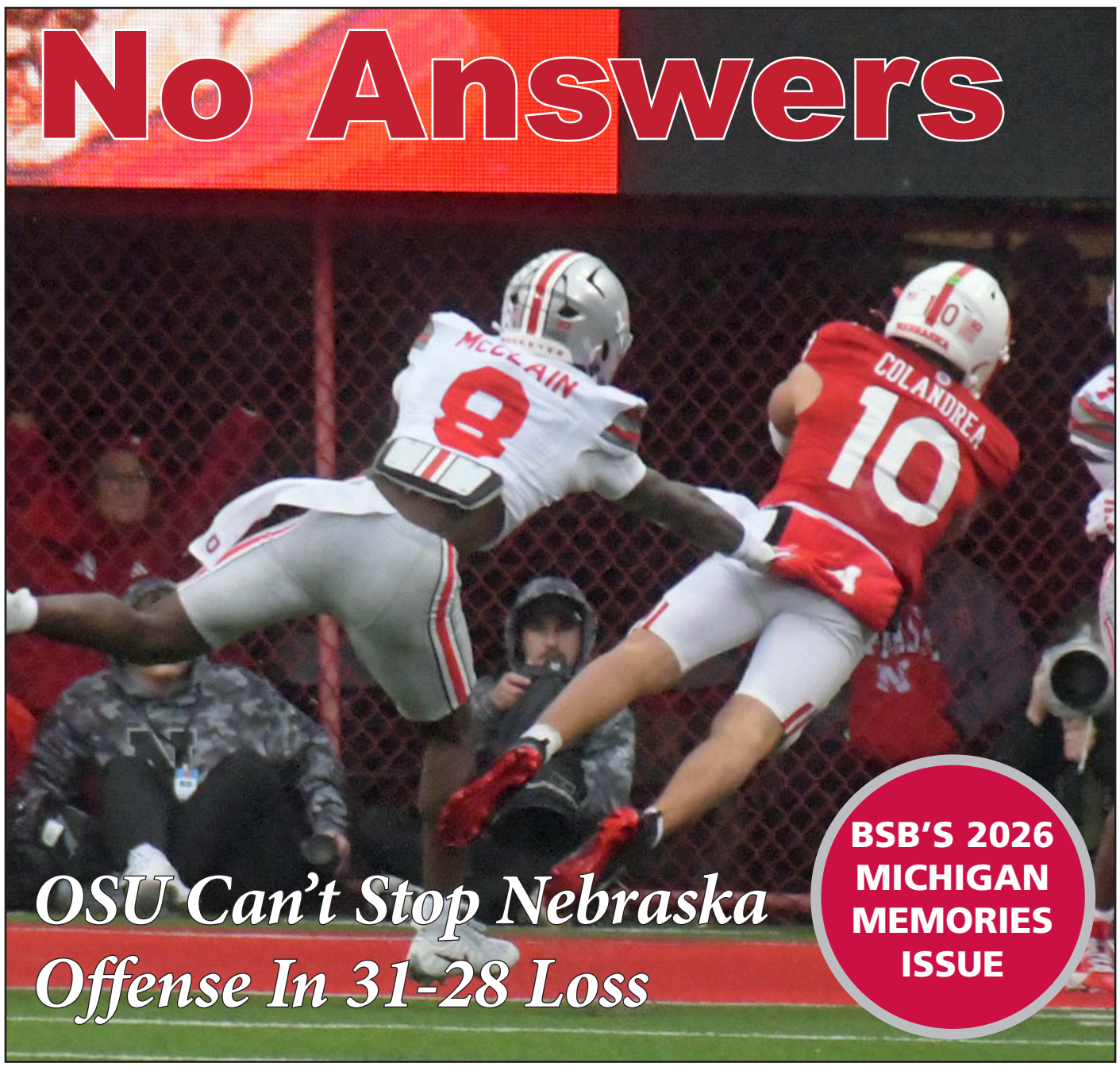
BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 46, No. 11 "For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More" Nov. 28, 2026

No Answers



OSU Can't Stop Nebraska Offense In 31-28 Loss

BSB'S 2026 MICHIGAN MEMORIES ISSUE

SONNY BROCKWAY

SLIPPING AWAY — Nebraska dual-threat quarterback Anthony Colandrea was too much to handle for Ohio State, emblematic of the Buckeyes' failed season. He passed for 200 yards and three touchdowns and ran for 63, including the 13-yarder here to extend the lead to 21-7 in the second quarter as safety Jaylen McClain pursued. The 31-28 loss dropped the Buckeyes to 7-4 with three defeats in four games since quarterback Julian Sayin was injured.

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State once again looked like the team it has been for most of the season against Nebraska on Nov. 21 at Memorial Stadium.

Penalties and defensive struggles were the story of the game yet again for the Buckeyes, and this time they were again enough to result in a loss, the fourth of the season for the Scarlet and Gray.

"We're all in this as a team," said head coach Ryan Day after falling 31-28 in Lincoln, Neb., officially ending his team's chances at making the College Football Playoff. "We win as a team, and we lose as a team."

That's the sentiment Day chose to use in his extremely brief postgame press conference, during which he offered little in the way of answers. But while he might have said – multiple times – that the Buckeyes are going to lose as a team, he put more focus on the defensive side of the ball when he spoke about where his team came up short.

"I'm disappointed in the outcome. We're not going to win many games when we're giving up 31 points and only getting two stops in a whole game," he said when asked about the defense to open the availability.

"Like always, we have to evaluate what's going on, and we'll do that, but this game right here – when you look at the third downs converted, especially in the first half, and then you see some of the plays that they made against us – it certainly cost us."

It's easy to see why Day thought that immediately after the game. Overall, Ohio State gave up 376 total yards of offense and allowed the Cornhuskers to stay on the field for 35:05 of game time and a total of 73 offensive plays. That was compared to 49 plays that the Buckeyes ran throughout the game.

When it came to third downs, Nebraska converted 10 of 16 of them, and it was 2 for 2 on fourth-down conversion attempts.

Perhaps most disconcerting was the fact that defensive coordinator Matt Patricia's unit didn't have an answer for Nebraska quarterback Anthony Colandrea's rushing ability. Colandrea ran the ball 11 times, many of those on big third-down attempts, and he went for a total of 63 yards, which included a sack for minus-2 yards.

Day's frustration came through when talking about the defense's inability to get off the field in important situations, especially when some of the looks the unit was seeing weren't new for them, Day said.

"(Our) offense goes down and scores with just under four minutes to go (in the game). We got the opportunity to fight back in it all the way at the end," Day said. "(Nebraska) hit us with a couple of plays that we had seen throughout the game, and we weren't able to get off the field, so that was extremely frustrating. That ultimately cost us the game."

Patricia didn't meet with the media postgame, so he didn't provide any answers for the performance that his team put on the field in the loss. But he may not have had any answers for the media since he also couldn't find an answer to stopping Colandrea and the rest of the Cornhuskers. Junior captain and linebacker Payton Pierce fielded the questions instead, trying to explain why Ohio State couldn't find a way to contain Colandrea.

"Fast guy, we had a good game plan in, but we just have to do better at getting that guy down on the ground, especially on third down," he said.

When Nebraska got into the red zone,

Continued On Page 9

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State lost 31-28 to Nebraska on Nov. 21 at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln for the Buckeyes' fourth loss of the season, with poor performances all over the field again. Here is the best attempt from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum to give out Buckeye Leaves.

Sam Cipriani, BSB: After leading Ohio State in tackles during the Buckeyes' loss to Nebraska, safety Earl Little Jr. gets my Buckeye Leaf.

Though Ohio State's defense struggled as a whole, Little was a bright spot for the Buckeyes, totaling eight tackles (four solo), including a 1-yard tackle for loss. Little also recorded a pass breakup in the second quarter.

Bobby Gorbett, BSB: In a forgettable performance for Ohio State, sophomore linebacker Riley Pettijohn stood out. The former top-50 recruit made four tackles, including a sack.

Pettijohn's sack came on Nebraska's first drive of the game when he chased down Cornhuskers quarterback Anthony Colandrea to bring up a third-and-long situation.

On a defense that has mainly disappointed this year, Pettijohn has been a bright spot. The sack against the Cornhuskers was the third of the season for Pettijohn, who has begun to establish himself as one of the bigger playmakers on Ohio State's defense.

Greg Wilson, BSB: The only obvious choice to earn a Buckeye Leaf in this game was junior wide receiver Jeremiah Smith. Without him on the field, it would have been a lot worse than the loss already was.

Smith finished the game with six catches for 165 yards and two touchdowns with an impressive catch for his second score of the game at the back of the end zone in the final minute of the second quarter.

While the Buckeyes may not be headed to the College Football Playoff, Smith is still headed to New York in December for the Heisman Trophy ceremony, an award that he is still the favorite for.

BSB Subscribers:

Tiffin Buckeye: None, this team is awful.

slimjim: Jeremiah Smith. 165 yards and 2 TDs. The only bright spot in the game.

BuckeyeScott: Brian Hartline for getting Jeremiah Smith to Ohio State.

Bob Cody: Jeremiah Smith and Luke Fahey earned Buckeye Leaves today.

R1TBDBITL: As usual, Jeremiah Smith gets a leaf. Matt Patricia has to give one back for not putting a spy on the Nebraska QB after burning us over and over again.

BUCKEYE SPORTS .COM

From The Message Board

Ohio State lost its fourth game of the season, which is the most losses in a year for the Buckeyes since the 2011 team that finished 6-7. We asked subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum who would win if the 2026 team and the 2011 team faced off against each other. With Michigan week up next, we also asked if they would still consider the season a success if the Buckeyes finish with a win over their archrival.

"2026 was much better than the 2011 team.

"I certainly won't consider 8-4 with a win over Mich as a 'success' for this year's team. Especially considering how bad Michigan is. Reminder: before the season began, many considered the difficulty of the schedule and anticipated three losses."

— Terrier Buck

"Better than 2011. And yes, if we beat TTUN I will consider it a good season. The Bucks are giving their best. Even when they lose, they are working hard."

— PeyoteBuck

"The 2026 team would beat the 2011 team.

"Beating Michigan is ALWAYS a team goal, and beating them would salvage the season where we won't make the playoffs."

— Bob Cody

"If the 2011 Buckeyes had a healthy Braxton Miller, they would eat the 2026 defense alive, just like the Nebraska quarterback did.

"If the Buckeyes beat Michigan, I would not consider the season a success, but I would feel a lot better."

— Frank Moskowitz, BSB

"2011 team wins because of no NIL, transfer portal, and better chemistry.

"Four losses is not a successful season, regardless. A win over Xichigan is always delicious."

— R1TBDBITL

"Is the 2011 team that lost seven games 15 years ago better than the 2026 team? Possibly. Here are some players off that team. Braxton Miller QB, Devin Smith WR, Dan 'Boom' Herron RB, Carlos Hyde RB, John Simon DE, Ryan Shazier LB, Bradley Roby CB, C.J. Barnett SAF, Devier Posey WR, & Nate Ebner DB/ST. All players that eventually won major awards and played in the pros. Would the 2026 team that started out rated No. 1 in the country this year and might wind up being unranked with a loss to Michigan be considered successful with a win? NO WAY JOSE; but it might make them feel better with some gold pants."

— BuckeyeScott

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Just Some Suggestions

I don't want Ryan Day fired only because the buyout is too expensive. Since that means he is still the coach, I have the following suggestions.

On defense, the Buckeyes may never rush fewer than four rushers. Even if it is third down and 40 to go. Patricia may not call that defense where six men are on one side of the center, no defender is between the center and the tackle, and only one defender is outside the tackle. Oregon scored two times against this defense. When the other team is within OSU's 10-yard line, at least five big bodies must be on the defensive line and two linebackers.

On offense, Arthur Smith may not call any pass play where Jeremiah Smith gets the ball behind the line of scrimmage. Arthur Smith may not call a play where the tight end splits out as a wide receiver. OSU can't block a pass rush and needs this tight end. Plus, he is a target down the middle for pass plays. Fahey is to be instructed to know what route Jeremiah Smith is going to run on every pass play and look at him first to see if he is open. I know Chris Henry Jr. has dropped passes, but you have to play him to stress the defense and help Smith get open.

Finally, the head coach, Ryan Day, must be instructed that with a freshman quarterback, you may not go for it on fourth down when you're only 10 points or less behind. PUNT THE BALL. Don't panic.

Duke Thomas
Columbus

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

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No. 1	Sept. 12	No. 13	Dec. 19
No. 2	Sept. 19	No. 14	Jan. 16
No. 3	Sept. 26	No. 15	Jan. 30
No. 4	Oct. 3	No. 16	Feb. 13
No. 5	Oct. 10	No. 17	March 6
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No. 10	Nov. 21	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 28	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 5	No. 24	August

The next issue (Dec. 5 cover date) will be mailed Dec. 1.

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Collapse Complete As Bucks Falter Again

I've been covering football programs for more than half a century, and I'm hard-pressed to remember a more epic collapse than the one experienced this year by Ohio State.

In mid-October, the Buckeyes went on the road and ended reigning national champion Indiana's 22-game winning streak, a victory that should have given OSU an inside track for another trip to the College Football Playoff. Except that starting quarterback Julian Sayin was lost for the season with an elbow injury.

Flash forward just five short weeks and the Buckeyes have gone from playoff contender to just another team playing out the string on its 2026 college football season. The team's flickering playoff hopes – which would have been buoyed by Indiana and UCLA losses to Washington and Michigan, respectively – were snuffed out for good with a 31-28 loss to a four-loss Nebraska team that hadn't beaten a ranked opponent in 10 years.

How did Ohio State fall so far so fast?

There are many reasons, of course, starting with the loss of Sayin, who took his 2,007 yards and 19 touchdown passes with him to the sideline. There are teams that seem to have an ability to overcome losing their starting quarterback, but those teams are often anomalies. Look no further than the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles and Baltimore Ravens, otherwise talented teams that were a combined 6-13 through the first 10 weeks of the 2026 season because former Super Bowl MVP Jalen Hurts (Eagles) and two-time league MVP Lamar Jackson (Ravens) are on injured reserve.

True freshman Luke Fahey has done a credible job filling in for Sayin, but the entire mindset of the offense changed when Sayin went down. The Buckeyes scrapped their multidimensional attack for one that focused primarily on getting the ball to superstar Jeremiah Smith.

While there is nothing wrong with spotlighting the best player on your roster, it seems foolhardy to force the ball to a receiver who draws double and triple coverage. Nobody is that good.

It also puts added pressure on an offensive line (that to anyone's description has fallen well short of expectations) trying to protect a freshman quarterback with fewer than a half-dozen college starts under his belt.

A perfect example of what I mean about the change in mindset is how Ohio State attacked Nebraska after scoring touchdowns on back-to-back possessions to tie the score at 21 with 6:37 remaining in the third quarter.

After falling in a 21-7 hole late in the second period, the Buckeyes executed a seven-play, 74-yard scoring drive that culminated in a 31-yard touchdown pass to Smith that had Fahey doing his best Sayin impression. The ball was delivered with perfection to Smith, who had beat double coverage in the end zone.

OSU then took the opening possession of the second half and systematically drove 76 yards on 14 plays that ended with running back Bo Jackson scoring on a 1-yard run. Not only was it a momentum-builder, but the drive took nearly half of the entire third quarter and featured a little go-for-broke mentality seldom seen during the second half of the season.

The Buckeyes went for it on fourth-and-2 at their own 44, getting a 10-yard run from Fahey on a quarterback draw, and Fahey later kept the drive alive with a 4-yard flip to Jackson on third-and-3 at the Nebraska 39.

With the score now tied at 21, the Ohio State defense – heretofore pushed around all afternoon – responded to the momentum shift and forced the Cornhuskers to punt for only the second time in the game.

And what did offensive coordinator Arthur Smith do with that momentum? He flat-out squandered it.

On the second play of the possession at his own 20, Smith suddenly decided a straight handoff from Fahey to Jackson was too conventional. He called for Fahey to pitch the ball to Jackson, something that is never a good idea that deep in your own territory. To call it on a slippery field with a wet ball is borderline criminal.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

The ball squirted through Jackson's hands, and the running back was forced to fall on the fumble. The resulting 7-yard loss and subsequent delay-of-game penalty put the Buckeyes into a third-and-19 hole from which they never recovered.

A 21-yard punt return by Nebraska led to a field goal after which Ohio State got the ball back facing a slim 24-21 deficit with 13:42 remaining in the game. Rather than try to regain momentum with the run game, Smith dialed up a pair of go routes, and Fahey dropped straight back. But the offensive line couldn't hold up, and the Cornhuskers got home for their lone sack of the day.

It was a 7-yard loss that immediately put the Buckeyes behind the chains, and two plays later, Fahey went deep for a double-covered Jeremiah Smith again, only this time the ball bounced off the OSU receiver's hands and into the arms of Cornhuskers cornerback Victor Evans III for an interception. That turnover eventually led to another Nebraska touchdown to make it 31-21 with 7:41 remaining.

The Buckeyes gamely fought back to score at the 3:52 mark, closing to within three points again at 31-28, but the offense never got its hands on the ball again.

Why would a run have been the better call to start the possession after Nebraska's field goal? For one, there was almost the entire fourth quarter to play, so trying a low-percentage deep pass didn't seem particularly prudent. Plus, the Buckeyes had netted an average of 5.5 yards on their previous 10 first-down runs.

Then again, that's not my only question regarding the running game.

Even back when Ja'Kobi Jackson was healthy, I didn't see the value of changing running backs every series. I certainly don't see the wisdom of clinging to that mentality now that Isaiah West has fumbled for the third time this season.

When the Buckeyes made their national championship run two years ago, they utilized the one-two punch of TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, a running back alliance that benefited Henderson and Judkins as well as the overall team effort. Sharing the carries that year allowed both backs to remain relatively healthy, and each cracked the 1,000-yard mark as a result.

This year, I don't see anyone else on the roster at the level of Bo Jackson, who is nearly at the 2,000-yard mark for his career in just his second season. Yet Jackson was given only 12 carries against Nebraska which he turned into 52 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

To be quite frank, I was surprised to see West get any carries especially following his fumble last week against Northwestern. His fumble against the Cornhuskers came as the Buckeyes were driving near midfield and led directly to a Nebraska touchdown that made it 21-7.

I long ago tuned out all the nonsense on social media calling for freshman phenom Legend Bey to get more playing time despite his obvious on-the-field gaffes. But I'm left wondering about a merit system that penalizes Bey for his missteps and not West for his fumbles.

Off A Cliff

I had a friend text me during the second half asking if I thought the problem with the Ohio State defense was talent, scheme or heart? After Nebraska rolled up 376 total yards using what amounted to nothing more than a glorified high school offense, it was a worthy question.

I refuse to accept the problem as a lack of talent. The defensive roster has at its disposal six former five-star prospects and a staggering 28 former four-stars. Four of those five-stars (cornerbacks Devin Sanchez and Jay Timmons, tackle Eddrick Houston and defensive end Qua Russaw) as well as five former four-stars (linebacker Riley Pettijohn, cornerback Jermaine Matthews Jr., defensive end Zion Grady and safeties Jaylen McClain and Earl Little Jr.) started against the Cornhuskers.

And yet the OSU defense made Nebraska quarterback Anthony Colandrea – a guy playing for his third college team – look like a Heisman candidate. Colandrea threw for 200 yards and three touchdowns while running for 63 yards and another score.

When the game was on the line in the final four minutes, and Ohio State basically knew the Cornhuskers would put the ball in Colandrea's hands, the Buckeyes were still powerless to stop him. A 5-yard scramble on third-and-2 at the Nebraska 33 with 2:14 remaining was costly enough, but the QB then converted a third-and-5 with the clock winding under a minute to salt the game away.

So, if it's not talent, that leaves us scheme and heart.

Second-year defensive coordinator Matt Patricia favors a 4-2-5 alignment, and that works fine with athletic linebackers such as Arvell Reese and Sonny Styles. But there are no such players on this year's defense. Couple that with the lack of a consistent pass rush and an inconsistent secondary that rarely contests a catch, and you see the result.

As far as the heart factor is concerned, I will never question any player's "want to." However, there has seemingly been a precipitous dropoff in defensive play since Sayin's injury – perhaps a bit strange in light of the fact Sayin never took a defensive snap.

What Now?

Ohio State now has four losses in a season for the first time since losing seven times in 2011 and heads into its traditional rivalry game against Michigan with little more than personal pride for which to play.

The Wolverines will be heading to Columbus full of confidence after celebrating Senior Day with an 18-16 upset in three overtimes over fourth-ranked and previously unbeaten UCLA, a victory that at least temporarily quelled criticism of first-year head coach Kyle Whittingham.

That means the Buckeyes are about to test the old theory of how a win in The Game can salvage a season although I'm not sure if anything can salvage this one. After being anointed preseason No. 1, OSU faces the very real possibility of finishing a season unranked since that disaster in 2011.

I don't want to imagine what the offseason firestorm would be like should Ryan Day's record in the rivalry fall to 2-5. I'm sure Day doesn't want to imagine that, either.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

2026 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 5	BALL STATE	W, 56-3	BTN	3-8, 35-28 loss to Ohio
Sept. 12	at Texas	L, 24-23	ABC	9-2, 45-3 win over Arkansas
Sept. 19	KENT STATE	W, 59-3	FOX	3-8, 20-3 loss to Miami (OH)
Sept. 26	ILLINOIS	W, 42-19	FOX	6-5, 34-17 loss to Iowa
Oct. 3	at Iowa	W, 31-14	CBS	9-2, 34-17 win over Illinois
Oct. 10	MARYLAND	W, 45-16	BTN	4-7, 35-21 loss to USC
Oct. 17	at Indiana	W, 19-15	FOX	9-2, 27-24 (OT) loss to Washington
Oct. 31	at USC	L, 30-18	NBC	8-3, 35-21 win over Maryland
Nov. 7	OREGON	L, 41-28	CBS	8-3, 45-7 win over Michigan State
Nov. 14	NORTHWESTERN	W, 28-19	FOX	6-5, 20-17 loss to Minnesota
Nov. 21	at Nebraska	L, 31-28	FOX	**7-4, 31-28 win over Ohio State**
Nov. 28	MICHIGAN	Noon	FOX	6-5, 18-16 (3OT) win over UCLA

Key Players Still Sidelined By Injury

Multiple significant players were out for Ohio State's 31-28 loss to Nebraska in Lincoln on Nov. 21.

While senior left guard Luke Montgomery returned to action after missing the Buckeyes' win over Northwestern, senior offensive lineman Phillip Daniels missed his fifth game this season due to injury.

Junior quarterback Julian Sayin and fifth-year running back Ja'Kobi Jackson missed their fourth and fifth consecutive games, respectively, after each underwent a surgical procedure.

Ohio State had multiple injuries in the safety room, including sophomore Deshawn Stewart as well as fifth-years Terry Moore and Brenten "Inky" Jones.

Also out for Ohio State were junior tight end Max LeBlanc, sophomore linebacker Eli Lee and freshman offensive lineman Max Riley.

Russaw Considering Return In 2027

Ohio State senior defensive end Qua Russaw indicated during a Nov. 18 press conference that he is leaning toward returning to the Buckeyes for the 2027 season rather than ending his collegiate career after just one year in Columbus.



Qua Russaw

"Most likely I think I'm going to be coming back," Russaw said.

Russaw's potential return comes amid changes to NCAA eligibility rules, including the adoption of the new "five-for-five" rule, which allows collegiate athletes to compete for five seasons.

Through 11 games, Russaw had recorded 26 tackles (17 solo), 7½ tackles for loss, two sacks and two pass breakups. Russaw finished with three tackles and a pass breakup in the Buckeyes' loss to the Cornhuskers.

When Russaw spoke about possibly coming back, he was coming off his most productive performance of the season, recording five tackles, a career-high three tackles for loss, one sack and a pass breakup in Ohio State's 28-19 victory over Northwestern on Nov. 14.

The Montgomery, Ala., native spent his previous three seasons at Alabama, where he totaled 50 tackles, two sacks, two interceptions and a forced fumble in 22 games before transferring to Ohio State for the 2026 season.

WR Henry Bouncing Back



Chris Henry Jr.

After struggling during Ohio State's win over Northwestern, freshman wide receiver Chris Henry Jr. has worked to correct his mistakes and regain his confidence.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and several Buckeyes praised Henry's re-

BIG 2026 Standings

	Conf. W	Conf. L	Conf. Pct.	All W	All L	All Pct.
UCLA	7	1	0.875	10	1	0.909
Indiana	6	2	0.750	9	2	0.818
Iowa	6	2	0.750	9	2	0.818
Oregon	6	2	0.750	8	3	0.727
USC	5	3	0.625	8	3	0.727
Ohio State	5	3	0.625	7	4	0.636
Wisconsin	5	3	0.625	7	4	0.636
Nebraska	4	4	0.500	7	4	0.636
Washington	4	4	0.500	7	4	0.636
Illinois	4	4	0.500	6	5	0.545
Minnesota	4	4	0.500	6	5	0.545
Michigan	3	5	0.375	6	5	0.545
Northwestern	3	5	0.375	6	5	0.545
Penn State	3	5	0.375	6	5	0.545
Maryland	2	6	0.250	4	7	0.364
Purdue	2	6	0.250	3	8	0.273
Rutgers	2	6	0.250	3	8	0.273
Michigan State	1	7	0.125	3	8	0.273

Nov. 20 Game
Oregon 45, Michigan State 7

Nov. 21 Games
Minnesota 20, Northwestern 17
Nebraska 31, **Ohio State** 28
Wisconsin 42, Purdue 10
Iowa 34, Illinois 17
Rutgers 25, Penn State 24
Michigan 18, UCLA 16 (3OT)
Washington 27, Indiana 24 (OT)
USC 35, Maryland 21

Nov. 27 Games
Nebraska at Iowa, noon
Minnesota at Wisconsin, 7:30 p.m.

Nov. 28 Games
Michigan at **Ohio State**, noon
Illinois at Northwestern, 12:30 p.m.
USC at UCLA, 3:30 p.m.
Penn State at Maryland, 3:30 p.m.
Michigan State at Rutgers, 4:15 p.m.
Purdue at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Washington at Oregon, 7:30

All times Eastern





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.

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A Message And Apology From Publisher Frank Moskowitz

As most of you know by now, Buckeye Sports Bulletin made a change to its fall publishing format. The Nov. 7 issue of BSB covering the Southern Cal game was published online only at BuckeyeSports.com. The Nov. 14 issue covering the Oregon game was in print, and the Nov. 21 issue covering the Northwestern game was online only. The online issues are complete issues, identical to the print issues and are free with your subscription. The Pre- and Post Michigan issues will be in print.

This is the level of service that subscribers are willing to pay for right now. They tell us that they are currently struggling with delivery and affordability issues. I decided that the best way to allocate the current resources was to make sure we properly covered the Michigan game, which has suddenly become even more important as a way to salvage a disappointing season.

I have spoken to many of you since this format change, and while most subscribers understand the temporary changes, they are unhappy that I did not warn them in advance. That is understandable and I truly apologize for that. It was a decision that was made thoughtfully, but hastily, and if I could go back and change things, I would do so gladly. Please don't blame the others who answer the phone. The implementation was mine and mine alone.

We still believe that the 24-issue format, including weekly print issues in football season, is the best for Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Our readers have made it clear that they prefer print and that is our niche.

As is generally the case when BSB goes through periods of difficult delivery, some longtime readers elect to let their subscriptions lapse because of the failure of the postal service to deliver the paper on time. Others have told us point blank that they are holding off renewing because of the nation's ongoing affordability issues.

We are hopeful that now that the avalanche of election mail is a thing of the past, delivery will improve. We still recommend upgrading your service to first-class mail in an envelope, though even that service was sluggish as Election Day neared. We are also seeing signs that gas prices are coming down, which should make our loyal readers with financial concerns more comfortable renewing.

This is also a great time for people who have not been taking advantage of our BuckeyeSports.com website to do so. Not only will you be able to access the online only editions, but you will also be able to enjoy the many other features, including immediate access to all editions upon publication.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call us at (614) 486-2202 during regular business hours.

sponse in practice throughout the week, noting that the freshman has remained focused despite his struggles against the Wildcats.

Henry had two crucial miscues in the victory over Northwestern. He dropped a near-perfect throw from freshman quarterback Luke Fahey on Ohio State's first drive of the third quarter that would have resulted in a significant gain. He also had a pass bounce off his face mask in the red zone during the first quarter, leading to Fahey's only interception.

"I think he's disappointed more than anybody," Day said. "He wants to make plays, and he's a young player who just has to continue to stack days and practices. I thought he's come out here and worked, and he hasn't let that drop affect his work this week, but he's got to go do it on the field."

Despite his struggles against Northwestern, Henry had shown flashes of his potential during his freshman campaign, recording 11 receptions for 283 yards and two touchdowns this season.

Senior wide receiver Devin McCuin also believed Henry would bounce back, emphasizing the importance of maintaining his confidence and blocking out outside criticism after a difficult performance.

"He's a great talent, obviously, so he just can't let that get to his head and let it keep growing," McCuin said on Nov. 17. "It's hard. It's hard for sure, and definitely in this day and age because a lot of people have opinions, and so you just have to wipe that out the window and just know he worked his tail off to get here."

Henry was unable to bounce back against Nebraska, as he failed to haul in a pass against the Cornhuskers.

Day Hopeful For Sayin's Recovery

During his Nov. 18 press conference, Day provided an encouraging update on Sayin, who suffered an elbow injury during the Buckeyes' victory over Indiana on Oct. 17 and has remained sidelined since.

Although Day did not provide a definitive timetable for Sayin's return, he indicated that the quarterback's recovery had progressed better than initially expected.

"I'm letting him handle that, and I can tell you the recovery is going well, though, and he's moving in the right direction for sure," Day said. "I don't quite have the timeline for it, but I can tell you it's moving better than I thought it would."

Fahey has taken over Ohio State's quarterback duties in his absence, but was just 1-3 in four games leading the Buckeyes' offense.

In seven games before his injury, Sayin had thrown for 2,007 passing yards, 19 touchdowns and four interceptions on a 68.2 completion percentage.

Day Says Fahey Making Strides

Following Ohio State's victory over Northwestern, Day said Fahey had continued to show improvement with each start, although he still has plenty of room to grow as he gains experience.

"I think he's learned from each game, but he still hasn't played a whole lot of football," Day said.

In the win over the Wildcats, Fahey completed 21 of 32 passes for 201 yards, three touchdowns and one interception. His performance earned him Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors, making him the sixth Ohio State true freshman quarterback to receive the recognition.

One of Fahey's most impressive plays came in the second quarter after North-

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

western took an early 3-0 lead. With the Buckeyes threatening on the Wildcats 4-yard line, Fahey stepped up in the pocket and extended the play before finding sophomore running back Isaiah West for a touchdown pass that gave Ohio State a lead it would not relinquish.

"Keeping his eyes up, but the big thing you noticed was the protection," Day said of that play. "(Fahey) was able to get to the second part of the route down there, and when you study a lot of the stuff that's in the red zone, whether it's in the NFL or in college, a lot of touchdown passes that happen down there are the second part of the route, and a big part of that is in the protection.

"I thought he kept his eyes up. He was able to feel that pocket. For the most part, he's done a pretty good job of keeping his eyes downfield but also feeling the pocket and moving around in there and figuring out when it's time to slide in there, when it's time to escape, when it's time to scramble. Isaiah did a good job moving with him, and he found him open."

Fahey continued to improve in the Buckeyes' loss to Nebraska, completing 16 of 27 passes for 259 yards with two touchdowns and one interception.

For the season, Fahey has passed for 1,283 yards and 10 touchdowns on a 64.4 completion percentage. He's also taken 24 carries for 30 yards.

OSU To Fall After No. 14 CFP Ranking

After its win over Northwestern, Ohio State was still alive for the College Football Playoff after jumping six spots from No. 20 to No. 14. If the season had ended before any other games were played, Ohio State would have missed the College Football Playoff by a few spots.

But given the loss to Nebraska, the Buckeyes would almost certainly drop in the rankings when the newest version was set to release on Nov. 24 after BSB went to press.

In the most recent AP top 25 that came out after Ohio State's loss to Nebraska, the Buckeyes ranked No. 25, which may have given an idea of where they would be when the CFP rankings were released.

Urban Denies Maryland Rumor

Despite a 247Sports report claiming Urban Meyer was a candidate to take over as the head coach at Maryland, the former Ohio State head coach said he had no interest in the position. Meyer said as much on his podcast, "The Triple Option."

"There is no truth to the Maryland rumors," Meyer said on Nov. 18.

That was after ESPN's Pete Thamel reported that there was no truth to those rumors as well.

Meyer had all sorts of success in his seven years leading the Buckeyes from 2012-18. He won the national championship in 2014 and helped the Buckeyes hoist the Big Ten title that year and in

BSB Subscribers Show Support Through VIP Program

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

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

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

VIP subscribers enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for $10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint," a 15% discount at College Traditions, as well as a card from either Rusty Bucket or Cameron Mitchell restaurants good for $10 off your next food purchase.

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

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

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

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

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

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Lots Of Buckeye News Coming Up. Read It Now

There is no reason to wait for your next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin to get the latest OSU sports news, including any recruiting activity. The next print issue of BSB will be mailed Dec. 1. The BSB staff will be reporting on the Michigan game, the early football recruiting signing period which opens Dec. 2, potential staff changes, basketball, hockey and more in real time at 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 all whiffed on the Nebraska game, each choosing the Buckeyes. Sam Cipriani saw it 31-17, Bobby Gorbett 24-20 and Greg Wilson 20-16.

Also, staff members man the Fan Forum, where the discussion between staff and readers is always lively and is more so during football season, particularly when there are games like the losses to the USC, Oregon and Nebraska. Staff and readers also discuss games, including the upcoming Michigan game, 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 each edition, making the site a must for those 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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If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access.

2017 and 2018.

He also went 7-0 against Michigan during his time as Ohio State's head coach. Maryland is searching for a new head coach after it fired Mike Locksley in the middle of this season.

Alberts Named Michigan AD

Since BSB last went to press, Michigan found its new athletic director. The Wolverines hired Trev Alberts, who most recently held the same position at Texas A&M. With the Aggies, Alberts handled the hiring of head basketball coach Bucky McMillan, who came to College Station, Texas, from Samford.

Before he was the athletic director at Texas A&M, Alberts was in charge of Nebraska's athletic department from 2021-24, hiring current Nebraska football head coach Matt Rhule.

Alberts will inherit a Michigan football program that is in complete disarray. First-year head coach Kyle Whittingham has failed to find any consistency with the Wolverines. Following its 18-16 triple-overtime victory over UCLA on Nov. 21, Michigan rose to 6-5 heading into rivalry week.

Alberts is set to take over for Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel, whose tenure included a tumultuous period for the athletic department. Michigan was involved in several scandals while Manuel was the university's athletic director, including an illegal sign-stealing operation that ended up with several former coaches facing lengthy suspensions and the program also facing sanctions.

Manuel announced he would step down at the end of 2026, at which point Alberts will take over.

McCord Makes First NFL Start

Former Ohio State quarterback Kyle McCord made his first career NFL start for the Miami Dolphins on Nov. 15 in a 24-22 loss to the Indianapolis Colts.

McCord finished 17 of 32 with 209 passing yards. He also had two carries for 4 yards, including a 3-yard rushing touchdown in the fourth quarter. It was the first time that McCord saw in-game action this season.

The start came a week after Miami starting quarterback Malik Willis was placed on injured reserve, which means he will have to miss at least four weeks.

McCord spent three seasons at Ohio State from 2021-23, throwing for 3,170 yards and 24 touchdowns during his junior campaign to earn third-team All-Big Ten honors while leading the Buckeyes to an 11-1 record before he entered the transfer portal.

He spent his next season at Syracuse, earning second-team All-ACC honors after leading the NCAA with 4,779 passing yards.

He was selected 181st overall in the sixth round of the 2025 NFL draft by the Dolphins.

In his second start against the Bills on Nov. 22, McCord was just 12 of 33 for 102 yards with an interception.

Three Bucks Shed Black Stripes

Ohio State fifth-year quarterback Justyn Martin, freshman safety Blaine Bradford and freshman defensive tackle Darryus McKinley shed their black stripes, the team announced on Nov. 18.

Martin hasn't seen the field for the Buckeyes, trailing quarterbacks Sayin, Fahey and Tavien St. Clair in the depth chart. Bradford has played 14 defensive snaps and appeared in eight games in his freshman season, recording one tackle and a pass breakup against Maryland.

McKinley has played eight defensive snaps in two games and totaled two tackles.

The trio joined seven others who have shed their black stripes since the beginning of the regular season. Freshman linebackers Braxton Rembert (Sept. 23) and Cincere Johnson (Sept. 30), sophomore safety Deshawn Stewart (Sept. 30), freshman offensive lineman Maxwell Riley (Oct. 7), freshman running back Favour Akih (Oct. 22), freshman tight end Nick Lautar (Oct. 22) and senior kicker Marcello Diomede (Oct. 26) have also done so.



Jen Flynn Oldenburg

OSU Fires WVB HC Oldenburg

After seven seasons with the program, Ohio State has parted ways with women's volleyball head coach Jen Flynn Oldenburg, the university announced on Nov. 19.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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"I'd like to thank Jen for all of her contributions to the program and her development of our student-athletes," said Ohio State athletic director Ross Bjork. "While we fell short of performance expectations, Jen is an incredible person and will always be a Buckeye. We wish her and her family nothing but the best."

Oldenburg went 107-92 overall over her seven seasons from 2020-26 and was 67-68 in Big Ten play. However, it didn't begin as badly as it ended for Oldenburg. Ohio State went 65-20 overall in Oldenburg's first three seasons, with 15 wins in Big Ten play in each of those years.

The Buckeyes reached the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament in 2020 and 2021 before making the Elite Eight in 2022.

But in Oldenburg's final four years, the Buckeyes went just 42-72, while Ohio State failed to reach the 15-win mark in that span.

In 2026, Ohio State was 11-16, with a 4-13 record in conference play. The Buckeyes were 0-8 against ranked opponents.

Oldenburg was the sixth coach in Ohio State history, joining Mary Jo Campbell, Sue Collins, Lisa Richards, Jim Stone and Geoff Carlston.

DL Smith Leads PFF Grades Vs. NU

Senior defensive tackle James Smith was Ohio State's highest-graded player in the Buckeyes' victory over Northwestern, according to Pro Football Focus' weekly player grades.

Smith earned a 91.1 grade in 19 snaps of action, recording a strip-sack on Northwestern quarterback Nicco Marchiol that the Wildcats recovered for a loss of 7 yards. He was the only Buckeye to grade above an 80.0, and it was the first time since Indiana on Oct. 17 that an Ohio State player earned above a 90.0 mark (Henry, 90.4).



James Smith

Junior Payton Pierce was the second highest-graded player on defense and top linebacker with a 79.6 mark. The other leading position players behind Smith and Pierce were defensive end Qua Russaw (69.7), cornerback Jay Timmons (66.6) and safety Earl Little Jr. (70.3).

Offensively, wide receiver Jeremiah Smith led the way for Ohio State with a 79.4 grade after recording 11 catches for 117 yards and a touchdown in the win. Fahey had a 72.9 mark in 68 snaps of action, with sophomore running back Bo Jackson finishing with the offense's second-best grade at a 76.6.

Junior Ian Moore (64.8) finished as the highest-graded offensive lineman, while sophomore Brody Lennon (60.0) was the Buckeyes' top-rated tight end.

On the other end, Henry was the lowest-graded Buckeye, earning a 45.7 grade for 21 snaps.

From The Pages Of BSB

45 Years Ago — 1981

During his senior season at Ohio State, linebacker Mike D'Andrea had finally achieved the goal he set when he first arrived in Columbus.

"Your goal as a player is to improve each year and get higher up on the depth chart," the Akron native said. "I finally got a chance to start as a senior, and I've held onto my spot. It was a goal and I achieved it."

Not that the 6-4, 220-pounder hadn't seen action before the 1981 season. He played in all 12 OSU games as a sophomore, logging 15 tackles. He repeated the feat of playing every game as a junior, registering 29 stops with two behind the line of scrimmage.

But as a senior, starting all 10 of Ohio State's games to that point, D'Andrea had emerged as a serious contributor, notching 48 tackles and three TFL and recovering a pair of fumbles. Yet he still saw room for improvement as his college career came to its final weeks.

"I need to get into my drop a little quicker, to read the play a little faster," D'Andrea explained.

40 Years Ago — 1986

Ohio State and Michigan were slated to collide in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 22 with the winner gaining the coveted Rose Bowl berth. The Buckeyes, atop the Big Ten standings at 7-0 after the had Wolverines stumbled a week earlier against Minnesota, were assured of no worse than a co-championship. But gridiron gurus in the Buckeye State and faithful Ohio State followers everywhere winced at the thought of sharing anything with anyone from the land of Maize and Blue.

One could just ask Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce.

"That's the way it should be," said Bruce, minutes after his Buckeyes polished off Wisconsin, 30-17, to advance to the final game of the season unbeaten in Big Ten play. "I'm happy to say they're coming to Ohio State, and we're going to play for the Big Ten championship and the Rose Bowl berth."

35 Years Ago — 1991

Confirming what had been rumored for a week, and what BSB had first speculated following Ohio State's Nov. 2 loss to Iowa, Ohio State would make its second trip in three years to Tampa, Fla., to play in the Hall of Fame Bowl on New Year's Day.

The Buckeyes were set to take on Syracuse in 74,350-seat Tampa Stadium, in a game that would be broadcast nationally on NBC.

Bob Sutton and John Adcock of the Hall of Fame Bowl selection committee made the official invitation to OSU athletic director Jim Jones one day after the Buckeyes' 20-16 victory against Indiana on Nov. 16. But Adcock was quick to point out that the bowl committee would have taken Ohio State regardless of its record down the stretch and that it had extended the offer prior to the team's annual matchup with Michigan.

"Absolutely we would have taken Ohio State," Adcock said. "That was a discussion we had, and we answered it real quick. We have full confidence in Ohio State. We think they could be undefeated with a break here or there.

"There was no doubt in our minds who we wanted. Ask Jim Jones or (coach) John Cooper. They were our No. 1 choice."

30 Years Ago — 1996

After 12 years of heartache, it only figured that Ohio State had to fight tooth and nail for its long-awaited Rose Bowl berth. Even more fitting was the fact that it was the OSU defense – the team's true strong point – that carried the Buckeyes past Indiana and on to Pasadena.

The second-ranked Buckeyes used a pair of late defensive touchdowns to sidestep the upset-minded Hoosiers, 27-17, on Nov. 16 in Bloomington and earn their first trip the Rose Bowl since Jan. 1, 1985.

"This is an incredible feeling," said Ohio State defensive end Matt Finkes, who returned an IU fumble 45 yards for the go-ahead touchdown with a little more than six minutes left.

25 Years Ago — 2001

Quarterback Steve Bellisari was arrested by campus police and charged with drunken driving early in the morning of Nov. 16, one day before Ohio State was scheduled to take on 12th-ranked Illinois.

Later that day, the QB was suspended indefinitely by OSU head coach Jim Tressel while athletic director Andy Geiger was left to sort out the mess at a heavily populated press conference.

That would be the same Bellisari who was one of four co-captains for the Buckeyes, a three-year starter who was being praised weekly for his work ethic and attitude, especially in light of intense scrutiny from a legion of fans. Tressel had often defended the QB, almost holding him up as the poster boy for a more resilient, academic and community-conscious program.

"He made a turn that caused a police car with two officers to take note of how the car was being driven, and they stopped him," Geiger said.

The following day, the Buckeyes dropped a 34-22 decision to the Fighting Illini.

20 Years Ago — 2006

Ohio State quarterback Troy Smith was sporting a wide grin on the afternoon of Nov. 18, and for good reason. He was grinning after the Buckeyes' third straight victory against Michigan capped a perfect 12-0 regular season and clinched a berth in the BCS Championship Game in Glendale, Ariz.

"I'll probably be wearing this smile for the rest of the week," Smith said following the game. "You've got to fight through, persevere, and the 2006 Ohio State Buckeyes did that. Outright Big Ten champs, baby."

Smith and his teammates had plenty to grin about after what happened in Ohio Stadium. Facing an also-unbeaten Michigan team that had lost legendary head coach Bo Schembechler on the eve of the game, the Buckeyes utilized nearly every offensive weapon at their disposal and withstood the Wolverines' best shot at ruining OSU's title hopes, taking a 42-39 victory that was every bit as a dramatic as the final score indicated.

15 Years Ago — 2011

As of BSB's press time, Ohio State had not announced any decision regarding its head football coach for the next season and beyond, but there were plenty of people suggesting that was merely a formality. Multiple sources indicated former Florida head coach Urban Meyer had agreed upon a deal to become the next head coach of the Buckeyes.

There were reportedly a few issues to iron out, but the consensus was what had been rumored for months – since shortly after Jim Tressel was forced out in late May – as a possibility about to come to fruition.

Meyer had been widely believed to be interested in the position because of his ties to the state as an Ohio native. Before he left the Gators following the 2010 season, his Florida contract included a provision that allowed him to leave for Ohio State, Michigan or Notre Dame, and he was quoted in a 2008 biography about growing up idolizing legendary head coach Woody Hayes.

When asked about the rumors, Meyer denied that he had been offered any job or that he had accepted any position, saying that there was "no truth to that."

10 Years Ago — 2016

Ohio State played a game Nov. 19 that proved each participating team's record irrelevant. A previously 9-1 Buckeye squad dispatched a 3-7 Michigan State team that had lost to such Big Ten doormats as Maryland and Illinois by just one point, 17-16.

While the win in East Lansing set second-ranked Ohio State up for a showdown with archrival Michigan on Nov. 26, it also continued a trend toward a fierce rivalry on the field between the Buckeyes and Spartans. And with that rivalry budding, the records went straight out the window.

As such, Ohio State players and coaches alike preached that Michigan State's previous problems were irrelevant even before the game began. After the result was final, that tune didn't change.

"We have a lot of respect for the team we just played," Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said. "Tough day at the office right there."

Five Years Ago — 2021

A perfect toss from C.J. Stroud over two Michigan State defenders to a waiting Chris Olave in the back of the end zone not only got the Buckeyes off and running with their first touchdown of a 56-7 romp over Michigan State, but it also was the 12th TD catch of the season – matching his career best from 2019 – and the 34th of his career to tie David Boston's record.

The record-breaker came later in the first quarter and was a thing of absolute beauty. Stroud stepped into a pass that traveled nearly 60 yards on the fly and pinpointed a waiting Olave in the end zone. The touchdown catch was No. 13 of the season and No. 35 of his career for Olave.

Although he hadn't said much about the career record, it was clear what finally achieving it meant to him.

"I had to get the ball," a smiling Olave said during the postgame press conference, the record touchdown football tucked safely under his arm. "I broke the record, which was a huge blessing, but I forget to keep the ball. Somebody had to go get it for me, and they gave it to me after the game."

One Year Ago — 2025

Not a single Rutgers player had made it into the visiting tunnel before Ohio State fans were singing in unison.

Students in the Block "O" south stands had their arms around each other, belting, "We don't give a damn for the whole state of Michigan," and as they made it a few bars into the song, fans around the rest of the stadium joined in.

It was clear that the rivalry meant as much as it ever had to the people watching the games.

Despite four straight losses, head coach Ryan Day wasn't backing down from what this game meant to the program, and he said that the Buckeyes' full attention turned to Michigan very quickly after the 42-9 win over Rutgers on Nov. 22.

"They're always on the back of our mind in terms of what we're working towards," Day said. "We know this is the last game of the year and what it means to everybody here. It didn't take long in the fourth quarter, once the game was in hand, for everybody to start figuring out this thing's coming fast. There was just a good look in everyone's eyes in the locker room."

Changes On Day's Staff Might Be Inevitable

Continued From Page 1

which was four times in the game against the Buckeyes, it found the end zone 75 percent of the time, with the other try ending in a field goal that put them up 24-21 at the time.

Since starting quarterback Julian Sayin was injured late in the game against Indiana, the story has been the same for the Buckeyes. Freshman Luke Fahey has tried to do what he can to will his team to a win, but those around him have not been able to hold up their end of the bargain.

By no means has Fahey been perfect. He has had his own struggles, which are to be expected out of a quarterback who was playing at the high school level a year ago. But Day went into the USC game – the first that Fahey started – saying that every other area had to play a little better to help the freshman along, which has not happened.

In Fahey's four games under center, Ohio State has committed 30 penalties for a total of 226 yards, an average of 7.5 penalties per game for 56.5 yards. The defense has also allowed just over 346 yards per game, helped along by a performance against the Wildcats' backup quarterback in which they gave up 278 total yards.

With a freshman quarterback already in a tough situation, those numbers make it infinitely tougher to put up enough points to win games.

But even before Sayin was injured in the game against Indiana, the cracks in the foundation were there. Little did anyone know at the time how much work Sayin must have been doing to keep the season from collapsing on itself.

In the win over Maryland on Oct. 10, the Buckeyes had eight penalties for 65 yards, which was not even a season high at the time since there were nine flags in the previous game against Iowa. But the Sayin to Jeremiah Smith connection was enough to paper over the cracks at the time with the two connecting for a pair of scores in the first half to help the Buckeyes jump out to a 31-10 lead at the break in a 45-16 victory.

Day said it himself after that contest.

"That's about us and our discipline. When you have eight penalties like that, that's not the sign of a good team," he said. "We have to make sure we're getting that fixed and being more focused in that area."

In the win over Illinois on Sept. 26, two weeks before beating the Terrapins, the defense struggled to put a stop to an Illini rushing offense that, after 11 games, was 100th in the country with 135.5 yards per game on the ground. In that game, Illinois rushed for 199 yards.

From there, the run defense improved, but at the cost of getting to the opposing quarterback. At least that's what junior defensive lineman Eddrick Houston said after the Buckeyes finally came through with five sacks in the Nov. 14 win over Northwestern.

"We were working on a little bit more stuff," Houston said after that win. "We were so focused after Illinois on stopping the run that we shied away from our pass rush."

With one game left in the regular season, arguably the most important one of the season now since there will be no playing for a Big Ten title or a national championship, Day was asked how much he trusts his defensive coordinator's ability to put together a successful game plan. His answer wasn't one that instilled much confidence.

"Well, we don't have a choice, so we have to get this thing together in the next week to go win this game," he said.

Does that mean changes are coming after the season? Day also wouldn't answer that question when asked since he wanted the focus to be on doing whatever they can to beat Michigan on Nov. 28. But changes do seem to be coming for the Buckeyes.

"When you watch a game like this, you have a lot of things that have to change," Day said. "I'm not going to jump to anything right now, because we have a game we have to play in another week."

But Day also pointed to a fumble by sophomore running back Isaiah West and the penalties the Buckeyes committed in the game, so the full blame wasn't placed on the defense.

"I'll say it again, when you lose the game, you lose the game as a team. It was not good enough as a group. For me to sit here and point out one group that came up short in this game would not be right because it took all of us to lose this game. But I think we all recognize the things that we've come up short in this year. I'm just as frustrated as anybody."

Fifth-year center Carson Hinzman spoke about the penalties after the game and how the Buckeyes were well aware they would have to play as clean a game as they could.

"It came down to execution. We knew this (officiating) crew. We've had them before. We know they can be easy on the trigger when it comes to some flags, so we've got to be able to play with that and understand what we have to do, and keep our hands inside, not give up holdings, not give up pre-snap errors," Hinzman said. "Unfortunately, that nipped us in the bud too many times. We didn't have a lot of opportunities, but the opportunities we had, we knew we had to cash them in, and we weren't able to do that in the second half."

A Chance To Respond

After the loss to Oregon on Nov. 7, the tone of the program was not very hopeful about earning a spot in the College Football Playoff or the Big Ten Championship Game.

But after the win over Northwestern and a few teams ahead of the Buckeyes losing, they were ranked as the No. 14 team in the CFP rankings, which had Day talking about how the team wasn't dead yet in terms of its playoff chances.

Just as a little life was injected into the program, it was sucked right back out with the loss to Nebraska. Hinzman, who was one of only two players who spoke with the media after the game along with Pierce, was having a hard time dealing with that fact.

"It's just difficult because you have so many guys that pour their heart into this stuff. It's difficult to choke down a season like this, especially being a fifth-year senior," he said with tears welling up. "It just sucks, man. You give everything to a program and to people. To come up short, it's heartbreaking, but damn it, we have one more game. Luckily for us, it's the most important game we have all year. We have to go win that."

Many seasons in the past have seen top-ranked Ohio State and Michigan teams battle against each other for Big Ten titles and spots in the national championship game or the playoffs.

This one will be between two teams that are having down seasons compared to the standard they set for themselves, with both programs having nothing left to play for this year other than bragging rights over their rival. As many who have seen the history of the rivalry between Ohio State and Michigan know, that motivation can be more than enough.

But Day will have to convince a locker room full of 51 players who are in their first year with the program that the rivalry is something they should take as seriously as Ohio State fans are still going to.

Pierce, who was recruited by Ohio State and has spent all three of his college seasons in Columbus, understands what The Game means.

"We have to go beat The Team Up North and end on a good note," he said. "At the end of the day, you come to Ohio State to win that game. It's all that matters."





Bucks Can't Overcome Turnovers In Loss

Anyone who watched Ohio State's 31-28 loss to Nebraska on Nov. 21 is aware that the reason for the loss was the shortcomings of the defense. Still, the Buckeye offense was not without fault. The unit, led by true freshman quarterback Luke Fahey, had a pair of pivotal turnovers in the second and fourth quarters to give Nebraska good field position.

GAME NOTEBOOK
Bobby Gorbett



SONNY BROCKWAY

DROPPED TO THE BENCH — Isaiah West had four carries for 11 yards against Nebraska but saw his carries limited after he lost a fumble in the second quarter. West has had problems with ball security this season.

The first slip-up came after Nebraska's second touchdown drive of the game. The Buckeyes had appeared to build some momentum on the early second-quarter drive after picking up a pair of first downs to get to their own 49-yard line. However, sophomore running back Isaiah West had the ball stripped out of his control after he was met by multiple Nebraska defenders 2 yards behind the line of scrimmage.

The Cornhuskers recovered the ball to take over inside Ohio State territory. Nebraska was able to score its third touchdown of the first half to take a 21-7 lead.

The next turnover came on the first drive of the fourth quarter. Just when it seemed as if the Buckeyes had built some momentum, having scored the most recent two touchdowns of the game, the offense started to deal with some negative plays.

A sack taken by Fahey on first-and-10 immediately derailed the drive. Fahey attempted to find junior receiver Kyle Parker to get the drive back on track, but his pass was slightly overthrown.

The third-and-17 play couldn't have gone much worse. For starters, the Buckeyes nearly took a delay of game penalty as the play clock ran down near zero.

With the Buckeyes trailing by three in the fourth quarter, head coach Ryan Day made the surprising decision to call a timeout to avoid the 5-yard penalty. That decision would hurt the Buckeyes in the final minutes, as Nebraska was able to run the clock out with the Buckeyes having just one timeout remaining on the final drive.

On the play itself, Fahey looked deep down the field for star receiver Jeremiah Smith. Smith created separation from Nebraska cornerback Victor Evans III, but Fahey must not have seen senior defensive back Jamir Conn over the top in perfect position to make a play.

Conn was able to jump up and make contact with Smith right as the ball arrived. The ball deflected up in the air and within reach of Evans, who made a diving grab to give the Cornhuskers possession at their own 49-yard line.

Just as they did in the first half, Nebraska was able to convert the turnover into a touchdown to lead 31-21.

The Buckeyes lost the turnover battle 2-0. For the season, the Buckeyes were minus-three in turnover margin, which ranked tied for 91st nationally going into the final week of the regular season.

Smith Builds Heisman Case

If there was any silver lining for Ohio State fans in the game, it was that Smith strengthened his grip on the Heisman Trophy despite the team's loss. Smith had an outstanding performance, finishing the game with six catches for 165 yards and a pair of receiving touchdowns.

He wasted no time in making an impact for the Buckeyes. On Ohio State's first third down of the game, the Cornhuskers pressured Fahey with six defenders. That left Smith to be covered by just one Nebraska defender. Nebraska found out the hard way why most teams don't take that approach in defending Smith.

Smith was able to create a few yards of separation against Evans, and Fahey had one of his best throws of the season under the heat of the Nebraska blitz to hit Smith perfectly in stride for the 67-yard touchdown.

From there, Nebraska did its best to cover him with multiple defenders and slow down his production. However, Smith again got free at the end of the half after the Cornhuskers took a 21-7 lead.

In desperate need of a big play, Smith delivered when he zigged past Nebraska cornerback Danny Odem III and used his speed to sprint by Dwayne McDougle III, who was also in coverage on the play. Fahey delivered a perfect pass to Smith at the very back of the end zone, and Smith, who had created a few yards of separation, tapped his toes in bounds to make it 21-14.

Smith struggled to get involved in the game as much in the second half. He didn't have his first catch in the half until midway through the fourth quarter.

However, that catch gave the Buckeyes some much-needed life. It came on a third-and-10 with a little over seven minutes remaining. He found space over the middle of the field and was able to hang on to the ball despite taking a huge hit from Evans after he brought in the reception.

Smith, who was the favorite for the Heisman Trophy entering the game, only increased his chances of winning the illustrious award. As BSB went to press, Smith was listed as a minuts-400 favorite to win the award, according to DraftKings sportsbook.

Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule has no doubt whom the award should belong to.

"Jeremiah Smith, give him the Heisman," Rhule said in an interview with Fox Sports immediately after the game. "I mean, we doubled him."

Rhule continued his praise of Smith in his postgame press conference.

"I don't think I've ever competed against a player as talented and special – and I've had a chance to play against a lot of them – as that kid Jeremiah Smith. That man, he is unbelievable, the way he can absolutely just tilt a game."

Nebraska Dominates Time Of Possession

Overall, it was by no means a bad game for the Ohio State offense. Fahey had arguably his best game of the season as Ohio State's starter despite the interception. He completed 16 of 27 passes for 259 yards and two passing touchdowns.

What really hurt the Buckeyes was that they didn't have the ball very long. Ohio State ran just 49 plays in the loss, as compared to the 73 plays that the Cornhuskers had.

As far as game time, Nebraska held the ball for 35:05 while Ohio State had it for just 24:55.

Day was asked after the game if the Buckeyes used sophomore running back Bo Jackson, who finished the game with 12 carries for 52 yards and two touchdowns, enough, and he mentioned how few opportunities his offense had all game.

"When I looked at it, we only ended up with 49 plays," Day said. "I don't know how many we had in the last drive. And then you mix in Isaiah (West) had four carries. There was a stretch in there early on where we had the three plays and the touchdown at the end of the first quarter. We only had about six plays anyhow. Forty-nine plays to 73 plays, the numbers don't look right, certainly as you come out of the game. But I think (Jackson finishing the game with only 12 carries) was more a product of the way the game was going."

The defense is certainly to blame for the Buckeyes' offense not being on the field as much as it usually is. Nebraska was very efficient on third down in the game. The Cornhuskers went 10 of 16 on third-down conversions in the win.

Nebraska started the game converting on five of its first six third downs. With one touchdown drive that started during the first quarter, the Cornhuskers picked up a couple of key third-down conversions and managed to eat up over seven minutes of game time off the clock before the Buckeyes touched the ball again.

Penalties, Mistakes Plague OSU

As has been the case in virtually all of its poor performances this season, Ohio State made a habit of shooting itself in the foot.

The Buckeyes finished the game with seven accepted penalties, and many of them were costly. On Smith's lengthy touchdown reception, Day stood in front of an official while the play was still going and didn't get out of the way in time to avoid a sideline interference penalty. Luckily for Ohio State, that didn't take away Smith's score, but it made it so that the team had to kick from its own 20-yard line. The Cornhuskers were able to get out to their 37-yard line on the return to set up a touchdown drive.

On that touchdown drive, senior de-

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Although Ohio State's offense sputtered throughout its 31-28 loss to Nebraska with just 335 yards of total offense, the Buckeyes' second-worst output this season, the combination of freshman quarterback Luke Fahey and junior wide receiver Jeremiah Smith was a bright spot.

Fahey completed 16 of 27 passes for 259 passing yards, two touchdowns and just one interception. He ultimately connected with Smith six times for 165 yards and Ohio State's first two touchdowns of the game.

The pair wasted no time forging a connection in Lincoln. After Ohio State forced a punt on Nebraska's opening drive, it would take Fahey just three plays to find Smith wide open deep on a post route for a 67-yard touchdown that gave the Buckeyes an early 7-0 lead. Fahey also connected with the Heisman-frontrunner wideout for a 31-yard toe-tap touchdown in the second quarter.

Four of Fahey's six completions to Smith went for 18 yards or more, with the pair connecting three times for completions of 30 or more yards. Smith recorded 46 yards after the catch, which all came on two of his catches.

What Didn't Work

Ohio State's defense struggled throughout the Buckeyes' loss to Nebraska. Quarterback Anthony Colandrea and the Cornhuskers' rushing attack found consistent success against the Buckeyes.

Colandrea completed 19 of 28 passes for 200 yards and three touchdowns. It marked just the second time this season that Colandrea threw for at least three touchdowns against a Power Four opponent, the other coming against Maryland on Oct. 3.

The dual-threat quarterback was equally effective on the ground, rushing 11 times for 63 yards and a touchdown. Ohio State struggled to contain Colandrea both inside and outside the pocket, managing just one sack in the game a week after getting a season-high five sacks in the Nov. 14 win over Northwestern.

Nebraska's rushing attack took 45 carries for 176 yards and a touchdown, while the Cornhuskers had three 40-plus-yard rushers in the victory.

Ohio State's defense also routinely allowed big gains, with Nebraska having seven plays of more than 10 yards (two passing, five rushing).

The Buckeyes also failed to capitalize on third and fourth down. Nebraska went 10 of 16 on third down and completed both of its fourth-down conversion attempts.

It marked the third time in four games that Ohio State's defense allowed 30 or more points. The Buckeye defense allowed more than 30 points only twice in the three years prior to this season.

Play Of The Game

After Nebraska scored 21 unanswered points to take a 14-point lead over Ohio State in the second quarter, the Buckeyes responded with a seven-play, 74-yard touchdown drive to cut into the deficit before halftime.

The drive was capped off by Smith's second touchdown of the game. Fahey faked a handoff before launching a deep pass toward the back middle of the end zone, where Smith was streaking downfield. Despite tight coverage from Nebraska defensive backs Kahmir Prescott and Dwayne McDougle III, Smith managed to haul in the pass while tapping both feet inbounds for the score. The touchdown ultimately cut Nebraska's lead to seven.

— Sam Cipriani

fensive end Qua Russaw committed a key penalty. On a third-and-3 from the Nebraska 44-yard line, quarterback Anthony Colandrea went with a hard count to get Russaw in the neutral zone. Nebraska wasn't able to fully take advantage of the free play when Colandrea's deep pass fell harmlessly to the ground, but the free 5 yards moved the sticks and kept the drive going.

Mainly though, it was Ohio State's offense that struggled with penalties. Multiple times, the Buckeyes were pushed behind the sticks with holding flags. The Buckeyes' first punt was, in large part, due to a holding penalty committed by senior left guard Luke Montgomery on a 4-yard first-and-10 run by Jackson in the first quarter.

Despite picking up 15 yards on the next two plays, the Buckeyes still had to punt after Fahey was inaccurate on a third-and-5 pass attempt.

The Buckeyes also had several pre-snap penalties, which have often been a problem since Fahey took over after regular starter Julian Sayin suffered a season-ending injury on Oct. 17.

Against the Cornhuskers, the Buckeyes had two false-start penalties and a delay of game call that went against them as well.

One late third-quarter drive encapsulated the sloppiness of Ohio State's offense. After Jackson ran for 3 yards on first down from Ohio State's 17-yard line, the Buckeyes tried a toss play on second down. Jackson couldn't catch the toss and had to hop on the loose ball for a 7-yard loss.

A delay of game penalty made it third-and-19, and Day elected to settle for an inside run and subsequent punt. Nebraska's Jacory Barney Jr. then returned the punt 21 yards to set his offense up with the ball at Ohio State's 38-yard line.

The Cornhuskers were able to kick a go-ahead field goal thanks to the great starting field position.

"Winning isn't everything, but wanting to is"

- Vince Lombardi







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Downfall Continues Thanks To Huskers

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In America's heartland, Ohio State did not have a heartbeat, watching its fading hope of making the College Football Playoff take a hit as the red-clad Nebraska fans stormed the Memorial Stadium field in Lincoln on Nov. 21 after the Cornhuskers were able to have their way with the No. 14 Buckeyes for a historic 31-28 victory.

OSU needed victories in its final two regular-season games and help from others to have any hope of reaching the Big Ten Championship Game with the idea of winning that to earn a spot in the 12-team CFP field.

Instead, the Buckeyes were done in by possibly the best quarterback they've faced this season – and could do nothing to stop the Cornhuskers before a soggy crowd of 85,699.

Anthony Colandrea threw for 200 yards and three touchdowns and ran for another score to lead the victory. Jeremiah Smith's 67-yard touchdown catch on the Buckeyes' first series of the game made it 7-0, but the Cornhuskers scored 21 straight points until Smith's 31-yard TD made it 21-14.

After John Hohl's 33-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter gave the Cornhuskers (7-4, 4-4) a 24-21 lead in the back-and-forth game, Colandrea hit Quinn Clark for a 26-yard TD for a 31-21 lead with 7:41 to play.

Bo Jackson's second TD run, from 1 yard, with 3:52 left, made it 31-28, but Colandrea ran 6 yards for a first down to the Nebraska 49 with 55 seconds left to ice the win. He had 11 carries for 63 yards.

Nebraska had lost 31 straight to ranked opponents since early in the 2016 season.

The Buckeyes (7-4, 5-3) have their most losses in a season since a 6-7 record in 2011 under interim coach Luke Fickell, which also included Nebraska's only win in 11 games in the series before this victory.

Luke Fahey, in his fourth start in place of the injured Julian Sayin, was 16 of 27 for 259 yards, two touchdowns and an interception. Smith, who had four catches for 117 yards and two TDs in the first half, had six catches for 165 yards on nine targets.

Colandrea was 19 of 28, while Kwazi Gilmer made seven catches for 73 yards and a score.

Pushed Around

Nebraska started from the 25 after the opening kickoff. On second-and-4, Colandrea ran for 3, but a blindside block cost the Cornhuskers 15 yards back to the 16, followed by a false start. Riley Pettijohn then had a sack for 2 yards to the 9 before a completion of 18 yards to Gilmer was 8 yards short of a first down.

A 49-yard punt was returned 3 yards to the 27 by Brandon Inniss and the Buckeyes struck quickly (56 seconds) on Smith's 67-yard TD on the third play.

Fahey opened with an incompletion to Devin McCuin and passed 6 yards to Mason Williams before Smith hauled in the throw at the Nebraska 33 and raced to the end zone for his 16th score of the season to make it 7-0 at 11:43.

But there was a flag on the play. It was on OSU, but the score counted because coach Ryan Day was flagged for sideline interference and the 15 yards were enforced on the kickoff.

That aided the Huskers, who used an Isaiah Mozee 26-yard return to the Nebraska 37 to launch the drive that tied it 7-7 on an 11-yard catch by Luke Lindenmeyer. In a coincidence, the score came with 5:49 left in the quarter, and it also took the Huskers 5:49 to go 63 yards in 13 plays.


Luke Fahey

On third-and-3, OSU was penalized for offsides, and three plays later Lindenmeyer made a catch for 13 to the OSU 35. A third-down completion to Gilmer then gave the Huskers a first at the 24.

Nebraska faced a third-and-1 after a 9-yard rush by Jamal Rule, and he came back with 2 more for a first down. Colandrea ran for 2 prior to his rolling right and making a pass to Lindenmeyer in the backfield, and the tight end took it in from there.

Ohio State began at the 25, but a hold on the first play put the ball on the 15. Jackson got 8 back with a run and 7 more with a catch for a third-and-5. A low pass to Jackson behind the line fell incomplete, and Joe McGuire's punt traveled only 40 yards to the 30.

The Huskers took a 14-7 lead at 11:44 of the second quarter on a 7-yard reception by Gilmer. Janiran Bonner had a catch for 8, and Mozee rushed for 4 for a first at the Husker 42 and continued the drive with an 11-yard run. He gained 3, then Rule had a 29-yard carry wiped out by a holding call.

The ball was put on the OSU 49, and Lindenmeyer got 9 yards with a catch before Rule rushed for 4 to the 36 for a first down to end the quarter.

Nebraska dominated the stats in part because of the Smith rapid score. The Huskers had 124 yards, compared to 88 for Ohio State. They ran 23 plays to OSU's six and possessed the ball for 12:06 to 2:54 for the Buckeyes, with eight first downs to one.

Rule pounded his way for 8 and 4 to the 24 on the first two plays of the second quarter as the Buckeyes were outmuscled up front. After Nebraska took a timeout, Colandrea ran for 18 to the 6, dropping his shoulder to gain a few more yards. Rule went for no gain, and Colandrea lost a yard prior to the slant pass to Gilmer to complete a masterful 70-yard, 13-play, 7:07 drive.

OSU was able to start from the 30 after Nebraska was offsides on the first snap. Isaiah West ran for 7 for a first. He rushed for 4 and 2 as the rain continued. On a third-and-4 from the 43, Smith made a 6-yard catch to keep possession at the 49.

Then disaster struck when West was tackled for a 2-yard loss, fumbling on the way to the ground, and Donovan Jones recovered for the Huskers at the OSU 47 with 8:46 left in the half.

Nebraska turned that into a 21-7 lead with 4:12 left on Colandrea's 13-yard run.

Colandrea threw for 6 to Mozee as the Buckeyes had no answers. Colandrea gained 1, as did Rule to set up a fourth-and-2 at the OSU 39. Nebraska took another timeout, and Colandrea, moving to his right, lobbed a pass to Rule for 11 yards to the 28.

Nebraska had a false start followed by a pass to Clark that was broken up at the 12 by Earl Little Jr. No problem because Gilmer hauled in a 13-yarder to the 20. It was third-and-2 when Rule gobbled up 3 yards straight ahead for another set of downs at the 17.

Rule ran for 4, and then Colandrea took off, going up the middle before heading to the right pylon, diving across the line for his sixth rushing touchdown of the season. It took nine plays and 4:34 to go the 47 yards.

Back came the Buckeyes with a 31-yard TD by Smith with 55 seconds left at the end of a 74-yard, seven-play, 3:13 drive.

OSU began from the 26 after a 16-yard return by Kyle Parker. McCuin had a 17-yard catch, but on third-and-6 from their own 47, OSU took a timeout when Smith feigned an injury because of 12 men on the field rather than risk a penalty. But he had to sit the next play.

The Buckeyes then took a false start, and Nebraska gave back the 5 yards with an offsides penalty before Fahey ran for 7 on a draw to gain a first at the Nebraska 46.

But the Buckeyes were then called for holding, and they had a first-and-20 with 2:00 left. Smith got 13 back with a catch, and McCuin's grab added 12 to the 31.

Then Smith bailed out the Buckeyes again with another Heisman-worthy play, catching a perfectly thrown ball between double coverage, getting his left foot inbound by inches at the back of the end zone.

The Huskers still had time. From the 25 on second down, Mozee ran for 14. Jacory Barney Jr.'s catch went to the OSU 49, and Gilmer hauled in a 14-yarder to the 35. Barney lost a yard on a fumble but fell on it, and Gilmer gained 8 with a catch to the 28 with 11 seconds left.

A pass to Barney to the 10 was incomplete, and Hohl's 46-yard field-goal attempt was to the right with three seconds left before OSU took a knee to end the half.

The Cornhuskers dominated the line of scrimmage in the first half, leading in yards (259-187), first downs (16-7), plays (46-19) and time of possession (20:48-9:12) through 30 minutes. OSU was outgained on the ground 116-24.

Fahey was 9 of 12 for 163 yards. Colandrea was 14 of 21 for 143 yards. Gilmer's seven catches went for 73 yards, and Rule rushed 12 times for 48 yards.

Upsetting Performance

Ohio State made it 21-21 at 6:37 in the third on Jackson's 1-yard run.

McCuin returned the second-half kickoff 22 yards to the 24, and Jackson ran for 12 on the first play. Later on fourth-and-2 from the OSU 44, the Buckeyes used a timeout, and from there Fahey ran for 10 to the Nebraska 46.

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OSU VS. NEBRASKA

Jackson carried for 7, but an 11-yard catch at the right sideline to McCuin was overturned upon a review. On third down, Jackson on a jet sweep to the left gained 4 for a first at the 35, but a false start on the next snap moved the Buckeyes back to the 40.

Jackson got 7 of them back. Fahey was blitzed but got the ball to Parker for 16 to the 17. Jackson rammed his way for 6, and Williams hauled in a catch for 7 to the 4. Fahey scrambled for 3 to the 1, and Jackson went behind a rejuvenated line to plow in from there. The 14-play, 76-yard drive used 8:20 off the clock.

Following a touchback, the Huskers had a third-and-9 from their 26 when Lindenmeyer made a critical 12-yard catch to the 38 to move the chains. Later needing 2 yards on third down, the Huskers abandoned the run, and Colandrea threw incomplete to Demetrius Bell at the OSU 30. A 37-yard punt and fair catch by Inniss gave the Buckeyes the ball at the 17 with 3:33 remaining in the quarter.

Jackson ran for 3, then lost 7 and recovered his own fumble at the 13. After a delay of game, Jackson gained 3 to the 11, and McGuire's line drive 48-yard punt was returned 21 yards by Barney to the OSU 38.

Barney on a jet sweep gained 4. Colandrea took off for 15 to the 19. He fumbled, but it was ruled his knee was down on the final play of the third quarter.

Rule opened the final period with a run for 6, and Colandrea ran for minus-2. Colandrea then overthrew Lindenmeyer in the end zone, and Hohl kicked a 33-yard field goal to go ahead 24-21 with 13:42 to play.

Starting from the 25, Fahey was sacked for the only time in the game, for 7 yards, and Parker made a diving try but couldn't make a catch at the OSU 46 on the next play. The Buckeyes took their second timeout with 12:53 to play.

Fahey threw to Smith, but Jamir Conn broke it up, and the ball deflected to Victor Evans III for an interception at the Nebraska 49.

For the second time, the Cornhuskers scored off a turnover when Colandrea hit Clark for a 26-yard TD for a 31-21 lead with 7:41 to play.

Mozee ran for 6 and 1. Rule went up the middle for 2 leading to a fourth-and-1 at the OSU 42. Rule got 2 for a first.

On a third-and-3, Lindenmeyer made a catch for 8 for another first at the 25. Rule lost a yard prior to the scoring pass to Clark. The short drive of 51 yards took nine plays and 5:05.

After the touchback and two incompletions, one to Smith, Fahey went back to Smith for 30 to the Nebraska 45 for his first catch of the second half. Jackson had a 5-yard catch overturned after a review.

Smith made a catch for 18 to the 27. West made a 6-yard catch, and Jackson ran for 5. Fahey threw incomplete to Nate Roberts, and Fahey passed to Jackson for what was called a 16-yard TD, but a review put the ball on the 1 with 4:13 to play.

Nebraska was called for an illegal substitution, and Jackson scored from the 1 with 3:52 left. However, it took 3:49 for the 10 plays to go 75 yards.

Nebraska, after the kickoff, was intent on running out the clock. Colandrea, from the 25, ran for 8, and Rule was stopped for no gain, but on third down, Colandrea ran for 5 to the 38 for a first down. Rule gained 5 yards combined on two runs to the Nebraska 43, and OSU used its final timeout with1:10 left. Colandrea ran for 6 and a first down to the Nebraska 49 with 55 seconds, and a kneel-down for a loss of 2 ended the game.

Notes

Nebraska totaled 376 yards (200 passing, 176 rushing) to 335 (259 passing, 76 rushing) for the Buckeyes, who averaged 3.5 yards per run. ... Nebraska is 7-0 this season when rushing for 150-plus yards. ... The Buckeyes were penalized seven times for 55 yards, and Nebraska also had seven for 45. Jackson gained 52 yards on 12 carries, Fahey had 15 on five runs and West 11 on four totes. ... Rule rushed for 70 yards on 23 runs. ... Lindemeyer's five catches went for 53 yards.

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL (7-4, 5-3)

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, L 30-18.

Nov. 7 OREGON, L 41-28; **14** NORTHWESTERN, W, 28-19; **21** at Nebraska, L 31-28; **28** MICHIGAN.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (4-2)

Oct. 7 Cincinnati at Mason, Ohio (Exh.), L 79-68; **25** BUTLER (Exh.), W 82-73.

Nov. 2 at BYU, L 94-83; **6** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 89-65; **9** MARSHALL, W 84-74; **13** at UConn, L, 84-68; **16** PRAIRIE VIEW A&M, W 86-59; **19** UMBC, W 101-62; **24** VANDERBILT; **29** LIPSCOMB.

Dec. 2 at Nebraska; **6** MARYLAND; **12** at Notre Dame; **15** STONY BROOK; **19** CBS Sports Classic at New York, N.Y., vs. Kansas; **22** MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE; **30** OREGON.

Jan. 2 at Iowa; **6** NORTHWESTERN; **9** at Illinois; **12** at Purdue; **17** PENN STATE; **23** MICHIGAN STATE; **26** IOWA; **30** at Michigan.

Feb. 6 at Penn State; **9** WISCONSIN; **14** WASHINGTON; **17** at UCLA; **20** at USC; **25** RUTGERS; **28** at Indiana.

March 4 at Minnesota; **7** MICHIGAN; **9-14** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (5-2)

Nov. 2 UIC, W 81-34; **5** CENTRAL MICHIGAN, W 103-36; **8** MERCYHURST, W 91-57; **12** UCONN, L 87-55; **15** FDU, W 93-49; **18** OLE MISS, W 60-57; **22** Lone Star Series at Fort Worth, Texas, vs. Texas, L 75-61; **28** 4 Tha Culture Holiday Classic at Richmond, Va., vs. VCU.

Dec. 2 AKRON; **5** at Rutgers; **9** GRAND VALLEY STATE; **13** CANISIUS; **16** MIAMI (OH); **20** Invisalign Bay Area Women's Classic at San Francisco vs. Stanford; **29** OREGON.

Jan. 2 MARYLAND; **7** at Michigan; **10** at Wisconsin; **13** ILLINOIS; **17** at Nebraska; **21** at Maryland; **24** MINNESOTA; **28** NORTHWESTERN; **31** at Penn State.

Feb. 3 at Indiana; **7** MICHIGAN STATE; **10** WASHINGTON; **18** at UCLA; **21** at USC; **24** PURDUE; **28** IOWA.

MARCH 3-7 Big Ten Tournament at Las Vegas.

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. 2 Paul Short Run at Bethlehem, Pa., women 24th/37; **16** Arturo Barrios Invitational at Texas A&M, men 8th/38; women 14th/46; **30** Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wis., men 15th/15, women 17th/18.

Nov. 13 NCAA Regional Championships at East Lansing, Mich., men 16th/31; women 19th/34.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (4-8-0, 2-4-0)

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, L 3-2 (OT); L 4-3; **31** MICHIGAN, W 5-2.

Nov. 1 MICHIGAN, L 5-4 (OT); **13-14** at Wisconsin, L 5-2; W 2-1; **20-21** NOTRE DAME, L 7-3; L 3-2; **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 (15-1-0, 11-1-0)

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, W 3-0; W 8-0; **30-31** BEMIDJI STATE, W 4-1; W 5-1.

Nov. 13-14 MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 5-3; W 3-2; **20-21** at St. Cloud State, W 5-0; W 6-1.

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.

RIFLE (2-10, 0-6)

Sept. 26 at Mississippi L 4,711-4,651; vs. UT Martin at Mississippi, W 4,651-4,597.

Oct. 3 NEBRASKA, L 4,730-4,675; **4** TCU, L 4,724-4,683; & NAVY, L 4,743-4,683; **16-17** at Alaska Fairbanks, L 4,723-4,674; L 4,747-4,689; **31** MURRAY STATE, L 4,725-4,703; & UTEP, L 4,706-4,703.

Nov. 8 at MIT, W 4,687-4,527; **21-22** at UTEP, L, 4,683-4,671 & L, 4,689-4,677.

Jan. 17-18 at TCU; **23-24** MT. ALOYSIUS & MOREHEAD STATE; **31** at Akron.

Feb. 5-6 Patriot Rifle Conference Champioship at Lincoln, Neb.; **20** NCAA Qualifier at Lincoln, Neb.

MEN'S SWIM AND DIVE (0-1)

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, L 173-127; **17-20** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 3rd/1,373 pts.

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 (1-0)

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, W 187-113; **17-20** OHIO STATE FALL INVITATIONAL, 2nd/1,922.5 pts.

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.

MEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 19-27 ITA ALL-AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIPS, NTS; **25-27** Fighting Irish Mini Duals at South Bend, Ind., NTS; **28-OCT. 4** COLUMBUS CHALLENGER, NTS.

Oct. 14-20 ITA MIDWEST REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS, NTS; **26-NOV. 1** M25 at Las Vegas, NTS; **29-Nov. 1** Big Ten Singles/Doubles Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS.

Nov. 5-8 ITA Sectionals Championship at Waco, Texas, NTS; **5-8** ITA Conference Masters Championship at Rome, Ga., NTS; **8-15** M25 COLUMBUS, NTS; **18-23** NCAA Individual Championships at Athens, Ga., NTS

WOMEN'S TENNIS

Sept. 19-27 ITA All-American Championships at Cary, N.C., NTS.

Oct. 8-12 ITA Midwest Regional Championships at Champaign, Ill.

Nov. 5-8 ITA Central Sectional Championships at Fort Worth, Texas, NTS; **5-8** ITA Conference Masters Championships at Rome, Ga., NTS; **17-22** NCAA Singles & Doubles Championships at Athens, Ga., NTS.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (11-16, 4-13)

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, L 3-0; **24** OREGON, L 3-1; **29** at Penn State, L 3-1.

Nov. 1 at Illinois, L 3-0; **4** PURDUE, L 3-0; **7** at Michigan State, W 3-2; **11** at Michigan, L 3-0; **13** WISCONSIN, L 3-1; **17** MARYLAND, L 3-1.

WRESTLING (2-1)

Nov. 1 Clarion Open at Clarion, Pa., NTS; **15** COLUMBIA, W, 34-10; **20** at NC State, L 19-17; **22** at Bellarmine, W, 37-6.

Dec. 12-13 National Duals at Tulsa, Okla.; **18** KENT STATE.

Jan. 3 CLARION; **10** PURDUE; **15** at Northwestern; **22** at Indiana; **24** at Iowa; **29** MICHIGAN STATE; **31** NEBRASKA.

Feb. 5 at Michigan; **12** PENN STATE.

March 6-7 Big Ten Championships at Nationwide Arena, Columbus; **18-20** NCAA Championships at St. Louis, Mo.

BSB Quotebook: Nebraska 31, Ohio State 28

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on his trust in defensive coordinator Matt Patricia despite the Buckeyes giving up 30 points for the third time in four games: "It's hard to think about that right now, coming off the field like this, as disappointed and frustrated as we all are. So we have to figure it out and come up with a way (to win). As always at the end of the year, we will evaluate everything and figure out what to do next."

Day on Ohio State rallying in the second half, and the Buckeyes' lack of offensive plays: "Being able to continue to fight through the way the game was going and to get a little momentum back – (it was) certainly not enough. There were eight or nine possessions, and there were only two punts (for Nebraska), so we only got two stops all day."

Ohio State junior linebacker Payton Pierce on his disappointment with the Buckeyes' loss: "It's pretty disappointing. It felt like we had some momentum in the second half, but we have to do better."

Pierce on how Ohio State was feeling as a team after the loss and how the Buckeyes will move forward: "It's hard to express the disappointment level. I think everybody is really disappointed. It's a challenge, and we have to bounce back (against Michigan). We've got a big game. Just rallying the guys together and going to win this rivalry game."

Nebraska junior defensive back Donovan Jones on the Cornhuskers' game plan for Smith: "In the second half, we did a lot better. Obviously there were little things, and they schemed up some good stuff. We had a plan for him, and obviously he's a playmaker, so props to him. He probably did have a lot of yards, but it was fun."



SONNY BROCKWAY

RESPECT — Whenever Jeremiah Smith (4) is on the field, defenses have to pay extra attention, and the Nebraska players said as much after the Cornhuskers' 31-28 victory. Smith did his best to keep the Buckeyes from a fourth loss on the season with touchdown catches of 67 and 31 yards among his 165 yards, but it wasn't enough.

Nebraska senior defensive lineman Cameron Lenhardt on the importance of pressuring the quarterback with a player like Smith on the other side of the field: "It's a lot of pressure. We want to get there for those guys in the back end. They did a great job as much as they could. But getting home and getting back there – we have to play complementary football on defense. The line has to help the back end. We have got to do a better job getting back there."

Rhule on Nebraska's performance in the win and his mentality going into the game: "I'm really proud of our guys. I told them before the game that this wasn't about doing anything special or different. Each of them came here to be great. Each of them works every day to be great. Their families were in the tunnel before we went out. Their families, when they first were born, looked at them and said, 'I hope someday you're great.' Sometimes you have to be great when everybody tells you you're not very great. Today I called on them all to go be great, not to be special and not to be different. This wasn't some big upset. We didn't have some crazy game plan. We didn't trick them. We played our style of football, and they had a lot of answers. It was two good teams battling it out, and I couldn't be prouder."

Nebraska senior quarterback Anthony Colandrea on his pair of third-down scrambles on the Cornhuskers' final offensive possession: "Coach Rhule, he was like, 'We'll give them the ball back with like 40 seconds left,' and I'm looking at him like, 'We can't do that.' Especially with that No. 4 character. (Nebraska interim offensive coordinator Glenn) Thomas called a really good play, and I just went out there and tried to execute it."

Lenhardt on ending Nebraska's streak of losses against ranked opponents that was up to 31 straight games before beating No. 14 Ohio State: "I mean, it's a new feeling. I'm excited and happy."



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The Numbers Game

Nebraska 31, Ohio State 28

Nov. 21, 2026 – Memorial Stadium, Lincoln, Neb.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	7	7	7	7	28
NEBRASKA	7	14	0	10	31

First Quarter

OSU – Je. Smith, 67-yard pass from Fahey (Hawkins kick), 11:43.

NEB – Lindenmeyer, 11-yard pass from Colandrea (Hohl kick), 5:49.

Second Quarter

NEB – Gilmer, 7-yard pass from Colandrea (Hohl kick), 11:44.

NEB – Colandrea, 13-yard rush (Hohl kick), 4:12.

OSU – Je. Smith, 31-yard pass from Fahey (Hawkins kick), 0:55.

Third Quarter

OSU – B. Jackson, 1-yard rush (Hawkins kick), 6:37.

Fourth Quarter

NEB – Hohl, 33-yard field goal, 13:42.

NEB – Clark, 26-yard pass from Colandrea (Hohl kick), 7:41.

OSU – B. Jackson, 1-yard rush (Hawkins kick), 3:52.

Att. – 85,699

Weather – Cloudy, 55 F

Team Statistics

	OSU	NEB
First Downs	16	23
Rushing	5	13
Passing	11	9
Penalty	0	1
Rushes-Yards	22-76	45-176
Passing Yards	259	200
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	16-27-1	19-28-0
Offensive Plays	49	73
Total Net Yards	335	376
Third Down Efficiency	5-9	10-16
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-1	2-2
Punts-Avg.	2-44.0	2-43.0
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	1-0
Penalties	7-55	7-45
Time of Possession	24:55	35:05

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **OSU**: B. Jackson 12-52; Fahey 5-15; West 4-11; Team 1-(-2). **NEB:** Rule 23-70; Colandrea 11-63; Mozee 8-43; Barney Jr. 2-2; Team 1-(-2).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **OSU:** Fahey 16-27-1-259-2. **NEB:** Colandrea 19-28-0-200-3.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Je. Smith 6-165; B. Jackson 4-30; McCuin 2-29; Parker 1-16; Williams 2-13; West 1-6. **NEB:** Gilmer 7-73; Lindenmeyer 5-53; Clark 1-26; Barney Jr. 2-16; Mozee 2-13; Rule 1-11; Bonner 1-8.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **OSU:** McGuire 2-44.0-48. **NEB:** Wilson 2-43.0-49.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Inniss 1-3. **NEB:** Barney Jr. 1-21.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** McCuin 1-22; Parker 1-16. **NEB:** Mozee 1-26.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **NEB:** Jones 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **NEB:** Evans III 1-0.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU**: Pettijohn 1-2. **NEB**: Lenhardt 1-7.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** K. Jackson Jr. 1-2; Pettijohn 1-2; Houston 1-1; Little Jr. 1-1; Mathews Jr. 1-1; Russaw 1-1. **NEB:** Lenhardt 1.5-11; D. Jones 1-2; Stoudmire 0.5-3.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **OSU:** Little Jr. 4-4-8; McClain 6-2-8; J. Moore 6-1-7; Pierce 3-3-6; Pettijohn 2-2-4; Sanchez 4-0-4; Grady 3-1-4; K. Jackson Jr. 0-3-3; Russaw 2-1-3; Mathews Jr. 2-1-3; Thomas 2-1-3; Houston 3-0-3; Alford 1-1-2; Timmons 1-1-2; Ja. Smith 0-1-1; Roker 0-1-1; Alliegro 0-1-1; Bradford 0-1-1; Johnson 0-1-1; Caldwell 1-0-1; Rembert 0-1-1; Walker 1-0-1; VanSickle 0-1-1. **NEB:** Foster 4-4-8; Shavers 3-4-7; Evans III 3-2-5; Lenhardt 1-3-4; McDougle III 2-1-3; D. Jones 2-0-2; Odem III 2-0-2; Stoudmire 0-2-2; Berymon 0-2-2; Pietrzak 2-0-2; Conn 1-0-1; Rhett 1-0-1; Charles 1-0-1; Bauer 1-0-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **OSU**: Montgomery, Siereveld, I. Moore, Hinzman, Cook, Fahey, B. Jackson, Christian, Williams, McCuin, Je. Smith, Sanchez, Mathews Jr., Timmons, Houston, Grady, J. Moore, Russaw, Pettijohn, Alliegro, Little Jr., McClain, Inniss, K. Jackson Jr., Ja. Smith, Parker, Roker III, Lockhart, Henry Jr., Thomas, Bradford, Alford, Calhoun, Johnson, Stover, Kelly, Pierce, Caldwell, West, Gebhardt, Rembert, McGuire, Rudzinski, Diomede, Smith Jr., Riggs, Walker, VanSickle, Padilla, Lowe, Roberts, Welcing, Lennon, Hawkins. **NEB:** Evans, Black, Babalade, Prichett, Gottula, Colandrea, Rule, Lindenmeyer, Hunter, Barney Jr., Gilmer, Conn, D. Jones, Odem III, Evans III, McDougle III, Lenhardt, Stoudmire, Van Poppel, Nwaneri, Shavers Jr., Foster, Bonner, Bell, Tarver Jr., Rhett, Guthrie, Sanders, Smith, Merritt, Clark, Ives, Shiggs, Mozee, Charles, Benning, Nelson, J. Jones, Bauer, Koch, Wacker, Rogers, Stenger, Ecternach, King, Hoffken, Wills, Mooberry, Terry, Pyle, Knaak, Wilson, Goldman, Hammerbeck, Hohl, Berymon, Lefotu, Pietrzak, Ochoa, Parrott.

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	(2) Southern California	L, 30-18	70,810
Nov. 7	(11) OREGON	L, 41-28	103,551
Nov. 14	(21) NORTHWESTERN	W, 29-18	101,256
Nov. 21	(16) Nebraska	L, 31-28	85,699
Nov. 28	(25) 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	259	186
Rushing	97	64
Passing	147	103
Penalty	15	19
Average Per Game/Rush	143.0	100.3
Average Per Game/Pass	303.8	194.0
Total Offense	4915	3237
Total Plays	748	696
Average Per Game	446.8	294.3
Average Per Play	6.6	4.7
Penalties-Yards	77-590	64-485
Fumbles-Lost	10-5	14-8
Third Down Efficiency	63-139	66-157
Percentage	45%	42%
Fourth Down Efficiency	14-23	7-17
Percentage	61%	41%
Sacks-Yards	17-117	21-160
Time Of Possession Avg.	32:00	28:00

Score By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	110	110	55	102	0	377	34.3
Opponents	40	63	37	75	0	215	19.5

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Bo Jackson	171	851	5.0	9	65
Ja'Kobi Jackson	59	354	6.0	6	49
Isaiah West	57	256	4.5	1	22
Legend Bey	19	80	4.2	0	24
Luke Fahey	24	30	1.3	0	11
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
Devin McCuin	1	1	1.0	0	1
Julian Sayin	37	-9	-0.2	2	9
Team	7	-26	-3.7	0	0
OSU Totals	**389**	**1573**	**4.0**	**18**	**65**
OPP Totals	**343**	**1103**	**3.2**	**13**	**48**

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Julian Sayin	131	192	68.2	2007	19-4	184.5
Luke Fahey	103	160	64.4	1283	10-5	146.1
Tavien St. Clair	5	7	71.4	52	1-1	152.4
OSU Totals	**239**	**359**	**66.6**	**3342**	**30-10**	**166.8**
OPP Totals	**199**	**353**	**56.4**	**2134**	**10-4**	**114.2**

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	86	1482	17.2	17	72
Devin McCuin	32	406	12.7	3	41
Bo Jackson	26	195	7.5	1	24
Nate Roberts	15	209	13.9	3	68
Mason Williams	14	170	12.1	1	28
Isaiah West	13	72	5.5	1	10
Brandon Inniss	11	153	13.9	1	49
Chris Henry Jr.	11	283	25.7	2	75
Phillip Bell	10	128	12.8	0	23
Brock Boyd	6	110	18.3	0	39
Legend Bey	5	56	11.2	1	25
Kyle Parker	3	38	12.7	0	16
Ja'Kobi Jackson	2	8	4.0	0	5
Maxence LeBlanc	2	12	6.0	0	6
Hunter Welcing	1	4	4.0	0	4
Brody Lennon	1	4	4.0	0	4
Jerquaden Guilford	1	12	12.0	0	12
OSU Totals	**239**	**3342**	**14.0**	**30**	**75**
OPP Totals	**199**	**2134**	**10.7**	**10**	**70**

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jeremiah Smith	17	–	–	–	–	102
Connor Hawkins	–	44-44	–	–	12-14	80
Bo Jackson	10	–	–	–	–	60
Ja'Kobi Jackson	6	–	–	–	–	36
Devin McCuin	3	–	–	–	–	18
Nate Roberts	3	–	–	–	–	18
Julian Sayin	2	–	–	–	–	12
Isaiah West	2	–	–	–	–	12
Chris Henry Jr.	2	–	–	–	–	12
Brandon Inniss	1	–	–	–	–	6
Mason Williams	1	–	–	–	–	6
Legend Bey	1	–	–	–	–	6
Jamir Perez	1	–	–	–	–	6
Luke Fahey	–	–	1	–	–	2
Cooper Peterson	–	1-1	–	–	–	1
OSU Totals	**49**	**44-44**	**–**	**–**	**12-14**	**377**
OPP Totals	**24**	**19-19**	**–**	**2**	**16-20**	**215**

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Connor Hawkins	5-5	4-4	3-5	0-0	12-14
OSU Totals	**5-5**	**4-4**	**3-5**	**0-0**	**12-14**
OPP Totals	**0-0**	**7-8**	**7-8**	**2-4**	**16-20**

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	32	1388	43.4	0	56
OSU Totals	**32**	**1388**	**43.4**	**0**	**56**
OPP Totals	**52**	**2178**	**41.9**	**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	**10**	**142**	**14.2**	**1**	**52**

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Phillip Bell	16	89	5.6	0	31
Brandon Inniss	5	46	9.2	0	17
De'Zie Jones	2	9	4.5	0	9
OSU Totals	**24**	**143**	**6.0**	**0**	**31**
OPP Totals	**12**	**157**	**13.1**	**0**	**44**

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Legend Bey	7	134	19.1	0	29
Devin McCuin	6	105	17.5	0	23
Brody Lennon	2	11	5.5	0	11
Kyle Parker	1	16	16.0	0	16
Maxence LeBlanc	1	16	16.0	0	16
OSU Totals	**17**	**282**	**16.6**	**0**	**29**
OPP Totals	**10**	**147**	**14.7**	**0**	**26**

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Earl Little Jr.	32	34	66	3.0-4	0-0
Payton Pierce	24	32	56	0.5-5	0.5-5
Jaylen McClain	30	23	53	1.0-11	1.0-11
J. Mathews Jr.	24	16	40	4.5-23	1.0-9
Kenyatta Jackson Jr.	14	23	37	7.5-37	5.0-34
Riley Pettijohn	18	18	36	5.5-27	3.0-21
Devin Sanchez	30	6	36	1.0-3	0-0
Christian Alliegro	16	18	34	2.5-7	0-0
Eddrick Houston	15	16	31	4.5-13	0-0
TJ Alford	15	14	29	2.5-6	0-0
Jason Moore	14	15	29	2.0-5	0.5-1
Qua Russaw	17	9	26	7.5-30	2.0-14
Jay Timmons	17	6	23	2.5-5	0-0
John Walker	9	10	19	1.0-3	0-0
Will Smith Jr.	9	6	15	3.5-12	1.5-9
Zion Grady	5	8	13	1.0-2	0-0
Simeon Caldwell	8	5	13	1.0-2	0-0
Leroy Roker	8	4	12	0-0	0-0
James Smith	3	8	11	2.0-12	1.0-7
Beau Atkinson	4	6	10	1.0-4	0.5-4
Cincere Johnson	7	3	10	2.0-5	0-0
Cam Calhoun	7	-	7	0-0	0-0
Jordan Thomas	5	2	7	0-0	0-0
Terry Moore	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Braxton Rembert	3	1	4	1.0-1	0-0
Gabe VanSickle	-	3	3	0-0	0-0
Dominick Kelly	3	-	3	1.0-4	0-0
Ryan Rudzinski	1	2	3	0-0	0-0
Epi Sitanilei	3	-	3	2.0-3	1.0-2
Jamir Perez	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Darryus McKinley	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Damari Simeon	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Blaine Bradford	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Brenton Jones	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Garrett Stover	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	**358**	**300**	**658**	**60-224**	**17-117**
OPP Totals	**396**	**364**	**760**	**57-255**	**21-160**

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

Fumbles Recovered: Little Jr. (2), Alford, Alliegro, Perez, Pierce, Riggs, Timmons.

Michigan Looking To Salvage Lost Season

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Going into this season, first-year Michigan head coach Kyle Whittingham faced some criticism for comments he made about the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry at Big Ten media days.

He said that he didn't hate Ohio State head coach Ryan Day or the Buckeyes, and Wolverines fans voiced concerns that he wouldn't be taking the rivalry as seriously as they believe he should.

"I just think that a rivalry can be intense and emotional without the hatred factor. I don't think there's any place for that, personally," Whittingham said later to clarify his comments.

Since then, there were many other problems that Michigan football had that Wolverines fans could be upset about as well. That began with a controversial season-opening last-second 13-12 win over Western Michigan thanks to a second-chance Hail Mary.

The Wolverines finished nonconference play without a loss, but the issues came to a head when Big Ten play began.

First, it was a loss to Iowa before Minnesota took the Little Brown Jug from Michigan for the first time since 2014 and the first time at home since the 1977 season. Later losses to Indiana, Michigan State and Oregon followed, but the Wolverines heading into Columbus are coming off a triple-overtime 18-16 victory over UCLA, which was the first loss for the Bruins all season.

Now Whittingham, already seemingly on the hot seat despite it being his first season with the program, hopes to keep that momentum going against a Buckeye team that has had its own struggles throughout the year.

After the 31-7 loss to the Ducks on Nov. 14, at least some Michigan fans let their opinions be heard about Whittingham when they could be heard shouting "Go back to Utah!" outside of the head coaches' postgame press conference.

But Whittingham is still focused on winning the rivalry game and is ready to see the environment in Ohio Stadium for The Game.

"I can envision it," Whittingham said. "I've never been in the 'Shoe, never played in that stadium. We did play Ohio State in the (2022 Rose Bowl with Utah). We've had a taste of that. We know they're a very good football team, very talented. I think the environment I'm anticipating could be very hostile, but I've been in hostile environments before. I don't know if it's going to blow all those away or not. We'll find out."

Whether Whittingham "gets" the rivalry the way Michigan fans want him to is yet to be seen, but at least one coach in the program does.

After the Wolverines fired offensive coordinator Jason Beck following their Nov. 7 loss to the Spartans, Jim Harding took over as the play caller. Harding is from Maumee, Ohio, and is well aware of what The Game means. He spoke about it before Michigan's win over UCLA.

"I'd be lying if I didn't think when this whole thing transpired (being promoted to interim OC) that I will be calling an offensive team in the Ohio State-Michigan game," Harding said. "That, to me, is crazy, but we have to worry about this week. But in the back of my mind, it's the greatest rivalry in all of sports.

"I literally get goose bumps even talking about it. But again, not to avoid, we have to focus on sending these kids out the right way (against UCLA), and then when next week comes, then there's more time to sit and reflect on it, but it's a great opportunity. I grew up, that's what you did. You watched Michigan football on Saturday afternoons growing up, and that being one of the games is pretty cool, and that's all I'll say."

Michigan and Ohio State have both had their own issues at the quarterback position, although they have not been injury-induced for the Wolverines as they were for the Buckeyes.

Sophomore Bryce Underwood began the season as the starter for the second straight year, but his development didn't seem to be progressing the way that might have been expected after he was the No. 1 overall prospect in the 2025 class and Michigan spent so much money to keep him in state.

True freshman Tommy Carr started his first game on Oct. 24 against Indiana, throwing for 167 yards on 20-of-32 passing with an interception. He had a strong game against Rutgers the following week, completing 22 of 27 passes (81.5 percent) for 266 yards and a score. Carr was named the starter after that performance against Rutgers, but back-to-back poor performances against Michigan State and Oregon gave Underwood another chance.

Underwood finished the win over UCLA, completing 11 of 24 passes for 127 yards and a touchdown as well as the game-winning two-point conversion pass to Jalen Hoffman.



FILE PHOTO

ALL WRAPPED UP — Then freshman Bryce Underwood (19) was under siege the entire game last season when the Buckeyes ended a four-game losing streak to the Wolverines, 27-9.

Get To Know ... Michigan

- **2026 Record:** 6-5, 3-5 Big Ten.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread Option; Defensive Formation – Multiple 4-3; Starters returning – Offense 3, Defense 3, Specialists 0.
- **Head Coach:** Kyle Whittingham, 1st year at Michigan, 6-5.
- **Series History:** 122nd meeting; Michigan leads 62-52-6.
- **School Facts:** Location – Ann Arbor, Mich.; Enrollment – 53,488; Nickname – Wolverines; Colors – Maize, Blue; Conference – Big Ten; Stadium – Michigan Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 107,601).

2026 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 5	WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 13-12
Sept. 12	OKLAHOMA	W, 17-10
Sept. 19	UTEP	W, 52-17
Sept. 26	IOWA	L, 20-19
Oct. 3	at Minnesota	L, 20-14
Oct. 17	PENN STATE	W, 21-18
Oct. 24	INDIANA	L, 13-6 (OT)
Oct. 31	at Rutgers	W, 28-21
Nov. 7	MICHIGAN STATE	L, 15-6
Nov. 14	at Oregon	L, 31-7
Nov. 21	UCLA	W, 18-16 (3OT)
Nov. 28	at Ohio State	Noon

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Savion Hiter	132	542	4.1	4
Jordan Marshall	93	346	3.7	5
B. Underwood	76	230	3.0	2

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
B. Underwood	85-156	54.5	1,077	6-6
Tommy Carr	67-106	63.2	686	2-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Andrew Marsh	48	459	9.6	1
Hogan Hansen	13	128	9.8	0
Savion Hiter	12	83	6.9	0
Jalen Hoffman	9	78	8.7	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game — 18.3
Rushing Yards Per Game — 135.7
Passing Yards Per Game — 160.3
Total Offense Avg. Per Game — 296.0

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Troy Bowles	44	44	88	7.0-18	0.5-1
Chris Bracy	50	30	80	4.0-25	3.0-23
N. Staehling	26	34	60	2.5-6	0-0
Jyaire Hill	36	12	48	2.0-4	0-0
John Henry Daley	15	22	37	11.0-47	8.0-42

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Chris Bracy	2	0	0	0
N. Staehling	1	79	79.0	1
Zeke Berry	1	37	37.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed — 17.5
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed — 103.5
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed — 174.8
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed — 278.3

Underwood said after the game that he's embracing the adversity.

"I took this (season) as lessons being learned and everything and how to move forward from it," he said. "I feel like the way you can show how to be a man is by facing adversity and how you take it on."

Underwood was without his top two wide receivers for the win over UCLA but should at least have Andrew Marsh back, who was serving a one-game suspension for an indecent exposure charge for a February incident. JJ Buchanan, however, will not be back against the Buckeyes with a shoulder injury that has him out for the season. Marsh has caught 48 passes for 459 yards and one score this season in 10 games.

At running back is true freshman Savion Hiter, a former five-star recruit that the Buckeyes were battling the Wolverines for in the 2026 class. Hiter has largely split the work with junior running back Jordan Marshall in the backfield, but Hiter has received more work overall and on a per-game basis. The freshman has taken 132 carries for 542 yards and four touchdowns, while Marshall has 93 totes for 346 yards and five scores.

The Wolverines' offensive line is in the bottom third of the Big Ten in sacks allowed, giving up 26 in 11 games. That's five more than the Buckeye group has allowed all year.

Where the Wolverines excel this season is on the defensive side of the ball. They are 17th in the country in scoring defense, allowing 17.5 points per game, and ninth in total defense, allowing 278.3 yards per game, which is third in the Big Ten behind only UCLA and Nebraska.

On the defensive line are John Henry Daley and Dom Nichols coming off the edges, with Trey Pierce and Enow Etta on the interior. Daley leads the team with 11 tackles for loss and eight sacks.

At linebacker are Troy Bowles, Chase Taylor and Nathaniel Staehling in Michigan's base 4-3 defense, with Bowles leading the team in tackles at 88 heading into rivalry week. The middle linebacker has done well getting into the backfield as well with five quarterback hurries to go along with seven tackles for loss.

Safety Chris Bracy is second on the team in tackles, with 80 (50 solo). He's the only Wolverine with two interceptions this season, and he has broken up two passes. He's joined by Rod Moore, who recently voiced his regret about returning to Ann Arbor after the 2023 national championship season. Moore is in his sixth season with the team.

"Leave after the national championship and go to the NFL," Moore told The Michigan Daily when asked what advice he would give his younger self. "I definitely would have left. I've been thinking about that a lot, but everything happens for a reason. I don't live with regret, but that is one thing that I will forever regret – is not leaving."

At cornerback are Jyaire Hill and Smith Snowden, with Zeke Berry in the slot when the Wolverines get into a nickel defense. Each of them has one interception this season.

While this isn't one of the classic Ohio State-Michigan games that featured two top teams battling for a Big Ten title or a spot in the national title game, it still could mean a lot to both teams with the ability to salvage the season with a win over their archrival.

Michigan at Ohio State

Saturday, Nov. 28 ▪ Noon ▪ FOX
Ohio Stadium; Columbus

Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...

1 Rod Moore Jr., 5-11, 190, 6th
25 Mason Curtis, 6-4, 215, Jr.
SS

3 Smith Snowden, 5-10, 188, Sr.
24 Jamarion Vincent, 6-2, 169, Fr.
Nickel

7 Chris Bracy, 6-1, 200, Jr.
6 Jordan Young, 5-11, 193, So.
FS

18 Troy Bowles, 6-0, 224, Sr.
30 Max Alford, 6-2, 235, Gr.
MIKE

4 Chase Taylor, 6-2, 222, So.
13 Aisea Moa, 6-2, 235, 5th
WILL

10 ZEKE BERRY, 5-11, 188, 5TH
2 Shamari Earls, 6-2, 195, So.
CB

0 JYAIRE HILL, 6-2, 190, SR.
26 Jeremiah Earby, 6-2, 186, 5th
CB

95 TREY PIERCE, 6-2, 310, SR.
9 Cam Brandt, 6-3, 270, Sr.
DT

8 Dom Nichols, 6-5, 245, Jr.
93 Benny Patterson III, 6-1, 257, So.
DE

90 John Henry Daley, 6-5, 252, Sr.
41 Tariq Boney, 6-1, 243, Fr.
DE

17 Enow Etta, 6-5, 328, Sr.
91 Jonah Lea'ea, 6-5, 290, Sr.
DT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

25 BO JACKSON, 6-0, 218, SO.
32 Isaiah West, 5-10, 222, So.
RB

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

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

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

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

— Starters in bold, returning starters in all caps

WHEN MICHIGAN HAS THE BALL...

8 JAYLEN MCCLAIN, 6-0, 203, JR.
28 Simeon Caldwell, 6-2, 210, Fr.
SS

25 Jay Timmons, 5-11, 191, Fr.
7 Jermaine Mathews Jr., 5-11, 195, Sr.
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
9 Zion Grady, 6-4, 262, So.
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

4 Qua Russaw, 6-2, 244, Sr
12 Beau Atkinson, 6-6, 260, 5t
DE

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

3 ANDREW MARSH, 6-1, 192, SO.
10 Jaime Ffrench Jr., 6-2, 185, So.
WR

71 Evan Link, 6-6, 313, Sr.
65 Andrew Babalola, 6-6, 305, So.
LT

96 Manuel Beigel, 6-5, 307, Jr.
66 Dan Taraboi, 6-7, 315, 5th
LG

53 JAKE GUARNERA, 6-3, 315, JR.
67 Houston Ka'aha'aina-Torres, 6-4, 310, So.
C

55 Nathan Efobi, 6-4, 303, Sr.
89 Avery Gach, 6-4, 302, So.
RG

78 Marky Walbridge, 6-6, 300, Fr.
58 Malakai Lee, 6-7, 359, Fr.
RT

13 Travis Johnson, 6-3, 185, Fr.
12 Salesi Moa, 6-2, 186, Fr.
WR

33 Cam Brown, 6-3, 185, So.
90 Hudson Hollenbuck, 6-2, 215, 5th
P

5 Savion Hiter, 5-11, 212, Fr.
24 Bryson Kuzdzal, 5-11, 205, Sr.
RB

19 BRYCE UNDERWOOD, 6-4, 230, SO.
14 Tommy Carr, 6-4, 195, Fr.
QB

9 Channing Goodwin, 6-1, 192, Jr.
0 Kendrick Bell, 6-2, 202, Sr.
SLOT

42 Jalen Hoffman, 6-3, 247, Sr.
80 Hogan Hansen, 6-6, 240, Jr.
TE

97 Jacob Baggett, 6-1, 190, Fr.
99 Trey Butkowski, 5-11, 179, So.
K

— Depth charts compiled by Greg Wilson

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. MICHIGAN RUSH DEFENSE

You can throw out the records when Ohio State and Michigan get together, so there's really no reason to go over the stats and finer points of the combatants. But being contractually obligated to provide the numbers, here goes. With a stunning 18-16 triple-overtime win over No. 4 and undefeated UCLA on Nov. 21, the Wolverines (6-5, 3-5 Big Ten) are now bowl-eligible, although their win against Western Michigan shouldn't count. If you are a Buckeye fan, you should be worried after three losses in four games to drop to an unfathomable record of 7-4, 5-3. Worse, unlike the Buckeyes, U-M relies on a stout defense that can't wait to pounce on a tepid OSU running game. The Buckeyes rushed 22 times for 76 yards for a 3.5-yard average. They were averaging 149.7 per game to rank in the bottom half of the FBS teams before playing Nebraska. The problem is the Buckeyes have trailed by at least two touchdowns in three of the past four games, meaning there are fewer opportunities to run, but don't let the backs off the hook because some deficits are due to an inability to sustain drives due to poor efforts from them. Bo Jackson had 52 yards (4.3 avg.), and Isaiah West had just four carries for 11 yards (2.8) and fumbled again. Michigan was allowing 103.5 yards a game and limited the Bruins to 107 yards (2.5), 95 yards below their season average. **EDGE: MICHIGAN**

MICHIGAN RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Wolverines have found their running back. Savion Hiter ran for 104 yards on a robust 26 carries (4.0) with a long of 24. It was his second straight game over the century mark. His 107 vs. Oregon marked the first U-M rusher over 100 yards this season. Still, there was little from others. Bryson Kuzdzal had four runs for 11 yards (2.8) against the Bruins, and quarterback Bryce Underwood netted 5 yards on 13 carries when his four sacks for 27 yards were among the negative yardage included. Michigan gained 120 yards (2.8), 17 below their season average. The Buckeyes had been giving up 92.7, but the Huskers ran for 176 (3.9). **EDGE: EVEN**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. MICHIGAN PASS DEFENSE

The on-the-job training for Luke Fahey continues. He'll make his fifth career start coming off completing 16 of 27 for 259 yards with touchdowns of 67 and 31 yards to Jeremiah Smith along with an interception. It's easy to blame Fahey for throwing to him in double or triple coverage, but there are few times Smith is guarded one-on-one. Fahey's second TD was a perfect throw to Smith, who had 165 yards from six catches off nine targets. Jackson was the second-most productive ball-catcher with four for 30 yards. U-M had been allowing 173.4 passing yards (13th) and held the Bruins, who were averaging 222.1, to 189 with four sacks. U-M has held opponents to 13 touchdowns and picked off eight passes. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

MICHIGAN PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Michigan has one of the worst scoring offenses, and the Wolverines needed three OTs to match their 18.3 average. Much-maligned Underwood started against UCLA and had a two-point conversion pass to Jalen Hoffman provide the winning margin. Underwood was 11 of 24 for 127 yards and a TD. OSU could not handle the dual-threat Anthony Colandrea, who ran for 63 yards and passed for 200 with three touchdowns while being sacked once. The Buckeyes have not had an interception in six games and have just four for the season, but they must come up big against the Wolverines. Overall, the Buckeyes have allowed 121 points in the past four games. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ohio State yielded 21 yards on a punt return and 26 on a kick return but did get kick returns of 22 by Devin McCuin and 16 for Kyle Parker. Salesi Moa returned a punt 23 yards for Michigan's longest punt return since 2023, and Jacob Baggett made all three field-goal tries. The first was from 46 yards while the last two were in overtime – 29 and a career-long 52. **EDGE: MICHIGAN**

INTANGIBLES

Oh boy. No one expected this. Michigan was the laughingstock of the country and couldn't wait to can first-year coach Kyle Whittingham. The Buckeyes were navigating a tough schedule, but just wait until the playoffs. You will see how good they are. Now, Michigan has all the momentum and can sense the angst in Columbus. The Wolverines have won the past two times in Columbus and can't wait to add more misery. Incredibly, the Buckeyes are 7-6 since going 12-0 in the regular season last year. **EDGE: MICHIGAN**

STAFF PREDICTION

Since Senior Day was months ago, it's time for OSU fans to salute Smith in his last game as a Buckeye, and there would be no better send-off than one final Heisman moment. Predictions are expected here, so this likely will be a farewell to half the coaching staff as changes are necessary. This would in no way be an upset for Michigan. **OHIO STATE 17, MICHIGAN 15**

Bellisari Helps Cooper Beat U-M For First Time

By BOBBY GORBETT
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

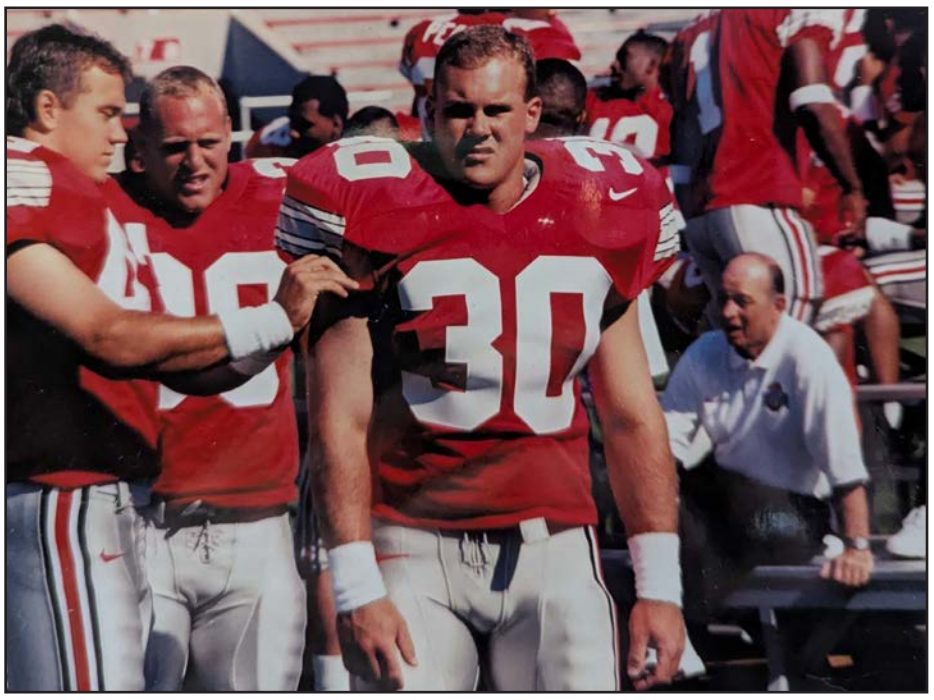
Perhaps because of the losses to Michigan and late-season collapses, many Ohio State fans don't look back upon head coach John Cooper's days with the fondest of memories.

During the career of inside linebacker Greg Bellisari, there were plenty of highlights, though. From 1993 to 1996, when two-time All-Big Ten linebacker Bellisari was on the roster, the team shared the Big Ten title in 1993 and 1996 and won the Rose Bowl to close the 1996 season. Perhaps what was most impressive was that the program was 41-8-1 over the four years that Bellisari was on the roster.

Still, as it often was with Cooper as head coach, The Game was the bugaboo for the Buckeyes. Despite being the higher-ranked team in three of the four games played against the Wolverines, the Buckeyes went just 1-3 against their archrival when Bellisari was on the roster, with the one win being a 22-6 victory in 1994, the only time OSU was lower ranked than the Wolverines.

"I don't think it's one thing or the other," Bellisari said when asked about Ohio State's struggles against Michigan under Cooper. "If you take each year, it's a very different game. I do think it's easy to lump them all together, but honestly, I've said this in the media before too. Coach Cooper didn't play on defense in the third and fourth quarters against them, we did, and John Cooper didn't miss tackles and get out of gaps against (former Michigan running back Tim Biakabutuka), we did.

"We didn't execute, and also you have to give credit across the ball. We can hate them all we want as a bitter rival, but they had some pretty darn good players, some pretty darn good coaches, good situational football for them to stick with some of the stuff they did that worked, and they honestly got the better of us at times."



FILE PHOTO

WANTING MORE — Linebacker Greg Bellisari (30) was with the Buckeyes for one win in four tries against Michigan but felt more victories were there for the taking. Despite having a higher ranking in three of the four games that he played vs. Michigan, the Buckeyes' win in 1994 came when Ohio State was the lower rank.

Bellisari grew up a long way from the host sites of The Game in Boynton Beach, Fla., but his father, Art, was a walk-on for Woody Hayes in the 1950s. That was more than enough for Greg Bellisari to support the Scarlet and Gray as a child.

When it came time to be recruited, though, Bellisari very nearly chose to stay close to home. He took visits to Ohio State, Michigan, Florida, Florida State and Georgia Tech. It was FSU, with legendary head coach Bobby Bowden and up-and-coming offensive mind Mark Richt as quarterbacks coach, that was the stiffest competition for Ohio State in Bellisari's recruitment.

"Bobby Bowden had it going at that point, and Mark Richt was actually a graduate of my high school and played high school football with my older brother, and he was at Florida State at the time, so I really was enamored with Florida State," Bellisari said. "However, (Florida State) had signed, I think, the No. 1 linebacker recruit in the nation almost seven years in a row at that point, and so I chose Ohio State. My best two fits were for sure Florida State and Ohio State, and I chose Ohio State for a lot of reasons, academics being one of them, which I guess no one cares about anymore."

Bucks Shut Out In Ann Arbor

Bellisari entered Columbus just as Cooper was turning the program into a legitimate national title contender. With such talented players on the roster as wide receivers Joey Galloway and Terry Glenn, linebackers Lorenzo Styles Sr. and Craig Powell, and defensive tackle Dan Wilkinson, Ohio State was able to enter The Game undefeated at 9-0-1.

The talent on the roster meant that Bellisari had to wait his turn as many freshmen do in their first years at Ohio State. Still, Bellisari was a backup linebacker and earned enough playing time on defense and on special teams to finish that season with 12 total tackles.

Bellisari was able to get on the field, but that was just about the only silver lining for him when Ohio State was shellacked 28-0 by Michigan in Ann Arbor that year.

The unranked Wolverines were able to intercept Ohio State quarterbacks four times that day to hand the No. 5-ranked Buckeyes their first loss of the season, and it took away the chance the team had of winning the national championship – that honor eventually went to Bowden and the Seminoles that year.

Bellisari vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1993/Fr.	Ann Arbor	L, 28-0
1994/So.	Columbus	W, 22-6
1995/Jr.	Ann Arbor	L, 31-23
1996/Sr.	Columbus	L 13-9

"I actually got to play, which felt like a huge honor just to be on that field in that situation," Bellisari said. "Obviously, I remember it being fairly disappointing. We felt like we had a team that could compete with them, and I think they just pulled away in probably the third or fourth quarter, and so we were dejected, of course. I was personally happy to be playing, but from the team's standpoint, I would have much rather been on the sideline with a win."

Bellisari Helps Bucks End Streak

The Buckeyes brought back many of the talented players from their 1993 season, which resulted in an inclusion in the preseason top-25 rankings. Bellisari was also able to crack the starting lineup in only his second year with the program.

Bellisari made the most of his opportunities, finishing the year with 63 total tackles, including four for loss, a sack and a career-high total of three interceptions. Bellisari had a pick-six in Ohio State's 23-7 win over Michigan State, but the play he remembered the best was an interception in the Buckeyes' 24-3 win over Wisconsin.

"I remember picking off the wheel route against Wisconsin," Bellisari said of the pick, which resulted in a 7-yard return. "I thought it was a really good play, and the funny part is I cut all the way back across the field, and I vividly remember Lorenzo Styles picking me up off the pile after I got tackled. He's like, 'You should have run off the sideline, numbnuts.' He had a little different saying. I just vividly remember him chewing me out because it was just funny."

The Buckeyes had their struggles during the regular season that year, entering The Game 8-3, and with Michigan being the higher-ranked team, their chances of a win didn't seem to be overwhelming.

Ironically, that flawed Buckeye team was able to finally pick up their first win over Michigan since 1987 by a score of 22-6. In his first game against Michigan as a regular contributor, Bellisari played well. He finished the game with 11 total tackles, the second-highest total on the team, and he also had a tackle for loss.

"If I think back to my mindset, I was proud to be a Buckeye," Bellisari said when asked what it meant to him to play a part in the win. "I was proud to play for the coaches and the people that were in that locker room, and so I would have done anything to finish the mission, so to speak, to win the game. That was my mindset. I was happy on a personal level, very happy to be a starter on that defense. There were a lot of guys I looked up to, and I was just really happy to have the opportunity."

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um, who had waited years to see the Buckeyes finally beat the Wolverines under Cooper. Bellisari said they contributed to what was the loudest stadium environment he had ever heard.

According to Bellisari, the good vibes in Columbus lasted long after the final whistle sounded during Ohio State's victory.

"You even felt that the following week around campus. If you went into – even just simply at McDonald's – you felt that true elation and emotion from the fans, and obviously that is something that those fans and people around this town look forward to all year."

Biakabutuka Spoils Perfect Season

Although the Buckeyes' 1994 season ended with a loss to Alabama in the Citrus Bowl, the good vibes seemed to continue into the 1995 season. With star running back Eddie George rounding into Heisman Trophy-winning form, Ohio State won the first 11 games of its season. That included wins over solid foes such as Washington, Notre Dame and Penn State.

The Buckeyes scored at least 27 points in each of those wins and scored over 40 points in six of those games.

According to Bellisari, that offense, which included not just George but star left tackle Orlando Pace, Glenn and quarterback Bobby Hoying in his redshirt senior year, was extremely difficult to slow down in practice.

"I had to practice against this offense every day," Bellisari said. "I don't think I played against or saw an offense that talented in the entire nation that year, nor in the multiple years that I played there. I was even a GA at Ohio State. I didn't see an offense as talented as that one. It was pretty amazing to see the talent level and the toughness and the football smarts of that group."

On the other end, it was Bellisari who emerged as a leader of the defense. Switching over to middle linebacker, Bellisari led the team in tackles for the first time in his career that year with 98, including five for loss.

"Playing middle linebacker is kind of like playing quarterback," Bellisari said. "You don't have an option to not be a leader. You have to be a leader and be composed to get the defense's heads right and get the calls and the checks. You have to assume a leadership role, even if you don't like leadership. I did feel like obviously there was an easy grip to lead. It was an honor to be the Mike linebacker."

The tremendous start had the Buckeyes ranked No. 2 and firmly in the picture for the national championship. However, Ohio State ran into a huge problem in the form of Biakabutuka.

Biakabutuka ran for 313 yards and a touchdown on 37 carries as the Buckeyes' 11-game winning streak was snapped in the regular-season finale, 31-23.

"They were very good at (their scheme)," Bellisari said when asked what led Michigan to have so much success on the ground. "Their offensive line was elite, and you could say that about a lot of Michigan teams. That's what you respect about them is they do the fundamental things right. They had a great offensive line. They executed. We, on the other hand, probably didn't execute. If you look at the run scheme, run fits, I think that entire game was a lesson in how not to fit the run and be gap sound."

Not only did the loss cost the Buckeyes a chance at the national championship, but it sent Northwestern to the Rose Bowl instead of Ohio State. The Buckeyes were no match for Peyton Manning and Tennessee in the Florida Citrus Bowl, losing that game 20-14.

Rose Bowl Win Eases Pain Of U-M Loss

Ohio State's 1996 season started much like the 1995 season with one key difference. Not only were the Buckeyes 10-0 with huge wins over Notre Dame, Penn State and Iowa, but they managed to clinch their first Rose Bowl appearance under Cooper before they even faced Michigan in the regular-season finale.

Ohio State clinched its Rose Bowl bid with a 27-17 win over Indiana.

By the time the Michigan game rolled around, the Buckeyes had their sights on much bigger things, though. With an undefeated record and being one of the more dominant teams in Ohio State history, a national championship was potentially still in the cards for Cooper's squad.

Halfway into their game against a three-loss Michigan team, it looked as though the Buckeyes would finish the regular season undefeated. Despite some difficulties for the offense in getting the ball into the end zone, Ohio State still led 9-0 at halftime after a dominant performance by the defense.

The Buckeyes' fortunes seemed to change on Michigan's very first second-half drive. It was then that Michigan quarterback Brian Griese found receiver Tai Streets for a 69-yard touchdown after star Ohio State cornerback Shawn Springs slipped in coverage.

The offense's issues only continued in the second half. They failed to score a single point in the last 30 minutes of the game, and all Michigan needed to pull off the huge upset was a pair of second-half field goals.

"I think it was a total team loss," Bellisari said. "As good as our defense was, you could sit there and say we gave up only 13 points, and we still should have won, but we did kind of let them mush a couple field goals later in that game. That trust that we had in each other all year faltered a little bit in that big game and big moments, and obviously that didn't lose us the game, but it added to it. The fact that we're inside the (red zone) three times in the first half and didn't score was something that we lament. Of course, those are opportunities not realized, and it all played into chipping away at our confidence in the third and fourth quarter and losing that game."

Bellisari's career still ended on a high note. The Buckeyes didn't let the Michigan loss doom their postseason. They were able to defeat a Jake Plummer-led Arizona State squad in Pasadena for Cooper's only Rose Bowl win at Ohio State.

"It meant everything," Bellisari said of the win over the Sun Devils. "I think it doesn't take away those Michigan losses, but it certainly justified us as a great football team and helped to leave a little bit of a legacy. That's how I felt. I was very proud of that, and I have very, very fond memories of that, in terms of it felt like we accomplished what we started. We finished what we started, so to speak. We were able to finish the right way, finish with a big win, and that was very gratifying."

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Hartsock Has Strong Memories Of 'The Game'

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ben Hartsock has a perspective that few players experienced, having straddled two distinct eras of the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry because of a coaching change while also being a national champion for the Buckeyes.

The tight end from Chillicothe (Ohio) Unioto was a freshman for John Cooper's final season in 2000 and felt the sting of a 38-26 loss in Ohio Stadium, which soon after led to Cooper's firing, taking with him a 2-10-1 mark vs. the Wolverines.

Enter the relatively unknown Jim Tressel, and Hartsock was in the Schottenstein Center when the newly named coach made his famous "310 days" speech, which marked a turning point in the history of the series.

Hartsock was part of two straight victories in The Game, with the 14-9 win in 2002 catapulting the Buckeyes into the title game against Miami (Fla.), a 31-24 double-overtime victory that marked the program's first championship since 1968. However, his last game in the rivalry was a loss.

Nearly a quarter century later, Hartsock still finds it hard to fathom what it meant to join an exclusive club of five title holders at the time before the 2014 and 2024 teams added to the total.

"My father and I were reflecting on this the other day that chapters of history of Ohio State are spectacular, and I got to be a part of one of the most magical," he said. "The '68 team was magic and the '02 team and now the national championships since then.

"There have been thousands of guys that were a part of amazing teams and did amazing things at Ohio State but never got to hoist one of those trophies. So for me to have had the opportunity to be on one that lifted the championship trophy and do it after that 34-year dry spell was spectacular.

"And then the subplot of that is my dad (Tim) was a senior at Ohio State that season, and so he went there as a student the year they won it in '68, and then he gets to go back with his son and watch his son be on the championship trophy stage was really something special for our family."

Hartsock vs. Michigan		
Year/Class	Location	Result
2000/Fr.	Columbus	L, 38-26
2001/So.	Ann Arbor	W, 26-20
2002/Jr.	Columbus	W, 14-9
2003/Sr.	Ann Arbor	L, 35-21

Hartsock had been a college football analyst on several outlets over the years, including ESPN and SiriusXM, but recently left to devote more time to his family and, as he will discuss later, resign himself to the fact that the days of The Game actually being The Game are over.

He also discusses finishing 2-2 vs. U-M with the 35-21 loss as a senior in 2003 still the nightmare of his career, which includes a 10-year NFL career, covering seasons with Indianapolis, Tennessee, Atlanta, the New York Jets and Carolina.

As a pro, he made 31 career catches for 312 yards and one touchdown, a reflection of playing a position where his blocking was more valued than his pass-catching abilities.

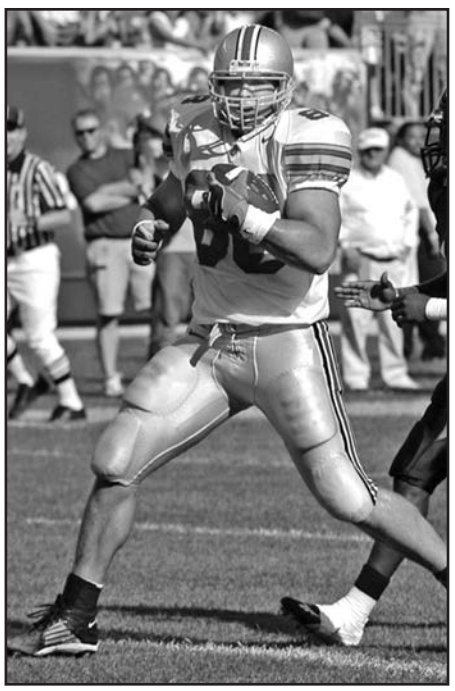
That was also true at Ohio State, where in four games vs. Michigan he totaled three catches for 31 yards.

Yet, he wouldn't trade playing in The Game for anything.

"I recognize and respect the rivalry and that hatred, but respect is the word that I think I land on about that game. I played every game in the NFL you could play except the Super Bowl. I will say the Michigan game had a different violence to it, and it had a different magnitude to it," he said. "I think especially in my era and especially for guys like me, when I played there were guys from across the country, but there were still the majority of Ohio guys vs. Michigan guys.

"It means more to me even now that I got to play in that era where it was I represent the state and they represent the state and you're one of us. We adopted Krenzel (quarterback Craig Krenzel, a Michigan native). (Linebacker and Minnesota native James) Laurinaitis is always an example I give, that he's an adopted son. Memories of those games were just the magnitude of the struggle. I'm in close quarters, hand-to-hand competition with this guy, and it matters in a way.

"I've lived in five states over the years and the teams that these other states root for, it certainly feels different than what I felt when I was at Ohio State."



FILE PHOTO

TAKING IT IN — The Ohio State career of Ben Hartsock (above) included the end of the John Cooper era and the start of Jim Tressel's run and featured the highs of beating Michigan twice and winning the 2002 national championship and the lows of two defeats to the rival.

Dream Come True

Growing up, Hartsock listened on the radio more than he watched the Buckeyes.

"Dad's a farmer, still farms, so harvest is in the fall. I have tons of memories of Paul Keels and Jim Lachey as I ran the grain cart for my brother running the combine," he said. "Those are fun and precious memories that I have.

"For that specific game, The Game was before Thanksgiving, so the harvest would have been over usually by that time. We watched that game, but I just remember the disappointment of losses is the unfortunate memory I have of those times."

He did attend a few games.

"My parents still have tickets, but I didn't go to The Game. I went to Rice and the more accessible games, so I didn't get to one until I was a recruit. I live in Georgia now, so people ask me a lot about the rivalry," Hartsock said. "(In Ohio), there are Browns fans, and there are Bengals fans, but everyone is a Buckeye fan. Living here in Georgia, there's a lot of mixed loyalties.

"My memories as a kid of following Ohio State, as an elementary kid, it's Chris Spielman. As a high school kid, it's Eddie George. As a recruit, it's Andy Katzemoyer and Joe Germaine."

But no, he didn't learn to "hate" Michigan.

"That's funny. I got to be good friends with Jon Jansen, Michigan's radio guy. He's embedded in the program," Hartsock said. "Jon and I have a tremendous respect for one another, even though we're sworn enemies. When we were doing radio shows together, I said we were kind of like Reagan and Gorbachev, like bridging the gaps. It's a funny thing."

Hartsock never considered going to Michigan.

"People have asked me that, and I was never of a caliber of a recruit that they ever showed any real interest, but I am 100 percent Ohio State," he said. "Here's an example. My daughter is a second-year student at Georgia Tech, and I have a principle. I have a philosophy that I don't wear other schools' colors. I'm an Ohio State guy. It's disrespectful to my loyalties as a Buckeye. The way that I get around this and support my daughter – I don't want her to feel isolated – I did get a Georgia Tech polo, but I put a piece of tape that said 'Dad' on it."

Beginning Of The End

Hartsock arrived in Columbus at a time when the pressure was mounting on Cooper. Losses to Michigan had become the norm, and unexpected defeats – such as to Michigan State in 1998 – cost the Buckeyes shots at the national title. Off-field issues had developed as well, so 2000 was going to be a pivotal season.

Cooper had just two wins vs. U-M going into that game, but Hartsock, even as a freshman, was surprised that there wasn't more emphasis on The Game.

"The thing that I felt when I was there under Coach Cooper, we all knew the struggles vs. Michigan. We all heard Coach Cooper try to normalize that game. I'm 19, 20 years old. I was dumb and young, but I was old enough to know that's not the way to do that," he said. "Maybe I'm soft on Coach Cooper because he changed my life by giving me a scholarship. My memory of him, of that era of preparation, is that it was important because we were on the wrong side of it. We have to figure this out.

"I just remember that responsibility. Those games carried so much more meaning, but even more so at the end of Coach Cooper because we knew what we were playing for. We were playing for his job."

The win for Michigan earned the Wolverines at least a share of the Big Ten title at the expense of the Buckeyes and also was the seventh time in Cooper's 13 seasons that U-M denied the Buckeyes a chance of either a conference title, Rose Bowl berth or a potential national championship game appearance.

"My record against Michigan speaks for itself," Cooper said afterward. "Obviously, it's awful."

The players felt the pain as well.

Years later, Hartsock said of the loss, "I think that that game coupled with the loss in the Outback Bowl was – the specifics of that is just the disappointment that we let him down. That we let Coach Cooper down and that we let the state down, and it was as dark as it could be as a Buckeye fan. As bad as it feels right now for Ohio State fans, that was worse."

A disheartening 24-7 loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl led to Cooper's firing on Jan. 2, 2001.

A New, Bold Voice

Sixteen days later, Tressel stood in front of a sellout crowd of 18,653 and an ESPN audience at halftime of the OSU-Michigan men's basketball game. After being introduced by athletic director Andy Geiger, he declared: "I'm so proud, so excited and so humble to be your football coach at Ohio State. I can assure you,



you will be proud of our young people in the classroom, in the community and, most especially, in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on the football field. Thank you very much."

"I was 100 percent there," Hartsock said. "It gives me chills every time I reflect upon that because as much as a coach can put his neck on the line, he did. As much as you cannot make a guarantee but make a guarantee, he did.

"You've got to understand, too, Coach Tressel was an unknown name when he was announced to all of us. Here he is day one, and he throws down the gauntlet. That was a very galvanizing moment."

The approach to the Michigan game changed immediately.

"That was from day one, but then throughout the entire offseason and all the practices, we would always have the period of practice that was the fourth quarter or The Team Up North period," Hartsock said. "Even through the season, we would do their stuff that period of the practice. It wasn't just like, 'Hey, we're going to run wind sprints.' No, we're going to run a game plan a little extra for that game.

"It flies in the face of all coaching manuals and approaches to coaching. I just finished the (Nick) Saban documentary, so that's all front and center as well. The mantras of coaching, thinking about a team or a game weeks or months away is not the way people do it.

"It was a big contrast to Coach Cooper, but the pressure was always there in both coaching staffs. One was to try to save a job, the other was simply we're treating this as important as the entire state feels it is."

The result was a 26-20 win in Tressel's first Michigan game to end a 14-year winless streak in Ann Arbor. Hartsock had an 18-yard catch in the fourth quarter.

"Whenever I see Jonathan Wells, he and I smile big, because I think The (Columbus) Dispatch had a picture of him and I celebrating in the end zone from that game," he said. "The memory of that was, 'OK, it was the payoff from the basketball game guarantee, and we did it.'

"I've had the debate of home wins vs. road wins. I prefer home wins, but for the people that do say it's better to beat a team on their home turf and that feeling, that game is where I can understand the feeling of slaying the dragon on their home turf. That was unique but if that game were at home, I'd have felt better about it."

Living On The Edge

Hartsock got his victory in Ohio Stadium in 2002 when the Buckeyes, who somehow grabbed victory from defeat several times during the season, survived again when cornerback Will Allen intercepted a pass near the end zone on the final play to move the Buckeyes to 13-0.

The entire season was a swing of emotions with fans screaming in despair before yelling with joy.

"My mom was a kindergarten music teacher in that era of her career, and she still to this day talks about how it ruined her singing voice for the rest of her career," Hartsock joked.

"That game, that season was magical and that game is just one of so many watershed moments. There's so many points during that season that the Cinderella story could have forked the wrong way. It's like in a situation where everything had to bounce right, and you had to go right, and then go right, and then go right, then go right. It's like flipping a quarter. That whole season was a season full of heads-up coin flips that went our way.

"And that doesn't make that one (The Game) less special. It's just that there's such a density of incredible moments in that season that it does almost kind of get lost in the shuffle."

Hartsock said Tressel never wavered from putting an emphasis on The Game, meaning those "Michigan" practice sessions were held throughout Hartsock's three seasons with him.

"Coach Tressel, he's an Ohio guy, and so I think he understood in a way that it's hard to comprehend what that means. I've tried to explain to people how sideways it was to have won a national championship and lost to Michigan (in 2024)," Hartsock said. "The world that we live in now where that is possible is just completely foreign to everyone up until this point in history. The young people today will never know any different, so they come to grips with it. But for those who lived the history before that, it's just such an odd, odd thing."

With the highs there are lows, as in the 35-21 loss at Michigan in his senior season of 2003. Hartsock had two catches for 13 yards. The Buckeyes were ranked fourth, the Wolverines fifth for the 100th meeting.

"The most haunting loss of my career – collegiate, high school and professional – is that game in Ann Arbor against Michigan as a senior," he said. "It's a soul-crusher. I lost two AFC championships that would have sent us to a Super Bowl, but that loss to Michigan haunts me.

"The 100th game, the jersey patch, the momentum. When I reflect upon my career and talk about Michigan and those rivalries, where I stick my chest out with pride is to say that I was a part of the teams that drew the line in the sand and sent us on that 20-whatever-year run against Michigan. But I don't like telling the fact that, yeah, I was 2-2, but one of those losses was my senior year."

Still, he has two gold pants medallions for the wins over Michigan, with one going to his mom and the other to his wife. But the third would have been given to his sister.

"She will occasionally remind me those were supposed to be her gold pants," Hartsock said. "Trust me, I wish I would have been able to give them to her."

Not The Same Game

Now that there are years of separation from playing The Game, he has opinions on the meaning of it.

"I'm old school and all. Does it mean as much? Will it mean as much in the future or even now? Well, I'm fully convinced that that game will always matter because it matters," he said. "I live here in Georgia, and Georgia Tech-Georgia still matters, but it's not competitive. And if the game doesn't have stakes, then it's never going to be what it could be. Ohio State-Michigan matters because it's Ohio State-Michigan.

"But Ohio State-Michigan with stakes is amplified. It's a multiplier. And when there was a BCS era, and you had to be undefeated to go to the championship, that was the biggest stakes. And then when you go to four teams (playoffs), even if you were a four-team apologist and liked it, you minimized the stakes. And now 12. These things cannot exist in unison.

"When you lower stakes, the game's importance lessens."

He's worried that players may opt out of this year's game against Michigan because the Buckeyes have four losses and have no chance of making the playoffs.

"If I hear some of the guys came up with some phantom tight hamstrings or this or that, that will break my heart," Hartsock said. "That's why I got out of the business. Again, I don't want my time being the old guy shaking his fist at the sky.

"But I am much healthier now as someone that is thankful for when I played as opposed to trying to make sense of what the game is today. Because all that does is pour a wet blanket on everybody's experience now."

He obviously is not a fan of the expanded 24-team field, which begins with the 2027 season, although one positive is the elimination of the conference championship game. There was always the possibility that the Buckeyes and Wolverines could play three times, maybe in consecutive games under the current format with The Game, the Big Ten title game and a playoff matchup. In the future, they could play only twice.

Hartsock said it could become a "sad state of affairs" if The Game means only a stepping-stone to which school hosts the other in a playoff game.

He feels the influx of transfers, especially the one-and-dones, harms the rivalry as well because so many players don't get a deep sense of the traditions.

"I think about guys like Will Howard," he said of the Kansas State transfer who quarterbacked the Buckeyes to the national title at the end of the 2024 season. "If you could write a book on how to be a one-year guy, he's it because I think that he recognized, hey, I need to learn this and I need to put an effort into it."

He said a lack of understanding applies to coaches who don't embrace OSU's culture.

"I think it's more of the professionalization and the nationalization of college athletics," he said. "You lose some of the charm of what college athletics was, that regional rivalry."

He decided to walk away from being an analyst last year.

"It became real clear the first few years of NIL and transfer portal, I felt a kind of a moral responsibility to be the counterpoint of what we were doing. But last season it got real clear that the counterpoint was done. It was time to get on board with what it is and move forward," Hartsock said. "My mentor in radio said every day you turn on a microphone, whatever you're most fired up about is what you need to talk about. And for me, it was all the stuff that was making me frustrated, and that was no way to live."

He hesitated to give a prediction for The Game, noting he didn't see the Nebraska game to offer a guess but did say, "I think there's no better way to fix a bad situation than to beat your rival. That's all I can say. Beating Michigan makes a lot of bad tastes in mouths go away."

And yes, despite his reservations about the way his sport is headed, he has plans for noon on Nov. 28.

"We'll be with family after Thanksgiving," he said. "So we'll certainly watch the game."

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TIM POND, member of both the Bishop Watterson High School and the Otterbein University Basketball Halls of Fame, recently offered his publication entitlted "Coaching Youth Basketball: Coaching the Coaches" for sale on Amazon.com. Access to this instructional manual was previously limited to attendees of his basketball clinics and camps only.

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Helwagen Nearing 40 Years Of U-M Memories

By SAM CIPRIANI
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For nearly four decades, Ohio State beat writer Steve Helwagen has had a front-row seat to one of college football's greatest rivalries, witnessing countless memorable moments and historic clashes between the Buckeyes and Michigan.

From the struggles of the John Cooper era to the dominance of Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer and the recent challenges under head coach Ryan Day, Helwagen has experienced nearly every high and low of The Game since he began covering Ohio State football in 1986.

Helwagen has missed just three Ohio State-Michigan games since 1986 and has attended every meeting between the two programs since 2001. In that span, the Buckeyes have compiled a 21-17-1 record against the Wolverines.

Helwagen began his journalism career at Ohio State's student newspaper, The Lantern, where he worked from 1986 to 1990. He then spent three years at the Circleville Herald before joining the Urbana Daily Citizen in 1993. He joined Buckeye Sports Bulletin in December of 1994, spending nearly nine years with BSB before moving to 247Sports in July of 2003, where he has remained since.

Throughout his career, Helwagen has witnessed the evolution of the rivalry, while learning that the competition extends far beyond the annual meeting between the two teams.

For Helwagen, covering the rivalry has become a year-round responsibility, with developments surrounding either program often affecting the other.

"Part of this job is that you're writing about Ohio State and Michigan almost 365 days a year," Helwagen said. "If Michigan gets a great player like Bryce Underwood or gets a great player from Ohio out from underneath Ohio State, then that's news in Ohio. You're always talking about it, so it's something that's always with you. You're always considerate of where that rivalry stands. Almost on a monthly basis, there's something that comes up from the other side (of the rivalry) that needs to be dealt with."

He began covering Ohio State during Earle Bruce's final years, but much of his early experience on the Buckeye beat came under Cooper, who went 2-10-1 against Michigan from 1988 to 2000 and failed to win any of his first six meetings with the Wolverines.

As the losses mounted, Helwagen watched media scrutiny of Cooper intensify, much like the criticism Day would face decades later. Cooper's struggles became a defining storyline of his tenure, making his pair of victories over Michigan in 1994 and 1998 especially memorable for Buckeye fans.

"The times that they beat Michigan, '94 and '98 , people were just overjoyed that they were able to do that. Coop then lost to them in '99 and 2000, and the loss in 2000 wasn't even the reason he was fired. It was off-the-field stuff that popped up in late 2000 that led Ohio State to eventually terminate (Cooper) and bring in Jim Tressel for 2001.

"Every time you lose to Michigan, the anticipation to play that game the following year from my standpoint just became larger and larger. Then obviously with Jim Tressel, the worm starts to turn in the other direction. He was 9-1 in his 10 years against Michigan. It was just an incredible run going the other direction."

Helwagen said Tressel would immediately make beating Michigan a priority, and his approach paid dividends.

Tressel defeated the Wolverines 26-20 in Ann Arbor in his first season in 2001, setting the tone for a decade in which Ohio State would lose The Game just once (2003). Of Tressel's nine victories, one stands above the rest in Helwagen's memory.



Steve Helwagen

In 2002, No. 2 Ohio State entered its regular-season finale against No. 12 Michigan 12-0 with an opportunity to secure a berth in the BCS National Championship Game against top-ranked Miami (Fla.).

With Ohio State trailing midway through the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes mounted a game-winning drive capped off by a 3-yard rushing touchdown by sophomore running back Maurice Hall with just under five minutes remaining to secure a dramatic 14-9 victory and send a recently renovated Ohio Stadium into a frenzy.

"In 2002, they had to win The Game to finish the regular season undefeated. If they don't win that game, somebody else is going to play Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl in the national championship," Helwagen said. "It was 9-7 in the fourth quarter, (Ohio State) was trailing, and they finally scored with about five minutes to go to go up 14-9.

"When they won the game on an interception (by Will Allen) on the last play near the end zone – they had lowered the field in 2001 to an eight- or 10-foot drop for a lot of the stands, and that didn't matter. The people came from every direction. It was spontaneous, and there were thousands of people in the middle of the field within seconds. It was just a rush unlike anything that I've ever seen. They finally had beaten Michigan for something that meant something. Everybody knew that day that they were going to the Fiesta Bowl. They were the only other undefeated team besides Miami, and they were going to go play for the national championship."

Although the victory ultimately propelled Ohio State toward its first national championship since 1968, Helwagen recalled that Tressel made it clear immediately after the game that defeating Michigan was an accomplishment worth celebrating on its own.

Helwagen said Tressel corrected a reporter who asked about the opportunity to compete for a national championship during his postgame interview on the field, instead emphasizing the significance of beating Michigan and capturing the Big Ten title.

"Jim Tressel, they interviewed him after the game, and they asked him. (A reporter) said, 'Well, how does it feel that you've got the berth to play for the national championship now?' and he goes, 'Oh no, today wasn't about that. Today was about the Ohio State-Michigan game and winning the Big Ten championship. That's what today was about,' " Helwagen said. "You think about somebody that puts it in that type of perspective, and he corrects the guy right on the field after the game."

Having covered both Tressel and Meyer throughout their tenures, Helwagen noticed differences in how the two coaches approached the Michigan rivalry, despite their respective success.

While Tressel took a more understated approach, Meyer, who grew up in Ashtabula, Ohio, and served as an assistant under Bruce in 1986 and 1987, brought a greater level of intensity to The Game.

Helwagen credited Meyer's ability to motivate his players and emphasize the rivalry's significance as a key reason he went a perfect 7-0 against Michigan from 2012-18.

"Urban was a great motivator, and he would really get his teams fired up. They videoed some of his pregame talks to the team, and they still play them on the big board at Ohio Stadium," Helwagen said. "His comment that the air on the other side of that door is rare, that only a few chosen people get a chance to play in the Ohio State-Michigan game – he found a way to channel all that into that rivalry. He had also worked for Earle Bruce, and he understood. He was from Ashtabula, Ohio. He understood full well what it meant for Ohio State to play well against Michigan. He took it deadly serious, and that's how he prepared his teams to play that game.

"(Meyer) took it so seriously, and it was almost like a Woody Hayes-like approach to it. Tressel had a quiet Woody Hayes approach to it, but he had his own way to approach it. With Urban, it was direct, a shot directly between the eyes that this is what this means. Failure is not acceptable, and we are going to go out there today, and we are going to win this game, regardless of anything that happens. We must win this game. That was how he approached it. His teams brought it, and they did a great job within the confines of that rivalry."

Tressel and Meyer's dominance over Michigan established expectations that have carried into Day's tenure. Day enters the 2026 matchup with a 2-4 record against the Wolverines.

The rivalry has taken a personal toll on Day, who described his three consecutive losses to Michigan before the 2024 matchup as "one of the worst things that's happened to me in my life." After Ohio State suffered a fourth straight defeat to the Wolverines that season, the scrutiny only intensified.

Helwagen believes Day's struggles have further showcased that the passion surrounding the rivalry has continued to grow, with frustration among Buckeye fans at times boiling over into personal attacks and threats directed at the coach and his family.

"The problem that Ryan Day had was he had teams that were at or near the top of the polls all season long that had national championship aspirations and playoff and Big Ten and all that, and it all gets scuttled at the end of the year because you lose to Michigan," Helwagen said. "People took it way beyond where it should have been taken with death threats to the family and physical threats, and all the social media stuff that was posted and different things. That's just beyond the pale. There's just no reason for any of that, and that's where people completely lose their perspective on what's important in sport and in life."

Throughout his nearly 40 years covering Ohio State, Helwagen has witnessed the passion surrounding The Game grow alongside its national prominence, fueled by decades of memorable matchups with national championship and postseason implications.

Among the most memorable editions of the rivalry he has covered were Ohio State's historic 42-39 victory over Michigan in the No. 1 vs. No. 2 showdown in 2006 and the Buckeyes' dramatic 30-27 double-overtime win over the Wolverines in 2016.

"The hype around the game has just grown exponentially," Helwagen said. "In 1999, ESPN put out a book chronicling the century in sports, and the Ohio State-Michigan game was picked as the No. 1 rivalry in all of sports. That's ahead of Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees, Alabama and Auburn, Duke and North Carolina basketball, Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali. There's nothing else that compares to it.

"When you have that situation where everything hinges on that one day and that one game, it's very easy for people to lose perspective and understand what this really is. It's a college athletics contest between kids who are 18 to 22 years old. But thankfully, or unthankfully, it has grown in stature. In 2006, it was taken to a different level. Both teams showed up undefeated, and Ohio State was No. 1, and Michigan was No. 2. That was the first time that had ever happened. Then 10 years later, in 2016, Michigan was No. 3, and Ohio State was No. 2. They were playing to get into the playoff that year. I look at it as just something that perpetuates itself year after year."

While those historic matchups have elevated the rivalry's national prominence, Helwagen believes The Game's significance extends beyond championships and national rankings.

After nearly four decades covering the rivalry, he recognizes the importance of each meeting, regardless of either team's record, and considers himself fortunate to have played a role in documenting its history.

"It's something that I've enjoyed being a really small part of," Helwagen said. "You go to cover it, and I've been on some pregame shows before the game trying to set the scene for it. It's so mammoth every year it comes around, whether it means something or it doesn't mean anything for the conference or the postseason, it still means everything. The network still wants it for the primary broadcast spot. The audiences for it are as big today as they've ever been. It's always one of the top four or five watched games of the year, if not No. 1. It deserves its place in the pantheon of great rivalries. I don't think there's any doubt about it."

Cotton Goes 1-1 In Two Games Vs. Michigan

By SAM CIPRIANI
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Former Ohio State defensive end James Cotton spent just two seasons with the Buckeyes from 1998 to 1999 after transferring from City College of San Francisco, but he arrived in Columbus right as longtime head coach John Cooper's struggles in The Game neared their breaking point.

Even with Cooper's routine failures against Michigan, Cotton managed to experience both a victory and a loss during his two seasons in Columbus.

In 1998, Cotton and the No. 7 Buckeyes entered the matchup at 9-1 and delivered one of the bright spots in the Cooper era in terms of the rivalry with the Wolverines. Ohio State beat No. 11 Michigan 31-16 at Ohio Stadium behind a historic performance from wide receiver David Boston, who hauled in 10 catches for 217 yards and two touchdowns to give Cooper his second and final victory in the rivalry.

The following season, however, the rivalry reverted to its painful script for Cooper's program. During its trip to The Big House in 1999, Ohio State fell 24-17 to the No. 10 Wolverines, dropping Cooper to 2-9-1 against Michigan and capping a disappointing 6-6 campaign for the Buckeyes.

Despite the loss, Cotton delivered a strong individual performance in his final matchup against the Wolverines, recording two sacks against future seven-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady in 1999.

After experiencing both a victory and a defeat against Michigan, Cotton felt that he got a taste of what makes The Game one of college football's most intense rivalries.

"I've been on both sides of it, and when you're on both sides of it, you understand that wins don't come easily. You could lose just as easily as you could win," Cotton said. "You feel bad for the players because we all work really hard, but then somebody has to win, somebody has to lose unless it's a tie. I know for a fact that the feeling that I had when we beat them far outweighed the feeling that I had when we lost to them up there."

Triumphant In First Try

Cotton, a Cleveland native, was introduced to the rivalry at a young age, growing up in Ohio and watching Ohio State in the early- to mid-'90s, but didn't feel fully invested until after his 1997 recruiting trip to Columbus.

For Cotton, watching Ohio State lose a top-five matchup against Michigan that year, particularly seeing the Buckeyes lose, 20-14, in heartbreaking fashion, was a motivating factor in him transferring from CCSF.

"I had never been down on the campus before and been in the stadium or anything until 1997, and so when they lost that game, I was crushed and devastated," Cotton said. "I was like, 'There's something that I can do to turn the tide and get the Buckeyes that victory that we need.' One of my goals was to beat That Team Up North, and that's what we did in 1998, my first year as a Buckeye."

Cotton's first experience as a player with rivalry week came in 1998, when he got a firsthand look at how Ohio State and Buckeye fans prepared for their annual matchup with Michigan.

"You have your scrimmages at the end of practice, that beat That Team Up North period," Cotton said. "The scout team has the Wolverine stickered helmets and jerseys. Then it's just embedded, and you start visualizing yourself playing in the big game, making those big plays in those moments. Everybody is a little uptight. I wouldn't call it fear, but it's a 'something big is on the horizon' type of feeling."

When the two teams finally met Nov. 21, 1998, Ohio State controlled the matchup from start to finish, overcoming a 28-24 loss to a Nick Saban-coached Michigan State team from two weeks prior to secure its first victory against the Wolverines since 1994.

Cotton recorded two solo tackles in the 31-16 victory, while senior quarterback Joe Germaine completed 16 of 28 passes for 330 yards and three touchdowns. Germaine connected with Boston for two of his three scores, while running back Michael Wiley added 120 yards on 12 carries, including a 53-yard touchdown run.

Cotton also recalled the physicality of the game in his first matchup with Michigan and his shortcomings in helping Ohio State contain the Wolverine offense.

"What I remember was missing a couple of sacks against Tom Brady in that game, and I said, 'I will never let that happen again.' I made him step up in the pocket and made him uncomfortable, but I missed the sacks," Cotton said. "I just remember those tackles and those hits. They just felt different. They were harder, tougher, meaner, and with bad intentions. But it was a beautiful day in the 'Shoe. I remember us being in control of the whole game and not worrying because we had a different type of swag, and the adversity we felt against Michigan State.

"When we lost to Michigan State, that made us realize that no matter what the adversity is, we could overcome it because we have the talent. Michigan State caught us when we weren't in the right mindset to control what happens when we meet sudden change. But we dealt with that loss, and we got over it quickly and came together as a team and realized that the bigger picture is beating That Team Up North and sending our seniors out with a victory against this team."

Although the loss to the 6-6 Spartans ended Ohio State's national championship hopes, the victory against Michigan became one of Cotton's fondest memories from his time in Columbus. Beyond interrupting the Wolverines' dominance in the rivalry, Cotton said the experience also reinforced the importance of setting an example for the younger players in the program.

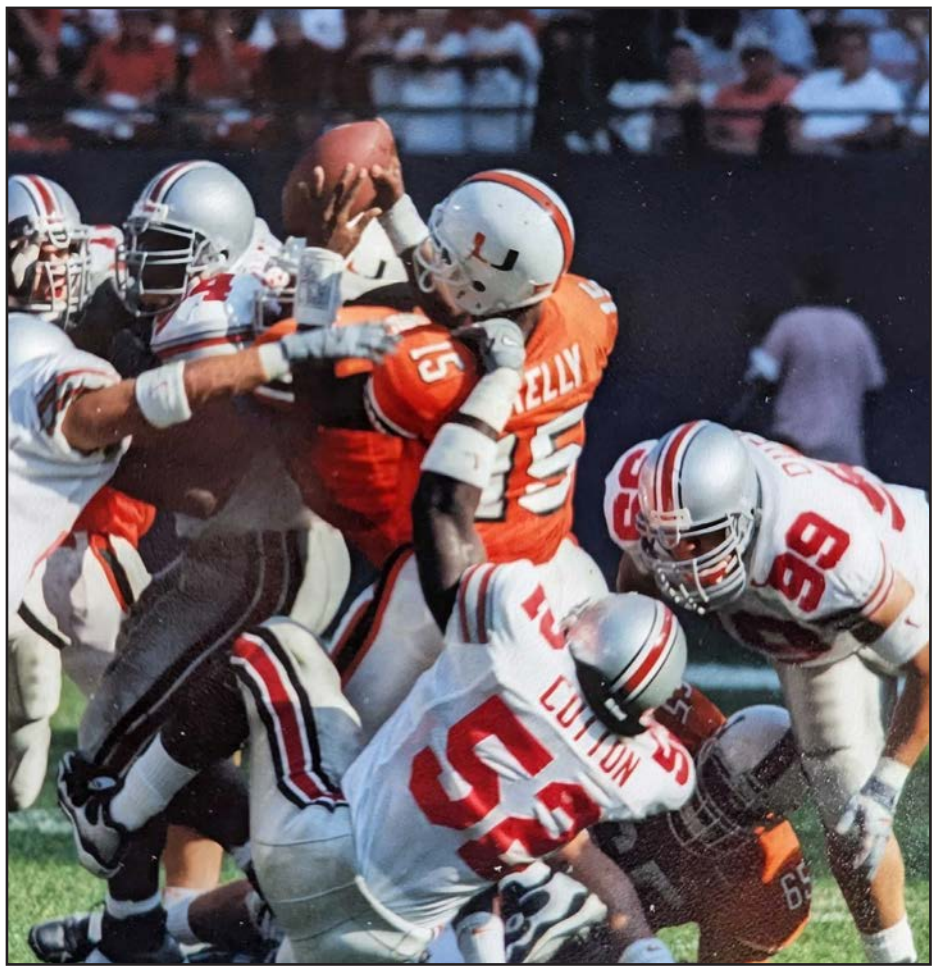
With his family in attendance and the Ohio State faithful rushing the field after the final whistle, Cotton said the victory was especially meaningful because of those he shared his celebration with.

"That was the peak of it, being a part of that victory and everything that came along with it, what it meant, how it felt,' Cotton said. "My parents were at The Game and uncles. The fans rushed the field. I remember my uncle grabbed a huge chunk of grass that my dad still has to this day from the stadium.

"The fans rushed the field and came down to celebrate on the field with us. That is one of my fondest memories as a Buckeye, being associated with that victory because it meant a lot to a lot of people."

The victory also carried particular signif-

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FILE PHOTO

MAKING THE MOST OF IT — Despite playing only twice against Michigan, defensive end James Cotton had many memorable moments from securing a win for beleaguered coach John Cooper to getting two sacks of Tom Brady in the Big House in the 1999 loss.

Cotton vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1998/Jr.	Columbus	W, 31-16
1999/Sr.	Ann Arbor	L, 24-17



Boom Was No Bust In Michigan Contests

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

While there is a history of hostility in the rivalry between Ohio State and Michigan, former Buckeye running back Dan "Boom" Herron doesn't have a lot of it to talk about, at least between the players.

"They were scared of us," Herron said. "Let's just be honest. I felt like we had mind control over those guys, and we were very confident. You might get a little trash talk going on, but those guys knew what time it was. They knew we were about to come out there and hit them in the mouth, score touchdowns and stop them on defense."

If the Wolverines were, in fact, fearful of the Buckeyes during the time Herron was in Columbus, they had good reason to be. Herron's tenure lasted from 2007 (when he redshirted) to 2011, with the first four of those games ending in victories for the Scarlet and Gray with an average margin of victory of just under 22 points.

The 2008 and 2010 versions of The Game were especially hard on the Maize and Blue, with 42-7 and 37-7 victories, respectively, for OSU in those games. But Herron wishes he could have beaten Michigan even worse than he did in those two games.

"Let's score 100 points. I think Woody said if he could go for three, he would," Herron said. "That's how I was thinking, running that score up as much as you can."

Herron didn't always feel that way about the Wolverines. A few people he was close to had gone up to Ann Arbor before him to play football.

"As a young kid, we had guys from my high school, Warren (Ohio) Western Reserve, that went to Michigan. I had two first cousins who played at Michigan, Alfie Burch – he was there when I was a baby – and Prescott Burgess. Mario Manningham, me and him went to the same elementary, middle school and high school. I just had ties to guys. I wouldn't necessarily say a fan, but I rooted for those guys because they're my family."

With those connections and great talent to likely get a scholarship offer from any school he wanted one from, Herron worked out for Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr at a recruiting camp hoping for an offer. But he also already had the Buckeyes and head coach Jim Tressel in mind as well.

"I went to Michigan for Junior Day, and I did well," Herron said. "I met with Lloyd Carr and he told me, 'We like you a lot. We're going to keep recruiting you. We're going to watch your first three games, see how those go and then we're going to make a decision from there.' Honestly, I was upset when I left because I was expecting to get an offer that day. To be honest with you, I'm not sure what would have happened if I would have gotten that offer that day.

"The following weekend, Ohio State had the same thing. I basically went against the same guys because it was all the top juniors. I did my thing, I did well and Coach Tressel texted me on my drive back to Warren and let me know I had a full scholarship. That was on Saturday. On Monday, Michigan called me and told me I had a full scholarship."

Herron committed to the Buckeyes as a junior and got his first in-person experience of the rivalry game when he attended the 2006 Game of the Century between No. 1 Ohio State and No. 2 Michigan, which ended in a 42-39 victory for the Buckeyes.

He said being at that game made it sink in how big the rivalry is in Columbus.

"I was just happy that I was able to even be there," he said. "They're going to be talking about that game for years after we're even gone. I saw how Coach Tressel led those guys on the field, and I was like, 'I have to be a part of that.' "

Ultimately, Herron said he looked at the two programs and where they were, and he believed he saw a declining Michigan program rivaling a Buckeye program that was perhaps as strong as it ever had been after the '06 game happened.

When he got to Columbus, the preparation for Michigan started right away. As many former Buckeyes talk about, Tressel had periods during practices throughout the season focused on the Wolverines.

"We would do some type of workout, some type of something where we always had them on our mind," Herron said. "We're watching them every week and making sure that when the time comes, we're prepared. You've got to know your opponent better than they know themselves, and Tressel was really big on that."

Herron redshirted his freshman season in 2007. That season, a win over Michigan was thought to give Ohio State a chance at the Rose Bowl, but because of some chaos around the country in college football, it ultimately gave the Buckeyes a chance at the national championship.

The Buckeyes would lose that game, but beating the Wolverines for the fourth straight season kept that hope alive. But during the rivalry game, neither the Rose Bowl nor the national championship was on the Buckeyes' minds.

"Our focus was to keep the main thing the main thing," Herron said. "Beat Michigan, and everything should fall in place. It played out how we needed it to play out."

That year, it was Chris "Beanie" Wells who made a name for himself in Buckeye lore, scoring the only two touchdowns of the game in a 14-3 win on a 1-yard run in the second quarter and a 62-yarder in the third.

Herron would ultimately go on to become

Herron vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
2007/RS	Ann Arbor	W, 14-3
2008/Fr.	Columbus	W, 42-7
2009/So.	Ann Arbor	W, 21-10
2010/Jr.	Columbus	W, 37-7
2011/Sr.	Ann Arbor	L, 40-34



FILE PHOTO

TAKE NO PRISONERS — It wasn't enough for running back Dan 'Boom' Herron (1) to defeat Michigan his first four seasons as a Buckeye, he wanted to annihilate the Wolverines by running up the score. He did his part, rushing for a pair of touchdowns in the 42-7 rout in 2008.



an impact player himself, but if not for Wells, whom Herron was competing with in the running backs room, Herron might never have become a Buckeye hero in regard to the rivalry himself.

"I'm from the small town of Warren, Ohio. When I got to Columbus, it was a big city. I was not focused like I needed to be. It took Beanie Wells, one of my best friends now, coming to pick me up one day, and we had a talk. He was like, 'Listen, man. As one of your good friends, your big brother, I'm going to tell you right now that if you don't lock in, you're never going to play.' From that day, I locked in and started buying into the system."

It took only until the next season for Herron to become the backup for Wells.

That year, Herron was the third-leading rusher on the team behind Wells and quarterback Terrelle Pryor, and when the rivalry game came around, Herron was able to make a major impact.

The Buckeyes led 14-7 at the half over the Wolverines, but it didn't take long into the third quarter for the game to break open. A Michigan drive stalled at the Buckeye 38-yard line and a 29-yard punt gave OSU the ball.

Wells rushed for 42 yards on the first play of the drive, and Herron got the ball on the next play and took it 49 yards to the end zone for a touchdown, his first of two in the game.

"Any player that plays at Ohio State would tell you there's nothing better than scoring a touchdown against Michigan," Herron said. "It could be a national championship, it could be a Rose Bowl, but when you score a touchdown against Michigan, you cement yourself into history of helping beat That Team Up North that we hate so much."

If getting in the end zone against the Wolverines feels that good, Herron's second touchdown of the game must have felt even better. He made it in on a 2-yard run over the left tackle for an early fourth-quarter score to make it 35-7 on the way to the 42-7 rout.

Scoring against the Buckeyes' rival became routine for Herron over the years he played in the game. It took him a while to find the end zone in a hard-fought 21-10 victory at Michigan Stadium in 2009, but he ultimately did with 4:46 remaining in the third quarter on a 12-yard pass from Pryor, which ended up being the last points of the game.

Herron nearly made it to the century mark on the ground with 96 yards, but his 17 yards receiving got him over that in all-purpose yards.

"Coach Tressel would say, 'In this game, everything means more.' If you get a run for 3 yards, that's like going 5 yards. You get a run for 10 yards, that's like having a 15- to 20-yard run."

So what about a 98-yard run? Herron broke one of those off in the third quarter of the 2010 game, but it wasn't meant to be, because it was called back for holding on Dane Sanzenbacher, which cost the Buckeyes 19 yards and a score. Herron's run was officially called an 89-yarder, with the hold moving the ball back to the U-M 19-yard line. That turned the drive into a three-pointer when Devin Barclay made a 36-yard try, which still put Ohio State up by four possessions, 34-7, in what was ultimately the 37-7 victory.

Herron finished with 175 yards and a touchdown after he had gotten in the end zone the drive before his near-record run from 32 yards out.

"I always wanted to have a game like that against those guys," Herron said. "I was kind of upset about them calling back my 98-yard run. But we scored four plays later, so it all worked out.

"But having a game like that against your rival, it will be talked about forever, and that's the goal. You want to show out in those types of games so people remember who you are and that you beat Michigan."

With a chance to go 5-0 against his rival, Herron and the Buckeyes would lose in 2011 after Tressel was let go and Luke Fickell took over as the interim head coach for the season.

"Do we have to talk about that?" Herron joked when asked about his last year playing in the rivalry.

"That was a rough year. Obviously, we had a lot going on. We had a young quarterback in Braxton Miller starting as a freshman. Coach Fickell, he did the best that he could do with all the circumstances we were going up against, but we also didn't lay down. We went in there, and it was a dogfight. If a couple other things had gone our way, we could have won that game.

"It freaking sucks, because having that loss on you is like, 'Oh man, I was one of the guys that lost to Michigan.' We had a seven-year run (from 2004 to 2010) where a lot of guys get to say, 'I never lost to Michigan,' and it just sucks that I can't say that."

As Herron referred to, it wasn't for a lack of trying. The Buckeyes had dropped a few close games that season, and it was no different when they went to the Big House. The Wolverines interrupted Ohio State's streak with a 40-34 victory in a game in which Miller rushed for 100 yards and Herron 37.

But one thing Herron does get to say is that he is one of a select few players who scored a touchdown in every game they played against Michigan. He had a 4-yard rushing score in the fourth quarter that brought the game within three points with 7:09 remaining. But U-M took over five minutes off the clock with its next drive, and Miller ended a two-minute drill with an interception to seal the game.

Surrounding that game were rumors that former Florida head coach Urban Meyer would take over in Columbus as the next head coach of the Buckeyes. Herron said that didn't serve as a distraction for the team in that game since it was just added to a pile of potential distractions the Buckeyes had already been working through.

But Herron did say, even though he didn't get to play under the head coach, that he was glad that Meyer was the next in line.

"A lot of programs, you see them have a year like that and they can't bounce back for years," he said. "Ohio State bounced back literally the next year. Urban Meyer was a great coach, a great leader, and I knew he would do great things at Ohio State."

When asked about the 2026 season, Herron said he believes that head coach Ryan Day and the Buckeyes will be able to come out on top for the second straight year despite the season not going quite the way it was expected.

"We have to get that dog back in us," he said. "We have to be the hammer, not the nail. I think Coach Day is a great coach. I think he's done a great job with the team, and I feel like he's going to get it figured out."

Cotton Sacks A Highlight

Continued From Page 23

icance for Cooper, who entered the contest with a 1-8-1 record against Michigan. Cotton remembered watching the head coach finally get the monkey off his back after years of frustrating losses in the rivalry.

"It was amazing to see him take that deep sigh and just breathe out and the sigh of relief," Cotton said. "That's all I remember seeing – him being exhausted mentally and physically. Knowing that he finally got the monkey off his back, the celebration in the locker room was monumental. Just being able to celebrate with the coaches, my teammates, it was just something like you can't even describe. I get chills just talking about it right now."

1999 Loss Was A Valiant Effort

Ohio State entered The Game in 1999 with expectations far removed from those surrounding the program during Cotton's first season in Columbus.

After opening the season 3-1, highlighted by a dominant 42-20 win over No. 14 UCLA, the Buckeyes struggled down the stretch, going 3-4 in the next seven to enter the Michigan matchup at 6-5.

Despite the team's inconsistent play, Cotton had established himself as one of Ohio State's most productive defensive players. He enjoyed a much stronger senior season, recording 56 tackles, 11 tackles for loss and five sacks, which led the team.

Cotton recalled the atmosphere inside The Big House during Ohio State's 24-17 loss to No. 10 Michigan as one befitting of the rivalry.

He described the loss as bittersweet, as his individual performance was one of the highlights of his collegiate career, but falling short against Michigan was devastating for him and the Ohio State community.

"I just remember it being a dreary day, a typical Ohio State-Michigan game. It was chilly out. You could see your breath in the air," Cotton said. "The soil up there is brownish. It isn't really green. It's just brownish, so it gives you that at-the-playground feeling. This is a backyard type of fight. We battled those guys. It was 17-17 late in the fourth, and I remember having a couple of big third-down sacks in that game. What I've cemented my legacy on was being the last player to sack Tom Brady two times in the Big House."

Ohio State held a 17-10 advantage after a Dan Stultz field goal midway through the third quarter, but Brady and the Wolverines eventually found their footing. Two late touchdown passes from Brady, including the go-ahead score to wide receiver Marquise Walker with just 5:01 remaining, lifted Michigan to its victory.

Cotton delivered arguably the best individual performance of his Ohio State career in the defeat. He finished with five tackles and two sacks, repeatedly pressuring Brady and making life difficult for the future NFL legend.

But what Cotton remembers most was Brady's composure throughout the Wolverines' victory, even as he tried to get inside the quarterback's head.

"I was the guy that was the intimidator, the enforcer. Every time (Michigan) broke the huddle, I'm standing over the ball, giving him my meanest look, and (Brady) would come up to the line and wink at me. That's how you knew he was in total control, and he wasn't easily flappable," Cotton said. "I was doing my best to try and come up with a play to get to him. And they ran some screen plays to bust it open.

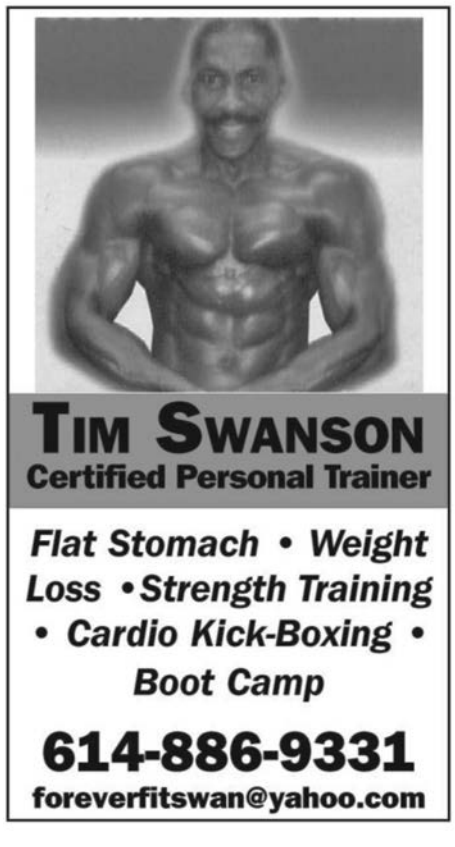
"It was a hard-fought game. I remember looking at the disappointment in my teammates' eyes and looking at the coaches. We had some opportunities in that game. We had a costly turnover late, but our job on defense is to get the ball back for the offense, and we couldn't stop them."

Even with the defeat, Cotton takes pride in being the last player to sack Brady twice at Michigan Stadium.

"I like to brag about it all the time. I let everybody know I was the last player to sack (Brady) up in the Big House," Cotton said. "What he's been able to do and how he played as long as he played and has the longevity is undeniable. He's the greatest of all time. I have nothing but the most respect for him."

More importantly, Cotton said his experiences on the winning and losing sides of the rivalry taught him lessons that extended beyond football.

"It has affected my life by giving me a legacy that my family can always be associated with," Cotton said. "Me making those couple of big plays against arguably the best quarterback in football and being a part of that rivalry and people wanting to hear stories from The Game, to always be affiliated with it, having a pair of gold pants, and then being on the other end of it and losing. I have both perspectives to talk about, and that's so important in life as well. We don't win in life all the time. We lose, and so the things and the lessons that I've learned from playing the big game, it all correlates to life."



Johnson, OSU Go Winless Against Michigan

By BOBBY GORBETT
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As it pertained to the Michigan rivalry, the early days of John Cooper were hard on all members of Buckeye Nation. That was certainly the case for former linebacker and defensive back Brent Johnson, who played for Ohio State from 1988-92.

Johnson, who mainly earned reps in Columbus as a special teamer and an extra defensive back on third downs before becoming a starter as a senior, was with the team during Cooper's first five years with the Buckeyes.

Cooper never had the Wolverines' number, but that was especially the case during his early tenure. Ohio State lost to its archrival every year from 1988-91 and only broke the losing streak with a 13-13 tie in 1992.

"Two of the years, games just got out of hand, and it was the typical 'If things could go wrong, they did go wrong.' Two of the years we were absolutely in the game, I thought we had the game won, and some lack of offensive production and a few costly turnovers, and then just fluke plays," Johnson about the Buckeyes' issues against the Wolverines. "Basically, it came to them just stepping up and making huge plays at certain times, and us not being able to come up with those plays, but there were zero times in the five years that I was there that we ever thought that they were superior to us. We never went into one game thinking that we weren't going to win."

Johnson, who was a standout running back at nearby Bexley (Ohio) High School, grew up a fan of the Buckeyes. There wasn't a specific Ohio State-Michigan game that stuck out to Johnson when he recalled his adolescence, but it was always a matchup he looked forward to.

"It was always just so back and forth that you just looked forward to being part of the rivalry and wanting to accomplish getting the gold pants, and having bragging rights over your No. 1 rival always interested me, and I hated their colors," Johnson said.

Johnson vs. Michigan		
Year/Class	Location	Result
1988/RS	Columbus	L, 34-31
1989/Fr.	Ann Arbor	L, 28-18
1990/So.	Columbus	L, 16-13
1991/Jr.	Ann Arbor	L, 31-3
1992/Sr.	Columbus	T, 13-13

Like many players in the area, Johnson was recruited by both Ohio State and Michigan. In addition to having a disdain for the Maize and Blue, Johnson was not appreciative of the way the Wolverines recruited him.

"It just seemed like Michigan just kind of took everything for granted, and they didn't call as much," Johnson said. "They didn't come to the school and visit. (Former Ohio State head coach) Earle Bruce would come to the school. (Former Ohio State head coach John Cooper) came to the school. (Former Michigan State head coach) George Perles came to the school, (former Miami Hurricanes head coach) Howard Snellenberger. (Michigan) just seemed pretty arrogant about stuff."

Despite his affinity for the Buckeyes at an early age, Johnson very nearly chose to go elsewhere. When he was deciding where to go to college in 1987, Nick Saban was the Spartans' defensive coordinator and was assigned to recruit Johnson. Saban apparently did a good job, because Johnson said they very nearly gained his commitment.

As good a recruiter as Saban was, he was apparently no match for the crew of Buckeyes who made Johnson feel at home when he visited Ohio State.

"All the players on the team," Johnson said when asked why he ultimately chose Ohio State. "(Former running back) Vince Workman was like the only one I knew. We played against each other in high school and got to know each other really well during track, so he was my host on the recruiting trip. But with every single person he introduced me to, we got along great. We had the best time. It was the coolest group of guys. I just liked the guys and the culture. We hadn't even done anything with football. They were taking us out to bars and hanging out and going over to their houses. It was just the guys on the team. They were all great, and we're all still good friends to this day."

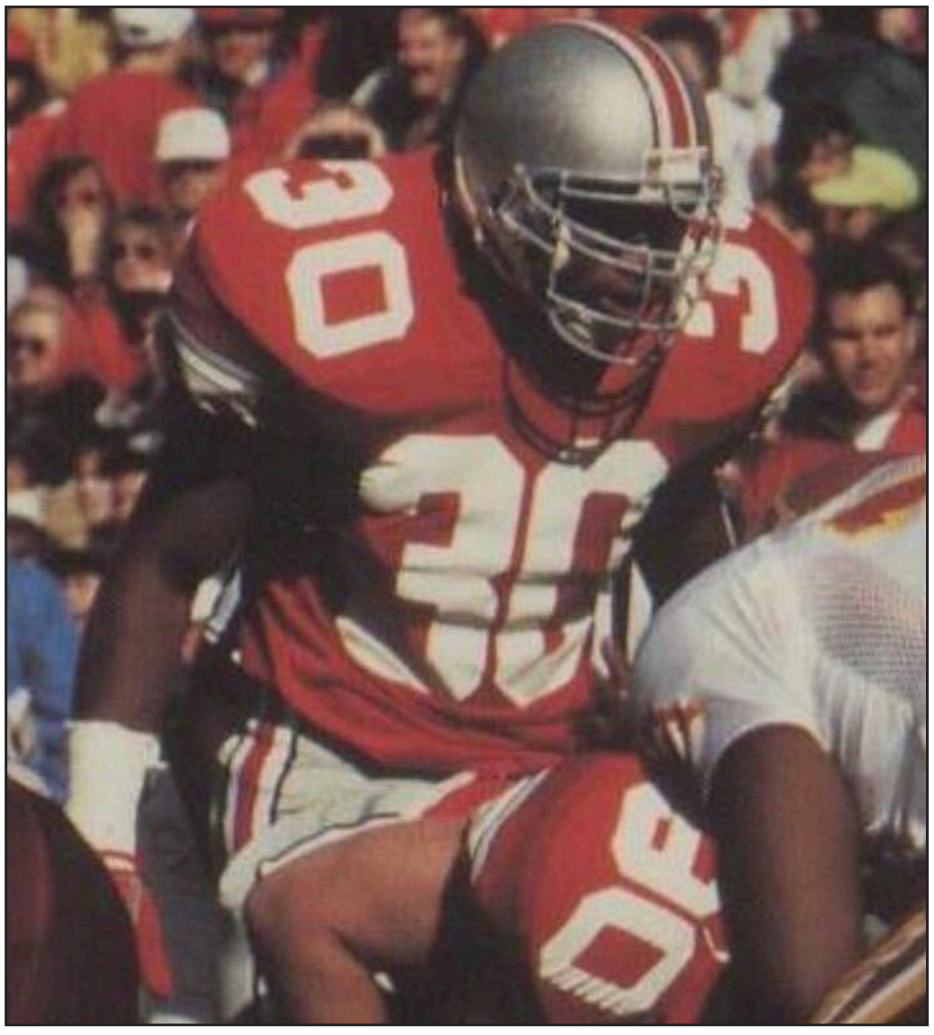


PHOTO COURTESY OF BRENT JOHNSON

FEELING BLUE — It wasn't a good feeling to never beat Michigan in five tries for Brent Johnson (30), but making lifetime friends with his teammates is what the linebacker remembers most about being a Buckeye. OSU lost four straight before tying the Wolverines 13-13 in his senior season.

Johnson, who committed to the program as a running back, redshirted during his first season at Ohio State. Johnson's first year was Cooper's first year at the helm, and it certainly did not go as planned. In a transition period from Bruce to Cooper, the Buckeyes went just 4-6-1 after starting the season 2-4.

One thing that Johnson learned that year was the different level of intensity that comes with preparing for the Wolverines.

"We had to put Wolverine stickers on our helmets," Johnson said of being on scout team. "That inspired the defense tremendously. They were going at us pretty hard, and that was a lesson to learn that year. No matter what you did, scout team all year long, the Michigan game is definitely different because those guys are coming at you hard because they're preparing for The Game."

Despite the intense level of preparation, Ohio State lost to Michigan 34-31 that year. The Buckeyes trailed 20-0 at halftime but mounted a furious comeback in the second half, scoring 24 unanswered to take a four-point lead. After the two teams traded touchdown drives, Ohio native John



Kolesar broke the hearts of Buckeye fans with a 41-yard receiving touchdown in the final two minutes of the game.

The Buckeyes were better during the next season. Ohio State got out to a poor start, losing two of its first four games, but responded with a six-game winning streak to climb into the Associated Press' top-25 rankings by the end of the year.

Johnson, meanwhile, was transitioning to a new position. Most young Buckeyes have a tough time earning playing time early on in their careers, but that was especially the case for Johnson, who shared a running backs room with talented players including Workman and Carlos Snow.

Cooper advised him to transition to the defensive side of the ball to play linebacker, and Johnson obliged.

"I'm very glad I did because (former Ohio State linebacker Derek Isaman) was the best mentor that one could have," Johnson said of his transition to linebacker. "I probably never would have gotten an opportunity to play if it wasn't for Derek Isaman taking the time to teach me the finer points of playing linebacker. The coaches throw you in there, and they expect you to learn really fast.

"It's a little intimidating when you switch positions, and you're a little bit worried about making mistakes and so forth. Derek pulled me aside and taught me how to read the line, taught me how to read the backs, and taught me formations and really how to study film, study formations, study the movement of the line, and what they were trying to accomplish and where I needed to be. That was a huge help."

That year, Johnson earned enough playing time to make his first interception of his career. In Ohio State's season-opening 37-13 win over Oklahoma State, Johnson got in the way of a pass thrown by quarterback Mike Gundy, who went on to lead the program after his playing days.

Johnson said he dealt with injuries during that year, but that didn't stop him from playing against the Wolverines. However, riding their six-game winning streak into The Game, the Buckeyes were no match for their rival.

On a 46-degree day in Ann Arbor, the Buckeyes played well enough to trail 21-18 in the fourth quarter against the No. 3-ranked Wolverines with a few minutes to go. However, they couldn't get the stop they needed in crunch time to prevent Michigan from winning 28-18.

"It was missed opportunities, more so than anything else. Offensively, we missed opportunities and (struggled to) put the ball in the end zone," Johnson said. "I just think defensively, we just ended up playing a lot of plays and just (had) little breakdowns ...

"We still went into that game thinking that we were going to win. We had every intention of it, but it was just one of those games where so many things just ended up going wrong."

It was a similar story for the Buckeyes and Johnson in 1990. A slow start, which included back-to-back losses to USC and Illinois followed by a tie with Indiana, preceded a five-game winning streak and an appearance in the top 25.

Johnson was in a similar role as a special teamer and rotational defensive back. That year, though, the Wolverines seemed much more vulnerable. Having already suffered three losses in the regular season, Michigan came into Ohio Stadium with a similar record and ranking as Ohio State.

The defense held up its end of the bargain, allowing only 248 yards of offense, but Ohio State quarterback Greg Frey threw three costly interceptions, which opened the door for the Wolverines to win again.

Michigan made a 37-yard field goal as time expired to win 16-13 and come back from a 13-6 deficit.

Despite the offense's poor performance, Johnson said there wasn't any finger-pointing from the defensive players.

"We were definitely disappointed, and we knew how talented our offense can be, and we know what they could offer," Johnson said. "It is definitely disappointing, but in the end, it's still your teammates, and we know that they weren't doing it on purpose.

"It's just more disappointing than anything else, but it's not causing fights or anything like that. There's no dissension. It wasn't like the defense wouldn't talk to the offense or anything like that. We both expect to lean on each other and both of us to do our jobs in order to win the game."

One year later, Johnson was associated with one of the most iconic plays in the series. Once again, a solid but outmatched two-loss Ohio State team faced a dominant Michigan team in the Big House.

The Buckeyes managed just 233 yards of total offense in a game they never seemed to have a chance to win. Michigan beat Ohio State 31-3, with eventual Heisman-Trophy winner Desmond Howard returning a punt 93 yards before hitting the Heisman pose in the end zone. It's a play that's seemingly been shown on repeat year after year since it happened and one that Johnson won't forget.

"I remember that play very well because I'm the very first person who missed him on that," Johnson said. "I remember I'm on the left side, and we punted the ball. The coaches usually tell most people if the ball is inside the 10, they either let it go or they fair catch it and they stand there. The ball was kicked to the right corner between the numbers and out of bounds.

"I'm running down, looking at the ball, looking at Desmond, and I'm thinking that because he's got the ball on the 5-yard line, he's going to fair catch it, and the other thing that's in my head is if he fair catches it, don't run into him and cause a 15-yard penalty. I see him catch the ball, and he just starts running at me, and my job is to contain. As I'm running down, he looks like he was going to try and outrun me to the outside, so I'm thinking, 'Do not let him get outside of you.' As a defense, our job is always to force people back to the inside, where all your help is coming.

"I'm trying to take an angle to not let him run around me, and he just puts his foot in the ground and heads back towards the sideline again, and I literally stick my hand out and almost touch his jersey. He didn't even use a quarter of the field. He didn't even get to the hash, so I'm thinking, 'All right, well, someone's going to get him.' The next thing I know, I look up, and he's scooting down the sideline. After that, the only thing going through my head is this: 'Why didn't I just run down and just try and just run through him and make the tackle?' "

Johnson couldn't forget the play if he wanted to. In promos for The Game or the Heisman Trophy ceremony, Howard's return is seemingly shown several times every year.

"I make ESPN every single year," Johnson said. "Every time they show that, I'm in it. I'm etched in history, but I'm etched on the wrong side of history."

Johnson finally earned his chance to start in his fifth year with the program after being moved from defensive back to linebacker. Earning the role meant a lot to Johnson.

"It had been everything I worked for, for the five years that I was there. I was super excited. I was really looking forward to the year and finally getting the opportunity to showcase what I had been working on for the past four years."

Disaster struck, though, when Johnson broke his leg during the middle of that season, abruptly ending his career after he finally became a starter.

"I broke my leg, which was devastating and very disappointing," Johnson said, "because like everything you'd work for, it just all kind of went up in smoke just that fast. I should have been at practice every day, but I was trying not to think about it. I had a full cast up to my thigh, and I was just trying to put all that out of my head. I was still cheering for my teammates on Saturday, but I did not want to think about what I was missing out on."

Johnson still tried to help his younger teammates, as Isaman had with him a few years prior. However, he mentioned that young linebackers Lorenzo Styles Sr. and Craig Powell didn't need much guidance.

Even though Johnson was on the sidelines, Ohio State was 8-2 headed into the regular season finale.

The Buckeyes were able to score 10 fourth-quarter points to avoid yet another loss to the Wolverines, but the 13-13 tie was certainly not the result the team was looking for.

"It felt like a loss," Johnson said. "We wanted to win that game so bad that there was no joy in the tie at all. We wanted to win. We felt that over the past five years we should have won at least a couple of the games, and we felt that we deserved at least one to two pairs of gold pants. Everybody was very disappointed, very disappointed and bitter when the game was over."

Johnson's affinity for the Buckeyes has not faded since he left the program. He said he tries to go to one or two Ohio State games a year but mainly appreciates being able to see everything on television.

He said that current head coach Ryan Day makes a habit of inviting former players back to Columbus for practice, which gives Johnson and his former teammates a chance to reconvene.

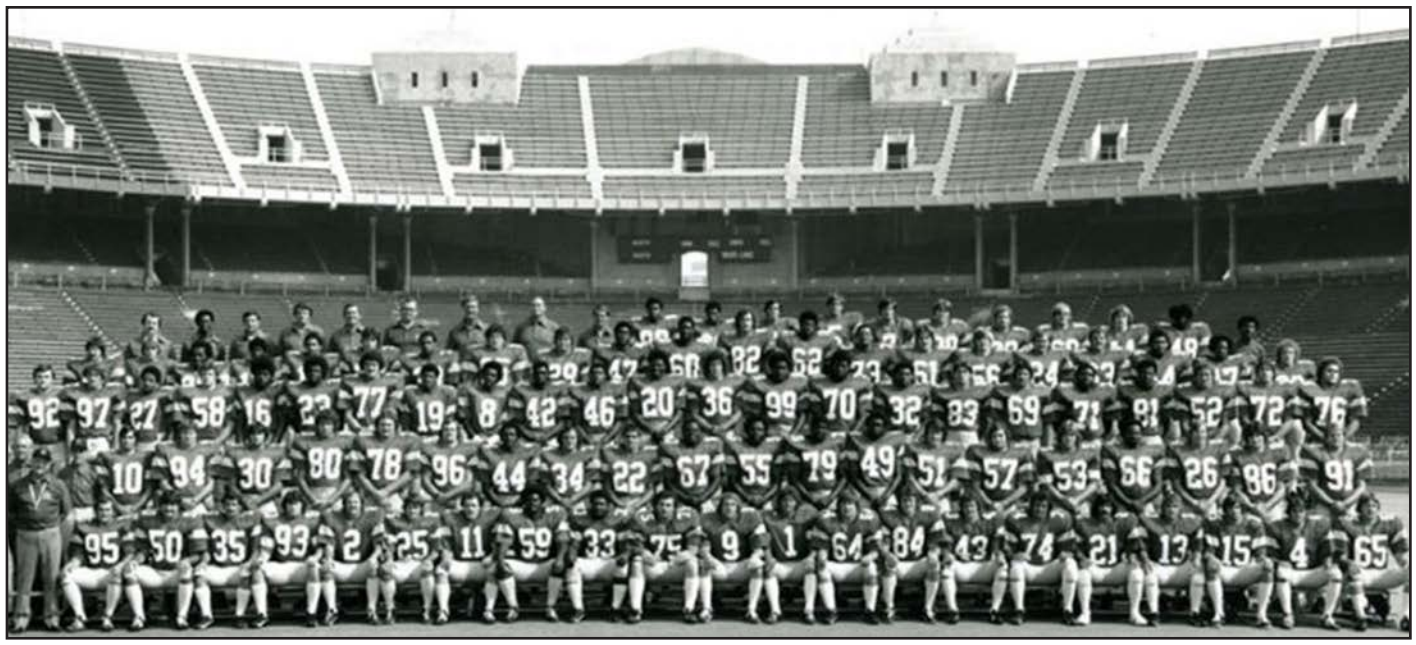
"We still have a good relationship. We all still get together fairly often, at least a couple times a year," Johnson said. "It's definitely a brotherhood."



With Archie Gone, Woody Faces Major '76 Rebuild

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 1976 season when Woody Hayes faced rebuilding his roster in the post-Archie Griffin era.

By MARK REA
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus



FILE PHOTO

DIFFERENT TEAM, SAME COACH — 1976 was Woody Hayes' 26th as Ohio State's coach, and it certainly presented a challenge in the first post-Archie Griffin season as the two-time Heisman Trophy winner and a group of other standouts had exhausted their eligibility. The cupboard wasn't bare, though, and the Buckeyes won a record fifth consecutive Big Ten championship despite losing to Michigan.

Fifty years ago, the United States was in a celebratory mood. In small towns and big cities from coast to coast, every size bunting, flag and pennant bearing red, white and blue celebrated the 200th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Yearlong festivities included commemorative coins and postage stamps, elaborate fireworks displays, an international parade of tall-masted ships in the waters around New York City and Boston, a huge parade in the nation's capital, and even a re-creation of George Washington's famous crossing of the Delaware River.

Unfortunately, longtime Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes was in no mood for celebrating. Unabashedly patriotic by any measure, Hayes no doubt enjoyed watching the myriad bicentennial events televised nationally. But as he began making preparations for the 1976 college football season – his 26th as head coach of the Buckeyes – Hayes faced a major rebuilding project with regard to his roster.

Only three returning starters – tackle Chris Ward, guard Joe Lukens and fullback Pete Johnson – returned to an offense that was accustomed to running roughshod over opponents. Ohio State averaged 35.3 points per game during a three-year period beginning in 1973, a stretch that coincided with the superstardom of Archie Griffin, who set myriad program, conference and national records while becoming the first (and still only) two-time Heisman Trophy winner.

But Griffin had exhausted his college eligibility after the 1975 season as had quarterback Cornelius Greene, wingback Brian Baschnagel, split end Lenny Willis, All-Big Ten tackle Scott Donnelly and first-team All-America guard Ted Smith.

Additionally, Hayes was the focus of a series of late-summer articles from The State News (the Michigan State student newspaper) accusing the coach of improper recruiting activities. In sharp contrast to allegations a decade earlier of helping players financially, charges that placed the coach and his program on a one-year Big Ten probation, Hayes not only showed no contrition this time, he steadfastly branded the charges as "ridiculous falsehoods" unworthy of his time to comment.

In early 1976, The State News began reporting that Hayes and Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler had secretly leaked information on Michigan State's recruiting practices under then head coach Denny Stolz. The information ultimately led to heavy NCAA sanctions against Michigan State, including a three-year probationary period that included recruiting restrictions, scholarship losses and a bowl ban.

Stoltz resigned under pressure and sat out the 1976 season before resurfacing in 1977 as head coach at Bowling Green. Meanwhile, the Spartan football program didn't go to another bowl game until the Cherry Bowl following the 1984 season.

The State News ran a series of articles beginning in August alleging that Hayes and Ohio State boosters were also involved in illegal recruiting practices. Michigan State players Ted Bell and John Vielhaber claimed Hayes offered them illegal enticements – Bell was allegedly given a $50 bill, while Vielhaber said his family received an autographed copy of Hayes' bestselling book "You Win With People!" – while the coach was recruiting them to become Buckeyes. (Ohio natives Bell and Vielhaber lettered one season each for the Spartans.)

A later story cited former OSU players, including All-America defensive back Tim Fox and fullback Harold "Champ" Henson, quoted as claiming teammates and assistant coaches would often trade their game tickets for cash or cars, a practice prohibited by NCAA rules.

"I've never in any way said we're perfect," Hayes said at the time, "but we do everything we can to discourage that kind of thing."

When the annual Big Ten Kickoff Luncheon was held in Chicago in early August, Hayes decided he was tired of skirting the issue.

"We've got to keep the integrity of our sport," the veteran coach told a crowd of about 900. "If someone gets out of line, by God, you've got to put them back in line. Let me say right in front of every coach here that if I catch you cheating, I'll turn you in.

"Did I turn in the team that cheated in our league? Yes, I turned them in. You're damned right I did! And I'll do it again if necessary."

By November, the MSU student newspaper was still chasing the story, claiming the NCAA and the Big Ten were actively investigating the matter. In the end, however, nothing came of the allegations as the NCAA and Big Ten dropped the case.

Lack Of Passing Attack

It was mere coincidence that Michigan State should provide the 1976 season-opening opposition for Ohio State, but it was no coincidence Hayes exacted whatever frustration he must have felt on the Spartans.

Darryl Rogers, fresh off a successful three-year run at San Jose State that included a Pacific Coast Athletic Association championship, was named Stoltz's successor and took over a talented roster that included redshirt-freshman quarterback Ed Smith, who was on his way to leading the Big Ten in passing yardage. The Spartans also had the services of All-Big Ten defensive back Tommy Hannon and future Major League Baseball star Kirk Gibson, who as a wideout led the league with 748 receiving yards.

While players such as Smith and Gibson flourished under Rogers and his wide-open offensive philosophy, the once-feared Michigan State defense sputtered. The Spartans gave up an average of more than 25 points per game on their way to a 4-6-1 finish, a record that began with a 49-21 waxing from fourth-ranked Ohio State.

Hayes was clearly in a take-no-prisoners mood as the Buckeyes shot out to a 35-0 halftime lead before a 75-yard touchdown run from tailback Jeff Logan made it 42-0 less than a minute into the third quarter. Only then did Hayes call off the dogs, allowing the Spartans to make the final score a bit more respectable.

In one final display of defiance, Hayes sent offensive coordinator Ralph Staub and defensive coordinator George Hill to the postgame interview session in his stead, observing that he would remain in the locker room "to keep from taking anyone's head off."

Logan, a 184-pound junior who served two years as Griffin's backup, led an OSU ground game that accounted for 463 yards. He rushed for a game-high 112 yards and two touchdowns and added a third score on a 68-yard punt return. Johnson added 99 yards and two TDs.

Meanwhile, first-year starting quarterback Rod Gerald seemed to flourish in the option game, rushing for 104 yards and two touchdowns of his own. That more than made up for the fact that Gerald attempted no passes during the game while the only completed pass for the Buckeyes was from Logan, who connected with wingback Jim Harrell for 36 yards.

Things got a little more difficult the following week as the Buckeyes made their first-ever trip to Penn State in a game that pitted Hayes against longtime Nittany Lions head coach Joe Paterno. Heading into the game, the legendary duo had already compiled 319 of their eventual combined 647 career victories.

Gerald scored the first half's only touchdown with an 8-yard option keeper around left end midway through the second quarter. Unfortunately, a botched snap on the PAT prevented senior kicker Tom Skladany from adding the extra point, and the Buckeyes carried a 6-0 lead into halftime.

After a scoreless third period during which Ohio State held the ball nearly 13 minutes, an unlikely hero stepped into the spotlight.

Early in the fourth quarter, faced with a fourth-and-1 at the Penn State 8-yard line, Hayes decided to roll the dice. Rather than asking Skladany to kick a chip-shot field goal to make it a two-score game, Hayes kept his offense on the field. In a tight formation, everyone in the record Beaver Stadium crowd of 62,503 – including the Penn State defense – expected Johnson to get the ball.

That's what Hayes expected them to expect, so he instructed Gerald to fake a handoff to Johnson and then roll to his left. As the QB executed his fake and the Nittany Lions began to pursue him, Gerald flipped the ball

outside to little-used halfback Bobby Hyatt, who was trailing the play. Hyatt cradled the ball, swept around the left side of the line and scored easily to give Ohio State a 12-0 lead.

It was the only carry of the 1976 season for Hyatt, a senior and former walk-on from the tiny village of LaGrange in northern Ohio, and served as his first and only career touchdown as a Buckeye.

Meanwhile, the OSU defense continually kept the Nittany Lions off the scoreboard until an 87-yard scoring drive late in the fourth quarter made it 12-7. Earlier, the Buckeyes had stopped Penn State twice inside their own 5-yard line – the first on an interception in the end zone by junior cornerback Ray Griffin and the other when senior defensive end Bob Brudzinski recovered a fumble at the 4.

Logan was again the game's leading rusher with 160 yards on 25 carries as the Buckeyes held a 280-100 advantage on the ground. However, the Buckeyes threw for only 10 yards in the game with Gerald attempting three passes and completing just one.

One-dimensional football didn't seem to be a problem, though, and Ohio State returned home the following week to host Missouri, a Jekyll-and-Hyde team making its first trip to Columbus since a 35-34 loss in 1949.

The Tigers had opened the season outside the top 25 before a 46-25 upset at eighth-ranked USC shot them all the way to No. 6. The following week, however, Illinois ruined their home opener with a 31-6 dose of reality, sending Mizzou plummeting back out of the rankings again.

Al Onofrio had been a fixture at Missouri since 1958, serving 13 seasons as an assistant under Dan Devine before becoming head coach of the Tigers in 1971. But while Onofrio's record was a nondescript 29-30 heading into the game against the No. 2 Buckeyes, his teams had a penchant for surprising highly rated teams. Their season-opening victory at USC was the seventh win against a top-10 opponent in the past four-plus seasons.

That magic didn't appear to travel with the Tigers to Columbus, however. The Buckeyes relied on their power running attack, getting three short touchdown runs from Johnson to grab a 21-7 lead at halftime.

But OSU's inability to establish any kind of passing game finally took its toll early in the third quarter.

On a third-and-14 play at his own 36-yard line, Gerald's pass over the middle was intercepted by Missouri linebacker Chris Garlich. The turnover set the stage for a 4-yard touchdown run by tailback Curtis Brown, making it 21-14 with 9:00 remaining in the third period.

It was still 21-14 when the Tigers took over possession at their own 20-yard line with 4:42 left in the game. To that point, they had managed only 244 total yards against the Ohio State defense, but backup quarterback Pete Woods – subbing for injured starter Steve Pisarkiewicz – engineered an 80-yard march that culminated in a 2-yard touchdown pass to wideout Leo Lewis with just 12 seconds remaining.

Most of the Horseshoe crowd of 87,936 went from stunned silence to triumphant jubilation when Woods' two-point conversion pass sailed over the head of Brown, seemingly preserving a 21-20 victory for the Buckeyes. But Ohio State was called for defensive holding, giving the Tigers a second chance at the upset.

This time, Woods kept the ball, dove through a crack in the left side of the line and squeezed into the end zone for a 22-21 upset win, something Onofrio later termed "of all the games Missouri has played, this has to be the greatest."

In the end, penalties and the lack of a passing game killed the Buckeyes.

Before the holding penalty on the first two-point conversion try, OSU appeared to have stopped the Tigers' momentum on their last possession when Brudzinski sacked Woods that led to a 13-yard loss. But that play was wiped out when the Buckeyes were called for holding.

Meanwhile, Ohio State piled up 296 yards rushing led by Johnson and Logan, who each cracked the century mark with 119 and 110 yards, respectively. But Gerald was only 1 of 8 for 9 yards in the passing department with one interception. Through three games, the OSU quarterback had rushed for 198 yards but was just 2 of 11 passing for 18 yards.

The loss ended a home winning streak at 25 games and marked the first home defeat against a nonconference opponent since a 20-14 loss to Colorado in 1971.

Things didn't improve much the following week when undefeated and fourth-ranked UCLA fought the No. 8 Buckeyes to a 10-10 tie. Skladany kicked a 25-yard field goal with 7:21 remaining to tie the score, but faced with a fourth-and-4 at the UCLA 47-yard line with just 35 seconds to play, Hayes sent his punt team into the game – a decision met with a cascade of boos from the 87,969 on hand at the Horseshoe and a dismissive wave of the hand from the coach. Later there was some discussion about whether the gesture was more of a one-finger salute than an actual wave.

After the game, Hayes offered his opinion on his decision.

"It was too far to go for a first down to gamble," said the 63-year-old coach. "I would have gone for it had the yardage been less. We thought of gambling, but all UCLA would have needed would have been one first down, and our defense played so well I didn't want to take the game away from them with a possible defeat. When you get as old as I am, you tend to get conservative."

As for the booing and his hand gesture, Hayes admitted, "I was bitter. It bothered me to hear that. Those who did are not friends of Ohio State or me. It affected me a lot more than the players and I responded to it. I didn't like it one damn bit."

Big Ten Co-Title

The Buckeyes got back in the win column the following week by rolling to a 34-14 win at Iowa, a team on its way to a seventh consecutive losing season. The score could have been even more lopsided had Ohio State not turned the ball over four times – two fumbles and a pair of interceptions.

In an uncharacteristic midseason move, Hayes unveiled a new offensive formation the following week at Wisconsin. After using pro-set and veer offenses during their first five games, the Buckeyes ran from the I-formation most of the afternoon and piled up 311 yards on the ground during a 30-20 victory.

Logan carried 19 times for 113 yards while Johnson, despite being hobbled by a pair of sprained ankles, added 44 yards and a pair of scores making him the first player in Big Ten history to tally at least 50 career touchdowns.

Relatively easy victories followed the next three weeks against Purdue, Indiana and Illinois, and suddenly the loss to Missouri and tie against UCLA were distant memories. The Buckeyes were 6-0 in conference play as they sought their record fifth straight championship, and they were all alone in first place in early November after Purdue shocked undefeated and top-ranked Michigan, winning a 16-13 victory on a late field goal.

Ohio State nearly got caught looking ahead the following week at Minnesota, barely squeezing out a 9-3 win against the Golden Gophers. Still, the victory allowed the Buckeyes to clinch at least a share of the Big Ten title, an achievement dampened by rumors coming out of Notre Dame that afternoon.


Bill Mallory

ABC reported during its telecast featuring the Fighting Irish and Alabama that Hayes was preparing to announce his retirement the following Friday to give his team added incentive for its rivalry game against Michigan.

Asked about the report, Hayes shook his head and replied, "That's ridiculous. If you think we'd need anything extra to prepare for that opponent, you don't know anything about the rivalry."

Unfortunately, Michigan was simply too strong. Playing without Gerald, out since late October with a back injury, and with Johnson still less than 100-percent healthy, the Buckeyes were held to a season-low 104 yards on the ground as the Wolverines ran away with a 22-0 victory. It was the first time Ohio State had been shut out in 122 games dating back to a 10-0 loss to Michigan in 1964.

On a perfect-for-football November afternoon – cool, crisp and sunny – the teams played to a scoreless tie in the first half after the Buckeyes squandered what was to be their best scoring opportunity of the afternoon.

OSU began its final possession of the second quarter at its own 25-yard line, and on the third play of the drive, Logan took an option pitch around the left end and quickly broke free down the sideline. Amid the roar of an Ohio Stadium-record crowd of 88,250 fans, Michigan safety Dwight Hicks caught up to Logan near midfield and made a touchdown-saving tackle.

On the next play, quarterback Jim Pacenta faked a pitch and squeezed through a hole in the line, broke two tackles and sprinted out to his right for a 24-yard gain. Two plays later, Logan added a 10-yard burst up the middle to give the Buckeyes a first down at the Michigan 12.

But on second down, Pacenta's attempt to hit tight end Greg Storer in the corner of the end zone was intercepted by Wolverines DB Jim Pickens to end the threat. Ohio State never got closer than the Michigan 38-yard line the remainder of the game.

"The interception at the end of the first half was a costly error on our part," Hayes told reporters after the game. "It was my call all the way, and it was just a bad call. We put that pass in earlier this week, but when they shot a linebacker in, our quarterback had to rush his throw.

"If we had scored then, it might have affected the second-half outcome, but I don't want to take anything away from them. They were a fine team today and deserved to win."

With the victory, the Wolverines earned the conference's Rose Bowl bid and went on to lose a 14-6 decision in Pasadena to third-ranked USC.

Meanwhile, Ohio State accepted a bid to play Big Eight co-champion Colorado in the Orange Bowl. The Buffaloes were coached by former Hayes assistant Bill Mallory, who had been in charge of the OSU defensive line during the 1968 national championship season.

Mallory had a few tricks up his sleeve for his old boss, and Colorado jumped out to a 10-0 lead in the first quarter. But with Gerald back at the controls, the Buckeyes leaned on their size advantage up front and eventually ran their way to a convincing 27-10 victory.

JUCO transfer Ron Springs, who had played sparingly at tailback behind Logan, ran for a game-high 98 yards while Logan, Johnson and Gerald combined for 186 yards while scoring one touchdown each.

Logan finished the 1976 season with 1,248 yards, then the fourth-highest single-season total in program history. Johnson rushed for 19 touchdowns, pushing his OSU and Big Ten career record to 58 TDs. The conference record has since been broken four times, but Johnson remains the Buckeyes' all-time touchdown leader.

Milestone Season

The 1976 season was a milestone year in many ways for Ohio State. The program established a new Big Ten record with a fifth consecutive championship, breaking the league record of four straight first established by Michigan in 1901-04 and equaled by the Wolverines three other times (1930-33, 1947-50 and 1971-74).

Brudzinski and Ward were named consensus first-team All-Americans, and Skladany joined them with several first-team nods, making the kicking specialist the sixth three-time All-American in program history.

Brudzinski, Ward and Skladany were joined as first-team All-Big Ten performers by Griffin, defensive tackle Nick Buonamici, middle guard Aaron Brown, linebacker Tom Cousineau and offensive guard Bill Lukens, while Logan, Johnson, tight end Jimmy Moore, defensive tackle Eddie Beamon and linebacker Ed Thompson each earned second-team status.

The season also marked the beginning of the end of Woody Hayes' long tenure as head coach. Ohio State would capture a sixth straight Big Ten title in 1977 – a still-standing conference record equaled by the Buckeyes themselves from 2005 to 2010 – but the Orange Bowl win against Colorado would mark the final bowl victory for Hayes.

The 1977 season ended with a lopsided 35-6 loss to third-ranked Alabama in the Sugar Bowl, and the following year ended even more disastrously when Hayes was fired after striking an opposing player in the waning minutes of a 17-15 Gator Bowl loss to Clemson.

Three-Star '27 Edge Rusher Flips To OSU

Ohio State gained its 23rd commitment in the 2027 class when Westerville (Ohio) North three-star edge rusher Damion King (6-3, 230) flipped his commitment to the Buckeyes on Nov. 18. King had previously been committed to App State, but once the Buckeyes came calling during his senior season, it seemed like it was only a matter of time before he joined the ranks for OSU.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK
Greg Wilson

King is ranked the No. 1,655 player in the country, the No. 129 defensive end and the No. 70 player in Ohio. It makes sense that defensive line coach Larry Johnson went after King so late in his high school career since the three-star had 78 tackles, 13½ sacks, three forced fumbles and a defensive touchdown in his senior season with Westerville North.

King could also be of use on special teams for the Buckeyes when he gets on campus. He blocked five extra-point attempts and two field goals during his senior season as well.

"Coach Johnson and the whole defensive line coaching staff have been transparent the whole time," King told On3 on why he committed. "They always kept it honest, and I feel like that played a big part of my decision. They've been communicating throughout the whole season like they said they would. They kept tabs on me, which is great, and I mean that they kept their word. That means a lot."

King joins a talented group of defensive linemen who are committed to the Buckeyes in the class. He is the fifth among them, now alongside Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic five-star defensive end DJ Jacobs (6-5, 240), Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon five-star defensive lineman Marcus Fakatou (6-6, 275), Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas five-star edge rusher Wyatt Smith (6-6, 235) and Birmingham (Ala.) Ramsay four-star defensive lineman Karlos May (6-2, 330).

While he may not be considered in the same class of player as the other four Buckeye commitments on the defensive line, King uses that as motivation.

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
Daylon Gordon	RB	5-9	195	★★★★	Wylie, Texas
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
Damion King	DL	6-3	230	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) North
Deontay Malone	ATH	6-0	182	★★★	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Karlos May	DL	6-3½	305	★★★★	Birmingham (Ala.) Ramsay
Brody McNeel	OT	6-5	285	★★★★	Richmond (Va.) Godwin
Caden Moss	OT	6-5	320	★★★★	Jackson (Miss.) Academy
Nigel Newkirk	RB	5-11	200	★★★★	Gainesville, Ga.
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	6-4½	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.

"I believe in myself and I think I'm really underrated and I have a lot to prove to people," King said. "Carrying that chip on my shoulder is going to do a lot for me. I just have to continue to stay consistent and just be who I am."

Two RBs Flip To Ohio State

Before King flipped, Ohio State gained its first commitment of the 2027 class in nearly a month when Wylie, Texas, four-star running back Daylon Gordon (5-9, 195) flipped his pledge from Texas State to the Buckeyes on Nov. 11. Gordon's pledge ended the long journey of running backs coach Carlos Locklyn trying to gain a 2027 commitment.

Gordon wasn't the first choice for Locklyn – that was Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School five-star David Gabriel-Georges (5-11, 220), who committed to Tennessee in August – but he's the first back to commit to the Buckeyes in the class.

According to 247Sports' composite rankings, they could be worse off with what they ended up getting. Gordon was rated as the No. 347 player in the class, the No. 22 running back and the No. 47 player in Texas. He shot up the 247Sports composite rankings when Rivals updated its rankings, which are a piece of the composite system. He was up to the No. 140 player in the country and the No. 7 running back.

Gordon is more than just a runner, catching 38 passes for 560 yards as a receiver in his junior high school season, but he was also effective on the ground, with his rushing total getting him to over 2,000 all-purpose yards that year.

This season, through 10 games, Gordon had 2,498 all-purpose yards and 35 touchdowns scored.

Gordon was the 21st commitment in the 2027 class for the Buckeyes, but he was just the second addition since July after Cleveland St. Ignatius three-star linebacker James Conrad (6-3, 225).

But Locklyn wasn't done gaining commitments. He also added Gainesville, Ga., four-star running back Nigel Newkirk (5-11, 200) on Nov. 15, who was on campus for an official visit for the win over Northwestern the day before.

Newkirk was committed to Alabama but had been showing some interest in Ohio State for a while. He and his family drove nine hours to Columbus when their flight was canceled due to the nationwide ground stop called by the Federal Aviation Administration on Nov. 13.

Newkirk was the No. 224 player in the country and the No. 14 running back when he committed, which was before the rankings updated. He was moved down to the No. 321 player in the country and the No. 18 running back.

'27 DL Commit Locked In

Johnson has put together a very strong 2027 class and is in the final weeks of trying to keep it together before the early signing period begins on Dec. 2. The Buckeyes seem to have a secure commitment from May at least.

May spoke with On3 about the visit he and all of the other defensive line commits took for the Oregon game, and it seems that they are using the game as motivation to get to Columbus and work hard to change the fortunes of the

Continued On Page 32



ASK AN ANALYST

with Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

Ohio State got a couple of commitments from running backs in Wylie, Texas, four-star Daylon Gordon (5-9, 195) and Gainesville, Ga., four-star Nigel Newkirk (5-11, 200). What do you make of those two as prospects?

"Well, I like Gordon better. I like him a lot. I would say Newkirk is talented, but more of a developmental guy. With Gordon, when I watch his film, what I like is that the guy puts the ball in the end zone. There are running backs that know how to find the goal line, and he looks like one of those guys. He reminds me very much of J.K. Dobbins. I like the way he can catch the ball. He's explosive, which is great, but the best trait I see on film out of Gordon is that he can make the first guy miss.

"And for a running back, when I used to rank them back in the day, that was always what I looked for first. Backs aren't going to block anyone. There are nine potential blockers trying to block 11 defenders. You have to make the first guy miss. Gordon has that ability, and I love that in him. Plus his explosion. Of the two, I think Gordon is a much better prospect. I think Newkirk is more of a power back, although he's not slow. He's going to get bigger. You don't see anything out of him catching the ball on his film the way Gordon catches the ball like a wideout. I like them both."

Carlos Locklyn has had ample time to prove himself in recruiting at Ohio State now. How do you evaluate his time in Columbus as a recruiter to this point?

"This is his third class. He brought in Bo (Jackson) and Isaiah West, and I like both of them a lot. Then he brought in Legend (Bey) and Favour Akih, and then this year the two guys you know we talked about. I think it's good. It's harder to evaluate recruiters in this day and age than it was 10 years ago. Ten years ago, you got who you got, and that was all on you. Now, you have NIL in the picture.

"Maybe this is the year that they're like, 'We don't have money for your position. Go get the best you can get.' Well, that's not your fault. This is a money game now, and when you don't know how NIL was allocated, it's really tough to criticize someone as a recruiter, whereas 10 years ago it was really easy. You got who you got. You either recruited or you got out-recruited. But I like Locklyn, the guys he's brought in. I like the way he develops them too.

"So I think he's a plus assistant coach at Ohio State."

Westerville (Ohio) North three-star defensive end Damion King (6-3, 230) also committed to Ohio State. What do you make of him as a prospect?

"I think he's properly rated. (He's a) local kid. He's definitely a developmental kid. I don't think he's going to be someone that's going to play as a freshman or fairly early. He has had a tremendous senior season. I don't think he was probably very high on Ohio State's radar coming out of camp last year. He has shown to be a much better player this year than he was last year. I've seen tremendous improvement in King, yet he's a high three-star kid. Bring him in, you develop him, and you see where he goes, and if it doesn't work, then you put him in the portal and you get someone else. He's definitely got a chance, and it's up to him."

Ohio State's on-field performance on the offensive line hasn't been up to the standard of what the program wants, but Tyler Bowen has ramped up the recruiting at the position since he arrived in Columbus. Has his recruiting been strong enough to give him more time to prove himself as a position coach as his guys start to become ready to play?

"That's a really great question because, overall, I don't think they've been up to what Ryan Day wants. Against Northwestern, they were really good, but when you look at the recruiting, he's got commitments all over the place. He gets five every year, and that's a lot. But I don't see a Paris Johnson or someone like that. I don't see dudes coming in. I see good, solid high three-star, low four-star guys. But I don't look at any of those guys as I looked at Paris Johnson when he came to Ohio State. Again, we're back to what his bucket of money is to deal with in NIL compared to what the wide receivers coach gets or what the running backs coach gets. We don't know that, so it's hard to criticize when recruiting is a money game now. NIL changed the game completely, and when you don't know how the budget is being allocated, you really don't have a right to criticize.

"But when I look at these guys, I see a bunch of Ohio guys that you would be able to recruit. He's not going head to head with Alabama and Georgia and beating them for these guys. I don't know how to rate Tyler Bowen. When you look at what Ohio State has put on the field this year, if I'm Tyler Bowen, I'm probably renting, not buying, because Ryan Day has shown he's not scared to make changes. I think the jury's out on Tyler Bowen. I don't think that's being too hypercritical or overly negative."



Buckeyes In Battle For New Jersey Linebacker

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Buckeyes.

"The main message is just basically all of us just coming in ready to work because the grind is about to get serious," May said. "Some of us can possibly become game changers very early."

May is the lowest rated of the four early commitments in the class at No. 124 in the country. Jacobs is ranked No. 2, Fakatou is at No. 32 and Smith is No. 35.

If Johnson is able to get each of them to sign with the Buckeyes, it would be an extremely impressive feat for the veteran coach, and it would come at a much-needed time since Ohio State is currently struggling with getting to the opposing quarterback.

May said that he still believes in Johnson's ability to coach him up when he gets to Columbus.

"I definitely do believe in the plan Coach J has for me, and right now I'm working harder than ever to make sure I come in the door ready," May said, "because I believe I can make a huge impact on the defense with the way I play."

Rivals Updates Favor Buckeyes

When Rivals updated its recruiting rankings for the 2027 class, there were many Buckeyes among the top players in the country.

Jacobs was ranked the No. 1 player, just ahead of Texas Tech commit Jalen Brewster (6-3, 320), a five-star defensive lineman from Buford Ga..

Jacobs was the only player ranked in the top 10 for Ohio State, and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne five-star wide receiver Jamier Brown (5-11,192) was ranked at No. 22 in the country. Fakatou wasn't far behind Brown, with the defensive lineman ranked as the No. 25 player in the country by Rivals. Jacobs, Brown and Fakatou were the only five-stars by that system.

Behind them was Jackson (Miss.) Academy four-star offensive lineman Caden Moss (6-5, 330) at No. 34 and Smith at No. 37. The next Buckeye included was Liberty Center, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Kellen Wymer (6-5, 270).

The biggest riser was Gordon, however, which, as previously mentioned, helped out his composite rating. Gordon is now considered the No.140 player in the country and the No. 10 running back. When he first flipped to OSU from Texas State, he was ranked by Rivals as the No. 433 player in the country and the No. 32 running back.

OSU Working To Land Gray

After he had to cancel his Sept. 26 visit to Columbus for the Illinois game, Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional five-star linebacker Tahj Gray (6-4, 233) was able to make it to Ohio State for the Buckeyes' loss to Oregon on Nov. 7.

Mick Walker, an Ohio State recruiting insider for On3, visited Gray recently at the 2028 prospect's high school and said that Gray has a strong relationship with linebackers coach James Laurinaitis.

"I saw Tahj a couple of weeks ago at his high school. He seemed to indicate that James Laurinaitis is the coach that he talks to the most and has the best relationship with," Walker told BSB. "I think that means a lot to Tahj and his family."

But relationships aren't going to be the only thing to take into account when it comes to landing Gray. He is the No. 16 prospect in the class and the top-ranked linebacker by the 247Sports composite ranking, so he will command a decent payday when it comes to name, image and likeness.

"With a guy like him, NIL also has to be a factor," Walker said. "He's going to be a five-star prospect. He's going to be probably a top-10 prospect when it's all said and done despite playing at the linebacker position, which recruiting and the NFL don't value necessarily the same as it probably is when it comes to on-field impact."

But whatever investment it may take for the Buckeyes may be worth it. Andrew Ivins, the director of scouting at 247Sports, compared Gray to former Buckeye linebacker Arvell Reese in his scouting report. Reese starred at Ohio State before going on to the NFL where he has been arguably even more impactful in his rookie season. And if Gray is able to bring that type of talent, any program would sign up for that.

It's both Gray's talent and versatility that earn him the comparison to Reese.

"Explosive and powerful athlete that could be a defensive chess piece," Ivins wrote in his scouting report. "Deployed primarily as an off-ball linebacker, but also gets looks as a two-point edge rusher and has proven to be effective in a spy role. Flashes impressive closing burst and a wide tackling range. Tends to take on blocks with conviction, but can also bypass them with his bend."

Walker said that Laurinaitis seems to be doing what he can to stay at the top of Gray's mind.

"James Laurinaitis is the only coach that went out on the road three times during the off week, and the third day was to make sure he got out and saw Tahj Gray," Walker said. "The Buckeyes seem to be in a good spot. He's only visited two other programs this season, Florida and Auburn, so they're in a good spot. But it's going to be a heavyweight fight."

Buckeyes In Good Spot For Snell

Ohio State hosted Allen, Texas, quarterback Ty Snell (6-3, 191) on campus for the loss to

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1986

The young men who played defensive back in college came from a mixed bag. In high school, some were top running backs, some were quarterbacks and others were receivers. Most played both ways in the prep ranks. Others specialized in the secondary.

Rodney Hampton, from Kashmere High School in Houston, was a prime example. Hampton was said to be one of the best pure athletes in the state. He reportedly had the tools to star at a number of positions in college.

Fred McGill fit the same category, out of Sulphur Springs, Texas. He was one of the best option quarterbacks in the state and had been called a big-time player by every recruiter who had checked him out.

35 Years Ago — 1991

Jeff and Steve Hubbard of Reynoldsburg, Ohio, did just about everything together – so much so that they were adamant about attending the same college.

"We're a package deal," Jeff said. "We have lived together all of our lives. We get better by pushing each other."

However, the two did not initially play football together at Whitehall, Ohio as Jeff wanted to pursue endeavors other than football.

"Freshman and sophomore years," he said, "I didn't play because I decided I was going to be an artist."

The duo's top choices were Kansas, Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio State and Penn State.

30 Years Ago — 1996

Seven out-of-state recruits made their official visits when Ohio State hosted Michigan.

They were lineman Ronald Boldin of Pahokee, Fla.; Spokane (Wash.) West Valley linebacker Ty Gregorak; wide receiver Brian Haugabrook of Wildwood, Fla.; defensive end Austin Lee of Post Falls, Idaho; Federal Way (Wash.) Decatur lineman Victor Rogers; and Detroit Pershing lineman Maurice Williams.

The Buckeyes also hosted junior college running back Jabari Jackson of City College of San Francisco. When Gregorak returned to his home on the West Coast, he raved to his head coach about his visit to the Buckeye campus.

"He very much enjoyed his visit," said CCSF head coach Steve Kent. "I think a good word to use would be giddy. He liked Columbus. He liked the players a lot."

25 Years Ago — 2001

Baltimore Gilman School linebacker Stan White Jr. verbally committed to Ohio State.

White, the son of former OSU linebacker Stan White, finally made his decision between the Buckeyes and Stanford. The younger White told BSB he recently had a conversation with Ohio State recruiting coordinator Bill Conley and was planning to have Conley over for an in-home visit during the weeks following the end of the regular season, which had the Buckeyes take a 26-20 win against Michigan.

"I just got off the phone with Coach Conley," White said. "He's already down in Florida recruiting. Obviously, he's really pleased with how the team played at Michigan. They took it to them. We talked about the game a little. We had a good conversation."

20 Years Ago — 2006

Pittsburgh Woodland Hills tight end Rob Gronkowski was one of nearly 100 recruits in attendance for Ohio State's 42-39 victory against Michigan Nov. 18, and he came away tremendously impressed ahead of the final stretch of his recruitment.

When asked what had the biggest impact on him, Gronkowski said, "Talking to Jim Tressel right after the game. It's a great thing to do for a recruit. It just feels like you should be (playing) there."

At 6-6 and 250 pounds, Gronkowski was listed by Scout as the No. 3 tight end prospect in the nation.

He said he was not surprised by the result of the game, although the gameday atmosphere was more impressive than he had expected.

"I knew they were going to win," Gronkowski said. "I just knew. They're No. 1. It just makes you want to be a part of it.

"It was a real crazy game (and) an awesome atmosphere. I expected it to be good, but it was even better than I thought it would be."

15 Years Ago — 2011

Ohio State had included Canton (Ohio) GlenOak running back Bri'onte Dunn on its list of verbal commitments for the 2012 class since September 2010, but that pledge to the Buckeyes seemed to be on increasingly shaky ground.

That was because Michigan was gaining momentum in its pursuit of the five-star back, particularly after Dunn took a visit to Ann Arbor the weekend of Nov. 19 to watch the Wolverines' 45-17 win against Nebraska. "I think they are very good," Dunn said of the Wolverines.

"I think they are very young, and in the future they are going to be pretty good. I was surprised the score was like that.

"They ran the ball pretty well, too. I think the coaches said that (junior running back Fitzgerald Toussaint) got the ball 29 times. That's a nice amount of carries. The Michigan coaches said that they need me to come, they'll use me a lot and I'll fit into the offense."

10 Years Ago — 2016

After spending the majority of the past few years winning most recruiting battles, Ohio State lost one Nov. 17 when four-star offensive tackle Jake Moretti flipped his commitment.

The Arvada (Colo.) Pomona prospect decided to stay in state and play for Colorado after having been committed to the Buckeyes for a year and a half. Moretti (6-5, 265) announced his decision with a note posted on his personal Twitter account.

"After a great deal of thought and discussion with my family and (Pomona head coach Jay) Madden, I have made the decision to attend the University of Colorado in January 2017," Moretti posted. "I'm grateful for my experience with Ohio State and a sincere thank you to Urban Meyer and the Ohio State staff."

Five Years Ago — 2021

The recruiting landscape was issued a surprise when Chicago Marist four-star linebacker Jimmy Rolder committed to Michigan following a breakneck rise through the rankings.

After the state of Illinois canceled its 2020 high school season, Rolder played a six-game season in the spring, and his recruitment took off in the following months. His first offer came Sept. 17 from Ball State, followed three weeks later by Illinois on Oct. 9. Over the subsequent nine days, he received offers from Michigan, Purdue, Cincinnati, Iowa and Ohio State, with offers later coming in from Florida and LSU.

"Five weeks ago, I would have never thought I would have the opportunity to make this decision," Rolder posted on Twitter. "I'm a true believer that everything happens for a reason and that God has a plan for everyone. With that said, I'd like to announce that I will be committing to the University of Michigan to continue my academic and football career!"

One Year Ago — 2025

Ohio State's impressive streak of recruiting in November continued, with commitments from Lebanon, Ohio, three-star tight end Nick Lautar on Nov. 16 and Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek four-star linebacker Braxton Rembert on Nov. 18.

Both prospects flipped from other schools, with Lautar backing off a Louisville pledge and Rembert going back on his commitment to Wake Forest. Lautar was the only tight end in the Buckeyes' class after Jacksonville (Fla.) The Bolles School three-star Corbyn Fordham flipped to Florida State in October.

It was seemingly an easy decision for Lautar, who didn't post on Twitter about his scholarship offer from Ohio State until right before the Buckeyes' 48-10 win over UCLA on Nov. 15 began. He needed just a day to decide that he wanted to be in Columbus.

Oregon, and the Buckeyes seem to be in a very good spot for the 2029 prospect.

As reported previously in BSB, Snell was the only 2029 quarterback whom OSU quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler went on the road to visit during Ohio State's off week, showing where his priorities are in the class. The only other quarterback Fessler visited that week was Danvers (Mass.) St. John's Prep five-star Christopher Vargas (6-5, 195), who is committed to the Buckeyes in the 2028 class.

Snell doesn't have a composite ranking yet as a 2029 prospect, but by the 247Sports standard ranking, he is the No. 29 player in the class and the No. 2 quarterback. He is ranked by Rivals as the No. 14 player in the country and the No. 2 quarterback.

Walker said he understands why Fessler is so interested in Snell.

"I've seen him throw a couple of summers now at Ohio State. Both times he's been really impressive," Walker said. "He's a guy that Billy Fessler is a big fan of and Ryan Day is a big fan of. Fessler only saw two quarterbacks during the off week, and it was Christopher Vargas and then it was Snell at his high school. That type of move in general shows how much Ohio State values and likes Ty Snell."

Snell has already received 37 scholarship offers, with many other top programs involved in his recruitment as well, as is always the case for top quarterbacks in the country. Walker said that the Buckeyes are in for a battle but are in a good spot early on.

"Obviously you're going to have to beat a couple of other schools for Ty Snell because he's one of the top quarterbacks in the class," Walker said. "But I believe this Ohio State visit for the Oregon game was the only visit he had scheduled or was planning to take during the season.

"He's a darn good player, a darn good quarterback, and the Buckeyes are in good position if they continue to push forward."

Buckeyes Make Top School Lists

Ohio State was included when three different prospects narrowed their top choices down.

Highest ranked of the three was 2028 prospect Springfield, Tenn., five-star cornerback Jermaine Cobbins (6-0, 180), who is down to nine schools. The programs he was still considering were Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Ohio State, Ole Miss, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M and Vanderbilt.

Cobbins, who attended a one-day recruiting camp in Columbus over the summer and said he had a good relationship with OSU cornerbacks coach Tim Walton, was ranked as the No. 15 player in the country, the No. 3 cornerback and the top player in Tennessee.

Detroit Cass Technical five-star offensive tackle Antijuan Wilkes (6-7, 280) is down to eight schools, including Kentucky, LSU, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio State, Texas A&M and Washington on his list.

Wilkes is ranked in the 2028 class as the No. 17 player in the country, the No. 2 offensive tackle and the No. 1 player in Michigan.

The third player to narrow down his school list was Gainesville, Ga., four-star cornerback Jai'lil Goley (6-0, 185), who is also in the 2028 class. Goley is down to five schools – Notre Dame, Ohio State, Oregon, Tennessee and Vanderbilt.

He is ranked as the No. 58 player in the class, the No. 7 cornerback and the No. 9 player in the state of Georgia.

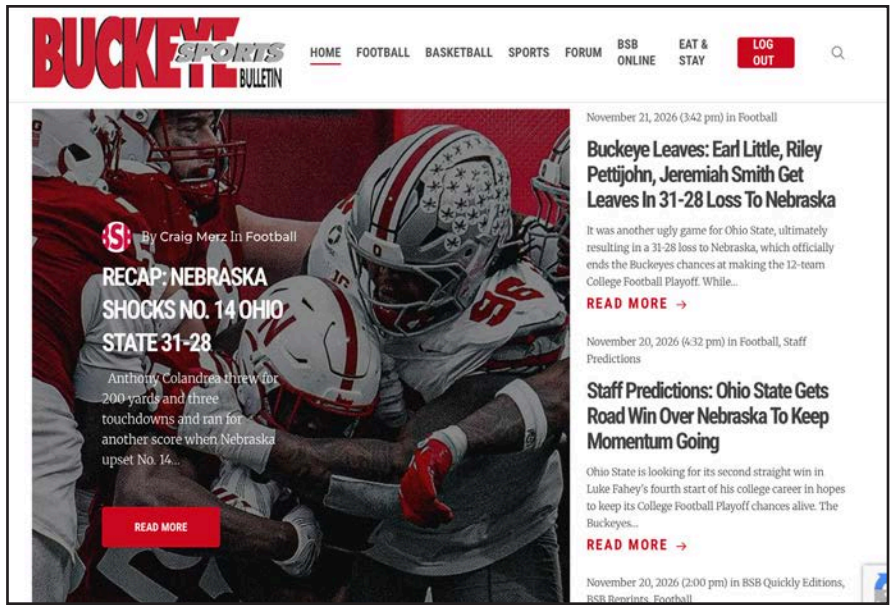
Buckeyes Make Scholarship Offers

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State made a couple of scholarship offers. Here's a quick look at the two players who got one from the Buckeyes.

- **Cincinnati Oak Hills three-star wide receiver Cordell Ball (6-1, 190)** – Ball was ranked as the No. 591 player in the country, the No. 80 wide receiver and the No. 16 player in Ohio in the 2028 class. He holds 23 Division I offers, many of them from Big Ten schools – Illinois, Maryland, Michigan State, Northwestern, Penn State, Purdue and Wisconsin.
- **Massillon (Ohio) Washington wide receiver Gio Jackson Jr. (6-4, 185)** – Jackson is the latest 2027 prospect who the Buckeyes have evaluated and liked during his senior season. Jackson is committed to Miami (Ohio) and has been since June 15. He is unranked, but wide receivers coach Cortez Hankton saw something he liked enough to offer.



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Diebler Demanding More Of Hoops Team

The first five games of the basketball season for head coach Jake Diebler's team weren't up to the standard that he is trying to set for the program.

COURT REPORT
Greg Wilson

While there were strong points during which Ohio State looked good on both sides of the court, the lulls in the Buckeyes' play were just as frequent, resulting in struggles against anywhere from high-major to low-major teams.

"I think, honestly, I need to be more demanding," Diebler said about how patient he can be with his players. "There has to be a high level of accountability to the effort and toughness and probably a little less accountability on some of the mistakes so the guys can play through that and grow through that."

While Diebler certainly hasn't been as pleased as he could be with the beginning of the season, he's also been happy to see that when the bad times come, his team hasn't rolled over and given up.

That much was evident when the Buckeyes responded to two big runs that UConn had against them during the game in Hartford, Conn., on Nov. 13. But Diebler wants to see the type of play that comes during those responses all the time.

"Our toughness comes out in the way that we respond," Diebler said. "The challenge for us internally is playing with that edge and that toughness all the time. We're still learning how to do that and how to get everybody doing it on the same day."

The issues were prevalent in the first half of the Nov. 16 game against Prairie View A&M when Diebler rotated through 11 different players early on. The Buckeyes struggled to make shots, going 9 of 28 from the field (32.1 percent) in the first 20 minutes, which Diebler said was the result of some poor shot selection from his team and solid defense from the Panthers.

But after the game, Diebler also said that the rotation is going to start thinning down as the Buckeyes get closer to Big Ten play so that they can be playing their best basketball in the conference.

"We're constantly evaluating our rotation, and we're going to have to make some tough decisions," Diebler said. "We're still in a phase of evaluating that and figuring out what's best."

The evaluation period may have been over on Nov. 19 when UMBC came to Columbus. Diebler had played 11 players in the first half of the game against Prairie View A&M. Even with a big lead over UMBC on Nov. 19, that first-half rotation was cut down to nine players.

Junior guard Curtis Givens III made that rotation, but he seemed to be the last in line since he played just under five minutes, which was the least of the nine. The two players who didn't make the cut were junior center Ivan Njegovan and junior forward Lee Aaliya.

Perhaps it was the rotation or possibly just the Buckeyes making shots, but whatever it was, Ohio State was much better to start the game against the Retrievers. They made 60.6 percent of their shots in the first 20 minutes (20 of 33) and 50.0 percent of their three-pointers (12 of 24) on the way to a 53-29 lead.

Then, they continued to play well in the second half. The three-ball didn't fall the way it did in the first half, with only 4 of 21 going in (19.0), but OSU still went 18 of 39 from the field in the final period (46.2) and outscored UMBC 48-33, getting them to the final score of 101-62

"We have significant sample sizes of guys who have shot the ball really well (in practice)," Diebler said. "Guys are starting to shoot more like they're capable of, which is really encouraging for us.

"The other thing is the quality of shot we've been able to manufacture has improved, and that has something to do with your efficiency, too. We turned down some good looks to get great ones for the majority of the game, which was really encouraging."

Mobley Reaches 1K Career Points

On a one-handed fastbreak dunk off a steal against UMBC in the second half with 4:44 left, junior guard John Mobley Jr. became the 63rd Ohio State men's basketball player in the history of the program to reach the 1,000-point mark.

With 15 points in the game, Mobley sat at 1,001 career points before the Nov. 24 matchup against No. 15 Vanderbilt at the Schottenstein Center. That had him tied with former Buckeye Sam Thompson, who played in Columbus from 2011 to 2015.

Mobley said he wasn't aware the milestone was coming up, but it felt great when he saw it.

"I had no idea. I was just out there playing the game, and when I was sitting on the bench, I looked up (at the scoreboard)," Mobley said. "Everybody (congratulated me). It was surreal. I watched Ohio State growing up all my life. To be able to join that club, it shows that all the hard work paid off."

Mobley said he thought it was cool that the milestone came on a dunk.

He hinted at a competition between him and junior guard Justin Pippen for who can dunk the most in games this season. Mobley joked about that being part of the reason he was glad for his milestone-reaching basket to be a dunk.

"I knew I was going to get it because JP caught me," Mobley said. "He has two dunks this year, and I had to capitalize and go for one again."

Mobley took the lead over Pippen again since this was his third dunk of the season.

Thompson Getting More Comfortable

In the first two games of his career, freshman forward Anthony Thompson struggled to get much going. He scored two points in his college debut against BYU in 20 minutes of game time and four points in the home opener against Youngstown State in just under 17 minutes. He shot a combined 1 of 11 in those two games.

But when Marshall came to Columbus, Thompson looked a little more comfortable on the court and put together his first double-digit scoring night with 11 points on 3-of-7 shooting with two makes from beyond the arc.

He made the first three-pointer of his career at 11:33 in the first half, and Diebler said after the game that it probably eased how Thompson felt on the court a little, comparing the freshman to the coach's brother, Jon, who was known for his three-point shooting as a Buckeye.

"It probably cut a little bit of tension," Diebler said. "If you remember, my brother really struggled from three his freshman year. He was an elite shooter, and he struggled early. I remember watching him, and you could almost feel the tension in the arena when he would shoot."

Diebler is just waiting to see the scoring from Thompson that he has seen in practice.

"Anthony is a tremendous shooter," he said. "He's really more than a shooter. He's a tremendous scorer. We've seen it in practice."

The head coach expected a good performance from Thompson at some point soon because of how he had been practicing and because the two of them had spoken about how he was feeling in-game, and Thompson had not lost any confidence.

"He and I spent some time together over the last couple of days on the court, grabbing lunch, and we had some very honest conversations," Diebler said. "His confidence has not wavered at all. I believed in him because of the way he's practiced.

"I just wanted to look him in the eye and say, 'Hey, man, how are you feeling?' He said, 'Coach, I feel good. I feel comfortable. I understand what I need to do.' I told him to stay aggressive and continue to find other ways to impact the game, which we saw him do."

After the win over Marshall, Thompson said that he is getting more comfortable in games the more he plays.

"I think I'm starting to get better with knowing my spots and knowing how I can get to my shots," Thompson said. "I've been working hard to have a good game, so it was really good to see the ball go in."

Thompson had a couple of strong games against the Panthers and Retrievers, scoring 12 and 11 points, respectively.

All of his points against Prairie View A&M came in the second half of the game. He finished that contest 4-of-8 shooting from the field, which included making 2 of 4 from three-point range and 2 of 2 from the free-throw line. He also added three rebounds.

He followed that with a 4-of-9 shooting performance against UMBC, making 3 of 8 from deep, with two rebounds and one block.

'27 Prospects Sign With OSU

Ohio State's two prospects in the 2027 class have officially signed with the program.

Fort Erie (Ontario) International Academy four-star power forward Deng Ngor (6-8, 200) and Kansas City (Kan.) Monarch Academy four-star point guard Jaxson Davis (6-0, 180) both became Buckeyes during the early signing period that began on Nov. 11.

Ngor didn't waste any time in signing with OSU, doing so the first day he was able to.

Diebler met with the media on Nov. 12 and spoke about Ngor's signing.

"Deng's recruitment was kind of old school, to be honest," Diebler said. "Luke Simons on our staff did a great job of identifying him early on when not a lot of people believed in him as a player at our level. We saw right away an elite competitor, a player with versatility, a player who impacts both sides of the ball. The more we got to know him, it became abundantly clear that he was our kind of guy."

Davis didn't take much longer, signing on Nov. 12 after Diebler had already spoken.

Diebler has made an attempt to ramp up his recruitment efforts in his three years and has been fairly successful, signing Thompson and LJ Smith in the 2026 class. Thompson was the first five-star signing in 12 years, and Smith was ranked a five-star in the 2027 class before he reclassified.

Ngor and Davis don't jump off the page when it comes to rankings quite the same way Thompson and Smith did, but they are still ranked highly.

Ngor is the No. 98 player in the country and No. 18 at power forward in the class, while Davis is No. 46 overall and the No. 11-ranked point guard. Diebler made clear that he understands that talent acquisition from the high school level is still extremely important in college basketball.

"When you look across the country, the best teams have really talented players," Diebler said. "That's what we're building toward. We have some really talented players. I think our program took a major step from last year to this year in regard to the roster."

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Buckeyes Win Two Over Low-Major Teams

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State got a short break from playing against top teams, beating Prairie View A&M and UMBC at home and shooting over 50 percent from the field in both of those games.

After a slow start to the season, junior guard Justin Pippen began to hit his stride, with 31 points combined in those two wins.

Buckeyes Struggle Through First

Ohio State (3-2) continued its trend of playing well for only one half in an 86-59 victory over Prairie View A&M (2-4) at the Schottenstein Center on Nov. 16 in front of 8,305 fans.

It was a five-point game at halftime, and while head coach Jake Diebler believed his team had some defensive breakdowns and bad shot selection, he also credited the Panthers for playing strong defense.

"We kept bringing the ball down, and they were attacking whoever had it around the rim," Diebler said about why the Buckeyes were missing so many shots in the first half. "They swarmed, attacked, swiped. I thought we played really rushed."

Ohio State was able to get out to a fairly strong start, taking a 13-5 lead at 14:06 behind three-pointers from junior guard John Mobley Jr., fifth-year guard Jimmie Williams and freshman guard LJ Smith.


LJ Smith

Diebler was subbing his players in and out consistently, rotating between different lineups every few minutes in the first half and ultimately playing 11 players in the period.

That may have made it tough to grab momentum with Prairie View A&M keeping the difference at single digits for the entire half. Williams had the strongest half for the Buckeyes with 11 points after 20 minutes, helping Ohio State hold a 34-29 lead midway through the game. The Buckeyes as a team shot 9 of 28 from the field (32.1 percent) and 5 of 17 from three-point range (29.4).

Whatever message Diebler gave his team in the locker room at halftime worked, with his team opening the second half on a 14-3 run. Pippen and sophomore forward Amare Bynum fueled the run with six points each. The Buckeye lead grew to 19 points at 9:18, 63-44, thanks to a second-chance layup from junior forward Andrija Jelavić.

Fifth-year center Josh Ojianwuna made a bucket at 5:55 to give the Buckeyes a 73-50 lead, and junior center Ivan Njegovan made two free throws with just over a minute left in the game to stretch the lead out to 29 points.

After a bucket for the Panthers, walk-on junior guard Braylen Nash scored the second basket of his Ohio State career with 19 seconds left in the game, and whatever fans hadn't left yet erupted in celebration. A two-point basket in the final seconds for Prairie View by Micah Bell got it to the final 27-point margin.

Ohio State's scoring was spread out, with Pippen leading the way at 14 points on 4-of-8 shooting. Williams had 13 points, while Bynum and freshman forward Anthony Thompson both scored 12. All of Thompson's scoring came in the second half. Mobley also joined in double digits with 10 points. Michael Eley led the Panthers with 22 points.

OSU Uses Three Ball For Big Win

After struggling to put together a strong full game in its first five contests, Ohio State (4-2) finally did so against UMBC (3-4) with a 101-62 victory at the Schottenstein Center on Nov. 19 in front of an announced 7,828 fans.

The scoring was well-distributed for the Buckeyes, but Pippen again led the way, this time with 17 points, adding seven assists and six rebounds along the way. The Buckeyes seemed to be threatening the program record for three-pointers made in a single game until they went cold from deep in the second half, but they made that up with efficiency inside.

The game began with an immediate alley-oop from Mobley to Bynum just 16 seconds in, but after the first two points of the game, the next 24 came from beyond the arc for Ohio State. Mobley started the three-point barrage on the next possession to go up 5-0. Pippen and Mobley took turns knocking down three-pointers to begin the game before Smith and Williams got involved with one each to make it 20-8 at the 13:11 mark. Not to be outdone, Pippen made two more of his own from deep to make it a 26-13 game with 10:54 left in the first half.

The Retrievers managed a short 6-0 spurt before Thompson broke the three-point streak with a driving layup before coming back down the floor and knocking down a deep ball of his own to extend the lead to 12.

After a few more inside shots than in the early going, junior guard Curtis Givens III, Smith and Williams each made another three to send the game into halftime with a 53-29 score. The Buckeyes were 12 of 24 from beyond the arc, which had them just six three-pointers made from tying the all-time program record that was set on Jan. 15, 2005, in a double-overtime loss against LSU. Pippen led the barrage with 4 of 5 from beyond the arc in the first 20 minutes.


Curtis Givens III

The second half started similarly to how the first half went, with Thompson making two three-pointers and Mobley one for a 67-37 lead with 16:16 to go.

From there, the Buckeyes couldn't buy a make from three-point range until Smith made one with 3:42 left in the game. But that didn't matter much for OSU, which built a 93-52 lead by that point and held on for the 39-point victory. The Buckeyes shot 4 of 21 from deep (19.0 percent) in the second half.

Along the way, with 4:46 left in the game, Mobley had a steal that led to a fast-break dunk that put him over 1,000 points in his Ohio State career.

The team finished with 16 makes from three-point range on 45 shots, the attempts being a program record.

Mobley (15 points), Bynum (14), Thompson (11), Smith (11) and Jelavić (10) scored double-digit points, joining Pippen, and Bynum managed a double-double with 10 rebounds. Riley Jacobs led UMBC with 16 points. Ohio State held a commanding 46 -28 edge on the glass.

"This was a great example of us taking a step forward and playing connected on both sides of the ball," Diebler said. "We've been practicing really well, and it's a great thing to see it translate into a game. We just have to continue to do it."

Ohio State has two more home games before BSB next goes to press. The Buckeyes first host No. 15 Vanderbilt on Nov. 24 (7 p.m., Peacock) before Lipscomb heads to the Schottenstein Center for a Nov. 29 game (5:30 p.m., BTN).

Ohio State 86, Prairie View A&M 59

Nov. 16, 2026
Schottenstein Center • Columbus

	1	2	F
PVA&M (2-4)	29	30	59
Ohio State (3-2)	34	52	86

PVA&M	Total Min	FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Wharton	31	2-3	0-0	1-2	2	3	5
Bynum	29	2-9	0-0	0-6	0	1	4
Williams	27	1-3	0-0	0-1	2	3	3
Eley	35	9-21	3-6	2-7	0	3	22
Mitchell	31	2-5	0-0	0-0	3	3	5
Ajiero	11	1-2	0-0	2-1	0	2	2
Ceaser	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Bell	16	4-9	1-3	1-0	1	3	9
Lee	16	4-6	0-0	0-1	1	2	9
Totals	**200**	**25-59**	**4-9**	**6-22**	**9**	**21**	**59**

Percentages: FG: 42.4%. **FT:** 44.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-18 (Eley 1-5, Lee 1-3, Mitchell 1-3, Williams 1-2, Bell 0-2, Bynum 0-2, Wharton 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 0. Turnovers: 10 (Bynum 2, Lee 2, Ajiero, Eley, Mitchell, Wharton, Williams, Team). **Steals:** 5 (Bynum 2, Ajiero, Lee, Mitchell).

Ohio State	Total Min	FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bynum	26	3-8	5-6	0-3	2	1	12
Jelavić	19	2-3	1-4	2-5	3	0	5
Thompson	23	4-8	2-2	0-3	0	1	12
Mobley Jr.	27	3-6	3-4	1-0	5	4	10
Pippen	26	4-8	3-4	2-2	2	1	14
Williams	26	3-7	5-6	0-4	3	1	13
Ojianwuna	15	2-2	0-0	1-5	0	0	4
LJ Smith	18	2-2	1-2	0-3	4	0	7
Aaliya	6	1-2	0-0	0-0	1	1	2
Givens III	7	0-1	1-2	0-0	0	1	1
Njegovan	6	0-1	4-4	2-1	0	2	4
Nash	1	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2
Totals	**200**	**25-49**	**25-34**	**9-27**	**20**	**12**	**86**

Percentages: FG: 51.0%. **FT:** 73.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 11-26 (Pippen 3-6, Williams 2-6, Thompson 2-4, Bynum 1-3, Mobley 1-3, LJ Smith 2-2, Aaliya 0-1, Givens 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Ojianwuna 2, Njegovan). **Turnovers:** 8 (Pippen 2, Bynum, Jelavić, Mobley, Njegovan, LJ Smith, Williams). **Steals:** 7 (Pippen 3, Mobley 2, Jelavić, Williams). **Officials:** Szelc, Kimble, Anderson. **Attendance:** 8,305.

Ohio State 101, UMBC 62

Nov. 19, 2026
Schottenstein Center • Columbus

	1	2	F
UMBC (3-4)	29	33	62
Ohio State (4-2)	53	48	101

UMBC	Total Min	FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Jacobs	18	6-9	4-6	2-0	1	3	16
Burton	26	0-4	0-0	0-2	2	2	0
Able	30	4-11	0-0	1-1	1	1	9
Ristic	21	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	1	3
Ceaser	15	3-8	0-1	0-4	0	4	9
Ndong	10	0-2	0-0	0-2	0	0	0
Varela	22	2-5	2-2	0-1	2	1	7
Huan	11	1-3	0-0	0-1	0	0	3
Morton	24	5-11	0-0	0-4	1	1	12
Barry	9	0-2	0-0	1-2	0	0	0
Ciunys	9	0-0	0-0	1-2	0	0	0
Ferry	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Slating	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	3
Totals	**200**	**23-60**	**6-9**	**7-21**	**7**	**13**	**62**

Percentages: FG: 38.3%. **FT:** 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 10-32 (Morton 2-6, Ceaser 3-5, Able 1-5, Varela 1-4, Huan 1-2, Ristic 1-2, Barry 0-2, Ndong 0-2, Slating 1-1, Burton 0-1, Ferry 0-1, Jacobs 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Jacobs). **Turnovers:** 16 (Ceaser 3, Huan 2, Jacobs 2, Ndong 2, Ristic 2, Barry, Burton, Ciunys, Morton, Varela). **Steals:** 6 (Burton 2, Morton 2, Jacobs, Ndong).

Ohio State	Total Min	FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Bynum	28	6-10	2-3	4-6	2	1	14
Jelavić	19	5-8	0-0	2-5	4	1	10
Thompson	20	4-9	0-0	0-2	0	0	11
Mobley Jr.	26	5-11	2-2	1-0	3	3	15
Pippen	26	6-10	1-3	1-5	7	2	17
Williams	20	2-8	2-2	1-1	1	1	8
Ojianwuna	14	0-0	0-0	1-3	1	0	0
LJ Smith	19	4-7	0-0	1-3	2	2	11
Givens III	15	3-5	2-2	0-3	1	1	9
Njegovan	5	1-2	0-0	1-2	0	0	2
Aaliya	4	1-1	0-0	1-1	1	1	2
A. Smith	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Nash	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Lazarević	1	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2
Totals	**200**	**38-72**	**9-12**	**15-31**	**22**	**12**	**101**

Percentages: FG: 52.8%. **FT:** 75.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 16-45 (Mobley 3-9, Pippen 4-8, Thompson 3-8, Williams 2-7, LJ Smith 3-6, Bynum 0-3, Givens 1-2, Jelavić 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Bynum 2, Jelavić, Njegovan, Ojianwuna, LJ Smith, Thompson). **Turnovers:** 11 (Mobley 3, Pippen 2, Bynum, Jelavić, Lazarević, Njegovan, Ojianwuna, LJ Smith). **Steals:** 11 (Pippen 3, Jelavić 2, Bynum, Givens, Mobley, Ojianwuna, LJ Smith, Williams). **Officials:** Phillips, Richardson, Floyd. **Attendance:** 7,828.



OSU Rebounding Shows Up Against Ole Miss

In his 14 years leading Ohio State, head coach Kevin McGuff's teams have been known at times for their speed, athleticism and intense full-court press defense, and they have often included prolific scoring guards.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE
Bobby Gorbett

Rarely, if ever, has one of McGuff's teams been known for its rebounding prowess. As evidenced by No. 19 Ohio State's 60-57 win over No. 19 Ole Miss – the two teams were tied in the AP poll when they played – on Nov. 18, that may be changing.

The Buckeyes dominated the Rebels on the glass by a margin of 51-33. Even McGuff wasn't sure the last time one of his teams did that in a game against a similarly ranked opponent.

"It's a great question. I don't know. I can't remember," McGuff said when asked about the last time his team handled the boards against a team as good as Ole Miss. "But it was good to see because sometimes you have to find a way, and we did it. We found a way with enough stops and rebounds."

In years past, the Buckeyes have prioritized using their speed, athleticism and defensive feistiness to generate extra possessions and easy fastbreak points with their full-court press. That approach has sometimes resulted in rebounding not being as much of a priority.


Kylee Kitts

The Buckeyes haven't even finished a season with a positive rebounding margin since 2019-20. Last year, the Buckeyes' rebounding margin of minus-.8 per game ranked just No. 219 nationally.

Although it is a small sample size, Ohio State already has an 8.6 margin on the glass.

Height certainly matters when it comes to a team's ability to rebound, and it undoubtedly helped the Buckeyes that two of their additions over the offseason were skilled forwards Sydney Mobley and Adriana Díaz. With the extra set of forwards on the roster, McGuff said rebounding was a particular area where the Buckeyes wanted to improve over the offseason.

"It's been a little bit of an emphasis for us just to be a better rebounding team in general, and offensive rebounding is part of that," McGuff said after Ohio State's season-opening win, a game in which the Buckeyes out-rebounded UIC 54-35, 25-15 on the offensive end.

Against national powerhouse UConn, Ohio State was outrebounded 39-31 in an 87-55 loss. McGuff made it clear to his team they could be better in that area against the Rebels.

"We knew we'd have to rebound well to win, so I was really happy with our effort there," McGuff said. "It was a team effort. Obviously, (junior center) Elsa (Lemmilä) and (junior forward) Kylee (Kitts) were really good on the glass, but (junior guard) Jaloni (Cambridge) was as well. When you're going to play offense like we did (Ohio State shot just 29.8 percent from the floor on 17-of-57 shooting), you're going to have to do something else about it. I was happy to see our defense hold up, and then our rebounding was really good."

Cambridge may not have led the team in rebounding against Ole Miss – that was Kitts with 15 rebounds – but her performance on the glass was probably the most impressive. The 5-7 guard grabbed a career-high 12 rebounds, matching Lemmilä's mark.

"I've been trying to box out sometimes, but I have a decent vertical, so if I can get some tips or something, that's what I have to do to help my teammates. Some of them were long rebounds, but that's what I have to be for this team."

Díaz Excels Against Ole Miss

In the offseason, Jaloni Cambridge and her sister Kennedy tried to tell anyone who would listen that Díaz had the potential to be the next star of Ohio State women's basketball. Díaz still has a long way to go before she can live up to that sort of praise, but it's easy to see the Cambridge sisters' vision.


Adriana Díaz

In the Buckeyes' win over Ole Miss, Díaz was one of the best players on the court. She finished the game scoring 15 points, while shooting 3 of 4 from the field and 7 of 7 from the free-throw line.

That performance was only one game after she scored 18 points, grabbed five rebounds and dished out four assists in her team's 93-49 win over Fairleigh Dickinson on Nov. 15.

"Especially when we've got other people not shooting very well, her ability to stretch the floor and make shots is critical," McGuff said of Díaz' performance against Ole Miss. "That's why we brought her here. I'm happy to see her starting to gain some confidence in this program, on this court, because we need that out of her. She's really capable of that, and hopefully she can continue to do that moving forward."

For the season, Díaz was averaging 7.3 points, 3.9 rebounds and 1.4 assists per game. The fact that she's earned at least 15 minutes of playing time in each of Ohio State's games against NCAA tournament-caliber foes UConn, Ole Miss and Texas points to her having gained the trust of McGuff.

Jaloni Cambridge believes Díaz still has plenty of room for growth.

"We saw her highlights, and I was super excited. Especially as a freshman coming in, she's so skilled, and we just have to keep building that confidence because she's a great player, and she knows she's a great player," Cambridge said. "I'm glad that she's shown that these past couple of games. She's going to keep improving for the next couple of games until the end of the season and then for years to come."

OSU Signs Chapman, Mason

Ohio State signed a couple of high-level recruits during the early signing period from Nov. 11 to 18. The class was led by Maplewood (Minn.) Hill-Murray four-star forward Mya Wilson (6-1) and Oakland (Calif.) Bishop O'Dowd four-star guard Myella Chapman (5-8). Wilson is ranked the No. 44 player nationally, the No. 11 small forward and the No. 11 player out of the state of Minnesota by the 247Sports composite. Chapman, meanwhile, is ranked the No. 51 player in the country, the No. 6 point guard and the No. 2 player from California.

The pair will be joined in the class by Cleveland Brush guard Tatiana Mason (5-10), who was unranked by On3 and 247Sports but has been committed to the Buckeyes since January.

In Twitter posts announcing the signings of each of the players, McGuff broke down what the trio can provide to the program.

"We are thrilled to welcome Mya Wilson to Ohio State," McGuff said. "Mya is a dynamic offensive player who brings tremendous scoring ability and versatility to our team. She has the ability to create her own shot, attack the basket, and stretch the floor with her perimeter shooting.

"Her skill and size on the perimeter make her a difficult matchup, and she has the basketball instincts to create opportunities for both herself and her teammates. We are excited about the different ways she will be able to impact our team and believe she has a tremendous future as a Buckeye. We couldn't be happier to have her as part of our program."

McGuff had similar praise for Chapman.

"She has a great feel for the game," he said, "does an excellent job creating opportunities for her teammates, and has the ability to push the pace and put pressure on opposing defenses. Her ability to control the game, make those around her better, and compete at a high level is something we really value. We are thrilled Myella chose Ohio State and look forward to the impact she will make on our program."

With Mason, McGuff said Ohio State fans should expect "an extremely versatile player with the ability to score at all three levels, create for herself and others, and make a significant impact defensively."

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Ohio State Goes 1-1 Against Ranked Foes

By BOBBY GORBETT
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State had an upgrade in competition since BSB last went to press. In their most pivotal week of nonconference play, the Buckeyes went 1-1 against a pair of ranked foes.

Ohio State's offense struggled in both games, but it defended and rebounded well enough to defeat Ole Miss at home.

OSU Picks Up Ranked Win

Defense, defense and more defense. That's how No. 19 Ohio State (5-1) was able to defeat also No. 19-ranked Ole Miss (4-1), 60-57, on Nov. 18 in front of 4,812 fans at the Schottenstein Center.

Despite shooting 17 of 57 (29.8 percent) from the floor in the win, Ohio State was still able to come through by holding the Rebels to a season low in points. Ole Miss shot 21 of 64 (32.8 percent) from the floor and also committed 20 turnovers.

Ohio State's defensive intensity was prevalent from the tip. The Buckeyes held the Rebels scoreless for the first 7:02 of the game to take a 10-0 lead.

The Rebels finally got on the board with a pair of free throws from guard Lauren Jacobs, who connected on the team's first field goal on their next possession. Ohio State responded with a 9-0 scoring run before the end of the first quarter to take a 19-4 lead at the break.

The Buckeyes missed their first 12 field-goal attempts of the second quarter, which allowed Ole Miss to cut the lead to 20-12 with 6:44 remaining before halftime. Elsa Lemmilä snapped the cold streak with a tip-in at 2:45. Junior guard Jaloni Cambridge helped the Buckeyes lead 30-20 at halftime with a layup with just under a minute to go followed by a basket from Ava Watson. Cambridge had 13 points in the first half.

After being held scoreless for over two minutes to start the second half, Ohio State's lead dwindled to six points. However, the Buckeyes were able to push their lead back to 11 on a layup by Lemmilä and a pair of free throws from Cambridge with 3:54 to go in the frame.

The Buckeyes led by 12 at 2:11 of the third quarter but had two fouls in the final 90 seconds of the period. The Rebels made four free throws in that span and a jumper by Jada Richard to cut Ohio State's lead to 46-39 at the end of the period.

Ole Miss scored on its first possession of the fourth quarter on a layup by Desrae Kyles to make it a five-point game, but Ohio State created separation with a 7-0 scoring run to lead 53-41 at the 7:03 mark.

The Buckeyes would then go on another shooting slump to give the Rebels life. Ole Miss capitalized with a pair of three-pointers to make it 56-49.

The Buckeyes' offensive struggles continued, and Talaysia Cooper made a clutch and-one three-pointer that made it a 59-57 game with 1:42 remaining. The Rebels had a chance to win it with just 10 seconds remaining after a Cambridge turnover. Cooper had an open three-point attempt at the top of the key, but her shot hit off the side of the rim. Cambridge then made one of two free throws at the line to put her team up three with eight seconds remaining.

The game certainly wasn't pretty. Not only did each team struggle from the floor, but they combined for 42 turnovers, with the Buckeyes charged with 22 of them.

"I think we set basketball back like 20 years tonight," McGuff joked. "We played hard. We competed at a high level against a very good Ole Miss team. We just were really sloppy, and part of that – give them credit. They play hard defensively. They're very crisp on the boards, and it's just not very pretty, but it's a really good win because we beat a very good team."

Interestingly, Ohio State held a 51-33 edge on the boards.

Cambridge was Ohio State's leading scorer with 27 points on 8-of-27 shooting in the win. Junior forward Kylee Kitts had a quiet scoring night with just three points but had a game-high 15 rebounds. Lemmilä, Kennedy Cambridge and Watson tied for the team high with three assists. Cooper had 14 points to lead Ole Miss in scoring.

Ohio State 60, Ole Miss 57

Nov. 18, 2026
Schottenstein Center • Columbus

	1	2	3	4	F
Ole Miss (4-1)	4	16	19	18	57
Ohio State (5-1)	19	11	16	14	60

Ole Miss	Min	Total M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Washington	17	2-4	0-0	2-0	0	3	5
Kyles	21	2-3	0-3	3-3	0	2	4
Tillman	17	1-1	4-4	0-1	0	2	7
Richard	32	3-15	2-3	0-2	2	2	10
Cooper	33	6-18	1-1	1-6	5	2	14
Civil	24	3-7	1-2	0-6	0	5	7
Okokoh	19	1-1	0-1	0-2	1	2	2
Jacobs	16	3-12	2-2	0-0	1	4	8
Godfrey	11	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	1	0
Anderson	10	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Totals	**200**	**21-64**	**10-16**	**9-24**	**9**	**23**	**57**

Percentages: FG: 32.8%. **FT:** 62.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-21. (Cooper 1-8, Richard 2-5, Washington 1-2, Jacobs 0-2, Civil 0-2, Tillman 1-1, Anderson 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 5 **Blocked shots:** 2 (Washington, Cooper). **Turnovers:** 20 (Richard 4, Civil 4, Godfrey 3, Kyles 2, Okokoh 2, Team 2, Washington, Cooper, Jacobs). **Steals:** 12 (Richard 2, Civil 2, Okokoh 2, Jacobs 2, Anderson 2, Tillman, Cooper).

Ohio State	Min	Total M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	28	1-4	1-2	5-10	0	2	3
Lemmilä	37	2-6	2-6	6-6	3	4	6
K. Cambridge	28	0-6	2-2	1-4	3	4	2
Watson	35	2-9	0-0	2-0	3	1	5
J. Cambridge	38	8-27	10-14	2-10	2	2	27
Martin	18	1-1	0-0	0-2	0	2	2
Díaz	16	3-4	7-7	0-0	0	4	15
Vanesko	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	**200**	**17-57**	**22-31**	**18-33**	**11**	**19**	**60**

Percentages: FG: 29.8%. **FT:** 71.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 4-20 (J. Cambridge 1-6, Watson 1-5, K. Cambridge 0-4, Díaz 2-3, Kitts 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Lemmilä 6, J. Cambridge). **Turnovers:** 22 (K. Cambridge 6, J. Cambridge 5, Lemmilä 4, Díaz 4, Kitts 2, Team). **Steals:** 8 (K. Cambridge 2, Watson 2, J. Cambridge 2, Lemmilä , Díaz).
Officials: Felicia Ginter, Brenda Pantoja, Kevin Pethel.
Attendance: 4,812

Bucks Go Cold Against Texas

No. 19 Ohio State (5-2) was doomed by a dismal offensive performance in its 75-61 loss to No. 5 Texas on Nov. 22 at Ariat Arena in Fort Worth, Texas.

The Buckeyes shot 19 of 57 (33.3 percent) in the loss, despite a solid performance from Jaloni Cambridge. Though dealing with foul trouble, Jaloni finished the game with 27 points on 9-for-20 shooting.

Ohio State wasn't terrible defensively but had no answer for Texas forward Breya Cunningham, who scored a team-high 24 points on 9-of-15 shooting.

It was a slow start for the Buckeyes. After an early layup by Lemmilä, Texas built a lead with a 7-0 scoring run. Texas guard Jayda Clark extended the Longhorns' lead with a three-point jumper with 3:00 remaining to make it 16-6, but the Buckeyes answered with five straight to make it 16-11 at the end of the quarter.

Jaloni Cambridge made an layup early in the second quarter, but she also picked up her third personal foul with 8:57 remaining before halftime and sat on the bench for the rest of the half.

The Buckeyes held up fine without Cambridge. Freshman forward Sydney Mobley cut the Texas lead to 24-21 with 3:37 remaining before the break with a driving layup. However, Ohio State made only one more field goal the rest of the half to trail 33-24 at halftime.

After not playing for much of the second quarter, Cambridge came out firing in the third. She scored 15 points in the frame and made a trio of three-point jumpers. However, the Buckeyes weren't as effective defensively, and Texas still led 53-43 heading into the fourth.

The Buckeye offense was even worse in the final period. It was held scoreless for the first 2:26, and Texas was able to score 16 straight points to lead 69-43.

The Buckeyes were a little bit more competitive late in the game but were only able to get within 14 points for the final margin.

"Give Texas credit," McGuff said of his team's loss. "They played a really good game. They certainly deserved it. From the tip, they were the aggressor. We were back on our heels. They set the tone right away, and we never really recovered."

While Jaloni Cambridge had a solid performance to lead the team in scoring, none of the other Buckeyes did their part on that end. Watson reached eight points, but she was just 3 of 13 from the field. Mobley had eight points on 3-of-4 shooting, but she fouled out in under 13 minutes of playing time.

Kennedy Cambridge led the Buckeyes with nine rebounds, and Watson had a team-high four assists. Ohio State struggled on the glass, getting outrebounded 49-33 with Cunningham pulling down 13. Texas took advantage of OSU's foul trouble, hitting 25 of 26 from the stripe (96.2 percent).

Before BSB next goes to press, Ohio State will play VCU in Richmond, Va., at noon on Nov. 28. The game can be viewed on ESPN+.

Texas 75, Ohio State 61

Nov. 22, 2026
Ariat Arena • Fort Worth, Texas

	1	2	3	4	F
Texas (6-0)	16	17	20	22	75
Ohio State (5-2)	11	13	19	18	61

Ohio State	Min	Total M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Kitts	30	0-1	0-2	1-2	1	3	0
Lemmilä	24	1-4	2-4	1-3	0	4	4
K. Cambridge	40	1-7	5-8	2-7	1	3	7
Watson	34	3-13	0-0	1-0	4	2	8
J. Cambridge	28	9-20	6-7	2-5	1	4	27
Martin	12	1-3	0-0	0-2	0	0	3
Díaz	16	0-4	0-0	1-3	0	4	0
Mobley	13	3-4	1-1	1-0	0	5	8
Vanesko	4	1-1	2-2	0-1	0	0	4
Totals	**200**	**19-57**	**16-24**	**9-24**	**7**	**25**	**61**

Percentages: FG: 33.3%. **FT:** 66.7%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-19. (J. Cambridge 3-8, Watson 2-5, Mobley 1-2, Martin 1-2, K. Cambridge 0-1, Díaz 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 1 **Blocked shots:** 7 (Lemmilä 6, Mobley). **Turnovers:** 20 (Watson 6, K. Cambridge 4, J. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä 2, Díaz 2, Mobley). **Steals:** 12 (K. Cambridge 4, J. Cambridge 3, Lemmilä 2, Mobley 2, Watson).

Texas	Min	Total M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Cunningham	28	9-15	6-6	6-7	0	4	24
Booker	35	3-13	6-6	5-4	4	4	12
Preston	25	3-5	5-5	0-1	5	4	11
Vann	12	0-2	0-0	3-1	0	0	0
Clark	37	6-22	1-2	2-5	5	2	15
Etute	12	0-2	4-4	1-3	0	2	4
Spaight	15	1-1	1-1	0-1	0	2	3
Crittendon	13	1-3	0-0	1-2	1	1	2
Bjorn	20	1-4	2-2	0-3	0	4	4
Graves	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Holguin	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	**200**	**24-67**	**25-26**	**20-29**	**15**	**24**	**75**

Percentages: FG: 35.8%. **FT:** 96.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 2-11 (Clark 2-9, Booker 0-1, Vann 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Cunningham, Etute, Crittendon). **Turnovers:** 20 (Booker 7, Spaight 4, Preston 2, Clark 2, Etute 2, Cunningham, Vann, Crittendon). **Steals:** 7 (Preston 3, Booker 2, Cunningham, Clark).
Officials: Natasha Camy, Gina Cross, Maggie Theman.
Attendance: N/A

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Ohio State Czechs All The Boxes For Frosh

The easy pun is that freshmen Jakub Fibigr and Jakub Milota are Czech mates.

So, that's the route to take. Yes, they are roommates from Czechia (formerly known as the Czech Republic), they grew up near each other, and for a time their fathers worked together, but there is a significant difference between them.

IN THE CREASE
Craig Merz

Milota is a goalie who, in his limited time, has twice beaten the No. 1 team in the country, while Fibigr is a defenseman. He had been out due to an injury until making his first appearances at Wisconsin on Nov. 13 and 14.

"It's really cool that we both end up here," Fibigr said. "There was some talks about Ohio State before we decided, but it wasn't based off, 'If you go, I will go.'

"We were talking to different schools, a lot of options, but it worked out. It's great to have a Czech buddy."

Milota in particular is following a Czech legacy he has never met, and his first name alone conjures thoughts of one of OSU's great goalies. Jakub Dobeš parlayed two notable seasons from 2021-23 into his current team, the Montreal Canadiens. Coincidentally, they are from the same hometown, Ostrava.

"Obviously, I know he was here (at Ohio State)," Milota said. "He did pretty good here, and once he started to be an NHL goalie, he popped up into my mind even more. Last year, I was around Montreal playing juniors, and I had a chance to watch him play a couple of times."

Dobeš was the 2022 Big Ten Goaltender and co-Freshman of the Year, first-team All-Big Ten and unanimous Big Ten All-Freshman Team. He was also a Mike Richter Award (top goalie in NCAA) semifinalist and Big Ten Player of the Year finalist.

The following year he was a Richter semifinalist, honorable-mention All-Big Ten and a Big Ten Goalie of the Year finalist.

You'd better believe Dobeš' name came up a few times when Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik was recruiting Milota.

"You've got Jakub and Jakub, and they're both from Ostrava, pretty ironic," Rohlik said. "He knows exactly who Jakub Dobeš is, which certainly is fantastic for our program."

Welcome Aboard

OSU now has a pipeline for Czech goalies: Tobias Tvrznik signed his letter of intent on Oct. 18 for the 2027-28 season. The fourth-round pick (No. 126) in the 2026 NHL draft by the Colorado Avalanche plays for the Wenatchee Wild in the Western Hockey League.

"I give credit to Carter (Crier, goalie coach) and our staff out there working hard in identifying him," Rohlik said. "I think he's had a tremendous year so far. He had a good year last year, and he's a young guy. He's a big kid (6-4).

"He's got a big year ahead of him. Still, we just want him to keep getting better, and hopefully he's ready to go when he gets here in six months, seven months."

Rohlik said the school helps acclimate the European players coming through the program. In addition to the Czechs, Swedes Sascha Boumedienne and Erik Påhlsson are on the roster.

"Academically, our university does a fantastic job to make them feel comfortable. I think that's a big part of it as well," Rohlik said. "We just see the hockey, but the other aspect of it, I think this university does as well as anybody, and I think that helps ease some questions that these guys might have academically."

It also helped that Fibigr and Milota not only learned English as part of their education beginning in middle school in Czechia, but they also came to North America to play junior hockey before joining the Buckeyes.

They grew up about an hour apart – Fibigr is from Unicov – and competed against each other in youth leagues and tournaments.

"Our dads worked together, but that was a while ago," Milota said. "They don't work together anymore now, but that's how we knew each other from a really young age."

After so many years as opponents, Fibigr and Milota became teammates for international play on the junior national team. They were roommates when Czechia won the bronze medal at the 2025 World Junior Championships in Ottawa (Fibigr also won silver in 2026).

By that time each was playing in the Canadian Hockey League. Fibigr played three seasons in the Ontario Hockey League, starting with Mississauga in 2023-24. The franchise moved to Brampton in 2024-25, and he was there until being traded to Windsor during the 2025-26 season, where he had 16 points (two goals, 14 assists) in 29 regular-season games and 12 points (three goals, nine assists) in 13 postseason games.

Milota spent three seasons in the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League. He was the league's rookie goalie of the year in 2023-24 with Cape Breton in the first of two seasons with the Eagles. He was traded to Blainville-Boisbriand before the 2025-26 season and played only three games before sustaining a season-ending injury.

Rohlik said the recruiting never stopped for Milota despite his injury and for Fibigr after the NCAA allowed players from the Canadian major junior leagues (WHL, OHL and QMJHL) to become eligible beginning with the 2025-26 season.

"The staff did a heck of a job," Rohlik said. "When everything changed with the major junior rule, it really put college hockey and recruiting in a blender trying to figure out, 'OK, where do we need to be? Where to go?' It gave us the opportunity to go out and get involved with these two guys and other guys as well.

"I think there's some comfort with these guys knowing that we've had Europeans. We've had Czechs. We've had Swedes. We've had Russians. I think that's got a lot to do with it as well."

The NCAA rule change allowed Fibigr to learn a bit of history about Ohio State and Dobeš.

"Before he was playing for the (Canadiens), I didn't know much about him," Fibigr said. "I didn't know much about college hockey here because it wasn't an option before. So then I got all the research on it, and obviously I knew he went here.

"I knew they've had Czech guys, Swedes or whatever. The team is good with guys from Europe, so it was just great to see a Czech guy who's been through the program now playing for Montreal."

Overcoming Adversity

Milota's first game in 13 months since his injury was a 5-3 loss at Sacred Heart on Oct. 16. He made 17 saves the next night for his first win, 5-1, to split the series.

"Honestly, I didn't feel rusty or something," Milota said. "I was pretty confident coming in that I can play hockey. It was more about getting my body back into shape, being better prepared physically and mentally. Mentally, I thought I did a good job, and I was just excited to play."

Milota has started the past eight games with incumbent Kristoffer Eberly nursing an injury and made 26 saves in a 5-2 win over top-ranked Michigan on Oct. 31 and 27 saves for a 2-1 victory at new No. 1 Wisconsin on Nov. 14.

"He worked his tail off to get back to be in a position where he's in," Rohlik said after the win at Wisconsin. "I was happy for him. He was certainly a difference maker, which gives the team a lot of confidence."

Rohlik was also impressed by Fibigr debuting against the best team in the country.

"It was pretty amazing for a freshman to step into that environment against that team and be your first two games of a college career," the coach said. "I thought he did very well."

While the Czechs took divergent paths to Columbus, they have the same goal: play in the NHL. In that regard, they have a foundation to get there.

Fibigr was a seventh-round pick (No. 202) of the Seattle Kraken in the 2024 NHL draft.

"I like the organization. I've been through a lot with them," he said. "I've been to training camps, development camps, and it was so cool. I've been to my fifth camp with them this summer.

"Before, if you were in college, you can't go to the training camp, but if you're playing in the juniors, you can, so I was able to do that. It was really cool to be practicing with the NHL players. You get to learn from them, and they've been awesome to me."

Milota went in the same draft to the Nashville Predators in round four (No. 99).

"It's a great feeling," Milota said. "It's one of your childhood dreams to get drafted to the NHL. I can't believe it."

The Predators have been in constant contact with him this season, namely director of goaltending Mitch Korn, the guru for goalies. He's been in the NHL for the past 36 years after being an assistant coach for Miami (Ohio).

"The Nashville organization is great, especially for the goalie in development," Milota said. "I'm really grateful that I was drafted there because Mitch Korn is a legend in coaching in the NHL and he's a great guy. I get a lot of help from all the coaches there, and they try to develop me, which I'm really grateful for. I cannot complain about that at all."

No Luck Vs. Irish

The Buckeyes were unable to build on their win over Wisconsin and lost 7-3 and 3-2 to Notre Dame at the Schottenstein Center on Nov. 20 and 21.

Milota in the opener had his worst game of the season and was pulled at 10:38 of the first period trailing 4-0 after stopping eight of 12 shots. Freshman Jack Erickson made his college debut and saved 23 of 25 with the Fighting Irish also scoring into an empty net after OSU rallied.

It was 5-0 when Max Montes, Jake Karabela and Ryan Rucinski scored to pull within 5-3 with six minutes left in the third period, but Notre Dame scored on the power play three minutes later.

The next night, OSU (4-8-0, 2-4-0) jumped to a 2-0 lead on power-play goals by Felix Caron with Karabela assisting on both before the Fighting Irish (7-6-1, 5-2-1) came back to net the winner at 7:40 of the third.

The potential tying score for the Buckeyes crossed the goal line just as time expired. Milota made 13 saves.

Next

The Buckeyes play at Union on Nov. 27 (7 p.m.) and 28 (5 p.m.). Both will be streamed on ESPN+.

They return home for Michigan State on Dec. 3 (8 p.m.) and Dec. 4 (6 p.m.) with BTN showing the series.

For a full recap of the Notre Dame series, go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



Buckeye Nation Out In Full Force After Loss

Apparently, a good deal of Buckeye Nation missed the last print issue because it is once again engaging in the same tomfoolery it was cautioned against.

A manhood-stealing road loss against Nebraska resulted in Ohio State suffering its fourth loss of the season, the first time it has had that many since the forgettable 2011 Luke Fickell campaign. That was also the last time OSU fell to Nebraska, giving up 28 second-half points in the process.

THE FACTS MAN
Mike Wachsman

After dispensing a ton of wisdom in this space following the Oregon loss, I was hopeful that Ohio State fans had mellowed a bit and understood that this season was not one of championship vintage, and that expectations should be tempered after the season-ending elbow injury to Julian Sayin. That meant accepting whatever results occurred and not getting into their feelings and spouting nonsense such as Ryan Day needs to be fired.

I should have known better.

To think that an entitled, spoiled fan base would accept even one season of subpar results was my mistake. After years of dealing with them and reading their nonsense, it should have been expected that they would be out in force, pitchforks ablaze, calling for Day's head.

It is time for me to realize that it's a losing battle trying to reason with the unreasonable, so the battle will be no more. I will merely laugh when it is suggested that Day be replaced by Nick Saban, Urban Meyer or Brian Hartline. Yes, you read that right – Brian Hartline.

Now, this does not mean that Ohio State is immune from criticism.

A week after looking like it had fixed many of its ailments, the Buckeyes came out swinging against the Huskers. OSU forced a punt on Nebraska's first drive and quickly went ahead when Luke Fahey found Jeremiah Smith single-covered – when will these teams *learn*? – for a 67-yard pitch and catch.

It was not difficult to imagine the miles-wide smiles radiating from Ohio State fans, but they slowly turned to frowns as Nebraska looked like it went back in time and leaned on a bruising ground game to forge a 21-7 lead. The Huskers routinely got to third down, and Ohio State was powerless to stop it from converting. Nebraska was 10 of 16 on third down and converted on 6 of 9 in the first half. Short or long, the Huskers were successful.

"When you watch a game like this, you have a lot of things you've got to change," Day said. "I'm not going to jump into all of that right now. This game right here, we see the third-down conversions, especially in the first half, and then some of the plays they made against us, it certainly cost us. We were unable to get off the field, and that was extremely frustrating."

Teams are not going to win football games if they cannot get the opposing offense off the field, and that in the end was Ohio State's downfall. While time of possession is not nearly as relevant as it was 20 years ago, on this afternoon it told nearly the whole story. Nebraska controlled the ball for over 35 minutes and ran 73 plays to just 49 for the Buckeyes.

OSU averaged nearly 7 yards per play and scored 28 points, which more often than not results in victory. But not on this day.

Therein lies the problem – a defense that just a year ago was airtight and the best in the land has become a sieve, taking poor angles, missing tackles and playing soft coverage far too often. It's nearly as bad as the 2018 season when the Buckeyes allowed 28 points or more six times that season – including games of 39, 49 and 51.

Part of it is that OSU simply lacks the experience and star power that it had for the last two seasons. No Caleb Downs, no Sonny Styles, no Arvell Reese. A mistake could be made, but it would be masked by another talented player picking up the slack. Those guys also held you accountable, and there is no one on this year's squad who seems willing to do that.

And then there is Matt Patricia.

Yes, he designed championship defenses in the NFL and oversaw a great unit last year for Ohio State. But it is looking more and more like he is someone who needs high-level talent for his scheme to work, and it has worked little in 2026. A coach is supposed to adapt and understand his unit's weakness, but Patricia is running largely what he ran last year despite the talent decline.

So here we are.

Ohio State has no shot at a championship, Big Ten or otherwise, and must use pride to end the season on a high note.

Some of Buckeye Nation seems to think that there is a culture problem within the program, but unless they are there all the time, there is no way for them to know that. There are coaching issues, and the hope is that Day sees fit to shake things up when the season is over.

"At the end of the year we'll evaluate everything and figure out what to do next," Day said.

This season is shaping up to look like Ohio State's 2004 campaign under Jim Tressel, in more ways than one. That group won a national title two seasons earlier but was inconsistent, with spotty quarterback play and losses to unranked Northwestern, Iowa and Purdue. While social media was not a thing back then, there were people calling for an end to "Tresselball." Fortunately for Ohio State, that season turned out to be a blip on the radar as the Buckeyes won 10 games the following year, then played in back-to-back national championship games.

Then, as now, OSU fans lacked the patience to see the bigger picture and were willing to overhaul the program because of an underachieving season.

Incidentally, fans called for the head of Woody Hayes on a number of occasions, too. About the only coach who was not routinely harangued was Urban Meyer, though after the 2014 national title the program slipped just enough that it was never again a true national title contender. So you would think that fans would have noticed and spoken up.

If this was Day's third season in four of this many losses, then talking about his job security would be completely rational.

But he is one of the all-time winningest coaches in college football history by percentage, and there is nothing to indicate that this is the start of a big tumble down the mountain. If he does not make coaching staff changes (both coordinators and a position coach or two), or if there are major transfers by front-line starters or if there are three or more losses next season, then we can revisit this.

But for now – just know that I do not want to have to repeat myself yet again, Buckeye Nation.

Only One Thing Matters

Anyone who has followed this space over the years knows that I put more value on making the CFP and vying for a national title than I do on the outcome of the Michigan game.

With the biggest goal now off the table, it can be said confidently that the only thing that matters now is the Buckeyes beating the Wolverines. Last year's physical, methodical victory in Ann Arbor stemmed the tide of losses in the series, but this is a different season.

Neither the Buckeyes nor Wolverines are playing at a high level, but that takes little luster off of The Game for those with a deep passion for it. Anyone worth their scholarship will be juiced for this game, for the chance to rub it in the face of their rival and to make life uncomfortable for the next 364 days.

"We don't have a choice, we have to get this thing together for the next week," Day said. "That's what I'm thinking about right now. We have to figure it out."

Only thrice in my lifetime has neither team been ranked heading into The Game – 1966, 1967 and 1987 – and the visiting team has won every time. Something to think about.

I have been around football long enough to know that nothing is ever guaranteed. One team can look colossally outmatched yet end up winning. Just think back to 2024 if you doubt.

That said, I would be pretty surprised if the Wolverines walked out of Ohio Stadium with a victory. Yeah, OSU has limped to the finish line but has shown that it can still score points.

Luke Fahey played his best game against Nebraska, finishing with a 95.0 QBR figure (sixth best nationally for the week according to ESPN) and throwing two touchdown dimes to Smith. Michigan's offense has been inconsistent, to put it nicely. There are a few pieces, but the Wolverines have had quarterback issues and recently fired offensive coordinator Jason Beck. So scoring has been a real chore. Throw in the fact that first-year coach Kyle Whittingham has had to ignore whispers of pending unemployment and it could mean extra pressure.

Michigan did manage to knock off previously unbeaten UCLA thanks to a swarming defense, and that defense is what could keep the Wolverines in the game with the Buckeyes. U-M has no one who can cover Smith, and running quarterbacks have been able to cause problems for the Maize and Blue. Fahey will no doubt feel some nerves in his introduction to the rivalry, but if he can settle in and make some plays with his legs, the Buckeye offense can keep its defense in the place it is at its best – on the bench.

In a down year, a win over your rival can salve even the deepest hurt.

Trivia Time

Only two sets of father and son played for Woody Hayes – can you name both of them?

Answer at the bottom.

There Is An I In Heisman

During the Nebraska game, I received a text from a friend who asked whether the loss would affect Jeremiah Smith's quest for the Heisman Trophy.

I told the friend that I would be more surprised if he did not win it than if he did, but given how the Heisman voters seem to believe that team wins are relevant to an individual award, it is possible that Smith does not bring home the hardware.

There is not a rational thinker out there who honestly believes Smith is anything other than the best player in college football. And that is precisely what the award is supposed to honor. Not "best player on best team," simply the most outstanding player.

It has become largely a quarterback award and a stats award, and while Smith is not a quarterback, he has the numbers to back up his candidacy. Here is a realistic scenario: Smith does not run away with the first-place votes but receives very few votes lower than second. If he hordes the second-place votes, there should be enough first-place mentions that he ends up winning it. It might be closer than it should be, but he still wins it.

If for some reason he does not win it, it would end up being a bigger travesty than Ndamukong Suh not winning it in 2009 despite having a historically great season on defense – 85 tackles, 20½ tackles for loss, 12 sacks, 28 quarterback hurries, three blocked kicks and an interception. As a defensive tackle, no less.

Smith has been the best player in college football for two seasons running, and even though Ohio State fans know it, it would be nice if the rest of America woke up to the fact.

Trivia Answer

One of the two is fairly easy – halfback/defensive back Hop Cassady and son Craig, who played defensive back. The other is a bit more obscure – Dick Logan, who played offensive guard, and son Jeff, who succeeded Archie Griffin at running back.

What The Shuck? Cornhuskers Expose OSU Flaws

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I had a hard time sleeping last night. I was worried about what I was going to say in this space when I sat down to it in the morning after the Nebraska game. Usually, by that time I already have something clearly in mind, and the column pretty much writes itself from there.

This time around, I know that something is terribly wrong with the Ohio State football team, but I can't put my finger on what exactly it is. I guess if I knew, I would be the one making Ryan Day's salary.

A few weeks back, even before this disastrous string of losses to USC, Oregon and Nebraska, I had made up my mind that this particular edition of the Buckeyes was not a championship-caliber team. I don't recall exactly when it was, but I believed it to be true. But not being a championship contender and being the team that we have seen the last few weeks, especially against Nebraska, are two completely different things.

The defense has been struggling for weeks, usually playing solid D for much of the game but ultimately succumbing to the big play or plays. But against the Huskers, the defense was porous from Nebraska's second drive of the game (penalties, not the Buckeyes thwarted their first), when they easily marched 63 yards on 13 plays for a score, to Nebraska's final drive when quarterback Anthony Colandrea easily converted two third downs to deny the Buckeyes the ball when they were only down by three and in possession of the greatest weapon in college football this year.

This was the worst defensive performance by the Buckeyes since the debacle in game two against Texas. In the game against the Longhorns, at least the defensive collapse came in the final 15 minutes. As mentioned, against the Cornhuskers, it was an almost full-game affair.

Watching Nebraska surgically dissect the Buckeye defense was painful. When I got a look at the final stat sheet, I was stunned to see the Huskers had only 376 total yards. Following the game in real time, I would have guessed something more like 500. Seeing Colandrea run the offense with its creative and well-executed plays was doubly difficult for me because I couldn't help but compare it to Ohio State's offense, which, to this untrained eye, seems limited to running Bo Jackson up the middle or forcing the ball to Jeremiah Smith, regardless of how many players are covering him.

I'm not sure how creative that is, but again, I have an untrained eye. The Buckeyes racked up 335 yards of offense, with Smith accounting for 165 of them, almost half. Where would the Buckeyes be without Smith?

As I opened, there is something terribly wrong with this program. It shows in more than just the execution on both sides of the ball.

Of course there are the penalties. The Buckeyes were flagged for seven more for another 55 yards. With the Buckeyes, it's not just the number, it's frequently the timing of the fouls. In my weekly watch of Ohio State's penalty rankings, the performance in this loss left the Buckeyes 97th nationally in number of penalties per game and 64th in yardage marched off per game. Wouldn't a properly functioning program get this problem at least somewhat cleaned up?

And what's an Ohio State game without some sort of special teams malfunction? This time, Joe McGuire got off a 48-yard punt, but let's just say it may have been hang-time challenged. Jacory Barney Jr. returned it 21 yards, putting Nebraska in business at the OSU 38. The Huskers cashed in only for a field goal. But those three points proved to be the winning margin in the game.

And speaking of critical field goals, who is to say if Ohio State had gotten the ball back in the final minutes of the game and moved the ball that Connor Hawkins would have been able to tie the game with a clutch field goal? Ohio State, including Hawkins in the Texas game, does not have a great track record making clutch field goals of late.

Most Buckeye fans and observers seem to not be questioning the talent of Ohio State on either side of the ball. They seem to be zeroing in on the coaching. At first, new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith was the prime target. Last year's darling, DC Matt Patricia, seems to be the one under the microscope now.

In his very brief remarks after the game, Day gave something similar to what has become his standard postgame response after a loss. AI could have easily scripted this.

"I'll say it again, when you lose the game, you lose the game as a team," he said. "It was not good enough as a group. For me to sit here and point out one group that came up short in this game would not be right because it took all of us to lose this game. But I think we all recognize the things that we've come up short in this year. I'm just as frustrated as anybody."

When he speaks after these losses, there always seems the implication that the coaching staff is part of the problem. I always get this feeling that behind closed doors, staff meetings might be volatile.

Now that Patricia, who coached the top defense in the nation last season, is the coach on the hot seat du jour, Day was asked about Patricia's ability to produce a game plan to beat Michigan.

"Well, we don't have a choice, so we have to get this thing together in the next week to go win this game," he said of his confidence in Patricia.

Not a particularly ringing endorsement. When asked if changes might be upcoming after the season, Day was also not especially forthcoming.

"When you watch a game like this, you have a lot of things that have to change," Day said. "I'm not going to jump to anything right now, because we have a game we have to play in another week."

AI might have given a more specific answer.

Jeremiah And His Feet

One of the things that makes Jeremiah Smith a cut above the many other great receivers is his control of his feet along the sideline or endline. He demonstrated that ability again on his 31-yard touchdown catch against Nebraska. Not only was his catch from Luke Fahey dazzling, but he also left no doubt that he was inside the end zone for the score. He has an amazing combination of awareness and agility.

I said this at the time, but it's worth repeating. If Smith had been on the receiving end of Indiana quarterback Josh Hoover's pass on the final offensive play for the Hoosiers in the Buckeyes' win, Ohio State would probably be 6-5 right now, because a wide-open Smith would have almost certainly gotten at least one of his feet down for the score.

By the way, while I don't have a huge sample to base this on, Fahey may be a little bit better than Julian Sayin when it comes to those long passes. Fahey led Smith perfectly on that 67-yard touchdown pass to Smith to open Ohio State's scoring. Sayin tends to slightly underthrow that pass. Fortunately Smith is good enough to come back and get it, especially because he is generally wide open.

How To Salvage A Season

Most readers of Buckeye Sports Bulletin are of my generation. We grew up on football in the dark ages – before NIL, the transfer portal, every game on TV and, most importantly, before there were playoffs. In those ancient days, if you were Ohio State or Michigan and you were having a disappointing season (and this year qualifies as a disappointing season for both schools), there was a way to salvage that season – beat your rival in The Game.

I keep thinking back to 1987.

Now that was a disappointing season for the Buckeyes. In the lead-up to The Game, an already struggling Ohio State team under Earle Bruce lost to Iowa on a stunning fourth-and-23 desperation touchdown pass with six seconds remaining. That was enough of "Ol' 9-3 Earle" for most of Buckeye Nation, including the powers that be at Ohio State, who fired Bruce two days later.

There was only one problem, and it is one of the points of this note. Ohio State-Michigan week was sacred to Buckeye fans back then. There were not to be any distractions, certainly not firing your coach only days before The Game. Suddenly fans of all types rallied around Bruce, who had been almost ridiculed through the years for his somewhat dumpy look, his conservative offense and his monotonous record.

Most importantly, the Buckeye players rallied around Bruce. In a surprise move, they greeted Bruce, who was dressed in what is now known as his trademark charcoal suit and fedora, wearing "Earle" headbands. And they backed that show of support up with a hard-fought 23-20 win in Ann Arbor.

"All of the things that have happened this year, all of the games we didn't win this year, and all that happened this past week makes today worthwhile," said quarterback Tom Tupa after the victory.

Tupa had one of his better games, completing 18 of 26 passes for 219 yards and a pair of scores. As a side note, Tupa was knocked out of the game briefly. Freshman Greg Frey, making his first real impact as a Buckeye, came in for one play and converted a 19-yard pass to Vince Workman on third-and-9, down to the Michigan 18. Four plays later, Matt Frantz hit the game-winning field goal from 26-yards out.

It was sweet revenge for Frantz, who just one year earlier, had missed a 45-yarder in the waning moments that led to a 26-24 Wolverine victory. That was the game before which Michigan quarterback Jim Harbaugh guaranteed a win to clinch a trip to the Rose Bowl. I've never liked Harbaugh since. That type of showboating was just something you didn't do in that rivalry.

My point in bringing this all up is that even though the Buckeyes were 6-4-1 that season, people remember that 1987 season fondly – all because of that victory over their rival.

And as for the late and frequently mocked Bruce, he went on to become one of the most beloved Buckeyes of all time, and the path to that iconic status started on the field in Michigan Stadium on Nov. 21, 1987.

Now, almost 40 years later, can the current Buckeyes salvage their season the way the Buckeyes did then? With the playoffs now the main objective for players of today's era, I wonder if beating Michigan means the same to them as it does to us old folks. I know they talk the talk, but are they ready to walk the walk it takes to win in the greatest rivalry of them all?

"The Buckeyes are about to test the old theory of how a win in The Game can salvage a season although I'm not sure if anything can salvage this one," BSB editor emeritus Mark Rea writes elsewhere in this paper. "After being anointed preseason No. 1, OSU faces the very real possibility of finishing a season unranked for the first time since that disaster in 2011."

BSB Battles On

I had an interesting conversation with a (former?) BSB subscriber the other day. Upon calling, he immediately identified himself as a subscriber for 30 years.

"I am not renewing my subscription," he told me. "You can't deliver the paper on time and now you put two issues up online only."

He seemed to miss the irony of his lament. Because of the many longtime readers who have dropped their subscriptions because of delivery problems, something we have no control over, we were forced to put those two complete editions online only. I made the decision, and it was to protect our status as a print publication, not to switch to a digital format, which our readers simply do not prefer.

Here we are, back again with what I think is a rather good print edition.

The two online issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin were complete, with all of your favorite features, and look just like a BSB print issue. They are still available online.

This is not a permanent format change. We still believe the 24 print issue format, with weekly print issues in football season, best suits our readers.

I speak to BSB subscribers every day, and I know how much BSB means to you. But I also know how difficult the delivery and affordability issues have been. Hopefully, with the election mail season over and gas prices coming down, these problems will soon be a thing of the past, and BSB will be back up to full speed and schedule. But we need your help.

Special thanks to our VIPs, who have stepped up to help fill the void of the past few weeks without hesitation, some making donations above and beyond the call of duty. There are only about 100 VIPs who are helping keep BSB vibrant and viable for all readers. Now would be a great time for those of you who are not already VIPs to join the fold. Instructions on how to gain this status can be found on page 6 of this issue.

We also ask that those of you who have been offered a discount pay full price to help underwrite those subscribers who love BSB but struggle with their subscription payment. I have said this before. If 1,000 readers paid just $20 more, it would generate enough extra money to print and mail three issues, which would cover the issues we were forced to put online only and then some.

Many of you will be receiving renewal cards in the next few days, and now is the time to renew and help protect the print issues after 60 days of very sluggish business.

Finally, now is also the time for those of you who are not utilizing the electronic BuckeyeSports.com to sign up for access, free with your subscription. You can read the online issues, as well as enjoy all the other features of the website. Instructions to sign up can be found on page 7. Many, many of you have been jumping on for the first time.

Thanks for your understanding and 46 years of support. If you have any questions you can give us a call at (614) 486-2202 during regular business hours. I personally have spoken to many of you in the last few weeks, and your patience, understanding and love of Buckeye Sports Bulletin are apparent and very heartwarming for me and our loyal staff.

Michigan Memories

This is the Michigan Memories issue of BSB, one of my favorite issues each year.

Here is a special comment about The Game from Jim Tressel, delivered via Dan Herron in his Michigan Memory.

"Coach Tressel would say, 'In this game, everything means more.' If you get a run for 3 yards, that's like going 5 yards. You get a run for 10 yards, that's like having a 15- to 20-yard run."

I can hear Tressel telling this to not only the team, but all of us.