeyes in 2011 when they went 6-7 under the interim head coach Fickell.

Brewster will have the opportunity to coach against his former squad when Ohio State travels to Washington on Sept. 27 for the two teams’ Big Ten opener.

Former Buckeyes DT Munger Dies At Age 30

Donovan Munger, a defensive tackle at Ohio State from 2013-15, died at the age of 30, his mother announced in a Feb. 20 Instagram post. The cause of his death had not been revealed as BSB went to press.

“My heart will never beat the same. It is

with my deepest sadness that I formally announce to the world the passing of my eldest child Donovan Munger. Pray for my family,” she wrote in the post.

Munger, a former four-star recruit out of Shaker Heights, Ohio, was with the Buckeyes for three seasons, recording five total tackles and a tackle for loss. Each of his tackles occurred during Ohio State’s national championship-winning 2014 season.

Munger’s OSU career was marred by health-related issues. He redshirted his freshman year in 2013 after being diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism in his lungs, a condition that later forced him to retire from football in 2016.

Christman Died Of Natural Causes

Former Ohio State offensive lineman Ben Christman, who was found dead on Feb. 11 at his off-campus apartment at UNLV, passed away in his sleep due to natural causes, according to his obituary on Akron’s Hummel Funeral Home website.

The obituary did not provide specifics on what the natural causes were, but a Feb. 25 report from the Akron Beacon Journal said Christman complained of chest pains after a practice the day before his death and had an EKG during a meeting with UNLV’s team cardiologist. The doctor said he looked normal, according to a member of the team interviewed by police, but the next day two teammates found him lying motionless in his bed.

Christman, an Akron native, played two seasons with Ohio State from 2021-22 before transferring to Kentucky in 2023 and then to UNLV this offseason. He had two years of collegiate eligibility remaining.

The Clark County Coroner’s office is still conducting Christman’s autopsy, which they said “will likely take months to complete.”

Lee Accepts Plea Deal To Dismiss Charges

Former Ohio State linebacker Darron Lee accepted a plea offer on Feb. 24 to dismiss a domestic violence charge and amend a charge of attempted assault, making it a misdemeanor in the second degree, according to court records.

The former Buckeye was ordered to serve two years of probation and pay a \$500 fine by Judge James Green after accepting the plea deal for attempted assault.

Lee also was found guilty of possession of a controlled substance and will serve one day in jail. He was issued one year of probation and entered a drug court program.

All of these charges come after Lee was charged with assault and domestic violence on April 4, 2023, after a female relative accused him of punching her in the head several times the night before. While investigating that incident, police were made aware of another alleged incident on Oct. 17, 2022, where Lee allegedly assaulted a different woman.

Lee, who played with Ohio State from 2013-15 and was a second-team All-American in 2015, spent five years in the NFL and won a Super Bowl with the Kansas City Chiefs in 2019.

www.theredbricktapandgrill.com

292 E. Gates St.
Columbus (614) 444-2742

HAPPY HOUR 3-8pm Mon-Fri
Half off all 30 drafts • Half off select appetizers
Craft bottle specials all day

100 Craft Beers!

New Food & Cocktail Menu

Newly Renovated Patio with Fire Pit

Handmade Pizzas & In-House Smoked Meats





OSU Careers Boost Prospects For NFL Draftees

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State has a deserved reputation for developing players for the NFL whether they were there three, two or – as is the case of three potential draftees this spring – one season in Columbus.

Quarterback Will Howard (Kansas State), center Seth McLaughlin (Alabama) and running back Quinshon Judkins (Ole Miss) transferred for the opportunity to not only improve individually but be a part of a potential championship team.

The latter goal became a reality on Jan. 20 when the Buckeyes defeated Notre Dame 34-23 in the College Football Playoff title game.

As for the first, how much a season at Ohio State raised their stock will be answered during the NFL draft April 24-26 in Green Bay, Wis.

For Howard and his fellow Buckeyes, their introductions to the world of pro football came at the NFL Combine in Indianapolis from Feb. 27 to March 2.

“I feel a ton more prepared, for sure. Without a doubt,” Howard said of electing to return for a fifth season rather than enter the 2024 draft after four seasons at Kansas State. “This year at Ohio State, I wanted it to be a step up.”

Ohio State led all schools with 15 players among the 329 invitees. Georgia and Texas were tied for the second-most invites with 14 apiece.

OSU had the third-most attendees all-time behind Michigan’s 18 last year and LSU’s 16 in 2020.

The other 12 Buckeyes were running back TreVeyon Henderson; wide receiver Emeka Egbuka; offensive linemen Donovan Jackson and Josh Simmons; defensive linemen Ty Hamilton, Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau and Tyleik Williams; line-backer Cody Simon; and defensive backs Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and Lathan Ransom.

Indy wasn’t the end-all and be-all because Ohio State will hold its pro day on March 26. Ransom, for example, did drills at the combine but will wait until the pro day for testing such as vertical jump, 40-yard dash and 20-yard shuffle.

On A Mission

In his time at K-State, Howard completed 58.8 percent of his passes for 5,786 yards and 48 touchdowns and 25 interceptions. For the Buckeyes, he set a season program record by completing 73.0 percent of his passes and throwing for 4,010 yards and 35 touchdowns against 10 picks.

But it was his play in the four playoff games that drew attention, completing 75.2 percent for 1,150 yards with eight TDs and two interceptions.

“I think that was huge for me,” Howard said. “A lot of people were telling me different things about where my draft stock was after the year, and I wasn’t really sure going into the playoffs. But they said, ‘Hey, you could really help yourself out if you have a strong showing in the playoffs.’”

“I think I proved to people that I am best when the pressure’s on, and when the playoffs came along, I think that was one of the best things. I was able to really just let it rip, and I was just being confident.

“I was throwing the deep ball well. I was being accurate. I mean, being able to go 13 for 13 to start the national championship was one of the better starts I’ve had to a game. But I feel like I just developed in every aspect of my game, and it was just a blessing to come to Ohio State. It was the best decision I ever made.”

Howard had an unsteady performance at the combine, making some crisp passes but missing others.

Chris Trapasso of CBSSports.com was unimpressed: “Howard was one of the biggest quarter-

backs among this year’s group – unquestionably a positive. While he deserves respect for testing, Howard had the lowest vertical and broad of the tiny collection of quarterbacks. Beyond that, he was noticeably inaccurate at all levels of the field during the throwing session, missing high and behind his targets. It was ugly.”

Howard admitted he could have done better.

“I felt decent,” he said. “I’m my own biggest critic, so I feel like there were some things I could clean up. But overall, I think I showed that I can spin the ball with the best. And I felt good about it. And I think my footwork was pretty solid. I’m excited for my pro day to show that I can spin it a little more.”

On Q

Judkins made the most of his one season with the Buckeyes by doing less. He was a workhorse at Ole Miss with 545 carries for 2,725 yards with 31 TDs. Splitting time in the Buckeye backfield with Henderson, he ran 194 times for 1,060 yards and 14 scores and caught 22 passes for 161 yards and two touchdowns in helping OSU to the title.

“I think with the outcome like that, it’s a perfect situation,” Judkins said. “Obviously, you don’t think about that as a player, the particular workload. That’s things that you can’t control, but it worked out in both of our favors.”

Henderson last season gained 1,016 yards and 10 TDs on 144 carries along with 27 receptions for 284 yards and a score. He said he wants to show scouts he can do more than just run and catch.

“An area of the game I’m looking to highlight is my pass protection,” he said. “I feel like that shows what type of player you are whether that’s selfish – you only care about when the ball is in your hands – or unselfish. How much do you care when the ball is not in your hands?”

Trapasso gave B-plus ratings to both backs.

He was concerned about Henderson’s weight. He was measured at the combine at 5-10, 202 pounds, six pounds less than his listing at OSU.

“TreVeyon Henderson barely cleared 200 pounds. It would have been nicer if there was a bit more sand in the pants, but it also should not have come as a revelation to many,” Trapasso said. “Henderson showed well as a pass catcher and was smooth through the on-field portion of the day.”

His take on Judkins (6-0, 221): “Quinshon Judkins weighed in nearly 20 pounds heavier than Buckeye teammate TreVeyon Henderson. He displayed good speed and, more impressively, an impressive 10-yard split (1.51 seconds). Judkins has quick feet and caught the ball well during drills.”

Center Of Attention

McLaughlin is an intriguing prospect. After transferring following four seasons at Alabama, he anchored the Buckeye line until suffering a season-ending Achilles tear before the Indiana game and missing the final two regular-season games and the playoff run.

Despite that, he won the Rimington Trophy (best center in the country). He told the media at the combine that his recovery from surgery is on schedule.

“It’s going good, going good,” he said. “Getting a bunch of great reports from my surgeon and my PT (physical therapist), and the timeline is I’ll be back for training camp. So that’s good news to hear.”

He had a tough final season at Alabama and was criticized for his poor snaps vs. Michigan in the 2023 CFP semifinal, so his decision to join the Buckeyes was a game-changer.

“To have people recognize that I played really

Buckeyes At The 2025 NFL Combine

Name	POS	HT	WT	Arm (In.)	Hand (In.)
Denzel Burke	CB	5-11	186	31 3/8	8 3/4
Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	202	31 1/2	9 5/8
Ty Hamilton	DT	6-3	299	32 1/4	10 1/8
Jordan Hancock	CB	6-0	195	30 3/4	8 5/8
TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	202	30 3/4	9 1/2
Will Howard	QB	6-4	236	32	9
Donovan Jackson	OG	6-4	315	33 1/2	9 7/8
Quinshon Judkins	RB	6-0	221	30 1/4	9 1/4
Seth McLaughlin	C	6-4	304	31	9 1/2
Lathan Ransom	S	6-0	206	30 1/2	8 1/2
Jack Sawyer	EDGE	6-4	260	31 3/4	9 3/4
Josh Simmons	OT	6-5	317	33	10
Cody Simon	LB	6-2	229	31 1/4	9 3/4
JT Tuimoloau	EDGE	6-4	265	33 3/4	10 1/2
Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	334	32	10 1/4

well and had a bounce-back year is tremendous. And that’s something nobody can take away from me,” he said. “And it’s a huge testament to the people that poured into me this year at Ohio State. (Then offensive line coach) Justin Frye did an incredible job. Coach (Ryan) Day, for just having the respect of my game to bring me in and not listen to everything that goes on on Twitter. And to have that amount of confidence in me, it really helped me play at a high level.”

On The Line

Injuries were also a topic of two other offensive linemen.

Simmons was a projected first-round pick until he sustained a torn patellar tendon in the sixth game against Oregon to end his OSU career. He left school soon after to concentrate solely on being as ready as possible by draft day.

“I knew I wanted to go play in the NFL, so I needed to get on this ASAP,” Simmons said. “If it was like an ankle injury, ankle sprain, obviously, I definitely would have been on the sideline (with Ohio State).”

His goal is to have his own pro day for scouts shortly before the draft.

“I’ll probably be cut loose mid-April to give everybody a good pro day,” Simmons said.

His injury has not kept him from being a potential first-rounder.

Jackson won praise during the season for replacing Simmons after a move from left guard, and his versatility did not go unnoticed. All Access Football has Jackson as the No. 3 offensive guard and a first-round pick.

“Most teams say, ‘We want you inside.’ I’ve played that position for the majority of my career,” he said. “A lot of teams, I would say, had a good impression of me playing different positions.”

Quick Turnaround

Sawyer and the rest of his combine mates experienced something that no past draftees have had to go through. With the expanded playoff format, the Jan. 20 championship was the latest in college football history, leaving little time to prepare for the combine.

“We had a late season, thankfully, that ended late and were able to win a national championship,” he said. “We didn’t have a whole lot of time training. I flew straight out to California the next week after the game to start training.

“So it’s really just taking care of your body and eating the right stuff. And I think we’ve done a really good job of that, all the guys too. So we all feel pretty good.”

Shuffled Lineups Help Lead To Inconsistency

Continued From Page 1

anticipated being in just a few weeks back.

"I came here to win," fifth-year wing and San Diego State transfer Micah Parrish said after the Northwestern loss. "I came here to go to the tournament. We need to win to get into the tournament, so that's what we have to do. We need to find a way."

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

While Ohio State's recent slide may be a shock to the system for those inside the program, those who have followed the team all year know the last month of play serves as a microcosm of this roller-coaster season.

The Buckeyes have shown at times that they are worthy of being an NCAA Tournament team by going out and defeating some of the nation's best. Ohio State has four AP top-20 wins on its résumé, including the aforementioned conference wins over Purdue and Maryland as well as statement neutral-site victories over then-No. 19 Texas in its season opener in Las Vegas on Nov. 4 and then-No. 4 Kentucky at Madison Square Garden on Dec. 21.

But as impressive as those wins are this season, perhaps equally disappointing are some of their more notable losses. Ohio State has dropped five games in which it was leading by six or more points in the second half, two of those losses being missed opportunities against ranked teams – a 73-71 home de-

feat to then-No. 15 Oregon on Jan. 9 in which it led by eight with 6:17 left and an 87-79 loss at then-No. 18 Illinois on Feb. 2 in which it led by 11 with 15:53 remaining.

The Buckeyes have also been on the losing side of five games that have been decided on the final possession, including two in overtime, and three games in which they fell by more than 20 points and shot worse than 38.0 percent from the field. The latter includes the recent 70-49 loss to a 13-13 Northwestern team in which the Buckeyes shot a season-low 32.7 percent from the field.

"This is not an acceptable way to play this game," Diebler said after the loss to the Wildcats. "The way we were letting our offense affect our defense almost felt almost like a new, young team, which we haven't been. You'd expect something like that to happen at the beginning of the season. That can't happen again, clearly."

But why do the Buckeyes look like world beaters and NCAA Tournament contenders on one night and then an entirely new team on another?

As Diebler and others have alluded to throughout the year, the Jekyll and Hyde season could boil down to the roster discontinuity Ohio State has been forced to deal with all throughout the campaign. Ohio State opened the season with an exciting new-look starting five that featured returning All-Big Ten guard Bruce Thornton and new transfer additions Aaron Bradshaw (Kentucky), Meechie John-

son Jr. (South Carolina), Micah Parrish (San Diego State) and Sean Stewart (Duke). But that once-formidable group is no longer due to either injury or forced/voluntary absence.

It started with the former five-star forward Bradshaw, who, after starting the first four games of the year and averaging 7.8 points and 4.8 rebounds, was forced to leave the team in late November due to a university investigation into an alleged off-campus incident that occurred at his home. The incident still has yet to be revealed, and Bradshaw has not returned to the starting lineup since re-joining the team in late December.

Bradshaw made his return to the floor on Dec. 21 against his former team – scoring 11 points on 5-of-6 shooting in the upset win – but at that point, the Buckeyes were still not whole due to another starter's absence. This time it was Johnson, who left the team following the Auburn loss due to personal reasons after starting the first 10 games and logging the second-most minutes on the team behind Thornton in that span (28.9).

Johnson, a former Buckeye recruit who returned to Ohio State after two successful seasons at South Carolina with the preseason goal of becoming an All-American, has not returned to the team and likely won't for the rest of the year, leaving a gaping hole in the Buckeye backcourt.

Bradshaw and Johnson are not the only players who have missed significant time this season, though. Stewart missed a large por-

tion of training camp due to injury and has dealt with minor ailments throughout the season. Sixth-year transfer guard Ques Glover sat out eight games early in the season due to a foot injury, while true freshman guard Colin White missed six games in November and December due to an ankle ailment, that was re-injured in late January, stunting his development.

Even more recently, a team-wide flu bug forced Bradshaw to miss another two games and limited freshman guard John Mobley Jr. – who is now a starter, replacing Johnson – to 23 minutes in the Buckeyes' 69-61 loss at UCLA on Feb. 23.

Although player attrition is nothing new in college basketball, the coming and going of Buckeyes this season – many of whom are in their first years with the program – has played a large role in the team's inconsistent play, forcing Diebler and his staff to mix and match with several different lineups throughout the year.

Diebler has said throughout the season that he does not want to make that into an excuse, but he did admit that the lack of roster continuity has negatively affected the team's on-court chemistry.

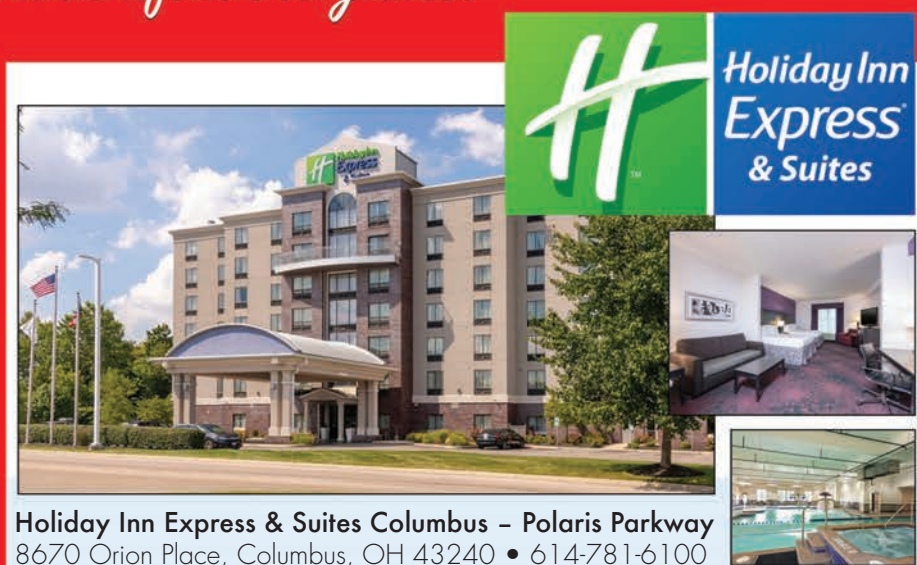
"It was easy to build the chemistry (off the court)," Diebler said on Jan. 28. "We have a great group of guys who enjoy being around each other. The on-court, in between the lines chemistry, that's been a little slower. That was impacted by injury, our lack of experience,

Spoil yourself before and after the game!



Fairfield
BY MARRIOTT

Fairfield Inn & Suites Columbus / Dublin
7150 Sawmill Rd, Columbus, OH 43235 • 614-389-3036



Holiday Inn Express & Suites

Holiday Inn Express & Suites Columbus - Polaris Parkway
8670 Orion Place, Columbus, OH 43240 • 614-781-6100



TOWNEPLACE SUITES
BY MARRIOTT

TownePlace Suites Columbus / Hilliard
4079 Lyman Dr, Hilliard OH 43026 • 614-541-9309



BW Best Western

Best Western Hilliard Inn & Suites
3831 Park Mill Run Dr, Hilliard, OH 43026 • 614-529-8118

choppiness of lineups.

"We've had almost like three or four different teams this season," he added on Feb. 3. "And I think our guys deserve a ton of credit. Because our staff has handled it well. We've adjusted on the fly. It's not exclusive to us. I know other teams go through this. But that can really test you."

Frontcourt Transfers Center Of Attention

Ohio State's lack of lineup stability is not the only factor that has put it on the brink of once again missing the NCAA Tournament.

The Buckeyes have also received minimal production out of their frontcourt, a position group that was once viewed as a potential strength of the team if all the pieces came together.

Heading into the year, the arrivals of Bradshaw and Stewart – who were both McDonald's All-Americans and five-star prospects coming out of high school – were highly anticipated. Many people around the sport – including the two players themselves – believed that they could blossom into a formidable tandem in the Big Ten if they could find their full potential in scarlet and gray.

"I'm happy that he's my teammate now because he's a hard worker just like the rest of the guys," Bradshaw said to The Columbus Dispatch before the season of his former All-American game teammate Stewart. "He's one of those killers, basically. I'm just glad I'm on the same court as him."

But as the calendar flips to March, neither Bradshaw nor Stewart has lived up to the billing. Through 29 games this season, the two big men have struggled to make a positive impact inside, combining to average 5.9 points, 4.5 rebounds and 0.9 blocks per game while shooting 52.4 percent from the field. They've also struggled to stay out of foul trouble all year, with Bradshaw having more fouls (53) on the year than he does rebounds (52) and Stewart leading the team with 92 personal fouls and five disqualifications.

Diebler said earlier in the year that Bradshaw and Stewart's struggles could be a result of them not getting consistent time on the court both during games and in practice, which he thinks has stunted their development in their first seasons as Buckeyes.

"I don't really believe in excuses, but there is a reality to when you don't get significant time (on the court) consecutively," Diebler said. "It slows down your growth. I think that's just natural. Sean missed almost an entire summer and part of the fall. And Aaron was out for a significant stretch. It's little things. Aaron hasn't been able to practice two days in a row for a stretch."

"I think when you are younger and lack experience, when you miss time, it's maybe more impactful vs. if you are a more experi-

enced guy who has gone through it before. I think the choppiness to their availability has impacted their growth. I think that's fair to say."

The Buckeyes' interior struggles stretch way beyond the former five-star sophomores, though. Aside from sophomore forward Devin Royal – who has taken a big step up in his development this season, ranking first on the team in rebounds per game (6.9) and second in scoring (13.3) – the rest of the frontcourt players have been nonfactors. Freshman 7-1 center and Otocac, Croatia, native Ivan Njegovan has shown promise in spurts but has largely struggled to defend and rebound for the majority of Big Ten play, while sophomore center Austin Parks has logged 14 or more minutes in just five games this season and has totaled 20 points, 13 rebounds and 18 fouls on the year.

This collective inefficiency inside has forced the Buckeyes to get pounded in the paint against more physical teams all season, especially in recent Big Ten play. In the Buckeyes' last four games, they have been outrebounded 147-111 and outscored 142-104 in the paint.

Diebler acknowledged this major weakness right before this losing streak, saying that his frontcourt will need to play well down the stretch in order for the Buckeyes to achieve their goals this season.

"I think our collective frontcourt in general has another level to get to, and it raises our ceiling tremendously if they can get there," Diebler said on Feb. 11. "But they've shown an ability to do it. We need that consistency now."

Although time may be running out on the year, the Buckeyes' first-year coach did offer some potential solutions on how the frontcourt could make more of a difference. He mentioned after the Northwestern loss that he would like to see the group – along with the entire team – use their physicality to their advantage rather than to their detriment, whether that be by fouling less or getting in better position for rebounds.

"This is a mentally tough group," Diebler said. "I don't question this group's mental toughness. I don't question our physical toughness. I question us using said physical toughness like we're supposed to all the time. (Against Northwestern), we (gave up) multiple defensive rebounds that were team rebounds because we didn't hit (our man). We just turned and they were able to tip the ball around. And then you saw in the second half them getting offensive rebounds because they were tipping the ball around."

"That's a physical toughness that we have to execute better. We're capable. We've shown it. We've shown we can do it."

To add salt to the wound, Diebler and Ohio State are seemingly searching for answers in

the frontcourt at the same time former Buckeye transfers Zed Key and Felix Okpara are flourishing for their respective teams.

Key, who spent four seasons with Ohio State before transferring to Dayton, is averaging 9.4 points and 3.7 rebounds per game for the Flyers. Okpara, who transferred to Tennessee this offseason just weeks after saying that he was committed to a Diebler-led program for the long haul, has started every game for the fourth-ranked Volunteers and is notching 7.6 points, 6.4 rebounds and a team-high 1.8 blocks per game.

So You're Sayin' There's A Chance?

There are a multitude of other issues that fans and others can list to explain the Buckeyes' recent slide. In addition to their lack of production in the frontcourt, the team as a whole has been exposed for their major lack of depth in recent weeks.

Aside from the quartet of Thornton, Mobley, Parrish and Royal – who are all turning in solid seasons by combining for 14.2 points, 2.3 assists and 4.1 rebounds per game – the rest of the roster has been virtually nonexistent. In the last four games, those not named above have scored just 57 of Ohio State's combined 280 points (20.4 percent) on 44.2 percent shooting (23 of 52).

Ohio State has also struggled mightily on offense as a team of late. It shot just a combined 36.9 percent from the field (65 of 176) and 26.0 percent from three (19 of 73) while committing 34 turnovers in its three-game losing streak against Michigan, Northwestern and UCLA.

The shooting woes were especially damaging because the Buckeye offense – specifically their three-point shooting – has carried them at times this season. As of Feb. 27, they rank seventh in the Big Ten in scoring offense at 78.5 points per game and third in three-point field-goal percentage (37.5).

But even with these recent struggles, Ohio State still has what many teams don't have this time of the year, and what it hasn't had in the last two seasons: a chance. With the team firmly on the bubble, there are still real opportunities for the Buckeyes to strengthen their

NCAA Tournament résumé and squeak into the 68-team field.

They took the first step in doing so when they upended USC on its home floor by a score of 87-82 on Feb. 26, giving the Buckeyes a potential sixth "Quad 1" win on the year if the Trojans stay within the top 75 of the NET rankings. Quad 1 wins include wins at home against teams ranked within the top 30 of the NET rankings, neutral-site wins against teams within the top 50, and road wins against teams within the top 75.

Ohio State can look to use the momentum it created with the Trojans in its final two regular-season games against Nebraska at home on March 4 and Indiana at Assembly Hall on March 8, the matchup against the Hoosiers being a chance for a seventh Quad 1 victory.

Then there is the Big Ten tournament held at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis from March 12-16, where the Buckeyes can make a strong final case to the committee by going on a run and picking up some more quality wins against tournament-bound Big Ten teams, something they have shown they are capable of doing in recent seasons as an underdog. As of Feb. 27, Ohio State is the No. 10 seed in the field, slated for a rematch against Northwestern in the first round on March 12, with Illinois awaiting the winner in the second round.

The path to breaking their two-year post-season drought and getting into the NCAA Tournament seems to be an arduous one, but regardless, there is still an avenue for Ohio State to go dancing if it can hit its peak and fully turn it around. And while it certainly hasn't been done yet this season, Diebler thinks the pieces are in place to pull it off.

"We control our own destiny," Diebler said after the UCLA game. "That's really the reality to it. We're not in a position where we have no chance to get to where we want to go. We just have to take it one day at a time and live in the moment. That's been the message – live in the moment. Because when we're healthy, we'll go on a run. We just have to live in the moment."

"This is a together group," he added. "And that's going to be the reason – a big reason – why we go on a run here down the stretch."

You Can Count On These Services From

THE QUICKPRINT CENTRE

3535 Fishinger Blvd. Suite 100, Hilliard, OH 43026
614-488-2683 • FAX 614-488-0059 • qpoh@aol.com

Offset-Printing	Digital Color Copies	Digital B&W Copies
Typesetting	Ship UPS	Rubber Stamps
NCR Forms	Fax Service	Business Cards
Laminating	Announcements	Binding
Brochures	Wedding Invitations	Labels

Dad's Coney's and Wraps

25% OFF

for Buckeye Fans in store only

128 Graceland Blvd. • Columbus, OH 43214
614-396-7141 • dadsconeysandwraps.com

OSU Beat Looks Back At 2024 Championship Run

By CAMERON MOONE

Special to Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Despite a heart-wrenching and confusing loss to archrival Michigan to end the regular season, Ohio State made the most of its post-season opportunity with four-straight double-digit victories in the inaugural 12-team College Football Playoff to capture the team's first national championship since 2014. After the win, Ohio State lost defensive coordinator Jim Knowles to Penn State, and one-and-done offensive coordinator Chip Kelly took a job in Las Vegas, where he'll be the play caller for the Raiders in Sin City.

After a tumultuous season full of ups and downs, highlight plays and head-scratching decisions, BSB interviewed four Ohio State beat reporters – Bill Rabinowitz of The Columbus Dispatch, Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors, Marcus Hartman of the Dayton Daily News and Steve Helwagen of 247Sports – to review the 2024 season in full while taking a look at some of the offseason moves that have happened thus far.

Q: Jim Knowles promised a top-ranked defense when he first arrived in Columbus ahead of the 2022 season. He ultimately delivered on that promise, becoming a key coach in Ohio State's national championship win. What are your final thoughts on the Knowles era with the Buckeyes, and what ultimately led him to leave?

Hope: "I would say he accomplished what he was brought in to do. I think that when he was brought in, the goal was to fix the defense and build a national championship-caliber unit. It followed a similar trajectory to what you had seen at previous stops for him, where a lot of times it took a few years to really build to that apex of what it could be. I think you certainly saw in his last two years, especially the third year, that defense was elite.

"It certainly sounds like, just based on the rumblings that have been out there for the past month or so, that there were some disagreements behind the scenes in terms

of Ryan Day asking Knowles to make certain changes with the defense. Maybe Jim Knowles just wanted to have full authority over what the defense would look like, so he decided to go find another opportunity."

Helwagen: "I think the first Oregon game was kind of a tipping point for Ryan Day. I think in that open week, (Day) really worked hard with Knowles behind the scenes to get the issues corrected. I don't know if, for some reason, Jim Knowles was rubbed the wrong way by what happened at that point of the season. But the fact is, it wasn't good enough to win a championship the way it was going.

"The defense played outstanding the rest of the way and helped (Ohio State) win the national championship. For whatever reason, Knowles decided after winning the championship that he wanted out. So he looked around and tried to find another job, and Penn State pops open, and there he goes. So, that's just the way it all worked out, and everybody can go their own separate ways."

Hartman: "It sounds like some of the reporting that was out there kind of jibed with things that were always rumored, that maybe he didn't get along with everybody all the time and wanted to be able to do his own thing. I guess going back to Penn State had a certain appeal to him as well. I also wonder if he's more of a guy who's more of a climber and a builder than someone who's content to be on top. I think it's probably a little bit of all of those things."

Q: The loss to Michigan in 2024 was one of the tougher-to-swallow outcomes in recent Ohio State history for fans. With pedestrian rushing numbers against an NFL-caliber front and just 10 total points on the day, an array of reasons combined for the upset victory for the Wolverines. What went wrong against Michigan, and did the loss make a difference in the run Ohio State had to the national championship?

Hope: "It was a bad offensive game plan. (Ohio State) ran the ball against the one ad-

vantage that Michigan really had in that game on paper: its defensive line vs. Ohio State's offensive line. Instead of playing around that, Ohio State played right into it. It's beating a dead horse at this point, but it was a bad offensive game plan, just a very poor performance for the Buckeyes offensively. There's really no sugarcoating that.

"In terms of (the Michigan loss) being galvanizing, I think it was. We've obviously heard all the stories about the players-only meeting with Ryan Day a couple days after that game and how it really seemed like the team flipped the switch. You can always play the 'what if' game or whatnot, but let's say Ohio State wins that Michigan game 17-13 – they just limp their way to a win. Does Ohio State go on and win the national championship? I don't know."

Rabinowitz: "There's no question (the players-only meeting) was a very difficult moment, because I think that they bared their souls, and it's impossible to know what would have happened in the playoffs if they had beat Michigan and beat Oregon. There's no way to know that, but I do think that it gave Ohio State a sense of freedom and maybe even desperation. They knew that their top two goals, beating Michigan and winning the Big Ten, were gone. They had one thing left, and that was the biggest, and so the loss had galvanized them, and then they looked different in the playoffs than they did in the regular season."

Hartman: "I think it's oversimplified that in the Michigan game Ohio State coaches said, 'Oh, we're just going to run the ball and prove how tough we are.' I don't think there's any way on earth that that was the game plan. I don't know why the running game primarily was supposed to be zone runs in that game, because if you look at it, for the year, they use a lot more gap, except for in that game, and even the Oregon game, these are the two games where they ran more zone. I don't really know why, but from the game plan standpoint, that'd be my biggest issue.

"It was a combination of a lot of factors that sort of added up to work against Ohio State. I think they planned to throw the ball, and then Howard played poorly, probably because he had a concussion. They had bad field position a lot, and so I understand them trying to run it out from there when the quarterback had already given away a touchdown, and they're trying to bang it out there and say, 'Well, let's just survive and get through.' I get all that, and it just didn't quite work out from that standpoint.

"I don't know that they were more motivated because they lost, but I do think that the way it lined up was perfect. It might have been better than if they had played Oregon the following week (in the Big Ten championship) and then had time off. I don't know what they would have looked like when they came back at the Rose Bowl after that, but maybe it would have been fine. But it did work out well."

Q: The 2024 season had an array of talents on the field for Ohio State. A freshman phenom, an offensive lineman out-of-position and a hometown kid all put on a show for Buckeye faithful throughout the national championship season. Who was your MVP for Ohio State for the 2024 season?

Rabinowitz: "Probably either Donovan Jackson or Will Howard. They were the most indispensable players. I don't think that they would win the championship if Will Howard ended up not being the quarterback. I'm even more sure that they wouldn't have won the national championship if Donovan Jackson hadn't moved out from guard to tackle, because they didn't have any other real alternatives."

Hope: "Jeremiah Smith. I mean, it's crazy to say that, because they have 15 guys who are probably going to be drafted in the NFL in a couple months, and Jeremiah Smith was a freshman. But if I'm just thinking about who was the best player on that team, I really believe it was Jeremiah Smith. You just look at how the season ended. When (Ohio State) needed one more play to seal the game against Notre Dame, they threw a deep bomb. But Jeremiah Smith, that's how good he was as a freshman, that they had trusted him in the biggest moment of the season to dial up a play for him. I just think of who was the best player on that team, the guy who made the biggest difference as a player on that team. I have to go with Smith."

Helwagen: "Donovan Jackson. He moved from guard to tackle in a moment of need for Ohio State, and it was a leap of faith on both sides. He ended up playing great at offensive tackle, and he helped lead the offense from that point on. I thought, with his play at left tackle, without him, I don't know where they are. That means Will Howard is going to get sacked a lot, and they're not going to get as much done offensively.

"If you'd said TreVeyon Henderson, Quinshon Judkins, Jack Sawyer, JT (Tuimoloau), Cody Simon or Caleb Downs, I don't think you have an incorrect answer in any of them. They were all valuable, and (Ohio State) probably doesn't win the national championship without one of them."

Hartman: "Jack Sawyer. He would be the sentimental pick. In the end, I think he'd be my pick, just because at the end of the day, the defense was really the story of the season, and he was their spiritual leader. He made that big play to slam the door against Texas, which Ryan Day said in an interview (on Feb. 19) that's when he felt like Ohio State was going to win it, partly because it clinched that game. Those were bounces you don't always get, and when you get them, you feel like it's working in your favor."

Q: Ohio State fizzled out at the end of the year with a disappointing home loss to archrival Michigan, marking the fourth straight season the Buckeyes failed to achieve two out of their three goals (beat Michigan, win a Big Ten championship). Very few likely envisioned the run the team would go on to have in the College Football Playoff. Did you foresee the charge Ohio State had en route to the national title?

Helwagen: "No, I did not expect them to be dominant in the playoffs. I thought they would beat Tennessee at home and then could carry the revenge card into the Oregon game. I figured maybe they'd win that, but that would probably be it.

"I didn't feel like they were going to win the national championship because the offensive line play in the Michigan game was so bad that you just had no indication that they



EL VAQUERO
MEXICAN RESTAURANT

3230 Olentangy River Road
Columbus, Ohio, 43202
(614) 261-0900
www.ElVaqueroRestaurants.com

**EVERYDAY
HAPPY HOUR**
4 pm-8 pm




\$5.00 OFF
your total bill of \$25 or more

Coupon valid only Sunday – Thursday. Excludes tax and alcohol. Dine-in and carry-out. One coupon per table. Not valid with any other offers. Valid at all locations with coupon. Expires 3/31/25

\$6.00 OFF
your total bill of \$30 or more

Coupon valid only Sunday – Thursday. Excludes tax and alcohol. Dine-in and carry-out. One coupon per table. Not valid with any other offers. Valid at all locations with coupon. Expires 3/31/25

were going to be able to beat a great defensive team when that time came. So I figured maybe they'd win the first game. Maybe they'd eke out a win in the Rose Bowl just because they needed to settle that score. But I didn't see them going much farther than that, just because I didn't have much belief in the offensive line.

"Defensive coaching against Oregon was terrible, and the offensive coaching against Michigan was terrible, and those were close losses. Ordinarily, in past years, that would have cost you a chance at the championship. They were very lucky that this was the first year of the 12-team playoff, they got into the playoffs and they won it."

Hope: "No, I don't think many people did, to be honest, after that Michigan game. I never thought it was out of the question. I always knew this team, if they put it all together, they were the most talented team in college football, and they were capable of anything. But the way they played against Michigan, and then you looked at the bracket, you go, 'Man, they have to beat Oregon, the No. 1 seed out of the West Coast. They have to beat Texas in the Cotton Bowl,' and then at that point, you're thinking they potentially would also have to beat Georgia in Atlanta. You have a bracket that was not set up for Ohio State to make the run that it did."

"Going into the CFP, I was like 'Are they even going to beat Tennessee?' You just didn't know what version of the Ohio State team you were going to get coming off of that Michigan game. After that Tennessee game, or even during it really, that's when I started to believe, 'OK, if they play like this for the entire CFP, they could win the national championship,' and that's exactly what they did."

Rabinowitz: "If you would have asked me that in August, I would have probably said maybe. If you'd asked me that after the Michigan game, I would've said no. You knew they had the talent. There was no question about that. But they didn't look like a national championship team for most of the regular season. But the first five to 10 minutes of the Tennessee game, I was like, 'There they are. Finally, they've arrived.' They played like that throughout the playoffs for the most part."

Q: Sawyer cemented himself as an Ohio State legend with his scoop-and-score touchdown to seal the game against Texas in the Cotton Bowl. Despite his slow start in his career, he blossomed into a formidable edge rusher while helping lead the Buckeyes to their national title win. Where do you see Sawyer's fit in Ohio State history, and did he maximize his stay in Columbus?

Hartman: "Sawyer is up there at the very high pantheon of Ohio State heroes. When you talk about the guy, he checks off all the boxes in terms of, he's born a Buckeye, and he was like this Mike Doss type of a guy for this generation. He was an Ohio guy who was productive and came back and helped spearhead those guys deciding to come back for what turned out to be a championship team. Then, not only that, he wasn't just there for the ride. He made some big plays throughout the second half of the season."

"In 2023, (Ohio State coaches) asked the defensive line to be more selfless and soak up blocks and stuff like that, so they didn't have as many opportunities to make plays. They finally figured out the right formula there at the end of this season. Partly it was that they were finally getting the lead and being able to rush

the passer so you get more opportunity for production. That's what it took, and you have to respect him for staying the course, working hard, not getting frustrated and waiting until things worked out for him at the end."

Helwagen: "Everybody's maturation happens at a different time, and it's difficult, particularly on the offensive and defensive line, to come in and make a huge impact in your first year, because you are an 18- or 19-year-old kid going up against grown 23- or 24-year-old men, and it's just difficult. It has not happened very often that you have phenoms come in and play great football on the offensive or defensive line as freshmen, maybe even a sophomore. Sometimes it takes until the third year, but I do think by the time he was done with his career, he had reached his destination of trying to become that type of leading player on the defense that could be counted on to carry out his assignment, make negative plays, sack the quarterback, bat down the football and create fumbles."

"If there's one trophy you want to hold up, the national championship is the one, and they got it. Sawyer is positioned in Ohio State lore and it's pretty well set."

Hope: "I think just about that (scoop-and-score against Texas) in particular. That play is going to be one of those plays that 40 to 50 years from now, Ohio State fans are still going to be talking about because it was such a spectacular moment. So I think that one play alone made Jack Sawyer an Ohio State legend, but the totality of what he did in that CFP run was phenomenal."

"Just being that Ohio guy, a guy who's a lifelong Buckeye fan, I've always viewed him as being the heart and soul of this team. Because of that, because of how integral he was in winning a national championship, he absolutely deserves to be considered as an Ohio State legend. Just with what he did in that final stretch, he did maximize his time in Columbus."

"I view the whole totality of Jack Sawyer's career as a success. I don't think Jack Sawyer was ever a bad player by any means. With Jack Sawyer, it took him longer. It took him until late in his junior year and senior year to really become a star player. I think overall,

you're going to look back at Jack Sawyer's Ohio State career as absolutely being a success, especially because of the way it ended."

Q: Ohio State had to replace both coordinators on either side of the ball and chose to elevate former wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and former tight ends coach Keenan Bailey to co-offensive coordinators. Furthermore, the Buckeyes brought in longtime New England Patriots staffer Matt Patricia to lead the defense in 2025. How do you view the offseason coaching changes that have happened so far?

Rabinowitz: "It'll be interesting to see how well Brian Hartline does as a play caller and how much Ryan Day is involved in that case. In big games and big situations, will Ryan Day take over that or is he going to give Brian Hartline free rein, more or less? Hartline was the coordinator two years ago but really was the coordinator in name only. So now he's going to be the coordinator in function, so we'll see how that goes."

Hope: "My initial thought when they promoted Hartline was a little bit skeptical because we saw what they did last year with Chip Kelly coming in and bringing in that veteran play-calling voice. I wondered, 'OK, they almost made Brian Hartline a play caller a couple years ago, then Ryan Day reneged on it. Is Brian Hartline really ready for this?' But the more you hear about it, you hear a lot about how Brian Hartline contributed behind the scenes last year. He's grown as a coach over the last couple years, but the more and more I've thought about it, it's the right move. If you want to keep a guy long-term, you have to give him opportunities to continue advancing up the ladder."

"The most polarizing move was hiring Matt Patricia. I have some questions about the move. I think my biggest question personally is when you think back to what he did in New England, he had a ton of success there in New England. For that reason, it makes sense. He had a defense there in New England where a lot of times, it could be a completely different scheme from one week to the next because they really formulate their defense based on matchups. There's obvious-

ly been questions about culture stuff and all that. I'm not as worried about that as some people because of the fact he's not the head coach, he's the defensive coordinator. The one thing I have concerns about is if his defense will be too complicated because we've seen that before."

Hartman: "I don't look at Patricia as a slam dunk at all. I mean, we have to wait and see what the details end up being. If he's going to come in and try to run an NFL scheme, that pretty much never works in college. You always just hear about it being too complicated, and the players play slow due to paralysis by analysis and then that's it. But if it's going to be more of him coming in almost to put his spin on the things that they did last year that worked – obviously, they'll have different personnel up front, so that may be different – then maybe that will work out. But I'm skeptical of that, and we'll see if it does."

"Trying the Hartline thing didn't work the first time. I guess we'll see if it works this time. I wonder if Day might have figured out last year how to strike a balance between being somewhat involved with the offense but not the total offensive coordinator. Maybe that will make a difference from that standpoint. I don't necessarily get the impression that Hartline is itching to be the offensive coordinator. I think he is happy in his role, and I think he could maybe be a head coach down the line as more of an overall CEO-type guy, not a guy who's just the head coach because he happened to be a really good offensive coordinator."

Helwagen: "You have to give Ryan Day credit. Most of his hires have been pretty good. He struck out on a few of them, I will admit, but I think that you have to give him the benefit of the doubt. I am going to assume that when he met with Matt Patricia, he was very impressed with what he heard. Obviously, Matt Patricia has six years as a defensive coordinator with the Patriots, two Super Bowl championships (as their defensive coordinator), and he was around winning football with Bill Belichick. He understands what it takes to put a winning team on the field."

SUMMIT
PERFORMANCE SPT INSTITUTE

Train to be the BEST you can be!
Designing fitness programs to meet your personal needs.

Personal Training

Group Fitness Training

Sports Specific Training

Owned and Operated By:
Brent Johnson
614-570-9918
B-fit.training@hotmail.com

Located at 2378 East Main Street in Bexley, Ohio



1997 OSU Harley Davidson Wide-Glide
43,453 miles • \$15,000

Custom airbrushed pictures on both fuel tanks of all Ohio State Heisman trophy winners plus Woody Hayes.

Serious inquires only call (740) 334-2459.

Bucks Finish Run To 2014 National Championship

Throughout the 2014 football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* has published historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "4." In this issue, *BSB* completes the series with the second of a two-part look back at the 2014 national championship season.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

The 2014 Ohio State football team had just returned home in the wee hours of a late-October morning following a 31-24 victory at Penn State that took two overtimes to decide. The Buckeyes were tired but confident that their fifth straight victory after an early-season upset loss to Virginia Tech would earn a favorable position in the first-ever College Football Playoff rankings.

But that confidence turned to bewilderment later in the day when the playoff selection committee had Ohio State buried at a

lowly No. 16.

Slowly but surely, however, the Buckeyes clawed their way back up the rankings, defeating Illinois, No. 8 Michigan State, No. 25 Minnesota and Indiana by an average margin of 18.8 points and pushing their winning streak to nine games before hosting Michigan as the nation's No. 6-ranked team in the traditional regular-season finale.

The Wolverines, in their fourth and final season with Brady Hoke as head coach, put up a fight early, nursing a 14-7 lead until OSU quarterback J.T. Barrett broke off a 25-yard touchdown run in the final seconds of the first half. That triggered a 28-point onslaught after intermission, and the Buckeyes ran away with a 42-28 decision.

It was a costly victory, however.

On the first play of the fourth quarter, with his team protecting a 28-21 lead, Barrett took an RPO up the middle where he was tackled for no gain by Michigan defensive end Mario Ojemudia.

"I heard (J.T.) yell, and I ran over to help him up," Ohio State tight end Jeff Heurman said later. "That's when I saw his ankle, and it wasn't pretty. I just told him to stay down. Then it just kind of hit me. I thought, 'Oh, man. Here we go again.'"

OSU head coach Urban Meyer was thinking the same thing.

"Our quarterback, our leader, breaks his ankle right in front of me. Same story as before," the coach said. "As I go out and hold his hand on the field, with tears rolling down his face, reality sets in. Our third-string quarterback was now our starter."

As Barrett was carried off the field, Meyer found Cardale Jones, put a hand on his shoulder and looked in his quarterback's eyes.

"And what I saw was a young man getting ready to take a physics test that he'd never studied for," Meyer said. "However, my job as a coach is to encourage him, so I looked at him and said, 'Cardale, I know you can do this,' when in my heart, I'm thinking, 'There's no way he can do this.'"

Despite his coach's misgivings, Jones managed to lead one scoring drive while the defense accounted for another score after defensive end Joey Bosa strip-sacked Michigan quarterback Devin Gardner, and linebacker Darron Lee scooped up the fumble and ran 33 yards for a touchdown with 3:58 remaining.

The Wolverines tacked on a meaningless touchdown inside the final 75 seconds to set the final score at 42-28.

The victory against Michigan sewed up the East Division crown for Ohio State, sending it to Indianapolis for a Big Ten Championship Game showdown with West champion Wisconsin.

Under the guidance of second-year head coach Gary Andersen, the Badgers had recovered from a pair of early losses and were working on a seven-game winning streak. As usual, they featured a top-level running game with consensus first-team All-America running back Melvin Gordon III on his way to a 2,000-yard season and 26 touchdowns.

With Gordon in the backfield and a defense ranked No. 2 in the nation, Wisconsin was installed as a 4½-point favorite against the Buckeyes and their third-string quarterback.

Adding to the strained emotions inside the OSU locker room was the tragic death of defensive lineman Kosta Karageorge. The walk-on from Columbus, who had also spent three seasons on the Ohio State wrestling team, was reported missing on the Wednesday before the Michigan game. Then on the day after the win against the Wolverines, Karageorge's body was found near campus, the victim of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

"I've been doing this for 22 years," OSU wrestling coach Tom Ryan said at the time. "This is as tough as it gets."

Meyer acknowledged Karageorge's death during his weekly press conference but added he would have no further comment as police continued their investigation. Players donned "53" decals as a tribute to Karageorge beginning with the conference title game against Wisconsin, a hurdle the Buckeyes knew they had to overcome to get to the expanded four-team College Football

Playoff.

"We had no illusions about our chances," Meyer said. "We knew we had to beat Wisconsin to even have a chance to get in."

Florida State, Alabama and Oregon were each locked into the top three spots in the CFP rankings with Ohio State fighting against fellow one-loss teams Baylor and TCU for the fourth and final berth. The Bears and Horned Frogs had tied for the Big 12 regular-season championship, but because the conference had stopped playing a league title game after the 2010 season, neither team was afforded the luxury of giving the selection committee one more reason to include them in the playoff field.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes took full advantage of that extra-game luxury. Thanks to a 39-yard touchdown pass from Jones to Devin Smith inside the first two minutes of the game, Ohio State exploded from the starting blocks and never looked back. By halftime, the Buckeyes had built a 38-0 lead on their way to a 59-0 blowout victory.

While Gordon was held to 76 yards on 26 carries, OSU running back Ezekiel Elliott turned his 20 carries into 220 yards and two touchdowns. Jones was an efficient 12 of 17 for 257 yards and three scores, all three to Smith who finished with four catches for 137 yards.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin quarterback Joel Stave completed only 17 of 43 passes for 187 yards and was sacked three times. The Badgers also turned the ball over four times – three Stave interceptions and a Gordon fumble deep in his own territory that Bosa scooped up and returned 4 yards for a touchdown.

The 59-0 win, still the largest margin of victory in Big Ten Championship Game history, was such a statement that the selection committee had little choice but to leapfrog Ohio State over Baylor and TCU and into the fourth spot of the College Football Playoff.

What followed were a pair of masterful victories that left no doubt the selection committee had made the correct choice.

Run To The Title

First up was a New Year's Day battle in New Orleans against top-ranked Alabama and its roster full of such future NFL standouts as running back Derrick Henry, receiver Amari Cooper and safety Landon Collins. The Crimson Tide had made their own statement with a 42-13 dismantling of Missouri in the SEC Championship Game and entered the game against Ohio State as 7½-point favorites.

The oddsmakers appeared to be on target when Alabama raced out to a 21-6 lead midway through the second quarter. But the Buckeyes erased most of that deficit by halftime, including a nifty 13-yard touchdown catch by Michael Thomas off a halfback pass from Evan Spencer to make it 21-20 at intermission.

OSU struck again early in the third quarter when the Jones-Smith connection hooked up for a 47-yard touchdown to give the Buckeyes a 27-21 lead. Then with 3:21 remaining in the third period, defensive end Steve Miller intercepted a pass from Alabama quarterback Blake Sims and returned it 41 yards to push Ohio State's lead to 34-21.

Ohio State Fans!



Weekly September through November
Five times from January through mid-March
Biweekly mid-March through mid-May
Monthly December, June through August

Some Ohio State sports fans need more information on the Buckeyes than they can find in their local newspaper. Buckeye Sports Bulletin is for those fans. By subscribing to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, they receive 24 issues a year featuring:

- In-depth coverage of all Ohio State sports
- The latest comments from coaches and players
- The latest in recruiting information
- Personality profiles
- Features on former Buckeye greats
- Rosters, schedules, statistics, photos
- Check us out on the Web at www.BuckeyeSports.com



1 Year, \$124.95

1 Year, First Class Mail, \$199.95

2 Years, \$209.95

2 Years, First Class Mail, \$359.95

I want to know more about Ohio State sports. I am enclosing \$ _____

Money Order Check MasterCard Visa Discover Amer. Express

Credit Card # and Exp. Date _____

Credit Card Orders Accepted 24 Hours A Day

Call (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

Mail To: **Buckeye Sports Bulletin**
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
www.BuckeyeSports.com

Former Buckeye QB Karsatos Passes At Age Of 61

The Crimson Tide answered with a touchdown with 1:01 left in the third quarter, and then the Buckeyes spent much of the final period trying to protect their 34-28 lead. The defense was doing its part, but the offense had suddenly stalled with minus-12 yards on the first seven fourth-quarter plays from scrimmage.

With the clock winding down to the five-minute mark, the Buckeyes were faced with a do-or-die possession that began at their own 5-yard line. Jones handed the ball to Elliott, who went straight ahead for a 4-yard gain before Jones kept it himself on the next two plays, the second of which barely gained enough for a first down as the quarterback absorbed two hard hits from the Alabama defense.

Then, thunder struck.

Jones once again handed off to Elliott, only this time the OSU running back moved off to his left before finding a crease just outside the tackle box. Keying off a block from Spencer, who wiped out Alabama linebacker Shaun Dion Hamilton, and then moving in behind Billy Price, pulling out from his left guard spot to seal off safety Nick Perry, Elliott broke into the clear and outraced three more defenders to the end zone.

The 85-yard bolt was the longest play surrendered all year by the Crimson Tide defense, and after the Buckeyes converted a two-point conversion, they enjoyed a 42-28 advantage with 3:24 remaining.

Alabama refused to quit, though. It pulled back within seven with a touchdown at the 1:59 mark, and then forced a three-and-out series by the OSU offense to get the ball back at its own 18-yard line with 1:33 left to go.

Sims completed four passes in a row, mixed in with a 12-yard scramble, to move his team into Ohio State territory. But with just eight seconds remaining, his desperation pass into the end zone was picked off by OSU defensive back Tyvis Powell, preserving the 42-35 victory and sending the Buckeyes to the title game.

Finishing In Style

In retrospect, the championship game against Oregon was a bit anticlimactic. Despite the fact the Ducks had rolled to a 59-20 Rose Bowl win against defending national champion Florida State and had been installed as 5½-point favorites, they were no match for a determined and confident bunch of Buckeyes.

Ohio State spotted Oregon an early 7-0 lead before scoring three touchdowns to grab a 21-7 advantage. The Ducks pulled within 21-10 by halftime and then got a 70-yard scoring strike from Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Marcus Mariota to Byron Marshall and a short field goal to narrow the gap to a single point at 21-20 midway through the third quarter.

But that was as close as it got. Elliott scored on a 9-yard run on the final play of the third quarter and then tacked on two more rushing touchdowns in the fourth quarter as the Buckeyes rolled to a 42-20 victory.

Elliott completed his postseason hat trick of 200-yard games, winning offensive game MVP honors with 246 yards and four touchdowns on 36 carries. Jones added 242 yards and a touchdown through the air and scored a rushing touchdown of his own. Powell led the Buckeyes with nine tackles

Earle Bruce made no apologies for his emphasis on recruiting homegrown talent, but when necessity forced the former Ohio State head coach to alter that strategy, it cracked open the door for the program's nationwide pursuit of top high school players.

It was the spring of 1981, and OSU starting quarterback Art Schlichter was about to enter his final year of college eligibility. Bruce thought he had the perfect candidate for Schlichter's replacement – prep All-American Bernie Kosar of Youngstown (Ohio) Boardman. Except there was one hitch. Kosar didn't want to play for the Buckeyes, eventually signing instead with Miami (Fla.) and then leading the Hurricanes in 1983 to their first national championship.

With Kosar out of the picture, Bruce's backup plan locked onto little-known California prospect Jim Karsatos, a strong-armed quarterback from suburban Los Angeles who had thrown for 40 touchdowns and more than 4,400 yards during his final two years in high school. Injuries and several rehab stints conspired to prevent Karsatos from realizing his full potential with the Buckeyes until 1985, but he was at the controls for 22 victories in 27 career starts and when he finished his career, he was among the top three passers in Ohio State program history.

In addition to his obvious on-the-field talents, Karsatos possessed an easygoing, self-effacing personality that endeared those closest to him. That was why news of the former QB's passing on Feb. 8 at the age of 61 was such a shock to his friends and former teammates.

"Jim was definitely blessed with the social gene," former Ohio State quarterback Greg Frey told BSB. "He was just so loose and so relaxed – even on game day. I think the only time I ever saw him without a smile on his face was when we were running wind sprints after practice. He would whine and moan to quarterbacks coach Tom Lichtenberg, saying, 'I'm the starter. I don't have to be doing this. I need to be throwing, not running. Tell Earle I don't need to be doing this.'"

Frey was a true freshman in 1986 when Karsatos was a senior co-captain.

"I was lucky because even though I was third-string that year and never got into a game, I traveled with the team," Frey said. "I would flood Jim with questions all the time, and he was very patient with me. You know, a lot of starters would be focused on the game plan or what have you, and they really wouldn't have time to be answering questions or coaching you. But Jim was very helpful, very generous with his time. I'll never forget that."

Karsatos was originally part of Bruce's 1981 recruiting class, but a knee injury suffered during a high school all-star game delayed his OSU enrollment a year. He redshirted in 1982 and then suffered a stress fracture in his back the following summer. By the time he had regained his health, Karsatos was buried on the depth chart.

He still managed to get his first career start as a redshirt freshman in 1983, subbing for injured starter Mike Tomczak (sidelined with a concussion) and leading the Buckeyes to a 21-11 win against Michigan State. During that game, Karsatos threw the first of 36 career touchdown passes, a 39-yard strike to tight end John Frank.

Tomczak returned to the lineup the following week, and Karsatos was relegated to mop-up duty. He did, however, manage one more touchdown pass, a 63-yard bomb to split end Doug Smith during the waning minutes of a 56-17 blowout of Indiana.

The fact that Karsatos and Smith were each bench players, and the pass came with just 1:53 to play in a game whose outcome had long been decided, didn't sit well with Indiana's volatile head coach Sam Wyche.

As Bruce later explained, "Wyche wouldn't let his players shake our players' hands after the game, and he gave me the finger from across the field. Classy, huh? It made me kind of chuckle, though. I realize people do bizarre things in the heat of battle, but jeez. That was a first."

After Tomczak's graduation following the 1984 season, Karsatos took over the starting duties in 1985 and led Ohio State to a 9-3 record that included a 22-13 takedown of top-ranked Iowa in early November. The following year as a senior and team co-captain, he helped engineer 10 victories in the team's final 11 games, including a 28-12 upset of No. 8

and was named the defensive player of the game.

Ohio State returned to Columbus to celebrate its first national championship in 12 years, hosting a raucous estimated crowd of 45,000 fans at Ohio Stadium who watched as Jones, Barrett and original starting quarterback Braxton Miller sat together and took turns jubilantly hoisting the national championship trophy into the air.

Ten years later, Meyer sometimes has a difficult time comprehending the magnitude of adversity his 2014 team overcame to

raise that championship banner.

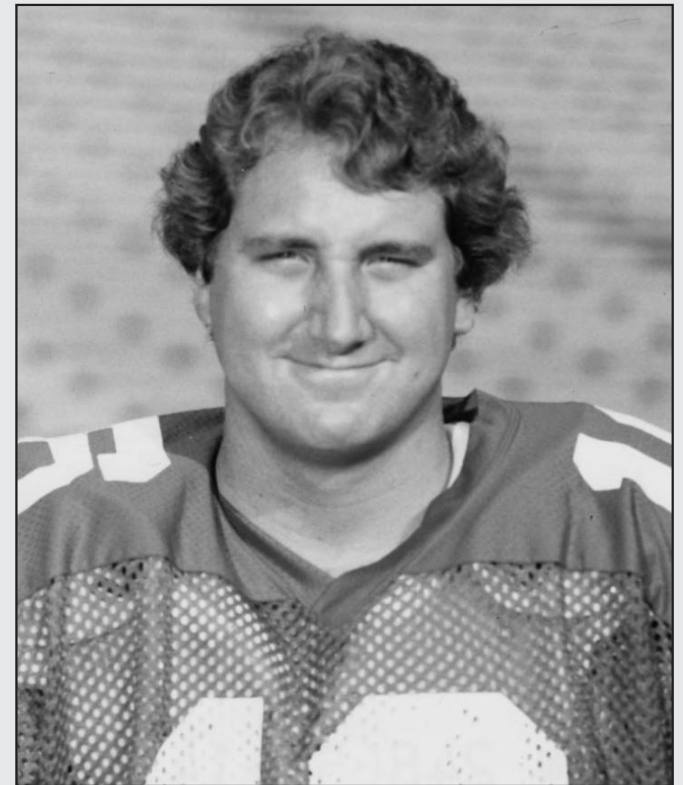
"That team was so good," he said. "There are still guys from that team playing in the NFL. That's how good that team was. But it was still the most improbable national championship because it was accomplished with a third-string quarterback."

Perhaps the coach's best summation of how things turned out came from the day after the championship game against Oregon.

"I was headed downstairs at the team hotel to have breakfast," Meyer said. "I walk in the room, and there's Cardale sitting with

a couple of players. I head over, sit down and just stare at him. Finally, I said, 'Cardale, what was that? What happened? Explain to me your transformation to be the leader you became to go down in history as a national champion quarterback.'

"He looked me right in the eye, tears started to roll down his cheeks, and he said, 'Coach, I finally figured out how to solve the mystery. The mystery was how do I put others ahead of self? I finally figured that out. Braxton and J.T., they're my brothers, and I was never going to let my brothers down.'"



Texas A&M in the Cotton Bowl.

"I would say those two games were the highlights of my career at Ohio State," Karsatos said in 2016. "Iowa had been pretty cocky in '85 before they played us, talking about how they were going to throw for 1,000 yards against our defense. Funny because we didn't hear much out of them after our defense picked their guy off four times. And the win over Texas A&M was special because it was my last game. I even got to score a touchdown in that one – standing up, no less, which was a rarity for me."

Following a college career during which he threw for 5,089 yards, Karsatos was the 12th-round selection of the Miami Dolphins in the 1987 NFL draft. He spent three seasons with the Dolphins but did not see action in any regular-season games.

After football, Karsatos became a successful financial advisor, founding his own eponymous financial network in 2003. He also put his bachelor's degree in communications to use, spending several years as a sideline reporter on Ohio State football radio broadcasts.

"We were teammates twice – at Ohio State and later on the radio network – and he approached both assignments with the same attitude," former All-America lineman Jim Lachey told BSB. "When the lights went on, he was laser-focused and extremely good at what he did. Afterward, that's when the fun began. JK was always a great guy to be around."

Karsatos also lent his name to a number of nonprofit organizations, was fiercely proud of his Greek heritage, and spent more than a few nights in the Short North Arena District at the Park Street Tavern whenever making his way back to Columbus.

"At the beginning of two-a-days in 1986, Jim told us that he had a goal," Frey said. "I'm thinking he's about to talk about a yardage total or touchdowns or the Rose Bowl, and he said, 'Guys, I'm going to start with a six-pack a night. After that, I'm going to build up to a 12-pack and go from there.' And you know what? If you watch film from his last game – that Cotton Bowl win – I think maybe he met that goal."

"But that was the kind of guy he was. He was all business on the field, but he liked to have his fun, too. He was just a great, great guy. I'm going to miss him."

– Mark Rea

Big Ten, SEC Talk Future Playoff Expansion

It hasn't been long since the first 12-team playoff, but the two conferences that seem to be leading college football into its new era have already talked about changes that could be made to the current format.

BIG TEN NOTES Greg Wilson

The Big Ten and the SEC are both pushing for another expansion of the College Football Playoff according to a report from Yahoo Sports, which could take the tournament to 14 or 16 teams. There would be four automatic qualifiers for both conferences in one of the proposals that was made public. The Big 12 and ACC would each get two automatic qualifiers, and the highest-ranked Group of Five champion would get in automatically as well.

That would leave either one or three at-large bids depending on the format, one of which would go to Notre Dame if it ranks inside the top 14. In the 14-team model, the top two seeds would receive first-round byes.

The CFP selection committee would also not have as much of a role since in either format, the seeding would be determined strictly by the rankings, not taking conference champions getting byes into account.

Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork commented on the possible expansion that the two conferences have been discussing.

"We're at a time where you have to put everything on the table to really capitalize on this moment in college athletics," Bjork told NBC 4 on Feb. 19, the day that Big Ten and SEC athletic directors all came together to talk about the future of the sport. "If we're sharing revenue with the athletes – which is the right thing to do – how do we produce more content? How do we have more high-level matchups? Clearly, with the viewer-

ship of the CFP, people want to watch these games, and they want high-level matchups.

"So I think we owe it to the game, we owe it to our athletes to say, 'Can we have more content?' And more content means more games. Is that 14? Is that 16? I don't know the right number. There's a lot of different models that we can study. But clearly the Big Ten and the SEC, we're at the forefront, we have the biggest brands, but we also need to protect the game of college football and make sure it's as accessible for as many people that can live in this world as possible."

Other conferences don't seem to be happy about the ideas that the Big Ten and SEC have come up with.

"There needs to be fairness and access to the championship," ACC commissioner Jim Phillips told Yahoo Sports. "It needs to be a true championship, not artificial and not an invitational."

"College football is stronger than ever," American Athletic Conference commissioner Tim Perneti told Yahoo Sports. "As the CFP evolves, we have a responsibility to student-athletes, the integrity of the game and our fans to build a future that includes expanded access for every conference."

The 2025 season will still have the 12-team format, but there could be changes to the seeding. However, the Big Ten and SEC don't officially take full control of the decision-making until the 2026 season, so there would need to be unanimity among all 11 members of the CFP Management Committee, which consists of 10 FBS commissioners and Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick.

If all 11 members do agree to change the seeding, it would likely be that the seeding would be ordered by the CFP committee's rankings. Had the format worked that way this year with the current 12-team format, the top four seeds would have been No. 1 Oregon, No. 2 Georgia, No. 3 Texas and No. 4 Penn State, with each team getting a bye.

Ohio State would have been the No. 6 seed and matched up against Big 12 champi-

on No. 11 Arizona State in the first round and the Longhorns in the second round.

"Once the field is set, we need to discuss how it should be seeded," said Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti. "I think some of this year's matchups and the round in which they occurred make that conversation necessary."

Izzo Passes Knight For Most B1G Wins

With a 79-65 win over Illinois on Feb. 15, Michigan State's Tom Izzo became the winningest coach in Big Ten history, passing the late Bob Knight for the most conference wins all-time. It was Izzo's 354th career Big Ten win, coming nearly 30 years after his first-ever conference win, a 65-60 victory over none other than Knight himself and Indiana on Jan. 4, 1996.

"There's some of me that says Bobby Knight deserves to have it," Izzo said. "I coached another year than him. I probably played more conference games than him. But if I could be in the same breath with him on that, that's great for me. I have great respect for him as a coach. He helped me a lot in my younger days as a head coach."

Izzo, 70, has already been inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in the class of 2016, so he is just adding to his already legendary résumé, but he now sits at the top of the Big Ten.

In his 30 seasons at the helm, Izzo has been able to take the Spartans to eight Final Four appearances, 10 Big Ten regular-season titles, six conference tournament titles and a national championship in 1999-2000.

Ranked No. 8 in the country, Izzo and the Spartans seem to be locked into an NCAA Tournament spot for the 27th consecutive season, which would be good for the longest active streak in college basketball. The Spartans are also in first place in the Big Ten standings as BSB went to press, which would give him his first conference regular-season title since 2020 if that standing holds.

But even being the winningest coach in Big Ten history, he still wants more, comparing himself to Knight's three national titles.

"I'd give up the Big Ten wins record for two more NCAA Tournament championships," Izzo said.

U-M's May Gets Contract Extension

Five days after the Michigan men's basketball team took down Ohio State in Columbus, first-year head coach Dusty May received an extension from his program that will keep him at the helm through the 2030 season.

"I am excited to announce that Dusty and I have agreed to a new multiyear contract," athletic director Warde Manuel said in a statement. "His commitment to this University and the success of the men's basketball program has far exceeded our expectations and makes us all excited for what the future holds. I look forward to Dusty, Anna, and his family remaining a part of the fabric of this University and community for many years to come."

The extension also comes with a raise for May, who will receive nearly \$1 million more per year than his original deal was for, according to the Detroit Free Press, receiving

a \$100,000 raise every season over the next five years. That brings his final year's salary north of \$5 million.

Once considered a possible candidate for the head coach opening at Indiana after Mike Woodson announced he will step down after the conclusion of the 2024-25 season, May's buyout has been raised to \$7.5 million, and the Wolverines hope the new deal will keep him in Ann Arbor over the offseason. Before the extension, May dismissed having any interest in coaching the Hoosiers.

"First of all, it's flattering," May said. "You think back and it's like, man, all I did was show up with great energy and passion for this game and helping people every day. Because of that, I think people saw something or believed in me, and you get to this point. But that stuff is crazy. I mean, I love being at Michigan. I love our team. We're fighting like crazy. That's it."

May was also a candidate for Ohio State's head coach opening after Chris Holtmann was fired during the 2023-24 season before the program ultimately hired Jake Diebler to lead the Buckeyes last March.

In his first year with the Wolverines, May got off to a 20-5 start (12-2 Big Ten) prior to the announcement of his extension while Diebler's Buckeyes have struggled of late with a 16-13 (8-10 Big Ten) record as BSB went to press.

Fickell Extended Through 2032

Not long after current Buckeye head coach Ryan Day received an extension that keeps him in Columbus through the 2031 season, former Ohio State coach Luke Fickell was also extended and is set to remain with Wisconsin through the same year.

The extension is just one extra year on his previous deal with the program and is seemingly strange timing given the Badgers are coming off a season in which they didn't make a bowl game for the first time since 2001 with a 5-7 record and 3-6 mark in the Big Ten.

However, Wisconsin does often give one-year extensions to each of its head coaches at the conclusion of seasons, also announcing an extra year on the contracts of the volleyball, women's soccer and men's soccer coaches as well.

Fickell's initial deal was a seven-year deal worth about \$54.6 million, and in two years he has gone 12-13, which is the worst two years to start a tenure since Barry Alvarez took over in 1990.

It won't get any easier for Fickell and the Badgers in the 2025 season. They finish the latter half of a home-and-home series with Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Ala., on Sept. 13 and have a difficult four-game stretch in the middle of the season against Michigan on Oct. 4, Iowa on Oct. 11, Ohio State on Oct. 18 and Oregon on Oct. 25.

Betts Returning For One More Year

UCLA women's basketball junior center Lauren Betts told ESPN on Feb. 7 that she will return to play her senior year with the Bruins despite being projected to be a top-five WNBA selection if she declared.

"College is the best years of your life, and

Press
Pub + on 5th
GOOD FOOD + FINE DRINKS

Press good food
fine drinks **Grill**

Both locations open for lunch & dinner daily!

1505 W. 5th Ave
Near Grandview Ave
614-817-1198

Monday-Thursday
11 AM - 10 PM

Friday-Saturday
11 AM - 11 PM

Sunday
Noon - 10 PM

741 N. High St
In the Short North
614-298-1014

Monday - Saturday
11:30 AM - 1:30 AM

Sunday
Noon - 1:30 AM

KITCHEN UNTIL 1 AM DAILY

presscolumbus.com

so I don't think I'd ever give that up," Betts said. "Why not be spoiled for a whole other year? The way the coaches take care of us in this program, how comfortable I am here, and I think that the friendships I've created – I'd want to do that for another year."

In the Bruins' first year in the Big Ten, Betts has helped lead the team to a second-place finish in the conference standings after losing to No. 4 USC on March 1. Betts had 11 points and 11 rebounds in the contest.

In the 2024-25 season, her second with UCLA after transferring from Stanford, Betts has scored 19.7 points per game while bringing down 9.9 rebounds and blocking 2.8 shots per contest.

Part of the reason Betts wants to return is to win a national championship, which the Bruins have a good chance of doing this year and likely next year as well. But she also wants to play a year with her younger sister, Sienna, who signed with the Bruins in November.

Sienna Betts, who plays high school basketball at Aurora (Co.) Grandview, is the nation's second-best prospect and top-rated power forward in the 2026 class.

"I think that I would be crazy if I gave up the opportunity to play with my sister, so obviously, I'm going to come back next year," Lauren Betts said.

NCAA Gives Top 16 Sneak Peek

When the NCAA Men's Basketball Selection Committee revealed its top 16 seeds live on CBS on Feb. 15, three Big Ten teams were featured with Purdue at No. 7, Wisconsin at No. 11 and Michigan coming in at No. 14. Since the list was revealed, Purdue lost three of its last four games and the Wolverines lost to Michigan State on Feb. 21 which likely changed the rankings.

Other teams in the top 10 were No. 1 Auburn, No. 2 Alabama, No. 3 Duke, No. 4 Florida, No. 5 Tennessee, No. 6 Texas A&M, No. 8 Houston, No. 9 Iowa State and No. 10 Kentucky. No. 12 Arizona, No. 13 Texas Tech, No. 15 Kansas and No. 16 St. John's rounded out the list.

With those spots, the Boilermakers would be slotted in as a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament, Wisconsin a No. 3 seed and Michigan would be a No. 4 seed.

If the SEC is able to hold onto five of the top eight spots in the rankings, it would be the first time ever that a conference has held that many of the top eight spots. In 2021, the Big Ten came close when it had four teams ranked in the top eight.

Regional assignments were also given along with the women's brackets, with the Bruins being placed in the Spokane 1 Regional, the Buckeyes in the Birmingham 3 Regional and the Trojans in the Spokane 4 Regional.

On the women's side, UCLA was ranked No. 1, USC was No. 5 and Ohio State was ranked No. 14. The Bruins lost to the Trojans shortly before the list was revealed but remained in the No. 1 spot. Another bracket reveal was released on Feb. 27, which kept UCLA at No. 1, and moved USC to No. 3 and Ohio State to 16.

2025 B1G Media Days To Be In Las Vegas

The conference announced on Feb. 21 that the 2025 Big Ten Football Media Days will be held in Las Vegas from July 22-24 at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino.

The move out West is no surprise after the conference added four West Coast teams in Oregon, UCLA, USC and Washington in 2024. Which teams will be featured on which days hasn't been revealed by the conference yet, or which student-athletes would be in attendance, but the entire three-day event will be aired live on Big Ten Network.

Petitti talked about expanding the conference's "geographical footprint" for certain events after the addition of those four teams, which could include the Big Ten Championship Game in the future. The event is confirmed to remain at Lucas Oil Stadium through 2028, but he did say he would be open to different locations in the future.

"I think you'll see us expand," Petitti said. "I think it's important to make sure that markets around the country get to experience Big Ten championships. It's a really good way to connect the conference. I think over time you'll start to see the geographic footprint expand, keeping in mind competitive issues."

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

Despite the ups and downs that the Ohio State basketball team had been experiencing, Ron Stokes was on a tear.

His inspired play began with a career-high 24 points scored in early February during OSU's home loss to Iowa and blossomed from there. At Northwestern on Feb. 7, the 5-11 senior guard helped ice a 63-60 Buckeye victory when he blocked a jump shot tossed up by 6-4 Milan Petrovic in the waning seconds of the second half. In addition to the 12 points that Stokes contributed in the game, he collected eight rebounds, matching his career-high mark, and was credited with 10 assists.

The Canton, Ohio, native followed that performance up with 19 points at Wisconsin on Feb. 9, a rare highlight in Ohio State's disappointing 92-78 loss to the Badgers, the next-to-last-place team in the Big Ten.

Stokes continued to have a hot hand. In OSU's 72-63 win over Indiana on Feb. 14, the Buckeyes' first-ever victory in Assembly Hall, the senior was his team's leading scorer with 17 points, even though he was playing with a sprained ankle.

35 Years Ago — 1990

The first time something is experienced is always the most memorable. It was no different for Ohio State wrestler Adam DiSabato and state championships. He won two of them in his career, but the second pales in comparison.

"The high point of my life so far is the first state title," DiSabato said. "The first one is always the best, no matter what it is. For my first state title, I was hurt three weeks before districts. I was supposed to win it, but with the injury, there was some doubt in many minds, including mine.

"I just overcame that and won it, and it was just the greatest feeling in the world. To win a college one might feel even better. That's something I will gladly wait to find out about."

He was gunning for the national championship, and it would not be out of the realm of possibility for it to happen. After all, he was ranked seventh in the nation at 126 pounds with a 26-2 mark.

30 Years Ago — 1995

Sometimes the numbers just don't lie.

When perusing the men's basketball box score for Ohio State's Jan. 18 clash with Minnesota, some of the figures popped out like a Mexican jumping bean – 15 OSU field goals in 50 attempts (30.0 percent), a mere eight assists and a whopping 23 turnovers.

Of course, the numbers that mattered most burned through the Williams Arena scoreboard at game's end – Minnesota 81, Ohio State 61.

"It was an ugly game," OSU guard Doug Etzler said. "It was real choppy because of the number of fouls. Nobody really got in the flow in the second half. It was an ugly, physical game, but they handled it better than we did, obviously."

25 Years Ago — 2000

According to a report in The (Toledo) Blade, Ohio State had developed a policy to not show controversial replays on its video board at Value City Arena. Presumably, the same policy would be in effect beginning in the fall after OSU's new \$11 million scoreboard and video board was constructed at Ohio Stadium.

"It's a Big Ten policy not to incite fans and embarrass an offi-

cial or the Big Ten, or question their decisions or judgments," said OSU associate athletic director Jim Smith, who oversaw communications and marketing.

"If it's an obvious blown call, it's of no benefit to show it and create a hostile environment that we are responsible for controlling. The Big Ten is on the side of safety. We're not advocating, we're just abiding by it."

But according to The Blade, the Big Ten had no such policy regarding replay.

"I'm not aware of any," Big Ten associate commissioner Mark Rudner told The Blade. "We don't refer to anything but the school's own good common sense."

Rich Falk, the Big Ten's commissioner in charge of men's basketball officiating, said the conference was prepared to take a more formal stance on the replay subject.

"With more and more screens and technology, it's clear we have to have some guidelines," Falk said.

20 Years Ago — 2005

Former Ohio State star Chris Spielman's coaching career didn't start off quite like he might have imagined.

As the first-year coach for the Columbus Destroyers of the Arena Football League, Spielman watched on Jan. 29 as his team dropped a 47-38 decision to the expansion Nashville Kats.

"You make your adjustments and learn from them," Spielman told reporters after the game. "We're going to grow. I do believe we have talent. It's just a matter of not turning the ball over."

The Destroyers, who had taken a 38-33 lead into the fourth quarter, had trouble in the turnover department as starting quarterback Chad Salisbury threw three interceptions. He completed 17 of 32 passes for 236 yards and four touchdowns. Salisbury also accounted for a fifth score on a 1-yard run.

His leading receiver was Damien Groce, who gathered in seven catches for 113 yards and touchdowns of 35 and 45 yards. Former OSU receiver Bobby Olive also caught two passes for 17 yards.

15 Years Ago — 2010

For perhaps the first time in 50 years, Bob Knight received a standing ovation from the Ohio State faithful.

At halftime of what would become an 85-63 Buckeye victory on Jan. 31 against visiting Minnesota, a Value City Arena crowd of 17,125 looked on as the program's lone national championship team was saluted for its work. One by one, each member of the 1960 squad that defeated California in the title game was introduced.

For a squad that included the likes of Jerry Lucas and John Havlicek, arguably the loudest applause went to a benchwarmer who averaged a modest 3.8 points in 74 appearances during his OSU career.

It went to Knight, who returned to his alma mater as the winningest coach in college basketball after a career that had him spend 29 years roaming the sideline for rival Indiana.

10 Years Ago — 2015

Winning the national championship comes with many perks, and the 2014 CFP National Championship-winning Buckeyes continued to reap the benefits.

Head coach Urban Meyer, university president Michael Drake and 12 members of the championship team were invited to the Ohio Statehouse on Feb. 11 and were honored by a bevy of legislators. Ohio Gov. John Kasich spent about half an hour with the team talking about the unlikely run to the national championship.

Kasich said that the selfless nature of the team and its ability to respond to adversity made Ohio proud and "lifted the entire state."

Members of the Ohio Senate and Ohio House of Representatives were also there to honor the Buckeyes. Speaker of the House Cliff Rosenberg addressed the team first, and the Buckeyes received resolutions on both the House and Senate floors and two standing ovations in the Senate.

"You made Ohio proud," Senate president Keith Faber said to the team. "Wherever you are from, Ohio will always be your home."

Five Years Ago — 2020

After a great start to the season when Ohio State men's basketball reached No. 2 in the Associated Press poll, it seemed like its once-promising season might have been lost.

Following a heartbreaking loss to Minnesota at home on Jan. 23, the Buckeyes were defeated in six of seven games and held a 2-6 record in the competitive Big Ten.

"We realize plenty of people wrote us off when we were 2-6," said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. "We had people making fun of us and putting all their sarcastic tweets out there. I've got them all saved."

Amid the losing skid, freshman guard D.J. Carton, who had been a spark for the Buckeyes, took a leave of absence from the team for personal reasons.

The Buckeyes bounced back, however, winning eight of their next 10 games, including victories against tough Maryland and Michigan teams.

During the winning stretch, Ohio State also lost junior forward Kyle Young to a high ankle sprain during the game against the Terrapins. Despite missing two of their top 10 contributors, the Scarlet and Gray continued their winning ways.

"We really wish they could be with us," sophomore guard Duane Washington said. "And you've got to make a choice: Are we going to sit back and be sad about it? Or are you going to attack the next day, the next practice, the next game?"

One Year Ago — 2024

Ohio State's 76-73 loss to Indiana on Feb. 6 – and the reaction by Holtmann after the game – was viewed by many as the beginning of the end for the Holtmann era at Ohio State, one which may ultimately be remembered more for games and moments like those than his early triumphs. That reality came true one week later – a day after Ohio State suffered a 62-54 loss at Wisconsin on Feb. 13, the team's program record-tying 16th consecutive road defeat – when the school officially announced that it was terminating Holtmann's contract effective immediately, ending his seven-year run as head coach.

"I thought that looking at the last couple of games, few games actually, that this team needed different leadership," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said after making the official announcement. "So I made the change."

Bowen Brings Solid Recruiting Track Record

Before former offensive line coach Justin Frye left for the NFL, Ohio State seemed to be in a fairly good position when it came to recruiting on the offensive line for the 2026 class, especially after the performance during the national title run.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

But now those relationships that Frye had with prep players no longer exist, and the Buckeyes' new offensive line coach, Tyler Bowen, will have to make his own impression on those recruits.

It's not going to be new for Bowen, who has done well with recruiting at other stops during his career, most notably when he was with Penn State from 2018-20 where he served as the offensive recruiting coordinator under James Franklin. He was able to reel in players such as Landon Tengwall, Rasheed Walker, Olu Fashanu and Tyler Warren.

Bowen has had some misses on the recruiting trail like any position coach does at the college level, but he has shown that he's able to compete for top prospects, which the Buckeyes are going to need for the 2026 cycle.

Ohio State is already in the top six for Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell (6-8, 300), the No. 1 prospect in the country, and is among the top choices by each of the three top-200 offensive linemen in the state of Ohio, Avon Lake four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280), Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310) and Washington Court House Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie

Help BSB Grow

Loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers frequently ask us what they can do to help keep BSB vibrant in this increasingly electronic age. One of the things readers can do is introduce BSB to new readers who might find our Ohio State sports content interesting.

In order to help you do that, we are offering an opportunity to send four free trial issues to potential subscribers. We will then offer your potential subscriber a very special offer to get them to join the fold of loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers.

We are also offering a special \$19.95 subscription rate for gifts for our service men and women. It's nice to send a little bit of home to those all over the world who are protecting us. Don't forget to include an APO address when applicable and remember, any subscription includes electronic access to BSB, so our Buckeyes in uniform will be able to enjoy their BSB immediately, wherever they are.

This four free trial issue offer is not good for current subscribers. This offer is to introduce readers to BSB. You can conveniently email your names and addresses to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com or mail them to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

(6-7, 285).

Cantwell said recently that he is trying to make official visits to each of his six top schools – Georgia, Missouri, Michigan, Ohio State, Miami (Fla.) and Oregon – but isn't sure he is going to be able to make that schedule work. He has already scheduled a spring visit to Ohio State, which will be March 20-21, just a few days after the Buckeyes begin spring ball. The visit will be a major opportunity for Bowen to build some momentum with Cantwell.

"I'd love to go see schools in spring ball that I haven't seen yet," Cantwell told 247Sports. "I've seen Mizzou and Georgia do spring ball, so I probably won't be back there until official visit season. The other four schools I can see myself making a trip to because it's beneficial."

Bowen has already received the approval of Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School five-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray (6-3, 285), who knows the new Buckeye assistant from his time being recruited by Bowen while he served as offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach at Virginia Tech (2022-24).

"I think it's a great pickup," Gray told 247Sports. "He is a great guy, and I think the players and fans will love him. Yes, I did know him very well from Virginia Tech. In fact, he came to one of my basketball games a couple of weeks ago."

Mansfield (Texas) Lake Ridge four-star offensive tackle Felix Ojo (6-6, 275) also talked about Bowen, saying the offensive line coach reached out to him the day the news was announced.

"I talked to him the first day the news came out," Ojo said. "I'm most definitely (still interested in Ohio State). I was a top priority for Coach Frye, and when he left, the whole staff reached out and let me know I'm still a priority. And talking with Coach Bowen went well even though he just got there. I'm a priority for him too."

Gray said that he already knows that he will make an official visit to Ohio State, although he isn't sure of the exact dates of his trip yet. He also is going to try to make it back up to Columbus during spring practices.

Gray is the No. 32 player in the country and is No. 2 both on the interior line and in the state of Virginia. Before Bowen's hiring, Gray had narrowed his list down to Clemson, LSU, Penn State, South Carolina and Tennessee, but he has obviously decided that the Buckeyes deserve another look with Bowen now on staff.

Whether Bowen will have the same effect on other recruits is still yet to be seen, but if Gray is any indication, the Buckeyes' hire can be considered a success early on. Now he will be tasked with getting OSU across the finish line with some top offensive line prospects, something Frye had trouble with when it came to prep players.

'26 Prospects Schedule Official Visits To OSU

With the 2025 recruiting class officially signed, the process has already quickly moved on to the 2026 cycle, and prospects aren't wasting any time when

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

OSU Football 2027 Commitments

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.

it comes to scheduling official visits for when they are able to start taking them over the summer.

Already scheduled to come to Columbus during the weekend of May 30-June 1 is Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180); Mineral (Va.) Louisa County five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0, 200); Destrehan, La., four-star wide receiver Jabari Mack (6-0, 192); Dunlap, Ill., four-star tight end Mack Sutter (6-5, 225); and Princeton (N.J.) Hun School four-star defensive end Luke Waffle (6-6, 245).

Dixon-Wyatt also has visits scheduled to Alabama, Oregon, Texas and USC. Hiter will visit Georgia, Michigan and Tennessee after heading to Columbus, each of those four destinations being his top choices. Sutter will also be at Alabama, Illinois, Penn State and Ole Miss while Mack will visit Texas and Texas A&M.

From June 6-8, the Buckeyes will host Flower Mound, Texas, four-star offensive tackle Drew Evers (6-4, 285); Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200); Cibolo (Texas) Steele four-star running back Jonathan Hatton Jr. (6-1, 205); and Norcross, Ga., four-star defensive lineman Carter Luckie (6-5, 265).

Gebhardt has plans to visit Clemson and Penn State, Luckie will also head to Georgia and Florida State and Hatton also has a visit scheduled to Oklahoma, though it's possible he will add more.

The weekend of June 13-15, Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star running back Carsyn Baker (6-1, 195); Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207); Buriem (Wash.) Kennedy Catholic four-star defensive end Derek Colman-Brusa (6-4, 230); Raleigh (N.C.) Southeast three-star defensive end Keysaun Eleazer (6-5, 190); Guthrie; Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225); Strongsville, Ohio, four-star linebacker Storm Miller (6-3, 220); and Red Oak, Texas, four-star wide receiver Brayden Robinson (5-8, 160) are set to be on campus.

As for other scheduled visits, Baker also plans to visit Texas A&M, Colman-Brusa will be at Oregon and Washington, and Guthrie is narrowed down to Clemson and Ohio State. Eleazer will be at Georgia Tech, Penn State and Virginia Tech while Johnson will also visit Alabama, Oklahoma and USC. Miller has

only Ohio State scheduled for an official visit, and Robinson is set to go to Miami and Notre Dame.

The next weekend, June 20-22, the Buckeyes will host Thomasville (Ga.) Thomas County Central four-star edge rusher Cam Brooks (6-3, 225); Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver and OSU commit Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205); and Flowood, Miss., five-star safety Bralan Womack (6-0, 195).

Brooks also has Clemson, Florida State and Cal visits scheduled, and Womack – a top target for the Buckeyes in the class – is going to go to Auburn, Florida and Texas A&M.

Henry has remained committed to the Buckeyes throughout his recruiting process, but he will still be taking other official visits as well to Miami (Fla.), Oregon and USC. The No. 7 overall player and No. 2 wide receiver in the class said in June of 2024 that even though he believes he will end up in Columbus because of offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, he still wants to enjoy the process of being a recruit. He has taken multiple visits to Eugene, Ore., since his commitment to the Buckeyes.

Glenside (Pa.) La Salle College four-star athlete Joey O'Brien (6-3, 185) doesn't have a date scheduled for his visit yet but knows he will take one to Ohio State and Notre Dame at some point.

Top 2027 WR Reclassifies

DeSoto, Texas, five-star wide receiver Ethan Feaster (6-1, 175), who was ranked the top pass catcher in the 2027 class, has reclassified to the 2026 class and will now have just one more high school football season before he signs with a school.

Hartline was already targeting Feaster in the 2027 class but will now have to speed up the process with the Texas prospect since he is able to schedule official visits over the summer now.

Feaster included a top 12 of Alabama, Colorado, LSU, Miami, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon, SMU, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and USC in his announcement that he would be in the 2026 class.

He is now ranked the No. 38 prospect in the country in the class of 2026, the No. 5 wide receiver and the No. 6 player in the state of Texas. This is after a season in which he caught 57 passes for 824 yards and 13 touchdowns. The year be-

fore, he had 32 catches for 634 yards and nine touchdowns.

OSU Offers More Recruits

The Buckeyes have offered multiple scholarships since BSB last went to press.

Malvern (Pa.) Prep four-star athlete Jackson Ford (6-4, 230) received one of many offers on Feb. 13. He is the No. 302 prospect in the 2026 class and the No. 21 athlete, although the Buckeyes are likely looking at him as a defensive end since it was Larry Johnson who called Ford.

Ford now has 19 Division I offers, a list that includes Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Rutgers and Wisconsin, among others.

Bauxite, Ark., four-star offensive tackle Evan Goodwin (6-7, 325) received a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes on Feb. 17 with Bowen getting active on the trail. Goodwin is the No. 345 player in the

country, the No. 30 offensive tackle and the No. 3 player in the state of Arkansas.

He has 23 Division I scholarship offers, including Florida State, LSU, Minnesota, Missouri, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Ole Miss and Wisconsin, among others.

Goodwin told Eleven Warriors that he was surprised to get an offer from the reigning national champions.

"I was shocked, really," Goodwin said. "Going from a kid who thought he was going to play Division II when I was in ninth grade to getting offered by the defending national champions is pretty crazy."

He didn't waste any time scheduling a visit to Ohio State and will be one of many different prospects on campus for spring practices, flying up to Columbus for March 27-28. He told 247Sports that he's very interested in also setting up an official visit to Columbus if his spring visit goes well, which would add on to visits to Missouri, Notre Dame and Mississippi State that he already has scheduled for the summer.

Since the offer, Goodwin has been in contact with former first-round pick and Ohio State offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr., who continues to help the Buckeyes when it comes to recruiting.

"He messaged me on Instagram," Goodwin said. "Really excited to just think Paris Johnson knows my name. His mom called my mom, and they talked about the process and Ohio State. I'm really excited to meet her as well."

Also receiving offers from Bowen were Fruitland, Idaho, four-star offensive tackle Kelvin Obot (6-5, 265); Chicago Mount Carmel four-star offensive tackle Claude Mpouma (6-7, 308); Windsor, Colo., four-star interior offensive lineman Deacon Schmitt (6-5, 320); and Needham (Mass.) St. Sebastian's four-star offensive tackle Marky Walbridge (6-6, 270). They are respectively the 150th, 192nd, 386th and 395th prospects in the country in the 2026 class.

Obot told 247Sports that he knows he wants to make a visit to Ohio State despite his relationship with Bowen and the

school just beginning, and he was excited to receive an offer from the Buckeyes.

Running backs coach Carlos Locklyn was active on the trail as well, offering DeSoto, Texas, five-star athlete Myson Johnson-Cook (6-2, 220) on Feb. 12. He is considered the No. 8 prospect in the country in the 2027 class. Last season, he ran for 911 yards and 14 touchdowns on 88 carries and caught four passes for 27 yards and another score through the air.

Johnson-Cook is considered the top player in the talent-rich state of Texas and is the 13th running back in that class to receive an offer from the Buckeyes. He also holds offers from 19 other Division I schools, including Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Purdue, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC.

Locklyn also offered another 2026 prospect on Feb. 11, with Roswell (Ga.) Fellowship Christian School running

Continued On Page 20

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

What do you think Ohio State's new offensive line coach, Tyler Bowen, brings to the table when it comes to recruiting?

"Justin Frye was really good as an on-field developer, and I think we saw that this year. He battled through injuries to (Josh) Simmons and (Seth) McLaughlin. I mean, in years past, Ohio State losing players of that caliber, there would have been no playoff run, but he did a great job patching things together. Luke Montgomery did what he had to do. Now, the flip side of that, he was not a good recruiter. They had to go out and get transfers because of past failures in that room. Without those two guys they brought in, and I think both are going to start as tackles, the chickens would have come home to roost on Justin Frye this year.

"Bowen is looked at as a really good recruiter. He hasn't been an offensive line coach for a long time now, so we'll see about his development, but he's supposed to be a better recruiter. He's starting off behind the eight ball because there are three of what I consider studs at tackle in Ohio this year, and they may be behind the eight ball on all three of those guys. So we're going to find out what type of recruiter he is, although it won't be fair to blame him if Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) and Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285) go to Clemson or elsewhere, or if Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310) goes elsewhere.

"I guess the flip side would be if Bowen can pull two of these three, or all three of these guys out of the fire, after just getting hired weeks ago, then you bow down and praise that guy. So we're going to see, he's got his work cut out for him because he wasn't left a great situation. OK, you have three plums in-state that, man, you'd kill to have all three of these guys, and you should have all three of them. It's Ohio State, for God's sake. But right now, they are not set up to get all three, and I could almost argue they're not really set up to land any of those three, I wouldn't think they're the favorites for any of those three. So we're going to learn something real quick here."

Do you think Bowen will be able to land some of the top guys that Justin Frye wasn't, or is the problem more Ohio State's NIL approach with high school O-linemen?

"It may be that. If there was ever a time - I don't know if they have any money left now, after what they spent last year, they might be broke - but if they do have whatever's left in that NIL bucket, now is the time be-

cause you're battling Clemson. Basically, Clemson is the leader right now for Riley and Guthrie. Clemson doesn't spend NIL money. That's not what they're known for. You're not going against the Texas oil money right now or the Oregon money. You're going against Clemson. So Clemson really has forged to the lead of these guys with basically old-time recruiting - comfort and relationships.

"Well, money can trump that, so there's still time for Ohio State. I would think this would be the year to allocate serious money to quarterback and to offensive line. Those would be my priorities, offensive line, especially because you got those three guys in-state that are just sitting there for you, and you just have to beat Clemson. You should be able to out-finance Clemson. Then it's a question of Tyler Bowen living up to his part of the comfort and relationship deal of it. I wouldn't give up on those two guys yet, but it doesn't look good right now."

How does the hiring of Matt Patricia as defensive coordinator affect the Buckeyes' recruiting since he hasn't ever coached at the college level for an extended period of time?

"We're going to find out. I'm a big Matt Patricia guy over the years. I've had a lot of coaches that started off in Ohio as young guys in the MAC end up, for some reason, with the Patriots. Nick Caley, Matt Thurin, who was at Ohio State, these guys all ended up in Boston, one at Boston College, one with the Patriots. And so I kind of knew the Patriots' system real well and their staff. I go up there a couple of times a year. I love Matt Patricia, but to be fair, I don't know that Matt Patricia is the super recruiter type, but Jim Knowles wasn't either.

"So you have great recruiters on that side of the ball - James Laurinaitis, Tim Walton - so you're fine that way. I don't know that they need Matt Patricia to be the super recruiter. He needs to be Jim Knowles. I don't know who Jim Knowles recruited in his three years at Ohio State, but I know what he did with that defense in year three. So I'm not sure about Patricia as a recruiter. I think Ohio State wants him to be Jim Knowles 2.0, and they're not going to worry about his recruiting. They've got great recruiters on that side of the ball - Larry Johnson, Laurinaitis, Matt Guerrieri, Walton - those guys are great. So Matt Patricia has got to be able to stop people rather than land people for Ohio State."

With spring practices coming up, are there any prospects to look for who have already scheduled visits?

"The visits are going to come later in March. I'm such a nut for quarterback and offensive line.

"I can't wait to see who comes in for quarterback

because they were in good shape for Nashville (Tenn.) Christian School five-star quarterback Jared Curtis (6-4, 225) and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star quarterback and Texas commit Dia Bell (6-3, 215). Those guys are amazing quarterbacks, and they both have committed elsewhere. Now you're kind of in that second wave of quarterbacks. Then if you look in-state, which is a place where you can usually fall back, Ashland, Ohio, three-star Nathan Bernhard (6-5, 227) is good. Cincinnati Moeller four-star Matt Ponatoski (6-2, 190) is good. Pickerington (Ohio) North three-star quarterback Jarin Mock (6-3, 190), I saw him over the weekend. He came to Akron to work out. I really like him.

"But those guys are not Jared Curtis. I'm not sure where they're going QB-wise right now, and that will be a telltale sign to see who shows up in the spring.

"Then I'm always looking at O-line. You have the two national guys, Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell (6-8, 300), Rockville (Md.) Georgetown Prep five-star offensive tackle Immanuel Iheanacho (6-7, 345), they're supposed to be visiting Ohio State. You'll see where they go with those two guys. Those are the pressing out-of-state guys to me right now. If they can get a visit from Mineral (Va.) Louisa County five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0, 200), that would be amazing. There's a running back, Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna four-star Derrek Cooper (6-1, 205), who plays at Jeremiah Smith's old school. JJ is on him. That would be my favorite running back. I would love to see him show up. But these guys are all in such demand by everybody nationally, you're hoping to get an official visit from them."

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205) has said that he is still committed to Ohio State and that won't change, but he did set up official visits to Miami, Oregon and USC. Should the Buckeyes be worried about him looking at other options at this point?

"Yes and no. I mean the yes part is you don't want those visits. So yes, you're concerned. You'd rather him say, 'I'm shutting it down, I don't want any other schools to ever call me again. I'm going to focus everything I have on rehabbing my injury right now and building this class.' You'd rather he says that. He's not saying that. So in the schools he's visiting, they pay so, no, you're not happy about it. But are they worried? I don't think so. I think he's coming to Ohio State to play for Brian Hartline. And the NIL money they'll spend on Chris Henry, they're not going to lose him. I feel comfortable that he will sign with Ohio State."

Buckeyes Offer Top 2026 Georgia Cornerback

Continued From Page 19

back CJ Givers (5-11, 195) being the latest in his class to receive one. He is unranked by 247Sports composite but ran for 1,403 yards and 21 touchdowns on 151 carries last season along with 13 catches for 182 yards through the air. He has 29 Division I offers and revealed a top four of Duke, Georgia Tech, NC State and Ole Miss before the Buckeyes offered him a scholarship.

Newly promoted co-defensive coordinator Tim Walton offered a scholarship to Marietta (Ga.) Sprayberry four-star cornerback Jorden Edmonds (6-3, 175) on Feb. 19, the No. 42 player in the class of 2026 and the No. 3 cornerback. He had 30 tackles (one for loss) in his junior season of high school ball while also catching 32 passes for 648 yards and four touchdowns as a receiver.

Dates Revealed For OSU Summer Camps

Like every summer, the Buckeyes will be holding recruiting camps at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center again in 2025, trying to spot some of the top talent in the country in some of the younger classes and find some prospects who might have slipped through the cracks in the 2026

class.

Last year, a couple of those players were incoming freshman wide receiver Bodpegn Miller and offensive lineman Jake Cook, who both did not have an offer from the Buckeyes until they showed off their skills at one of those camps in Columbus.

The dates for this year's camps were announced by wide receiver assistant coach Devin Jordan on Twitter on Feb. 21, attaching the message, "ATTENTION ALL HIGH SCHOOL WRS!! Last year we handed out 10+ offers to WRs who attended our camps. Who's next?!"

The one-day camps will be held in Columbus on June 5, 9, 10, 12 and 17, giving recruits a chance to split up with their positions and be seen and coached by Ohio State's assistants between the dates of official visits throughout the month of June.

There will also be a youth camp held from June 3-4, which will allow players entering the 5th-8th grades to participate.

Along with those camps, there will also be 7-on-7 competitions held on the outdoor fields at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on June 11 and 18.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Buford, Ga., four-star athlete Tyriq

Green (5-10, 191) revealed his top eight schools, with Ohio State included on his list. Along with the Buckeyes, Green is still considering Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Tennessee and USC. He is ranked the No. 150 player in the country, the No. 10 athlete and the No. 20 player in the state of Georgia.

• Dallas South Oak Cliff three-star linebacker Jamarion Phillips (6-0, 220) and Richland (N.J.) St. Augustine Prep defensive lineman Damari Simeon (6-3, 275) also narrowed down their scholarship lists to 10 schools each. Phillips, the No. 751 player in his class, had Ohio State with Arkansas, Arizona State, Baylor, Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, SMU and Texas A&M. Simeon, who is unranked by 247Sports, included the Buckeyes with Duke, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, Syracuse, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and Wisconsin.

• It seems as if the Buckeyes are out of the running for Rockville (Md.) Georgetown Prep five-star offensive tackle Immanuel Iheanacho (6-7, 345), who revealed his top 11 schools, not including the Buckeyes. He narrowed his list down to Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Maryland, Miami, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and Texas A&M.

- Baltimore St. Frances Academy five-

star defensive end and Maryland commit Zion Elee (6-4, 220) originally said he would take an official visit to Ohio State but soon after said he would be closing his recruitment and canceling all of his official visits other than one to visit the Terrapins. The other schools he was planning to see were Auburn, Ohio State, Penn State and Texas A&M, but the No. 1 defensive end in the country seems to be locked in with head coach Mike Locksley at this point. He committed to the Terrapins on Dec. 7.

• A top cornerback target in the 2026 class, Carrollton, Ga., four-star Dorian Barney (6-1, 180) revealed a top-12 list of Ohio State, Michigan, Oregon, Penn State, Florida State, Texas A&M, Ole Miss, Georgia, Miami, Notre Dame, North Carolina and Colorado. He is considered the No. 91 overall prospect, the No. 11 cornerback and the No. 12 player in the state of Georgia and has 50 Division-I offers.

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

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1985

Defense and size were the key words when describing the 1985 Ohio State football recruiting class.

"This is a better defensive recruiting class than last year," said OSU recruiting coordinator Bob McNea. "It's faster. We didn't get as many skill position players, but we already had skill players."

When McNea talked of it being a strong defensive recruiting class, he had to talk of the linebackers. The Buckeyes inked seven of them. They included Dennis Gossett, Dee Dee Howard, Derek Isaman, Jim Palmer, Paul Soltis, John and Mike Sullivan and Srecko Zizakovic.

35 Years Ago — 1990

Ohio State's 1990 recruiting class swelled by seven members in one week with three Ohio blue-chippers and four out-of-state stars issuing verbal commitments to the Buckeyes.

In-state stars deciding to play their college football at Ohio State were defensive lineman Matt Bonhaus of Cincinnati Elder, defensive end Pete Beckman of Chesterland West Geauga and wide receiver Joey Galloway of Bellaire.

Joining that trio at Ohio State was linebacker Anthony Peterson of Monongahela, Pa.; fullback Alex Rodriguez of Chicago; middle guard Sean Carden of Berwick, Pa.; and tight end Cedric Saunders of Sarasota, Fla.

The Buckeyes also got some bad news during the week when Pittsburgh defensive lineman Aaron Jackson decided to withdraw his commitment, switching his allegiance to Big Ten rival Michigan State.

30 Years Ago — 1995

A pair of Ohio players whom Ohio State had been recruiting since Day One, Antwon Jones of Piqua and Jeff Snedegar of Lore City, committed elsewhere.

Jones, a defensive end prospect, committed to Notre Dame during a visit over the weekend of Jan. 20. He was rated among the top five college prospects in Ohio by The Ohio Football Recruiting News and was also considered among the top defensive line prospects in the Midwest.

Snedegar, a quarterback/outside linebacker from Buckeye Trail, committed to Kentucky on Jan. 17.

Snedegar visited OSU the weekend of Jan. 6 as well as West Virginia and Kentucky. He was a standout quarterback at Buckeye Trail, but OSU and WVU recruited him as an outside linebacker. Kentucky was also interested in his skills as a quarterback.

"I liked the academics at Kentucky the best," said Snedegar, who wanted to major in wildlife or secondary education. "That was one of the main deciding factors."

25 Years Ago — 2000

Ohio State's football recruiting effort appeared to finish on a high note with commitments from a pair of talented players just days before National Signing Day on Feb. 2.

The Buckeyes got commitments from Detroit Cass Tech linebacker Marco Cooper and Beaufort (S.C.) Battery Creek running back Greg Jones on Jan. 30.

Cooper, who picked OSU over Tennessee, seemed to be a strong commitment. But some believed Jones, who was also looking at national champion Florida State, might waver at the last minute.

If those commitments held up, however, Ohio State would have had 26 players in its recruiting class, including junior college transfer Jack Tucker, a linebacker who was already enrolled. According to BSB's unofficial count, OSU would have used all of its available scholarships.

20 Years Ago — 2005

Visiting and committing the final weekend of the recruiting process was Chagrin Falls, Ohio, wide receiver Brian Robiskie, who received his offer on Jan. 20, just days before he was scheduled to head to Miami (Fla.) for a visit.

The wide receiver took that visit then followed it up with another to Ohio State the last weekend of January. His time in Columbus was apparently enough to sway him toward wanting to be a Buckeye.

"I got to see the business school, which I'm interested in, and let them talk to me about what they have planned, not only with the team but with things like the weight room and the whole complex," Robiskie told BSB. "They're going to put a lot of money into it, try to renovate some of that stuff, and that sounds exciting. I can tell a lot of guys are excited and want to be a part of that."

15 Years Ago — 2010

Days before signing day, five-star linebacker Jordan Hicks of West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West announced his intention to play football for Texas head coach Mack Brown.

"I don't feel like I turned my back on Ohio State," Hicks said at a press conference. "I wasn't born here. Ohio State is an Ohio school (and) I'm not from Ohio. I really don't have that connection there from growing up liking them."

Without that built-in lure working for the Buckeyes, Hicks said his decision came down to a matter of trust.

"Trust by far was the deciding factor," he said after donning a black and burnt orange Texas hat. "I have total trust in (Texas defensive coordinator Will) Muschamp, Coach Brown and (linebackers coach Jeff) Madden. I just had a trust factor with them,

and it felt like family."

10 Years Ago — 2015

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer's recruiting reputation spoke for itself, but the three-time national championship coach had seen the recruiting trail grow more crowded in each of the previous two years.

After Penn State hired James Franklin following the 2013 season, Michigan responded by plucking Jim Harbaugh from the NFL in late December. Neither coach had quite the proven pedigree of Meyer, but both appeared to mirror, at least in some ways, the fanatical attention to recruiting that Meyer possessed.

"In addition to Urban Meyer, Jim Harbaugh and James Franklin are going to be some of the most feared recruiters in the country," CBS Sports recruiting analyst Tom Lemming told BSB. "With those three, their hobby is recruiting, not playing golf or something else."

Five Years Ago — 2020

St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star cornerback Jakailin "J.K." Johnson placed Ohio State in his top six schools on Feb. 14 alongside Clemson, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma and USC.

The 6-0, 168-pound Johnson was considered the fourth-best cornerback and No. 59 overall prospect in the class of 2021. He recorded 42 tackles and seven interceptions to help the Spartans to their second state title in school history.

Johnson - the cousin of Buckeyes sophomore wide receiver Jameson Williams - had landed an offer from Ohio State the previous spring but was considered a heavy Notre Dame lean at the time. He took a visit for the program's inaugural Buckeye Bash and BBQ a few weeks later and returned to campus again for the 34-10 win over Michigan State in October.

One Year Ago — 2024

Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts was one of Ohio State's top targets and expected to make a decision in April, May or June, according to 247Sports, with Alabama, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon and Penn State among his top schools.

Roberts was the No. 107 overall prospect and fourth-ranked tight end in the class. The former Notre Dame commit visited Ohio State twice during the 2023 season and expected to make it back to Columbus for the spring game on April 13.

"I'll make it back in the spring and on an official visit," he said. "Ohio State, Oregon and Oklahoma are definitely official visits and possibly Penn State. Alabama is in there too. They've done a great job recruiting me with their new staff."

Mobley Shooting For Stardom In Frosh Season

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

From the moment he picked up a basketball, shooting has always been at the forefront of John Mobley Jr.'s mind.

Growing up in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, as the son of a former professional basketball player and current basketball coach and trainer, Mobley spent the formative years of his childhood perfecting his craft in the driveway with his dad, John Mobley Sr., often testing and expanding his range on a kid-friendly hoop.

"I started at a very, very young age with a little hoop, just with my dad shooting on a – I wouldn't even say an eight-foot, like a six-foot hoop," Mobley said at Ohio State's team media day on Oct. 8. "I started from there, building my way up. By the time I was in second grade, I was able to shoot from the volleyball line."

It may be unusual for a child to have already developed a long-range shot at around age 7, but that early practice has generated its rewards for Mobley throughout his childhood and young adult life.

Mobley's time spent with his father in the driveway led him to early stardom as a teenager, where he became skilled enough to move over 2,000 miles west to Las Vegas to play varsity high school basketball at athletic powerhouse Bishop Gorman.

There, he helped lead the Gaels to a 30-1 record and state championship runner-up finish as a sophomore in 2021-22 by averaging 15.5 points per game before recording another 20.1 points per contest as a junior.

That practice also helped him thrive in the next chapter of his basketball life when he transferred to Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy for his senior season. He cemented himself as one of the better scorers in the country in his one season with the Tigers by scoring 21.5 points per game, while also earning the nickname "The Sniper" by 247Sports in its 2024 class superlatives and becoming the nation's No. 49 overall prospect and sixth-best combo guard according to the 247Sports composite.

"Juni (his nickname is Juni but he prefers to be called by his formal name John) Mobley, in my opinion, was one of the very best shooters in the country, regardless of class," Ohio State head coach Jake Diebler said over the summer.

This year, all of the work Mobley has turned in dating back to his early days practicing in the driveway has led him to instant stardom at Ohio State, where he has emerged as one of the more electrifying shooters in the Big Ten and a reliable playmaker for the Buckeyes in just his first collegiate season.

Through 29 games this season, the true freshman guard has often wowed fans with his unique range and confidence from beyond the arc, ranking 15th in the Big Ten in three-point field goal percentage (40.3 percent) and tied for first in three-pointers made per game (2.4) among those who attempted more than 2.5 threes per game.

Those traits have also allowed him to rank third on the team in scoring at 13.1

points per game and second in assists with 64.

"I'm always going to shoot no matter what," Mobley said earlier this season. "Even if (the previous shot) went out, I probably would've shot another one like that. So for me, that confidence is always going to stay there, and my mindset is going to stay the same."

Mobley's confident attitude was evident from the start of his freshman season. Returning to Las Vegas to make his collegiate debut in front of a nationally televised audience against No. 19 Texas on Nov. 4, he was unfazed by the bright lights and swished the first shot of his career, a three-point attempt from the logo just 1:26 after being first subbed in.

Mobley wasn't done after that, though. He buried three more triples on as many attempts that night to help him finish his debut with an impressive 14 points and give Ohio State a statement 80-72 season-opening victory.

"I love his aggressive mentality and mindset," Diebler said of Mobley after the game. "I recruited him, and I believe in what he can do. He plays with a freedom and a confidence that's going to be really important for our team."

Diebler's projection of the impact the freshman could make on his team for the season seemed to be correct. Mobley used the momentum from his sparkling debut to make each of the first seven three-point attempts of his career and log at least 13 points and three made triples in six of his first eight games.

Mobley's white-hot start to his career helped him emerge as one of the most efficient shooters in the nation – ranking second in the country in three-point field-goal percentage after the team's blowout loss to Auburn on Dec. 14 at 54.0 percent – but the freshman's role would have to change in a significant way soon after that date when fifth-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr. left the team due to personal reasons prior to the Buckeyes' Dec. 17 game against Valparaiso.

Johnson's departure meant Mobley would be thrust into the starting lineup just 11 games into his freshman campaign and

he would be tasked with not just keeping up his efficient scoring but making plays as a do-it-all guard alongside All-Big Ten veteran guard Bruce Thornton.

Mobley's insertion into the starting lineup did end up putting a dent in his scoring efficiency. As opposing teams began to make him one of the main focal points in their defensive game plans, his three-point shooting plummeted. He made just 30.5 percent (18 of 59) of his attempts from beyond the arc and scored 12.2 points in his first 10 starts compared to the 54.0 percent and 12.4 he had in his first 10 games off the bench.



John Mobley Jr.

But while the scoring took a dip, he learned to make plays off the ball and find more unique ways to impact the game. He learned to be more of a facilitator, raising his assist numbers from 1.2 per game to 3.0 in those 10 games, while he also increased his rebounding totals from 1.3 to 1.9.

Mobley's evolution into becoming an all-around player came as no surprise to his head coach, who said he has always believed that his skills stretch way beyond his shooting.

"I've said this from Day One," Diebler said after the team's 83-64 win over Penn State on Jan. 30. "He had a reputation as a shooter. He is much more than that. He's a complete offensive player. He can score in the paint. He can certainly score from the three-point line. But you're seeing his ability to create and read crowds, and I think he's ahead of the curve for a freshman in that regard."

Mobley said after that same PSU win – in which he scored 19 points and dished out eight assists – that he is happy to showcase his full capabilities on the court and wants to rid himself of the label of a three-point specialist.

"It feels good," Mobley said. "My whole life growing up, everybody labeled me as just a shooter, but it feels good to showcase my all-around game. Defense, offense, get-

ting people involved, getting to the basket, also shooting."

Mobley has continued to succeed as an all-around guard as the season progressed. Not only has he regained his touch from beyond the arc, making 26 of his last 67 attempts from three (38.8 percent) in his last nine games, but he is still making plays without scoring, averaging 2.4 assists and 1.6 rebounds in that same span. And while this elite play hasn't necessarily translated to wins for the Buckeyes, who hold just a 4-5 record in those games, it positions Mobley among a group of just a few players on the roster whom Diebler can trust with the ball in their hands in late-game situations.

Diebler has mentioned Mobley alongside fellow perimeter players Thornton and fifth-year wing Micah Parrish along with sophomore forward Devin Royal as guys who he feels can have a big game on any given night. But with Mobley's dynamic shooting and playmaking abilities, the freshman may prove to be the most intimidating scoring threat of them all for the Buckeyes as they look to salvage their season and make one final push for the NCAA Tournament.

Earlier this season, the Buckeye coach described the trust he has in Mobley, while also saying that he feels he is still nowhere close to unlocking his full potential.

"He loves to hoop, and I love that about him," Diebler said. "He plays with a ton of aggressiveness, and we have great confidence in him. It hasn't always been that ratio. To his credit, he studies the film. He works on his game, and he's getting better and better."

"I just trust him with the ball in his hands. He makes great decisions. He can read the game really well. I'm just really proud of his growth. He hasn't arrived yet. He's still got room to keep growing. He will because he works. He's got to stay in the gym like he always has his entire life."

Regardless of how he finishes the regular season or whether he can help lead the Buckeyes to the postseason, the impact Mobley has made on the program in year one sets him up for a promising career in scarlet and gray, that is if he decides to forgo a potential NBA career and return for his sophomore season with the Buckeyes.

WHY THE SHEETZ NOT

BUILD YOUR MASTERPIECE FROM OUR MENU?

SHEETZ.COM

SHEETZ

MADE TO ORDER

Gayle's Return To OSU Draws Mixed Reactions

Ohio State's Feb. 16 game against Michigan carried several significant storylines, but none was more intriguing than the return of Wolverines junior guard Roddy Gayle Jr. to Columbus just under 10 months after he surprised many and turned in his scarlet and gray jersey for maize and blue.

COURT REPORT

Patrick Engels

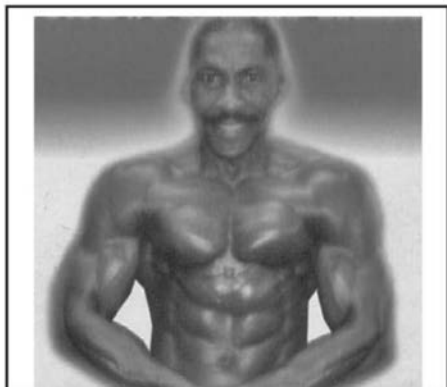
Gayle's surprising decision to transfer from Ohio State to Michigan last April drew the ire of Buckeye fans across the state and country, and to no one's surprise, those hard feelings spilled out inside a nearly capacity Value City Arena crowd of 18,058 when Gayle was angrily booed each time he touched the ball or was involved in a play.

Gayle's reception from the fans was expected by everyone familiar with the situation, and according to his teammates, the Buckeye-turned-Wolverine was unfazed by the sometimes over-the-top vitriol coming his way.

"I think this game meant more for (Gayle) than anyone else," Wolverine junior forward/center Danny Wolf said after the game. "I mean, he went to war with those guys just like he did us. And when you have (18,058 fans) all chanting obscenities and obscurities about a person that behind-the-scenes you guys don't even know what goes on – I'm just so proud of Roddy. He just stuck with it."

Michigan head coach Dusty May sang a similar tune as Wolf after the game. In a video clip posted on the Wolverines' official Twitter account after the game, May was seen complimenting Gayle and his teammates in the locker room over their ability to take the high road and brush off the constant hate they received from the away crowd.

"We're going to get a lot of vitriol," May said.



TIM SWANSON
Certified Personal Trainer

Flat Stomach • Weight Loss • Strength Training
• Cardio Kick-Boxing • Boot Camp

614-886-9331
foreverfitswan@yahoo.com

2024-25 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

16-13 Overall (8-10 Big Ten) Statistics through games of Feb. 27

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	29-29	1037-35.7	165-329	.502	54-123	.439	120-143	.839	10-87	97-3.3	43-0	126	40	4	32	504-17.4
ROYAL, Devin	28-24	777-27.8	129-248	.520	14-50	.280	101-128	.789	60-134	194-6.9	80-1	31	49	9	24	373-13.3
MOBLEY JR., John	29-19	783-27.0	121-304	.398	71-176	.403	68-75	.907	4-42	46-1.6	52-1	64	41	2	23	381-13.1
PARRISH, Micah	28-28	876-31.3	121-275	.440	49-139	.353	65-83	.783	20-106	126-4.5	73-1	41	59	9	31	356-12.7
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	19-5	318-16.8	47-91	.516	7-29	.241	20-27	.741	19-33	52-2.7	53-2	4	8	15	10	121-6.4
STEWART, Sean	27-27	497-18.4	64-121	.529	1-2	.500	23-44	.523	39-117	156-5.8	92-5	18	30	25	19	152-5.6
GLOVER, Ques	21-0	355-16.9	35-103	.340	10-29	.345	17-24	.708	10-22	32-1.5	39-2	28	19	2	6	97-4.6
MAHAFFEY, Evan	29-3	543-18.7	49-73	.671	1-2	.500	13-35	.371	40-49	89-3.1	65-4	27	18	28	23	112-3.9
NJEGOVAN, Ivan	20-0	118-5.9	13-26	.500	2-7	.286	5-7	.714	13-19	32-1.6	15-0	2	1	8	0	33-1.7
ETZLER, Kalen	7-0	17-2.4	4-5	.800	2-2	1.000	0-0	.000	0-4	4-0.6	1-0	0	1	0	1	10-1.4
PARKS, Austin	14-0	122-8.7	8-15	.533	0-1	.000	4-8	.500	7-6	13-0.9	18-0	5	5	1	2	20-1.4
WHITE, Colin	16-0	136-8.5	7-19	.368	4-12	.333	3-6	.500	5-11	16-1.0	20-0	6	6	3	5	21-1.3
NASH, Braylen	9-0	14-1.6	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	9-0	18-2.0	0-2	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1-0.1	0-0	2	0	0	0	0-0.0
Team									47-51	98		19				
Total	29	5900	796-1702	.468	236-630	.375	448-596	.752	274-707	981-33.8	568-16	381	320	108	188	2276-78.5
Opponents	29	5900	704-1667	.422	185-624	.296	503-669	.752	306-676	982-33.9	540-9	334	344	94	122	2096-72.3

"There's nothing that makes them more angry than us ... dusting that stuff off. Nothing makes them angrier. When they're doing all that stuff to us, and we act like, 'Man, we ain't into that. We're chasing something bigger.'"

Gayle's highly anticipated return to Ohio State – which saw him log nine points and eight rebounds and score the final go-ahead basket with 1:45 left in the game – wasn't viewed negatively by everyone representing the Buckeyes.

During pregame warmups, Ohio State head coach Jake Diebler shared a moment and exchanged pleasantries with Gayle, whom he recruited out of high school and coached both as associate head coach and interim head coach during Gayle's two seasons with the Buckeyes.

Diebler said it was great to catch up with his former player prior to tip-off.

"When he was here, he was literally like family," Diebler said. "His parents would call me if they felt like he needed something. We were that close. So just in that moment, he knows how much I cared about him, and I think that feeling was mutual when he was here. It was a quick embrace and a quick word, but I prefer to keep that between us. But it was good."

Ohio State junior guard Bruce Thornton – who came into Ohio State as a freshman along with Gayle in 2022-23 and started 46 games with him with the Buckeyes from 2022-24 – also had some positive things to say about his now-rival after the game.

"That's my guy," said Thornton, who at one point in the game was picked up full court by Gayle. "We came in together, (were together) through this situation. I wish him the best."

Gayle Discusses Departure From OSU

Before he made his return to Columbus, Gayle opened up in an interview with The Columbus Dispatch about his decision to leave Ohio State for its archrival.

The former Buckeyes' guard – who averaged 9.1 points, 3.1 rebounds and 2.0 assists in 71 games (46 starts) in scarlet and gray – said that while he appreciates the special relationship he developed with Diebler over the years, the uncertainty that struck the program after Chris Holtmann's firing last February ultimately turned him off and propelled him to

find another opportunity.

"I'd felt uncertainty weighing down on me ever since the coaching change," Gayle said. "I love Diebler, but nobody knew that he was going to be the new head coach going into next season. I feel like that uncertainty weighed on me mentally a lot, especially toward the end of the season."

Gayle said that he made the final decision to enter the portal soon after the Buckeyes' NIT quarterfinal loss to Georgia on March 26, 2024, when he came to the realization with his family that the best chance for him to achieve his goal of playing in the NBA was to suit up for a different school.

This decision was a tough one to make, so much so that he put off telling Diebler – who had just been hired by Ohio State as full-time head coach – for a few weeks after he made his decision, finally telling him in his car for what he described as an emotional conversation.

"The relationship I have with Diebler goes for about four, five years, so telling him really messed me up for a while," Gayle said. "It took me a week or two to build the courage to even tell him that I was going to test the waters. I told him I was going to take a few visits and enter the portal and let him know after that. That's how that unfolded. I did tell him that I was going to take a visit to Michigan. He was not very happy about that."

Gayle admitted that he seriously considered withdrawing his name from the portal and returning to Ohio State, putting the Buckeyes in his top three alongside Creighton and Michigan.

But while a reunion was on the table – Diebler and new assistant coach Dave Dickerson made one final push for Gayle during a visit at his home in Youngstown, N.Y. – he ultimately chose the Wolverines and May, whose fast-paced style of play he was bringing from Florida Atlantic intrigued Gayle.

He also revealed in the interview that he received an alarming amount of hate online from Buckeye fans – including death threats – both during and after his decision. Gayle said that because of the threats he was scared to return

to Ohio State's campus to retrieve his clothes and half-joked with his father that he needed security on campus.

"My DMs were insane, even when I took the visit to Michigan," Gayle said. "Death threats. 'Don't come back to Columbus.' Stuff like that."

"It was weird for me because if you open a DM it would be like, 'Hey, great game today.' Then a month or two later (after I visited/committed to Michigan) it was the same person saying, 'Traitor, f—k you, blah blah blah.'"

Although these comments caused Gayle to think twice about transferring to Michigan, he knew that he ultimately had to focus on himself and make what he thought was the right decision for his basketball future.

"Morally, I understand that it's wrong, but from my perspective, I think it was the best decision for me and my family for me to be successful and for me to chase my dreams," he said.

"I had to learn to leave social media and fans out of it because you can't argue with a fan."

"Their way is the right way every time, and you're not supposed to morally do certain things, but when you look at a kid trying to reach his goals, I feel like it was the best option for me. Simple as that."

Through Feb. 27, Gayle was averaging 10.4 points, 3.7 rebounds and 2.5 assists while shooting 43.1 percent from the field in 27 games (23 starts) this season.

Diebler, May Want Protected Home-And-Home

The first-ever matchup between the Diebler-led Buckeyes and May-led Wolverines provided plenty of intrigue, but unless the two teams meet back up in the Big Ten or NCAA tournament this March, fans will have to wait another year until the rivals can create more drama on the hardwood.

Both programs are working to make sure this does not become an annual occurrence in the new 18-team Big Ten conference schedule, however. Shortly after Michigan's thrilling 86-83 win over Ohio State, both Diebler and May revealed that they had requested before the season that the Big Ten guarantee the two programs a protected home-and-home series every year.

"I love being a part of this game, so much

so that I was asking anybody that would listen to make this a doubleheader every single year when we were out in California (for Big Ten preseason meetings)," Diebler said. "I know there's a lot that goes into that, but I think our fans deserve that. Both schools deserve that. Let's play this game twice a year if we can make that work. Because (the Feb. 16 game) was a great atmosphere.

"Even though it might not be as fun as it could be – it's a gut-wrenching preparation and anticipation for the game because of how much it means – we both agreed that going forward we'd like for that to happen," added May, who agreed to a new five-year deal with the Wolverines that will keep him in Ann Arbor until 2030. "I don't know if we can do a quick flip next year, but we both requested that from the league."

As Diebler alluded to, the conversations sprouted during the Big Ten's offseason meetings in California, where the Buckeye coach took charge and brought the idea up to conference officials after speaking with May about the issue.

While it is unclear whether Diebler's and May's wishes will be granted by the Big Ten or when that would occur, the two rival coaches said they hope the teams can match up twice a year sooner rather than later because doing so would be beneficial for the two programs, their fan bases and all other parties involved.

"We should have that game in Columbus every year, and we should be going up there every year, because rivalry games are great for all the obvious reasons," Diebler said. "So it's great that Dusty is on board too, and we'll see what happens with it. But hopefully we can get that done."

"Obviously, it's hard, because it's two rivalry games vs. one, but it's just what's good for the game," May added. "It's what's good for the sport. It's what's good for our players. It's less travel. It's big for TV. It's big for our fan bases."

May Views OSU As NCAA Tournament Team

In addition to pleading for an annual home-and-home series with Ohio State, May devoted some of the time during his postgame press conference to praising his rival opponent.

After watching his team withstand several valiant Buckeye runs en route to their three-point victory, May went out of his way to make a case for Ohio State as an NCAA Tournament team, saying that they without a doubt belong in the 68-team field this season.

"I think Ohio State's without a doubt an NCAA Tournament team," he said. "It was two heavyweights battling it out, going hit for hit, and fortunately we made the plays when we needed to."

May – who emerged as a final candidate for Ohio State's head coaching vacancy last spring before Diebler was hired on March 17, 2024 – spoke glowingly of the program his fellow first-year coach has built this season.

Along with praising the "phenomenal" play of sophomore forward Devin Royal, freshman guard John Mobley Jr. and Thornton, May lauded the way Ohio State has navigated through its difficult schedule and grown as a team since the beginning of the season, a development he said many of his colleagues have also

noticed of late.

"It's a lot of fun competing against those guys because we have a lot of respect (for them)," May said. "Like us, they played an incredibly difficult schedule, which has prepared them for Big Ten play. They're a much better team now than they were six weeks ago. A much, much better basketball team,

"I looked at a couple texts from coaches that have played them earlier, and they said, 'Wow, they've improved.' That's probably the most difficult thing to do in today's climate, is to keep a team together, fighting like crazy together, and then have them improve as you go through this long, grueling season of college basketball, especially in the Big Ten Conference."

May's declaration about the Buckeyes might be trending toward being an incorrect one after they lost two of three after the Michigan defeat.

Diebler Reflects On One Year Spent As Coach

Exactly one year after taking over for Holtmann and assuming the interim head coaching role on Feb. 14, 2024, Diebler took a step back from his head coaching duties and gave some perspective on that historic day in Buckeye Hoops history and how his life has changed since then.

Diebler, who served as an assistant for Holtmann for five seasons – including two years as associate head coach from 2022-24 – said that he remembers feeling a mix of different emotions when he heard the news that Holtmann would be fired and he would take over as interim head coach. But the biggest thing on his mind during that time was not to make himself a candidate to fill the vacancy but instead to lead a group of hurting players as best he could for the remainder of the season.

"That was such a blur because everything was going so fast," he said. "What I remember about that time when that happened was just the mix of emotions, the pain, the hurt you felt for Coach Holtmann and our guys.

"My focus at that time was – and I don't mean for this to sound cliché, but it really was – just to serve those players in the program as well as I could. I've said that before. Really, that's all it was. I wasn't thinking about myself or what was next. I was thinking about serving the program and those players as well as they absolutely could."

Diebler's team-first mentality helped lead the Buckeyes out of a midseason slump, guiding them to a 6-2 record in the team's last eight regular-season games and then taking the team all the way to the NIT quarterfinals with two more postseason victories. His leadership also proved to be one of the main reasons that then-incoming athletic director Ross Bjork decided to shed the interim tag off the Ohio native last spring.

Now more than one year removed from Holtmann's firing and Diebler now operating as full-time head coach with his own staff and an almost entirely new roster, the Buckeyes are fighting to stay off the bubble and earn a berth to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2021-22.

Regardless of whether the Buckeyes are dancing in March, Diebler is committed to leading the program behind the same principles that allowed him to earn his dream job a season ago.

"Now fast-forward and you get to be the head coach of your dream job," he said. "It's a blessing. I'm just so thankful that God has, in

my opinion, just ordered these steps. And for that, I take this responsibility of being in this position very seriously and continue to keep that same theme of serving the players who are here as well as we possibly can and serving this program as well as I possibly can."

OSU Alters "Awkward" Chick-fil-A Promotion

It's almost unfathomable to predict a team being booed on their home floor in the midst of a blowout win, but that is exactly what happened during the Buckeyes' two double-digit victories over Iowa on Jan. 27 and Washington on Feb. 12 due to an in-game promotion involving free Chick-fil-A.

As part of a partnership with the company, fans who attended the first 14 home games at Value City Arena were given a coupon for free chicken if the Buckeyes eclipsed at least 16 assists in a game. That threshold was reached in just four of those matchups, but the team came close to reaching that number in its 82-65 win over the Hawkeyes and 93-69 victory over the Huskies.

Against Iowa, the Buckeyes were stuck on 15 assists for the final 5:08 of action and missed several shots that could have given the team assist No. 16, leading the 11,261 fans in attendance to playfully boo their home team despite them winning by their largest margin in a Big Ten game this season up to that date.

A similar occurrence unfolded just 16 days later when the Buckeyes – despite cruising to their fifth win in seven tries – failed to reach 16 assists in the final 7:34, causing even louder boos from the 9,987 fans inside the arena to cascade down on the home team, the loudest

jeers coming on the game's final possession as they dribbled out the clock for the last 28 seconds rather than going for another assist.

Shortly after that sequence, Diebler took the lectern to address what he called an "awkward" situation, saying that while he does understand the fans' desires for the free chicken, he did not want to disrespect the opponent and look for an extra assist on that final possession.

"I don't really know how I can answer that," Diebler said when a reporter jokingly asked, "Do you hate free chicken?" "I like free chicken, I do. But I also love the game. We had a lot of opportunities, certainly, to (get to 16 assists), and in that moment, if there were maybe 34-35 seconds on the shot clock, it would've been a different attempt on the last play.

"But I think you have to honor the game and the opponent in that moment, despite your love for chicken. Do I need to (give a thumbs up) and say, 'I love Chick-fil-A?' It's kind of awkward, but I appreciate the energy and stuff. Hopefully, everybody realizes why we didn't take an attempt on that last possession."

Diebler's comments seemed to spark some change regarding the promotion. In Ohio State's last two home games as BSB went to press against Michigan and Northwestern on Feb. 20, the target score for free chicken was lowered from 16 to 12 assists. That new threshold was reached during the Michigan game when the Buckeyes dished out 13 assists, but fans were sent home with empty hands after their 70-49 blowout loss to Northwestern when OSU recorded just eight assists, the third-lowest total this season.



Jake Diebler



Is proud to be a CBD partner with



For all your wellness needs
cbdhealth.com



30%
OFF ALL PRODUCTS
Must present coupon in-store. One coupon per customer. Valid through 2024. Offer only available at Columbus Botanical Depot. Use code "clean15" at check out online

Columbus Ohio's first CBD store.
Find out today how CBD could help you.



14 W. Pacemont Road
Columbus, OH 43202

HOURS
10:30am - 8pm
EVERY DAY

Losing Stretch Puts Bucks On NCAA Bubble

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State put itself in jeopardy of missing the NCAA Tournament for the third straight season due to a losing stretch that included just two wins in five games.

After taking care of business with a blow-out 93-69 home win over Washington on Feb. 12 to win their fifth game in seven tries and improve their record to 15-10 and 7-7 in the Big Ten, the Buckeyes hit a wall at the most inopportune time by losing three straight games. Each of those three defeats came in different fashion, with Ohio State first falling to archrival Michigan on Feb. 16 on a last-second miss from junior guard Bruce Thornton then suffering its worst loss of the season by 21 points to a 13-13 Northwestern team at home on Feb. 20, all before losing by eight points in a hard-fought road game at UCLA on Feb. 23.

The three-game losing streak put the Buckeyes out of the projected 68-team field according to multiple reputable outlets, but there was hope for a potential final push to the Big Dance after OSU handed USC a five-point loss in Los Angeles on Feb. 26 to end their West Coast trip on a winning note.

OSU Cruises Past U-W At Home

Ohio State (15-10, 7-7) used a strong shooting performance to pick up a comfortable 93-69 win over Washington (12-12, 3-10) on Feb. 12 in front of 9,987 fans inside Value City Arena, the lowest attended Big Ten game in the venue's 26-year history.

The Buckeyes took full advantage of a struggling Huskies team tasked with traveling nearly 2,500 miles east to Columbus on a weekday by getting out to a double-digit lead by the 9:11 mark of the first half and never looking back, trailing for all of 22 seconds in the game and leading by as many as 30 points in the comfortable 24-point victory.



Micah Parrish

The nearly wire-to-wire win was in large part due to an impressive offensive outing from the Buckeyes in which they shot 58.2 percent from the floor (32 of 55) and 61.1 percent from three (11 of 18) to score their most points in a conference game since Jan. 21, 2023 (Iowa, 93-77).

"I felt like we took a step forward tonight in some areas," head coach Jake Diebler said. "It was just a complete team effort, which you love to see this time of year. But I'm just proud of how connected we were for the majority of the game."

Ohio State's dominance over the Huskies began early when it made five threes and forced seven Washington turnovers in the first 12:10 to jump out to a 34-22 lead with 7:50 remaining in the half on a Micah Parrish basket from distance.

A more positive spurt for Washington allowed it to trail 39-31 with 4:14 left after a pair of free throws by Wilhelm Breidenbach, but a four-point play from Parrish put things in order and ignited a 12-5 run that allowed the Buckeyes to go into halftime leading 51-36.

Ohio State made 10 baskets in a row from 9:45 to 1:18 and connected on eight of its 12 threes in the period and 20 of 30 shots total, both good for 66.7 percentages. Parrish had 14 first-half points, and John Mobley Jr. had 12.

"We were clicking," Mobley said of the end-of-half stretch. "(Washington) was talking trash a little bit. We feed off that. That was a big mistake on their part."

The Buckeyes continued their dominance out of the break, scoring on 11 of their first 16 offensive possessions to push their lead to 73-50 with 11:24 left following a three-pointer from Thornton.

After three straight free throws from Washington senior guard DJ Davis cut the deficit to 20 on the next possession, OSU held the Huskies to just one field goal in their next five attempts to go up by 30, 86-56, with 5:52 left.

From there on, the only remaining drama was whether the Buckeyes would gift the sparse crowd free Chick-Fil-A by eclipsing 16 assists. As in their blowout home win over Iowa on Jan. 27, they were unable to do so, going without an assist for the final 7:35 and having fans boo their home team as the

Ohio State 93, Washington 69									
Feb. 12, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus									
	1	2	F						
Washington (12-12, 3-10)	36	33	69						
Ohio State (15-10, 7-7)	51	42	93						
Washington	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Harris	29	4-9	4-4	0-0	1	3	14		
Diallo	27	5-6	4-6	1-1	1	4	14		
Breidenbach	20	2-6	3-4	0-2	1	1	9		
Osobor	26	4-8	0-2	2-4	3	3	8		
Mason	21	1-4	0-0	1-0	0	3	2		
Davis	29	4-8	3-3	0-1	1	0	14		
Kepnang	19	3-5	0-0	1-3	0	3	6		
King	5	1-2	0-0	0-0	1	0	2		
Ihenacho	13	0-2	0-0	0-2	2	3	0		
Butler	9	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0		
Ibekwe	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	24-52	14-19	6-16	10	21	69		
Percentages: FG: 46.2%. FT: 73.7%. Three-point field goals: 7-17 (Davis 2-6, Breidenbach 2-5, Mason 0-2, Butler 0-2, Harris 2-3). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Harris, King, Ihenacho). Turnovers: 14 (Diallo 4, Osobor 3, Mason 3, Ihenacho 2, Harris, Kepnang). Steals: 6 (Harris 4, Mason, Kepnang).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Mobley	32	7-9	2-2	0-2	2	1	21		
Parrish	31	7-13	4-4	1-6	3	2	21		
Thornton	31	4-8	8-9	1-3	5	0	17		
Royal	26	3-8	2-2	1-3	1	2	8		
Stewart	21	3-6	0-0	2-5	0	2	6		
Bradshaw	17	5-5	0-0	1-2	0	3	12		
Mahaffey	12	2-2	0-3	0-0	2	1	4		
Glover	17	1-3	0-0	0-1	2	1	2		
Njegovan	2	0-0	2-2	0-1	0	0	2		
White	5	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	0		
Baumann	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Nash	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Etzler	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0		
Totals	200	32-55	18-22	9-25	15	14	93		
Percentages: FG: 58.2%. FT: 81.8%. Three-point field goals: 11-18 (Mobley 5-7, Parrish 3-6, Bradshaw 2-2, Royal 0-1, White 0-1, Thornton 1-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (Stewart 2, Mahaffey 2, Bradshaw). Turnovers: 14 (Mobley 5, Thornton 2, Mahaffey 2, Royal, Stewart, Bradshaw, Glover, White). Steals: 7 (Mahaffey 2, Mobley, Parrish, Thornton, Royal, Bradshaw). Officials: Irving, Kimble, Reed. Attendance: 9,987.									

Michigan 86, Ohio State 83									
Feb. 16, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus									
	1	2	F						
Michigan (20-5, 12-2)	44	42	86						
Ohio State (15-11, 7-8)	39	44	83						
Michigan	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Goldin	24	9-14	2-2	6-4	1	1	20		
Wolf	33	7-12	3-5	3-8	5	2	17		
Burnett	33	3-8	2-2	1-2	2	4	11		
Donaldson	30	3-10	2-2	1-2	0	3	8		
Jones	24	3-3	1-2	1-2	1	4	8		
Gayle Jr.	29	3-9	3-4	3-5	2	2	9		
Tschetter	20	3-7	0-0	1-1	1	1	8		
Carson	3	2-3	0-0	0-1	0	2	5		
Pippen	4	0-2	0-0	1-1	1	1	0		
Totals	200	33-68	13-17	19-27	13	20	86		
Percentages: FG: 48.5%. FT: 76.5%. Three-point field goals: 7-21 (Burnett 3-7, Donaldson 0-4, Tschetter 2-3, Wolf 0-2, Carson 1-2, Goldin 0-1, Pippen 0-1, Jones 1-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Goldin). Turnovers: 12 (Goldin 3, Donaldson 3, Jones 2, Tschetter 2, Wolf, Gayle). Steals: 5 (Burnett 2, Wolf, Donaldson, Jones).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Royal	32	10-16	3-3	3-2	1	3	26		
Thornton	40	6-12	4-5	0-5	6	3	17		
Mobley	33	5-14	3-3	1-2	2	0	16		
Parrish	37	2-11	4-6	0-3	1	3	9		
Stewart	27	2-2	2-6	4-6	1	0	6		
Glover	10	2-2	0-1	0-1	1	0	5		
Bradshaw	10	1-3	1-1	1-0	1	5	3		
Mahaffey	11	0-1	1-2	0-0	0	2	1		
Totals	200	28-61	18-27	12-19	13	16	83		
Percentages: FG: 45.9%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 9-25 (Mobley 3-9, Parrish 1-6, Royal 3-5, Thornton 1-3, Bradshaw 0-1, Glover 1-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (Stewart 2, Parrish, Bradshaw, Mahaffey). Turnovers: 9 (Parrish 3, Royal 2, Mobley 2, Stewart, Bradshaw). Steals: 7 (Royal 2, Thornton 2, Mobley, Stewart, Mahaffey). Officials: Dorsey, Simons, Walton. Attendance: 18,058.									

Buckeyes dribbled out the clock on their final possession with 15 helpers.

Despite the lack of late assists and free chicken, Ohio State still had one of its best offensive outings of the year with four players reaching double figures. Mobley and Parrish had 21 each, while Thornton (17) and sophomore forward Aaron Bradshaw (12) followed. Bradshaw made each of his five field goals and added three rebounds, one block and one steal.

Washington was led by guards Davis, Tyler Harris and Vazoumana Diallo, who each scored 14 points. Preseason All-Big Ten forward Great Osobor was held to eight points on 4-of-8 shooting, tied for his third-worst scoring outing of the season.

OSU Falls Short Vs. U-M In Thriller

Ohio State (15-11, 7-8) fell on the losing side of a highly competitive, back-and-forth rivalry game against No. 20 Michigan (20-5, 12-2) on Feb. 16 in front of a near-capacity crowd of 18,058 inside Value City Arena, losing 86-83 to former Buckeye guard Roddy Gayle Jr. and the Wolverines.

In a game that had several intriguing storylines heading into the matchup – most notably the return of Gayle to Ohio State and the first-ever meeting between first-year head coaches Diebler and former Buckeye coaching target Dusty May – the two rival schools provided the most drama on the court.

The Buckeyes and Wolverines went blow-for-blow all afternoon, trading leads

Northwestern 70, Ohio State 49									
Feb. 20, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus									
	1	2	F						
N'western (14-13, 5-11)	31	39	70						
Ohio State (15-12, 7-9)	24	25	49						
N'western	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Martinelli	33	7-15	4-4	0-5	0	2	18		
Berry	38	6-12	3-3	2-4	1	3	15		
Nicholson	31	5-6	0-1	3-1	0	2	10		
Mullins	23	1-5	0-0	3-3	0	1	2		
Clayton	11	0-2	0-0	0-3	2	3	0		
Windham	29	4-9	5-5	0-3	2	1	15		
Ciaravino	26	1-2	4-4	2-3	0	3	6		
Fitzmorris	9	1-3	2-2	1-0	0	1	4		
Smith	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	25-54	18-19	13-23	5	16	70		
Percentages: FG: 46.3%. FT: 94.7%. Three-point field goals: 2-14 (Berry 0-4, Windham 2-4, Martinelli 0-3, Mullins 0-2, Clayton 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Nicholson 2). Turnovers: 11 (Martinelli 3, Windham 2, Team 2, Berry, Mullins, Clayton, Fitzmorris). Steals: 4 (Berry, Nicholson, Mullins, Ciaravino).									
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.					
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.		
Parrish	34	5-13	3-4	0-1	0	2	16		
Thornton	34	6-12	1-2	0-1	4	2	13		
Royal	27	0-4	4-4	2-2	1	3	4		
Mobley	25	1-8	2-2	0-0	2	2	4		
Stewart	25	2-3	0-0	3-5	0	3	4		
Glover	23	2-10	1-1	1-1	1	1	6		
Mahaffey	14	1-1	0-0	1-1	0	2	2		
White	10	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	2	0		
Njegovan	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0		
Parks	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0		
Totals	200	17-52	11-13	10-17	8	18	49		
Percentages: FG: 32.7%. FT: 84.6%. Three-point field goals: 4-21 (Parrish 3-9, Mobley 0-5, Thornton 0-3, Glover 1-3, White 0-1). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 1 (Stewart). Turnovers: 16 (Royal 4, Mobley 3, Parrish 2, Thornton 2, Stewart 2, Glover 2, Team). Steals: 5 (Thornton 2, Parrish, Mobley, Mahaffey). Officials: Breeding, Brill, Kimble. Attendance: 12,684.									

16 times and tying 11, with the largest lead being just seven points for Michigan late in the first half and early in the second. But in the end, the Wolverines prevailed in this slugfest in large part due to their dominance inside, where they held a 46-31 rebounding advantage and 46-34 edge in paint points to help them stave off multiple Buckeye runs and remain atop the Big Ten standings.

"(I'm) absolutely frustrated, angry, disappointed," Diebler said after the game. "This game hits different. It means a ton, and I'm not going to step back from that, because we didn't get the result we wanted."

"We'll take today to certainly reflect on this, and then we have to move forward quickly and get ready, because everything that we're fighting for is still in front of us. But this loss hits different, there's no question."

The fireworks in this rivalry game began early when the two teams raced out to an early 10-10 tie, but the intensity inside Value City Arena reached another level when Gayle – who transferred from Ohio State to Michigan this offseason after two seasons with the Buckeyes – checked into the game at 15:17 to a loud chorus of boos from the Buckeye faithful.

Gayle made his presence felt quickly with a contested layup to put his new team up 16-15 at the 14:07 mark, but the Buckeyes answered with consecutive threes from Ques Glover and Devin Royal to lead 21-16 with 13:10 left.

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

OSU then went cold on offense the rest of the half, missing 13 of their final 17 shots and committing five turnovers, helping Michigan take a 44-39 lead into halftime off a tip-in from 7-1 graduate center Vladislav Goldin at the buzzer.

The Buckeyes exited the locker room a crisper team, and after going back and forth with the Wolverines, they finally broke through with a strong offensive sequence run to lead 65-63 with 12:43 left following a Thornton layup. But another poor offensive stretch stalled that momentum and allowed U-M to answer with a 15-8 sequence to go back up 78-73 with 5:12 remaining after a fadeaway jumper by 7-0 junior center/forward Danny Wolf.

Ohio State remained undeterred, though, scoring on two straight possessions to tie the game at 80 and then – after Michigan went up four off a layup from Gayle and third-chance basket from Goldin – cutting the deficit back down to one after a Parrish corner three with 32 seconds remaining.

After Wolf went 1 for 2 from the free-throw line on the other end, the Buckeyes had the opportunity to tie or take the lead coming out of a timeout on their final possession. That chance fell by the wayside, however, when Thornton pivoted himself open in the paint but air-balled a wide-open floater with one second left, allowing Michigan to ice the game from the free-throw line and exit Columbus with the narrow three-point victory.

“To be honest, we got a wide-open floater five feet away from the basket and I just shot it short,” Thornton said of his miss. “I’ll shoot that same shot over and over again. My confidence will never (get) away from

me.”

Despite the miss, Thornton finished with 17 points on 6-of-12 shooting along with a game-high six assists. Royal had a game-high 26 points on 10-of-16 shooting – 3 of 5 from three – along with five rebounds, while forward Sean Stewart – a sophomore transfer – had a team-high 10 rebounds and six points.

Michigan was led by Goldin and Wolf, who both recorded double-doubles. Golden had 20 points on 9-of 14 shooting and 10 rebounds, while Wolf was credited with 17 points, 11 rebounds and five assists. Gayle had nine points and eight rebounds in his return to Value City Arena, though he was just 3 of 9 from the field.

Ohio State went to the line 27 times but connected on only 18 of its charity shots.

Bucks Blown Out At Home Vs. 'Cats

Ohio State (15-12, 7-9) put a considerable dent in its NCAA Tournament resumé on Feb. 20 in front of 12,684 unhappy fans inside Value City Arena with a blowout 70-49 defeat to Big Ten bottom-feeder Northwestern (14-13, 5-11) that was in large part caused by a terrible offensive performance.

All signs before the game pointed to the Buckeyes taking care of business at home against the shorthanded Wildcats – who are playing the rest of the season without veteran starters Brooks Barnhizer and Jalen Leach – but Diebler’s team instead was uncompetitive for most of the night and turned in its worst collective showing of the year.

Plagued by a team-wide flu bug that forced Bradshaw, walk-on guard Colby Baumann and assistant coach Luke Simons to miss the game, Ohio State labored its way to season lows in points, field-goal percentage (32.7 percent, 17 of 52) and three-point field-goal percentage (19.0, 4 of 21), while also committing a near-season-high 16 turnovers that led to 18 Wildcat points.

The poor offense was coupled with another lackluster showing inside, where Northwestern held a 36-27 rebounding advantage and 40-22 edge in paint points, all of which helped it build a lead that grew to as much as 28 points and hand the Buckeyes a shocking blowout loss on their home floor.

“(The effort) wasn’t what it needed to be,” Diebler said after the game. “This is not an acceptable way to play this game. The way we were letting our offense affect our defense almost felt almost like a new, young team, which we haven’t been. You’d expect something like that to happen at the beginning of the season. That can’t happen again, clearly.”

The nightmare started early for the sickly Buckeyes, who missed 13 of their first 20 shots and committed nine early turnovers to help Northwestern jump out to a 27-17 lead with 5:11 left in the half.

Ohio State showed some life in the ensuing minutes to cut the deficit down to five, 29-24, with 1:22 left after a three-point play from Parrish, but on the other end it allowed Northwestern to get four straight offensive rebounds, leading to a layup from



Sean Stewart

junior guard Justin Mullins that allowed the Wildcats to lead 31-24 at halftime.

The Buckeyes were 2 of 11 from distance in the first frame (18.2 percent) and had 11 turnovers to only four for Northwestern.

It didn’t take long for things to get out of hand for the Buckeyes out of the break. They went without a field goal on 16 of their first 17 offensive possessions and committed four more turnovers to allow Northwestern to start the half on a 27-6 run and take a commanding 58-30 lead with 9:24 left after a contested layup from junior forward Nick Martinelli.

“We tried to hit some home runs, and they made us pay for it,” Diebler said of the Wildcats’ early-half run. “We took some low-percentage shots, some long-contested twos, and ultimately they made us pay because they were getting much better looks.”

Ohio State stopped the bleeding with a 10-2 run to trail 60-40 with 5:49 left following a Parrish layup, but the hole it put itself in was far too large to mount any semblance of a comeback. The Buckeyes missed seven of their final nine shots and allowed the Wildcats to break their full-court press with relative ease to cruise to the 21-point victory.

Ohio State had just two players score more than six points in the win, with Parrish (16) and Thornton (13) leading the way on a combined 11-of-25 shooting. The other eight Buckeyes who earned playing time combined for 20 points on 6-of-27 shooting (22.2 percent). Mobley was 1 of 8 and Glover 2 of 10.

Ohio State also tallied just eight assists, its third-lowest total of the season.

Northwestern – which earned its third straight win over the Buckeyes for the first time since 1966-67 – was led by Martinelli, who was one of four Wildcats in double figures in scoring with 18 points and five rebounds. They scored 25 bench points compared to the Buckeyes’ eight, with 15 coming from graduate guard K.J. Windham.

Offense Falters Again In Loss At UCLA

Ohio State (15-13, 7-10) was hindered by another anemic offensive performance and a depleted roster in a 69-61 loss to UCLA (20-8, 11-6) on Feb. 23 at Pauley Pavillion in Los Angeles that further decreased its NCAA Tournament hopes.

Just three days after their worst offensive showing of the year against Northwestern, the Buckeyes – still dealing with a flu that forced Bradshaw to miss a second straight game and limited Mobley to just 23 minutes of playing time – had a similarly poor outing against the Big Ten’s top-ranked scoring defense, shooting just 31.7 percent (20 of 63) from the floor and 22.2 percent from three (6 of 27).

Each of these factors allowed UCLA to lead for 36:23 of the game’s 40 minutes and hand OSU a third straight defeat with three regular-season games to go.

“We didn’t play perfect by any means,” Diebler said after the game on a Zoom call. “But if we play with that toughness and that togetherness and that fight, we’re going to win a lot of games down the stretch, there’s no question in my mind.”

Just like against Northwestern, the Buckeyes’ horrid shooting began right away when they made just four of their first 20 shots to help UCLA to an early 13-12 lead. With the

Ohio State 87, USC 82

Feb. 26, 2025
Galen Center • Los Angeles

	1	2	F
Ohio State (16-13, 8-10)	52	35	87
USC (14-14, 6-11)	38	44	82

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Parrish	38	7-12	3-5	1-1	3	3	20
Thornton	36	5-14	8-8	0-1	5	1	20
Mobley	33	5-9	5-6	0-1	1	2	18
Royal	24	3-5	6-6	0-5	1	4	13
Stewart	16	4-6	0-0	3-0	2	4	8
White	12	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	3
Bradshaw	11	1-1	0-0	0-1	2	2	3
Mahaffey	21	1-1	0-1	0-1	3	5	2
Glover	8	0-1	0-0	1-0	1	1	0
Njegovan	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	27-50	22-26	7-12	18	22	87

Percentages: FG: 54.0%. FT: 84.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-20 (Parrish 3-6, Mobley 3-6, Thornton 2-4, Royal 1-2, White 1-1, Bradshaw 1-1). **Team Rebounds:** 4. **Blocked Shots:** 3 (Mahaffey 2, Stewart). **Turnovers:** 12 (Parrish 5, Royal 2, Mobley, Stewart, Bradshaw, Mahaffey, Team). **Steals:** 7 (Parrish 2, Thornton, Mobley, Royal, Mahaffey, Glover).

USC	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Yates	39	9-16	7-9	0-1	3	3	27
Agbo	39	5-8	3-3	0-2	3	3	17
Claude	31	3-6	5-6	0-2	4	5	12
Thomas	33	2-2	0-0	1-4	5	2	4
Cohen	10	2-4	0-0	2-0	2	0	4
Agee	18	4-5	4-6	0-4	2	3	12
Slajchert	13	1-2	2-2	0-0	1	1	4
Patton Jr.	9	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	3	2
Knowling	6	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	1	0
Shelley	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	27-45	21-26	4-16	21	21	82

Percentages: FG: 60.0%. FT: 80.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-18 (Yates 2-8, Agbo 4-6, Claude 1-2, Agee 0-1, Slajchert 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Shelley). **Turnovers:** 14 (Claude 5, Yates 4, Thomas 2, Agbo, Cohen, Team). **Steals:** 6 (Yates 2, Agbo, Claude, Cohen, Slajchert). **Officials:** Harris, Pfeifer, Scirotto. **Attendance:** 5,720.

Bruins also struggling from the field to start, OSU was able to hold a brief 15-13 lead after a second-chance three-pointer from Thornton at 8:47. But the home team found its rhythm to go on a 14-7 run to take a 27-22 lead with 2:55 left and eventually hold a 28-24 halftime lead.

Ohio State (9 for 33) and UCLA (11 for 34) combined to shoot 20 of 67 (29.9 percent) from the field and 7 of 25 (28.0 percent) from three in the first frame and committed 12 turnovers – six each.

The Buckeyes briefly got out of their scoring funk to begin the second half by getting a pair of three-point plays from sophomore center Austin Parks – who started the period in place of Stewart after he picked up his third foul with 1:42 left in the first – and Mobley (Parks’ the old-fashioned way) to cut the deficit to 31-30, but that momentum was quickly erased when UCLA went on an 8-0 run to lead 39-30 with 15:41 left.

OSU answered with seven quick points of its own – five coming from Glover – to trail 39-37, but another disjointed offensive stretch allowed the Bruins to take back control with a 16-7 run that put it up 55-44 with 7:24 left after a pair of free throws from junior forward Tyler Bilodeau.

After four straight Buckeyes points, UCLA expanded its lead to 62-51 with 2:17 left with a 7-3 sequence that included three free throws. The Buckeyes made one final push with a Parrish three-point play and Thornton floater to trail 62-56 with 1:08 left, but the Bruins put the game away with

Continued On Page 26

UCLA 69, Ohio State 61

Feb. 23, 2025
Pauley Pavillion • Los Angeles

	1	2	F
Ohio State (15-13, 7-10)	24	37	61
UCLA (20-8, 11-6)	28	41	69

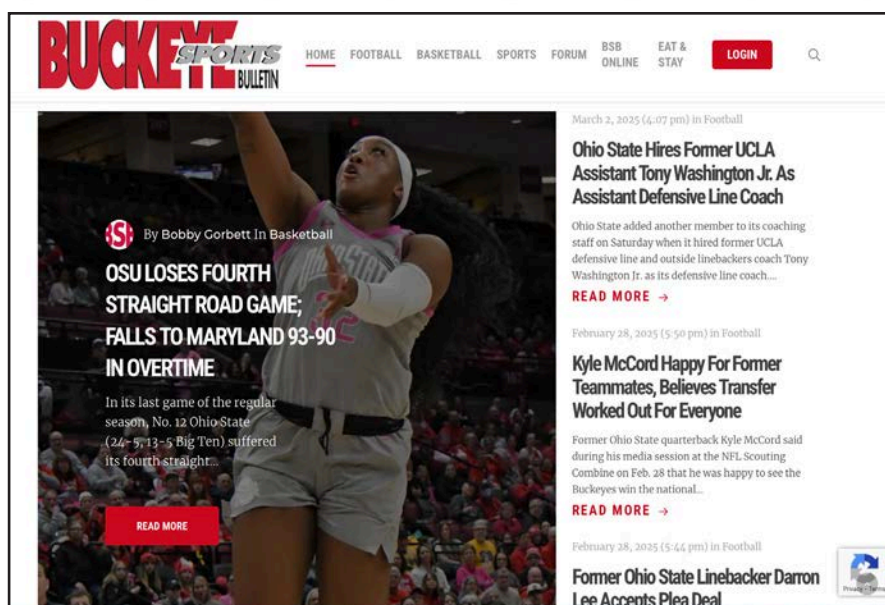
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Thornton	40	7-17	4-4	0-4	3	0	21
Parrish	39	2-10	7-7	2-5	1	1	12
Mobley Jr.	23	3-10	0-0	0-0	1	1	8
Royal	35	2-7	2-2	1-5	0	3	6
Stewart	12	1-4	0-0	1-1	2	4	2
Glover	17	3-7	1-2	0-0	2	2	7
Parks	14	1-2	1-1	2-0	0	1	3
Mahaffey	15	1-3	0-0	3-0	1	3	2
Njegovan	5	0-3	0-0	1-3	0	1	0
Totals	200	20-63	15-16	13-21	10	16	61

Percentages: FG: 31.7%. FT: 93.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-27 (Thornton 3-9, Mobley 2-7, Parrish 1-6, Royal 0-2, Glover 0-2, Parks 0-1). **Team Rebounds:** 6. **Blocked Shots:** 4 (Parrish 2, Glover, Mahaffey). **Turnovers:** 9 (Parrish 3, Mobley, Royal, Glover, Mahaffey, Njegovan, Team). **Steals:** 8 (Mobley 3, Thornton 2, Parrish, Stewart, Mahaffey).

UCLA	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Dailey	33	8-15	1-3	2-6	1	3	20
Clark	28	4-9	2-2	1-1	2	3	13
Bilodeau	12	2-4	4-4	0-0	1	3	8
Johnson	32	1-8	0-0	6-7	4	3	3
Andrews	28	1-5	0-0	0-2	4	0	2
Mack	26	3-6	4-4	0-2	3	2	11
Mara	20	3-8	4-7	3-6	0	2	10
Stefanovic	13	1-2	0-0	0-1	1	0	2
Kyle	8	0-0	0-0	1-0	1	0	0
Totals	200	23-57	15-20	15-30	17	16	69

Percentages: FG: 40.4%. FT: 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-20 (Clark 3-6, Johnson 1-5, Dailey 3-5, Andrews 0-2, Mack 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Kyle 3, Mara 2, Clark, Johnson). **Turnovers:** 13 (Bilodeau 3, Andrews 3, Dailey 2, Johnson 2, Mack 2, Clark). **Steals:** 7 (Johnson 3, Dailey 2, Clark, Mara). **Officials:** Nunez, Richardson, Walton. **Attendance:** 9,015.

SEE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING ON BUCKEYESPORTS.COM Free To Print Subscribers



Buckeye Sports Bulletin has expanded its online presence to a full-service website to complement the 24 annual print editions. Access to BuckeyeSports.com is free to all print subscribers and includes numerous great features like:

- Daily features, analysis and breaking news stories
- A fan forum where readers can interact with the BSB staff and other subscribers while catching up on the latest Buckeye news
- Rosters, scholarship charts, schedules and commit lists for the football team to keep up to date with the Buckeyes
- Electronic versions of the BSB print editions
- The BSB Quickly archive

To sign up for this free service send an email to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com and we will send you easy-to-follow instructions on how to enjoy reading Buckeye Sports Bulletin online

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

OSU Earns Needed Win To End LA Trip

Continued From Page 25

a Skyy Clark three and four from the free-throw line to set the final margin at eight.

Ohio State was once again limited by its lack of offensive production outside of Thornton (21 points) and Parrish (12), though Parrish was just 2 of 10 from the floor and 1 of 6 from deep. The seven other Buckeyes who earned playing time combined for just 28 points on 11-of-36 shooting (30.6 percent), Mobley leading the way in that group with eight points on just 3-of-10 shooting.

UCLA was led by sophomore guard/forward Eric Dailey Jr., who notched 20 points on 8-of-15 shooting and grabbed eight rebounds. He and 7-3 sophomore center Aday Mara (10 points, nine rebounds) and Kobe Johnson, with 13 off the glass, helped the Bruins hold a 45-34 rebounding edge. Clark added 13 points.

Bucks Escape LA With Last-Second Win Vs. USC

Despite squandering a 17-point first-half lead, Ohio State (16-13, 8-10) made enough plays down the stretch to escape Los Angeles with a nail-biting 87-82 victory over USC (14-14, 6-11) at the Galen Center on Feb. 26 to keep its NCAA Tournament hopes alive.

The Buckeyes seemed poised to break their three-game losing streak when they used a sparkling first-half offensive performance to lead by 14 at halftime, but things changed quickly when the lid went on the basket for OSU, allowing USC to gradually climb back in the game and tie the score at 80 with 1:07 left.

Ohio State buckled down in crunch time, though, using a three-point play from Royal with 41 seconds left to help outscore the Trojans 7-2 in the game's final 1:07 minute of action to end its two-game West Coast trip on a winning note.

"We went through a stretch where we struggled to make some shots the last couple games, but I just told our guys, 'We're going to make them.' This is a group that – I just believe we're built for these moments. That's the way I look at it. That's the way we talk around here.

"These guys have proven to be really clutch, and we've had plenty of practice in these situations throughout the course of the year."

With Diebler deciding to give his team the day off on Feb. 25 to rest and recover from the flu, Ohio State looked refreshed and re-focused early, making 14 of its first 17 shots – including six of its first six threes – to jump out to a 36-21 lead with 6:52 left in the first half after a Parrish jumper.

USC settled in and cut the lead to as low as nine on multiple occasions, the last at 42-33 with 3:41 remaining in the half, but it still had no answer for the Buckeyes' sizzling offense. OSU knocked down two more threes on three attempts – including true freshman guard Colin White's first basket since Jan. 6 – to help extend their lead to as high as 17, 52-35 at 1:02 on a Parrish layup, and go into halftime with a 52-38 advantage.

The Buckeyes' 73.1 percent (19 of 26) field-goal percentage in the first half was the highest by any Big Ten team in a single period all season.

Ohio State wasn't nearly as sharp coming out of the half – missing 10 of its first 15 shots and committing four turnovers – which allowed USC to storm back and find itself within four, 69-65, with 9:41 left after a three-point play from redshirt freshman guard Wesley Yates III.

Parrish temporarily curbed the Trojans' momentum with a three on the other end, but the Buckeyes went without a field goal until the 41 second mark, allowing USC to continue its comeback and tie the game at 80 with 1:07 left after a jumper from graduate forward Rashaun Agee.

With Ohio State in danger of suffering a demoralizing bubble-bursting loss, Royal kept the Buckeyes' postseason hopes afloat when he dribbled into the paint from the baseline, elevated off two feet and made a difficult and-one basket over USC graduate guard Chibuzo Agbo to break the field-goal drought and give his team the 83-80 lead. The Buckeyes missed a pair of free throws in the final 30 seconds to give USC a chance at a potential game-tying three, but a missed shot from beyond the arc from Yates with six seconds left hit the back iron, allowing Mobley to make both of his free throws on the other end to close out the win.

Ohio State shot 33.3 percent (8 of 24) from the field and 27.3 percent (3 of 11) from three in the second half but made 16 of its 18 free throws. The Buckeyes were led by Thornton, Parrish and Mobley, who had 20, 20 and 18 points, respectively. Royal scored 11 of his 13 points in the second half and tied for a game high of five rebounds. Thornton tied for game honors with five assists.

USC, which shot 60.0 percent on the night on 27-of-45 shooting, was led by Yates, who had 27 points on 9-of-16 shooting, while Agbo added 17, including 4 of 6 from three.

Ohio State will look to further boost its NCAA Tournament résumé with two more regular-season games and at least one postseason game before BSB next goes to press. The Buckeyes will close the regular season with a home tilt against Nebraska on March 4 (9 p.m., Peacock) before traveling to Bloomington, Ind., to face off against Indiana on March 8 (3:45 p.m., CBS) in what very well could be an NCAA Tournament elimination game.

Ohio State will then travel to Indianapolis for the Big Ten tournament held at Gainbridge Fieldhouse from March 12-16, where it will either play its first game in the first round on March 12 or in the second round on March 13. As of Feb. 27, Ohio State was the No. 10 seed in the tournament, set to play No. 15 seed Northwestern in the first round, although it sat just one game behind No. 9 seed Indiana in the loss column. Seeds Nos. 6-9 receive a single bye to the tournament, while seeds Nos. 10-15 play on the first day.

Lemmilä Makes Instant Impact In First Season

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Freshman center Elsa Lemmilä had everything going for her the summer before her senior season with her club basketball team Tapiolan Honka. Lemmilä, a native of Espoo, Finland, was receiving plenty of attention from high-major Division-I schools and was set to represent her country in the U18 European championships when she suffered a torn ACL injury.

"I remember it so well," Lemmilä told BSB. "I've always been prone to injury, so that junior year was really I think one of the longest times that I'd played without injuring myself. So it was a really big disappointment when I tore my ACL before coming here."

Unlike most Division-I college basketball players, Lemmilä did not spend her childhood with a basketball in her hands. The Buckeyes' freshman center started her club career at age 12, and it took a few years before she got to the level where she was playing against older players. Around the time of the COVID outbreak though, Lemmilä's game improved enough to represent Finland in a U16 European Challengers event and get recruited by Ohio State.

However, the injury-prone Lemmilä sprained her ankle early in the event and missed most of the competition. She ultimately recovered and made good use of a long window of good health during her junior year. In her 2022-23 season with Tapiolan Honka, Lemmilä averaged 15.8 points per game, 10.0 rebounds, 3.4 assists and 2.4 blocks.

Lemmilä also showed off her skills in the 2022 U18 European Championships where she averaged 12.9 points, 9.0 rebounds and 2.0 blocks per outing.

A year after her torn ACL, Lemmilä was able to get some reps in practice with her national team right before coming to Columbus, but the situation was certainly less than ideal for one of the newest Buckeyes.

"I wouldn't say that I was in the best condition," she said. "When I came here, I took it easy and I didn't start straight away."

A self-described defensive-minded player, Lemmilä immediately noticed some rust in her game offensively when she first arrived in Columbus.

"We were playing a lot of five against five, and I'm playing against a lot of people who have played basketball for 20 plus years, so even in that environment I would not be super ambitious and try everything that I can to score. So I think I definitely lacked a lot of confidence on offense," she said.

Off the court though, Lemmilä didn't have some of the growing pains that might be expected of someone moving across the globe to attend a new school, in part because she had moved long distances before. The Buckeye freshman lived in Switzerland and China in addition to Finland before ultimately attending Ohio State, which she thinks helped her adapt to some of the new challenges of being a student-athlete for the first time.

"I think moving a lot was able to teach me to adapt quickly and also to be really independent, so I don't really have to rely on other people to find my way around and get



SONNY BROCKWAY

NOT A 'FINNISHED' PRODUCT — Freshman center Elsa Lemmilä from Finland has been plagued by injuries, but when healthy she has shown promise at both ends of the floor.

comfortable doing what I have to do," Lemmilä said. "That really helped me especially at the beginning of the semester, when I was finding my way to all of my classes, finding my way to practice. I really quickly adapted, and I didn't have that awkward in-between phase where I was maybe late to class or just really stressed about getting places."

But Lemmilä had her work cut out for her on the court to get playing time. In addition to the growing pains that come with recovering from a torn ACL injury and learning a new system, she was stuck in the depth chart behind Kentucky transfer forward Ajae Petty, who averaged 14.2 points and 10.6 rebounds during her last year with the Wildcats.

When the regular season officially arrived, Lemmilä wasn't starting many games. But because the Buckeyes' nonconference slate was riddled with mid-major opponents, she received at least 15 minutes of playing time in seven of the team's first nine games.

Her defensive presence immediately translated to the collegiate level. She recorded 12 combined blocks in the Buckeyes' first four games. Her best performance came against Ohio on Nov. 20, when Lemmilä recorded 21 points on 9-of-13 shooting, along with 14 rebounds and five blocks in a 106-42 win.

"She's extremely talented and she's a great athlete," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after that game. "She's a very, very bright young woman, which translates in practice and on the court. I thought she was great tonight, and I still think she's not anywhere near what her potential is, which is really exciting. With the way she's working, I think she's going to have a really positive impact on our team and on our season."

Lemmilä continued to grow as the Buckeyes progressed through their nonconference slate, and she had another bright spot in the team's Big Ten opener against Illinois on Dec. 8. In an 83-74 win, the 6-6 center recorded a team-high four blocks.

Eventually, as the Buckeyes progressed in Big Ten play and the huge blowouts that marked the nonconference schedule were becoming increasingly sparse, Lemmilä started to lose her playing time.

The Buckeyes' backup center received only 10 or more minutes of playing time once in six games from Dec. 29 to Jan. 19, the only time being in a 30-point win over Northwestern. However, one game after Ohio State's surprising 62-59 loss to Penn State on Jan. 19, a game in which the Buckeyes were out-rebounded 39-21, Lemmilä got her chance.

In a 74-66 win over Maryland on Jan. 23, she played 23 minutes compared to Petty's nine. Lemmilä scored just five points in the game but made her presence felt in other areas by recording four blocks and grabbing five rebounds.

After the win over Maryland, McGuff indicated that his decision to play Lemmilä for almost the entire second half over Petty was simply because of how well the freshman played.

"I thought when Elsa went in she looked really good and was really impactful, so we just wanted to go with her for a little longer than we might otherwise," McGuff said.

The extended playing time received by Lemmilä wasn't a one-time thing. In the Buckeyes' next game against Nebraska, she earned 22 minutes and again put her 6-6 frame to good use, going for nine rebounds and two blocks.

In Ohio State's next game against Washington, Lemmilä didn't have a block but instead scored four points and recorded a team-high three steals.

After playing 10 minutes only twice in Ohio State's first seven Big Ten games, Lemmilä averaged 20 minutes in their next three games and was a defensive force in every appearance.

Lemmilä's reliability and activity on the defensive end drew plenty of praise from junior forward and Ohio State's vocal leader Cotie McMahon.

"Elsa has improved so much, just even from a confidence standpoint. We are seriously so proud of Elsa, and I feel like we tell her that all the time," McMahon said. "But we really mean it. Like we are so proud of Elsa. And the fact that we can count on her as a freshman is just something that not everybody has the opportunity to do."

If Lemmilä's season didn't peak when she scored eight points in Ohio State's 65-52 loss to then No. 1 UCLA and Player of the Year contender Lauren Betts, it may have hit its apex over a week later when she received more than 25 minutes of playing for the first time all season in back-to-back games against Minnesota and Iowa. She may not have started either game, but when it really mattered in overtime of both games, it was not Petty but Lemmilä who played all five minutes of each extra period.

According to Lemmilä, the playing time she's earned in crunch time against Big Ten foes has worked wonders for her confidence.

"It means a lot to me," Lemmilä said. "Especially because I'm not the kind of person that would be able to have that confidence in myself — maybe not as a freshman, so it's really important to me that that confidence comes from other people."

As of Feb. 27, Lemmilä had grabbed 5.2 rebounds and blocked 2.0 shots per game, scoring 4.4 points.

Lemmilä feels as though she's made improvements offensively since the beginning of the season but still doesn't feel like she's fully recovered from her knee injury.

"I don't know what it is, but on defense, I can take any kind of contact," she said. "But as soon as I have to initiate it on offense, all of my basketball knowledge goes out the window and I panic."

Lemmilä feels that in order for her to regain some of her confidence offensively, she'll need to be a bit more daring in practice and games.

"I don't always want to mess up in games, but in practice, I'm allowed to mess up," she said. "Even if I mess up, I know everybody wants to see me have that confidence to do well on offense, so I don't feel the pressure to perform super well."

Regardless of her offensive shortcomings, very few could have predicted that a freshman center, fresh off a torn ACL, who is acclimating to a new country would become one of the team's most important contributors. Even Lemmilä herself struggles to believe it.

"A year ago I definitely did not think I would be playing this much, but I'm really happy that I am," Lemmilä said.

Thierry, Greene Honored On Senior Day

Right before Ohio State defeated Purdue 98-46 on Feb. 23 to land its largest Big Ten home win in program history, head coach Kevin McGuff and the 8,567 fans in attendance honored graduating seniors Madison Greene and Taylor Thierry on Senior Day.



Although graduate forwards Ajae Petty and Eboni Walker are also in their last year of collegiate eligibility, they already went through Senior Day festivities in previous seasons, Walker having hers last year with the Buckeyes and Petty last season at Kentucky. As part of the Senior Day celebration, the Buckeyes played a brief video 15 minutes before the game to honor Greene and Thierry before both players made the walk to center court to pick up their framed jerseys.

During a press conference after the game, McGuff shone a light on what his graduating seniors mean to the program.

"Two extremely high-character people who represent our program in a first-class manner on and off the court," McGuff said. "They're just great kids. We're going to miss both of them and what they've done for us. They've been a lot of fun to coach so hopefully we've got several more games with them because I really feel like it's been a privilege to have them in our program."

Thierry was never the type of player who needs to be the focal point of an offense during her four-year career with the team, and that didn't suddenly change during her penultimate regular-season home game. The Cleveland native finished the game with just two points on 1-of-2 shooting but had three rebounds, two steals and a block.

Despite averaging a respectable 9.5 points on 56.0 percent shooting during her career as of Feb. 27, Thierry has made most of her impact on the defensive end. She has built a reputation as one of the program's best defenders, ranking 10th in school history in total steals with 225, 11 ahead of former four-time All-America guard Kelsey Mitchell.

Like Thierry, Greene didn't have a high-volume shooting day against the Boilermakers, but she still had a solid outing in the Buckeyes' win. She recorded five points on 1-of-2 shooting and recorded three assists off the bench.

Greene, a Pickerington, Ohio, native who

2024-25 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

24-5 Overall (13-5 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 2

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.						
MCMAHON, C	25-25	825-33.0	154-348	.443	29-80	.363	86-132	.652	22-97	119-4.8	59-1	54	55	6	32	423-16.9
CAMBRIDGE, J	25-25	673-26.9	148-333	.444	25-75	.333	80-109	.734	13-97	110-4.4	61-3	97	61	5	53	401-16.0
GRAY, Chance	29-29	812-28.0	128-317	.404	63-184	.342	53-63	.841	9-48	57-2.0	37-0	44	36	3	43	372-12.8
THIERRY, Taylor	29-29	900-31.0	109-193	.565	22-49	.449	50-71	.704	62-87	149-5.1	74-2	33	36	14	69	290-10.0
PETTY, Ajae	29-29	633-21.8	123-209	.589	0-0	.000	33-58	.569	73-136	209-7.2	71-2	51	63	12	25	279-9.6
WATSON, Ava	23-0	328-14.2	44-134	.328	29-90	.322	12-13	.923	3-17	20-0.9	20-0	18	12	0	29	129-5.6
CAMBRIDGE, K	27-4	443-16.4	51-113	.451	9-38	.237	21-45	.467	28-47	75-2.8	42-1	32	25	10	42	132-4.9
GREENE, Madison	29-4	535-18.4	37-96	.385	14-36	.389	41-53	.774	6-20	26-0.9	53-0	48	30	5	33	129-4.4
LEMMILÄ, Elsa	29-0	459-15.8	45-87	.517	1-9	.111	35-52	.673	43-105	148-5.1	49-0	26	26	57	21	126-4.3
WALKER, Eboni	24-0	268-11.2	29-64	.453	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	25-17	42-1.8	11-0	29	12	4	18	58-2.4
Team									41-43	84		18				
Total	29	5875	868-1894	.458	192-562	.342	411-596	.690	325-714	1039-35.8	477-9	432	374	116	365	2339-80.7
Opponents	29	5875	674-1681	.401	172-574	.300	315-441	.714	327-772	1099-37.9	551-16	363	652	88	162	1835-63.3

had two seasons end with knee injuries after being named honorable-mention All-Big Ten in 2020-21, is grateful for the experience of being a Buckeye.

"It's been really good, like really, super fun," Greene said of her Ohio State career after the game. "I learned a lot, experienced a lot of ups and downs, but through it all, I had my family, my team, my coaches, friends and everybody helping me along the way, and without them, I wouldn't be here. I'm just super grateful for everything that I've experienced over the years."

OSU No. 14 In Initial Tourney Seeding Preview

Less than a month from Selection Sunday, Ohio State slotted in as a No. 4 seed in the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Selection Committee's first top 16 early bracket reveal on Feb. 16.

The Buckeyes were the second-highest ranked No. 4 seed in the committee's reveal, which meant they were the No. 14 overall team in the country in the eyes of the committee. The other teams on the four-seed line included Kentucky – which was the highest-ranked No. 4 seed at No. 13 – followed by No. 15 Oklahoma and No. 16 Tennessee.

The committee also revealed what region the Buckeyes would play in if the season were to end on Feb. 16. McGuff's team was slotted in the Birmingham 3 Regional, meaning they would play a potential Sweet 16 or Elite Eight game in Birmingham, Ala. Joining Ohio State in that region was No. 1 seed Texas (3), No. 2 seed UConn (7) and No. 3 seed North Carolina (11), the latter two teams of which the Buckeyes played and beat in the 2022-23 NCAA tournament on their way to the Elite Eight.

Ohio State's placement in the committee's

top 16 seeds reveal proves it is well on track to make a fourth straight NCAA tournament appearance, but one day after the list was announced, McGuff was more focused on what his team could do to improve its standing.

"I didn't watch it, I didn't know anything about it," McGuff said of the reveal after Ohio State's 86-78 overtime win over Iowa on Feb. 17. "We were No. 14. I couldn't tell you who is No. 13 or No. 15 or No. 16. It is what it is. The bottom line is we can play up or down depending on how we do."

The Buckeyes went 3-1 in the days after the initial reveal with home wins over Iowa, Purdue and No. 23 Michigan State and a loss to unranked Indiana on the road, McGuff's team slightly moved down in the committee's next reveal released on Feb. 27. Ohio State is now a No. 4 seed (No. 16 overall) and is now slated to play in the Birmingham 2 Regional, joining No. 1 seed Texas, No. 2 seed NC State and No. 3 seed TCU.

Bucks Lack Consistency To End Regular Season

On paper, Ohio State's last three weeks of the regular season weren't disastrous considering it lost only one/two road games to likely NCAA tournament-bound teams Indiana and Maryland.

However, regardless of the final scores, the Buckeyes' last leg of the regular season was riddled with long stretches of poor basketball that either played a part in the losses or made the wins a lot less comfortable.

During home wins over Minnesota on Feb. 13 and Iowa on Feb. 17, the Buckeyes saw leads of 14 and 12 evaporate in the closing minutes of the fourth quarter before ultimately winning in overtime. Then, in its 71-61 road loss to Indiana on Feb. 20, Ohio State dug it-

self into a 12-point hole at halftime and trailed by as many as 18 in the second half before suffering the 10-point upset loss.

After the Iowa game – in which the Buckeyes' outscored the Hawkeyes 12-4 in overtime to secure the 86-78 victory – McGuff was quick to remind his team of the importance of playing with intensity for the entire game.

"In overtime, we played really hard," the coach said. "We executed at a high level, we were together, we had great energy, great communication, but we didn't have that the last five minutes (of regulation)," McGuff said. "So we've got commit to that for closer to 40 minutes. I think we can close out games, but until we really get to that, we're going to leave ourselves vulnerable."

The Buckeyes' vulnerabilities were taken advantage of only a few days later in the loss to Indiana when McGuff's team allowed the Hoosiers to shoot over 50.0 percent from both the field (54.3) and three-point range (52.9).

When asked about the Buckeyes' inability to play well for the full 40 minutes after the I-U loss, Greene pointed to the team's issue translating their practice efforts into the game.

"Like Coach said, we're not playing for 40 minutes," Greene said. "Whoever is on the court whenever they're out there, we need to be aggressive and do what we do in practice. I feel like when we get in the game sometimes we get out of what we do in practice, and we work really hard in practice and we do well against the guys and we just need to carry that over to when we get in the game as well."

It appears the Buckeyes have translated those positive practice habits into more consistent success in games since the I-U loss. In its two wins over Purdue on Feb. 23 (98-46) and Michigan State on Feb. 26 (89-78), Ohio State jumped out to quick leads that it would

WELCOME BACK FOOTBALL FANS!
SPECIAL DISCOUNT OF UP TO
\$2,000* ON A LENNOX SYSTEM.

**Save up
to \$2000***

* valid on qualifying high efficiency equipment



**Furnace Tune-Up
\$59.95***
Football Special

Additional Savings

- **FREE** Thermostat
 - **FREE** 1 Year Worth of Filters
 - **FREE** Tune-Up Package with Furnace & AC
- *10 Yr Labor Packages Available*

Free Estimates, *Financing / 0% Interest, Payments
as low as \$100 on a new installation with
qualifying credit, 24-Hour Emergency Service

License #50821

**NOW
HIRING**

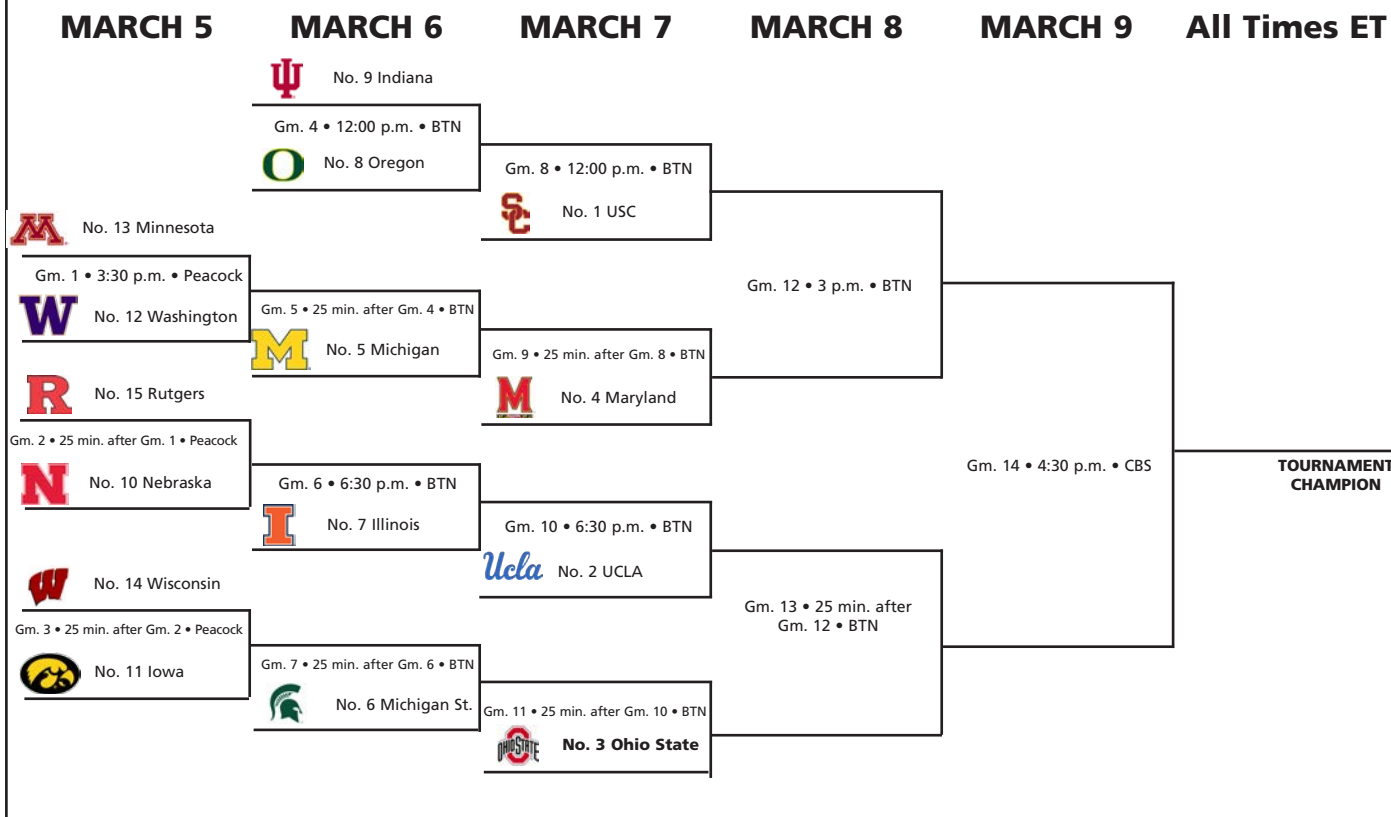


614-268-3933

hvacnorthland.com

BIG Women's Basketball Tournament

March 5-9 • Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis



Award's late midseason top-20 watch list and the Naismith Trophy midseason team – which is composed of 30 players – on Feb. 11 and 12, respectively.

The winner of the Wooden Award – given to the most outstanding player in women's college basketball – will be honored at the Los Angeles Athletic Club on April 11, while the Naismith Trophy recipient will be named on April 2.

In addition to the players, McGuff also received recognition for guiding his new-look team to a fourth straight season of 20 or more wins on Feb. 19 when he was among 15 coaches named to the Naismith Women's College Coach of the Year Watch List.

McGuff has been named to the watch list in four of the last five seasons, and he was a semifinalist last year before losing out to South Carolina's Dawn Staley. The winner of the award will be named on April 2.

Cambridge Plank's Lady Buck Of Month

As a team, Ohio State suffered some setbacks with three losses in a difficult month of February, but it still received quality play from Cambridge, who was honored with the Plank's Lady Buck of the Month award for February. She earns the honor for the third time this year, also winning in November and January.

In eight games, Cambridge averaged 19.4 points, 4.6 rebounds, 4.0 assists and 2.4 steals while shooting 42.7 percent from the field and 48.4 percent from three. She helped the Buckeyes end the month on a high note by scoring a career-high 33 points in the team's win over Michigan State.

never relinquish and only expand upon as the game progressed to cruise to double-digit victories.

Then, in a 93-90 loss to Maryland in overtime on March 2, the Buckeyes didn't have much of a lead to give up. In fact, Ohio State trailed by as many as nine points with 6:50 remaining in regulation before mounting a comeback to send the game to overtime. In the extra period, the Buckeyes led by three points with 2:03 left, but it was only a last-second buzzer-beating 3-point shot by Maryland guard Sarah Te-Biasu, that ultimately doomed Ohio State.

Bucks Not Bothered By Scoreboard Malfunction

Perhaps the only thing more bizarre than Ohio State's late blown lead against Iowa was that technical difficulties caused the scoreboard inside Value City Arena to not display the score throughout the game.

The arena found a way to circumvent the issue by displaying the broadcast's scorebug through the feed on the big screen, but that resource wasn't available during the entire game.

The exact score ended up being of great importance to both teams in a very close game headed toward overtime, but according to freshman point guard Jaloni Cambridge,

the technical difficulty didn't affect the team.

"I noticed it pretty quickly, right away," Cambridge said. "You always look up and see the score, but I mean we just kept talking to our coaches, being with each other. We didn't really worry too much about the score because it's not the main thing. We just kept playing our game."

Bucks Earn Awards, Named To Watch Lists

In the midst of another winning season, several within the Ohio State program were recognized by being named to watch lists or receiving awards.

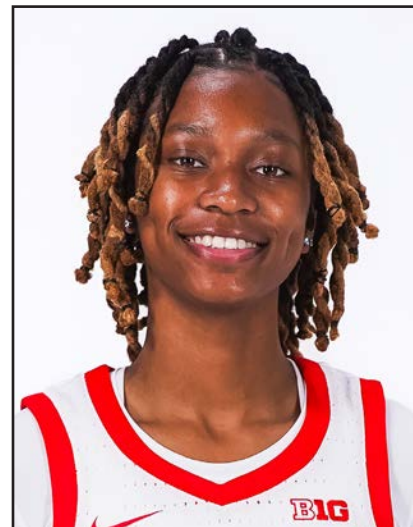
Freshman guard Ava Watson, who sprained her ankle in Ohio State's overtime win over Minnesota, was named the Big Ten Freshman of the Week on Feb. 17. Watson earned the distinction after scoring 16 points on 5-of-6 shooting against the Gophers, her second-highest scoring outing of the year. She has yet to return to the court after the injury as BSB went to press.

One week later on Feb. 24, Cambridge became the second straight Buckeye to be named the Big Ten Freshman of the Week. She earned the honor for the third time this season after averaging 22.3 points, 3.7 assists and 3.0 steals in three games against Iowa, Indiana and Purdue. That stat line also helped

her be named Tamika Catchings National Freshman of the Week by the U.S. Basketball Writers Association on Feb. 25.

Junior forward Cotie McMahon, who was averaging a team-high 16.9 points per game along with 4.8 rebounds and 2.8 assists as of Feb. 27, was named to both the Wooden

Plank's Cafe



Jaloni Cambridge
Freshman Guard
Nashville, Tenn.

PLANK'S LADY BUCK OF THE MONTH FOR FEBRUARY



PLANK'S CAFE 743 Parsons Avenue at Sycamore
(614) 443-6251

- Open 6 Days a Week
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- We deliver entire menu
- Plenty of parking

A Columbus Landmark Since 1939

& PIZZERIA

OSU Closes Regular Season With Three OT Games

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's last three weeks of the regular season were riddled with nail-biting finishes.

The Buckeyes bounced back from their largest loss of the season to USC with a pair of overtime home wins over Minnesota on Feb. 13 and Iowa on Feb. 17 in which they nearly squandered late double-digit leads. They then lost a 10-point game on the road to Indiana on Feb. 20 before winning their last two home games of the regular season convincingly against Purdue on Feb. 23 and No. 23 Michigan State on Feb. 26.

The Buckeyes couldn't carry a winning streak into the postseason, though, as they lost a road battle to No. 19 Maryland on March 2 in heartbreaking fashion in overtime.

OSU Outlasts Minnesota In Overtime

After blowing a 14-point lead in regulation, No. 9 Ohio State (21-3, 10-3) made enough plays in overtime to snap a two-game losing streak with an 87-84 win over Minnesota (19-7, 7-7 Big Ten) on Feb. 13 in front of 6,417 fans at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes led 71-57 with only 5:09 remaining, but a field-goal drought that lasted the final 3:34 of regulation along with five turnovers put the Golden Gophers in position to tie the game.

Head coach Kevin McGuff's squad bounced back from their poor finish to regulation by tallying 13 points in the extra session to come up with the win.

In a low-scoring first half, it was freshman guard Ava Watson and Cotie McMahon who led the way for the Buckeyes. Watson came off the bench to score 11 points on 4-of-5 shooting while making all three of her three-point attempts. McMahon tacked on 12 points on 5-of-9 shooting to help Ohio State shoot 15 of 25 (60.0 percent) from the field in the first half and take a 35-30 lead into halftime.

Ohio State couldn't do much to increase its cushion at the start of the third quarter, and Minnesota junior guard Amaya Battle – whose brother Jamison played for the Ohio State men's basketball team during the 2023-24 season – scored four straight points in 38 seconds to get the Gophers within four points of the Buckeyes, trailing 42-38 at the 5:54 mark.

The Buckeyes added some breathing room with a 12-4 scoring run, though, which helped them to take a 54-46 lead into the fourth quarter.

Minnesota clawed back to start the period and found itself within five points of the Buckeyes after a three-point play from graduate guard Alexsia Rose at 7:51. However, Ohio State seemed to diminish the road team's chances of a comeback with a 13-4 scoring run to lead 71-57 with 5:09 remaining.

Ohio State made only one field goal the rest of regulation, allowing Minnesota to cut the deficit down to six points, 73-67, with 46 seconds remaining.

The Gophers then scored two layups in eight seconds, both by Tori McKinney, after back-to-back Buckeye turnovers to trail 73-71, and after Madison Greene split two free throws, Minnesota sophomore guard Grace Grocholski completed the dramatic comeback with a game-tying triple at the eight-second mark.

The Buckeyes still had a chance to win the game in regulation, but Chance Gray had her

Ohio State 87, Minnesota 84										
Feb. 13, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus										
	1	2	3	4	OT	F				
Minnesota (19-7, 7-7)	17	13	16	28	10	84				
Ohio State (21-3, 10-3)	21	14	19	20	13	87				
Minnesota	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Hart	30	10-15	1-2	2-2	1	1	21			
Battle	45	7-15	2-4	0-4	5	4	17			
McKinney	41	5-9	0-0	1-2	3	4	10			
Heyer	32	4-8	0-0	2-5	0	1	10			
Grocholski	35	2-7	4-4	4-2	4	4	9			
Stewart	15	5-9	1-1	1-2	0	2	12			
Rose	23	2-6	1-1	4-2	2	2	5			
Holloway	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
Klick	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Czinano	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Johnson	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	225	35-69	9-12	16-19	15	20	84			
Percentages:	FG: 50.7%	FT: 75.0%	Three-point field goals: 5-22 (Battle 1-6, Heyer 2-6, Stewart 1-4, McKinney 0-3, Grocholski 1-3)	Team rebounds: 2	Blocked shots: 1 (Grocholski)	Turnovers: 21 (Battle 5, Grocholski 5, Rose 4, McKinney 2, Heyer 2, Team 2, Stewart)	Steals: 4 (Battle 2, Hart, Rose)			
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
McMahon	43	10-16	5-6	2-2	6	1	25			
Thierry	42	5-6	0-0	2-5	1	3	10			
J. Cambridge	32	3-9	4-5	1-4	5	5	10			
Gray	29	4-10	1-2	0-2	2	2	9			
Petty	18	4-7	0-2	1-2	0	0	8			
Watson	17	5-6	2-3	0-0	0	3	16			
Lemmilä	27	3-3	0-0	1-3	2	3	6			
Greene	14	1-2	1-2	0-0	3	2	3			
K. Cambridge	3	0-0	0-2	0-1	0	0	0			
Totals	225	35-59	13-22	8-19	19	19	87			
Percentages:	FG: 59.3%	FT: 59.1%	Three-point field goals: 4-12 (Gray 0-6, Watson 4-4, J. Cambridge 0-1, Greene 0-1)	Team rebounds: 1	Blocked shots: 3 (Lemmilä 2, Thierry)	Turnovers: 17 (McMahon 5, J. Cambridge 3, Gray 3, Lemmilä 2, Thierry, Petty, Watson, Greene)	Steals: 13 (J. Cambridge 6, Gray 3, Thierry 2, Watson 2)	Officials: Melissa Barlow Mark Berger, Maj Forsberg	Attendance: 6,417	

shot blocked right before the buzzer sounded to send the game into overtime.

McMahon helped steady the Buckeyes at the start of overtime with consecutive layups to put her team up by two, but Minnesota answered with a second-chance basket and free throws to tie the score at 80 with 1:47 remaining.

Back-to-back scores from Elsa Lemmilä and Taylor Thierry put OSU back in front 84-80 with 42 seconds remaining. Gophers junior forward Mallory Heyer connected from beyond the arc on the other end to put her team within one, but Lemmilä put the Buckeyes back up three with a layup with 18 seconds left.

After both teams split a pair of free throws, Lemmilä played hero again when she blocked a game-tying three-point attempt from graduate center Anika Stewart before the buzzer sounded to give the Buckeyes the win.

Lemmilä had four of her six points in overtime along with the game-sealing block, but the Buckeyes were led throughout the night by McMahon, who had a game-high 25 points and six assists while shooting 10 of 16 from the field.

After the game, McMahon was simply relieved her team fended off Minnesota.

"This was an ugly win, but I would take an overtime win over a loss," McMahon said. "We just had to do what we had to do, clean it up a little bit and win in overtime."

Watson's 16 points on 5-of-6 shooting were her second most of the season and second most on the team. Fellow freshman Jaloni Cambridge had a game-high six steals, helping the Buck-

Ohio State 86, Iowa 78										
Feb. 17, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus										
	1	2	3	4	OT	F				
Iowa (18-8, 8-7)	12	9	23	30	4	78				
Ohio State (22-3, 11-3)	22	12	17	23	12	86				
Iowa	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Olsen	40	8-20	8-12	1-1	7	4	27			
Feuerbach	33	4-7	2-2	0-0	4	5	12			
Affolter	36	3-7	4-4	1-14	4	5	11			
Stuelke	33	5-12	0-2	2-3	1	5	10			
McCabe	28	1-3	0-0	1-5	0	2	3			
Guyton	29	3-5	1-2	0-0	1	4	9			
O'Grady	12	2-4	2-2	0-0	1	2	6			
Mallegni	9	0-4	0-0	3-5	0	2	0			
Stremflow	5	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0			
Totals	225	26-62	17-24	11-30	18	29	78			
Percentages:	FG: 41.9%	FT: 70.8%	Three-point field goals: 9-25 (Olsen 3-9, Feuerbach 2-4, Guyton 2-4, Affolter 1-3, McCabe 1-3, Mallegni 0-2)	Team rebounds: 4	Blocked shots: 1 (O'Grady)	Turnovers: 20 (Olsen 4, Mallegni 4, Feuerbach 3, Stuelke 3, Affolter 2, Guyton 2, O'Grady, Team)	Steals: 5 (Stuelke 2, Olsen, Feuerbach, Affolter)			
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
J. Cambridge	40	8-14	11-14	0-3	4	3	29			
McMahon	44	8-21	8-13	3-5	2	4	25			
Gray	25	2-5	0-0	0-1	0	2	5			
Thierry	38	2-6	0-0	2-1	1	2	4			
Petty	10	1-2	0-0	0-4	1	3	2			
K. Cambridge	24	5-6	4-7	1-3	2	1	16			
Lemmilä	34	1-4	3-4	1-8	4	3	5			
Greene	10	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	3	0			
Totals	225	27-58	26-38	7-27	14	21	86			
Percentages:	FG: 46.6%	FT: 68.4%	Three-point field goals: 6-15 (Thierry 0-3, McMahon 1-3, McMahon 1-3, Gray 1-3, Lemmilä 0-2, J. Cambridge 2-2, K. Cambridge 2-2)	Team rebounds: 2	Blocked shots: 4 (Lemmilä 3, K. Cambridge)	Turnovers: 12 (J. Cambridge 4, K. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä 2, McMahon, Thierry, Greene)	Steals: 11 (Thierry 5, McMahon 2, K. Cambridge 2, J. Cambridge, Lemmilä)	Officials: Tim Daley, Natasha Cury, Brian Hall	Attendance: 8,810	

eyes force 21 Gopher turnovers that led to 30 points. Cambridge also scored in double figures with 10 points.

Minnesota senior center Sophie Hart led her team with 21 points on 10-of-15 shooting, while Battle had 17 points along with a team-high five assists and four rebounds. The Gophers held a 35-27 edge in rebounds and 20-10 advantage in second-chance points.

OSU Hangs On In OT Vs. Hawks

For the second game in a row, Ohio State (22-3, 11-3 Big Ten) blew a double-digit fourth-quarter lead before making enough plays in overtime to defeat Iowa (18-8, 8-7 Big Ten) 86-78 on Feb. 17 before 8,810 in Value City Arena.

In a fourth quarter that was eerily similar to its win over Minnesota just four days earlier, Ohio State created a 12-point lead with 1:38 to go, but the Buckeyes missed 5 of 10 free throws to allow Iowa the chance to climb back into the game. With four three-point baskets in the final 1:22, the road team did exactly that. However, Ohio State recovered from its regulation slip-up to outscore Iowa 12-4 in overtime.

Offensively, Ohio State shot just 11 of 28 from the field (39.3 percent) in the first half but held Iowa to an 8-of-27 shooting start (29.6 percent) while forcing nine turnovers. The Buckeyes' lockdown defense allowed the team to take a comfortable 34-21 advantage into halftime.

The Hawkeyes' offense came alive in the third quarter when Iowa made five of its first seven shots of the second half and went on a

Indiana 71, Ohio State 61										
Feb. 20, 2025 Skjodt Assembly Hall • Bloomington, Ind.										
	1	2	3	4	F					
Ohio State (22-4, 11-4)	17	11	11	22	61					
Indiana (17-9, 9-6)	26	14	17	14	71					
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
J. Cambridge	32	7-17	2-4	0-4	2	1	18			
McMahon	37	6-12	1-2	1-2	1	3	14			
Thierry	32	2-6	2-2	1-3	1	3	6			
Petty	15	2-3	0-0	0-2	1	1	4			
Gray	26	1-8	0-0	0-3	0	1	2			
Greene	21	3-5	1-2	0-0	0	1	9			
Walker	11	2-4	0-0	0-0	1	0	4			
K. Cambridge	10	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	3	3			
Lemmilä	16	0-0	1-2	0-3	0	1	1			
Totals	200	24-57	7-12	2-18	6	14	61			
Percentages:	FG: 42.1%	FT: 58.3%	Three-point field goals: 6-18 (J. Cambridge 2-6, Gray 0-5, McMahon 1-3, K. Cambridge 1-2, Greene 2-2)	Team rebounds: 3	Blocked shots: 4 (Lemmilä 2, J. Cambridge 2, McMahon 2, Thierry, Lemmilä)	Steals: 12 (J. Cambridge 4, McMahon 2, Thierry 2, Walker 2, Greene, K. Cambridge)				
Indiana	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Ciecki	38	5-10	4-4	0-1	2	4	16			
Garzon	37	5-9	3-3	0-11	6	4	16			
Parrish	33	5-9	4-5	0-6	4	1	16			
Striplin	32	5-7	1-2	1-4	2	3	11			
Moore-McNeil	29	3-5	0-0	0-2	4	5	7			
LaMendola	7	2-3	0-0	0-1	1	0	5			
Bargesser	13	0-2	0-0	1-1	1	2	0			
Meister	8	0-1	0-0	0-2	1	0	0			
Sandvik	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	25-46	12-14	3-31	21	19	71			
Percentages:	FG: 54.3%	FT: 85.7%	Three-point field goals: 9-17 (Garzon 3-6, Ciecki 2-4, Parrish 2-3, Moore-McNeil 1-2, LaMendola 1-2)	Team rebounds: 4	Blocked shots: 1 (Striplin)	Turnovers: 21 (Ciecki 4, Moore-McNeil 4, Parrish 3, Striplin 3, Bargesser 3, Garzon 2, LaMendola, Team)	Steals: 4 (Ciecki 2, Garzon, Parrish)	Officials: Jesse Dickerson, Julie Krommenhoek, Brenda Pantoja	Attendance: 10,772	

15-6 scoring run to cut Ohio State's lead to 40-36 at the 4:49 mark.

McMahon helped remedy the Buckeyes' scoring woes with five points in the last minute of the third quarter, but a layup from Iowa senior forward Addison O'Grady made the score 51-44 going into the fourth.

The break in action between quarters did little to halt the Hawkeyes' momentum. Senior guard Kylie Feuerbach led Iowa on a 7-2 scoring run by scoring five points in the first 47 seconds of the fourth quarter to trail the Buckeyes by just two points, 53-51 with 7:34 left in regulation.

Ohio State extended its lead from two to 12 with a 16-6 scoring run to make it 69-57 at the 1:38 mark, but for the second straight game, the Buckeyes struggled to put their opponents away.

Iowa started its comeback by making back-to-back three-point shots in 21 seconds, and while the Buckeyes made only three of their next six free throws, senior guard Lucy Olsen knocked down a pair of triples to make the score 73-69 with 24 seconds remaining. Ohio State had a turnover on its next possession, and after picking up an offensive rebound, senior guard Sydney Affolter made a layup and a free throw to make it a one-point game with 16 seconds left in regulation.

McMahon split a pair of free throws on Ohio State's next possession, and with only three seconds to go, Olsen made two free throws to send the game into overtime.

After the game, McGuff felt as though the Buckeyes could have shut down the Hawkeyes at the free-throw line.

OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 98, Purdue 46

Feb. 23, 2025
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Purdue (9-18, 2-14)	8	18	9	11	46
Ohio State (23-4, 12-4)	24	31	22	21	98

Purdue	Total				A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Jones	30	5-10	1-2	0-2	1	2	11
Bass	30	3-6	0-0	1-9	0	0	8
Swanson	29	2-12	1-2	1-2	2	4	7
McCarthy	21	2-7	0-3	1-3	1	2	4
Collier	17	1-4	0-0	0-1	0	2	2
Puryear	28	3-7	1-2	0-5	1	2	7
Petree	16	2-3	0-0	1-1	0	2	5
Lombard	21	0-7	2-2	0-4	3	3	2
Reynolds	8	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Totals	200	18-56	5-11	6-27	8	18	46

Percentages: FG: 32.1%. FT: 45.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-18 (Swanson 2-8, Lombard 0-4, Bass 2-4, Collier 0-1, Petree 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (McCarthy, Puryear, Reynolds). **Turnovers:** 21 (Jones 6, Swanson 4, McCarthy 3, Team 3 Bass, Collier, Petree, Lombard, Reynolds). **Steals:** 4 (Jones, Bass, Collier, Petree).

Ohio State	Total				A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Gray	29	8-18	0-0	0-2	1	1	21
J. Cambridge	23	5-10	7-7	0-3	5	1	20
McMahon	18	5-9	3-7	0-5	2	0	16
Petty	22	5-7	2-4	4-10	0	1	12
Thierry	22	1-2	0-1	1-2	1	1	2
K. Cambridge	21	3-5	3-4	0-2	6	1	10
Lemmilä	21	2-6	1-2	1-7	0	3	6
Walker	20	3-4	0-0	1-3	3	2	6
Greene	24	1-2	2-2	0-0	3	1	5
Totals	200	33-63	18-27	10-35	21	11	98

Percentages: FG: 52.4%. FT: 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 14-27 (Gray 5-12, J. Cambridge 3-5, McMahon 3-4, K. Cambridge 1-2, Lemmilä 1-2, Greene 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 8 (Petty 3, Lemmilä 3, McMahon, Thierry). **Turnovers:** 11 (Petty 2, Lemmilä 2, Walker 2, J. Cambridge, McMahon, Thierry, Greene, Team). **Steals:** 12 (J. Cambridge 4, K. Cambridge 3, Thierry 2, McMahon, Petty, Walker). **Officials:** Chuck Gonzalez, Cara Seggie, Frank Steratore **Attendance:** 8,567

"We could have closed the game out on free throws, and we didn't, and so they made us pay," McGuff said. "Some of it was Lucy (Olsen) just made some incredible shots. She made some really tough shots. Give her credit for that. Some of the shots she made we didn't execute what we were trying to do defensively, especially off the ball screens, and so we gave her a little more of an opportunity than we should have, but she made us pay."

After falling behind early in overtime on another Olsen basket, Cambridge gave Ohio State a 77-76 lead with 2:09 remaining on a jumper in the paint.

The Buckeyes then forced Iowa into a shot-clock violation, and Cambridge made two free throws to lead by three.

Olsen responded with her own free throws at the 1:05 mark before McMahon made a layup with 44 seconds left in the extra session to lead by three. The Buckeyes then forced Olsen into a miss from three-point range on the other end, and after Iowa freshman guard Teagan Mallegni grabbed the rebound, Kennedy Cambridge blocked her shot and came up with the rebound.

Cambridge then found Thierry sprinting toward the basket, who calmly made a layup to put Ohio State up five. The Buckeyes closed the door with three free throws, allowing the Value City Arena crowd to let out a sigh of relief.

Jaloni Cambridge led Ohio State with 29 points while shooting 8 of 14 (57.1 percent) from the field and also tied for the team lead with four assists, while Lemmilä grabbed a team-high nine rebounds and also had four assists. McMahon had 25 points on 8-of-21 shooting and Kennedy Cambridge finished the game

with a career-high 16 points (5 of 6).

The Hawkeyes were led in the loss by Olsen, who had 27 points. Affolter had 15 rebounds to go along with 11 points, helping the Hawkeyes to a 41-34 edge on the glass.

OSU Defense Sputters In Loss To Indiana

Ohio State (22-4, 11-4) lost its third straight road game Feb. 20 in front of 10,772 fans at Assembly Hall, falling to Indiana (17-9, 9-6) by a score of 71-61.

The Buckeyes' loss was marked by a mediocre defensive performance where they allowed the Hoosiers to shoot 25 of 46 (54.3 percent) from the field and 9 of 17 (52.9 percent) from three. Despite forcing 21 turnovers that led to 20 points, Ohio State's press and half-court defense had several lapses, allowing the home team to find its groove on offense and come away with the upset victory.

"Indiana is a really good team when they get into a good rhythm offensively, and they got into that tonight," McGuff said after the game. "What I thought we were going to have to do is get them out of an offensive rhythm, and we really didn't do that until the very end for a few minutes."

Indiana wasted no time poking holes in Ohio State's press, scoring eight points in the first 2:19 of the game, with six of those points coming in transition. The Buckeyes momentarily went out of their pressure, but Indiana's offense was just as good in the half-court.

After a perfect 5-of-5 shooting start, the Hoosiers made four of their next five field goals to take a 21-15 lead with 3:52 left in the period.

Ohio State went back to its press after a McGuff timeout, but Indiana scored the last five points of the quarter to lead 26-17.

The Buckeyes came out on a tear to start the second quarter as McMahon knocked down a three-point shot and a layup in 27 seconds, after baskets by Thierry and Eboni Walker, to lead her team on a game-tying 9-0 scoring run, but that momentum was short-lived. Indiana made a trio of three-point jumpers and limited OSU to 1-of-8 shooting to go on a 14-2 run that lasted the final 7:30 of the half and gave it a 40-28 ad-

vantage at halftime.

The Buckeyes couldn't put their poor start behind them in the second half. After Jaloni Cambridge opened the third quarter with a three-pointer, the Hoosiers grew their lead to 14, 47-33, with a 7-2 spurt.

Greene tried to get her team out of the funk with a three-pointer to trail 47-36 with 5:53 left in the third, but the Buckeyes' defensive issues persisted as Indiana scored seven straight points to go back up 54-36 with 2:51 to play in the stanza.

Indiana finished the quarter strong on defense, allowing only one field goal – a layup by Cambridge on a fast break – after Greene's triple, to help grow its lead to 57-39 heading into the final frame.

The Hoosiers provided the Buckeyes some life when junior guard Yarden Garzon was issued a flagrant foul at the 5:38 mark, sparking an 8-2 OSU run that allowed it to trail 62-51 at 3:55 after a Greene three. However, Garzon responded with seven points of her own in 53 seconds to push the lead back out to 17, 69-52, with 1:47 left.

The Buckeyes ended the game on a 9-2 run, but it was too late to make a difference and the Hoosiers still won by double digits.

Cambridge led the Buckeyes, recording a team-high 18 points on 7-of-17 shooting, and she also tied Thierry for the team lead in rebounds with four. Thierry added six points. McMahon was the only other Buckeye in double figures with 14.

Indiana had a balanced scoring effort in its win and was led by junior guard Shay Ciezki, Garzon and graduate guard Sydney Parrish, who scored 16 points each. Garzon added a game-high 11 rebounds, helping I-U out-bound Ohio State 34-20.

Bucks Bounce Back With Emphatic Win

Three days after the loss to Indiana, Ohio State (23-4, 12-4) responded with a 98-46 senior day victory over Purdue (9-18, 2-14) in front of 8,567 fans at Value City Arena on Feb. 23.

Ohio State's previous two home games ended in overtime wins, but against Purdue, the

52-point win was its largest Big Ten home win in program history. The Buckeyes' dominant win was fueled by one of their more efficient outings in Big Ten play. They made 33 of 63 shots from the field (52.4 percent) including 14 of 27 from three-point range (51.9 percent). They forced 21 turnovers in the game, which was slightly below their season average, but the 35 points they scored from those turnovers played a part in the large margin of victory.

The Buckeyes pounced on the outmatched Boilermakers in the first minute of the game when graduate forward Ajae Petty opened the scoring with a second-chance layup. Three-point jumpers from Jaloni Cambridge and Gray helped Ohio State extend its lead to 13 before Purdue could score its first points on a jumper by Mahri Petree at the 5:38 mark.

Purdue forward Reagan Bass drained a three-point jumper to help lead her team on a 5-0 spurt, but the Buckeyes ended the quarter on an 11-3 scoring run to take a 24-8 lead on a free throw by Kennedy Cambridge with 11 seconds on the clock.

Ohio State's momentum carried into the second quarter when Greene and Kennedy Cambridge each made three-point jumpers to give the Buckeyes a 30-10 lead. Moments after Cambridge made her triple, she tracked down the ball on Purdue's inbounds attempt and found Walker under the basket for a layup.

Later, Purdue sophomore guard Rashunda Jones made two layups in 54 seconds to keep the deficit at 22 points, 41-19, but Ohio State scored 12 straight points to take a 53-19 lead with 3:04 remaining in the first half on a pair of free throws by Kennedy Cambridge.

Ohio State made only one field goal, also by Kennedy, the rest of the half but still took a 55-26 lead into halftime. Jaloni (12) and Kennedy (seven) combined for 19 points in the second quarter, outscoring Purdue (18).

The Buckeyes didn't slow down in the second half. Gray scored eight points in the first 2:27 of the third quarter to lead the Buckeyes on a 13-3 scoring run.

With his team's lead up to 42 points to start

Continued On Page 32

OT Loss Extends Road Losing Streak To Four

Continued From Page 31

the fourth quarter, 77-35, McGuff gave plenty of playing time to role players such as Greene, Walker and Kennedy Cambridge, but the Buckeyes didn't slow down without all their regular players on the court. Instead, they scored the first 12 points of the final period to take an 89-35 lead with 5:38 left.

Ohio State scored nine points in the game's final minutes to reach the 98-point mark – the team's highest total in Big Ten play this season – and register the 52-point win.

After the game, Greene – who in conjunction with Thierry was honored pregame as a graduating senior – was happy to have a stress-free win after the previous overtime thrillers.

"It was good to have a game like this," Greene said. "We haven't really had a game like this all season, so it felt good."

Gray was the Buckeyes' leading scorer with 21 points. The former Oregon guard shot 8 of 18 from the field, including 5 of 12 from three-point range. Jalonni Cambridge was just behind Gray's team high in points, tallying 20 on 5-of-10 shooting and adding five assists in the win which was second only to her sister, Kennedy, who finished the game with six assists to go along with 10 points.

Petty had her fifth double-double of the season with 12 points and a game-high 14 rebounds.

Jones was the only Boilermaker to finish the game in double digits. She scored 11 points in Purdue's loss.

OSU Explodes Offensively In Win Over MSU

In one of its better offensive performances of the season, Ohio State (24-4, 13-4) outscored No. 23 Michigan State (20-8, 10-7) 89-78 on Feb. 26 to finish 15-0 at home on the 2024-25 regular season.

The Buckeyes' offensive outburst was led by Jalonni Cambridge and Petty, who combined for 56 points on 23-of-33 shooting during the win. Thirty-three of those points came from Cambridge, which was a career high for the freshman.

"She was really aggressive up and down the court, which we want her to be," McGuff said of Cambridge. "She got to the rim. She got to the three-point line. She was very efficient obviously from the three-point line."

Cambridge and Petty helped Ohio State shoot 34 of 62 (54.8 percent) from the field and 11 of 23 (47.8 percent) from three-point range. It was obvious that the Buckeyes were in for a good night offensively when they made 10 of their first 12 field goals to take a 23-16 lead with 3:03 left in the first quarter after a Cambridge three-point play.

The Buckeyes had their own defensive issues in the first quarter and allowed the road team to shoot 11 of 17 (64.7) in the opening frame, but their hot shooting still allowed them to take a 31-24 lead into the second quarter.

Neither team slowed down in the second period as Petty scored five points and corralled five rebounds in the first 4:07 of action and Michigan State junior guard Theryn Hollack drained two three-point shots, leaving the Buckeyes with a 42-32 lead at the 5:53 mark. Despite MSU's solid offensive start to the period, a McMahon triple at 5:34 helped Ohio State take a 45-32 lead, which was its largest of the game to that point.

The Buckeyes cooled down slightly to end the quarter and failed to make a field goal in the last 3:00, but they still took a 54-41 lead into halftime.

Michigan State kept battling at the start of the second half, and although Ohio State scored nine points in the first 3:39 of the period, the Spartans stayed within range and trailed by 11, 63-52, with 6:08 left after a layup from junior forward Grace Vanslooten.

Ohio State's lead shrank to 10 at the 2:29 mark, 67-57, but McMahon and Cambridge combined for a trio of triples to lead their team on a 12-2 scoring run that lasted the final 2:05 of the third quarter and put them up 79-59.

The Buckeye offense scored only two points in the first 6:03 of the fourth quarter, allowing MSU to take advantage with a 15-2 scoring run that made the score 81-74 with 4:16 left. A McMahon layup snapped the Buckeyes' scoring drought, and 29 seconds later Cambridge added a basket of her own to extend the Buckeye lead back to 85-74 with 3:28 remaining.

To the delight of the 7,207 fans in attendance at Value City Arena, the Buckeyes locked in defensively and allowed only four free throws the rest of the way to secure the 11-point win.

Petty finished the game as Ohio State's second-leading scorer behind Jalonni Cambridge with 23 points along with a season- and team-high 15 rebounds and six assists. McMahon also had an efficient scoring night with 17 points on 6-of-11 shooting, including 4-of-6 shooting from three.

Hallock was outstanding for Michigan State

in the loss with a team-high 29 points on 9-of-15 shooting, including a perfect 5 of 5 from three. Vanslooten nearly had a double-double with 19 points and nine rebounds.

Bucks Fall To Terps After OT Buzzer-Beater

In its last game of the regular season, No. 12 Ohio State (24-5, 13-5) suffered its fourth straight road loss, falling 93-90 in overtime to No. 19 Maryland (23-6, 13-5) on March 2 in front of 9,335 fans inside Xfinity Arena.

The Buckeyes, who lost on a last-second three-pointer by Maryland graduate guard Sarah Te-Biasu, were plagued by foul trouble and turnovers throughout. They committed 19 turnovers that led to 25 Terrapin points and had Jalonni Cambridge and McMahon each foul out late in the game.

"I thought our competitive character and effort were where they needed to be, but we made too many mistakes," McGuff said. "We had a lot of turnovers that led to easy Maryland baskets and a couple of key opportunities for big defensive stops that we didn't get. Give Maryland credit. I thought they played a great game today."

After falling behind 24-17 at the end of the first quarter, Ohio State locked in defensively in the second, limiting Maryland to 5-of-15 shooting and forcing five turnovers in the period. The Buckeyes also shot 8 of 15 in the quarter and had eight different players score, all helping McGuff's squad to take a narrow 38-37 lead into halftime.

Maryland started the second half strong with a 7-3 spurt, and later, after a pair of free throws from Greene, Te-Biasu hit her second three of the game to give the Terrapins a 49-45 lead. Ohio State struggled offensively through much of the frame, but it ended on a high note when Gray drained a three with 40 seconds left to trail 58-57 heading into the fourth quarter.

Ohio State took a one-point lead just 36 seconds into the period off a Cambridge fastbreak basket, but that lead was short-lived. The Buckeye freshman fouled out at 7:26 with the Terps leading 65-61, and they quickly upped that lead to 70-61 on a Kaylene Smikle three with 6:50 left. Despite the absence of Cambridge, OSU responded with a 6-0 run of its own, and after Smikle answered with a layup, it scored another five straight points to tie the game at 72 with 2:58 remaining after a Greene three and a Kennedy Cambridge steal led to a Thierry layup.

The game was tied at 78 with 29 seconds left, and Maryland had a chance to win the game in regulation on the final possession, but Kennedy Cambridge stole the ball from senior guard Shyanne Sellers before the buzzer sounded to send the game to overtime.

Greene, Thierry and McMahon all made two-point baskets – McMahon a pair and Thierry's an old fashioned three-point play – to help the Buckeyes take an 87-84 lead with 2:03 left, but after failing to come up with a defensive rebound, they allowed Maryland to tie the game with another three from Smikle.

McMahon made one of two free throws to put the Buckeyes ahead 88-87 with 33 seconds left, but Te-Biasu had a response seven seconds later with a driving layup to put Maryland ahead 89-88.

It appeared Ohio State was going to take the lead when Cambridge had her shot blocked only to get the offensive rebound and score the basket, but the officials deemed the block to be a jump ball, wiping out the two points and giving

Maryland 93, Ohio State 90

March 2, 2025
XFINITY Center • College Park, Md.

	1	2	3	4	OT	F
Ohio State (24-5, 13-5)	17	21	19	21	12	90
Maryland (23-6, 13-5)	24	13	21	20	15	93

Ohio State	Total						Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	
Thierry	43	7-11	4-4	1-2	0	4	21
McMahon	31	8-16	1-2	1-4	1	5	18
Petty	33	5-9	2-4	4-6	3	1	12
J. Cambridge	18	3-10	4-5	2-1	2	5	10
Gray	21	2-3	1-1	0-1	1	3	6
Greene	33	3-7	5-6	0-1	2	4	12
K. Cambridge	34	3-7	2-3	3-3	0	2	9
Lemmilä	11	1-1	0-0	1-2	1	0	2
Walker	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	225	32-64	19-25	12-20	10	24	90

Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 76.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-20. (Thierry 3-5, McMahon 1-4, J. Cambridge 0-3, Greene 1-3, K. Cambridge 1-3, Gray 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 0. **Blocked shots:** 5 (K. Cambridge 2, McMahon, Petty, Greene). **Turnovers:** 19 (McMahon 5, J. Cambridge 4, K. Cambridge 4, Petty 3, Thierry, Gray, Greene). **Steals:** 11 (K. Cambridge 3, Gray 2, Thierry, McMahon, Petty, J. Cambridge, Greene, Lemmilä).

Maryland	Total						Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	
Smikle	38	9-21	6-6	2-6	2	3	26
Sellers	37	6-11	5-6	0-1	8	3	21
Kubek	39	7-12	3-5	2-0	1	2	17
Te-Biasu	41	5-10	2-2	1-2	3	2	15
Dalce	19	2-5	4-4	6-5	0	5	8
DeBerry	6	3-3	0-0	0-1	1	0	6
Fisher	28	0-0	0-2	1-3	2	5	0
McLean	17	0-4	0-0	2-2	1	4	0
Totals	225	32-66	20-25	14-23	18	24	93

Percentages: FG: 48.5%. FT: 80.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-19 (Sellers 4-7, Smikle 2-5, Te-Biasu 3-4, Kubek 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Fisher). **Turnovers:** 18 (Sellers 9, Dalce 3, Te-Biasu 2, Smikle, Kubek, DeBerry, Fisher). **Steals:** 8 (Smikle 2, Sellers 2, Dalce 2, Kubek, Te-Biasu). **Officials:** Angie Enlund, Jesse Dickerson, Felicia Grinter. **Attendance:** 9,335

Maryland the ball up one with 18 seconds left.

After graduate forward Allie Kubek split two free throws, Ohio State tied the game when Greene slipped, kept her dribble alive and made a difficult game-tying reverse layup with seven seconds left.

Just as the two teams seemed to be headed toward another overtime, Te-Biasu rushed down the court on the other end, elevated off one leg and drained a three-point shot with one second left to put Maryland up 93-90. Cambridge had a chance to send the game to double overtime from half-court, but her shot was well short.

The Buckeyes were led by Thierry in the loss. She scored 21 points on 7-of-11 shooting (3 of 5 from three) in a game-high 43 minutes. McMahon added 18 points and five rebounds before fouling out in the game's final minute, while Petty had her seventh double-double of the season with 12 points and 10 rebounds.

Smikle led Maryland with 26 points on 9-of-21 shooting to go with her eight rebounds, while Sellers added 21 points on 6-of-11 shooting with eight assists against nine turnovers.

Despite the loss, Ohio State still earned a double-bye and a No. 3 seed in the Big Ten tournament scheduled for March 5-9 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. The Buckeyes will start postseason play in the quarterfinal round on March 7 (approximately 9 p.m., BTN) against either No. 6 seed Michigan State or the winner of No. 11 seed Iowa/No. 14 seed Wisconsin game.

Ohio State 89, Michigan State 78							
Feb. 26, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus							
	1	2	3	4	F		
MSU (20-8, 10-7)	24	17	18	19	78		
Ohio State (24-4, 13-4)	31	23	25	10	89		
Michigan St.	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Hallock	35	9-15	6-6	0-1	1	3	29
VanSlooten	34	8-16	3-5	3-6	0	0	19
Ayrault	29	3-10	4-4	0-3	4	3	11
Simmons	32	0-1	10-10	1-2	3	4	10
Tate	28	1-5	0-0	1-3	0	4	2
Shumate	13	2-2	0-0	0-1	0	2	5
Hampton	18	0-4	2-2	1-0	3	2	2
Sotelo	11	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Totals	200	23-54	25-27	8-20	11	19	78
Percentages: FG: 42.6%. FT: 92.6%. Three-point field goals: 7-11 (Hallock 5-5, Ayrault 1-4, Hampton 0-1, Shumate 1-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 1 (Shumate). Turnovers: 10 (Tate 3, Ayrault 2, Sotelo 2, Hallock, Simmons, Shumate). Steals: 8 (Hampton 4, Simmons 3, Hallock).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
J. Cambridge	37	12-22	4-7	1-3	5	3	33
Petty	25	11-11	1-2	5-10	6	5	23
McMahon	36	6-11	1-2	0-4	0	2	17
Gray	20	2-8	1-2	0-2	5	1	7
Thierry	31	1-4	2-2	2-0	0	1	4
Lemmilä	15	1-2	1-2	1-3	1	0	3
Greene	23	1-3	0-0	1-0	2	4	2
K. Cambridge	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Walker	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	34-62	10-17	11-24	19	18	89
Percentages: FG: 54.8%. FT: 58.8%. Three-point field goals: 11-23 (J. Cambridge 5-9, Gray 2-7, McMahon 4-6, Thierry 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 6 (Lemmilä 5, Greene). Turnovers: 14 (Petty 4, J. Cambridge 3, McMahon 2, J. Cambridge, McMahon, Gray, Thierry, Lemmilä, Greene, Team). Steals: 4 (Petty 2, Thierry, Lemmilä). Officials: Josh Howell, Cameron Inouye, Lisa Jones. Attendance: 7,207							

Sasso Retires From Collegiate Wrestling

Sammy Sasso is retiring from wrestling, Ohio State wrestling head coach Tom Ryan announced on Feb. 27. It was confirmed by Sasso on Twitter the morning of Feb. 28.

"It's painful to say that my college wrestling career has come to an end," Sasso said in his Twitter statement.

ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

"Sasso is very direct with his words and his thinking," Ryan said. "In the beginning of the year, he said, 'I will do everything in my power to get back to the level of wrestling that I know I'm capable of. If I can't, I won't wrestle anymore.'"

After returning this season from a gunshot wound that he suffered in August of 2023, the four-time All-American and two-time Big Ten champion will no longer compete for the Buckeyes.

Sasso's 12-7 record this season, which he accrued at 157 and 165 pounds, made it so the battle was between him and red-shirt freshman Brandon Cannon for a spot in the lineup in the Big Ten tournament that begins on March 8.

"This season hasn't been the Sammy Sasso you are used to watching, and I understand that," Sasso's statement read. "Most people would have thrown in the towel after getting shot, but I couldn't just give up. I worked harder than ever before to get where I'm at, but nonetheless my leg cannot move the way it used to. Although this whole situation has been tough, I know this entire process has made me a better person."

"His will is 100 percent there," Ryan said. "That has never wavered. This guy is an ultra-competitor. As difficult as it was for him to bow out – he was supposed to go to Lock Haven and battle it out with Cannon for the spot, but he's a man and he felt that it was not in his best interest or the best interest of the program."

He retires with a 106-19 career record as a four-time NCAA qualifier, coming in second place in the NCAA tournament twice during his career (2021 and 2023) and fifth once (2022) after the 2020 tournament was canceled due to COVID-19.

Despite his wrestling career coming to an end, Ryan said that Sasso wants to remain involved with it through coaching.

"We met with Sammy about a role at the (Ohio Regional Training Center) here," Ryan said. "He wants to stay in college coaching, so he'll have plenty of opportunities, we believe. We're grateful for all he gave to this place and the way he led here."

Wrestlebucks Drop Finale Against Penn State

Ohio State fell to Penn State in its reg-

ular-season finale on Feb. 14 by a score of 27-13 despite the Nittany Lions being short two of their usual No. 1-ranked starters.

The Buckeyes were able to win only three of the 10 matches in front of a sold-out Covelli Center crowd of 4,494, with No. 21 Brendan McCrone, Cannon and No. 9 Nick Feldman winning their bouts.

McCrone – who head coach Tom Ryan said was sick the day of the dual – started the night off with a big upset, taking down No. 7-ranked freshman Luke Lilledahl with a pin at 3:58, something he said he knew he had a chance to do going into the match.

"I believed that even when I didn't feel the best that I was going to come out on top whatever way I could," McCrone said. "I knew I could pin them. I know that I could pin almost anyone in the country. I was just patient, then waited and I got my hands locked and brought it over."

"He was in the tripod, and he brought his leg up a little too much, so I was able to get my hands locked. He was long and I knew if I got my hands locked that I could take him to his back."

McCrone said that winning on a night when he didn't feel his best gave him a lot of confidence going into March.

"It shows that there's going to be adversity, whether it's the wrestler or it's mental, physical or whatever, there's going to be adversity," he said. "Especially this postseason, nothing is going to be perfect for anybody."

After Nic Bouzakis lost his match to No. 8 Braeden Davis, 8-5, despite seeming like he had full control of the bout through the first two periods, the main event – a rematch between No. 1 Jesse Mendez and No. 3 Beau Bartlett – was up.

Mendez went into the match having won the last three matchups the two had against each other – the Big Ten championship, the national championship and the NWCA All-Star meet (each of them 4-1) – but wasn't able to come out on top this time, falling 4-2.

It was the first time since Feb. 2, 2024, that Mendez lost at all, that defeat also coming against Bartlett in the regular season last year.

"Jesse is a warrior," Ryan said. "(Bartlett) is really good, a couple-time All-American. We just made a couple mistakes. I thought out of all the times we've wrestled him, that might have been the most dominant in terms of opportunities to score. We were on his leg a lot."

"The only way to learn is you keep going in, and you keep going in, then eventually the mind figures out how to finish it. It gives us something to really home in on for the next six weeks, making sure that's a position (Mendez) works hard at and he makes a few little tweaks."

With No. 1 Tyler Kasak out at 157 pounds for Penn State, Cannon went up against freshman Joe Sealey and was able to earn a bonus team point with a 10-1 major-decision win. No. 1 Greg Kerkvliet was also out of the lineup against the Buckeyes at heavyweight, leaving Feldman up against Cole Mirasola for a 10-3 win at heavyweight.

Despite the final score, Ryan was happy with how the Buckeyes performed, with four of the seven losses by three points or fewer, given the talent on the Penn State roster.

"Quite frankly, Penn State is one of the better teams we've ever faced," he said. "I've been doing this for 32 years now. I've been watching the NCAA since 1982. This was one of the best teams NCAA wrestling has seen. But we battled at a lot of weights. We have to find a way to win those matches."

OSU Preparing For B1G, NCAA Tourneys

The Buckeyes' schedule was set up so that Penn State would be the final regular-season dual, giving them both time to rest and time to figure out what their optimal lineup is going into tournaments.

McCrone said after the Penn State dual that time was going to be used wisely.

"It's going to be good that we have a couple of weeks off from competition, but it's going to be very intentional," McCrone said Feb. 14. "We're all going to be very focused. Guys that are in the starting 10 are going to keep trying to get better and keep improving in situations and positions that we need to improve in."

Ryan gave the team two days off after the Penn State dual, but from there the intensity was turned up so that the wrestler's minds and bodies would be ready for what is waiting for them in March.

"The next two days are recovery," Ryan said. "You need a group of guys that recover right. Not having practice doesn't mean you're not eating right, sleeping right, resting and getting to bed on time. Then we turn it up a bit. Our intensity goes really high, and our volume goes a bit lower. Practices aren't as long, but they're really intense."

"You fine-tune them. Look at the list of positions you need to work on, and you work on them ad nauseam so that when it

happens again, they can execute it."

Ryan revealed the full lineup for the Big Ten tournaments on Feb. 27, with McCrone going at 125 pounds, Bouzakis at 133 pounds and Mendez at 141 for the lightweights. In the middle weights will be Dylan D'Emilio at 149 pounds, Cannon at 157, Paddy Gallagher at 165 and Carson Kharchla at 174. The heavyweights will be Ryder Rogotzke at 184 pounds, Seth Shumate at 197 pounds and Feldman at heavyweight.

Seniors Recognized Before PSU Dual

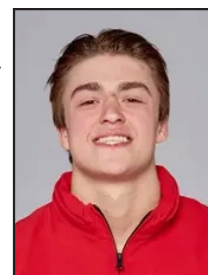
It was senior night for the Buckeyes on Feb. 14, and those wrestlers were honored before the match with framed singlets as they were called onto the mat.

Gavin Bell, D'Emilio, Andre Gonzales, Bryce Hepner, Carson Kharchla, Garrett Lautzenheiser, Mike Misita, Klay Reeves, Hogan Swenski and Sasso were all recognized before the dual.

Outside of wrestling, Ryan hopes the seniors who won't be back have taken a lot from being in his program.

"The power of love," Ryan said when asked what he hopes his wrestlers have learned from him. "When you're around a bunch of people that understand what love looks like and feels like, that's one thing. And obviously gratitude. I'm grateful for them. Those are the big takeaways. Then the last thing is that when you do something for a greater reason than your own self-worth, that's priceless."

"These guys care about the program. I want to win bad for me and my family, my faith, my God, but winning for each other is powerful. I think this group of guys really care about each other, and they fought for each other. Those are some of the things I want them to take with them."



Brendan McCrone



Sammy Sasso

MI MEXICO MEXICAN RESTAURANT

4775 East Main Street, Columbus, OH 43213 • (614) 577-0143

AUTHENTIC Mexican Food

Mon. 11am - 11pm
Tues. - Sat. 11am - 10pm
Sun. 11am - 9pm

THURSDAY • 1/2 PRICE MARGARITAS & BEER • 3-9 pm

\$10 OFF

Any Food Order

of \$50 or more

Dine in only.
Not valid with any other coupon.
Not valid on Thursdays.

\$5 OFF

Any Food Order

of \$25 or more

Dine in only.
Not valid with any other coupon.
Not valid on Thursdays.

50% OFF

Buy 1 entree at the regular price, get 2nd entree (equal or lesser value) for 50% off

Dine in only.
Not valid with any other coupon.
Not valid on Thursdays.

Every football Saturday, come in and enjoy margaritas & bottled beers at half price.

Try our new Jumbo Sangria Margarita!

www.MiMexicoColumbus.com

Newly remodeled bar!

Outdoor Hockey Games Could Be a Shoe-In

Now that the NHL has played the first hockey game in Ohio Stadium, the next time a rink is built inside the venue could be for the Ohio State men's and women's teams.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

So says OSU athletic director Ross Bjork. While plugging the NHL Stadium Series game between the Columbus Blue Jackets and Detroit Red Wings on March 1, he was asked at media availability on Feb. 19 first, if the university was interested in hosting outdoor games for its programs, and secondly, why weren't they involved this year?

The former was easy to answer and less complicated.

"That's our goal," he said. "This obviously gives us a great template. We would not have the NHL run it. It would be nice to have their infrastructure because they know how to do this. But we'll use this as a template, a guide, to say, 'Can we pull this off?' So, we'll map that out in the years to come."

When the Blue Jackets' first outdoor game was announced a year ago, Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said he expected the men and women would get a chance to

play in Ohio Stadium in the near future but it wouldn't be in 2025 because of scheduling conflicts.

Which leads to Bjork's response as to the lack of OSU games at the Stadium Series. It seemed odd that men and women would not participate considering both teams played at Wrigley Field – the men vs. Michigan on Jan. 3 and the women facing Wisconsin the next day.

"This is an NHL event," Bjork said. "They have very strict protocols. The games we had at Wrigley Field for our men's and women's teams, that was after the NHL game (St. Louis vs. Chicago in the Winter Classic on Dec. 31) was played. To protect their rights – they're renting (Ohio Stadium) from us – it's their stadium until after that game is played, so there wasn't really an opportunity to do that."

The men hosted Michigan on Feb. 27 and 28 at Value City Arena so the NHL was not going to allow one or both of the games on "their" ice in the 'Shoe before the Blue Jackets and Red Wings tilt. Rohlik said playing the day after was not feasible with the Big Ten tournament starting March 7.

Likewise for the women, who swept St. Thomas on Feb. 28 and March 1 in a best-of-three WCHA first-round series at the OSU Ice Rink. Scheduling around the Stadium Series didn't make sense for them either.

Still, the trio of events was the perfect storm.

"It's a big hockey weekend overall, between our men's team, our women's team – they're both ranked in the top 10 this year – and to have this game, I think it's just a great way to celebrate hockey in our city," Bjork said.

And a celebration it was as an Ohio State-Blue Jackets theme intermixed from the layout of the rink in the middle of a Block O to the extra-large decals of the Blue Jackets' infamous goal cannon being laid on the flooring surrounding the rink to emulate a Buckeye Leaf on a football helmet, to the pregame pep rally in St. John Arena – think Skull Session – and the walk in from there to the stadium by the players and staff.

By the way, the headliner at the rally was O.A.R., which was formed by several members when they were students at Ohio State.

Then there was the crowd of 94,751 for the second-largest crowd in NHL history that arrived early to tailgate, attended a fan fest then settled into their seats with the temperature at 27 degrees with a 17-degree wind chill for the opening faceoff.

"I knew it was going to be special," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. "But I was still blown away."

What made it even better for the long-suffering Blue Jackets fans was a dramatic 5-3 win to complete a home-and-home sweep which put Columbus two points ahead of the Red Wings for the first wild card from the Eastern Conference for the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Blue Jackets led 3-1 after two periods before the Red Wings tied it. A late go-ahead and an empty-net tally capped the event.

As for the largest crowd ever, that was 105,491 at Michigan Stadium for the Winter Classic on Jan. 1, 2014, between Detroit and the Toronto Maple Leafs.

There was no way to top that. While the Ohio Stadium capacity is 102,780 there were about 10,000 seats that were unavailable due to the placement of a concert stage for Columbus Rock duo Twenty One Pilots as well

as platforms needed for cameras for hockey that are different than permanent positions to broadcast football, said Steve Mayer, president of NHL Content and Events.

"I think the stadium itself, for me as a sports fan, this is an iconic place," he said on Feb. 26. "I've watched some incredible sporting events take place in this building, and it's special to be here and for us to actually look at what will be the second-largest crowd in the history of these outdoor games."

"And to know that even though it started many years ago, we're still going strong, and we're bringing a game to Columbus for the first time, it's kind of unbelievable that we haven't been here, that Columbus hasn't played in an outdoor game, and the fact that it's about to happen is really cool."

Mayer admitted there were concerns when ticket sales lagged initially but said much of that had to do with Ohio State dominating the news with the Buckeyes' run to the College Football Playoffs championship which ended with a win over Notre Dame on Jan. 20.

"Early on, we were like, 'Whoa, we need to pick up the pace,'" he said. "But what we're finding lately (for the outdoor games) is exactly what happened here in Columbus – that fans take their time."

"There was a lot in this market a few months ago with one college football game after the other and we recognized that, and we knew that the sales would pick up late, and they have. What a testament to the Columbus Blue Jackets, that you could fill a stadium with 90,000 people."

While it was an NHL-run event, the Ohio State presence was felt. The athletic band performed at the pep rally during the game and did Script Ohio on the ice prior to the game.

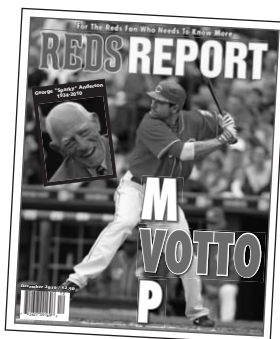
National championships in team spirit, the women's hockey team and, of course, football were recognized, and kicker Jayden Fielding, linebacker Sonny Styles and Ohio State president Ted Carter participated in the ceremonial puck drop.

REDS FANS!

Follow The Reds Year-Round In Reds Report

Reds Report is must reading for every Reds fan. Each information-filled issue includes player features; historical articles; extensive minor-league coverage with features on top prospects, complete statistics and farm club updates; box scores and game summaries for every Reds game; complete team and individual statistics; a Reds memorabilia section and much more.

1 Year (12 issues) — \$45.95



Send to: Reds Report • P.O. Box 12453 • Columbus, Ohio 43212

- Please send me a one-year (12 issues) subscription to **Reds Report** for \$44.95.
- My check or money order is enclosed. Check # _____
- Charge to my: Discover MC Visa AMEX

Exp. Date _____

Card No. _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

For Faster Service On Credit Card Orders Call
1-800-760-2862

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For February



Davis Burnside
Junior Forward
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Home Away From Home

The collaboration between the Blue Jacks and Ohio State goes both ways.

Due to the high school wrestling state tournament, the men's team will play its best-of-three Big Ten quarterfinal series vs. Wisconsin at Nationwide Arena, home of the Blue Jacks, on March 7, 8, and 9, if necessary, with all games starting at 7 p.m.

It's unfortunate for the Buckeyes, who were 13-3-1 at Value City Arena this season.

If the No. 3 seed Buckeyes defeat the No. 6 Badgers and No. 7 Notre Dame upsets No. 2 Minnesota, OSU would host the Fighting Irish in a single elimination game at Value City Arena on March 15.

Quarterfinal wins by the Buckeyes and Golden Gophers would put the semifinal in Minneapolis on the 15th. No. 4 Michigan hosts No. 5 Penn State in the other quarterfinal with the winner advancing to play at top-seed Michigan State on the 15th.

The Buckeyes won't have the same building conflicts the next two seasons if they were to host quarterfinals, as long as the Big Ten schedule remains the same, because the Ohio High School Athletic Association on Feb. 27 signed a two-year extension with OSU for the wrestling tournament.

The 2026 championships will be March 13-15, and in 2027 the dates are March 12-14. Of course, that would mean the Buckeyes would not have Value City Arena for possible semifinals.

Crunch Time

Since BSB last went to press, the Buckeyes (21-11-2, 14-9-1 Big Ten) went 3-3-0 to finish third in the conference, a remarkable turnaround from the 14-20-4, 3-18-2 mark of last season.

Michigan State and Minnesota tied with 50 points while the Buckeyes had 42, six points ahead of Michigan.

Picked in the coaches preseason poll to finish seventh (last) in the Big Ten this season, the Buckeyes are ninth nationally in the PairWise rankings. College Hockey News gives them a 98 percent chance of making the NCAA tournament with an 87 percent probability of doing it through an at-large bid. The Big Ten tourney winner receives an automatic qualifier.

The Buckeyes swept the Badgers this season, but in all four games the outcome was in doubt in the third period. OSU opened Big Ten play at Wisconsin on Oct. 18 with a 2-1 overtime win followed the next night by a 2-1 victory.

They swept the Badgers 4-1 and 4-2 in Columbus on Feb. 14 and 15. The following series, the Buckeyes lost 4-1 and 6-3 at Minnesota on March 21 and 22 before completing the regular season vs. U-M by winning the opener 2-1 in overtime prior to a 4-3 setback.

Setting The Pace

Junior forward Davis Burnside is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for February when he had nine points (five goals, four assists) in eight games.

He had a goal and an assist in each win over Notre Dame as well as the Feb. 15 victory over the Badgers. Burnside has 13 goals and 17 assists for 30 points in 33 games to rank second on the team.

For recaps of the Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

FOOTBALL

Aug. 30 TEXAS.
Sept. 6 GRAMBLING; **13** OHIO; **27** at Washington.
Oct. 4 MINNESOTA, **11** at Illinois; **18** at Wisconsin.
Nov. 1 PENN STATE; **8** at Purdue; **15** UCLA; **22** RUTGERS; **29** at Michigan.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (16-13, 8-10)

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, W 93-69; **16** MICHIGAN, L 86-83; **20** NORTHWESTERN, L 70-49; **23** at UCLA, L 69-61; **26** at USC, W 87-82.
March 4 NEBRASKA; **8** at Indiana; **12-16** Big Ten Tournament, Indianapolis.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (24-5, 13-5)

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, W 87-84 (OT); **17** IOWA, W 86-78 (OT); **20** at Indiana, L 71-61; **23** PURDUE, W 98-46; **26** MICHIGAN STATE, W 89-78.
March 2 at Maryland, L 93-90 (OT); **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, Men 4-0, Women 6-0.
March 8 NCAA Midwest Regionals, TBA; **20-23** NCAA Championships at University Park, Pa.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS (4-1, 1-0)

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, NTS; **23** WINTER CUP, NTS.

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 (3-9, 2-7)

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, L 197.375-195.800; **22** at Penn State, L 196.525-196.300.
March 2 BIG FOUR MEET vs. RUTGERS, W 196.650-195.875; vs. NEBRASKA, L 196.675-196.650; vs. UCLA, L 197.200-196.650; **7** at NC State; **16** WEST VIRGINIA & KENT STATE.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (21-11-2, 14-9-1)

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, W 4-1, W 4-2; **21-22** at Minnesota, L 4-1, L 6-3; **27-28** MICHIGAN, W 2-1 (OT), L 4-3.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (27-6-3, 19-6-3)

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, W 5-3, W 3-2; **28** WCHA QUARTERFINALS vs. ST. THOMAS, W 5-1.
March 1 WCHA QUARTERFINALS, vs. ST. THOMAS, W 4-1.

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, NTS; **26-March 1** Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis, 3rd/1, 100.
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, 1ST/1, 313.5.
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 (7-8, 4-3)

Jan. 3-4 BRIGHAM YOUNG, L 3-1; L 3-1; **10-11** FORT VALLEY STATE, W 3-0; W 3-0; **17** at First Point Collegiate Challenge in Austin, Texas, vs. Stanford, L 3-0; **18** at First Point Collegiate Challenge in Austin, Texas, vs. UCLA, W 3-1; **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, W 3-0; **15** LINDENWOOD, W 3-1; **20** at McKendree, L 3-1; **22** at Lindenwood, W 3-1 **27** at Ball State, L 3-2.
March 1 PURDUE FORT WAYNE, W 3-2; **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 (13-3, 5-3)

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, L 27-13.
March 8-9 Big Ten Championships at Chicago; **20-22** NCAA Championships at Philadelphia.

Buckeyes Looking To Get Back To NCAAs

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For the second time in the past three years, Ohio State's baseball program is entering a season with a new head coach. Bill Mosiello lasted just two seasons in Columbus, finishing his short-lived tenure with the Buckeyes with a 60-51 overall record while going 21-27 in conference play.

He failed to take the program back to the NCAA tournament, where it hasn't been since the 2019 season, and now Justin Haire takes over the position with the same goal.

The Big Ten conference as a whole has fallen short of success in recent years, with Michigan's 2019 run to Omaha being the last time a team in the league has been one of the final eight remaining.

Haire – who comes to Ohio State after leading Campbell to five NCAA Regionals during his 10-year tenure (2015-24) – is hoping the league itself will be able to step back up into national relevance in the college baseball world, and he's hoping that begins with the Buckeyes.

"It starts with getting back into the NCAA tournament and having as many opportunities as you can get in the NCAA tournament," Haire



Justin Haire

said. "Hopefully, with the addition of the four programs into the Big Ten and the wealth of really good coaches in the Big Ten, we can see it elevate itself as a conference and earn more host sites.

"If you want to stack the deck to get to Omaha, you have to be really good, you have to have a place that can host and you have to be able to schedule good enough to earn that host."

Getting to host a regional is important, with just under 75 percent of teams that have made it to the College World Series in Omaha being No. 1 regional seeds who started their postseason runs at their home fields. Last season, seven of the eight teams that made it were No. 1 teams, and the last time it was fewer than five was in 2007, when just three No. 1 regional teams made it to Omaha.

The Buckeyes haven't gotten off to a hot start if they do want to earn themselves that favorable position this year. With three weekends of baseball done, Ohio State is 1-8 after playing some tough competition on the road to open the year.

They began with three games against Arizona State, getting swept, with two of those losses being by one run. The next weekend in the Jax College Baseball Classic in Jacksonville, Fla., they began the weekend by beating a ranked NC State team but went on to lose to Coastal Carolina in 11 innings and give up a 10-0 lead to lose 12-10 on a walk-off home run against Alabama.

"We're trying to get them all out of the way. How many different ways can we lose games?" Haire joked on Feb. 24. "I told our guys that the game has a weird way of evening itself out, so we'll see if those words actually ring true as we get closer to June."

That continued in the College Baseball Series at Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, when Ohio State lost another three games to teams that are likely on their way to the NCAA tournament at the end of the season, playing two of the three games close, and leading No. 9 Oregon State until a five-run bottom of the eighth inning.

The Buckeyes will be playing at Bill Davis Stadium much sooner than the team is accustomed to, with the first home game of the season on March 4, a midweek contest against St. John's. It's the earliest home opener since 1992 when they played Ashland on the same date at Trautman Field.

That's something Haire wants to make sure they can do every year due to the advantages of being at home and trying to get more fans in the stands.

"Nobody wants to open on the road for six straight weekends. That's something we're going to try to avoid at any cost," Haire said. "But No. 2, there are teams in the Midwest that play a lot of home games. There's a number of teams in our league that have worse weather than us and worse field conditions that are playing more home games.

"For our fan base, for our student-athletes, for our program, for us to establish an identity that we're going to play at home – we're going to play in some chilly weather, and that's OK. But we don't need to be playing in chilly weather on the road. We need to be playing in chilly weather at home and turn that into a home-field advantage."

On The Bump

The Buckeyes came into the new season without their 2024 ace after Landon Beidelschies transferred away over the off-season to now-No. 4 Arkansas, where he has had some early success in the rotation. With Gavin Bruni gone after being drafted by the Washington Nationals and Colin Purcell graduating, the three pitchers who made the most starts last year are no longer with the team.

Despite that, Haire thinks they can still have success on the mound with Blaine Wynn, Chase Herrell and Jake Michalak starting games.

"They're all very capable," Haire said. "They all have good stuff, good arms and have the ability to go through the lineup a couple of times and do some really good things,"

Wynn has shown the potential to take over as the Friday starter in Beidelschies' place. Over the offseason, he played for the Hyannis Harbor Hawks of the Cape Cod League – the top college baseball summer league in the country – and finished with a 2.55 ERA in seven games with four starts (24 2/3 innings pitched). In 21 appearances as a reliever for the Buckeyes last year, he had a 3.38 ERA, which was the best mark on the team for anyone who was on the mound for more than three innings. That helped him earn third-team All-Big Ten honors after the season.

Wynn has made just one start this year, in the season opener against the Sun Devils, but gave up five earned runs in just three innings and hasn't been back on the mound since due to an injury.

Herrell, a sophomore, has been tabbed the No. 2 starter, which has gone very well for him so far. In three games, he has given up eight earned runs and has been able to get deep into

2025 Ohio State Baseball Roster

No.	Name	Position	Year	Height	Weight	B/T	Hometown
35	Simon Bargo	RHP	So.	6-5	202	R/R	Cincinnati
45	Douglas Bauer	RHP	Jr.	6-4	210	R/R	Houston
46	Hayden Blosser	RHP	Fr.	6-3	163	R/R	Avon Lake, Ohio
4	Reggie Bussey	OF	Jr.	6-2	190	L/L	Twinsburg, Ohio
29	Ryan Butler	RHP	Sr.	6-3	215	R/R	Salem, Va.
19	Will Carpenter	INF	Gr.	6-1	210	L/R	Aurora, Ohio
25	Luke Carrell	LHP	Gr.	6-2	205	R/L	Davis, Calif.
30	Nik Copenhaver	RHP	R-Fr.	6-4	210	R/R	Hamilton, Ohio
33	Chris Domke	RHP	So.	6-3	210	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
16	Mason Eckelman	C	So.	6-1	215	L/R	Broadview Heights, Ohio
14	Andrew Edrington	RHP/OF	So.	6-1	185	R/R	Cincinnati
1	Lee Ellis	INF	So.	5-11	170	R/R	White Plains, Md.
20	Drew Erdmann	RHP	So.	6-4	220	R/R	Hudson, Ohio
8	Ty Fox	INF	Fr.	6-2	185	L/R	Rochester Hills, Mich.
0	Zach Freeman	OF	Sr.	6-0	200	L/R	Los Angeles
7	Nick Giamarusti	OF	Sr.	6-0	195	R/R	Chicago
24	Charlie Giese	RHP	Jr.	6-5	205	R/R	Rockwall, Texas
9	Matthew Graveline	C	Jr.	6-1	195	R/R	Centerville, Ohio
34	Chase Herrell	RHP	So.	6-2	215	L/R	Milford, Ohio
53	Spencer Hill	RHP	Gr.	6-3	220	L/R	New Albany, Ohio
40	Jaylen Jones	LHP	Sr.	6-1	215	L/L	Thomasville, Ga.
55	Alex Koelling	INF	Fr.	6-1	185	L/R	Mason, Ohio
48	Gavin Kuzniewski	RHP	Fr.	6-0	195	R/R	Fishers, Ind.
32	Noah LaFine	RHP	Fr.	5-11	178	R/R	Akron, Ohio
41	Tannis Lange	LHP	Fr.	6-3	190	L/L	Waukesha, Wis.
2	Trey Lipsey	OF	Sr.	6-2	195	L/R	Southfield, Mich.
21	Jake Michalak	RHP	So.	6-3	210	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
12	Ryan Miller	INF	Sr.	6-3	220	L/R	Dublin, Ohio
31	Sal Mineo	OF	Fr.	5-11	195	L/L	Slippery Rock, Pa.
15	Sahil Patel	LHP	R-So.	5-11	175	L/L	Buford, Ga.
44	Alonzo Paul Jr.	C	Jr.	5-8	180	R/R	Valparaiso, Ind.
42	Tyler Pettorini	INF	Sr.	6-0	180	L/R	Wooster, Ohio
36	Zev Salsberg	RHP	Fr.	6-2	190	R/R	Toronto, Ontario
17	Anthony Scheppler	INF	Fr.	6-0	210	L/R	Novato, Calif.
26	Hunter Shaw	LHP	Jr.	6-4	190	R/L	Chelsea, Mich.
47	Zak Sigman	RHP	So.	5-10	190	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
6	Maddix Simpson	INF	Fr.	6-2	195	R/R	Fort Myers, Fla.
11	Marc Stephens	INF	Jr.	6-1	185	R/R	Orange Beach, Ala.
10	Blaine Wynn	RHP	Jr.	6-3	207	R/R	Miamisburg, Ohio

Head Coach – Justin Haire. **Assistant Head Coach/Pitching Coach** – Tyler Robinson. **Assistant Coach/Field Coordinator** – Joey Holcomb. **Assistant Coach/Director of Recruiting** – Elliott McCummings. **Director of Player Personnel & Development** – Jordan Stampfer. **Director of Pitching Development/Camp Coordinator** – Griffin Parrill. **Director of Program Development** – Harrison Mohr.

2025 Schedule

FEB. 14-16 at Arizona State.; **21** vs. N.C. State at Jax Baseball Classic in Jacksonville, Fla.; **22** vs. Coastal Carolina at Jax Baseball Classic in Jacksonville, Fla.; **23** vs. Alabama at Jax Baseball Classic in Jacksonville, Fla.; **28** vs. Auburn at 2025 College Baseball Series in Arlington, Texas.

MARCH 1 vs. Baylor at 2025 College Baseball Series in Arlington, Texas; **2** vs. Oregon State at 2025 College Baseball Series in Arlington, Texas; **4** ST. JOHN'S; **7-9** VALPARAISO; **11** EASTERN MICHIGAN; **14-16** at Indiana; **18** MIAMI (OH); **21-23** at Iowa; **28-30** OREGON.

APRIL 1 WEST VIRGINIA; **4-6** at USC; **9** KENT STATE; **11-13** MINNESOTA; **15** WRIGHT STATE; **18-20** at Michigan State; **22** AKRON; **23** TOLEDO; **25-27** RUTGERS; **29** CENTRAL MICHIGAN.

MAY 2-4 MICHIGAN; **6** OHIO; **9-11** at Northwestern; **13** BUTLER; **15-17** ILLINOIS; **20-25** Big Ten tournament at Omaha, Neb.

games despite it being early in the season, getting through six in both of his first two starts.

He said he has been able to go deep into games so far this season because of the approach he has when he gets on the mound, which is to go right at the hitters and force them to hit him.

"I don't like walking people," Herrell said. "Work deep into games and just attack hitters. If they beat me, they beat me. But I want to get beat by them and not myself."

"He can really pitch and can really compete at a high level," Haire said about Herrell. "We feel like he's a guy that week in and week out is going to give us a chance to go out there and win as long as we can hold up our end of the bargain on the offensive and defensive

side."

Michalak, who is also a sophomore, has been taking the ball for Sunday games and hasn't been able to find the success that Herrell has. He was able to keep the Crimson Tide off the board for three innings in his second start but gave up three runs in the fourth and walked six total batters. His 15.63 ERA is something Haire wants to see go way down soon, but he sees some positives out of his hurler.

"He's learning how to be a starter and figure some things out," Haire said. "He was super competitive and got up to 94 pitches. There's a lot of pieces that are positive."

The bullpen was somewhat of an issue for the 2024 team, and that hasn't changed

in 2025. The Buckeyes do have some pitchers who have done well in relief but have nine pitchers with an ERA in the double digits. This shows that depth can be an issue with this position group, something Haire knew going into the year.

But he does think that with more time on the mound, some of the more inexperienced pitchers will get better.

"Going into the year, that's our biggest question mark, depth of roster, really, across the board," Haire said. "We knew that there would be some young or inexperienced guys that would be put in big situations, a little baptism by fire for some of those guys. Some of them have responded well and some of them not so great, but we'll respond better the next time.

"It's a learning process for them. It's a learning process for us. As these guys get more experience and settle into what their identity is, we can slot them into some roles and do a better job of maximizing them. That just comes with consistency over time and getting those guys in some different spots to see how they respond."

Douglas Bauer, Hayden Blosser, Luke Carrell, Nik Copenhaver, Drew Erdmann, Zev Salsberg and Hunter Shaw have had the most usage out of the pen in the early going, many of them showing some promise, with Erdmann taking the ball on Fridays in Wynk's absence.

Simon Bargo, Charlie Giese, Gavin Kuzniewski, Tannis Lange, Sahil Patel and Zak Sigman have had chances as well.

Copenhaver – a transfer from baseball powerhouse Vanderbilt – has the potential to be the closer for this team, despite facing some early struggles, most notably giving up the walk-off homer to Alabama.

"He's an extremely hard worker," Haire said of the redshirt freshman and Hamilton, Ohio, native. "He's a kid who was recruited heavily out of high school by a lot of different programs. He's an ultra-competitor and really smart. It's just trying to settle into his role and what he's good at in terms of being able to command his best two pitches and kind of get into that role of being a good bullpen guy that's going to be able to get out of some jams."

In The Dirt, Behind The Dish

Ohio State didn't only lose its top pitcher to the transfer portal over the offseason, it lost its top hitter as well, with shortstop Henry Kaczmar transferring to South Carolina.

But the two schools were able to swap shortstops, with OSU bringing in Lee Ellis from the Gamecocks through the portal. Ellis moved from shortstop to second base when he came to Columbus, where he's been starting to this point.

Assistant coach Joey Holcomb also joined the Buckeyes after being with South Carolina for one season, and Haire credits him for bringing Ellis in.

"He coached Lee," Haire said, "and when Joey got hired here and Lee got into the portal, he called me that night and said, 'Hey, there's this kid that I coached last year in South Carolina that went in (the portal). He's our type of guy. He's got a ton of tools. He just needs to be coached. He needs to be loved. He needs to have some structure around what he's doing.' I think he's got the chance to be a really special player."

Through nine games, Ellis was hitting just .219 but was leading the team in home runs with four, one of which ended up being the

game-winner against NC State in the Buckeyes' first win of the season. He hasn't had many chances to show off his elite speed yet, but Haire warned that Ellis' 6.4-second 60-yard dash will allow him to swipe many bases.

Marc Stephens has taken the starting job at shortstop and is off to somewhat of a slow start, slashing .200/.220/.250. He transferred to Ohio State from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, where he played two seasons and batted .435 as a sophomore, which led his conference.

Tyler Pettorini returned for his senior season in Columbus and was second on the team in hitting as BSB went to press with a .297 average and .981 OPS. He's been able to hit for a batting average over .300 for the past two seasons, but he has been improving his eye in that time as well, going from 10 to 24 walks from 2023 to 2024, and his on-base percentage is up to .386 through nine games.

Will Carpenter and Ryan Miller have split time at first base, with Miller hitting better during his short amount of time in the lineup so far.

His .968 OPS is third-best on the team thanks to the one home run he hit on opening day, while Carpenter's is at .650 in five games.

Mason Eckelman and Matthew Graveline have been splitting time behind the plate to keep both of them fresh, but they both have remained in the lineup every game, whether that is with them slotting in as the designated hitter or Graveline heading out to left field, where he has played some this year, robbing a grand slam against Alabama.

Graveline, a Centerville, Ohio, native, was named a top Big Ten 2025 MLB draft prospect before the season along with Wynk, while Eckelman was among the top 2026 draft prospects along with Ellis. So regardless of who is behind the dish in the battery in any given game this season, the Buckeyes should feel comfortable.

Graveline has also been trying to get better in terms of controlling the strike zone as a hitter, and that went well for him last season. He had 17 more walks in his sophomore year than he had as a freshman despite playing in just six more games.

"That's what I wanted to focus on," Graveline said. "Lowering the strikeouts and increasing the walks and evening those out. I thought I did a lot better with that."

In The Grass

The Buckeyes also have some familiarity in the corner outfield spots with seniors Nick Giamarusti and Trey Lipsey back in left field and right field, respectively. The bat has been somewhat slow coming alive for both of them, but they each still have something going right for them to this point.

Giamarusti's speed has been unleashed by Haire, and he had already stolen seven bases on seven attempts in nine games, five of them coming in the first three-game series against Arizona State. His approach on the bases has been indicative of how Haire wants his team to feel at all times when they are on the field.

"Our offense is stuck on the green light," Haire said. "There's no coming off of that. Very, very rarely are we going to shut it down offensively. We probably have the best team speed that I've ever had in my coaching career, 22 years in college baseball. We've got a lot of guys that can do some different things and put pressure (on the defense). Nick is chief among them. He's the best runner on our team. He's got a lot of guts on the basepaths."

Giamarusti's 15 steals last season were nothing to sneeze at, but with Haire at the helm, he has felt much more free on the bases.

"It's mainly different philosophies of coaching," he said. "Last year I didn't always have the green light. It was more dictated by Coach (Mosiello) giving me the green light as opposed to this year as Coach Haire alluded to, I pretty much always have the green light. It's kind of nice that Coach has that confidence in me and I can just be aggressive. I can steal second and third and get the team in position to score runs.

"We preach stealing in the first two-to-three pitches of the at-bat because if I'm stealing, I don't want them to swing, and then there's a foul ball and I have to go back. Stealing it as early in the count as possible and getting in scoring position is big for us."

Lipsey might be hitting into outs early on, but it's obvious that it isn't due to a lack of seeing the ball well. He has 10 walks already, which leads the team, and is also first on the team in on-base percentage at .511. After starting last season slow and heating up late, he is trying to carry over his great finish into this year and keep that pace throughout the season.

"With the stuff we worked on, consistency will be a huge thing for me, and I think I'll be able to be more consistent," he said.

Reggie Bussey, who is in his first season with the Buckeyes after transferring from Oakland – where he hit .336 with 74 hits, 31 RBI and a team-high 31 stolen bases – slots

into center field and provides a lot of speed, just like many others on the roster do. Giamarusti believes the group of players they have can compete with anyone in the country when it comes to running.

"I think we're the fastest team in the country, so we have to play to our strengths," he said. "Coach always harps on causing chaos on the bases. That starts with me as well as a couple other guys on this team. Play to our strengths, and that gives us the best chance to win."

Bussey hasn't been showing much of his speed on the bases to this point, but he has been able to cover the outfield gap-to-gap very well, making what should be tough plays look easy and what should be impossible plays look possible. Haire mentioned a "Superman" catch Bussey had against the Crimson Tide as evidence of that.

The Twinsburg, Ohio, native is also off to a good start at the plate, slashing .321/.441/.393 in nine games with two doubles and four RBI.

Ultimately, Haire's goal is to help his players achieve what they want to, one of those things being a berth in the NCAA tournament. If that happens this season, that's great, but Haire is looking to establish his culture in the program first, thinking success will come along the way if he is able to do so.

"Yes, there's stair steps to get to Omaha. Yes, there's stair steps to get to the Big Ten tournament and winning the Big Ten and all of those things, which are great," Haire said. "I'm just a firm believer that if we invest in our guys and put them in a position to be successful every day, teach them and allow them to make mistakes and grow, that we have a better chance of doing all those steps right and achieving all of those along the way."

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

RULES AND RATES: 20 cents per word, 10 cents for more than one insertion. Minimum order of \$5. No agency discounts. Make checks payable to Buckeye Sports Bulletin. We accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express.

All ads are uniformly set with the first two words set in boldface capital letters at no charge. However, no other words may be set in boldface. Anyone planning a larger or more distinct ad may receive our ad rate card upon request.

We reserve the right to request additional information or merchandise be submitted from advertiser prior to acceptance of an ad, and we reserve the right to refuse advertisements considered objectionable.

Deadline is one week prior to publication date. Call (614) 486-2202 or write P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212 for info.

WANTED TO buy: OSU basketball tickets/stubs from the 1960s, '70s, '80s, '90s & 2000s. Call Mike at (704) 995-0414.

WANTED TO buy: OSU football memorabilia, programs, ticket stubs, pennants, championship rings, gold pants, helmets, autographs, game-used equipment, small or large collections. Call Chris at (419) 957-6789.

BUCKEYE GAMEDAY Memories: A new book of short stories about humorous gameday experiences in the 1960s through the 2010s by Tim Sullivan. Available on Amazon.com.

FOR SALE: OSU football programs including bowl games, national playoff and championship games. OSU basketball programs, NFL programs, golf, Olympics, NBA, other print sports memorabilia. Call John at (330) 507-7339.

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.

FOR SALE — OSU-MICHIGAN Game, 1975 - original RADIO broadcast on CD! Woody's last great team & Archie's last UM game as Bucks go 11-0! Three-disk set runs 3½ hours! Listen in your car! \$25 + \$3 S & H. Call 1-630-527-8890!

WANTED TO buy: OSU football memorabilia and equipment, programs, pennants, glasses, books, jerseys, helmets, ticket stubs. One item or a hundred. Will travel. Call George at (614) 506-1081.

BSB PUBLISHER Frank Moskowitz and other members of the BSB staff are available to speak at your business, social or alumni group meetings. Informative and fun. Call (614) 486-2202 for details.

Day's Fingerprints All Over NFL QB Landscape

Remember before Ryan Day was the national championship coach or even before some (irrational) people thought he should be on the hot seat for losing to Michigan once or four times too many?

Before then, he was known mainly as the quarterback guru.

EXNER POINT
Rich Exner

Almost from the day he arrived as the quarterback coach in 2017, Day turned the position at Ohio State into an NFL training ground.

Ohio State never had a quarterback who lasted more than a season in the NFL before Art Schlichter, according to the trusted website, Pro Football Reference. Then there were four years of Schlichter (1982-1985) and 15 seasons, mostly as a backup, of Mike Tomczak (1985-1999).

Other than that, it was mostly just an OSU quarterback in the NFL for a season or a few here and there, but none really becoming a regular starter. Only Schlichter was a first-round draft pick.

Enter Day.

Day for two years coached Dwayne

Haskins, Big Ten record setter and first-round draft pick (15th overall), though his pro career didn't pan out before his tragic death on a Florida highway.

At about the same time, Day spent a year and a half coaching Joe Burrow, who transferred after being beat out by Haskins during spring practice in 2018.

Burrow became a national champion and Heisman winner at LSU before the Cincinnati Bengals made him the No. 1 overall pick in the 2020 NFL draft. Yes, I know Burrow's big accomplishments in college came at LSU. But he spent a lot of time at OSU being coached by Day and is an OSU graduate.

Both Haskins and even Burrow were developed by Day beyond expectations that accompanied them when they were recruited.

The next was the more highly recruited out of high school in Justin Fields, who transferred to OSU after a year at Georgia. After two seasons with Day, Fields became the 11th pick of the first round of the 2021 draft by the Chicago Bears.

He was followed by C.J. Stroud, the second pick in 2023 by the Houston Texans and instant NFL sensation.

Why do I bring all this up now, in the spring of 2025?

Three more quarterbacks with Day ties likely will be chosen in this year's NFL draft.

There's Quinn Ewers, who finished his career in Texas. It's hard to give Day much credit for Ewers, as Ewers spent just a few months at Ohio State before transferring out.

But Day certainly deserves credit for the other two – Will Howard, who closed out his college career with a national championship under Day, and Kyle McCord, who spent three seasons in Columbus, one as a starter, before transferring to Syracuse.



Will Howard

So think about it. Assuming Ewers, Howard and McCord all stick on NFL rosters in 2025, there will be six quarterbacks with Ohio State/Ryan Day ties in the NFL. And at least two of them – Burrow and Stroud – will be big-time starters.

That's far unlike the decades of Ohio State football pre-Day.

Draft Predictions

There will be a lot of shuffling between now and Draft Day, but as of late February, here's a few takes of where the quarterbacks stood:

CBS Sports – Ewers, fourth among quarterbacks and 107th overall; McCord fifth and 109th overall; Howard ninth and 152nd overall.

FOX Sports – McCord, fourth among quarterbacks, projected for the second round; Ewers, sixth and second- or third-round pick; Howard, eighth and fourth-round pick.

Walter Football – Ewers, fifth among quarterbacks and second- to fourth-round; Howard, sixth and fourth- to sixth-round; McCord, seventh and fourth- to sixth-round.

Pro Football Focus – Howard, fifth and a top-100 pick. (Ewers and McCord not in this list).

Ticket Matters

Ohio State does something when it comes to season tickets that I've never come across.

Every few years, they shuffle the deck and make you pick your seats again. This is one of those years.

Season ticket holders don't get to retain their seats from last year. Instead, there will be another seat selection process this spring. The seats they pick this year will be good through 2028.

Why Ohio State does this I'm not sure. But it's the first time I've experienced this, having begun my season tickets for OSU in 2023 after doing so off and on for Cleveland pro sports teams for years – currently for the Cavs and Browns.

The other thing that has happened this year is a significant price increase for some areas, in part the result of Ohio State changing the pricing tiers.

As an example, 10-yard-line seats in the lower part of C Deck are running \$1,170, including the required \$250 "donation," for the seven games this year. Up from \$884 for the same seats last year for eight games.

So on a per game basis, the price for those seats is going from \$110 a game in 2024 to \$167 a game in 2025, a 52 percent increase. It will be interesting to watch this season to see if the secondary market is actually cheaper than buying in advance directly from OSU.

Some areas are not experiencing the same type of increases. It's a matter of where a section falls on the new zone map the athletic department has created.

For public sale season tickets, including required donations, prices range from \$582 to \$2,905 for the seven games vs. \$398 to \$2,444 for eight games a year ago.

Money Matters

Speaking of ticket money, the recently released NCAA financial report filed by Ohio State for the 2023-2024 school year shows the Buckeyes collected \$47.9 million in football ticket money, far ahead of any other sport.

Men's basketball brought in \$4.9 million, women's basketball \$953,149, men's ice hockey \$717,079, wrestling \$414,687 and women's volleyball \$321,653.

Adding in TV money, donations and all other sources of revenue, the athletic program brought in \$254.9 million in 2023-2024. (Ten years earlier, the total was \$145.2 million.)

OSU paid out \$54.3 million in coaching salaries and benefits, \$50.9 million in staff salaries and benefits, and \$26.1 million in athletic scholarships.

In 2013-2014, those totals were \$26.4 million for coaches, \$26.7 million for staff, and \$16.8 million for scholarships.

As you can see, scholarship spending hasn't grown as much as coaching and staff salaries. But things will be changing with the start of paying players directly, on top of scholarships.

Shade RESTAURANTS

- NFL Ticket
- So Many HD, Flat-Screen TVs!
- Friendliest Staff
- GREAT Food

Shade on the Canal
19 S. High St.
Canal Winchester
614-837-9873

Shade on 30th St.
850 S. 30th St.
Heath
740-788-9287

Shade on State St.
994 E. State St.
Athens
740-566-1009

TOPSOIL VERY RICH PULVERIZED OR UNPULVERIZED "SOIL PLUS"

BLENDED SOIL WITH SAND and ORGANIC COMPOST
RESIDENTIAL • COMMERCIAL
CRUSHED LIMESTONE, WASHED SAND & GRAVEL

ANY SIZE LOAD • IMMEDIATE DELIVERY ANYWHERE
Buy Where the Professionals Do • Delivered on Time - Every Time, It Doesn't Cost Any More!
Columbus' Largest

JONES FUEL COMPANY
350 Frank Road • 443-4611 • 1-800-TOPSOIL
www.jonestopsoil.com

Passing Of Former Buckeye QB Evokes Memories

Mark Rea offers an endearing look back at former Ohio State quarterback Jim Karsatos, who passed away Feb. 8 at the age of 61, on page 15 of this issue. Karsatos was the third starting quarterback in the annals of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, following Art Schlichter and Mike Tomczak. Sometimes I remember details about players back then better than more recent Buckeyes, probably because my brain was far less cluttered with Buckeye minutiae.

Mark and I seem to have an ever so slightly different recollection of Karsatos' recruitment at Ohio State. Mark appears to imply that the Fullerton, Calif., product was a consolation prize for home-bred prep quarterback Bernie Kosar, who ended up at Miami (Fla.). Mark does, however, acknowledge that in the early '80s, Ohio State recruiting was mostly an in-state operation.

"Earle Bruce made no apologies for his emphasis on recruiting homegrown talent," he writes, "but when necessity forced the former Ohio State head coach to alter that strategy, it cracked open the door for the program's nationwide pursuit of top high school players."

I recall that landing Karsatos was a pretty big deal for Buckeye fans at the time. It wasn't just that he was from California – Tomczak, an Illinois native, was also from out of state – which seemed fairly exotic at the time, but even more exotic were the quarterback's passing numbers.

He came out of Sunny Hills High school having passed for 4,426 yards and 40 touchdowns, not typical numbers for Ohio State quarterback recruits, who, regardless of passing ability, were still expected to run with the football. Just as Schlichter was seen as the QB who brought Ohio State's offense into the modern age, Karsatos was seen as a quarterback who could take the Buckeyes the next step to the era of a more pass-oriented attack.

"I think he's the best throwing quarterback that I've seen since I've been here," Bruce said in BSB's 1985 Football Preview issue as Karsatos prepared to take the starting quarterback reins from Tomczak.

Karsatos would go on to start for the Buckeyes for two seasons and played in several of the more significant Ohio State games of the mid-'80s, including the huge 22-13 upset win over the Chuck Long-led, top-ranked Iowa Hawkeyes in a rainy Ohio Stadium in 1985 and an impressive 28-12 win over a powerful Texas A&M team in the Cotton Bowl following the 1986 season.

"I would say those two games were the highlights of my career at Ohio State," Karsatos said in 2016. "Iowa had been pretty cocky in '85 before they played us, talking about how they were going to throw for 1,000 yards against our defense. Funny, because we didn't hear much out of them after our defense picked their guy (Long) off four times. And the win over Texas A&M was special because it was my last game. I even got to score a touchdown in that one – standing up, no less, which was a rarity for me."

That final remark was a reminder that Karsatos was brought in to pass the ball, not to run with it.

But with the good in a career also comes the bad.

The reason Karsatos and the Buckeyes were playing in the Cotton Bowl and not the Rose Bowl was that he played in another well-known game, Ohio State's 26-24 loss to Michigan to cap the regular season, a game most remembered for Matt Frantz missing a potential game winning field goal with just over a minute left, and more significantly, Wolverine quarterback Jim Harbaugh's "guarantee" that his team would leave Ohio Stadium with a victory.

As any regular reader of this column knows,

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I have been annoyed with Harbaugh ever since.

For the record, Harbaugh and Karsatos had different but somewhat equal games. In terms of yardage, Harbaugh threw for 261 yards on 19-of-29 passing. Karsatos was 15 of 27 for 188 yards but threw for two touchdowns – both to Cris Carter – with one interception, while Harbaugh had no TDs and was picked off twice.

It's funny, but for about a year now, I have been meaning to mention Karsatos in my column. It concerns his 1985 season. I stumbled across his stat line for that year, and it intrigued me.

He was 177 of 289 passing for 2,311 yards and a 61.2 completion percentage with 19 touchdowns and just eight interceptions. While that would seem like a fairly standard passing line today, Karsatos' performance was ahead of its time. His completion percentage and touchdown-to-interception ratio were fairly exceptional for that period – at least at Ohio State.

For comparison purposes I looked at the OSU quarterbacks just before and after him and chose their most prolific season in terms of passing yardage to study.

In 1981, Schlichter completed 183 of 350 passes for 2,551 yards, a 52.3 completion percentage, with 17 touchdowns and 10 interceptions. In 1984, Mike Tomczak was 145 of 244 for 1,952 yards, a 59.4 percentage and 10 TDs against 11 picks. After Karsatos, Tom Tupa started for one season and was 134 of 242 (55.4 percentage) for 1,786 yards, 12 scores and 10 picks. Greg Frey followed and in his most prolific season, 1990, he was 139 of 276 for a 50.4 completion rate, 2,062 yards and 16 touchdowns against 16 interceptions.

You can see that none of these Buckeye quarterbacks posted completion rates or touchdown/interception ratios that approached that of Karsatos. His completion percentage that year was the highest in OSU history to that time, as were his 19 TDs. He finished fourth in the country in passing efficiency.

One quarterback of the time who had a higher completion percentage than Karsatos was Harbaugh, who completed 65.7 percent of his 254 passes for 2,557 yards in that '86 season but had only 10 scores to eight thefts.

The one who may have been really ahead of his time was Long. He completed 64.6 percent of his passes for his four-year starting career.

In the 1985 season, when the Buckeyes upset the Hawkeyes, the Iowa quarterback was 231 of 351 for a 65.8 percentage, 2,978 yards and 26 touchdowns. But he also threw 15 interceptions. So even Long, who finished second in the Heisman voting that year, couldn't equal Karsatos' TD-to-interception ratio. But you can get a sense of what a big deal it was to beat Iowa and its star quarterback that year.

Enough with all these numbers.

A simple "rest in peace, Jim Karsatos" is what's really in order.

Questions? We Have Answers

When it comes to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, I am just like any other reader – only I get to read the stories before you do, and I don't have to pay for my subscription. There are some stories I like and some that I don't necessarily enjoy as much, though as part of the editing process, I read them all.

I enjoy stories like the one in this issue where Buckeye experts answer relevant questions of the day (see pages 12-13). In this particular article

we gathered a group of four Ohio State beat reporters who are among the most in-the-know in Marcus Hartman of the Dayton Daily News, Bill Rabinowitz of The Columbus Dispatch, Steve Helwagen of 247 Sports and Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors. Our Cameron Moone asked them a variety of questions about this past championship season.

I found the answers about Jack Sawyer – who has had an interesting Buckeye life from his childhood as an Ohio State fan, to his recruitment, to his sometimes up-and-down career, to most likely becoming a Buckeye icon – perhaps the most interesting.

"Sawyer is up there at the very high pantheon of Ohio State heroes," Hartman said. "When you talk about the guy, he checks off all the boxes in terms of, he's born a Buckeye, and he was like this Mike Doss type of a guy for this generation. He was an Ohio guy who was productive and came back and helped spearhead those guys deciding to come back for what turned out to be a championship team. Then, not only that, he wasn't just there for the ride. He made some big plays throughout the second half of the season."

Hope added this:

"I think just about that scoop-and-score against Texas in particular. That play is going to be one of those plays that 40 to 50 years from now, Ohio State fans are still going to be talking about because it was such a spectacular moment. So, I think that one play alone made Jack Sawyer an Ohio State legend, but the totality of what he did in that CFP run was phenomenal.

"Just being that Ohio guy, a guy who's a life-long Buckeye fan," Hope continued. "I've always viewed him as being the heart and soul of this team. Because of that, because of how integral he was in winning a national championship, he absolutely deserves to be considered as an Ohio State legend. Just with what he did in that final stretch, he did maximize his time in Columbus."

Another question I found interesting was much simpler.

"Who was your MVP for Ohio State for the 2024 season?"

We got three different answers. I was surprised that no one answered Caleb Downs, and I was surprised that it was offensive lineman Donovan Jackson who was picked by two of the four and that is with absolutely no disrespect to Jackson, who was a key part of the championship drive.

"He moved from guard to tackle in a moment of need for Ohio State, and it was a leap of faith on both sides," Helwagen said of Jackson. "He ended up playing great at offensive tackle, and he helped lead the offense from that point on. I thought, with his play at left tackle, without him, I don't know where they are. That means Will Howard is going to get sacked a lot, and they're not going to get as much done offensively."

But Helwagen summed up why the question was asked in the first place. I think everyone would agree there was no clear-cut choice.

"If you'd said TreVeyon Henderson, Quinshon Judkins, Jack Sawyer, JT (Tuimoloua), Cody Simon or Caleb Downs, I don't think you have an incorrect answer in any of them. They were all valuable, and Ohio State probably doesn't win the national championship without one of them."

These four beat writers are among the most knowledgeable of anyone in Columbus, yet it seems like even *they* don't know for sure why former defensive coordinator Jim Knowles upped

and left for rival Penn State.

"It certainly sounds like, just based on the rumblings that have been out there for the past month or so, that there were some disagreements behind the scenes in terms of Ryan Day asking Knowles to make certain changes with the defense," Hope said. "Maybe Jim Knowles just wanted to have full authority over what the defense would look like. So, he decided to go find another opportunity."

"It sounds like some of the reporting that was out there kind of jibed with things that were always rumored, that maybe he didn't get along with everybody all the time and wanted to be able to do his own thing," Hartman added. "I guess going back to Penn State had a certain appeal to him as well. I also wonder if he's more of a guy who's more of a climber and a builder than someone who's content to be on top. I think it's probably a little bit of all of those things."

Many thanks to these four reporters for taking the time to provide their insight to BSB readers – and to me!

Even Retired, Sasso Inspires

If this were Hollywood, Ohio State wrestler Sammy Sasso would be preparing for the Big Ten and national wrestling tournaments. But this is the real world, and instead, Sasso is experiencing his first days of retirement from the sport – at least on the mat – after confirming he was hanging up his singlet and headgear on Feb. 28.

On Aug. 18, 2023, Sasso was shot in a carjacking in Columbus, forcing him to get emergency surgery to repair his colon and leaving him to have to relearn to walk after he suffered nerve damage. Throughout the ordeal, Sasso never lost hope of returning to the mat, and that dream was realized with a 12-6 win over Jackson Hurst of Chattanooga in Ohio State's opening dual of the 2024-2025 season.

But wrestling is a sport, especially in the powerful Big Ten, that is uniquely geared toward the conference and national championships, tournaments where the performance of each team member present counts toward the final standings. No one knows that more than Sasso, a four-time All-American and two-time Big Ten champion. The timing of his retirement helped avoid an awkward wrestle-off of sorts between Sasso, one of Ohio State's all-time greats, and redshirt freshman Brandon Cannon for a spot in Ohio State's postseason lineup.

"His will is 100 percent there," OSU wrestling coach Tom Ryan, who first announced the retirement, said. "That has never wavered. This guy is an ultra-competitor. As difficult as it was for him to bow out – he was supposed to go to Lock Haven and battle it out with Cannon for the spot. But he's a man and he felt that it was not in his best interest or the best interest of the program."

"This season hasn't been the Sammy Sasso you are used to watching, and I understand that," Sasso said upon confirming his retirement. "Most people would have thrown in the towel after getting shot, but I couldn't just give up. I worked harder than ever before to get where I'm at, but nonetheless my leg cannot move the way it used to. Although this whole situation has been tough, I know this entire process has made me a better person."

It's not like his season was a bust. He finished with a 12-7 dual record, meaning he had worked his way back to a competitive collegiate level. I hope that gives him some satisfaction.

Sasso's retirement is covered in more detail in the "On the Mat" feature elsewhere in this issue. I bring it up here because I want to say publicly how inspirational his journey has been to me and I hope to many others.

Maybe Hollywood will find Sasso's story yet.



Ohio State Buckeyes

FAN GEAR

Ohio State Buckeyes™ National Championship Rings

Celebrate the Buckeyes National Championship with these incredible championship rings

Purchase rings separately or purchase the entire set with custom Buckeyes case

- Made of solid silver Lustrium® overlaid in 18k white and yellow gold. Weight is approximately 30 grams
- 3D mold to ensure deep cuts for crystal clear logos and text
- AAA rated CZs - Sizes: 8-14 - Delivery is 4-5 weeks.
- 2024 National Championship, 2025 Rose Bowl
- 2025 Cotton Bowl, 2025 CFP (College Playoff Championship)

Sorry, no refunds on custom championship rings

\$299.99 (Individual ring w/Case) **\$999.99** (4 ring set w/Case)

Ohio State Buckeyes™ 8-Time National Championship Trophy

Celebrate the Buckeyes 8th National Championship with this incredible championship trophy

Made of resin, 18lbs. Beautifully crafted.

Sizes: 13" and 26"

Sorry, no refunds.

\$249.99 13"

\$599.99 26"



(877) 575-9960