

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 44, No. 19

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 5, 2025

## Next In Line

By **GREG WILSON**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The Ohio State football team got back into the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for the first of 15 spring practices on March 17, and for the first time since 2020, there was no Jack Sawyer, Emeka Egbuka, Denzel Burke, TreVeyon Henderson and so many more who are now off to the NFL draft.

But the college football world isn't stopping for the Buckeyes to allow them to take their time to gather themselves after winning the national championship in the longest season the sport has ever had. Less than two months later, they got back onto the field and started to figure out how to accomplish their three goals in the 2025 season.

As head coach Ryan Day always says, the Buckeyes want to beat Michigan, win a Big Ten championship and – the biggest goal of the three – win a national championship and go back-to-back. It's going to be nearly an entirely new starting lineup for Ohio State this year.

"Every year that happens, though," Day said. "That's the great thing about being at Ohio State. We have such great impact players, then once spring starts you have to restart and look at it differently. That's part of the process. It's a great opportunity for guys to step up. We're onto the next year now. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy. We're just getting started, but it is a transition for sure."

Winning back-to-back championships is an extremely difficult task in college football. Only two teams have been able to do so since the turn of the century, both coming from the Southeastern Conference.

Alabama was the first of the two, winning in 2011 and 2012 – when there was no College Football Playoff – while Georgia did so more recently, winning in 2021 and 2022 – when the CFP was only four teams deep. The Crimson Tide returned 14 starters for



*Retooled Bucks Have Goal To Repeat As National Champs*

SONNY BROCKWAY

**EYES ON THE PRIZE** – The sports world moves quickly as Ohio State head coach Ryan Day knows. The Buckeyes reached the top of the summit on Jan. 20 by winning the CFP title game. But that is in the past, and the 2025 team continues spring practices with the goal of leaving its own legacy.

its second straight run to the title, and the Bulldogs had 10 starters return for the next season.

For the 2025 season, Ohio State faces the challenge of trying to repeat with an almost entirely new squad, returning just six starters from its title-winning team. This

means the Buckeyes will go into 2025 with an entirely new identity than they had for the 2024 season.

That's something the players who are currently in the facility are overtly aware of, with Day saying on the first day of spring camp that he and the players understand that they have to be their own team.

In his first press conference of spring ball, Day said that when he met with the leaders of this year's team, they had the idea to take down some of the national championship reminders from throughout the Woody.

"The leaders of this group decided they want to take some of the national championship stuff down in the facility because they realize, 'We didn't win a national championship. Last year's team did.' That

was a good start. That's the right mentality to have because we have to start this thing from scratch and build from there."

At Ohio State's pro day on March 26, former Buckeye Donovan Jackson had some protests about the idea of removing reminders to the title just two months removed from reaching the goal he had for four years. But while the images of the title run still hang in the hallways, the message from the team has been made very clear. They are not going to rest on their laurels, and they seem to be just as hungry to try to win another.

As Day said, it's not going to be easy, but there is some proof of concept now that the way he runs the program actually works.

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## BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN.COM

### From The Message Board

**Both the Ohio State men's and women's basketball programs had disappointing finishes to their seasons, with the men's team missing the NCAA Tournament for the third consecutive year and the women's team losing in the Round of 32 for the second straight season. We asked subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum to offer their thoughts on what both programs need to do to reach that next level of success, as well as what they feel the realistic expectations are for both teams under the leadership of Jake Diebler and Kevin McGuff moving forward.**

"I am not a basketball expert, nor a coach, but in any successful endeavor, it is important to have a robust process that can be relied upon to help in the completion of your goals. Typically in team sports it is important to have a strong team culture, focus on improving player skills, develop team communications, and utilize

effective coaching strategies. As far as realistic expectations, I believe there is no reason not to expect either the men or the women Buckeyes to compete for a B1G championship and be very competitive in the end-of-season playoffs."

– BuckeyeScott

"It may be premature to change coaches for either MBB or WBB. Continuity is an underappreciated benefit for a sports team. For MBB, I think realistic expectations are to 'compete' for the B1G championship every year, or most years. For WBB, I don't know what realistic expectations are.

"Syracuse might be a good object lesson (for the men's basketball team). Since 2014 they've lost at least 14 games every season except two. Going back to 2000, their record is only slightly better (than Ohio State's). Syracuse is supposed to be a basketball school. It's unusual and difficult to maintain excellence in basketball decade after decade."

– Terrier Buck

"This is why the coaches get paid the big bucks. I have no idea how they can repair their teams. I have the feeling the team chemistry on both teams has been strained, and once that happens, well, good things don't happen. It's beyond a duct tape patch job."

– PeyoteBuck

"I think it's much harder to build a culture in basketball in the portal era. Between graduates, transfers and one-and-dones,

teams can lose half their players or more each year. Ohio State has built a solid culture and winning tradition in football that players want to be part of, so the best players and coaches come. We don't have that in basketball, and I don't know how to make that happen."

– Michael Bauer

"For the men, they need to prevent another mass exodus from the team this offseason. They will never build their chemistry otherwise. Bringing in a decent big man would also help. A big man who is known for his productivity, not his recruiting stars.

"As for the women, it's been 12 years now. Isn't it obvious that Ohio State has gone as far as it is going to go under McGuff? If remaining on the fringes of the elite in both the conference and the country is what is acceptable now at Ohio State, then I guess so be it. It's unfortunate though. If they were going to fire McGuff, presumably they would have done it already so I guess we will have at least one more year of the same old same old, though they fired Thad Matta in June. Kevin McGuff is no Thad Matta."

– Poster That Harley Built

### From The Pages Of BSB

#### 40 Years Ago — 1985

It wasn't so much a matchup of David and Goliath, but rather the lightweight going against the heavyweight, a Sugar Ray Leonard in the ring against Larry Holmes.

That was one way to describe Ohio State's game with eighth-ranked Louisiana Tech on March 16 in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. The Bulldogs, who had just destroyed Pitt on the backboards two days earlier in their Midwest Region first-round contest, had their way again with the Buckeyes. OSU was unable to stop Tech when it decided to go to the basket, while the Bulldogs put up a brick wall at their end to frustrate any inside assault the Buckeyes had planned.

The end result was another lost rebounding battle (42-32) for the Buckeyes and a 79-67 decision in favor of Louisiana Tech. Ohio State packed up and left for home from Tulsa with a final 20-10 season record.

Buckeye coach Eldon Miller, who preached all season long that his players had to guard well and grab the loose ball in order to succeed, brought up the subjects again after the game.

"In the game of basketball, if you can't control the backboards, you're going to have a lot of problems," he said. "They were too strong for us."

#### 35 Years Ago — 1990

Randy Ayers admitted he had seen the peaks and valleys during his first season as Ohio State's head basketball coach.

"This season certainly had its ups and downs," Ayers told BSB after the Buckeyes had bowed out of the NCAA Tournament. "I guess 17-13 was the limit for this team. We were 10-8 in the Big Ten, and I'm very pleased with that. We played very well at home and beat everyone in the conference except the top two teams (Michigan State and Purdue)."

Ayers' team matured at midseason after a rough start and won eight of its final 11 regular-season games, including wins over such nationally ranked powers as Louisville, Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota.

The strong finish catapulted Ayers' young squad to an eighth seed in the NCAA's West Regional.

A thrilling, come-from-behind 84-83 overtime win over Providence in the first round on March 15 advanced Ohio State to meet top-seeded UNLV in the second round on March 17. The Runnin' Rebels, the No. 3-ranked team in the country, defeated OSU 76-65 to end its tournament odyssey.

#### 30 Years Ago — 1995

After three seasons of "ifs" and "almsots," Ohio State coach John Cooper was ready for something major to happen with the Buckeyes.

But to get there (i.e. the Rose Bowl and a top-10 finish), Ohio State had some key questions to answer and spots on both offense and defense to fill beginning with spring practice.

"Every spring is the same," said Cooper, who had guided OSU to a record of 27-8-2, one Big Ten co-championship and two second-place finishes over the past three years.

"We begin by trying to replace last year's graduating seniors or those players we lost off last year's team. We are also trying to introduce the younger players who haven't played into the system.

"This year, we've got three new coaches on the offensive side of the ball with Walt Harris, Mike Jacobs and Chuck Stobart. It won't be a learning process because they are veteran coaches. But in terms of getting acquainted with the players, that's what spring practice is all about," he said.

#### 25 Years Ago — 2000

At least for one night, the NCAA Tournament once again brought out the best in the Ohio State men's basketball team.

The Buckeyes looked the part of the juggernaut in destroying Appalachian State 87-61 on St. Patrick's Day and appeared to be on their way to

the gold at the end of the rainbow.

But round two of the tourney generated disappointment – bitter disappointment.

The Buckeyes' 75-62 loss to Miami (Fla.) March 19 in Nashville, Tenn., put a screeching halt to a 23-7 season that included a Big Ten co-championship but still left many high-reaching fans and the OSU players themselves starving for much more.

"It's hard to believe the season's over," senior point guard Scoonie Penn said. "We felt like we had a chance to move on."

#### 20 Years Ago — 2005

When the Ohio State women's basketball team burst Rutgers' bubble during the regular season, it left the Scarlet Knights questioning a few things.

Was their three-game winning streak over top-10 foes a mirage? Did they play defense as hard as they professed to? Were the seniors ever going to step up?

The Buckeyes won that mid-January game 52-50 after erasing a 21-16 halftime lead. The second time around, however, with the stakes much higher, it was Rutgers that had all the answers.

The Scarlet Knights harassed OSU into a woeful 39.5 percent shooting day – its second-worst performance of the year – and hit opportune shots down the stretch on the way to a 64-58 victory in an NCAA tournament third-round game held March 27 at Temple's Liacouras Center in Philadelphia.

Rutgers guard Cappie Pondexter, who had played just 19 minutes and scored five points in the first showdown, led the Scarlet Knights masterfully, passing when she needed to and talking the shots no one else dared take.

She scored a game-high 24 points and was a big part of a Rutgers defense that caused 15 Ohio State turnovers.

"I felt I could make a difference," Pondexter said. "It just came down to making shots and playing smart. They're a good team, and we knew if we gave them openings, they'd take them."

#### 15 Years Ago — 2010

Evan Turner had a decision to make for the second consecutive year.

The previous year, the Ohio State guard opted to return to Columbus for his junior season despite being projected as a first-round NBA draft pick. The decision paid off as he put up one of the most prolific seasons in program history and led the Buckeyes to the Sweet 16 for the first time in his career.

The question now was whether Turner could again turn down the chance to fulfill a lifelong dream.

In the immediate aftermath of his team's 76-73 loss March 26 to Tennessee, Turner was asked if he could give a figure on how likely he was to return for his senior season.

"I can't give a percentage right now," he said. "This (loss) is just sticking in my head. I really don't want to go out like that. I don't even know."

#### 10 Years Ago — 2015

A little more than two months previous, Cardale Jones etched his name in Buckeye lore.

The third-year sophomore quarterback had just completed an unlikely run, leading the Ohio State football team to a national championship. Jones entered the season as a backup, but injuries to Braxton Miller and J.T. Barrett thrust the strong-armed Cleveland Glenville product in the spotlight.

He did not disappoint, helping Ohio State defeat Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game, No. 1 Alabama in the Sugar Bowl and second-ranked Oregon to claim the inaugural College Football Playoff. In that span, he threw for 742 yards and five touchdowns while running for 90

more yards – often of the tough variety – and another score.

He entered the spring as the No. 1 quarterback for the Buckeyes. Part of that was by coincidence, though as both Miller (torn labrum in right shoulder) and Barrett (broken right ankle) were still recovering from injuries. That left Jones as the only member of what Urban Meyer had dubbed the "Magnificent Three" to be fully healthy.

It would be understandable if Jones considered the spring his chance to push ahead of his fellow QB competitors, but he rebuffed that notion March 12 following Ohio State's second spring practice.

"Spring is always about getting better and working on fundamentals," said Jones, who on more than one occasion told reporters that he was not overly concerned about the upcoming QB showdown.

#### Five Years Ago — 2020

While fans were undoubtedly eager for sports to resume, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith believed it was still too early to speculate on whether there would be a college football season in the fall.

After all, there was still plenty of uncertainty surrounding the worldwide coronavirus outbreak that had led to the postponement of several professional sports leagues and the cancellation of all spring college sports – including the Buckeyes' annual spring game, which had been scheduled for April 11.

"We've been busy, frankly, trying to adjust to our new normal," Smith said during an interview with Columbus radio station 610 WTVN on April 10.

That same day, the NCAA established a working group to assess how much preseason conditioning would be needed before the season could begin, adding in a statement it was still "premature to establish a timeline for when the scenarios may be put in place." Meanwhile, Smith and the athletic directors at the 13 other Big Ten institutions had been discussing return-to-play protocols during their daily conference calls for a little over a week.

"We really have to understand that the players did not have their spring football, so that's physical activities lost," Smith said during a teleconference with reporters that afternoon. "And remember, there is training that typically occurs in the summertime. At the end of the day, we need to develop a return-to-play model for those players that's frankly practice-oriented so that we avoid soft-tissue injuries that occur in muscles, tendons and ligaments and end up with sprains, strains and contusions."

#### One Year Ago — 2024

When the dust settled on the regular season – and after the Buckeyes tacked on another win over Iowa in the second round of the Big Ten tournament on March 14 – Ohio State interim head coach Jake Diebler had thrust an Ohio State team that owned a 14-11 record and 4-10 mark in the Big Ten on Feb. 14 back onto the NCAA Tournament bubble with six convincing wins in seven tries.

For incoming Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork, what was once an inspiring story became an impressive showing of leadership and coaching ability that he could not dismiss, causing him to believe that the right person for the Buckeyes' head men's basketball coaching job was not a big name outside of the program, but rather a Buckeye lifer who was right on campus.

"We laid out a very specific profile about what we envisioned for Ohio State basketball," Bjork said during Diebler's introductory press conference as head men's basketball coach on March 18. "Passion; energy; create a program; identity; a track record of player development; a recruiting machine, especially here in the Midwest and in the state of Ohio; strong leadership skills that can galvanize Buckeye Nation; someone who understands and also can capitalize in modern-day college athletics; born-to-coach. Jake Diebler fits each one of those characteristics and then some.

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**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**  
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# Transfer Portal: Two Sides To Every Coin

Ohio State would not be the defending national champion without the services of Will Howard, Quinshon Judkins, Caleb Downs, Seth McLaughlin, Josh Simmons and others who found their way to Columbus via the transfer portal.

That said, I still don't like the concept of unrestricted free agency in college athletics.

When the requirement was dropped to sit out a year of competition after transferring, the focus of Ryan Day and his contemporaries shifted from an all-out assault on high school prospects to one that added scouting the opposition and then using NIL money for proven commodities to fill their needs.

It seems to me the only thing separating the NFL and college football these days is that there is a salary cap in the pro ranks that leads to parity. There is no such illusion as parity in college football. Programs such as Ohio State that were already successful can afford to retain their elite status as long as the money never runs out – and at Ohio State, the prospect of the money ever running out seems ludicrous.

Basketball, of course, is a completely different animal. Entire rosters can transition from year to year as programs change coaches or chase NCAA Tournament glory.

In the space of just 12 months, Darian DeVries has bounced from coaching at Drake to West Virginia to Indiana where he will have to rebuild a roster from scratch. When forward Bryson Tucker and point guard Myles Rice entered the portal on March 28, it left DeVries with exactly zero scholarship players remaining on his roster.

Perhaps DeVries could begin his rebuilding process with 6-7 forward Tre White, who is shopping for a new school. White signed out of high school with USC before transferring to Louisville before transferring to Illinois, where he averaged 10.5 points and 5.5 rebounds per game this past season. But itchy feet being what they are, White announced he was hitting the portal again shortly after the Illini lost to Kentucky in the NCAA Tournament Round of 32.

At Ohio State, basketball is the flip side of the coin to football in terms of the transfer portal.

I'm still trying to process the reasons that the men's team rallied around Jake Diebler down the stretch of last season and then appeared disinterested and disengaged this year when the Buckeyes had a legitimate chance to return to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2022.

Whether or not Diebler is the coach to bring the Ohio State program back to prominence is a debate for another time. What is not up for debate is how Diebler is managing the portal. He brought in five transfers this season, and only one – guard Micah Parrish, who averaged 13.3 points per game – wound up of much benefit.

Meanwhile, the only portal pickup so far for next year is guard Gabe Cupps, who left the sinking ship at Indiana. Cupps was a two-time Ohio Mr. Basketball at Centerville High School (the alma mater of Kirk Herbstreit, Mike Nugent and A.J. Hawk among others), but his career with the Hoosiers was a checkered one. He averaged 2.6 points in 33 games as a freshman but appeared in only four games this past season.

Over on the women's side, Kevin McGuff is having to deal with some of the same issues. Three-time All-Big Ten forward Cotie McMahon (another Centerville product) has decided she would like to make it past the first weekend of the NCAA tournament, so she has entered the portal. There have been unconfirmed rumblings that McMahon's attitude put her cross-

ways with McGuff and some of her teammates. There is no getting around the fact, however, that the Buckeyes are going to have to find a way to make up for losing a player who started each of the 97 games she appeared in the past three seasons and averaged 15.3 points and 5.5 rebounds per contest.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

McGuff just finished his 12th season at Ohio State, and 276 victories (including vacated wins) during that span is a total that speaks for itself. But there is a creeping feeling that many of those wins are being achieved against much lesser competition, and a 21-point regular-season loss to USC, a 29-point loss to UCLA in the Big Ten tournament semifinals, and a 15-point loss to Tennessee in the second round of the NCAA tournament does little to dispel that feeling.

### Back To Football

The time between celebrating a national championship and the first whistles of spring practice used to be nearly three months. For Ohio State, it was exactly 56 days from its 34-23 win against Notre Dame to the first spring session on St. Patrick's Day.

Since hoisting the championship trophy on that euphoric mid-January night in Atlanta, Day has been busy plugging holes in both his coaching staff and roster. Gone are coordinators Chip Kelly and Jim Knowles as well as 12 players who started against the Fighting Irish, a number that doesn't include wideout Emeka Egbuka because the Buckeyes began the title game in an offensive set that featured six linemen and two tight ends.

That number does, however, include Howard, who had a storybook season after transferring in from Kansas State. Howard went from entering the program with fans wondering how or if he could compare to predecessor Kyle McCord to joining the exclusive club of Ohio State quarterbacks who have helped lead the Buckeyes to a national championship.

Changing starting quarterbacks with regularity is a necessity at the college level – until, of course, someone decides to scrap how long any individual player can retain his eligibility. Before that happens, though, college coaches have to go through the replacement process at least every two or three years. For Day, he will be looking for his fourth starting QB in four seasons from a trio that includes three-year veteran Lincoln Kienholz, sophomore Julian Sayin (who transferred from Alabama last year), and true freshman and five-star prospect Tavien St. Clair.

Quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler, promoted from program assistant to a full-time position this year, already has coach-speak down pat. Early in spring camp, he said, "Right now, those three guys are really just focused on getting better every single time they step in this building."

Fessler has a vested interest in saying that. He doesn't want any complacency at the position, and he doesn't want to risk chasing one of his prospects into the portal.

But I have a secret for you. Sayin is going to be the starter. Just like Howard wasn't recruited by Day from Kansas State to hold a clipboard for Devin Brown, Sayin wasn't lured from Alabama to be a backup.

It's a pretty safe bet, too, that Sayin is

going to be just fine. There is no way he can replicate the experience Howard had when he got to Columbus, and it would be presumptuous to believe Sayin can escape the growing pains that come with any young player starting at quarterback at Ohio State.

When he trots out to take the first offensive snap in the season opener against Texas, Sayin will have the experience of having thrown only 12 collegiate passes. Over the past quarter-century, only Justin Zwick (2004), J.T. Barrett (2014) and C.J. Stroud (2021) have started the season opener as the new quarterback for the Buckeyes with fewer career attempts.

Zwick's career was done in by injuries and the emergence of Troy Smith, but Barrett and Stroud are the top two quarterbacks in program history in terms of yardage (a combined 17,557 yards) and touchdown passes (189 between them). I think it's safe to say they turned out all right.

Barrett and Stroud had a plethora of premium targets while at OSU, and that is something Sayin shares with them. Egbuka and his program-best 205 career receptions might be gone, but freshman All-American Jeremiah Smith is still here. And when Smith gets double-teamed – and he will – Carnell Tate, Brandon Inniss and others will be there to pick up the slack.

As previously mentioned, I think Sayin is going to be just fine.

### Over-Inflated Ego

Self-awareness has never been a strong suit at Michigan. I mean, it's painfully obvious Desmond Howard never listens to the ridiculous things that come out of his own mouth. I long ago gave up wondering whether his ESPN schtick is a purposeful parody of Ron Burgundy in the "Anchorman" movies or if Howard truly believes the nonsense he spews.

Now, under the heading of "Other Things You Never Thought Possible," someone with Michigan ties has managed to one-up Howard in the lack of self-awareness department.

Connor Stalions, the former Michigan football assistant at the heart of the program's sign-stealing scandal in 2023, resurfaced recently to opine about his future in the coaching profession. Suffice it to say, Stalions had better start wishing upon every star he sees in the nighttime sky.

Why media outlets continue to give voice to crackpots and their crackpot notions has always been a bit of a mystery to me, but the Michigan satellite of On3 Sports – a network of websites that focus mainly on college football and basketball – recently gave Stalions a platform on which to dream about one day returning to Ann Arbor as head coach of the Wolverines.

"Oh, of course, yeah," said Stalions about the idea of coaching at Michigan. "I'll outwait anyone. Whenever. Whenever it's time."

He added that he would be willing to take a job at a rival Big Ten program if that is what it took to get to his ultimate goal.

"As long as it's not Ohio State or Michigan State," he said with a laugh before adding that he actually would consider the Buckeyes. "Obviously, Ohio State would never even consider that, but I'll answer the phone if they call."

Compile a list of the most delusional people you've ever known, and this guy has to rank near the top. Whenever the NCAA finally gets around to hammering the Michigan football program for the way it sold its soul to win the 2023 national championship, Stalions is going to be the poster child for show cause penalties. He won't be able to get a job sweeping out college locker rooms.



**Day Says Spring Game Will Be Played**

After some uncertainty about what Ohio State's "Spring Showcase" on April 12 would entail, head coach Ryan Day confirmed during a March 24 press conference that the event would still most likely be a traditional spring game, assuming his team is healthy enough to compete.

"We want to do this," Day said. "We want to play a spring game. Now, there may be some guys that are held from the spring game, but not many. So we need to get out there and compete."

"The format of it and how it works will probably be similar to what we've done in the past. So it will be a great opportunity for fans and folks to see our guys get out there and play."

Multiple other teams around the country – Michigan State, Nebraska and Texas being three examples – have decided not to have spring games because of the concern that other schools would use that as an opportunity to scout and poach players during the spring transfer portal, which opens on April 16 and closes just nine days later on April 25.

Day, however, sees it as more of an exciting opportunity for both his players to get their feet wet inside Ohio Stadium before its highly anticipated season-opening home tilt with the Longhorns and the fans to gain a first glimpse at the 2025 team before they start their pursuit of a second consecutive national title.

"That part of it (the transfer portal), to

me, it is what it is, but we need to go do it. It's important that we start the season fast, and I think that first step is playing in the spring game," Day said. "So we're looking to get a great crowd, and I know we've got some great things planned that day."

Day offered more information on what would go on that day beyond the scrimmage in a March 31 press conference. He said that after the game the team will hold their annual "Saddle Up" event at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, an NIL fundraiser that – according to the event's website – will include live country music, dancing, live and silent auctions and the second annual "Run for the Scarlet and Gray" horse race with celebrity jockeys. The event will run from 6-10 p.m.

Day said the country singer Russell Dickerson and Columbus-based band North to Nashville will perform, while former Buckeyes Will Howard, Donovan Jackson, Seth McLaughlin and Jack Sawyer will all be in attendance.

"It's a great night to not only celebrate the championship but also raise money for NIL," Day said. "April 12 will be a great day here."

Tickets for the Saddle Up event start at \$250, while spring game tickets will start at \$10. Fans can also purchase a limited number of reserved seating options in AA deck for \$22 and club seats at \$37. All prices for the game are subject to change, according to the school.

Ohio State is also planning on having a number of different fan experiences on April 12, including a pregame fan fest and a photo opportunity with the College Football Playoff national championship trophy.

**Ohio State Accepts Invite To Visit White House**

Ohio State will visit the White House on April 14 to celebrate its 2024 national championship team, Day confirmed at the March 24 press conference.

"It's an honor to be invited. We were formally invited," Day said. "I remember growing up and watching the national championship teams go to the White House. I always looked at that, like, 'Man, what an honor that would be.' So, it's part of the celebration of our team. I'm looking forward to getting that all planned out."

Day's confirmation came three days after CBS initially reported that the Buckeyes would be headed to the nation's capital to meet with President Donald Trump, Vice President and Ohio State graduate (2009) JD Vance and others.

Ohio State will be the first championship-winning team to visit the White House since Trump began his second term as president in January as well as the first college football national champion to visit since LSU's football team was honored in 2019 during Trump's first term.

Alabama in 2020, Georgia in 2021 and 2022 and Michigan in 2023 all did not make the trip due to COVID-19 restrictions and scheduling conflicts.

Ohio State last visited the White House in 2015 after its national championship run when former President Barack Obama was in office. The Buckeyes also met with former President George W. Bush in 2003 following their 2002 championship.

**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)

**Smith, Siereveld, Styles Named Iron Buckeyes**

Ohio State named the recipients of the 2025 Iron Buckeyes honor after spring practice on March 19, with strength coach Mickey Marotti giving the honor to redshirt sophomore offensive lineman Austin Siereveld, sophomore wide receiver Jeremiah Smith and senior linebacker Sonny Styles.

In a video released on the team's Twitter account, Marotti is seen describing to the team the significance of the Iron Buckeye award, explaining that it is an honor "given to the student-athlete who best exemplifies unquestionable physical training dedication, determination, discipline, toughness and leadership." Then he named the three winners of the award, which he said were voted on by team leaders and strength coaches, among others.

Smith earns the distinction for the second time in as many seasons with Ohio State. Last year, he was named an Iron Buckeye for his training dedication during post-spring workouts, which made him the first freshman ever to win that honor.

Styles is also an Iron Buckeye for the second consecutive season. He earned the award with Smith last summer before turning in a solid 2024 campaign in his first year starting at Will linebacker, ranking second on the team in tackles with 100.

Siereveld was named an Iron Buckeye for the first time in his three years with the program. The Liberty Township, Ohio, native is expected to serve as a versatile rotational piece on Tyler Bowen's offensive line this season after earning starting reps at both left and right guard last season.

Siereveld was seen taking first-team reps at left tackle in spring practices open to the media, and Day said he has also spent time playing at guard.

**Harrison Has High Hopes For Smith**

In an appearance on The Podcast on March 26, former Ohio State and current Arizona Cardinals wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. paid Smith perhaps the biggest compliment he's received since he joined the Scarlet and Gray.

"I think he is the LeBron James of football," said Harrison, who was visiting Columbus for the team's pro day. "He's built differently than everyone else. Just athletically gifted, the mindset that he has. As a football player it's really special to see the talent and who he is as a character. There is no limit for him."

Harrison possesses a special kind of talent in his own right, one which he put on

full display during his Ohio State career from 2021-23. After spending most of his true freshman season sitting behind Garrett Wilson, Chris Olave and Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Harrison totaled 144 catches for 2,474 yards and 29 total touchdowns during his sophomore and junior seasons, a stat line that allowed him to become a two-time unanimous All-American and one-time Heisman Trophy finalist (2023).

Despite how good Harrison was with the Buckeyes, though, Smith is on pace to be even better. In his true freshman season, Smith broke every single-season freshman receiving record at Ohio State, including receptions (76), receiving yards (1,315) and receiving touchdowns (15).

According to Harrison, who ranks seventh in program history in both receptions (155) and receiving yards (2,613) and third in receiving touchdowns (31), Smith should have no problem shattering the receiving record books at Ohio State once he wraps up his collegiate career in 2026.

"Every record there is at Ohio State, he's going to have it," Harrison said. "There's nothing he's going to leave college not having done."

The praise Smith is receiving in his teenage years is nothing out of the ordinary. Smith was forecast by his cousin and NFL quarterback Geno Smith to be the greatest wide receiver ever, and many draft experts have said he would be the No. 1 overall pick in the upcoming 2025 NFL draft if he were eligible.

"Pressure? Nah, I don't really feel pressure," Smith said after his first college game last August. "I know all the hype around me was crazy coming in. I just wanted to come in and work, not be about all hype. Impress my coaches, impress my peers, and impress my teammates."

**Ohio State To Hold Student Appreciation Day**

Ohio State will hold its annual Student Appreciation Day on April 5 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, giving a chance for students to take in one of the Buckeyes' spring practices before the Spring Showcase. The event will begin at 11:30 a.m.

This will mark the fourth straight year Ohio State will offer its students an intimate look at the football team during a spring football practice. The event, which was originally launched by former head coach Urban Meyer, was discontinued due to the COVID-19 pandemic before Day restored it in 2022.

"It's great to see the students out here," Day said after the event in 2023. "It's good

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Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be raising the cost of upgrading subscriptions to first-class mail in an envelope 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, the cost of the envelope and handling to mail a copy of BSB first class. That's \$39 for 13 issues. BSB's philosophy has been better to lose \$9 than lose a subscriber completely due to poor mail delivery.

We are offering you plenty of time to upgrade to first class at the existing \$30 rate 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."

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 19 cover date) is scheduled to be mailed April 15.

With spring football practice now in full swing and the "Spring Showcase" rapidly approaching, 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.

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for them to see (the team) live and in color. An opportunity like today – during the (season), they're up in the stands, a little bit further away. But with this, they get to see how it goes."

If the Buckeyes continue their Student Appreciation Day blueprint from previous years under Day, the event will likely consist of an intrasquad scrimmage as well as a postgame session where students can meet the Buckeyes, take pictures with them and receive autographs.

Last year's practice was highlighted by the spectacle put on by Smith, who made several impressive catches during a performance that was indicative of things to come in his record-breaking freshman season.

Ohio State is offering shuttle buses to pick up students from campus and drop them off at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. Students can get both onto the shuttle and into the practice for free as long as they show a valid school ID.

### Hancock Wouldn't Trade Title For U-M Win

Moments after 17 former Buckeyes completed their pro day workouts, Jordan Hancock made it clear exactly what Ohio State's national championship win meant to him.

"All of (the hard work) was worth it," Hancock said of the Buckeyes' national championship victory. "Being a senior, it means everything."

Unlike most national champions, though, Ohio State's path to glory was a bit unique when considering the way that it finished the regular season. Further complicating things was that one of the Buckeyes' two losses on the year came to archrival Michigan, a stunning 13-10 defeat at home that extended the Wolverines' winning streak over the Buckeyes to four straight games. Despite the loss in the regular-season finale, though, Ohio State made the inaugural 12-team College Football Playoff as a No. 8 seed and subsequently won four straight games to take home the national championship.

According to Hancock, the new college football landscape slightly alters the stakes of The Game.

"It's a different era," Hancock said. "Obviously, you want to beat The Team Up North, but we also want to hoist that big trophy and be the No. 1 team in the country."

Hancock is part of a 2021 class that never managed to beat Michigan during their time as Buckeyes, losing to U-M in each of their four matchups from 2021-24, with two of those losses coming at home (2022 and 2024). Although Hancock's college days are now in the rearview mirror, he said Ohio State's losses to Michigan will not sit well with him, a feeling that is likely shared by all of his now-former teammates. Still, when asked if he would trade the Buckeyes' national championship win for a victory over the Wolverines, Hancock didn't hesitate in his response.

"No," he said. "No, I wouldn't trade at all."

"It's not going to sit well for sure, but I feel like we needed that loss to win the national championship. It was probably the best loss I've had in my life."

### Williams-Dixon Discusses Decision To Return

Ohio State's running back group in 2024 was led by two soon-to-be NFL draft picks in TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, leaving freshmen James Peoples and Sam Williams-Dixon down the depth chart, with Peoples being the clear No. 3 in the rotation.

That reality likely compelled Williams-Dixon to enter the transfer portal during the midst of the Buckeyes' College Football Playoff run, but he didn't stay away from the program for long, withdrawing his name from the portal and returning to Ohio State on Feb. 12.

During a media availability on March 17, Williams-Dixon discussed his decision to return to the Buckeyes, saying that he realized Ohio State was the best place he could be to "grow up" and start doing what was best for himself.

"For starters, it was just me listening to the wrong people," Williams-Dixon said. "I have to take care of my life. I didn't have control of it, and I got control of it. What brought me back was I didn't want to leave. I was engraved here. I love it here."

When Williams-Dixon was going through the recruiting process, it was former running backs coach Tony Alford who brought him into Ohio State. Then when Alford left for Michigan last offseason, Williams-Dixon didn't have any prior relationship with new running backs coach Carlos Locklyn.

Williams-Dixon said that although he didn't have the best relationship with Locklyn last year, their bond grew much stronger this offseason after he went through the difficult process of entering the portal and returning to Columbus.

"I feel like coming back made (our re-

lationship) way better," he said. "We have a way better connection. When Alford left, it was a little shaky for that whole year, but when I came back, (Locklyn) and I sat down and got to know each other a little bit more and had that man-to-man talk."

The redshirt freshman said those talks weren't happening between him and Locklyn before he entered the portal, but now they are more consistent in getting together after Williams-Dixon became more comfortable with speaking up, which he said was part of the growing up he had to do.

Going forward, Williams-Dixon is trying to make the best of his situation and earn time on the field with Peoples and transfer CJ Donaldson Jr. seemingly ready to lead the group this year. He will also have to compete with the three true freshmen from the 2025 recruiting class in Bo Jackson, Anthony "Turbo" Rogers and Isaiah West.

Williams-Dixon thinks that being able to stand out in the passing game is one of the things that could help him get onto the field. He did not record a reception last year but had 53 rushing yards on seven attempts in his four games played.

"Being part of the passing game is really important for me," he said. "I can catch the ball, and I can run the ball."

### Lockhart Loses Black Stripe

Ohio State redshirt freshman cornerback Miles Lockhart had his black stripe removed after Ohio State's seventh spring practice on March 29, making him the first Buckeye to earn the distinction in the 2025 season.

Lockhart, a former four-star prospect in the 2024 class out of Chandler (Ariz.) Basa, did not play any snaps as a freshman last season while sitting behind program stalwarts Denzel Burke, Hancock, Davison Igbinosun and others. With Burke and Hancock now off to the NFL, though, he could be in line for at least some playing time as a reserve.

Judging from the spring practices open

**Continued On Page 6**

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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

to the media in early March, Lockhart is starting the year as the Buckeyes' No. 3 slot cornerback behind redshirt senior and projected starter Lorenzo Styles Jr. as well as fellow 2024 four-star Bryce West. Junior Jermaine Mathews Jr. – who is projected to start at outside cornerback – also saw some time at the slot position, making it an even steeper hill to climb for Lockhart if he wants to get on the field in any capacity this season.

Lockhart's stripe removal leaves just four members of Ohio State's 2024 recruiting class who have yet to become "official" members of the team, those being defensive linemen Dominic Kirks and Eric Mensah, punter Nick McLarty and wide receiver Damarion Witten.

## Women's Hockey Falls In Title Game To Wisconsin

The Ohio State women's hockey team's bid for a third national championship in four

years fell just short on March 23 when it fell 4-3 in overtime to archrival Wisconsin in the national title game.

The Buckeyes weren't as dominant as they were last year when they finished the national championship-winning season 35-4, instead carrying a record of 27-8-3 into the NCAA tournament.

Still, after two straight wins over St. Lawrence (6-1) and Cornell (4-2), the Buckeyes found themselves clinging to a 3-2 lead in the final minutes of the third period in the national title game. However, the game changed for the Buckeyes when they were called for too many players on the ice with 1:50 left, giving the Badgers a chance to tie the game on the power play.

Wisconsin opted to make it a 6-on-4 advantage in the last 1:02 of the game when it pulled goalie Ava McNaughton. After applying plenty of pressure, the Badgers shot a puck toward the net with about 20 seconds to go. It was at that point when Ohio State graduate forward Maddi Wheeler grabbed the puck in the crease and was called for a delay of game penalty to give Wisconsin a penalty shot. Badger junior forward Kirsten Simms took full advantage of the opportunity, faking out Ohio State goalie Amanda Thiele to tie the game at three-all.

In overtime, Wisconsin picked up right where it left off, outshooting Ohio State 9-1, before Simms scored the game-winning goal 2:49 into the overtime period.

"Going into overtime with them tying it so late, it was hard," Ohio State junior defender Emma Peschel said after the game. "We knew that there was a momentum shift.

We talked about that all weekend, but we knew that right from the jump we had to get on it. We had to get that momentum back. And unfortunately, we couldn't grasp it."

The last-second loss was perhaps as heartbreaking as they come for the Buckeyes, but after the game head coach Nadine Muzerall was very proud of her players, many of whom have now played their final games in scarlet and gray.

"There's not a lot to really say after a tough loss," Muzerall said. "These are fantastic human beings. I think they played phenomenal tonight. It's the way we lost with 18 seconds left. It was an unfortunate outcome."

## Ohio State Adds Yates To Defensive Support Staff

Ohio State added another member to its support staff in the days since BSB last went to press when it hired former NFL offensive lineman and assistant Billy Yates as a defensive quality control coach on March 17.

Yates played in the NFL from 2003-10 and was also an assistant offensive line coach with the Detroit Lions in 2020 and with the New England Patriots from 2021-23, both stints coming under the Buckeyes' new defensive coordinator Matt Patricia.

His coaching career began in 2013 when he was the strength coach for Texas A&M. He then went on to be the assistant strength coach for Texas Tech from 2014-16 before being hired for the full-time role at Bowling Green from 2017-19 and then

moving on to the NFL.

Yates is one of 10 additions to the Buckeyes' staff this offseason, joining Patricia, Bowen, defensive quality control assistants Taver Johnson and Miguel Patrick, offensive program assistants Charlie Dickey and Colin Keanu, assistant tight ends coach Wendy Laurent, offensive quality control coach Austin Fields, and special teams quality control coach Nate Ebner.

Yates, who is one of seven former NFL players on Day's coaching staff, joins a support staff group that also includes defensive program assistant Joshua Chorba, special teams program assistant Gunner Daniel, offensive quality control coaches Tim Hinton and Tony Johnson, assistant secondary coach Michael Hunter, offensive program assistant Devin Jordan, special teams quality control coach Rob Keys and assistant linebackers coach Sam McGrath.

## Voltolini No Longer On OSU Staff

Associate athletic director of football operations Brian Voltolini did not have his contract renewed by Ohio State, The Lantern reported on March 27.

Voltolini first joined Ohio State as director of operations in 2012 under Meyer and spent six seasons in that role. He was elevated to associate athletic director in 2018.

According to Ohio State's website, Voltolini's responsibilities as associate athletic director of football operations in-



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cluded "budget planning/tracking, game day, team charters and hotel selections and other logistics pertaining to the program."

Voltoini's departure from the program leaves Ohio State with just two members of the Meyer era left on the staff, those being Marotti and general manager of player personnel Mark Pantoni.

Voltoini spent 18 total years working with Meyer, serving on his staff at Bowling Green (2001-03), Utah (2003-06) and Florida (2006-10) before reuniting with him in Columbus.

## Okudah, Campbell Find New Homes In NFL

A pair of former Buckeyes have found new NFL homes. Former unanimous All-American cornerback Jeff Okudah signed a one-year, \$2.35 million contract with the Minnesota Vikings on March 18, while Parris Campbell, a former first-team All-Big Ten receiver with the Buckeyes, agreed to terms on a one-year, \$1.34 million contract with the Dallas Cowboys on

March 15.

Okudah, who played for Ohio State from 2017-19, has experienced an injury-riddled NFL career thus far. The former No. 3 overall 2020 NFL draft pick spent three disappointing seasons with the Detroit Lions – starting just 22 games in that span – before being traded to the Atlanta Falcons for a third-round draft pick. He played 13 games for the Falcons and recorded 44 tackles and one interception before signing with the Houston Texans last offseason, where he played just six games while battling a hip injury.

Okudah, 26, will now look to revitalize his career on his fourth NFL team in Minnesota. The Vikings went 14-2 last season and boasted the 22nd-best scoring defense at 25.4 points allowed per game.

Like Okudah, Campbell has made plenty of stops during his six-year NFL career. After totaling 1,768 receiving yards at Ohio State from 2014-18, Campbell was drafted in the second round of the 2019 NFL draft by the Indianapolis Colts and played three seasons with the franchise,

most notably totaling 63 catches for 623 yards and three touchdowns in 2022.

Campbell's 2022 season earned him a new contract with the New York Giants in 2023, but he was unable to live up to expectations, recording just 20 catches for 104 yards and zero touchdowns in 12 games. His most recent stint came with the Philadelphia Eagles this past season, where, despite considering retirement before the year, he went on to win a Super Bowl ring when the Eagles defeated the Kansas City Chiefs 40-22 in Super Bowl LIX this February.

Campbell did not record a stat in the Super Bowl and had just 30 receiving yards in five games. He will now look to succeed on a Cowboys team that finished 7-10 last year and had just one player record over 610 receiving yards (CeeDee Lamb, 1,194).

## Dezenzo Makes Astros Opening Day Roster

Former Ohio State outfielder Zach Dezenzo made the Houston Astros' open-

ing-day roster.

Dezenzo, the Astros' No. 5 ranked prospect according to MLB Pipeline, played for Ohio State from 2019-22 and boasted a slash line of .281/.362/.538 with 38 home runs and 131 RBI. Dezenzo's collegiate production allowed him to be named a freshman All-American at Ohio State and be selected by the Houston Astros in the 12th round of the 2022 June amateur draft.

Dezenzo then made a quick ascension through the minor leagues – slashing .295/.377/.499 with 29 home runs and 107 RBI in three seasons – before making his major league debut this past season on Aug. 6, 2024. The Alliance, Ohio native slashed .242/.277/.371 in his debut season with two home runs, eight RBI and 22 strikeouts.

Despite spending much of his time in Columbus playing shortstop and third base, Dezenzo is now playing first base for Houston. In his brief playing time in 2025, Dezenzo has played in right field and had no hits and three strikeouts in three at-bats before BSB went to press.

# Breaking In QB At Ohio State Nothing New

Continued From Page 1

"That run, it solidified for everyone in the building that the culture works, the system works," he said. "How we do it, our process works. It gave credibility to everything we're doing. Truth be told, when you're a first-time head coach, you haven't done it before and you become the head coach at Ohio State, you typically don't get the benefit of the doubt until you win it all. Now we have the testimony moving forward for our guys, and that's the most powerful thing we can do."

Day said that he's much more relaxed after the win on Jan. 20, but he made sure he was clear that his desire to win and his process aren't going to change.

"I'm definitely more relaxed," Day said. "To say I'm not is crazy. There's no question. We're in a different place than we were a couple months ago. Let's call it what it is. But that doesn't change the approach."

Another thing the Alabama and Georgia teams that repeated championships had that the Buckeyes don't is that they were able to keep the same quarterback for both

seasons, with A.J. McCarron and Stetson Bennett leading those respective offenses.

Will Howard was under center for Ohio State last year, and he's one of the previously mentioned major contributors who is taking their talents to the next level.

It's the third straight season there will be a quarterback competition in Columbus that will likely bleed into fall camp, this one between redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz, redshirt freshman Julian Sayin and true freshman Tavien St. Clair.

Howard was able to lead the team to the promised land in his first year in the program, but he had four years of experience under his belt when he earned the starting job. Kienholz, Sayin and St. Clair have almost no in-game experience that wasn't in blowouts, other than Kienholz' forgettable performance in the 2023 Cotton Bowl.

But that doesn't mean the Buckeyes won't get good play from the quarterback position. Day compared the experience level in the room to former Buckeye C.J. Stroud's redshirt freshman season when he competed with Jack Miller and true freshman Quinn Ewers to win the starting job.

Any worry that Buckeye fans might have had surrounding the signal caller that season was unnecessary since Stroud finished the year with a 71.9 completion percentage, 4,435 yards and 44 touchdowns to six interceptions in 12 games. He was fourth in Heisman voting.

With Kienholz looking much better this spring and the former five-star recruit Sayin showing off the talent that had him ranked as the top quarterbacks in the country out of high school, there is a sense of optimism surrounding the position. But Day is expecting them to be the hardest-working players on the team.

"The No. 1 job for the quarterback is to be the hardest working guy in the building. If it's somebody else, then that's a problem," Day said. "They should be the first ones in the building and the last ones to leave."

"To me, it's the process of understanding how to get better and then continually working. Then when you make a mistake, you learn from that mistake and you grow quickly. A lot of that has to do with their preparation. When a guy walks into the huddle, you can tell if he's prepared or not."

Preparedness is something that every player is seeking this spring. Day understands that they aren't going to win any games this early in the season, but they can use the work they get to do to build toward the team they want to be in the fall. He hopes that none of his players are going into practice with the mindset of winning a starting job. Instead, he feels the mentality should be to get better every single day and stack those days.

"In spring, you have 15 practices, and a good portion of the 15 practices are the guys learning and growing," Day said. "The No. 1 job for each individual player is to get better individually and come together as a team. Once we get into the summer, it's a little more moving, it's a little bit more situational. You start to feel a little bit more what it's going to look like in a game."

Another change the team will be working through in the spring is that it will have an entirely new defense with defensive coordinator Matt Patricia commanding that side of the ball. Not only will the scheme look different, but there are only three returning starters with safety Caleb Downs, cor-

## Ohio State Spring Football Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School
1	Davison Igbinosun	CB	6-2	193	Sr.	Union, N.J./Mississippi
1	Brandon Inniss	WR	6-0	203	Jr.	Hollywood, Fla./American Heritage
2	Caleb Downs	SAF	6-0	205	Jr.	Hoschtan, Ga./Mill Creek / Alabama
3	Lincoln Kienholz	QB	6-3	207	Jr.	Pierre, S.D./T.F. Riggs
3	Lorenzo Styles Jr.	CB	6-1	195	Gr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
4	Devin Sanchez	CB	6-2	185	Fr.	Houston, TX
4	Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	215	So.	Miami Gardens, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
5	Mylan Graham	WR	6-1	185	So.	New Haven, Ind./New Haven
5	Aaron Scott Jr.	CB	6-0	185	So.	Springfield, Ohio/Springfield
6	Sonny Styles	LB	6-4	235	Sr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
7	Phillip Bell	WR	6-1	195	Fr.	Mission Viejo, CA
7	Jermaine Mathews Jr.	CB	5-11	189	Jr.	Cincinnati/Winton Woods
8	DeZie Jones	WR	5-10	185	Fr.	Wayne, NJ
8	Arvell Reese	LB	6-4	238	Jr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Glenville
9	Malik Hartford	SAF	6-3	194	Jr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
9	Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	225	Fr.	Bellefontaine, OH
10	Faheem Delane	SAF	6-1	210	Fr.	Olney, MD
10	Julian Sayin	QB	6-1	203	So.	Carlsbad, Calif./Carlsbad / Alabama
11	C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	233	Sr.	Dayton, Ohio/Archbishop Alter
11	Quincy Porter	WR	6-4	205	Fr.	Oradell, NJ
12	CJ Donaldson	RB	6-2	237	Sr.	Miami, Fla./West Virginia
12	Bryce West	CB	5-11	196	So.	Cleveland, Ohio/Glenville
13	Miles Lockhart	CB	5-9	193	So.	Chandler, Ariz./Basha
13	Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	185	Jr.	Zephyrhills, Fla./Wiregrass Ranch
15	Zion Grady	DL	6-4	246	Fr.	Enterprise, AL
16	Mason Maggs	QB	6-2	224	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
16	Keenan Nelson Jr.	DB	6-1	185	Sr.	Philadelphia/St. Joseph's Prep / South Carolina
17	Tarvos TJ Alford	LB	6-1	225	Fr.	Port Saint Lucie, FL
17	Carnell Tate	WR	6-3	191	Jr.	Chicago/Marist (Ill.) / IMG Academy
18	Jaylen McClain	SAF	6-0	192	So.	Rahway, N.J./Seton Hall Prep
18	Bodpegn Miller	WR	6-3	180	Fr.	Mansfield, OH
19	Nick McLarty	P	6-7	255	So.	Melbourne, Australia/Caulfield Punt Factory
20	James Peoples	RB	5-10	203	So.	San Antonio, Texas/Veterans Memorial
20	Riley Pettijohn	LB	6-2	220	Fr.	McKinney, TX
21	Brenten Inky Jones	SAF	6-2	205	Sr.	Steubenville, Ohio/Steubenville
23	Nolan Baudo	WR	5-10	180	Jr.	Chicago, Ill./Marist
23	Garrett Stover	LB	6-1	220	So.	Sunbury, Ohio/Big Walnut
24	Deshawn Stewart	SAF	6-1	195	Fr.	Wayne, NJ
24	Sam Williams-Dixon	RB	5-11	203	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington North
25	Ty Howard	LB	5-11	205	Sr.	Cleveland/Duquesne
25	Bo Jackson	RB	6-0	210	Fr.	Cleveland, OH
26	Chase Brecht	RB	6-0	205	Sr.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
26	Payton Pierce	LB	6-2	223	So.	Lucas, Texas/Lovejoy
28	TC Caffey	RB	5-10	215	Sr.	Hubbard, Ohio/Hubbard
28	Leroy Roker III	SAF	6-1	175	So.	Fort Myers, Fla./Bishop Verot
29	Glorien Gough	DB	5-11	175	Jr.	Palos Verdes Estates, Calif./Mater Dei
30	Cody Haddad	SAF	5-11	175	Fr.	Cleveland, OH
32	Isaiah West	RB	5-10	213	Fr.	Philadelphia, PA
33	Eli Lee	LB	6-3	230	Fr.	Akron, OH
34	Bukari Miles Jr.	CB	6-2	190	So.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
34	Brennen Schramm	WR	6-0	191	Jr.	Medina, Ohio/Medina
35	Anthony Venneri	P	6-0	225	Sr.	Hamilton, Ontario/St. Thomas More / Buffalo
37	Zach Hayes	LB	6-3	220	So.	LaGrange Park, Ill./Nazareth Academy
38	Jayden Fielding	K	6-0	175	Sr.	League City, Texas/IMG Academy
38	Eli Riggs	LB	6-4	230	So.	Cincinnati/Indian Hill
39	Joey Velazquez	LB	5-11	226	Gr.	Columbus, Ohio/De Sales / Michigan
41	Morrow Evans	LS	6-1	205	So.	Bellaire, Texas/Episcopal
42	Joe McGuire	P	6-2	212	Jr.	Melbourne, Australia/Prokick Australia
43	John Ferlmann	LS	6-3	228	Gr.	Phoenix, Ariz./Arizona State
43	DiantÉ Griffin	CB	5-9	185	Sr.	Lima, Ohio/Lima Senior
46	Ryan Rudzinski	SAF	6-4	213	Jr.	Columbus, Ohio/Bishop Watterson
48	Logan George	DL	6-4	249	Jr.	Pocatello, Idaho/Idaho State
50	Alec DelSignore	LB	6-1	225	Jr.	Youngstown, Ohio/Cardinal Mooney
51	Luke Montgomery	OL	6-5	308	Jr.	Findlay, Ohio/Findlay
52	Joshua Mickens	DE	6-3	233	Jr.	Indianapolis, Ind./Lawrence Central
53	Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-4	288	Jr.	Dublin, Ohio/Coffman
55	Dominic Kirks	DE	6-4	255	So.	Painesville, Ohio/Riverside
58	Gabe VanSickle	OL	6-5	285	So.	Coopersville, Mich./Coopersville
59	Ahmed Tounkara	DL	6-1	260	So.	Dublin, Ohio/Scioto
62	Joshua Padilla	OL	6-4	295	Jr.	Huber Heights, Ohio/Wayne
63	Julian Goines-Jackson	OL	6-1	315	Sr.	Zanesville, Ohio/Youngstown State/Zanesville
64	Simon Lorentz	OL	6-3	280	So.	Dover, Ohio/Dover
66	Nate Riegler	LB	6-3	210	So.	Findlay, Ohio/Findlay
67	Austin Sierveld	OL	6-5	320	Jr.	Liberty Township, Ohio/Lakota East
69	Ian Moore	OL	6-6	309	So.	New Palestine, Ind./New Palestine
70	Phillip Daniels	OL	6-5	315	Jr.	Cincinnati/Minnesota
71	Jayvon McFadden	OL	6-4	285	Fr.	Upper Marlboro, MD
72	Deontae Armstrong	OL	6-6	298	So.	Elyria, Ohio/St. Edward
73	Devontae Armstrong	OL	6-5	303	So.	Elyria, Ohio/St. Edward
74	Carter Lowe	OL	6-6	341	Fr.	Toledo, OH
75	Carson Hinzman	OL	6-5	300	Sr.	Spring Valley, Wis./Saint Croix Central
76	Jake Cook	OL	6-5	295	Fr.	Westerville, OH
77	Tegra Tshabola	OL	6-6	327	Sr.	West Chester, Ohio/Lakota West
78	Ethan Onianwa	OT	6-6	357	Fr.	Katy, Texas/Rice
80	Shawn Lodge	WR	6-0	170	Sr.	Akron, Ohio/St. Vincent St. Mary
81	Damarion Witten	WR	6-4	215	So.	Cleveland/Glenville
82	David Adolph	WR	6-5	209	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
83	Nate Roberts	TE	6-5	235	Fr.	Washington, OK
84	Dorian Williams	WR	6-2	200	So.	Cincinnati/Princeton
85	Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	260	Sr.	Acworth, Ga./Allatoona
86	Max Klare	TE	6-4	236	Jr.	Cincinnati/Purdue
87	Reis Stocksdales	WR	5-10	188	Gr.	Morrow, Ohio/Little Miami
88	Maxence LeBlanc	TE	6-4	227	So.	St-Bruno, Quebec/Baylor (Tenn.) School
88	Trajen Odom	DL	6-3	285	Fr.	Weddington/
89	Will Kacmarek	TE	6-6	260	Gr.	St. Louis, Mo./Ohio U.
90	Eric Mensah	DL	6-3	290	So.	Stafford, Va./Mountain View
91	Jarquez Carter	DL	6-1	285	Fr.	Newberry, FL
92	Caden Curry	DE	6-3	260	Sr.	Greenwood, Ind./Center Grove
94	Jason Moore	DL	6-6	305	Jr.	Ft. Washington, Md./DeMatha Catholic
95	Casey Magyar	K	5-11	185	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Kent State
95	Tywone Malone Jr.	DT	6-4	301	Gr.	Jamesburg, N.J./Bergan Catholic/Ole Miss
96	Eddrick Houston	DE	6-3	270	So.	Atlanta, Ga./Buford
97	Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	DE	6-6	258	Sr.	Hollywood, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
98	Kayden McDonald	DL	6-3	326	Jr.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett

**Coaching staff** – Ryan Day, head coach; Brian Hartline, offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach; Matt Patricia, defensive coordinator; Tim Walton, assistant head coach/co-defensive coordinator/secondary/cornerbacks coach; Keenan Bailey, co-offensive coordinator & tight ends coach; Matt Guerrieri, safeties coach/pass game coordinator; Tyler Bowen, offensive line coach & run game coordinator; Larry Johnson, associate head coach/defensive line coach; James Laurinaitis, linebackers coach; Carlos Locklyn, running backs coach; Billy Fessler, quarterbacks coach; Mickey Marotti, associate AD, director of football sport performance; Rob Keys, special teams coordinator; Sam McGrath, assistant linebackers coach; Michael Hunter Jr., assistant defensive backs coach; Gunner Daniel, program assistant - special teams; Devin Jordan, program assistant - wide receivers; Joshua Chorba, program assistant - linebackers; Tony Johnson, analyst - running backs; Charlie Dickey, program assistant - offensive line; Marcus Johnson, assistant offensive line coach; Wendy Laurent, assistant tight ends coach; Austin Fields, football QC - offense; Tim Hinton, executive director for football relations / special assistant to the head coach; Billy Yates, football QC - defense; Taver Johnson, analyst - defensive backs; Miguel Patrick, football QC - defense; Nate Ebner, football QC - special teams; Colin Keanu, program assistant - quarterbacks; Tony Washington, program assistant - defensive line.



nerback Davison Igbinosun and linebacker Sonny Styles reclaiming their roles.

Patricia brings a lot of football experience, having coached in the NFL for nearly 20 years. He also brings some instant credibility in that he has won three Super Bowls during his 16-season stint with the New England Patriots and has had to deal with the shorter turnaround that comes with playing in the championship game. Now, he can provide some sort of advice for Day, who is dealing with that for the first time.

“In my previous experience, one of the biggest things is to try to always get everybody to understand the urgency that you need to come back at,” Patricia said. “We would always say, ‘We’re just behind everyone else. Everybody else got to jump-start (their season) and is a little bit further ahead,’ and try to create that urgency of what’s happening right now. We’ve really got to be intentional about everything we do. We have to rest. We have to recover.”

The urgency he talked about isn’t something that he believes needs to be around just in the spring. He thinks that is going to have to last throughout the entire season since they are reigning champions.

“There’s a big target on you now, and everybody is going to spend the offseason studying every facet of what you do,” Patricia said. “Even if you don’t play that team until the middle of the season, we’ve got four days to get ready for them. They’ve spent six months getting ready for us. We’ve got to catch up to where they are.”

The players who have been with the team for at least a year understand what it’s

going to take to try to win another title. But the Buckeyes also welcome in transfers and freshmen who aren’t as familiar with being a Buckeye, and that’s another part of the focus this spring.

Some of those new players did have the advantage of being with the team during the last few games of the championship run since they enrolled early, but getting them 100 percent up to speed is going to be even more important this year because of the lack of experience on the roster as a whole.

That was one of the big things the coaches and leaders of the team talked about in the meeting before spring ball started that Day mentioned.

“One of the first things was to reinforce the culture, and after the end of the meeting it was, ‘We have to rebuild the culture,’ because this team hasn’t done anything,” Day said. “There are guys on this team who don’t know the culture. They were fortunate enough to be with the team for the last two games, which was great. But just because they were there to watch the run doesn’t mean they are ready to get onto the field just yet. They still have a lot to learn before they earn any playing time.

“Does it look like it’s the first time they’ve ever heard some of the calls before or do you not notice them early on? It’s usually pretty good when you don’t notice a young guy. I don’t know that until a guy gets on the field, but I know in terms of the preparation, how we handle ourselves in meetings, all of those things were really good things for those guys to see.

“I know for sure that once we get going

in August that they’ll be much further along than most because they did have those couple of weeks and now they’re jumping into it in the spring.”

It could also be easier for the new players to earn some time on the field this season because of the new roster limits rules. The Buckeyes, as well as every other Division I college football team, will only be able to have 105 players on the roster, down from 120

Because of that, Day wants to make sure that his players are as versatile as ever, using former Buckeye wide receiver Xavier Johnson as an example of the type of player who can help the team due to the fact that he can do so many things.

“We want to be able to teach guys in dual roles this year,” Day said. “I think that’s important. If you’re a tight end, you need to be able to play receiver. A tight end could learn protection and line up in the backfield. A receiver – like Brandon Inniss – could line up in the backfield and take a handoff. You think about Xavier Johnson and you think about the run we made late in the (2024) season when guys had to move around and play multiple positions.

“You see that in the NFL, but the difference here is that you don’t get to sign people off of waivers. At 105, that’s tough. If you only have 105 guys and some of those guys are young freshmen, you have to have versatility at all of those positions.”

But regardless of who the replacements for last year’s starters will be and who will earn some sort of role on the team, the spring game is going to come first.

The Buckeyes are calling this year’s version the “Spring Showcase,” which led to some confusion initially, especially since schools like Texas, Michigan State and Nebraska have canceled their spring games due to the worry of players being poached in the spring portal, among other things.

However, Day confirmed on March 24 that he is hoping that their showcase will resemble as close to a traditional spring game as it can, leaving wiggle room for anything else in case the Buckeyes are dealing with too many injuries by the time April 12 comes around.

Ohio State opens the 2025 season with a big test, which could show early on how up to the task this reloaded roster is to repeat as champions. Texas – which played Ohio State close in last year’s CFP semifinal in Dallas and is a surefire national title contender this season – comes to Columbus on Aug. 30. It’s the first game action the Buckeyes will have since the national championship win over Notre Dame, which is a big reason that Day wants to have the spring game.

According to Day, the start of the Buckeyes’ title-defending season is fast approaching, and the Spring Showcase will be a big opportunity to sharpen their swords before the mighty Longhorns come to town.

“We’re 159 days away from playing Texas, and (the Spring Showcase) will matter to a lot of young players,” Day said on March 25. “We’ll need to get out there and compete. It’s important that we start the season fast, and that first step is playing in the spring game.”

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# Smith, Sayin Headline Offensive Standouts

By CAMERON MOONE

Special to Buckeye Sports Bulletin

For a unit that is being forced to replace eight starters and numerous standouts, the 2025 outlook on the Ohio State offense might be higher than it was heading into 2024.

With the uber talented wideout Jeremiah Smith returning after his record-breaking freshman season and now-established mainstay offensive linemen such as Carson Hinzman at center and Luke Montgomery and Tegra Tshabola at guards leading the front five, the Buckeye offense may have truly put the term “reload, not rebuild” into practice after the national championship-winning season.

The offense will look a bit different throughout spring and heading into the first game against Texas on Aug. 30, however. One-and-done offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, who re-engineered a pedestrian offense from 2023 into a 2024 juggernaut (35.7 points, 429.4 yards per game), returned to the NFL to take the same position with the Las Vegas Raiders. Following his departure, Ohio State made two internal promotions to fill his duties, tabbing wide receivers coach Brian Hartline as full-time offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Keenan Bailey as co-offensive coordinator.

It wasn't just Kelly whom the Buckeye offense needed to replace. Offensive line coach Justin Frye also headed to the professional ranks to take on the same position with the Arizona Cardinals. After Frye's departure, head coach Ryan Day added former Virginia Tech offensive coordinator Tyler Bowen to lead the front five in 2025 – a hire that has already paid off with Ohio State landing commitments from two in-state offensive line targets for the class of 2026 as BSB went to press.

Day thinks the combination of Hartline, Bowen and others makes for a formidable offensive staff that could work well together for the 2025 season.

“I think the first thing (when looking at Bowen as a candidate) was talk to Brian (Hartline),” Day said on March 7. “Brian will be a first-time play caller for us, and (we) wanted to make sure that we had somebody in the room and in the run game that had coordinator experience.”

“We have really good support behind him that we hired and that I think are excellent. They've got a lot of energy, and you can feel when they come in the building. So we'll work through the spring and kind of see and evaluate how that goes. But I think that he's going to work tremendously with Brian in a short period of time.”

Adding new coordinators and position coaches as well as plugging in some transfers at various positions along the offense, the Ohio State unit that put together its best play in the College Football Playoff last season will have a tall task replicating that success, but it is not lacking the talent to do so this season.

With spring practice now in full swing, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has an early position-by-position overview of Ohio State's 2025 offense.

## Quarterbacks

Ohio State will have a different quarterback taking the first snap of the year, its fourth signal caller in four years. After C.J. Stroud led the Buckeyes for back-to-back seasons,



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NEW ERA — Replacing Will Howard, the quarterback who led Ohio State to the 2024 national championship, is a tall order, but redshirt freshman Julian Sayin (10), freshman Tavien St. Clair (9) and redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz (not pictured) are ready for the challenge with Sayin being the early favorite to start against Texas on Aug. 30.**

the Scarlet and Gray relied on Kyle McCord (2023) and Will Howard (2024) to command the offense. With Howard now off to the NFL, Ohio State will either see redshirt freshman Julian Sayin, redshirt sophomore Lincoln Kienholz or highly touted freshman Tavien St. Clair under center for Week 1.

The consensus pick among media to earn the starting spot is Sayin, who transferred to Ohio State in January 2024 as a five-star recruit after a brief stint in Tuscaloosa, Ala., before leaving after longtime head coach Nick Saban retired from the Crimson Tide. The 6-1, 203-pound Sayin was efficient in his minimal time on the field in 2024, going 5 for 12 for 84 yards and a touchdown – a 55-yarder to tight end Bennett Christian against Western Michigan on Sept. 7.

“The quarterback room is young,” Day said on March 7. “They're going to have to compete. We need a quarterback to be tough. We need them to be a leader. I've said this before. They've had a great opportunity to watch Will. That's the standard of what leadership should look like. Now they've got to go do it.”

“Early on, we're going to try to roll and try to get three groups so those guys get an equal amount of reps. We'll split up who goes where. Even last year with Will, we did that. Guys were getting reps with the ones, guys were getting reps with the twos, the threes. We're going to roll them and try to get the best evaluation we can. We'll evaluate everything.”

Even with Sayin's early buzz, St. Clair and Kienholz have solidified themselves as true threats to start in the season opener. St. Clair has been committed to Ohio State since June 21, 2023, nearly as long as Kienholz has been enrolled in Columbus (June 19, 2023), and was with the team for their national championship run. He has familiarity and close relationships on his side throughout spring ball but hasn't been spared from the growing pains of the average incoming freshman.

“At the end of the day, Tavien is still a guy that should be in high school,” quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler said on March 19. “Does

it help that he was around all last spring and in a bunch of meetings? Yeah, I think so. But at the end of the day, he's sitting there in those meetings, but he still has his own offense to go run the following fall.”

“His mind is more on that probably than it is on studying all the details of different concepts in this scheme that we're running here. Is it the first time that he's hearing a lot of things? Yes. Are there a couple things that are a little bit familiar? Yes. So I think that can give you a little bit of an advantage. But, at the end of the day, it's just trying to find a way that he can continue to learn and grow and get better every single day.”

St. Clair enters spring with a label that hasn't been bestowed to an incoming freshman at Ohio State since Braxton Miller in 2011: a five-star, in-state quarterback. The 6-4 gunslinger hails from Bellefontaine, Ohio, about an hour northwest of Columbus. In contrast to St. Clair, what Kienholz lacks in not being born in Buckeye country he makes up for in the work he's put in to contend for a starting spot throughout spring.

Kienholz, a Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs High School product, redshirted his first season in Columbus and appeared in only two games in 2024 as the team's fourth-string quarterback. Even with this lack of playing time, though, Kienholz is the longest-tenured quarterback among the three potential starters, and the work he's done behind the scenes compared to what he's done in the limelight has put him in a position to compete for the starting job this year.

“I've definitely seen a lot of growth from (Kienholz), getting in here in June (2023) and to where we see him now,” Fessler said. “Just a full year of understanding the offense, a full year of getting a feel for what we're trying to do and what we're trying to accomplish, and just the minute details about where my eyes need to be, how I can tie my feet in with my eyes and how I can make sure that I'm not just throwing the ball to the right receiver because that's where my read dictates, but I'm also throwing

it at the right time and I have accuracy. So that's what I'm excited for because you're starting to see more and more of that from Lincoln as we get into the practices.”

For Sayin, though, the talent is all there. Described as having a quick release by Fessler, Sayin likely possesses the gaudiest skill set out of the three contending quarterbacks in terms of arm strength and pocket presence. Now, it's time to polish those skills heading into his second full spring in Columbus, according to his quarterbacks coach.

“We're continuing to work to build that arm strength, to strengthen (Sayin's) core, to work rotationally, because he is such a rotational thrower,” Fessler said. “We're working on maximizing his movements, both between his lower half and his upper half so he can get that ball out with enough velocity to be successful.”

“He definitely has a quick release. But there's so much more to playing the position of quarterback than just having a quick release. So we're really working through all those other things.”

## Running Backs

Ohio State running backs coach Carlos Locklyn put it simply when referring to the loss of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins – a duo of backs who put up a combined 2,076 yards and 24 rushing touchdowns, 10 of those scores coming in the postseason.

“We lost two big dogs,” Locklyn said.

But his fear of the future is limited because of the talent that Ohio State possesses in the running backs room. Leading the way among the position group in the early stages of spring ball are sophomore James Peoples, junior West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson and sophomore Sam Williams-Dixon – all running backs who saw time in 2024 for their respective schools. Apart from those three, the Buckeyes also hauled in freshmen such as Bo Jackson (four-star, No. 10 running back in the nation), Isaiah West (three-star, No. 59) and Anthony “Turbo” Rogers (four-star, No. 5) – although Rogers won't be a spring participant due to enrolling later this year.

“James had a good offseason,” Locklyn said on March 7. “CJ is 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.”

Peoples was efficient in his limited time on the gridiron last season, rushing for 197 yards on 49 attempts (4.0 average) with two touchdowns. Now in his second full spring in Columbus, Peoples said he will rely on his improved strength and conditioning to solidify his role as a feature back for the Buckeyes.

“I definitely gained weight,” Peoples said on March 19. “I'm like 210, 211 (pounds) right now. Same height, of course. But, other than that, just really improving footwork and stuff like that. (Strength and conditioning) coach Mick (Marotti) has been doing a great job this winter in developing our bodies and everything, as well as our mind. So being a student of the game and learning everything is a blessing for me.”

Donaldson, who was seen as more of a bruising back than an out-of-the-backfield option with the Mountaineers, totaled 11 touchdowns on the ground in back-to-back seasons in Morgantown, W.Va., while rushing for a

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

combined 1,532 yards. Unlike Peoples who added to the scale, Donaldson made an effort to improve his frame from his Big 12 days and trimmed down from his former 238 pounds to a reported 225 pounds during his first winter in the Big Ten.

"Weighing 240, it was just different, man," Donaldson said on March 19. "I could feel the difference out here. When I'm running at 225, I feel like I'm running like the Flash right now. I definitely feel quicker, more explosive. I'm just (working on) getting off the ball and just continually working on my short-area burst as frequently as possible."

Between Peoples and Donaldson as the main rotators in spring plus the incoming freshmen and Williams-Dixon, Locklyn said versatility will be the name of the game going forward when examining the best back for Ohio State.

"I want different styles," Locklyn said. "I never try to take the same back. You don't want to take the same thing. You want to take guys with different strengths, whether they're big guys, small guys, pass catchers, in between the tackle runners. No, I don't want to take the same back."

### Offensive Line

Ohio State's offensive line in 2024 was a patchwork system that ultimately worked out well for the team as it captured the national championship hardware at the season's end. Heading into 2025, the group may be in one of the more solidified spots that it has seen in recent years.

That isn't to say the Buckeyes don't have some roles to fill throughout spring, though. All-America guard Donovan Jackson, who slid into the left tackle spot last season after Josh Simmons went down, is heading to the NFL, as is two-time starting right tackle Josh Fryar. Rimington Award winner Seth McLaughlin, who suffered a torn Achilles just before the Indiana game in November, is also headed to the pros. That leaves three open spots for Ohio State's 2025 linemen to fill, with junior Montgomery and redshirt junior Hinzman projected to reclaim the starting roles they had in the CFP at left guard and center, respectively.

The Buckeyes got help through the portal to fill out the important offensive tackle positions, picking up Ethan Onianwa from Rice while adding Phillip Daniels Jr. from Minnesota. Both linemen enter the program with intimidating frames – Onianwa at 6-6, 345 pounds and Daniels at 6-5, 315 – and some noteworthy collegiate experience, but it was made obvious during the first practices of camp that they will both have to earn their starting jobs, as redshirt sophomore Austin Siereveld was earning first-team reps at left tackle and redshirt freshman Ian Moore was getting the starting treatment at right tackle.

One name to watch on the offensive line is Siereveld, whose versatility likely allows for him to play any position. He was also seen taking reps inside during the practices open to the media. The sophomore Armstrong brothers, Deontae and Devontae, can also play at tackle and on the interior, all making for what Day thinks is a determined and deep group that has impressed him early on.

"I like the way that we're working right now," Day said. "I think there's a good rhythm about Tyler, and you know all the guys. They're attacking this thing, and there's just a good rhythm about them. I think the guys on the offensive line feel like they're getting better coming off the field every day. And you're seeing a

lot of guys swing right now, playing a couple different positions, and some of the techniques are similar. They'll start to settle themselves down, but right now, those guys are just working, competing."

Bowen agrees that nothing is set in stone yet in terms of who is starting, but he is impressed with the talent and versatility his group possesses.

"I'm going to reserve a lot until we get on the field," Bowen said on March 7. "Obviously, there's a body of work with some guys from last year that you're seeing on film, watching every snap that they went through last year, and guys moving around and all those things.

"I'd say the thing that stands out to me is the athleticism in the room that we've got, guys who can pull and kick out and get on the perimeter and do things. I think there's a general level of athleticism that sticks out and guys that have experienced different spots. So you hope as we go through spring, we're able to create some flexibility up front."

### Tight Ends

Much of the production from Ohio State's tight ends room was lost when Gee Scott Jr. (27 receptions, 253 yards, two touchdowns) ran out of eligibility after the 2024 season. But the previously said "rebuild, not reload" mantra can be applied heavily to Bailey's tight end group.

The Buckeyes most notably brought in transfer Max Klare from Purdue while holding onto former Ohio transfer Will Kacmarek, redshirt sophomore Jelani Thurman and Christian. Klare is likely to lead the room after totaling an impressive 51 receptions for 685 yards and four touchdowns – all numbers that led Boilermaker pass catchers in 2024. While those receiving numbers are impressive, the Cincinnati native is poised to become more than just a prolific pass-catching tight end at Ohio State.

"Being a tight end, it's not just about pass catching," Klare said. "You have to block, and I think that's something that I want to keep developing. And going against these guys (on Ohio State's defense) every day, running routes and blocking these guys every day, I mean, it's going to make you better. So I think I have a

vision of where I want to be as a tight end, and this place gives me the best opportunity to do that."

Following Klare in the tight ends room this spring will likely be Kacmarek, who, despite missing four games due to injury, still caught eight catches for 86 yards and was key in the blocking game. Bailey called Kacmarek the "best blocking tight end in the country."

Thurman (four catches for 42 yards and a touchdown) will also be looking for an expanded role this season and, according to Bailey, has taken great strides to achieve that, while Christian, sophomore Max LeBlanc and true freshman Nate Roberts will also attempt to gain significant playing time with strong spring performances. Each of these players has Bailey excited to get the most out of his group this spring as they prepare for another likely long season.

"It has to be," Bailey said on when asked if this is the deepest tight ends room he's coached at Ohio State. "We had all six (tight ends) play in the playoff, and four of those six are back. So we've got tons of guys in that room who have started college football games, and not just against the school down the street, (playing) in big-time moments and big-time games. So yeah, we're super deep."

### Wide Receivers

It feels as if Ohio State wide receivers are an omnipresent force. Year after year, a blooming star comes forward while supplementing or replacing the efforts of an older, more established player. The 2024 season was no different, with Smith shattering every freshman receiving record at Ohio State and leading the Buckeyes in pass catching while being younger than Carnell Tate and Emeka Egbuka in the position group.

Now technically still a freshman academically but a sophomore within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Smith remains along with Tate as part of one of the more feared units in all of college football. Smith, who was named an "Iron Buckeye" for the second straight off-season due to his excellence and dedication in the weight room, has continued to earn universal praise from every coach that is asked about him. Both Day and Hartline suggested that

their superstar sophomore has taken strides this season to improve his leadership and serve as an example for the younger players who have just joined the program, which is an element of his game that he didn't necessarily show last season as a freshman.

"He is a lead-by-example kind of young man," Hartline said. "He's not going to say a whole lot, at least in years past. I would say growing would be that way. He's being a little more outspoken. I think he's speaking more in the receiver room. I would say conversations that we have definitely just feel more and more intellectual, and football IQ and all that's just growing. He's just another year older, another year of improvement, so he's growing that way."

Tate, meanwhile, is poised for a breakout season after he caught 52 passes for 733 yards and four touchdowns in 2024 as Ohio State's No. 3 wideout. The same can be said for fellow junior Brandon Inniss, who, after catching 14 passes for 176 yards and a touchdown as a reserve last year, is finally slated for a starting role at the slot position, where he will look to replace the production of Egbuka.

While the trio of Smith, Tate and Inniss could be the most formidable in all of college football at the wide receiver position, Hartline said the success of his room this year will ultimately be determined by the development made by some of the younger wideouts on the roster this offseason, starting in spring. He listed freshmen Philip Bell, De'Zie Jones, Quincy Porter and Bodpegn Miller as players who will determine just how good this group is. Sophomore Mylan Graham will also be an important piece of the room this season, who can emerge as the first player off the bench for Hartline if he has a strong spring camp.

"I think having the guys that are coming back that know the offense and have been pretty productive is one thing that checks that box. But how good the younger guys are really will dictate how good the room is," Hartline said. "I think that all four of those (freshmen) are doing a really good job of learning the offense, doing what is expected, and they're studying – putting in extra work, trying to get caught up, trying to uphold the standard of the room."

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# New-Look OSU Defense Not Short On Talent

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With eight new starters and a new coordinator leading the way, Ohio State's defense seems to be riddled with unknowns.

Perhaps the biggest certainty though is that the 2025 unit will have its work cut out for it to replicate the success of its predecessor.

En route to their first national championship since 2014, Ohio State's defense finished No. 1 in scoring defense (12.9 points per game allowed), No. 1 in total defense (254.6 yards per game allowed), No. 3 in rushing defense (87.6 yards) and No. 3 in passing defense (167.0 yards).

As is often the case in collegiate sports, great success is followed by plenty of turnover. The Buckeyes had eight defenders graduate from 2024 including their entire defensive line, cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock, safety Lathan Ransom and linebacker Cody Simon. All of those departures were to be expected, but what came as a surprise to many who follow Ohio State was that defensive coordinator Jim Knowles left for the same position at Penn State.

Knowles, considered by many to be one of the best coordinators in college football, improved Ohio State from the No. 59 ranked total defense the year before he arrived (2021) to No. 1 in his last year with the team.

New defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, who cut his teeth as an assistant under Bill Belichick with the New England Patriots and became more of a household name during his unsuccessful stint as head coach of the Detroit Lions from 2018-20, will not have to rebuild the unit as Knowles did but rather retool the younger Buckeye defense in 2025.

Although Patricia has been on head coach Ryan Day's staff for only a little over a month, he already likes what he's seen from his young defenders.

"We have great young men here right now, and what I can speak on is just the work ethic, the drive, the consistency, to come in every day and try to get better," Patricia said on March 24. "That's phenomenal. These guys are really there working their butts off right now to try to get out there and be successful and be consistent and keep the standard."

As Patricia and the Buckeyes' young players continue to gain comfort in their new roles with the Buckeyes, Buckeye Sports Bulletin offers a position-by-position spring preview of the 2025 Ohio State defense and how the units are shaping up as spring camp rolls on.

## Defensive Line

Ohio State's defensive line epitomizes the level of turnover Patricia and the rest of the coaching staff are going to have to deal with in 2025. The Buckeyes' 2024 defensive line – led by senior defensive ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau and senior defensive tackles Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams – peaked at the perfect time during Ohio State's national championship run. In their four College Football Playoff wins, the Buckeye defense came up with 18 sacks, seven more than the next closest playoff team (Penn State, 11).

With all of that production now headed to the NFL, longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson will work with a new-look group that



SONNY BROCKWAY

**GETTING DEFENSIVE —** Longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson (left) and new defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, a former assistant coach on Bill Belichick's New England Patriots staff and ex-head coach of the Detroit Lions, are charged with reloading the nation's top defense after the departure of DC Jim Knowles.

consists of senior and redshirt junior defensive ends Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson, junior and sophomore defensive tackles Kayden McDonald and Eddrick Houston and others such as Idaho State transfer Logan George, former five-star linebacker-turned defensive end C.J. Hicks and veteran defensive tackle Tywone Malone Jr.

Compared to last year, it's a relatively inexperienced group. But Johnson is up for the challenge.



Caden Curry

"It's fun. It's what I think coaching is all about," Johnson said when asked if it is invigorating to coach a new group. "Can you do it again? Can you get a bunch of young guys to play at the highest level every day? So that is a challenge, but that's what you get up

in the morning and come to work for."

At least as it pertains to play at Ohio State, Curry is the most accomplished of the bunch.

In 16 games played last season, he recorded 22 tackles, including 3½ for loss, along with 2½ sacks. Curry also made his presence felt on special teams, most notably blocking a punt during Ohio State's 45-0 win over Purdue.

Curry, a four-star recruit out of Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove, has the athletic traits needed to be a difference maker off the edge. However, as one of the more experienced players, he will also be looked up to as a leader in the defensive end room, a role that was not required of him in previous seasons with Tuimoloau and Sawyer present in previous years.

In a media availability on March 25, Curry said he may use his old teammates for guidance as he ventures into uncharted territory as a leader.

"Definitely seeing Jack and JT, they led by example, but also vocally," he said. "Definite-

ly seeing all those things (they did last year) and just using it for myself and just talking to them every day if I need some help from them. I mean, they're still one call away, and they always answer me."

Also a backup in 2024, Jackson projects to start opposite Curry in 2025. The top-60 recruit out of high school was a bit quieter than Curry last season, but he still had 16 tackles, including three for loss, as well as 1½ sacks.

Jackson didn't receive a ton of playing time in his first three years with the team, but with Tuimoloau and Sawyer gone, Johnson expects big things from the Hollywood, Fla., native.

"He's got to be the guy who's going to have to demonstrate the production for us at defensive end, and I think he has a chance to do that," Johnson said. "He's going to play 40-50 plays a game, so we'll see him more, and I think we'll see his talent come to the front."

On the inside of the defensive line, Houston, a five-star prospect, seems to be a prime candidate to receive substantial playing time. Despite starting the year at defensive end instead of defensive tackle, Houston was a legitimate contributor once he moved to the interior toward the end of the year. He recorded six of his seven tackles in the final seven games of the season, including two in the national championship game win against Notre Dame.

Houston feels he could be as effective at the 3-technique (defensive tackle who lines up on the outside shoulder of the offensive guard) as he is at defensive end. The confidence Houston has in his abilities at defensive tackle was shared by his position coach.

"He could be a great pass rusher," Johnson said. "He's real powerful, real strong. He has all the makings, an opportunity to be really special."

Projected to start alongside Houston on the interior is McDonald, who despite not being as highly touted as Houston coming into college still managed to produce in his limit-

ed action last season.

McDonald's 2024 stats don't pop off the page necessarily – he recorded 19 tackles in 16 games – but at 6-3 and 326 pounds, he has the size profile to clog running lanes as a likely starting defensive tackle.

As for the projected reserves, Hicks' move to the defensive end spot has generated all sorts of buzz. Last season, Hicks seemed to have a legitimate chance to start at Ohio State's Will linebacker position alongside Simon, but he lost his position battle to fellow five-star Sonny Styles.

He still had a decent year as a reserve finishing with 22 tackles. He was at his best getting after the quarterback, recording two sacks on the year.

Considering his production rushing the quarterback in 2024 and the fact that linebackers coach James Laurinaitis described him as the best blitzing at the linebacker position, it comes as very little surprise that Hicks switched positions.

"I feel the change to edge fits my play style a lot more," Hicks said on March 25. "It allows me to be more aggressive, and when it's time to get to the quarterback, I can get to the quarterback."

Still, any position change comes with a learning curve, and for Hicks, a player listed at 6-3 and 233 pounds, defending the run may not be as easy as it is for other bigger defensive linemen. Johnson isn't too concerned about Hicks' run-stopping abilities, though.

"I think he'll be fine because he's on the edge," Johnson said. "He's not playing on the inside. He's on the edge, playing against tight end. He may get a tackle every now and then. He's got the technique. It's good. He can do it."

As for some of the other defensive line reserves, George – who racked up an impressive 6½ sacks and 18½ tackles for loss for Idaho State last season – has also received some buzz early in spring camp for his competitiveness and physicality, with Day saying that he has already earned the respect of the locker room. Redshirt sophomore Will Smith Jr. and junior Jason Moore will look to provide the Buckeyes more depth on the inside, while redshirt freshman Dominic Kirks and redshirt sophomore Joshua Mickens will look to make an impact off the edge.

## Linebackers

For the second year in a row, Ohio State will have to replace a starting linebacker. And in replacing Simon, the Buckeyes will have to fill the shoes of not just a first-team All-Big Ten player but also the defense's most prominent leader. Simon was the Buckeyes' Block "O" recipient and recorded a team-high 112 tackles while wearing the green dot, which also tasked him with relaying Knowles' play call to the rest of the defense.

Entering his fourth year with the program, Styles seems to be a candidate to rise up as a leader in Simon's absence. Not only is Styles one of three returning starters on the defense, but he was also one of three recipients of the Iron Buckeye award for winter workouts, which, according to Ohio State, is given to the "student-athlete who best exemplifies unquestionable physical training dedication, determination, discipline, toughness and leadership."

Through winter workouts and the early

parts of spring, Styles' leadership has impressed Laurinaitis.

"You said the leader of the front seven, I think he's the leader of the entire team,"



Sonny Styles

Laurinaitis said when questioned on March 27. "He handled himself really well through the entire winter workout period."

Styles is no slouch on the field, either. A starter throughout the 2024 season, he ranked second on the team behind Simon with 100 tackles (10½ for loss) along with six sacks, five pass breakups and a forced fumble.

Starting alongside Styles at the Will position will likely be Arvell Reese, who had a breakout sophomore season in a backup role. The four-star prospect out of OSU football factory Cleveland Glenville appeared in all 16 games last season and recorded 43 tackles (3½ for loss), along with one-half sack and two quarterback hurries.

Reese, who immediately flashed his speed when he first received playing time in 2024, was specifically praised by Laurinaitis for his positional versatility.

"We're realizing everything that Arvell Reese can do, and it's a lot," Laurinaitis said. "He's a special talent, and he's matured so much from two years ago."

With Styles and Reese slotted into the starting roles, several Buckeyes will be fighting for important backup roles, a group that is headlined by four-stars and current second-years Payton Pierce and Garrett Stover.

Despite being buried in the depth chart as a true freshman, Pierce made an impact for the Buckeyes on special teams, recording four tackles for the Buckeyes in 12 appearances.

According to Laurinaitis, Pierce has a natural talent for the linebacker position.

"Payton's awesome," Laurinaitis said. "He's tough, an absolute natural middle linebacker. His feel in the box and his ability to maneuver and feel blocking schemes (is great), and he's got that wrestling background, so his striking ability and the way he snags and then runs his feet on contact like is just a throwback. I love Payton. I expect Payton to have a lot of playing time."

Like Pierce, Stover – the cousin of former Buckeye tight end and linebacker Cade Stover – didn't receive much playing time behind Ohio State's veteran linebackers, but he did appear in five games. He devoted a lot of time in the offseason to improving his physicality, going from 205 to 220 pounds this spring.

"I was pretty undersized playing middle linebacker at 205, so gaining that weight, spending a lot of time in the weight room with Coach (Mickey Marotti) and his training staff has really helped," Stover said.

Also lobbying for playing time this season are true freshmen Tarvos Alford and Riley Pettijohn, who were the nation's 13th- and second-best linebacker prospects in the 2025 recruiting class, respectively, as well as fellow first-year Eli Lee and graduate and former Michigan Wolverine Joey Velazquez.

## Cornerbacks

Despite ranking No. 3 in the nation in passing yards allowed in 2024, Ohio State's cornerbacks were at times the most criti-

cized position on the defense. For starters, the Buckeye cornerbacks had a performance to forget in one of the team's only two losses of the season against Oregon on Oct. 12, where they allowed Dillon Gabriel to throw for 341 passing yards and two touchdowns. No player had a worse performance in that game than Burke, who was routinely beaten over the top for long receptions.

As the season wore on, though, the Buckeye cornerbacks came into their own, and in the College Football Playoff, the secondary allowed just 235.3 passing yards per game.

Despite having to replace both Burke and Hancock, Ohio State's cornerbacks room can still be a strength of the defense with senior cornerback Davison Igbinosun returning and key contributors such as Jermaine Mathews Jr. and Lorenzo Styles Jr. back in the mix.

Igbinosun had plenty of great moments during the season, most notably making an acrobatic interception in the end zone during Ohio State's 20-13 win over Penn State on Nov. 2, but he also committed 16 penalties – five more than any other defender in college football – many of them coming in the form of pass interference.

According to cornerbacks coach Tim Walton, Igbinosun's penalties are something they will work to fix in the spring.

"Probably so," Walton said on March 7 when asked if Igbinosun would wear oven mitts in practice. "We'll work on that. Even when I was in the league, we had streaks where guys got penalties. Those things happen a little bit. You want to keep learning and grow from it. What happens is we go back through it and look through it. Some of them he has to do a better job with. Two or three of them were questionable calls."

As many penalties as there were, Igbinosun stepped up to record 45 tackles, make two interceptions and break up a team-leading nine passes. Most importantly, he was rarely beaten over the top.

Mathews wasn't an official starter for Ohio State in 2024, but throughout the team's playoff run, he certainly seemed like one. Mathews played in all four of the Buckeyes' playoff wins and had perhaps his best performance in Ohio State's 28-14 win over Texas, giving up just two catches for 7 yards in 30 coverage snaps against a vaunted Longhorns passing attack.

At the NFL combine, Burke had high praise for his former teammate.

"I expect a lot out of him," Burke said of Mathews. "He's going to go crazy. Mark my words."

With Igbinosun and Mathews likely being the team's starting outside cornerbacks, Styles will presumably take over for Hancock as the team's slot corner/nickel.

Styles, the older brother of Sonny, had a bit of an irregular path to Columbus. After starting his collegiate career as a wide receiver at Notre Dame, he transferred to Ohio State for the 2023 season and subsequently switched to cornerback. Styles redshirted during his first year as a cornerback, but in 2024 he proved he had found a home at his new position, playing in all 16 of the Buckeye games while making 16 tackles.

Still, Styles didn't receive the number of snaps that Mathews did down the stretch in 2024, which, according to Walton, makes this spring an important one for the former wide receiver.

"He works really hard, he's really sharp, detailed, he puts in the time," Walton said.

"This will be a good spring for him, to see him in a new role."

The Buckeyes will have several other players competing for playing time at cornerback, including talented sophomores such as former five-star Aaron Scott Jr. and top-65 recruit Bryce West, who both earned minimal playing time last season when the games were well in hand (Scott seven games played, West five). But no projected backup cornerback has generated more interest from the media than freshman Devin Sanchez.

Sanchez enters Columbus not just as a five-star prospect out of North Shore High School in Houston, but also as the No. 1-ranked cornerback recruit in the 2025 class.

As the highest-rated defensive recruit from Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class, some have already wondered if Sanchez can have the sort of impact on the defense that Jeremiah Smith had on the offense as a freshman.



Davison Igbinosun

When asked about any comparisons between Sanchez and Smith, Walton was hesitant to put any unnecessary expectations on his player.

"You're not stupid for saying that, but I don't ever like to put expectations on guys," Walton said. "I like to let them go play and see. He's a tremendous athlete, but I want him to get adjusted to the game, learn the game, get in some situational football stuff, and see, and then grow. Go get better. Go compete."

In addition to Sanchez, Scott and West, redshirt freshman Miles Lockhart – who recently had his black stripe removed on March 29 – will also compete for playing time. Senior Diante Griffin, the grandson of Archie Griffin, is also in the room as a walk-on.

## Safeties

With unanimous All-American Caleb Downs and All-Big Ten first-teamer Lathan Ransom leading the way, Ohio State's safeties were the most reliable defenders on the field, more times than not.

Downs will return to Ohio State as not just the team's best defender but perhaps the best defender in the country. In 16 games, the Alabama transfer went for 81 tackles (7½ for loss) along with one-half sack, two interceptions, six pass breakups and a quarterback hurry on the way to his second All-America nod.

According to safeties coach and passing game coordinator Matt Guerrieri, Downs is not just an All-America player at the back end of the team's defense, but also a role model whom other safeties can look up to.

"When you have a guy like Caleb – who he is as a person, from a leadership standpoint, from a safety skill standpoint – it's easy as a coach when you can say, 'Just watch Caleb Downs, follow what Caleb Downs does.' So that's made it much easier from that standpoint," Guerrieri said.

Ransom, on the other hand will not be coming back, prompting what will likely be a two-horse race between junior safety Malik Hartford and sophomore safety Jaylen McClain for the other safety position under Patricia's new-look defense.

At least before spring practices, it seemed as though McClain was the front-runner for

the starting role alongside Downs. Despite being the No. 373rd-ranked prospect in the 2024 recruiting class, McClain made an impact when his name was called his freshman season, recording 15 tackles, including one for loss, along with one pass breakup.

However, in the first spring practices made available to the media, it was the more experienced Hartford who lined up with the rest of the starters.

Hartford, who totaled just eight tackles in his third season with the program last year, drew all sorts of praise from Patricia during the defensive coordinator's March 24 press conference.

"I think he's done a really good job of being consistent every day, training his body. He's improved a lot," Patricia said, "His movement has improved. His strength has improved. And he's just a student of the game. He's in here all the time, studying and learning. I really like right now that there is some flexibility for him to be able to play down, play back. He has great range, kind of in that back end too, which is really good."

The Buckeyes' depth at safety will be reinforced by players such as senior Keenan Nelson Jr. and true freshman Faheem Delane. Like Sanchez, Delane's status as a top-60 recruit has some observers eager to see if he can produce immediately at the next level. In order for that to happen, though, Delane will have to put the work in during the offseason.

"He needs to do his job at max capacity, just like any of the guys," Guerrieri said when asked what Delane has to do to make an impact in year one. "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."

Nelson, a South Carolina transfer, was a nonfactor in his first season with the Buckeyes and did not record a statistic on the year. He will look to find his role in Guerrieri's room this spring within a room that also includes freshmen Cody Haddad and De-shawn Stewart as well as redshirt freshman Leroy Roker III.

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# Impressive Performances At OSU Pro Day

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Quarterback Will Howard put on a show, defensive tackle Tyliek Williams had an injury scare, and receiver Emeka Egbuka was just plain fast. Those were some of the takes when the past, present and future were on full display for Ohio State's pro day on March 26.

Inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, former Buckeyes such as Cardale Jones, Marvin Harrison Jr. and New England Patriots head coach Mike Vrabel were on hand to watch 17 players attempt to enhance their NFL draft stock while current players including wide receivers Brandon Inniss, Bryson Rodgers and Carnell Tate and defensive ends Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson participated in position drills.

But the spotlight was on the 17: Howard and Egbuka; running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins; tight end Gee Scott Jr.; and offensive linemen Josh Fryar, Donovan Jackson, Seth McLaughlin and Josh Simmons.

The defense was represented by tackles Williams and Ty Hamilton; ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolou; linebacker Cody Simon; cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock; and safety Lathan Ransom.

Only Scott and Fryar were not invited to the NFL Combine in Indianapolis from Feb. 27- March 2.

"I'm really a big guy on just controlling things that you can control," Scott said. "I couldn't control whether or not I went to the combine, but what I can control is put my best foot forward today. That's what's important, is just controlling the narrative and controlling things that you can control in your life."

Fryar was equally motivated to perform on his home turf after the snub.

"It was more fuel to the fire," he told BSB. "I think I was a couple of votes away from getting into the combine. It's something that I wanted to do. But at the end of the day, it's just another chapter and story of the underdog mentality."

There were 142 NFL personnel in attendance highlighted by five head coaches in addition to Vrabel: Ben Johnson, Chicago; Raheem Morris, Atlanta; Kellen Moore, New Orleans; Brian Schottenheimer, Dallas; and Mike Tomlin, Pittsburgh.

Five general managers also made their way to Columbus: Terry Fontenot, Atlanta; Brian Gutekunst, Green Bay; Omar Khan, Pittsburgh; Ryan Poles, Chicago; and Mickey Loomis, New Orleans.

Scott knows why there was so much interest.

"I would say this is the pinnacle of college football," he said. "You know that guys don't come here to mess around. This program doesn't mess around, and I think this program has done a great job on and off the field in preparing me for the rest of my career."

## On Target

Howard did not have a strong performance at the combine, but he looked comfortable as expected while throwing to familiar receivers in a friendly and familiar setting.

Former NFL quarterback Jake Heaps,

who has been training Howard in preparation for the NFL draft April 24-26 in Green Bay, Wis., brushed off his pupil's combine.

"So, he doesn't throw the ball well to guys he doesn't know well in shorts," Heaps told The Columbus Dispatch. "Guess what. He'll never have to do that again in his entire career."

According to the Dispatch, Howard completed 64 of 67 passes at pro day with two of the incompletions being dropped by his targets.

"It wasn't perfect," he said, "but we were almost perfect."

Howard displayed an ability to throw with touch or depth as he did on consecutive passes to Egbuka and Inniss.

"I think I showed I can throw the ball at every level," Howard said. "I can push the ball down the field. I can put it with some pace on these out routes and short routes and be accurate."

"I think I was able to put everything on display here. I'm happy about how it went, and hopefully everyone else agrees."

Of course, he didn't have to convince his now former coach.

"I thought he was on fire," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said. "I thought the ball had pace. He did a nice job down the field. Had a good rhythm. You could see him under center. He had fun with it, and the receivers did a good job."

"That was an impressive workout, and I think a bunch of the NFL guys just saw his size, saw the way the ball was coming out of his hand and were very impressed."

Many so-called draft experts see him going in the middle rounds. Howard has higher hopes for himself.

"It's not a knock to any of the other quarterbacks but I think I'm the best," Howard said. "If you don't feel like you're the best, then why I am doing this thing? I'm confident. I believe I have what it takes to be a QB1 in the NFL. Whatever franchise takes me is not going to regret it."

Said Heaps: "He answered a lot of questions about arm strength. A lot of people had questions about his ability to throw the ball down the field, and he really showed he can put the ball on the money and stretch it. He should be really happy with how he threw, especially in that area."

## On The Fast Track

Egbuka has been in the shadow of Garrett Wilson, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and this past season super freshman Jeremiah Smith. But with OSU's reputation for developing receivers, Egbuka – the Buckeyes' career leader for catches (205) – could be the latest to be a first-round pick.

He ran an official 4.45-second 40-yard dash and had 4.12 seconds in the 20-yard shuttle, which would have tied for third fastest among receivers at the combine.

Sports Illustrated's Albert Breer posted on social media: "Got times of 4.47 and 4.49 for Ohio State WR Emeka Egbuka from two teams on the ground at the Buckeyes pro day. A little faster than expected – a really good time for a big, physical slot receiver. Egbuka's got a great shot to land in the first round."

## Down, Not Out

Williams did not do any running at the

NFL combine. Instead he spent time talking to teams and getting measurements.

He was hoping to make a good impression during pro day, but he went down grabbing his left leg near the end of the 40-yard dash and had to be helped off by trainers.

Williams later returned with a wrap on his leg. He later posted on Twitter soon after the pro day, "I AM OKAY! lil cramp at the end NOTHING SERIOUS"

## Mending

McLaughlin, a center, and left tackle Simmons used the day to address their health issues. McLaughlin tore his Achilles before the Buckeyes' second-to-last regular-season game against Indiana. Simmons sustained a torn patellar tendon during the Oct. 12 game against Oregon.

"I'm working on running right now," McLaughlin said. "I'll be fully cleared on field for May 1 and then full contact in July. I'll be good to go by training camp. That's the expectation and that's if I'm on schedule, and there's no reason to fall off schedule."

Vrabel spent a lot of time talking to Simmons, who had an impressive 34 lifts of a 225-pound bar and did some movement drills to show he is on the road to a full recovery.

When Simmons went out, Jackson moved from left guard into his spot and performed admirably. Jackson's versatility enhances his draft standing.

"I had a couple conversations with people. Some had me at some positions, some had me at different positions. Some had me at positions I've never even played yet," Jackson said. "But I just really need a job, so wherever they tell me to play, I'm going to play at it and do it to the best of my abilities."

"Some teams were like, 'We see you have the ability to play (tackle),' " Jackson said. "I know some teams only dress seven or eight guys on the O-line, so just having the versatility to have the option to play it, I think it helped me a whole lot."

## Celebration

The pro day participants and everyone else inside The Woody were not-so subtly reminded that just over two months earlier Ohio State was crowned national champion after defeating Notre Dame 34-23 on Jan. 20.

There was a championship banner on a wall and three large murals of the team celebrating the victory.

"All we ever wanted were the banners," Ransom said. "To bring that back to here, it means the world to me. I'm just happy to be a part of it."

Jackson was appreciative of the recognition.

"It's very cool. I wouldn't say nostalgic because it happened, what, like two months ago, but it's certainly one of those things where I don't think it really hit me yet until I saw it," he said. "And I was like, 'Wow, the adversity, the fire, everything that last year's team went through is now being displayed all across The Woody.'"

Day was happy to show off the additions to his former players.

"During the stretch run, we kept talking to them about how these are the (previous) national championships right here, and we

need a banner right there," Day said, pointing to the wall. "The fact that it's actually there now and to see their faces right here, it's great for them. That's the first thing they notice."

But there was also the realization that this would be the last time those players would be representing Ohio State before leaving to pursue pro careers.

"Bittersweet is a good word," Scott said. "It's sweet because we're excited to go and continue the rest of our careers. But it's bitter because I'm going to miss these guys. These are my brothers that I've grown to love."

"These things right here are just a symbol of everything that we've been through as a team," he said of the banner and photos. "It's so amazing to see us on this side of things looking back. It creates such a tight-knit amount of love that I have for these guys."

## Quotables

- Hancock ran the fastest 40-yard dash on the day at 4.42 seconds and also led in the vertical jump (41.5 inches) and broad jump (10-6).

"People had questions on my speed because of the position I played, but I just kind of scratched that off. And jumped well, so I felt good."

- Hamilton's 35 reps bettered Simmons by one for the most bench presses for the day. Hamilton also did well with a 4.95 in the 40-yard dash and a 32-inch vertical leap for the 299-pounder.

"I feel like I did great," Hamilton said. "I came here to do everything I wanted to do, and I feel like just going out there and having fun and just doing what I've been doing all my life."

- Sawyer was happy to return to the field. "To be able to get back to playing football and training for football, it's been fun. It's been a fun process. But I'm excited that all the work now has been done, and now you just get to wait and hear your name called, hopefully as early as possible."

- Ransom on what he showed scouts: "That I think I'm the smartest safety that they've interviewed. I can get on the board and tell you what the D-line is doing, linebacker is doing, what the nickel is doing, the corners are doing, safeties are doing. And then that I'm more athletic than they thought I was to get out there and show that."

- Day on the possibility of Ohio State breaking Georgia's 2022 record of 15 players selected in one draft:

"It would be more testimony as far as doing things the right way and the development of our program. Being at Ohio State, I mentioned this to all the personnel, Ohio State has a fan base of just under 12 million. I believe the Dallas Cowboys (have about) 8.5 million, so our guys understand what it means to play on a big stage. They understand what it means to play when all the stakes are high. They know how to handle themselves in a big environment, in a sports market like Columbus.

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# B1G Men's Teams Bow Out Of NCAA Tourney

After Purdue's appearance in the Final Four last season, the Big Ten this year failed to produce a men's basketball regional champion for the fourth time in the past five seasons with Michigan (Sweet 16), Michigan State (Elite Eight) and Maryland (Sweet 16) all exiting the tournament before the final weekend of the Big Dance.

## BIG TEN NOTES Cameron Moone

The Wolverines fell to No. 1 overall seed Auburn 78-65 on March 28, as a 48-39 lead midway through the second half was not enough for head coach Dusty May and Co. to prevail over the top-seeded Tigers. Michigan was outscored 39-17 in the final 12:26 in large part due to its struggling offense, which made just four of its last 15 shots in that span, including a stretch of seven straight misses from 6:00 to 1:24.

Close wins over No. 10 seed New Mexico (71-63) and No. 6 seed Ole Miss (73-70) in the Round of 32 and Sweet 16, respectively, were not enough to propel the Spartans to their first Final Four since 2019. Auburn took down its second consecutive Big Ten team with a 70-64 victory over Michigan State on March 30. Despite three

Spartans scoring in double digits – junior forward Jaxon Kohler (17), senior guard Jaden Akins (15) and freshman guard Jase Richardson (11) – an early 23-8 lead for the Tigers proved to be too much for Michigan State and head coach Tom Izzo, who are still looking for their first national title since 2000.

The Terrapins were also bested by an SEC team, losing to eventual Final Four attendee Florida 87-71 on March 27. Freshman center and projected top-10 NBA draft pick Derik Queen, who had catapulted Maryland to the Sweet 16 with a buzzer-beating running jump shot against No. 12 seed Colorado State the game prior, led the Terrapins with 27 points and five rebounds in what will likely be his final collegiate game.

On the women's side of the hardwood, despite losses from No. 9 seed Indiana (64-53 to No. 1 seed South Carolina), No. 7 seed Michigan State (83-49, No. 2 seed NC State) and No. 6 seed Michigan (76-55, No. 3 seed Notre Dame) in the Round of 32, the Big Ten will have at least one Final Four qualifier after No. 1 overall seed UCLA beat No. 3 seed LSU 72-65 in the Elite Eight on March 30. Superstar junior center Lauren Betts notched 17 points and seven rebounds in the win to help the Bruins earn their first regional championship in program history.

As BSB went to press, No. 1 seed USC was set to take on No. 2 UConn in the Elite

Eight on March 31 in Portland, Ore. The Trojans advanced to the regional final with wins over No. 16 seed UNC Greenville in the first round (71-25), No. 9 seed Mississippi State in the second round (96-59) and No. 5 seed Kansas State in the Sweet 16 (67-61), the latter two wins coming without All-America guard JuJu Watkins, who suffered a season-ending torn ACL in her right knee early in the first quarter against the Bulldogs.

USC has been led in Watkins' absence by graduate All-Big Ten forward Kiki Iriafen, who scored 36 points on 16-of-22 shooting in the win over Mississippi State.

## Indiana Hires DeVries, Iowa Hires McCollum

A pair of Big Ten men's basketball programs found new head coaches as BSB went to press, with Indiana plucking Darian DeVries from West Virginia on March 18 and Iowa hiring Drake head coach Ben McCollum on March 24.

Starting with DeVries, the 49-year-old native of Aplington, Iowa, becomes IU's 31st head men's basketball coach after spending just one season as head coach at West Virginia, where he went 19-13 and 10-10 in the Big 12. Despite being in 111 of 111 projected brackets per Bracket Matrix, DeVries and the Mountaineers were left out of the 68-team NCAA Tournament field on Selection Sunday on March 16, and two days later he bolted to Bloomington, Ind., to become the leader of an IU program that is looking to return to national relevance.

After a 19-13 season this year under former head coach Mike Woodson, the Hoosiers missed the NCAA Tournament for the second consecutive season and the seventh time in the last nine years. Indiana has also yet to appear in a Final Four since 2001-02, with its last national title coming in 1986-87.

"This is unquestionably one of the top jobs in America," said DeVries, who went 105-55 (.732 winning percentage) with three NCAA Tournament appearances while leading Drake from 2018-24. "As someone who grew up in the Midwest loving the game of basketball, I've always admired the IU basketball program for its championship-level success, tradition, and fan support. There's a passion to succeed at the very highest levels both within the Big Ten and in the NCAA Tournament, and that's a desire that as a coach I share."

McCollum, DeVries' successor at Drake, will stay in Iowa (Drake's campus is in Des Moines) to coach the Hawkeyes after spending one successful season as the Bulldogs' head coach. The 43-year-old coached the Bulldogs to a program-best 31-4 record and 17-3 mark in the Missouri Valley conference this season and led them to their first NCAA Tournament victory since 1971 after upsetting No. 5 seed Missouri 67-57 in the first round.

Before his one year at Drake, McCollum

experienced massive success at the Division II level, leading Northwest Missouri State to four national championships and winning at least 21 games in each of his past 13 years there. He has a 426-95 record in his 16 years as a college head coach.

"Ben has a track record of success both on and off the court. His talent for developing student-athletes and fostering a strong team culture has been evident throughout his career," said Iowa athletic director Beth Goetz. "I am confident that Hawkeye fans will enthusiastically support the McCollum family as we embark on the next chapter of Iowa men's basketball."

McCollum will now lead an Iowa team that went 17-16 this past season and finished in a tie for 12th place in the Big Ten with a 7-13 conference record. The Hawkeyes, who have not won more than 20 games since 2021-22, fired longtime head coach Fran McCaffery after their Big Ten tournament second-round loss to Illinois on March 15. McCaffery has since found a new home, accepting a new coaching position at his alma mater Penn on March 27.

## Maryland's Willard Takes Job At Villanova

Following three seasons at Maryland that had the Terrapins reach a pair of NCAA Tournaments, head coach Kevin Willard was named to the same position at Villanova on March 30, according to a press release from the university.

"Coach Willard quickly stood out among an impressive pool of candidates during a comprehensive national search," Villanova President Peter Donohue said in the release. "Throughout the process, Coach Willard demonstrated that he has the vision and experience to guide Villanova basketball in the changing world of college athletics. Beyond his notable success on the court, we were also impressed by his ability to articulate how Villanova basketball fits into the overarching mission of the university."

Willard's departure at Maryland has been described as a messy situation by many who closely follow college basketball. In the weeks leading up to him taking the new job, Willard talked openly and publicly about his frustrations with the Terrapins' athletic department, specifically with their inability to properly fund the men's basketball program. He also never denied that he was speaking to Villanova when asked by the media throughout Maryland's NCAA Tournament run.

"I want this program to be great," Willard told the media following Maryland's first-round win over Grand Canyon in Seattle on March 21. "I want it to be the best in the country, I want to win a national championship, but there are things that need to change. ... We've been one of the worst, if not lowest, in the NIL in the last two years. So that's first and foremost."

Despite the messy breakup, Willard still had success in his three years leading Maryland, going 65-39 overall and 32-28 in the Big Ten with the previously mentioned NCAA Tournament appearances in 2022-23 and 2024-25. His best season came

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Darian DeVries



this past year when he led the Terrapins to a 27-win season – their highest win total since 2015-16 – and a second-place finish in the Big Ten regular-season standings (14-6 record).

Willard, who turns 49 on April 6, will now lead a Villanova program that has not experienced much success since longtime head coach Jay Wright's retirement after the 2021-22 season. They missed the NCAA Tournament and went 54-47 (31-29 in Big East) in their last three seasons under Kyle Neptune, who was fired by the school on March 15.

**Former U-M Staffer Charged With Computer Crimes**

Fourteen months after he was placed on administrative leave for an investigation into alleged cybercrimes, former Michigan co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Matt Weiss was indicted on 24 total counts of computer access crimes, including 14 counts of unauthorized access to computers and 10 counts of aggravated identity theft. Acting United States Attorney Julie A. Beck announced the charges in a press release on March 20.



**Matt Weiss**

The charges accuse Weiss – who coached with the Wolverines during the 2021 and 2022 seasons before being fired on January 20, 2023, due to an investigation of computer access crimes by university police – of accessing thousands of NCAA student-athletes' personal accounts over a multiyear span, with a specific target of female student-athletes to view personal and intimate photographs and videos. Weiss was released on a \$10,000 bond and had to hand in his passport to authorities, while also being ordered to install software to monitor Internet use, as first reported by ESPN.

"According to the indictment, between approximately 2015 and January 2023, Weiss gained unauthorized access to student-athlete databases of more than 100 colleges and universities that were maintained by a third-party vendor," the press release from the Eastern District of Michigan's United States attorney's office said. "After gaining access to these databases, Weiss downloaded the personally identifiable information and medical data of more than 150,000 athletes.

"Using the information that he obtained from the student-athlete databases and his own Internet research, Weiss was able to obtain access to the social media, email, and/or cloud storage accounts of more than 2,000 target athletes. Weiss also illegally obtained access to the social media, email, and/or cloud storage accounts of more than 1,300 additional students and/or alumni from universities across the country."

The 42-year-old first had a position with the Baltimore Ravens under head coach John Harbaugh, brother of Weiss' future superior and ex-Michigan, now-Los Angeles Chargers head coach Jim Harbaugh. Starting in 2015 while with Baltimore, it is alleged that Weiss accessed students'

medical information through a database called Keffer Development Services and was illegally privy to the aforementioned 150,000-plus files. The prosecutors allege that Weiss was able to access the accounts by hacking the passwords used by the students as well as athletic directors and trainers.

On March 24, Weiss pleaded not guilty in federal court to all 24 counts while also being hit with a civil suit along with his former employer in Michigan. The lawsuit comes from two former Wolverine female student-athletes – a gymnast and a women's soccer player – who were allegedly involved in Weiss' computer crimes. Two more former female Michigan athletes – a volleyball player and a soccer player – filed a class-action lawsuit against the university, its board of regents and Weiss on March 27.

"This negligence has compromised the confidentiality of personal, medical, and intimate information, leading to profound feelings of betrayal, trauma, and fear among former female student-athletes and others affected," Parker Stinar of the Stinar, Gould Grieco and Hensely mass tort personal injury firm said in an emailed statement to The Detroit News on March 24. "It is troubling that a university that prides itself on being the 'Leaders and the Best' continuously falls short in safeguarding those who dedicate their hard work and passion to its athletic programs. We are committed to holding the university accountable for its actions and to ensuring that such failures do not happen again."

**U-M's Manuel Says He Hasn't Discussed Postseason Ban**

As one of the more polarizing stories in college football over the past decade crawls into its 18th month, Michigan AD Warde Manuel said he has not discussed any postseason bans with the NCAA as the investigation continues.

"The process is ongoing. There's not much I can say about any of that. As it relates to where this is: It is ongoing, and we will work through the process," Manuel told 247Sports' The Michigan Insider on March 18. "I have not had any conversation about postseason bans or penalties that are coming.

"What I can point to is that Charlie Baker, when we won the championship, said they won it fair and square. That's something I can say that gives me some sense that they understand that this was a team who won that championship fair and square. I look at that, and as we move forward, we'll see how it goes."

The investigation, which dates back to the October 2023 allegations toward Michigan and former staffer Connor Stalions for illegal in-person scouting and sign stealing, continues to have no final say from the NCAA.

"Hopefully, by the end of the summer, is what I can say at this present time," Manuel told 247Sports in February. "As I've done before, because of where we are with the case, I can't talk about the case itself. I just want to make sure people understand: It's not because I think something bad is going to happen, or it's really bad, or it's really good. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know the decision that's going to be made.

"We're going to make the best argument that we have with the facts that we know that are laid out to us. And we put that argument in the response, and then we'll go through the process, and then we'll see where it goes from there. And then once the process is finalized, then I can talk about it. But right now, to give the investigation and the process the due respect, I don't need to comment about it at all."

Warde's comments come just over two months after Michigan called the NCAA's accusations "grossly misreaching" and "wildly overcharging the program without credible evidence that other staff members knew (of the violations)" in a response to the Notice of Allegations presented by the NCAA.

**Michigan State Cancels Spring Game**

In what appears to be a new trend for college football programs, Michigan State head coach Jonathan Smith announced on March 18 that the team would be having no spring game this year, joining the likes of Nebraska and USC as Big Ten teams that have done away with the event for 2025.

The second-year Spartans head coach said that "multiple factors" ultimately led to Michigan State doing away with the traditional spring scrimmage, such as renovations at Spartan Stadium and the often-mentioned fear of tampering from other college football programs.

"Through the preparation of practices and thoughts going into it, I wanted to

take advantage of all 15 practices," Smith said during the press conference. "We're going to finish spring ball without a spring game, and there were some considerations with that. Some of the logic is when you do those (spring games), you prepare for those the back half of the spring. We think the best for this current unit is to take advantage of all 15 practices and not prepping like you're going into a game.

"Let's face it, in this day and age, where the opportunity for players across the country (to) make decisions come the back half of April, it's a part of the conversation," Smith said.

Nebraska was the first domino to fall regarding the nixing of the spring staple when Cornhuskers head coach Matt Rhule announced on Feb. 1 that the school would not have a spring game. Other schools around the country – such as LSU, Oklahoma and Texas – scratched the scrimmages in the following weeks.

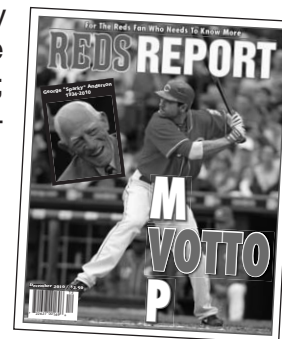
Ohio State is calling its event on April 12 a "Spring Showcase," but head coach Ryan Day said it will try to play a game like usual, while Michigan head coach Sherone Moore said his program never gave consideration to canceling the Wolverines' April 19 spring game at Michigan Stadium.

While the Spartans are opting not to hold their traditional intra-squad scrimmage, a Michigan State spokesperson told the Detroit Free Press that they are seeking to find ways to implement a fan experience either in the summer or during August camp.

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# Five-Star 2026 Safety Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State got its eighth commitment for the 2026 class on March 31, and it was a big one, with Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic five-star safety Blaine Bradford (6-1, 207) pledging his services to the Buckeyes.

ted to Ohio State.

Bradford is the second five-star player in the 2026 class for Ohio State, joining Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205).

Ohio State looks to be in very good shape for the 2026 class when it comes to the secondary since it also seems to be the favorite to land Akron Hoban four-star Elbert Hill (5-10, 175), the No. 3 corner in the country, who would join Avon, Ohio, four-star cornerback Jakob Weatherspoon (5-10, 172) in the cycle if he does end up choosing the Buckeyes.

## Bowen Lands Two 2026 OL Commitments

Ohio State landed its sixth and seventh commitments in the 2026 class when Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310) pledged his services to the Buckeyes on March 25 and Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O'Connor three-star interior offensive lineman Tucker Smith (6-5, 280) committed just a day later.

Greer is the No. 188-ranked player in the country, No. 17 offensive tackle and No. 7 player in the state of Ohio according to 247Sports composite rankings, while Smith is No. 799 in the country, the No. 71 interior offensive lineman and the No. 10 player in the state of Arizona.

Greer was Ohio State's second offensive line commitment since new offensive line

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	
Blaine Bradford	S	6-1	207	★★★★★	Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic	
Corbyn Fordham	TE	6-4	215	★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School	
Sam Greer	OT	6-7	310	★★★★	Akron Hoban	
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	
Tucker Smith	OL	6-5	280	★★★	Glendale (Ariz.) Sandra Day O'Connor	
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.	

coach Tyler Bowen started in Columbus in February. He also got a commitment on March 10 from Avon Lake, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 280) – the nation's No. 114 player, No. 9 offensive tackle and No. 4 player in Ohio – who chose Ohio State over Clemson.

As for Smith, he told 247Sports that Ohio State being a winning program was a big part of the reason he decided that he wants to be in Columbus.

"Coach (Ryan) Day, Coach Bowen and Coach Charlie Dickey are winners and will

get the best out of me," Smith said. "I love the history, atmosphere and dedication to winning."

It was a similar answer from Greer when he was asked about his interest in the Buckeyes before his commitment.

"What stood out to me was the plan and goal everyone in that building had. They're always competing for everything," Greer said. "It truly is the best vs. the best every day in that field house."

Bowen already had the reputation of being a strong recruiter, and he is proving

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Greg Wilson

He is the No. 1 safety and the No. 23 overall player in the country according to 247Sports composite ranking. He is the first safety that Matt Guerrieri has landed this cycle.

Bradford had official visits set to go to Columbus, Texas and LSU but chose the Buckeyes over those two top programs. He could still take those visits, but for now, the Scarlet and Gray have the upper hand.

It's noteworthy that they were able to land him over the in-state Tigers, especially given that Bradford's older brother, Jacob, signed with LSU in the 2025 class. But Guerrieri has already proved in his short time as a position coach that he can compete for the best prospects.

It will likely be a fight until the early signing period in December to keep Bradford in the class, but for now, he is commit-

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

that early on with how he has been doing so far at Ohio State.

Riley and Greer are the top two offensive linemen in the state of Ohio, and it's fitting that they are the first two to commit to Ohio State in the 2026 class since they were the first two offensive linemen to receive offers from the Buckeyes when former offensive line coach Justin Frye was still in Columbus.

With Greer's commitment, the Buckeyes now have four players from the state of Ohio who have committed from the 2026 class, a list that also includes Pataskala Watkins Memorial four-star wide receiver Jaeden Ricketts (6-0, 187) and Weather- spoon. That group doesn't include Henry, who committed to the Buckeyes when he was still going to high school in-state at Cincinnati Withrow.

Aside from Henry and Smith, the only other non-Ohio 2026 commit for the Buckeyes is Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School four-star tight end Corbyn Fordham (6-4, 215).

The Buckeyes are far from done when it comes to recruiting on the offensive line for the 2026 class. Some of the top targets they still have on their radar are Nixa, Mo., five-star offensive tackle Jackson Cantwell (6-8, 300) – the No. 1 overall prospect in the class regardless of position; Mansfield (Texas) Lake Ridge five-star offensive tackle Felix Ojo (6-6, 275); Richmond (Va.) St. Christopher's School five-star interior offensive lineman Darius Gray (6-3, 285); Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive tackle Keenyi Pepe (6-7, 320); and Vero Beach, Fla., four-star interior offensive lineman Micah Smith (6-6, 325), among others.

### Day Emphasizes Value Of Spring Visits

While the current Ohio State team is trying to improve on the field so it can have a chance to repeat as national champions in the 2025 season, the coaches are also focused on trying to improve the future Buckeye teams by hosting countless visitors on campus throughout the few weeks of practice they have.

Day talked about how important the spring visits are for the recruits who make it to campus when it comes to them getting to feel what it's like to be a Buckeye.

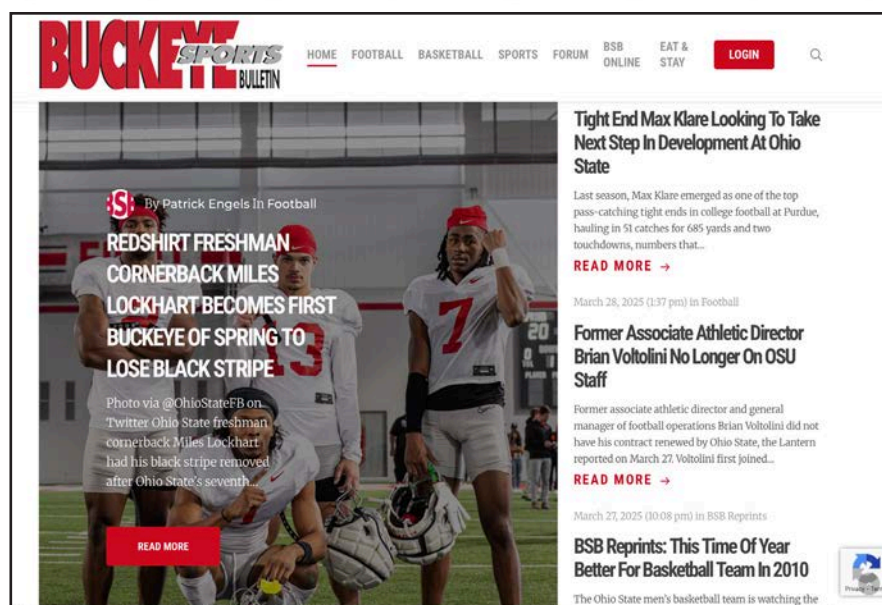
"It's huge to see our guys work, to see the energy when you walk into the Woody (Hayes Athletic Center). You just feel it when you walk in," Day said. "You feel greatness. You feel excellence. You walk into that indoor (field), you see the new banners up on the wall. It's all there. We take a lot of pride in developing the most elite players in the entire world and then the expectations of winning championships. It's great for recruits.

"It's one thing to put it on Instagram. It's one thing to follow our social media or talk to coaches. It's another thing to walk in the building and see it and be around great people and be around a culture of great players and great coaches. I think that's obviously what separates us. Anytime you can physically walk in and see it, it makes a big difference. I think it's good for parents to see as well."

Having been at Ohio State as the head coach since 2019, Day already understood that, but he understands the importance of the spring visits even more so now due to the fact that he's on the other side of some

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# Four-Star Back Projected To Be A Buckeye

Continued From Page 19

of those visits with his son, R.J., who is an unranked quarterback at Columbus St. Francis De Sales in the class of 2027.

The high school sophomore has just seven Division I offers, five of them from MAC schools, but is still going through the process as a recruit, and Day is getting to see other programs through the eyes of a parent for the first time.

"I know as a dad, I want to take a look at the people and look them in the eye," he said. "There are a lot of great weight rooms, a lot of great facilities across the country, a lot of great stadiums. But to me, ultimately, it comes down to the people. It's been like that a lot longer than I've been here."

As he has said many times throughout his time at Ohio State, he feels the same way about the relationships the other way around as well, saying it's a goal to make sure the recruits his coaches go after can live up to the "Ohio State standard" in terms of their character. He also admitted that sometimes that's not something he needs to worry about since Ohio State is a place that not all recruits want to be at in the first place.

"Sometimes it takes care of itself," Day said explained. "Ohio State's not for everybody. Some people, it might be just too much. I don't know. The expectations are high here. Sometimes that takes care of itself, and that's OK. You have to want

to be at Ohio State, whether you're from the state of Ohio or not. Some people, they gravitate towards it. This is what they wanted. Jeremiah Smith, this is what he wanted. I can name a bunch of guys that are that way. They wanted to be around this, where every day when you walk on that field, it is a war.

"You have to compete every single day for your position, and you've got to compete every single week to win every game. That expectation is a big part of it. I think the second thing, though, is people and families who want to be around this style of culture. When you walk in the building, it's a family atmosphere. A lot of people talk about family. That's another thing to actually live it and get around our players."

But to make sure the players are ready for that when they arrive as freshmen, Day and the Buckeyes try to be as open as possible to all of the recruits they have on campus, as well as to the parents who come with them.

That means opening up the locker rooms and allowing the recruits to be around all of the current players, even making the parents of current players available to talk to the parents of recruits who might have questions about what it has been like for their sons at Ohio State.

"What we try to do is open up our doors and say, 'Please get around the locker room. Get around our players. Go have lunch with our guys and be around our players.' They're the ones who are living it on a

daily basis," Day said. "Please get around our parents and let them tell the stories of how we've handled great situations, tough situations, how we've hung together, and what their experience is like for their son.

"We all know that there are other things involved nowadays, but it hasn't changed in terms of relationships. You want people to choose Ohio State for the right reasons, to be a Buckeye for the right reasons, so that when it maybe doesn't exactly go as it was planned or doesn't go exactly perfect, they're willing to stick it out and hang in there and work through difficult times."

## 2026 RB Akih Down To Top 3

Another in-state prospect the Buckeyes are after is Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B. Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), who didn't receive an offer from Ohio State until March 17.

Akih must have been waiting to get that offer from running backs coach Carlos Locklyn because just two days later, he revealed his top three schools with Ohio State included along with Miami (Fla.) and USC. He has official visits scheduled to all three of them.

Akih was originally set to visit USC the weekend of June 6-8, but Locklyn apparently told him that would be the best time for him to be in Columbus, so Akih made the necessary changes and will be at Ohio State for those dates. His other visits will be to USC from June 13-15 and Miami

from June 20-22.

According to 247Sports composite rankings, Akih is the No. 205 player in the country, the No. 15 running back and No. 8 player in the state of Ohio. After Akih revealed his top three schools, he received a "crystal ball" from 247Sports' national recruiting analyst Allen Trieu and Iowa State recruiting expert Nick Osen to commit to Ohio State.

Last season, Akih ran for 1,653 yards and 15 touchdowns while also catching nine passes for 142 yards and three scores in 11 games for his high school team.

Akih made his second unofficial visit to Ohio State during the spring on March 27, two days after making a trip to Miami to visit the Hurricanes.

## Buckeyes Extend More Offers

While so many prospects are visiting Columbus during the spring, the Buckeyes are taking advantage of that face time to extend scholarship offers, as they usually do.

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State has given offers to St. Louis Kirkwood four-star athlete Jacob Eberhart (6-3, 200); Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School four-star wide receiver Gordon Sellers (6-2, 180); Fort Wayne (Ind.) Northrop three-star wide receiver Jerquaden Guilford (6-2, 190); and Phoenix Mountain Pointe three-star offensive tackle Aaron Thomas (6-7, 285) in the 2026 class.

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

### 40 Years Ago — 1985

Such Buckeyes as Terry White, Doug Donley and Ernie Andria hailed from the two-state, 48-school Ohio Valley Athletic Conference, but three signees in one year from the OVAC was rare.

But that wasn't the situation during the 1985 "recruiting season" when NCAA binding letter-of-intent day on Feb. 13 came and went. The Buckeyes landed three interior linemen from the OVAC including touted giant Tim Moxley of Barnesville, who was rated among America's top 100 recruits by The Sporting News. Also signed to OSU letters were Mike Kuri of Martin's Ferry and Charley Keenan, the anchor of the unbeaten Steubenville High School team that captured the Division II state championship.

### 35 Years Ago — 1990

Over the previous two years, a pipeline from Sarasota, Fla., to Columbus had been pumping high school football talent into the Ohio State program.

In 1989, defensive backs Foster Paulk and Chico Nelson became Buckeyes, and in 1990, Larry Kennedy and Cedric Saunders decided to go north to play football for OSU.

Like Kennedy, Paul and Nelson, Saunders was highly recruited by the three in-state schools in Florida (Miami, Florida State and Florida) but was swayed to Ohio State by assistant coach Ron Zook.

### 30 Years Ago — 1995

The lone wide receiver signed by Ohio State in the 1995 recruiting season had the potential to develop into a great one.

Jimmy Redmond, a 6-1, 165-pound speedster out of Blue Springs South High School in Lee's Summit, Mo., rejected an offer from Glen Mason and the Kansas Jayhawks to accept a scholarship to Ohio State.

Before committing to the Buckeyes, Redmond had also considered Southern Cal, Minnesota, Michigan and Kansas State.

"I chose Ohio State because of the great tradition and also because of the great educational opportunity," Redmond said. "I'll have an opportunity to compete at Ohio State. I might even get to play next year since Joey Galloway and Chris Sanders are leaving."

### 25 Years Ago — 2000

The Ohio Football Recruiting News, published by Bill Kurelic,

and Ohio's Future Stars, published by Chris Roberts and Duane Long, each came out with rankings of the top Ohio seniors-to-be.

Those two publications agreed on one thing: Cleveland St. Ignatius defensive end Pat Massey was the state's No. 2-ranked prospect.

TOFRN listed OSU commitment Redgie Arden, a linebacker from Ironton, as the state's No. 1 junior. OFS, meanwhile gave the nod to Upper Arlington defensive end Simon Fraser.

But both had the rangy Massey in their top two. He had to be considered a primary recruit for Ohio State, where his brother Jim was going into his junior year as an offensive lineman.

### 20 Years Ago — 2005

Ohio State wasted little time kicking off its 2006 recruiting effort, getting verbal commitments from two of the top Ohio prep seniors-to-be less than a week after National Signing Day.

Akron Garfield running back Chris Wells committed to the Buckeyes on Feb. 6, and that was followed a day later by a verbal from linebacker Ross Homan of Coldwater.

"It's a very good start for Ohio State in a year that is expected to be very good for high school talent in the state," said BuckeyeSports.com recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic. "Those two guys committing so early could help get some other early commitments from in-state players."

### 15 Years Ago — 2010

The buzz of the two commitments as BSB last went to press had been afforded a chance to die down before head coach Jim Tressel got three more commitments on March 16, pushing the class of 2011 to seven members.

Four of the five March commitments hailed from the Buckeye State, and none of them had been nationally ranked to that point by Scout.com.

The three more recent commitments were from Palatine (Ill.) William Fremd center Brian Bobek; Elyria, Ohio, defensive tackle Chase Ferris; and Toledo Rogers cornerback DerJuan Gambrell.

### 10 Years Ago — 2015

Cocoa, Fla., four-star running back Bruce Judson, a member of the 2017 class, committed to the Buckeyes in the late-night hours following Ohio State's national championship win over Oregon.

It wasn't a rash decision, as the high school sophomore had been linked to Ohio State for a visit and was a teammate of true freshman defensive back Jamel Dean, who had enrolled at Ohio State in January and was taking part in spring practice.

"I just went with my heart," Judson said. "It is like family up there at Ohio State, and they all came together and won a championship last season. I was up there for camp, and I really liked the atmosphere. Everyone worked hard. It was one big family, and that is why I love Ohio State."

### Five Years Ago — 2020

After missing on several top running backs in the previous recruiting cycle, running backs coach Tony Alford rebounded in a big way by securing commitments from two of the nation's top six players at the position. That included Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson - who announced his pledge to the Buckeyes on March 27 - and Cornelius (N.C.) W.A. Hough four-star Evan Pryor.

The 5-11, 195-pound Henderson was considered the second-best running back and No. 17 prospect overall in the class of 2021, rushing for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns to lead the Blue Devils to the state championship the year before. He picked Ohio State over finalists Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Penn State, Texas, Virginia and Virginia Tech.

### One Year Ago — 2024

Vero Beach, Fla., four-star linebacker Tarvos Alford announced his commitment to the Buckeyes on March 30.

Alford - no relation to former running backs coach Alford - was the No. 62 overall prospect and the eighth-ranked linebacker in 2025, choosing Ohio State over Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Tennessee and UCF.

"There's a lot of history at Ohio State, and people leave a legacy," Alford told On3. "I feel like if you go there, you're on the verge of making history."

Much of Alford's recruitment came down to his relationship with linebackers coach James Laurinaitis, who visited Alford twice in January after he was promoted from a graduate assistant. Alford, meanwhile, had visited Ohio State the previous summer and returned in the fall for the Buckeyes' win over Michigan State on Nov. 11.

# ASK AN ANALYST

With Allen Trieu Of 247 Sports

**Ohio State and Tyler Bowen earned their second commitment in the month of March when Akron Hoban four-star offensive tackle Sam Greer (6-7, 310) committed on March 25. What do you make of Greer as a prospect?**

"I think it's pretty cut and dry with him. He has really high-end physical skills. He's big. He's super athletic. If you watch him play basketball, he does a lot of things on the court that guys his size would usually struggle to do. So he's very, very athletic and mobile at his size. He hasn't played a ton of football. He missed all of his freshman and sophomore years due to injury, came back last year, and I think we saw some good things during that, but also saw some things that can be cleaned up.

"He's a guy that – as we look in the four-star range and at the high-major commits and say, 'Who do we have to watch in the fall, and who could really rise?' – it's him, and this is talking already about a four-star guy. As far as a take for Ohio State, if you're Tyler Bowen, you have to be really, really excited to work with a guy with his tools. And it sounds like he has a really great work ethic, too. The only real knock on him is just some bad luck with injuries."

**You gave Ohio State a crystal ball to land Delaware (Ohio) Rutherford B Hayes four-star running back Favour Akih (6-0, 190), who is another Ohio recruit. Why do you believe he's trending toward the Buckeyes, and what do you make of him as a prospect?**

"I think he's right there, not very far away. Ohio State has this great running back tradition, especially recently, where you can look at his game – he's a speed guy, 100-meter dash guy – and compare it to some of the backs they've done really well with, like a TreVeyon Henderson or Quinshon Judkins. And look at how they

use guys with his skill set and the proximity to home. The fact that he's grown up an Ohio kid, that all points towards Ohio State.

"USC and Miami have done a really good job there. I think they're still fighting the fight. I still don't think they're out of it. He's still considering those schools, but there's a lot going for Ohio State. With him, it's, again, a great combination of size and speed. You don't get a ton of backs coming out of the Midwest with 10.8 100-meter dash times. And I think he can still get better. We saw game-to-game last year a progression of him throughout the season. And I think he's going to have a huge senior year."

**Ohio State already has five commitments from in-state players if you include Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. (6-5, 205), who committed when he was still going to school in Ohio. Are there more in-state players you believe will end up with the Buckeyes, and what do you think of the Ohio talent in the class overall?**

"I think it's a really good class of Ohio kids. I don't think it's top-heavy. There's not a Tavien St Clair in this class, but there's a lot of quality and depth in this class. Kind of like last year where a Bodpegn Miller or a Jake Cook get discovered at camp. There are a lot of those kinds of guys that could come to camp and earn an offer.

"I don't think Ohio State's done with this in-state class. I like them to end up with Lewis Center Olentangy three-star linebacker CJ Sanna (6-3, 225), who just visited again. I think he's getting close (to committing). I like them for Akron Hoban four-star cornerback Elbert Hill (5-10, 175). I know he's looking at some schools around the country – USC is working on him there –

but I think he's still kind of leaning Ohio State. Four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225) is interesting out of Cleveland Glenville. He's going to take visits all over the country, he's going to consider other schools, but usually with a Glenville kid and an Ohio kid, Ohio State's probably the team to beat there. So those are three guys right there that I think Ohio State could land, and it is still working on Strongsville four-star linebacker Storm Miller (6-3, 220). I definitely don't think we're anywhere close to done with the in-state class for Ohio State."

**Matt Patricia is recruiting for the first time at the collegiate level. How do you think he affects the Buckeyes' recruiting while he is on staff, and have you heard any feedback from prospects who have met with him in the spring?**

"So far, I haven't heard too much when it comes to recruiting. When recruits come in and have a chance to meet him, they definitely have mentioned knowing that it's somebody with a lot of knowledge, somebody who has obviously coached at the highest levels, especially the kids who are coming from this region and know his name very well from being with the Detroit Lions and being in the pros. They know they're getting that kind of knowledge. I haven't really had a chance to fully see what he can do on the trail yet. Maybe we'll see a little bit more of that in May when he can kind of hit the road and build some relationships, and then also into June, where kids can really have a chance to work with him hands-on at camp.

"So as far as of right now, the biggest thing he has going for him is his résumé and that name recognition. And then as far as building the relationships, that's just starting, and I think we'll get a chance to see a little bit more of how he does in those areas in the next couple months."

Eberhart got his offer when he was on campus for a spring visit and plays wide receiver, safety and linebacker for his high school team, but he likely would be recruited by Ohio State as a linebacker. He is the No. 398 player in his class, the 24th-best athlete and the No. 6 player in the state of Missouri. Eberhart has 37 Division I offers already, including some from Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, LSU, Miami, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Purdue, USC and Wisconsin.

Guilford is ranked the 497th player in his class, the No. 78 wide receiver and the No. 4 player in the state of Indiana and has offers from 21 Division I schools including Georgia, Indiana, Miami, Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State, Purdue and Wisconsin.

Thomas also received his offer when he was on campus for a spring visit and is the No. 551 player in the country, the No. 47 offensive tackle and the No. 6 player in the state of Arizona. His 20 Division I offers include Cal, Iowa State, Minnesota, Oregon State, and Washington.

In the 2027 class, the Buckeyes extended offers to Argyle (Texas) Liberty Christian five-star safety Cooper Witten (6-2, 210); Lincoln, N.C., linebacker Jalaythan Mayfield (6-1, 215); and Columbia (S.C.) Irmo athlete Nate Carson (6-4, 270).

Witten's name might sound familiar to NFL fans since he is the son of former Dallas Cowboys tight end and 11-time NFL Pro Bowler Jason Witten. Cooper, the No. 11 prospect in the nation, No. 1 safety and No. 2 player in the state of Texas, picked up his offer when he was visiting the Buck-

eyes on March 21. It will be tough for the Buckeyes to pull him out of the talent-rich state, but they have had some success with a few prospects there in recent years.

Mayfield and Carson are both unranked by 247Sports composite, but both have some fairly impressive offers to show off already. Mayfield has been offered by Arkansas, Duke, Florida State, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee, among others, while Carson has received bids from Alabama, Florida, Florida State, South Carolina and Virginia Tech.

Ohio State also offered one 2028 recruit in Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic defensive end Jackson Vaughn (6-3, 220). Despite spite still being a freshman in high school, Vaughn already has 30 Division I offers, including some from Auburn, Illinois, LSU, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ole Miss, Penn State, Purdue, Rutgers, Texas A&M, USC and Washington.

## Other Notes And Tidbits

• Sellars narrowed his scholarship list down to six schools on March 18, including Ohio State on his list along with Clemson, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina A&T and South Carolina. Ohio State doesn't seem to be an extremely strong contender for Sellars' services since he already has official visits scheduled for the summer that aren't to Columbus, going to Clemson on May 30, South Carolina on June 6, Georgia on June 13 and Michigan on June 20. However, since he just received his offer

from the Buckeyes on March 17, they could make a run late in the 2026 prospect's recruitment. Sellars, the nation's 203rd-best prospect, 33rd-best wide receiver and 13th-best player out of North Carolina, will announce his commitment on April 18.

• Cleveland Glenville four-star linebacker Cincere Johnson (6-3, 225) didn't seem to be getting too much closer to a decision as BSB went to press, but he did

make a spring visit to Columbus on March 25. The pipeline from Glenville to Ohio State could continue if Johnson ends up with the Buckeyes, where he has received a "crystal ball" to commit. The nation's 104th-best prospect, eighth-best linebacker and third-best player out of Ohio will take an official visit to Ohio State from June 13-15.



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# Meechie Breaks Silence On Absence From Team

Perhaps one of the more puzzling storylines of Ohio State's disappointing 2024-25 season was the extended absence of fifth-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr., who, after starting the first 10 games for the Buckeyes, left the program due to personal reasons, didn't return for the rest of the season and entered the transfer portal on March 28, officially ending his second tenure with the Scarlet and Gray.

## COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Over three months after he left the team following Ohio State's blowout loss to Auburn on Dec. 14 and two days before he entered the portal, Johnson's first comments about the decision were revealed in a March 26 story in The Columbus Dispatch, where he said he was dealing with multiple personal matters and mental health issues at the time of his departure that were affecting him to a point where he needed to step away from the game.

"I was just going through a lot mentally," Johnson said. "Mental health is serious. It's something I've dealt with my whole life. It was something that definitely was affecting me. It was my life. There was a lot going on, and basketball being something that you use to be an outlet, I just didn't feel like myself mentally. I just had to focus on my mental health. That was that."

Johnson committed to the Buckeyes for his second stint with the program last off-season after a second-team All-SEC year at South Carolina and was expected to play an integral role for the Buckeyes in the 2024-25 campaign, but he said one of the biggest issues he was dealing with was the void left in his life by his late grandfather,

Williams Johnson, who died of colon cancer while he was playing with the Gamecocks. He said that although this occurred before he returned to Ohio State, his absence still negatively affected him and weighed on him this past season.

Those mental struggles led to inefficient play on the court, where he averaged 9.1 points and 2.7 assists per game on just 35.6 percent shooting from the field and 35.7 percent shooting from three while committing 23 total turnovers in his 10 games, numbers that were far off from the 14.1 points on 39.9 percent shooting he logged in 2023-24.

Johnson also said his departure had nothing to do with him quitting on the program or trying to earn an extra year of collegiate eligibility through a mental health hardship waiver – he does now qualify for one due to playing only 10 games – but rather him trying to put his mental health first and improve his quality of life.

"(Gaining an extra year of eligibility) had nothing to do with it," he said. "It was me talking to my therapist and doctors and family. I wasn't getting sleep. I was going through a lot. Doctors were like, 'Take a step back for a second and prioritize the right things that matter.'"

"My therapist, if you talked to her, I was disappointed in a lot of things, not from an Ohio State standpoint but just within myself in how a lot of things went and how I wasn't able to be there on the court with my team," he added. "I've seen a lot of things: 'Oh, he quit.' Nah, that's just not what happened at all."

Johnson will now look for a new team out of the transfer portal for the second consecutive year to finish his six-year collegiate career. He had not yet found a new home as BSB went to press. Despite him cutting ties with the Buckeyes, he did say that he holds no ill feelings toward head coach Jake Diebler and the Ohio State program and university.

"Nothing that Coach Diebler or any of the coaches or anybody in the program did was wrong," he said. "Everybody was super, super supportive through this time. The university's obviously been great to me, and I was thankful to have them on my side and supporting me. I would never want people to think that I just quit on the program."

### Buckeyes Add Cupps In Portal

Ohio State earned its first transfer commitment of the offseason on March 26 when former Indiana guard Gabe Cupps announced on social media that he had committed to the Buckeyes.

Cupps, a Dayton native, joins the Buckeyes after spending two seasons at Indiana. He played just four games this season while taking a medical redshirt due to a lower-body injury and averaged 2.6 points, 1.8 rebounds and 1.2 assists per game as a freshman with the Hoosiers, playing 33 games, starting 22.

Like last year's Buckeye transfers, Cupps' biggest accomplishments in basketball thus far have come at the high school level. He was named Ohio Mr. Basketball in 2022 while playing at Dayton Centerville

after a senior season in which he averaged 14.3 points, 2.5 rebounds and 2.0 steals per game. He also led his school to 45 consecutive wins, a stretch that included a state championship in 2021 and a state runner-up finish in 2022.

Cupps' transfer is not a surprise. The Buckeyes were reportedly viewed as the favorites to land him over Dayton after he entered the portal on March 18. Ohio State was heavily involved in Cupps' recruitment out of high school, with the Ohio native putting the Buckeyes in his top three alongside Indiana and Stanford before ultimately landing with the Hoosiers.

Now, Cupps will look to jump-start his collegiate career for his home-state team alongside a group of two other Ohio Mr. Basketball award winners – sophomore forward Devin Royal in 2023 and freshman forward Colin White in 2024. He also joins an Ohio State backcourt that – as BSB went to press – consists of Bruce Thornton, John Mobley Jr., who confirmed he would return to Ohio State for another season, and Taison Chatman.

Ohio State is expected to add more players in the portal to improve its roster after a disappointing 17-15 season that caused them to miss the NCAA Tournament for the third consecutive season.

### Mahaffey, Parks Enter Portal

While Cupps joined the program, the Buckeyes also had two players in addition to Johnson who opted to find new homes, with both junior wing Evan Mahaffey and sophomore center Austin Parks entering the transfer portal after it opened on March 24.

Mahaffey, a Cincinnati native and product of athletic powerhouse Moeller High School, joined Ohio State in the 2023-24 season after spending his freshman year at Penn State, a move that he made to try to be closer with his father, Jamie, who was battling a heart condition and underwent a heart transplant that year.

Mahaffey made an instant impact with the Buckeyes in his first season with the program as a versatile defender and rotational piece, starting 35 of 36 games and averaging 4.3 points, 4.2 rebounds, 1.7 assists, and 1.0 steals per game. That production dipped significantly this season, however. With the more seasoned wing Micah Parrish gaining more playing time and dominating the minutes at the position, Mahaffey was relegated to a bench role, starting just three games and recording 18.0 minutes, 3.6 points, 3.1 rebounds, 0.8 assists and 0.7 steals per game.

Mahaffey, who shot 67.1 percent from the field but just 38.5 percent from the foul line (15 of 39), was a nonfactor at the end of the season for the Buckeyes. He logged 20 or more minutes in just one of his final eight games and totaled 15 rebounds in that span.

The Ohio native has one year of collegiate eligibility remaining.

Parks, meanwhile, announced on Twitter that he was entering the transfer portal after

spending two seasons with the Buckeyes and with two seasons of collegiate eligibility remaining.

The former three-star product out of Saint Mary's (Ohio) Memorial did not see much time on the floor as a Buckeye, appearing in just 24 games in his career and totaling 23 points, 18 rebounds, six assists, three steals and a block.

With transfer sophomore forwards Aaron Bradshaw and Sean Stewart struggling for much of this season, Parks had the opportunity to gain some more playing time in the frontcourt, but he was mostly unable to get on the floor at a consistent rate. He logged 14 minutes or more in just five of his 15 games and totaled 20 points and 13 rebounds while recording 19 fouls.

With Parks and Mahaffey both seeking new teams this offseason, the Buckeyes are now down to 10 scholarship players for next season, with the possibility of losing more to the portal, which remains open until April 22.

### Buckeyes Interested In Several Transfers

As alluded to previously, Cupps is not the only transfer the Buckeyes have expressed interest in adding this season.

Perhaps the most notable name the Buckeyes are reportedly after is former Indiana forward Malik Reneau, who entered the portal on March 18 after three strong seasons with the Hoosiers. The Miami native was a consistent producer on the interior during his time in Bloomington, Ind., averaging 11.4 points, 5.0 rebounds and 1.8 assists per game in his career. Those stats have made Reneau a hot commodity in the transfer portal this year, with schools such as Clemson, Georgia, Michigan and North Carolina among the schools who have shown early interest in him along with the Buckeyes.

Reneau is not the only frontcourt transfer Ohio State has expressed interest in. Also joining that list is former Santa Clara center Christoph Tilly, who entered the portal on March 24, and incoming Bosnian freshman forward Harun Zrno (6-7), who decommitted from Indiana on March 19.

Tilly, who stands at 7-0 and weighs 240 pounds, is coming off a second-team All-West Coast Conference selection this season after averaging 12.5 points, 4.9 rebounds and 1.9 assists per contest. The rising junior and Berlin, Germany, native reportedly had a Zoom meeting with the Buckeyes on March 27 and completed one with Illinois the same day.

Zrno is coming off a strong season for Slavija Istocno Sarajevo of the First League of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he averaged 17.5 points, 3.6 rebounds, 3.6 assists and 1.2 steals per game, according to proballers.com. The Buckeyes did not pursue him during his recruitment, with Creighton, Virginia and Wisconsin, among others, getting involved before the Hoosiers originally earned his pledge.

Diebler and his staff are also looking to add to the backcourt through the portal beyond Cupps, and an important name to watch at that position is Columbus native and former Xavier forward Dailyn Swain. Swain, who spent his high school years at



Evan Mahaffey

Johnson who opted to find new homes, with both junior wing Evan Mahaffey and sophomore center Austin Parks entering the transfer portal after it opened on March 24.

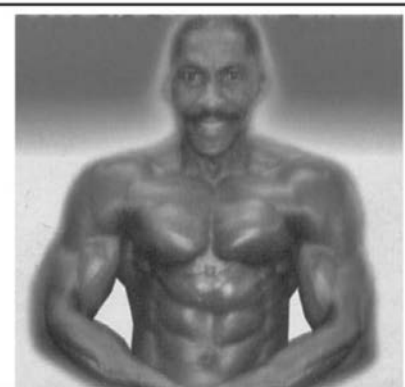
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Columbus Africentric Early College, is coming off a solid year for the Musketeers where he averaged 11.0 points, 5.5 rebounds, 2.6 assists and 1.6 steals per game in 34 games and 33 starts.

Although the Buckeyes haven't officially expressed interest in Swain as BSB went to press, Ohio State was heavily involved in his recruitment in 2023, and sophomore forward Devin Royal made it clear that he wants to team up with Swain, commenting "O-State sounds really good" with an eyeball emoji on the former Musketeer's March 23 Instagram post.

If Swain were to sign with the Buckeyes, they would have the top three players out of Ohio from the class of 2023 on their roster. Royal was No. 1, followed by Swain at No. 2 and Cupps at No. 3.

Other names to watch for the Buckeyes in the portal are rising sophomore guard Jalil Bethea (Miami, Fla.), rising sophomore center Lathan Sommerville (Rutgers), rising senior 7-0 center Christoph Tilly (Santa Clara) – who had a Zoom call with Ohio State on March 27 – incoming freshman forward Aleksa Vlajic (Fordham) and rising sophomore guard All Wright (Valparaiso), among others.

## Bjork Says Diebler Is "Right Guy" For OSU

Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork said on a March 17 radio appearance with WOSU Public Media that while he is disappointed the Buckeye men's basketball team missed out on the NCAA Tournament, he still believes the program is on the right trajectory and capable of achieving postseason success under the leadership of Diebler.

"We're always disappointed (to miss the tournament)," Bjork told "All Sides with Amy Juravich." "Excellence is the standard here. Anytime you miss out on postseason opportunities, of course you're disappointed. Jake has done a great job of changing the culture, changing the mindset. How we operate the program is at a completely different level than the previous regime.

"Now we just have to get over the hump. We need to be in the conversation to be competing for Big Ten championships, a strong run in the postseason."

Bjork's comments came the same day Ohio State ended its 2024-25 season by declining an invitation to the brand-new College Basketball Crown tournament and 11 days after he said that Diebler was "meeting expectations" in his first year leading the program.

In the days between those two events, the Buckeyes' season hit a tailspin at the worst time of the year, with the team dropping its last two games to Indiana at Assembly Hall and Iowa in the first round of the Big Ten tournament to fall out of NCAA Tournament contention.

Bjork acknowledged that one thing Diebler's team may need to improve upon next season is to finish games that they are leading late, a problem that bit them throughout the year.

"Anytime you're in this competitive world, you want to win at the highest level, so when you have those disappointments you analyze, 'OK, what do we need?'" Bjork said. "How do we finish these games where we had the lead with five minutes left, with seven minutes left?" Those are the things we have to get over, and Jake knows that. The

staff knows that. The players know that."

Bjork also commented during the interview about the importance of player retention this offseason as well as why the team declined to play in the postseason, which he said was due to the uncertainty surrounding the roster and Diebler and his staff wanting to get a head start on preparing for the transfer portal, which opened on March 24 and remains open until April 22.

But perhaps most importantly, Bjork maintained that he is confident Diebler has all the qualities and intangibles needed to take the program back to Big Ten and national relevance.

"Jake's the right guy," Bjork said. "He's got vision. He's got energy. He relates to the players in this modern era. We've just got to get over the hump, and there's a lot of work happening behind the scenes to get that done."

## Johnson Named Ohio Mr. Basketball

A future Buckeye took home some serious hardware on March 20 when Garfield Heights four-star point guard and 2026 Ohio State commit Marcus Johnson (6-1, 175) was named 2025 Ohio Mr. Basketball, the state's top individual honor for high school hoops.

Johnson, the cousin of Meechie Johnson, earns the distinction after an outstanding junior season in which he led his team to its first OHSAA Division III, Region 9 title since 2016 and an appearance in the Division III semifinals by averaging 29.7 points, 5.7 rebounds, 4.7 assists and 2.2 steals per game.

Johnson accomplished those feats while being coached by his father, Sonny, who also was named Ohio Mr. Basketball at the same school in 1998. They are now the first-ever father-son duo to take home the award. Garfield Heights has gone 72-9 in the three seasons with Sonny Johnson leading the team and his son playing point guard.

"It's history. This will last forever, me winning Mr. Basketball," Johnson told WKYC Channel 3 on March 20. "I used to go places with my dad when I was younger, and they would always say, '1998 Mr. Basketball.' So now for myself, winning in 2025, I'm just really happy."

Johnson is also the 14th Buckeye to win the award and joins the previously mentioned group of current Buckeyes who won – Cupps, Royal (Pickerington Central) and White (Ottawa-Glandorf).

Johnson, the nation's 29th-best player, sixth-best point guard and No. 2 player out of Ohio in his class, committed to Ohio State on April 10, 2024, and is currently slated to join the program for the 2026-27 season. He has expressed interest in reclassifying to the 2025 class, however, which would allow him to suit up for the Buckeyes this season alongside 2025 commits Branson (Mo.) Link Academy four-star power forward A'Mare Bynum (6-8, 225) and Cleveland Richmond Heights four-star shooting guard Dorian Jones (6-4, 160).

"(Jake Diebler) is a really good coach, a really good guy," Johnson told Eleven Warriors on March 16. "Definitely locked in with Ohio State."

## Gayle, Okpara Lead New Teams In NCAA Tourney

While Ohio State is at home watching

this year's NCAA Tournament, some notable former Buckeyes are achieving their dreams in the Big Dance for their respective new schools.

The most notable former Ohio State player who competed in the tournament is Michigan guard Roddy Gayle Jr., who played a significant role in his once-rival program's run to the Elite Eight.

Gayle, who transferred from Ohio State to Michigan last offseason after two seasons with the Buckeyes, started the tournament strong in the first round by racking up 11 points on 4-of-8 shooting along with two assists and two rebounds in the fifth-seeded Wolverines' thrilling 68-65 victory over No. 13 seed UC San Diego on March 20. He made a pair of key defensive plays in the final 2:30 to keep the Tritons off the board.

Gayle then had perhaps the signature game of his career two days later in the Round of 32 on March 22, when he erupted for a season-high 26 points on 7-of-14 shooting – 4 of 6 from three – along with four rebounds to power the Wolverines to a 91-79 win over No. 4 seed Texas A&M. He scored 21 of his 26 points in the second half and netted 11 straight points midway through the period, all of which helped U-M come from 10 points down to advance to its first Sweet 16 since 2022.

Gayle, who has been criticized by Michigan fans at times this season for his regular-season struggles, poked fun at those who doubted him while speaking with media after the game.

"Social media has been all over the place," Gayle said. "I feel like every comment I have, they call me a double agent for choosing Michigan after going to Ohio State. I feel like I beat those allegations as of recent, so it's just an exciting feeling to be able to put everything in the past."

Gayle had another solid outing – albeit

in a losing effort – in Michigan's 78-65 loss to No. 1 overall seed Auburn in the Sweet 16 on March 28, racking up another seven points, one rebound and one assist in 25 minutes of action to end his 2024-25 season. After the game, Gayle indicated to the media that he would like to return to the Wolverines for his senior season.

Former Ohio State forward Felix Okpara also produced in the NCAA Tournament for his new school. He helped second-seeded Tennessee make a run to Elite Eight for the second consecutive season by averaging 5.8 points, 8.0 rebounds and 1.3 blocks in the Volunteers' four postseason games.

Okpara's best performance came in Tennessee's 77-62 first-round win over No. 15 seed Wofford on March 20, in which he racked up seven points, five rebounds and one block to help his team cruise to the Round of 32. The former Buckeye, who transferred to Rick Barnes' program last offseason after originally pledging his loyalty to the Diebler-led Buckeyes last April, then had four points, seven rebounds and a block in Tennessee's 67-58 Round of 32 win over No. 7 seed UCLA on March 22, and added another eight points, 11 rebounds and one block in the Vols' 78-65 Sweet 16 win over No. 3 seed Kentucky on March 28.

He ended his season with four points and nine rebounds in Tennessee's 69-50 loss to No. 1 seed Houston on March 30.

Gayle and Okpara aren't the only former Buckeyes to have their moment in the spotlight. Former sharpshooting guard Bowen Hardman played 14 minutes in No. 13 seed Akron's 93-65 loss to No. 4 seed Arizona and connected on one three while adding a steal.

Hardman, who transferred to the Zips last offseason after logging just 3.8 minutes per game his first two collegiate seasons with Ohio State, averaged a career-high 6.6 points on 43.3 percent shooting from the field and 39.8 percent from three in 15.5 minutes per contest for Akron.

*For up-to-date reports on the Buckeyes' activity in the transfer portal, visit BuckeyesSports.com, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin Subscribers.*



Roddy Gayle

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# Men's Hoops Program Facing Uncertain Future

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

After an offseason full of optimism and high expectations, the Ohio State men's basketball team's 2024-25 campaign ended with a whimper.

Due to a lack of roster continuity and several underwhelming individual performances, the Buckeyes limped to a 17-15 record and 9-11 Big Ten mark in Jake Diebler's first year as full-time head coach, losing five of their final seven games and tapping out in the first round of the Big Ten tournament to miss the NCAA Tournament for the third consecutive season, something the program had not done in two decades.

"I'm angry we're not playing in the NCAA Tournament," Diebler said on 97.1 The Fan on March 17. "I am. We took some steps forward this year. We're not satisfied."

Ohio State's NCAA Tournament-less season was one that few expected entering the year. Many who closely follow the Buckeyes believed that Diebler had re-energized the program after leading his team to an 8-3 finish last season as interim head coach and then retooled the roster in the full-time role with several promising transfer additions, none more touted than former five-star McDonald's All-American forwards Aaron Bradshaw and Sean Stewart.

That preseason hype was felt by 247Sports' Ohio State men's basketball beat reporter Steve Helwagen, who said he had high hopes for the team before they ultimately faltered when it mattered most.

"To me, everything seemed to be on the up and up," Helwagen said. "I thought they'd win 20 games. I thought they'd go to the NCAA (Tournament), maybe win 11 or 12 games in the Big Ten. The schedule looked difficult, but it felt like they had a team to be able to do it. You thought, 'Man, this is a pretty good eight-man rotation here.' But unfortunately, as the weeks and the months and the games passed, it just never came together like anybody could have thought it would."

As the first full offseason of the Diebler era begins and criticisms and questions about the way the season unfolded grow louder, Buckeye Sports Bulletin caught up with men's basketball historian Lee Caryer, Helwagen and Land-Grant Holy Land men's basketball beat writer Connor Lemons to gauge their thoughts on the current state of the program, how the team can move forward after this year and why they struggled as a program of late, among other things.

## A Season Full Of 'What-Ifs'

According to each of the three subjects interviewed, the story of the Buckeyes' disappointing season begins in the frontcourt, specifically with the two sophomore transfer forwards.

Coming into the season, Bradshaw and Stewart were widely viewed as players who could help the Buckeyes hold their own inside in the physically demanding Big Ten, something that the team has struggled to accomplish in recent years in the conference with previous post players such as Zed Key, Felix Okpara and Kyle Young, among others.

Instead, the exact opposite transpired. Due to a university investigation into an alleged



SONNY BROCKWAY

**HARD TIMES — Coach Jake Diebler inherited a program from Chris Holtmann that missed the NCAA Tournament two straight seasons. Make it three after the Buckeyes' disappointing finish this season has potentially put Diebler on the hot seat.**

domestic incident that occurred in his off-campus home and a flu bug that hit the team at the end of February, Bradshaw missed 10 games this season and never got comfortable in Diebler's system, averaging just 6.0 points and 2.7 rebounds per contest. Stewart, meanwhile, was plagued by foul trouble all year and could never get into a rhythm of his own, totaling 5.7 points and 5.8 rebounds per contest while leading the team with 103 fouls and seven disqualifications.

Caryer, who has followed the OSU men's hoops program since the days of Frank Howard and Gene Millard in the late 1950s, did not hold back when asked to describe both Bradshaw and Stewart's first seasons in scarlet and gray.

"Sean Stewart simply does not have a shot he can score with," Caryer said. "He doesn't have a hook, he doesn't have a jump shot, he doesn't have a post move, he doesn't have anything, and he's not on the court a lot. He has potential, that's true, but the potential is not being realized at all."

"Bradshaw thinks he's a guard. He made a three-point shot, and for the next six weeks, that's all he thought about. They're both examples of what's going on because they were not evaluated properly and they're not being developed properly."

Bradshaw and Stewart's year-long struggles were most felt on offense, according to Lemons. He said their inability to score from close range made the Buckeyes over-reliant on the perimeter shot, which made their offense one-dimensional and easy to guard.

This season, Ohio State went 9-12 when it made fewer than 10 threes and 8-3 when it made 10 or more from long range.

"In my eyes, they lacked that strong foundation on offense," Lemons said. "They didn't have that center that they could reliably go to to get a high-percentage look. Almost all of their baskets were really contested jump shots. So if Ohio State was hitting tough shots, they were going to win games, and if they weren't hitting those tough shots, they were going to lose."

"But I just think it's so important to have a center, somebody who can at least give you

eight or nine points a game, that you can rely on. It would have opened up the offense for guys on the perimeter like (freshman guard John) Mobley Jr. and (junior guard Bruce) Thornton. Maybe not every jump shot would be contested if teams had to respect (the center position) a little bit. I just think it made things a lot harder for them."

Lemons also pointed to the team's interior defense as a major weakness this season, which he thinks was caused by the void Okpara left when he bolted for Tennessee, a move that he didn't believe Diebler anticipated last offseason. He said pairing the defensive-minded Okpara — who averaged 7.1 points, 6.4 rebounds and 1.7 blocks per game for Tennessee this season to help lead them to the Elite Eight — with the offensive-minded Bradshaw would have given the Buckeyes enough on the inside to buy at least one more win and a return to the NCAA Tournament.

"This Ohio State team was one win away from making the tournament, and I'm pretty confident that Felix Okpara starting one game and playing 25 to 30 minutes, with the defensive impact that he'd have, would have flipped at least one game. So if you would've kept Felix, they probably would have made the tournament. And the mood around the program would be drastically different."

"They didn't recruit Bradshaw to replace Okpara. They wanted to recruit Bradshaw — 'Here's our 7-footer who can shoot and give us some points off the bench,' and then with Okpara, 'Here's our 7-footer who is one of the best rim protectors in the country. Ohio State wanted to have both.'"

Bradshaw's and Stewart's struggles weren't the only development that held the Buckeyes back this season.

According to Helwagen, Ohio State's season turned grim when fifth-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr. left the team after the Buckeyes' blowout loss to Auburn on Dec. 14 due to personal reasons and did not return the rest of the season. He said that the absence of Johnson — a second-team All-SEC selection at South Carolina last season who logged the second-most minutes on the team behind Thornton at 28.8

at the time of his departure — created a ripple effect in the backcourt that negatively impacted the unit's depth, forcing Mobley into the starting lineup with just 10 games of collegiate experience and requiring more minutes out of rotational pieces such as sixth-year guard Ques Glover and junior wing Evan Mahaffey.

After being inserted into the starting lineup, Mobley's three-point shooting percentage dropped from 54.0 percent to 33.3 percent, while Glover and Mahaffey averaged just 4.5 and 3.2 points, respectively, on a combined 43.8 shooting (64 of 146) in their expanded roles.

"Meechie Johnson quit the team, walked away, and that really put a crimp in everything," Helwagen said. "Because now, instead of playing (Johnson) 25 or 30 minutes, Diebler has to play Mobley 30 minutes, Mahaffey 15-20 minutes, Ques Glover 15-20 minutes. And those guys are like the 11th and 12th men on a good Ohio State team. On this team, they're the sixth and seventh men, and that killed them. That just killed them dead."

"Those guys, there was no production at all. All season long, there was no offensive production. You don't have to guard them. And it made it so much more difficult on the rest."

## Lack Of Depth, Urgency Doom OSU Down Stretch

Despite these glaring issues with the roster, Ohio State was still well within striking distance of making the NCAA Tournament toward the end of the season.

After winning five of seven games from mid-January to mid-February — a stretch that included impressive wins over Sweet 16 teams Purdue and Maryland — the Buckeyes' record stood at a respectable 15-10 and 7-7 in the Big Ten. The winning streak put them squarely in the NCAA Tournament according to several bracket experts across the nation with about a month of play to go.

Those positive feelings quickly evaporated in that final month, however, after the Buckeyes put themselves on the NCAA Tournament bubble by dropping three straight games to Michigan, Northwestern and UCLA. Then, after winning two games against USC and Nebraska to get back into postseason consideration, they had their bubble popped by losing the final two games of the season to Indiana at Assembly Hall and Iowa in the first round of the Big Ten tournament.

According to Helwagen, Ohio State's end-of-year drop-off stems from the program not having enough depth to compete over a long and arduous Big Ten season, causing the team's scoring quartet of Mobley, fifth-year wing Micah Parrish, Thornton and sophomore forward Devin Royal to wear down in the most important games of the year.

"When you've got a four-man rotation, and no depth, and no big man — they kind of ran that big four off the rails, played them too many minutes," Helwagen said. "Mobley, in particular, hit the wall. His production went way down at the end of the season. He was only in double figures in two of the last five games, and those were must-win games where they needed him."

"The Iowa game in the Big Ten tournament, Iowa has to win a game at Nebraska just to get into the tournament, and they're playing to keep their season going. And here's Ohio State, who needs one win to go to the NCAA



Tournament, and they can't get it against a team that they beat by double digits earlier in the season. It just didn't make any sense. To me, they just ran this team off the rails, and they had nothing left to give in the last week or two."

The Buckeyes' poor finish to the season was also a head-scratcher for Lemons. He felt the team played with a notable lack of urgency and showed little fight in certain games down the stretch – most notably in their blowout 70-49 home loss to Northwestern on Feb. 20 and the 77-70 defeat to Iowa in the postseason – a puzzling development that he blames on the coaching staff and veteran leaders on the roster.

"With a few of those losses, what stuck out to me when I was watching, I just didn't really see urgency, especially in the Northwestern game," Lemons said. "That was a head-scratcher. That's the one where if you flip that to a win, I don't know if it 100 percent would have put them in the tournament, but just the optics of being 18-14 instead of 17-15 honestly might have.

"In the Iowa game at the very end of the season, when you've got everything to play for, and your opponent – I mean, Fran McCaffery got fired the very next day. (Iowa athletic director Beth Goetz) was probably like, 'Are you kidding me? You guys couldn't just lose and be done so I could fire Fran, I have to wait another day?' They couldn't even beat a coach who was literally a dead man walking.

"The lack of urgency in those two games was kind of a stunner to me. I don't know if I expected to see a coach throw a clipboard or see Bruce screaming at his teammates and telling them to get their (act) together. But it just kind of seemed like in both of those games, they just kind of sleepwalked through both of them. Down the stretch, they didn't look aware of what was at stake, which is crazy."

### Now Or Never For Diebler

Ohio State's late-season swoon has the program in an all-too-familiar situation, where it is watching the NCAA Tournament at home while former players such as Okpara and Roddy Gayle Jr. – who transferred to Michigan this past offseason after two seasons with the Scarlet and Gray – make deep runs to the Elite Eight and Sweet 16, respectively, with their new teams.

While this is likely an uncomfortable reality for the team, it is now up to Diebler and his staff to get Ohio State out of this three-year skid and back to the tournament for the first time since the 2021-22 season. According to Helwagen, that path back to Big Ten and national prominence begins with the transfer portal this offseason, where he thinks Diebler will need to change his approach and bring in experienced veterans rather than promising young projects.

"You definitely need to take it in a new direction," Helwagen said. "Getting young guys on potential, that's not going to work. I think you have to get proven people who have produced at the major-conference level. If you expect to contend at the major-conference level, you need legitimate college players, not guys with potential who had great recruiting rankings, have potential huge upside, but are unfinished products. You can't go for that anymore.

"There is no room for error. You have to take guys who are proven commodities if you expect to contend in the Big Ten, and that's a problem for them. They have to do a much bet-

ter job vetting the prospects that they bring in in the transfer portal because the sad part of this is the clock is ticking."

Ohio State had not brought in an experienced major-conference transfer as BSB went to press, instead garnering a commitment from rising third-year and former Indiana guard Gabe Cupps on March 26. Like Bradshaw and Stewart, Cupps has noteworthy high school accolades, winning Ohio's Mr. Basketball award in 2022 at Centerville, but he has yet to translate those successes at the collegiate level. He averaged just 2.6 points and 1.8 rebounds per game as a freshman before playing in only four games this past season due to injury.

The Buckeyes are reportedly interested in several proven Power Five and mid-major players, however, including rising seniors Malik Reneau (Indiana) and Cristoph Tilly (Santa Clara) and rising juniors Pryce Sandfort (Iowa) and Colby Duggan (Campbell), among others.

Although both Helwagen and Lemons agreed the transfer portal will be critical this offseason for Ohio State, Caryer thinks the best way forward may be through the world of recruiting, where Diebler and his staff can bring in a group of players who can develop together over time rather than plucking multiple players from different schools.

He did admit that this strategy may be difficult to implement in a transfer-heavy collegiate climate, though, and that a team with mostly transfers could also have success in college basketball.

"I'm really old school, so I'd love to do what Purdue is doing and Michigan State is doing, and that's bring them in (through high school recruiting), watch them develop, see them grow together and have a nice, friendly process where everybody gets degrees," Caryer said. "That's what I'd like as a fan. But there are really two ways to do it.

"We saw Kentucky and Illinois play (in the Round of 32 of the NCAA Tournament), and they both had rosters that were entirely new. Years ago, we would have said, 'That's impossible, that can't happen.' Well, they were in the second round of the NCAAs and (Ohio State) wasn't. So it can happen. I would think it would be easier to develop and grow (high school recruits), but in today's society, maybe that's not true. Because the kids want immediate gratification. They want NIL checks. They probably aren't even thinking about graduating from college anymore."

Caryer, Helwagen and Lemons all agreed that player retention will be an important factor this offseason, with each of them saying that Thornton, Mobley and Royal are three players whom the Buckeyes need to bring back for 2025-26.

Lemons said that retaining Thornton – a three-time team captain who currently ranks 21st in school history in points (1,487) and 10th in assists (408) – will be especially important for the program, and his decision will go a long way in determining how he wants to define his Buckeye legacy.

"Bruce is obviously the biggest one," Lemons said. "This comes down to, 'What does Bruce value?' Does he value winning at Ohio State enough that if a Florida or a Georgia or Alabama were to call him up and say, 'Hey, Bruce, I heard you're making \$900,000 at Ohio State, how would you like \$1.5 million and you get to actually play in the tournament?' How much does Bruce value Ohio State that he would turn that down and say, 'No, I'm go-

ing to finish what I started.'"

Regardless of whom the Buckeyes have on the roster for 2025-26, both Helwagen and Lemons believe that this upcoming season will be a make-or-break year for Diebler, who they think would be let go by athletic director Ross Bjork if they fail to make the NCAA Tournament for the fourth consecutive season.

"This is three years without making the tournament," Helwagen said. "To miss it a fourth straight year, I don't think Diebler would come back from that.

"He's to blame as much as anybody, and now he has to get it fixed," he added, "or he's going to be out of his dream job pretty quick."

### Different Decades, Same Old Story

Ohio State's last three NCAA Tournament-less seasons may seem like "rock bottom" for the program for some younger fans, but according to Caryer, these shortcomings are only a microcosm of a decades-long struggle for the Buckeye men.

Before even being asked one question during a phone interview with BSB, Caryer made sure to point out the two things that he thinks have harmed the program dating back to the Thad Matta-era (2004-17).

"The two big issues as I see them are No. 1 evaluation and No. 2 development," Caryer said. "The coaches have to look at a player at an early age and forecast where he can be in the future, and that's not easy. That's not something you're going to always be right about. (Then you have to develop) with the coaches on hand.

"Most players need to be developed within the role that they're supposed to play on the team. Ohio State is just not doing that on a consistent basis. We had an E.J. Liddell. We now have a darn good point guard in Thornton. They've been right, that's true. They have to be right more often."

"You can look at Matta's last years, and you can look at all the (Chris) Holtmann years, and you can look at the Holtmann/Diebler years – in which Diebler was actively involved – you could find a lot more misses than hits on the evaluation side."

Caryer also said the program's struggles run deeper than missing on recruits and transfers over the years. He argues that the men's basketball team has taken a major back seat to football in the eyes of the athletic administration and university over the last seven decades, causing the school to be non-explicit with the standards they want the program to uphold and to consistently struggle to find the right head coaches.

When asked why the athletic administration has failed to establish that clear standard, Caryer recounted a story involving former Ohio State guard Dick Schnittker (1946-50) and head coach Tippy Dye (1946-50), which he thinks best showed the school's deep-root-

ed ignorance of the basketball team's best interests.

"(Schnittker) was an All-American. He played in the NBA. He was (Ohio State's) star. They took him off the basketball team (in 1950) to play on the football team – which he was not playing on – as a receiver in the Rose Bowl," Caryer said. "That's how important football was then, that he would miss four basketball games to play in the Rose Bowl when he hadn't been practicing with the team all year.

"Tippy Dye, who had won the Big Ten, left after that year for some reason. Maybe he thought basketball players should play basketball and not football. The emphasis of football over basketball, there is a long series of stories, but there was nothing quite that stark. Tippy Dye went to Washington and had a very successful career and went to the Final Four (in 1952-53), and (Ohio State) went there none (until 1960). So that's how deeply embedded this ignoring the best interests of basketball is."

Although there are still signs today that can point to an overall lack of interest in the basketball team compared to the football team – most notably the sparse attendance at Value City Arena as opposed to the jam-packed crowds at Ohio Stadium each Saturday – Helwagen said the current administration has given the Buckeyes plenty of resources to compete with the best in the Big Ten and nation, and they simply need to use it the right way in order to succeed.

"There's no reason, with all the resources that they have at their disposal, that they can't contend in the Big Ten and nationally," Helwagen said. "This is not a poor athletic program. They've got money. They've got to put the money in the right places to get the right people that they need and then put the pieces around those people to be successful, and it just hasn't happened in the last decade."

Regardless of the debate regarding the resources of the men's basketball team compared to football, the reality remains that the Buckeyes are flirting with irrelevancy in high-major men's college basketball. At least according to Helwagen, that simply will not cut it for a program that has a proven track record of success.

"They have a tradition of winning men's basketball at Ohio State," Helwagen said. "It just hasn't happened in the last 12 years. They have to get back to that. They went to the Sweet 16 four straight years with Thad Matta (2009-10 to 2012-13). I mean, that may as well be 100 years ago at this point.

"So they have to get back to where those are the standards. That they are pushing to be a second-weekend team in the NCAA, if not contend for a Final Four or two every decade, and contend in the Big Ten, and play to win the conference tournament. That's what they need to aspire to do, and nothing short of that is acceptable."

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# McMahon Enters Portal After Loss To Vols

Three-time All-Big Ten forward and Ohio State's 2024-25 leading-scorer Cotie McMahon entered the transfer portal on March 26, ending her outstanding three-year career with the Buckeyes. She has one year of collegiate eligibility remaining.

**DOUBLE  
DRIBBLE  
Bobby Gorbett**

McMahon, who joined redshirt sophomore center Faith Carson as the only Buckeyes to have entered the transfer portal as BSB went to press, was Ohio State's most productive all-around player this past season. She averaged a team-high 16.5 points per game along with 4.7 rebounds and 2.1 assists on her way to earning her second straight first-team All-Big Ten selection. She also became a threat from three-point range this season, making a career-best 37.4 percent of her shots from deep.

McMahon's departure from Ohio State is a surprising one, as she was slotted to once again be the Buckeyes' unquestioned leader next season on a team that will feature talented returning players such as Big Ten Freshman of the Year Jalon Cambridge and Chance Gray, among others. But the Centerville, Ohio, native did express some frustra-

tion with how the Buckeyes' 2024-25 season ended after their 82-67 second-round NCAA tournament loss to Tennessee on March 23 that knocked them out of the post-season before the Sweet 16 for the second consecutive season.

"I'm very frustrated, simple as that," McMahon said after the loss to the Volunteers, in which she finished with 17 points and five rebounds.

McMahon also aired out her frustrations in a social media post following the Tennessee game, saying in a March 24 Instagram story that "(I) want to be surrounded with people who have the same fight, same passion and love for the game just as much as I do."

Regardless of the reason behind her transfer, the reality is the Buckeyes will be playing next season without one of the better players in recent program history. The former No. 23-ranked recruit averaged 15.1 points, 5.5 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.6 steals per game while starting every game as a freshman, a stat line that helped her win Big Ten Freshman of the Year and the Buckeyes reach their first Elite Eight in 30 years.

She then totaled another 14.4 points, 6.3 rebounds, 2.1 assists and 1.1 steals per contest as a sophomore in 2023-24 while helping the Buckeyes earn a Big Ten regular-season title and No. 2 seed in the tournament before having her previously mentioned third straight All-Big Ten season in 2024-25.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**OUTTA HERE** — Junior Cotie McMahon, a three-time All-Big Ten forward, leaves a void after she announced her entry into the transfer portal on March 26, three days after the Buckeyes exited the NCAA tournament following a second-round loss to Tennessee. The team's leading scorer for 2024-25 expressed frustration with the direction of the program.

"It doesn't stop here," McMahon said last season after winning the Big Ten title. "I have two years to grow with this team and the teams coming in."

While McMahon looks for a new home to finish out her collegiate career — she had not yet joined a new team as BSB went to press — the Buckeyes will now enter a crucial off-season with a relatively thin roster. Kevin McGuff's team is down to eight players, with four from this past season finishing their eligibility — guards Madison Greene and Taylor Thierry and forwards Ajae Petty and Eboni Walker — and Carson also entering the portal on March 24 after redshirting this year.

Ohio State is especially thin in the frontcourt, with freshman center Elsa Lemmilä being the team's only interior player who has logged collegiate playing time. Ella Hobbs and Seini Henry will be available for Ohio State next season, but they both red-

shirted this year, meaning McGuff will have to hit the transfer portal to add experience to his frontcourt for the 2025-26 season.

### Seniors Play Final Games For Buckeyes

While a season-ending loss isn't easy for any player, Ohio State's 15-point loss to Tennessee at Value City Arena was particularly hard on its seniors, who played the last games of their collegiate careers.

"It's obviously not the best feeling," Thierry told BSB when asked about her emotions after the game. "We couldn't get past the second round for the second year in a row, but honestly, I'm just grateful for the time here. Looking back on my four years, I'm incredibly grateful for the experiences I've had here."

Shortly after the Buckeyes' loss, McGuff praised all of his seniors but specifically sin-

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2024-25 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

26-7 Overall (13-5 Big Ten)  
Statistics through games of March 23

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.						
MCPMAHON, C	29-29	949-32.7	173-390	.444	34-91	.374	99-155	.639	24-111	135-4.7	68-1	60	66	7	35	479-16.5
CAMBRIDGE, J	29-29	793-27.3	167-389	.429	26-84	.310	88-119	.739	14-116	130-4.5	72-3	113	78	6	59	448-15.4
GRAY, Chance	33-33	912-27.6	137-344	.398	70-201	.348	53-63	.841	9-51	60-1.8	42-0	49	39	3	45	397-12.0
THIERRY, Taylor	33-33	1029-31.2	129-229	.563	26-56	.464	53-76	.697	70-100	170-5.2	79-2	40	41	17	77	337-10.2
PETTY, Ajae	33-33	720-21.8	137-233	.588	0-0	.000	36-64	.563	82-156	238-7.2	79-2	54	67	14	31	310-9.4
WATSON, Ava	25-0	342-13.7	45-138	.326	29-93	.312	13-15	.867	3-17	20-0.8	22-0	18	13	0	30	132-5.3
CAMBRIDGE, K	31-4	510-16.5	56-129	.434	11-43	.256	25-49	.510	32-51	83-2.7	48-1	37	28	13	48	148-4.8
LEMMILÄ, Elsa	32-0	490-15.3	47-93	.505	1-9	.111	37-56	.661	44-111	155-4.8	51-0	27	28	60	21	132-4.1
GREENE, Madison	33-4	606-18.4	40-106	.377	15-41	.366	41-53	.774	7-20	27-0.8	58-0	53	38	5	38	136-4.1
WALKER, Eboni	28-0	324-11.6	32-72	.444	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	33-22	55-2.0	14-0	33	19	5	20	64-2.3
Team									48-48	96		22				
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6675</b>	<b>963-2123</b>	<b>.454</b>	<b>212-619</b>	<b>.342</b>	<b>445-650</b>	<b>.685</b>	<b>366-803</b>	<b>1169-35.4</b>	<b>533-9</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>2583-78.3</b>
<b>Opponents</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6675</b>	<b>776-1911</b>	<b>.406</b>	<b>208-675</b>	<b>.308</b>	<b>342-477</b>	<b>.717</b>	<b>367-874</b>	<b>1241-37.6</b>	<b>611-16</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>2102-63.7</b>

gled out Thierry and Greene, who played with Ohio State for their entire collegiate careers.

"I mean, these are two of the best kids I'll ever get a chance to coach," McGuff said. "Just really high-character young women who are going to go on to do great things in life. So hopefully we can add a few people who bring the same type of competitive character that people like Taylor and Madison have brought to this program."



Madison Greene

Greene's collegiate career was a bit of a bumpy road.

After an outstanding sophomore season in which the Pickerington, Ohio, native averaged 13.4 points, 4.3 assists and 1.7 steals per game in 15 contests, Greene suffered season-ending ACL injuries in back-to-back seasons.

She returned to the court in 2023-24 and stayed for a sixth year with the program in 2024-25 but never managed to match the production she had in her sophomore season, combining to average just 3.5 points, 1.6 assists and 1.1 steals per game during those two seasons as a reserve. Still, in a press conference following Ohio State's 98-46 win over Purdue on Feb. 23, Greene felt positive about her time spent in Columbus.

"It's been really good, like really, super fun," Greene said. "I learned a lot, I experienced a lot of ups and downs, but through it all, I had my family, my team, my coaches, friends and everybody helping me along the way, and without them, I wouldn't be here. I'm just super grateful for everything that I've experienced over the years."

Thierry, who didn't deal with the injury bug like Greene, was a fixture in the Buck-

eyes' starting lineup in her last three seasons with the team. A defensive stalwart for the Buckeyes, the Cleveland native made the All-Big Ten defensive team twice and finished her career at No. 10 in program history with 234 career steals.

"Looking since my freshman year, it's just been incredible to see the growth of this program, just seeing all that (success) come in, and having contributed to what this program is today, it's really cool to look back at that," Thierry said. "I think this was an incredible group we had this year. It sucks that we came up short, but honestly, I'm really proud of the program where it is right now compared to where it was my freshman year."

**Buckeyes Doomed By Lack Of Depth Vs. Tennessee**

McGuff's main message to Ohio State during its 2024-25 season was the same all year: Sustain a high level of play for 40 minutes.

Despite all of McGuff's reiterations of this message to the team and to the media, the Buckeyes never seemed to play at their highest level for a full game. In their loss to Tennessee, the Buckeyes' inconsistencies ended up costing them.

"I think it always came down to the same thing, and that in this game – once again, this is very indicative of the season in that we had stretches that were really good. But we just didn't sustain them for close enough to 40 minutes to be, I think, at another level as a team. And so that was sort of our issue throughout the year."

As McGuff mentioned, the Buckeyes showed flashes of their potential in the loss. They got out to a 16-5 lead and later on in the third quarter mounted a 20-2 scoring run to retake a one-point lead.

Other than during those runs though, the

Buckeyes were thoroughly outplayed by the Volunteers, and in the fourth quarter specifically, they were outscored 16-8.

"I felt like all season we've been doing that," Greene said when asked about the team's failure to sustain its 20-2 third-quarter scoring run in the fourth quarter. "Or we don't start the game off really well and once we catch back up, we get comfortable, and we get back down or something like that. It's been a common theme that I think I've seen throughout the year, and unfortunately, it happened today as well."

McGuff was well aware of his team's issues playing consistently for 40 minutes and said before the tournament started that his bench needed to play well to keep his team fresh. At least against Tennessee, that didn't happen. None of the five Buckeyes who came off the bench against the Volunteers scored more than four points in their

playing time.

Tennessee, meanwhile – a team known for making hockey-style line changes – had its two leading scorers in its win over Ohio State, redshirt sophomore guard Talaysia Cooper and junior forward Zee Spearman, come off the bench. And while the Volunteers seemed to find their stride as the game wore on, the Buckeyes seemed to run out of gas in the closing minutes.

"We expended a lot of energy throughout the game, but I think as much as anything, we were mentally tired," McGuff said after the game. "I thought physically, we were fine. But mentally, we were a little worn out and a little bit frustrated."

**Plank's Lady Buck Of The Month**

Plank's Lady Buck for the Month of March is Thierry. In her final five games as a Buckeye, Thierry averaged 13.6 points, 4.8 rebounds and 1.4 assists per game while shooting 57.4 percent from the field (27 of 47) and 58.3 percent from three (7 of 12).

Thierry, a player who became known for her defense over her four years at Ohio State, also averaged 1.8 steals per game in March.

In her last collegiate win, Thierry scored a team-high 16 points on 8-of-13 shooting along with five rebounds, two assists and one steal, leading Ohio State to a 71-51 win over No. 13 seed Montana State in the first round of the NCAA tournament on March 21. She finished her collegiate career by totaling eight points, six rebounds, three assists, two steals and one block in a game-high 39 minutes of action in the loss to the Volunteers.

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# OSU Loses In Round Two For Second Straight Year

By **BOBBY GORBETT**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After earning a No. 4 seed and home-court advantage in the NCAA tournament, Ohio State suffered a season-ending loss in the second round for the second consecutive season.

Despite facing an early deficit in the first round of the tournament on March 21, the Buckeyes dominated the last 25 minutes of their matchup with No. 13 Montana State to advance with a 71-51 victory.

The Buckeyes failed to carry any momentum into their second-round game against No. 5 seed Tennessee two days later, though. Ohio State got out to an early lead, but a series of runs by the Volunteers had the home team facing a huge third-quarter deficit. The Buckeyes mounted a big run of their own to momentarily take the lead but were no match for Tennessee in the fourth quarter, sending them to the offseason with an 82-67 defeat.

With the loss, Ohio State has now failed to advance past the first weekend of the NCAA tournament for the fourth time in its eight appearances under head coach Kevin McGuff, the other instances coming in 2014-15, 2017-18 and 2023-24. The Buckeyes also ended the 2024-25 season winning just half of their final 12 games after starting the year 20-1 and 9-1 in the Big Ten, and they now face an uncertain offseason after the



SONNY BROCKWAY

**OUSTED AGAIN —** The disappointment was evident among the Ohio State players, including leading scorer Cotie McMahon (32), when the Buckeyes lost at home in the Round of 32 of the NCAA tournament for the second season in a row after Tennessee pulled away for an 82-67 victory on March 23. McMahon entered the transfer portal three days later.

surprising transfer of star junior forward Cotie McMahon.

## Bucks Crush Bobcats In First NCAA Tourney Game

No. 4 seed Ohio State (26-6) got out on a near-perfect start in the NCAA tournament on March 21 at Value City Arena when it dominated No. 13 seed Montana State (30-4) 71-51 to advance to the second round.

At least early in the game, the Buckeyes appeared to be entrenched in a battle when they trailed 27-23 midway through the second quarter, a deficit slightly inflated by a technical foul received by McGuff after he argued with officials about a couple of calls that went against his team.

"That's when we come together as a team and try to stay poised," junior guard Chance Gray said after the game when asked about her team's response to McGuff's technical. "We can't control the referees or the atmosphere of the game. We can only control ourselves and be good teammates and good players. That's all we really focused on."

The Buckeyes' focus went to good use as from 3:17 in the second quarter to 7:08 in the third, they went on a 24-0 scoring run to take a 47-27 lead they would never relinquish.

Despite the final score, it was the Bobcats who delivered the first blow. Star point guard Esmeralda Morales drained two three-point shots in the first 3:44 of the game as part of a 10-6 game-opening spurt for the underdogs.

The Buckeyes answered with an 11-2 scoring run to go up 17-12, but the Bobcats didn't go away. Instead, they scored the final five points of the opening frame to tie the score at 17.

Ohio State opened the second quarter with six straight points capped by a three from Gray, but that was right before the Bobcats shifted momentum with a 10-0 scoring run to give them the previously mentioned 27-23 lead. Each of those 10 points were scored by sophomore guard Natalie Picton, who connected on two threes, two technical free throws – which were caused by McGuff arguing a questionable travel call against Gray and a foul on Taylor Thierry five seconds later – and a layup.

Ohio State calmed down after a media timeout at the 4:59 mark, though, as freshman guard Jaloni Cambridge and McMahon scored the final nine points of the first half to help the Buckeyes take a 32-27 lead.

The break for halftime didn't stop Ohio State's scoring run. Gray opened the frame with a trio of three-pointers, and Cambridge, McMahon, and Ajae Petty each made layups to complete the game-changing 24-0 run.

The Bobcats finally stopped the bleeding with a Morales three at 6:18 to break the scoring drought, but that did nothing to halt the Buckeyes' momentum. They answered with eight straight points, capped by a Thierry layup, to extend their lead to 55-30 with 2:46 left in the quarter.

Montana State ended the period on a 7-0 run, but Ohio State still took an 18-point edge into the final quarter, 55-37.

If it hadn't done so earlier in the game, Ohio State extinguished any hope of a Montana State comeback by scoring seven of the first eight points in the final frame. The Bobcats showed some fight the rest of the way, but they only got within 18 points of the lead before the buzzer sounded, and the Buckeyes captured the 20-point win to advance to the second round of the tournament for

the fourth consecutive season.

The Buckeyes, who shot 50.9 percent from the field (28 of 55), had a balanced approach on offense, with all five starters reaching double figures in points, Thierry leading the way with 16 points on 8-of-13 shooting.

In her first NCAA tournament game, Cambridge led the Buckeyes with six assists and six steals to go along with her 12 points, helping her team force 26 turnovers that led to 32 points. Petty (11 points) led the team with seven rebounds to help give OSU a 33-23 advantage on the glass and 44-14 edge in paint points.

Although it wasn't nearly enough to put her team over the top, Morales had a strong offensive outing in the first NCAA tournament game of her career, scoring a game-high 20 points with 5-of-7 shooting from three.

## Tennessee Bounces Bucks Out Of NCAA Tourney

Ohio State (26-7) suffered a season-ending defeat in Value City Arena in the second round of the NCAA tournament for the second consecutive season on March 23, falling to No. 5 seed Tennessee (24-9) 82-67 despite making a furious third-quarter comeback to briefly regain the lead.

As much as Ohio State is known for its own full-court pressure, it was Tennessee's press that was more effective. The Volunteers forced 23 turnovers that led to 37 points, while the Buckeyes tallied just 15 points off 14 turnovers.

"Certainly they sped us up, and we didn't handle it very well," McGuff said of his team's issues with turnovers. "I thought we were in the right spots but really not making

## Ohio State 71, Montana State 51

March 21, 2025  
Value City Arena • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Montana State (30-4)	17	10	10	14	51
Ohio State (26-6)	17	15	23	16	71

Montana St.	Total	FT		Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
		M-A	M-A				
Johnson	20	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	3	0
Martin	27	1-1	0-2	1-1	1	2	2
Dykstra	25	4-9	0-0	0-3	1	3	8
Morales	35	5-7	5-6	0-0	1	1	20
Bunyan	21	1-4	2-2	0-3	0	0	5
Harris	21	0-4	2-2	1-1	1	2	2
Chirrick	16	1-3	0-0	1-3	1	2	2
Picton	20	3-5	4-4	0-1	1	3	12
Janssen	11	0-3	0-0	0-3	0	1	0
Robbins	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Erickson	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>15-37</b>	<b>13-16</b>	<b>6-17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>51</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 40.5%. FT: 81.3%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-22 (Morales 5-7, Bunyan 1-4, Dykstra 0-3, Picton 2-3, Harris 0-2, Janssen 0-2, Johnson 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Martin). **Turnovers:** 26 (Morales 5, Dykstra 4, Chirrick 4, Team 4, Picton 3, Martin 2, Harris 2, Johnson, Bunyan). **Steals:** 7 (Johnson 2, Picton 2, Janssen 2, Harris).

Ohio State	Total	FT		Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
		M-A	M-A				
Petty	25	4-5	3-6	4-3	0	3	11
McMahon	30	5-9	5-9	1-4	4	1	15
Thierry	27	8-13	0-0	3-2	2	3	16
Gray	31	5-9	0-0	0-1	1	3	15
J. Cambridge	28	5-11	2-2	0-5	6	2	12
Greene	12	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	1	0
Walker	19	1-2	0-0	4-1	2	0	2
K. Cambridge	17	0-3	0-0	2-1	0	1	0
Watson	11	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>28-55</b>	<b>10-17</b>	<b>15-18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>71</b>

**Percentages:** FG: 50.9%. FT: 58.8%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-17 (Gray 5-8, J. Cambridge 0-3, Watson 0-3, McMahon 0-1, Thierry 0-1, J. Cambridge 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (J. Cambridge, K. Cambridge). **Turnovers:** 16 (Walker 4, Petty 3, McMahon 2, Thierry 2, Greene 2, Gray, J. Cambridge, Team). **Steals:** 14 (J. Cambridge 6, Petty 2, Greene 2, McMahon, Thierry, Gray, Watson). **Officials:** Kelly Broomfield, Fatou Cissoko-Stephens Sean Martin, Lisa Jones. **Attendance:** N/A

# OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Tennessee 82, Ohio State 67										
March 23, 2025 Value City Arena • Columbus										
	1	2	3	4	F					
Tennessee (24-9)	17	23	26	16	82					
Ohio State (26-7)	21	14	24	8	67					
Tennessee	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Whitehorn	26	6-10	0-0	2-3	3	3	14			
Spencer	29	3-9	2-4	1-1	6	2	10			
Darby	18	3-6	0-0	0-1	0	0	9			
Spear	24	2-9	2-2	2-3	1	2	7			
Hollingshead	19	2-6	0-0	2-2	0	1	4			
Cooper	30	7-17	3-4	1-7	5	2	19			
Spearman	21	8-10	1-2	2-3	1	3	17			
Latham	12	1-1	0-0	1-3	1	3	2			
Boyd	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	4	0			
Puckett	8	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Strickland	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>32-71</b>	<b>8-12</b>	<b>14-25</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>82</b>			
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 45.1%. FT: 66.7%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 10-34 (Spencer 2-8, Cooper 2-8, Spear 1-5, Darby 3-5, Whitehorn 2-4, Puckett 0-3, Spearman 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 6 (Whitehorn, Spear, Hollingshead, Cooper, Spearman, Latham). <b>Turnovers:</b> 14 (Cooper 6, Spear 3, Spencer 2, Whitehorn, Darby, Boyd). <b>Steals:</b> 15 (Cooper 7, Whitehorn 3, Spencer 2, Spear, Latham, Puckett).										
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
J. Cambridge	33	7-20	4-4	0-5	3	4	19			
McMahon	34	5-9	4-6	0-5	1	4	17			
Thierry	39	3-4	2-2	0-6	3	1	8			
Petty	14	4-7	0-0	2-4	1	3	8			
Gray	20	1-4	0-0	0-1	0	2	2			
K. Cambridge	13	2-4	0-0	0-1	0	1	4			
Greene	18	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	2	3			
Lemmilä	7	1-1	1-3	0-1	1	0	3			
Watson	3	1-1	1-2	0-0	0	0	3			
Walker	19	0-1	0-0	1-3	1	0	0			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-54</b>	<b>12-17</b>	<b>8-26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>67</b>			
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 46.3%. FT: 70.6%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 5-12 (McMahon 3-4, J. Cambridge 1-3, Greene 1-2, Thierry 0-1, Gray 0-1, K. Cambridge 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Lemmilä 2, Thierry, Walker). <b>Turnovers:</b> 23 (J. Cambridge 8, McMahon 4, Greene 4, Thierry 2, Walker 2, Gray, Watson, Team). <b>Steals:</b> 8 (Thierry 2, K. Cambridge 2, Watson 2, Gray, Greene). <b>Officials:</b> Fatou Cissoko-Stephens, Brenda Pantoja, Teresa Stuck. <b>Attendance:</b> 7,089										

8 shooting start on the way to a 16-5 lead.

The Buckeyes didn't hold off the Volunteers for long, though. Instead, the road team made four of its next six field goals to mount a 12-2 scoring run that cut the Buckeyes' lead to one, 18-17, with 44 seconds left after a tip-in by fifth-year guard Jewel Spear.

After Ohio State ended the first quarter with a trio of free throws by Cambridge and McMahon for a four-point lead, Petty helped extend the lead to 25-20 with four points early in the second quarter. Tennessee's defense started to cause the Buckeyes issues midway through the frame, and after forcing three turnovers in a span of 1:39, the Volunteers went on a 12-1 scoring run to take a 32-26 lead with 4:23 remaining before half-time after a Ruby Whitehorn three.

The two teams traded layups, and a three-point jumper by McMahon helped shrink her team's deficit to 34-31 with 3:10 left, but the Volunteers held steady the rest of the half to take a 40-35 advantage into the locker room after a pair of free throws by senior guard Samara Spencer with a second on the clock.

Ohio State committed four turnovers in the first 2:04 of the second half, all of which led to Tennessee baskets. The Buckeyes' struggles to keep possession of the ball helped Tennessee score 14 of the quarter's first 16 points to take a 54-37 lead with 6:58 left.

With its season on the brink, Ohio State picked the perfect time to answer the Volunteers' surge. Fueled by a stretch of nine straight points from Cambridge, Ohio State went on a 16-0 run over 2:33 to trim Tennessee's lead down to 54-53 with 4:25 left after a Thierry layup.

After Tennessee scored its first bucket in over three minutes to go up three, McMahon scored four straight points to give Ohio State a 57-56 lead.

Tennessee finally managed to swing the momentum back in its favor after redshirt sophomore guard Talaysia Cooper connected on a three on the ensuing possession, igniting a 10-2 scoring run that lasted the final 2:48 of the third quarter and gave the Volunteers a seven-point edge, 66-59, head-

ing into the fourth period.

With its season still hanging in the balance, Ohio State needed a hot start to the fourth quarter but instead made just one of its first six shots offensively, and the Volunteers' lead climbed to double digits, 71-61.

Thierry briefly broke the scoring rut with a layup at 5:42 to trail 71-63, but the Buckeyes then missed their next five shots and committed another turnover, allowing Tennessee to score five straight points to take a 76-63 lead with just 3:24 remaining.

The Buckeyes got only as close as 11 points in the game's final three minutes, and after the Volunteers scored the last four points of the game, Ohio State was sent home with a 15-point loss.

"I think as much as anything, we were mentally tired," McGuff said when asked if his team ran out of gas in the fourth quarter. "I thought physically, we were fine. But mentally, we were a little worn out and a little bit frustrated. I think we went on a run to get the game tied, and then I just think the mental fatigue when we turned it over a couple times - we didn't handle that real

well mentally as much as anything."

Cambridge was Ohio State's leading scorer in the loss, finishing the game with 19 points, but she wasn't very efficient, making only 7 of 20 field goals, and committed a game-high eight turnovers.

In what proved to be her last game as a Buckeye, McMahon scored 17 points on 5-of-9 shooting, including 3-of-4 shooting from three-point range, along with five rebounds and one assist. Cambridge tied Thierry for the team lead in assists with three, while Thierry also tied Petty for a team-high of six rebounds in her final game in scarlet and gray.

Cooper, meanwhile, was the Volunteers' leading scorer, finishing the game with 19 points along with a game-high eight rebounds. She helped the road team hold a 39-34 edge on the glass and 44-38 edge in paint points.

Tennessee also held a 17-10 edge in assists over the Buckeyes and attempted 17 more shots (32 of 71, 45.1 percent) than Ohio State (25 of 54, 46.3 percent) due to the havoc it created with its press.

good decisions when we had to go to a little bit of a higher rate of speed."

Despite the somewhat lopsided final score, it was Ohio State that jumped out on top in the first quarter after forcing a high-powered Tennessee offense into a 2-of-

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# Mendez Wins Second Straight National Title

Jesse Mendez went into the NCAA tournament coming off two losses in the Big Ten tournament, falling to Brock Hardy of Nebraska in the semifinals and Beau Bartlett of Penn State in the third-place match.

## ON THE MAT Greg Wilson

His path to going back-to-back would have to be through both of those wrestlers at NAAs, and he succeeded in getting that revenge by beating Bartlett in the semifinals and Hardy in the finals on March 22 to become the first multi-championship-winning wrestler at Ohio State since Kyle Snyder won three national titles in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Mendez' path through the 141-pound bracket began with No. 30 Briar Priest of Pittsburgh, whom he beat by tech fall 21-5 in the first round. Then he was able to get through No. 14 Sergio Lemley from Michigan in the second round with an 11-2 major-decision win and No. 6 Vance VomBaur of Minnesota 17-5 in the quarterfinals.

The win over VomBaur was the first sign that Mendez was wrestling better than he had been the last few times he was on the mat. When the Golden Gophers came to Columbus on Feb. 7, VomBaur caused Mendez to struggle more than usual, taking the match all the way to tiebreaker periods.

Mendez did end up taking the win in that match, but by just one point, 6-5. In the NCAA tournament, Mendez made sure there was no chance that VomBaur could pull off an upset, earning the Buckeyes an extra team point in the process.

After the Buckeyes lost the dual to Minnesota late in the regular season, Mendez acknowledged that he had issues to fix, but those seemed to last through the Big Ten tournament.

"(VomBaur) is tough, and I didn't wrestle a great match," he said. "But the sport wouldn't be fun if you didn't have problems to fix. And I've got some things to fix. It's a good thing it's February and not March."

Mendez recalled the troubles he had with VomBaur after he beat him in the quarterfinals.

"That kid is tough. He's really tough" he said, still out of breath after the win over VomBaur. "He brought it to me last time we wrestled. So I just knew it was going to be a war for seven minutes.

"Just keeping my foot on the (gas)," Mendez said when asked what he focused on improving before NAAs. "There were a lot of times when I'll put up nine in the first period and then I'll take my foot off the pedal. But it's really hard (for my opponents) to come back when I'm still trying to score."

Whatever those issues were, he ended up getting everything under control enough by late March that he was able to take down both Bartlett and Hardy.

The bout against Bartlett in the semifinals was much like the many other times



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**ON TOP — Jesse Mendez responded to a subpar performance in the Big Ten tournament to defeat several conference rivals along the way in the 141-pound weight class to win his second consecutive national championship. He is the first Ohio State wrestler to win multiple titles since Kyle Snyder in 2016, 2017 and 2018.**

the two had faced off in the past two years. There were no takedowns the entire match, and they were tied 1-1 through three periods after both had an escape point from the final two periods.

There was no scoring in the sudden-victory period as well, and Mendez chose bottom for the first tiebreaker period. He was able to escape in the 30 seconds he had to try to score, earning a 2-1 lead and needing to keep control of Bartlett for the 30 seconds of the second tiebreaker period to take the win and advance to the finals.

Bartlett made a very good effort to escape, rolling away from Mendez with seconds left in the period, but Mendez was able to stay on Bartlett's leg and the match finished with a 2-1 victory for Mendez, giving him the chance to defend last year's title.

"I'm tougher. That's it," Mendez said on the ESPN broadcast when asked what the difference-maker was in the match against Bartlett.

Mendez knew it would take more scoring against Hardy to win the title, especially after he went down 5-1 in the first period due to a Hardy takedown and a two-point near-fall that Mendez was able to escape from.

Nebraska challenged that the near-fall should have been worth four points rather than just two, but after a few minutes of review, the call on the mat stood and the aggressiveness from Mendez began.

With seconds remaining in the first period, he was able to secure a double-leg takedown on Hardy to score three points of his own to be down just one after the first three minutes of the match.

Hardy escaped to begin the second period, but the rest of those two minutes were controlled by Mendez. Forty seconds in, Mendez was able to get leverage again and take Hardy down, taking a 7-6 lead and earning a four-point near-fall as well as a riding-time advantage of 1:13.

"I visualized this tournament 100 times, and one of those times you have to visualize yourself going down big early," Mendez said immediately after the win about what the difference was after going down 5-1. "I know I have the motor. I know I have the technique to do it. I just have to believe in it, and that's what you saw."

Mendez left the second period with an 11-6 lead, giving Hardy just two more minutes to come back, which wasn't enough for the Big Ten champion. Mendez' advantage was exactly what he talked about after the win over VomBaur. Although he didn't score more points other than the one for riding time in the match, he remained aggressive by trying to get at the legs of Hardy, who had to remain defensive, which kept his aggressiveness at bay in the third period.

Mendez nearly had another takedown, but Hardy was able to avoid it and turn it into points for himself with just two seconds remaining in the match, making it a 12-9 final score in favor of Mendez.

The win over Hardy made Mendez the sixth multi-time national champion in Ohio State history, joining Snyder, Kevin Randleman (1992, 1993), Tommy Rowlands (2002, 2004), J Jagers (2008, 2009) and Logan Stieber (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

## Buckeyes Finish Tied For Fifth

The Buckeyes were far from winning the national title as a team despite Mendez' individual national championship. They tied for fifth with Minnesota at 51.5 points, finishing behind fourth-place Iowa (81.0), third-place Oklahoma State (102.5), second-place Nebraska (117.0) and Penn State, which scored 177.0 team points to win its 12th NCAA championship in the last 15 seasons (excluding 2020 when there was no tournament due to COVID-19).

The team score for the Nittany Lions was

a record for the most points scored in one NCAA tournament, beating the record they set just last season when they had 172.5. They had just two national champions after having four in the 2024 event, but the average overall finish was better for the team.

The Nittany Lions finished the tournament with eight of their 10 wrestlers inside the top three of their weight class and the other two who missed still getting inside the top six, each of them finishing as All-Americans.

Ohio State had just two All-Americans when the tournament came to its end, with Dylan D'Emilio finishing his Ohio State career with a fourth-place finish after coming into the tournament as the No. 13 seed in the 149-pound bracket. It was the highest finish at the national tournament for D'Emilio, who finished in eighth place at the 2023 event. He also earned his 100th career win along the way when he beat No. 20 Koy Buesgens of N.C. State 5-1 in the first round of the event.

His first loss of the event was to No. 1 Caleb Henson of Virginia Tech in the semifinals in a 6-2 decision, and he was able to get into the third-place bout with a 7-1 win over No. 6 Lachlan McNeil of North Carolina before falling to No. 3 Shayne Van Ness of Penn State 15-4.

No other Buckeyes finished on the podium, with Nick Feldman at heavyweight, Seth Shumate at 197 pounds, Brandon Cannon at 157 pounds and Nic Bouzakis at 133 pounds coming close, each of them losing in the blood round of the consolation bracket to just miss placing.

## Welsh Transfers To Penn State

The Buckeyes lost an extremely important part of their 2025-26 team when redshirt freshman Rocco Welsh decided to transfer to Penn State.

He took a redshirt this year for the Buckeyes after making the NCAA championship at 174 pounds last season, losing to the top pound-for-pound wrestler in the country, Carter Starocci of Penn State, 2-0.

Now that Starocci is gone after winning five NCAA titles, the first wrestler to ever do so thanks to the extra year of eligibility he received from the COVID-19 year, Welsh could slot in at the 174-pound weight class for the Nittany Lions and immediately be one of the top contenders at that level.

He could have done so with the Buckeyes for the next three years but decided he wanted to join the Penn State powerhouse and be coached by Cael Sanderson, who has won four straight NCAA championships and 12 of the last 14.

This year, wrestling unattached from Ohio State, Welsh had a 15-0 record with tournament titles at the Clarion Open, the Cleveland State Open and the F&M Open. Only two of his matches ended in normal decisions.

Now the Buckeyes will have to figure out what they will do at the weight class they planned on slotting Welsh into, whether that was 174 pounds or 184 pounds, and they will have to match up against him in conference play as well when they match up against the Nittany Lions.

# Ohio State Pitching Still Having Troubles

Things didn't get any easier for the Ohio State baseball team in the week after BSB last went to press, going 1-3 in their first four games.

## FROM THE STRETCH Greg Wilson

That stretch started with a 14-7 blowout win over Miami (Ohio) in a midweek contest on March 18 in which the offense showed off how good it could be by scoring that many runs at Bill Davis Stadium. Every Ohio State hitter was able to get on base other than third baseman Maddix Simpson, who has been getting more playing time recently in place of Marc Stephens, who had trouble hitting in the 14 games he started to begin the year.

But the issues that have caused the Buckeyes to lose 16 games this season were well on display in that game as well. They gave up seven runs to the RedHawks, which weren't only due to the 10 hits they had.

With Blaine Wynk on the mound trying to get back into the rotation after he missed a few weeks due to an injury he had suffered on opening day, Ohio State pitchers gave up eight free bases, walking seven Miami hitters and hitting one.

The Buckeyes were able to fight their way out of trouble enough to still take the win in the game in large part due to Miami leaving 11 runners on base, but on a day when they were likely trying to fix those issues that have been plaguing them throughout the season so far, they were unable to show any progress.

Allowing so many free bases worked out for them on March 18 because they were spread out. Spencer Hill, who pitched one-third of an inning in the fifth, had two walks and the hit by pitch, allowing two runs before he was removed from the game.

But the Buckeye offense wasn't able to save the team in the series the following weekend when they went to Iowa. They were shut out in the first game 12-0, the Hawkeyes needing just seven innings to finish the Friday contest. Ohio State had just three hits in the game, two off the bat of designated hitter Nick Giamarusti.

Ryan Butler, Sahil Patel and Charlie Giese gave up five combined walks in the six combined innings they pitched, also hitting one Iowa batter. Butler, who started the season on the bench because he had mono, is still trying to get back from his illness.

"He was slotted in as one of our weekend guys coming in and got mono the last weekend of the preseason," Ohio State coach Justin Haire told BSB. "He was out for 21 days. He's come back and he's feeling good, but we need to solidify guys at the front of games. He's been a great option and has started a lot in his career and is a guy that we have some trust in."

Since Butler returned to the mound, he has pitched in five games with four starts and has an ERA of 13.50 while allowing 19 hits, walking 12, hitting five and striking out 15.

The bats were a little more present a day later when the Buckeyes scored five runs



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**MOUND POUND** — Drew Erdmann and the rest of the Ohio State pitching staff have struggled under first-year coach Justin Haire. The Buckeyes have allowed at least 10 runs in 13 of the first 24 games.

with five hits, but that still wasn't enough with the Hawkeyes scoring 12 runs for the second straight game, five in the first inning off Wynk, who lasted just two-thirds of an inning.

Wynk, Gavin Kuzniewski, Luke Carrell and Drew Erdmann pitched in the game and walked a combined 13 batters and hit two while allowing nine hits.

Erdmann, however, had a solid outing by finishing the game with  $3\frac{2}{3}$  innings of scoreless baseball, which earned him a Friday start when Oregon came to Columbus a week later for the first conference matchup the two programs have had since the Ducks joined the Big Ten.

Nothing went well for Ohio State in the Sunday game against Iowa, losing in seven innings for the second time of the weekend. They gave up 18 runs, only going one inning in the six the Buckeyes pitched without allowing the Hawkeyes to score (second inning).

Jake Michalak earned the loss by allowing eight earned runs in the  $2\frac{1}{3}$  innings he pitched, giving up six free bases. At that point, Haire was just trying to get through the game with Nik Copenhaver, Hunter Shaw, Douglas Bauer and Zak Sigman finishing it out. Shaw gave up six runs in two innings of work.

After the series against Oregon, the Buckeyes' team ERA is up to 9.38 compared to their opponent team ERA of 6.97, which is not a winning equation.

### Haire Gets First BIG Wins

In the nonconference portion of the schedule to begin the season, the Buckeyes struggled to put wins on the board, but they hung with some of the better teams in the country longer than their record might have suggested.

That team disappeared in the first couple of weekends of conference play but was back when the No. 10-ranked Ducks came to Bill

egon scored seven runs and held the Buckeyes to zero.

Erdmann didn't have the same luck he did in the Iowa series, giving up four runs in four innings of work, and Ohio State's hitters had just four hits in the contest.

But the tides turned on March 29 when the two teams matched up in a doubleheader with Ohio State taking the first game of the two by a score of 11-10, coming back from a four-run deficit in the final two innings to give Haire his first conference victory.

The eighth-inning rally began with a Trey Lipsey double to right field to lead off the inning. He then scored on a throwing error by the catcher after he advanced to third. With two outs, Mason Eckelman was hit by a pitch while Tyler Pettorini was already on second, and the two moved up a base on a wild pitch. Then Matthew Graveline knocked them both in with a two-RBI single to right field, giving the Buckeyes an 11-10 lead. Shaw earned the win by closing out the final two innings.

The Buckeyes won in dramatic fashion again in the second game by scoring four runs in the bottom of the eighth inning to take a three-run lead, 8-5. Pettorini ultimately had the game-winner with a 358-foot home run to right field that put them up. The Ducks mustered just one run in the top of the ninth inning, and the Buckeyes took the series, their first series win of the year.

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# Bounce-Back Season Ended In NCAAs By BU

The way the season ended wasn't what Ohio State wanted, but based on preseason expectations, it was a successful campaign nonetheless despite losing in the first round of the NCAA tournament.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Outside of those in the program, no one saw the Buckeyes making a run for the Big Ten regular-season title, pulling out dramatic wins in the quarterfinals and semifinals of the conference tournament and going on the road against top-ranked Michigan State and take the Spartans to double overtime before falling just short of OSU's first Big Ten tourney title.

Then came the Toledo Regional semifinal on March 27 when the Buckeyes tied Boston University 3-3 through two periods before the Terriers went on a five-goal binge for an 8-3 win to put the Buckeyes' finishing record at 24-14-2 overall and third place in the conference with a 14-9-1 mark.

"That's hockey," OSU coach Steve Rohlik said after the season-ending loss. "That's the way it goes. I thought we played two pretty good periods. We had a great push in the first. Even the second, they had a couple quick answers which we didn't want to see, but we were still right there to start the third."

While the bitterness of that period will linger, the bigger picture is what the 2024-25 team will be remembered for.

After coming within one game of the 2023 Frozen Four before losing to eventual national champion Quinnipiac, the Buckeyes fell off the map for the better part of the 2023-24 season.

They won just one of their first 18 conference games until a home sweep of No. 4 Wisconsin in early February sparked a resurgence which led to winning two of three on the Badgers' ice in the conference quarterfinals. OSU then lost 2-1 to Michigan State in the semifinal, but a fire was lit.

The players decided to change their off-season routine and stay in Columbus after school was over in May rather than gather in August before the start of training camp as in previous years.

This allowed more time to work out together and create a bond between the returning players and the incoming freshmen and transfers.

Still, skeptics looked at the 14-20-4 record (3-18-2 Big Ten) and the Buckeyes were picked for last in the conference by the coaches. OSU was tabbed for seventh in the Big Ten but entered the NCAA tournament as the No. 9 seed among the 16 entrants.

"This is why you put all those hours in in the summer and the hard work that these guys did. I'm proud of our group," Rohlik said.

Senior goalie Logan Terness pointed to the 2024 Big Ten playoffs as motivation that created momentum heading into the 2024-25 season.

"We know we're a great team, and all that work that we put in, starting in the summer and even starting last year, at the end of the year there, we built a culture, obviously a winning culture that we take pride in our game," he said prior to the Boston U. game. "We like having people bet against us. I think it kind of added fuel to the fire and just helped push us along."

Gunnarwolfe Fontaine, who transferred to OSU this season from Northeastern, said the NCAA tournament allowed others to see what the Buckeyes accomplished.

"Finally showing some recognition to us, especially being the year we were predicted to be dead last in the Big Ten, which didn't

sit well with a lot of us, because we knew what the group here had," he said.

It took a team effort because the Buckeyes don't have any superstars or top NHL draft picks. Rohlik was unafraid to roll all four lines and the three defensive pairings in the second overtime against Michigan State, including freshmen in key spots.

"You have to, obviously, when you get into almost playing two hockey games," he said. "We had to try to play everybody. In the NCAA tournament you do have the three timeouts (a period), which is a lot different than our league, with only the one, so teams are going to be able to play the guys they want, and we did."

Because of the Buckeyes' lack of high-profile players or people not paying attention to them, no one was voted to the Big Ten's first or second team.

Forwards Fontaine, Davis Burnside and Riley Thompson, defenseman Damien Carfagna and Terness were honorable mentions.

However, Rohlik was named conference coach of the year for the third time.

### Extra Work

Since BSB last went to press, the Buckeyes lost the Big Ten title game 4-3 to Michigan State to spoil an epic comeback on March 22, followed by the loss to BU five days later.

The Buckeyes advanced to play the Spartans by taking the last two games of the best-of-three quarterfinals vs. Wisconsin at Nationwide Arena on March 7-9. In the second game, OSU staved off elimination by overcoming a two-goal deficit to win in overtime.

OSU then downed Penn State 4-3 in overtime in a semifinal at Value City Arena on March 15.

### So Close

"Obviously a gut punch" is how Rohlik described the dramatic loss to Michigan State before a raucous sellout crowd of 6,555 at Munn Ice Arena in East Lansing, Mich.

After OSU overcame an early 2-0 deficit and a late 3-1 hole to send the game beyond regulation, Big Ten Player of the Year Isaac Howard scored the winner at 15:09 of the second overtime to end the longest game in conference history.

"A heck of a hockey game," Rohlik said. "My guys gave me everything I could ask for. I'm proud of my group, and we just came up a little short."

OSU is the lone school not to win a Big Ten tournament. The Buckeyes lost the in-

augural conference tourney final in 2014 in overtime to Wisconsin and in OT to Notre Dame in 2018. The third try was not a charm.

Michigan State won its first tourney in 2024 and became the first to capture the regular-season and tournament titles in consecutive seasons.

The Spartans took an early lead by scoring on two of four power plays. Joe Dunlap made it 2-1 late in the first period.

After MSU extended the lead to 3-1 just 42 seconds into the third period, the Buckeyes staged a comeback with goals by Carfagna at 12:46 and Fontaine at 17:39.

Dunlap and Carfagna each had a goal and an assist, defenseman Aiden Hansen-Bukata had three assists, and Terness made a career-high 47 saves.

Fontaine and Carfagna were named to the all-tournament team.

"I thought both teams were really good," said Michigan State coach Adam Nightengale. "We obviously earned a few power plays in the first period and capitalized, which was huge."

"Ohio State is a really good team, and I think it spoke to their character to keep pushing. I think we were up with nine minutes left by two. And again, that's why they're having the season they're having, is the character in the room and the coaching, and so then to tie it up, that says a lot about them."

Ohio State's uncharacteristic lack of discipline cost them dearly at the onset.

In the previous four postseason games totaling almost 13 periods if the overtimes are added, the Buckeyes were called for eight penalties.

They took four within the first 13 minutes vs. the Spartans. The second, a bench minor for too many men, resulted in the first goal by Karsen Dorwart at 7:39. Howard made it 2-0 with another man-up score at 11:41.

Tanner Kelly converted a pass from Howard to make it 3-1 early in the third period and the Spartans appeared to be cruising, but the Buckeyes rallied just as they did from a 2-0 deficit in Game 2 vs. Wisconsin.

Carfagna was behind the net when he banked a shot off goalie Trey Augustine for a 3-2 score.

Fontaine tied it 3-3 by gathering a loose puck and scoring from low in the left circle.

"When your backs are against the wall, you have no choice," Rohlik said. "Our guys were going to keep going forward. To get that second one was huge, and then we just felt it. I wish that period was a little longer,

## VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For March



**Aiden Hansen-Bukata**  
*Graduate Defenseman  
Delta, British Columbia*

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we were kind of on a roll there.

"It's this group. They're relentless. Never give up. They believe in one another. It's been such a blessing to coach a group like this."

In the end, the Spartans prevailed in the three-hour, 45-minute marathon.

"I thought it was a really good hockey game," Nightengale said. "Both teams were physical but within the rules, and that's what you want. I think if you're a fan coming to watch hockey, it's a physical game and it's a competitive game, and I thought both teams did a great job of that tonight."

**Terriers Terrific**

The game summary shows a five-goal third-period blitz by No. 8 seed Boston University was the difference. But the Buckeyes were all over the Terriers in the first period when they had a 15-2 shot advantage but led only 1-0 on a Dunlap goal.

"Certainly not the start we were looking for, that's for sure," BU coach Jay Pandolfo said. "We just weren't winning battles or skating even in the first period."

In the second period, BU tied it, but Dunlap made it 2-1 at 12:53. Ohio State answered the tying goal by BU at 17:19 with the go-ahead score by Max Montes 30 seconds later. What should have been a huge momentum shifter for the Buckeyes quickly evaporated just 12 seconds after that for a 3-3 deadlock.

OSU nearly took the lead back on what would have been a hat trick for Dunlap, but his shot, initially ruled a goal, crossed the goal line 0.2 seconds after the horn to end the second period.

From there, the Buckeyes' power-play once again failed as it had done the entire postseason. Trailing BU 4-3, Jack Hughes scored shorthanded on the Buckeyes at 5:25 of the third period, and the rout was on, including a late empty-net, shorthanded goal.

Dunlap scored twice, Hansen-Bukata had two assists and Terness made 15 saves.

**Numbers**

The BU game was the final for Caden Brown, Dunlap, Fontaine, Patrick Guzzo, Hansen-Bukata, Reilly Herbst, Brent Johnson and Terness. ... Guzzo ends his career as the Buckeyes' all-time leader in games played with 171. ... Fontaine and Thompson each had a team-high 17 goals. Fontaine was first on the team with 40 points, followed by Thompson and Burnside with 33 each.

**A Big Help**

Hansen-Bukata, a transfer from Rochester Institute of Technology, had seven assists in six postseason games to earn the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for March, including five in the final two games.

The defenseman had three assists against Michigan State and two vs. BU to lead the Buckeyes with 29 assists on the year. He finished fourth on the team with 31 points.

*For recaps of the Michigan State and Boston University games go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*

**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 (26-7, 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., W 71-51; **23** NCAA Tournament second round at Columbus vs. Tennessee, L 82-67.

**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., 5th/33.

**MEN'S GYMNASTICS (4-4, 1-3)**

**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, L 322.450-321.700.

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

**WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS (9-10, 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 (24-14-2, 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, L 4-3 (2OT); **27** NCAA Regional at Toledo vs. Boston, L 8-3.

**WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (29-8-3, 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, W 4-2; **23** NCAA national championship at Minneapolis vs. Wisconsin, L 4-3 (OT).

**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., 16th/78 pts.

**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., 14th/66 pts.

**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., NTS; **21-22** USF Invite at Tampa, Fla., NTS; **27-29** Raleigh Relays at Raleigh, N.C., NTS; **28-29** Texas Relays at Austin, Texas, NTS.  
**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 (12-10, 7-5)**

**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, L 3-1; **22** at Lewis, L 3-2; **27** MCKENDREE, W 3-2  
**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, 5th(t)/51.5pts.

# OSU Football-Men's Hoops Gap Getting Bigger

Are a whole bunch of things combining to make Ohio State men's basketball irrelevant for all but the most diehard of fans?

The one-and-done for the stars making quick trips to the NBA certainly hasn't been a good thing for college basketball in general.

**EXNER  
POINT  
Rich Exner**

Football seasons expanding over the years into December for conference championship games and then early January for the four-team playoffs certainly kept eyes off of basketball for weeks.

Then this year, with the expanded playoffs, the Buckeyes weren't done playing football until Jan. 20, 18 games into the OSU basketball season.

And there's that pesky problem of winning. Ohio State has had three straight losing seasons in the Big Ten, finishing 10th, 10th and 13th in the standings.

In 26 seasons of playing basketball at Value City Arena, the last two seasons rank last and next to last in attendance, averaging 11,578 fans a game this season after bottoming out at 10,938 a year ago.

That's a lot of empty seats in an arena

with more than 18,000 seats.

Attendance is one barometer. Another is how many people are paying attention, whether or not they go to games.

I work in Cleveland in an office with several Ohio State grads. Many of my friends are pretty big sports fans. It's a rare day anymore when I hear people even mention Ohio State basketball, let alone say they've tuned in to watch a game on TV.

The attention is on football more than ever before, or at least for some time.

## Checking In On Justin Fields

It's interesting that after sitting on the bench in Pittsburgh for the second half of last season, Justin Fields was signed by the New York Jets to apparently be their starting quarterback – \$40 million, including \$30 million of it guaranteed, for two seasons.

I still think Fields can play. I was just surprised to see the market was that high for him.

The New York Jets website after the signing posted some interesting stats about the former Georgia Bulldog and Ohio State Buckeye.

He's the only quarterback in NFL history to have three touchdown runs of at least 50 yards.

Since 1970, only Fields and Kyler Murray have had streaks of five consecutive games with both rushing and passing

touchdowns.

His 178-yard rushing game against the Dolphins on just 15 carries in 2022 still is a record for rushing yards for a quarterback since 1960.

## Will Howard And Kyle McCord

As the NFL draft draws closer, it's looking more like Will Howard will be available in the mid-rounds – going in the third or fourth, most likely. I had thought after the playoff run that he could be a late first-round or a second-round pick.

As March was coming to a close, I surveyed various ratings. It's interesting that he often is listed ahead of Quinn Ewers. An ESPN listing had Howard sixth among quarterbacks, just ahead of former Buckeyes Ewers at eighth and Kyle McCord at ninth.

A CBSsports.com listing pegged Howard as the 152nd-best prospect, ninth among quarterbacks. Ewers was the fourth quarterback at 107th, McCord fifth at 109th.

Pro Football Focus listed Howard as the 112th-best prospect, fourth among quarterbacks, behind only Cameron Ward (21st), Shedeur Sanders (46th) and Jalen Milroe (99th). In that listing, Ewers was ranked eighth among quarterbacks at 142nd and McCord ninth at 161st.

Finally, Walter Football placed Howard seventh among quarterbacks. Ewers was fifth and McCord was eighth.

## Smith-Njigba-Like Speed

Some football players run so smoothly that you don't realize how fast they are. Terrelle Pryor was one of those: never looked like a burner until you realized no one could run him down.

Emeka Egbuka apparently is another one of those players. I knew he was fast, but I didn't realize how fast until I saw the 40 times from Ohio State's pro day. Egbuka turned in a 4.45 40.

Why I say that is really fast is because that bettered the 4.48 Jaxon Smith-Njigba ran two years ago.

Without seeing the times, I would have thought Smith-Njigba was more of a burner. Not saying Egbuka didn't look fast on the field, but I thought his success was tied more to his precise routes and catching ability. Add speed to that combination.

## Wide Receiver U.

Egbuka will soon be joining quite a collection of Buckeye wide receivers in the NFL.

Here's how the Buckeye alumni did

this past season, ranked in order of catches in 2024. They combined for 476 receptions and 44 touchdowns.

Garrett Wilson, 2022 draft: 101 receptions for 1,104 yards and seven touchdowns for the Jets, upping his career totals to 279 receptions, 3,249 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Smith-Njigba, 2023 draft: 100 receptions for 1,130 yards and six touchdowns for the Seattle Seahawks, upping his career totals to 163 catches for 1,758 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Terry McLaurin, 2019 draft: 82 catches for 1,096 yards and 13 touchdowns for the Washington Commanders, upping his career totals to 460 receptions for 6,379 yards and 38 touchdowns.

Marvin Harrison Jr., 2024 draft: 62 receptions for 885 yards and eight touchdowns in his rookie season for the Arizona Cardinals.

Jameson Williams, 2022 draft: (After finishing college with one year at Alabama), 58 receptions for 1,001 yards and seven touchdowns for the Detroit Lions, upping his career totals to 83 receptions for 1,396 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Noah Brown, 2017 draft: 35 receptions for 453 yards and one touchdown for the Commanders, upping his career totals to 150 receptions for 2,000 yards and six touchdowns.

Chris Olave, 2022 draft: 32 catches for 400 yards and one touchdown for the New Orleans Saints, upping his career totals to 191 receptions for 2,565 yards and 10 touchdowns. His 2024 season was shortened to eight games because of two concussions.

Parris Campbell, 2019 draft: Six receptions for 30 yards and one touchdown for the Philadelphia Eagles, upping his career totals to 123 receptions for 1,117 yards and six touchdowns.

Additionally, three former Buckeye tight ends combined for 44 catches: Nick Vannett (17 for the Tennessee Titans), Cade Stover (15 for the Houston Texans) and Luke Farrell (12 for the Jacksonville Jaguars).

And running backs had 60 more receptions: J.K. Dobbins (32 for the Los Angeles Chargers), Trey Sermon (16 for the Indianapolis Colts) and Ezekiel Elliott (12 for the Dallas Cowboys).

Altogether, that's 580 NFL receptions in 2024.

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# No Defense For Buckeyes' Closing Arguments

As the discussion continues about the state of the Ohio State men's basketball program, I got to thinking about Muhammad Ali – not the young Ali who could overwhelm any opponent with his amazing hand speed and boxing prowess, but the more mature Ali, who was a little slower, but a lot savvier.

As a bout progressed, Ali would lean up against the ropes, cover up and let his opponent punch away for 2:50 of the round, doing little damage. Then, with 10 seconds remaining in the round, he would throw a flurry of punches to leave a late impression with the judges to try to pick up the round.

When die-hard Ohio State men's basketball fans were holding out hope for a Buckeye berth in the NCAA Tournament before the team was ultimately unequivocally knocked out of contention by the one-two punch of Indiana and Iowa, they would point to wins earlier in the season – such as those over No. 19 Texas, No. 4 Kentucky and No. 11 Purdue – as reasons that the Buckeyes belonged. But those wins were so far in the past that Ohio State might have been left out, even if it hadn't been knocked to the canvas by the Hoosiers and Hawkeyes.

The Buckeyes had done the exact opposite at the end of the 2023-24 season when an Ali-like 8-3 closing flurry helped generate fan excitement for the future and left interim coach Jake Diebler as the new champion in the eyes of incoming athletic director Ross Bjork, even though the Buckeyes didn't make the tournament last season either.

I decided to take a look at the final 11 games of this season to see what exactly left Ohio State and its fans with a completely different outlook in 2025 than they had at the end of the 2024 season.

While the Buckeyes were 8-3 down the stretch last season, they were 4-7 over the same time frame this year. But it wasn't just that they lost more. It was how they lost those games or even how they won some of them. The Buckeyes clearly were not from the Ali school of closing with a flourish.

Ohio State was outscored in the second half of all but three of those 11 games, including six of the seven losses. Only in the 86-83 loss to rival Michigan did the Buckeyes outscore their winning opponent in the final 20 minutes. The Buckeyes also outscored their opponents in the second half of wins over Maryland and Washington.

In their 87-79 loss to Illinois on Feb. 2, the Buckeyes led by as many as 11 in the second half. In their loss at Nebraska, they led by eight in the second stanza before falling 79-71. Against UCLA, Ohio State pulled within two, 39-37, with 13:25 to play before trailing by as many as 13 and ultimately falling, 69-61.

In the two knockout games, Ohio State led Indiana by 10 in the second half before losing 66-60, and the Buckeyes were tied with Iowa, 61-61, with 7:25 to play before being outscored 16-9 the rest of the way to finally be put out of their misery.

None of this even takes into consideration the inexplicable 70-49 thrashing administered by lowly Northwestern in The Schott on Feb. 20. The Buckeyes entered the second half trailing by just seven, before falling behind by as many as 28 points.

Even the last two wins of the season were challenging.

Against USC on Feb. 26, Ohio State led by as many as 15 in the second half before the Trojans stormed back to tie it 80-80 at the 1:07 mark. The Buckeyes closed on a 7-2 run for the 87-82 victory. OSU led by as many as 11 in the second half over visiting Nebraska before being taken to double overtime in a 116-114 victory.

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Ohio State didn't leave the selection committee or Buckeye fans much to be encouraged about with their poor clutch play in the last 11 games of the season.

For what the experts think about all this, see our story on pages 24-25 of this issue. Here's a sample:

"To me, everything seemed to be on the up and up," Steve Helwagen of 247Sports said. "I thought they'd win 20 games. I thought they'd go to the NCAA (Tournament), maybe win 11 or 12 games in the Big Ten. The schedule looked difficult, but it felt like they had a team to be able to do it. You thought, 'Man, this is a pretty good eight-man rotation here.' But unfortunately, as the weeks and the months and the games passed, it just never came together like anybody might have thought it would."

### Was Tressel's Standing Waning?

With so much negativity surrounding the basketball program, for our Reprint Thursday feature at BuckeyeSports.com on March 27, we looked back 15 years to 2010, when on a more positive note, the Buckeyes made it to the Sweet 16. While the Buckeyes did not advance to the Elite Eight, I gave them high marks for their season.

"It's hard for me to be disappointed with the full body of work of the men's team," I wrote in this space in the April 3, 2010, issue of BSB. "The Buckeyes should be lauded for winning both the regular-season and conference tournament crowns despite playing the early part of the Big Ten slate without star player Evan Turner."

But I was startled by another note in that same column, one that had nothing to do with basketball. Apparently, at least in my mind, Buckeye fans were getting restless with football coach Jim Tressel. I guess I had forgotten that.

"As hard as it is to believe, I'm sure there were some who were disappointed when Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel's contract was recently extended for two years, now running through the 2014 season." I wrote. "Despite an almost unprecedented run of success for the Buckeyes since Tressel's arrival, there are those who still would like to see Ohio State make a coaching change."

"I'll be the first to admit I have my quibbles with the way Tressel goes about his business. From a newspaper publisher's standpoint, I wish he would allow better access to the team for we ink-stained wretches – as well as microphone-toting electronic media members – who cover the team on a regular basis. And I certainly wish he would offer less vague or diplomatic answers to the pointed and sometimes not-so-pointed questions presented to him."

"From a football standpoint, I wish he would bring in some coaching help on the offensive side of the football."

"But all in all, it's awfully hard to complain about all the Big Ten championships, wins over Michigan, the national title and other championship game berths and the most recent Rose Bowl victory."

"And other than the notable exception of the Maurice Claret affair, Tressel generally keeps his Buckeyes out of the headlines for things other than their gridiron exploits."

"For those who despite all that wish for a change, I say, 'Be careful what you wish for.'"

Ironically, Tressel's clean slate would quite soon be tarnished by the infamous "Tattoo-gate" scandal. And in just over a year, he would be gone.

Just a thought 15 years later.

Tressel took three teams to national championship games in his 10 years at the OSU helm. That was before four-team and 12-team playoffs. Back then (I make it sound like it was in the days of leather helmets) you had to be one of the top two teams in the country to play for the national crown, and his Buckeyes were there multiple times.

Don't forget that all Reprint Thursday stories, including the 2010 basketball stories and my column, are archived for your information and enjoyment at BuckeyeSports.com. Click on the "BSB Online" tab and then click on "BSB Reprints." Or call us at (614) 486-2202 if you need help accessing anything on the website.

### Never Too Late For Graduates

I guess I should take my traditional look at the fall football graduates before spring commencement rolls around. You could build a pretty good football team around the guys who graduated on Dec. 14.

Denzel Burke, Josh Fryar, TreVeyon Henderson, Will Howard, Donovan Jackson, Lathan Ransom, Jack Sawyer and Tyleik Williams all graduated.

These guys were champions on and off the field.

The complete list of athletic graduates was published in the Feb. 1 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, which is archived at BuckeyeSports.com.

### Yeah, That's The Reason

I admit that I am a bit obsessed with Jim Knowles' departure for rival Penn State just days after he and the Buckeyes won the national championship. There was something going on between the somewhat eccentric defensive coordinator and Ohio State. I especially believed that (well, I've always believed it) after Penn State's BlueWhite Illustrated revealed that Knowles approached Penn State coach James Franklin about the job, just two days after OSU's win over Notre Dame, as reported in this space last issue.

The fact that Penn State apparently can't – or has no desire to – keep a secret as well as Ohio State does leads me to believe we may ultimately get the true story. Throw in that OSU's Larry Johnson, repeatedly rumored to have had friction with Knowles, abandoned Penn State in 2014 after a lengthy (1996-2013) tenure in State College and that may add some intrigue that the folks on the PSU side of the equation might be willing to report on.

One of the sillier suggestions as to why Knowles was so eager to take on the Penn State job is that he is from Philadelphia. State College is 193 miles from Philadelphia, so it's not like he is going to be running over for a Philly Cheese Steak sandwich on a regular basis.

Knowles has been gone from his hometown since he left to play football at Cornell (228 miles away) in 1983, and that is the closest he has been to living in Philadelphia ever since, residing as far away as 1,347 miles (Oklahoma State) for four seasons. Why suddenly is being from Philadelphia a reason to take a job with a rival? And if Knowles was proactive in reaching out to Franklin and he was so eager to be "near" Philadelphia, why didn't he reach out to Franklin about a job earlier? Franklin has been at PSU since 2014 when Knowles was DC at Duke.

This theory was just silliness.

One thing I did not quote in our last issue from Knowles' introductory story in BlueWhite Illustrated was BWI writer Nate Bauer calling Knowles' hiring "the splashiest hire of college football's offseason, and arguably the most significant assistant coaching acquisition in Penn State history." (my italics)

It was definitely a splashy hire. We'll know about the hire's place in Penn State history soon enough.

A last thing about Knowles – for now anyway.

In checking out how far he had strayed from Philadelphia in his adult life, I saw that he had coached for a year at Mississippi between his stops at Western Michigan and a second stint at Cornell for his only head coaching job.

I swear I never knew that he was at Ole Miss. But on the other hand, it is something that I may just have forgotten. I have been doing a lot of that lately. Did you recall that he had been at Ole Miss?

In checking to see if he was indeed in Oxford in 2003, I saw that the always reliable Wikipedia says that he was linebackers coach and recruiting coordinator.

If he was recruiting coordinator, I can see why he only lasted a year. Not his strongest attribute.

### Receiver U.

An interesting, though not surprising, note from Rich Exner's Exner Point column on page 34 of this issue.

Ohio State had four receivers in the NFL with 1,000 or more receiving yards last season, if you count Jameson Williams, who transferred to Alabama after two years at Ohio State. The list includes Garrett Wilson (101 receptions, 1,104 yards and seven touchdowns), Jaxon Smith-Njigba (100 receptions, 1,130 yards, six TDs) and Terry McLaurin (82 receptions, 1,096 yards, 13 touchdowns).

The list doesn't include Marvin Harrison Jr., who fell just short with 62 receptions for 885 yards and eight scores in his rookie season.

In the pantheon of Ohio State receiving stars, I have always felt that McLaurin doesn't receive his due. In six seasons in the NFL with Washington he has had at least 77 catches and at least 1,002 yards in five of them. The only season he didn't reach those benchmarks was his rookie season of 2019, when he broke into the league with 58 catches for 919 yards and seven scores.

### Beat The Increase

As mentioned in this space last issue, 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 from the Football Preview Issue through the Michigan game at the existing rate of \$30 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."



# COLUMBUS Clippers

## 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						
					28 @TOL 4:05	29 @TOL 4:05
30 @TOL 2:05	31	1 STP 6:15	2 STP 6:15	3 STP 6:15	4 STP 6:15	5 STP 4:05
6 STP 1:05	7	8 @WOR 6:05	9 @WOR 6:05	10 @WOR 6:05	11 @WOR 6:05	12 @WOR 4:05
13 @WOR 1:05	14	15 LOU 6:15	16 LOU 6:15	17 LOU 12:05	18 LOU 6:15	19 LOU 4:05
20 LOU 1:05	21	22 @LHV 6:45	23 @LHV 6:45	24 @LHV 6:45	25 @LHV 7:05	26 @LHV 6:35
27 @LHV 1:35	28	29 STP 6:15	30 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   37 Games   Full Season						
				1 STP 12:05	2 STP 6:15	3 STP 4:05
4 STP 1:05	5	6 @IND 6:35	7 @IND 1:35	8 @IND 11:05	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 8:05	17 @OMA 8:05
18 @OMA 3:05	19	20 IOW 7:05	21 IOW 12:05	22 IOW 12:05	23 IOW 7:05	24 IOW 7:05
25 IOW 1:05	26 @ROC 4:05	27	28 @ROC 11:05	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 @IOW 7:38	25 @IOW 1:08	26 @IOW 7:38	27 @IOW 8:08	28 @IOW 7:08
29 @IOW 2:08	30	<b>\$5 Fridays</b> Pizza Slice & Small Pepsi, Small Draft Beer, or Wine \$5 for all Bleacher, Lawn, and SRO Tickets				

JULY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 @TOL 7:05	2 @TOL 7:05	3 @TOL 7:05	4 TOL 4:05	5 TOL 7:05
6 TOL 1:05	7	8 LOU 7:05	9 LOU 7:05	10 LOU 12:05	11 LOU 7:05	12 LOU 7:05
13 LOU 1:05	14	15	16	17	18 @IOW 8:08	19 @IOW 7:08
20 @IOW 2:08	21	22 BUF 7:05	23 BUF 7:05	24 BUF 12:05	25 BUF 6:35	26 BUF 7:05
27 BUF 1:05	28	29 @JAX 7:05	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						1 @JAX 7:05
						2 @JAX 6:35
3 @JAX 5:05	4	5 GWN 7:05	6 GWN 7:05	7 GWN 7:05	8 GWN 7:05	9 GWN 7:05
10 GWN 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 6:15	20 OMA 6:15	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 IND 6:15	3 IND 6:15	4 IND 6:35	5 IND 7:05	6 IND 7:05
7 IND 1:05	8	9 @STP 7:37	10 @STP 7:37	11 @STP 7:37	12 @STP 7:37	13 @STP 6:07
14 @STP 3:07	15	16 OMA 6:15	17 OMA 6:15	18 OMA 6:15	19 OMA 7:05	20 OMA 5:05
21 OMA 1:05	22	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" - \$1 select concession items  
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"  
- Students 14 and above can present a valid ID and for \$5 receive a Reserved Seat ticket
- THU.** "COPA DE LA DIVERSIÓN"  
- Clippers transform into Los Veleros on Thursday Nights  
"THIRSTY THURSDAYS"  
- Beverage Specials on Beer, Margaritas & Soft Drinks  
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"
- FRI.** "\$5 FRIDAYS"  
- \$5 for all Bleacher, Lawn, and SRO Tickets  
- \$5 for a slice of Donatos Pizza & a Small Pepsi  
- \$5 for Beers (small) & Wine  
"STUDENT ID NIGHT"
- SAT.** "GAMEDAY 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, 8/8, 9/5



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