



## Back To Square One



### Uncertainty Looms For OSU Men After Third Straight NCAA Tournament Miss

By **PATRICK ENGELS**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Around this time last year, the Ohio State men's basketball program was trending in an unmistakably positive direction.

Following the abrupt firing of Chris Holtmann last Valentine's Day, then-interim head coach Jake Diebler injected instant, much-needed life into a battered Buckeye locker room, using his high-energy approach and ultra-positive mentality to string together five wins in the final six games of the regular season and then tack on another impressive victory over Iowa in the first round of the Big Ten tournament before losing the next day to Illinois.

That winning stretch did not bring the Buckeyes back into the NCAA Tour-

namment for the first time since 2021-22, but it did earn Diebler the head-coaching job and the program a berth in the NIT as a No. 2 seed. And just as he had done in the interim role, the Gibsonburg, Ohio, native continued to stack together wins as the program's official head coach, adding two more postseason victories against Cornell and Virginia Tech before ending the season with a 79-77 loss to Georgia in the NIT quarterfinals.

Ohio State's end-of-year run under Diebler in 2023-24 created some palpable optimism regarding the future of the Buckeyes' once-elite basketball program among those who follow it. There was a noticeably different buzz inside Value City Arena during the Buckeyes' three NIT games, one which was most evident

Continued On Page 8

SONNY BROCKWAY

**UNFULFILLED** — A strong finish to the 2023-24 season led to the interim title being removed for Ohio State men's basketball head coach Jake Diebler and optimism that the Buckeyes would return to the NCAA Tournament this season for the first time since 2021-22, but they failed to live up to expectations.

### OSU's Women's Team Hopes To Right Ship In NCAA Tourney

By **BOBBY GORBETT**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since its expansion to 64 teams in 1985 and subsequently 68 teams in 2011, the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament has been one of the most reliably bankable products in collegiate sports. Boosted by Final Four pools, tournament challenges and perhaps most importantly the unpredictable nature of its first- and second-round games, March Madness has become ingrained in popular culture in the United States.

As any die-hard fan could tell you, the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament — known more for its star players and legendary coaches leading their respective teams to dominance than shocking upsets — is nothing like the men's tournament.

While the men's event seems to have a major upset every year in its first round, the women's tournament is much more chalk. The Nos. 14-16 seeds are a combined 1-360 since the bracket field expanded to 64 teams in 1994. Furthermore, Nos. 12-16 seeds have made the

Continued On Page 10



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NOW'S THE TIME** — Women's basketball coach Kevin McGuff hopes the Buckeyes play more like the team that started 20-1 than the one that went 5-5 down the stretch.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Greatest Team?

I am writing in response to the letter to the editor in the Feb. 15 issue of BSB by the gentleman from Montana (Michael Walrath, Three Forks, Mont.). He was still simmering from the loss to Michigan and made the following two statements: "...this should have been truly one of the greatest teams in the history of college football," and "...the greatest rivalry in the history of sports came to an end."

I respect that he made some valid comments to support his conclusions, but I disagree with them. For example, Thomas Edison invented artificial light. But it took him over 10,000 trials before he got it right. He didn't consider those as failures, but as learning experiences that led to success. He got patents on many other inventions. He is considered to be one of the greatest inventors of all time.

Abraham Lincoln was defeated in several elections for public office before he became president of the United States. He is considered by many to be the greatest president our nation ever had.

Our national champion football Buckeyes had two bumps in the road, one being severe. But they remained positive and moved forward, ultimately dismantling four powerful opponents in the playoffs. They are a model for all people who are knocked flat but get up and fight on. And we have all been there before in our lives. That is why I believe they belong in the discussion of the greatest college football teams.

Finally, is the rivalry with That Team Up North still alive? My wife used to be a nurse in a nursing home. There was a lady resident there that my wife says was feisty and had an infectious laugh. She loved the Buckeyes and had a gizmo that could play the Buckeye fight song. After every Buckeye touchdown,

she would play that tune. She told people that she had two favorite teams in college football: The Ohio State Buckeyes and any team that was playing Michigan. I believe the rivalry is alive and well. Go Bucks!!!

**Bill Herr**  
Bluffton, Ohio

### Title Softens Sting From U-M Loss

To those who are "still not satisfied" with the performance of Coach Day and the 2024 Buckeyes, because of their loss to Michigan, I ask: Would you prefer that we beat Michigan and not win a national championship, or the other way around? I have wanted the Buckeyes to smash their rival every year since 1964, but I'd like to think that I, and most OSU fans, don't have a "psychotic obsession" (as Coach Saban called it) with the rivalry – particularly given the new CFP format, which afforded us the opportunity to achieve what every other team in America strives for.

The bar was not lowered for the 2024 Buckeyes because of their loss to their rival. And, for the rest of time, when anyone looks back on this team, they will recognize it as one of the greatest in the proud history of Buckeye football.

**Jim Terranova**  
Millbrae, Calif.

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



## From The Message Board

**Ohio State began its quest for a second consecutive national title on March 17 when spring camp started. We asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum to offer their thoughts on what they are most looking forward to seeing unfold during the four weeks of practices, such as which storylines they are most interested in keeping an eye on and what they want to see the team accomplish/settle before the "Spring Showcase" on April 12.**

"I'm hoping there will be better clarity on the DL and OL. Hoping there will be some depth that can prove they can play in a pinch. I'm not really worried about any other positions. Ohio State returned the two best players in college football so they just have to build around them and go from there. I do think they have three/four spots on the OL pretty solidified."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Well, we have a lot of coaching changes that have taken place. In particular the new offensive (Brian Hartline) and defensive (Matt Patricia) coordinators. Not sure when the last time we started a new season with the same head coach but changed both the offensive and defensive coordinators. It will be interesting to me to see if we can glean any changes or direction that might be different in the style of play calling by these coaches."

– BuckeyeScott

"I'm curious to see if we have a standout QB that will start the season instead of this, 'Well it might be so-and-so or so-and-so.' I say pick a QB and get the chemistry started."

– PeyoteBuck

"I'm interested to see if James Peoples can break out and be an elite RB. I like what I've seen in his limited playing time."

– R1TBDBITL

"Will Julian Sayin, Lincoln Kienholz or Tavien St. Clair show Ryan Day enough skill, talent and leadership to give the Buckeyes a chance to win the Big Ten and defend their National Championship? If Day isn't convinced, will he consider bringing in a veteran QB? I'm not sure there is anyone better still in the portal pool. I think Day desperately wants his young guys to answer the bell. Besides, most other programs are breaking in new QBs, except Penn State.

"After the Notre Dame game, as the

veteran players celebrated, the next wave of talented Buckeye players announced: 'This is now our team.' While they have a huge target on their backs, it is their time to shine. Hopefully, Coach Day and his leadership team have built a great coaching staff and a great roster to tackle the challenge."

– Byron McNutt

"I'm probably most interested in seeing if Devin Sanchez and Riley Pettijohn can be kept off the field?"

– Terrier Buck

"First and foremost, I will be interested in all of the new players vying for starting spots. Second, I will be interested in Patricia's defensive style, even though I know the defense will be considerably different by the opener. Third, I want to see how Hartline thinks as a play-caller, even though the playbook will be limited. This team has a lot of new moving parts. It will be fun to see how things mesh!"

– Michael Bauer

"Obviously I will be watching the quarterback battle. But whoever the quarterback is, he will be limited if there isn't a solid running game, so I will be watching the running backs as well. Who will stand out more, James Peoples, who paid his dues last season as the No. 3 back, or CJ Donaldson Jr., who has starting experience in a power conference? Or will one of the freshmen leapfrog everybody? Will it be another year of co-starters?"

"As far as the coaches, I don't think we will get to see Brian Hartline calling plays, especially with no spring game. I am curious to see Matt Patricia's demeanor after all the hubbub when he was hired. Finally, I hope Ryan Day will make some decisions at quarterback and running back rather than telling us he hasn't made up his mind right up until the day before the Texas game, which has been his habit of late."

– Poster That Harley Built

# TOPSOIL

VERY RICH PULVERIZED OR UNPULVERIZED "SOIL PLUS"

BLENDING 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](http://www.jonestopsoil.com)

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 (April 5 cover date) will be mailed on April 1.

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

#### Wachsman Elite Donor:



# What Was Left On Cutting Room Floor

With the defending national champion Ohio State football team (doesn't that have a nice ring to it?) beginning its compacted spring schedule, and probably the less said the better about the stumbling-down-the-stretch Buckeye basketball teams – both men and women – this seems like a good time for the annual offering of what got left out of my BSB columns over the past several months.

I begin with a snippet I was going to share immediately after the Buckeyes won the national title. It took 16 games to accomplish, but Ohio State boasted a pair of 1,000-yard rushers for the first time in 11 years and only the third time in program history.

Quinshon Judkins accumulated 1,060 yards while TreVeyon Henderson totaled 1,016, allowing them to join Carlos Hyde (1,521) and Braxton Miller (1,068) in 2013, and Archie Griffin (1,450) and Pete Johnson (1,059) in 1975.

Seasons featuring players rushing for more than 1,000 yards don't seem that unusual these days, but remember the Buckeyes didn't have one until 1969 when Jim Otis broke through with 1,027 yards. Making the OSU fullback's season even more remarkable is that the Buckeyes played only a nine-game schedule in 1969.

From 1913 through 1941, Ohio State played more than eight games in any one season only twice, meaning most years a player would have had to average 125 yards per game to get to 1,000. Beginning in the World War II era, however, five players rushed for at least 900 yards before Otis cracked the 1,000 mark in 1969 – Les Horvath (924 in 1944), Ollie Cline (936 in 1945), Hop Cassady (958 in 1955), Bob Ferguson (938 in 1961) and Otis (985 in 1968).

Fun fact: Before Judkins and Henderson each did it this past season, Ohio State hadn't had a 1,000-yard rusher in three of the previous four seasons. The Buckeyes hadn't had that kind of drought since having just one 1,000-yard rusher during the six seasons between 1987 and 1992. In case you'd like to make some trivia money someday, the only OSU player to crack 1,000 yards during that stretch was Robert Smith with 1,126 during his freshman year in 1990.

#### Where Are You From?

The more I think I know about the history of Ohio State football, the more I realize just how much I don't know. Case in point: While researching the 1944 football season, I discovered that head coach Carroll Widdoes was born in the Philippines to parents who were Christian missionaries.

That got me wondering about the birthplaces of other Ohio State head coaches and whether any others were born outside the United States. As it turns out, Widdoes is the only one.

It's not a shock that the majority of OSU head coaches are Ohio natives, but somewhat surprising is that only about half of the 25 men who have held the position since 1890 were born in the Buckeye State. And of those 12 who were born in Ohio, only two called Columbus their hometown – Alexander Lilley, who is acknowledged as the first coach in OSU football history, and Luke Fickell, who played for the Buckeyes in the late 1990s before serving as an assistant coach for 14 years and head coach in 2011.

You would probably be able to win a trivia contest if you can name the state that has produced the second-most Ohio State head coaches. The answer is New York with Charles Hickey (1896), Edwin Sweetland (1904-05) and John Wilce (1913-28). The only other state with more than one is Pennsylvania – Harry Vaughan (1911) and Earle Bruce (1979-87).

Seven other states have sent native sons to Ohio State to become head coach – New Jersey

(David Edwards, 1897), Minnesota (John Eckstorm, 1899-1901), Connecticut (Perry Hale (1902-03), Wisconsin (John Richards, 1912), Kansas (Francis Schmidt, 1934-40), Tennessee (John Cooper, 1988-2000) and New Hampshire (Ryan Day, 2019-present).

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

While Ohio has provided just a little less than half of the head coaches in Ohio State football history, the state produced nearly 90 percent of the starting quarterbacks for the Buckeyes from the end of World War II until the early 1970s. The lone outliers during that period were Pandel Savic (1948-49), who emigrated to the United States from his native Macedonia, and Tony Curcillo (1951), who was born in New Jersey before playing his high school ball in Elyria, Ohio, alongside Heisman Trophy winner Vic Janowicz.

After Curcillo completed his eligibility in 1951, Ohio State didn't have another non-Ohio native start at quarterback until Maryland product Greg Hare took over under center in 1972. Hare played at Fort Hill High School in Cumberland, a crosstown rival of Allegany High School, which produced a speedy running back named Earle Bruce.

For all of the Ohio State starting quarterbacks cultivated from the Buckeye State over the years, there hasn't been one for a while. The most recent was Cardale Jones, who took over the reins from an injured J.T. Barrett late during the 2014 national championship run before ceding the position back to Barrett the following year.

Since then, counting Texas native Barrett, each OSU starter at quarterback has been recruited from outside Ohio – Dwayne Haskins (Maryland), Justin Fields (Georgia), C.J. Stroud (California), Kyle McCord (New Jersey) and Will Howard (Pennsylvania).

#### Back To December

This one came from the column that covered the first playoff game when SEC member Tennessee ventured north to visit Ohio Stadium five days before Christmas.

Over its 135 seasons of playing intercollegiate football, Ohio State has played more than 1,000 games – but only 20 times during the month of December.

Most of those games, in which the Buckeyes have a 13-7 record, were postseason games – either Big Ten Championship Games or bowl contests – and the Dec. 20 matchup with Tennessee in the CFP first-round game qualified as another postseason contest.

Only twice in its history has OSU played regular-season games in December.

The first game came more than a century ago when the team traveled to Akron on Dec. 5, 1891, and came back with a 6-0 victory against what was then known as Buchtel College.

The other December game played during the regular season was a 52-12 romp at Michigan State on Dec. 5, 2020, a contest that had been rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Buckeyes enjoyed a 521-261 advantage in total yardage in that game with Fields throwing for 199 yards and two touchdowns while adding another 104 yards and two scores on the ground.

Ohio State actually played twice in December 2020. Two weeks after beating the Spartans, the Buckeyes took on Northwestern in the

conference title game in Indianapolis and came home with a 22-10 win.

The only other time in program history the Buckeyes played twice in December was in 2017 when they took a 27-21 win against Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 2 and then closed out the season Dec. 29 with a 24-7 win against USC in the Cotton Bowl.

#### Happy November Returns

A little research through the OSU record book revealed that November seems to be a good month for the Buckeyes in terms of punt returns.

When Cale-b Downs returned a punt 79 yards for a touchdown during the 38-15 win against Indiana on Nov. 23, he became the first OSU player to return a punt for a touchdown since Jalin Marshall ran one back 53 yards during a 42-27 win against Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014.

When Neal Colzie set the program's single-game record with 170 punt-return yards, a performance that included a 43-yard return for a touchdown, it came during a 35-0 win against Michigan State on Nov. 10, 1973.

Also, Ted Ginn Jr. scored three touchdowns, including one on a 60-yard punt return, during a 32-19 win at Michigan State on Nov. 6, 2004. Ginn also scored on a 17-yard run and a 58-yard pass from Troy Smith.

Ginn added another punt return for a touchdown later that month, going 82 yards during the 37-21 victory against Michigan on Nov. 20, 2004. It gave Ginn his fourth punt-return touchdown of the season, establishing a new Big Ten record.

#### And Finally

• Joe Germaine set the program's single-season passing record in 1998 with 3,330 yards, a mark that lasted 19 years until Haskins broke it with 4,831 yards in 2018. Since then, two other OSU quarterbacks have eclipsed 4,000 yards in a single season – Stroud with 4,485 in 2021 and Howard this past season with 4,010. Trying to put that into some sort of perspective, over the history of the Ohio State program, there have been only 16 quarterbacks who have thrown for 4,000 or more yards during their entire careers.

• Jack Sawyer got most of the credit (and deservedly so) for his scoop-and-score against Texas that cemented the victory to send the Buckeyes to the national title game. But Henderson deserved a lot of credit for helping to flip the game's momentum with a 75-yard touchdown off a screen pass with just 13 seconds remaining in the first half.

• Henderson finished his OSU career fifth on the all-time rushing list with 3,762 yards, but a sometimes-overlooked part of his game was his ability to catch a pass. He finished with 77 career receptions, tying him with Bo Rein (1964-66) for most catches in a career by an OSU player whose primary position was running back. The only other primary running backs in program history with 70 or more catches are Keith Byars (72, 1982-85) and J.K. Dobbins (71, 2017-19).

• Despite its head coach's protestations otherwise, Indiana might still not quite be ready for prime time. Not only did the Hoosiers lose a 29th consecutive game to Ohio State this past season, but their loss to Notre Dame in the opening round of the College Football Playoff dropped them to 1-72 lifetime against teams ranked in the top five by The Associated Press. Their only victory in those games was a 19-14 win against third-ranked Purdue on Nov. 25, 1967. That 1967 season also marked the last time IU won a Big Ten championship as well as its only Rose Bowl appearance, a 14-3 loss to top-ranked USC.



## Buckeyes Begin Spring Camp

Ohio State began its spring camp on March 17 nearly two months after its national championship win, and with so many starters gone to the NFL draft, there were quite a few position battles to watch on Day One. There wasn't much actual football played during the nearly hour-long session that was open to the media, but there did seem to be some separation in terms of which players were getting first-team reps in drills.

One of the battles is at safety, where sophomore Jaylen McClain and junior Malik Hartford are competing for the starting spot. During their first practice, Hartford was practicing with the ones while McClain followed, although McClain seemed to earn a bigger role down the stretch of the 2024 season.

Senior C.J. Hicks was working with the defensive line and was rotating in with the second team, while Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and Caden Curry were on the edges with Kayden McDonald and Eddrick Houston on the interior. Tywone Malone, Will Smith Jr. and Logan George worked in with Hicks.

As expected, Arvell Reese and Sonny Styles were the two linebackers who were working through drills first while Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Davison Igbinosun were at corner and Lorenzo Styles Jr. was at nickel.

On the offensive side of the ball, the transfers are going to have to earn their way into roles with Ethan Onianwa and Phillip Daniels both not practicing with the starters. On the offensive line was Austin Siereveld at left tackle, Luke Montgomery at left guard, Carson Hinzman at center, Tegra Tshabola at right guard and Ian Moore at right tackle.

Redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz, sophomore Julian Sayin and freshman Tavien St. Clair were all getting an equal amount of work in but were mostly throwing in order of seniority. James Peoples was getting first reps at running back with transfer CJ Donaldson behind him, and at wide receiver was Jeremiah Smith, Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss.

## Early Enrollees, Transfers, Others Get New Numbers

Ohio State's first spring practice also gave media a first look at the team's new additions and the jersey numbers they will sport this season. Among the early freshman enrollees, cornerback Devin Sanchez wore No. 4; wide receivers Phillip Bell and De'zie Jones wore No. 7 and No. 8, respectively; St. Clair wore No. 9, linebacker TJ Alford wore No. 17; wide receiver Bodpegn Miller wore No. 18; linebacker Riley Pettijohn wore No. 20; safety DeShawn Stewart wore No. 24; running backs Bo Jackson and Isaiah West wore No. 25 and No. 32, respectively; safety Cody Haddad wore No. 30; linebacker Eli Lee wore No. 33; offensive linemen Jayvon McFadden, Carter Lowe and Jake Cook wore No. 71, No. 74, and No. 76; tight end Nate Roberts wore No. 83; and defensive linemen Trajen Odom and Jarquez Carter wore No. 88 and 91, respectively.

Ohio State's new transfers also donned new numbers. Donaldson wore No. 12; linebacker Ty Howard wore No. 25; defensive lineman Logan George wore No. 48; offensive linemen Daniels and Onianwa wore No. 70 and 78, respectively; and

## 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)

tight end Max Klare wore No. 86.

The Buckeyes also had four players change their numbers. Inniss changed from No. 11 to No. 1; Mathews changed from No. 24 to No. 7; Reese changed from No. 20 to No. 8; and wide receiver Bryson Rodgers was listed on the roster as No. 21 but wore No. 13 in practice.

## Hicks Moving From LB To DL

As a five-star recruit in the class of 2022, Hicks seemed to have a bright career ahead of him with the Buckeyes, but he has had trouble finding a consistent role at linebacker, being stuck behind the likes of Tommy Eichenberg, Steele Chambers, Cody Simon, Sonny Styles and more.

There have been calls for Hicks to move to defensive end, and while that didn't happen the past few years, the senior – as previously mentioned – lined up at defensive end for the first spring practice, signaling that a position switch is in the cards for Hicks.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson confirmed on March 7 that he has been working with Hicks in the spring.

"He's with me (the defensive line group) right now," Johnson said. "He's with me right now and trying to learn how to

play the position. He's done an outstanding job (making that transition) thus far. He's bought into what we're doing."

Johnson is excited to have Hicks working with him, and with both JT Tuimolou and Jack Sawyer headed to the NFL, there will be many reps available for him to work his way into some playing time with a good spring and fall camp.

Johnson hopes that Hicks can make the transition seamlessly enough to be a three-down edge rusher this season.

"We don't just want to use him on third down," Johnson said. "We want to use him on first and second down. So my job is to get him ready to play, to run from the line of scrimmage as opposed to being in space. I think he'll give us a chance to give us some great depth and really do some good things for us. I'm excited about him because he's really excited about the position change."

## OSU Adds Three More To Staff For 2025

Ohio State made three additions to its coaching staff since BSB last went to press, hiring former Buckeye safety Nate Ebner as special teams quality control coach on March 17, rehiring former UAB defensive line coach Miguel Patrick as a defensive assistant on March 4 and tabbing former UCLA assistant Tony Washington Jr. as defensive line/outside linebackers coach on March 1.

Ebner joins Day's coaching staff 14 years after he last suited up for Ohio State as a defensive back. He played for the Buckeyes from 2009-11 and totaled 30 tackles and one sack. Ebner most notably excelled on special teams both with Ohio State and during his 10-year NFL career (2012-17), six of which were with the New England Patriots while new OSU defensive coordinator Matt Patricia was on staff.

Patrick returns to Ohio State after a two-year stint with UAB as the program's defensive line coach. Last season, he helped the Blazers record 18 team sacks and 48 tackles for loss, which ranked 111th and 124th in the nation, respectively. The former Alabama State linebacker spent the 2022 season on Ryan Day's staff at Ohio State as a defensive quality control coach, helping a Buckeye defense that finished the year ranked No. 24 in scoring defense, allowing 21.0 points per game.

Washington joins Ohio State's staff after spending the 2024 season as defensive line and outside linebackers coach at UCLA, helping it finish sixth in the

## Beat The Increase To Upgrade To First-Class Mail

Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be raising the cost of upgrading subscriptions to first-class mail during football season from \$30 to \$32 to try to ease some of the pressure from the two postal increases last year. On average, it costs \$3 in postage, handling and the price of the envelope to mail a copy of BSB first class. That's \$39 for 13 issues. Our philosophy has been better to lose \$9 than lose a subscriber completely, which we have been doing a lot lately due to poor mail delivery.

We are offering you plenty of time to upgrade to first class at the existing \$30 rate, or for \$40 through recruiting season in February. Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 to order by credit card. Or you can send your check, money order or credit card information (don't forget your three- or four-digit security code) to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Be sure to mention either the "Football Upgrade" or the "Recruiting Upgrade."

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

There is also no reason to miss any of the latest news between each print issue of BSB. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff reports

on all the breaking news in real time at BuckeyeSports.com. The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin (April 5 cover date) is scheduled to be mailed April 1.

With spring football practice now in full swing, 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.

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.

country in rushing defense, allowing 96.2 yards per game, and 69th in scoring defense (25.3 points allowed per game). The former Oregon and NFL linebacker also worked as a graduate assistant at Nebraska from 2019-20 and then in several roles with his alma mater Ducks, first as director of player development in 2021, then as assistant defensive line coach in 2022 and finally as outside linebackers coach in 2023.

Washington – who played against Ohio State in the 2014 national championship game while at Oregon, recording seven tackles and one half tackle for loss – will take over the role previously occupied by graduate assistant LaAllen Clark, who left Ohio State to become defensive line coach at Texas on Feb. 2.

**Former OSU RB George Hired By Bowling Green**

Former Ohio State Heisman Trophy-winning running back Eddie George was hired on March 9 as the head coach for Bowling Green. He signed a five-year deal with a base salary of \$600,000 per year and a 2.5 percent annual increase, according to The (Toledo) Blade.

“I am truly excited to be the head coach at Bowling Green State University,” George said. “Bowling Green is a wonderful community that has embraced the school and the athletics department. We are eager to immerse ourselves in the community and help build this program to the greatness it deserves.

“I am overwhelmed with excitement and joy for the possibilities this opportunity holds. I’m also thrilled to be back in the great state of Ohio, where I played my college football. I look forward to meeting the team, the coaches, everyone in the athletics department and everyone in the BGSU and Bowling Green community.”

George earned the job at Bowling Green after a four-year stint as head coach at FCS Tennessee State, where he went a combined 24-22 and 13-12 in the Ohio Valley Conference. He led the Tigers to a successful 2024 season in which they

went 9-4 and secured a share of the OVC-Big South title, the school’s first league title in football since 1999.

Tennessee State also made the FCS playoffs under George’s leadership this season, falling to Montana 41-27 in the first round. The run allowed him to be named the OVC-Big South Coach of the Year, and it also earned him an interview for the Chicago Bears head coaching vacancy in January.

George, who won the Heisman Trophy with the Buckeyes in 1995 and rushed for 3,768 yards and 44 touchdowns for the Scarlet and Gray from 1992-95, will now return to Ohio to lead a Bowling Green program that is coming off consecutive 7-6 seasons under Scot Loeffler, who left the program to become quarterbacks coach of the Philadelphia Eagles.

“The sunsets are different here in Ohio, and the people really embrace you,” George said during his introductory press conference on March 11. “The community is so strong. They really rally around the university, and I got that feeling of, man, just love it here at this university.”

**Meyer Recommended George For BGSU Job**

George’s hiring might not have happened if it weren’t for the help of a former Ohio State and Bowling Green head coach.

During George’s introduction as the Falcons’ 21st head coach, Bowling Green athletic director Derek van der Merwe revealed that he received a call from Urban Meyer in which the former Buckeye coach strongly advocated for George to be the next coach at Bowling Green.

“After talking to Urban Meyer, he called me the next day, and he says, ‘I only have one name for you.’ I said, ‘Give me names. Please give me as many names as you can.’ He said, ‘I have one name for you. I want you to talk to Eddie George.’” van der Merwe said. “I said, ‘The Heisman Trophy winner, right?’ He says, ‘Yeah.’ He says, ‘Don’t look at anything. Don’t read anything on him. Don’t read his background.

Talk to him. Talk to the human being.’

“After meeting with Eddie George during the search process, it became very clear to me that Eddie checked every aspect of that profile that we created. Eddie is someone who cares about people, values personal growth and development. He defines himself by his ability to adapt, adjust, and have success in every aspect of his life.”

George also told his side of the story during the introductory press conference, saying that he didn’t necessarily think about going for the open head coaching vacancy until he got a text from Meyer. The text coincidentally happened to be sent right as he was driving through the city of Bowling Green, Ky., which George said was a sign from God to inquire about the position.

“Honestly, I wasn’t looking for another opportunity,” George said. “I was committed to finishing off my job at Tennessee State. Going into the last year of my contract, that was my focus. And (the Bowling Green job) was a situation where it presented itself. I asked God maybe three weeks ago, ‘Give me a sign of what’s next.’

“I promise you, this is exactly what happened: As I’m driving back from Indianapolis, from the (NFL) combine, I’m driving through Bowling Green, Ky. – I see the sign, Bowling Green – and I look down at my phone, it’s a message from Urban Meyer, talking about, ‘Are you interested in the Bowling Green job?’ And I put the phone down, I was like, ‘Oh boy.’”

Meyer, who coached at Bowling Green

from 2001-02, earning a combined 17-6 record in that span before moving on to Utah, offered a public endorsement of George in a written statement, saying that George’s “strong work ethic, leadership and ability to inspire others make him an ideal fit.”

George also earned the endorsement from former Ohio State head coach and current Ohio Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel, who said in a statement that George has been a winner throughout his career and his “passion for young people and the game of football” will serve Bowling Green well.

**Johnson Says He Had No Beef With Knowles**

Before former Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles left for the same job at Penn State, there were rumors that he and Johnson had some disagreements on how the defense should be run, never with any confirmation whether that was true.

But Johnson told the media that there never were any issues between the two coaches.

“There was no conflict. ... I don’t chase stories and lies out there because nobody’s asking me questions first. But Jim and I had a really great conversation about what we’re doing. There was never a moment when I was like, ‘Hey, I don’t want (three defensive linemen).’ There was never that. ‘What’s the best fit for our players? How can we get them to compete?’ That

Continued On Page 6



Is proud to be a CBD partner with



For all your wellness needs

cbdhemphhealth.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

**Harr's FORKLIFT SERVICE, INC**

SALES | RENTAL | SERVICE | PARTS

**NOBLELIFT KOMATSU**

**harrs-forklift.com**

1181 Refugee Road  
Columbus, OH 43207  
(614) **443-4651**  
Fax: (614) 443-4711

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

was always the conversation with us. The story was made up.”

Johnson speculated why it might have become a rumor that the two coaches had some disagreements, but he maintained that he and Knowles never butted heads in the three years their time in Columbus overlapped.

“You guys (the media) looked at his system at Oklahoma State and thought that he’s going to bring the Jack thing here. So everybody was looking for a 3-4 defense, but you have to remember that we have all of these 4-3 guys here and you would have to change the way you recruit.”

When Knowles first joined the staff for the 2022 season, they experimented with using Jack Sawyer at the hybrid defensive end-defensive line Jack position, but he was not able to reach his potential at that spot and was moved back to edge rusher the following year.

The Buckeyes also occasionally gave Hicks the opportunity to try to earn time at the Jack last season, but only in blowout wins.

Knowles also confirmed Johnson’s claim that the two coaches always had a good relationship, although he did say that the veteran D-line coach does prefer the four-man front.

“I have tremendous respect for what he does,” he said. “He’s legendary. Yeah, he’s tied to the four-man front, and that was fine. I ran some of the jack stuff my first year (at Ohio State). We got away from it,

but that was more me just saying, ‘This doesn’t work here. That’s not how we’re built. That’s not how we recruit. That’s not something we need to do.’

“It wasn’t anything with Larry. I think he’s great at what he does, and he and I always had a good relationship.”

Whether there was some truth to the rumors or not ended up not mattering in the end when the two coaches helped Ohio State to its first national title in 10 years. But now the Buckeyes’ entire starting front four is moving on to the NFL and OSU brought in Matt Patricia to be its new defensive coordinator, so Johnson will have a new coach to work with in 2025.

## Buckeye Stars Spotted At EA Sports Photoshoot

It appears a trio of national championship-winning Buckeyes will grace the cover of the upcoming EA Sports College Football 26 video game.

According to a report from On3, Day, junior safety Caleb Downs and sophomore wideout Jeremiah Smith flew out to the Rose Bowl for a photoshoot with EA Sports for the company’s next college football game, which will likely be released in mid-July.

That report seemed to be confirmed when pictures surfaced of the deluxe edition cover of the video game on social media showing the three Buckeyes standing in the Rose Bowl stands among a large group of players, coaches and mascots from other teams. Smith, wearing a scarlet jersey, is seen front and center alongside Alabama wideout Ryan Williams, while Downs, in the team’s white uniform, is standing a few rows back beside former Heisman Trophy-winning Florida quarterback Tim Tebow and Penn State head coach James Franklin.

Day is seen one row behind Downs in his usual gameday attire next to Ole Miss head coach Lane Kiffin. Also pictured in the photoshoot are former Heisman Trophy-winning USC running back Reggie Bush, Penn State running back Nick Singleton, Florida quarterback DJ Lagway,

Georgia head coach Kirby Smart and Michigan quarterback Bryce Underwood, among many others.

This would mark the second straight season that Ohio State is represented on an EA Sports College Football deluxe cover. Last year’s cover – which was the first since the game returned from an 11-year hiatus – featured former Ohio State running back Quinshon Judkins alongside a group that included 2024 Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter of Colorado, former Michigan running back Donovan Edwards and former Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers, among others.

According to On3, EA Sports plans to release multiple covers of the game, perhaps opening the door for more Buckeye cameos. The game plans to have a coaches’ cover, where Day could make another appearance, and a legends cover that features Tebow and former Michigan quarterback and recently-fired Wolverines staffer Denard Robinson.

## U-M’s Underwood Says “It’s Over” For OSU

Underwood has yet to play in The Game, or any collegiate game for that matter, but the former five-star is coming into the 2025 season confident as it pertains to Ohio State.

Appearing on an episode of “The Rich Eisen Show” on March 12, Underwood revealed he met Akron native and Ohio State superfan fan LeBron James at a Los Angeles Lakers game, where he delivered a bold message to the four-time NBA champion about James’ beloved Buckeyes.

“(I told him), ‘Before this all started, just have to let you know, I go to Michigan,’” Underwood said. “He was like, ‘Oh yeah, yeah.’ (And I said), ‘It’s over for Ohio State.’”

According to Underwood, James took the slight against his Buckeyes well.

“He said Ohio State is home,” Underwood said. “He laughed it off a little bit. And so then we continued to have a conversation.”

Underwood enters Ann Arbor as the

No. 1 overall recruit in the country after an excellent senior season at Belleville, Mich., in which he threw for 2,509 yards and 32 touchdowns to six interceptions while completing 71.8 percent of his passes.

If Underwood is to win the job over Fresno State transfer Mikey Keene and last season’s starter Davis Warren at some point in the 2025 season, he’ll get his first opportunity to live up to his bold statement and hand the Buckeyes a fifth straight defeat in The Game when the Wolverines welcome the defending national champion Buckeyes to Ann Arbor to end the regular season on Nov. 29.

## Bjork Says Renovations Coming To Horseshoe

Athletic director Ross Bjork and the rest of Ohio State’s athletic department have plans to renovate Ohio Stadium.

In a March 6 interview with 97.1 The Fan’s Jen Winters, Bjork said Ohio State is looking at little ways to improve the 103-year-old home of the Buckeyes.

According to Bjork, Ohio State is mulling several changes to Ohio Stadium, including new field-level premium opportunities, new graphics, and moving TV trucks to a new TV compound to free up public parking, the latter of which Bjork said may not be implemented for this upcoming season.

Bjork also said in the interview that Ohio State has conducted studies on ways to alter Ohio Stadium, which was built in 1922 and last renovated in 2001.

“We’re doing a master plan study on ribbon boards, new video board technology, a sound system. Those things probably wouldn’t happen until the 2026 season. And then every year we really have to do a study on, ‘OK, what’s next from a big-picture standpoint?’ So we’re going through that process right now, but I think there could be some exciting things both from being in the stadium and projects that are coming up.”

One change to Ohio Stadium that is already in the works is the addition of the “1922 Club,” an “exclusive, private club venue” that could be added to the Horseshoe as soon as 2026. The club’s full gameday membership costs \$4,500 and features numerous perks, such as all-inclusive food, beer and wine and access to exclusive, members-only events.

## Day Thought Of Dad After Championship Win

In an interview on “The Herd With Colin Cowherd” on March 7, Day revealed his team’s national championship win took on a deeper meaning for him.

During the interview, Day said the first person he thought of after Ohio State defeated Notre Dame 34-23 in the national championship on Jan. 20 was his father, Raymond, who died by suicide 37 years to the day from the title game win, on Jan. 20, 1998. Day was only 9 years old at the time of the tragedy.

“For me, it was my father. I didn’t really make this public before, but since you asked me, I’m going to answer the question,” Day said. “I lost my father on Jan. 20 when I was 9 years old, and I saw when the schedule came out that the national championship game was on the same day

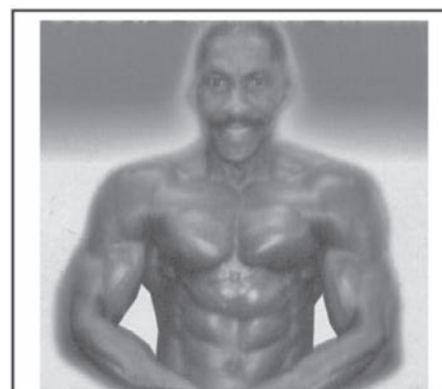


### 1997 OSU Harley Davidson Wide-Glide

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.



### TIM SWANSON Certified Personal Trainer

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

614-886-9331  
foreverfitswan@yahoo.com

# 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](http://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.

that I lost my father. I just knew he was with me that day, and that was the first guy I thought of."

Day, who recently agreed to an extension that will run until the 2031 season and increase his salary to \$12.5 million, has long been an advocate for mental health awareness, creating the Christina and Ryan Day Fund for Pediatric and Adolescent Mental Wellness, which works to tackle mental fitness in the classroom. He and Nina also donated \$1 million to Ohio State in 2022 for the university to fund research and services that promote mental health at the Wexner Medical Center and College of Medicine.

"The mental health thing has always been important to me based on the way that I grew up and some of the things that I experienced growing up," Day told Meyer's "The Triple Option Podcast." "Through Nationwide Children's (Hospital) and through OSU, I think Columbus is the leader in the country in the mental health space.

"It's good for Buckeye Nation, for Co-

lumbus, for Ohio to see guys who are at the biggest stage, big strong guys who are still willing to say, 'Hey, man, I'm struggling today. I need a little help.'"

## Harrison Jr., Fanatics Settle Lawsuit

After a 10-month legal battle, former Ohio State wide receiver and current Arizona Cardinal Marvin Harrison Jr. reportedly settled a case with Fanatics on March 13 that prevented his jersey from officially being sold. Terms of the settlement were not yet available as BSB went to press.

"The dispute between Fanatics and Marvin Harrison Jr. has been resolved," read a statement by a Fanatics spokesperson. "The parties are pleased to have resolved this matter and looking forward to a productive working relationship going forward."

The settlement reached between Harrison and Fanatics comes after he was sued by the sports retailer in May of 2024 for breach of contract. In the lawsuit, Fanatics accused Harrison of signing a

\$1.05 million term-binding agreement. In two affidavits, Harrison claimed it was his father, Pro Football Hall of Famer Marvin Harrison Sr. who signed the agreement as an authorized representative of his company, The Official Harrison Collection.

Fanatics then reissued its lawsuit in August of 2024 with allegations of common law fraud and negligent representation, while adding Marvin Harrison Sr. as a defendant.

Most recently, Harrison Jr.'s lawyer, Andrew Staulcup, made a motion to have the case dismissed in January, but that motion was denied. Now, with the lawsuit settled, Harrison's officially licensed products are available on Fanatics' online stores. Harrison's No. 18 jerseys are being sold for \$129.99 and \$174.99, according to the website.

[www.theredbricktapandgrill.com](http://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**





# Lack Of Chemistry Leads To Men's Downfall

Continued From Page 1

when fans loudly cheered for Diebler when his name was called by the venue's public address announcer.

There was also the public financial backing of the program and its new head coach by Ohio State's most powerful donors, such as the top NIL collective The Foundation, and even the public endorsement of the Diebler hiring from NBA legend and Ohio State fanatic LeBron James.

All of this signaled that better times might be ahead for this program, and Diebler felt that positive momentum, too.

"The way we played, the urgency and the aggressiveness we played with, the toughness we played with, the togetherness we played with, those are things we want to be about moving forward," Diebler said after the Georgia NIT loss. "We have to be able to bottle that up. And as our guys transition to offseason work, we need to remember what that felt like and be able to keep taking it to another level."

Fast-forward nearly one year after those comments, and there was a much different feeling emanating from the team.

Just days after completing a wacky 2024-25 regular season that was marred by significant roster discontinuity and a number of close losses, Diebler stood in front of a small group of reporters inside the Buck-

eye locker room at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis on March 12 dejected and raspy-voiced, seemingly searching for ways to explain his team's 77-70 upset loss to No. 15 seed Iowa in the first round of the Big Ten tournament.

After squandering a 10-point second-half lead to Indiana four days earlier, Ohio State needed a win over the underdog Hawkeyes in order to keep its NCAA Tournament hopes alive. Instead, the Buckeyes let Iowa shoot 54.7 percent from the field (29 of 53) on the night and outscore them 16-9 in the final 7:25 to suffer the crushing defeat, virtually eliminating them from NCAA Tournament contention for a third consecutive season.

When asked what went wrong in the loss, Diebler said that he didn't feel his team lacked effort or heart in this do-or-die game but rather lacked connectedness on the defensive end down the stretch, which allowed Iowa to come away with the come-from-behind win.

"When I say we weren't connected, we had too many breakdowns where communication maybe wasn't early enough or communication wasn't received well enough," Diebler said. "Especially down the stretch, we had some opportunities to help more off of some of their personnel, and we didn't do that well enough, and that allowed them to get the ball to the rim.

"That was our issue defensively. It wasn't being tough. It wasn't playing hard enough. It was us not executing our communication well enough."

There was a similar feeling of dejection and bewilderment among the players in that same locker room. True freshman guard John Mobley Jr. sat by his locker with his face in his hands, seemingly to cover the tears flowing from his eyes. Sophomore forward Devin Royal was also teary-eyed during his media interview, while a frustrated Micah Parrish – one of the last ones to leave the locker room – hunched over and yelled in frustration before a reporter approached him.

"It hurts," the emotional Mobley said. "This could've possibly been my last game as a freshman here. It definitely hurts, for sure."

Much like Diebler, many of the players, including junior guard Bruce Thornton – a three-time captain who has already cemented his name in Buckeye record books statistically but lacks an NCAA Tournament appearance on his résumé – pointed to the team's lack of connectedness as the main reason that they fell on the losing side of the Hawkeyes.

The team's connectedness – both on and off the court – was a key talking point for Diebler all season, and the Buckeyes' team leader said that component was lacking against the Hawkeyes.

"It definitely hurts. I'm not going to fake my emotions," said Thornton, who had 24 points on 8-of-13 shooting along with a game-high nine assists in the loss. "But the more connected team won. Iowa had a great game plan. When they made a mistake, they got it right back, so all credit to them. On certain plays, we just could have been better. We just lost to the better team today."

Regardless of the sting of the defeat and how the game went south, the reality remains that Ohio State will be sitting at home while other teams live out their dreams in the NCAA Tournament for the third consecutive season. That was made official on March 16 when the NCAA selection committee left the Buckeyes out of the 68-team field, despite them being in the Big Dance in several of the projected brackets just a few weeks prior.

For Ohio State, it's a disappointing development that many would not have forecast heading into the season and one that fell short of the expectations athletic director Ross Bjork put on the program before the year began.

"This is Ohio State, so we expect to be the elite of the elite," Bjork told BSB in May. "That's what we want to be. That's what Coach (Ryan) Day's after. That's what Coach Diebler's after. Are we going to win every game? We hope we can. But there are also other people who are trying to win too. So our expectation is that we compete at the highest level, that we're knocking on the door for a Big Ten championship.

"I said it (during Diebler's introductory press conference), we want to cut down nets. We all embrace that. We have to keep building. On the basketball side, we probably have a little farther to go."

## Same Old Mistakes, Same Old Losses

The Buckeyes' bubble-bursting late-season slide – during which they lost five of their last seven games – ultimately boiled down to the team being hindered by the same mistakes that have plagued them throughout the season.

Ohio State was known all year as a Jekyll-and-Hyde group that can look like an NCAA Tournament team on one night and then a Big Ten bottom-feeder the next, and there was perhaps no better example of that than the team's last three games as BSB went to press.

After returning from a lengthy West Coast trip that ended with a promising 87-82 win at USC on Feb. 26, the Buckeyes kept their positive momentum going at home in the most dramatic of ways. Needing a win to keep their postseason hopes afloat, Diebler's team scratched and clawed its way to a 116-114 double-overtime victory over Nebraska on March 4, coming back from a five-point deficit in the first overtime and a three-point deficit in the second extra period to do so.

The win put Ohio State back in the 68-team field according to several projected brackets with just one regular-season game to go, and it had many thinking that a win over the Hoosiers at Assembly Hall on March 8 would secure the Buckeyes an elusive spot in the tournament.

But, in the worst of times, it was Hyde who showed up for the Scarlet and Gray in Bloomington, Ind. After using some strong defense to jump out to a 46-36 lead with just over 12 minutes left in the game, the Buckeyes suffered an all-too-familiar fate on the road this season in large part due to their all-too-familiar stagnant end-of-game offense. After taking that 10-point lead off a Royal three with 12:12 left, the Buckeyes missed 13 of their last 15 shots and committed five turnovers, allowing Indiana to storm back and outscore OSU 30-14 the rest of the way.

Then, against Iowa, a similar scenario unfolded. After coming back from being down eight with 13:51 to play to take a 58-57 lead with just 8:49 left, the Buckeyes once again failed to run an efficient offense down the stretch, making just one field goal and committing three turnovers to spur a game-changing 11-3 Iowa run that put the Hawkeyes up seven with just 3:46 left.

The Buckeyes' lack of efficient offense in crunch time – a lull that usually features extended sequences of little-to-no ball movement and poor shot selection – has plagued them all year, leading to several excruciating defeats in which they held promising leads only to squander them as the game inched toward its end.

According to Diebler, these recurring issues may be an example of the team's youth and inexperience negatively impacting the team.

"We have lived in the margins this year a little too much," he said. "I think part of that is some of our youth and inexperience. Those are probably the moments that I reflect on. Aside from a couple of halves in the nonconference and certainly for a portion



**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



of that Northwestern game (a 70-49 loss on Feb. 20), we played really tough and hard all season long. It's just at times, toughness and playing hard isn't quite enough. You've got to execute. Attention to detail becomes critical."

Some of the players also pointed to their inability to close out games and string together consistent offense down the stretch as a major reason that they are on the outside looking in for the NCAA Tournament.

"Just finishing big games," sophomore forward Sean Stewart said when asked where this team came up short this season. "We were in it with the best teams in the country. We had them at their place, on the road, at home, up in the second half. We just didn't finish some of those games out and kind of put us in the situation that we're in now."

The scoring droughts and blown leads weren't the only two bugaboos that came back to bite the Buckeyes when it mattered most. The team also earned little production out of its bench in the losses to Indiana and Iowa, with only nine reserve points scored against the Hoosiers and three against the Hawkeyes. For those who are counting, that's just 9.2 percent of the Buckeyes' 130 combined points in those contests.

But looking even further, those on the roster not named Mobley, Parrish, Royal and Thornton accounted for just 17 of those points, or 13.1 percent of the scoring. This was a consistent trend all season, with no player outside of that scoring quartet – not counting fifth-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr., who averaged 9.1 points per game but left the team due to personal reasons in mid-December – averaging more than 6.0 points per game.

That group includes 7-1 sophomore center Aaron Bradshaw, a once-prized transfer portal addition from Kentucky who averaged just 6.0 points and 2.7 rebounds while fouling 2.6 times per game in his 22 appearances. The former five-star and McDonald's All-American had just three combined points and seven rebounds in the Buckeyes' last two losses, going scoreless against Iowa.

Diebler acknowledged in the locker room after the Iowa game that the team's lack of depth may have been a major weakness this season, one which could have caused his main contributors to wear down as the stressful season dragged on.

"Our depth was not as good as we needed it to be down the stretch at times of games," Diebler said. "We got outscored significantly from the bench this game, but we have some guys who have had to adjust roles and who are in new situations."

### What's Next For Buckeyes?

With a seemingly distraught locker room and some significant holes that need to be addressed, the prevailing question remains: "Where do the Buckeyes go from here?"

That question got a whole lot more confusing on March 17 when Ohio State declined an invitation to the brand-new College Basketball Crown Tournament, a 16-team field that was scheduled to feature the top two teams based on their NET rankings from the Big Ten, Big 12 and Big East who failed to qualify for the NCAAs, as well as 10 other at-large selections.

After finishing as the top-rated Big Ten



SONNY BROCKWAY

**UP AND DOWN — Inconsistency plagued the Buckeyes throughout the season. Impressive wins were followed by head-scratching losses, and 30 minutes of solid play were often wiped up by poor finishes.**

team in the NET – as well as the top-rated team in the country – that did not make the NCAA Tournament – at No. 41, the Buckeyes were contractually obligated to participate in the event if they chose to play in the postseason. They were prohibited from playing in the NIT.

Diebler and his players did not seem interested in talking about the College Basketball Crown – which reportedly will include an NIL aspect to it – after the Iowa game, but the coach did offer some explanation on what went into the team's decision not to play while on his radio show on March 17.

"We had some time to evaluate what the future could hold. We saw (March 16) we were very much right there for the NCAA Tournament. The biggest thing for us is we've been playing in big-time, meaningful games for a significant stretch," Diebler said on 97.1 The Fan. "Our guys poured everything they had into it. We have guys who are banged up, some guys with injuries and the impact of the totality of the season. We've still got some guys sick right now. It's been a lot."

Regardless of the reason, the Buckeyes have made a firm decision to end their season, putting their final record at an uninspiring 17-15 and 9-11 in the Big Ten. It's a decision that could signal some significant change coming to the program this offseason, specifically with the roster, which could be overhauled for the second straight year due to the transfer portal. The portal opens March 24 – one day after the Round of 32 of the NCAA Tournament ends and three days before the Sweet 16 begins – and closes on April 22.

Among the five Buckeyes made available for interviews in the locker room who could return to the team next year, Mobley, Stewart and freshman forward Colin White all suggested that they were happy with their roles this season at OSU. Mobley and White agreed that they could see themselves as pillars of the team in the future, while Stewart

said that he has found a home at Ohio State where he can flourish on the court.

That list doesn't include Royal, who was not asked about the matter, or Thornton, who gave a noncommittal answer when asked about his future. Thornton, who will likely garner significant interest from other lucrative Power Five programs after turning in an excellent second-team All-Big Ten season – that is if he decides not to enter the NBA draft – said that a decision like that is not on his mind and he wants to focus on keeping his guys in the right mental headspace.

"My first thought is to make sure all my guys are all right," Thornton said. "Just a hard loss, especially this (Iowa) game. I don't know what the future will hold or anything like that, but I just need to make sure our guys are all right and make sure we're all on the same page because we just don't know what the future holds for us."

With Thornton's future with the Buckeyes up in the air and contributors such as Parrish and Glover graduating, Diebler might need to go to work in the portal this offseason to find premier talent, something that he struggled to accomplish last year with Bradshaw and Stewart struggling, Johnson leaving the team and Glover making little impact.

Diebler's first order of business in the portal may be to find a formidable interior presence to complement Royal and Stewart, who were both asked to take on bigger roles and guard some of the most physical big men in the Big Ten due to Bradshaw struggling or being inactive for a good portion of the season.

As BSB went to press, the Buckeyes were listed among five teams interested in 6-7 Campbell transfer forward Colby Duggan, a rising junior who totaled 15.7 points and 3.3 rebounds for the Fighting Camels last year.

Then comes filling out the roster with depth pieces, something that can also be solved through recruiting. The Buckeyes

will welcome a two-man class in 2025 that includes Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star center A'Mare Bynum (6-8, 225) and Richmond Heights, Ohio, four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160), the nation's 59th- and 109th-best prospects in the class. That is followed by another two-man class in 2026 that features the talented four-star Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175) of Garfield Heights, Ohio, (No. 29 overall) – who recently told Eleven Warriors that he is locked in on Ohio State and is thinking about reclassifying to the 2025 class – and Upper Arlington, Ohio, three-star power forward Alex Smith (6-9, 195, No. 177).

Each of those four players could bring some optimism back to the program over the next two seasons, but for now, Diebler and the Buckeyes are likely set for a few uneasy and uncertain months.

Regardless of what transpires over that period, though, Diebler remains confident that Ohio State can flourish on the Big Ten and national scale under his leadership and that those within the program will do whatever it takes to return to relevancy.

"I've said this all along, all season," Diebler said. "Our toughness, our togetherness, playing in meaningful games, it was important. Certainly, selfishly, as a program, we wanted to take a giant step forward this year. I think we took a step forward so far. I haven't been shy about what I think the standard is of this program."

"The reality is it's a fight to get back there, and we're going to fight every single day. And this group has – that's where, when I reflect on (this season) – this group has fought and overcome a lot of adversity to do it, to get back and do those things that I just talked about."

"So I think this program belongs. You guys (the media) know how I feel about that. So we've got to keep grinding and keep working towards that."

# Bucks Look To Rebound From Recent Losses

Continued From Page 1

Sweet 16 only five times in the 43-year history of the tournament, and no team seeded No. 4 or below has ever taken home a national title.

In a world of haves and have-nots, the Ohio State women's basketball program has pretty consistently resided somewhere in the middle during the 12-year tenure of head coach Kevin McGuff.

Under McGuff, the Buckeyes have often had the makings of a national contender. They have had All-Americans such as Kelsey Mitchell and Jacy Sheldon, a specific identity with their full-court pressure and even regular-season success, with four Big Ten regular-season championships won (2016-17, 2017-18, 2021-22, 2023-24).

The postseason has been a different story, though. With McGuff at the helm, Ohio State has made it past the Sweet 16 only once – that coming in 2023 when the Buckeyes and Sheldon made the Elite Eight after upsetting UConn in the Sweet 16 – and has won only one Big Ten tournament title (2017-18).

These postseason struggles, which included losses to women's basketball powerhouses such as North Carolina in 2015, Tennessee in 2016, Notre Dame in 2017 and Texas in 2022, have extended the Buckeyes' Final Four drought to 31 seasons, the last appearance coming in 1993 when Katie Smith led OSU all the way to the national title game before losing to Texas Tech.

Perhaps no year better exemplified the McGuff tenure than the 2024 season, when Ohio State won the Big Ten regular-season title with a 16-2 conference record after defeating a Caitlin Clark-led Iowa squad in January but failed to replicate its success in the Big Ten tournament, getting upset by No. 8 seed Maryland by a score of 82-61 in the first round.

Then, in the second round of the NCAA tournament, the second-seeded Buckeyes were upset 75-63 at home to No. 7 seed Duke, abruptly ending a once-promising season as well as the careers of Sheldon and standout guard Celeste Taylor.

"It stinks, because we've got a lot of great kids who played their last game here," McGuff said after last year's season-ending loss. "They invested so much in the program and this community. It's just not the ideal way for this to end. but as I told them, I would love to sit in the locker room on the final day and say, 'Hey, we gave it everything we had.' Duke was better today, and they deserved to win the game, and we were not



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NO PLACE LIKE HOME** – By earning the No. 4 seed, Ohio State hosts the first two rounds of the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament at Value City Arena March 21 and 23. The Buckeyes are 15-0 at home this season.

very good."

A little less than a year after that crushing end to the season, though, McGuff and the Buckeyes have another chance to finally get over the hump and make their first Final Four in over three decades after they were named a No. 4 seed in the 68-team field on March 16. Ohio State barely clung onto home-court advantage and will play its first-round game at Value City Arena against No. 13 seed Montana State. With a win, the Buckeyes would likely take on No. 5 seed Tennessee – also at home – with a right to go to the Sweet 16 in Birmingham, Ala., on the line.

A No. 4 seed isn't quite what the program was expecting when they got off to a 20-1 start this season, but regardless, they still have a chance, and that's something the Buckeyes can be excited about.

"I think we're super excited to just be able to keep working, getting better every day as a team, moving forward and doing the little things every day," junior guard

Chance Gray said shortly after learning her team's seed. "Because I think a lot of it with us on our team is a lot of the little things that will make us a better team overall. So I'm super excited just to be able to compete and have another opportunity to showcase who we can be."

## Steep Hill For Bucks To Climb

As excited as the Buckeyes may be about their fourth straight inclusion in the NCAA tournament, their prospects of a deep run this March seem fairly low. After winning its first 17 games in the post-Jacy Sheldon era and holding the previously mentioned 20-1 record after a 66-56 home win over Washington on Feb. 2, Ohio State finished the season with just five victories in its last 10 games. After their Big Ten tournament ended with their largest loss of the season, a 75-46 defeat to eventual tournament champion UCLA in the semifinals on March 8, the Buckeyes head into the NCAA tournament with a record of 0-3 against the Bruins and their crosstown rival USC, both of whom earned No. 1 seeds in the NCAA tournament.

"We are where we are," McGuff said after his team's loss to UCLA when asked about his team's failure to beat the two national contenders. "So we won't dwell on that. More so, what can we do right now to make sure we're as prepared as possible when we get an opponent in our path."

Despite boasting a starting lineup with three new starters, including true freshman guard Jalonni Cambridge, Gray and Kentucky graduate transfer forward Ajae Petty, as well as two program stalwarts in Cotie Mc-

Mahon and Taylor Thierry, the Buckeyes not only won all of their nonconference games, but with the exception of a close game against Belmont on Nov. 17 (67-63), they dominated all of the outmatched opponents in their way.

Even when Big Ten play rolled around, teams such as Rutgers, Northwestern and Illinois were simply no match for the talented Buckeyes. It wasn't until a Jan. 19 road matchup against Penn State – which entering the game had yet to record a win in the conference in its first six tries – that Ohio State suffered its first loss, falling to the Nittany Lions 62-59 in State College, Pa.

The Buckeyes were without Cambridge in that loss, and with a trip out West to take on national contenders UCLA and USC looming, they quickly recovered with three straight wins over No. 8 Maryland, Nebraska and Washington.

It is a tall task for any team to take down either of the top-10 Southern California foes, and for the Buckeyes it was no different. Not only do both teams possess two of the best résumés in college basketball, but each is led by bona fide Naismith Player of the Year candidates – UCLA with junior center Lauren Betts, and USC with sophomore guard JuJu Watkins.

As stiff as the challenge was against then-No.1 UCLA on Feb. 5, Ohio State was ready through 31 minutes of game time.

After storming out to a seven-point lead halfway through the first quarter, Ohio State found itself tied 44-44 with 9:26 to go against the Bruins. But any chance of pulling off a signature upset win fizzled away almost immediately when it went on a 7:17 field-goal drought that ignited a game-seal-

## chocolate café

FINE CHOCOLATES • COFFEES • DESSERTS • SPIRITS & PEOPLE



1855 Northwest Boulevard  
(614) 485-CAFE  
chocolatecafecolumbus.com

*We can cater your tailgate party!*

Parties • Corporate Catering

Weddings • Baby & Bridal Showers • Tailgates!



ing 19-1 scoring run for the hosts. The brutal Buckeye sequence was more than the difference in the game as the Bruins prevailed by 13 points.

Of course, McGuff wasn't pleased with the result, but he was still proud of the way his team competed.

"I thought our competitive character was great tonight, and I thought we really played hard against a great team, but you're not going to go on the road at UCLA and shoot 29 percent and expect to win," McGuff said after the loss. "I mean we had our chances. We didn't take advantage of it, and to their credit they did."

Things turned even more negative for the Buckeyes three days later against USC when they had another awful shooting night – making 29.4 percent of their shots (20 of 68) and 18.2 percent of their threes (2 of 11) – and were also killed on the glass, with the Trojans holding a 62-30 edge in rebounds and 34-32 edge in paint points. Those two struggles wasted a solid team defensive performance on Watkins, who was limited to 17 points on 5-of-21 shooting, and forced them to fall behind by as many as 25 points in the fourth quarter in an 84-63 loss, which was at the time its largest losing margin of the season.

According to McMahon, the Buckeyes' struggles on the offensive side of the ball during their West Coast trip could be credited to some lack of togetherness in the face of adversity.

"From these two games when things didn't go right, we just started playing 'me-ball' and a little bit of one-on-one, and that's just not what we do," McMahon said after the loss to the Trojans. "Our system is very much about moving the ball from side-to-side and getting what's easy, getting what comes to us."

"So (learning) from these two games we just have to stay within the system, just do what we do and trust each other, trust that when we can get our teammates open and trust that they're going to make that shot."

### Roller-Coaster End To Season Creates Doubts

Unfortunately for McMahon and the Buckeyes, though, those problems from the UCLA and USC games were not immediately solved. In each of its next two games, Ohio State saw double-digit leads evaporate in the final minutes on its home floor and needed overtime to beat both Minnesota and Iowa. Then, in a 71-61 road loss to Indiana on Feb. 20, the Buckeye offense hit what seemed to be rock bottom, shooting just 42.1 percent as a team (24 of 57) and having only 39 points entering the fourth quarter against a Hoosier team on the NCAA tournament bubble.

Eventually, though, the Buckeye offense started to produce. They were much improved in their next game – albeit their competition was a Purdue team that finished the season with only three wins in Big Ten play – shooting 52.4 percent from the field (33 of 63) and 51.9 percent from three-point range (14 of 27) in a 98-46 win on their home floor.

Then, when the competition got tougher in its next game against a then-No. 23 Michigan State team on Feb. 26, Ohio State was just as effective on offense, scoring 89 points on 54.8 percent shooting (34 of 62) in its 11-point win.

Even in a three-point overtime loss to

Maryland in their regular-season finale on March 2, the Buckeyes totaled 90 points, so when Buckeye players including Thierry and Petty met with the media ahead of the Big Ten tournament, they felt pretty confident with the direction the team was headed.

"I think we're playing more together offensively and defensively," Thierry said. "Obviously, there are some areas that we can improve in, but I think overall we're just playing together and it's starting to show. I think that this is a great time for this to start happening."

Holistically though, as many improvements as his team made from the start of the regular season, McGuff still wanted to see more consistency from his squad in the postseason.

"I think that (the regular season) kind of went the way I thought, in that having lost so many veteran players and welcoming so many newcomers, I thought it would be a little bit up and down, and we had some inevitable highs and lows that every season is going to have," McGuff said.

"The thing that we've been really trying to impress upon them is consistency. I think our good is good enough, but last year we played more consistently towards 40 minutes for the most part, most of the season. This year we really haven't gotten that. When we've been good, I think we're probably better than last year, but last year's team was way more consistent."

McGuff's evaluation of his team's regular-season performance served as a harbinger for what was to come in the Big Ten tournament a couple of days later. After a tight one-point win over Iowa in the first round that required McMahon to sink two game-winning free throws with six seconds left, the Buckeyes were sent home with yet another postseason loss to a powerhouse team. This time around it was their worst loss of the season in the most important one to date, falling 75-46 to UCLA.

Ohio State's blowout semifinal loss – which was its second-largest Big Ten tournament defeat in program history – featured almost every issue that had plagued the team throughout the season. McGuff's squad was outrebounded 43-25, allowed UCLA to score 67 points on 63.0 percent shooting through three quarters and had yet another poor offensive performance, scoring just 46 points, their worst scoring output since a 46-41 win over Florida on Dec. 16, 2018.

Unlike their regular-season battle against the Bruins, the Buckeyes weren't just outplayed over one stretch, but completely dominated from the tip, something McGuff blames himself for.

"They looked more prepared from the start, and if our team isn't ready to go at the start, that starts with me," McGuff said. "Like I said, we won yesterday because we fought to literally the last second, and we didn't have that today. That's part of coaching, and part of my job is to make sure that they're prepared and ready to fight and play together, and we didn't have that today."

### Buckeyes Shift Focus To NCAA Tournament

As bad as the Big Ten tournament was for the Buckeyes, a deep run in the NCAA tournament would immediately make the 2025 postseason a success. By no means

does Ohio State have a cakewalk to the Final Four, but as a No. 4 seed, the path to the Sweet 16 runs through Columbus. The value of home-court advantage isn't lost on a team that wrapped up the regular season 15-0 at Value City Arena.

"We've got a great fan base, and I think they've really helped create a tough environment here at (Value City Arena)," McGuff said. "So I'm confident we'll be able to do that again for (March 21). I'm excited for our players to get the chance to play in front of our fans."

In addition to the home-court advantage, the Buckeyes also received a fairly favorable draw early on in the tournament. The Buckeyes' first-round opponent, Montana State, will enter Columbus with 30 wins, but only one of those wins came against a Power Five opponent (Central Florida, 76-68 win on Nov. 29).

And in the second round, Tennessee – the likely opponent for Ohio State if it can get there – is much more formidable in name than on the court. The Volunteers, who won eight national championships under legendary coach Pat Summitt, have struggled to maintain the same success since her retirement in 2012 and this year finished the regular season with a record of just 8-8 in SEC play.

Like the Buckeyes, the Volunteers got out to a red-hot start to the season with 13 straight wins, but they have since won nine of their last 18 games to stumble into the NCAA tournament with a record of 22-9.

Even if Ohio State's path is clear, it's hard to envision a team playing with a ton

of confidence coming off a 29-point loss, but according to Gray, she and her teammates have taken the necessary steps to recover from the defeat.

"I think we all just tried to look at ourselves and what we could have done better," she said. "I think most of that issue was just how hard we were playing and the mentality that we came out with. We tried to fix it in practice, and we had a really good couple of days of practice. I think we always try to do a better job of not dwelling on the loss but moving on and getting better the next day."

With home-court advantage, a feasible path to the Sweet 16, and a quality week of practice on their side, the Buckeyes seemed to be as well-spirited as a team can be coming off their biggest loss of the season. Still, looming in the shadows is No. 1 seed Texas, who would almost certainly match up with Ohio State if McGuff's group made the Sweet 16.

There will be no concrete evidence that the 2024-25 Buckeyes can get over the hump and defeat a powerhouse until they actually do it, so for McGuff, his hope is that his team's best is good enough.

"We'll see," McGuff said when asked what gives him confidence Ohio State can beat the best teams in the country. "We've had a good week of practice and we'll need another one heading into this weekend, but we're going to focus on Montana State, and hopefully we can get by that one, and we'll put a plan together for the next team and try to get a great practice in and show up and give it everything we got."



# Patricia Looks To Revitalize Career At OSU

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

It's been a bit of a grind for Matt Patricia the past few years.

After experiencing enormous success in his six seasons calling defensive plays for the Bill Belichick-led New England Patriots (2012-17) in his first tenure with the team, helping the decorated franchise to two more Super Bowl wins in 2014 and 2016, Patricia earned a new role as head coach of the Detroit Lions in 2018 but failed to translate that success to the head coaching chair.

He led the Lions to three straight losing seasons, going 13-29-1 in that span before being fired 11 games into the 2020 campaign.

"I wasn't my best version of a coach, and that's certainly something I take responsibility for," Patricia said on March 7 of his time in Detroit. "I didn't do a good job."

Patricia's struggles with the Lions led him to assume a variety of smaller roles for the Patriots from 2021-22 – which ranged from senior football advisor to main offensive play caller – but unlike his last stint with the franchise, the two-year run was a rather unsuccessful one. New England earned an 18-16 record with one playoff appearance with Patricia on staff, and its offense averaged 21.4 points per game with him as play caller in 2022, good for 17th out of 32 NFL teams.

Then came a one-year stint with the Philadelphia Eagles in 2023 as their senior defensive assistant. That didn't work out for Patricia either. The Eagles relinquished 25.2 points per game that season, the third most of any team in the NFL.

This tough sequence of events compelled the longtime NFL assistant to take a year off from coaching altogether in 2024, instead diving into the sports media industry to form a podcast with Belichick

and former Patriots assistant Michael Lombardi called "Coach," which was described as a "groundbreaking educational football analysis show."

That time off seemed to steer things straight for the Sherrill, N.Y., native. It was then when he – along with Belichick – decided on the next step of his football journey, one which would take him back to college for the first time since being a graduate assistant at Syracuse from 2001-03 rather than a 20th season in the NFL coaching ranks.

"That year off really gave me a good chance to look at the full landscape of football," Patricia told reporters. "When you're in that grind and going all the time and you're playing a lot of games – you just go into that next mode. And for me, it was a great opportunity for me to kind of step back and say, 'What's changed?'"

"And honestly, for me, one of the most exciting changes in college football was the playoffs. That's what I loved about the NFL – 'Just give me a chance. Get us in the playoffs and we have a chance to make a run and be able to get going.' And I thought that was so cool in college football. Obviously, it was great for Ohio State. And that, along with some of the things with NIL, and some of the other changes that are coming, it just made me feel like college football was similar to what I had been doing in the NFL. Studying it in the offseason, college football, to me, really felt like, 'OK, hey, that's where I want to be.'"

That offseason realization led Patricia to Columbus this spring, where he will serve as Ohio State's defensive coordi-

nator for the 2025 season, replacing Jim Knowles after he left for Penn State on Jan. 26.

Patricia will be tasked with the daunting challenge of leading a unit that returns just three starters – unanimous All-America safety Caleb Downs, cornerback Davison Igbinosun and linebacker Sonny Styles – from its 2024 group that finished No. 1 in the country in both total defense and scoring defense under Knowles. Although that is certainly no easy task, the guy who hired him, that being Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, said his new assistant is the perfect fit for the role and brings instant credibility to the room from his time in New England and beyond.

"One of the things that people ask me all the time is, 'What are the biggest learning lessons every year you learn as a head coach?' And one of them is to make sure that you're thorough in your hiring process and that you bring in the right fit," Day said. "I felt like Matt was that guy for a lot of reasons. I think the first one was his experience. Coaching 19 years in the NFL, he's coached in six Super Bowls, has three Super Bowl rings, so the experience speaks for itself. I think he's one of the best minds in the game."

"His experience is going to have credibility the instant he walks in that room because of the guys that he's coached, the teams he's coached on and his experience on the field."

As Day alluded to, Patricia is no stranger to coaching elite defenses in the NFL. He helped New England finish in the top 10 in scoring defense in eight of his nine seasons calling plays for the franchise. That includes a No. 1 finish in 2016 (15.6 points allowed per game), when the Patriots finished with a 14-2 record and came back from 28-3 down in Super Bowl LI to defeat the Atlanta Falcons 34-28 in overtime.

In New England's only other Super Bowl season with Patricia as defensive coordinator in 2014, the team ranked eighth in the NFL in scoring defense at 19.6 points allowed per game.

Although the brilliance of Belichick – who took his talents to the college level to become head football coach at North Carolina – may have played a significant role in the Patriots' defensive dominance during those years, Day said he heard from Patricia's former coworkers in New England that it was the coordinator who was leading the unit as time went on rather than the eight-time Super Bowl-winning head coach.

"You ask guys who were actually in the building. You ask coaches that he coached with. You have to make a lot of calls to find out about people," Day said. "What you found out was he was running the defense. Now, certainly, Belichick had a big hand in that, but as time went on there, it was (Patricia's) show. And there was certainly a lot of collaboration there."

"But he's very, very intelligent. He really knows defensive football. And the guys who played for him really felt like they were getting better because of the way he taught football fundamentally. I think even our guys in the building now, in a short period of time, it's making a lot of sense to how he teaches the game. So all those things were part of the evaluation in making the decision."

Despite this success in New England, however, Patricia does not want to bring the Patriots' defense with him to Columbus. Rather, he wants his scheme to match the personnel he has at Ohio State and the skill sets each of his players possesses, both of which he is still trying to determine in the early months of his time with the program.

Patricia listed players such as Downs, Igbinosun, junior cornerback Jermaine



Matt Patricia

# WHY THE SHEETZ NOT

BUILD YOUR MASTERPIECE FROM OUR MENU?

f t SHEETZ.COM i d

## PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

Mathews Jr., junior linebacker Arvell Reese and Styles as players who have already caught his eye from his early days around the team.

“My whole goal is to try to figure out, ‘What do you do well? How do I put you in the best position to go get on the field and do that job well to the best of your ability?’ ” Patricia said. “Because if you can play fast, you can play aggressive, I have you in your skill set, then you’re going to be disruptive as a defensive player. You’re going to help us win as a defense, win as a team, and we can fit the pieces around where everybody goes in that accord and then go from there.”

Day said Patricia’s ability to mold his defenses based on the personnel he has was a significant factor in his hiring, as was the familiarity he already has with several members of the defensive coaching staff. Patricia most notably spent time working with co-defensive coordinator/cornerbacks coach Tim Walton at Syracuse in 2002, when Walton was the Orange’s defensive backs coach and Patricia a graduate assistant.

Both Patricia and Walton said that they have maintained contact ever since and share many of the same experiences from their respective years coaching in the NFL, which Walton thinks will allow them to collaborate easily in their respective roles with the Buckeyes.

“We speak the same language,” Walton said. “He spent 20-plus years in the NFL. I was 12 years in the NFL. So a lot of guys in the tree that he’s under and a lot of guys that I worked closely with really kind of have the same background. So that part will be a good blend.”

But it’s not just with Walton whom Patricia has a previous relationship. He mentioned that he also has a longstanding relationship with and respect for defensive line coach/associate head coach Larry Johnson from his time scouting his defensive linemen, and he spent time scouting and coaching linebackers coach James Laurinaitis when he was prepping for the NFL draft out of Ohio State in 2009.

Patricia thinks each of these prior experiences will help the defensive staff maintain cohesion this season.

“How lucky for me, to be able to come in a situation where these guys can really help bring me in?” Patricia said. “Obviously, I lean on Tim quite a bit because of our relationship going back, but Coach Johnson and I have known each other for a long time, going back to when I was at Syracuse University.

“I worked out James – I’m pretty sure it was out on this field (at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center) and I was yelling at him. So all those connections – it’s been really awesome. My job is really to sit and learn and try to observe and then say, ‘OK, where can I add, where can we change, where can we adjust?’ And we have to work it out as a staff.”

While Day, Walton and Patricia’s comments may make it seem like this is a home-run hire for the Buckeyes, Patricia’s résumé isn’t all perfect as he heads back to college. Aside from the problems in Detroit and the disappointing tenures with the Patriots (second stint) and Eagles, there have been some rumblings that his coaching style is too harsh and he has an

**Junior safety Malik Hartford:** Hartford, a four-star recruit, enters his third season at Ohio State with just 18 total tackles and three pass deflections under his belt, but with safety Lathan Ransom departing for the NFL this offseason, he could be in for a bigger role in 2025 with a solid spring performance.

Hartford will begin spring camp battling for the starting strong safety role alongside sophomore Jaylen McClain, who gained more playing time than the then-sophomore after showing out last spring and summer, earning the third-most snaps (106) among Buckeye safeties and third-most snaps among true freshmen last season. Hartford, on the other hand, earned just 94 snaps with most of them coming either on special teams or late in games during blowouts.

Last season, Hartford could not show his worth on the Buckeye defense in spring camp due to a shoulder injury that required him to have surgery and miss the whole spring. But this year, he is healthy and ready to compete for an expanded role alongside McClain in Matt Patricia’s new defensive scheme.

**Senior defensive end C.J. Hicks:** Hicks seems to be a common name featured on this list every year. Over the last three seasons, the former five-star prospect was viewed as a budding young prospect who had all the intangibles needed to thrive at linebacker, but for whatever reason he never fully reached his potential at the position. He recorded just 14 total tackles in his first two seasons at Ohio State before losing out on the starting Will linebacker position to Sonny Styles in 2024 and recording 22 tackles and two sacks on the year.

Like his teammate Styles last year, however, Hicks could be in line for more success this season while manning a new position. Defensive line coach Larry Johnson said on March 7 that Hicks would be making the official move from linebacker to defensive end. Last season, linebackers coach James Laurinaitis was emphatic in his claim that Hicks was one of the best blitzers on the team, and he will now get to show that this spring while coming off the edge, a position switch that may better complement his 6-3, 233-pound frame.

With Buckeye legends such as Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimolou no longer with the program, Hicks has a solid opportunity to fully tap into his potential and grab a starting role at defensive end this season, where he will battle with Caden Curry, Kenyatta Jackson Jr., Logan George and others for the role. That push for a starting role begins this spring as he gets acclimated to his new position.

**Junior wide receiver Brandon Inniss:** Although he likely knew this was what he signed up for when he committed to Brian Hartline and Ohio State in 2022, Inniss has been limited primarily to a bench role so far in his Buckeye career while sitting behind superstar wideouts Emeka Egbuka, Marvin Harrison Jr. and Jeremiah Smith, among others. He caught just one pass for 58 yards and a touchdown his freshman season and then added another 14 receptions for 176 yards and one score as a sophomore.

This season, though, the former highly rated four-star prospect is poised to use what he learned from the receivers who came before him and finally assume a starting role with the Buckeyes this season in the slot alongside Smith and fellow junior wideout Carnell Tate on the outside. Inniss certainly has all the intangi-

“abrasive personality.”

Then there is also his 1996 sexual assault case when he was arrested, charged and indicted on one count of sexual assault of a 21-year-old woman while on a college spring break trip to South Padre Island, Texas, only for him to never stand trial and avoid conviction after the case was dismissed because the victim was unable to “face the pressure or stress of a trial.”

Patricia has repeatedly proclaimed his innocence from these charges, and both Day and OSU athletic director Ross Bjork

said the incident was a major topic of discussion during his interview process and that Patricia passed the character check.

“We asked him directly,” Bjork said. “There was a lot of information that was already vetted back in 2018 (during the hiring process with the Lions), and we are more than comfortable with Matt. Once you get to know him you know his character and what it’s all about.”

The hiring of Patricia is certainly a complex one, but regardless, Day believes his new defensive coordinator checks every box and is the right person – both on

bles to take that next step and become a key contributor on the Buckeyes’ new-look offense. Head coach Ryan Day and Hartline repeatedly praised the then-sophomore’s approach and competitive attitude throughout last season, and he was able to show that off some in the College Football Playoff when he caught two key receptions for 25 yards.

Now is the time for Inniss to grab the starting job after two seasons of sitting, and he has a strong shot to do that as one of the more experienced wideouts on the team. He will likely battle this spring for the slot role with redshirt freshman Mylan Graham, who appeared in just four games last year and did not record a statistic.

**Redshirt sophomore quarterback Lincoln Kienholz:** Like Inniss, Kienholz has been stuck toward the bottom of the depth chart at his position in his first two seasons with Ohio State. He served as the team’s third-string quarterback behind Kyle McCord and Devin Brown in 2023 and then was relegated to fourth string behind Will Howard, Brown and true freshman Julian Sayin 2024.

With Howard and Brown no longer on the roster, Kienholz now has his first real opportunity to battle for the starting quarterback job as the most experienced signal caller in the room. The former multi-sport high school athlete enters spring camp in a three-man quarterback competition with the sophomore Sayin – who is considered by many to be the favorite to win the job – and true freshman Tavien St. Clar, the Buckeyes’ first five-star Ohio-born quarterback commit since Braxton Miller in 2011.

Kienholz, who has completed just 10 passes for 111 yards in his first two collegiate seasons (all of them in 2023), is unlikely to take the starting role away from Sayin if all goes according to plan for the Buckeyes. But a strong showing this spring for the third-year QB could make things interesting for Day, new quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler and the entire offensive staff entering summer camp.

**Redshirt sophomore tight end Jelani Thurman:** Standing at an intimidating 6-6 and 258 pounds, Thurman has all the physical tools to become a dominant pass-catching tight end at the college level. But through two seasons in scarlet and gray, he hasn’t quite lived up to that potential. While there have been some flashes, the Fairburn, Ga., native has mostly been a nonfactor on the Buckeye offense sitting behind the likes of Cade Stover and Gee Scott Jr., hauling in just six catches for 60 yards and a touchdown in 20 career games.

Thurman did show some of his potential last year and was a willing blocker at times for the Buckeyes’ Chip Kelly-led offense, but this season he will be required to be a much more consistent player in Keenan Bailey’s new-look tight ends room. With Scott gone to the NFL, he will battle this spring for an expanded role alongside returnees Bennett Christian and Will Kacmarek and Purdue transfer Max Klare, the latter of whom is viewed by many as a potential All-Big Ten player this season.

Thurman faces an uphill climb to earn more playing time this year, but if he can show he can use his physicality to thrive in both the passing and blocking game this spring, Bailey and the staff could give him a real shot to contribute this season.

—Patrick Engels

# Young Bucks Battle At QB, RB and Safety

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's 2024 national championship roster was filled to the brim with talented, experienced playmakers at nearly every position. Where the Buckeyes didn't have returning starters, they had more than capable transfers with Caleb Downs, Seth McLaughlin and Will Howard, among others to fill those roles.

A month and a half after its national championship victory, Ohio State's focus is completely on a 2025 team that, unlike its predecessor, will feature as many as 15 new starters.

Ohio State football is rarely lacking talent, and the 2025 team certainly isn't, but with all of their new starters, the Buckeyes may be a little light on experience.

Still, the responsibility of playing for Ohio State and the expectations that come with it are no different according to head coach Ryan Day.

"Our expectations don't change," Day said on March 7. "I think last year with everybody coming back and some of the additions that we made, it sort of created a lot of attention nationally, and that was what it was, but that shouldn't have affected how we went about our work. That's just stuff on the outside, and whatever they're going to say about this team shouldn't affect how we go to work each day and how we start our first game."

The Buckeyes may have the toughest test possible in Week 1, going up against Texas at home. As redshirt sophomore quarterback Arch Manning takes the helm, many expect the Longhorns to be one of the best teams in all of college football in 2025. With that big challenge on the schedule, Ohio State's coaching staff has a particularly pressing need to identify its best lineups on both sides of the ball before the season commences.

With only a handful of established starters on the team, the Buckeye coaching staff will have plenty of decisions to make at key position battles.

Perhaps no positional battle will be more hotly contested than those at quarterback, running back and safety, which is why Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking an in-depth dive into each of those positions to examine how the Buckeyes might proceed.

## Quarterback

Just like any other football team, the Buckeye quarterback position is surrounded by more intrigue than any other. With Howard headed for the NFL draft, Ohio State will have its fourth different starting quarterback leading the offense in as many years.

Whoever the 2025 starter is out of the group of redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz, redshirt freshman Julian Sayin and true freshman Tavien St. Clair, he will be tasked with leading an offense that includes just three returning starters.

With so many new faces on the offense, Day's desire for a leader at the quarterback position is as evident as it has ever been.

"The standard of what the leadership should look like around here, I mean, you start listing guys who have been here re-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SAYIN' THERE'S A CHANCE — Redshirt freshman Julian Sayin appeared to be the front-runner to replace quarterback Will Howard ahead of redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz and true freshman Tavien St. Clair as spring camp began.**

cently and down the history of Ohio State football, you have some of the best names who have ever played the game," Day said. "The biggest thing they have to do is lead and be tough."

Although he has no experience starting games, Sayin — a former five-star prospect out of Carlsbad, Calif. — is viewed as the front-runner at the position.

Behind Howard and then-Buckeye quarterback Devin Brown in the depth chart, Sayin played in only four games for Ohio State last year, all of them in garbage time. It was certainly a small sample size for the former Alabama commit, and it was a bit of a mixed bag. Sayin completed 5 of 12 passes for 84 yards and a touchdown and added 24 rushing yards on two carries.

Still, Sayin's talent is undeniable. After receiving his first scholarship offer in the eighth grade, Sayin completed 511 of 724 passes for 7,970 yards, 86 touchdowns and just 10 interceptions in three years as a high school starter, according to MaxPreps.

Entering his second year of college football, Sayin still has room to grow, but first-year quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler is excited with the steps he's taken over the offseason.

"Last year, going into the year, he was competing (to be Howard's backup) and ended up not winning the job," Fessler said. "He could have turned it down, been bummed out and not attacked it the right way, but I saw him continue to grow throughout the

year. I saw him learn from Will. He can get to a point this year where now he can step up and be more of a vocal leader. That's something I've seen growth in him as well. He's put on some weight. He looks good. He's attacked his time in the winter. That's been awesome."

Despite not attempting a pass in 2024, Kienholz has the most collegiate pass attempts of any quarterback in the room. After he had just five throws in Ohio State's 2023 regular season, Kienholz was thrown into the fire of Ohio State's 14-3 Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri, when Brown left with an injury early in the second quarter.

Kienholz completed 6 of 17 passes for 86 yards as Ohio State failed to score a single point while he was leading the offense.

He may not have been quite as highly touted as Sayin as a recruit, but Kienholz was still in the top 200 of the 247Sports composite rankings out of T.F. Riggs High School in Pierre, S.D.

Partially contributing to his four-star rating as a recruit is Kienholz's athleticism. The redshirt sophomore also played baseball and basketball, and in addition to passing for 7,810 yards, 88 touchdowns and 27 interceptions, he ran for 2,844 yards and 26 touchdowns. In his limited playing time, Kienholz has yet to put his athleticism on display, rushing for only 2 yards on six carries, but it could be a trait that helps him down the line.

The Buckeye quarterback coach has

been impressed with Kienholz' traits off the field so far.

"Lincoln has definitely stepped up from a leadership perspective," Fessler said. "You can see the way he attacks workouts. This winter is so big for all three of them to set the standard and understand what the intangibles of playing quarterback are all about. It's so much more than picking up a football and throwing it. I've seen that growth from Lincoln. That's really exciting."

Kienholz was behind Sayin on the depth chart during the 2024 season, but despite receiving little to no playing time, he was encouraged about his prospects of climbing his way up after the departures of quarterbacks Air Noland and Brown to the transfer portal.

"I haven't really gotten a huge opportunity to show myself," Kienholz told The Columbus Dispatch before the Rose Bowl. "And I feel like this coming year could be a big year for me."

As encouraged as Kienholz seems ahead of this season, it isn't a certainty he'll still be in Columbus when games are played if the spring doesn't shake out the way he hopes.

"If this spring doesn't work out for me," Kienholz said, "I might have to go somewhere else. But that's not really what I'm thinking about."

Then there is true freshman Tavien St. Clair, who, despite being just 18 years old, could be thrust into a very important position if Kienholz does transfer from the program in the spring.

He may not have the age and experience of the vast majority of other starting quarterbacks in college football, but as the No. 7-ranked recruit in the 247Sports' 2025 composite rankings, St. Clair certainly has the talent to play sooner rather than later.

At 6-4, 225 pounds, he looks the part, and his 2,536 passing yards, 74.1 percent completion percentage, 29 touchdowns and four interceptions thrown during his senior season at Bellefontaine (Ohio) High School illustrate the potential he brings as a passer to the Buckeye quarterback room.

Like Kienholz, St. Clair was also a multi-sport athlete in high school, playing baseball and basketball, and he flashed his mobility, running for 254 yards and nine touchdowns.

As talented as he is, St. Clair's youth will likely make it hard for him to earn the starting job considering Day has never had a true freshman as the full-time starter at quarterback, but Fessler is still impressed with the way he's gone about his business.

"Tavien should still be in high school. Instead, he's in my office all the time learning the offense," Fessler said. "When he's not with me, he's with Coach Mick (Marotti), and when he's not with Coach Mick he's over there doing academics in (the Student Athlete Support Services Office). His days are pretty jam-packed. That's definitely new for him. But his commitment to wanting to be great and wanting to be at a level where he can go out and compete in the spring has been really impressive."

## Running Back

After being touted as one of the best — if not the best — running back duos in the country, Ohio State running backs TreVeyon

Henderson and Quinshon Judkins lived up to the hype in 2024. While helping lead Ohio State to its first national championship since 2014, both ran for over 1,000 yards, giving the Buckeyes their first pair of 1,000-yard rushers since 2013 when running back Carlos Hyde and quarterback Braxton Miller did the same.

But by the time the 2025 season rolls around, Henderson and Judkins will be preparing for their first seasons in the NFL.

Second-year running backs coach Carlos Locklyn has the duty of getting his young running back room – which features senior West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson Jr.; walk-on junior TC Caffey; sophomore James Peoples; redshirt freshman Sam Williams-Dixon; and a trio of true freshmen in Bo Jackson, Anthony Rogers and Isaiah West – ready to replace the production of his two workhorse running backs.

“Even though we lost two big dogs, James had a good offseason,” Locklyn said. “CJ, still learning, but he’s working hard. I’m excited about Bo Jackson. We still have Isaiah West and then Turbo Rogers will be here in June. We still have TC Caffey. And Sam is back, so we have a pretty good room. It’s going to be some fun battles.”

If the Buckeyes have someone who is most likely to assume a workhorse role, Peoples seems to be a strong candidate. He was the third-string back behind Judkins and Henderson last year and got on the field enough to rush for 197 yards and two touchdowns on 49 carries.

Still, Locklyn was adamant that Peoples, a four-star recruit out of Veterans Memorial High School in San Antonio, would not be handed a starting job just because of his standing on last season’s depth chart.

“I get it. James was behind the two guys,” Locklyn said. “This microwave society that we have is moving him right in. No, you have to earn it. I’m not giving them anything. None of them. I’m not giving them anything. That’s just how it is.”

Even if Peoples is the focal point of the Buckeye running back room, it is unlikely that he would receive the vast majority of carries. Henderson for example, who finished his career fifth all-time in rushing yards in the history of the program, had Chip Trayanum and Miyan Williams as options alongside him before Judkins entered the program in 2024. According to Locklyn, the Buckeyes’ running-back-by-committee approach will likely not change in 2025.

“I believe in the philosophy that Coach (Jim) Tressel said: ‘You need two and a spare,’” Locklyn said. “So I’m hoping we get two and a spare and another spare. We just reload. This university’s been about having great running backs, and I think that’s what we’re going to have in the room. And it’s on me to set the tone of the kids, the mindset in the room. So that’s on me. So I think we’re going to be good.”

Donaldson seems to be a prime candidate to be a strong No. 2 next to Peoples as the most experienced back in the room.

In two seasons as a starter at West Virginia, he gained 1,532 yards on the ground while scoring 22 touchdowns, running for over 700 yards and scoring 11 rushing touchdowns both seasons.

Donaldson possesses an imposing frame at 6-2, 240 pounds, and as evidenced by his 30 career rushing touchdowns, he could prove to be a particularly important asset to

the Buckeyes in short-yardage and red-zone situations.

Like St. Clair at the quarterback position, none of Ohio State’s freshman running backs are expected to hold the starting job on their own, but Locklyn still likes the potential that each of them has.

“All three of the freshmen we got coming in, I’m telling you, I’m excited about them, just to see what their journey is going to look like into college football.”

Perhaps the freshman running back most suited for instant impact is Jackson, a four-star recruit out of Villa Angela-St. Joseph in Cleveland.

As a junior, Jackson had 1,329 rushing yards and 27 touchdowns before being injured early in the fourth game of his senior season in which he was on an impressive pace with 588 yards and 10 scores. A former baseball player and track runner, Jackson has already put his athleticism on display, according to Locklyn.

“You look at Bo Jackson, he’s got size and speed,” Locklyn said. “I think he’s right now 6-0, 220 pounds. He’s got gifts only God can give him. So you see the potential where he could be. Now, you’re going to have to work and compete, but I’m excited about him. But like I said, we’ll see.”

### Safety

As BSB went to press, Ohio State’s first game was a little less than six months away, but as long as junior safety Caleb Downs is not injured, his name can already be penciled in at his safety position. Downs, a two-time All-American, is certainly Ohio State’s best returning defender but also may be the best returning player in college football.

Downs – who recorded 81 total tackles, two interceptions and six pass deflections on the way to becoming Ohio State’s 39th unanimous All-American – is not just a sure-fire tackler at the backend of the Buckeyes’ defense but also a great example for the other players in the room, according to safeties coach and passing game coordinator Matt Guerrieri.

“Anytime that you lose guys, you’re always growing your depth,” Guerrieri said. “Obviously losing (Lathan Ransom), that will be a critical thing for us as we fill his shoes. But when you have a guy like Caleb – from who he is as a person, from a leadership standpoint, from a safety skill standpoint – it’s easy as a coach when you say, ‘Just watch Caleb Downs. Follow what Caleb Downs does.’ So that’s made it much easier from that standpoint.”

The other safety position is where Guerrieri will have a decision to make. Like its other positions with question marks, Ohio State has plenty of options including junior Malik Hartford, redshirt junior Kennan Nelson Jr., sophomore Jaylen McClain, redshirt freshman Leroy Roker and true freshman Faheem Delane.

McClain, Hartford and Delane seem to be the three players with the best chances of securing a starting spot, even if it isn’t totally clear what spot they are competing for. Under defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, the Buckeyes’ two safety positions were the adjuster and bandit. The adjuster position – occupied by Downs in 2024 – was akin to a free safety position farther back from the line of scrimmage, while the bandit role resembled the strong safety position.

With new defensive coordinator Matt



SONNY BROCKWAY

**LOCK DOWN – With two-time All-American Caleb Downs returning for his third season, Ohio State doesn’t have to worry about reloading one of the safety positions.**

Patricia leading the way on that side of the ball, Guerrieri says the emphasis will be on highlighting each player’s strengths.

“Our job is to put the best football players on the field. Lathan’s role was Lathan’s role because that’s what Lathan did well,” Guerrieri said. “Caleb’s role was Caleb’s role because that’s what Caleb did well. So then you say, ‘OK, what do these guys do holistically well?’ and then let’s highlight those things and put them in position to be successful.”

Despite his young age, Delane, with a 6-1, 210-pound frame, could immediately provide the Buckeyes with a physical option next to Downs.

Delane, a top-60 recruit out of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Olney, Md., recorded 97 tackles, including seven for loss, and had three interceptions during his senior season.

It may be an uphill battle against more experienced safeties such as McClain and Hartford, but Guerrieri said he can make an impact early on if he does the little things off the field.

“We’re excited about Faheem,” Guerrieri said. “We were obviously excited from when we recruited him, but what does he need to do? He needs to do his job at max capacity, just like any of the guys. We probably weren’t talking about Jaylen McClain this time a year ago, from that standpoint. And what did he do? He showed up early, he stayed late. He did his job as hard as he could possibly do it.”

McClain’s hard work throughout his freshman season is why many expect him to start in his sophomore season.

Unlike Delane, McClain was not a highly touted recruit out of Seton Hall Prep in West Orange, N.J. He was the No. 373 prospect and by some outlets received only three-star status. Still, after losing his black

stripe before the season in early August, McClain worked his way up to become the backup behind Ransom.

He didn’t receive a ton of playing time behind the Buckeyes’ veteran safeties, but he still recorded 15 total tackles, including one for loss, and a pass deflection in 15 games.

Similar to McClain, Hartford made a big impact as a true freshman. He played in 157 snaps while making 10 total tackles with a pair of pass breakups. As a sophomore though, Hartford’s season may have been a bit of a disappointment. He played in 13 games but didn’t seem to make too much of an impact with only eight tackles and a pass breakup.

Still, Guerrieri expects big things from Hartford in his junior season.

“I’ve seen a big jump from Malik,” Guerrieri said. “You’re going to see a different kind of guy when he takes the field this spring. It’s all mentality. Physically, that’s why you saw the flashes of him as a true freshman, and he’s always had that piece right there. But the mentality, the toughness, the grit that he has, that’s showing up big time right now, so I have big expectations.”

After not receiving much playing time a year ago, it seems unlikely that Nelson or Roker has a legitimate chance to start alongside Downs barring a big improvement before the season begins. Guerrieri said that Roker, despite being down the depth chart last season, has made big improvements over the offseason already.

“Leroy got his black stripe off early as a freshman, and that was earned,” Guerrieri said. “He’s had an awesome offseason. When you guys see him at spring practice, he’s going to look like a different guy. Physically, he’s a different guy. Mentally, he’s been incredibly competitive. He is one of our most improved guys.”

# Johnson Trying To Replace D-Line Production

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Many different position groups need to replace starters after the 2024 season since the Buckeyes had so many players return for the national championship run and then leave for the NFL once they succeeded.

But the defensive line is having to replace more production than any other position group for the Buckeyes. Ty Hamilton, Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau and Tyleik Williams are all off to pro ball, and defensive line coach Larry Johnson is left with the task of finding four new starters.

When head coach Ryan Day held a press conference on March 7 before the Buckeyes began spring ball, he said that the defensive line is one of the positions he is most worried about going into the spring due to the fact that they are no longer deep at the position, also losing defensive tackle Hero Kanu through the transfer portal to Texas.

“On the defense, right now the defensive line is probably the biggest concern, in terms of replacing those four guys and then also Hero,” Day admitted. “That’s five guys we have to replace. I think we have some good guys and good options there, but that will be a focus (of spring practices).”

For Johnson, that’s one of the great things about being a college coach and why he’s still sticking around at 73 years old. He told the media on March 7 that he likes testing himself as a coach to see if he can get the players he recruited into his room to play at a top level in the country.

“It’s fun. It really is,” Johnson said. “Can you do it again? Can you get a bunch of young guys to play at the highest level every day? That is a challenge, but that’s why you get up in the morning, to come to work and look for a challenge. I love challenges.”

The good thing for Johnson and Ohio State is that in the 2024 season, there was a lot of depth, and that depth rotated into games consistently throughout the year, so some of last year’s reserves do have experience playing at a high level. Multiple second-string defensive linemen for the Buckeyes last season very likely could have been starters on most other Division-I teams.

But even with that experience, and the talent they showed off when they were in games, Johnson is still waiting to see whether they will be able to put up those numbers as the starters getting the majority of the playing time.

“I don’t know where you can put production on those guys yet,” he said. “They played a lot, but what you have to look at is that they haven’t played 40 or 50 plays a game. They played 20 or 25 plays coming in as a substitute. When you’re a starter, that’s a different ballgame.”

“So those guys need to learn how to be on the field longer, and that’s something we have to build through the spring and summer and get ready to go in fall camp. We’re not there yet, but the opportunity to build this is going to be a challenge.”

That group begins with redshirt junior edge rusher Kenyatta Jackson Jr., who will get his first opportunity to start this season. He finished last year with 16 tackles, three for loss and 1½ sacks with one fumble recovery.

He still has two years of eligibility remaining at the college level since he was able to redshirt his first season with the Buckeyes, and he seems to be the clearest option to slide into a major role on the edge.

Losing so much experience and production from the line, Johnson believes Jackson could step up and be the leader of the group, which is what he said he is going to need to do.

“He’s got to be our leader, first of all,” Johnson said. “That’s our role for him. He has not been in a position to be the leader, move the unit. So far, he’s done a great job of doing that. Now he’s going to be the guy who’s going to have to demonstrate the production for us and move the yardstick for us at defensive end. And I think he has a chance to do that. Now he’s going to play 40, 50 plays a game. We’ll see him more, and I think we’ll see his talent come to the front.”

Senior Caden Curry is next up for a spot on the other end of the defensive line. Both Jackson and Curry had the opportunity last year to transfer when Sawyer and Tuimoloau decided to return for one more year, but they decided to instead remain backups for another year and continue to develop.

That extra year of being behind two very talented players and learning from Johnson could pay off in big ways for both of them, but it could also be a detriment since they haven’t had as much in-game experience as they might have been expected to four years into their college careers.

Sophomore Eddrick Houston is another player who seems to have a starting spot if he continues in the direction he’s been developing. About midway through the 2024 season, he made the move to the interior after being recruited as a five-star edge rusher, and he ended up getting a fair amount of playing time throughout the playoff run as a backup to Williams and Hamilton.

Johnson said Houston – who totaled seven tackles and two pass breakups his freshman season – is going to be staying on the interior since they don’t want to switch him again, which could stunt his development if he has to move back and forth. But Johnson likes Houston’s ability to rush off the outside shoulder of the opposing offensive guards when he’s on the interior.

“He’s going to play the three-technique. That’s where he feels comfortable playing,” Johnson said. “We don’t want to switch him again. He’ll give us some inside rush at a three-tech position. He’s very comfortable doing that. He helped us out to get through our stretch and now he feels like, ‘Coach, I could do this if I have a chance to be the starter in the fall.’ That’s motivation for him.”

Junior Kayden McDonald also played his way into a bigger role throughout last season, namely in the 20-13 win over Penn State in State College, Pa., on Nov. 2. When Williams was injured in the game, McDonald was one of a few players who were thrust into that position to try to bring home a win, and he delivered when the Buckeyes needed a goal-line stand late in the fourth quarter to hold onto their 20-13 lead.

On third-and-goal from the 2-yard-line, he was able to push Penn State center Nick Dawkins back into the path of running back Kaytron Allen, forcing him to redirect his route and allowing Hamilton and Kanu to



SONNY BROCKWAY

**LINE 'EM UP — Age is just a number for 73-year-old defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who looks forward to restocking a position group that was instrumental in the Buckeyes' run to the national championship last season.**

wrap up Allen and bring him down. After that play, he had a consistent role on the defensive front.

Outside of the four who seem most likely to earn the starting jobs for the first time in their college careers, the Buckeyes are moving C.J. Hicks from the linebacker position to the edge.

It will be his fourth season with Ohio State, and he hasn’t been able to make his way into a consistent role on the defense to this point despite being a highly touted prospect out of high school. But Johnson believes this will be a good move for both Hicks and his position group.

“He’s with me right now and trying to learn how to play a position,” Johnson said of the five-star linebacker recruit. “The transition he mentally has to go through, he’s done an outstanding job thus far. He’s bought into what we’re doing, and I think that’s the key.”

“He has a really good skill set. So we can use him. But we don’t want to just use him on third downs. We want to use him on first and second down. So my job is to get him ready to play, to rush from the line of scrimmage as opposed to being in space. Once we accomplish that, he’ll give us some chance to have some really great depth and really do some good things for us.”

The Buckeyes also added a transfer on the edge for some depth, bringing in former FCS star Logan George, who had 56 tackles (18½ for loss), 6½ sacks and six quarterback hurries last season with Idaho State.

“Talking to his coach was really great,” Johnson said. “He raved about him as a player. Then once we sat down in person and talked, I felt like he could fit our room. He can rush, he plays hard. Everything you want to see, he has. I’m looking forward to seeing where it goes from here.”

Whether his play will be able to translate

from the FCS to the Big Ten is yet to be seen, but Johnson has confidence in the decision he made to go after George in the portal.

“Based on what I’ve seen thus far, his skill set is going to translate. If not, I’ve made a huge mistake,” Johnson joked. “It’s a big moment now, but he’s done a great job, and I can tell you that I’m really looking forward to him. He’s been all business, and that’s what you want. He’s a great leader in the room. He’s helping the young guys. He goes on the field, and he works.”

Ohio State also has a couple of returning depth pieces on the interior of the defensive line, with redshirt senior Tywone Malone and redshirt sophomores Jason Moore and Will Smith Jr. all hoping to earn a role next year as well. Fellow redshirt sophomore Joshua Mickens is another player who could make his way up the depth chart on the edge in his third year with the program.

Regardless of who does earn the most time, Johnson believes it’s going to take everyone up and down the depth chart to get through another extended season, and each of them has an equal chance to be a contributor at this point with almost the entire off-season still left to go.

“All 10 or 12 have to go,” Johnson said. “We have to get everybody ready to fly. It’s hard to say who’s going to be the guys right now because we haven’t hit spring football. We’re in the conditioning, the mental part of the things we do right now. But as time gets on going to fall camp and we do more conditioning, we’ll have an idea of who’s going to jump to the front.”

Of the five freshmen joining the 2025 team on the defensive line, Zion Grady likely has the best chance to see the field in his first year with the Buckeyes.

Jarquez Carter, Trajen Odom, Maxwell Roy and Epi Sitanieli will also join the room.



# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## 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 (17-15, 9-11)

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, W 116-114 (2OT); 8 at Indiana, L 66-60; 12-16 Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis. vs. Iowa, L 77-70

## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (25-6, 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); 7 Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis vs. Iowa, W 60-59; 8 Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis vs. UCLA, L 75-46; 21 NCAA Tournament first round at Columbus vs. Montana St.

## 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, NTS; 20-23 NCAA Championships at University Park, Pa.

## MEN'S GYMNASTICS (4-3, 1-2)

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, L 325.450-321.450; 15 at Michigan, L 328.100-322.000; 25 ILLINOIS.

April 4-5 Big Ten Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.; 18-19 NCAA Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.

## WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS (6-10, 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, L 197.000-196.325; 16 vs. KENT STATE W 196.875-195.650; vs. PITTSBURGH, W 196.875-195.925; WEST VIRGINIA, W 196.875-195.850.

## MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (24-12-2, 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.

March 7-9 Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals at Nationwide Arena, Columbus, vs. Wisconsin, L 4-1; W 3-2 (OT); W 3-2; 15 BIG TEN TOURNAMENT SEMIFINALS vs. PENN STATE, W 4-3; 22 Big Ten Tournament Final at Michigan State.

## WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY

(28-7-3, 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; 7 WCHA Final Faceoff at Duluth, Minn., vs. Minnesota, L 6-2; 15 NCAA TOURNAMENT vs. ST. LAWRENCE, W 6-1; 21 NCAA Frozen Four at Minneapolis vs. Cornell.

## 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 pts.

March 9 LAST CHANCE MEET, NTS; 10-12 NCAA ZONE DIVING, NTS; 13-15 CSCAA National Invitational at Ocala, Fla., 1st/843.5 pts; 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, NTS; 10-12 NCAA ZONE DIVING, NTS; 13-15 CSCAA National Invitational at Ocala, Fla., 5th/494 pts; 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, Men 14th, Women T-12th.

March 1 Big Ten Indoor Championships at Indianapolis, Men 14th, Women T-12th; 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 (11-8, 6-3)

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, W 3-0, W 3-0; 13 QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE, W 3-0; 15 QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE, W 3-0; 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, 6th/95.5 pts.; 20-22 NCAA Championships at Philadelphia.

## 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.

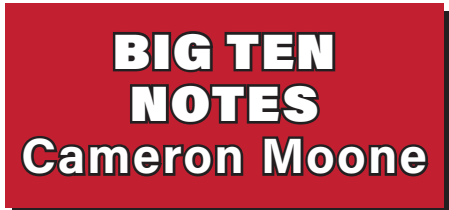
In order to help you do that, we are offering an opportunity to send four free trial issues to potential subscribers. We will then offer your potential subscriber a very special offer to get them to join the fold of loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers.

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@buckeye-sports.com or mail them to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

# 20 B1G Teams Represented In March Madness

With the UCLA women's basketball team earning the automatic bid for women's basketball, Michigan captured the men's Big Ten tournament championship with a 59-53 win over Wisconsin on March 16.



There were 20 teams that made it in for the Big Ten for both men's and women's basketball combined. Twelve squads qualified in women's – a new record for a conference – and eight for men's, giving the Big Ten the second-most selections in men's hoops behind the SEC's men's record of 14 selections.

Headlining the women's side are UCLA and USC while Michigan State and Michigan lead the way for men's basketball in the conference.

The Bruins earned the No. 1 overall seed in the women's bracket, led by player of the year candidate Lauren Betts, who is scoring 19.7 points per game and pulling down 9.9 rebounds. The Bruins begin their journey with the winner of the play-in game between Southern and UC San Diego on March 21 at 10 p.m.

JuJu Watkins also led her USC team to a No. 1 seed in the Spokane 4 region after losing to UCLA in the conference title game. Watkins, who is also a player of the year candidate, averaged 24.6 points, 6.9 rebounds, 3.5 assists, 2.2 steals and 1.9 blocks per game, affecting games in every way she could. The Trojans play No. 16 UNC Greensboro to begin their run on March 22 at 3 p.m.

Other Big Ten teams in the conference on the women's side are Ohio State (No. 4, Birmingham 3 region), Maryland (No. 4, Birmingham 2), Michigan (No. 6, Birmingham 3), Iowa (No. 6, Spokane 4), Michigan State (No. 7, Spokane 1), Illinois (No. 8, Birmingham 3), Indiana (No. 9, Birmingham 2), Nebraska (No. 10, Birmingham 3), Oregon (No. 10, Birmingham 2) and Washington (No. 11, Birmingham 2).

On the men's side, the Spartans wrapped up the year at 27-6 and are led by the scoring duo of Jaden Akins and Jase Richardson, who are averaging 12.7 and

12.0 points per game, respectively. In the middle is 6-9 forward Jaxon Kohler, who pulls down 7.6 rebounds per game on top of 8.0 points a night to help Michigan State to the No. 2 seed in the South region, where it will tip off against No. 15 seed Bryant on March 21 at 10 p.m.

Michigan grabbed the No. 5 seed in the South region and will take on 12th-seeded UC San Diego on March 20 at 10 p.m. The Wolverines are led by Vladislav Goldin, who is averaging 16.7 points per game on the season. Michigan has three players scoring in double digits on the campaign, with Danny Wolf (13.1) and Tre Donaldson (11.6) supplementing Goldin's efforts. Buckeye-turned-Wolverine Roddy Gayle Jr. will go dancing for the first time in his college career, averaging 9.4 points and 3.5 rebounds a game in his first season in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Other teams in the men's bracket from the Big Ten are Wisconsin (No. 3, East region), Maryland (No. 4, West), Purdue (No. 4, Midwest), Oregon (No. 5, East), Illinois (No. 6, Midwest) and UCLA (No. 7, Midwest).

## All-B1G Men's Basketball Team Announced

The Big Ten announced its all-conference teams for men's basketball on March 11.

Headlining the list of honors was Big Ten Player of the Year, which went unanimously to Purdue junior guard Braden Smith, who was given that honor by both the coaches and media. Smith ranked 10th in the conference in scoring entering the postseason, averaging 16.3 points per game on 44.5 percent shooting, and he led the league in assists per game at 8.8 – the next closest was Penn State's Ace Baldwin Jr. at 7.1.

Smith is the third straight Boilermaker to be named Big Ten Player of the Year in as many years, after center Zach Edey earned the honor the two previous years. Smith was also a unanimous All-Big Ten first-team selection by both the coaches and media, joining Wisconsin graduate guard John Tonje as the only men's basketball players to accomplish that feat this season.

Alongside Tonje and Smith on the



Braden Smith

coaches' first team were Maryland freshman center Derik Queen, Purdue junior forward Trey Kaufmann-Renn and Nebraska senior guard Brice Williams. On top of being named first-team all-conference, Queen also earned Freshman of the Year honors from both the coaches and media thanks to his stellar season of 15.7 points and 9.2 rebounds per game. The only difference between the coaches and media first-team honorees was Michigan graduate center Vladislav Golden replaced Queen on the media ballot.

Ohio State junior guard Bruce Thornton headlined the All-Big Ten second team, earning unanimous honors from coaches and media after leading the Buckeyes with 17.7 points and 4.6 assists per game. Joining Thornton on the unanimous second team is Minnesota senior forward Dawson Garcia, Northwestern junior forward Nick Martinelli and Michigan junior forward/center Danny Wolf. Martinelli was the highest scorer out of those four, leading the Big Ten with 20.2 points per game in the regular season.

Baldwin earned Defensive Player of the Year honors for the second consecutive season after ranking 10th in the country with 2.4 steals per game heading into the postseason. He's the first repeat winner of the award since Purdue's Kenneth Lowe in 2003-04.

Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo was named the league's Coach of the Year, the fourth of his career and first distinction since 2012. He led the Spartans to their first outright Big Ten regular-season title since 2018 after going 17-3 in conference play.

## Watkins, Betts Headline All-B1G Women's Teams

The Big Ten also announced its women's all-conference teams and individual award recipients on March 4, with new conference teams UCLA and USC dominating those lists.

Trojan sophomore guard JuJu Watkins was voted Big Ten Player of the Year by both coaches and media, the program's first conference player of the year since Cherie Nelson in 1988. Watkins helped lead USC to its first regular-season conference title in 31 years in their first year in the Big Ten by averaging an impressive 24.4 points and 6.7 rebounds per game. These stats also helped her earn unanimous first-team All-Big Ten nods from the coaches an honor she shared with her teammate graduate forward Kiki Iriafen, UCLA junior center Lauren Betts and junior guard Kiki Rice, Illinois fifth-year forward Kendall Bostic, Ohio State junior forward Cotie McMahan, Iowa senior guard Lucy Olsen, Maryland senior guard Shayanne Sellers and Wisconsin junior forward Serah Williams.

Of those names, Betts also earned Defensive Player of the Year honors after recording 9.9 rebounds and 2.8 blocks

per game, while Michigan guard Olivia Olson was named Co-Freshman of the Year alongside Ohio State's Jalonni Cambridge by coaches. Cambridge, who tallied 16.0 points, 4.4 rebounds and 3.9 assists heading into the postseason, earned sole Freshman of the Year honors by the media.

USC's Lindsay Gottlieb was chosen as the Big Ten Coach of the Year in the Trojans' first season in the conference, with her team sitting at 28-3 before the start of the NCAA tournament. Wrapping up the 2024-25 All-Big Ten awards was UCLA junior forward Janiah Barker, who was named the Big Ten Sixth Player of the Year for her 7.6 points per game off the bench this season.

## Oregon's Lanning Gets Extended Through 2030

Thanks to a stellar first season in the Big Ten that had Oregon win the conference championship and earn the No. 1 seed in the 12-team College Football Playoff, the Ducks extended head coach Dan Lanning through the 2030 season on March 7, according to a release from the university's athletic department.

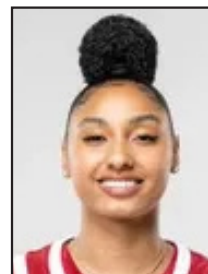
Lanning, who turns 39 on April 10, has commanded the Ducks for the past three seasons, compiling a record of 35-6 while going undefeated in the 2024 regular season before falling to Ohio State in the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day. The former Georgia defensive coordinator has engineered a full Ducks turnaround, notching three straight top-10 recruiting classes, highlighted by a No. 3 finish in the country for the 2024 cycle.

"Oregon football has reached historic heights under Dan's leadership," athletic director Rob Mullens said. "His relentless commitment to providing a first-class student-athlete experience is evident in the culture he has fostered within his program. His dedication to this university, our student-athletes and the city of Eugene has put Oregon football in position to compete for championships on a yearly basis."

The extension is expected to pay Lanning nearly \$11 million a year. On top of extending Lanning, Oregon also extended defensive coordinator Tosh Lupoi and offensive coordinator Will Stein through the 2027 season.

"Every morning I wake up grateful and hungry to represent Oregon," Lanning said in a statement. "Sauphia (Lanning's wife) and I continue to be humbled by the support that the University of Oregon provides. I'm also very thankful we have been able to have great continuity with our coaching staff over the last three years. The job Will and Tosh do for our program cannot be overstated. I have seen growth from both sides of the ball, which is a credit to their leadership and the support they receive from our offensive and defensive staffs."

Lanning now joins a club of eight other college football coaches who will earn over \$10 million a season, headlined by Ohio State's Ryan Day (\$12,500,000) and Georgia's Kirby Smart (\$13,282,580).



JuJu Watkins

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

**Dantonio Added To CFP Committee**

After roaming the sidelines for 13 seasons in East Lansing, Mich., longtime Spartan head coach and former Ohio State defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio has joined the College Football Playoff selection committee, according to a release from the CFP on March 4.

Now back into the college football world, Dantonio joins a group of four other new members who will be on the committee for the 2025 season, including Maryland athletic director Damon Evans, longtime sportswriter Ivan Maisel, Middle Tennessee State athletic director Chris Massaro and former Ole Miss All-America tight end Wesley Walls.

Another Big Ten tie announced in the release was that Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel would not return as the chair of the selection committee, being replaced by Baylor AD Mack Rhoades.

Dantonio joins the CFP committee a decade after leading the Spartans to their lone appearance in the College Football Playoff in the 2015 season, a campaign in which Michigan State won the Big Ten championship over Iowa before falling to No. 2-seed Alabama 38-0 in the semifinals.

**Two Men's Basketball Coaches Let Go**

Mere hours after Minnesota fell to Northwestern in the opening round of the Big Ten tournament, the Golden Gophers parted ways with head coach Ben Johnson after four seasons, according to a statement from the university athletic director Mark Coyle on March 13.

Johnson's contract had two years remaining with a \$2.92 million buyout.

"The expectation for our program is to compete for championships, and unfortunately, we have not done that in the last four years," Coyle said in a statement.

"This is an extremely desirable job in one of the best conferences and cities in the nation, and we fully expect to compete at the highest level on and off the court."

Johnson was an assistant at Xavier before his hiring at his alma mater. The 44-year-old coach had his best season in 2023-24, when the Golden Gophers went 19-15 overall and 9-11 in the Big Ten, losing to Indiana State in the second round of the NIT to finish the year. Minnesota went 56-71 overall and 22-57 in the Big Ten during Johnson's tenure.

The firing came late in the night for Johnson, with the news not being posted on the university's website until 2:07 a.m. EST.

The Big Ten tournament was also the end for Fran McCaffery, as Iowa announced on March 14 that he would no longer be leading the program after 15 seasons with the Hawkeyes.

McCaffery's termination comes after

the Hawkeyes notched a 17-16, 7-13 record on the season while losing to Illinois 106-94 in the second round of the Big Ten tournament on March 13.

"Fran McCaffery has been an integral part of our Hawkeye family for the past 15 years," Iowa athletic director Beth Goetz said. "He is a tremendous coach and teacher, and we are grateful for the positive impact he has made on the institution and the community. We have a deep appreciation for his dedication to our student-athletes and his passion for the game that will have a lasting impact on our program."

The longtime head coach holds the Iowa school record for all-time wins with 297 and for most Big Ten victories at 143. McCaffery led the Hawkeyes to seven NCAA Tournaments, advancing to the round of 32 four times but never landing a spot in the Sweet 16.

**From The Pages Of BSB**

**40 Years Ago — 1985**

Who was that Northeastern team anyway? That's what the red-faced Buckeyes were thinking in any case, after losing 76-74 to the Huskies on Feb. 16 at the Meadowlands. Ohio State woke up with a 15-7 overall record with only three weeks to go in the regular season and a chance for an NCAA Tournament bid getting further out of reach.

"I think it just put us right down at the bottom of the hill," senior forward Joe Concheck said. "We were up there and we were feeling confident about ourselves, and it kind of kicked us back down."

As Concheck stressed, the lesson his squad learned that day would not soon be forgotten.

"It's good to get kicked down once in a while," he said, "especially in the regular season. We came in Sunday (Feb. 17) and got a chance to talk (in a team meeting) and iron things out. It made us all search within ourselves and kind of say, 'What do we need to do now to win? We've got to get back in this thing and get an NCAA bid.'"

**35 Years Ago — 1990**

Cranking up the full-court pressure and making the big plays down the stretch were two of the main ingredients in Ohio State's 91-88 overtime upset of No. 10 Louisville on Feb. 2 before a loud, sellout crowd of 13,276 in St. John Arena and an ABC-TV audience. Forward Jim Jackson led the Buckeyes (10-9, 4-5) with 21 points, while center Perry Carter added 20 points and 13 rebounds. Point guard Mark Baker keyed the pressure with five of Ohio State's 12 steals and added 15 points.

The Buckeyes fell behind by 17 points, 57-40, early in the second half but then outscored Louisville 35-13 over the next 11 minutes to take a 75-70 lead with 3:38 left.

"I'm really happy with our young guys," said Ohio State coach Randy Ayers. "We fell behind by 17, but they hung tough. We became more aggressive with our full-court press. We got great traps established and got our hands on some loose balls."

**30 Years Ago — 1995**

OSU freshman forward "Big" John Lumpkin gave the Buckeye basketball team some much-needed size and a tough-as-nails attitude to go along with it.

"John is a tough kid, and he brings that football mentality to the basketball court with him, which is something we really needed," said OSU assistant coach Dave Cecutti. "However, anytime you go from one sport to another like John has, there has to be an adjustment period."

Lumpkin, at 6-9, 250 pounds, was not only a prototype power forward but also a very promising young tight end for John Cooper's Buckeye football team. Lumpkin was in fact attending Ohio State on a football scholarship, and despite being redshirted the previous season, he was viewed as a vital part of OSU's future fortunes on the gridiron.

"I love both sports equally. It's just that football season occurred first and I am on a football scholarship, so I must fulfill my football obligation before joining the basketball team," Lumpkin said. "Playing both sports is really enjoyable, and I hope to continue to participate in each of them throughout my career."

**25 Years Ago — 2000**

The mood at Ohio State's football appreciation banquet Jan. 31 was upbeat, especially when the topic of the 2000 season was brought up.

"Certainly we have to be a lot better next year than we were

last year, and we have a lot of young football players in our program who are working hard with (strength and conditioning coach) Dave Kennedy and (assistant strength coach) Dave Langworthy right now," said Cooper.

"Those players are working hard, and I promise you those young football players and our coaching staff are disappointed with what happened last year, and the only thing we can do about it is work hard and make sure it doesn't happen again next year."

Cooper and the players surveyed seemed intent on putting 1999's 6-6 season behind them.

"We always say that the next play is the best play, so we're not really going to worry about our past," said fullback Jamar Martin. "What happened in the past happened, and we're not going to let it go. We're not going to let it affect us. We already know what we need to do next year."

**20 Years Ago — 2005**

Fighting off a golf game rusty after back surgery, Jack Nicklaus earned the largest paycheck of his Hall of Fame career on Feb. 5, taking home \$340,000 in the Wendy's Champions Skins Game.

Nicklaus, the former Ohio State All-American who had turned 65 in January, hadn't played a competitive round of golf in several months and went to the annual event in Wailea, Hawaii, "hoping to win one skin."

Instead, he won 11 straight skins and the event championship. Craig Stadler was second with five skins and \$180,000 followed by Tom Watson with two skins and \$80,000. Arnold Palmer was shut out for the third time in the last four years.

**15 Years Ago — 2010**

Jon Diebler's confidence flew in the face of the evening's facts. His No. 13 Ohio State team had seen its double-digit lead against visiting Penn State dwindle down to three points with less than two minutes remaining, and the junior guard was staring at his first scoreless game since he was a freshman.

But it was Diebler's three-pointer with 1:26 remaining that doubled his team's lead and staved off the Nittany Lions' upset attempt in what would be a 75-62 victory Feb. 3 for the Buckeyes.

"I knew the odds were he had to make it," said OSU head coach Thad Matta. "We didn't shy away from Jon."

The junior finished the night 1 for 7 from the field and 1 for 6 from three-point range, saying after the game it was the first time he had ever been requested for interviews following a game where he had just one basket.

It just happened to be the key basket of the game.

**10 Years Ago — 2015**

How would the Buckeyes handle motivation this year after conquering the Big Ten and the first College Football Playoff in the last?

After all, Ohio State had put together three consecutive unbeaten conference seasons, and the Buckeyes handily beat the two best teams in the league the previous year late in the season, including a two-score win at Michigan State and a 59-0 whitewashing of Wisconsin.

How in the world could a team silence the doubters if there were none?

The best answer ended up coming from not head coach Urban Meyer, the master of motivation, but Joshua Perry, a senior linebacker who grew up rooting for Ohio State before living the dream as a starter on one of the school's six national title teams. He reminded reporters that there are always doubters.

"It's just the nature of the game and the nature of being in the position that we are in," Perry said when asked if anyone could question how good Ohio State would be that season. "We're one of those teams that have a great tradition, we've been good in the past, but there is always that little bit of doubt."

"People want to talk about maybe the Big Ten Conference is this or that or the other. And can Ohio State really do it again? Maybe it was a fluke that all those players came together the way they did. They had really good senior leadership, but those guys aren't there anymore - all things that you are going to hear."

**Five Years Ago — 2020**

There had been instances throughout the history of Ohio State athletics of "what if" situations that left fans pondering what the outcome would have been under different circumstances.

What if wide receiver Chris Olave hadn't broken his route and instead caught a touchdown pass from quarterback Justin Fields in the waning seconds of the College Football Playoff semifinal against Clemson on Dec. 28? Maybe the Buckeyes would have gone on to win the national title.

What if the 2012 football team, the first coached by Urban Meyer, hadn't played under a school-imposed postseason ban for a violation under former coach Jim Tressel? OSU went 12-0 that season but never had a chance to compete for the Big Ten or national championships.

There certainly would have been other significant examples over the years, but a new entry that would rank near the top was added March 12 when the NCAA men's basketball tournament was canceled before it could even start because of the COVID-19 pandemic that caused an almost universal suspension or cancellation of sporting events.

There would be no third straight NCAA Tournament for third-year coach Chris Holtmann. There would be no opportunity to advance past the second round, where Ohio State had been knocked out the past two seasons.

"You think about the schools that are in it the first time or the first time in a while," Holtmann said. "Rutgers in our league was going to be in the tournament for the first time in a while. You think about all the small schools, whether it's Robert Morris that clinched their berth. You'd love to be able to see those teams play in what I think is the most suspenseful, greatest sporting event around."

**One Year Ago — 2024**

Although he had spent just two months as a Buckeye, quarterback Will Howard's start to his Ohio State career had already endured some unique twists and turns.

After transferring to Ohio State from Kansas State on Jan. 4, Howard spent the first few weeks thinking that longtime NFL and college coach Bill O'Brien - who was hired on Jan. 19 as the Buckeyes' offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach - would be his play-caller. That reality quickly shifted on Feb. 9 when O'Brien packed his bags for Boston College to become the Eagles' head coach, and just a few hours later, Howard had a new veteran coordinator/quarterbacks coach in former UCLA head coach Chip Kelly.

"The move we made with getting Coach Kelly as quickly as we did showed you how invested Coach Day is this year and how much we've invested in this year," Howard said on March 4, "because that's a heck of a hire. He's a really good dude to be around and to learn from."

# Four-Star OT Riley Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State earned its first commitment in the 2026 class in over two months when Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on March 10.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

"I can't believe God gave me the opportunity to be a Buckeye," Riley posted on Twitter to announce his commitment. "As a kid from Avon Lake, Ohio, it was always my goal to play for the world-famous Buckeyes. Thank you to Coach (Ryan) Day and (offensive line coach Tyler Bowen) for believing in me."

He had been saying that he wanted to make his decision early in the year, but when Bowen was hired as the new offensive line coach, he pushed that back slightly so that he could get to know him a little more.

Riley was deciding between Ohio State and Clemson and had unofficial visits scheduled to both schools during spring ball, but he apparently had enough to make up his mind. He hasn't said whether he will still make his visit to Clemson.

Riley initially received an offer from the Buckeyes on March 7, 2023, when Justin Frye was still with the team and has been interested ever since, making multiple visits throughout the past two years, most recently for the national championship celebration.

Riley is the No. 114 prospect in the country, the No. 9 offensive tackle and the No. 4 player in the state of Ohio, and his commitment to the Buckeyes is a big win for Bowen in his early days with OSU. However, Riley's relationship with Frye kept him interested in Ohio State as well.

Riley is the fifth commitment in the

class of 2026, joining Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205); Avon, Ohio, four-star cornerback Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 172); Pataskala (Ohio) Watkins Memorial four-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187); and Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star tight end Corbyn Fordham (6-4, 215).

Bowen and the Buckeyes are far from done with the offensive line in this cycle, with their eyes still on Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310); Vero Beach, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 325); Mansfield (Texas) Lake Ridge five-star offensive tackle Felix Ojo (6-6, 275); and perhaps most importantly Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell (6-8, 300) and Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School five-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray (6-3, 285).

Regardless, Bowen being able to land a commitment from Riley so early on in his tenure at Ohio State could be a good sign for this class that he will be able to quickly build relationships with prospects to make up for lost time.

### Buckeyes Hosting Big Spring Visits

With spring football officially beginning just under two months after Ohio State won the first-ever 12-team playoff, the Buckeyes are making sure they are able to capitalize on that win and bring in many big visitors for spring ball.

Because of the extra-long season they had in 2025, Day opted to give his players a longer break than they might have had otherwise with schools allowed to open camp on March 3. Day allowed his players to go on spring break (March 10-14 for Ohio State) and start the next week on March 17.

The shorter amount of time for spring ball means the Buckeyes have to stuff their recruiting visits into a four-week period, with camp ending with the "Spring Show-

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	
Maxwell Riley	OT	6-5	280	★★★★	Avon Lake, Ohio	
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.	

case" on April 12.

As BSB went to press, it was already a jam-packed schedule for one of Ohio State's busiest times for recruiting on the yearly calendar, one that will likely only expand as the spring goes on and as the format of the spring showcase becomes clearer.

One prospect had already been on campus before practices started, with Phoenix Mountain Pointe three-star offensive tackle Aaron Thomas (6-7, 285) coming to Columbus on March 14.

For the first day of spring ball, the Buckeyes were set to host Greer; Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star safety and Clemson commit Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200); Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190); Columbus Bishop Watterson offensive tackle Pete Eglitis (6-7, 270); Westerville (Ohio) South safety and Pitt commit Isaac Patterson (6-0, 185); Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day four-star wide receiver Gordon Sellars (6-2, 180); Smith; Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star cornerback Jordan Thomas (6-1, 185); and Westerville South defensive end London Vickroy (6-5, 215).

Greer and Smith will be important to get on campus so that they can meet with Bowen in person. Gebhardt is a prospect the

Buckeyes have been after for a while now, and he was set to be on campus multiple times throughout the spring, also already scheduling an official visit to Columbus. He hasn't said whether he will still make his visits to Ohio State after he committed to Clemson on March 11.

On March 19, Ohio State is set to have Celina, Texas, four-star quarterback Bowe Bentley (6-2, 200); Princeton (N.J.) Hun School four-star defensive end Luke Waffle (6-6, 245); and Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy three-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225) on campus.

Bentley is the No. 123 player in the country and the No. 10 quarterback in the 2026 class. He is one of a few signal callers whom Ohio State is still after in the 2026 class, with the position being a tough one for the team to fill so far in this cycle.

Possibly the highlight and most important visit of the entire spring practice window will be when Cantwell is on campus from March 20-21. He is the No. 1 player in the country and still has the Buckeyes inside his top schools. If the visit to Columbus goes well, Cantwell could schedule an official visit with the Buckeyes over the summer as well.

Joining Cantwell on March 21 will be Grayson, Ga., running back Ashton Turner (5-8, 196) and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West tight end Xavier Ratica (6-6, 227), who are both 2027 prospects. Gebhardt had also scheduled a visit for March 21 before his commitment.

From March 23-25, Prosper, Texas, four-star offensive tackle Zaden Krempin (6-4, 270) will be on campus.

Making a one-day visit on March 24 will be the son of former Buckeye quarterback Steve Bellisari, Columbus Bishop Watterson quarterback/defensive back Drew Bellisari (6-3, 185), along with Grove City (Ohio) Christian School linebacker Landen Sams (6-0, 225); Perrysburg, Ohio, offensive tackle Reed Gerken (6-5, 290); Houston Cypress Falls defensive end James Harris (6-2, 225); Westerville (Ohio) Central offensive tackle Brock Baumann (6-5, 253); and Harper Woods, Mich., five-star wide receiver Dakota Guerrant (6-1, 185).

Guerrant, Gerken, and Harris are all 2027 prospects, while Baumann is in the 2028 class.

The Buckeyes will host Cincinnati Winton Woods offensive tackle Lual Aleu (6-5, 280) and Streetsboro, Ohio, defensive line-

 **barcelona**  
restaurant & bar

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 FOOTBALL RECRUITING

man Arthur Scott (6-3, 290) the next day.

March 29 is also set to be a busy day for visits, with Roswell (Ga.) Fellowship Christian School running back CJ Givers (5-11, 195); Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward interior offensive lineman Mason Wilhelm (6-4, 285); San Francisco Archbishop Riordan four-star interior offensive lineman Tommy Tofi (6-6, 320); Mineral (Va.) Louisa County five-star running back Savion Hiter (6-0, 200); Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star safety Simeon Caldwell (6-3, 185); Carrollton, Ga., four-star cornerback Dorian Barney (6-1, 180); and Cleveland St. Ignatius wide receiver Trey Haddad (6-1, 180) – brother of Buckeye safety Cody Haddad – on campus. Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207) will also be in the middle of an extended visit to Ohio State that day, coming from March 28-31.

The next big day for visits will be when Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (6-2, 180); Sanna; Libertyville, Ill., tight end Brock Williams (6-5, 210); Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit five-star linebacker Kaden Henderson (6-2, 200); Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy five-star safety Bralan Womack (6-0, 195); La Grange Park (Ill.) Nazareth Academy offensive tackle Luke Injaychock (6-6, 265); Columbus Bishop Watterson linebacker Jackson Reynolds (6-3, 198); and Gray will visit.

Each of Henderson (2027 class), Womack and Gray are in the top 50 for their respective classes.

Then the day before the spring showcase, Ohio State is set to host Ojo; Destrehan, La., four-star wide receiver Jabari Mack (6-0, 192); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star defensive lineman Cameron

Brickle (6-2, 305); and Newark (N.J.) Malcolm X Shabazz three-star athlete Zaiden McDonald (6-1, 190).

When the format of the spring showcase is made more clear, there will likely be many different recruits who schedule visits to Ohio State that day, although there haven't been many who have revealed visits for the event yet.

### Day Wants To Look At Changing Portal

It's not news that the season that Ohio State and Notre Dame played in 2024 was longer than any college football team has gone through before. There were many different concerns with the new schedule college football had with the 12-team playoff, but one that wasn't addressed in the first year was the transfer portal and the dates that it's open.

The Buckeyes' season ended when they beat Notre Dame on Jan. 20 to become national champions. But the season lasting until then made it much more difficult to recruit portal players since the winter portal opened on Dec. 9, when the Buckeyes were preparing to take on Tennessee in the first round, and closed on Dec. 28, four days before their Rose Bowl win over Oregon.

Day addressed the issues he had with the schedule in a press conference on March 7, saying the rules need to be looked at over the offseason.

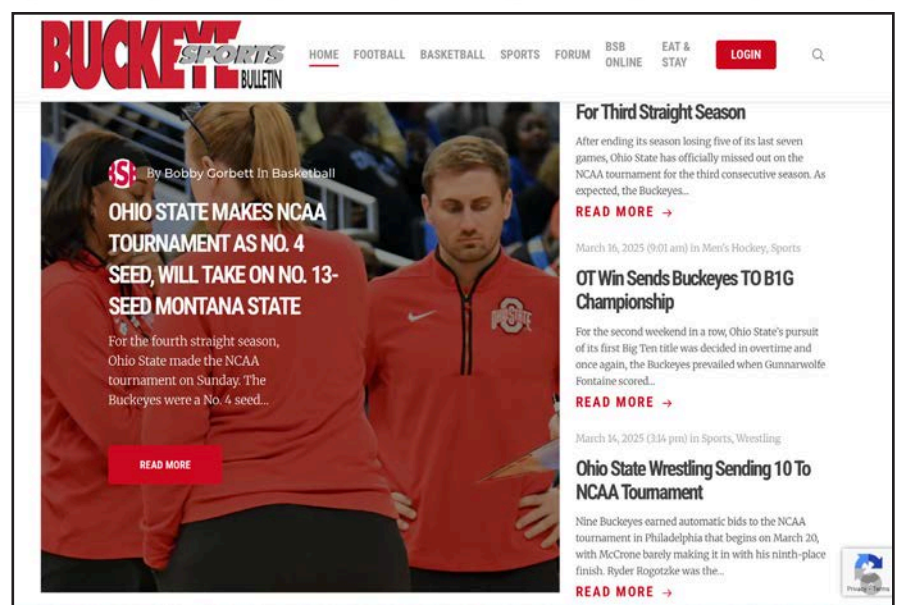
"One of the things for us that was tricky was that the portal opened and closed before our season was over," Day said. "That's something that we have to take a hard look at with the rules."

The head coach must have already heard

Continued On Page 22

# 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](mailto:subscriptions@buckeyesports.com) and we will send you easy-to-follow instructions on how to enjoy reading Buckeye Sports Bulletin online**

## 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 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 pro-

grams, 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.

**WANTED TO buy:** OSU basketball tickets/stubs from the 1960s, '70s, '80s, '90s & 2000s. Call Mike at (704) 995-0414.

**BSB PUBLISHER** Frank Moskowitz and other members of the BSB staff are available to speak at your business, social or alumni group meetings. Informative and fun. Call (614) 486-2202 for details.

# Ohio State Offers 14-Year-Old Running Back

Continued From Page 21

the Twitter fingers typing as he said that, anticipating what people would say about his concern.

"People will say, 'You guys just won the national championship, what are you complaining about?'" Day said. "Well, it matters for (the 2025 team). Recruiting the portal was a major challenge for us. You can imagine, if you are trying to add someone in the portal, but you are still trying to finish your season out, how that could affect your current roster."

The Buckeyes added just six players in the winter portal, which is as many as they took out of the winter portal the year before. But there are many more spots open on the roster since several players who returned for 2024 will be taken in this April's NFL draft. None of the six transfer commits seem to be as highly touted as the additions of Caleb Downs, Quinshon Judkins and others last year, either.

It's not only the fact that Ohio State had a tough time recruiting out of the portal this year, but also that other teams had no issues taking players from the Buckeyes and Fighting Irish since they had an extended window to enter the portal after the season and were the only players available at the time.

"Then we get done with the season, and Notre Dame and Ohio State are the

only two teams with guys in the portal for that five-day window and everybody else is closed," Day said. "Then it's open season on our players. We have to take a hard look at this to figure out what's right. Whether that's just one window for the spring portal once all of that is fleshed out, to me, it's either that or you move back the games."

Day said that the Buckeyes are likely not done in the portal since it opens back up after spring practices from April 16-25. This time, they won't have any issues with playoff games getting in the way of recruiting.

"We will look into the portal based on how things come out in the spring," Day said. "Because we have to fill out our roster too. There are some positions where we're not at capacity right now."

Those positions could be the defensive line, where the Buckeyes lost all four of their starters from the 2024 season as well as Hero Kanu, who left the Buckeyes through the portal to join Texas. Day also said that the offensive line could be a position worth taking a look at depending on how the players on the current roster do in the spring.

## 2026 Ohio Prospects Commit To Clemson

Ohio State seemed to be in good shape for its 2026 class when it came to offensive line recruiting before Frye left for the NFL, but as of March 7, it missed out on one of the top targets in the state of Ohio on the

line.

Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285) is one of a few in-state offensive linemen whom Frye was after, but Guthrie committed to Clemson while he was on an extended unofficial visit to the campus. His visit to Clemson, S.C., according to Greg Smith of Rivals, lasted from March 4-9.

Guthrie received a "crystal ball" to commit to Clemson from four different insiders in the last couple of months, and now his commitment to Tigers offensive line coach Matt Luke is official.

Guthrie had the Buckeyes in his top four alongside Clemson, Georgia and Penn State. He had somewhat of a relationship with Bowen but apparently liked what Luke had to offer better.

Guthrie had official visits set for the summer, heading to Clemson first on May 30, Ohio State the weekend after that and Penn State the weekend of June 13. He hasn't specified whether he will still take those visits when the time comes or if he will close his recruitment completely.

Gebhardt, as alluded to earlier, committed to Clemson just four days after Guthrie did.

The nation's No. 405 overall prospect, No. 31 overall safety and No. 19 player out of Ohio seemed to be trending more toward Ohio State in recent months after having

been on campus many different times and being from the Columbus area. He had official visits scheduled with the Tigers and Penn State as well as the one he was supposed to have with the Buckeyes in June.

## Locklyn Offers 2029 Running Back

Since running backs coach Carlos Locklyn was hired by Day, nobody has been busier on the recruiting trail in terms of sending out scholarship offers. He continues to stay busy and is the first coach on the Ohio State staff to offer a prospect in the 2029 recruiting class.

Victorville (Calif.) Victor Valley running back Makai Buchanan still hasn't made it to high school yet, let alone played a down of football at that level, but he already holds a scholarship offer from Locklyn and the Buckeyes.

They aren't the only program to extend an offer to the 14-year-old. The Buckeyes are his 11th Division-I offer already, including some from Arizona, Arizona State, Ole Miss and Texas A&M, among others.

There's no telling what the next four years will look like in Buchanan's recruitment, but Locklyn gave the Buckeyes a head start if he ends up being a prospect they want to keep going after, especially if recruiting him early on is important to Buchanan, as it is for multiple other recruits.

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

### 35 Years Ago — 1990

Oddly enough, it took a Michigan man to convince Johnny Mattress to commit to Ohio State.

Mattress, a quarterback from Cincinnati Princeton, seemed destined to answer the recruiting question with a "no" to Ohio State and a "yes" to Michigan.

But that was before he talked to Michigan quarterback Michael Taylor.

Taylor, like Mattress, went to Princeton and decided to attend Michigan. Both were option-style quarterbacks who were also adept at throwing the football.

"Michael just gave me his point of view," Mattress said. "He felt like I would get an opportunity to show my stuff. He said go to Ohio State because (Greg) Frey has only one more year and they don't have a legitimate backup quarterback."

### 30 Years Ago — 1995

There were precious few surprises as Ohio State wrapped up its recruiting effort with National Signing Day on Feb. 1.

Perhaps the biggest news out of the final week of recruiting was that a trio of top-rated players the Buckeyes were tracking all decided to go elsewhere.

All-USA wide receiver Randy Moss of Belle (W.Va.) DuPont opted for Notre Dame at the last minute. Moss, brother of OSU lineman Eric Moss, picked the Irish over OSU, Florida and Tennessee.

A pair of running backs Ohio State wanted — Bradenton (Fla.) Southeast tailback Dyrall McMillan and Farmington Hills, Mich., fullback Nick Williams — decided to attend Miami (Fla.) after making late visits there.

Couple all that bad news with late flip-flops by a pair of OSU verbal commitments, wide receiver Gerald Williams of Tucker, Ga. (instead headed to Oklahoma) and linebacker Greg See of Radnor, Pa. (instead headed to Florida), and the OSU recruiting effort sort of limped home.

### 25 Years Ago — 2000

Every year, it seemed Ohio State was hurt by Big Ten rules that prohibited its member schools from sending out more letters of intent than the school had available spots.

"We're hurting a little bit in relation to the schools down south," head coach John Cooper said. "If you have 25 scholarships, you can only send out 25 tenders. That's not saying you're going to get all 25."

"In the SEC, you can send out as many as you like, maybe 40, but you can't have any more than 25 enroll in the fall. They'll send out extras knowing some of them will not qualify."

When asked if the coaches ever discussed or lobbied for a change, he said, "It comes up every time we meet."

"I'd like to see us all have the same rule, whether we can over-sign or they can't. We should all be playing the same game."

### 20 Years Ago — 2005

College head coaches aren't supposed to look so relaxed on National Signing Day, especially ones who have had to defend their program repeatedly over the last 2½ months.

Yet there was Jim Tressel, looking as casual as he ever had in a suit jacket and open collar, laughing and joking with reporters as the last of 18 letters of intent were faxed to his office on Feb. 2.

"Lawrence Wilson is a Buckeye! Lawrence Wilson is a Buckeye!" Tressel shouted shortly after receiving word that the last of the expected letters was in hand. It was a sort of youthful exuberance not often on display from the OSU head coach, who said he had plenty to be happy about.

"We're excited about this class," Tressel said. "We think they're a special group. We think that they'll be very, very competitive on the field, obviously, because their credentials point that out. But we know they'll be very competitive in the classroom as well."

### 15 Years Ago — 2010

On National Signing Day, Ohio State fans must have felt like the groom left waiting at the altar.

The Feb. 3 morning began with the Buckeyes in the hunt for nearly a half-dozen recruits, each of whom could have provided a boost for their 2010 recruiting class. The evening came with decisions from each of those recruits that left the reigning Rose Bowl champions jilted.

One faint glimmer of hope remained in the team's pursuit of Seantrel Henderson, the nation's top overall prospect who hailed from St. Paul (Minn.) Cretin-Derham Hall.

Henderson, an offensive tackle, told a national television audience that he would be playing his college football for USC, with one caveat. He would be waiting to sign his letter of intent until after the university met with an NCAA infractions committee, a meeting scheduled for late February.

### 10 Years Ago — 2015

Ever since Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer raised the CFP

national championship trophy aloft on Jan. 12 following a 42-20 win against Oregon in Arlington, Texas, it had been thought that the title would pay bigger dividends with the crop of high school juniors than the class of 2015.

The concrete evidence started to arrive, as the Buckeyes were off to a fabulous start in recruiting with seven commits for the class of 2016, all of whom were members of the Scout 300.

Another possibility came from Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star offensive tackle Liam Eichenberg, who was the No. 9 offensive tackle and No. 60 overall prospect in the 2016 class and was deciding between Ohio State and Notre Dame.

"If Ohio State hadn't won the national championship, I would have committed to Notre Dame already," Eichenberg said. "That helped them a lot and gives me a lot to think about."

### Five Years Ago — 2020

In an effort to help prevent the spread of coronavirus, the NCAA on March 13 suspended on- and off-campus recruiting activities for all Division-I sports through April 15. Contact between coaches and prospective student-athletes was still permitted through phone calls, text messages and written correspondence, however.

The football recruiting calendar was in a quiet period, which meant prospects would be allowed to take unofficial visits but coaches weren't able to make any contact off campus. That had changed, of course, as had the rules that would allow juniors to take official visits beginning on April 1.

### One Year Ago — 2024

The top offensive tackle in 2025 — Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day five-star offensive tackle David Sanders Jr. — had cut his extensive list of scholarship offers down to six, and Ohio State remained in the running for the second-ranked recruit in the class.

Sanders released his top six on March 2, with the Buckeyes included along with Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee.

"I just felt like after discussing it with my parents, we felt like these were the schools recruiting me the hardest, especially from the beginning," Sanders told 247Sports. "These are the schools I felt most comfortable around when taking my visits, spending time with the guys in the locker room and the places I feel I can be most successful."

## ASK AN ANALYST

### With Garrick Hodge Of Eleven Warriors

**Ohio State earned a commitment from Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) on March 10. Have you been able to see him play, and what do you make of him as a prospect?**

"I've seen Max play, and he definitely has a frame that can stick at offensive tackle at the collegiate level. The guy has been starting at tackle since he was a freshman and is no doubt one of the better players in the state."

**How much credit does former offensive line coach Justin Frye deserve for landing Riley, and how much credit should first-year offensive line coach Tyler Bowen get for quickly establishing a relationship with him?**

"Justin Frye and Riley had a good relationship, no question, but Tyler Bowen made a good first impression with Riley, and I think the opportunity to stay home was too good to pass up."

**Washington Court House (Ohio) Miami Trace four-star offensive tackle Adam Guthrie (6-7, 285) and Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy four-star safety Kaden Gebhardt (6-2, 200) are two Ohio prospects the Buckeyes were interested in before they committed to Clemson. Do you believe the Tigers will continue to be more competitive in recruiting with how Dabo Swinney has been against NIL in the past?**

"Clemson has always been pretty solid at recruiting, and Dabo definitely has an interesting personality, but

the people that love him really love him. If they're serious about using the transfer portal more frequently, they could be interesting."

**Flowood (Miss.) Hartfield Academy five-star safety Bralan Womack (6-0, 195) is one of many recruits who will be on campus this spring, and Ohio State is one of his top schools. Where do you think the Buckeyes stand with him right now?**

"Bralan has always been fascinated by Ohio State, and I'd give them a pretty good chance of landing him, but they have some steep competition from three SEC schools (Auburn, Florida and Texas A&M). I definitely don't think you can count the Buckeyes out on this one, though."

### Buckeyes Send Out More Offers

Other Buckeye coaches made scholarship offers as well, with five more recruits receiving offers since BSB last went to press.

Those five were 2026 prospects Duncenville, Texas, four-star defensive end Landon Barnes (6-4, 235); Chatsworth (Calif) Sierra Canyon five-star defensive end Richard Wesley (6-5, 250) and four-star cornerback Havon Finney (6-1, 170); Goodyear (Ariz.) Desert Edge four-star cornerback Camren Hamiel (6-0, 175); and 2027 recruit Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Aaryn Washington (6-0, 160).

Hamiel is the No. 242 player in the country and has offers from 29 Division-I schools, although he seems to be leaning toward Arizona State and Penn State, with official visits scheduled to both of those schools.

Barnes, the No. 181 recruit in the country and the No. 18 defensive end, holds 31 offers, including some from Arizona State, Colorado, Georgia, LSU, Maryland, Ole Miss, SMU, UCLA and Washington.

Wesley is the No. 10 prospect in the class, the No. 2 defensive end and the No. 3 player in the state of California and holds 24 offers, many of those from top programs

such as Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee and Texas. The Buckeyes are a bit late to the party for Wesley, so it will be tough making up ground.

Finney, the No. 96 recruit in the country, No. 11 cornerback and No. 12 player in the state of California, revealed a top seven since the Buckeyes offered him, with Ohio State included alongside LSU, Michigan, Oregon, Texas, UCLA and USC.

Washington is the No. 49 prospect, No. 5 corner and No. 5 player in the state of California in the 2027 class. He has 18 offers already, including ones from Alabama, Arizo-

na State, LSU, Miami, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas A&M, UCLA, USC and Washington.

### Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State had two more prospects schedule official visits since the last time BSB went to press with Frisco (Texas) Panther Creek four-star safety Donovan Webb (6-0, 182) and Dunlap, Ill., four-star tight end Mack Sutter (6-5, 225) both set to come to campus the weekend of May 30. They are the No. 296 and No. 86 prospects in the country, respectively.



CELEBRATE  
**PETE ROSE**  
 NIGHT  
 MAY 14  
 reds.Com / Pete

# Fields, Bosa Happy To Ca\$h In On Free Agency

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Joey Bosa, J.K. Dobbins, Ezekiel Elliot and Justin Fields are among more than 20 former Ohio State players who became free agents on March 10 to start the annual NFL signing frenzy.

Some, such as running backs Elliott and Dobbins, remained unsigned as BSB went to press while quarterback Fields (New York Jets) and defensive end Bosa (Buffalo Bills) inked lucrative contracts with new teams. Meanwhile, defensive end Chase Young (New Orleans Saints) and others decided to stay put.

## Green Day

Fields was clearly the most notable of the ex-Buckeyes in the news. Going to the media center of the world will do that. Acquired on March 10 to replace future Hall of Famer Aaron Rodgers adds notoriety exponentially.

About to play for his third team in as many years, Fields left the Pittsburgh Steelers after one season and agreed to a two-year, \$40 million deal (\$30 million guaranteed) with the Jets, where he'll be reunited with his OSU receiver Garrett Wilson.

Former Buckeye tight end Jeremy Ruckert is also there, and shortly after Fields signed, ex-Ohio State center Josh Myers swapped Green Bay's colors for the Jets' green with his free-agent contract signing.

In the 2019 and 2020 seasons when Fields was at Ohio State, Wilson had 73 receptions for 1,155 yards and 11 touchdowns while Ruckert caught 27 passes for 293 yards and nine touchdowns.

Fields played three seasons for the Chicago Bears after being the 11th pick in the 2021 NFL draft before being traded to the Steelers.

He completed 60.3 percent of his passes for 6,674 yards with 40 touchdowns against 30 interceptions and rushed for 2,220 yards



FILE PHOTO

**TAKE FLIGHT — Former Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields will look to revitalize his NFL career with the New York Jets this season after signing a two-year, \$40 million deal with the franchise. The move reunites him with former Buckeye teammates Garrett Wilson, Jeremy Ruckert and Josh Myers.**

and 14 TDs in 40 games for Chicago.

In 2022, he rushed for 1,143 yards – the second most by a quarterback in NFL history – and eight touchdowns. He also threw for 2,242 yards and 17 TDs.

In his brief time with the Steelers, he went 4-2 as a starter to begin the season until injured Russell Wilson returned for the remaining 11 games. Fields had a 65.8 percent completion rate for 1,106 yards with five TDs and one pick. He also ran for 289

yards (4.7 yards per carry) and five scores, but the Steelers spent this offseason pondering whether to keep Wilson or Fields, both or neither.

At this stage, it appears the Steelers are without a QB after both Wilson and Fields opted to test the free-agency market. The Cleveland Browns are courting Wilson, while in an ironic twist, the Steelers are reportedly interested in Rodgers.

Not surprisingly, Fields' up-and-down career made for mixed views on his move to the Jets.

The Athletic said: "He's the sort of quarterback the Jets haven't really had before – a legitimate dual-threat, even if he still could use some development as a passer.

"Under first-year Jets offensive coordinator Tanner Engstrand, formerly a part of the Detroit Lions' staff, expect an offense built around Fields' skill set with a lot of RPOs, play-action and creativity to get him in space and take advantage of his athleticism, while also attempting to develop him as a passer. Fields also was beloved by both the Bears and Steelers locker rooms and is viewed as a leader by many who have played with him. At 26, he's also on the same timeline as some of the Jets' younger stars."

ESPN's Stephen A. Smith opined on the "First Take" gabfest that it's make-or-break time for Fields.

"If it doesn't work here, I'm not trying to say that his career would be over, that's not what I mean by it," he said. "I simply mean that looking at him as a starter in the National Football League as the face behind center for a franchise, I think that narrative will come to an end if he doesn't succeed here."

Fields' longtime quarterback trainer Quincy Avery told andscape.com that his client is in a "great situation."

"We all wanted it to work out for him in Chicago, for that to be a good situation where he could find success," Avery said. "We didn't think he would be in that type of situation in Pittsburgh with him and Russell both there. Now, he's got a chance to be part of building something new."

Pro Football Talk's Mike Florio feels the Steelers expected Fields would accept a low-ball offer to stay.

"I think the primary goal was, and they admitted it, they wanted to keep either Fields or Wilson, but they wanted to go cheap, and I think they went too cheap with Fields, and it blew up in their faces," he said.

But Joe Kuzma, writing for steelcityunderground.com, said the Steelers are better for not keeping Fields.

"Pittsburgh couldn't move the ball, gain first downs, gain short yardage, or score points in the way they'd like with Fields under center. Paying him \$20 million or more per season wasn't a wise long-term business decision either.

"The Steelers used last offseason as a free trial of what Fields could provide. They canceled the subscription and will end up being paid back for what they spent. In that sense, they are totally justified in moving on from Justin Fields."

Fields, who wore No. 1 at OSU and Chicago and 2 for the Steelers, revealed on March 14 that he will wear No. 7 with the Jets.

## Fresh Start

Buckeye fans will be pleased by Bosa's remarks soon after signing a one-year \$12.6 million contract with the Bills on March 13 after nine seasons with the San Diego/Los Angeles Chargers.

"I really enjoyed my years in L.A., but coming to a team back like the Ohio State days, where you're really living in a football town with an unbelievable fan base, it's really got me excited," he said.

Bosa, 29, has 72 sacks and 156 quarterback hits over 107 career appearances, but his production has dropped in recent seasons due to injuries, and the Chargers released their longest-tenured player on March 5.

The third pick in the 2016 draft, Bosa was the NFL's Defensive Rookie of the Year and made four Pro Bowls in his first six years in the league.

But Bosa played just 30 of 52 regular-season and playoff games the past three seasons due to groin, foot and hip injuries and recorded 14 sacks. He made \$36 million last season but played 14 games (nine starts) with five sacks and 22 tackles.

"Time doesn't slow down for anybody," Bosa said. "Seasons, especially when you spend them injured, go by in a blink of an eye. Even when you're healthy, the seasons just go and go and go. As a rookie, it felt like forever. Now it's gone in the blink of an eye.

"I was playing at about 70 percent, 60 percent for a good, good while, and every week you'd add a few percent to that. I know it's been a tough last few years, but I know when I'm healthy and I'm on the field, I play



**Press**  
Pub + on 5th  
GOOD FOOD + FINE DRINKS



good food  
**Press Grill**  
fine drinks

Both locations open for lunch & dinner daily!

<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">1505 W. 5th Ave</p> <p>Near Grandview Ave 614-817-1198</p> <p>Monday-Thursday 11 AM - 10 PM</p> <p>Friday-Saturday 11 AM - 11 PM</p> <p>Sunday Noon - 10 PM</p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">741 N. High St</p> <p>In the Short North 614-298-1014</p> <p>Monday- Saturday 11:30 AM - 1:30 AM</p> <p>Sunday Noon-1:30 AM</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">KITCHEN UNTIL 1 AM DAILY</p>
---	--

presscolumbus.com





FILE PHOTO

**RING CHASING — After nine successful seasons with the San Diego/Los Angeles Chargers, former Ohio State defensive end Joey Bosa started the next chapter of his NFL career by signing a one-year, \$12.6 million deal with the Buffalo Bills, where he will look to win his first Super Bowl alongside 2024 NFL MVP Josh Allen.**

really well, and I'm at a high level."

Bosa said a chance to play in meaningful games with star Bills quarterback Josh Allen was enticing.

"Josh texted me that if we do what we set out to do, we could really be immortalized in this town," Bosa said. "And that's what it's all about is winning a championship, and that's, I think, why people are here.

"I'm ready to experience something different. I'm getting old and I'm ready to win, and I think this team is primed to do that."

Bucky Brooks, NFL analyst for Fox Sports, said Bosa is a perfect fit for the Bills.

"The pass-rushing wizard has struggled with injuries recently, but his disruptive potential could help the Bills get over the hump in 2025. The five-time Pro Bowler has amassed 72 career sacks, with four seasons with at least 10 sacks," he said. "Though he last hit that mark in 2021, Bosa is an ideal 'DPR' (designated pass rusher) to align opposite Gregory Rousseau to give the Bills a destructive tandem to attack the talented quarterbacks in the AFC."

**Big Bucks For Bucks**

• Myers, 26, was a second-round pick by the Packers in 2021 and started all 56 games he appeared in over the past four seasons before joining the Jets on a one-year, \$3.5 million contract on March 13.

He allowed one sack and 29 pressures in 1,006 snaps in 2024.

• Young tops the list of former Buckeyes who will remain with their teams for at least one more season. The No. 2 pick of the 2020 draft by Washington started his career strong but tailed off and was traded to San Francisco in 2023. That didn't pan out, and he signed with the Saints before the 2024 season. He had 31 tackles, a career-high 21 quarterback hits, 5½ sacks and 66 QB pres-

sures for New Orleans to earn a three-year, \$51 million deal on March 10.

• Outside linebacker/edge rusher Baron Browning agreed to a two-year, \$15 million contract on March 9 to stay with the Arizona Cardinals. He was traded there in November from the Denver Broncos.

• Wide receiver Noah Brown remains with the Washington Commanders and former Buckeye receiver Terry McLaurin following his signing to a one-year, \$4.5 million contract on March 13.

Since being a seventh-round pick in the 2017 draft, Brown has also played for the Dallas Cowboys and Houston Texans. In his first season with the Commanders in 2024, Brown caught 35 passes for 453 yards and one touchdown.

• Long snapper Liam McCullough didn't wait for free agency and on March 9 signed a four-year contract extension with the Atlanta Falcons. He's been with the Falcons since 2022. It's worth \$5.78 million with \$1.9 million guaranteed.

• Defensive tackle Dre'Mont Jones signed a one-year, \$10 million deal with the Tennessee Titans on March 12 after being released by the Seattle Seahawks, where he played the previous two seasons after four seasons with the Denver Broncos, who selected him in the third round of the 2019 draft. He totaled 8½ sacks, 77 tackles and 12 tackles for loss the past two seasons.

• Offensive lineman Jonah Jackson was traded to the Bears on March 4, and as part of the deal he received a one-year contract extension through the 2027 season. Also, \$12.25 million in total guarantees was added to his contract for 2026.

• On March 10, linebacker Malik Harrison signed a two-year, \$10 million deal with the Pittsburgh Steelers after five seasons with AFC North Division rival Baltimore. In

2024, he had a career-high 54 tackles and his only two career sacks.

• On the same day, tight end Luke Farrell joined the San Francisco 49ers on a three-year deal worth up to \$20.25 million with \$11 million guaranteed after four years with the Jacksonville Jaguars. He was used primarily as a blocker and caught 36 passes for 318 yards in his time there.

• Super Bowl champion receiver Parris Campbell left the Philadelphia Eagles after one season to sign a one-year contract with the Dallas Cowboys on March 15. No financial details were released.

Campbell, 27, caught six passes for 30 yards and a touchdown for the Eagles. He played one season with the New York Giants in 2023 after his first four years out of Ohio State were with the Indianapolis Colts.

He has 123 career catches for 1,117 yards and six touchdowns since being the No. 59 pick in the 2019 draft.

• Dobbins, who rushed for a career-high 905 yards in his first season with coach Jim Harbaugh and the Chargers, is still looking for a team as are fellow backs Elliott (formerly of the Cowboys) and Trey Sermon (Indianapolis Colts).

Other unsigned Buckeyes include tight end Nick Vannett (Tennessee); offensive tackle Michael Jordan (Green Bay); defensive end Jaylen Holmes (Washington); defensive tackle Johnathan Hankins (Seattle); linebackers Jerome Baker (Tennessee) and Raekwon McMillan (Tennessee); and cornerbacks Eli Apple (Los Angeles), Jeff Okudah (Houston), Kendall Sheffield (New York Jets) and Shaun Wade (Los Angeles).

**REDS FANS!**

*Follow The Reds Year-Round In Reds Report*

**R**eds 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**

# Bjork: Diebler "Meeting Expectations" In Year One

Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork told 97.1 The Fan's "Morning Juice" on March 6 that he is pleased overall with the job head men's basketball coach Jake Diebler has done in his first year leading the program.

## COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

"Jake's doing a great job and really meeting our expectations," Bjork said. "And now we just need to win those games that we were close on. And we know we can do it moving forward."

Bjork, who removed the interim tag off Diebler on March 17, 2024, after he led the Buckeyes to an 8-3 record in the team's final 11 games, said at the time of the interview that while it hasn't been all perfect this season, Diebler has put Ohio State right where it needed to be as a program, where it is competing for a spot in the NCAA Tournament.

"We're in the mix, right? And that's what we said. We've got to be in the mix," Bjork said. "Now, could we have won some games that we had the lead in the last couple minutes and things like that? So there's things that Jake is learning. But what I love is the passion, the energy, the connectivity with our players."

Bjork also acknowledged that Diebler and his program have faced a lot of adversity this season, especially with their roster, after several key contributors such as Meechie Johnson Jr., Aaron Bradshaw, and others have missed extended time either due to injury or forced/voluntary absence.

"We haven't had a full roster the whole season," Bjork said. "Somebody could probably do an analysis of how many

## 2024-25 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

### 17-15 Overall (9-11 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 12

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	32-32	1157-36.2	187-373	.501	59-139	.424	133-156	.853	11-98	109-3.4	49-0	148	47	4	35	566-17.7
ROYAL, Devin	31-27	894-28.8	147-280	.525	16-58	.276	115-149	.772	69-145	214-6.9	86-1	35	54	9	27	425-13.7
PARRISH, Micah	31-31	995-32.1	138-314	.439	58-163	.356	79-100	.790	22-114	136-4.4	82-1	47	65	12	36	413-13.3
MOBLEY, John	32-22	891-27.8	132-339	.389	77-200	.385	75-85	.882	5-44	49-1.5	60-1	71	47	2	23	416-13.0
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	22-5	372-16.9	50-102	.490	9-33	.273	23-31	.742	22-38	60-2.7	58-2	5	8	16	14	132-6.0
STEWART, Sean	30-30	552-18.4	71-131	.542	1-2	.500	27-54	.500	45-128	173-5.8	103-7	18	32	28	21	170-5.7
GLOVER, Ques	24-0	383-15.9	39-113	.345	11-32	.344	17-24	.708	10-24	34-1.4	44-2	29	19	2	9	106-4.4
MAHAFFEY, Evan	32-3	576-18.0	49-73	.671	1-2	.500	15-39	.385	41-57	98-3.1	70-4	27	19	28	23	114-3.6
NJEGOVAN, Ivan	21-0	119-5.7	13-26	.500	2-7	.286	5-7	.714	13-19	32-1.5	16-0	2	2	8	0	33-1.6
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	15-0	124-8.3	8-15	.533	0-1	.000	4-8	.500	7-6	13-0.9	19-0	5	5	1	2	20-1.3
WHITE, Colin	19-0	151-8.0	7-20	.350	4-13	.308	3-6	.500	7-13	20-1.1	21-0	6	6	3	5	21-1.1
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									53-56	109				20		
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6550</b>	<b>878-1884</b>	<b>.466</b>	<b>261-710</b>	<b>.368</b>	<b>505-675</b>	<b>.748</b>	<b>305-772</b>	<b>1077-33.7</b>	<b>626-18</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>2522-78.8</b>
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6550</b>	<b>793-1851</b>	<b>.428</b>	<b>212-696</b>	<b>.305</b>	<b>555-738</b>	<b>.752</b>	<b>339-750</b>	<b>1089-34.0</b>	<b>603-12</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>2353-73.5</b>

games have we had a full roster. Meechie has been out the whole year. Aaron Bradshaw has been in and out of the lineup. We've had other guys kind of dinged up and nicked up."

But regardless of who has and hasn't been on the court this season, the first-year athletic director thinks the Buckeyes are set up well for the future under the leadership of Diebler, who has shown that he both can function and succeed while leading a high-caliber program such as Ohio State.

"Once we have a full complement of this roster, once we engage in recruiting at a higher level, which Jake and the staff are doing, to me, the sky is the limit for this program."

Bjork's assessment of Diebler may have changed since he made those comments after the Buckeyes dropped five of their last seven games to miss the NCAA Tournament for the third straight season.

Bjork was in attendance for Ohio State's bubble-bursting 77-70 loss to Iowa

in the first round of the Big Ten tournament and was seen embracing Diebler outside the Buckeyes' locker room after the game.

### Thornton Earns Second-Team All-BIG Honors

Junior guard Bruce Thornton was recognized for his outstanding junior season



Bruce Thornton

on March 11 when he was selected second-team All-Big Ten by both coaches and media. This marks Thornton's second straight All-Big Ten nod, after he earned third-team honors by the media last season. Thornton, the Buckeyes' unquestioned team leader and three-time team captain, earned the unanimous second-team honor after leading Ohio State in multiple categories this regular season, including points (17.5 per game), assists (4.5), steals (35) and minutes played (36.1). His points per game average was a career high, and it ranked eighth in the conference.

Thornton's 139-to-43 assist-to-turnover ratio (3.23) also led the conference and ranked seventh nationally among players with three or more assists per game. He also shot a career-high 49.7 percent from the floor (179 of 360) and 42.6 percent from three (58 of 136) while tacking on 3.4 rebounds per game, all of which, according to Diebler, proves his worth as one of the more well-rounded guards in the conference.

"With what we ask him to do, and how he's done it, I think absolutely (he) deserves to be recognized as one of the best players in this league," Diebler said on March 10.

Besides redshirt forward Kalen Etzler, who was Ohio State's sportsmanship award honoree, no other Buckeye earned postseason honors. Perhaps the most notable omission from that list is freshman guard John Mobley Jr., who did not make the league's All-Freshman team despite totaling 13.2 points and 2.3 assists per

game and shooting an efficient 39.1 percent from three (75 of 192) during the regular season.

Diebler made his case for Mobley to be named to the conference's All-Freshman team the day before the ballots were revealed, saying that he has performed at a high level all season even with opposing defenses keying in on him. Mobley was thrust into the starting lineup after Johnson left the team in December, and he started each of the final 21 games of the regular season.

"With John, what we've asked him to do and the attention he gets from other defenses and how he's still been able to perform at the level he's performed, I think he's absolutely deserving (to be all-league) in what is a stacked freshman class in our league."

Making the All-Freshman team ahead of Mobley were Rutgers guards Ace Bailey and Dylan Harper, Illinois guard Kasparas Jakucionis, Maryland center Derik Queen – who also was named the league's Freshman of the Year – and Michigan State guard Jace Richardson.

Thornton was joined on the second team by Minnesota senior forward Dawson Garcia, Michigan big men Vladislav Goldin and Danny Wolf, and Northwestern junior forward Nick Martinelli.

For more on the All-Big Ten teams, check out page 18 of this issue.

### Draft Expert Says Thornton Should Stay At OSU

After earning his second consecutive All-Big Ten nod, Thornton will be tasked this offseason with the difficult decision of whether to forgo his senior season for the NBA or return to Ohio State for his fourth and final year of collegiate eligibility.

As the Buckeyes' best player over the past two seasons, Thornton will likely garner some NBA interest this summer. But according to Sam Vecenie, senior NBA draft writer for The Athletic, he may be better suited for a return to Columbus in 2025-26 in this new era of name, image and likeness (NIL).

"If he was to enter the draft this year, I would guess that he would get a two-way contract," Vecenie, an Ohio State graduate (2012), told The Columbus Dispatch in an

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

**MEXICAN RESTAURANT**

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

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

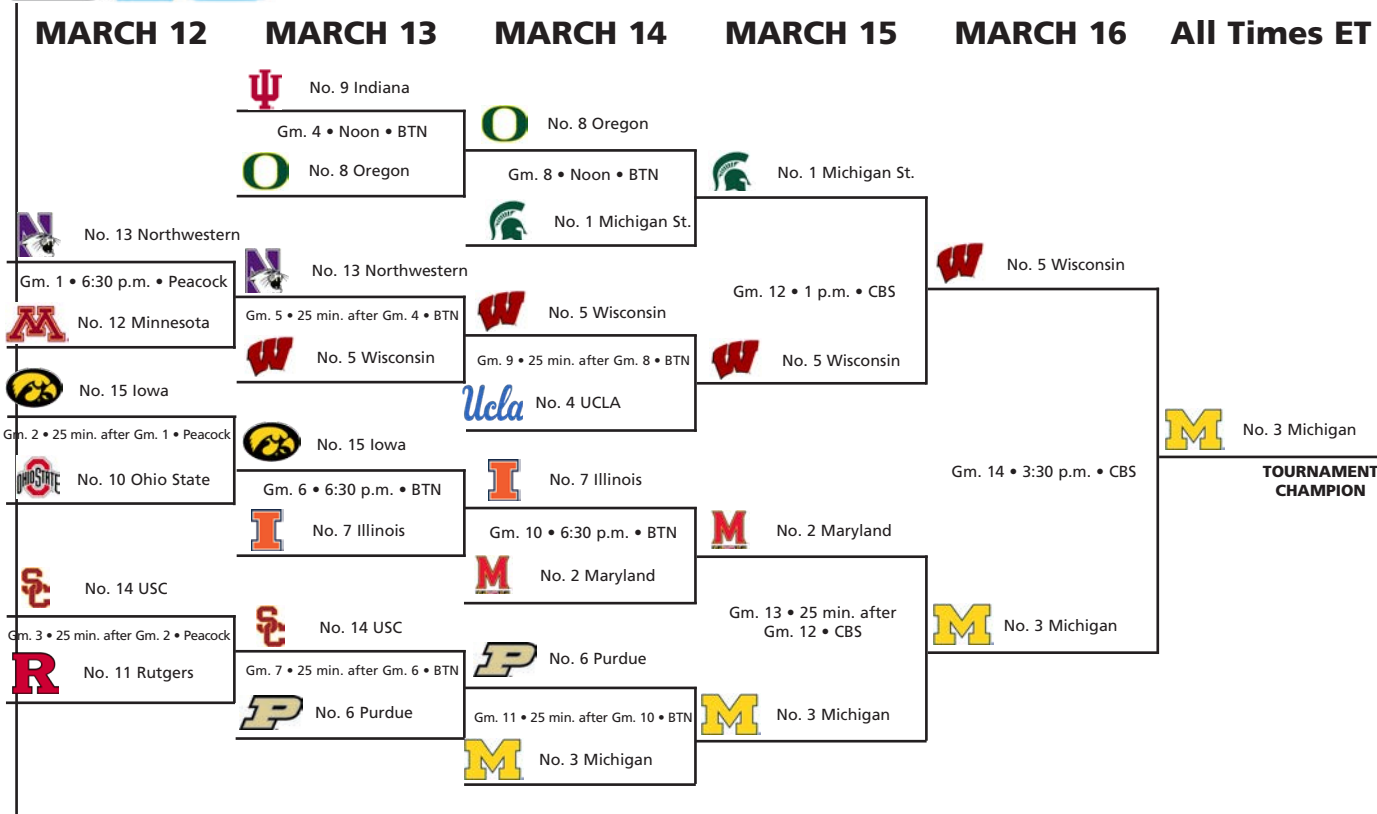
Coupon valid only Sunday – Thursday. Excludes tax and alcohol. Dine-in and carry-out. One coupon per table. Not valid with any other offers. Valid at all locations with coupon. Expires 3/31/25

**\$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

# BIG Men's Basketball Tournament

March 12-16 • Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis



## Future Bucks Impress In Postseason Tournaments

Around the same time Ohio State was jockeying for a spot in the NCAA Tournament, some of the program's future players were putting their skills on full display during their respective high school postseason tournaments.

Perhaps the most notable postseason performance among the Buckeye recruits was that of 2026 commit and Cleveland Garfield Heights four-star point guard Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175). Johnson, the nation's No. 29 prospect, No. 6 point guard and No. 2 player out of Ohio who committed to OSU last April, helped his top-ranked Bulldogs win their first OHSAA Division III, Region 9 title since 2016 by scoring 26 points in the team's 58-45 dethroning of Akron Hoban on March 8.

Johnson, along with his head coach and father Sonny Johnson, had fallen short in the regional final in the previous two seasons but this time around they cut the nets down, and it was due in large part to the Buckeye commit's brilliance throughout the tournament. He was averaging 34.3 points per game leading into the regional final.

Johnson, the cousin of Meechie Johnson, had his junior season end on March 16 when Garfield Heights fell to Louisville (Ohio) 49-48 in the Division III state semifinals. He had 25 points in the loss.

Johnson was not the only future Buckeye to have success in OHSAA's high school basketball tournaments. 2025 signee and Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160) also led his team to an extended postseason run, helping the Spartans get to the Division V Region 17 championship game before falling to Cleveland Lutheran East by a score of 64-59 on March 8.

Jones, the nation's No. 109 overall prospect, No. 18 shooting guard and No. 1 player out of Ohio, scored 17 points in Richmond Heights' 77-59 regional semifinal win over Canton Central Catholic but had just six points in the final while battling foul trouble and an apparent leg injury.

His high school career ended at the hands of his former teammate, 2026 three-star power forward TJ Crumble (6-7, 210), who, after transferring back to Lutheran East after spending his sophomore season at Richmond Heights, led both teams with 25 points and 10 rebounds in the title game win. Crumble, the nation's 134th-best player, 24th-best power forward and third-best player out of Ohio, is being aggressively recruited by Diebler and the Buckeyes, who offered him in May of 2023 and hosted him on consecutive visits the weekends of Sept. 6 and Sept. 13.

Upper Arlington, Ohio, three-star power forward Alex Smith (6-9, 195), a commit in the 2026 class, also had a strong showing in his postseason tournament. The nation's 177th-best prospect, 29th-best power forward and fifth-best player out of Ohio led the Golden Bears all the way to the Division I Region 2 semifinals before falling 58-39 to Olentangy Liberty on March 7. He scored 29 of those 39 points with Diebler and assistant coach Luke Simons looking on.

interview. "A two-way contract in the NBA is \$600,000, ballpark. Based off of current market values, I feel quite confident that somebody out there will offer him a million dollars a year to play college basketball.

"With that being said, it probably makes more sense for Bruce to be a college basketball player next year. The ultimate reality here is he's more valuable in the college basketball ecosystem than he is within the NBA ecosystem, both from a financial and a play perspective."

Multiple sources told the Dispatch that a potential \$600,000 two-way NBA contract would be a "pay cut" from Thornton's current NIL earnings at Ohio State. His NIL valuation might increase next year as the program's top collectives – such as the Cardale Jones and Brian Schottenstein-led The Foundation – look to entice Thornton to return for his senior season.

As Vecenie alluded to, Thornton's return would also be beneficial on the court, where he could boost his draft stock with another strong collegiate season. The Buckeye guard is not among Vecenie's top 100 NBA draft prospects for 2025 in his latest big board released Feb. 27.

If he does decide to return to Ohio State, Thornton could etch his name into the history books as one of the program's most decorated players. As BSB went to press, Thornton ranked 21st in OSU history in career points (1,487), 10th in assists (408) and seventh in made threes (159). With his current 17.7 point average, it would take him 35 more games to eclipse Dennis Hopson's record of 2,096 points, while he also needs just 36 more starts to break William Buford's record of 137 career starts.

## Buckeyes Make Most Of Unorthodox Senior Day

Ohio State, like many other programs around the country, had a rather uneventful Senior Day on March 4 before

its thrilling 116-114 double-overtime win over Nebraska, honoring just two players – sixth-year guard Ques Glover and Etzler – with only Etzler spending his entire collegiate career with Ohio State.

The Buckeyes could have had more seniors honored that night. Fifth-year wing Micah Parrish decided not to take part in the celebration because he already did so at San Diego State last season, while Johnson is still away from the team due to a personal matter.

Diebler acknowledged the uniqueness of his program's Senior Day festivities after the game, saying that the celebration has become different in this new era of the transfer portal and great player movement. But even if many of the seniors did not begin their careers with the Buckeyes, he still made sure to recognize just how important players like Glover and Parrish have been to the program this season, especially when it comes to establishing the culture he wants to create for the Buckeyes moving forward in his tenure.

"You guys (the media) know this, how important playing with toughness and togetherness are," Diebler said on March 3. "It was important in year one to establish that. Those guys played a part in that. This is our first year as a program moving forward, so for them to come here and believe in what we're doing and be bought in to play hard and practice hard every day – we do that. (In this program) there's accountability, and we practice hard. And they've embraced it.

"So I'm just so thankful for those guys and how they've embraced what we're about and how they've played a role in our growth as a team. I think we've really grown since the season started. And they've helped us handle the adversity we've seen well, and I'm just really thankful for that."

While Glover and Parrish have helped set the standard for how Buckeye basket-

ball is to be played under Diebler's leadership during their one-and-done years in Columbus, the coach said Etzler has been a key component to this program since he arrived in 2021 out of Crestview High School.

Etzler, a Van Wert, Ohio native, has not seen much time on the court in his three active years with the team – he redshirted in 2021-22 – logging just 23 games and totaling 17 points, 21 rebounds, three assists and two steals in that span. But even if he doesn't get much playing time, Diebler said Etzler still makes a significant impact on this program and brings a positive approach and mindset to the team every day.



Kalen Etzler

"Kalen's a joy to be around, and he shows up every day. Every day he shows up," Diebler said. "He has an important role on this team, and he's embraced it. No one ever gets to see just how important that is, but when we do scout team and we prep, and he's learning 10 to 15 new plays, what he has to do is challenging. And a lot of people could become frustrated and not do that well because maybe they wanted to play more or whatever.

"But he shows up every day, and he does it to the best of his ability. And he cares deeply about this program and university. He's poured just as much as anybody else into it, and this program will take care of him because of that. He'll always be a part of the Ohio State basketball family. He's going to be successful in whatever he decides to do because of the way he approached – specifically this year – the way he approached every day. He needs a job or an interview, he can count on me for a reference."



## Iowa 77, Ohio State 70

**March 12, 2025**  
Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis

		1	2	F			
<b>Iowa (17-15, 7-13)</b>		<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>77</b>			
<b>Ohio State (17-15, 9-11)</b>		<b>37</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>70</b>			

Iowa	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Sandfort, Pa.	35	6-14	3-3	0-3	2	1	17
Dix	36	7-13	0-1	0-2	4	3	16
Dembele	29	2-2	4-4	3-6	1	4	8
Thelwell	25	2-8	0-0	0-2	3	0	5
Traore	17	2-4	0-0	1-4	1	2	4
Harding	23	5-6	2-2	0-2	3	3	15
Sandfort, Pr.	20	4-5	0-0	0-2	1	2	10
Brauns	14	1-1	0-0	1-0	3	1	2
Kingsbury	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>29-53</b>	<b>9-10</b>	<b>6-23</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>77</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 54.7%. FT: 90.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-24 (Sandfort, Pa. 2-7, Thelwell 1-5, Dix 2-5, Sandfort, Pr. 2-3, Harding 3-3, Traore 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 6 (Dix 2, Traore 2, Dembele, Brauns). **Turnovers:** 12 (Harding 3, Sandfort, Pa. 2, Dix 2, Thelwell 2, Traore, Sandfort, Pr., Team). **Steals:** 5 (Sandfort, Pa. 2, Dix, Traore, Sandfort, Pr.).

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.			
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Thornton	38	8-13	7-7	0-3	9	1	24
Royal	36	7-12	3-4	3-3	1	2	17
Parrish	35	6-14	3-3	0-0	1	3	16
Mobley	28	2-10	2-2	1-1	0	2	8
Stewart	15	1-2	0-4	1-3	0	1	2
Glover	12	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	4	3
Bradshaw	16	0-4	0-0	3-3	0	1	0
Mahaffey	13	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	1	0
White	7	0-1	0-0	1-1	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-59</b>	<b>15-20</b>	<b>13-18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>70</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 42.4%. FT: 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-22 (Mobley 2-8, Parrish 1-6, Royal 0-3, Thornton 1-3, White 0-1, Glover 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Bradshaw). **Turnovers:** 10 (Thornton 4, Mobley 3, Parrish, Stewart, Mahaffey). **Steals:** 7 (Parrish 2, Glover 2, Royal, Stewart, Bradshaw). **Officials:** Carstensen, Dorsey, Walton. **Attendance:** N/A.

after a three by sophomore forward Aaron Bradshaw, but Indiana closed the half with four straight points to trail by four, 29-25, despite shooting 30.0 percent (9 of 30) from the field and 11.1 percent (1 of 9) from three in the period.

Indiana cut the deficit to one off a Luke Goode three on its first possession of the second half before the Buckeyes, led by the scoring prowess of Parrish, who had eight points in the spurt, regained control with another 17-8 run to lead 46-36 with 12:12 left after a Royal three. The Hoosiers answered with their first 15-4 run that allowed them to go up 51-50 with 7:06 left, its first lead since the 15:48 mark of the first half.

The Buckeyes responded with six straight points to go back in front 56-51 with 5:00 left, but that momentum was halted when Parrish was unable to corral a defensive rebound off a missed free throw by Oumar Ballo, giving Indiana another possession that it turned into a second-chance three from fifth-year senior guard Trey Galloway to trail 56-54.

That sequence seemed to turn the tide back in IU's favor, as it made four straight free throws to reclaim the lead and then, after an OSU shot-clock violation, used a deep stepback three from Galloway to lead 61-56 with 1:24 left.

Galloway's three was a highlight in Indiana's second 15-4 run, which closed out the game. The Buckeyes missed each of their last six shots and committed four turnovers, all of which allowed the Hoosiers to extend their lead and send Mike Woodson home with a six-point win in his last-ever home contest as head coach.

Ohio State, which missed 13 of its last

15 shots, was led in the loss by Parrish and Royal, who scored 19 and 13 points, respectively. No other Buckeye reached double figures, Thornton being the closest with nine points – his worst scoring output since Feb. 9 – on 2-of-11 shooting.

Indiana was led by Galloway (16) and sophomore forward Malik Reneau (16), who scored 21 of their combined 32 points in the second half. Ballo added nine points and seven rebounds to help IU hold a 40-31 rebound edge and a 28-20 advantage in paint points.

### Bucks' Bubble Bursts In B1G Tourney

Ohio State's NCAA Tournament hopes came to an end on March 12 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis after it suffered a 77-70 upset loss to No. 15 seed Iowa (17-15, 7-13) in the first round of the Big Ten tournament.

The 10th-seeded Buckeyes (17-15, 9-11), desperately needing another win to keep their already teetering season alive, struggled to contain Iowa's elite offense all night, allowing the Hawkeyes to shoot 54.7 percent from the field (29 of 53) and 41.7 percent from three (10 of 24).

It was an equally disappointing performance for Diebler's offense, which shot 5 of 22 from three (22.7 percent).

Ohio State had its chances to win, most notably using a 12-3 run midway through the second half to take a one-point lead with 8:49 left in regulation. But the clock struck midnight for the Scarlet and Gray when Iowa outscored them 20-12 the rest of the way to advance to the second round of the tournament against No. 7 seed Illinois and send OSU packing with a third straight NCAA Tournament-less season.

"We anticipated getting (Iowa's) absolute best," Diebler said. "They showed that down the stretch with how they've played. I think ultimately, it just boiled down to we had a couple of defensive breakdowns that were uncharacteristic of us, and they made us pay. You've got to give them credit. They made us pay."

"We showed great fight to get back, had some opportunities there to either tie the game, take the lead back, and had a couple empty offensive possessions. They made a couple more plays than we did."

Ohio State did not seem like a team playing for its NCAA Tournament life early on when it made just two of its first 12 shots, but Iowa was equally bad on offense, allowing the Buckeyes to lead for most of the early portion of the half and go up 13-11 with 10:24 left after a Sean Stewart layup.

The lids then came off the baskets at Gainbridge Fieldhouse, with the two teams trading shots at a frantic pace over the ensuing minutes leading up to a 24-24 tie with 7:10 left after a three from Iowa junior guard Josh Dix. The game continued to seesaw back and forth for the rest of the half as the Buckeyes and Hawkeyes exchanged leads and tied four times the rest of the way, the final tie coming by way of a deep three from Mobley with seven seconds left that put the score at 37-all at the break.

Iowa began to assert its dominance out of the half by making eight of its first 12 shots of the period to take a 54-46 lead with 13:51 left after a Dix layup. The Buck-

eyes responded in a big way with the previously mentioned 12-3 run to go back up 58-57 with 8:49 remaining after a contested Thornton jumper, two of six points for the Buckeye captain during that stretch.

But things turned dire for the Scarlet and Gray in crunch time when it hit an all-too-familiar wall offensively, turning the ball over three times in 1:21 and missing four of its next five shots to allow Iowa to gradually regain control and take a 68-61 lead with 3:46 left.

"We just needed to play smarter, harder," a teary-eyed Royal said of the team's late struggles. "They were more connected than us at the end of the game."

Ohio State tried to mount a late comeback by getting a layup from Parrish, two straight baskets and a free throw from Thornton and then another Thornton jumper off a turnover to trail 72-70 with just 45 seconds left. But OSU gave up a wide-open three to sophomore guard Brock Harding on the other end to put Iowa up 75-70 with 16 seconds left and ice any chances of a Buckeye miracle.

Ohio State was led in the loss by Thornton with 24 points on 8-of-13 shooting, with a perfect 7-of-7 shooting from the line. He also had a game-high nine assists. Royal (17) and Parrish (16) were the only other two key contributors for the Buckeyes, who got just three bench points as opposed to the 27 for Iowa.

The Hawkeyes were led by senior guard Payton Sandfort with 17 points on 6-of-14 shooting, while Dix (16), Harding (15) and Payton's brother, Pryce (10), followed.

With Ohio State not receiving a bid to the NCAA Tournament, they had an automatic bid to the "College Basketball Crown" tournament, which is supposed to feature the top two rated schools from the Big Ten, Big 12, Big East and other at-large participants who did not receive a bid in the NCAA Tournament based on NET rankings.

But on March 17, Ohio State declined an invitation to the event, officially ending its season.

# 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](http://www.BuckeyeSports.com)

- 1 Year, \$124.95  1 Year, First Class Mail, \$209.95  
 2 Years, \$199.95  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](http://www.BuckeyeSports.com)**

# OSU Celebrates 65th Anniversary of NCAA Title

By CAMERON MOONE

Special to Buckeye Sports Bulletin

As the Ohio State men's basketball team failed to claim a spot in this year's NCAA Tournament for the third straight season, the group etched into Buckeye history celebrated the 65th anniversary of the lone NCAA men's basketball championship at Ohio State.

Sitting alongside the likes of Dick Furry (forward, 1957-60) and David Barker (guard, 1957-60), Ohio State men's basketball historian Lee Caryer celebrated the team that brought eternal glory to Columbus for the first – and only – time in school history at the Bexley (Ohio) Public Library on March 9.

There is likely no one with more authority to reflect on the days of Ohio State basketball at the time of its national championship run than Caryer, whose opening statement categorized the team as “one of the greatest teams in college basketball history,” as well as “easily the greatest team in Ohio State history.” And with microphone in hand, Caryer shared anecdote after anecdote on the 1959-60 national championship team.

The era the team played in was called the “Golden Age of Ohio State Basketball” in the title of Caryer's book about the squad. Legendary head coach Fred Taylor (1959-76) commanded a group that was highlighted by five future NBA draftees and three College Hall of Fame honorees: Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek, Larry Siegfried, Mel Nowell, Joe Roberts and legendary Indiana men's basketball coach Bob Knight. Caryer's first story did not focus on anyone who could score, though, instead shifting his focus to Taylor and what he meant to the team.

“Some of (the Ohio State basketball players) saw Taylor as the father they didn't have,” Caryer said. “Some of them saw him as the father they loved and adored, a second father. That's the way the players felt about him.”

To supplement the homages from his



FILE PHOTO

**GLORY DAYS** – The Buckeye men's basketball team celebrates after beating California 75-55 in 1960 to win the program's only national championship.

former players, Caryer listed several facts about Taylor that emphasize his importance in Ohio State men's basketball history.

Taylor is the only coach from Ohio State to be in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame solely as a coach (1986 induction).

Taylor was a two-time national coach of the year (1961, 1962).

Taylor's coaching record was 297-158, including a 14-4 record in the NCAA Tour-

nament.

Perhaps most importantly, though, Taylor was an academic-minded coach who wished for his players to be in position to succeed after their basketball days were over, according to Caryer.

“When (Taylor) recruited you, he said, ‘What I have to offer is you'll get a college education and we will compete for a Big Ten championship,’” Caryer said. “That was it. He didn't think there was anything else that mattered. He attracted the kind of kids who bought what he was selling because it was what he believed.”

Continuing to speak out from the lectern behind which he stood – his head at times dropping to gather his words, an action that displayed a symbolic “1960” in bright scarlet across his hat – Caryer then transitioned into the role of Furry and Barker on the national championship team.

Furry, a Columbus native, played an important role on that 1960 team as he was the roommate of Barker, who was Black – the sort of athlete who received discrimination all across the country, especially when the Buckeyes traveled south. But Furry's open-mindedness at the time proved to be a strength of the team that won the national championship – a collected unit that later went on to be lifelong friends.

However, Furry was incredibly close to not attending Ohio State, instead considering going to Miami (Ohio) for its strong accounting program. That was until Taylor changed his mind.

“I had my application ready to go to Mi-

ami (Ohio) in the fall of 1955 when I got a phone call from Fred,” Furry said. “He said, ‘We'd like to talk to you about coming to Ohio State to play basketball.’ So, right then and there, the envelope that was filled out ready to go to Miami got thrown away, and I came to Ohio State.”

Furry then shifted his story to perhaps the most polarizing member of the national championship team: Bob Knight. Furry and his parents hosted Knight at their Valley View home on the west side of Columbus over school holidays during the basketball season, and Knight became a lifelong friend as a result of the bond they shared during that run en route to the national crown.

A career 6.7 points per game scorer who pulled down an impressive 10.7 rebounds per game during the 1958-59 season, Furry went on to be drafted into the NBA by the New York Knicks in the 13th round in 1960. After Furry finished his round of reflecting, he was joined on stage by Barker.

While Barker did not achieve the same amount of collegiate success that Furry and his other teammates had – averaging 1.6 points and 1.2 rebounds during his three-year OSU career – nevertheless he was a component of the national championship team. According to Caryer, Barker's importance to the team was not because of his prowess on the court, but for his role showing that Ohio State was a diverse and open campus for all people.

“Barker did not get the playing time he deserved, but still he has a very, very signif-



FILE PHOTO

**NOTHIN' BUT NET** – From left to right, Larry Siegfried, head coach Fred Taylor and Jerry Lucas celebrate winning the national championship by cutting down the nets.

## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

icant place in Ohio State history," Caryer said. "(Barker), Roberts and Coach Taylor integrated Ohio State."

Baker's opening remarks revolved around what arguably was the most important factor of the team: friendship. Between his self-described "union of friendship" with Furry because of their roommate status and the weekly messages the team receives from Lucas to this day, Barker said the lifelong relationships are a result of being on the team together.

Much like Furry, Barker was in close talks to attend a school that was not Ohio State. In Barker's case, he was either going to head west to play for Notre Dame or play for smaller John Carroll University in University Heights, Ohio. This time around, though, it wasn't words from his future roommate Furry or future coach Taylor that changed Barker's mind, but rather a member of Ohio State's national runner-up team in 1939: Jimmy Hull.

"(Hull's) advice was, 'David, you can either go to a big school and be a little guy or you can go to a little school and be a big guy,'" Barker said. "As it turned out, I figured I'd go to a big school and be a little guy. It turned out to be more than just a little guy. It was a great, great opportunity and experience for me."

That great experience was further cemented because of the strong morals supported by Taylor and the basketball team. Those morals were on full display during a moment at a hotel in Kentucky where the head coach and the team had the backs of Barker, Roberts and Nowell. After being

initially turned down to stay at the hotel due to the race of those three players, Taylor stood up for his players.

"We went into the hotel and they said, 'Some of you are not going to be able to stay here.' Fred Taylor walked up and said, 'Yes, we're all going to stay here,'" Barker said.

After the hotel refused to allow the team to stay, Taylor moved the group to another hotel, showing that Taylor was focused on integrating the team during a period that saw huge success for the program and big changes in the game and the country.

The team that went on to beat defending national champion California 75-55 in the San Francisco-area Cow Palace on March 19, 1960, was held together by a common yet undying characteristic: unity. From Roberts' and Barker's trailblazing friendship, Havlicek's collegiate prowess to a coach that sought to change narratives around civil rights in college basketball, the lone national championship team in Buckeye history just figured out how to do it together.

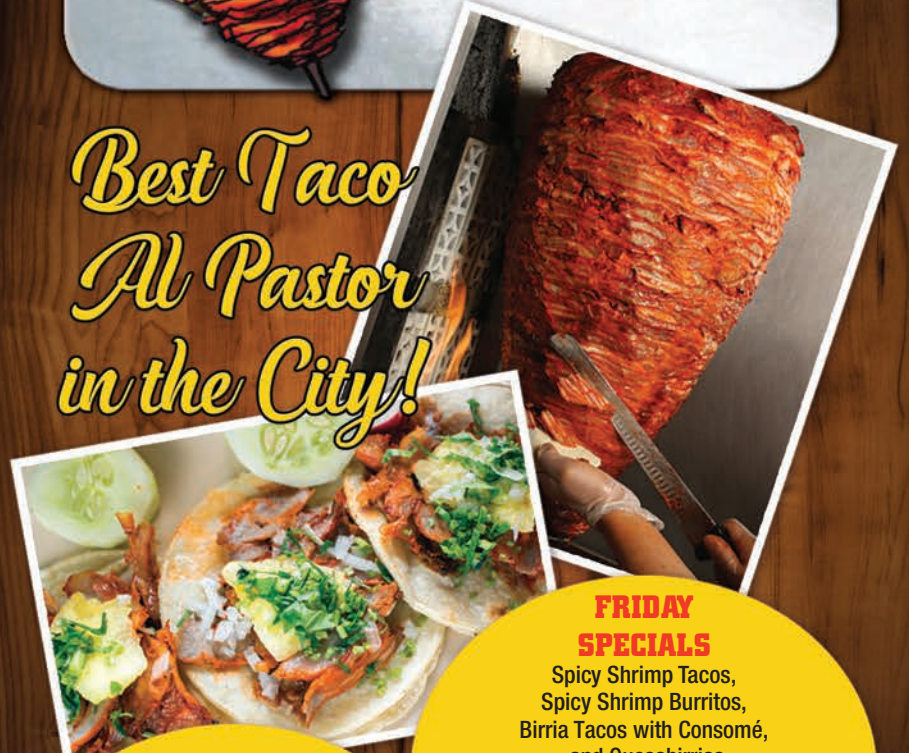
Furry capped off the event with a story that summed up the team well. Having breakfast with his brother and wife during a reunion of the team, he was asked by his sister-in-law if every basketball team gets along as well as Ohio State's did.

Furry's retort?

"I can't answer for a lot of other teams," Furry said. "But I know that this group of people get along better together than almost any group I've ever seen."



*Best Taco  
Al Pastor  
in the City!*



### FRIDAY SPECIALS

Spicy Shrimp Tacos,  
Spicy Shrimp Burritos,  
Birria Tacos with Consomé,  
and Quesabirrias

### SATURDAY SPECIALS

Barbacoa Tacos (Shredded Beef Tacos)  
Consomé de Borrego (Lamb Soup)

### SUNDAY SPECIALS

Cabeza de Res Tacos  
(Veal Head Tacos)

### MONDAY SPECIALS

Buy One Taco Al Pastor,  
Get One FREE!  
22 oz Tall Draft Beer \$4.99

### WEDNESDAY SPECIALS

Gringas Al Pastor **Only \$2.50 each!**  
Micheladas \$6.99 each

**MULTIPLE TV'S  
TO WATCH THE GAMES**  
All Locations Serving Alcohol with Full Bar

**DUBLIN • 7370 Sawmill Rd.  
614-726-9185**

Sun-Thurs | 11am-12am • Fri & Sat | 11am-1am

**Columbus • 5221 Godown Rd.  
614-538-0211**

Sun - Thur | 11am - 12am • Fri & Sat | 11am - 1am

**Gahanna • 1344 Cherry Bottom Rd.  
614-471-4717**

Mon-Sun | 11am - 11pm

*New Store!*

**Columbus • 1121 S. Hamilton Rd.  
614-852-3000**

Mon-Sun | 11am - 11pm



# ACCURATE

## CONTRACTING SERVICES

**(614) 921-1400**  
[accuratecontracting.net](http://accuratecontracting.net)  
[info@accuratecontracting.net](mailto:info@accuratecontracting.net)  
 3999 Parkway Lane, Suite 1  
 Hilliard, Ohio 43026

We have a passion  
for creating  
spaces!



**RETAIL**

Attention to detail is our forte!  
Dream big,  
and let us build it.  
Quality is our priority.  
Upgrade your retail center now.

**COMMERCIAL**

We believe that every  
commercial space has the  
potential to be extraordinary.  
Let us help you  
bring your vision to life.

**ASSISTED LIVING**

Independent living or skilled  
nursing facility, our goal is to  
see our clients satisfied and  
their residents enjoying their  
new living spaces.





# Cambridge, McMahon Named First-Team All-B1G

After leading the Buckeyes to a 13-5 finish in Big Ten play, freshman point guard Jalonie Cambridge and junior forward Cotie McMahon were each named to the All-Big Ten first team on March 4.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Bobby Gorbett

Cambridge and McMahon were the only Buckeyes to earn first- or second-team honors, but senior guard Taylor Thierry was named to the All-Big Ten defensive team and was an All-Big Ten honorable mention

### 2024-25 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

#### 25-6 Overall (13-5 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 8

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	27-27	885-32.8	163-372	.438	31-86	.360	90-140	.643	23-102	125-4.6	63-1	55	60	7	34	447-16.6
CAMBRIDGE, J	27-27	732-27.1	155-358	.433	25-78	.321	82-113	.726	14-106	120-4.4	66-3	104	69	5	53	417-15.4
GRAY, Chance	31-31	861-27.8	131-331	.396	65-192	.339	53-63	.841	9-49	58-1.9	37-0	48	37	3	43	380-12.3
THIERRY, Taylor	31-31	964-31.1	118-212	.557	26-54	.481	51-74	.689	67-92	159-5.1	75-2	35	37	16	74	313-10.1
PETTY, Ajae	31-31	681-22.0	129-221	.584	0-0	.000	33-58	.569	76-149	225-7.3	73-2	53	64	14	29	291-9.4
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	29-4	480-16.5	54-122	.443	11-41	.268	25-49	.510	30-49	79-2.7	46-1	37	28	12	46	144-5.0
GREENE, Madison	31-4	576-18.6	39-103	.379	14-39	.359	41-53	.774	7-20	27-0.9	55-0	51	32	5	35	133-4.3
LEMMILÄ, Elsa	31-0	482-15.6	46-92	.500	1-9	.111	36-53	.679	44-110	154-5.0	51-0	26	28	58	21	129-4.2
WALKER, Eboni	26-0	286-11.0	31-69	.449	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	28-18	46-1.8	14-0	30	13	4	18	62-2.4
Team									42-47	89		20				
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6275</b>	<b>910-2014</b>	<b>.452</b>	<b>202-590</b>	<b>.342</b>	<b>423-616</b>	<b>.687</b>	<b>343-759</b>	<b>1102-35.5</b>	<b>500-9</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>2445-78.9</b>
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6275</b>	<b>729-1803</b>	<b>.404</b>	<b>190-619</b>	<b>.307</b>	<b>321-449</b>	<b>.715</b>	<b>347-832</b>	<b>1179-38.0</b>	<b>573-16</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>1969-63.5</b>



FILE PHOTO

**FIRST IMPRESSION** — Jalonie Cambridge was named to the All-Big Ten first team by the coaches and the Big Ten Freshman of the year by media voters. She averaged 15.4 points, 4.4 rebounds and 3.9 assists to help the Buckeyes reach the NCAA tournament.

after leading the Buckeyes with 2.4 steals per game in the regular season. Her defensive efforts also helped her be named one of 10 semifinalists for the Naismith Women's Defensive Player of the Year award on March 11.

Graduate guard Madison Greene, meanwhile, rounded out the Buckeyes' postseason honors by being named Ohio State's sportsmanship honoree.

Cambridge, who averaged 16.0 points, 4.4 rebounds and 3.9 assists in her first regular season with the Buckeyes, was named Big Ten Freshman of the Year by the media, and the coaches named her the Big Ten Co-Freshman of the Year with Michigan guard Olivia Olson. She earned unanimous first-team all-conference honors from coaches and a second-team selection from the media and was an All-Big Ten freshman selection by both the coaches and the media.

McMahon, who was the last Buckeye to win the Big Ten Freshman of the Year in 2023, made the All-Big Ten first team for the second consecutive year by both coaches and media after averaging a team-high 16.9 points along with 4.8 rebounds and 2.2 assists in the regular season.

McMahon and Cambridge were joined on the All-Big Ten first team by 10 others, who were selected by the coaches, media or both, including USC sophomore guard Juju Watkins, the Big Ten Player of the Year, and unanimous All-Big Ten first-team selection Lauren Betts, a junior center at UCLA.

#### OSU Offense Sputters In Big Ten Tourney

In terms of game flow, Ohio State's two Big Ten tournament games couldn't have been more different.

In their 60-59 win over Iowa on March 7, the Buckeyes' largest lead was only nine points. Then, in its 75-46 blowout loss to then-No. 4 UCLA the next day, Ohio State never led and trailed by 37 points heading into the fourth quarter.

However there was one constant between Ohio State's two Big Ten tournament games, that being its lack of offensive rhythm.

Despite coming up with the dramatic win over Iowa, Ohio State's 60 points were at the time its third-lowest total of the season. The Buckeyes shot just 23 of 63 from the field (36.5 percent) and 7 of 18 from three (38.9 percent) while committing 14

as they struggled to deal with the Hawkeyes' zone defense.

"The first half, I just did not think we moved the ball or ourselves around too much, or had a sense of urgency to do that," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after the game when asked about the Buckeyes' offensive struggles. "But as the game went on, especially late, I thought we got a lot better shots, and then we stepped up and we made some."

The Buckeyes, who scored 12 points in the last 6:48 of the fourth quarter against Iowa, didn't carry any semblance of offensive momentum into their next game against the eventual Big Ten tournament champion Bruins. Instead, Ohio State scored a season-low 46 points and failed to reach 10 points in both the first and third quarters as it limped to its worst loss of the season.

According to McGuff, the Buckeyes didn't do anything well during an eight-point first quarter.

"Our bigger problem to start was our offensive execution, which we weren't getting good shots, we had some silly turnovers and when we did get shots, we didn't make them," McGuff said.

These two games seemed to be a throwback to the Buckeyes' offensive struggles in February, when they eclipsed 70 points only twice in their first six games during the month.

Ohio State seemed to leave those issues behind when it defeated Purdue 98-46 and Michigan State 89-78 on Feb. 23 and Feb. 26, respectively, and even managed to score 90 points in an overtime loss at Maryland in its final regular-season game.

However, the Buckeyes failed to sustain their offensive efficiency in the Big Ten tournament, which according to Thierry, can be partially credited to the Buckeyes' defensive struggles carrying over to the other end.

"Honestly, I think our defense contributes to our offense," Thierry said after the UCLA loss. "So when our defense isn't good, we're not getting any good looks on offense."

Powered by its full-court press, Ohio State ranked in the top 10 in all of Division I with 22.3 turnovers forced per game entering its game against UCLA. But since their 84-63 loss at USC on Feb. 8, Ohio State failed to force more than 22 turnovers in an individual game.

In the Big Ten tournament, Ohio State's full-court pressure didn't show many signs



of improvement. The Buckeyes forced 16 turnovers in each of their two tournament games, but against the Hawkeyes, they managed just eight points off those turnovers, and they only slightly increased that number to 10 against UCLA.

**Watson Still Injured Heading Into Tournament**

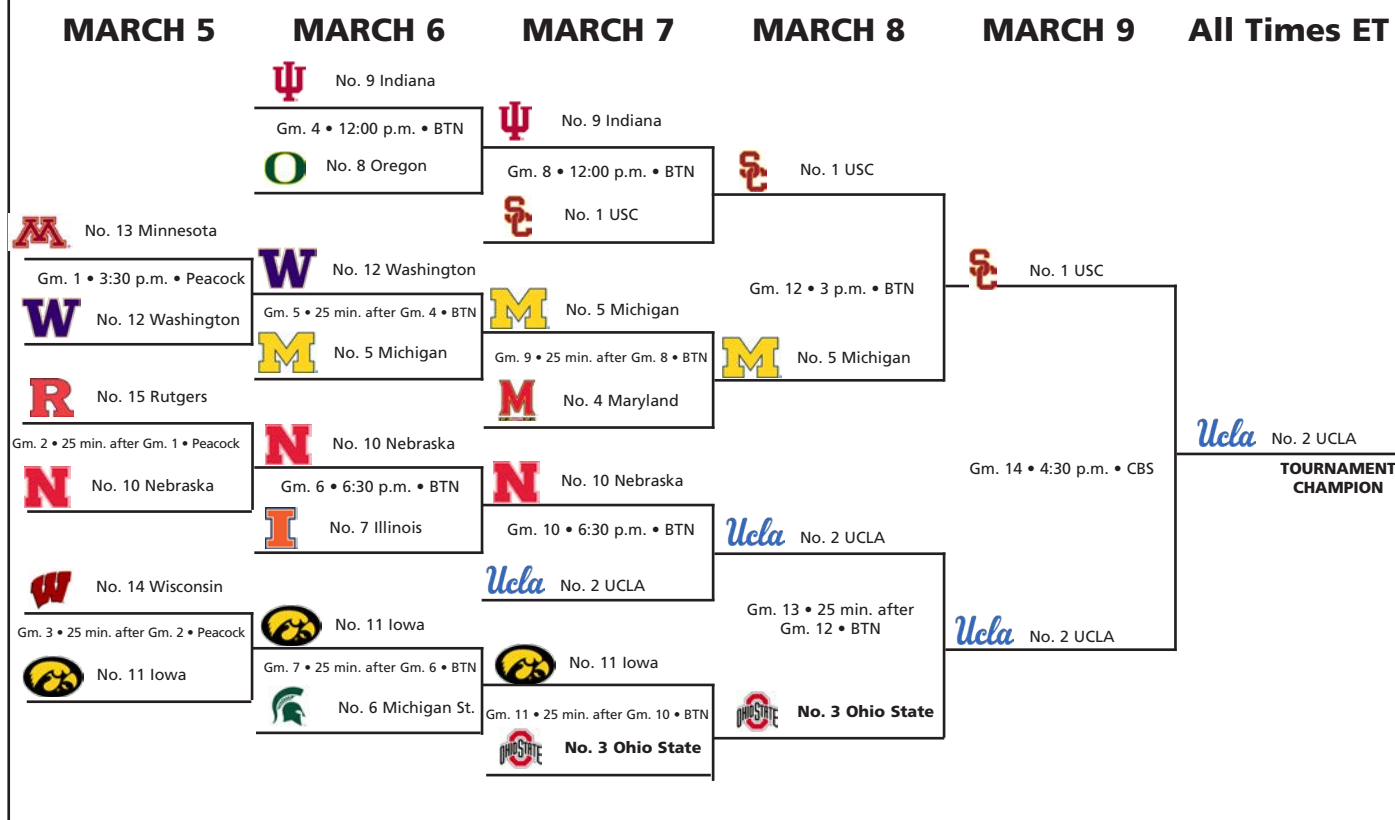
Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State freshman guard Ava Watson missed her sixth and seventh straight games in the Big Ten tournament. The Buford, Ga. native has been sidelined with a sprained ankle injury since scoring 16 points in Ohio State's 87-84 overtime win over Minnesota on Feb. 13. Watson, who was named Big Ten Freshman of the Week for her performance against the Golden Gophers, was first labeled as day-to-day by McGuff after the Buckeyes' win over Purdue on Feb. 23, and hadn't progressed from that status as they went to Indianapolis.

"She's still day-to-day," McGuff said in a media availability at the Schottenstein Center on March 6, "so I don't really know what that's going to look like this week, but I think she could really help us as well."

Watson – a three-point specialist – had yet to start a game for the Buckeyes before her sprained ankle injury and got out to a slow start on the year on offense, making just three of her first 21 three-point shots over her first four collegiate games. Since then, though, Watson has been substantially more efficient from deep, making 26 of her 69 attempts (37.7 percent).

"She's benefited from the experience," McGuff said of Watson's improvements this season. "I think in the beginning, the speed

**BIG Women's Basketball Tournament**  
 March 5-9 • Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis



of the game, she was a little rushed, but now it's kind of slowed down for her and you see more of those shots go in."

On the year, Watson is averaging 5.6 points, 0.9 rebounds and 0.8 assists while shooting 32.8 percent from the floor (44 of

134). Considering the offensive issues that plagued them in two Big Ten tournament games, the Buckeyes could certainly use the help of an improving markswoman such as Watson.

It looks like they will get that help as

McGuff said during the post-selection show availability that he thinks there is a good chance that Watson returns for the Buckeyes' first-round matchup against No. 13 Montana State on March 21.

*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

# Buckeyes Go 1-1 In Big Ten Tournament

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State had a mediocre showing in two games at the Big Ten tournament at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. The Buckeyes started postseason play with a nail-biting but encouraging one-point win over Iowa but suffered a humiliating defeat to UCLA in the semifinals the next day.

The Buckeyes trailed by as many as 39 points in the loss to UCLA and failed to reach the 50-point threshold for the first time all season. Ohio State scored just 106 combined points in its two Big Ten tournament games, which is its lowest back-to-back game total of the season.

## McMahon's Free Throws Close Out Win Vs. Iowa

Despite a mediocre offensive performance, Ohio State (25-5) hung on for a 60-59 win over Iowa (22-10) on March 7 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse to advance to the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament.

The Buckeyes shot just 23 of 63 from the field (36.5 percent) but were solid enough defensively, allowing the Hawkeyes to make only 23 of their 59 shots (39.0 percent). Those efforts helped OSU hold a lead for nearly 27 of the 40 minutes in the game, but it was the Hawkeyes who led 59-58 with under a minute to go, until Cotie McMahon – who entered the game with a free-throw percentage of just 65.2 – drained two game-winning free throws with just six seconds to go.

"Honestly, I didn't really hear anything," McMahon said after the game when asked about the noise of the 7,500 spectators in attendance during her free-throw attempts. "I was kind of cussing myself out, like if I don't make these free throws, then we're going home. So I just made them."

Ohio State showed no rust early on in its first game in five days, opening the first quarter with a 10-3 scoring run. The Buckeye offense cooled down to end the opening frame, making two of its last eight field-goal attempts, as the Hawkeyes – who faced their own offensive struggles, making three of their 17 shots in the first quarter – trimmed their deficit to 14-9 heading into the second frame.

After a transition layup from Madison Greene made it 18-11 early in the second quarter, Iowa found an offensive rhythm to score seven straight points and tie the game at 18 after a three-pointer from senior guard Lucy Olsen at 7:02.

The Buckeyes responded with six straight points but followed that spurt with a 1-of-9 shooting stretch that allowed Iowa to grab a 28-26 lead with 43 seconds before the half on a 10-2 run capped by a Hannah Stuelke layup.

Taylor Thierry helped the Buckeyes regain a 29-28 lead before halftime with an and-one layup, but her team was still out-scored 19-15 in the second quarter.

After the Hawkeyes landed the first blow of the third quarter with a 9-4 run to lead 37-33, Ohio State received a lift from its bench. Kennedy Cambridge and Eboni Walker combined for 10 points in the last 5:29 of the third quarter to lead the Buck-

Ohio State 60, Iowa 59												
March 7, 2025 Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis												
	1	2	3	4	F							
Iowa (22-10, 10-8)	9	19	18	13	59							
Ohio State (25-5, 13-5)	14	15	19	12	60							
Iowa		Total	FT	Reb.								
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Olsen	39	6-18	0-0	1-2	7	1	14					
Stuelke	33	7-12	0-0	3-9	1	2	14					
Affolter	30	4-9	2-2	1-2	0	1	14					
Feuerbach	35	2-5	0-0	0-2	5	1	7					
McCabe	27	0-6	2-4	0-4	3	2	0					
Heiden	14	4-6	0-0	0-4	1	2	10					
Guyton	13	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	1	0					
Stremlow	5	0-0	0-0	1-1	0	0	0					
O'Grady	4	0-1	0-0	1-1	0	0	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>23-59</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>10-27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>59</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	<b>FT:</b>	<b>75.0%</b>	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 7-21 (McCabe 0-6, Olsen 2-6, Affolter 4-5, Feuerbach 1-3, Guyton 0-1).							
	<b>Team rebounds:</b>	5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Feuerbach 2, Olsen, Heiden).										
	<b>Turnovers:</b>	16 (Affolter 4, Feuerbach 4, Stremlow 3, Guyton 2, Olsen, Stuelke, Heiden). <b>Steals:</b> 5 (Feuerbach 2, Olsen, Stuelke, Stremlow).										
Ohio State		Total	FT	Reb.								
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
McMahon	33	6-13	4-6	1-2	1	2	18					
Thierry	33	5-10	1-1	3-4	2	0	14					
J. Cambridge	37	3-15	0-0	0-7	5	3	6					
Petty	25	3-7	0-0	3-9	1	1	6					
Gray	18	1-3	0-0	0-1	3	0	2					
K. Cambridge	18	2-5	2-2	1-0	2	2	8					
Walker	7	2-3	0-0	2-0	1	2	4					
Greene	21	1-6	0-0	1-0	1	2	2					
Lemmilä	8	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	1	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>23-63</b>	<b>7-9</b>	<b>12-26</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>60</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b>	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>FT:</b>	<b>77.8%</b>	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 7-18 (McMahon 2-4, Thierry 3-3, K. Cambridge 2-3, J. Cambridge 0-3, Greene 0-3, Gray 0-2).							
	<b>Team rebounds:</b>	2. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 3 (Thierry, Petty, K. Cambridge). <b>Turnovers:</b> 14 (J. Cambridge 5, K. Cambridge 3, McMahon 2, Thierry, Gray, Greene, Team).										
	<b>Steals:</b>	3 (Petty 5, McMahon, Petty, K. Cambridge). <b>Officials:</b> Gina Cross, Cameron Inouye, Maggie Tieman. <b>Attendance:</b> 7,500										

eyes on a 15-9 run and take a 48-46 lead heading into the final frame.

Both teams got out to slow starts offensively in the fourth quarter, but the Buckeyes gained ground with a three-pointer from Thierry to go up 57-51 with 4:10 remaining.

But later, the Hawkeyes had a three-point shot from guard Sydney Affolter at 2:23 to bring the Hawkeyes to within 58-56. After a costly turnover by Greene gave the Hawkeyes the ball with 1:40 left, Affolter gave her team a 59-58 advantage with another three.

On Ohio State's ensuing possession, freshman point guard Jalonni Cambridge – who had a quiet night with only six points on 3-of-15 shooting – was called for an offensive foul to give Iowa the ball back. But the Buckeyes came up with a crucial stop, and after McMahon drained her free throws at the six-second mark, Iowa had one last chance to win the game.

The Hawkeyes put the ball in the hands of Affolter, and after some physical defense from Ohio State, the ball went out of bounds with less than a second left. Iowa had a potential game-winning look from Stuelke, but her midrange jumper fell just short at the buzzer, and the Buckeyes prevailed by one point.

It may not have been the Buckeyes' best offensive performance, but both McMahon and Thierry had solid outings, leading the

UCLA 75, Ohio State 46												
March 8, 2025 Gainbridge Fieldhouse • Indianapolis												
	1	2	3	4	F							
Ohio State (25-6, 13-5)	8	13	9	16	46							
UCLA (29-2, 15-2)	22	22	23	8	75							
Ohio State		Total	FT	Reb.								
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
J. Cambridge	22	4-10	2-4	1-2	2	2	10					
Thierry	31	4-9	0-2	2-1	0	1	9					
Gray	31	2-11	0-0	0-0	1	0	6					
McMahon	27	3-11	0-2	0-3	0	2	6					
Petty	23	3-5	0-0	0-4	1	1	6					
K. Cambridge	19	1-4	2-2	1-2	3	2	4					
Lemmilä	16	1-4	1-1	1-3	0	1	3					
Greene	20	1-1	0-0	0-0	2	0	2					
Walker	11	0-2	0-0	1-1	0	1	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>19-57</b>	<b>5-11</b>	<b>6-19</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>46</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>FT:</b>	<b>45.5%</b>	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 3-10 (Gray 2-6, Thierry 1-2, McMahon 0-2).							
	<b>Team rebounds:</b>	3. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 5 (Thierry, McMahon, Petty, K. Cambridge, Lemmilä). <b>Turnovers:</b> 12 (J. Cambridge 3, McMahon 3, Lemmilä 2, Petty, Greene, Walker, Team). <b>Steals:</b> 9 (Petty 3, K. Cambridge 3, Greene 2, McMahon).										
UCLA		Total	FT	Reb.								
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Jones	31	8-16	0-0	0-1	1	3	22					
Betts	23	6-7	0-0	2-4	3	1	12					
Jaquez	18	5-5	0-0	1-4	0	1	12					
Dugalic	25	4-8	0-0	1-8	4	1	10					
Rice	19	4-6	0-0	0-2	6	0	8					
Barker	14	2-5	0-0	0-3	2	1	4					
Gardiner	13	1-2	0-0	0-1	1	1	3					
Aarnisalo	25	1-7	0-0	1-6	6	2	2					
Socka-Nguemen	9	1-3	0-0	2-0	0	0	2					
Dudley	17	0-2	0-0	2-0	2	1	0					
Cain	6	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>32-63</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>10-33</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>75</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b>	<b>50.8%</b>	<b>FT:</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 11-24 (Jones 6-12, Dugalic 2-4, Jaquez 2-2, Gardiner 1-2, Cain 0-2, Rice 0-1, Aarnisalo 0-1).							
	<b>Team rebounds:</b>	5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Dugalic 2, Betts, Barker). <b>Turnovers:</b> 16 (Aarnisalo 4, Jones 2, Dugalic 2, Betts, Jaquez, Rice, Barker, Gardiner, Socka-Nguemen, Dudley, Team). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Rice 3, Dugalic 2, Aarnisalo). <b>Officials:</b> Roy Gulbeyan, Michol Murray, Maggie Tieman. <b>Attendance:</b> 7,805										

team with 18 and 14 points respectively. Ajae Petty led the Buckeyes with 12 rebounds and added six points, while Jalonni Cambridge had a team-high five assists and seven boards.

The Hawkeyes had four players scoring at least 10 points. Affolter, Olsen and Stuelke each tied for a team high of 14 points, and Ava Heiden added 10. Stuelke had her seventh double-double of the season by bringing in 12 rebounds, helping Iowa hold a 28-24 advantage in paint points.

## OSU's Offense Flops In Loss To UCLA

In the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament, Ohio State (25-6) had one of its worst performances of the season on both ends of the court, falling to eventual tournament champion UCLA (29-2) 75-46 on March 8.

Ohio State never led in the 29-point loss, which was the largest margin of defeat for head coach Kevin McGuff's team since the 2022-23 season. If the game wasn't already decided at halftime when the Buckeyes trailed 44-21, it certainly was a few minutes into the third quarter when the Bruins built a 61-25 lead.

The Buckeyes never found a rhythm offensively, making just 19 of their 57 shots from the field (33.3 percent), and on the other end, they struggled to consistently slow down UCLA, which made 32 of its

63 (50.8 percent) shots, including 11 of 24 from three-point range (45.8 percent).

"First of all, give UCLA credit," McGuff said. "I thought they played great. They showed up focused, ready to go. They kind of jumped on us early, and we didn't respond very well. We didn't coach very well. We didn't play very well. Like I said, UCLA was ready, and we were not today. It was a disappointing loss for us."

The Buckeyes had issues keeping up with the favored Bruins from the start of the game, making only two of their first 10 shots to fall behind 16-5 with 3:00 left in the first quarter. Meanwhile, the Bruins had seven players score in the first quarter and as a team shot 10 of 14 from the field to OSU's 3 of 14 to hold a 22-8 lead heading into the second frame.

McMahon, 0 for 4 in the first period, got on the board in the second quarter with a pair of midrange jumpers to make it 25-12 before UCLA star center Lauren Betts led her team on a 6-0 spurt with two quick buckets to extend the lead to 31-12. Chance Gray stopped that streak with a three-pointer, and later, Jalonni Cambridge helped the Buckeyes chip into UCLA's lead with a pair of midrange jump shots of her own, making it 35-21 with 3:09 left in the half. But any momentum gained was short-lived.

The Bruins scored the last nine points of the half, five of which came from junior guard Londynn Jones, who made a jumper right before the buzzer to grow the Bruins' lead to 44-21 at halftime.

McMahon made a turnaround jump shot to start the third quarter, but that may have been the highlight for Ohio State in that period. The Bruins went on a 17-2 scoring run to extend the lead to 61-25 with 4:26 left in the stanza. Four scored during that stretch, while the lone Buckeye basket came from Cambridge at 8:30.

Trailing by 37, 67-30, heading into the final frame, Ohio State didn't allow a UCLA point in the first 3:24 of the fourth quarter but managed only two points during that span with a layup from Petty. Jones snapped the dry spell with a three to make it 70-32 with 6:36 to play

Ohio State went on a meaningless 12-2 scoring run to avoid its first 30-point loss of the season in the final 5:56 of the fourth quarter, but its 46 points scored was still its lowest total since scoring 42 in an 18-point loss to Purdue on Dec. 28, 2018.

Ohio State was led by Cambridge in the loss with 10 points on 4-of-10 shooting. No other Buckeye reached double figures in points, with Thierry coming the closest with nine points.

Petty and freshman center Elsa Lemmilä shared the team lead with four rebounds, but the Buckeyes were out-rebounded by UCLA 43-25 and outscored 32-20 in the paint.

Jones, the only Bruin to play at least 30 minutes in the blowout win, led her team with 22 points on 8-of-16 shooting including 6 of 12 from deep. Betts had 12 points on 6-of-7 shooting along with six rebounds in her 24 minutes of action.

# OSU Trying To Claw Back After Slow Start

The first three weekends for Ohio State this season were spent on the road as they usually are when the season begins in February. But this year, the Buckeyes also began with an extremely tough schedule.

## FROM THE STRETCH Greg Wilson

They started the season with a three-game series against Arizona State and were swept, picked up their first win of the season against then-No.12 N.C. State on Feb. 21 before losing to Coastal Carolina on Feb. 22 and Alabama on Feb. 23 in the final half inning of each game, and followed that weekend by going 0-3 in the College Baseball Series at Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, against Auburn, Baylor and Oregon State from Feb. 28-March 2.

The 1-8 record they returned home with on March 4 wasn't pretty, but they were able to compete more through that stretch than the record might show. Six of those eight losses were by fewer than two runs, and Ohio State was leading the No. 9-ranked Beavers through 7½ innings.

When the Buckeyes returned home to Bill Davis Stadium to take on St. John's, they left with a 12-10 win, but a 10-7 loss to Valparaiso three days later was one that was hard to swallow for head coach Justin Haire and the rest of the team, the biggest issue being the free bases pitchers were giving up, something that had been an issue going back to the first game.

"The biggest thing is we've got to stop creating innings for people," a frustrated Haire said after the game. "They had a couple of hard-hit balls in the early innings, we came out and scored three, then we hit the first two guys and walk the next two guys. It's hard to keep people off the scoreboard when we're putting people on base like that. It's a challenge."

In that game, Buckeye pitchers hit three batters and walked nine, not forcing the Beacons to have to do much to get runs across.

That game against the Beacons was a microcosm of what they had been dealing with the entire season. Even after getting three more wins, (two to finish the series against Valpo and a midweek win over Eastern Michigan on March 11), the Buckeye team ERA was still at 8.55, and it climbed nearly to 10 after the loss to Valpo on March 7.

Chase Herrell has been the best starter Ohio State has sent out so far with a 3.27 ERA through his first four starts, averaging more than five innings per appearance.

It doesn't help that Friday starter Blaine Wynk has been injured since the first series against the Sun Devils, but Haire is hoping the righthander will be able to make a return sooner rather than later.

"He's feeling OK and he's working

through some things," Haire told BSB on March 10. "We're hoping to get him back in the next couple of weeks. He threw a bullpen (March 7) and has been attacking the things he needs to attack to feel better and feel closer to 100 percent."

The one thing the Buckeyes have going for them is they have also been scoring a lot of runs. Opposition ERA isn't much better than OSU's team mark, with other hurlers throwing to a 7.92 ERA. However, the Buckeyes are hoping they can find a way to keep up the offensive explosion while limiting the free bases.

"We just need to play more consistent baseball and fix our mistakes," sophomore catcher Mason Eckelman said after the March 7 loss. "Most of the time it's been us shooting ourselves in the foot. We just need to clean some things up and play more as a team."

Jake Michalak, who has been getting the ball on Sundays, had a good start to finish the weekend against the Beacons. He had struggled throughout the first few weekends against some tough competition but was able to go six innings and strike out 10 in the 8-3 series clincher.

"That's my first start and outing in general in college that I'm confident in and feel good about," Michalak said. "The strikeouts came at the end when I settled in more. It felt really good."

It's Michalak's second year with the Buckeyes but his first as a starter, and he said it took some time to get comfortable in the new role after coming out of the bullpen last season.

"My first three starts were against some pretty good teams, but aside from that it was just getting comfortable, getting settled in and getting ahead in counts," he said. "As a reliever, it doesn't really matter how many pitches you're at, just get the job done and sustain yourself. But as a starter, you want to put your bullpen in the best position and go as long as you can."

Haire is hoping the start against Valparaiso was a sign of what's to come for Michalak as the season goes on.

"We feel like his best opportunity to help us is at the beginning of games," Haire said. "If he figures it out, it could be really elite stuff, so we felt like it was important to really give him this early-season opportunity to figure it out. He made the most of that on (March 9). Hopefully, that's just another big step in the right direction for him. We know it won't be all smooth sailing, but hopefully, that's a big confidence boost for him and for our guys when he's out there."

### Lipsey Setting Tone As Leadoff Batter

It hasn't been the best of starts for Ohio State through the first month of the season, with a 5-12 record as BSB went to press, but there have been some bright spots through the rough patch.

Senior right fielder Trey Lipsey has been the brightest of those spots and is off to an extremely hot start at the plate. Through 17 games he was hitting .317 and was getting on base more than 50 percent of the time he stepped in the box (.506).

Despite the fact that Lipsey has already been the best hitter on what has been a solid Buckeye offense, Haire believes he still might have some untapped potential.

"As good as he's been, as many runs as he's scored, as much as he's been able to put some pressure on, I do think that there's more in the tank for him," Haire said. "He's not your prototypical (leadoff hitter) skill-set-wise. For him, (it's not just) 'I need to walk, get hit by a pitch, grind out at-bats.' He's also got the chance to hit the ball for extra bases and be a really dangerous player at the top of the lineup."

Lipsey showed that off the day after Haire said he believed there might be more pop in the bat. Against Eastern Michigan on March 11 in a 13-7 win, Lipsey led off the bottom of the first with a double to right center, putting himself in scoring position right away. The extra base wasn't needed in this scenario since Tyler Pettorini launched a ball over the right-center fence two batters later, but Haire's point was proven.

As his head coach alluded to, Lipsey is still good at everything a usual leadoff hitter excels at as well. He leads the team in both walks (17) and hit by pitch (seven) while still boasting a perfect stolen base percentage (9 for 9).

At the beginning of the 2024 season, Lipsey had some struggles and was removed from the lineup at times, but Bill Mosiello continued giving him chances,

which allowed him to come out of the slump and finish the year with a respectable slash line of .268/.388/.439.

If the Buckeyes are able to continue to find their way in the win column like they have been since they came back to Bill Davis Stadium (4-1 record at home), Lipsey will likely continue to be a big part of that surge, and Haire is looking forward to what that might look like for the senior.

"Just continuing to open up his toolbox that he has will be important as we move through the season," Haire said. "But, man, I'm really excited about his maturation, being able to control the zone, find ways to get on base and extend innings. As he continues to do that, it could get even more fun."

### Buckeyes Start Big Ten Play

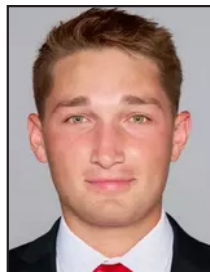
Ohio State was hoping to keep its short winning streak going when it began its Big Ten schedule in Bloomington, Ind., with a three-game series from March 14-16. But that wasn't the case when the Buckeyes were outscored by the Hoosiers 34-12 in those three contests, the first and the third games ending early due to the 10-run mercy rule.

Free bases weren't as much of an issue in the first game when Herrell gave up nine earned runs on 10 hits and no walks with one hit-by-pitch. But those issues returned as the weekend went on with seven free bases in the second game and nine in the 14-3 loss on Sunday that was over midway through the seventh inning.

The Buckeyes hope to get back on track with a midweek game against Miami (Ohio) on March 18 before heading to Iowa for another three-game series March 21-24. The Hawkeyes had a 10-8 record as BSB went to press (4-2 Big Ten).



Trey Lipsey



Jake Michalak

## MI MEXICO

### MEXICAN RESTAURANT

4775 East Main Street, Columbus, OH 43213 • (614) 577-0143




Newly remodeled bar!

**AUTHENTIC Mexican Food**

Mon. 11am - 11pm  
Tues. - Sat. 11am - 10pm  
Sun. 11am - 9pm

**Every football Saturday, come in and enjoy margaritas & bottled beers at half price.**

**Try our new Jumbo Sangria Margarita!**

www.MiMexicoColumbus.com

THURSDAY • 1/2 PRICE MARGARITAS & BEER • 3-9 pm

<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">\$10 OFF</p> <p style="font-weight: bold;">Any Food Order</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">of \$50 or more</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Dine in only. Not valid with any other coupon. Not valid on Thursdays.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">\$5 OFF</p> <p style="font-weight: bold;">Any Food Order</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">of \$25 or more</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Dine in only. Not valid with any other coupon. Not valid on Thursdays.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Buy 1 entree at the regular price, get 2nd entree (equal or lesser value) for 50% off</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Dine in only. Not valid with any other coupon. Not valid on Thursdays.</p>
--	---	--

# Ohio State Struggles In B1G Tournament

After having three weeks off between its last dual of the regular season and the Big Ten tournament, Ohio State wrestling struggled in the conference competition, finishing with 95.5 points, which placed it sixth in Evanston, Ill., March 8-9.

Redshirt freshman Brandon Cannon was the sole Buckeye to advance to a Big Ten championship match, doing so at 157 pounds, despite not having his starting spot

## ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

locked down until Sammy Sasso decided to retire in late February.

He fell to Penn State's Tyler Kasak, the No. 2 wrestler in the country, by a 12-2 major decision in the final match. The Nittany Lions had six wrestlers make the finals, five of them becoming conference champions, with only heavyweight defending national champion Greg Kerkvliet losing in his match to Minnesota's Gable Steveson.

The Nittany Lions left with a big win, scoring 181.5 team points, far ahead of second-place Nebraska's 137.0 points, with Iowa (112.0), Minnesota (108.5) and Illinois (105.5) also finishing ahead of the Buckeyes.

Cannon made it to the finals as the No. 8 seed in his weight class since he hadn't been in the lineup for long due to an injury he was dealing with early in the season, but he was able to make it through No. 9 Chase Saldade of Michigan (15-0 tech fall), No. 1 Ethen Miller of Maryland (9-2 decision) and No. 5 Tommy Askey of Minnesota (10-3 decision) on his way to his second-place finish, earning himself an automatic bid in the NCAA tournament.

The biggest surprise of the tournament for the Buckeyes was at 141 pounds, where



Brandon Cannon

Jesse Mendez lost a 9-8 decision to Nebraska's Brock Hardy in the semifinals and fell for the second straight time to Beau Bartlett of Penn State in the third-place match 4-2, making it three losses in a row for Mendez going

back to the dual against Penn State on Feb. 14. Hardy would go on to win the tournament, pinning Minnesota's Vance VomBaur in the championship in just 1:59.

Nic Bouzakis was able to finish in third place at 133 pounds despite losing his first match in the winner's bracket to No. 8 Angelo Rini of Indiana. After receiving a bye in wrestlebacks, he beat No. 7 Zan Fugitt

of Wisconsin (fall, 2:30), No. 6 Jacob Van Dee of Nebraska (medical forfeit, 1:05), No. 5 Dylan Shawver of Rutgers (6-4 decision) and No. 4 Braeden Davis of Penn State in the third-place bout, pinning him in 2:23.

Also placing for the Buckeyes was Dylan D'Emilio, who finished fifth at 149 pounds, as well as Paddy Gallagher (seventh, 165 pounds), Carson Kharchla (fourth, 174 pounds), Seth Shumate (eighth, 197 pounds) and Nick Feldman (fifth, heavyweight).

At 125 pounds, Brendan McCrone lost his first two matches of the tournament, falling in a 3-2 decision against Dedrick Navarro from Northwestern and suffering a 14-4 defeat to Nicolar Rivera of Wisconsin after getting a bye in the consolation bracket.

True freshman Luke Lilledahl of Penn State, whom McCrone pinned when the two teams faced off when the Nittany Lions were in Columbus, won the tournament at 125 pounds by upsetting No. 1 Matt Ramos of Purdue in the semifinals and No. 2 Caleb Smith from Nebraska in the championship.

McCrone did get another chance in the ninth-place bracket. He got revenge over Navarro with a 2-0 decision and beat Joey Cruz of Iowa 2-0 to finish in ninth place, which earned him an automatic bid in the NCAA tournament.

Ryder Rogotzke was the other Buckeye in the tournament who didn't place, also losing his first two matches of the 184-pound competition to No. 9 Donnell Washington from Indiana in the first round by a 9-4 decision and No. 7 Shane Cartagena-Walsh of Rutgers in the consolation bracket due to a disqualification.

## OSU Sending 10 To NCAAs

Nine Buckeyes earned automatic bids to the NCAA tournament in Philadelphia that begins on March 20, with McCrone barely making it in with his ninth-place finish. Rogotzke was the only wrestler selected from Ohio State who didn't automatically qualify for a spot in the event.

However, he did earn an at-large bid, and he will make the second appearance of his career in the event and will be the No. 26 seed at 184 pounds, matching up against No. 6 Isaac Dean of Rider in the first round.

The Buckeyes will be looking to make some major improvements in the two weeks between the Big Ten tournament and NCAAs since they did face some struggles at the conference event in Evanston.

All signs point to Penn State winning its fourth straight NCAA championship as a team and its 12th in the last 15 years. The Buckeyes in 2015, Iowa in 2021 and COVID-19 in 2020 have been the only things that have been able to get in the way of head coach Cael Sanderson and the Nittany Lions' historic run.

Although the Buckeyes certainly won't just concede going into the event, head coach Tom Ryan did say after the Penn State dual that this year's Nittany Lions team is one of the best that he's ever seen in his long time being involved in the sport at the college level.

"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."

The Buckeyes lost that dual 27-13 despite Penn State not starting two of its wrestlers who are ranked No. 1 in the country, both of whom are returning for the NCAAs.

The Buckeyes will still send 10 wrestlers to hunt for the program's first national title since it won in 2015, the only national championship win in program history.

Each of the wrestlers already knows what his path to a championship looks like.

McCrone is the No. 20 seed at 125 pounds and will face off against No. 13 Marc-Anthony McGowan of Princeton in the first round. McCrone has shown that he has the ability to compete with any wrestler when he's having a good day, so he could find a way to win a few matches this year after losing in the first round last year.

Bouzakis is in as the No. 7 seed at 133 pounds and will go up against No. 26 Kai



Nic Bouzakis

Orine of N.C. State in the first round. Bouzakis pinned Orine in just 51 seconds when the Buckeyes beat the Wolfpack in a dual on Dec. 19, 2023.

After Mendez' losses, he is the No. 3 seed at 141 pounds and will go up against No. 30 Briar Priest of

Pitt in the first round. His biggest challenge in trying to repeat as national champion this year will be that he is on the same side of the bracket as Bartlett this time around, who is the No. 2 seed. The two would meet up in the semifinals if they both win their first three bouts. If Mendez is able to get back on top of Bartlett, he could have to go up against the top-seeded Hardy again in the finals.

At 149 pounds, D'Emilio is the No. 13 seed going against No. 20 Koy Buesgens of N.C. State. Cannon is the No. 5 seed at 157 pounds and will match up against No. 28 Christopher Hamblin of Oregon State. Gallagher is the No. 26 seed at 165 pounds and matches up with No. 7 Hunter Garvin of Stanford.

At 174 pounds, Kharchla is No. 9 and faces off with No. 24 Lennox Wolak of Virginia Tech, while Shumate will be making his first-ever appearance in the NCAA tournament as the No. 23 seed, going against No. 10 Isaiah Salazar of Minnesota. Salazar beat Shumate 4-1 when the Golden Gophers were in Columbus to beat the Buckeyes on Feb. 7.

Then Feldman will try to do at least as well as he did last year when he came in fifth place as a redshirt freshman. He is ranked No. 12 this year and will go up against No. 21 Jacob Bullock of Indiana in the first round.

For recaps of all of the Buckeyes' NCAA tournament matchups, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

## The Ohio State University Alumni Association

### GUIDE YOUR CAREER

3,200+

active employers working with Alumni Career Connection

4,500+

AlumniFire members ready to network

The Buckeye Network reaches 9,000+ active members on LinkedIn

### BOND WITH FELLOW BUCKEYES

Join one of 121 Regional Clubs

Connect with one of 48 Societies supporting your interests



Attend special events—168 hosted in FY16

### PAY FORWARD



More than 150 volunteer projects done by Buckeyes in 2016

### TRAVEL THE WORLD

Join one of 30+ trips with Alumni Tours



### GET SOCIAL

Follow along to stay up to date with The Ohio State University Alumni Association



32,515 Likes



34,300 Followers

540,000+ alumni across the globe



YOU'RE A BUCKEYE FOR LIFE



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

# Buckeyes Eye First Big Ten Championship

Ohio State appears headed to the NCAA tournament for the second time in three seasons, but first it will make an important stop in East Lansing, Mich., on March 22 for the Big Ten championship game.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The Buckeyes will play No. 1 seed Michigan State (7:30 p.m., BTN) thanks to a 4-3 overtime victory against Penn State in the conference semifinal at Value City Arena on March 15.

Technically, OSU's return to the national tournament won't be official until the Buckeyes earn the automatic qualifier by beating the Spartans or receive an at-large bid during the selection show on March 23.

But with an epic comeback to defeat Wisconsin 3-2 in a quarterfinal series and the dramatic result vs. the Nittany Lions, the College Hockey News PairWise Probability Matrix gives the Buckeyes (24-12-2) a 100 percent chance of being one of the 16 teams to make the NCAA tournament.

Those are pretty good odds. OSU is ninth in the PairWise, which mimics the selection criteria to produce the field. It's a remarkable accomplishment considering the Big Ten coaches in their preseason poll tabbed the Buckeyes for seventh (last) in the conference following a 14-20-4 (3-18-2 Big Ten) record last season.

"It's the resilience," OSU coach Steve Rohlik said. "It's the details, the way we practice. It's the belief. It's the brotherhood and the family in the locker room."

The No. 3-seed Buckeyes have a tough task against the defending champion Spartans in the hope of faring better than their first two championship game appearances.

OSU lost the inaugural final 5-4 in overtime to Wisconsin in 2014 in Saint Paul, Minn., and again in OT, 3-2, at Notre Dame in 2018.

The Buckeyes are the only school not to win the tourney, although OSU did claim the regular-season title in 2019. Michigan State won its first tourney title last season.

### Nit-Picking

Graduate Gunnarwolfe Fontaine scored his second goal of the game at 14:31 of overtime for the victory over Penn State.

"There's not a lot of holes in that team," Rohlik said of the Nittany Lions. "It took everything we had tonight and then some to obviously come out on top. So big, big win for my guys."

Fontaine made it 1-0 in the first period, but the Nittany Lions (20-13-4) led 2-1 in the third period before OSU quickly struck twice before 2,900 fans.

Freshman Nathan Lewis tied the game at 9:19 on a controversial goal. Max Montes threw the puck toward the net; it bounced high, and Lewis swatted it out of the air. It was called no-goal on the ice by

the officials, but Ohio State challenged the call, and it was determined it was a goal after a review.

The key component was that the stick must be below the shoulder of the attacking player. Lewis is 6-6, so while he did touch the puck well above the crossbar (which for years was the criteria for a high stick), it was below his shoulders.

It was his second goal of the season and first since Nov. 1 vs. Lake Superior State.

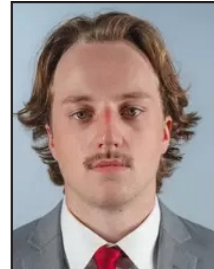
At 11:36, Joe Dunlap sent his younger brother, Jake, on a two-on-one, with Patrick Guzzo scoring off a pass in front for a 3-2 Buckeye lead.

"It's pretty special when you can look over and see your brother out there with you," Rohlik said. "You know, they haven't played a lot together at all this year, just in the last couple games, and it was big-time goal out there with those two involved. The one thing they both can do is skate, and they showed the speed on that goal."

The euphoria didn't last long because Penn State tied the game at 14:05 when Matt DiMarsico scored on a rebound. But Logan Terness made 14 saves in the third and one more in OT for a total of 31 for the Buckeyes.

### How They Got There

If not for a bit of luck, the Buckeyes might have been bounced from the tournament in the quarterfinals. Wisconsin had a chance to sweep the best-of-three series but in Game 2 missed a chance to go ahead 3-1 with about two minutes left by scoring into an empty net after Terness was pulled for an extra attacker.



Gunnarwolfe Fontaine

Fontaine, a transfer from Northeastern who is first on the team with 39 points and ranks second with 16 goals and 23 assists, tied it 2-2, and Riley Thompson won it in overtime. OSU then won the deciding game 3-2.

Fontaine said the Wisconsin series provided a road map heading into OT vs. Penn State.

"We were all saying, 'We've been here before. We did it (against Wisconsin). Let's go,' especially when our season is on the line," he told BTN. "We shouldn't, honestly, be here. They had an empty net to beat us in the second game and we got lucky missing the net, and we tied it up, and we went on to win Sunday and now we're here going to the championship. So we're not taking anything for granted, and we have a really connected group, and we fight for each other every second we've got out there."

### Not So Homey

The quarterfinal series was at Nationwide Arena (18,144 capacity) because Value City Arena was occupied by the high school boys wrestling state tournament. The games drew 1,747 on the first night, followed by 2,181 and 962.

Even though the Buckeyes eventually got the desired outcome, it didn't feel like

the same home advantage as VCA where the Buckeyes were 13-3-1 in the regular season.

The students were on break – save for the OSU athletic band to provide some atmosphere – and paying for parking as opposed to being free for games at VCA may have kept some people away. It was a sterile environment reminiscent of the dreadful COVID-19 days when games were played with no fans or a limited number.

It was apparent in Game 1 the Buckeyes were lacking the spark a boisterous home crowd provides.

Rohlik doesn't want to use the non-home ice situation as an excuse, but it is a fact: The crowd would have filled the OSU Ice Arena and been a whole lot louder.

"We've got to take it personally in that locker room," he said after Game 1. "It's up to us (to create an atmosphere). If we play in front of 10 fans, or 5,000 or 10,000. I mean, it's up to us to go out there and play with the intensity needed to play in the playoffs."

It was quite a letdown from having crowds of 7,523 and 9,225 for the final two games of the regular season against Michigan at VCA.

### Barely Beating Badgers

Wisconsin (13-21-3) won the first game of the quarterfinal 4-1 on March 7.

The Badgers led 3-0 through two periods. Brent Johnson scored, and Terness made 30 saves for the Buckeyes.

With the win, the Badgers were looking for a reverse of last season's playoffs when OSU went to Wisconsin and took the series 2-1 to become the first No. 7 seed to advance out of the quarterfinals.

The Buckeyes looked flat, and it cost them dearly.

Ryland Mosley scored at 18:51, redirecting a backhand by Quinn Finley. It got worse at 3:04 of the second when Owen Mehlenbacher converted a pass from Adam Pietila to complete a two-on-one, and at 9:09, Simon Tassy made it 3-0 by batting in a rebound.

Johnson scored at 4:19 of the third to cut the deficit to 3-1 with a brilliant double deke moving in from the top of the right circle before the senior defenseman put in a backhand for his fifth goal of the season. Terness was pulled with 2:28 left, and Kyle Kukkonen scored into the empty net with 1:46 remaining.

### Last Gasp

In the die-or-die Game 2, the Buckeyes fell behind 2-0 before they got new life in the form of freshman Jake Rozzi pouncing on a loose puck to make it 2-1 at 16:57 of the second period.

The score remained 2-1 when Terness was pulled for an extra attacker. That left the Buckeyes vulnerable, but they had little choice with the clock going below three minutes left in regulation.

OSU was pressing for the equalizer. Then it happened. The puck was chipped off the sidewall and out of the Ohio State offensive zone.

Finley, UW's leading scorer and a third-

round draft pick of the New York Islanders, came down the ice on a two-on-one with Mosley and an empty net beckoning.

Mosley fed a backhand to Finley, who was alone in the lower left circle about 15 feet from the open net and was about to score his 20th goal, but his shot hit the outside left post with 2:02 remaining.

"Sometimes you need a bounce, and you know, I think their guy was thinking, 'I want to be unselfish and give it to the other guy instead of just burying it,'" Rohlik said. "Then one of the best players in the country kind of fumbles a little bit there, and it's the break we needed."

Thompson added, "We were shocked, but it happened and then we capitalized on that, took advantage of it so we're not complaining."

It proved costly to the Badgers when Fontaine made it 2-2 with 1:29 left, and Thompson completed the comeback with the series-tying goal at 7:30 of the 20-minute overtime.

On the tying goal with Terness still off, Davis Burnside from beneath the goal line threaded a pass out front past four Wisconsin players, and Fontaine did not miss from the high slot.

Thompson potted the winner when a shot by Aiden Hansen-Bukata hit him.

"The puck got to the point, and once I saw that, I just kind of tried to work my way to the net," Thompson said of his 17th goal. "Fortunately, I just caught a lucky bounce off my stick and my shin pad so I'll take that."

### Closing It Out

OSU did not lead in regulation play in the first two games, but Rozzi in Game 3 made it 1-0 at 6:02 of the first period. Less than a minute later, Finley tied it 1-1 on the power play.

Burnside put the Buckeyes up 2-1 with a power-play goal at 9:37 of the third period.

Montes followed with an insurance goal at 12:43 before the Badgers scored at 17:18, but Terness and his defense held their ground. He made 15 of his 29 saves in the third period.

"The guys did a really great job allowing me to see the puck and do my thing," Terness said. "We got two goals there in the third period and were able to lock it down after that. That's a big testament to the guys in our group."

Burnside said, "We just stuck to the process. We never really had any doubt. We're a tight-knit group. Some bounces just went our way, and we're all grateful for that."

*For full recaps of the Wisconsin series and the semifinal vs. Penn State, go to the [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*

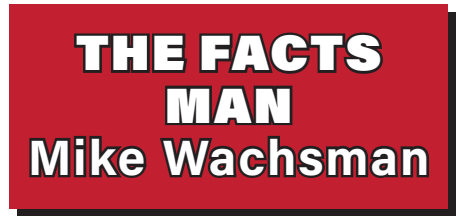


Davis Burnside

# Buckeyes Can't Rest On Laurels This Spring

Two months past and it still feels just as good.

There are times when random plays from Ohio State's national championship run flash through my head, and the immediate thought is, "They really did that." The Buckeyes finished the 2024 season atop the college football mountain, and it's highly likely they will enter 2025 atop that same mountain.



Much as Buckeyes fans like to, one cannot live in the past. And that's why the opening of OSU's spring practice will provide some welcome relief. Sure, it isn't actual football, but it is a chance to learn about how Ryan Day will handle being the hunted instead of the hunter, how he will handle a ton of player attrition and whether he will even think about the daunting task of repeating as national champions.

The bar is set high in Columbus, and only a handful have cleared it. Day is one of them, but this is a new year, a new chapter. However some things remain unchanged.

"Our expectations don't change," the coach said. "None of that stuff's ever going to change."

The Buckeyes will go through their usual battery of practices, though there will be fewer in full pads and more in just helmets. It will look a lot more like an NFL practice, which makes sense as the college game veers more and more into looking like its professional brother. Most who follow this space know that yours truly believes that is a bad thing, from the look of the game to the strategy and everything in between. For ages, college football could proudly separate itself from the NFL in just about every manner.

Fans were engaged, players were embraced, coaches were canonized. In the NFL you're basically rooting for laundry as few remain with a team for the duration of their careers.

With college football adopting what amounts to free agency with the transfer portal, it is quite possible that fans become less invested in old State U. If kids aren't going to invest in a program, why should fans? But that's a rant for another day.

As far as the Buckeyes are concerned, there are some very solid building blocks.

Chief among them are receiver Jeremiah Smith and safety Caleb Downs, who could each make a case as the best player in college football on their respective side of the line of scrimmage. Throw in some familiar faces at linebacker (Sonny Styles) and the defensive backfield (Davison Igbinosun and Jermaine Mathews Jr.) and it's easy to see why Day and his coaching staff aren't exactly crying, "Woe is me."

"As you look at our team, there's a lot of guys who played a lot of football," Day said. "Those guys will be treated a little differently than other guys."

The rigors of what amounted to an NFL schedule mean that Day is going to be more deliberate about how much work the "stars" get. He knows what most of them can do, so don't be shocked if a few understudies are handed a leading man workload. Spring is when coaches find out who can or cannot play, and the Buckeyes have plenty of young talent just waiting to find the spotlight.

It isn't just players trying to find their footing, though. There are some new faces on the coaching staff, perhaps none more important than new defensive coordinator Matt Patricia.

A veteran of the NFL and the dynastic New England Patriots organization, Patricia brings a different dynamic to the fold than predecessor Jim Knowles. Known more as a "mad scientist," Knowles tweaked and fiddled and added to a pretty complex system and gave players a lot to digest. When at its best, a Knowles defense was almost impenetrable – much as it was in 2024 when Ohio State led the nation in defense.

Patricia is a bit more basic, though he will shift his fronts between 3-4 and 4-3, with some 4-2-5 thrown in for good measure. This allows the coaching staff to use players in specific roles and allows them to master just a handful of things.

There was a thought that maybe Day would elevate from within on the defensive side, with safeties coach Matt Guerrieri and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton getting the most chatter. The hiring of Patricia put an end to that, but Day showed faith in the veteran Walton by naming him co-coordinator.

"Having Tim Walton as a co-coordinator there is a huge part of our defense," Day explained. "I think Matt and Tim working together as coordinators is going to be critical. I think we have to continue to look critically at how to evolve our defense."

At its core, however, there won't be a ton of change on the stop side. Great players often make for a great defense, and Patricia will take the spring to learn what guys can and cannot do and how to best put them in a position to succeed.

"I think we have to look at how we can continually evolve with the defense," Day said. "When you look at (Patricia's) defense, they've always utilized his players."

Patricia isn't the only new coordinator. Brian Hartline was elevated in the off-season after Chip Kelly did a one-and-done and scurried back to the NFL, and though he had the title previously, Hartline was not really the one calling the plays.

He will be this time. "I believe Brian is going to do a great job as offensive coordinator," Day said. "He's grown in a lot of areas. He's ready to call it now."

## Taking Inventory

It's always interesting to me to peruse the roster to find out where the surplus and deficits are.

Even Stevie Wonder could see that the Buckeyes are overflowing with talent and experience at receiver, led by Smith and Carnell Tate. Throw in holdovers Brandon Inniss and Bryson Rodgers, redshirt freshman Mylan Graham and incoming freshman Quincy Porter and you have the mak-

ings of what could once again be the best group of pass catchers in college football.

There is also optimism in the tight end room, led by stellar Purdue transfer Max Klare. The chain-mover had more than twice as many receptions as the next guy on Purdue's roster and adds a down-the-seam threat to the Buckeye arsenal. Steady blocker Will Kacmarek is back, and the coaches hope that this is the time for a breakout by talented but inconsistent Jelani Thurman. He showed progress in blocking during the Buckeyes' run through the College Football Playoff, and another step means that he will be firmly in line for targets this season.

The secondary may have a few new faces but will still be among the most feared groups in college football, thanks in large part to Downs. Anyone who has paid a minute of attention knows just how valuable Downs is to the Buckeyes' success, and even if his numbers are not eye-popping, he still impacts nearly everything that happens on the stop side of the ball. The return of Igbinosun will help, and if he can cut down his aggression and penalties, he could be one of the best in the game. This is the time for Jermaine Mathews Jr to make his name known, and though OSU fans already are familiar with him, the nation will learn quickly that he has the capability to be a lockdown corner. Freshman Devin Sanchez will be on the field in some capacity, probably at nickel, and he could do for the defense what Smith did for last year's offense. He's physical, smart and not afraid to take charge. This group will set the tempo for the entire defense.

The running back room may be a tad light on experience, but it's sneaky good in terms of talent. The name that repeatedly came up during interviews at the NFL Combine was James Peoples, with more than a couple of former Buckeyes comparing him to J.K. Dobbins. That's a pretty lofty comparison, and if Peoples can even approach that, then the Buckeyes are in good hands. Peoples is joined by battering ram CJ Donaldson Jr., a transfer from West Virginia who, to steal a line from an analysis of Cris Carter, "only scores touchdowns." Donaldson had 30 of them in three seasons with the Mountaineers and should be lethal in the red zone for the Buckeyes this season. Add in freshmen Bo Jackson, who can do it all, and Anthony "Turbo" Rogers, who is a home-run threat, and it's easy to see that the Buckeye ground game should remain strong.

Linebacker has strength among its starters but is largely unproven. Styles could become one of the best in the nation with another year at the position under his belt, and coaches have raved for some time about the potential for Arvell Reese. He looks ready to bust out. Freshmen Riley Pettijohn and Tarvos Alford could see the field by default as there is not a ton of experience ahead of them. Pettijohn especially looks like a star in the making, and it will be fun to watch him blossom under the guidance of coach James Laurinaitis – who knows a thing or two about playing linebacker at a high level.

Quarterback has huge potential, but for now it is a position in flux. Presumed starter Julian Sayin has added some bulk, and reports have said that there isn't a throw he

cannot make. His release is as quick as any OSU quarterback in recent memory, so his biggest hurdle will be grabbing the leadership reins. Will Howard was adept at that and was able to galvanize the offense into a finely tuned unit. Having the physical skills is great, but if Sayin cannot handle the leadership and mental aspect, then there could be problems.

Don't discount Lincoln Kienholz, a kid whom Day has touted on more than one occasion. He has stuck it out and shown flashes, and this spring could be the perfect time to show that he won't just hand the starting chores to Sayin. Freshman Tavien St. Clair has created a buzz, and some of it is deserved. He has the size and arm talent that coaches crave, though his processing and the speed of the game will take a bit of time to get used to. Maybe he climbs to backup status by the end of the season, but folks thinking he will start will need to pump the brakes.

There is some turnover on the offensive line, and that could in the end be a real problem.

There is no Donovan Jackson to bail out a wounded group, and the Buckeyes went to the portal to address needs at both tackle positions. Ethan Onianwa was a bear at Rice and should claim the left tackle spot, but Minnesota transfer Philip Daniels will have to get past holdover Ian Moore on the right side. Carson Hinzman adds experience and stability in the pivot, and there are experienced bodies at guard in Luke Montgomery, Austin Sierveld and Tegra Tshabola.

Also new is the coach, with Virginia Tech's Tyler Bowen taking over for Justin Frye, who went to the NFL's Arizona Cardinals. Bowen has an energy as well as coordinating experience and based on reports has the goods on the recruiting trail – something Frye never seemed to master.

Usually a strong point, the defensive line is a major concern for Ohio State after all four starters departed for the NFL. At end it should be a mix of Kenyatta Jackson Jr, Caden Curry, CJ Hicks and Idaho State transfer Logan George, with freshman Zion Grady having a real shot at getting involved. Inside there is holdover Eddrick Houston, who could blossom into a star, and Kayden McDonald, who did nothing but produce in limited time on the field last season. There is not much depth here, so look for Day and his staff to hit the portal after spring to fill in some holes. You also have to wonder whether this will be the last spring for Larry Johnson, who keeps chugging on despite diminishing returns in the last few seasons. The hiring of UCLA's Tony Washington Jr. as assistant defensive line coach could signal the beginning of a change up front, though for the moment Johnson appears ready as ever to work hard and put his charges through their paces.

The fascinating thing about spring (and beyond) is that groups you expect to shine often do not, while groups you thought would struggle leap to the forefront. It will be interesting to see which players and units step forward and which give cause for concern during the month-long spring session.

# Buckeyes' Season Left Us All A Basket Case

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I know this sounds strange coming from the publisher of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, but I was actually happy when the Ohio State men's basketball team lost to Iowa, eliminating that final glimmer of hope that the Buckeyes might make the NCAA Tournament. It was time to put the Buckeyes, and their suffering fans (at least this season), out of their misery. Frankly, I was getting tired of listening to loyal and ever-optimistic Ohio State fans after each disheartening loss, or even a win with a blown lead to make it interesting, explain how the Buckeyes still had a chance to claim a berth.

I know, there are all these complicated metrics and lots of self-styled experts who had the Buckeyes in the field of 68, right up until the last two painful losses to Indiana and the Hawkeyes. I'm no Joe Lunardi, who according to ESPN "uses the same data points favored by the committee, including strength of schedule and other season-long indicators, including the NET and team-sheet data similar to what is available to the NCAA, in his projections of the field."

While Lunardi was poring over all of his "indicators" and still sneaking the Buckeyes in, I kept thinking of John Cooper and one of his many homespun sayings. Coop used to say of physical specimens such as Rickey Dudley or Alonzo Spellman, "He passed the look test."

Lunardi is looking at all his data, and I'm looking at the Buckeyes and I'm thinking, these guys don't pass the "look test," blowing leads, falling short on rallies and losing to teams they shouldn't be losing to.

I've long felt that the NCAA Tournament would be more competitive and the field more representative if they just went with the 68 best teams. No automatic bids, just the 68 best teams. If you are in the Podunk Conference and you are one of the best teams in the country, come on down. If you are not, let's see how you do in the NIT.

By the time the season came to an end (at least for Ohio State), I did not believe the Buckeyes were among the best 68 teams in the country.

"But they beat Kentucky," the most diehard Buckeye fans kept saying until the bitter end. But they also lost to Northwestern – were clobbered in fact. One came earlier in the season when the team was still competitive. The latter came when the Buckeyes were in the midst of self-destructing. Don't the two games, at the least, cancel each other out?

I'm not trying to pick on die-hard Buckeye fans. Optimism is what being a true fan is all about. The thought is that if your team can just get *in* the tournament, there is always a chance they could make one of those magical runs that happen in the Big Dance from time to time. But if this year's team got into the Dance, they would have been a low seed and would have had to play quality opponents from day one. What did any of us see in the final month of the season that would lead us to believe that Ohio State could make such a run? My guess is that getting the nod would have just prolonged the agony, and there has been agony – at least for me.

Are the Buckeyes' problems due to coaching or personnel? Either way, it's on first-year coach Jake Diebler. If a team can't hold onto a lead or get over the hump after overcoming a deficit, it's either a problem on the court or on the sideline. With Diebler having recruited everyone on the team, either as an assistant coach or the head man, he has to take responsibility either way, and I'm not saying he hasn't.

Let me say right now, I am in no way, shape or form suggesting that Diebler should go. I think at the least he should get three years to

grow as a head coach and build his program.

I think that this season's problems actually started at the end of last season, when the team ended the year going in the opposite direction of this year's team at the close.

Amid the turbulence of a midseason coaching change, interim coach Diebler was able to rally the troops to an 8-3 finish and a couple of upset wins against No. 2 Purdue in his first game at the helm and at Michigan State. Buckeye fans were ecstatic, and incoming athletic director Ross Bjork was impressed enough that, in his first major move at OSU, he lifted the "interim" tag on March 17, even though Diebler had no head-coaching experience.

My vision at the time was that Diebler had the players singing "Kumbaya" in the locker room while they thrilled Buckeye fans and surprised the basketball world. Family and team chemistry seemed to be the key ingredients for Diebler and the Buckeyes' success, and the sky would be the limit when the "family" returned for the 2024-25 season, ready to build on their immediate success.

Then the other shoe dropped. Core players Roddy Gayle Jr., Zed Key and Scotty Middleton, along with Bowen Hardman, quickly hit the portal at season's end.

"Am I the only one who raised an eyebrow when Roddy Gayle, Zed Key and Scotty Middleton from the men's basketball team all entered the transfer portal?" I wrote in this space in the April 20, 2024, issue of BSB. "I thought team chemistry under then-interim coach Jake Diebler was supposed to be one of the reasons Ohio State closed so strongly after the dismissal of Chris Holtmann, and the assumption (maybe just by me) that Diebler was going to retain the core of the team was one of the reasons that AD-in-waiting Ross Bjork went out on a limb and took the interim tag off Diebler.

"The trio totaled nearly a third of the team's scoring last season. I can see how Key, who started only two games last season, might have seen the writing on the wall, that his minutes would continue to erode in favor of junior-to-be Felix Okpara at a time when Key is hoping to showcase his skills for a possible pro career. But Key is a popular figure in Columbus who would have provided a veteran presence for the team, and I could have seen him staying, too.

"However, Middleton and Gayle were part of the young, but maturing, core of the team. Gayle was third on the team, averaging 13.5 points a game. Middleton averaged only 4.4 points a game but averaged 6.3 points in his games under Diebler. I wonder if Bjork saw or knew this was coming when he pulled the trigger on Diebler? You can bring in players to replace the departed trio. But can you duplicate that chemistry that turned around the fate of Ohio State basketball and helped earn Diebler the permanent job?"

But it got worse.

Okpara joined the exodus on April 21, committing to Tennessee just a few days later. Okpara had reaffirmed his commitment to the Buckeyes three weeks earlier.

"Can't wait to start a new chapter with Coach Diebs, my returning teammates, and the new staff and players to get Ohio State back to our rightful spot at the top of the Big Ten," Okpara had said.

After Okpara finalized the departures, I had this to say in the May issue.

"Gayle and Okpara, along with Scotty Middleton, Zed Key and Bowen Hardman, are all gone, taking 41.2 percent of last season's scoring and 44.0 percent of the rebounds through the portal with them. Did they take the much talked about 'togetherness' out the door with them as well? As I said, I didn't see this coming. I'm left wondering if Diebler did. Did incoming AD Ross Bjork see it? Would he have pulled the trigger as quickly on promoting Diebler if he knew this exodus was on the horizon?"

Production can be replaced, and Diebler went out and brought in what looked to be an impressive group with Aaron Bradshaw, Ques Glover, Meechie Johnson, Micah Parrish and Sean Stewart passing the outgoing Buckeyes on their way in through the portal. Led by Parrish, who scored 13.3 points and pulled down 4.4 rebounds, some of the production was replaced, and it might have been even more if Johnson had played more than 10 games.

But the chemistry? That's hard to duplicate, and I saw little that resembled last year's team from February and March.

What worries me is that there will almost certainly be more comings and goings this off-season, with even less chemistry to build on. Diebler is going to have to work to recapture the magic of 2024.

Or in today's unfamiliar world, is this going to be the new norm?

### Welcomed With Open Arms

Some of you maintain that I don't understand what it is like to have to wait for your Buckeye Sports Bulletin to be delivered through the mail. I *do* understand. You call me up and tell me about it. But I recently had a similar experience of my own. I have been waiting for several weeks for my copy of BlueWhite Illustrated, our fellow publication at Penn State. I wanted to see what they had to say about the hiring of former OSU defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

Needless to say, the acquisition was seen as a big deal.

The main headline read "Statement Win" in bold, all caps, with a subhead of "By outdueling other top schools to land Jim Knowles, Penn State signals its determination to compete at college football's highest level."

After following him for three years in Columbus, I knew plenty about Jim Knowles. Truth be told, I was looking for any intel on why he left Ohio State following a championship season and chose to join a bitter rival. There still remains somewhat of a mystery around the move. I found this quote from the hiring story by Nate Bauer, a solid journalist whom I have met a couple of times, interesting:

"Knowles had been on (PSU coach James) Franklin's radar for years, but with the Buckeyes coming off a national title, there was little reason to think he was a realistic candidate to succeed Tom Allen, who had left for Clemson after just one season with the Nittany Lions. Franklin hadn't talked to Knowles or even to his agent. The Nittany Lions were looking elsewhere in their search.

"But just two days after the College Football Playoff championship game, Franklin received a predawn phone call. It was Knowles, and his interest in the position sent the Nittany Lions' search in a different direction. (My italics.)

"We had been talking to a ton of other guys and vetting and going through the process, but

it's a twisting and winding deal," Franklin said. "There are guys who you think you may be able to get, and you can't. We looked at NFL guys and kept narrowing the list down. We hadn't made any offers, and then this became a possibility."

In case you were wondering, "Knowles didn't tip his hand on too many topics just one week into his new job," columnist Thomas Frank Carr wrote after Knowles' introductory press conference on Feb. 4. "When asked if the team will use a hybrid edge rusher, the so-called 'Jack' position, he pushed the topic into the future once he's gotten to know the strengths and weaknesses of his roster."

Knowles wasn't Penn State's only new coaching hire, I found out. The Lions also hired former Ohio State running backs coach Stan Drayton to fill the same position in Happy Valley. I was not aware of that.

"Stan Drayton brings decades of experience coaching running backs at the highest levels to our program," Franklin said. "He is an important addition to our staff. His experience as a head coach and working alongside elite backs in his career will be invaluable to our running backs room."

That means that Ohio State's two biggest rivals both have former Ohio State assistants coaching their running backs, with Tony Alford at Michigan.

Drayton had most recently been head coach at Temple from 2022 until he was fired with two games remaining last season. He left Ohio State after working with Ezekiel Elliott and winning the national championship in 2014 to coach the running backs with the Chicago Bears. He returned to the college ranks at Texas as associate head coach and run-game coordinator from 2017-2021 before taking the Temple job.

A quick note about BWI vs. Buckeye Sports Bulletin, for those of you who complain about the price of BSB. BWI, which was once a successful weekly, now publishes monthly, meaning I was reading about Knowles' hiring and Penn State's National Signing Day recruiting news more than a month after they happened. I'm not sure that's what BSB readers want.

But you have to be willing to pay for our 24 issues a year. BlueWhite Illustrated charges \$68 for 11 issues annually, or \$6.18 per issue. That would project out to \$148.32 for our 24 issues, or more than \$20 more than our \$124.95 yearly price.

### Beat The Increase

Speaking of BSB prices, we will be raising the cost of upgrading your subscription to first-class mail during football season from \$30 to \$32 to try to ease some of the pressure from the two postal increases last year. On average, it costs us \$3 in postage, handling and the cost of the envelope to mail a copy of BSB first class. That's \$39 for 13 issues, so this is a money-losing proposition for us. Our philosophy has been, better to lose \$9 than lose a subscriber completely, which we have been doing a lot lately due to poor delivery.

However, we are offering you plenty of time to upgrade to first class at the existing rate of \$30 for the football season or \$40 through recruiting season in February. Just give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862 to order by credit card. Or you can send your check, money order or credit card information (don't forget your three or four-digit security code) to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Be sure to mention either the "Football Upgrade" or the "Recruiting Upgrade."

# CLIPPERS COLUMBUS

## 2025 SCHEDULE

MARCH/APRIL						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<b>APRIL 1st HOME OPENING NIGHT</b> Tansky Tuesday "Dime-A-Dog" Night #1						
10 @TOL 2:05	11	12 STP 6:35	13 STP 6:35	14 STP 6:35	15 STP 6:35	16 @TOL 4:05
17 STP 1:05	18	19 @WOR 6:05	20 @WOR 6:05	21 @WOR 6:05	22 @WOR 6:05	23 @WOR 4:05
24 @WOR 1:05	25	26 LOU 6:35	27 LOU 6:35	28 LOU 12:05	29 LOU 6:35	30 LOU 4:05
31 LOU 1:05	1	2 @LHV 6:45	3 @LHV 6:45	4 @LHV 6:45	5 @LHV 7:05	6 @LHV 6:35
7 @LHV 1:35	8	9 STP 6:35	10 STP 6:35	<b>Dollar Day Menu</b> Wednesday Night Games		

MAY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<b>Purchase 2025 Season Seats</b> 20 Games / 21 Games / Full Season						
4 STP 1:05	5	6 @IND 6:35	7 @IND 1:35	8 @IND 1:05	9 @IND 7:05	10 @IND 6:35
11 @IND 1:35	12	13 @OMA 7:35	14 @OMA 7:35	15 @OMA 7:35	16 @OMA 6:05	17 @OMA 6:05
18 @OMA 3:05	19	20 @IOW 7:05	21 @IOW 12:05	22 @IOW 12:05	23 @IOW 7:05	24 @IOW 3:05
25 @IOW 1:05	26 @ROC 4:05	27	28 @ROC 7:05	29 @ROC 6:45	30 @ROC 6:45	31 @ROC 6:45

JUNE						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 @ROC 1:05	2	3 TOL 7:05	4 TOL 7:05	5 TOL 7:05	6 TOL 7:05	7 TOL 7:05
8 TOL 1:05	9	10 @BUF 6:35	11 @BUF 6:35	12 @BUF 6:35	13 @BUF 6:35	14 @BUF 6:35
15 @BUF 1:05	16	17 @IND 7:05	18 @IND 7:05	19 @IND 12:05	20 @IND 7:05	21 @IND 7:05
22 @IND 1:05	23	24 @BOW 7:38	25 @BOW 1:08	26 @BOW 7:38	27 @BOW 8:08	28 @BOW 7:08
29 @BOW 2:08	30	<b>\$\$ Fridays</b> Pizza Slice & Small Pepsi, Small Draft Beer, or Wine \$5 for all Bleachers, Lawn, and SRG Tickets				

JULY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3 @TOL 7:05	4 @TOL 7:05	5 @TOL 7:05	6 TOL 4:05	7 TOL 7:05
8 TOL 1:05	9	10 LOU 7:05	11 LOU 7:05	12 LOU 12:05	13 LOU 7:05	14 LOU 7:05
15 LOU 1:05	16	17	18	19 @BOW 8:08	20 @BOW 7:08	
21 @BOW 2:08	22	23 @BFL 7:05	24 @BFL 7:05	25 @BFL 12:05	26 @BFL 6:35	27 @BFL 7:05
28 @BFL 1:05	29	30 @JAX 7:05	31 @JAX 7:05			

AUGUST						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<b>Post-Game Fun Run</b> Sunday Home Games						
3 @JAX 5:05	4	5 @WNN 7:05	6 @WNN 7:05	7 @WNN 7:05	8 @WNN 7:05	9 @WNN 7:05
10 @WNN 1:05	11	12 @TOL 6:35	13 @TOL 6:35	14 @TOL 6:35	15 @TOL 7:05	16 @TOL 7:05
17 @TOL 2:05	18	19 @OMA 6:35	20 @OMA 6:35	21 @OMA 12:05	22 @OMA 7:05	23 @OMA 5:05
24 @OMA 1:05	25	26 @LOU 6:35	27 @LOU 12:05	28 @LOU 6:35	29 @LOU 7:15	30 @LOU 7:15
31 @LOU 6:05	<b>Thirsty Thursdays</b> Beverage Specials, Thursday Games					

SEPTEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3 @IND 6:35	4 @IND 6:35	5 @IND 6:35	6 @IND 7:05	7 @IND 7:05
8 @IND 1:05	9	10 @STP 7:37	11 @STP 7:37	12 @STP 7:37	13 @STP 7:37	14 @STP 6:07
15 @STP 3:07	16	17 @OMA 6:35	18 @OMA 6:35	19 @OMA 6:35	20 @OMA 7:05	21 @OMA 5:05
22 @OMA 1:05	23	24	25	26	27	
28	29	30				

## 2025 PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

- TUE. "TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG" NIGHTS**  
- 4/1, 4/15, 4/29, 5/20, 6/3, 6/17, 7/8, 7/22, 8/5, 8/19, 9/2, 9/16
- WED. "MILITARY & FIRST RESPONDERS" GAMES**  
- 50% off all available tickets (max of 4) for active & retired Military & First Responders
- "DOLLAR DAYS"** - 21 select concession items
- "STUDENT ID NIGHT"**  
- Students 14 and above can present a valid ID and for \$1 receive a Reserved Seat ticket
- THU. "COPA DE LA DIVERSIÓN"**  
- Clippers transform into Los Veleeros on Thursday Nights
- "THIRSTY THURSDAYS"**  
- Beverage Specials on Beer, Margaritas & Soft Drinks
- "STUDENT ID NIGHT"**
- FRI. "\$5 FRIDAYS"**  
- \$5 for all Bleachers, Lawn, and SRG Tickets  
- \$5 for a slice of Donatos Pizza & a Small Pepsi  
- \$5 for Beers (small) & Wine
- "STUDENT ID NIGHT"**
- SAT. "GAME DAY PROMOTIONS"**  
- Visit [clippersbaseball.com](http://clippersbaseball.com) for Saturday Night Promotions
- SUN. "FAMILY DAY & SENIOR DAY"**  
- \$18 Bleacher or \$27 Reserved Family Pass for 2 Adults & up to 4 Kids (18 & under) or Seniors (60 & over)  
- \$3 Bleacher or \$5 Reserved Seat (60 & over)
- "POST-GAME FUN RUN"**

**TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG**  
4/1, 4/15, 4/29, 5/20, 6/3, 6/17, 7/8, 7/22, 8/5, 8/19, 9/2, 9/16

**POST GAME FIREWORKS!** - 5/24, 6/6, 7/5, 7/26, 8/5, 9/3

   @CLBClippers  
#ClipShow

[clippersbaseball.com](http://clippersbaseball.com)

HOME | Copa de la Diversión | Business Day Special | AWAY | "TANSKY TUESDAY" DIME-A-DOG | FIREWORKS

\*All game times listed are subject to change. \*All game times are Eastern.

330 Huntington Park Lane, Columbus, OH 43215 Office: 614.462.5250 Tickets: 614.462.2757