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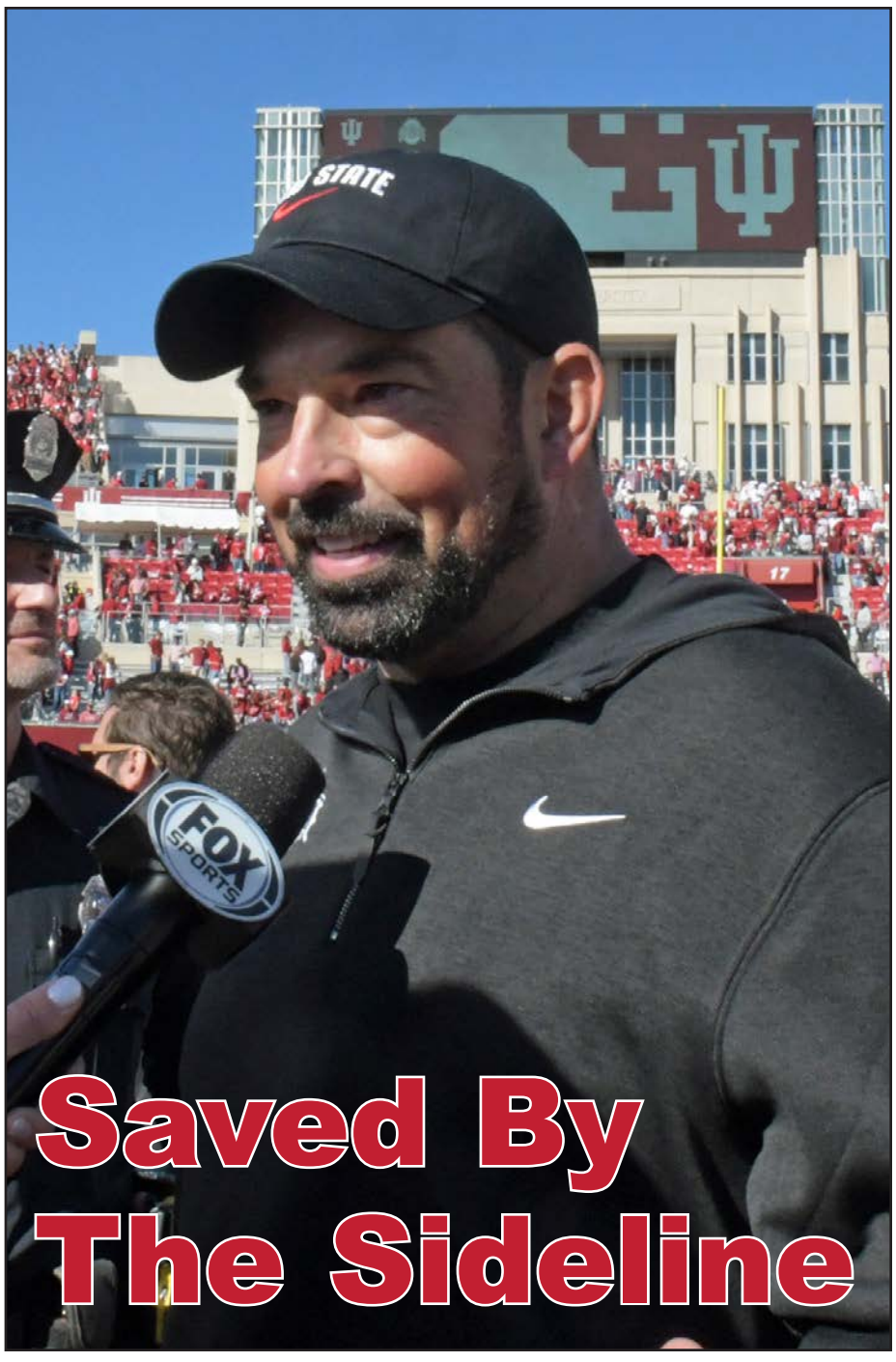

SONNY BROCKWAY

O-H, HAPPY DAY — Ohio State coach Ryan Day was all smiles knowing the Buckeyes came oh so close to possibly suffering their second setback of the season but survived a late challenge by Indiana to escape Bloomington with a 19-15 victory to end the Hoosiers' 22-game winning streak. A potential game-winning touchdown catch by IU's Nick Marsh was instead an incompletion on fourth down when he stepped out of bounds while making the grab with 1:02 to play.

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Huge Win, Big Loss — Ohio State Survives IU Threat

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Football is a game of inches.

Everyone has heard that common saying that has probably been around as long as the game itself. Time and time again, it becomes clear why it's used so often.

On Oct. 17, No. 4 Ohio State was mere inches away from losing its second straight matchup against Indiana.

With just over a minute left in the game and the Buckeyes up 19-15, Indiana was driving down the field and found itself with a fourth-and-4 chance from the OSU 27-yard line. Cam Calhoun found himself in one-on-one man coverage on the left side of the field against Indiana wide receiver Nick Marsh.

Marsh used a double move to get by Calhoun and found himself about as wide open as he could have been, and Hoosier quarterback Josh Hoover targeted him with a deep pass on the left sideline as Marsh jogged into the end zone.

But it didn't matter how badly Calhoun was beaten on the play, because when Marsh caught the ball, his left foot came down just out of the left side of the end zone. Marsh knew it immediately, throwing his hands on his head with the ball still in his grasp as he looked down to see where his foot landed. What he saw was that it was fully on the white sideline, and had he had his right foot down instead, the Hoosiers would have taken a late lead.

"When the ball was in the air I was starting to think about getting a two-minute drill ready to roll," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, who had a beaming smile across his face as he got into his postgame press conference.

It didn't matter to Day that given how the play unraveled, the Buckeyes maybe should have lost due to blown coverage. The only thing that he cared about is that his Buckeyes won the game.

He thought back to the 24-23 loss to Texas on Sept. 12 this season, with possibilities still running through his mind about how that game could have ended differently. But this time, his team finished with a victory.

"Listen, if (Marsh) catches the ball in the end zone and his foot's a yard in, we're all sitting here in a different spot," Day said. "When you think about the Texas game, I can name about seven things where it came down to one play. We were able to find a way to win the game in the fourth quarter, and that's the bottom line."

Junior safety Jaylen McClain is certainly happy the play turned out the way it did, especially since it's a mistake the Buckeyes made that didn't pay off for the opposing team. Now it's on film without any real consequence, and it can be addressed over the off week.

"We'll take the win regardless, but we always know that when we watch film the issues are always going to be there," McClain said. "We just have to clean a few things up so it won't look like that, I guess."

The loss for Indiana ended a Hoosier dream streak of 22 straight wins that included a national championship last season as well as a Big Ten Championship Game victory over the Buckeyes, which was the first time the Hoosiers had beaten Ohio State since 1988. That game also ended a 30-game win streak OSU had over Indiana that dated back to a 1990 tie.

For the Buckeyes, this year's game was revenge for that 13-10 defeat they suffered last season, regardless of how much Day attempted to say that it wasn't revenge they were seeking. Sophomore tight end Nate Roberts and other players made it clear after the Oct. 10 win over Maryland that as soon as they turned their attention to Indiana, they were already thinking about what had happened on Dec. 6, 2025.

"We think about it all the time," Roberts said. "They took something away from us and one of our goals last year that we wanted to execute, and we're going to use that as motivation."

When the Buckeyes gave the ball back to the Hoosiers at the IU 30-yard line with 3:06 left to go in the game, Day said he talked on the sideline about what the plan had to be. He said they wanted to leave the game up to their defense.

"We talked about going into that drive and as that drive was going on, 'We have to go win this game on defense.' You have to give our staff credit, you have to give the players credit, you have to give (defensive coordinator Matt Patricia) credit. We were aggressive in that moment, and it worked out for us. The defense just grinded all game and was resilient."

Wanting to win with the defense on the field was partly the case, Day said after the game, because starting quarterback Julian Sayin went down in the fourth quarter with an injury, forcing the Buckeyes to send freshman Luke Fahey into the game under center. It was his first game action outside of coming in late in blowouts earlier this

Continued On Page 8

FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

No. 4 Ohio State escaped Bloomington, Ind., with a narrow 19-15 victory over No. 5 Indiana, with the defense stepping up throughout the game. Here are some choices from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves.

Sam Cipriani, BSB: Ohio State safety Earl Little Jr. was all over the field for the Buckeyes in their trip to Bloomington. He recorded a team-high eight tackles (two solo).

Little's biggest play of the day came in the first quarter when Indiana was set up with third-and-10 on Ohio State's 45-yard line. He broke up a pass from Indiana quarterback Josh Hoover intended for star receiver Charlie Becker. It was Little's lone pass breakup of the day.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: It wasn't a great day for Ohio State's offense, but star receiver Jeremiah Smith still made some huge plays. He didn't necessarily stuff the stat sheet, but Smith made arguably the play of the game for the Buckeyes in the fourth quarter of the win.

On a crucial fourth-and-1 in Indiana territory, Ohio State dialed up a shot play. Despite being initially covered, Smith was able to work back towards the ball and haul in a contested 38-yard touchdown.

The reception allowed Smith to tie the all-time Big Ten record for most receiving touchdowns.

Smith finished the game with four catches for 68 yards and the receiving touchdown.

Greg Wilson, BSB: Ohio State's defense kept the Buckeyes in the game the entire day, keeping Indiana from scoring more than a touchdown in the first half despite the Hoosiers looking like the better team of the two in the first 30 minutes.

That performance continued in the second half, and freshman nickel back Jay Timmons, who returned from an injury that kept him out for the last two games, was a major part of that.

Timmons finished the game with seven tackles (five solo), two pass breakups and a forced fumble that gave Ohio State the ball back early in the second half and was a momentum-shifting play.

BSB Subscribers:

Slimjim: Matt Patricia.

Luckeeman: Joe McGuire, the punter, helped the field position game!

Bob Cody: Buckeye Leaves awarded to: Jeremiah Smith for his TD on fourth-and-1, ties the lead for career Big Ten TD receptions; Bo Jackson TD reception; Chris Henry Jr. with two big receptions to keep drives alive.

On defense: Jay Timmons back from injury and excelled – hope the bye week gives him more healing; Earl Little, Jr. – leading tackler.

Special teams: Connor Hawkins nailed both field goals and helped us win; Joe McGuire – consistent long punts.

John Lanning: We avoided upset weekend by a step. Buckeyes played hard and survived. My leaves go to:

1. Earl Little – great effort. Hoping for more pressure by the defense.

2. Mr. Smith, again – nice comeback catch for the deciding score.

3. Mason Williams – I like using the tight end to block and receive.

Hoping two weeks will get us ready for the next challenges.

R1TBDBITL: Little and Timmons. They were all over the field.

BUCKEYE SPORTS .COM

From The Message Board

Ohio State's starting quarterback, Julian Sayin, suffered an injury in the fourth quarter of the 19-15 win over Indiana on Oct. 17. OSU head coach Ryan Day said it would keep Sayin out "several weeks," seemingly leaving the starting job in the hands of freshman Luke Fahey, who replaced Sayin late against the Hoosiers. We asked our subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum how they expect Fahey to perform as the starter and whether they expect the offense to look different with him leading it. Here are some of the answers.

"I think he will be fine. Just needs time to get the reps and build a plan around him"

— Tiffin Buckeye

"I have more confidence in Day as a QB coach than I have in Fahey. I'm not optimistic at all as long as Sayin is out."

— Terrier Buck

"Given all the circumstances, I expect the coaching staff to have Luke and Tavien St. Clair prepared for USC, with a short leash similar to Julian last season vs. Texas. Luke will be back home, and he can run as part of his game as QB."

— Bob Cody

"I like that Fahey can run. It gives us another option. He will get the reps now and will be able to get comfortable with the flow of the game from the start. I'm hoping it's 2014 all over."

— John Lanning

"What I know is Luke Fahey is our backup QB who beat out a five-star QB to be the backup and had thrown for over 7,000 yards in his high school career. He wouldn't be the first Ohio State second-teamer to replace a starter and excel in his new role. It's a team game, and those around him will have as much of a role in his success as he does. Having said that, I expect the offense to change some to take advantage of his running capabilities and the passing game to be more quick-release and short-passing oriented."

— BuckeyeScott

"I remember the 2014 season. Many thought our season was over before it started when Braxton went down two weeks before the opener. Maybe it's just me, but I think Julian's arm was bothering him before the 'crunch' hit. His passing wasn't sharp at all. With the open week here, I'm sure the coaches will get a solid plan together. I do expect more running from the QB position (thank goodness!). I think Sayin could have avoided most of the sacks with his feet."

— R1TBDBITL

"I am curious to see if the door cracks open for St. Clair to get back into the picture. Maybe it doesn't, and maybe it doesn't matter, but I think there's a chance they were leaning into Fahey not just because they liked what they saw but also because he's more likely to be here as the backup next year. (Then again, TSC didn't look good in his time off the bench, either.)

"I also remember Cardale Jones saying he was in the dumps for a while early in the season in '14 but pulled out of it and started getting better in practice before his opportunity came.

"I felt Barrett could do a solid job when Braxton got hurt because they were already talking all preseason about making the QB more of a distributor and he could do that. I had no expectations for Jones to even be decent when he got his turn."

— Marcus Hartman, BSB

"If you are going to lose your 'star' quarterback, what better time than before an open week? I suspect they will dummy down the offense, as they did for Sayin before his first start against Texas. It wouldn't hurt if the running game got untracked. Fahey needs to remember that Jeremiah is out there, but be careful about trying to force the ball into him. Will this situation light a fire under Tavien St. Clair and make it a two-way battle?"

— Frank Moskowitz, BSB

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Bucks Somehow Escape IU With Victory

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

On an afternoon when Ohio State repeatedly killed its own momentum, never got the benefit of the doubt on a single officiating call, and played the final snaps of the game with its starting quarterback standing on the sideline, his passing arm in a sling, the Buckeyes somehow managed to deal reigning Big Ten and national champion Indiana a 19-15 defeat, capping an escape from Bloomington that would have made Houdini proud.

People who watched only the highlights or read the final score will likely believe it was a classic slugfest between two evenly matched, top-five opponents. In reality, it was a mistake-filled, not-much-to-be-proud-of mess on both sides of the field.

OSU quarterback Julian Sayin, who turned in what could be described as one of the poorest performances of his career, heaved a jump ball into the end zone that all-everything Jeremiah Smith picked out of the air for a 38-yard touchdown, giving the Buckeyes a 19-7 lead with 12:46 remaining in the fourth quarter.

But as with the last time Ohio State had a top-five team on the ropes late in the game – the 24-23 loss to Texas in early September, in case you need to be reminded – the Buckeyes couldn't seem to deliver the knockout blow.

The Hoosiers quickly answered with a touchdown and two-point conversion to make it 19-15 with 10:30 remaining, setting up a frenetic finish that wasn't decided until IU receiver Nick Marsh – who had easily beaten Ohio State cornerback Cam Calhoun to the end zone on a fourth-and-4 play – gathered in a 19-yard pass that detonated a triumphant explosion from the sellout Memorial Stadium crowd of 54,532.

Except that Marsh, who had caught the game-winning pass a week earlier against Nebraska, couldn't get a foot down in the end zone. His left foot clearly came down out of bounds, Ohio State ran out the remaining 62 seconds, and the Buckeyes had their first Big Ten road victory against a top-five opponent since a 20-13 win at No. 3 Penn State in 2024.

How the victory was achieved is anyone's guess.

Ohio State would gain some momentum in the game and then immediately give it away. It began on the first possession of the game when Sayin was a smooth 4 for 4 in an opening salvo featuring rollouts and chunk plays to the tight end and just as quickly shut itself down with an ill-fated second-and-4 run that went nowhere. Two plays later, the Buckeyes were forced to settle for a field goal to take an early 3-0 lead.

After stifling the Indiana offense with a three-and-out on its first possession, OSU got a 20-yard run up the gut from Bo Jackson that was quickly negated by a holding call on center Carson Hinzman. That possession ended in a punt after which the Hoosiers would have been pinned at their own 10-yard line, but Ohio State was flagged for an illegal formation. I needn't remind anyone that an illegal formation penalty on a punt is about the most egregious unforced error a team can commit – the kind that usually gets you beat in a close game.

The Buckeyes kept churning, though, allowing Indiana to make mistakes of its own.

IU kicker Nico Radicic, last year's Big Ten Kicker of the Year, uncharacteristically clanged a 32-yard field-goal attempt off the left upright with 5:11 remaining in the second quarter, a miss that eventually led to an Ohio State touchdown right before halftime.

In the second half, the Hoosiers, who hadn't lost a fumble in 1,437 offensive snaps, lost two in the space of eight plays although Ohio State managed to score only three points off those two turnovers.

Radicic missed again late in the third quarter, a 55-yard attempt that was true but well short. Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti has scarcely made a misstep since taking over the IU program in 2024, but that was a head-scratching decision. Radicic's career-long is the 49-yarder he booted during this year's season opener against North Texas.

Sayin converted a crucial third down with a 12-yard completion to freshman Phillip Bell as the third quarter wound down and then found Smith for the jump-ball touchdown to make it 19-7 with 12:46 to go. After that, the Buckeyes went for two – a somewhat questionable call made even more perplexing when a simple off-tackle handoff to Jackson was quickly stuffed.

The touchdown pass to Smith was the next-to-last pass Sayin threw during the game – the next-to-last official pass anyway.

After Indiana closed to within four points at 19-15, Sayin completed a first-down pass to running back Isaiah West. Three plays later, Sayin was the victim of a hard sack from IU defensive end Mario Landino during which the QB's shoulder and elbow took the full force of the hit, the result of which was a fumble and 18-yard loss. Replay seemed to indicate Sayin's arm was moving forward slightly before losing the ball, a play that should have resulted in an incomplete pass. Replay was never called for, though, and the 18-yard loss stood.

Sayin exited the game, spent a few minutes in the sideline medical tent and then headed to the OSU locker room. He later returned with his right arm in a sling, ending a day in which he often seemed unsure of himself. In the end, Sayin seemed downright lucky to complete 15 of 29 passes (a career-low 51.7 completion percentage as a starter) for 235 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions. He also took three sacks.

In his defense, Sayin wasn't exactly helped by the play-calling of first-year offensive coordinator Arthur Smith. Yes, there were times when Sayin was indecisive, taking sacks or throwing into tight coverage when throwing the ball away seemed more prudent.

But after starting the game with two quick completions to tight end Mason Williams – the second worth 28 yards out of a floating pocket – the Buckeyes never again targeted Williams during the game and seldom called for Sayin to do anything but fade straight back and hope for the best.

Likewise with the macho mentality of running the ball up the middle in short-yardage situations near the goal line. I know you should be able to run the ball for a yard or two on any occasion, but the Buckeyes are a passing team and lining up four straight times with Jeremiah Smith on the sideline is borderline criminal. Only when Smith returned on fourth-and-goal at the 2 did Indiana commit two defenders to him, leaving Jackson alone long enough to gather in the touchdown pass that gave OSU a halftime lead.

If you want to establish a running game, do it against the Ball States and Kent States of the world. It might seem strange to quote John Cooper here, but one of Coop's main tenets was "win the surest way." For the Buckeyes, the surest way to win is utilizing Jeremiah Smith in any conceivable way that gives them an edge.

What In The World?

I promised long ago not to spend much time criticizing officials, but what transpired (and sometimes didn't transpire) in Bloomington at least bears mentioning.

Smith is almost by consensus thought to be the top receiver in college football, using a combination of power, speed and grace to make catches other receivers can only dream about. That's why he is Ohio State's career leader in every receiving stat that matters as well as tied for the Big Ten career record with 39 touchdown receptions.

All of that said, Smith seems to be on his own when it comes to fending off overaggressive defenders.

Early in the second quarter, Smith was bumped by IU defensive back Jamari Sharpe before the ball arrived, leading to an interception the Hoosiers turned into their first touchdown of the game. Later in that same quarter, Smith was the victim of an out-and-out mugging by Indiana safety Preston Zachman on a deep pass down the middle. Several replays caught Zachman (who never turned his head around to find the ball) cradling Smith with both arms as the OSU receiver tried to come back to make the catch.

Veteran Big Ten referee Jeff Servinski and his crew called 11 penalties during the game – 12 if you include the ridiculous targeting call against OSU defensive back Jermaine Mathews that was overturned by replay – but none of them were for pass interference.

As a matter of fact, defenders attempting to cover Smith have been flagged only four times for PI during Smith's career – and none since last year's Purdue game, a span of 207 targets and counting.

Again, I'm from the school that believes a team should be good enough to overcome poor officiating, and I never watch a game to see yellow flags handed out like Halloween candy. But when so many of these outcomes are on a knife's edge, officials simply must get it right, and they should be getting it right more often.

What Lies Ahead?

According to most reports, Sayin will be sidelined for the foreseeable future, an injury that ignited an online debate about who should take his place.

True freshman Luke Fahey, who has won the backup job over sophomore Tavien St. Clair, didn't exactly distinguish himself against Indiana after Sayin went out at the 7:38 mark of the fourth quarter.

Fahey scrambled for an 8-yard gain on his first snap, but it was pretty much all downhill from there.

On his subsequent seven snaps spread over two possessions, Fahey failed to complete either of his two pass attempts, took a sack for a 10-yard loss and was called for intentional grounding as the Buckeyes unsuccessfully tried to run out the final 7:38 of the game.

Armchair quarterbacks immediately called for St. Clair to take over by the time the game at USC rolls around, an opinion based primarily on the fact St. Clair is 6-4 and a five-star prospect while Fahey is 5-11 and a three-star.

I have no idea which is the better option, but this is where Ryan Day and quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler earn their paychecks.

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OSU Rises To No. 3 In AP Poll

Ohio State jumped one spot to No. 3 in the most recent AP top 25 poll after defeating Indiana 19-15 on Oct. 17 in a thriller in Bloomington.

Miami (Fla.) leapt to the top spot in the poll after then-No. 1 Georgia fell to unranked Auburn 27-24 on a last-second field goal, and then-No. 2 Notre Dame was beaten by BYU 28-24. BYU rose six places to No. 2 in the poll after the win, while Notre Dame fell to No. 4 and Georgia dropped four spots to No. 5.

Rounding out the top 10 were No. 6 Indiana, No. 7 Ole Miss, No. 8 Texas Tech, No. 9 UCLA and No. 10 Utah. Other Big Ten teams in the top 25 included No. 15 Iowa, No. 16 USC and No. 24 Northwestern.

Texas fell 12 spots to No. 19 after losing to Florida 27-24, making it the biggest faller of the week. The Gators rose 12 spots to No. 20. No. 25 Arizona jumped three spots to enter the top 25 for the first time this season.

Sayin Hurt, Jackson Out Vs. IU

Ohio State began its matchup with Indiana with multiple significant injuries and left with even more.

Running back Ja'Kobi Jackson missed his first game of the season, while offensive lineman Austin Siereveld was left out of his second straight contest. Safeties Leroy Roker III and Khmari Bing and running back Anthony "Turbo" Rogers were also kept out against the Hoosiers.

Ja'Kobi Jackson

Quarterback Julian Sayin hurt his throwing arm against Indiana and came out of the locker room with a sling on before he missed the final 10 minutes of action. Head coach Ryan Day said Sayin is expected to be out for multiple weeks.

Multiple defensive players were injured in the game. Defensive tackle Eddrick Houston went down but ultimately came back. Defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. was hurt but came back for Ohio State's final defensive stand. Defensive tackle John Walker and cornerback Jay Timmons also suffered injuries against Indiana.

2026 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 5	BALL STATE	W, 56-3	BTN	2-5, 32-31 win over Bowling Green
Sept. 12	at Texas	L, 24-23	ABC	4-2, 27-24 loss to Florida
Sept. 19	KENT STATE	W, 59-3	FOX	2-5, 29-2 loss to South Florida
Sept. 26	ILLINOIS	W, 42-19	FOX	3-3, idle
Oct. 3	at Iowa	W, 31-14	CBS	5-1, idle
Oct. 10	MARYLAND	W, 45-16	BTN	2-4, 37-30 loss to Rutgers
Oct. 17	at Indiana	W, 19-15	FOX	**6-1, 19-15 loss to Ohio State**
Oct. 31	at USC	TBA	TBA	6-1, idle
Nov. 7	OREGON	TBA	TBA	4-2, 17-14 win over Nebraska
Nov. 14	NORTHWESTERN	TBA	TBA	5-1, 24-21 win over Michigan State
Nov. 21	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	5-2, 17-14 loss to Oregon
Nov. 28	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	4-2, 21-18 win over Penn State
Dec. 5	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.	TBA	

Cignetti Lauds WR Smith

Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti had high praise for Ohio State star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith during his Oct. 13 press conference.

The reigning national champion coach pointed to Smith's nine touchdowns in Ohio State's four games against Power Four opponents before visiting Indiana as what's led to the wideout's dominant season.

"He's taken it up a notch, without question," Cignetti said.

He added that while Indiana has two elite wide receivers of its own in Michigan State transfer junior Nick Marsh and junior Charlie Becker, both of whom have surpassed 30 catches for 500 yards and seven touchdowns, neither has matched Smith's production this season.

"There's no one like him right now playing at this level. I mean, we've got two really good ones," Cignetti said. "He's a freak, and we're going to have to do a great job on him."

During an appearance on "The Triple Option" podcast, which is co-hosted by former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, Cignetti also joked about the challenge of defending Smith.

"We're not allowed to play with 12 or 13, so we're up the creek, I guess," Cignetti said.

Smith has racked up 52 catches for 984 yards and 12 touchdowns through seven games this season. He hauled in four passes for 68 yards and one score in Ohio State's 19-15 win over Indiana on Oct. 17.

Cignetti moved to 1-2 against Ohio State after the defeat.

Day: OSU Must Improve Off. Efficiency

After a disappointing performance in Ohio State's 45-16 victory over Maryland, Day said his offense must improve its efficiency. He said that creating an efficient offense starts with maintaining balance between the passing and rushing attacks.

When asked about Ohio State's star wideout, Smith, along with the run game and receiving threats, Day emphasized the importance of keeping opposing defenses from focusing on his top receiver.

"The balance is what's critical," Day said. "You put the most stress on a defense, and we can stretch the teams horizontally and vertically, run the ball in different styles, different groupings. But at the end of the day, it comes down to efficiency. They're not just going to sit back and let us run the ball down their throat. They're not just going to sit there and let us throw the ball to No. 4 every snap. It's just not going to happen. We have to mix that up. I'm sure they're going to mix it up, and then it comes down to how well we're going to do our job and execute the plays."

That emphasis on efficiency also extends to situational football. Ohio State ranks tied for 42nd in the FBS, converting 44.3 percent of its third-down attempts, while its 75.0 percent fourth-down conversion rate on 16 attempts is eighth.

The Buckeyes also have room to improve in the red zone, with Ohio State tied for 49th nationally, scoring on 87.9 percent of its trips inside the 20-yard line.

While Day said Ohio State has improved in the red zone as the season has progressed, he stressed that its execution against Indiana is the true test.

"It depends on how well we execute. That's what it comes down to. But we can say we made progress. We can say we need to make more progress. The bottom line is how we perform on Saturday, and that's it," Day said of how far Ohio State has come in the red zone. "That's everybody in the program, and so we know that that's going to be a very important part of the game plan. They do a very good job down there, so we have to be on point. We can't take negative plays. We have to be efficient and execute and give them a good plan down there."

Ohio State converted on 3 of 3 of its red-zone attempts against the Hoosiers with one touchdown from the red area and was 6 of 15 on third-down attempts.

TE Williams Building Confidence

With his first touchdown as a Buckeye during Ohio State's win over Maryland, senior tight end Mason Williams is continuing to find his footing in a crowded tight end rotation.

Mason Williams

The Ohio transfer hauled in two passes in the victory, highlighted by a 1-yard touchdown grab with 24 seconds remaining in the first half. The score kept alive Ohio State's impressive streak of scoring a touchdown in the final 30 seconds of the first half in six consecutive games.

"You can't really ever beat the feeling of a touchdown, especially in a game like that

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Upgrade Down To $22, Next Issue Mails Nov. 3

More Ohio State big games are coming and there is no reason to wait for your next print Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting activity. In fact, due to the open week, the next issue of BSB will not be mailing until Nov. 3. The BSB staff will be reporting from every press conference or other availability throughout football season, especially now that the action is getting heavier. All the news is available in real time at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

BuckeyeSports.com also offers plenty of additional content not found in your paper. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff mans BuckeyeSports.com, reporting on the breaking stories, plus posting additional features.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays, as well as the always entertaining Staff Predictions, which appear the Friday before every game. Our pickers saw a higher-scoring game against Indiana than it turned out. Sam Cipriana called it 27-20 Ohio State. Bobby Gorbett had it 27-24 OSU, and Greg Wilson picked IU to win, 31-27.

Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively, and is more so during football season. Staff and readers also discuss games in real time on the Official Game Thread on the Forum.

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

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I Believe In BSB

The following Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers showed that they "Believe in BSB" by renewing their subscriptions at full price despite being offered discounts. BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz thanks all participants in this initiative. Any new full-price renewal participants will be listed in the next issue of BSB. For information on how to participate, give us a call during regular business hours at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862.

Jeremy Grand, Hilliard, Ohio

Gary Green, Norrth Canton, Ohio

Sue Mayer, Columbus

Dick Sweeney, West Jefferson, Ohio

Robert West, Celina, Ohio

in an environment that we have," Williams said. "I have to give credit to everybody else getting us down there into that field position, holding up the line. (Sayin) made a good throw, so it was a good time."

The 6-4, 246-pound tight end pointed to Ohio State's 24-23 loss to Texas, where he had two catches for 29 yards, as a key learning experience that led to a change in mindset.

"When you come to Ohio State, you're going to play against the best, and that's why you come here," Williams said. "Getting the chance to play down in Texas – and as much as you like to win that game, losing that one definitely hurt, but it gave me a valuable lesson that it's not all sunshine and roses around here. You have to work for everything that you have."

Williams and the Buckeyes had another chance to play in a matchup game on Oct. 17, and the tight end had two catches for 45 yards in the win.

Williams has now totaled seven catches for 82 yards and one touchdown, which is second among Buckeye tight ends in each of those categories, trailing sophomore Nate Roberts.

DeWine Issues Executive Order

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine issued an executive order Oct. 13 allowing the state's public and private colleges and universities to grant otherwise eligible athletes from the high school class of 2022 a fifth season of competition, despite the NCAA's eligibility ruling.

The NCAA adopted a new model in June that granted eligible athletes up to five years of competition but ruled that 2022 high school graduates who completed four seasons could not compete for a fifth.

"When the rules change, fairness has to remain part of the equation," DeWine said. "We want Ohio's student-athletes to have the same opportunity as student-athletes in other states."

Former Ohio State head coach and Lt. Governor Jim Tressel backed DeWine's decision and stated the importance of Ohio athletes receiving the same opportunities as their peers.

Three days after DeWine signed the executive order, NCAA President Charlie Baker announced on Oct. 16 that the NCAA had filed a lawsuit against the Ohio governor. It marked the first time the NCAA had filed a lawsuit against a sitting state governor.

In the 41-page lawsuit, the NCAA argued that DeWine's order violated the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution by giving Ohio institutions an unfair advantage. The NCAA also said the order violates the First Amendment by allowing schools to circumvent its rules and argues that DeWine lacks the authority to allow universities to put on the roster athletes whom the NCAA ruled ineligible.

Each of the eight Division I universities in Ohio reportedly supported DeWine's challenge to the NCAA's eligibility rules.

CFP Expanding To 24 Teams

The College Football Playoff is set to expand from 12 to 24 teams beginning in 2027, according to an Oct. 16 report from ESPN.

Pete Thamel also reported that ESPN will pay an additional average of $345 million annually over the next five years for the expanded 24-team CFP, on top of its existing $1.3 billion annual payment.

No final details have been revealed about the final format and how many automatic bids and at-large bids there will be, but Thamel reported that discussions have included 19 at-large bids, with the Power Four conference champions and the highest-ranked Group of Six team receiving the automatic bids.

The proposed plan would give seeds No. 1 through 8 a first-round bye and a home game, with the No. 1 team playing the winner of the game between the No. 16 and No. 17 seeds, the No. 2 team playing the winner of No. 15 and No. 18, and so on. Teams seeded No. 9 through No. 16 would get a first-round home game.

The college football season is already set to begin a week earlier beginning in 2027, which helps in the scheduling for the expanded playoff format, but this format will also lead to the cancellation of all Power Four conference championship games.

Harrison Traded To Texans

Former Ohio State receiver Marvin

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

Harrison Jr.'s tenure with the Arizona Cardinals is officially over. Harrison and a sixth-round pick were traded to the Houston Texans on Oct. 11 for a second-round pick and a seventh-round pick.

Harrison had an extremely prolific collegiate career. He was named a two-time unanimous All-American after impressive sophomore and junior seasons and also won the Biletnikoff Award, given to the nation's best receiver, as a junior.

Harrison had back-to-back 1,000-yard receiving seasons in 2022 and 2023, respectively, which led to him being selected with the No. 4 overall pick by the Cardinals in the 2024 NFL draft.

Harrison struggled to find any consistency with the Cardinals, though. He finished a solid rookie season with 885 receiving yards and eight receiving touchdowns on 62 catches but then struggled with injuries in his second season in the NFL.

The Cardinals had apparently seen enough after the start of his third season with the team. In four games, Harrison had just five catches for 85 yards.

Now Harrison will get a fresh start with the Texans, who are led by C.J. Stroud, one of his two starting quarterbacks at Ohio State. The Texans were off to a 1-4 start before Harrison joined.

In his first game with the Texans, Harrison had three catches for 34 yards on limited snaps since he didn't have long to learn the Houston playbook.

DT Hamilton Plays LS For Jags

While Jacksonville Jaguars defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton typically lines up across from opposing centers and long snappers, the former Buckeye took on a different role during Jacksonville's 19-17 victory over the Philadelphia Eagles on Oct. 11 in London, England.

After Jaguars starting long snapper Ross Matiscik suffered a shoulder injury in the first quarter, Hamilton stepped in to handle long-snapping duties on special teams. Hamilton helped Jacksonville convert two second-half field goals, including kicker Cam Little's game-winning 57-yarder as time expired to secure the Jaguars' victory.

Hamilton also recorded one tackle and one quarterback hit in the win.

It wasn't the first time Hamilton was pushed into long-snapping duties, doing so after Matiscik went down during Jacksonville's final 2025-26 regular-season game.

Hamilton has spent the last six seasons with the Jaguars after he was selected 73rd overall in the 2020 NFL draft. In that span, he has started in 67 of 92 games, recording 259 total tackles, 18 TFLs, four pass breakups and two forced fumbles.

He previously spent five seasons at Ohio State from 2015-19, tallying 66 tackles, 21 TFLs and seven sacks, earning third-team All-Big Ten honors in 2019.

Styles And Reese Swap Jerseys

Following the New York Giants' and Washington Commanders' 27-27 tie on Oct. 11, former Ohio State linebackers Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese swapped

From The Pages Of BSB

45 Years Ago — 1981

"I kind of think that we're back in the race again, aren't we fellows?" Earle Bruce said and asked during the postgame press conference following Ohio State's 29-10 win over Indiana. "We're back in the race again and we can determine our own destiny. There's no doubt about that. That's what I like."

Bruce, whose Buckeyes were 3-1 in the Big Ten and tied with Iowa, a 12-10 loser to Minnesota, liked what the Golden Gophers did to previous leader Iowa, but also liked a lot of what he saw in his team's victory.

"I really thought that the defense did an outstanding job in the second half, shutting Indiana down," Bruce said. "A really super job. A super job after the first drive of Indiana. They played well, came to the ball and made some good plays."

40 Years Ago — 1986

David Brown stood on the podium. A smile as wide as his shoulders graced a face dripping with perspiration. It was definitely a happy face. He was, as he would later say, on cloud nine.

Brown, a second-year freshman from Utica, N.Y., was the center of attention after Ohio State had conquered Purdue 39-11 on Oct. 18 in front of what started out as a crowd of 68,737 fans in the first game in the history of Purdue's Ross-Ade Stadium. An interception of a Doug Downing pass by Brown was turned into a 100-yard return for a touchdown in the third quarter.

And Brown had reason to smile. After all, how often does a defensive back return an interception 100 yards? The Big Ten record book said it had been done only seven times before, the most recent of which was in 1919.

"When I saw my outside linebacker (Eric Kumerow) waving me on, I knew something was going on," said Brown. "I knew from that point on I was in good hands. He threw a nice block for me and that just kept me going."

35 Years Ago — 1991

Playing Northwestern in Cleveland Stadium might not have qualified as a home game on Ohio State's 1991 schedule, but for several members of the Buckeyes it was more of a home game than playing at Ohio Stadium.

Nine members of the OSU team who made the 150-mile trip up Interstate 71 to help the Buckeyes defeat "host" Northwestern 34-3 on Oct. 19 were going home, natives of the greater Cleveland area.

And while Ohio State head coach John Cooper grew up in Powell, Tenn., several hundred miles away from Cleveland, he, too, talked about playing a game in a stadium of which he had childhood memories.

"As a kid, I used to listen (on radio) to the Cleveland Indians," Cooper said. "I grew up listening to such players as Bob Feller, Early Wynn, Mike Garcia, Jim Hegan, Larry Doby, Luke Easter, Lou Boudreau, and all the great Cleveland baseball teams. And it was the same with Cleveland Browns football – Jimmy Brown, John Wooten is a good friend of mine, and Otto Graham."

30 Years Ago — 1996

He was billed as the next Chris Spielman. He was compared to Tom Cousineau and Marcus Marek.

But as Ohio State fans had learned through six games, Andy Katzenmoyer was making a name for himself as a freshman linebacker for the Buckeyes.

"He's had a great year," OSU coach John Cooper said. "How many true freshmen do you think can come in and start like that? He's played better than any of us thought he would."

Katzenmoyer was acclaimed as the USA Today national defensive player of the year and the Ohio Associated Press Mr. Football award winner as a high school senior at nearby Westerville South High School.

He had lived up to the billing, helping OSU to a 6-0 start. But the freshman hadn't stopped to think about exactly who he compared to or what the "experts" thought.

"I haven't really thought about it," Katzenmoyer said. "I'm just trying to do my job and working hard in practice. I just take it week by week and try to get focused on our next opponent."

25 Years Ago — 2001

It would probably have been an overstatement to say Ohio State's football season was hanging by a thread when the Buckeyes went into halftime amid a chorus of boos, trailing San Diego State 12-6 on Oct. 20.

After all, a loss to the Aztecs – however damaging to the psyche, especially after a tough loss to Wisconsin the week before – would not have factored in the Big Ten standings after this game was rescheduled from Sept. 15 due to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

But the Buckeyes rebounded amid a flurry of SDSU turnovers and took a 27-12 victory.

"It's a win," concluded head coach Jim Tressel, whose first OSU team inched ahead to 4-2 overall. "That's good. We had a chance to come back and play after being disappointed with our performance a week ago.

"And I don't think there is any misconception from anybody in our locker room that we're wonderful all of a sudden."

20 Years Ago — 2006

Throughout the week leading up to Ohio State's game with Michigan State, fears abounded that history would repeat itself. As it turned out, that's exactly what happened, if not quite the way anticipated.

There was no punt hitting an unsuspecting Nate Clements, no disputed final rulings on the clock, no Joe Germaine fumbles, no Levi Jackson breaking free for 88 yards for a go-ahead score.

Instead of those moments from past Spartan upsets of No. 1-ranked Ohio State teams, Buckeye fans saw a familiar sight of a different type – Ted Ginn Jr. sprinting by helpless Spartan defenders for a long touchdown.

Ginn's punt return in the second quarter put Ohio State ahead 17-0, and the Buckeyes cruised to their seventh win of the season by a final of 38-7.

"You hear all week about all the other teams that were No. 1 and lost to these guys, and we've been saying, 'Hey, this is a different year, this is a time for us,' " said linebacker James Laurinaitis.

15 Years Ago — 2011

The 17-7 win over Illinois on Oct. 15 at Memorial Stadium was never pretty – it couldn't be, not with quarterback Braxton Miller completing just a single pass – but the Buckeyes grind-it-out attitude was effective as they slowly choked the life out of the Fighting Illini.

Ohio State won the physical battles and controlled the line of scrimmage each way. With the 2011 stretch run on tap, it appeared the team found the identity it was lacking in the first half of the season when inconsistency plagued both sides of the ball.

"Anytime you play in the Big Ten, you have to be physical," said cornerback Travis Howard. "It's Big Ten football. Teams are going to run the ball, guys are bigger, and you have to have the mentality of going out there every day and being tough and physical. That's what we had to do today."

On offense, Ohio State stuck to the ground, piling up 51 runs against only four passes on the day, running for 211 yards.

10 Years Ago — 2016

The keys to winning football games are controlling the line of scrimmage and executing on special teams. Just ask Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer.

Against Penn State on Oct. 22, the Buckeyes didn't control the line of scrimmage, and they certainly didn't execute on special teams. That added up to a crushing 24-21 loss for the previously second-ranked Ohio State squad in State College, Pa., snapping an eight-game winning streak for Meyer's program.

The Buckeyes were 6-0 overall and 3-0 in the Big Ten heading into the game, but the problems that had shown up in spots during the season piled up, and Ohio State showed it had a long way to go to be a playoff contender.

"We're not a great team right now," Meyer admitted.

Five Years Ago — 2021

It takes some college quarterbacks three years to fully mature into the most polished version of themselves. Ohio State redshirt freshman C.J. Stroud had seemingly accomplished that task in a mere three games.

Stroud, just a month before the scourge of social media and Buckeye Nation's favorite whipping post, continued his assault on opposing defenses as well as the program record book with a near-perfect performance on Oct. 23 at Indiana. Despite a nuisance rain that went from mist to downpour and again back to mist, Stroud connected on 21 of 28 of his attempts for 266 yards and four touchdowns and Ohio State ran away with a 54-7 victory.

Since Stroud rested his shoulder during a week-four win over Akron, he had been nothing short of sensational. His three-game ledger since his sabbatical featured 62 completions in 84 attempts (73.8 percent) for 1,002 yards and 14 touchdowns with no interceptions. Still, Stroud didn't measure his success in quite that way.

"I don't look at what happened last week or the game before that," he said. "I come in with a clean slate every week. What happened last week, you have to throw that away. If you bank on that taking you to the next game, you're riding a roller coaster."

One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State was in control of a 34-0 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 18 the entire afternoon, even with reserves starting to get constant time in the contest by the middle of the second quarter.

But it seemed that before the game, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and Co. had already decided that, no matter what the game looked like, it was going to be the Julian Sayin show.

Sayin finished the game with 42 passes, the most of his young career, and completed 36 of them (85.7 percent), continuing the impressive completion percentage he had already put up through six games.

Those 36 completions were enough for 393 yards, which was a career high, and four touchdowns, tied a career high he set against Grambling State on Sept. 6. Junior wide receiver Carnell Tate caught two of those scores, his fifth and sixth of the season.

"He's the truth. He's the Heisman winner," Tate said when asked what he would tell Heisman voters about Sayin. "No questions, ifs ands or doubts. Each and every week, he goes out there and proves to us why he's the Heisman winner."

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

"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 45 years and what we plan to do in the future."

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jerseys postgame.

Both 2026 top-seven NFL draft selections played a pivotal role in the draw. Styles, who was the No. 7 overall pick by the Commanders, finished with a team- and career-high 13 total tackles, adding a tackle for loss and a pass breakup.

Reese, the fifth-overall selection by the Giants, was tied for a team-high nine tackles and also took down Washington quarterback Jayden Daniels for a sack.

For the season, Styles is tied for second on Washington with 33 tackles and three TFLs. He's also deflected three passes and intercepted one throw. Reese has been just as effective with 49 total tackles, three pass breakups, one sack and one interception.

Jackson Leads PFF Grades Vs. Terps

Ohio State may have cruised to a dominant victory over Maryland, but the Buckeyes' performance was far from flawless.

Despite the 29-point win, Ohio State had several areas to clean up, and its Pro Football Focus grades reflected some of the Buckeyes' inconsistencies.

Cornerback Dominick Kelly had Ohio State's highest overall grade with an 80.5 mark after recording a pass breakup in five snaps. Running back Ja'Kobi Jackson, who took 14 carries for 76 yards, paced the Buckeye offense with a 78.4 overall grade.

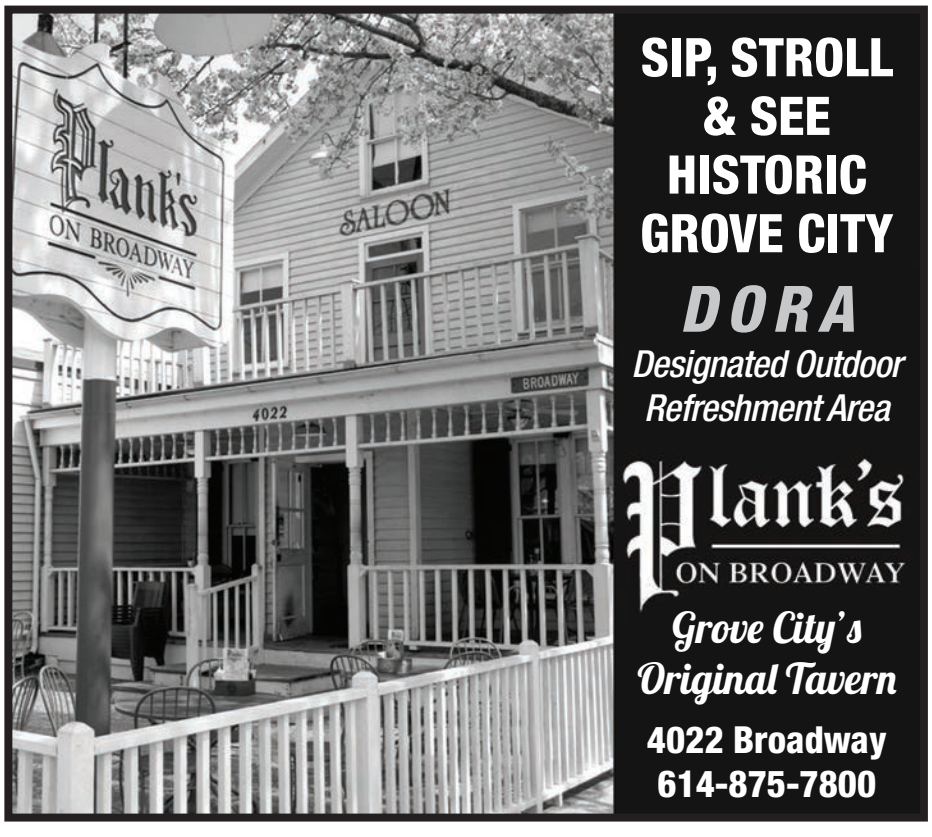
Smith (74.3) was Ohio State's next highest-graded player offensively. Gabe VanSickle led the offensive line with a 68.6 grade in his debut at right tackle, while Roberts had the highest grade among tight ends at 65.8 after catching a 68-yard touchdown pass late in the second quarter.

Meanwhile, Sayin received a 52.6 grade, his lowest of the season and career. He completed 13 of 21 passes for 242 yards and four touchdowns but threw a pick-six and fumbled twice, one of which was lost.

Defensive tackle John Walker led the Buckeye defensive line with a 77.3 grade, while Eli Lee topped Ohio State's linebacker room with a 71.1 mark.

In the secondary, Cam Calhoun (75.7) was Ohio State's highest-grade cornerback, and Earl Little Jr. (74.7) led the safeties unit.

Defensive lineman James Smith was the Buckeyes' lowest-graded player with a 35.8 mark in seven snaps. Tight ends Max LeBlanc (44.5) and Hunter Welcing (49.6) earned the two lowest grades on offense.



Ohio State Turns To Freshman QB Fahey

Continued From Page 1

season, so the head coach wanted his defense to finish the job instead of leaving it up to the freshman.

But it also surely had to do with how well Patricia's unit played in the game. When the OSU offense faltered throughout the first half, the Buckeye defense was there to continue to bail out its teammates with a stop.

Despite looking like the better team for nearly all of the first half, Indiana still trailed 10-7 after 30 minutes due to OSU's defense playing as well as it did.

It was the run game where the Buckeyes performed best. Despite multiple defensive linemen going down throughout the game – Eddrick Houston early on, followed by John Walker and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. later in the contest – they held the Hoosiers to a total of 73 rushing yards on 29 carries (2.5-yard average) and one touchdown. That rushing total included only one sack for 11 yards.

McClain was happy to hear after the game that Day trusted the defense so much on the last drive.

"It feels good. On the defense, we all have a lot of personality, and we have a lot of great players that want to step up and be relied on," he said. "For us to go out there and get it done like that, that's big-time for us."

The Buckeyes have now played two big games that were top-five matchups at the time of the games, losing to Texas and beating Indiana.

Last season, before the Big Ten championship and the Cotton Bowl, Ohio State was only tested in its season-opening win over the Longhorns and was able to cruise the rest of the way to a 12-0 regular season.

Multiple players said after the season that they didn't feel that they were battle-tested enough when they got into the postseason and that issues they didn't know they had showed up. This season, just seven games in with a few more games that look to be tough ones on the schedule, Day already feels like his team is better off in that sense.

"When I think back on some of the years we've had here where we didn't find ourselves in games like this, you don't always know as much about your team as I think we do right now. They're challenged. They feel much more comfortable right now playing in the fourth quarter than they did to start the season."

Coming up after the off week, Ohio State has a game against USC at LA Memorial Coliseum on Oct. 31 before immediately coming back to Ohio Stadium for a matchup against a talented Oregon team on Nov. 7 and then facing another ranked squad in Northwestern on Nov. 14.

Then comes an unranked Nebraska team on Nov. 21 in Lincoln, Neb., that gave the Hoosiers some trouble before the Buckeyes are back home again for The Game against Michigan. Some of those games might not provide as much possible trouble as others do, but there are no absolute guarantees left for the Buckeyes.

With Sayin out for an unknown amount of time – at least several weeks, Day said after the win over the Hoosiers – Ohio State will need to come every Saturday with its A game.

Time For Fahey

Buckeye fans know well how important a backup competition can be at the beginning of a season, which is why so many wanted to know early this year how the competition between Fahey and sophomore quarterback Tavien St. Clair would turn out.

Against Ball State, it was Fahey who came out first in the blowout, and since then, the freshman has kept the backup job. As it tends to do sometimes, that backup job has all of a sudden turned into a starting job for Fahey after Sayin left with his injury.

He led the offense for not even two full drives against the Hoosiers, but he was able to get his first taste of being the lead man for the Scarlet and Gray. Day could tell that it may have been a bit overwhelming at first.

"It was moving fast for him there. We're trying to find some things to calm down a little bit," Day said. "We really hit a couple runs, but we weren't consistent enough. Then we had the false start, and I was concerned about that because when you have somebody who comes in and changes the cadence, it just takes a little bit to be off."

On the very first play that Fahey was in, his potential showed when he quickly went through his reads, didn't see an open man, tucked the ball and ran for an 8-yard gain. A late hit on the play gave the Buckeyes a first down, but from there the offense stalled as it did many times even when Sayin was on the field in the game, and Indiana took the ball back.

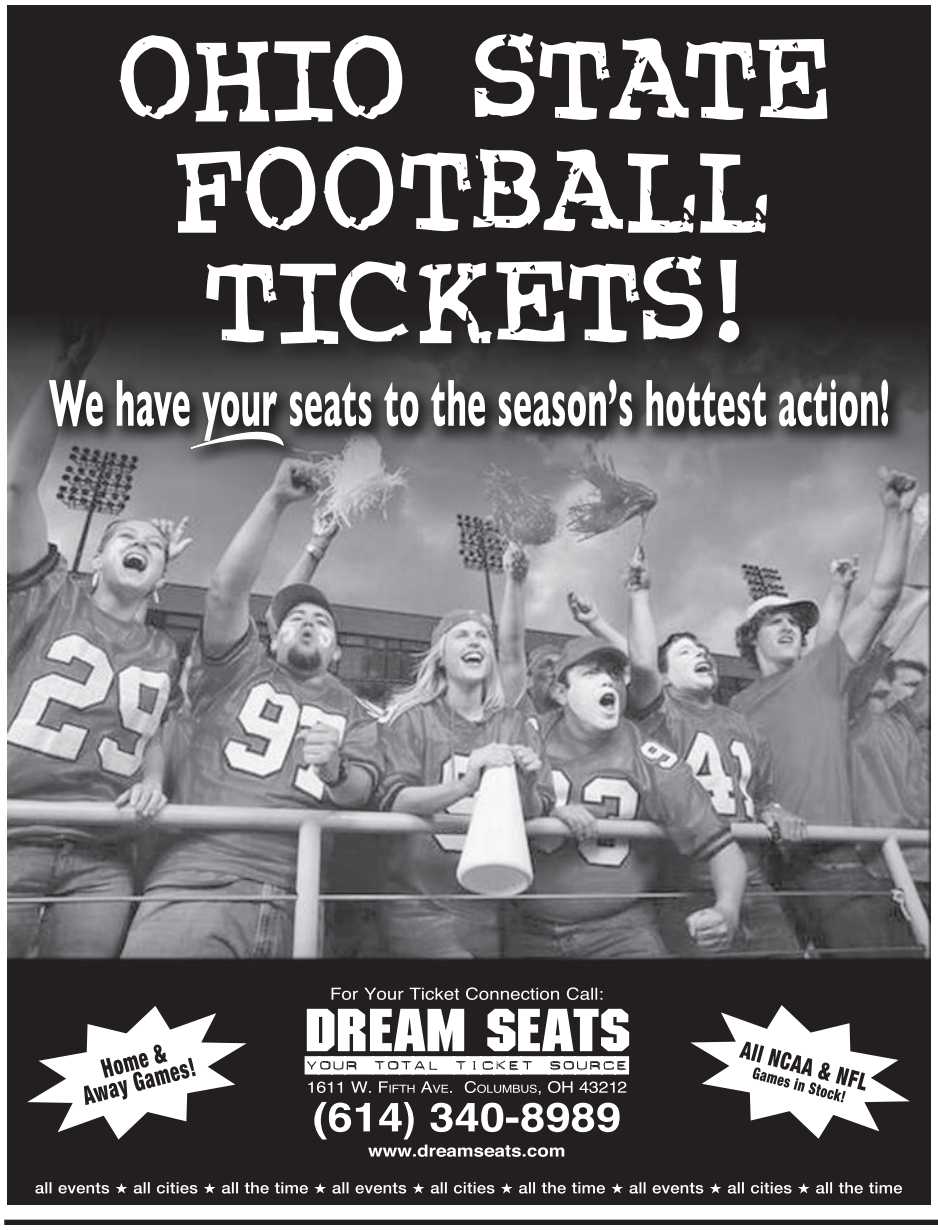
"It's not the same when you come in as the young freshman like that in that spot. But one thing about Luke, you can see on that scramble that he made, he stepped right up," Day said. "He's got the confidence. He's got athletic ability. He's a competitive kid. I don't think the moment was too big for him. It was just moving fast for him. If he had a few more drives, I think he would have found the speed of the game."

But with Sayin out for at least several weeks, as Day said, the Buckeyes find themselves looking at a very different challenge than what it looked to be the morning of the win over Indiana.

The last time Ohio State started a true freshman quarterback for more than one game was when Braxton Miller took over for Joe Bauserman in the 2011 season. Now Fahey is faced with the same task, but with much more expectations than Miller's team had that season.

But senior left guard Luke Montgomery was clear that the Buckeyes trust Fahey to lead the offense.

"We wouldn't have Fahey in there if we didn't have full trust in him. For being a true freshman, having to step up in a top-five



SONNY BROCKWAY

COOL HAND LUKE — Freshman quarterback Luke Fahey (13) had little experience for Ohio State when he entered the pressure cooker at Indiana in the fourth quarter when 2025 Heisman Trophy finalist Julian Sayin was injured. Fahey finished the 19-15 victory and is likely to start the next game at Southern California on Oct. 31.

matchup like that, I'm super proud of him," Montgomery said. "He's a heck of a player. He wouldn't be out there if he wasn't. We have full trust in him."

Day has also seen many different injuries affect his teams that he has led throughout his eight seasons at the helm of Ohio State. But this will be the first time he deals with a multi-week absence for his starting quarterback.

"When someone goes down, someone has to step up," Day said. "Ja'Kobi Jackson went down, Austin Siereveld went down. We've had some guys go down, so guys have to step up. The quarterback position is different, but we'll regroup. We have a bye week to figure that out. We have a good team, and this is all bigger than just one person.

"Certainly, we don't want to see (Sayin) get hurt, and we need him. But at the same time we'll come together and figure this out. We have a good team. When Luke is in there, we may need to do things a little bit differently, but the bye week gives us a chance to regroup on that and put our heads together."

But what Day understood after the game, still speaking with a big smile on his face when contemplating the reality of a true freshman possibly leading his team the rest of the way, is that Fahey has an opportunity that many quarterbacks would kill for going forward.

"What an unbelievable opportunity to come in and lead this team right here with these types of players," he said, "throwing the ball to Jeremiah Smith, Devin McCuin and Chris Henry, having Bo Jackson and this offensive line, with the defense coming together. This is the stuff in stories."

In terms of Smith, the current Heisman Trophy favorite who tied the Big Ten record for all-time receiving touchdowns with a score against Indiana, the star wideout says that he and Fahey need to start building more chemistry as soon as possible.

"A lot of practice, a lot of reps. We have to get together," Smith said. "Especially, we have a bye week this week, so we have time, two weeks until we play a game. It's going to take time to build that. I'm not going to say it's going to take one day. It's not that easy."

But Montgomery, who said he was able to help Fahey keep his cool in the huddle when he got into the game, was strong in his belief of the freshman.

"I think it's preparation," Montgomery said when asked how Fahey had been able to rise so quickly in the ranks in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. "He's always in the facility. He always wants to learn. He's always asking, 'Why and how? How do I do this? When am I going to do it?' He has a certain moxie about him as a quarterback. When you have a moxie about you, you just have confidence in yourself to go out there and play like he does."

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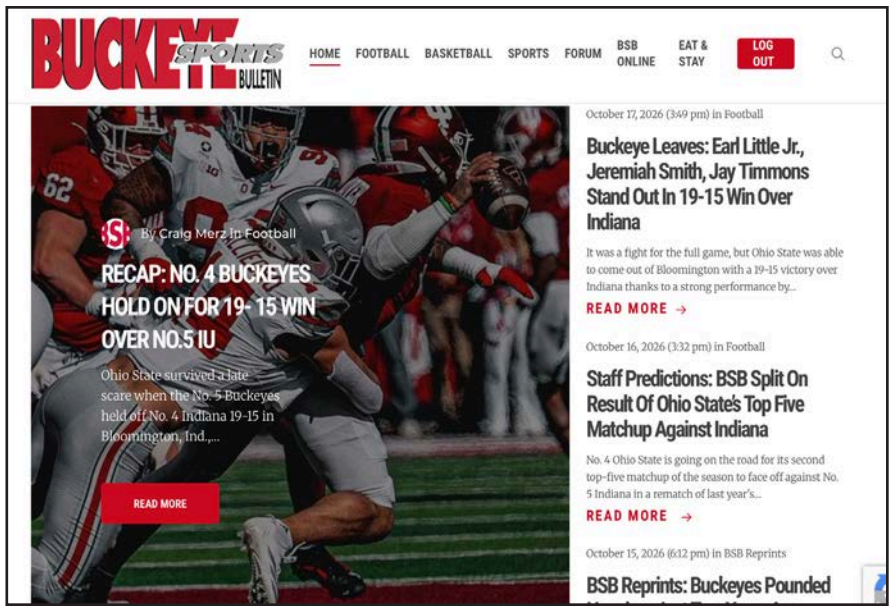

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Sayin Struggles In Tight Win Over Hoosiers

While Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin did not finish the game in the No. 4 Buckeyes' 19-15 victory over No. 5 Indiana, what the junior did showcase in Bloomington wasn't up to his usual high standards. Sayin was just 15 for 29 with 235 passing yards, tossing two touchdowns and two interceptions.

GAME NOTEBOOK
Sam Cipriani

After he completed his first four passes for 67 yards on Ohio State's opening field-goal drive, it seemed as if the quarterback had taken a step in handling Indiana's pressure after struggling to do so in the 2025 Big Ten Championship Game.

However, seven straight incompletions would follow. On the final pass of the incompletion streak, Ohio State faced a second-and-16 from its own 16-yard line early in the second quarter after Sayin had been sacked. Sayin forced a pass toward wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, who had yet to record a catch. But as Smith ran a slant route, Indiana defensive back Jamari Sharpe deflected the pass into the air, allowing fellow defensive back Amare Ferrell to intercept it and return it 23 yards to the Ohio State 7-yard line. The turnover led to an Indiana touchdown just two plays later, giving the Hoosiers a lead they held until seven seconds remained in the first half.

Sayin would go on to finish the half with just a 47.6 completion percentage (10 for 21) for 147 yards, one touchdown and the interception.

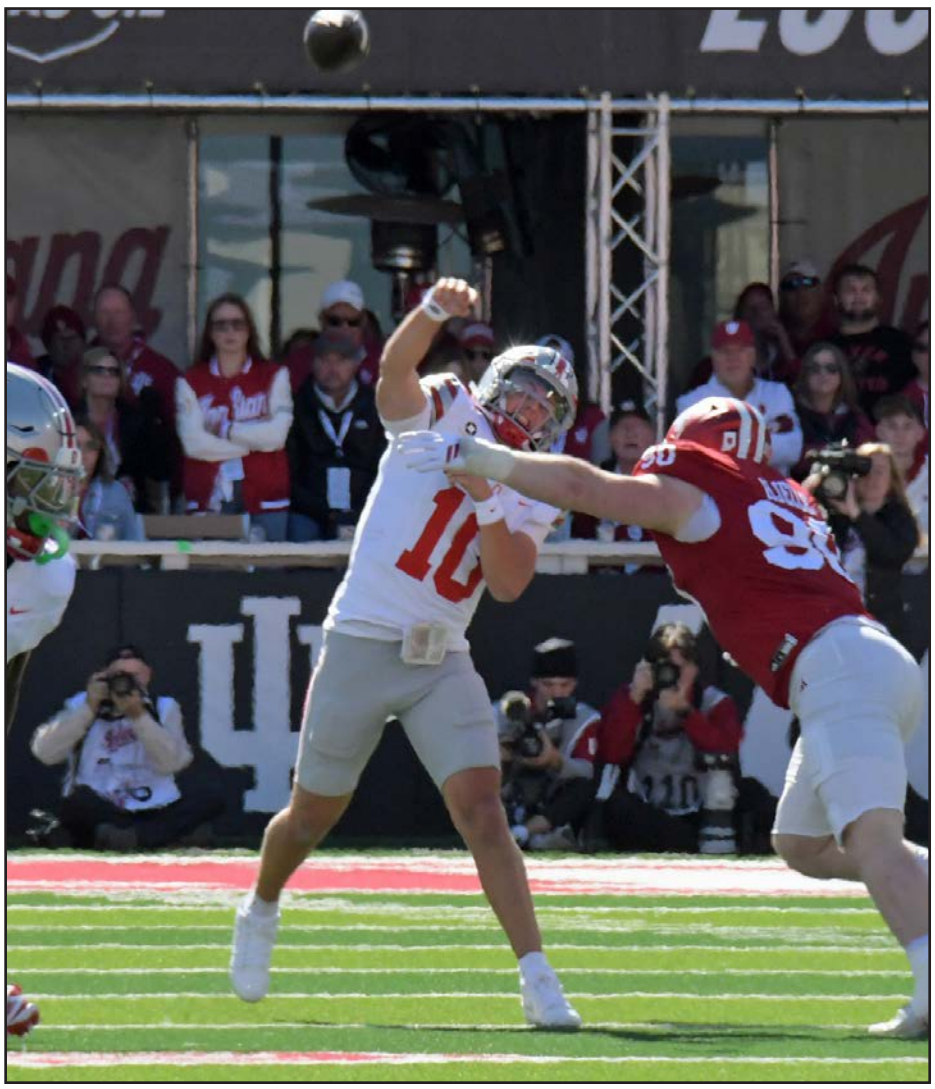
Improvements didn't come early in the second half when he went two for his first five and threw a second interception to Ferrell.

After Ohio State had extended its lead to six with a field goal on its opening drive of the second half, the Buckeyes had moved into Indiana territory at the Hoosiers' 41-yard line. But on second-and-15, Sayin made an uncharacteristic overthrow intended for Smith, which fell into the hands of Indiana's Ferrell for his second pick.

Sayin responded on Ohio State's next offensive drive with a 38-yard touchdown pass to Smith that ultimately proved to be the game-winning score.

Only four plays into Ohio State's second fourth-quarter drive, the Buckeyes were set up with a first-and-10 from Indiana's 38. However, Sayin was hit from behind by Indiana defensive lineman Mario Landino and fumbled for an 18-yard loss. Offensive tackle Phillip Daniels recovered the loose ball to retain possession, but the fumble pushed Ohio State out of striking distance. After the play, Sayin emerged from the pile holding his arm and later returned to the sideline wearing a sling. He did not re-enter the game.

"Next man up. I wish Julian a speedy recovery," Smith said of his quarterback's injury. "But next man up. Luke Fahey, he did a great job out there today."



SONNY BROCKWAY

BATTERED BUCKEYE — Julian Sayin (10) took a beating from the onset but stayed in the game long enough to help Ohio State to a 19-15 win over Indiana on Oct. 17. Sayin was hurried and hit while completing 15 of 29 for 235 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions. He was sacked three times before exiting in the fourth quarter with an upper-body injury that will keep him out "several weeks," according to coach Ryan Day.

With Sayin's two interceptions, it marked the first time in his career that he's had back-to-back multi-turnover games.

Non-Smith Pass-Catchers Step Up

Smith and Sayin have combined to forge one of the most dominant passing duos in the nation, combining for over 50 connections and nearly 1,000 yards for 12 touchdowns this season.

Smith led the Buckeyes with four catches for 68 yards and a touchdown, but as Indiana's defense focused heavily on limiting the star wideout, other Ohio State receivers stepped up to provide additional threats in the passing game.

Freshman receiver Chris Henry Jr. made a major contribution among that group with two key catches for 51 yards on Ohio State's touchdown drive just before the end of the first half. Senior receiver Devin McCuin also hauled in two catches in the game, taking them for 23 yards and senior tight end Mason Williams had two grabs for 45 yards.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day praised Henry and the Buckeyes' tight end room for handling added responsibility when Smith drew extra defensive attention but emphasized the need for greater consistency from the rest of the offense moving forward.

"They certainly had a good plan for how they wanted to (take away Jeremiah Smith)," Day said. "Chris Henry came up with a couple of big catches because he found himself in some one-on-one situations. We hit some tight ends as time went on. We just need to be a little more consistent with some of the other stuff when (Smith) is getting doubled or getting more attention, then we're able to do that. When you go against good defenses like this, that's going to come up, but I think we'll come out of this game and recognize that there are more areas to be more exact in terms of our execution."

Williams looked to be on his way for a monster game after catching Sayin's first two pass attempts for 17 and 28 yards, respectively, with the Buckeyes marching down for a field goal on the game's opening drive. However, those would be the Ohio transfer's only two targets of the afternoon. Still, Williams' 45 receiving yards were more than he had tallied in Ohio State's previous six games combined (37).

Sophomore tight end Nate Roberts also tallied one catch for 18 yards.

"Definitely," Smith said when asked if the tight ends' involvement in the offense takes a load off his shoulders. "You see, the first two plays were to the tight ends. We got 10-plus yards on those, so it takes a lot of pressure off us for sure."

OSU Has Troubles In Red Zone

Ohio State scored on all three of its red zone trips against Indiana, but the way the Buckeyes finished those drives fell short of the offense's expectations.

Sayin and the Ohio State offense moved down the field with ease on its opening possession, completing four straight passes to reach the Indiana 14-yard line. However, the Hoosiers' defense stiffened in the red zone, and with the Buckeyes unable to stretch the field vertically, Ohio State struggled.

Sayin completed a 6-yard pass to senior receiver Brandon Inniss before sophomore running back Bo Jackson took a carry and was stopped at the line of scrimmage for no yards. An incompletion from Sayin on third down forced Ohio State to settle for a short 26-yard field goal from junior kicker Connor Hawkins.

Ohio State didn't make its second trip into the red zone until its final drive of the second quarter. While Jackson ultimately capped off their 15-play, 80-yard touchdown drive with a 2-yard touchdown catch from Sayin on fourth-and-1, the process wasn't pretty.

After the Buckeyes got inside the Hoosier 5-yard line on a 7-yard reception from Smith, Ohio State's offense fell flat.

Jackson was stuffed on back-to-back rushes for small gains of 2 and 1, which luckily were enough for Ohio State to earn a first down at the Indiana 2. Ohio State's next three plays consisted of a Jackson 1-yard loss, a Sayin incompletion when tight end Max LeBlanc was open in the end zone and a rush for no gain, before the Buckeyes finally found the end zone on a touchdown reception for Jackson.

Day said the Buckeyes' first-half struggles made going for it on fourth down in the red zone the only option, adding that settling for a field goal was never under consideration.

"What was not an option was kicking a field goal at that point," the coach said. "We just weren't going to let that happen. At that point, we said, 'Well, this clearly isn't working.' When we got the first down, I said to myself, 'Well, we have at least three downs to try to hammer this in there and then on fourth down we'll try to spread them out a little bit.' We'll go back to the drawing board, but we have to be able to hammer that in when we get down in there in those big spots.

"Give Jules credit for finding Bo. Bo made a nice catch because it was kind of high and away right there, so that was big for us. Seven games in a row we've scored a touchdown at the end of the first half. That's pretty amazing. Resilient against a good defense."

Freshman cornerback Jay Timmons forced a fumble on Indiana wideout Davion Chandler to start the second half and give Ohio State some of its best field position of the afternoon on the Hoosiers' 45.

But after Sayin completed passes of 18 and 10 yards to move Ohio State to Indiana's

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

It was not a great day for Ohio State's offense in its 19-15 win over Indiana on Oct. 17. In addition to scoring a season-low 19 points, Ohio State gained a season-low total of 313 yards. However, when the Buckeyes needed a key conversion on fourth down, they were able to come up with it.

At the very end of the first half, Ohio State had a first-and-goal from inside Indiana's 2-yard line, but failed to get into the end zone on three straight plays. That brought up a crucial fourth-and-goal play from the 2-yard line. After Sayin was given plenty of time to throw, and star receiver Jeremiah Smith captured the attention of several Hoosier defenders, sophomore running back Bo Jackson was able to get free toward the pylon and haul in a clutch touchdown.

In the second half, the Buckeyes scored on another key fourth-down play. The fourth-and-1 was from Indiana's 38-yard line, and again Sayin had plenty of time to throw. Although the Hoosiers initially covered up Ohio State's pass-catchers, Sayin threw up a prayer in the end zone, and Smith was able to come back to the ball and put the Buckeyes up 19-7.

Ohio State finished the day 2 for 2 on fourth-down conversions.

What Didn't Work

The Buckeyes' struggles on the offensive end were largely due to the unit's sloppiness. Once again, Ohio State's offensive production was hurt by penalties. The Buckeye offense was called for six penalties on the day, including multiple false starts and multiple holding calls. Of course, Ohio State had the misfortune of losing starting quarterback Julian Sayin for much of the fourth quarter, but three of its penalties came before Sayin left the game.

The penalties weren't the only issue. Ohio State quarterbacks were sacked four times, and the Hoosiers finished the game with six tackles for loss. Although the offensive line was to blame for a couple of the sacks, Sayin held on to the ball too long on other plays. On a first-and-10 play in the second quarter, the Buckeyes tried to set up a screen play for Jackson. The Hoosiers were aware of what the Buckeyes were trying to do, and rather than throwing the ball away, Sayin tried to escape. It cost the Buckeyes a loss of 10, as Indiana defensive lineman Tobi Osunsanmi was able to wrestle Sayin down way behind the line of scrimmage.

The most costly mistakes were a pair of interceptions thrown by Sayin.

Sayin's first interception, thrown in the direction of star receiver Jeremiah Smith, directly led to an Indiana touchdown early in the second quarter. His second interception derailed a promising third-quarter drive and occurred when Ohio State had the ball on the Hoosiers' side of the field.

Although it's hard to blame a true freshman playing against the defending national champions, backup quarterback Luke Fahey failed to complete a pass and committed an intentional grounding pass in the limited playing time he received..

Play Of The Game

Much like in the fourth quarter of its 24-23 loss to Texas in Week 2, Ohio State was leaking serious oil in the final frame against the Hoosiers. After the offense stalled out on back-to-back drives, Indiana had a chance to take the lead with a game-winning drive in the final 3:06.

A key roughing the passer penalty on senior cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. gave Indiana a first-down from Ohio State's 33-yard line. The Hoosiers, hindered by a holding penalty, picked up 6 yards on three plays to bring up a make-or-break fourth and four from Ohio State's 27-yard line. With its starting quarterback out, Ohio State was in desperate need of a stop on fourth down.

Halfway through the play, it seemed as though Ohio State was in serious trouble because Indiana receiver Nick Marsh zoomed past Buckeye cornerback Cam Calhoun. Alone in the end zone, Marsh only needed to get a foot down to put the Hoosiers ahead. However, a slightly inaccurate throw by Indiana quarterback Josh Hoover drifted him toward the sideline. Marsh failed to keep his foot in bounds, and the incomplete pass gave the Buckeyes the ball and the win.

.

— Bobby Gorbett

17-yard line, the Buckeyes again settled for a field goal. A 5-yard Sayin scramble and a 1-yard rush from sophomore Bo Jackson set up a manageable third-and-4 from the 11, but an incompletion forced Ohio State to settle for a 29-yard field goal from Hawkins.

IU WR Becker Gashes Bucks D

While it's typically Smith garnering the status for the best receiver performance in any contest Ohio State plays in, Indiana junior wide receiver Charlie Becker outshone the Buckeye wideout in a duel of potential top-10 NFL draft selections.

Becker hauled in a team- and game-high nine catches for 165 yards. And in Smith-like fashion, Becker accounted for over half of quarterback Josh Hoover's 296 passing yards.

"Certainly when you watch Becker out there, he's a tremendous player," Day said. "He's making these catches on the sideline, and we've got guys hanging all over him."

Becker didn't just consistently find openings against the Buckeye defense, but turned them into big plays. Eight of his nine catches went for gains of at least 14 yards.

Indiana junior wide receiver Nick Marsh, a Michigan State transfer, also had a solid outing with three receptions for 57 yards and the Hoosiers' only receiving touchdown – a 19-yard catch-and-score with 10:30 to play in the final quarter.

Despite Becker's big day, Hoover completed just 20 of his 40 passes, with the one score to Marsh. Ohio State's defense broke up six of Hoover's attempts.

Ohio State junior safety Jaylen McClain attributed Indiana's passing success in part to the Buckeyes' commitment to stopping the run. The Hoosiers managed just 73 yards on 29 carries, averaging 2.5 yards per attempt.

"I feel like our run defense has improved a lot," McClain said. "There's a lot of stuff to work on, but it starts in practice every week. I feel the D-linemen more, and I feel like they stepped up to the challenge."

OSU Wins Special Teams Battle

Ohio State's special teams have made major strides in recent weeks, and that trend continued against Indiana.

Hawkins wasn't asked to use his distance kicking skills but nailed both of his field goal attempts from close range. He is now 8 for 10 on field goal tries this season. Hawkins also made his lone extra-point try to stay perfect on the season.

Senior punter Joe McGuire also made an impact with his leg. He had five punts for 44.4 yards per boot, which was slightly improved from his season 43.6 average coming in. McGuire had two punts of more than 50 yards, and his worst punt of the day yardage-wise was a 35-yard boot in the fourth quarter that ultimately pinned Indiana on its own 6-yard line.

Additionally, sophomore wideout Phillip Bell has continued to emerge as a steady presence in Ohio State's return game. Bell returned two punts for a total of 19 yards, with a long of 14.

Indiana, on the other hand, didn't have quite the same success as Ohio State.

Senior kicker Nico Radicic, who was 6 for 7 on field goal tries coming into the contest, missed both of Indiana's field goal attempts of 32 and 55 yards, costing the Hoosiers a loss.

Indiana punter Billy Gowers averaged 42.2 yards per punt on four attempts. Becker recorded an 8-yard punt return in the fourth quarter on the Hoosiers' lone takeback.

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 19, Indiana 15

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on his team's win over Indiana: "The big points in the game were some of the turnovers we created. We had an opportunity on offense to separate a little bit, and we didn't finish that one drive (in the third quarter) – we had the pick. But the fourth-down conversion with (junior receiver Jeremiah Smith) was a big play in the game. Then at the end of the half, being resilient and finding a way to score there. It was a hard-fought game, and the guys never gave up. We wanted to win a game like this in the fourth quarter. The last couple of weeks, I felt like we were able to do that on offense with the run game, and in this game it came down to the defense."

Day on Smith's 38-yard touchdown on fourth down: "Unbelievable catch. He gets in a unique situation where, even when he has guys around him downfield, he's so tall that if you even just give him a chance, he's going to make some plays, and that was a good example of that. We wanted to be aggressive at that moment. Man, what a great play he made."

Smith on his touchdown reception: "Actually, on that one, I ran the wrong route. (junior quarterback Julian Sayin) just trusts me. Once again, just throw the ball up and I'll make a play."

Sophomore running back Bo Jackson on his position group's performance without seventh-year Ja'Kobi Jackson: "With Ja'Kobi out, the whole running back room had to step up: me, (sophomore Isaiah West), (freshman Legend Bey). This game, you could say, was for him. We tried to play as hard as we could. Now with Julian being out, it's next man up. You have to have a next-man-up mentality."

Senior offensive lineman Luke Montgomery on the physicality of the game: "It was definitely a physical game. In reality, when a defensive line stunts and stuff, they don't want to play straight up. It's tough, but that's what we're called to do. We have to do a better job up front."

Smith on Bo Jackson's 2-yard receiving touchdown: "That play, we drew it up in practice. We thought there was going to be an opening for me to catch the slant, but everybody gravitated towards me, and Bo was wide open for a touchdown."

Montgomery on being in the huddle with freshman quarterback Luke Fahey: "He's just a baller. He kept telling me over and over after the game that he was starstruck. He couldn't believe it. When you put work in, especially at the quarterback position – I have a brother who plays quarterback – it's tough. Only one guy is out there. All the preparation that goes into it behind closed doors. For him to be a true freshman and be the backup at Ohio State, like he is right now, and for him to come out in a top-five matchup, you dream about that. He got his opportunity today, and I was in the huddle telling him, 'We have your back, bro. Just go out there and play. Focus on just one play at a time and keep rolling.' "

Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti on his team's performance: "That was a tough one not to win. I thought our kids gave great effort and fight, and hung in there, and put ourselves in position to win the close game. We had so many opportunities to get it done, not only at the end of the game, but throughout the game. Just too many missed opportunities on offense. I thought our defense really played well. They had their backs against the wall quite a few times, and maybe Ohio State kicked a field goal or something of that nature.

Montgomery on Sayin's role now that he's injured: Whatever happens with Julian, like I said, it's next man up, and Julian is going to be leading whether he's playing or not. It's Fahey's time right now, and we have to lead him and continue to grow and improve every week."

Junior safety Jaylen McClain on the defense's improvements following the Texas game: "After the Texas game, obviously it wasn't good in the facility, wasn't good in the room. We weren't good enough, so we had to step up. It starts with practice, and it starts with wanting it more. We've been stepping up, wanting it more and we've been way more intentional."

McClain on the significance of Ohio State's win: "It meant a lot. I feel like it was a defining moment for us. It was another great school. It's the defending national champions, and to go into their house and get a win like this, it's huge for not just the defense, but the team in general."

Smith on what the win says about Ohio State: "That we're a very good football team. We knew it was going to take great focus to come in here and win this game for 60 minutes straight and win the game in the fourth quarter. And that's what we did."

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 19, Indiana 15

Oct. 17, 2026 – Memorial Stadium, Bloomington, Ind.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	3	7	3	6	19
INDIANA	0	7	0	8	15

First Quarter

OSU – Hawkins, 26-yard field goal, 11:52.

Second Quarter

IU – Richard, 7-yard rush (Radicic kick), 13:54..

OSU – B. Jackson, 2-yard pass from Sayin (Hawkins kick), 0:07.

Third Quarter

OSU – Hawkins, 29-yard field goal, 11:51.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Smith, 38-yard pass from Sayin (B. Jackson failed rush), 12:46.

IU – Marsh, 19-yard pass from Hoover (Richard pass from Hoover), 10:30.

Att. – 54,532

Weather – Sunny, 51 F

Team Statistics

	OSU	IU
First Downs	19	17
Rushing	6	1
Passing	11	15
Penalty	2	1
Rushes-Yards	37-78	39-73
Passing Yards	235	296
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	15-31-2	20-40-0
Offensive Plays	68	69
Total Net Yards	313	369
Third Down Efficiency	6-15	8-16
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-2	0-2
Punts-Avg.	5-44.4	4-42.2
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	3-2
Penalties	7-50	4-42
Time of Possession	32:12	27:48

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **OSU**: B. Jackson 18-56; West 6-45; Bey 3-6; Je. Smith 1-2; Fahey 2-(-2); Team 2-(-3); Sayin 5-(-26). **IU:** Richard 16-46; Beebe Jr. 9-24; Hoover 4-11.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **OSU:** Sayin 15-29-2-235-2; Fahey 0-2-0-0-0. **IU:** Hoover 20-40-0-296-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Je. Smith 4-68; Henry Jr. 2-51; Williams 2-45; McCuin 2-23; Roberts 1-18; Bell 1-12; West 1-10; Inniss 1-6; B. Jackson 1-2. **IU:** Becker 9-165; Marsh 3-57; Morris 3-26; Chandler 2-32; Schott 1-8; Preston 1-6; Richard 1-2.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **OSU:** McGuire 5-44.4-52. **IU:** Gowers 4-42.2-58.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Bell 2-19. **IU:** Becker 1-8.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **IU:** Morris 1-0.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Alford 1-0; Little Jr. 1-0. **IU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **IU:** Ferrell 2-23.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU**: McClain 1-11. **IU**: Landino 2-28; Osunsanmi 2-16.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** McClain 1-11; Smith Jr. 1-1. **IU:** Landino 2-28; Osunsanmi 2-16; Daley 0.5-2; Hardy 0.5-1; Savage 0.5-1; Tucker 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **OSU:** Little Jr. 2-6-8; Timmons 5-2-7; K. Jackson Jr. 2-5-7; Pierce 1-6-7; Sanchez 4-2-6; Mathews Jr. 3-3-6; J. Moore 2-4-6; McClain 1-3-4; Alford 1-2-3; Houston 0-3-3; Smith Jr. 2-0-2; Pettijohn 0-2-2; Ja. Smith 0-2-2; Russaw 1-0-1; LeBlanc 1-0-1; Je. Smith 1-0-1; Calhoun 1-0-1; Atkinson 1-0-1; Walker 0-1-1; Alliegro 0-1-1. **IU:** Tucker 5-3-8; Hardy 2-6-8; Ferrell 3-4-7; Harris 2-4-6; Jones 2-4-6; Savage 2-3-5; Daley 2-3-5; Osunsanmi 3-1-4; Sharpe 2-1-3; Landino 2-0-2; Baldwin Jr. 1-1-2; Burnham 1-1-2; Zachman 0-2-2; Smythe 0-2-2; Sanks 1-0-1; Utzinger 0-1-1; Wyatt 0-1-1; Hjelle 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **OSU**: Je. Smith, Parker, Sayin, B. Jackson, Montgomery, VanSickle, Moore, Daniels, Hinzman, Roberts, Williams, Little Jr., Jackson Jr., Sanchez, Mathews Jr., McClain, Alliegro, Timmons, Pierce, Walker, J. Moore, Houston, Inniss, Bey, Ja. Smith, McCuin, Russaw, Pettijohn, Bell, Grady, T. Moore, Atkinson, Lockhart, Fahey, Thomas, Henry Jr., Bradford, Alford, Calhoun, Johnson, B. Jones, Stover, Caldwell, West, McGuire, Rudzinski, Diomede, Smith Jr., Riggs, Padilla, Cook, Adolph, Christian, Lennon, LeBlanc, Hawkins. **IU:** Richard, Preston, Hoover, Marsh, Gibbs, Brunner, Evans, Smith, Ajani, Lynch, Becker, Ferrell, Harris, Hardy, Zachman, Daley, Osusanmi, Savage, Sharpe, Jones, Tucker, Landino, Wilson, Baldwin Jr., Chandler, Obiazor, Morris, Burnham, Gandy, Sanks, Turner, Radicic, Ndukwe, Wyatt, Elmore, Gowers, Ohlinger, Beebe Jr., Chung, Reese, Utzinger, McAteer, Conner, McConnell, Clark, Calhoun, Allen, Clausen, Leibfried, Schott, Hjelle, Smythe, Warren.

Season Statistics

2026 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Sept. 5	(1) Kent State	W, 56-3	101,120
Sept. 13	(1) Texas (4)	L, 24-23	105,044
Sept. 19	(6) KENT STATE	W, 59-3	100,009
Sept. 26	(7) ILLINOIS	W, 42-19	101,452
Oct. 3	(5) Iowa (14)	W, 31-14	69,250
Oct. 10	(5) MARYLAND	W, 45-16	102,589
Oct. 17	(4) Indiana (5)	W, 19-15	54,532
Oct. 31	Southern California (16)	TBA	
Nov. 7	OREGON	TBA	
Nov. 14	NORTHWESTERN (24)	TBA	
Nov. 21	Nebraska	TBA	
Nov. 28	MICHIGAN	12 p.m.	

OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	171	111
Rushing	64	36
Passing	97	64
Penalty	10	11
Average Per Game/Rush	153.1	92.9
Average Per Game/Pass	323.1	171.4
Total Offense	3334	1850
Total Plays	480	439
Average Per Game	476.3	264.3
Average Per Play	6.9	4.2
Penalties-Yards	47-364	41-326
Fumbles-Lost	4-1	9-6
Third Down Efficiency	39-88	38-99
Percentage	44%	38%
Fourth Down Efficiency	12-16	3-12
Percentage	75%	25%
Sacks-Yards	10-81	15-113
Time Of Possession Avg.	32:07	27:53

Score By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	86	83	41	65	0	275	39.3
Opponents	16	23	9	46	0	94	13.4

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Bo Jackson	107	516	4.8	4	65
Ja'Kobi Jackson	59	354	6.0	6	49
Isaiah West	28	125	4.5	1	22
Legend Bey	15	56	3.7	0	24
Favour Akih	8	13	1.6	0	5
S. Jackson Jr.	2	8	4.0	0	5
Tavien St. Clair	2	8	4.0	0	7
Jeremiah Smith	2	7	3.5	0	5
Luke Fahey	3	1	0.3	0	8
Julian Sayin	37	-9	-0.2	2	9
Team	5	-7	-1.4	0	0
OSU Totals	**268**	**1072**	**4.0**	**13**	**65**
OPP Totals	**209**	**650**	**3.1**	**6**	**37**

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Julian Sayin	131	192	68.2	2007	19-4	184.5
Luke Fahey	9	13	69.2	203	2-2	220.4
Tavien St. Clair	5	7	71.4	52	1-1	152.4
OSU Totals	**130**	**181**	**71.8**	**2027**	**20-5**	**196.8**
OPP Totals	**121**	**230**	**52.6**	**1200**	**3-4**	**97.3**

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	52	984	18.9	12	72
Devin McCuin	19	268	14.1	2	34
Brandon Inniss	11	153	13.9	1	49
Bo Jackson	11	71	6.5	1	13
Nate Roberts	11	178	16.2	2	68
Mason Williams	7	82	11.7	1	28
Phillip Bell	7	84	12.0	0	23
Chris Henry Jr.	6	202	33.7	2	75
Brock Boyd	6	110	18.3	0	39
Isaiah West	5	37	7.4	0	10
Ja'Kobi Jackson	2	8	4.0	0	5
Maxence LeBlanc	2	12	6.0	0	6
Legend Bey	2	37	18.5	1	25
Hunter Welcing	1	4	4.0	0	4
Kyle Parker	1	16	16.0	0	16
Brody Lennon	1	4	4.0	0	4
Jerquaden Guilford	1	12	12.0	0	12
OSU Totals	**145**	**2262**	**15.6**	**22**	**75**
OPP Totals	**121**	**1200**	**9.9**	**3**	**36**

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jeremiah Smith	12	–	–	–	–	72
Connor Hawkins	–	34-34	–	–	8-10	51
Ja'Kobi Jackson	6	–	–	–	–	36
Bo Jackson	5	–	–	–	–	30
Devin McCuin	2	–	–	–	–	12
Julian Sayin	2	–	–	–	–	12
Nate Roberts	2	–	–	–	–	12
Chris Henry Jr.	2	–	–	–	–	12
Brandon Inniss	1	–	–	–	–	6
Mason Williams	1	–	–	–	–	6
Isaiah West	1	–	–	–	–	6
Legend Bey	1	–	–	–	–	6
Jamir Perez	1	–	–	–	–	6
Cooper Peterson	–	1-1	–	–	–	1
OSU Totals	**36**	**36-36**	**–**	**–**	**8-10**	**275**
OPP Totals	**10**	**6-6**	**-**	**2**	**8-10**	**94**

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Connor Hawkins	4-4	2-2	2-4	0-0	8-10
OSU Totals	**4-4**	**2-2**	**2-4**	**0-0**	**8-10**
OPP Totals	**0-0**	**3-4**	**4-4**	**1-2**	**8-10**

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	19	832	43.8	0	56
OSU Totals	**19**	**832**	**43.8**	**0**	**56**
OPP Totals	**36**	**1514**	**42.1**	**0**	**64**

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jaylen McClain	2	7	3.5	0	7
TJ Alford	1	2	2.0	0	2
Riley Pettijohn	1	8	8.0	0	8
OSU Totals	**4**	**17**	**4.3**	**0**	**8**
OPP Totals	**7**	**123**	**17.6**	**1**	**52**

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Phillip Bell	14	85	6.1	0	31
Brandon Inniss	3	26	8.7	0	16
De'Zie Jones	2	9	4.5	0	9
OSU Totals	**19**	**120**	**6.3**	**0**	**31**
OPP Totals	**5**	**27**	**5.4**	**0**	**13**

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Legend Bey	4	72	18.0	0	29
Devin McCuin	1	20	20.0	0	20
Maxence LeBlanc	1	16	16.0	0	16
Brody Lennon	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	**7**	**108**	**15.4**	**0**	**29**
OPP Totals	**7**	**78**	**11.1**	**0**	**19**

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Earl Little Jr.	15	23	38	0-0	0-0
Payton Pierce	13	24	37	0.5-5	0.5-5
Jaylen McClain	15	17	32	1.0-11	1.0-11
Devin Sanchez	22	6	28	1.0-3	0-0
J. Mathews Jr.	16	11	27	1.5-12	0-0
Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	8	14	22	4.0-28	3.0-27
Riley Pettijohn	10	12	22	4.0-24	2.0-19
Christian Alliegro	7	14	21	1.5-3	0-0
TJ Alford	10	9	19	1.5-3	0-0
Jason Moore	7	11	18	1.5-5	0.5-1
Jay Timmons	12	4	16	1.0-4	0-0
Eddrick Houston	5	9	14	1.5-7	0-0
Qua Russaw	7	7	14	3.5-23	1.0-10
John Walker	6	6	12	0-0	0-0
Will Smith Jr.	6	6	12	2.5-5	0.5-2
Beau Atkinson	3	6	9	1.0-4	0.5-4
Simeon Caldwell	5	4	9	0-0	0-0
James Smith	1	7	8	1.0-5	0-0
Leroy Roker	5	2	7	0-0	0-0
Zion Grady	1	6	7	0-0	0-0
Cam Calhoun	7	-	7	0-0	0-0
Terry Moore	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Cincere Johnson	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Jordan Thomas	3	1	4	0-0	0-0
Braxton Rembert	3	-	3	1.0-1	0-0
Epi Sitanilei	3	-	3	2.0-3	1.0-2
Damari Simeon	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Brenton Jones	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Darryus McKinley	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Jamir Perez	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Ryan Rudzinski	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Dominick Kelly	1	-	1	1.0-4	0-0
Blaine Bradford	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
DeShawn Stewart	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Stanley Jackson Jr.	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Khary Wilder	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
CJ Sanna	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Maxence LeBlanc	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Garrett Stover	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Jeremiah Smith	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Dre Quinn	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	**209**	**210**	**419**	**31-150**	**10-81**
OPP Totals	**256**	**242**	**498**	**36-160**	**15-113**

Fumbles Forced: Timmons (2), K. Jackson Jr., McClain, Pierce.

Fumbles Recovered: Alford, Alliegro, Little Jr., Perez, Pierce, Timmons.

Smith Catch, IU Non-Catch Secure Buckeyes' Win

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Jeremiah Smith ran the wrong route on his biggest play of the game, but everything in the end turned out right for Ohio State when the No. 4 Buckeyes escaped Bloomington, Ind., with a tense 19-15 victory over No. 5 Indiana on Oct. 17.

The superstar receiver was throttled for three quarters, but his 38-yard touchdown catch in the fourth turned out to be the difference before 54,532 fans in Memorial Stadium.

The Hoosiers (6-1, 3-1) had their 22-game winning streak end when a fourth-and-4 pass at the Ohio State 27 was incomplete when Nick Marsh, open by 5 yards, stepped on the left sideline in the end zone while making the catch with 1:02 left in the game.

Ohio State (6-1, 4-0) led 13-7 early in the fourth quarter when, on fourth-and-1, Smith went up between two defenders in the end zone to grab the ball for his 39th career receiving touchdown to tie Michigan's Braylon Edwards for the Big Ten record.

Smith had four catches for 68 yards on eight targets. Julian Sayin was 15 of 29 for 235 yards with two TDs and two interceptions before being injured in the fourth quarter.

He is expected to miss "several weeks," according to coach Ryan Day, but the Buckeyes don't play again until Oct. 31 at Southern California.

Bo Jackson, with Ja'Kobi Jackson unavailable, ran for 56 yards on 18 carries, and Isaiah West carried six times for 45 yards.

Turbulence

The Buckeyes began the first drive at the 25 after the touchback and got a disappointing, from their perspective, three points at the 11:52 mark after driving 67 yards to the 8 as the red-zone problems continued.

After the kickoff, Sayin immediately went to tight end Mason Williams for 17 and 28 yards before Devin McCuin returned from missing one game to make a catch for 16 to the IU 14.

Brandon Inniss made a sideline catch for 6 to the 8, but Bo Jackson was stopped for no yards, and on third down, Sayin had plenty of time but couldn't find anybody and threw the ball away for a moral victory for the Hoosiers when Connor Hawkins made a 26-yard field goal.

Indiana went three-and-out after picking up 4 yards, and a 58-yard punt by Billy Gowers was returned 14 yards by Phillip Bell to the 27.

Jackson ran for 20 on the first snap, but a holding penalty on Carson Hinzman cost the Buckeyes 10 yards. Sayin was then hurried and threw off target to Smith. Jackson ran for 12, and a pass to Inniss at the IU 35 was incomplete.

Joe McGuire's 49-yard punt was downed at the 22. Indiana picked up its initial first down on a 17-yard catch for Charlie Becker. On third-and-4 from the IU 47, Brock Schott hauled in an 8-yarder to the OSU 45 on a play on which defensive tackle Eddrick Houston was injured. Needing 10 yards on third down, Josh Hoover threw incomplete.

SONNY BROCKWAY

FOR THE DEFENSE — Safety Deshawn Stewart (29) goes for a pass breakup against Indiana stalwart receiver Charlie Becker during Ohio State's 19-15 victory. Becker made nine catches for 165 yards but was on the wrong end of the score less than a year after the Hoosiers downed the Buckeyes 13-10 in the Big Ten Championship Game.

A 25-yard punt gave the ball back to OSU at its 20.

Jackson ran for 6 and 10. Sayin threw incompletions twice to McCuin and once to Inniss while Smith was double-teamed and was targeted just once in the game so far. Meanwhile, Sayin had thrown six straight incompletions.

McGuire had a 54-yard punt to the 10 negated by an illegal formation penalty, and he followed with a 50-yarder to the 19.

The Hoosiers moved the chains on a third-down 6-yard run by Hoover. A third-and-3 completion of 4 yards kept the drive alive at the 42 before IU faced a third-and-11 at the start of the second quarter.

OSU had the edge in yards, 95-59, in the first period, and Sayin was 4 of 10 for 67 yards.

Hoover was missing throws as well and overthrew an open Marsh, and the punt went 37 yards to the 22, where Sayin was sacked for 6 yards on the first play before Amare Ferrell intercepted him because he threw into double-coverage. Jamari Sharpe deflected the ball, and Ferrell made the pick at the 30 and returned it 23 yards to the 7.

After Jay Timmons broke up a pass to Becker, Turbo Richard rushed for the TD to make it 7-3 at 13:54.

Legend Bey made his first appearance, and he ran for 3 and lost 3. Smith then got his first catch of 13 yards for a first down at the 38 upon surviving a review. Sayin went deep to Smith at the 19, but it was underthrown as he was hurried again, and it was broken up by Preston Zachman.

After Bey ran for 6, Sayin missed Chris Henry Jr. on a communication breakdown, and McGuire punted 36 yards to the 20.

A third-and-2 pass play of 13 yards to Davion Chandler moved the ball to the 41. Two plays later, Becker's catch went for 16, and Richard ran for 6 to the OSU 37. Another third-down catch of 19 yards to Marsh put the ball on the 18. Lee Beebe Jr. rushed for 3 and 1 to set up third down again, but this time, Payton Pierce knocked down an underthrown ball to Richard at the 3.

The Buckeyes then got the break they had been looking for when Nico Radicic's 32-yard field-goal attempt hit the left upright with 5:11 left in the half.

It took a while, but the Buckeyes went 80 yards in 15 plays – seven from 11 yards and in – and took 5:04 off the clock for a 10-7 lead with seven seconds left on a 2-yard catch by Jackson.

On third-and-6 from the OSU 24 at the start of the drive, Henry made a catch of 21 yards to the 45 along the left sideline. Indiana unsuccessfully challenged that his left foot was out of bounds. Jackson rushed up the middle for 5 yards on third down to move the chains to the IU 43, but the offensive line leaked again, and Sayin was sacked for 10 yards with 2:00 left.

But he came back with a 30-yard throw to Henry to the 23, and a roughing-the-passer infraction moved the ball to the 11. Smith caught a bubble screen and raced 7 yards on first down. Jackson bulled his way for 2 yards. After a measurement, a first down was given at the 1, but a review moved the ball back to the 2, setting up third-and-1.

Jackson then went left in a rugby scrum and barely got the first down at the 1 with 29 seconds left. Jackson lost a yard to the right, and OSU took its second timeout with 22 ticks remaining. Sayin rolled right and threw incomplete in the end zone to an open Max LeBlanc.

Jackson then gained nothing on third down with 10 seconds to go. As was pointed out on the FOX broadcast, Smith was not on the field the previous four snaps to at least be a decoy.

Finally, he was lined up to the left and took two defenders toward the middle, leaving Jackson all by himself for the 2-yard TD catch.

The Buckeyes scored in the final 15 seconds of the half for the sixth time in seven games this season. The lone exception was a touchdown against Maryland in the Oct. 10 game with 24 seconds to go.

The Buckeyes in the first half totaled 176 yards, 29 rushing, while IU gained 138 (61 rushing). Sayin was 10 of 21 for 147 yards, a pick and a TD. Henry had two catches for 51 yards, Williams two for 45 and Smith 2 for 20 off five targets. Hoover was 6 for 15 for 77 yards.

Nail-biter

Indiana started the second half at the 25, and Richard ran for 1 before Chandler made a catch at the 44, but Timmons punched the ball away, and Earl Little Jr. recovered it at the 45. However, the Buckeyes could not take full advantage and relied on a 29-yard field goal by Hawkins to go ahead 13-7 at 11:51.

It was Indiana's first fumble lost on a play from scrimmage in 1,347 snaps.

The OSU drive started well with passes of 18 to Nate Roberts and 10 to Smith to the 17. Sayin kept the ball and gained 5, Jackson carried for 1, but a pass to Inniss in the end zone was broken up by Sharpe to set up the three-pointer.

A third-and-4 pass of 36 yards to Becker got the ball to the 33. On third-and-10, Shazz Preston hauled in a 6-yarder to set up fourth down at the 27. Boom. Jaylen McClain blitzed and sacked Hoover for 11 yards, forcing a fumble which TJ Alford recovered at the OSU 38.

Isaiah West carried for 12 and 3, Jackson ran for 6, and Sayin picked up a first with a 3-yard run. After an incompletion, a false start on Hinzman moved the ball back to the 43. Sayin then was intercepted for the second time by Ferrell at the IU 17 on a high pass intended for Smith.

Becker on second down had a 16-yard catch. On the next play, Hoover ran for 8 but left the game for a snap after landing on his right shoulder. A Beebe run netted zero before Hoover's pass to Tyler Morris gained 16 to the OSU 41.

Looking at a fourth-and-6 from the 37, IU called a timeout before a Radicic 55-yarder was short. His previous best was 49 yards.

The defensive stand proved pivotal because Smith pulled in the 38-yard TD pass to make it 19-7 after a failed two-pointer with 12:46 left in the game. The drive was seven plays for 62 yards and used 4:10.

OSU took over at its 38. Jackson ran for 1, but a pitch to Smith in the backfield went for just 2. Sayin hung in the pocket under pressure and threw 12 yards to Bell and a first at the IU 47 on his seventh catch of the

season to end the third quarter.

Jackson began the fourth period with 4, 2 and 3 yards. On fourth-and-1, Sayin went for it all and was rewarded. He threw into the end zone where Smith made the difficult look easy. A run by Jackson for two points failed.

"I actually ran the wrong route," Smith said. "But Julian trusted me once again, and I made the play."

Prior to the catch, he had three receptions for 30 yards. It would be his last.

Indiana, which had trailed Nebraska 17-6 in the fourth quarter before rallying for a 20-17 win in its previous game, started the comeback with a 19-yard pass to Marsh and catches of 14 and 21 to Becker to the OSU 21.

Three plays later, Marsh, who had the two late TD catches to beat Nebraska, was at it again with a 19-yard reception followed by a two-point pass to Richard to make it 19-15 with 10:30 left.

Indiana needed only 2:16 to go the 75 yards in seven plays.

The Buckeyes turned to West for a 10-yard catch and runs of 5 and 22 to the IU 38, but it turned bad quickly when Sayin was sacked for 18 yards and fumbled. However, offensive lineman Phillip Daniels recovered it at the OSU 44.

Sayin left with an injury and freshman Luke Fahey came in. He took off on an 8-yard run, and 15 yards were tacked on for a personal foul on Isaiah Jones for hitting Fahey on the ground, putting the ball at the IU 33.

West ran for 2 and Jackson had no gain before a holding call gave the Buckeyes third-and-18 from the 41 before an incompletion to Inniss.

McGuire punted 35 yards to the 6 with 5:23 left, and Hoover passed 10 yards to Morris, followed by three incompletions.

A 49-yard punt and Bell's 5-yard return started the drive at the OSU 40. West ran for 1. Then there was a false start on Gabe VanSickle and an intentional grounding resulting in a loss of 10 for a third-and-24 at the 26. Fahey threw to Bey for a screen that was incomplete, and the punt of 52 yards was returned by Becker for 8 yards to the IU 30 with 3:06 left.

On second down, Becker made a great catch in double coverage for 25 yards to the OSU 43. After an incompletion, IU had a false start.

Hoover threw incomplete, but Jermaine Mathews Jr. was called for roughing the passer, and the play was reviewed for targeting but not enforced with 2:00 left.

From the 33, an incompletion was followed by an Indiana holding, moving the Hoosiers to the OSU 43.

Becker got 16 back on a catch, and Hoover scrambled out of the pocket for no gain on a tackle by Beau Atkinson.

With a fourth-and-4 from the 27, Marsh was wide open but didn't stay in bounds, and the Buckeyes took over at the 27.

Two Fahey kneel-downs lost 3 yards, but the Buckeyes didn't care because their first top-10 win in their last four tries, including a 13-10 loss to Indiana in the 2025 Big Ten Championship Game, was secured.

Notes

Ohio State gained 313 yards (235 passing, 78 rushing on a 2.1 average per carry. Indiana totaled 369 yards (296 passing, 73 penalties were for 50 yards; Indiana was penalized four times for 42 yards. ... The Buckeyes went 6 of 15 on third down compared to 8 of 16 for IU while OSU was 2 for 2 on fourth down and the Hoosiers 0 for 2. ... OSU had a sack for 11 yards. Indiana had four for 44. ... Fahey was 0 for 2 and ran twice for minus-2. ... Henry (51 yards), Williams (45) and McCuin (23) each had two catches. Hoover completed 20 of 40 for 296 yards. Becker made nine catches for 165 yards. ... Little led the Buckeyes with eight tackles (two solo).

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (5-1, 3-0)

Sept. 5 BALL STATE, W 56-3; **12** at Texas, L 24-23; **19** KENT STATE, W 59-3; **26** ILLINOIS, W 42-19.

Oct. 3 at Iowa, W 31-14; **10** MARYLAND, W 45-16; **17** at Indiana, W 19-15; **31** at USC.

Nov. 7 OREGON; **14** NORTHWESTERN; **21** at Nebraska; **28** MICHIGAN.

CROSS COUNTRY

Sept. 4 Mike Baumer Cross Country Classic at Wright State, men 1st/9; women 1st/13; **11** Spartan Invite at Michigan State, men 3rd/23; women 6th/24.

Oct. 16 Arturo Barrios Invitational at Texas A&M; **30** Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wis.

Nov. 13 NCAA Regional Championships at East Lansing, Mich.; **21** NCAA Championships at Terre Haute, Ind.

FIELD HOCKEY (4-10, 0-6)

Aug. 14 at Ohio (Exh.); **20** at Miami (Ohio) (Exh.); **22** MICHIGAN (Exh.); **28** OLD DOMINION, L 3-2; **30** BELLARMINE, W 2-0.

Sept. 4 Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Piscataway, N.J., vs. Syracuse, L 3-2; **6** Big Ten/ACC Challenge at Piscataway, N.J., vs. Virginia, W 2-1; **11** DELAWARE, W 4-3 SO; **13** CORNELL, W 2-0; **20** BOSTON COLLEGE, L 3-2; **25** at Iowa, L 4-1; **27** at Iowa, L 3-2.

Oct. 2 NORTHWESTERN, L 5-0; **4** INDIANA, L 2-1; **9** RUTGERS, L 3-2; **16** at Penn State, L 4-3 SO; **18** at Maryland, L 4-0; **23** MICHIGAN STATE; **25** at Kent State; **30** at Michigan.

Nov. 5-8 BIG TEN TOURNAMENT; **13-22** NCAA Tournament at TBA.

MEN'S GOLF

Sept. 7-9 Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 6th/14; **13-15** Inverness Invitational at Toledo, 5th/18.

Oct. 5-6 Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio, 1st/4; **17-19** Fallen Oak Collegiate at Saucier, Miss.; **26-27** Cal Poly Collegiate at Carmel, Calif

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WOMEN'S GOLF

Aug. 31 Roseann Schwartz Invitational at Hermitage, Pa., 1st/11.

Sept. 7-9 Folds of Honor Collegiate at Grand Haven, Mich., 6th/12; **14** Toledo Rocket Mortgage (Individuals) at Toledo, NTS.

Oct. 5-6 Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio, 1st/4; **12-13** Haskins Women's Intercollegiate at Columbus, Ga., 3rd/13; **19-20** Dayton Flyer Invitaitonal (Individuals) at Dayton.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (2-2-0)

Oct. 9-10 at RPI, L 3-0; W 3-2; **16-17** at Sacred Heart, L 5-3; W 5-1 **23-24** AUGUSTANA; **31** MICHIGAN.

Nov. 1 MICHIGAN; **13-14** at Wisconsin; **20-21** NOTRE DAME; **27-28** at Union.

Dec. 3-4 MICHIGAN STATE; **11-12** UCONN.

Jan. 8-9 at Penn State; **15-16** MINNESOTA; **22-23** at Michigan; **29-30** WISCONSIN.

Feb. 5-6 at Notre Dame; **19-20** at Minnesota; **26-27** PENN STATE.

March 4-5 at Michigan State.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (7-1-0, 5-1-0)

Sept. 24-25 at Penn State, W 2-1(OT); W 2-1.

Oct. 2-3 at St. Thomas, W 5-2; W 5-2; **9-10** WISCONSIN, W 2-1; W 5-3; **16-17** at Minnesota, L 6-2; W 6-5; **23-24** COLGATE; **30-31** BEMIDJI STATE.

Nov. 13-14 MINNESOTA DULUTH; **20-21** at St. Cloud State.

Dec. 4-5 MINNESOTA STATE.

Jan. 1-2 at Yale; **8-9** at Minnesota Duluth; **15-16** at Bemidji State; **22-23** MINNESOTA; **29-30** at Minnesota State.

Feb. 5-6 ST. CLOUD STATE; **12-13** ST. THOMAS; **19** at Wisconsin; **20** at Wisconsin at Green Bay, Wis.; **26-28** WCHA First Round at TBD.

MEN'S SOCCER (6-4-2, 1-4-1)

Aug. 7 WRIGHT STATE (Exh.); **11** IU INDY (Exh.); **15** INDIANAPOLIS (Exh.); **20** VIRGINIA TECH, W 1-0; **24** DEPAUL, W 6-0; **28** MEMPHIS, W 2-0.

Sept. 3 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 5-0; **8** at Kentucky, W 4-1; **11** at Wisconsin, T 1-1; **18** RUTGERS, L 2-1; **21** WASHINGTON, L 4-0; **25** at George Mason, T 1-1.

Oct. 2 at Penn State, W 2-1; **10** at UCLA, L 2-1; **16** MICHIGAN STATE, L 3-2; **20** INDIANA; **24** at Maryland; **30** NORTHWESTERN.

Nov. 4 at Michigan.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (12-1-1, 8-1-0)

Aug. 5 WEST VIRGINIA (Exh.); **8** at Louisville (Exh.); **16** at Clemson, T 0-0; **20** KANSAS, W 1-0; **27** KENTUCKY, W 2-1.

Sept. 3 PRINCETON, W 4-0; **6** MEMPHIS, W, 3-1; **10** PENN STATE, W 1-0; **13** at Indiana, W 3-0; **17** at UCLA, L 1-0; **24** USC, W 2-0; **27** IOWA, W 3-1.

Oct. 3 NORTHWESTERN, W 3-0; **8** at Wisconsin, W 3-2; **11** at Minnesota, W 2-0; **18** at Purdue, W 2-1; **22** RUTGERS; **25** ILLINOIS; **30** at Michigan.

MEN'S SWIM AND DIVE

Sept. 24 College Swimming League: Match 1 at Westmont, Ill., 4th/4.

Oct. 2 College Swimming League: Match 3 at Palo Alto, Calif., 4th/4; **9** SCARLET VS. GRAY INTRASQUAD; **10** ALUMNI MEET; **16-17** Zips Classic at Akron, 1st/5.

Nov. 6 at Kentucky; **17-20** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL.

Jan. 9 KENYON; **16** at Michigan; **29-30** OHIO STATE WINTER CLASSIC.

Feb. 24-27 Big Ten Championships.

March 7 LAST CHANCE MEET; **8-10** NCAA Zone Diving Championships at West Lafayette, Ind.; **11-13** CSCAA National Invitational Championship at Ocala, Fla.; **25-28** NCAA Championships at Austin, Texas.

WOMEN'S SWIM AND DIVE

Sept. 24 College Swimming League: Match 1 at Westmont, Ill., 4th/4.

Oct. 2 College Swimming League: Match 3 at Alto, Calif., 4th/4; **9** SCARLET VS. GRAY INTRASQUAD; **10** ALUMNI MEET; **16-17** Zips Classic at Akron, 1st/5.

Nov. 6 at Kentucky; **17-20** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL.

Jan. 9 KENYON; **16** at Michigan; **29-30** OHIO STATE WINTER CLASSIC.

Feb. 17-20 Big Ten Championships; **28** LAST CHANCE MEET.

March 8-10 NCAA Zone Diving Championships at West Lafayette, Ind.; **11-13** CSCAA National Invitational Championship at Ocala, Fla.; **18-21** NCAA Championships at Austin, Texas.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (10-8, 3-5)

Aug. 28 JIM STONE CHALLENGE vs. BOWLING GREEN, L 3-1; **29** JIM STONE CHALLENGE vs. FRESNO STATE, W 3-0; **30** JIM STONE CHALLENGE vs. NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-1.

Sept. 2 Big Ten/SEC Challenge at Norman, Okla., vs. Ole Miss, L 3-1; **3** Big Ten/SEC Challenge at Norman, Okla., vs. Oklahoma;, L 3-2; **11** SPORTS IMPORTS CLASSIC vs. WINTHROP, W 3-2; **12** SPORTS IMPORTS CLASSIC vs. SOUTHERN INDIANA, W 3-1; **13** SPORTS IMPORTS CLASSIC vs. YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 3-2; **18-19** at Virginia, W 3-2, W 3-0; **25** at Iowa, W 3-1; **26** at Nebraska, L 3-0.

Oct. 1 RUTGERS, L 3-0; **3** at Northwestern, W 3-1; **9** WASHINGTON, L 3-0; **11** MINNESOTA, L 3-0; **16** at USC, W 3-2; **18** at UCLA, L 3-2; **23** INDIANA; **24** OREGON; **29** at Penn State.

Nov. 1 at Illinois; **4** PURDUE; **7** at Michigan State; **11** at Michigan; **13** WISCONSIN; **17** MARYLAND.

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Receivers Room Leads Ohio State Offense

By SAM CIPRIANI
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After replacing eight offensive starters last season, Ohio State entered 2026 with significantly more continuity. The Buckeyes returned their starting quarterback, running back, two receivers and four offensive linemen to establish a veteran foundation in the offense.

Under new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith, whom Ohio State hired away from the Pittsburgh Steelers in late January to establish a more balanced attack, the Buckeye offense has developed into one of the nation's most productive units. Through six games, Ohio State ranked among the nation's top 10 in several key offensive categories, featuring a high-flying passing attack.

Led by Julian Sayin and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, the top Heisman Trophy candidate halfway through the regular season, the Buckeyes ranked fourth in the FBS with 337.8 passing yards per game. Sayin's 17 touchdown passes were tied for third nationally.

Ohio State's ground game still had room to improve, averaging 165.7 rushing yards per game, which ranked 60th nationally. Overall, Ohio State had averaged 42.7 points and 503.5 yards per game through its first six contests. Those marks ranked seventh and eighth nationally, respectively.

Despite the offense's statistical success, Ohio State's performance against Maryland exposed areas that needed improvement. The Buckeyes' starting offense had largely protected the football throughout the first five games of the season, with its only turnover coming on Sayin's Hail Mary attempt against Texas. However, Ohio State turned the ball over twice against the Terps, with Sayin and the passing offense stumbling to their lowest passing yardage total of the season at just 242 yards.

Following Ohio State's 45-16 win over Maryland on Oct. 10, head coach Ryan Day emphasized the need for the offense to improve its execution as the Buckeyes entered the second half of the season.

"The turnovers, we can't have that happen," Day said. "It comes back down to the coaches. It starts with me, and we have to do a better job holding everybody accountable and make sure that doesn't happen again."

With that in mind, Buckeye Sports Bulletin graded each of Ohio State's offensive position groups at the midway point of the regular season. The grades do not include the Buckeyes' 19-15 win over Indiana on Oct. 17.

Quarterbacks

In his second year at the helm of Ohio State's offense, Sayin has looked like an improved version of his 2025 form.

Throughout the offseason, Day and the Buckeye coaching staff tasked Sayin with becoming more comfortable running the football, and the quarterback had answered the call through the first six games.

The 2025 Big Ten Freshman of the Year took just 42 carries for minus-44 yards and no rushing touchdowns last season. Sayin had already taken 32 carries for 17 yards and two touchdowns through six games.

His improvements were best on display in the Sept. 26 win over Illinois when he ran seven times for 29 yards and a 7-yard score.

"One of our jobs as coaches is to challenge. Coaches challenge coaches, coaches challenge players, sometimes players will challenge the coaches, and I like when that happens," Day said after the win over the Illini. "We challenged Julian this past week, and I thought he responded."

While Sayin's ability to step up and create with his legs has certainly improved, he had continued to be the ultra-accurate quarterback he was a year ago.

Sayin had once again completed over 70 percent of his passes (71.2), while throwing for 1,772 yards and 17 touchdowns to just two interceptions. He ranked fifth nationally with 295.3 passing yards per game.

Sayin had thrown for three passing touchdowns in four of the Buckeyes' six contests, including a five-total-touchdown (four rushing, one passing) performance against Illinois, where his 367 passing yards were just 26 off a career high.

Luke Fahey

However, some have questioned Sayin's ability to distribute the ball to other pass catchers outside of Jeremiah Smith.

While last year Sayin spread the ball out more evenly between Smith and NFL draftees Carnell Tate and Max Klare, the star wideout had accounted for 51.6 percent of Sayin's passing yards in 2026. The Buckeyes' second-leading receiver, Devin McCuin, had 245 receiving yards (13.8 percent).

Ohio State's backups behind Sayin hadn't looked too shabby either. To the surprise of many, three-star freshman Luke Fahey jumped five-star recruit Tavien St. Clair as the Buckeyes' second-string quarterback.

Fahey had completed 9 of 11 passes for 203 yards and two touchdowns, but both of Fahey's incompletions were interceptions. St. Clair, on the other hand, had thrown just seven passes, completing five for 52 yards, one touchdown and one interception.

BSB Midterm Grade: A-

Running Backs

Ohio State's running back room entered the 2026 season with several question marks.

Although the Buckeyes returned sophomore Bo Jackson, who rushed for over 1,000 yards last season as a freshman, and fellow sophomore Isaiah West, it remained to be seen whether the young tandem would take the next step.

But through the first six games, neither had locked down the role of Ohio State's feature back.

Bo Jackson led the Buckeyes with 89 carries for 460 yards, but Ja'Kobi Jackson had been the more efficient back. The Florida transfer had rushed 59 times for 354 yards, a 6.0 yards-per-carry average, besting Bo Jackson's 5.2. Ja'Kobi also had a team-high six rushing touchdowns, while Bo Jackson had four.

Day drew comparisons between the Jackson duo and Ohio State's 2024 backfield, when TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins each rushed for more than 1,000 yards during the Buckeyes' national championship run.

"I think everybody needs to feel pressure, and everybody needs to feel competition," Day said. "And we're challenging a lot of different people, and it's a good thing. When Quinshon and TreVeyon were working together, they were challenging each other every day. I think Quinshon really helped TreVeyon in a lot of ways, and I think vice versa. It's the same thing here. Ja'Kobi's coming in, and I think he's pushing Bo, but it's a great relationship. And I think it's a healthy relationship, and I think it's a healthy competition."

Despite both backs averaging more than 5.0 yards per carry, Ohio State's ground game had lacked consistency, particularly when it comes to generating explosive plays.

The Jacksons each broke off long runs of 65 and 49 yards, respectively, in Ohio State's season opener against Ball State. However, the Buckeyes struggled to replicate that explosiveness since.

Following less productive outings against Kent State and Illinois, Day challenged Ohio State's running backs to run with greater physicality and aggressiveness. The message appeared to resonate in the Buckeyes' 31-14 victory over Iowa, as both Jacksons rushed for 70-plus yards and helped the Buckeyes close out the victory with a 16-play, 55-yard drive that consumed 9:30.

"They ran downhill and they got physical," Day said of the run game against Iowa. "Our running game right now, when you look at the efficiency, is solid. But we want to be more explosive still. We want to create bigger runs."

After the Ball State win on Sept. 5, Ohio State's two lead backs didn't rush for a gain of over 20 yards until Bo Jackson reeled off a carry of 25 yards vs. Maryland.

Against the Terps, Bo looked to return to form from some of his 2025 flashes, becoming the first Buckeye running back this season to breach the century mark with 23 carries for 107 yards and two scores.

While the Jacksons had helped stabilize Ohio State's ground game, the Buckeyes have received less production from the rest of their running back room.

Freshman Legend Bey has shown flashes of potential but was still adjusting to the running back position after transitioning from high school quarterback. Bey had rushed 12 times for 50 yards while adding two receptions for 37 yards, including a 25-yard touchdown against the Cardinals in the opener.

BSB Midterm Grade: B-

Wide Receivers

Ohio State's wide receiver room has largely been the "Jeremiah Smith Show" in 2026, but the Buckeyes' depth at the position has shown promise as well in the first season under new receiver coach Cortez Hankton.

Despite bringing in a pair of talented transfers and a freshman, the junior wideout still had been one of the best wideouts in the country, totaling 48 catches for 916 yards and 11 touchdowns for an outstanding 152.7 yards per game.

Smith ranked second in the FBS behind only Oregon State's Jesse Legree in receiving yards, touchdowns and receiving yards per game.

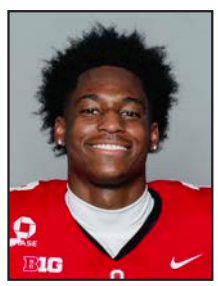
During the first half, Smith became Ohio State's all-time leader in receptions, receiving yards and touchdowns, completing the program's receiving triple crown while emerging as the Heisman Trophy favorite.

Sayin emphasized Smith's work ethic off the field and in practice as what's fueled his hopeful Heisman campaign.

"He's just a special player, but he's somebody who we see every day in practice," Sayin said. "We see how hard he works, and we see the things that he does. Everybody is not super surprised when he makes big-time plays on Saturdays because we know how hard he works."

The rest of Ohio State's receiving corps hadn't commanded nearly as many targets as Smith but had mostly been able to produce when needed.

UTSA transfer senior McCuin hauled in 17 passes for 245 yards and two touchdowns in five games, sitting out against Maryland with an injury. Fellow senior Brandon Inniss followed close behind with 10 catches for 147 yards and a score.


Devin McCuin

A pair of freshmen had also made an impact for Ohio State. Five-star recruit Chris Henry Jr. turned four receptions into 151 yards and two touchdowns, averaging 37.8 yards per catch. Brock Boyd added six receptions for 110 yards.

Day expressed confidence in the young receivers' contributions beyond the stat sheet, adding that he expected both to become more involved in the passing game moving forward.

"I think physically you're seeing them play well," Day said on Oct. 7. "Blocking, Iowa's got some physical guys, and they were mixing it up with them. They're playing with confidence. I could see them getting more and more opportunities in the passing game. It's going to happen."

LSU transfer Kyle Parker was also ex-

Rating The Offense

Here is where the OSU offense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Maryland game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Offense	165.7	60th	6th
Passing Offense	337.8	4th	1st
Total Offense	503.5	8th	1st
Scoring Offense	42.7	7th	1st
Turnovers Lost	6	T-50th	9th
Third-Down Conv.	.452	T-40th	5th

pected to make an early impact but missed Ohio State's first five games with an injury before he debuted with one catch for 16 yards against Maryland. With Parker out, sophomore Phillip Bell earned reps in his place, taking six catches for 72 yards.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

Tight Ends

After bringing in two tight ends in the transfer portal and a year under the belt of sophomore Nate Roberts, the tight end room was expected to take similar form to the year prior.

Last season, Ohio State rotated primarily between a pair of transfers in Will Kacmarek and Max Klare, with Klare working as a third-option receiving threat and the former being regularly recognized as Ohio State's best blocking tight end.

But this season Ohio State's tight ends had taken a significant step back, both in blocking and pass catching. Ohio State's tight ends caught just 19 passes for 217 yards and three touchdowns. Roberts has the majority of that production, catching 10 passes for 160 yards and two scores.

Before Ohio State's matchup with Iowa, Arthur Smith mentioned Roberts' development, pointing to his touchdown against Kent State as an opportunity that the young tight end seized to earn greater trust within the offense.

"The guy is continuing to work. Nate's a young player, and with the season Jeremiah has had, sometimes it can overshadow, but that's why you keep working," Smith said. "Sometimes you just need one to go through the hoop. He scores the week before and makes a heck of a play in a 'gotta have it' situation. To me, that is how you build trust."

Ohio State's other tight ends had offered mixed results. Ohio transfer Mason Williams had shown some effectiveness as a blocker and contributed five receptions for 37 yards and a touchdown that came against Maryland.

Meanwhile, Northwestern transfer Hunter Welcing had yet to make a meaningful impact despite entering the season as the No. 10 tight end in the transfer portal and a member of the preseason Mackey Award watch list. He had recorded just one reception for 4 yards.

Fifth-year Bennett Christian had remained a reliable blocker but has yet to record a reception. Junior Maxence LeBlanc, with two catches for 12 yards, and sophomore Brody Lennon, with one catch for 4 yards, had also seen opportunities.

The unit's limited production was disappointing given Ohio State's frequent use of multiple-tight-end sets. The Buckeyes have even used offensive lineman Jake Cook as an extra blocker in Bison packages while searching for answers to their inconsistent run game.

Still, the unit showed signs of improvement against Maryland, with Roberts and Williams each catching touchdown passes. The performance offered a glimpse of the tight ends' potential to become more than an extension of Ohio State's rushing attack as the Buckeyes enter the second half of the season.

"That's just momentum, especially going into a big game like (Indiana). Just knowing that we can execute like that and showing other teams that we're a threat," Roberts said after the Maryland game. "We're not just going to be run-blocking tight ends. We're a threat in the pass game. Obviously, there were other routes that we could have executed and popped out a little bit more. But those catches from me and Mason were definitely great momentum swings, especially going into the end of the second half of the season."

BSB Midterm Grade: C+

Offensive Line

Ohio State's offensive line entered the 2026 season as one of the Buckeyes' more experienced units, giving offensive line coach Tyler Bowen and the coaching staff reason to believe it would be a relative strength. But multiple crucial injuries and inconsistent performances have hindered Ohio State's offensive front.

Ohio State returned four starters from last season's line, on which Austin Siereveld played left tackle, Luke Montgomery left guard, Carson Hinzman center and Phillip Daniels right tackle. However, the coaching staff quickly moved Siereveld from left tackle to right guard to make room for junior Ian Moore at left tackle.

Before the season, Day praised the new veteran interior trio of Siereveld, Hinzman and Montgomery, saying the group had been "walking on water" in fall camp. The early returns, however, were less convincing, as the Buckeyes surrendered two sacks and six tackles for loss against Ball State in the season opener.

The instability only worsened during Ohio State's loss to Texas, when Daniels suffered an injury that forced reserve guard Gabe VanSickle into the lineup and pushed Siereveld to right tackle for the first time in his career.

The lack of continuity has been particularly evident in pass protection. Sayin has been sacked 11 times in six games, an average of 1.83 per contest that was tied for 75th nationally. In comparison, Sayin was sacked just six times throughout the 2025 regular season and 16 times all of last year. Illinois was the only opponent Ohio State had kept from sacking Sayin through six games.

Montgomery said after the OSU win over Iowa that he understands the Buckeyes still have room to grow as a unit.

"It's improved for sure. Obviously, we've got to get better if we're being really critical about ourselves, and we've got to fix some things," Montgomery said. "(The running backs are) finding their identity right now, and they're getting a lot better, and so are we as an offensive line. We're all starting to mesh more together. And guys are really understanding schemes and stuff like that. Overall, it's been great."

Another absence further complicated matters, with Siereveld missing the Maryland game with an illness, forcing Cook to start at right guard and VanSickle to shift to right tackle. The constant shuffling has made consistency difficult to find. Ohio State allowed two sacks and six tackles for loss in the win.

BSB Midterm Grade: B

OSU Defense Rebounds From Slow Start

By BOBBY GORBETT
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the past two years, Ohio State has had a pretty simple formula on defense: rebuild and reload. After replacing eight starters, the 2025 Ohio State defense was somehow even better than an elite 2024 unit that led the Buckeyes to the national championship. Allowing just 9.3 points per game, Ohio State's historically great defense was perhaps the biggest reason the team went 12-0 in the regular season for the first time since 2019.

This year, defensive coordinator Matt Patricia was tasked with a similar rebuild. Losing key pieces from last year's unit, including safety Caleb Downs, linebackers Arvell Reese and Sonny Styles, defensive tackle Kayden McDonald, and many others, Patricia hasn't quite been able to achieve the same success as last year but still has one of the better units in the country.

Through six games, the Buckeyes ranked No. 5 nationally in total defense, allowing just 246.8 yards per game, and No. 8 in the country in scoring defense, allowing 13.2 points per game.

The Buckeyes' defense isn't perfect. That much was made obvious in a 42-19 win over Illinois, when the defense allowed 462 total yards, the most a Patricia-led Ohio State defense has ever given up. Although the secondary was also poor, it was the front seven that was really exposed. The Fighting Illini rushed for 199 yards in that game and were able to pop several explosive runs.

In the days that followed that game, the defense's opinion of that performance was summed up well by fifth-year defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr.

"It wasn't acceptable," Jackson said. "Two hundred rushing yards is terrible."

Of course, the issues the Buckeyes had in that game didn't prevent them from beating Illinois, but in the fourth quarter of a 24-23 loss to Texas in week 2, it was the defense's issues that held the team back from emerging victorious.

Against the Longhorns, Ohio State allowed three long second-half touchdown drives to concede a 20-point lead.

Still, the Buckeyes have improved defensively as the season has progressed. After the ugly performance against Illinois, Ohio State stifled Iowa's offense in a 31-14 win. It was a similarly impressive performance by the defense in a 45-16 win over Maryland on Oct. 10. The Buckeyes allowed just one offensive touchdown in that game and 146 yards of total offense.

"You saw our team play with great passion, and energy, and confidence today on the road in that type of environment," head coach Ryan Day said when asked about the defense's performance in the 17-point win over the Hawkeyes. "That was a huge step for this group in the right direction collectively. There's no question that replacing those guys doesn't just happen overnight. Figuring out what's right for this group is part of the process.

"Watching the film will allow us an opportunity to have a little bit more information to say, 'All right, here's where we think we can go,' and then we have to make the next best decision on what the next step for this group is because we have to continue to upgrade. Making sure that we're staying ahead of things. The good thing is, in the first half of the season so far, we've played in two good road environments. We've had some things we need to get better at, but I think we answered some questions today."

With all of that in mind, BSB graded each defensive position at the midway point of the regular season. The 19-15 win over Indiana on Oct. 17 is not included in the grades.

Rating The Defense

Here is where the OSU defense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Maryland game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Defense	96.2	21st	6th
Passing Defense	150.7	8th	3rd
Total Defense	246.8	5th	2nd
Scoring Defense	13.2	8th	2nd
Sacks/Game	1.5	T-101st	12th
Third-Down Def.	.361	T-64th	12th

Defensive Line

In the last two years, Ohio State replaced seven starters from its defensive line, and early on in the season, it really started to show. Through its first four games, Ohio State's front four had just seven sacks, and the defensive line was at least somewhat to blame for the issues in stopping the run.

That difficult stretch led to a call for action of sorts from Day.

"We need production for sure, so we're taking all applications," Day said. "It's everybody's job in the building, coaches and players, to make sure that we're putting guys in a situation to be successful."

Although Day said Ohio State was taking all applications in late September at defensive line, the week one starters are the ones who have turned the tide most recently. In his last three games before Indiana, Jackson had two sacks, including a key strip-sack that led to an early touchdown in the Buckeyes' win over Iowa.

Junior defensive tackle Eddrick Houston has also responded to Day's challenge. After a very cold start to the season, which led to other players being rotated in at his position, Houston has seemed to find some consistency.

Houston had a season-high total of four tackles in the Buckeyes' win over Iowa, and then in the win over Maryland, he registered four tackles, including 1½ for loss.

"There's been really good play there," Day said of Houston's performances against Iowa and Maryland. "He's gaining more and more confidence, and so now the question for Eddrick is can he sustain it now after having some success? You've seen him struggle with some things and overcome that. What a great sign for a young player who is now maturing to go through a little bit of adversity and then come out the back end.

"That's the part of (retention) that you just love – to see the growth of some guys. Now he's taking the next step, and he's playing with really a ton of confidence. Now, how can we make sure that we're staying focused and we're playing consistently? I'm excited about how he's playing."

FILE PHOTO

REBUILD? NO, RELOAD — For the second consecutive season, defensive coordinator Matt Patricia had to replace eight starters, but the 2026 version held its own through six games with the exception of the fourth quarter against Texas. Players such as defensive tackle Eddrick Houston (96) and linebackers Payton Pierce (26) and Riley Pettijohn (5) have stepped up their play.

Like Houston, fellow starting defensive tackle John Walker seems to be finding his stride of late. The transfer from UCF didn't register a tackle against the Hawkeyes but was able to get in the backfield, finishing the game with a pair of quarterback hurries. Both Walker and Houston came under fire for the defense's struggles to stop the run against Illinois but had a mentality change of sorts, allowing the rest of the defense to function.

When asked after the Illinois game why Ohio State struggled to stop the run, Jackson indicated that too many players were trying to play hero ball rather than staying in their gaps. Houston may have been one of the players guilty of trying to play hero ball, because he said that as part of his mindset shift, he's focused on closing pockets to let others on the defense make plays.

Sophomore linebacker TJ Alford is certainly a fan of the new approach.

"It's great," Alford said when asked about the defensive tackles' new mindset. "They changed their mindset. They're putting their hands on people, setting the line of scrimmage back. It really allows us to roam around, make the tackles when they don't make the tackles."

The other defensive end spot opposite Jackson has been a rotation for pretty much the entire year. Sophomore Zion Grady started in Ohio State's first game against Ball State, but he's struggled with injuries, paving the way for Alabama transfer Qua Russaw to earn some playing time.

Russaw, who also dealt with injuries to start the season, had 13 total tackles, including 3½ for loss and one sack in five games played.

The Buckeyes ranked just 101st nationally, averaging only 1.5 sacks per game, so there's still room to grow in that area, but they were also No. 21 in the country, allowing just 96.2 rushing yards per game.

Like every other position group, the Buckeyes have rotated in plenty of players along the defensive line. Interior defensive linemen Jason Moore, Will Smith Jr. and James Smith have all made an impact. Of that trio, Moore led the way with 12 total tackles. He and Smith Jr. combined for a sack in the Buckeyes' 59-3 win over Kent State.

Grady returned from injury to make four tackles against the Hawkeyes and then recorded two tackles in Ohio State's win over Maryland. Former North Carolina transfer Beau Atkinson was thought to be a potential key contributor before the season after he had an impressive spring. Atkinson hasn't quite lived up to those expectations, but he'd still totaled eight tackles and a half sack.

BSB Midterm grade: B-

Linebackers

Last year there was no mistaking the identity of Ohio State's two best linebackers. Not only were Reese and Styles the two best Buckeye linebackers, but they were also two of the better players in the country. The same cannot be said for this year's group.

Although senior Christian Alliegro and junior Payton Pierce have started every game they've been available – Alliegro was out with an injury against Maryland – it has been a four-man rotation at linebacker. As

important to Ohio State's linebacker room as Pierce and Alliegro are sophomores Riley Pettijohn and TJ Alford. Pierce led the room and was tied for the team lead with 30 total tackles. He's also recorded a pass breakup, forced a fumble and recovered a fumble.

Pettijohn and Alliegro each had 20 total tackles, while Alford wasn't far behind with 16 total tackles.

Together, Reese and Styles could do just about everything one would want a pair of collegiate linebackers to do. Each player had the capability to create havoc as blitzers or run defenders. Each player had the athleticism and football IQ to be more than serviceable in coverage, and Reese could even line up as a defensive end and generate pressure on opposing quarterbacks that way.

Pierce and Alliegro, Ohio State's current starting linebackers, are not nearly as dynamic. Through six games, the duo combined for just one-half sack. Pettijohn and Alford have filled the playmaking gap left by Reese and Styles. Pettijohn had two sacks and an interception, and Alford had an interception of his own. Pettijohn's four tackles for loss were also tied for the team lead.

The linebackers took some heat for opposing offenses' ability to run the ball early in the season.

Alliegro chalked up struggles against the Fighting Illini to the defense struggling to communicate, an issue they apparently ironed out before the Iowa game.

"We didn't do a good enough job against Illinois communicating," Alliegro said. "It all starts in practice. We talked about what was happening and why, and I think we did a good job building up that. Ultimately, in the (Iowa) game, we were doing a better job just pointing out formations or just making minor adjustments that maybe we weren't super locked in on before."

It's easy to see why communication could get mixed up. The linebackers are supposed to be the leaders of the defense, but with so much rotation happening at the position, it's difficult for just one player to step into that role, according to Pierce.

"It's a little bit frustrating trying to get into a groove, but it's part of the game," Pierce said. "The D-line rotates, linebackers rotate. We're just trying to do what's best for the team."

Still, Pierce sees the benefit in several players rotating into the game.

"We have a lot of linebackers that can play, and it keeps us all fresh and good throughout the season, so it's great having that," Pierce said.

BSB Midterm grade: B

Cornerbacks

It's difficult to evaluate the performance of Ohio State's cornerbacks. On the one hand, Ohio State ranked No. 8 in the country in passing yards allowed, giving up just 150.7 yards per game. On the other hand, none of the Buckeyes' opponents have been known for their ability to air it out.

In fact, of the teams Ohio State played in its first six games, Illinois has the best passing attack, and the Fighting Illini ranked just No. 48 nationally in passing offense through six games, going for 254.7 passing yards per game. The Fighting Illini actually went past that average against the Buckeyes, with senior Katin Houser able to complete 21 of 37 passes for 263 yards and a touchdown.

Still, that was the only time Ohio State allowed an opponent to pass for over 200 yards in a single game. Although he found his rhythm late in the game, Arch Manning was mainly held in check by Ohio State's secondary. Manning completed 23 of 37 passes for 195 yards, a touchdown and an interception.

Sophomore cornerback Devin Sanchez and senior Jermaine Mathews Jr. each struggled to contain Fighting Illini receivers and gave up completions down the stretch of the Texas game. At least against the Longhorns, what may have been more concerning were the plays the opposition didn't make.

In addition to allowing three second-half touchdowns, including one in which Sanchez was burned on a comeback route by Texas receiver Ryan Wingo, the Buckeyes allowed multiple receivers to roam free deep down the field in the first half.

In the second quarter, Texas appeared to have its first touchdown when Wingo found space at the goal line, with Sanchez trailing behind by several yards. It didn't cost the Buckeyes, because Wingo dropped the pass, but it still wasn't a good sign early in the season for Ohio State's defense.

"It was just a miscommunication in the coverage and seeing the bigger picture of the whole play," Sanchez said of Wingo's dropped touchdown. "It was just a miscommunication and something we have to fix."

In games against Maryland and Iowa, it seemed as though there were a lot fewer miscommunications. Before Iowa starting quarterback Hank Brown left with an injury, he was just 12 of 27 for 132 yards and an interception.

Maryland starting quarterback Malik Washington had even less success against Ohio State's secondary. Washington finished the game passing for 64 yards, completing 12 of 25 passes.

Although tackles aren't always a great sign for defensive backs, it's also a sign that they are active participants in run defense. Sanchez led the room with 22 total tackles, while Mathews wasn't far behind with 21 total tackles.

The Buckeyes haven't used five defensive backs on the field as much as in years past, but freshman Jay Timmons stepped up as the starting nickel for the first four games. In that time, he made nine total tackles, including one for loss, and recorded four pass breakups. Against Texas, he forced and recovered a fumble on the first play from scrimmage.

For the games against Maryland and Iowa, Timmons was out with an injury. Mathews filled in for him inside while Alabama transfer Cam Calhoun came in for Mathews. Calhoun has six total tackles and a pass breakup this season.

BSB Midterm grade: B+

Safeties

In the preseason, the safeties were viewed as one of the stronger positions on the team, and so far, the group led by junior Jaylen McClain and fifth-year Florida State transfer Earl Little Jr. has lived up to expectations.

It's impossible to replace someone as talented and fundamentally sound as All-American Caleb Downs, but Little has done his best. The 6-0, 203-pound safety is tied for the team lead with 30 total tackles and also has three pass deflections. It also seemed automatic that Downs would bring a running back to the ground if it was a one-on-one situation last year.

With Little, there were growing pains early in the season and occasional missed tackles. On a second-and-6 play from midfield in the fourth quarter of the loss to Texas, Little had a key missed tackle on Texas running back Raleek Brown. Brown went for 11 yards on the play that helped Texas score the game-winning touchdown.

"I played a smooth game," Little said of his performance against Texas. "It could have been better. I had some critical opportunities. I could have made plays on the ball, but overall, I feel like I had a decent game."

Like Little, McClain also had some vulnerabilities exposed against the Longhorns. Texas receiver Cam Coleman was able to sprint by the Buckeyes' deep safety on a post route in the first quarter. However, when Manning attempted to find him deep down the field, the ball bounced out of his arms and right toward McClain, who made the easy interception.

Like many others on the defense, McClain and Little have found their stride lately. With seven combined tackles in games against Iowa and Maryland, Little was a huge part of the Buckeye defense strengthening against the run.

McClain, meanwhile, has been arguably the best defender on the team after the Texas game. McClain was a bright spot in the defense's mediocre performance against Illinois. He logged a team-high eight tackles in that game but, more importantly, had four pass breakups, including a crucial one on fourth down that halted a potential Illinois comeback.

Against Iowa, he had his second interception of the season and followed that performance up with eight more tackles against Maryland.

A couple of young Buckeyes, Simeon Caldwell and Leroy Roker III, had made an impact off the bench. Caldwell had recorded nine total tackles, while Roker had seven total tackles.

BSB Midterm grade: A-

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Special Teams Falling Short Of Expectations

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

This was supposed to be the year the special teams were fixed for Ohio State. The unit had underperformed the Buckeye standard for the past few years under head coach Ryan Day, so Day went looking for a new coach whose only job was to improve that area.

He found the man he wanted in former Illinois special teams coordinator Robby Discher, and he found a kicker in the transfer portal who was supposed to fix the field-goal issues Ohio State was having the past few years as well, in Connor Hawkins.

Discher accepted the challenge.

"The goal is to always try to elevate any place you're at, and that's always a challenge," Discher said in the spring. "It's a competitive business, and it's a performance-based business. It's like that with the players, and it's like that with the coaches. Obviously, there are a lot of things that Ohio State's done extremely well, and no sense in changing some of the stuff. Some things you feel strongly about, maybe you can have your own fingerprint on."

After the first few games, Day was still not pleased with what he had seen from the unit to open the season.

"I don't think I can sit here and say we've improved on special teams," Day said after beating Iowa in Week 5. "We need to play better, and that's everybody included. It's not just (Discher).

"Overall, when we look at the consistency of kicking field goals, not good enough. When we look at our return yards, we need to be better across the board. When we have an opportunity to pooch (punts) at the 10-yard line, that has to get done. It's a challenge to everybody in the program. We've got to get better in all four phases of special teams."

Here are Buckeye Sports Bulletin's grades for Ohio State's special teams through the first six games of the season. The 19-15 win over Indiana is not included in midterm grades.

Rating The Specialists

Here is where the OSU specialists ranked among the Big Ten and nationally (statistics through the Maryland game).

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Net Punting	39.4	80th	14th
Punt Return Avg.	5.9	110th	17th
KO Return Avg.	15.4	122nd	17th
Punt Return Def.	4.8	T-41st	7th
KO Return Def.	13.0	T-11th	4th

Kicking Game

Hawkins transferred to Ohio State from Baylor, where he made 18 of 22 field goals last season (81.8 percent), while making 3 of 4 from 50-plus yards, including a long of 54 yards.

It's no secret that the Buckeyes have struggled with field goals being made in big moments in the past few seasons, and Hawkins was supposed to help fix that issue. Going into the season, there was more confidence in the kicking position with Hawkins in scarlet and gray.

It didn't take long for feelings of worry to come crashing back into the minds of Buckeye fans when, in the Week 2 24-23 loss to Texas, Hawkins missed a 45-yarder in the fourth quarter that very well may have iced the game very wide left, never giving the ball a chance to go through the uprights.

After the loss, Day said he still believed Hawkins was the right guy for the job.

"We're confident in Connor," Day said. "I don't think we can group Connor in with anything that's happened in the past. That's not Connor's issue. That being said, we count on him to make that kick. He's beat himself up over that kick."

The head coach also didn't put all the blame on the kicker, since the offense stalled and struggled to give Hawkins better field position for a closer field goal.

"We have to try to put him in a better situation where it's not a 45-yarder," Day said. "If we get a couple more first downs, every time you gain more yardage, you increase the chances of making the field goal. We all take accountability."

Then, Hawkins missed a 40-yarder against Iowa in Week 5 that, at the time of the kick, kept the Hawkeyes within four points of OSU.

The game ended up a three-score victory for the Buckeyes, but Day said the team was looking into ways to try to get their kickers more ready for the pressure of a big moment in case an important kick comes later in the season.

"We have to look into everything and try to figure out different ways in practice to apply more pressure," Day said. "We've looked into it. We've made changes. Everybody has to feel pressure, there's no question. What we've done hasn't worked, so we've got to continue to figure out ways to get better.

"I do think we have guys that can kick field goals, and they've shown they can do that, but it has to be consistent. It has to be in big spots. We have to keep looking and uncover all stones to get this thing addressed because we know it's going to come down to one of these kicks again. We have to make it."

Overall, Hawkins made 6 of 8 field goals through six games, making 4 of 4 from under 40 yards and 2 of 4 between 40 and 49 yards. He had not attempted anything longer than a 48-yarder, which he made in the third quarter of the loss to Texas. He was also 33 of 33 on extra points but failed to come through in a couple of bigger moments.

BSB Midterm Grade: C

Punting Game

Senior punter Joe McGuire is the starter for the Buckeyes for the third straight season, and in the previous two he didn't stand out as either a strong point or as a weakness of the team.

That's mostly still the case for McGuire again this season, but his performance in the loss to Texas also wasn't something Day was completely pleased with.

Ohio State's first drive in the second half ended with a punt that McGuire sent just 26 yards to the Texas 13-yard line. In the fourth quarter, he had the opportunity for a long boot from Ohio State's 31 and sent it 41 yards to Texas' 28-yard line, failing to pin the Longhorns in both situations.

"If we're going to do that, if we're going to make that decision, it is hard for me to stand in front of you and say, 'Yeah, that's a good decision' when the ball's on the (13-yard line)," Day said. "If we pin them on the 2 or the 1, you're probably saying, 'OK, I get it.' Either we have to execute that better, or we have to go for it. That's the bottom line."

Day still believes in McGuire, however, or else he wouldn't be on the field continuing to punt for the Buckeyes. He praised the senior's ability to get the ball out quickly, which can eliminate the worry of a blocked punt.

However, he still wants to see McGuire become more consistent in situations where the Buckeyes have an ability to pin the opposing team deep in their own territory.

"I do believe in Joe. I think Joe has the ability to do it," Day said. "But we've got to go put it on the field. If it gets to the point where we're not executing it well enough, then we've got to make other decisions."

OSU was 80th in the country in net punting, with two touchbacks and 19 return yards making its average 39.4 yards per punt. McGuire has had some positives, however, pinning six of his 14 boots inside the 20-yard line and sending four of them 50-plus yards.

BSB Midterm Grade: C+

Return Game

Going into the season, it was hard not to wonder what the kick-return game could look like for the Buckeyes with freshman Legend Bey coming to Columbus.

The speedy running back has the ability to make defenders miss, which he showed off on the offensive side of the Ball against Ball State on Sept. 5 with a 25-yard receiving touchdown.

But in that same game, Bey struggled as the kick returner, receiving the opening kickoff, hesitating with the ball and taking it out of the end zone for a 16-yard return. He did the same thing after the Cardinals' second-quarter field goal and returned that one to just the 10-yard line.

"The more disappointing thing was that the second time it happened again," Day said after the game. "There are things that are going to happen as a freshman, but what we can't do is make the same mistake twice. Nobody felt worse than Legend on that, but those are trust things that we're going to have to keep working on to build trust with the coaches and the teammates."

Bey then didn't get the nod for kickoff returns in the Week 2 loss to Texas, and he didn't get the opportunity to get back into the game in that role until OSU's best special teams game of the season against Maryland on Oct. 10. Bey was a small part of that game's success with a kickoff return of 29 yards in the first quarter.

He had another chance in the game and took that one back 17 yards from the 6-yard line.

Day saw some of the potential of Bey in that game and was happy the freshman was able to get some in-game work again.

"We haven't really had many at-bats on the kickoff return. We'll be able to get Legend going there," Day said. "We'll get on the film and see individually how it went, but we took a step in the right direction in terms of our mentality and our approach was better."

Devin McCuin, Max LeBlanc and Brody Lennon have each returned a kick for 20, 16 and 0 yards, respectively. Overall, Ohio State was 122nd in the country in kickoff returns, averaging 15.4 yards per return.

In the punting game, sophomore Phillip Bell has emerged as the most trusted player to take punts back. He showed why in the game against Maryland, getting the Buckeyes going with a 31-yard return in the first quarter to set up their first score of the game.

"I thought the return was really set up well," Day said. "We had a good plan on how we wanted to do that, and it was executed pretty well and got us going early on. We put a lot of work into it this week."

That was the best it had looked through six games, though. In 12 attempts, Bell was averaging 5.5 yards per return. Senior Brandon Inniss had three returns for 26 yards (8.7), and De'Zie Jones had returned two for 9 yards (4.5).

When it comes to kick-return defense, the Buckeyes were much better, allowing just 13.0 yards per return on kickoffs (11th in the country) and 4.8 yards per return on punts (41st).

BSB Midterm Grade: D+

USC Seeks Statement Win Against Buckeyes

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The last few seasons have not gone quite as USC head coach Lincoln Riley may have planned.

This season was supposed to be different for the Trojans, with a lot of experienced players returning to team up with a few very talented freshmen who have already become important pieces of the puzzle.

Many prognosticators had the Trojans making the College Football Playoff for the first time since the tournament's inception in 2014. But after having already lost a game when Oregon was at the Memorial Coliseum on Sept. 26, Riley is hoping Ohio State doesn't turn what was supposed to be a dream of a season into a nightmare when the Buckeyes come to visit on Halloween.

"This is a results-driven business," Riley said after the 41-27 loss to the Ducks. "We understand that. There's no moral victories for us here. There never will be. I'm proud of the way we fought, but we have to play a little bit better. We fought like crazy. There's a lot of good, but we have to play a little bit better. We've got a lot of other big games coming up. We have a lot of other great opportunities."

The Trojans recovered from that loss with victories over Washington (25-21) and Penn State (31-23) in the two weeks following, and they had an off week that perhaps was used to start gathering scouting information on the Buckeyes as they matched up with Indiana.

But USC will have to get through an Oct. 24 game against Wisconsin at Camp Randall Stadium before it turns its full attention to Ohio State.

The cracks in the USC foundation that were brought to light in the loss to Oregon had been lurking under the surface beforehand. They could be seen in the season opener when the Trojans allowed San Jose State to score 26 points and again in Weeks 3 and 4 when Louisiana put up 30 points a week before a lowly Rutgers team came within a score of USC (42-35) the week before the game against Oregon.

Riley's future at USC now seems to be hanging in the balance, and a win over Ohio State would certainly give the fifth-year head coach at least a little more job security regardless of what happens the rest of the way. Riley didn't lose hope about what his team could be this season after losing at home to the Ducks. He was still able to find a silver lining.

"We didn't get run out of the stadium," Riley said. "There's a lot of good on that tape. You don't have a chance to win a game like that if you don't do some things pretty well."

Fifth-year quarterback Jayden Maiava said that the Trojan players take issue with people calling for Riley's job.

"Yes, it does bother us, but we use it as fuel," he said on the "Outta Pocket with RGIII" podcast. "Everybody in this building knows who Coach Riley is. He really truly is the best coach in the country."

Maiava was one of the biggest reasons for the expectations put on USC this season, and it seems to be for good reason. As BSB went to press, he was seventh in the country in passing yards per game with 292.1 through seven games.

He had completed 152 of 224 passes (67.9 percent) for 2,045 yards, 18 touchdowns and three interceptions.

Maiava's top three targets at wide receiver have been freshman Kayden Dixon-Wyatt – who was committed to Ohio State in the 2026 class until he flipped to USC late in the cycle – freshman slot receiver Trent Mosley and junior Zacharyus Williams.

Dixon-Wyatt leads the way with 27 catches for 400 yards and four touchdowns in seven games. However, Mosley had played in just four games and caught 22 passes for 366 yards and five scores. Both first-year players will likely get a lot of attention from Maiava against the Buckeyes.

Despite not spending much time together since Dixon-Wyatt just arrived this season, the fifth-year QB has a lot of trust in the freshman.

"(Dixon-Wyatt is) that guy. He can just go up and go get it," Maiava said. "He's that kind of player, and we built that trust over the work that we've put in."

When Mosley was out of the lineup with an injury, another freshman pass catcher ended up being a favorite of Maiava's to target. Tight end Mark Bowman, another former Ohio State target in the 2026 recruiting cycle, has 21 catches this season for 204 yards and two touchdowns.

At running back, junior King Miller carries the majority of the workload and gets some help from fifth-year Waymond Jordan. Miller's 114 attempts have gone for 595 yards (5.2-yard average) and four touchdowns. Jordan has 63 carries for 287 yards (4.6) and two scores.

Riley wants to see his running backs take a step forward after the off week from where they have been. He has, however, been pleased with his backs' ability to get important yards when they've been needed late in games.

"We've been effective running it, but we can run it much better," Riley said. "The thing I've been probably most proud of is we've been able to do it in crunch time. We've been able to do it to close out some games, which previous years here we had a harder time doing. So that part has been really positive. But we definitely can run the ball better. We feel like we're capable of great there, and our ability to surge and really be able to do that in this back half of the schedule will be very important for this football team."

On the offensive line, the Trojans have some experienced players, four of whom started for the team last season as well. Senior Elijah Paige is at left tackle, senior Tobias Raymond is at center, senior Alani Noa is at right guard and junior Justin Tauanuu is at right tackle. Junior left guard Kaylon Miller is not quite as experienced with USC but earned a starting role.

The Trojans' defense has been the weaker side of the ball so far this season. After Week 7 games, USC was 81st in the country in scoring defense, allowing 25.1 points per game, and 63rd in the country in total defense, allowing 350.0 yards.

On the defensive line, the Trojans have another freshman starter they were able to beat the Buckeyes for in the 2026 recruiting class. Defensive end Luke Wafle was a player Ohio State wanted badly, and after his start to his collegiate career with Southern Cal, it's easy to see why.

Wafle has 27 tackles, which is fourth on the team through seven games, which includes six tackles for loss and two sacks. He has also hurried the quarterback once and broken up a pass.

Riley saw what Wafle could bring to the defense as early as the first game of the season.

"He was around the ball. He was around the quarterback," the head coach said of Wafle after the win over San Jose State. "He made some plays for us, obviously, and he was really close to making a bunch of others. And I think that's just scratching the surface of how good this guy can be."

Joining him on the defense line are junior defensive end Kameryn Crawford and, on the interior, fifth-year Alex VanSumeren and junior Jide Abasiri.

At linebacker are junior Desman Stephens II – who served a one-game suspension imposed by USC for a hit that knocked Oregon quarterback Dante Moore out of the game the two teams played – and senior Deven Bryant. Bryant is second on the team in tackles with 39.

At cornerback are junior Chasen Johnson and fifth-year Jontez Williams, as well as junior nickel corner Kennedy Urlacher. Urlacher has been able to get into the backfield from the slot, boasting four tackles for loss and three sacks.

At safety are senior Christian Pierce and fifth-year Prophet Brown. Brown has picked off two passes this season, and Pierce, who led the team in tackles with 40, has one, the only three interceptions the defense has managed through seven games.

Get To Know ... USC

- **2026 Record:** 6-1, 3-1 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Multiple; Defensive Formation – Multiple 4-2-5; Starters returning – Offense 9, Defense 6, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Lincoln Riley, 5th year at USC, 41-19.
- **Series History:** 25th meeting; USC leads 13-10-1.
- **School Facts:** Location – Los Angeles, Calif.; Enrollment – 46,000; Nickname – Trojans; Colors – Cardinal, Gold; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Memorial Coliseum (Surface – Grass; Capacity – 71,349).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
King Miller	114	595	5.2	4
Waymond Jordan	63	287	4.6	2

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Jayden Maiava	152-224	67.9	2,045	18-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
K. Dixon-Wyatt	27	400	14.8	4
Trent Mosley	22	366	16.6	5
Z. Williams	18	315	17.5	1
Mark Bowman	21	204	9.7	2

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game — 36.4
Rushing Yards Per Game — 152.3
Passing Yards Per Game — 310.1
Total Offense Avg. Per Game — 462.4

2026 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 29	SAN JOSE STATE	W, 42-26
Sept. 4	FRESNO STATE	W, 39-0
Sept. 12	LOUISIANA	W, 49-30
Sept. 19	at Rutgers	W, 42-35
Sept. 26	OREGON	L, 41-27
Oct. 3	WASHINGTON	W, 25-21
Oct. 10	at Penn State	W, 31-23
Oct. 24	at Wisconsin	7:30
Oct. 31	OHIO STATE	TBA
Nov. 14	at Indiana	TBA
Nov. 21	MARYLAND	TBA
Nov. 28	at UCLA	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Christian Pierce	25	15	40	0-0	0-0
Deven Bryant	24	15	39	0-0	0-0
Desman Stephens	16	12	28	2.0-2	0.5-1
Luke Wafle	19	8	27	6.0-15	2.0-11
K. Urlacher	18	3	21	4.0-16	3.0-14

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Prophet Brown	2	99	49.5	1
Christian Pierce	1	16	16.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed — 25.1
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed — 111.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed — 239.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed — 350.0

Ohio State at USC

Saturday, Oct. 31 ▪ TBA ▪ TBA
Memorial Coliseum; Los Angeles

Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...

6 Christian Pierce, 6-1, 205, Sr.
30 Marquis Gallegos, 6-0, 195, Jr.

SS

9 Kennedy Urlacher, 5-11, 200, Jr.
7 Alex Graham, 6-0, 195, So.

Nickel

16 Prophet Brown, 5-11, 190, 5th
31 Madden Riordan, 5-10, 180, Fr.

FS

8 DESMAN STEPHENS II, 6-3, 250, JR.
14 Ta'Mere Robinson, 6-3, 240, Sr.

MIKE

17 Deven Bryant, 5-11, 230, Sr.
15 Jadyn Walker, 6-2, 240, Jr.

WILL

27 Chasen Johnson, 6-1, 195, Jr.
2 Elbert "Rock" Hill IV, 5-10, 190, Fr.

CB

0 Jontez Williams, 5-10, 200, 5th
25 Marcelles Williams, 5-11, 190, Jr.

CB

94 Luke Wafle, 6-6, 265, Fr.
10 Braylan Shelby, 6-5, 260, Sr.

DE

91 Alex VanSumeren, 6-2, 300, 5th
88 Floyd Boucard, 6-3, 315, So.

DT

97 JIDE ABASIRI, 6-5, 280, JR.
4 Jahkeem Stewart, 6-5, 295, So.

DT

1 KAMERYN CRAWFORD, 6-5, 255, JR.
18 Zuriah Fisher, 6-4, 265, 5th

DE

WR

4 JEREMIAH SMITH, 6-4, 222, JR.
15 Chris Henry Jr., 6-5, 211, Fr.

LT

69 Ian Moore, 6-6, 315, Jr.
67 AUSTIN SIEREVELD, 6-5, 327, SR.

LG

51 LUKE MONTGOMERY, 6-5, 313, SR.
76 Jake Cook, 6-4, 310, So.

C

75 CARSON HINZMAN, 6-5, 301, 5TH
62 Joshua Padilla, 6-3, 301, Sr.

RG

67 AUSTIN SIEREVELD, 6-5, 327, SR.
58 Gabe VanSickle, 6-5, 320, Jr.

RT

70 PHILLIP DANIELS, 6-5, 312, SR.
74 Carter Lowe, 6-5, 318, So.

WR

3 Devin McCuin, 6-0, 195, Sr.
11 Brock Boyd, 6-1, 196, Fr.

P

42 JOE MCGUIRE, 6-2, 209, SR.
93 Brady Young, 6-3, 220, 5th

K

96 Connor Hawkins, 6-1, 200, Jr.
92 Cooper Peterson, 6-0, 214, Fr.

RB

24 Ja'Kobi Jackson, 6-0, 219, 5th OR
25 BO JACKSON, 6-0, 218, SO.

QB

13 Luke Fahey, 5-11, 206, Fr.
9 Tavien St. Clair, 6-4, 235, So.

SLOT

1 BRANDON INNISS, 6-0, 197, SR.
5 Kyle Parker, 5-10, 198, Sr.

TE

83 Nate Roberts, 6-5, 240, So.
86 Mason Williams, 6-4, 246, Sr.

— Starters in bold, returning starters in all caps

WHEN USC HAS THE BALL...

8 JAYLEN MCCLAIN, 6-0, 203, JR.
11 Terry Moore, 6-0, 200, 5th

SS

25 Jay Timmons, 5-11, 191, Fr.
1 Earl Little Jr., 6-0, 203, 5th

NICKEL

1 Earl Little Jr., 6-0, 203, 5th
10 Leroy Roker III, 6-0, 202, Jr.

FS

26 Payton Pierce, 6-1, 232, Jr.
17 TJ Alford, 6-1, 237, So.

MIKE

14 Christian Alliegro, 6-4, 245, Sr.
5 Riley Pettijohn, 6-2, 235, So.

WILL

7 JERMAINE MATHEWS JR., 5-11, 195, SR.
24 Dominick Kelly, 6-2, 193, So.

CB

2 KENYATTA JACKSON JR., 6-6, 263, 5TH
4 Qua Russaw, 6-2, 244, Sr

DE

55 John Walker, 6-3, 302, Sr.
94 Jason Moore, 6-6, 316, Sr.

NT

96 Eddrick Houston; 6-3, 304, Jr.
3 James Smith, 6-3, 306, Sr.

DT

9 Zion Grady, 6-4, 262, So.
12 Beau Atkinson, 6-6, 260, 5t

DE

6 Devin Sanchez, 6-2, 199, So.
18 Cam Calhoun, 6-0, 176, Sr.

CB

WR

16 TANOOK HINES, 6-0, 190, SO.
85 Tron Baker, 6-0, 200, Fr.

LT

72 ELIJAH PAIGE, 6-7, 315, SR.
51 Vlad Dyakonov, 6-6, 295, Fr.

LG

60 Kaylon Miller, 6-0, 305, Jr.
68 Hayde Treter, 6-6, 320, Jr.

C

73 TOBIAS RAYMOND, 6-6, 310, SR.
52 Willi Wascher, 6-2, 310, So.

RG

77 ALANI NOA, 6-3, 315, SR.
60 Kaylon Miller, 6-0, 305, Jr.

RT

74 JUSTIN TAUANUU, 6-6, 310, JR.
70 Aaron Dunn, 6-7, 310, So.

WR

17 Kayden Dixon-Wyatt, 6-2, 200, Fr.
1 Ethan "Boobie" Feaster, 6-1, 190, Fr.

P

35 Lachlan Carrigan, 6-3, 205, So.
48 Ryon Sayeri, 5-11, 185, Jr.

K

45 Caden Chittenden, 5-10, 190, Jr.
48 RYON SAYERI, 5-11, 185, JR.

RB

8 KING MILLER, 6-0, 225, JR. OR
2 Jordan Waymond, 5-10, 210, 5th

QB

14 JAYDEN MAIAVA, 6-4, 230, 5TH
7 Sam Huard, 6-1, 205, 5th

SLOT

4 Trent Mosley, 5-10, 180, Fr.
0 Zacharyus Williams, 6-2, 200, Jr.

TE

19 Mark Bowman, 6-5, 245, Fr.
84 Tucker Ashcraft, 6-5, 260, S

— Depth charts compiled by Greg Wilson

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. USC RUSH DEFENSE

Since Southern California was off Oct. 17 and the Buckeyes don't play the Trojans until Oct. 31, this preview will rely on USC's stats from its last game, a 31-23 win at Penn State on Oct. 10. Also, because the status of Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin was uncertain as BSB printed because of an injury in the 19-15 win over Indiana, the prediction comes with an asterisk. Whether it's Sayin or Luke Fahey, the Buckeyes need better run production, although they were without Ja'Kobi Jackson. Bo Jackson had 56 yards on 18 carries (3.1 avg.) and was stuffed numerous times near the goal line. Isaiah West had a good second half and finished with 45 yards on six carries (7.5) with a long of 22. OSU gained 78 yards (2.1) on an Indiana defense that ranked seventh in the nation (75.0 yards per game). The Trojans' run defense was improving weekly, as evidenced by their totals allowed in the past four games: 168, 138, 116 and an impressive 68 yards on 31 carries (2.2 avg.) for Penn State. The Trojans average 111.0 rushing yards allowed a game. **EDGE: USC**

USC RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Before their off week, the Trojans ranked 76th, averaging 152.3 yards on the ground, behind an offensive line that was named to the Joe Moore Award Midseason Honor Roll recognizing the most outstanding offensive line in college football. The Trojans have 12 rushing touchdowns and are averaging 36.4 points. King Miller is the top back with 595 yards (5.2) and four touchdowns. The Buckeyes were stingy against the Indiana run, allowing only 73 yards (2.5), with the longest run an 8-yarder by QB Josh Hoover. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. USC PASS DEFENSE

It was a tough afternoon in Bloomington for Sayin and Jeremiah Smith until clicking on a 38-yard, fourth-down TD early in the fourth quarter, which provided the winning points. Sayin left soon after with a shoulder or arm injury. He was 15 of 29 for 235 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions while constantly being harassed. The porous line allowed four sacks, and Sayin was under duress enough that he hurried passes. The Hoosiers were intent on stopping Smith and did for three quarters with blanketed double coverage. He had four catches for 68 yards, but fortunately, freshman Chris Henry Jr. chipped in with two catches for 51 yards, and tight end Mason Williams made two early grabs for 45 yards. If the freshman Fahey starts, it has to be a unified effort to provide protection and make clean routes to give him the best opportunity to succeed. The Trojans ranked near the bottom nationally by allowing 239.0 yards per game after Penn State's Rocco Becht completed 21 of 32 passes for 289 yards with a touchdown. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

USC PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Jayden Maiava completed 21 of 33 passes for 301 yards with three touchdowns against Penn State. He was 152 for 224 (67.9 percent) with 18 touchdowns to three interceptions. The passing offense was in the top 10 nationally with a 310.1 yards per game mark. His favorite target statistic-wise is Kayden Dixon-Wyatt with team-bests for catches (27) and yards (400) along with four touchdowns, but he's played seven games, three more than Trent Mosley, who returned from an injury that kept him out three games to make nine catches on 13 targets for 111 yards and a 19-yard TD vs. the Nittany Lions to earn Big Ten Freshmen of the Week acclaim. He has 22 receptions for 366 yards and five TDs on the season. It was a trying but in the end successful venture for the Buckeye pass defense against Indiana. Hoover passed for 296 yards but was 20 of 40, and he lost a fumble on his one sack. The Buckeyes got a massive break when a potential winning pass to Nick Marsh was caught out-of-bounds. **EDGE: USC**

SPECIAL TEAMS

With the score tied at 17, the Trojans attempted an onside kick to start the second half, but Penn State recovered. Connor Hawkins made both field-goal tries vs. IU (26 and 29 yards), and Joe McGuire punted for a 44.4 average. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INTANGIBLES

USC needs a signature win under Lincoln Riley. Every team that plays Ohio State needs a signature win. The Buckeyes dodged a bullet at Indiana and won't face a must-win to stay in the playoff chase. That doesn't lessen the importance or the difficulty. **EDGE: USC**

STAFF PREDICTION

Ohio State has an open week to get healthier and clean up its mistakes. Here's guessing Fahey plays and the team rallies around him. **OHIO STATE 24, USC 20**

Sanchez Looks To Rid Himself Of Penalty Bug

By BOBBY GORBETT
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Leading up to Ohio State's 2026 season, no player showed more confidence than sophomore cornerback Devin Sanchez. Despite having limited experience as a starter, Sanchez made his goals for the season crystal clear.

"I'm trying to get that (Jim Thorpe Award)," Sanchez said. "That's my main goal, become an All-American, and I feel like I can do that, especially with the spring I had, going against (Jeremiah Smith) every day, and then this camp I'm going to have. It's just going out there competing and knowing that there's no better corner in the country than me."

Those lofty expectations took some by surprise. Although Sanchez was a five-star recruit out of high school, he made just one start last season as a freshman.

Through his first seven games this year at Ohio State, Sanchez has not lived up to his standards. Although Ohio State's defense ranks No. 21 nationally, allowing 171.4 passing yards per game, Sanchez has allowed plenty of completions and has struggled with penalties.

Four days after being called for two pass-interference penalties in Ohio State's 31-14 win over Iowa on Oct. 10, Sanchez talked about needing to improve his coverage to avoid being penalized going forward.

"Definitely, I feel it now," Sanchez said when asked if he feels there's more attention on him from the refs. "It's just going out there and knowing that the refs are looking more, especially at me. It's just having to go out there and play a smooth physical game and not be as grabby."

Sanchez was brought down to earth early in the season. In Ohio State's 24-23 loss to Texas, Sanchez gave up the first of the Longhorns' three fourth-quarter touchdowns on a comeback route from Texas receiver Ryan Wingo.

Sanchez easily could have given up another touchdown when a busted zone coverage led to Wingo getting free in the end zone in the first half. It didn't cost the Buckeyes, as Wingo dropped the pass, but it still wasn't the best outing for Sanchez.

"I feel like I played cool," Sanchez said of his performance. "There were a couple of mistakes that I could have fixed, looking at the tape. For a game like that early in the season, it was cool. I could have fixed some things, but I think I played fine."

By the time Ohio State's 42-19 win over Illinois on Sept. 26 rolled around, Sanchez had apparently not sorted out his issues.

Sanchez gave up multiple key catches against the Fighting Illini, including a late 27-yard touchdown that made the score 35-19. On the play before, Sanchez kept Illinois' drive alive with a pass-interference penalty on fourth down.

Just like in the Texas game, it could have been worse for Sanchez. Sophomore Illinois receiver Brayden Trimble scorched Sanchez on a route and became wide open in the end zone at the end of the second quarter. If not for an inaccurate pass thrown by junior Illinois quarterback Katin Houser, it would've been another touchdown allowed by Sanchez.

Three days before the Illinois game, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said the team liked what it saw in practice from Sanchez but still was hoping he could convert it on game days.

"You see the ability there, but the question is going to be, as time goes on, is he going to be the guy we can count on throughout the whole season?" Day said. "We all believe he can be. It's just a matter of him doing it. We know what we see in practice. He's doing a good job against the receivers we have, but now you have to go do it and put it on the field based on the packages we're putting in there. He has the right mindset. He has a huge 'want to.' He cares a lot about his teammates, cares a lot about Ohio State. Now that we're getting into conference play, he really wants to stack some of these games and be that guy that we're counting on."

Devin Sanchez

The Buckeyes have continued to count on Sanchez as a starter despite the early-season growing pains. The Houston native did a better job keeping the ball in front of him in the Buckeyes' wins over Maryland and Iowa, but the aforementioned struggles with penalties were a different story.

"He's competitive, and he has to have a little bit more composure at the top of the route for sure," Day said when asked about Sanchez's issues with penalties. "I would say some of those are close, but, hey, they get called, so you have to own them, and so you have to make the adjustment. We like the fact that he's aggressive, but we can't get called for penalties like that. We have to do a good job with our technique."

Sanchez, who has been called for four pass-interference penalties on the season, isn't the only Buckeye to struggle with penalties over the last few years. Fellow cornerback Davison Igbinosun was notorious for grabbing receivers during his time at Ohio State.

Sanchez was asked what he could learn from how Igbinosun, who has since found a home with the Buffalo Bills of the NFL, attempted to overcome those issues, and he said it starts in practice.

"Just fixing it at practice," Sanchez said. "Doing what I have to do to stop grabbing, and play a complete game, and limit those calls."

Although tackles aren't always a good thing for defensive backs, Sanchez has made 28 total tackles and six pass deflections. Sanchez always wants to get pass breakups first and foremost but knows the importance of preventing yards after catch.

"I'm going against great receivers as well, so it's what comes with football, giving up catches," Sanchez said. "I'm just making sure they don't get those yards after contact. I'm just making sure I down the ball and just play the next play."

Sanchez Falters Against Hoosiers

For Sanchez and the rest of Ohio State's cornerbacks, the best competition through six weeks came in practice. Although Texas and Illinois had talented receivers, neither team ranks in the top 40 nationally in passing offense.

Easily the biggest test for the Buckeyes came against Indiana in Week 7. Matching up against star junior receivers Nick Marsh and Charlie Becker, Sanchez knew the Buckeyes' cornerbacks had their work cut out for them.

"Just being great receivers that they are, me and Jermaine (Mathews Jr.) have to win our one-on-ones outside," Sanchez said. "Knowing that if it's a tight game, we know that the ball's going to come out there at us. Our respect to them. Outside of Jeremiah, (they're) probably the two best receivers in the Big Ten. We have to go out there and win, knowing that the ball's going to come to us."

The ball certainly did come Sanchez's way, and by no means was it a good day at the office for the five-star. Often working against Becker, Sanchez struggled to prevent catches or big plays. Becker finished the game with nine catches for 165 yards. Not all of that production came against Sanchez, but much of it did.

Becker's longest catch, a 36-yarder in the third quarter, came against Sanchez, who was beaten off the ball and caught looking back at the quarterback rather than continuing to sprint downfield.

Thanks to Indiana quarterback Josh Hoover slightly underthrowing the deep ball, Sanchez was able to catch up and sling Becker to the ground at the Ohio State 33-yard line.

Although Sanchez was often a liability in coverage, there were some plays that Becker made despite solid coverage. In the fourth quarter, when the Hoosiers were attempting to mount a game-winning drive, Sanchez had decent coverage on Becker's second-longest catch of the game. On a second-and-8 play from Indiana's own 32-yard line, Becker created only a couple of yards of separation, but that was all he needed to leap up and make a contested catch in between Sanchez and Ohio State safety Jaylen McClain.

It wasn't all bad for Sanchez. He finished the game with six tackles and had a pass breakup in his team's win.

Perhaps most important for the Buckeyes was that Sanchez didn't have a single penalty called on him.

Through seven games, Sanchez is clearly not the polished defensive back he may have thought he could be before the season, but Becker may well be the second-best receiver in the country, and he lines up against the best receiver in the sport in practice.

To live up to his own lofty expectations, Sanchez must hope iron sharpens iron.

Cook Provides Spark For OSU Run Game

By BOBBY GORBETT
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Run blocking or offensive line play in general has never been what Ohio State is known for under head coach Ryan Day. Through its first two games, that held true this year. Aside from a strong second-half performance in a 59-3 season-opening win over Ball State, the Buckeyes failed to find any consistency with their running game in the first two weeks.

The Buckeyes' issues running the ball came to a head in the second half of their 24-23 loss to Texas in Week 2. Failing to end the game with its running game, the Buckeyes allowed the Longhorns a pathway to come back by scoring just three points in six second-half drives.

The Buckeyes knew they had to make a change to generate more consistency on offense. However, few Buckeye fans or media types would have guessed Ohio State's saving grace would be sophomore Jake Cook.

As Ohio State's extra offensive lineman in its Bison package (six offensive linemen and one tight end), and the team's starting right guard in its 45-16 win over Maryland, Cook has helped the Buckeye offensive line find much-needed stability to start Big Ten play.

"He's got a great makeup, mindset," Day said of Cook. "He's a tough guy who takes a lot of pride in how he works every day and how his teammates and his coaches perceive who he is, and so he's been able to get in the game for us this year and have meaningful snaps, and now in two different positions. He's a guy who grew up in Ohio, wasn't a highly recruited guy, but was gritty, was tough, earned everything he got, and committed to us a little bit later on in the process, and has continued that same gritty mindset for us. I think he's going to have a bright future here."

As Day pointed out, Cook wasn't the highest-rated recruit by any stretch of the imagination. A member of the 2025 class, Cook was ranked No. 378 in the country, the No. 23 interior offensive lineman and the No. 16 player from the state of Ohio. For the Buckeyes' high standards, he wasn't the sort of talent to write home about, and in just his second year in the program, very few expected him to find a role.

It was especially difficult to see Cook stepping up because the Buckeyes had so many answers along the offensive line, returning four of five starters from a group that was mainly successful in the regular season last year.

However, after the Buckeyes ran for just 94 yards on 31 carries in the loss to Texas, much of the blame for the struggles on the ground went to the tight ends. Unlike last year, when Ohio State had two veteran tight ends in Max Klare and Will Kacmarek, 12-personnel has not been a secret to success on the ground.

According to Ohio University transfer Mason Williams, the plan to get Cook more involved with the offense was a product of the offense's struggles in short-yardage situations.

Jake Cook

"Back when we played down in Texas, we struggled a little bit in (short-yardage situations), and since then, especially at Iowa in that fourth quarter when we started going at them a little bit, we realized what we can be and what we can do," Williams said. "Especially as a group when we're working together and when we communicate. With Jake Cook as that Bison, he adds a unique element to what we have going on, and it's definitely a confidence that we have growing, showing that we can compete as a group with anybody, any front in the country."

Cook has played in each of Ohio State's first seven games, but it was in the win over Kent State that he had something of a coming-out party. Earning first-team reps for the first time in his career in the Bison package, Cook helped open holes on multiple Ohio State touchdown runs.

"There were some good things that he did," Day said of Cook's performance against the Golden Flashes. "Not to get too technical about how that all played out, but they need to work together better in that situation. But that's why we try to get in those situations and work through the game rep of it, and figure out where we're at. It's something that we're not going to major in, but I do think that there was enough on film to lead us to believe that we should continue to build on it."

Starting offensive tackle Ian Moore was a bit more colorful in his praise for Cook following the win over Kent State.

"I love it. I love seeing Jake Cook next to me," Moore said. "I mean, his mentality, I hate to swear, but it's just 'f—k it, I'm running.' And I love it."

Although Day said he didn't want Ohio State to major in its Bison package, the Buckeyes kept coming back to Cook. He received 13 snaps in the Buckeyes' 42-19 win over Illinois, and 11 snaps in the 31-14 win over Iowa. It's no surprise Cook continued to get into games. With the Bison package becoming an important part of the offense, Ohio State started to form an identity in the running game.

In the win over the Fighting Illini, the Buckeyes had an efficient day running for 151 yards on 32 carries (4.7-yard average).

No drive better exemplified Ohio State's newfound running game prowess than a lengthy one that ended the 17-point victory over the Hawkeyes.

The Buckeyes were able to erase the final 9:30 of game time with a 16-play fourth-quarter drive. The game-sealing play was a 3-yard run by sophomore Bo Jackson to move the sticks on fourth down at the Hawkeye 21 with 2:04 to play. Cook was in the game on the play and was able to bring Iowa defensive lineman Iose Epenesa to the ground with a solid block.

It was a much more difficult challenge for Cook in the Buckeyes' next game against Maryland, though. With multiple starting offensive linemen out with injury, Cook was asked to start at right guard for the Buckeyes for the first time in his career.

Cook may not have lit the world on fire at right guard, but he certainly didn't let the house burn down, which is always the first priority for an offensive lineman. Playing in a career-high 70 snaps, Cook finished with a solid Pro Football Focus grade of 63.4.

According to starting tight end Nate Roberts, the Buckeyes were not at all concerned by Cook making it into the game.

"Not really, because when your number's called, you have to go and execute," Roberts said when asked if Ohio State had to do anything differently with Cook in the lineup. "Jake Cook stepped up. It was his first collegiate start, so I'm happy for him. He's one of my best friends."

It wasn't the cleanest game for Ohio State's offensive line. The Buckeye front gave up two sacks on junior quarterback Julian Sayin but still helped ball carriers go for over 200 rushing yards.

As the Buckeyes start to get healthier up front, it's unclear how much Cook plays going forward, but Roberts said he has all the traits to help the offensive line in the future.

"He's a smart player," Roberts said. "He's a really tough and gritty player who will go and mix things around in there. When his number is called, he always goes and executes. He's done a great job and, obviously, with how the game went (against Maryland), I think he's going to help the offense."

Cook has done a little bit of everything for the Ohio State offense this year. Technically, in the Bison package, Cook is eligible to catch a few passes since he's lined up as a tight end. With a 6-4, 310-pound frame, Cook is probably unlikely to run past many linebackers and defensive backs, but senior tight end Williams isn't ruling it out.

"Oh, all the time," Williams said when asked if he's ever given Cook tips on catching passes. "I'm the biggest proponent of letting Jake Cook catch a few passes. It was my idea in the first place to get him a few passes. I was pestering (tight ends Coach Keenan Bailey) and (offensive line Coach Tyler Bowen) about it."

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Three-Star Linebacker Flips To Ohio State

Ohio State had Cleveland St. Ignatius three-star linebacker James Conrad (6-3, 225) on campus for its 45-16 win over Maryland, and it didn't take long for the former Buffalo commit to decide he wanted to be a Buckeye.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

Conrad officially flipped from Buffalo on Oct. 15, committing to Ohio State and becoming the 20th pledge in the 2027 class. He had been committed to the Bulls since June 14, but linebackers coach James Laurinaitis must have liked what he's seen from Conrad in his senior season.

Ohio State didn't extend a scholarship offer to Conrad until he was on campus for the Oct. 10 win over the Terrapins, but that was all the three-star needed to be convinced.

"I called Coach Laurinaitis and told him (about committing), and he was super fired up," he told Lettermen Row. "He said that I had been on his radar for a while and he was waiting to offer me until the gameday visit. So he was super happy that he finally got me up to offer me. (Laurinaitis said) he thought I'd be a future commit. He said it was hard for him to stay patient and not offer until last week."

Conrad also told Lettermen Row that he liked what he saw when he was on campus and that he enjoyed speaking with the Buckeye linebacker coach.

"I was super excited to receive the gameday visit to come meet the staff and see (Laurinaitis) again," Conrad said. "He was very personable, and my parents and I really enjoyed talking to him. Just seeing how the guys rally around him. That makes me all the more confident in what kind of leader he is. And the relationships he has with his players."

Conrad is the third linebacker in the class, joining four-stars Prince Goldsby and Quinton Cypher. Conrad is also the first commitment for the Buckeyes since four-star defensive lineman Karlos May pledged on July 18, ending a nearly three-month-long drought.

Conrad is ranked by 247Sports' composite as the No. 992 player in the country, the No. 84 linebacker and the No. 37 player in Ohio.

OSU Hopes To Flip Badger RB Commit

Conrad wasn't the only 2027 prospect committed elsewhere who visited for the Maryland game and walked away with a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes.

Ohio State is still looking for a running back in the cycle, and the latest prospect to be added to its wish list was Green Bay (Wis.) Notre Dame Academy four-star Kingston Allen (6-0, 195).

Allen has been committed to Wisconsin since April 3 and took an official visit only to Madison. His visit to Columbus for the Buckeyes' win over the Terrapins was an unofficial visit, so he may still be back for an official at some point during the season.

According to MaxPreps, Allen had a junior season to remember. He rushed 356 times in 13 games for 3,436 yards and 57 touchdowns. In 12 of his games, he went for over 100 yards. He had 200-plus yards in 10 games and even went for 477 yards and 509 yards in back-to-back weeks against Greenfield (Wis.) High School and Slinger (Wis.) High School. In those two games, he rushed for eight and seven touchdowns, respectively. He's continued that dominance this season, with 180 totes in eight games through Oct. 15 going for 2,287 yards (285.9 per game) and 43 touchdowns (5.4 scores per game).

The competition Allen plays against is almost certainly not great, but numbers like that will turn heads regardless.

The four-star is considered the No. 238 player in the country, the No. 18 running back and the No. 2 player in Wisconsin.

Allen is the second-highest-ranked target the Buckeyes have been looking at lately at the running back position, but they have had their eyes on multiple others. It's also possible they will try to sign two prospects at running back.

Cincinnati Princeton three-star running back Jordan Hall (5-11, 205) has his com-

Continued On Page 26

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	★★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
Jaden Carey	CB	5-11	175	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas
James Conrad	LB	6-3	225	★★★	Cleveland St. Ignatius
Quinton Cypher	LB	6-2	220	★★★★	Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook
Jordan Donahoo	WR	6-4	185	★★★	Oviedo, Fla.
Brady Edmunds	QB	6-5	215	★★★★	Huntington Beach, Calif.
Marcus Fakatou	DL	6-6	275	★★★★★	Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon
Prince Goldsby	LB	6-3	205	★★★★	Blue Spring (Mo.) South
DJ Jacobs	DL	6-5	225	★★★★★	Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity
Eli Johnson	S	6-3	200	★★★★	Cibolo (Texas) Steele
Jimmy Kalis	OT	6-6	280	★★★★	Pittsburgh Central Catholic
Deontay Malone	ATH	6-0	182	★★★	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Karlos May	DL	6-3 ½	305	★★★★	Birmingham (Ala.) Ramsay
Brody McNeel	OT	6-5	285	★★★★	Richmond (Va.) Godwin
Caden Moss	OT	6-5	320	★★★★	Jackson (Miss.) Academy
Davis Seaman	IOL	6-4	290	★★★★	Columbus Bishop Watterson
Angelo Smith	S	5-10	170	★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna
Wyatt Smith	DL	6-6	235	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas
Mason Wilt	OT	6-5	265	★★★	St. Clairsville, Ohio
Kellen Wymer	OT	6-5	265	★★★★	Liberty Center, Ohio

OSU Football 2028 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2028 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jett Harrison	WR	6-1	175	★★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
Elijah Newman-Hall	RB	5-11	195	★★★★	Tampa (Fla.) Blake
Luke Sohyda	TE	6-4	250	★★★	Canonsburg (Pa.) Canon-McMillan
Christopher Vargas	QB	6-4 ½	195	★★★★★	Danvers (Mass.) St. John's Prep
Jameer Whyce	DL	6-4	270	★★★★★	Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison

OSU Football 2029 Commitments

Player(s) in the class of 2029 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Austin Miller	WR	6-5	200	N/A	Bellflower, Calif.

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Search For '27 Running Back Continues

Continued From Page 25

mitment date coming soon (Oct. 23) and will be choosing between Ohio State, Penn State and Missouri. He is the No. 851 player in the country and the No. 60 running back.

Ohio State has also checked in on Gainesville, Ga., four-star running back Nigel Newkirk (5-11, 200) – the top-ranked RB (No. 226 overall) that OSU is looking to flip – who is committed to Alabama, Baton Rouge (La.) Catholic four-star Florida State commit Jayden Miles (6-2, 203), and The Villages, Fla., three-star Tranard Roberts (6-0, 195).

OSU Offers Buffalo Edge Commit

The Buckeyes' approach of getting senior film on 2027 prospects may end up paying off again, as it already has with Conrad flipping late. Now they are also after Westerville (Ohio) North three-star edge rusher Damion King (6-3, 230). King is committed to App State and has been since June 20, but Ohio State may be looking to change that.

He is ranked as the No. 1,638 player in the country and the No. 122 edge rusher, but the Buckeyes have liked what they have seen from him in his senior season so far.

In his first five games, King made 35 total tackles (32 solo), which included four tackles for loss and nine sacks. He has also forced a fumble, recovered one and even blocked a field goal on special teams. In his junior season at Westerville North, King finished with 73 tackles, 18½ for loss, 11½ sacks and two forced fumbles.

King participated in a one-day recruiting camp at Ohio State over the summer and was on campus for multiple spring visits. He will be back for the Buckeyes' next home game on Nov. 7 when Oregon comes to town, according to On3.

"Right now I'm still committed to App State," he told On3. "I won't make any decisions until after the OSU visit, and then I will sit down with my family and discuss what is the best for me."

King said that he enjoyed the talks he had with defensive line coach Larry Johnson when he was on campus.

"Coach Johnson said that they've been keeping tabs on me for a while," King said. "And have watched every game. He loves the way I've been playing and something he mentioned a lot was the speed I've been playing at.

"He kept saying, 'You've been playing fast.' He also said that they have a few more roster spots to fill and he's been allowed to get one of them. (Johnson) said that I was his guy and the only one he's going to be offering, whether I take it or not."

Vargas Invited To All-America Game

Ohio State will have one of its commits competing on a national stage once again when Danvers (Mass.) St. John's Prep five-star quarterback Christopher Vargas (6-5, 195) plays in the Under Armour All-America Game in January. Vargas has been committed to Ohio State's 2028 class since Aug. 8 and most recently visited when he was also on campus for the game against Maryland.

Vargas had been able to lead his high school team to a 6-0 start in the 2026 season after beating Shrewsbury (Mass.) St. John's on Oct. 16, 43-28.

The five-star is considered the No. 8 prospect in the class, the No. 2 quarterback and the No. 1 player in Massachusetts.

The All-America game will take place in central Florida. Vargas will get the chance to play against other top competition from around the country.

'28 WR Down To Top Five

Ohio State was included in the top five when 2028 Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star wide receiver Brandon Jefferson (6-1, 180) narrowed down his scholarship offers. Jefferson included the Buckeyes along with Indiana, Ole Miss, Penn State and Virginia Tech. He is considered the No. 170 prospect in the country, the No. 27 wide receiver and the No. 8 player in Maryland.

Jefferson has had strong performances in both his freshman and sophomore high school seasons. He went for 51 catches, 837 yards and 10 touchdowns in his first year before he had 71 receptions for 1,103 yards and 17 scores in his second.

The four-star will be one of many prospects who are in Columbus for Ohio State's game against Oregon.

Buckeyes Offer More Prospects

- **Port Charlotte, Fla., safety Andre**

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1986

The one name every college recruiter was aware of was the San Antonio slinger, Ty Detmer.

Detmer broke the Texas single-season passing record for any classification by completing 209 of 371 passes for 3,551 yards and 36 touchdowns in 13 games. The attempts, completions, yards and touchdowns were all state records. He threw only nine interceptions and was named his state's player of the year, only the second junior to ever be so highly honored.

"Ty's a pure drop-back passer," one Southwest Conference talent scout told Super Prep before the season. "He's going to be in the lineup to throw the ball, not to run an option attack. Ty doesn't have burning speed to turn the corner, but he does have enough quickness to avoid the rush and get the pass off."

35 Years Ago — 1991

When Robert Smith quit the Ohio State football team just before the 1991 season, many experts believed that some of the allegations he leveled at the program might have hurt recruiting.

In reality, Smith's departure may have helped the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts, especially when it came to running backs.

With Smith gone and senior co-captains Carlos Snow and Scottie Graham leaving after the season, Ohio State's well-stocked stable of running backs would get a little thin.

Louis Willard of Grove City was considered the top running back in Ohio until he tore ligaments in a knee during the first game of the 1991 season. He later underwent reconstructive surgery and was set to return the next season at full strength.

Despite the injury, Willard remained high on the lists of Ohio State, Michigan, Notre Dame, Vanderbilt, Tennessee and Florida.

30 Years Ago — 1996

Cypress (Calif.) Brethren Christian quarterback David Priestley got the full Ohio State experience during his official visit over the weekend of Oct. 12.

Priestley made a verbal commitment to the Buckeyes in September. He jetted out for the Wisconsin weekend to get an idea of what Ohio State was all about.

His weekend began on Oct. 11 as he helped his Brethren Christian team even its record at 2-2 with a 23-6 win over Los Angeles Baptist. Then, he and his parents boarded a plane out of Los Angeles at 1:30 a.m. Pacific time on Oct. 12. They were settled in their Columbus downtown hotel by 10:30 a.m. Eastern time.

"I met up with (quarterback coach Walt) Harris and sat in on the quarterbacks meeting," Priestley said. "I was sort of surprised at how in-depth everything was.

"Obviously I didn't know their calls and their terminology, but I was there as they went over some film. It was interesting and also surprising to see how much you have to know," he said.

25 Years Ago — 2001

It was a dilemma, but it wasn't really a dilemma.

Ohio State or Notre Dame?

Those were the two options that offensive lineman Nick Mangold of Kettering (Ohio) Alter mulled over for a brief period over the summer. He went to a camp at OSU and came away with a scholarship offer from Jim Tressel. The following weekend, he went to a camp at Notre Dame and was offered a scholarship by Bob Davie.

"The family was a little bit torn," said Alter coach Ed Domsitz. "His dad always wanted Ohio State but his mom's side of the family sort of always liked Notre Dame, so there was a bit of tug-of-war there for a while."

In the end, Mangold's love for the Buckeyes prevailed.

"It was an issue of I've always liked Ohio State as a little kid growing up with the Buckeyes," Mangold said. "It was an overall better fit for me because I've had that love for the team and the school for as long as I can remember."

20 Years Ago — 2006

One year after taking home honors as the top player in the state of Wisconsin and helping lead his team to a state championship, Racine Park tailback John Clay was one game away from finishing with a different type of season.

With just a 3-5 record, Clay's season would end with a midweek game on Oct. 18. And while his season might be ending, that just meant the recruiting season could begin for the tailback.

"I've got one more game this Wednesday, then I'm going to start on all my visits," Clay told BSB.

Clay said he wasn't sure which schools he would take official visits to, but he did have a top five of Ohio State, Wisconsin, Iowa, Tennessee and Nebraska. That wasn't in any particular order, however.

"I don't have a leader," he said. "All of them are the same right now."

15 Years Ago — 2011

Joshua Perry's reputation preceded him, but the information gathered by college coaches interested in the linebacker often wasn't enough to ease the surprise of meeting him face to face for the first time.

"Sometimes when I am meeting coaches for the first time in person, they say they have heard good things about me," Perry said. "But then they tell me they didn't really believe everything they heard about me until they got to talk to me."

It was only a matter of time before the linebacker became one of the top prospects in the 2012 class, but the proximity of Olentangy High School – located just north of Ohio State – gave former Buckeyes wide receiver coach Darrell Hazell the advantage of really getting to know Perry long before his reputation became widespread knowledge.

His reputation would have traveled fast, with Perry's impeccable athleticism, matched by a 3.8 grade-point average, a 26 ACT score and a reputation of being a positive figure in the community.

"He wasn't a tough sell," said Olentangy head coach Ed Terwilliger.

10 Years Ago — 2016

Long considered an Ohio State lean, five-star athlete Jeffrey Okudah seemed to have his options narrowed down to four schools. The Grand Prairie (Texas) South prospect told Scout.com that he was planning to take just four official visits instead of the five he was allowed.

Two of those visits had already taken place. Okudah was at Oklahoma when the Buckeyes downed the Sooners in September, and he visited Georgia at the end of that month. He was set to take an official visit to Florida State for the weekend of Oct. 29 before taking his fourth, and likely final, visit to Ohio State for either the Nebraska game Nov. 5 or the Michigan game Nov. 26.

Okudah, who planned to enroll early, had previously listed Clemson and USC in his top six.

Five Years Ago — 2021

Ohio State landed a pledge from four-star defensive end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep on Oct. 19, snapping one of the longest class-wide commitment droughts in several years for the Buckeyes in the process.

Jackson became OSU's first verbal commitment for the 2022 class since July 9 when Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek four-star offensive tackle George Fitzpatrick joined the group.

Jackson became the 15th member of the class, which had jumped back into the No. 4 spot in the team rankings after falling as far as No. 8. He was the first defensive lineman to join the class.

"It was just the relationships I've built with the coaching staff, especially Larry Johnson," Jackson said of his decision. "My family loves him. You know his track record, what he puts into the NFL. I believe that he'll develop me as a great pass rusher and a great man."

One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State added to its 2026 class on Oct. 13 when three-star offensive tackle Landry Brede flipped from NC State to the Buckeyes.

Brede first received an offer from OSU on Sept. 6 and was on campus for a visit on Sept. 13 before pledging to offensive line coach Tyler Bowen.

Brede, of Mentor (Ohio) High School, was the No. 1,114 player in the country, the No. 91 offensive tackle and the No. 48 player in Ohio.

After Brede received his initial offer from the Buckeyes, it seemed likely they would be able to pull him away from NC State.

"It was a great feeling to finally get an offer from the school I have grown up watching," he said. "I feel very blessed to have the opportunity to play for such an amazing program.

ASK AN ANALYST

with Mick Walker of On3

Class of 2027 Louisville (Ky.) Christian Academy five-star defensive lineman Kellen Hall (6-4, 265) rescheduled his visit to Columbus to Nov. 28 when Michigan comes to town. He went to Kentucky instead on Oct. 10. Where do you think Ohio State stands in his recruitment?

"I still think they're in the top-ish group. He's somebody that Ohio State prioritized for a long time. He's already visited Oklahoma, Kentucky and Georgia. Of that group, I think Georgia and Kentucky have kind of seized the moment. He's visited the Wildcats multiple times. I still think the Buckeyes are going to be able to get him on campus later this season, though. He's going to come back for the Michigan game, which is a big one. He's going to announce his commitment at some point in January or some point early in the offseason. If you have that, and you can potentially get the last visit, that bodes well for Ohio State. Not getting him on campus for the Maryland game when he was originally planning to do that doesn't feel great in the moment. But Ohio State should still be able to get him on campus."

Green Bay (Wis.) Notre Dame Academy four-star running back Kingston Allen (6-0, 195), who is committed to Wisconsin in the class of 2027, was on campus for the game against Maryland. Have you been able to see him play at any point? What do you make of him as a prospect?

"I haven't seen him play in person, just different highlights and the stats. If you look at the stat book, he's been one of the most productive running backs in the country as a senior. He's done some pretty amazing things up there in the Green Bay area. It's not the most elite competition that he's facing week in and week out, but you still can only play the people that are in front of you. And when he does that, he's put up some crazy numbers. I'm very interested to see how it goes going forward. This was an unofficial visit for him, so he still has an official visit at his disposal. He very well could come back to campus again. Ohio State is in pursuit of a couple of running back targets, but Kingston Allen is one that they've been quietly working on for a couple of weeks now, so to get them on campus and to finally issue the offer, it's a big first step in that recruitment for the Buckeyes."

Ohio State also extended an offer to class of 2027 Cleveland St. Ignatius three-star linebacker James Conrad (6-3, 225). What do you think the Buckeyes' chances are to flip him from Buffalo?

"Honestly, (Ohio State) has a chance to get that one done, maybe before he even steps on campus again, which would be a couple of weeks because OSU has a couple of weeks until their next home game. You could see Ohio State getting him in the boat and flipping him from the Bulls in the relatively near future, and in the coming days and weeks, just because Ohio State has a need for another linebacker. That's what (linebackers coach) James Laurinaitis wants, but he's also a player that the Buckeyes really covet because of his ability to make plays and cause disruption on the defense."

OSU also offered Westerville (Ohio) North three-star defensive end Damion King (6-3 230) in the class of 2027. What do you think are the chances they flip him from App State?

"Another one that I believe the Buckeyes have a very good chance of flipping. He's somebody that Larry Johnson, defensive line coach at Ohio State, has been a fan of since the summer. They worked him out at camp. They've continued to evaluate him as a senior, and obviously that's why they issued the offer after seven games of film. He's someone that it will take getting him on campus for another visit (to commit). So again, it could take a month or so. Ohio State doesn't return home until the Oregon game on Nov. 7. It could take a minute before he eventually flips, but I still think Ohio State's in the driver's seat to be able to do that. It's just a matter of getting him on campus and making sure he's continuing to fit with the culture, but also that he continues to play well as a senior the next couple of games."

Scott (6-0, 190) – Ohio State safeties coach Matt Guerrieri got involved in Scott's recruitment on Oct. 9 when he offered the 2029 prospect. Scott is unranked in the class at this point, but holds 15 Division I offers, which include Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia Tech. Scott told On3 after he was on campus for the game against Maryland, where he got his offer, that he is high on the Buckeyes. "It means a lot," Scott said of the offer. "Ohio State is my favorite team, so to have an opportunity to play here is great. I've always liked them growing up and they continued to grow on me. I like how they develop their players."

• **Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek four-star running back Elijah Cromwell (5-11, 180)** – Running backs coach Carlos Locklyn doesn't shy away from getting involved in many different recruiting battles, and he offered another 2028 prospect on Oct. 12. Cromwell is ranked as the No. 268 player in the country, the No. 18 running back and the No. 2 player in Colorado. He holds 26 Division I offers, which include Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia Tech and Washington, among others.

• **Fishers, Ind., tight end Max Hopkins (6-8, 240)** – Hopkins is unranked in the 2029 class and holds nine Division I offers from Ohio State, Austin Peay, Indiana, Louisville, Miami (Ohio), Michigan State, Notre Dame, Purdue, and Toledo. Hopkins has multiple visits scheduled, getting to Michigan State for its Oct. 17 game against Northwestern, Louisville on Oct. 31 and Notre Dame on Nov. 14. The interest from Power Four programs and the Irish indicates that while Hopkins doesn't yet have a ranking, he will likely be a coveted prospect in the 2029 cycle.

Royal Shuts Down Recruitment

After the Buckeyes and many other programs may have been attempting to get New Orleans (La.) Brother Martin five-star wide receiver Easton Royal (6-0, 214) to flip from Texas, one ended up being successful.

Since BSB last went to press, Royal flipped his commitment from Texas to Florida. He had been committed to the Longhorns since Nov. 29, 2025, but he took official visits in the summer of 2026 to multiple campuses, with the Gators earning one.

After he officially flipped, Royal also said that he will be shutting down his recruitment, so any further attempts from programs who may want to convince him to flip again may not work out.

Royal is considered the No. 5 prospect in the country, the No. 1 wide receiver and the No. 1 player in Louisiana.

The Buckeyes were a bit late to the Royal party, not offering him until Jan. 6, although wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton likely had a relationship with Royal from when Hankton was with LSU. The Tigers offered Royal in May of 2025, when Hankton was still with the program. But the offer to Royal and a visit for last year's game against Texas in Columbus was the most traction OSU had in his recruitment and there never seemed to be any momentum there.

Other Notes And Tidbits

• The Buckeyes missed out on Nashville (Tenn.) Christ Presbyterian Academy three-star tight end Wright Martin (6-2, 250), who committed to Clemson on Oct. 15. The Buckeyes offered Martin in June when he was in Columbus for a one-day recruiting camp, but after the commitment of 2028 tight end Canonsburg (Pa.) Canon-McMillan three-star Luke Sohyda (6-4, 250) in September, it became much less likely that Martin would choose OSU. Martin is the No. 590 player in the 2028 class, the No. 28 tight end and the No. 23 player in Tennessee. He chose Clemson over Ohio State, Georgia and SMU.

SI Story Lands Woody, 1956 Buckeyes On Probation

Throughout the 2026 football season, Buckeye Sports Bulletin will publish historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "6." This week, BSB looks back at the 1956 season when a magazine article led to Big Ten probation and a Rose Bowl ban for the Buckeyes.

By MARK REA
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

The 1956 season for the Ohio State football team should have been one for the history books.

The Buckeyes were two-time defending Big Ten champions for the first time in nearly 40 years, and despite the graduation loss of three-time All-American and Heisman Trophy winner Howard "Hopalong" Cassady, sixth-year head coach Woody Hayes had a stocked roster that made the Buckeyes an odds-on favorite to win a conference-record third straight Big Ten title.

Seniors Jim Roseboro, Galen Cisco and Don Vicic returned to the talented backfield along with electrifying sophomore Don Clark, the Akron Central High School product nicknamed "The Central Express" who was ready to take over Cassady's role as a do-everything halfback. They would operate behind a massive line that included veterans Dick Guy, Bill Michael and Aurealius Thomas as well as Jim Parker, who was on his way to winning the Outland Trophy, a second consecutive first-team All-America honor and an eighth-place finish in the Heisman voting.

The Buckeyes also had the benefit of a relatively easy schedule. None of their first seven opponents were nationally ranked, five of those seven would finish the 1956 season with losing records, and a sixth would do no better than .500.

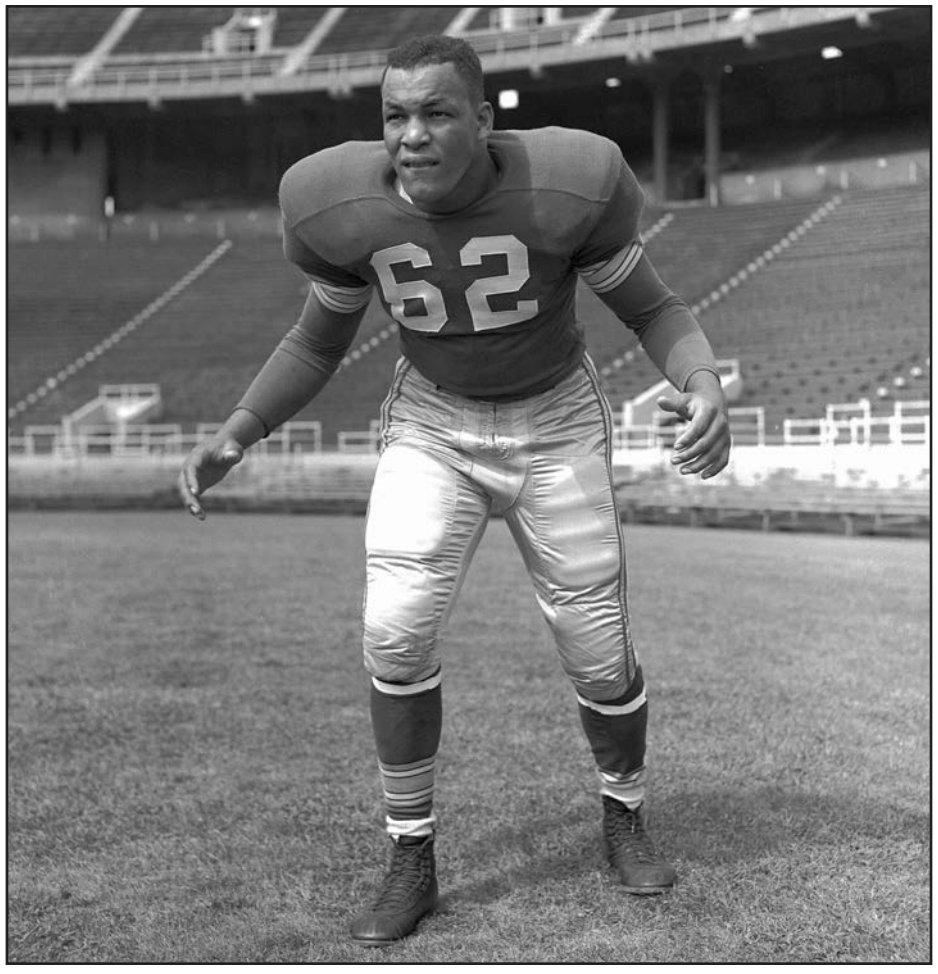
Returning All-Americans, star-studded lineups and a relatively soft schedule were not what was generating headlines in Columbus, however.

The Buckeyes were getting ready to play their 1956 season under the cloud of Big Ten probation for Hayes and a one-year Rose Bowl ban for the team due to what the conference called "a serious irregularity in the off-campus work program for certain football players being advanced monthly wages for either two or three months with no enforceable liability to repay in kind or in services."

In other words, Ohio State football players were being paid for jobs that didn't exist.

The sanctions were triggered by a story in the Oct. 24, 1955, issue of Sports Illustrated magazine titled "The Ohio State Story: Win or Else." The story, and its accompanying cover illustration of Cassady, should have been a showcase for Hayes and his program. Instead, SI writer Robert Shaplan detailed the coach's willingness to stretch rules to the breaking point to ensure that his players were in uniform each Saturday afternoon in the fall.

In addition to hinting at improprieties involving academic eligibility, Shaplan wrote, "Once signed, a recruit can count on some financial help from Hayes if he is 'in need.' Woody insists he never forks up for a luxury – another narrow line – but it's also certainly true that he makes sure he won't lose any valuable men by financial default."



FILE PHOTO

ONE OF THE BEST — The 1956 season was a difficult one for Ohio State due to a one-year Rose Bowl ban and Big Ten probation for coach Woody Hayes plus a two-game skid to end the season, including to Michigan, but offensive lineman Jim Parker (62) was an All-American for a second straight season. He would later be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the College Football Hall of Fame.

After the story was published, Big Ten commissioner Kenneth "Tug" Wilson sent special investigator Jack Ryan to Columbus to investigate the OSU football program for 10 weeks. Ryan found that Hayes had provided "assistance to unnamed members of the Ohio State football squads from his personal funds in amounts which are said to total approximately $400 annually over a period of five years."

A follow-up story by Sports Illustrated found that Wilson looked further and discovered "a serious irregularity" in the off-campus work program which provided OSU athletes, particularly football players, with salaries up to $100 a month and occasionally higher.

"Most of these jobs are with the state – things like paging for the legislature or clerking for the highway department," the story read, "but some of the more rabid fans, including prominent Columbus businessmen, also hire athletes. The trouble was that in numerous instances the athletes seemed to have collected their wages in advance, without anybody notably concerned if they ever performed the work for which they had been paid."

None of the OSU players were punished by the Big Ten, but Hayes was sanctioned after admitting that he indeed gave about $400 a year to various players in need of help (he refused to name them) over the previous five years.

The coach said that while he did not agree with the probation or the Rose Bowl ban, he would abide by it.

"All my life, I have been taught respect for properly delegated authority, and for this reason I do not believe we should appeal the decision," the coach said. "This, however, does not infer that I agree with the severity of the penalty nor the matter in which the investigation was made."

During the investigation, Wilson had a private meeting with Hayes and came away convinced the coach was not trying to gain a competitive edge.

"I have been around and I can tell when a guy is holding back or is trying to con me," the Big Ten commissioner said. "But this man was being so naïvely honest and open about what he'd been doing that I couldn't be too tough on him. He wasn't trying to defend anything. He was just trying to explain some of his own human and moral instincts.

"But even though I might have bought it myself, I couldn't buy it for the conference and told him so. He just looked me in the eye and shrugged. I had the feeling he'd take any penalties handed out to him but that no penalty would ever shake his belief in what he'd done.

"So, what with the sloppy job program the athletic department was running, and Woody's own home-relief program, I put Ohio State on a one-year probation. We never had that kind of trouble from him again."

Lethal Run Game

Ohio State fans didn't seem to care about probations or bowl bans, showing up 82,153 strong to watch the Buckeyes host Nebraska in the 1956 season opener. It was the largest opening-day crowd in Ohio Stadium history, and one treated to a vintage Hayes attack featuring 416 rushing yards during a 34-7 victory.

Clark did his best Cassady impression by running for 107 yards that included touchdowns of 35 and 38 yards. Roseboro added a short touchdown run, and the Buckeyes even scored through the air when quarterback Frank Ellwood connected with senior end Fred Kriss for a 27-yard touchdown.

Defensively, the Buckeyes held the Cornhuskers to 253 total yards and created five turnovers. They also scored on special teams when junior halfback Leo Brown blocked a first-quarter punt and returned it 17 yards for a touchdown.

A similar result greeted an even larger crowd the following week when a stadium-record 82,881 was on hand as Ohio State put on a late surge to hand visiting Stanford a 32-20 loss. The attendance figure broke the old mark of 82,845 set in 1948 when top-ranked Michigan handed the Buckeyes a 13-3 loss.

Stanford QB John Brodie – who later had a 17-year NFL career with the San Francisco 49ers – put on an aerial show seldom seen at the Horseshoe, completing 21 of 35 passes for 256 yards and two touchdowns, but the Buckeyes systematically beat down their opponents with a relentless ground attack worth 302 yards.

Clark and Roseboro led the team again, combining for three rushing touchdowns and another through the air – a crucial 18-yard pass from Clark to Roseboro in the fourth quarter to break a 20-20 tie. It was the only completed pass for the Buckeyes during the afternoon.

Clark finished with 141 yards on the ground while the defensive star for Ohio State was halfback Joe Cannavino, who grabbed an interception and recovered a fumble.

The offensive attack was a little more balanced for the first road contest of the season, a 26-6 victory at Illinois to kick off the conference season. OSU still rushed for 307 yards while gaining only 29 through the air, but Ellwood took center stage with a 14-yard touchdown pass to Roseboro and a pair of scoring runs in the second half.

The Buckeyes returned home armed with a No. 5 ranking in the national polls and a date with nonconference foe Penn State, an opponent Ohio State hadn't played since a 37-0 loss in 1912 that so incensed then-OSU head coach John Richards that he pulled his team off the field in the second half, decrying what he called "unnecessarily rough playing" by the Nittany Lions.

There was no such controversy this time, but seventh-year Penn State head coach Rip Engle and his staff – which included 29-year-old Joe Paterno – devised a plan that effectively shut down the potent Ohio State offense enough to claim a 7-6 upset victory.

The Nittany Lions finally broke a scoreless tie in the fourth quarter, putting togeth-

er a 13-play, 65-yard scoring drive that culminated with a 1-yard TD run by sophomore halfback Bruce Gilmore. Senior kicker Milt Plum (who later enjoyed a 13-year NFL career as a quarterback, most notably with the Cleveland Browns and Detroit Lions) added the extra point to give Penn State a 7-0 lead with about four minutes remaining.

The Buckeyes responded with a three-play, 67-yard march of their own topped off with a 3-yard touchdown run from Clark. But sophomore kicker Frank Kremblas, who had missed an 18-yard field-goal attempt in the second quarter, missed his PAT try, leaving the Nittany Lions with a one-point advantage.

Ohio State had also squandered a scoring opportunity in the third quarter when a 16-play, 86-yard possession ended when Gilmore intercepted Ellwood in the end zone.

If the narrow loss to the Nittany Lions lingered, the Buckeyes didn't let it show. They focused their attention back on the Big Ten race and reeled off successive victories against Wisconsin, Northwestern and Indiana. In so doing, Ohio State established a new conference record with 17 consecutive league victories.

The 35-14 win against Indiana also set a new Big Ten single-game rushing record with 465 yards, beating the old mark of 454 set by Purdue during a 39-0 win against Indiana in 1948. Cisco rushed for a career-high 160 yards on 17 carries while Ellwood scored twice on short runs and Clark added a 73-yard touchdown gallop.

Ohio State, 6-1 overall but still a perfect 4-0 in conference play, now prepared for a two-game, season-ending gantlet that began at Iowa and finished at home against Michigan. The Buckeyes were in first place in the conference standings with a one-game lead over Iowa and Michigan State (both 4-1) and a game and a half over Minnesota (3-1-1).

Season-Ending Losses

During his first season as Iowa head coach in 1952, Forest Evashevski had eked out an 8-0 win in Iowa City against the Buckeyes. But Hayes had gotten his revenge with back-to-back wins in Columbus in 1954 and '55, including a 20-10 triumph in 1955 that featured 169 yards and three touchdown runs by Cassady during the final home game of his college career.

Unfortunately, the Buckeyes couldn't replicate that success a year later. Iowa successfully throttled the OSU ground game and came away with a 6-0 victory, clinching the Hawkeyes' first Big Ten championship since 1922 and their first-ever trip to the Rose Bowl.

Ohio State managed only 147 yards rushing and pushed no further than the Iowa 32-yard line during the game. Meanwhile, the Hawkeyes scored the game-winner early in the third quarter on a 17-yard pass from quarterback Ken Ploen to end Ken Gibbons. The touchdown was set up by a 15-yard pass-interference penalty against the Buckeyes.

After the game, as Hayes sat dejectedly in the visiting team's locker room, a local television cameraman began shooting film after walking through an unattended, open door. That initiated a fracas between the coach and cameraman which wound up with Hayes forcibly removing the cameraman from the locker room.

That was after a pregame incident during which Hayes noticed three portable heaters behind the Iowa bench before procuring one of them for his side of the field. During official team introductions, however, an Iowa official returned the heater to the home sideline.

The Buckeyes could still have forged a tie for the conference championship, but those hopes faded with they returned home for an anticlimactic 19-0 loss to Michigan. The Buckeyes managed only 192 total yards and turned the ball over six times while getting shut out by the Wolverines for the third time in six years with Hayes as head coach.

Four of the turnovers were fumbles, including two by Roseboro early in the game. The first came on a kickoff return after Michigan had taken an early 7-0 lead, a miscue mitigated by the OSU defense. But after the Wolverines punted and pinned the Buckeyes inside their own 5-yard line, Roseboro fumbled again, this time at his own 2, a mistake that Michigan converted into a 6-yard touchdown run by All-Big Ten halfback Terry Barr.

Roseboro got a measure of revenge when he blocked the extra-point try to leave the game at 13-0.

Ohio State had its chances. It put together a 67-yard drive in the second quarter but muffed the scoring opportunity with another fumble, this one by Cisco on the OSU 22. Then early in the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes marched all the way to the Michigan 4-yard line before Ellwood was stopped on a fourth-down keeper for no gain.

The Wolverines delivered the crowning blow later in the final period with a six-play, 74-yard drive that culminated in a 1-yard touchdown dive by senior quarterback Jim Maddock.

Ninth-year Michigan head coach Bennie Oosterbaan, who moved his personal record in the rivalry series to 18-12-2 (including 5-3-1 as head coach, 10-9-1 as an assistant and 3-0 as a player) told reporters his defensive strategy was simply to overload the line of scrimmage with eight or nine defenders because the Ohio State passing game posed so little threat.

The Buckeyes proved Oosterbaan correct, completing just 1 of 5 attempts for 10 yards with two interceptions.

The lack of a passing attack was an Achilles heel for Ohio State throughout the season. In fact, it was Clark from his halfback position who was the team's leading passer in 1956. He completed 3 of 7 attempts for 88 yards while Ellwood was successful on just 7 of 20 passes for 86 yards. To put that into historical perspective, OSU quarterback Julian Sayin completed a single pass to Jeremiah Smith for an 87-yard touchdown during a 2025 victory against Grambling State.

Brown was the team's leading receiver with 151 yards in nine games. In subsequent years, more than 40 Buckeyes have exceeded that total in a single game.

Life After Football

In 1957, Brown became the first African-American elected team captain – serving as co-captain with Cisco – and finished second on the national championship team in receiving with 83 yards. He later became an oral surgeon in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a colonel after 20 years. When he died in Colorado in 2018 at the age of 84, Brown was laid to rest in Denver with full military honors.

Guy was another member of the 1956 team who pursued a career in the military. Upon graduation, he joined the Marine Corps and served on active duty and active reserves for 11 years before retiring with the rank of major. He then embarked upon a professional life that included more than 50 years of real estate development, syndication, commercial leasing and residential sales.

In addition to leading the 1956 team in passing, Clark also led the Buckeyes in rushing with 797 yards. He would lead the Buckeyes the following year in rushing as well before missing most of his senior season in 1958 with a series of injuries. That didn't prevent the Chicago Bears from taking him in the first round of the 1959 NFL draft, but Clark played his entire five-year pro career in the Canadian Football League.

Joining Clark in the CFL was Vicic, who spent eight seasons with the BC Lions and was a member of the team's 1964 Grey Cup champions.

Another member of the 1956 Buckeyes was junior defensive back and kicker Don Sutherin, who spent more than 30 seasons in the CFL as a player and coach, and won four Grey Cups as a player and three more as a coach. Sutherin, who was inducted into the Canadian Football Hall of Fame in 1992, might have been the most decorated member of the 1956 Ohio State with one notable exception.

Parker, after earning first-team All-America honors twice with the Buckeyes, played 10 full seasons with the Baltimore Colts after being selected with the eighth overall pick in the first round of the 1957 NFL draft. He was named All-Pro eight straight years, went to the Pro Bowl in each of those seasons, and helped the Colts win back-to-back NFL championships in 1958-59.

In addition to scores of honors such as having his jersey number retired and being elected to the NFL's 100th Anniversary All-Time Team, Parker received induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1973 and the College Football Hall of Fame one year later.

Ellwood, who turned 91 in April, went into coaching, returning to his hometown of Dover, Ohio, following graduation to serve as an assistant at his high school alma mater. In 1958, he returned to Ohio State and spent a year on Hayes' staff before spending three years as an assistant at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

He returned to Ohio State in 1962 for another three-year stint before serving 10 years as an assistant to longtime Ohio University head coach Bill Hess.

In 1975, Ellwood took over for Jack Lengyel as head coach at Marshall and spent four seasons with the Thundering Herd. Years later, he served in the athletic department at Georgia Southern, including one year as head coach of the Eagles.

Cisco went in a different direction than many of his teammates, choosing instead a career in professional baseball after earning third-team All-America honors while compiling a 12-2 pitching record with the Buckeyes. He signed with the Boston Red Sox in 1958 and made his major-league debut four years later, eventually spending seven seasons as a right-handed starter and reliever. Following his retirement as a player, Cisco spent all or parts of 28 more seasons as a pitching coach for five different teams.

THE OHIO STATE STORY:
WIN OR ELSE

Unlike the Ivy schools (SI, Oct. 17), the Buckeyes function as a public utility for the entertainment of 8 million fans. All they ask of coach and players is a victory every Saturday

by ROBERT SHAPLEN

EVERY SATURDAY AFTERNOON during the football season, while a scarlet-jerseyed quarterback of Ohio State University barks signals on the field, 425,000 additional quarterbacks in Columbus and another 8 million throughout the state are sure to think, at some point during the game, that each of them could do a better job. By Monday morning, the traditional time for quarterback sniping, these millions of signal callers will have replayed the game several times over in their own minds, and will then start replaying it in groups. Along about Wednesday or Thursday the coming Saturday's game will come up for discussion, and all of Ohio will decide in advance just how that one ought to be played.

To a certain degree this sort of thing goes on all over the country, but in Ohio football is super-serious business. Few are the games at Ohio Stadium, rain or shine, that are not attended by capacity crowds of 82,000 screaming, back-pounding, bottle-sipping, pigskin-pixilated customers. The rest of the quarterbacks in the state—those who couldn't get tickets—do their second guessing on radio or TV (a half dozen radio stations make sure the game is brought into every home). And if OSU loses, the separate and collective wrath of these millions of proprietary partisans will be leveled against the man behind the quarterback—The Coach.

Big Brother to everybody when he's on top, but candidate of candidates for the salt mines when he's not, a head football coach at OSU has been described as having, next to the Presidency, the toughest job in the United States. Not only does he have to direct the fortunes of his squad, but he is at the constant beck and call of all the quarterback organizations in Ohio, to whom he must make full accountings. The coach's postgame confessions of sins are regularly delivered in a manner reminiscent of a defendant at a Soviet trial. "I was wrong there," he will say, banging his head abjectly. "I shouldn't've done that." The fact that he may have been right, or that the point in question is at least debatable, makes no difference. The boys in the back room want blood.

The man on trial this week (for losing 20-14 to Duke) is an oddly wounded-up individual named Wayne Woodrow (Woody) Hayes, who is both a charming and frightening product of what, in those years of postwar prosperity, is more of a bountiful big business and a mass hysteria than it ever was before. In many respects Hayes is the perfect man for the job. Beyond replaying the game coolly with the manifold quarterbacks in exile, he is inimitably tough and is far from a hypocrite. Hayes is completely, in fact devastatingly, aware that in the struggle for survival he must produce a winning team or lose his $15,000-a-year position and, even more important, his prestige as a big-time coach, which happens to be Woody's total reason d'être.

"I love football," Hayes says, with his slight lisp and almost with tears in his eyes. "I think it's the most wonderful game in the world, and I despise to lose. I've hated to lose ever since I was a kid and threw away the mallets when I lost at croquet."

This perhaps unadmirable trait has the unalterable approval at every man Buckeye, but Hayes gets no points for mere enthusiasm. Each week of the season brings on a public reincarnation of himself, in the image of hero or villain. If, as usual, there are nine games in the schedule, he lives nine unpredictable, breath-taking, spine-tingling lives. Depending on how much of a

WORRIED COACH is a familiar figure at Ohio State. Here Woody Hayes broods on sidelines during game OSU finally won.

FILE PHOTO

BUSTED — A Sports Illustrated investigation into payments to Ohio State players for jobs which didn't exist and coach Woody Hayes making illegal payments to players resulted in sanctions for the Buckeye program in 1956.

Roseboro didn't play professional sports, but his older brother, John, played 14 MLB seasons and won three World Series rings with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

After graduating from Ohio State, Jim Roseboro remained in Columbus and began a long career in education that included coaching at East High School and Ohio Wesleyan. In 1971, he became only the third African-American elected to the Columbus City Council, and he later served as director of the Columbus City Minority Business Development Center.

Roseboro retired to California in the mid-1990s and died of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) in December 1997 at the age of 62.

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Bucks Hope To Build After Tourney Return

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State was able to climb the mountain for the first time since 2022 last season. But the Buckeyes still weren't anywhere near the top.

They finally made it back into the NCAA Tournament with a late-season run that secured their position, but the excitement of being back didn't last long since No. 9 seed TCU knocked them out in the first game of the first round.

The loss ended the Ohio State career of all-time leading OSU scorer Bruce Thornton, who left the program without a single win in the tournament. But there's no denying that progress was made by at least making it back to the Big Dance.

Head coach Jake Diebler has not lowered his standard and continues to say that he wants to bring Ohio State back to the heights it has reached in the past.

"From day one, I've leaned into the standard of this program," he said. "That's the goal, to get back to those peaks of this program. I'm not afraid of the expectations. I'm not afraid of the standard that is this program. In fact, we're trying to take it to the top, and that's the mentality I want our guys to have."

Diebler's approach this offseason to try to take the next step toward that goal was to try to build a deep team that can play fast and rotate players in and out of the game. Ohio State brings back starters John Mobley Jr. and Amare Bynum for their third and second years with the program, respectively. Ivan Njegovan, who contributed last year, is also back.

But outside of those three, the Buckeyes will be looking elsewhere for production. They went into the transfer portal for four players, brought in four freshmen and added one player from the international pool for a new-look roster.

That roster has already had multiple chances to play competition other than themselves, getting two blowout wins in Puerto Rico over two teams of professional players from the territory. They also matched up outdoors with Cincinnati on Oct. 7 and lost 79-68 at the Lindner Tennis Family Center in Mason, Ohio.

Ohio State's season begins on Nov. 2 when it heads to Salt Lake City to take on BYU for a 9 p.m. EST tipoff.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin has a position-by-position breakdown in alphabetical order of Ohio State's roster for the 2026-27 season – not counting walk-ons.

Forwards

Lee Aaliya, 6-9, 235, So. – Aaliya was the latest addition to the Buckeyes' roster over the offseason, but he still could be an impactful one. He has experience playing overseas, most recently playing in Liga ACB in Spain and averaging 18.4 points and 9.6 rebounds per game. He also played for his home country's Argentinian National Team in the 2026 AmeriCup and World Cup qualifiers.

"His athleticism and size combination is really unique," Diebler said. "Defensively, he has a versatility and an ability to really be disruptive."

FILE PHOTO

AIMING HIGH — Coach Jake Diebler guided Ohio State to the NCAA Tournament last season for the first time since Chris Holtmann was the coach in 2022, but he won't be happy with just getting there and exiting quickly as was the case last season with a first-round exit. He wants a return of the glory days that brought deeper tournament runs.

Diebler also said that Aaliya is a smart player and, since he was a later addition, they were planning to play him at only one position, but Aaliya told BSB that he had started working as a power forward as well as a center.

Aaliya playing at center would likely be for a lineup where Ohio State is trying to play small and push the pace, which is something Diebler has said he wants to try to do more often this season.

The Argentinian said he brings value on both sides of the floor.

"I bring some experience and how good I am defensively," he said. "Also getting to the rim. I really like to play around the rim."

Amare Bynum, 6-8, 245, So. – It took only 10 games for Diebler to see that Bynum deserved to be a starter as a freshman for last year's Ohio State team. Putting Bynum into an important role that early on ended up paying off. The improvements he made over the season were obvious by the time the Buckeyes were pushing for a spot in the tournament late in the season.

In the final 12 games of the regular season, Bynum averaged 11.3 points, 4.8 rebounds and 1.0 steals per game while also playing well defensively. In the tournament loss to TCU, he scored 12 points and brought down nine rebounds, providing a much-needed spark in the second half as he often did down the stretch.

Adding in the three postseason games OSU played in – two in the Big Ten tournament and one in the NCAA Tournament – Bynum shot 54.8 percent from the field and 37.0 percent from three-point range in the final 15 games of the season.

Bynum said at media day that the biggest improvements he's made in his game since last season are on the perimeter, making plays.

"I can put the ball on the ground a little more this year," Bynum said. "It's going to be a great year. I can pass more, do it all like last year."

Andrija Jelavić, 6-11, 240, Jr. – Jelavić joined Ohio State out of the portal after one season with Kentucky, where he scored 5.5 points per game and added 4.0 rebounds in over 15.6 minutes per game.

He believes his ability to stretch the floor and play outside as a big man is one of the biggest things he brings to the team this season.

"It's one thing that sets me apart from all the other guys, that versatility," he said. "Not just shooting-wise, but dribble-wise, passing-wise, and that ability to pick and pop, pick and roll or even short roll and pass out or finish. That can be a really big weapon for this team."

But for the Buckeyes to take the next step, Jelavić knows from experience how important chemistry is.

"Chemistry isn't something that should be taken for granted," Jelavić said when asked what lesson he took from his season with the Wildcats. "We had really good talent, but the chemistry between us (wasn't great)."

He doesn't seem to see that being an issue with the Buckeyes since he said the chemistry is part of the reason he came to Columbus.

"During my visit here, all of the guys, you could see the chemistry was felt both on the court and off the court," he said. "We showed in Puerto Rico, we played really unselfish basketball, and we have a lot of weapons on this team."

Alex Smith, 6-9, 215, Fr. – Coming in as the No. 207-ranked player in the 2026 class, Smith may not play a major role on this year's squad with the frontcourt depth the Buckeyes have.

But the three-star brings the ability to stretch the floor with a strong three-point shot, showing that off his senior year at Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Prolific Prep. He led the team in three-pointers made with 44, shooting 37.3 percent from beyond the arc. He also excelled defensively with 33 steals and seven blocks in 22 games.

"The big glaring thing (I bring) is obviously my shot," Smith told BSB. "That's what I was recruited for. But I say I'm a smart player and have a good IQ. I'd say I'm pretty gritty and there are a lot of other little things that don't show up on the stat sheet."

The grittiness aspect of Smith's game is important to him. He said that growing up in Columbus, he was a big fan of former Buckeye Kyle Young, who was known for that style of play.

Smith also said that his year at Prolific Prep helped him get ready to play in Columbus.

"It helped a lot with getting stronger and faster," he said. "I was playing against dudes who are as good as me, if not better, every day in practice who were going to challenge me."

Anthony Thompson, 6-9, 215, Fr. – Thompson was perhaps the most talked about addition over the offseason since he's the first five-star recruit to sign with the Buckeyes since D'Angelo Russell in the 2014 class. But the freshman has said that he embraces the expectations that come with that.

The former McDonald's All-American has become much stronger in his little time with the Buckeyes over the offseason, both Thompson and Diebler said. Thompson also believes he's gotten better on the defensive end since he arrived.

"Staying consistent with my defensive impact possession to possession," he said when asked what the coaching staff has been preaching to him. "Making sure that I'm always in the right spots and making sure I'm not getting lost. I think I've gotten a lot better at that."

There is some uncertainty about what Thompson brings defensively, but there isn't that much uncertainty about his offensive potential. The left-handed forward averaged 24.9 points per game for Western Reserve Academy High School in Hudson, Ohio, and 22.1 points in the 2025 Adidas 3SSB circuit.

"He's got a skill set that translates at every level in basketball, and that's his ability

2026-27 OSU Men's Basketball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Oct. 7	Cincinnati (Exh.)
Oct. 25	Butler (Exh.)
Nov. 2	at BYU
Nov. 6	Youngstown State
No. 9	Marshall
Nov. 13	at Connecticut
Nov. 16	Prairie View A&M
Nov. 19	UMBC
Nov. 24	Vanderbilt
Nov. 29	Lipscomb
Dec. 2	at Nebraska
Dec. 6	Maryland
Dec. 12	at Notre Dame
Dec. 15	Stony Brook
Dec. 19	Kansas*
Dec. 22	Mississippi Valley State
Dec. 30	Oregon
Jan. 2	at Iowa
Jan. 6	Northwestern
Jan. 9	at Illinois
Jan. 12	at Purdue
Jan. 17	Penn State
Jan. 23	Michigan State
Jan. 26	Iowa
Jan. 30	at Michigan
Feb. 6	at Penn State
Feb. 9	Wisconsin
Feb. 14	Washington
Feb. 17	at UCLA
Feb. 20	at USC
Feb. 25	Rutgers
Feb. 28	at Indiana
March 4	at Minnesota
March 7	Michigan
March 9-14	Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis

* - CBS Sports Classic, New York

2026-27 Ohio State Men's Basketball Projected Starting Lineup

10 • Justin Pippen • G

Ht: 6-4 • **Class:** Jr.

First season at Ohio State after a year at each of Michigan and Cal. Averaged 14.2 points and 4.6 assists last year.

0 • John Mobley Jr. • G

Ht: 6-2 • **Class:** Jr.

Third season with Buckeyes. Made preseason All-Big Ten team after shooting 41.1 percent from three last season.

6 • Anthony Thompson • F

Ht: 6-9 **Class:** Fr.

Highest rated Ohio State signee since Jared Sullinger joined the Buckeyes in the 2010 recruiting class.

1 • Amare Bynum • F

Ht: 6-8 • **Class:** So.

Started 24 games last season and averaged 9.7 points and 4.9 rebounds. Had team-high 37 dunks, according to OSU.

17 • Josh Ojianwuna • C

Ht: 6-10 • **Class:** 5th

Spent last season with Buckeyes recovering from an ACL tear. Averaged 7.4 points and 6.4 rebounds in 23 starts at Baylor in 2024-25.

to shoot," Diebler said over the summer.

Guards

Curtis Givens III, 6-3, 190, Jr. – Ohio State is Givens' third stop at the college level in three years after one season each at LSU and Memphis. He started 15 games and played in 25 with the Tigers last year, scoring 9.4 points per game with 2.1 rebounds and 2.3 assists added. He shot 36.5 percent from beyond the arc.

"(Diebler) wants me to be a playmaker, make plays for other guys and score when the opportunity presents itself," Givens told BSB. "We're going to have lots of opportunities this year because of the way we play. We like to get after teams for 94 feet, up and down the court, and we like to score early in the shot clock."

Givens, who shot 43.1 percent from the field last season, said that efficiency was the area he targeted most for improvement over the offseason and taking better shots.

Givens started for the Buckeyes in their Cincinnati scrimmage, although Diebler said that the lineups he put on the floor may not have meant much with so long to go before the season actually begins. However, the head coach believes Givens could be a big part of the guard depth, especially when it comes to the constant defensive pressure Givens spoke about.

"When you look at our guards, you can keep putting different guys on the ball. Justin (Pippen) is really gifted at it, Curtis can do it, LJ (Smith) is fast and I think (Mobley) has really improved in that area."

Myles Herro, 6-2, 175, So. – Diebler said at Big Ten media days that Herro is dealing with an injury and may take a while to come back from it. However, that may not be much of an impactful injury for OSU while Herro recovers since he's not expected to contribute as much to the guard depth as others in the backcourt are.

Herro redshirted last season right before the NCAA established its new five-for-five rule that would have meant he wouldn't need to redshirt. A three-star prospect, Herro was a strong high school player in Wisconsin and distributed the ball well.

When he gets healthy, any time that Herro gets on the floor may come late in blowout wins for the Buckeyes, and he will have the opportunity to prove himself then to try to earn more playing time.

John Mobley Jr., 6-2, 190, Jr. – Mobley was the only Buckeye to be included on the preseason All-Big Ten team, and it's easy to see why after what he provided for OSU last season in his sophomore year.

He started in all 31 games that he played and was able to remain on the floor for over 31 minutes per contest, shooting 43.2 percent from the field and 41.1 percent from three-point range. He averaged 15.7 points per game, which was an increase from the 13.0 points per contest he put up in his freshman season.

Now, without Thornton leading the way for the Buckeyes, Mobley could end up being the focal point of the offense. Mobley also wants to be more of a playmaker and help set up his teammates.

But where the junior said he needs to be better more than anywhere is on the defensive end, which is what he also heard from NBA teams when he entered his name into the draft over the offseason before deciding he wanted to be back in Columbus.

"Guard 94 (feet), disrupting guards and trying to get guards when they're a little tired," Mobley said about what being better defensively would look like for him this year. "Also just being more physical on the ball, off the ball. That's really what my problem was at the beginning of last year. It got better toward the end."

Justin Pippen, 6-4, 190, Jr. – In the scrimmage against Cincinnati, Pippen suffered a minor ankle injury that Diebler said the Buckeyes were monitoring carefully before the season. But once he's healthy, the former Cal guard is trying to be a more efficient player than he was with the Golden Bears.

"I had lots of talks with (Diebler) about that, and we're working toward that every day," he said. "Taking the right shots, getting in the paint, playing off two feet and not taking a lot of threes off the dribble, but more catch-and-shoot ones and shooting them open."

Scoring wasn't a problem for Pippen last season, but efficiency certainly was. He shot just 37.0 percent from the field and 32.7 percent from three, scoring 14.2 points per game on just over 11 shots per contest.

Where he could help the Buckeyes is distributing the ball. He had 4.6 assists per game last season. Pippen said that he and Mobley have both been taking the ball up the floor and either of them has the ability to run the offense when needed.

"We're both going to be interchangeable," he said. "It's obviously the coach's decision, but we've talked about it and we've practiced the same way. We're interchangeable."

Diebler believes those two guards made each other better over the offseason.

"(Pippen) has an ability to be disruptive defensively that we haven't had on the perimeter," Diebler said. "I've had him and John go against each other almost all summer and fall. We've now started to integrate them in some live play on the same team, but those two sparring back and forth all summer helped them both tremendously."

LJ Smith, 6-4, 180, Fr. – After reclassifying to the 2026 class, it wouldn't be a surprise to see LJ Smith get out to a slow start despite being a highly ranked prospect. That was the case when he first got on campus and practiced with the Buckeyes, but Diebler said the 17-year-old has been able to adjust well.

"We're constantly pushing him to keep going further," Diebler said. "He plays really hard, he's competitive, he's talented. But what we want to see is him from a production standpoint be consistent, and we're starting to see that more. From summer to fall, it's been a big jump. I don't really look at him as a freshman sometimes, and the staff has to remind me that he is. He's going to be a productive player for us."

Smith admitted that he had to get caught up when he got to campus, but he thinks that he has made good progress and that when the games start and he sees competition from opposing teams, that process will speed up.

"Speed, and being more explosive and physical," Smith told BSB when asked what he found out he needed to work on most when he arrived at OSU. "There's still some more to go, but I feel like when we get to real games and we start playing more and more, I'll get there."

Jimmie Williams, 6-4, 210, 5th – Williams is not only changing teams after joining the Buckeyes in the portal, but he's taking a step up in competition this year, coming from Duquesne.

The Solon, Ohio, native has made a jump in competition level before, though, starting his college career at JUCO Wallace State Community College before transferring to South Florida then Duquesne.

For the Dukes last season, Williams averaged 15.1 points per game, 4.5 rebounds and 2.6 assists, and Diebler has been impressed with how his game has translated to this point.

"We brought him in for a reason. We felt like he was going to be able to score the ball for us," Diebler said. "His consistency moving up a level has been tremendous. He's going to be an asset for us and bring some scoring punch. He can play multiple positions on the perimeter."

Williams showed his potential in Puerto Rico when the Buckeyes scrimmaged against a team of pro players from the area. He scored 20 points in the first of two scrimmages, shooting 6 of 7 from three-point range and brought down four rebounds.

Centers

Vuk Lazarevic, 7-1, 230, Fr. – Since Aaliya and Jelavić will also be playing at the five position in a rotation, there will be very little time left for Lazarevic to make it into games. But for the Serbian freshman, learning behind the more veteran players early in his career will likely be more beneficial for him.

Lazarevic spent one season at Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy – where Mobley played high school ball – in 2025-26, and he started and averaged 8.0 points, 4.8 rebounds and 1.2 blocks per game, so the potential to grow is there.

"His combination of size and skill fits our system, and he adds good depth to our frontcourt," Diebler said when Lazarevic signed with the Buckeyes in the 2026 class. "I can't wait to watch him grow and develop in our program."

Ivan Njegovan, 7-2, 260, Jr. – Njegovan has shown slow improvement over his first two seasons with Ohio State and has shown flashes of being a great defensive presence in the paint for the Buckeyes against Big Ten competition.

The big man finds himself in a rotation with multiple other centers for playing time this season and was the one who started in Ohio State's scrimmage against Cincinnati.

Njegovan earned more playing time as the season went on last year and finished with 2.6 points and 3.0 rebounds per game in just over 11 minutes per contest. But now, both Diebler and Njegovan believe it's time for the junior to take the next step in his game and be a bigger contributor.

"(Diebler) wants me to become the best version of the player I can be. I think he has a big trust in me, and he thinks I can really help this team win, and that's something I think, too," Njegovan told BSB. "It's my third year here, and it's time to do something bigger."

Josh Ojianwuna, 6-10, 270, 5th – Ojianwuna was fully cleared to participate shortly before official practices began in September, and it was the first time he was able to fully participate in workouts since he tore his ACL at Baylor in the 2024-25 season. That much was obvious when he struggled, along with the rest of Ohio State's bigs, in the scrimmage against Cincinnati, scoring just four points in 17 minutes on 2-of-5 shooting with two rebounds and five fouls.

Diebler said he expected a period during which Ojianwuna would have to get back up to speed, and he still believes the big man can be an important piece of another tournament team for Ohio State.

Before the scrimmage, Ojianwuna said that he thinks sitting out last year, he was able to learn from the sideline and will be able to apply that when he's on the court this season.

"I feel like that helped me a lot to understand how physical the Big Ten is," he said. "That got me prepared for when I'm back, what I need to expect and also knowing areas I need to help my teammates."

Ojianwuna believes his experience at Baylor will help him with the Buckeyes as well.

"I've been part of a winning program and was able to come in here and see what the program was about," he said when asked what he brings to the team. "And also being able to rebound. Rebounding is where I think I'm going to help this team the most."

UCLA's Iamaleava To Miss Rest of Season

In the midst of No. 21 UCLA's upset 17-15 victory over No. 13 Oregon at Autzen Stadium in Eugene, Ore., on Oct. 10, Bruins senior quarterback Nico Iamaleava suffered a torn ACL and is expected to be out for the season.

BIG TEN NOTES
Sam Cipriani

Iamaleava suffered the injury late in the second quarter of the game while being tackled by Ducks senior defensive lineman Bear Alexander and senior linebacker Jerry Mixon, but he missed just one snap of action in the first half, with senior backup quarterback Ty Dieffenbach stepping in relief.

Iamaleava did not return in the second half, and Dieffenbach finished the game completing 3 of 6 passes for 43 yards and a fourth-quarter touchdown that ultimately sealed UCLA's win.

"When someone goes down, and someone has to step up, you're either exposed, or you're revealed," UCLA head coach Bob Chesney said after the game. "One of the two is going to happen when your number gets called. For Ty to step up in that moment when Nico couldn't go, he put himself in a spot where he was revealed for knowing the run game and getting us into the touchdown pass."

On the play when Iamaleava suffered the injury, Alexander took a late punch at the ball that struck the quarterback across the helmet after he was already primarily on the ground.

Chesney criticized the missed call, expressing frustration with the additional contact.

"When you see it, it's certainly egregious," Chesney said. "It shouldn't be a play that is allowed to occur in the sport. And it's a shame that that was missed."

Oregon head coach Dan Lanning said Alexander wouldn't be punished and called the punch a "ball shot."

Through UCLA's first five games, Iamaleava threw for 982 yards on a 62.1 completion percentage for four touchdowns and four interceptions. He also added 144 rushing yards and a score.

Following the loss, Oregon fell out of the AP top 25 for the first time this season, while UCLA was one of the poll's biggest risers, jumping nine spots to No. 12 in the Week 6 poll. After a 17-7 win over Wisconsin on Oct. 17, the Bruins were up to No. 9 in the Week 7 poll.

Oregon Keeping QB Competition Open

With Oregon starting quarterback Dante Moore sidelined for the Ducks with a concussion that's kept him out indefinitely and Dylan Raiola struggling in relief, Lanning is keeping the backup quarterback job open while his starter works to get healthy.

The decision comes after Raiola played poorly in Oregon's loss to UCLA and was benched in the fourth quarter of the game for third-stringer Brock Thomas. Raiola went just 6 of 19 for 43 yards while tossing two interceptions in the defeat. Thomas, on the other hand, completed 11 of 15 passes for 156 yards and a touchdown that would have tied the game if not for a failed two-point conversion attempt.

Lanning said that even though Raiola began the season as the backup and led Oregon to a win over USC, he would have to beat out his competition for the role while Moore continues to recover.

"We really have a competition in a lot of positions," Lanning said. "Obviously, quarterback position, if Dante is not able to go. Offensive line, there's a lot of competition at that position. There's plenty of positions where there's competition. There's competition every single week. I always say football is like renting a house. It's not owning a house. You have to pay rent every week."

Moore suffered the head injury as he was taking a hit from USC linebacker Desman Stephens II while attempting to slide in Oregon's 41-27 victory over the Trojans on Sept. 26.

Thomas got the start against Nebraska on Oct. 17. He completed 9 of 20 passes for 54 yards in the 17-14 win over the Cornhuskers. However, Thomas was benched after an interception in the fourth quarter, and Raiola finished the game completing 11 of 18 passes for 59 yards and the game-winning touchdown pass.

MSU's Fitzgerald Apologizes For Gesture

Following Michigan State's heartbreaking 38-37 overtime loss to Illinois on Oct. 10 at Spartan Stadium in East Lansing, Mich., head coach Pat Fitzgerald apologized for his sideline gestures during the loss.

As Michigan State attempted to mount a late comeback down 31-24, Fitzgerald was seen trying to pump up the home crowd in the fourth quarter. While he classically swung his arms up and waved his towel around his head, he was also seen showing his middle finger to the Illinois bench.

After a failed two-point conversion in overtime ultimately crushed Michigan State's hopes of winning, Fitzgerald acknowledged his actions were inappropriate.

"My mom's rolling over in her grave," Fitzgerald said. "I need to be more disciplined. I need to be more composed. I do have a passion problem, and I've had that for a long time. But that needs to be controlled and not be emotional, and I was emotional. I can't do that."

Despite acknowledging his lack of composure, Fitzgerald maintained that his passion for the Spartans would not change.

"I'm not going to apologize for fighting for my guys," he said. "I'm not going to apologize for fighting for our program and for our school. It means the world to me to be here. It means the world to me to have this opportunity. It means the world to me to be those guys' leader. I'm really proud of that response. I'm not proud of mine, but I'm proud of theirs."

In Fitzgerald's first year at the helm of Michigan State, the Spartans have posted a 2-5 record, failing to earn a Big Ten victory. He fell to his former team, No. 24 Northwestern, 24-21, on Oct. 17, where he coached for over 20 seasons in various roles.

Smart "Waiting" On Cignetti Effect

While Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti has gone 33-3 through 2½ seasons with the team and led the Hoosiers to the 2026 College Football Playoff title, Georgia head coach Kirby Smart believes replicating that success in the SEC compared to the Big Ten is easier said than done.

When asked whether Cignetti's turnaround of a historically struggling Indiana program had raised expectations for first-year head coaches, Smart pointed to the SEC's week-to-week competition as a significant obstacle.

"I'm still waiting on the first Cignetti effect in the SEC," Smart said. "It's tough, tough, tough sledding week in, week out."

Indiana had won 22 consecutive games prior to its loss to Ohio State on Oct. 17, establishing itself as one of college football's premier programs under Cignetti, but Smart suggested the Hoosiers' rise required more than simply bringing in a new coach.

"(The) key to all that is the quarterback, and Coach Cignetti has done a tremendous job developing, bringing (in), or getting quarterbacks," Smart said. "That's a big part of every offense's or team's success."

Cignetti has brought in an experienced transfer at the position in each of his three seasons at Indiana. That began with Ohio's Kurtis Rourke in 2024, followed by California's Fernando Mendoza in 2025 and TCU transfer Josh Hoover in 2026.

Hoover has been one of the most efficient quarterbacks in the country despite his turnover troubles in Fort Worth, throwing for 1,660 yards and 18 touchdowns with no interceptions.

Georgia won back-to-back national championships under Smart in 2021 and 2022 but has failed to make a semifinal or better in the 12-team playoff era.

Braun: NW Should Dream Big

Following a strong 4-1 start to the season that included putting defending national champions Indiana on the ropes and a 31-point trouncing of Penn State, Northwestern head coach David Braun spoke on the program's lofty aspirations heading into this year, beginning with offensive coordinator Chip Kelly.

After finishing 96th in the FBS in scoring offense in 2025, Braun hired the former Ohio State offensive coordinator, Kelly, to transform the Wildcats' offense. The move has paid dividends, with Northwestern averaging 33.5 points per game, which is tied for 40th nationally.

Additionally, Michigan State transfer quarterback Aidan Chiles also leads the Big Ten with a 70.5 completion percentage. Northwestern's rushing offense is also quite effective, averaging 191.5 yards per game on the ground.

"What these first few weeks have shown is we're not crazy to dream big," Braun said. "And then there is this reality of that fire, that momentum, can be dulled out pretty quick if we don't stay focused one week at a time. There is momentum, and we've just got to make sure we keep our foot on the gas."

With the opening of the New Ryan Field, Braun said Northwestern has an opportunity to build on its early-season momentum and establish itself as a consistent Big Ten contender.

"There is an opportunity here with this new stadium, with what we're doing, to look back on this time a few years from now and say, 'Man, it's pretty special what Northwestern football has built,' " Braun said. "Not just catching lightning in a bottle, but having built something really sustainable."

U-M Adds Two Players

Michigan has added two players to its football roster in former Miami (Fla.) tight end Alex Bauman and former Boise State defensive back Jeremiah Earby after both received temporary restraining orders granting them eligibility for a fifth college season.

Washtenaw County Circuit Court Judge Julia B. Owdziej ruled on Oct. 13 that denying their eligibility would cause "irreparable and severe" harm, while the NCAA would face "negligible" harm.

Both Bauman and Earby are enrolled at Michigan and have committed to join the Wolverines but haven't officially signed. A preliminary injunction hearing is scheduled for Nov. 4.

Multiple publications reached out to the university, but a Michigan spokesperson declined to comment.

Earby totaled 94 tackles, 16 pass deflections and five interceptions during his previous two seasons at Boise State. He also spent two seasons at California before joining the Broncos. Earby has totaled 156 tackles, 33 pass breakups and seven picks for his collegiate career.

Bauman recorded 18 receptions for 166 yards and a touchdown with the Hurricanes in 2025, while helping Miami to the national championship game. Between his year with the Hurricanes and previous three seasons at Tulane, Bauman has totaled 81 catches for 776 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Michigan has stumbled during head coach Kyle Whittingham's first season at the helm. The Wolverines began the season 3-0 but faltered with losses in their first two Big Ten contests, putting their backs against the wall if Michigan looks to reach the CFP. Michigan bounced back with a 21-18 victory over Penn State on Oct. 17.

BIG 2026 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
UCLA	4	0	1.000	6	0	1.000
Ohio State	4	0	1.000	6	1	0.857
USC	3	1	0.750	6	1	0.857
Indiana	3	1	0.750	6	1	0.857
Northwestern	2	1	0.667	5	1	0.833
Iowa	2	1	0.667	5	1	0.833
Oregon	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Wisconsin	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Minnesota	2	1	0.667	4	2	0.667
Nebraska	2	2	0.500	5	2	0.714
Purdue	2	2	0.500	3	4	0.429
Michigan	1	2	0.333	4	2	0.667
Illinois	1	2	0.333	3	3	0.500
Rutgers	1	2	0.333	2	4	0.333
Washington	1	3	0.250	4	3	0.571
Penn State	0	4	0.000	3	4	0.429
Michigan State	0	4	0.000	2	5	0.286
Maryland	0	4	0.000	2	5	0.286

Oct. 16 Game
Washington at 38, Purdue 26

Oct. 17 Games
UCLA 17, Wisconsin 7
Oregon 17, Nebraska 14
Ohio State 19, Indiana 15
Northwestern 24, Michigan State 21
Rutgers 37, Maryland 30
Michigan 21, Penn State 18

Oct. 24 Games
Indiana at Michigan, noon
Rutgers at Northwestern, noon
Oregon at Illinois, 3 p.m.
Iowa at Minnesota, 3:30 p.m.
Michigan State at UCLA, 3:30 p.m.
USC at Wisconsin, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 31 Games
Minnesota at Indiana, TBA
Illinois at Maryland, TBA
Michigan at Rutgers, TBA
Wisconsin at Iowa, TBA
Washington at Nebraska, TBA
Nevada at UCLA, TBA
Ohio State at USC, TBA
Northwestern at Oregon, TBA
Purdue at Penn State, TBA

All times Eastern

Home Swede Home For Buckeye Boumedienne

Sascha Boumedienne was born in Stockholm, Sweden, and takes pride in representing his country on the international stage, but his love for Columbus led the junior defenseman to transfer to Ohio State this season to play in his second home.

IN THE CREASE
Craig Merz

"It's nice to be back in the Columbus area," he said. "I've lived here and went to high school here and have a bunch of buddies that not only come from here but go to Ohio State too. It's a blast."

Boumedienne (6-3, 195) played for the Ohio Blue Jackets AAA program and graduated from Olentangy Liberty High School (2024) in suburban Columbus while his father, Josef, worked in the front office of the Columbus Blue Jackets for 11 years, first in the scouting department before becoming an assistant coach for the 2023-24 season in his final season with the team. He is presently the general manager of the Swedish national team as well as being named in September as the vice president of hockey operations for the Florida Panthers.

Josef was a European scout based in Sweden before being promoted to director of pro scouting in 2021 and moving to Columbus with his family.

The younger Boumedienne also has another Ohio connection. He played junior hockey for Youngstown in the United States Hockey League before going to Boston U. for two seasons.

And, oh yeah, his older brother, Sami, is a junior on the OSU fencing team.

"When I knew I wanted to transfer, obviously I was looking at different schools and where I wanted to go, and everything just felt right about Ohio State," Sascha said. "It was kind of kind of a homecoming and having all my best friends here.

"I've known the (Ohio State) coaches for a while since I lived here, seeing them around the rinks. They're really great people, and that's what I was looking for. It wasn't really a hard decision, and my big brother goes to Ohio State too, so it felt like a really comfortable decision and obviously a really good hockey team too.

"We both thought it would be fun if we went to the same school. That's a pretty special thing, being able to go to the same school as your brother."

It also cut down on the travel a bit for his parents because their younger brother, Wilson, is playing for Fargo in the USHL.

"My mom talks about it all the time," Sascha said. "She doesn't have to go to three different places; she just has to go to two now – Columbus and our little brother in Fargo, N.D."

Having moved around the world due to his father's work, Boumedienne was pleasantly surprised when he arrived in central Ohio.

"It was great coming to Columbus," Sascha said. "Coming from Europe, you don't really know what to expect. You don't really hear about Columbus on the international level, but we loved our time here as a family in Columbus. I really enjoyed it, and it's kind of like a second home now. I really love the city and love the people."

Goal-Setting

He hopes his time with the Buckeyes will help him become the second generation to reach the NHL. His father, a defenseman, played 47 games (four goals, 12 assists) for the New Jersey Devils, Tampa Bay Lightning and Washington Capitals from 2001-04,

Sascha was the No. 28 pick by the Winnipeg Jets in the 2025 NHL draft and is the fourth first-rounder to play for the Buckeyes. The others were drafted while at Ohio State: Ryan Kesler (23rd to the Vancouver Canucks in 2003), R.J. Umberger (16th, Vancouver in 2001) and Dave Steckel (30th, Los Angeles Kings in 2001).

Kesler scored 573 points (258 goals, 315 assists) in 1,001 NHL games for the Canucks and Anaheim Ducks from 2003-19. Umberger had 392 points (180, 212) in 779 games for the Philadelphia Flyers and Blue Jackets from 2005-16, and in 425 games for the Capitals, Devils, Toronto Maple Leafs and Ducks from 2005-14, Steckel recorded 79 points (33, 46).

In Boumedienne's two seasons at Boston U., he scored five goals with 18 assists in 75 games. He played against the Buckeyes in the first round of the 2025 NCAA tournament.

They were tied 3-3 after two periods before the Terriers scored five for an 8-3 win. He had an assist.

"I knew a few of the players on Ohio State, Nate (McBrayer) and (Nathan) Lewis and then the coaching staff too," he said. "That was kind of a special game for me and that was fun."

Not so much for the Buckeyes, so he doesn't bring it up much in conversation.

"Everyone's like, 'Oh, we had you guys. We had you guys,' but yeah, I'm glad we came out on top," Boumedienne said.

Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik is happy to have him on his side now.

"Sascha's a good player, and then you see on the back end he's a first-round pick," Rohlik said. "He's not going to be treated any differently. We try to develop all our guys, including Sascha, at the highest level. I think that's what we're most proud of.

"It's a feather in our staff's cap to get a guy like that here, but you've still got to go out and produce. You've still got to develop, and that's what we're going to try to do."

Rohlik said he looks forward to working with the Winnipeg organization on the development of Boumedienne.

"I think we're one of the teams with an open-door policy because I think we all want the same thing," the coach said. "We all want Sascha and any of our guys to be the best they can be, and any input we can get from Winnipeg or anybody else on what they see and what we see and collaborate together, I think it's best for the kid."

Room To Grow

Now that Boumedienne has played some games for the Buckeyes, Rohlik said he can see the potential but cautioned that he is still a work in progress, noting that as a freshman at Boston U. he was one of the youngest players in the NCAA, and he is still younger than some of the OSU freshmen this season.

Boumedienne will turn 20 on Jan. 17.

"He's still learning," Rohlik said. "It's hard for people to understand when you see a kid like that, knowing that he's still one of the youngest guys on our team. They're like, 'Well, wait a minute, he's a junior.'

"He went in at such an early age. He's still scratching the surface. We're excited as coaches of what we think we can help him with to continue to get better. You can see the attributes that he brings and his skill set. He's just learning to become a complete player too."

While Boumedienne is young, he has a lot of international experience and helped the Swedes earn the gold medal at the prestigious World Junior Championship in January by scoring the winning goal.

He averaged 22:13 of ice time – second most on the team – and had two goals and two assists in seven games.

"Every time I throw that national team jersey on is something you don't take for granted," he said. "You almost get goose bumps every time you throw it on. It's something that means a lot. Growing up idolizing all the Swedish players and looking at all those star players in the NHL that come from Sweden, you're really, really proud. I'm looking forward to keep doing that."

His offensive skills come from his days as a forward.

"Until I was about 13, the year before we moved to the States, I was a centerman," he said. "Then I switched over to D. I wanted to be just like my dad. That's probably the reason why."

Playing up front has helped him be a better defenseman.

"If you played that position, you kind of know what they're thinking on the other side of the puck when you're defending them," he said. "There's definitely some benefits to it.

"I'd like to provide a little bit of everything, obviously trying to bring my offensive instincts and play to help the forwards create some offense and get up in the rush. But I also want to be hard to play against, defend and use my two-way game and my skating all of the ice.

"I'm trying to be available for the coaches to be able to throw me over the boards at any point of the game and then be comfortable with me being out there."

Even as a newcomer and, again, a young player, he wants to also provide any advice he can.

"I feel like they can lean on me if they need," he said. "But most of these guys are really mature, and they can take care of themselves. Obviously, I'd be happy to answer any questions about any of my experiences."

Don't call him a wily vet or something like that just two-plus seasons into his career, but he has experienced a lot.

"I've gone to Frozen Four (2025). I've gone far in the playoffs and then obviously last year we kind of had a tough year with BU (17-17-2)," he said. "So I've been on both ends of the spectrum, obviously. It's a really fun time playing college hockey, so I don't know if I feel like a grizzled vet, but I definitely feel more experienced."

Heart Of It All

The Buckeyes for the second straight series earned a split after losing the opener.

Following a 5-3 loss on Oct. 16, OSU (2-2-0) used 17 saves by freshman Jakub Milota for his first win and three assists from freshman Evan Jardine for a 5-1 victory at Sacred Heart the next night.

Jardine, a fourth-round pick by the Columbus Blue Jackets in the 2026 NHL draft, led the way with five points on the weekend, including his first two goals as a Buckeye in the first game after Sacred Heart (2-2-0) scored the first three goals. Senior Ryan Gordon had the other goal for the Buckeyes.

In the rematch, the first OSU goals for freshmen from Will Tomko, Benjamin Wilmott and Ryan Rucinski led the way. Juniors Nathan Lewis and Felix Carin also scored for a 5-0 lead in the second period.

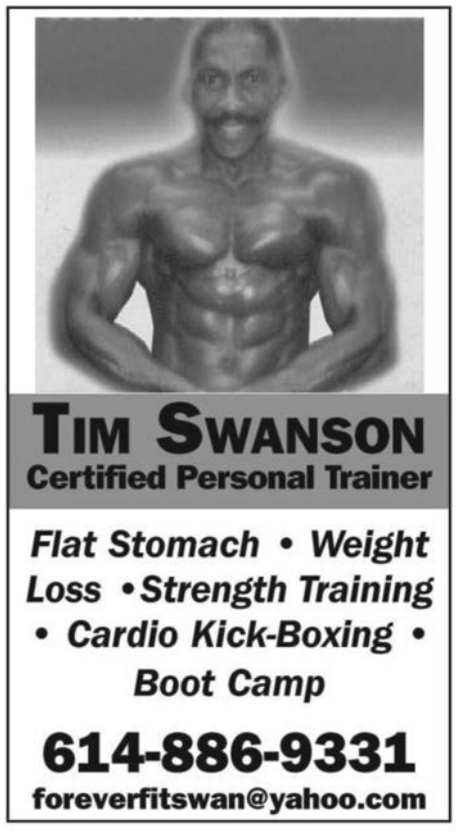
Sacred Heart broke the shutout at 13:53 of the second on a goal by Diego Buttazzoni.

Ahead

The Buckeyes play their first home games at Value City Arena vs. Augustana on Oct. 23 (6:30 p.m.) and 24 (5 p.m.) Both will be streamed on Big Ten Plus.

Then they host Michigan to open the Big Ten schedule on Oct. 31, a Saturday (6 p.m., B1G+), and Nov. 1 (7:30 p.m., BTN). The Buckeyes are idle the following weekend.

For a complete recap of the Sacred Heart and Michigan series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



Buckeye Defense Delivers In Win Over Hoosiers

Oct. 17th was a day of carnage for the Associated Press top 10 college football teams. Five of the top seven crash-landed, and others, like Miami, barely survived.

COACH'S CORNER
Bill Conley

Ohio State traveled to Bloomington to take on defending national champion Indiana, where the Buckeyes snapped the Hoosiers' 22-game winning streak, got sweet revenge from last year's devastating loss in the Big Ten Championship Game, and kept Ohio State atop the Big Ten title race. It was far from a perfect game, but it was a hard-fought one the Buckeyes earned over a very good football team.

Matt Patricia's defense had a daunting task: stop an Indiana offense that was averaging over 40 points per game, was balanced in its attack in terms of run and pass, and had struck late to survive scares from the two toughest opponents they had played so far this season in Northwestern and Nebraska.

In order to accomplish the goal, the Buckeye defense had to make the Hoosier offense one-dimensional. That meant slowing down the Big Ten's second-leading rushing offense that was putting up over 220 yards per game on the ground.

If the Hoosiers' running attack could be limited, it would put the pressure on transfer quarterback Josh Hoover to win the game with his arm. Hoover hadn't thrown an interception as Indiana's starting quarterback, but at his previous school, TCU, he had been picked off 33 times in four seasons.

In order to slow down the Hoosier running game, the Buckeye defense had to minimize production from running backs Turbo Richard and Lee Beebe Jr., each of whom had put up just under 600 yards in the first six games, combined for nine touchdowns, and proved to be not just consistent but also explosive.

Richard had a 57-yarder and Beebe a 70-yard run already this season. If the Buckeye "Silver Bullet" defense's front seven could limit the Hoosier rushing attack, the young but quickly maturing Buckeye secondary could concentrate on stopping the Hoosier passing game.

First down would be crucial for the Hoosiers. If the Indiana offense could muster 5 to 6 yards per carry on first down, Indiana offensive coordinator Mike Shanahan would have multiple options to keep drives alive and attack the Buckeye defense.

But Matt Patricia would win this battle by holding the Hoosier first-down running game to just 53 yards on 14 carries, with the longest first-down run being just 8 yards, that by Hoover late in the third quarter, not by Richard or Beebe. Total first-down run production for the Indiana offense averaged 3.8 yards per carry. When the Hoosiers threw the football on first down, things didn't go any better, putting up just 47 yards on 14 attempts.

To be a major contender in college football, you must have a dominant defensive front. The defensive interior must hold their ground against their massive offensive counterparts, shed the block, then get to the football.

If pass shows, they must now transition into a rusher who can pressure the opposing quarterback or even sack them. The Buckeye defensive interior is getting better each game, and there is no argument that they won the day by dominating the Hoosier offensive line, especially against the run.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson loves to rotate his players in order to keep them fresh and to give them repetitions in the heat of battle, and it's paying off for the Buckeyes. Defensive linemen Kenyatta Jackson Jr., Jason Moore, Eddrick Houston, and Will Smith Jr. tallied 18 tackles together.

Qua Russaw, Beau Atkinson and John Walker all contributed to the strong defensive performance up front. As good as they played, however, OSU still needs continued improvement, especially at pressuring the quarterback in passing situations.

The Buckeye defense's mission to make the Indiana offense one-dimensional was accomplished. As mentioned, the Hoosier running attack had been averaging over 220 yards per game but was held to just 73 for the entire game, and their total offensive production was nearly 100 yards less than they had been averaging in their six previous games.

Despite not making any interceptions, the Buckeye defense recovered two fumbles. A talented Indiana wide receiver, Charlie Becker, had a good day with nine receptions but was kept out of the end zone.

The Buckeye pass defense was more than solid with Earl Little Jr., Jaylen McClain, Jay Timmons, Devin Sanchez, and Jermaine Mathews Jr. all stepping their game up to a higher level, as the entire unit is doing.

The Ohio State defensive staff seems to have increased confidence in their personnel and their specific roles. If the unit stays on track and continues to progress, it can be a major reason the Buckeyes can contend for the Big Ten title this season.

Kicking Game Makes Strides

Ryan Day challenged his special teams players and coaches in demanding more production and consistency out of them. It seems that challenge has had some positive results.

Wide receiver Phillip Bell is making his mark as a punt returner. First of all, a punt returner has to make the right decision whether to return the punt or not. Secondly, he has to have sure hands to field the ball. Lastly, have the confidence to immediately head north and south to make as many yards as possible. Bell showed those skills against Indiana along with some elusiveness in the open field. He had two punt returns for 19 yards, including a 14-yarder to help start a drive.

Punter Joe McGuire responded to the Day challenge/threat by averaging 44.4 yards on five punts, including a long of 52 yards. His highlight of the day, however, was a fourth-quarter boot that rolled dead at the Indiana 6-yard line. Those are the type of punts that can really flip the field.

Hallelujah, it was finally not the Buckeyes who missed field goals. Sure-footed Indiana field-goal kicker Nico Radicic was all but that against OSU. He missed two field goals, including a chip shot 32-yarder. On the other hand, Ohio State's guy, Connor Hawkins, made two field goals of 26 and 29 yards. Not a huge accomplishment, but progress.

Now if Ohio State can bring a punt or kick back for a touchdown or even block a punt or field goal, special teams will indeed become special.

Own Worst Enemy At Times

I was watching a Western movie one time where "Swifty" Morgan, played by Chuck Connors, accidentally shot himself in the foot. Too often, the same thing is happening to the Buckeyes.

Taking a sack instead of throwing the ball away, making an untimely penalty that stalls a drive, or having a personal foul that helps the opponent keep their drive alive is happening all too many times this season.

The game is tough enough without helping your opponent. Aggressive mistakes happen, but boneheaded ones should not. Several times against Indiana, the Buckeyes lost valuable field position due to unforced errors.

Among other things, we took ourselves out of field-goal range in the fourth quarter with a holding penalty, which denied us a chance to stretch our lead over the Hoosiers. Championships can be lost by making these types of mistakes. Enough is enough.

QB Injury Is Challenge to Coaches

The injury to Julian Sayin is an obvious blow to the Buckeye offense. Hopefully, Julian will make a quicker recovery than initially expected.

The next man up is Luke Fahey, a true freshman who has a daunting task in front of him. High hopes of Tavien St. Clair as a solid backup to Sayin are out the window. He, obviously, has not earned the trust of the coaching staff to be the No. 2 at his position. Fahey has earned the job and possesses many of the intangibles coaches look for in their signal-caller, like intelligence, dedication and leadership.

He also has the tangibles, the quarterback skills and fundamentals. What he doesn't have, through no fault of his own, is experience. He simply hasn't had the number of reps in Division I competition to be a difference maker at the position.

The success of Fahey in the next few weeks depends on the offensive coaching staff. They must devise a scheme that can let him be successful. Luke can't do all the things Julian Sayin can do yet, so he can't be overloaded.

Other players must also take their game to a higher level to take some of the heat off Fahey. It will be a massive challenge to accomplish in the days of the portal system where seasoned backup quarterbacks are a thing of the past. They leave to go to greener pastures where the opportunity to start and earn NIL money is the motivator. It's a real shame, but that's the way it is in 2026.

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OSU Defense Lands Knockout Blow Against IU

When it was still relevant as a sport, boxing was very high on my radar.

As huge fights were announced, I would get excited, and there would be palpable tension as the moments ticked down until the opening bell.

THE FACTS MAN
Mike Wachsman

For a while I fancied the middleweights – Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Tommy "Hit Man" Hearns, Sugar Ray Leonard. All iconic, all champions, and a trio that staged some of the best fights I have ever seen. Rapid-fire action, explosiveness. It was hard to beat.

But at heart the heavyweights were my favorites.

The list of greats in my lifetime reads like a who's who of the sweet science – Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, George Foreman, Ken Norton, Larry Holmes, Mike Tyson. Pure power and demolition, guys who would stand in front of you and land haymaker after haymaker in an attempt to get you out of there.

That was my view of Ohio State's compelling road victory over Indiana. No, it wasn't explosive, and some would say it wasn't even entertaining. But it was dramatic, and full of body shots that threatened to vanquish either side at any moment.

Ohio State's defense forced two turnovers against a Hoosier offense that had lost the ball only once this season, and though the Buckeyes managed just three points off the turnovers, the stop unit showed that it was going to be a problem for IU all afternoon.

With an offense that looked rubber-legged and uncertain, Ohio State needed something to get it going. Last year's defense was full of stars, guys who you knew would make a play when it was needed. This year's bunch had not, to this point, shown that same kind of consistency.

So it was fortuitous that the defense grew up before our eyes and held what had been a pretty potent offensive squad to just 15 points. Nursing a four-point lead late in the game, coordinator Matt Patricia turned up the heat and aggression, and it was just enough to leave Bloomington with a victory.

"I said into the headset that we would need to win this game on defense," OSU coach Ryan Day said. "We give everyone credit. We were aggressive in that moment, and it worked out for us. The defense grinded all game and was resilient. The big points of the game were some of the turnovers we created."

Indiana has been held below 20 points just four times in the past three seasons. Ohio State is responsible for three of those.

There were some grumblings that Ohio State would fold in a late-game situation, the way it did when it squandered a 20-point fourth-quarter lead in an early-season loss at Texas. Message boards and call-in shows showed plenty of doubt in the stop unit, especially when it was compared to last season.

Never mind that the Buckeyes were top 10 in scoring defense coming into the game – the perception was that this defense was soft.

The players were tired of hearing about that and decided to do something about it.

There was still 10:30 to play when Indiana pared the deficit to 19-15, and there were those questions again. Would the Buckeyes give up the lead on the road? Would the Hoosiers find the magic late in the contest? Would OSU play soft and allow Indiana to march down the field for a game-winning score?

The answer to all of those questions is no, though Ohio State faithful held their breath momentarily as officials decided that receiver Nick Marsh stepped out of bounds before catching a pass in the end zone that would have given IU a late lead.

Things like that had not happened to Indiana during the course of its 22-game winning streak but seem to happen against OSU with regularity.

There was a newfound toughness from the defense, which routinely stuffed an Indiana run game that had rolled up over 230 yards on four occasions this season. Against the Buckeyes, Indiana had just 73, and no run longer than 8 yards.

"We learned lessons from that (Texas) game," Day said. "We were able to find a way to win the game in the fourth quarter. That's the bottom line. It was more about us. Matt and our defensive staff decided to be more aggressive in the fourth quarter, especially when (quarterback) Julian (Sayin) went down. We wanted to win the game on defense."

There are still a few land mines ahead for Ohio State – USC, Oregon and Michigan, though none seem quite as daunting now as they did when the season began. Still, they will not be easy, especially with a reserve quarterback who has minimal experience on the big stage.

So it will be up to the defense to lead the way, and that's fine with all concerned.

"I think they feel much more comfortable now playing in the fourth quarter than they did to start the season," Day said. "Half the guys on the team weren't here last season, so every week we're getting more cemented as a team. In years past when guys were here for three, four, five years, they would spend a lot of time together, have experience together. Games like this, losses like we had early in the season, they bring you together in a short period of time. Now more than ever you have to have a team that plays for each other."

Playing together allowed the Buckeyes to take the belt from the reigning champions.

Will History Repeat Itself?

As is their wont, Buckeye Nation was not nearly as happy after the victory as it should have been. OSU was not perfect, and the fact that luck played a role in the win seemed to be greeted with skepticism rather than joy.

Root however you want to, but it is beyond me why anyone would be unhappy after a victory. I've always said that an ugly win is better than a pretty loss any day of the week.

There is one concern going forward: the absence of Sayin. The junior appeared to have suffered a shoulder injury following a big sack by Indiana's Mario Landino in the fourth quarter, paving the way for freshman Luke Fahey to enter the fray.

It is a big ask to expect a kid who got minimal practice reps with the first unit to come in and play spotless football. It was easy to see that Fahey's eyes were wide as he entered the game, and his play showed a bit of nervousness as he misfired on both of his pass attempts. But he did show some nifty running skill on an 8-yard run on his first play, and his teammates seemed proud afterward that he was able to manage the closing moments of the contest.

"It was a tough spot to come into," Day said. "It was moving fast for him, so we were trying to find some things to calm him down a little bit. One thing about Luke – and you could see it on that scramble he made – he has confidence. He's got athletic ability. I don't think the moment was too big for him."

I got two separate text messages after the game that the win was nice, but the season is over because of Sayin's injury. One even said that Fahey should not be playing at this level and that the offense will be hard-pressed to score 14 points on a weekly basis.

After a brief chuckle, both senders were reminded that it was not that long ago that Ohio State faced a similar situation.

Think back to 2014 when Braxton Miller went down with a shoulder injury in fall camp and the reins were turned over to untested and lightly regarded backup J.T. Barrett. He did not do much to engender faith from fans during a 35-21 home-opening loss to Virginia Tech, but then a funny thing happened – he gained confidence, grabbed command of the offense and led the Buckeyes on a path that culminated in a national championship. He was unable to finish the journey because of an injury of his own, but third-teamer Cardale Jones brought everything home for Ohio State in a now-legendary season.

This is not to say that Fahey will turn into Barrett. Few can do that.

What it is saying is that it is premature to judge a kid based on him not expecting to play, going in cold and facing live bullets against good competition for the first time. Yeah, Fahey had seen spot duty earlier this year, but Ball State and Kent State are not Indiana. They are not USC or Oregon or Michigan, either.

There definitely is work to be done, which is why the off week comes at the perfect time. Ohio State now has nearly two weeks to figure out how to use Fahey – who was no slouch on the recruiting trail, by the way. He had 27 offers, from Oregon, Washington and Auburn to name just a few. He was a three-star recruit in the class of 2026 and had, among other things, "a quick release, throws one of the tighter balls in the region and processes the game very quickly. An extremely smart player with a high football IQ," according to his 247Sports profile.

Forgive me if I choose to side with Day and his coaching staff over the YouTube evaluators of Buckeye fandom. Day knows quarterbacks, and the Buckeyes would not have offered the kid if they didn't see something in him.

Maybe the game ends up being too much for Fahey, and the offense grinds to a halt. But maybe after a week of practice with the ones, and a week of tinkering the offense to fit his skill set, Fahey can come out against USC and manage things with confidence. He does not have to be great. He just has to run the offense without turning the ball over or making poor decisions. He does not need to be a hero.

Oh, one last example of rushing to judgment on a quarterback – OSU fans thought that Lincoln Kienholz was garbage after the Buckeyes' disastrous 14-3 loss to Missouri in the 2023 Cotton Bowl. Pressed into service after starter Devin Brown went down with an injury, Kienholz went 6 of 17 for 86 yards and led the offense to just 203 total yards. Kienholz is currently piloting a Louisville squad that ranks 11th in total offense. He is 16th in passing efficiency and has had four games of 70 percent completions or better.

So why don't we wait until Fahey has some actual time to prepare for a game before throwing him on the scrap heap?

Quick Hits

• Ohio State has scored in the closing moments of the first half in seven straight games, including the 15-play, 80-yard drive against Indiana that gave the Buckeyes a 10-7 edge.

The closing sequence of that drive was odd, mainly because for three plays from the Hoosiers' 1- or 2-yard line the Buckeyes did not have Jeremiah Smith on the field. OSU ran 14 personnel – one back and four tight ends – and attempted to use brawn to find pay dirt. Instead, there was a run for a lost yard, an incomplete pass and another run for zero yards. Smith was finally on the field on fourth down, and OSU was successful on a 2-yard scoring toss from Sayin to Bo Jackson out of a spread formation.

"What was not an option was taking a field goal at that time," Day said. "When we got the first down, we knew we would have some chances, and on fourth down we decided to spread them out a little bit. We have to be able to hammer that in when we get down there."

I get the idea of wanting to pound the ball down Indiana's throat, but there are almost no situations where Smith should be off the field, if for no reason other than it gives the opposing defense something to worry about and possibly double-team, which leaves someone else open.

• Much has been made about Ohio State's special teams, both this season and for the past few seasons. There have been crucial missed kicks and precious little juice in the return game, but against Indiana the special teams won the day.

Joe McGuire averaged 44.4 yards on five punts, landing two inside the 20 – including a fourth-quarter punt that rolled out of bounds at the Hoosiers 6-yard line. Kicker Connor Hawkins made his two field-goal attempts of the day while IU kicker Nico Radecic missed a pair – including a doink off of the goalpost from 32 yards in the second quarter, just prior to Ohio State's clock-eating scoring drive. And Phillip Bell averaged 9.5 yards on two punt returns and showed a willingness to get upfield instead of just taking a fair catch.

Putting A Wrap on Big Win Over Hoosiers

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

When you talk about Ohio State's (unique, hard-fought, entertaining, sloppy – insert your own word) 19-15 win over No. 5 Indiana, you have to talk Buckeye defense. The Hoosiers entered the game ranked in the national top 20 in scoring (40.2) and total yardage (462.7) but could muster only 369 yards and the 15 points against the Buckeyes. More importantly IU was averaging 221.3 on the ground and left Memorial Stadum with only 73 on 29 carries for a paltry 2.5-yard average.

As I watched Indiana coach Curt Cignetti – the new Jim Harbaugh as far as universal ultra-praise – and crew repeatedly test the Buckeye rushing defense, I couldn't help but think of Ryan Day and Chip Kelly against Michigan in 2024, when they repeatedly tested the Wolverines' strength, the defensive line and run defense, with little or no success.

IU running backs Turbo Richard and Lee Beebe Jr. each had longs of 7.

The Hoosiers had a little more luck through the air. While quarterback Josh Hoover completed only 20 of his 40 passes, those completions accounted for 296 air yards. You could easily say that the defense, in the end, gave up what should have been the game-winning score to a wide-open receiver, but I would counter with the same thing I kept saying about last year's loss to the Hoosiers in the Big Ten Championship Game. If you hold the eventual national champions to just 13 points, you should win the game. Fast-forward to the 2026 game. Even if Nick Marsh had gotten his foot down for the TD, which would have given the Hoosiers 22 points, offense was supposed to be Ohio State's calling card. If the defense held IU to 22 points, the Buckeyes should have scored enough points to win the game.

Which brings us to Julian Sayin. I don't mean to pile on to a guy who suffered an injury that may keep him out for several weeks, but was that the worst game of his Ohio State career or what? He completed 15 of 29 of his passes for 235 yards with two interceptions and three sacks. While that stat line is well below his usual stellar output, it doesn't even reflect some of his badly missed passes and otherwise look of discombobulation.

Some will say that Sayin just doesn't play well in big games. You could argue that case, especially given his struggles in last year's postseason where he threw three interceptions, was sacked 10 times and generated only an average of 12.0 points, or this season's Texas game where he barely completed over 50 percent of his passes, had a pick, was sacked twice and threw for just 86 yards in the second half on 5-of-16 passing.

But I have my own theory on Sayin's struggles against the Hoosiers, based on absolutely nothing other than my own observation. It looked like Cignetti and his crew had made the decision to put all-out pressure on the junior quarterback, which seems to have proved a successful strategy. Sayin got banged around quite a bit in the early going, and I maintain he might not have been the same after that early Hoosier onslaught. Don't forget, he started the game completing his first four passes for 67 yards on OSU's opening drive, which resulted in a Connor Hawkins field goal. It went downhill after that.

Of course, it might have helped Sayin and the Buckeyes if Ohio State had mounted any sort of ground attack. The Buckeyes did even worse than the Hoosiers when it came to rushing, gaining just 78 ground yards for an ineffective 2.1-yard average. It seems like Bo Jackson teases me lately. Against the Hoosiers he got off to a fast start with four carries for 28 yards in the first quarter and a flashy 20-yard run that was called back after a holding penalty. After the first frame, however, he ran 14 times for 28 yards and a long of 6, and he finished the game with 18 carries for 56 yards, a 3.1-yard average and a long of 12.

The Buckeyes really seemed to miss Ja'Kobi Jackson in the game. He might have been able to pound out some of those tougher yards. But one thing I want to say about Bo Jackson. When he gets caught in a scrum, he keeps his legs churning and does a great job of moving the pile. I have always enjoyed and appreciated that in a running back.

Penalties continue to haunt the Buckeyes. This time it was seven flags for 50 yards, some unforced. The Buckeyes are 78th in the country with 6.7 penalties per game and 43rd with an average 52.0 yards an outing. The better ranking in penalty yards per game is probably a reflection on the number of miscues of the 5-yard variety (think false starts) the Buckeyes have been guilty of. To be honest with you, I'm surprised the Buckeyes aren't ranked worse in the penalty categories.

For those who worry that the Buckeyes would have lost this game based on what should have been an Indiana touchdown in the waning moments of the game, when it comes to the playoffs, that's still a win over a top-five team that also gives Ohio State a leg up on a berth in the soon to be obsolete Big Ten Championship Game.

And remember this: When you look at the record books 20 years from now, this game will simply show up as a 19-15 Buckeye victory, no drama noted.

The Nation's Best

Is there anybody out there who doubts that Jeremiah Smith is the best receiver in the country, if not the best *player* in the country? Against IU, he had four receptions for 68 yards, a solid afternoon for the bulk of the receivers out there, but far below his usual gaudy numbers. But even within those modest stats, he had a play – a 38-yard touchdown reception – that affected the outcome of the game and was sure to make all the highlight reels.

The reality is Smith affects every play for which he is on the field, even if he is not the intended target on the play. Just by being out there, he is drawing multiple defenders, opening up other players and options. In fact, against the Hoosiers, he even affected plays when he was not even in there. With Smith on the bench, the Buckeyes were unable to punch the ball in from just feet from the end zone. The star receiver trotted back on the field, and his presence helped open up Bo Jackson for a 2-yard TD reception that gave the Buckeyes a 10-7 lead heading into the locker room.

The real reason I bring Smith up right here is that I wanted to say that if the pass that Marsh failed to score on had been thrown to Smith, I believe Smith would have scored. One of the things that puts him above even the best receivers such as Marsh is his constant awareness of where the sideline and end lines are and his incredible control of his feet. His ability to get a foot down before going over the line is stunning.

Special On Special Teams

I've called out punter Joe McGuire this year for having an average season. Credit where credit is due. He had a great game against the Hoosiers, averaging 44.4 yards on five punts, with a long of 52 and three inside the 20, including one that pinned the Hoosiers at their 6 in the hotly contested fourth quarter. His other four punts left IU at its 22, 19, 20, and 30. Does anybody besides me think that a stat of "Inside the 10" would be more relevant than "Inside the 20"?

Also in the improving special teams department, Phillip Bell had a 14-yard punt return against Indiana. He had a solid afternoon, adding a 12-yard reception to convert a third-and-7 at the end of the third quarter, extending the drive that Smith scored on.

Upgrade Cost Down Again

Not to sound ungrateful to our so many loyal and longtime subscribers, but I don't always understand your logic when it comes to not upgrading your subscription to first-class mail in an envelope.

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I know that affordability is one of the main problems. Let's face it. We all understand affordability. It's brutal out there. But here's a step in eliminating that hesitation. With a good part of the season already played, the price for the upgrade through the Michigan game has come down to $22, and to upgrade through the playoffs and the Football Recruiting Wrap-Up in February is now just $32.

Speaking of the Michigan game, here is a brutal reminder. With BSB mailing on Tuesdays and Thanksgiving Thursday smack in the middle of Michigan week, chances for most readers using regular mail to get their paper before The Game are greatly reduced, especially for those living out of state.

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As I have said before, one initiative I am not going to stop pushing is asking BSB subscribers to buy a subscription for their local barber shop or library for just $32.95. It's a great way to spread the word about Buckeye Sports Bulletin and provide a community service.

The Two Sides Of Woody

We are well into Managing Editor Emeritus Mark Rea's series on Ohio State football seasons ending in the numeral "6." When it comes to Mark's stories and research, I am a reader, just like you. I always find something new and interesting in each installment, dating back to coverage of the 1896 season.

We are now up to 1956, and I found it fascinating that in just this one season – a fairly nondescript season at that with a 6-3 record and fourth-place finish in the Big Ten – we see the different sides and the complexity of Woody Hayes.

As you will read, in a Sports Illustrated article that year – the magazine was in its infancy, starting publication in August of 1954 – SI writer Robert Shaplan detailed the coach's frequent practice of giving players "in need" about $400 a year.

As I look back at this practice 70 years later, I don't see anything but altruistic reasons for doing it. The players were already in Columbus, and without the transfer portal, they most likely weren't going anywhere. Keep in mind, as is well documented, Woody wasn't making millions of dollars a year, like today's coaches. According to AI he earned a starting salary of $12,500 when he was hired as Ohio State's head football coach in 1951, and his salary grew to $43,000 (or up to $55,000 depending on reporting) by his final season in 1978. A $25,000 salary in 1956 would be the equivalent of $302,289 today. Heck, all sorts of players make way more than that with today's NIL.

For the payments, and other infractions, Hayes was put on Big Ten probation and the team faced a one-year Rose Bowl ban.

"None of the OSU players were punished by the Big Ten, but Hayes was sanctioned after admitting that he indeed gave about $400 a year to various players in need of help (he refused to name them) over the previous five years," Mark writes.

The coach said that while he did not agree with the probation or the Rose Bowl ban, he would abide by it.

"All my life, I have been taught respect for properly delegated authority, and for this reason I do not believe we should appeal the decision," the coach said. "This, however, does not infer that I agree with the severity of the penalty nor the matter in which the investigation was made."

During the investigation, Big Ten commissioner Kenneth "Tug" Wilson had a private meeting with Hayes and came away convinced the coach was not trying to gain a competitive edge.

"I have been around and I can tell when a guy is holding back or is trying to con me," the commissioner said. "But this man was being so naively honest and open about what he'd been doing that I couldn't be too tough on him. He wasn't trying to defend anything. He was just trying to explain some of his own human and moral instincts."

That was the generous side of Woody. Then there is the other side of him, the one for which most outside of Buckeye Nation best remember him.

The Buckeyes suffered a difficult, 6-0 loss to Iowa that season.

"After the game, as Hayes sat dejectedly in the visiting team's locker room, a local television cameraman began shooting film after walking through an unattended, open door," Mark writes. "That initiated a fracas between the coach and cameraman which wound up with Hayes forcibly removing the cameraman from the locker room."

That type of behavior would be repeated many times in the following years, culminating in Hayes' final indiscretion, hitting a Clemson player after an interception in the 1978 Gator Bowl, Hayes' last game as coach.

Mark Rea's story on the 1956 season can be found on pages 28-29 of this issue.