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Vol. 43, No. 1

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 9, 2023

OSU Scraps With IU In 23-3 Win To Begin Season

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

It's something that's largely been forgotten in recent years, but No. 3 Ohio State's 23-3 win at Indiana on Sept. 2 to begin the season served as a stark reminder that, despite the talent that has come through the program in recent years, it still is not an easy task to be under center for the Buckeyes.

It's a position that's been buoyed by the likes of Dwayne Haskins, Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud over the past five seasons, all of whom have been able to take that talent to the next level, and it's set a nearly unfair expectation for those set to follow in their footsteps.

Junior quarterback Kyle McCord, winner of an offseason competition with redshirt freshman Devin Brown to be the starting quarterback for Ohio State, will have those expectations placed squarely upon his shoulders. The burden appeared heavy at times against the Hoosiers in just the second start of McCord's career entering his third season with the Buckeyes, with his only other start coming during his true freshman season.

That last start – a home contest against visiting Akron – was a positive outing for McCord, completing 72.2 percent (13 of 18) of his passes for 319 yards, two scores and an interception. But this time around, the circumstances – a Big Ten opponent on the road in front of 50,050 fans to open the season, rather than a Mid-American Conference opponent in Ohio Stadium – offered a higher degree of difficulty, and it showed in Ohio State's struggle to put away the upset-minded Hoosiers.

McCord completed 60.6 percent (20 of 33) of his passes for 239 yards, no touchdowns and an interception while rushing



SONNY BROCKWAY

UP-AND-DOWN START – Ohio State junior quarterback Kyle McCord, who was named the starter ahead of the 23-3 win over Indiana on Sept. 2, completed 60.6 percent of his passes (20 of 33) for 239 yards and an interception.

for 8 yards on a pair of carries. While a mostly inoffensive statistical outing, it was part of a larger inability by Ohio State's offense to find a groove against Indiana's defense, at least through the first half of the contest.

"Mixed bag, I guess, right now," head

coach Ryan Day said after the win. "I thought there were some good things. But we have to play better situational football. We have to finish in the red zone. We have to finish in short yardage, and we have to do a better job on third down. If we can do that then we certainly will be better."

It was clear from the outset that Ohio State's offense – even with star wideouts Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, not to mention a healthy TreVeyon Henderson – had trouble finding a rhythm. Ohio State's first drive of the game – one that likely featured a fair bit of scripting to help ease in McCord, not to mention three new starters on the offensive line – ended in a 7-yard rushing score from Miyan Williams, but the next two drives featured just 52 yards and no points,

with the Buckeyes' third drive ending with an interception thrown by McCord to Indiana safety Phillip Dunnam.

The throw came on fourth-and-2 from Indiana's 29-yard line, with Ohio State in the I-formation with Chip Trayanum at fullback and Williams at tailback behind McCord with added blocking from tight ends Cade Stover and Joe Royer, as well as an extra offensive lineman in freshman Luke Montgomery. After faking a handoff to Williams, McCord searched downfield for his main target, Trayanum, but he was upended by an Indiana defender just past the line of scrimmage, leaving McCord with limited options on fourth down. He instead looked to Stover across the mid-

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From The Message Board

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State looked a bit different from usual in the season-opening 23-3 win at Indiana on Sept. 2, with the offense struggling to find a groove while the defense dominated the Hoosiers. Here are some choices from Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff members and readers from the BuckeyeSports.com Forum for players who were worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the win.

Patrick Engels, BSB: Ohio State featured a balanced rushing attack in its season opener, and that backfield production starts with senior Chip Trayanum.

With the offense stagnating early in the third quarter, Trayanum helped ignite the team with a couple of big runs later in the period. The Akron native recorded two rushes of 10 yards or more on Ohio State's third-quarter touchdown drive, first dashing towards the sidelines with a 14-yard gain and then adding another 12-yard rush four plays later. His efforts helped the Buckeyes enter the red zone, leading to a touchdown from Miyan Williams that would essentially put the game away.

Trayanum finished with eight rushes for 57 yards in the season opener, an impressive start to his senior campaign that may earn him more playing time down the road.

Braden Moles, BSB: I'm sending out two Buckeye Leaves to a pair of players who were consistent even when Ohio State struggled in the early stages of the game.

First up is cornerback Denzel Burke, who had a lockdown performance against the Hoosiers. He got a hand on seemingly every ball that came his way, finishing with two pass breakups, reflecting a focus from the staff this offseason for Ohio State's cornerbacks to be more physical and get to the ball faster. He was just one part, though, of an impressive performance from the secondary that allowed just 82 passing yards between Indiana redshirt freshmen quarterbacks Brendan Sorsby and Tayven Jackson.

Going to the other side of the ball, tight end Cade Stover deserves some recognition after finishing with five receptions for a career-high 98 yards, including a 49-yard reception in the third quarter that helped Ohio State's offense find a groove en route to the win. He was not able to offer quite the

same contributions as a blocker, but Stover was still a significant part of Ohio State's passing attack that struggled at times when he was not being targeted.

BSB Subscribers

PeyoteBuck: Miyan Williams gets my leaf and I'd give a shout-out to Julian Fleming, who was not flashy but did his job well.

Tiffin Buckeye: Definitely nobody on offense. Give it to the kicker (Jayden Fielding), he saved them.

BuckeyeScott: Fielding was a perfect 3 for 3 on field goals today. I would also give some to linebackers Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg, who led this stingy defense.

Mcarr: Stover for me. Love those yards after catch. Saw some good blocks too. The whole defense. No one defender seemed better than the others.

AnthonyBuckeye: Sonny Styles for speedy play from sideline to sideline and tackles for loss, Trayanum for energetic running and blocking, Fleming for catching passes coming his way and Fielding for being 3/3 on field goals.

BYRON MCNUTT: It is hard to judge this performance, after all, it was Indiana. The Hoosiers do have a lot of 23-24-year-old players. Glad to say the OL had no false starts or holding penalties, except for the one on Stover. Can't argue with the names already mentioned: Burke, Chambers, Eichenberg, Fielding, Stover, Styles and Trayanum.

As always, the Bucks will get every opponent's best shot. This team must bring its "A" game every week. This team will face five or six teams far superior than Indiana and those teams will have very good QBs.

Fortunately, the Bucks have two games just ahead in which to iron out the bugs. Our elite receivers need to find routes that fool defensive backs. Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson always seemed to find open areas. Ryan Day and Brian Hartline need to scheme a little better and then get Kyle McCord to find the open receivers.

After head coach Ryan Day claimed he would play both junior quarterback Kyle McCord and redshirt freshman quarterback Devin Brown against Indiana, McCord ultimately saw the field for all but two drives, with Brown attempting only three passes. We asked our readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum what their thoughts were on McCord's first start of the season and how Day handled the quarterback situation. Here are some of the responses:

"Not very good. We were told Devin would play and he barely played. I didn't really think McCord did anything special to stay in either."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"There were some bright spots by McCord. Tremendous pressure by keeping the competition alive ... pressure now to keep the job. If I remember correctly, didn't (C.J.) Stroud struggle early? Improving the line play will help. He will get better every week as everyone gets comfortable under fire."

– John Lanning

"The added pressure of trying to keep his starting job may have contributed to McCord's ineffective play. I'd grade it C-minus. Let's hope it is a learning experience. He certainly can play better than he did vs. Indiana."

– Terrier Buck

"I want to be careful in how I look at this performance by McCord and Brown. This was the first game of the year, away and against another B1G team. All things that lead to mistakes and as Ryan Day said, "a mixed bag." Also, this was the first game our new offensive coordinator got his feet wet. Let's cut the Buckeyes a break

and be happy the defense played well and look forward to the rest of the season."

– BuckeyeScott

"Mixed results for me. McCord had his good moments and his not so good. I'd be more concerned about the offensive line which also had its not-so-good moments mixed in with some occasional good. The two seem related."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I wasn't especially encouraged or discouraged. If Marvin Harrison Jr. hadn't stepped (or been pushed?) out of bounds, this discussion would be entirely different."

– Mcarr

"I agree with Day to keep McCord in to try to establish a rhythm. One can argue that rhythm was never really established, but (in my honest opinion) we would have had more disruption with the constant switching of QBs in a game that was still in doubt into the fourth quarter. Hopefully Brown gets more time with playing lesser teams at home before the big one at South Bend, Ind."

– R1TBDBITL

"Ryan Cooper" does not respect the Buckeyes' football tradition. Woody Hayes would fire him fast.

**Michael Parks
Hailey, Idaho**

I don't know how you did it, Frank, but you did! Congratulations!

**Jim Breithaupt
Washougal, Wash.**

Props To The Publisher

Publisher Frank Moskowitz's "The View From 15th and High" in the August 2023 Football Preview issue is especially touching and heartfelt. I consider Frank a close friend of mine and have known him for 45 years. During that time, I never doubted his willingness and ability to succeed at putting out the Buckeye Sports Bulletin, week after week, year after year, even when many readers abandoned print media for the Internet.

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.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stopping Explosive Plays

Most of the media mention OSU's poor defense against the big play (20+ yards) in the last two games of the season, but Mark Rea accurately points out that it was a season-long issue.

To supplement his information, Michigan State had five pass plays of 20+ yards, plus an 18-yard touchdown. Penn State gained 211 yards on six explosive passes for an average of 35.2 yards, plus a 27 yard run. Maryland had six pass plays ranging from 25 to 49 yards, plus a 26-yard run.

Yes, good teams gashed the defense, but so did pretty good teams. The 2023 season hinges on solving the problem which was not solved from September through November last year.

**Lee Caryer
Columbus**

Fear The Beard

Can anyone find a head coach at Ohio State that has won a national championship wearing a beard? Can you name any head football coach in all of college football who won a national championship with facial hair?

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All Things Considered, Not Bad Opener

Just before intermission of the 2023 season-opening game between Ohio State and Indiana, longtime CBS play-by-play announcer Brad Nessler was reading the halftime stats with a hint of bewilderment in his voice.

Installed by oddsmakers as 30-point favorites against a team that had won only two Big Ten games over the past two seasons combined, the Buckeyes had accumulated only 172 first-half total yards, were 1 for 6 on third-down conversions, and held an anything-but-commanding 10-3 lead.

"Hmmm," Nessler said. "Not exactly what fans were expecting."

That might qualify as the understatement of the year where most of Buckeye Nation is concerned, but not me. Going into the season with three new starters along the offensive line, a starting quarterback competition that was decidedly undecided, and a defense that was long on potential and short on actual performance, I really didn't know what to expect when Ohio State kicked off its 134th season of intercollegiate football.

What I saw were some good things, some mediocre things, and some things that obviously still need work. All in all, however, the final score of 23-3 was good enough for an OSU team that should continue to improve as the season goes on.

Everyone focused on the quarterback competition, apparently won – at least for now – by third-year man Kyle McCord, who started against the Hoosiers and played every series except two. McCord was good at times, below average at others, and finished his afternoon with decent numbers that included 20 completions in 33 attempts for 239 yards, no touchdowns and one interception.

There were times when McCord looked poised, especially a couple of times when he evaded the Indiana rush to complete passes. He beautifully led tight end Cade Stover down the middle of the field on a third-quarter play that covered 49 yards, and on the next play, threw a lightning bolt to Marvin Harrison Jr. that would have been good for a 24-yard touchdown had Harrison been able to re-establish himself back onto the field of play after being forced out of bounds.

But there were other times when McCord appeared flustered, such as a fourth-and-2 play early in the second quarter when the Hoosiers took away his primary receiver, and a hurried throw back across his body into traffic resulted in the quarterback's only interception of the day. McCord also made the wrong read on a quarterback keeper midway through the third quarter that turned a sure touchdown into a field goal.

Still, it seemed part and parcel to a normal season-opening performance for a largely untested quarterback, one operating in front of a rebuilt offensive line that apparently needs more time to mesh.

The OSU running game never really got itself on track although Chip Trayanum and starter TreVeyon Henderson combined for 104 yards on 20 carries. Miyan Williams chipped in with 25 yards and a pair of touchdowns on seven attempts, and no matter how disjointed the running attack seemed at times, that trio averaged a more-than-respectable 4.8 yards per carry.

Before the telecast, Nessler's longtime partner Gary Danielson previewed the game in terms of Memorial Stadium resembling the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Danielson equated Ohio State's receiving corps to a sleek fleet of race cars, saying that McCord's primary focus as the new driver of the OSU offense was to "keep from crashing those fancy cars into the wall."

Danielson needn't have worried. The fleet barely got out of the garage with Emeka Egbuka quietly catching three balls for 16 yards, and Harrison logging only two receptions for 18 yards – both in the first half.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

To be fair to the talented duo, McCord was in check-down mode for much of the afternoon as a spirited Indiana defense did its best to hurry and harass him. As a result, Julian Fleming and Stover stepped up for the medium-range, middle-of-the-field stuff and combined for 11 catches for 156 yards. Fleming had six of those catches to set a new career single-game high, and Stover's 98 yards set a new single-game high for him.

I realize I have been in the minority among much of Buckeye Nation, but I have never been that high on Stover as a finished product at tight end. There is no doubt he was productive in the passing game last season, but he was often out of position or sometimes just plain missed blocking assignments in critical situations.

Those deficiencies seemed to have been fixed, however. In addition to remaining a lethal threat in the passing game, Stover delivered several excellent blocks, including helping to seal the edge on Williams' first touchdown run in the opening quarter.

Another player on whom I have trained my fire the last couple of years is cornerback Denzel Burke, but he appears to have returned to the form that made him a freshman All-American two years ago. Burke didn't record any tackles against IU, but part of that was because he didn't allow any passes to be caught against him.

Burke was a microcosm of the Ohio State defense in the opener. It surrendered no touchdowns and only 153 total yards to the Hoosiers, and just 65 of that came after halftime. Perhaps best of all, Indiana had no pass plays in the game that went for more than 24 yards, and no running plays that gained more than 11.

There is little doubt the Buckeyes will face more potent offenses than the Hoosiers, but the salient point is that they didn't play down to their competition.

What Went Wrong

Regardless of the final score, no football team ever plays a perfect game. That is especially true during season openers, and the Buckeyes were no different. Unfortunately, there were a couple of imperfections that stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb.

There will be a time during the 2023 season when the offense will need to control the line of scrimmage and convert short-yardage situations on third or fourth down, and that effort against Indiana could be described with only one word: abysmal. The Buckeyes finished 2 for 12 on third downs one year after boasting a third-down conversion rate of 45.2 percent (75 for 166).

Even worse, on third-and-2 or less situations, when offensive linemen really earn their reputations, Ohio State was 0 for 3 with a net gain of minus-3 yards on those plays. I don't care how many new starters you have. That's unacceptable.

Also unacceptable was the seemingly lackadaisical way the Buckeyes approached special teams – specifically kick-blocking units.

Indiana punter James Evans faced virtually no rush all afternoon and proceeded to average 54.2 yards on six attempts. That would have led the nation last year by more than five yards.

Likewise, Ohio State offered absolutely no resistance when IU kicker Chris Freeman attempted a 42-yard field goal in the second quarter, a kick that bounced high against the right upright before falling over the crossbar. Since it was the first field-goal attempt of Freeman's career, the Buckeyes might have at least offered a token effort to block it and perhaps have rattled the Indiana kicker just enough to make him miss. We'll never know because OSU players simply stood at their positions and watched the ball sail over their heads.

Lastly, there was the strange case of Devin Brown, the second-year quarterback who reportedly was going to share snaps with McCord.

Brown's afternoon consisted of a three-and-out series in the second quarter – which ended on a 3-yard loss that the sophomore quarterback all but telegraphed to the Indiana defense – and the team's final possession, another three-and-out that featured Brown's first career completion. Unfortunately, it went to backup running back Dallan Hayden for a 2-yard loss.

One must assume that Brown will get more of a chance to show what he can do in the coming weeks against the likes of Youngstown State and Western Kentucky.

Fun Facts

- Brown became only the second Ohio State quarterback since 1970 to watch the first completed pass of his career go for a loss. It also happened to Chris Chugunov during the 2019 season opener, a 45-21 victory against Florida Atlantic. Chugunov's first completion in an OSU uniform went for a 2-yard loss to Jaelen Gill, who transferred to Boston College following the 2019 season and is now at Fresno State. By the way, Gill caught eight passes for 65 yards and a touchdown during the Bulldogs' 39-35 season-opening victory at Purdue.

- Before anyone begins to bemoan McCord and his supposedly "pedestrian" numbers of 239 yards passing with no touchdowns, perhaps its good to remember his immediate predecessor didn't exactly set the world on fire during season openers. C.J. Stroud threw for only 223 yards in what most fans termed an "uninspiring" 21-10 win against Notre Dame.

- The Buckeyes have now won 24 consecutive season openers. Their last defeat in an opener was a 23-13 loss to Miami (Fla.) in the 1999 Kickoff Classic. The program record for most consecutive victories in season-opening games is 37, set between 1906 and 1942.

- Did anyone seriously believe Indiana had a chance to win the game? In addition to being extremely challenged in terms of offensive firepower, the Hoosiers haven't beaten a top-five team since a 19-14 win against No. 3 Purdue in 1967. Since then, IU is now 0-33 against top-five opponents.

- Ohio State was held to its lowest point total in the series since a 23-17 win in 1993. Over its previous 15 games against Indiana, the Buckeyes had averaged 42.9 points per game.

- The Buckeyes pushed their winning streak against the Hoosiers to 29 straight games, the longest current streak in any Football Bowl Subdivision rivalry. The all-time record for most consecutive victories in an FBS rivalry is owned by Notre Dame, which defeated Navy 43 times in a row from 1964 through 2006.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

McCord Tabbed As Week 1 Starter

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day announced on Aug. 29 that junior Kyle McCord would serve as the team's starting quarterback for the season opener at Indiana on Sept. 2.

Since C.J. Stroud's departure following last season, McCord had been battling with redshirt freshman Devin Brown to take over at quarterback. The battle began in earnest in the spring and stretched through fall camp, with Day often calling the competition too close to call between the signal callers.

McCord was named the starter against the Hoosiers following a strong couple of weeks of practice, but Day said that both McCord and Brown earned the opportunity to see the field against Indiana to begin the season, though that did not really come to fruition with Brown playing just two series in the opener against the Hoosiers.

McCord arrived at Ohio State in the

2021 recruiting class as a four-star prospect out of Philadelphia, but he was thrust into starting action just four games into the season when Stroud was ruled out against Akron with a shoulder injury. He saw limited action since that outing, however, appearing in just four more games that season and playing in seven games last year, attempting only 20 passes with 190 passing yards. Brown, meanwhile, appeared in just two games last season and did not throw a pass.

Should McCord remain the starter for the entire season, he'll look to continue a strong run of quarterback play at Ohio State. Dating back to Dwayne Haskins in 2018, the starting quarterback (in a full season) has thrown for no fewer than 3,272 yards and 41 touchdowns, with Haskins – as well as Justin Fields and Stroud – eventually becoming first-round selections in the NFL draft.

With the exception of 2020, an Ohio State quarterback has been a finalist for the Heisman Trophy every year since 2018.

Day Finalizes Starting O-Line

Day also solidified his offensive line during his Aug. 29 press conference, announcing redshirt freshman Carson Hinzman, junior Josh Simmons and senior Josh Fryar as the team's starting center, left tackle and right tackle, respectively.

Hinzman, a second-year Buckeye who redshirted his freshman season, was competing for the starting center role with



SONNY BROCKWAY

NEW IN THE TRENCHES – Right tackle Josh Fryar (left) is among three new starters on the offensive line this season along with center Carson Hinzman and left tackle Josh Simmons.

Louisiana-Monroe transfer Victor Cutler Jr. and junior Jakob James. According to Day, the Spring Valley, Wis., native separated himself from the competition following a strong performance at fall camp.

"We believe that Carson can do it because we've seen it on the field," Day said. "Carson deserves the opportunity to play. He's practiced well. There will be butterflies early on, but once you get into the meat of it, you start to work through those things, and before you know it, you have some games under your belt."

Simmons, who arrived at Ohio State in June after spending two seasons at right tackle for San Diego State, made an immediate impact on the team during fall camp on the left side of the line, prompting Day to proclaim that he is very excited about the potential of the third-year transfer. He beat out redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola for the position.

Fryar enters his fourth season at Ohio State with three years left of eligibility. Although he saw little time as a starter in his first three years for the Scarlet and Gray,

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2023 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Indiana	W, 23-3	CBS	0-1, 23-3 loss to Ohio State
Sept. 9	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	12 p.m.	BTN	1-0, 52-10 win over Valparaiso
Sept. 16	WESTERN KENTUCKY	4 p.m.	FOX	1-0, 41-24 win over South Florida
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	7:30 p.m.	NBC	2-0, 56-3 win over Tennessee State
Oct. 7	MARYLAND	TBA	TBA	1-0, 38-6 win over Towson
Oct. 14	at Purdue	TBA	TBA	0-1, 39-35 loss to Fresno State
Oct. 21	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	1-0, 38-15 win over West Virginia
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	TBA	TBA	1-0, 38-17 win over Buffalo
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	1-0, 24-7 win over Northwestern
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE	7:30 p.m.	NBC	1-0, 31-7 win over Central Michigan
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA	TBA	TBA	1-0, 13-10 win over Nebraska
Nov. 25	at Michigan	12 p.m.	FOX	1-0, 30-3 win over East Carolina

earning just one start at right tackle last season against Indiana, he appeared in each of the Buckeyes' 13 games last year. He shuffled across the line during fall camp but ultimately found himself at right tackle to start his senior campaign, beating out true freshman Luke Montgomery for the role.

"Josh has played in games," Day said. "He actually has played a significant amount of time, so that's good."

Ohio State entered the season opener against Indiana with a solidified front five that also consists of returning starters Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones, who will reclaim their roles at left and right guard, respectively.

Fielding Handling Kicking Duties

Along with announcements at quarter-

back and on the offensive line, Day also offered a pair of updates for special teams on Aug. 29, beginning with news that sophomore Jayden Fielding will handle both kickoff and field goal duties for the Buckeyes this season.

Fielding was battling with redshirt junior Parker Lewis, and special teams coordinator Parker Fleming said on Aug. 22 that the competition between the pair was very close. But as the opener approached, Day said that Fielding had separated from the competition.

"He's done a really good job in the spring, did a nice job kicking off for us last year, and his overall consistency has allowed him to be the starter," Day said.

Prior to the season opener against Indiana, Fielding had yet to attempt a field goal at Ohio State, though he did miss a 40-yarder in the spring game. He han-

dled kickoffs for the Buckeyes last season, kicking off 105 times with a 61.8 yard average with 46 going for touchbacks and three going out of bounds.

He will replace Noah Ruggles, who kicked in each of the last two seasons for Ohio State and ranked sixth in extra points (148) and ninth in kick scoring (259 points) in program history and has the third-longest streak of consecutive extra points at 134. He also holds the program record for field-goal percentage, converting 37 of his 41 attempts (90.2 percent) at Ohio State.

Day's other announcement was that Emeka Egbuka and Xavier Johnson would handle punt return and kickoff return duties for Ohio State.

Egbuka handled 11 of Ohio State's 15 punt returns last season, averaging 6.8 yards per return with a long of 18 yards. Nationally, the Buckeyes ranked just 79th in the nation in punt returns and seventh in the Big Ten, averaging 6.7 yards per attempt.

Johnson, meanwhile, handled most of the kickoff returns, taking 12 kickoffs and averaging 22.4 yards per attempt with a long of 46 yards. The Buckeyes struggled nationally in this category as well, ranking just 88th in the country and 10th in the Big Ten with 19.0 yards per attempt.

Ohio State has not returned a punt for a touchdown since Jalin Marshall in 2014 against Indiana, while it's been even longer without a kickoff return touchdown, with Jordan Hall the last to do so in 2010 against Michigan.

With some of Ohio State's struggles in

recent years to get consistent production out of the return game, Day said the team did consider making some changes, but that Egbuka and Johnson give the Buckeyes their best chance for success starting this season.

"We looked at a lot of different options to see who could do that, and we'll possibly give some of those guys opportunities, but when you talk about returning both punt and kickoff, they require a certain skill set," Day said. "The first thing is they have to be able to field the ball.



Xavier Johnson

We put some guys back there and it felt like once the ball was in their hand, they gave us a real good chance but didn't quite handle the ball very well. And then other guys, you know, just have to take care of the football. You have to be strong enough to take a shot because those are kind of high-speed hits, so there's a lot that comes with it.

In the opener, Egbuka returned two punts for 14 yards, while Johnson took one kickoff return 23 yards. Indiana punted the ball away six times while kicking off twice.

Eight Buckeyes Out Against Indiana

Ohio State was mostly healthy enter-

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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ing the opener at Indiana, with only eight Buckeyes – none of whom were expected to see significant time on the field – ruled out for the contest.

The list of unavailable Buckeyes included a pair of freshmen in safety Jayden Bonsu and defensive lineman Will Smith Jr., as well as linebacker Kourt Williams II, who is out for the season with an ACL injury, running back T.C. Caffey Jr., tight end Zak Herbstreit, and wide receivers Kyion Grayes, Joop Mitchell and Reis Stockdale.

No Buckeyes were listed as questionable, and none were reported as having been injured in the 23-3 win over the Hoosiers.

Ten Freshmen Make Trip To Bloomington

Ohio State brought a 74-man travel roster to Bloomington, Ind., for its Sept. 2 season opener against Indiana, with 10 of

Staff Misses With Predictions For The IU Game

It's football season, which means the return of our popular staff predictions at the BuckeyeSports.com website. As you can imagine, the staff members whiffed on their picks as Indiana hung tough before Ohio State settled for a 23-3 victory. Patrick Engels called it 41-10, Craig Merz 48-14 and Braden Moles 52-17, leaving Engels the "closest." The good news is that the defense outperformed the predictions of all three staffers. Engels should also get credit for suggesting that, "Given their relative inexperience at quarterback and offensive line, it wouldn't surprise me to see the Buckeyes get off to another slow start in Bloomington." But he then adds, "But this time around, I can't see the Hoosiers hanging with Ohio State past the first quarter."

Predictions will continue throughout the season on the Friday before each game. BuckeyeSports.com is free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

Football season also means the return to weekly publishing of the BSB print issue. The complete edition of each issue is posted at BuckeyeSports.com, immediately upon completion of the paper, making the site a must for readers having continuing mail problems. There is also immediate coverage after each game, and readers can discuss the game on the Fan Forum, including "The Official Game Thread" with real-time comments from BSB staff members and readers throughout the game.

There are also additional stories throughout the week, including coverage of Ryan Day's weekly press conference, as well as news from any other press availabilities leading up to the next game.

Football recruiting is a 365-day-a-year process these days, and the BSB staff has stepped up its coverage of Ohio State's quest for prep talent, so be sure to check in regularly at BuckeyeSports.com.

Along with daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the previously mentioned Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day.

Please note that recent developments with the mail service have us concerned about delivery time for BSB. We remind you again, the complete print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted at BuckeyeSports.com at the time the issue is mailed and is available to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site. Your copy of the paper will still arrive in your mailbox at the usual time.

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Don't forget that readers can upgrade their existing subscriptions to first-class mail in an envelope through football season for \$29 and through the traditional recruiting season in February for \$39. Just call us at the previously mentioned phone number for credit card orders or send your credit card number or check to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Mention either the "Football" upgrade or the "Recruiting" upgrade.

those players being true freshmen.

The Buckeyes carried nine of their 21 scholarship players from the 2023 recruiting class on the roster, including corner-

back Jermaine Mathews Jr., defensive end/linebacker Arvell Reese, offensive tackle Luke Montgomery, quarterback Lincoln Kienholz, safety Malik Hartford, tight end Jelani Thurman and wide receivers Carnell Tate, Brandon Inniss and Noah Rogers.

First-year walk-on punter Joe McGuire also made the travel team, serving as the backup for junior Jesse Mirco.

Six freshman Buckeyes – Hartford, Mathews, Montgomery, Reese, Tate and Thurman – made their respective debuts against Indiana. The former five-star Tate earned his first collegiate reception with 8:36 left in the fourth quarter, hauling in a short curl route from McCord at the

Hoosiers' 44-yard line that resulted in a 15-yard gain. He was targeted two other times, both at the end of the second quarter.

Hartford, the No. 1 overall prospect in Ohio for the 2023 class, replaced graduate Josh Proctor at the free/adjuster safety position during the third quarter. The West Chester, Ohio, native assumed the role for most of the second half, logging just one tackle and a pass breakup in 25 snaps – the 13th-most on the defense.

Montgomery, also a four-star prospect out of Findlay, Ohio, logged four snaps on the offensive line, entering the game on short-yardage packages. He appeared as an extra offensive lineman on Ohio State's



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"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 42 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," as well as a card good for \$10 off your next food purchase at any Cameron Mitchell Restaurant.

As mentioned, 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 more than \$125 will have their names listed as Elite-Plus VIPs.

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The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite-Plus, Elite, Scarlet and Brutus VIP subscribers. **Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman):** Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

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fourth-and-2 attempt during the second quarter, which resulted in an interception by McCord. The other debuting Buckeyes – Mathews, Reese and Thurman – only logged snaps on special teams.

Meyer Comments On QB Competition

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer offered his opinion on the quarterback competition between McCord and Brown on Aug. 22, assuring Buckeye fans that Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis would ultimately make the correct decision on who will lead the program under center.

Meyer, who led Ohio State from 2012-2018 and secured the program's most recent national championship in 2014, said on the On3's "Urban's Take With Tim May" that Day and Dennis' impressive track records on choosing and developing quarterbacks should ease fans' concerns regarding the battle.

Since the 2020 season – Day's second year as head coach and Dennis' inaugural stint leading the quarterback room – the two helped mold Buckeye starting signal callers Fields and Stroud into first-round NFL draft selections following their prolific Ohio State careers.

"No, they shouldn't be (concerned)," Meyer said. "Ryan Day and Corey Dennis, what they've done the last four years at quarterback, recruiting and development and play, I don't know it's been done before. Certainly not at Ohio State, certainly not in the Big Ten. The last thing (fans) need to worry about is the quarterback position at The Ohio State University."

Meyer added that the team's prolonged starting quarterback battle may have served as a positive for the program, as

it showed both McCord and Brown that Day and his staff have full confidence in the two to succeed if handed the starting job, deterring them from potentially transferring. Meyer cited his own experience dealing with quarterbacks, looking back at the competition between Haskins and Joe Burrow in 2018.

"Can you imagine if Joe Burrow would have stayed at Ohio State?" Meyer said. "And if I would have just said, 'OK, we're not going to name a starter. Let's keep them playing.' And then Dwayne Haskins leaves the next year for the NFL, you know who our starter would be the next year? Joe Burrow. Can you imagine him taking over that team? The season he had at LSU, and also he does that for Ohio State?"

Meyer said he expected Day to make the final call at quarterback over Dennis, offensive coordinator Brian Hartline and his other assistants. This, according to the longtime coach, will occur not only because of his former offensive play-caller's extensive knowledge of the position, but also due to the current landscape of the sport as a whole.

"He's the only guy that can (make the decision)," Meyer said. "It's the most important position in not just college football, but all of sport, and that's his expertise. But even when it's not, (Alabama head coach) Nick Saban is going to pick a quarterback, because that's the way it is. That's the way it's always going to be in this sport."

"I used to laugh when someone (would say) the NFL is a quarterback league. Well, so is Pop Warner, so is seventh grade football, so is high school and obviously college. So who you select to put behind the center, that's the head coach's call."

Johnson "Honored" To Receive Block O

Like Jonathon Cooper, Thayer Munford and Kamryn Babb before him, nobody else made more sense to become the recipient of Ohio State's Block O jersey this season than Johnson.

The wideout has been a noted leader for Ohio State entering his sixth season with the program, but it has not been a journey without struggles. Along with switching positions several times throughout his career with the Buckeyes, Johnson – a former walk-on – did not earn his scholarship with the program until midway through his fourth season in Columbus.

"He's played in so many different position rooms – corner, running back, he moved to receiver – and he just always kept working," wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. said. "He never complained about anything. Just his leadership on and off the field, he's a guy that you want leading the team. He's just a great example for myself and just the rest of the guys on the team, so he's just the perfect person to wear the Block O."

Those hardships did not stop Johnson from becoming a valued member of the team, and after going through those obstacles to begin his Ohio State career, he said everything that's come to him since – including the Block O jersey as well as being named a captain – is all the better for it.

"I think that it makes it that much sweeter," he said. "I think that going through all that and maturing in the way that I did and growing in the way that I did it, I wouldn't change it for the world."

In being named the Block O recipient – just the fourth in team history – Johnson said he was "overcome with emotion"

when reflecting on his career and what brought him to that point.

"Everything that I've been through with teammates, with guys, I think all that emotion kind of came to the forefront when I heard my name called," he said. "Because when I reflect on my career here, it hasn't gone exactly how I wanted, exactly how I would have drawn it up. But it's been beautiful in its own right."

"When my name was announced, when Coach Day kind of honored me with that

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honor of being the Block O and representing this university, it was something that I definitely didn't take lightly and I was extremely honored to receive. I'm just honored to continue that tradition of excellence that the Block O award winners have set the standard of in the past."

Freshman OL Siereveld Loses Black Stripe

Freshman offensive lineman Austin Siereveld became an "official" member of the Ohio State program on Aug. 23 when he shed his black stripe following practice.

Siereveld (6-5, 317), a four-star prospect out of Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East, arrived at Ohio State in January before making his debut with the team during spring camp. He was rated the 15th-best interior offensive lineman in the country and eighth-best player in Ohio for his class, as well as Ohio State's 20th-best commit for 2023. He committed to Ohio State on May 4, 2022, choosing the Buckeyes over Alabama and Notre Dame.

The Middletown, Ohio, native was seen working with the second-team offensive line at guard during fall practices made available to the media. He did not travel with the team for its Sept. 2 season opener against Indiana.

With Jackson and Jones reclaiming their roles at left and right guard, respectively, as well as redshirt senior guard Enokk Vimahi returning, Siereveld is not expected to earn considerable playing time this season as he continues his development.

Siereveld became the 15th player to shed his black stripe during fall camp and the 25th overall since last season. He is also the 12th freshman and eighth offensive lineman to earn the distinction, joining Tshabola (March 23), George Fitzpatrick (March 23), Quinton Burke (April 1), Cutler (Aug. 10), Simmons (Aug. 10), Montgomery (Aug. 12) and Joshua Padilla (Aug. 21).

Snyder Named New Voice Of Buckeyes

Ohio State announced on Aug. 24 that Tom Snyder will be the new voice of the Buckeyes, taking over public address duties at Ohio Stadium beginning this season.

Snyder, a graduate of Otterbein University, was selected from a pool of over 100 applicants and seven eventual finalists. He earned his bachelor's degree in journalism in 2005 and has served as a PA announcer for Long Beach State (baseball) and UCLA (baseball) and is the lead

broadcaster for St. Francis DeSales High School athletics.

He replaces former public address announcer Bob Kennedy, who died in April and had been the voice of the Buckeyes for the past 23 seasons. In addition to football, Kennedy made announcements for baseball, field hockey, men's and women's soccer, women's ice hockey and men's and women's volleyball.

"Bob had a big heart, and he loved his Buckeyes," said Jerry Emig, Ohio State's associate athletic director for communications. "He loved his PA jobs. He was a true professional at his craft and a friend to us all. He knew the local media, our administrators, coaches and student-athletes, and he certainly knew the histories well of many Ohio State sports, and he loved to talk about them."

Snyder will make his debut as the voice of the Buckeyes for Ohio State's home opener on Sept. 9 against Youngstown State.

Gradishar Named Senior Finalist For Pro Football HOF

Former Ohio State linebacker Randy Gradishar inched one step closer to receiving a bust in Canton on Aug. 23, when he was named one of three senior finalists for induction into the Pro Football Hall of

Fame Class of 2024.

He joins former Chicago Bears defensive tackle Steve McMichael and New York Titans and Oakland Raiders wide receiver Art Powell as the three players who will be enshrined if they receive at least 80 percent of votes casted by a selection committee in a January meeting. This is the fourth time Gradishar has been named a Hall of Fame finalist. He was selected as a modern-era finalist in 2003 and 2008 and as a senior candidate for the Centennial Slate in 2020.

Gradishar, 71, experienced a decorated career at Ohio State (1971-1973), becoming a three-time starter and earning two All-American selections. His best season for the Scarlet and Gray came in 1973, where he finished sixth in the Heisman Trophy balloting as a senior after leading his defense to four shutouts and relinquishing just 64 points all season behind 134 tackles, six tackles for loss and four pass breakups. These accolades allowed the Buckeye linebacker to be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1998.

He was then drafted with the 14th overall pick in the 1974 NFL draft by the Denver Broncos, an organization he played with for 10 seasons. The former Buckeye earned seven Pro-Bowl selec-

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago — 1983

The "Big Play" Buckeyes.
That's what Ohio State coach Earle Bruce called his team after its season-opening 31-6 win over Oregon on Sept. 10.
"We were a big-play team today," said Bruce after the Buckeyes had dispatched the Pac-10 Conference Ducks with a strong second-half offensive effort.
"We were not a consistent team today. Our offense was spittin' and sputterin' in the first half, but our defense played a fine game."

35 Years Ago — 1988

Now, John Cooper deserved that Big Bear hug.
For eight months, Cooper had promised a change in the style of football played at Ohio State, and he backed up his promise by leading the Buckeyes to a 26-9 victory over Syracuse in the 1988 season opener and his debut with Ohio State on Sept. 10.
Ohio State won the game in typical Cooper-like fashion, using nearly all of the head coach's Ten Commandments for football.
"That's the kind of football I like to play," Cooper said of his team's performance in the game. "Maybe the game plan was a little conservative, but we went with what worked. And that's the 10th of those commandments — win the surest way."

30 Years Ago — 1993

During both the 1990 and 1991 seasons, fans and members of the media had two words on their lips, two words that strike fear in the hearts of almost any college football coach: "quarterback controversy."
As the 1993 season got under way, Ohio State had two capable quarterbacks again. Bobby Hoying was a sophomore and he was the starter, while Bret Powers was a senior and he was the backup. But there was a different feeling this year.
Instead of being two separate entities working in separate tempos, Hoying and Powers appeared to be the perfect complement to one another, giving the Buckeyes' offense a sort of rhythmic quality. But could the Buckeyes find happiness — as well as the road to success — with two quarterbacks seeming to share the load?

"I think so," said offensive coordinator Joe Hollis. "This is a luxury for us. How many times do you have two quarterbacks who you are totally and completely comfortable with in game situations? I've been coaching a few years and I don't remember it happening too many times."

25 Years Ago — 1998

When Ohio State had accepted a bid to play in the Kickoff Classic the previous December, the Buckeyes had several motives in mind.
They included a nifty payout for the athletic department as well as extra practice time for OSU's expected young football team. A win over Miami (Fla.), a tradition-rich program that had fallen on hard times over the past several years, was all but a

given.

But it was a new year, and that was never more apparent than after the Hurricanes had cruised to a 23-12 win over the Buckeyes Aug. 29 at East Rutherford, N.J.
"It was just a different feeling out there today," said tailback Michael Wiley, a key component on OSU's Big Ten championship teams from 1996 and '98. "I have never felt like this before."

20 Years Ago — 2003

The atmosphere for an Ohio State home opener, marking the dawn of another football season, is always a happening.
But with the Buckeyes coming off the 2002 national championship, their first in 34 years, and playing just the sixth night game ever at the Horseshoe — against a ranked opponent, no less — the atmosphere was buzzing for the Aug. 30 opener with Washington.
Under the transported lights from ABC peering over the mammoth facade of Ohio Stadium, a crowd of 105,078 — the third largest ever at the Horseshoe — watched OSU begin the defense of its national title with a convincing 28-9 victory over the No. 17 Huskies.
"It's always special to come and play — especially the first game — under the lights against a great team," tailback Maurice Hall said. "It's just electrifying. The fans are excited, and that just makes us excited."

15 Years Ago — 2008

Those who like to record such things will want to remember that Terrelle Pryor made his Ohio State debut at 12:27 p.m. Aug. 30 at Ohio Stadium, but they should not forget that he was far from alone in doing so.
Pryor, ranked the nation's No. 1 recruit in the class of 2008 by Scout.com, assumed the quarterback position in an empty backfield with three classmates on the offensive line and two more split out wide.
Freshman Michael Brewster snapped the ball to Pryor, who looked to his right and tossed a short pass to fellow frosh Lazaar Thomas, who had lined up in the slot and snagged the ball for a 9-yard pickup. The quarterback had time to do so in part because of the protection provided by freshman tackles Mike Adams to the left and J.B. Shugarts to the right.
Completing the first-year sextet was wide receiver DeVier Posey, who might have had a great view of everything from where he was split out wide if he had noticed what was happening.
"We didn't know that we were all in together," Posey said. "After that, we were all like, 'Dang, we were all in together and we did pretty good.' It felt good to be in with our boys and the guys you've known for a long time."

10 Years Ago — 2013

With his sharply dressed team only steps behind him, Urban Meyer was the first to emerge from the north tunnel in Ohio Stadium on Aug. 31.

Ohio State was on the final leg of its weekly pregame trek from the Skull Session in nearby St. John Arena to its locker room on the south side of the stadium. Only the length of the field stood between the Buckeyes and their destination.

"And so did Buffalo," junior linebacker Curtis Grant said. "They were standing on our Block O, and that's kind of disrespectful to us. It's kind of like having somebody in your own house. You walk in, you open your door and you have some strangers in your house. You want to know what's going on."

Five Years Ago — 2018

Ohio State sends handfuls of players to the NFL every season, and members of the coaching staff come and go on an annual basis. Sometimes, though, the turnover is more significant.
Going into 2018, it had been a while since the Buckeyes had a first-time starter at quarterback in week one, and it had been even longer since a head coach not named Urban Meyer roamed the sidelines in a season opener. Both of those streaks were broken Sept. 1 at Ohio Stadium when the No. 5 Buckeyes — led by acting head coach Ryan Day and first-year starting quarterback Dwayne Haskins — trounced Oregon State, 77-31.
Day, of course, was the head coach on a temporary basis. Meyer was suspended for the first three games of the season after mishandling former receivers coach Zach Smith's employment at the university. Haskins, on the other hand, was in his position on a more permanent basis as the heir to J.T. Barrett's quarterback throne.

"It was a lot going on for me," Day said in his first postgame press conference as a head coach at any level. "It was the first time going through everything, whether it was in the meetings or going to the skull session, the walk, pregame, going out on the field."

One Year Ago — 2022

It was a quiet night for Ohio State wideout Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who had just two catches for 3 yards before exiting the 21-10 win over Notre Dame on Sept. 3 with a left leg injury.
Smith-Njigba's leg was rolled up in the first quarter as he was tackled on the sideline, and he then spent time working with trainers and riding an exercise bike before returning briefly, though he did not return to the game in the second half. Day indicated after the game that he hoped to have Smith-Njigba back against Arkansas State the following week.
"It was a struggle early on," Day said. "They were a good defense. They have a lot of seniors, and when we lost Jaxon, we got a little out of rhythm, couldn't convert on third down, got a little off schedule there with a couple of things. There were a couple of penalties that we've got to clean up, but early games are a little bit clunky, and again, losing Jaxon threw us off a little bit and we had to respond."



FILE PHOTO

GET WELL SOON — Ohio State wrestler Sammy Sasso will undergo physical therapy after being shot in a carjacking near Ohio State's campus on Aug. 18. According to an update from his family, he is expected to make a full recovery but is unable to walk on his own.

tions while leading the patented "Orange Crush" Denver defense, and he became the franchise's all-time leader in tackles with 2,049. He also registered 19½ career sacks, 20 interceptions, 13 fumble recoveries and four defensive touchdowns, and he was named the NFL's Defensive Player of the Year in 1978.

If selected, Gradishar will become the 11th Buckeye to be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, joining Cris Carter, Sid Gillman, Lou Groza, Dante Lavelli, Dick LeBeau, Orlando Pace, Jim Parker, Ed Sabol, Paul Warfield and Bill Willis. He also would be the fourth Ohio State player to be selected by both the College and Pro Football Hall of Fames, joining Pace, Parker and Willis.

Sasso To Undergo Physical Therapy

The family of Sammy Sasso provided an update on the Ohio State All-American wrestler's condition Aug. 26, stating on their GoFundMe page that he will need to undergo "comprehensive physical therapy" to regain his ability to walk.

Sasso, who was shot in the stomach on Aug. 18 near North High Street in Columbus and transferred to the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center in "serious condition" later that night, will be moved to an inpatient rehabilitation facility upon his release from the hospital, according to the GoFundMe created by his family. The page also stated that Sasso is expected to make a full recovery, but he is unable to walk on his own.

Sasso spent three days in ICU care

before being moved to an acute care unit at the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center, where he is continuing to be monitored by medical professionals. Since being shot, Sasso has undergone two surgeries to repair his body. On the night of the shooting, the Ohio State wrestler had "emergency surgery" to repair his colon, and the next morning, he received another incision, this time to remove the bullet near his spine.

According to the GoFundMe, the placement of the bullet resulted in Sasso suffering "severe nerve damage" to his spine.

"Sammy's journey has taken an unexpected turn, yet even in the face of adversity his spirit remains unbroken," the GoFundMe stated. "The love and support pouring in from around the country is a testament to the mark Sammy has left on our hearts. Now, more than ever, Sammy needs support from the community.

"Your contribution will help support Sammy's recovery and provide him with the resources he needs to regain his strength and continue his inspirational journey," it continued. "Every donation, no matter how big or small, brings us one step closer to providing Sammy the support he needs."

As Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, the fund had received \$130,067 in donations, exceeding its initial \$100,000 benchmark. A 15-year-old girl and 16-year-old boy were arrested on Aug. 29 for their connection with the shooting and have since been charged with aggravated robbery and felonious assault, among other offenses.

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Snaps Few And Far Between For QB Brown

Continued From Page 1

dle of the field, but Dunnam stepped in front to take the ball away.

"I saw some good things," Day said of McCord's response to the pick. "The pick was on fourth down so it didn't draw out the way we'd like to. I'm not going to blame him for that. If it went back the other way, it would have been a disaster, but we got him on the ground."

Ohio State still held a 7-3 lead after the defense held Indiana to a field goal – the Hoosiers' only points of the afternoon, and the Silver Bullets limited Indiana to just 153 total yards of offense and 2.8 yards per play – but the offensive struggles, not to mention the interception by McCord, had some wondering when – or if – Day might give a look to Brown, who Day said in the week prior to the game would see the field.

"I think that Kyle has done a great job over the last two weeks showing consistency," Day said on Aug. 29. "He's played very well in practice. But Devin, throughout the body of the preseason, has shown that he deserves to play. So expect both of them to play. We have confidence in both of them."

Brown, who had yet to throw a pass in his Ohio State career, then took the field for Ohio State's fourth drive of the game following McCord's interception. With a fan base anxiously awaiting what Brown

might do under center, Day and offensive coordinator Brian Hartline called a pair of runs to Williams that gained 9 yards and a designed keeper for Brown, which was immediately blown up by Indiana defensive tackle Andre Carter for a 3-yard loss, forcing a three-and-out.

That would be the last sighting of Brown until the team's final drive of the game, with time ticking and Ohio State holding the eventual 23-3 final score. In that drive, Brown finally attempted his first pass with the Buckeyes – an incomplete aimed toward Royer – before losing 2 yards on a completion to running back Dallan Hayden and seeing another pass fall incomplete. All told, Brown – who Day said would see "significant snaps" – was on the field for just six plays, finishing 1 of 3 for minus-2 yards and carrying the ball once for a 3-yard loss.

After the game, Day said the close nature of the contest – not to mention the offense's struggles through the afternoon – led to limited time on the field for Brown.

"I would have liked to have seen Devin play a little bit more," Day said. "But we went three-and-out there, and then I was worried that we weren't going to be able to get into a rhythm. We already felt a little clunky early on, missed some short-yardage situations, didn't convert on some third downs. I didn't want to run the risk of putting ourselves in a bad spot by



SONNY BROCKWAY

MAYBE NEXT TIME — After Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said that red-shirt freshman quarterback Devin Brown (33) would play against Indiana, Brown appeared in only two drives in the 23-3 win on Sept. 2.

continually moving those guys in and out.

"But going in, you know, I really wanted to play Devin some more. I would like to do that moving forward. Like I said from the beginning, we have to make sure we're doing what's right for the team, what's right for Ohio State, and I felt like that was the right call at the time."

With Brown riding the bench for the opener, Ohio State stuck with McCord to help right the ship after going into the half with just a 10-3 lead, not the usual dominance the Buckeyes expect when facing Indiana given the team's 28-game winning streak against the Hoosiers entering the Sept. 2 matchup. But during the second half, McCord – as well as the rest of the offense – began to settle in.

"You kind of get into the flow of the game," he said. "As an offense, I think we played a lot better in the second half. I thought we ran the ball better, we passed the ball better, moved the ball better as a result. So I think, you know, just how can we continue that and get it to the next level. Just keep improving and putting more points on the board."

McCord came out in the second half with some of his best throws of the day, connecting with Julian Fleming on a 27-

yard completion that led to a 22-yard field goal from Jayden Fielding, who connected with all three of his attempts – as well as a pair of extra points – in his first start for the Buckeyes.

On the following drive, Trayanum – who finished with a team-high 57 rushing yards on just eight carries – started things off with a 14-yard gain, and two plays later McCord delivered a 49-yard strike to Stover across the middle of the field, the longest play of the day for either side, to set up another score from Williams. Prior to Williams' score, however, a touchdown to Harrison was wiped off the board after Harrison stepped out of bounds before hauling in the score.

"He made the nice throw to Marvin that the refs told me that he got pushed out of bounds, or he put himself out of bounds," Day said. "I'd like to see the film. I thought that was a nice throw. We came right back and scored right after that. That's a good sign, because it can be deflating when you throw a touchdown then you have to come back and do it again."

Day said those scoring drives – and specifically the throw to Stover – helped the offense get into a rhythm for the remainder of the contest, though he still



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said the overall offensive outing was a “mixed bag.”

“We have to see if it was a mixed bag with (more) positive or negative,” he said. “That’s part of watching the film. Sometimes you think coming out of the game that something happened and you don’t quite see it that way on the film, so we’ll get on it, identify it and move forward.”

That second-half turnaround was a product of everyone – from McCord to the receivers to the offensive line – feeling more comfortable while trying to work in so many new and moving parts on that side of the ball.

“Everybody was feeling more comfortable, more relaxed,” Henderson said. “A new quarterback starting, new group on the offensive line, so we were probably just feeling more relaxed in the second half. We push through (adversity). We’ve already been through adversity last season, this offseason, so we’ve already faced a lot of adversity. We were used to it. We didn’t panic. We weren’t out of whack. We stayed calm and we just kept going.”

Given the up-and-down nature of not only McCord’s performance but the offense as a whole, Day declined to give a true assessment of how the signal caller played in his first start of the season, adding that he made a couple of good plays with his feet but also would like to take (back) a couple of plays – namely the interception as well as a red-zone quarterback draw in the third quarter in which he missed an open hole and ran directly into Carter.

“Until we watch the film, it’s hard to evaluate exactly how the overall body of work was in the game,” Day said. “That’s what I felt when I was trying to figure out whether to get Devin in there or not. When you get those first couple drives under your belt, you kind of get into the rhythm of the game. I didn’t want to have Devin go through that as well and then all of a sudden we’re in the second half and we’re in a dogfight and neither of them are in a rhythm. So that was my gut, and I went with it.”

The final margin was deceiving given how close Indiana played Ohio State through the first three quarters, but several players – including defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau and cornerback Denzel Burke, who helped lead an impressive defensive performance – stressed that the Buckeyes’ only goal in coming to Bloomington, Ind., was to come back to Columbus with a win. But while they achieved their goal for Week 1, for some of Ohio State’s more lofty goals – beating Michigan, winning the Big Ten and winning a national title – there are plenty of areas of improvement that will need to be made as the season progresses.

“There were definitely some good plays but some things that I want to clean up,” McCord said. “I feel like we definitely left some points there on the board. We moved the ball pretty well. Just a few times in the red zone, you want to make touchdowns rather than field goals, but go back and watch it and learn from it and grow from it and keep getting better.”



SONNY BROCKWAY

DOMINANT DEFENSE – Ohio State junior defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau helped lead the Silver Bullets to a dominant performance against Indiana, allowing just a field goal and 153 yards in the 23-3 win.

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Carter Brings Military, Educational Experience

By **BRADEN MOLES**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The Ohio State University has been looking for leadership ever since former president Kristina M. Johnson announced last year that she would resign in May of 2023 as requested by the Ohio State board of trustees, and in the months since, there has been an exhaustive search to find the next president for the state's flagship institution.

That search came to an end on Aug. 22 when the Ohio State board of trustees announced that current University of Nebraska president Walter "Ted" Carter Jr. had been selected as the 17th president in Ohio State's history and will take his post on Jan. 1, 2024.

"I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to serve as president of Ohio State, an institution founded upon and well known across the globe for research, teaching and an enduring commitment to service," Carter said. "The work being done across Ohio and beyond to shape the future of research and innovation, workforce development, the arts, health care, college affordability and college athletics is remarkable. These are areas of particular passion for me, and I can't wait to begin my journey as a Buckeye."

Carter, who turns 64 on Nov. 4, became the eighth president in Nebraska's history on Jan. 1, 2020, and will continue to serve in that role until the end of the year while also preparing to take over at Ohio State. During his time in that position, Carter oversaw nearly 70,000 students across four campuses and also instituted the "Nebraska Promise," which was a financial aid program that guaranteed full tuition for low- and middle-income students, and

implemented a budget plan with a two-year tuition freeze.

"First, you should all know – and I said this earlier – I loved working at Nebraska," Carter said. "I'm not leaving there disgruntled, unhappy about anything. It's a tough job, and Nebraskans have welcomed my wife and I the entire time I've been there, so that's important."

"The contract I had that was extended, I was very appreciative. It wasn't something I asked for, but this is a different opportunity. You all clearly understand that this university is a significant opportunity for an academic leader to want to be part of, so when the opportunity came up, after a lot of very difficult thoughts – it is a very bittersweet day, as I will be saying goodbye to Nebraskans at the end of the year – but I'm going to be welcomed by a whole different community, and from what I've seen thus far, this is a great place to be."

Carter replaces the outgoing Johnson, who fulfilled her last day as president during Ohio State's spring commencement ceremony on May 7. Despite over nine months having passed since Johnson announced her resignation, few details have been offered as to why she and Ohio State decided to part ways after she began her term just over three years ago.

"Since I arrived at The Ohio State University in August of 2020, we have been able to achieve so much, on so many different fronts, despite considerable adversity including the COVID-19 pandemic," she said in a statement announcing her resignation. "I am very proud of all that we have accomplished together. It's been a privilege to serve this incredible university, and I have been honored to work as part of this brilliant, dedicated and passionate community."



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

PRESIDENT SLAPSHOT – New Ohio State University president Walter "Ted" Carter Jr., who will begin his term on Jan. 1, 2024, brings a background in education, military and athletics to OSU.

"I have made the difficult decision to step down as president following commencement at the end of the academic year. This will allow a search for the next president to proceed and adequate time for

me to assist with a seamless transition."

That transition is already under way and will officially be completed at the start of next year, but Carter is already looking at how he can take what has been built at Ohio State and continue to improve upon it.

"This is the largest, most complex organization I will have ever become a part of," he said. "You have to acknowledge that. When you come into an institution like this, the first thing you have to think about is, if this is a big, giant elephant, how do you tackle it? As I've learned in other complex organizations that I've had the privilege to run while in uniform and in civilian life, it's still the same. It's one bite at a time."

"My first job and my first order is to make sure I do no harm. I don't want to come in and change things that are going well. I want to learn a lot and do a lot of listening to all the colleges, the students, the faculty, the staff, the faculty senate, and then I'm going to try to get a better understanding of where I can impart my leadership for us to take it to that next level."

"At the end, when I'm saying goodbye to you someday, I want to look all of you in the eye and say, 'I left The Ohio State University – maybe only slightly – but certainly better than when I found it.'"

As Carter alluded to, he brings a strong military background to Ohio State. Growing up in Burrillville, R.I., he graduated in 1981 from the United States Naval Academy with a bachelor's degree in physics and oceanography, and after being designated as a naval flight officer, he graduated



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in 1985 from the Navy Fighter Weapons School, better known as “Top Gun.”

“When the movie was being filmed, I was a ‘Top Gun’ student,” he said in 2018. “In 1985, I was there when Tom Cruise and Tony Edwards came. I was there in the initial filming, and then I was an instructor when the movie came out in May of 1986. So a lot of famous scenes there. Some of the flying scenes, I think, are still the best, but the opening sequence of the flight deck working and launching and landing airplanes by far is my favorite.”

During his career as a flight officer, Carter had 6,150 flight hours in the back seat of F-4, F-14 and F-18 aircrafts, and he accompanied pilots in 2,016 carrier-assisted landings, a record among active and retired U.S. Naval Aviation designators. He also flew 125 combat missions in support of joint operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, Kosovo and Kuwait.

After his final combat deployment in 2012, Carter became the 54th president of the Naval War College on July 2, 2013, and held that role until July 8, 2014. He then became the 62nd superintendent of the United States Naval Academy on July 23, 2014, a post he remained in until July 26, 2019. That stretch made him the longest-tenured superintendent for the Naval Academy since the Civil War. Throughout his military career, Carter has earned numerous accolades, including the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross (with valor) and the Bronze Star, among several other recognitions.

While Carter helped lead the Naval Academy to multiple top rankings nationally and set institutional records for student success, the service academy received criticism before and during Carter’s tenure for increased rates of sexual assault and sexual harassment, though steps were taken – including the creation of the Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education, or SHAPE – to help reduce those instances.

One of Carter’s first priorities at Ohio State will be getting up to speed on the university’s own sexual assault allegations. An independent investigative report released in 2019 said that former university physician Dr. Richard Strauss, who died by suicide in 2005, sexually abused at least 177 students from 1978-98, and Ohio State has since reached settlements with 296 survivors for more than \$60 million. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June that over 230 men in two separate cases will be allowed to proceed with lawsuits against the university.

“I followed my predecessors in saying how sorry I am and I apologize to those survivors of that abuse,” Carter said. “I know this university has been open to listening to them, and I know there’s more litigation to be done, and I’ll have more comments and thoughts on that as I get more knowledgeable in the seat.”

Another focus of Carter’s when it comes to student safety is securing their safety on campus. A report released last year by Ohio State indicated that incidents of aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft and stalking on campus were all up from 2020 to 2021.

Campus safety was again in the spotlight in recent weeks following the carjacking and shooting of Ohio State wrestler

Sammy Sasso on Aug. 19 near campus on North High Street. Sasso received severe nerve damage to his spine after being shot in the abdomen but has since been released from the hospital and is receiving physical therapy and learning to walk again.

“(Student safety is) absolutely going to be at the top of my priorities,” Carter said. “I’ve led a number of campuses, and safety has always been a challenge. We watch what happens on the national scene and many of our university campuses. I’m very happy to hear the Ohio State wrestler is not seriously injured, and I’m wishing him and his family well.”

“But this is a message for our students and for the parents of our students. They want to know that we’re making every effort to make our campus safe. I know there’s been some investments here recently. I promise to take another look at that, and if we need to make further investments to make sure we’re doing everything possible, I will do that.”

In addition to his military experience, Carter – like Ohio State’s recent presidents – has plenty of experience in higher education between his time in the military and his last three years at Nebraska. But Ohio State – with five campuses and a combined enrollment of 65,795 students, not to mention \$9.02 billion in expected revenue for FY24, well ahead of the \$3.3 billion in expected revenue at Nebraska – presents an entirely different challenge, but one that Carter is excited to take on.

“Ohio State is a large and complex organization,” he said. “This is the type of environment I have worked and lived with for many years. What I look for and what I have often found are those comparatively simple and seemingly small commonalities that unite us. In higher education, itself a complex space, and at Ohio State, we all share the mission to educate and be educated. We are continuously striving to master the art of teaching and learning. There is no greater, no more honorable pursuit, and it is a lifelong journey.”

“I never left the teaching and learning space, and as I had the privilege to move through the U.S. Naval War College, the United States Naval Academy and the University of Nebraska, my passion for education has only grown greater year after year.”

Carter Brings Strong Background In Athletics

One of Carter’s most important decisions once he takes over will be deciding Ohio State’s next athletic director, as Gene Smith is set to retire on June 30, 2024. But Carter will be able to make an informed decision given his previous background in athletics, both as a player and during his time at Nebraska.

While at the United States Naval Academy for his undergraduate degree, Carter was a four-year letter winner for the school’s men’s ice hockey team, and he was named a team captain. During his time there, he earned the nickname “Slapshot,” which has stuck with him ever since and was even his call sign during his military career.

“I almost got benched and was told if I ever raised my stick above my knees I’ll never play again,” Carter told NHL.com in 2018. “The movie ‘Slap Shot’ had come out around that time, so the two just came

Ohio State Presidents

Name	Tenure
Edward Francis Baxter Orton, Sr.	Sept. 17, 1873 — June 21, 1881
Walter Quincy Scott	June 21, 1881 — June 20, 1883
William Henry Scott	June 20, 1883 — June 30, 1895
James Hulme Canfield	July 1, 1895 — June 30, 1899
William Oxley Thompson	July 1, 1899 — Nov. 5, 1925
George Washington Rightmire	March 1926 — July 1, 1938
Howard Landis Bevis	Feb. 1, 1940 — June 30, 1956
Novice Gail Fawcett	Aug. 1, 1956 — Aug. 31, 1972
Harold Leroy Enarson	Sept. 1, 1972 — Aug. 31, 1981
Edward Harrington Jennings	Sept. 1, 1981 — Aug. 31, 1990
E. Gordon Gee	Sept. 1, 1990 — Jan. 2, 1998
William English Kirwan	July 1, 1998 — June 30, 2002
Karen Ann Holbrook	Oct. 1, 2002 — June 30, 2007
E. Gordon Gee	Oct. 1, 2007 — June 30, 2013
Michael V. Drake	June 30, 2014 — June 30, 2020
Kristina M. Johnson	Sept. 1, 2020 — May 7, 2023
Walter “Ted” Carter Jr.	Term commences Jan. 1, 2024

*Interim presidents include George Washington Rightmire (Nov. 6, 1925 — March 1926); William McPherson (July 1, 1938 — Jan. 21, 1940); John Richard Sisson (Dec. 15, 1997 — June 30, 1998); Edward Harrington Jennings (July 1, 2002 — Sept. 30, 2002); and Joseph A. Alutto (July 1, 2007 — Sept. 30, 2007; July 1, 2013 — June 29, 2014).

together and it stuck with me, and I kept the call sign all the way through flying in jets for 37 years.”

Though at Nebraska for just over three years, Carter hired the school’s new athletic director, Trev Alberts, in 2021 and also helped in the hiring process for new football coach Matt Rhule, who replaced Scott Frost, who was fired midway through last season.

“It’s interesting,” Carter said. “If you go back and look at what I’ve had to do at Nebraska in the 3½-plus years, I’ve had to let go of a football coach for the Cornhuskers, I’ve had to hire a new football coach, two new athletic directors – one at (University of Nebraska-Omaha) and one at Lincoln – two chancellors, so I’ve been in the talent management space for a long time.”

Once Carter takes over on Jan. 1, 2024, he will work – with some input from Smith – to help find Ohio State’s next athletic director. No candidates have been named outright, but several former employees un-

der Smith – including current Division I athletic directors in Pat Chun (Washington State), Martin Jarmond (UCLA), Heather Lyke (Pittsburgh) and Diana Sabau (Utah State) – are all expected to receive consideration. When it comes to finding the athletic department’s next leader, however, Carter said there will be no replacing Smith.

“I’ll just say that there isn’t anybody that’s going to replace Gene Smith,” Carter said. “He’s arguably the most prestigious, best-known, accomplished athletic director in the country, so let’s just be clear; there is no replacing a legend like Gene Smith.”

“That said, I’m looking forward to working with him. We’ll have six months to work on it together. I’m excited about the opportunity to build that new team of leadership and arguably the greatest Division I sports program of any college campus in the country.”

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Defense Demanding Perfection After Near-Shutout

After a disappointing end to year one of the Jim Knowles era, Ohio State's defensive unit began its 2023 campaign on a major high note. With a sour taste still in their mouths from the back-to-back losses to Michigan and Georgia, the Buckeyes' 4-2-5 front played with an edge, limiting Indiana's new-look offense to just 153 total yards, 2.8 yards per play and three points.

"I thought our defense played really well," head coach Ryan Day said. "I'm excited about that. I think what we talked about is it's a different-looking defense. We had some good length out there, we got our hands on some balls early. They took some shots early, and I thought we were there, ready to make the play. The defensive line was disruptive."

Despite the praise from Day, members of the defensive unit left Indiana's Memorial Stadium wanting more. They recognized that the season-opening performance was a stark improvement from the end of last season, but for this year, a small stepping stone is simply not enough.

"We wanted to hold them to zero (points), honestly," cornerback Denzel Burke said. "Three (points are) too much for us. We want to be a dominant defense, want to be a dominant force. We want to bring the Silver Bullets back, and we hope to show you guys these next 11 games coming up."

Ohio State's defensive improvements started with the secondary. Led by returning starters Burke and Josh Proctor along with new faces Davison Igbinosun and Sonny Styles, Knowles' defensive backs played with a rekindled intensity and aggression, stymieing the Hoosiers' offense on both fronts with four pass breakups and yielding

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Engels

just 82 total passing yards. These successes, according to Proctor, can be attributed to the group's increased familiarity and comfort of the scheme – something that may not have been apparent last year.

"I think we've all improved in the back end, honestly," Proctor said. "That comes down to communicating and making sure the corners know what play it is or what the down and distance is where they have to press or play off, or just communicating to everybody and making sure everybody's on the same page in the back end."

It may not show in the stat sheets, but the Buckeyes' front seven also showed signs of gaining elite form. The unit faltered midway through the second quarter following a Kyle McCord interception, allowing an 11-yard run by Indiana's Christian Turner to put the Hoosiers in prime position for their lone score of the game, but that was the only glaring blemish of the day, as they limited Indiana's triple-option attack to just 71 rushing yards on 33 attempts, a meager 2.2 yards per carry.

The defense was also quick in getting to the ball, accumulating six tackles for loss from seven different players, and at least half a tackle for loss from every level of the defense.

From an outside perspective, Ohio State's defensive efforts against Indiana



SONNY BROCKWAY

SCORCHING HEAT – The temperature on the field for Ohio State's season opener at Indiana on Sept. 2 reached over 110 degrees pregame and during the first half, resulting in some toasty conditions for the Buckeyes and Hoosiers.

seemed like a near-perfect performance where it dominated on multiple fronts. But for the players themselves, it is nowhere near a finished product. Instead, they still have a long way to go in order to reach their full capabilities.

"Just knowing our potential and what we

can do and what we do in practice every day, I feel like our defense could be the number one in the nation," Burke said. "You have to take care of the little things, really be disciplined, have good eye control. (With) the defensive line doing their thing up front, we'll be all right."

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Jim Knowles' unit entered the 2023 season with a number of question marks, mostly surrounding their ability – or potential lack thereof – to limit explosive plays. This issue reared its ugly head in the final two games of last season against Michigan and Georgia, but this year's season opener against Indiana was a completely different story.

Outside of the final drive of the third quarter (that stretched into the fourth) where the Hoosiers connected on three passes worth 16 yards, 16 yards again and then 19 yards, the Buckeye defense mostly held its opponents in check, limiting them to just one play of 20 or more yards, that being a 24-yard completion by Tayven Jackson to wide receiver Cam Camper in the second quarter. Compare those stats to last year's Michigan game – where they relinquished three backbreaking passing scores of 45 yards or more along with two long TD runs – and you have a major improvement on that end.

The Buckeyes' ability to curb Indiana's big-play ability can be attributed to the stellar play of their defensive backs. Cornerback Davison Igbinosun and safeties Sonny Styles and Josh Proctor each set the edge when defending against the run, combining for 12 tackles on the day, while cornerback Denzel Burke was especially stout against the pass, recording two pass breakups.

What Didn't Work

Indiana's offense struggled to find explosive plays, but the same held true for Ohio State's offense despite so many talented receivers on the roster.

When a team's two-best weapons – Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka – are held to just five combined catches and 34 yards, it means the offense is in for a rough game. Luckily for the Buckeyes, however,

they are simply too talented at the skill positions for that to affect them against an inferior opponent.

That being said, the offense will need to figure out a way to get Harrison and Egbuka more touches if they want to thrive later in the season. This will likely change, however, as the scarce production may just be attributed to a lack of chemistry between the wideouts and McCord in his first start of the year.

And though the offense was eventually able to find a groove, finishing with 380 total yards, just 95 came in the first quarter, indicating a slow start for the unit that could get it in trouble against more talented teams.

Play Of The Game

McCord's 49-yard completion to tight end Cade Stover takes the cake on this one, as it served as a true momentum-shifter for the Buckeye offense. Ohio State's offense had been laboring for two-plus quarters prior to that link-up, generating just one touchdown drive and 13 points, keeping the Hoosiers squarely in the game.

McCord was also struggling to find his rhythm, throwing a costly red-zone interception earlier in the game that provided Indiana with all kinds of momentum. That all changed when McCord delivered a near-perfect pass to find the streaking Stover up the middle, who rumbled all the way down to the Hoosiers' 24-yard line.

The completion, which head coach Ryan Day described as McCord's best throw of the day, put the Buckeyes in position for an eventual Miyan Williams rushing touchdown – his second of the game – which extended the Ohio State lead to 20-3 and put the contest out of reach before the eventual 23-3 final.

— Patrick Engels

RB Depth A Key In Hot Conditions

The Ohio State running back room flexed its depth against Indiana, with Day calling on his three top rushers to carry the load for the Buckeyes amid scorching conditions.

With temperatures in the mid-to-upper 80s at kickoff and temperature readings on the field reaching over 110 degrees through the early stages of the contest, Day and his staff welcomed a running-back-by-committee approach throughout the game to ensure the full freshness of his offense, relying on TreVeyon Henderson, Chip Trayanum and Miyan Williams to carry the load.

"Trey is the starter, and Miyan is right there, and you could see what Chip can do," Day said after the game. "It's good to have multiple backs. It was hot today, especially in the first half. Tony (Alford) kind of rotated them, and that was good."

Day and Alford's approach was evident on Ohio State's first drive of the season. With McCord starting under center for just the second time in his career, the Buckeyes used four different rushers – Henderson, Trayanum and Williams, as well as a carry by McCord – to embark on a methodical 11-play, 80-yard drive which ended in the team's first score.

The sequence ended with a rumbling 7-yard touchdown from Williams, but it was mostly highlighted by the efforts of Henderson and Trayanum, who knocked off rushes of 19 and 17 yards, respectively.

OHIO STATE VS. INDIANA

Ohio State's first scoring drive set the tone during what would turn out to be a busy day for the running back room, as the three players would account for 27 of the team's 31 rush attempts along with 129 of their 143 total rushing yards. This heavy reliance on the run game could serve as a common theme for the Buckeyes as they embark on the rest of their schedule and continue to ease McCord – and potentially redshirt freshman Devin Brown – into their new roles as contributing quarterbacks.

"It's going to be a long season," Day said. "They're all going to carry it, but Trey is the starter, Miyan's right there, and Chip's right there as well. I don't think Dallan (Hayden) got a bunch of work today, either. He's going to have to play. We only have one football, but all those guys are deserving."

For the players themselves, carrying the load for the offense is an opportunity that they have fully embraced at the start of the season – as, in their minds, the entire unit is fully equipped to handle such a challenge.

"It was exciting," Henderson said. "We've got a great running back group, but we've just got to keep going, keep stacking days, keep stacking games and practices. But this running back group is dangerous."

Shuffle At Free Safety

Knowles and his defensive staff made a surprise move in the secondary during the team's season opener, inserting Proctor as the starting adjuster/free safety to start the game.

Earlier in fall camp, Knowles indicated that he planned to start Syracuse transfer Ja'Had Carter at the position for the start of the season. But after the second-year coordinator declared an open competition between Carter, Proctor and freshman Malik Hartford for the role later in the summer, the veteran Proctor came away with the starting job for Week 1.

"It means the world," Proctor said after the game. "That's all I wanted was a chance. All I needed was a chance to get out there. I know I can ball. I know what I can do, so when the chance came, I just wanted to take advantage of it."

Proctor made the most of his opportunity, setting the edge in the run game with a pair of blistering hits in the first quarter. This was headlined by his key tackle for loss of Indiana running back Jaylin Lucas midway through the first period, when the graduate safety quickly reacted to a Brendan Sorsby shovel pass to corral Lucas and pin the Hoosiers back to the 7-yard line, leading to an emphatic celebration from Proctor.

"We figured that another option was coming, and I knew I had the pitch guy," Proctor said. "I tried to beat the tight end to



SONNY BROCKWAY

BOOTING BUCKEYE — Sophomore kicker Jayden Fielding had a successful debut as Ohio State's starting kicker in the team's 23-3 win over Indiana, connecting on a trio of field-goal attempts and hitting his two extra-point tries.

the side so I wouldn't get blocked out. It felt good. I had to make sure I got the tackle at first, but it definitely felt good."

Despite the stellar start, Proctor saw his leading role slip away from him in the second half, where he was replaced by the first-year Hartford in the third quarter with the game still in question. Hartford, a four-star prospect who had earned praise at fall camp for his football acumen and athleticism, assumed the position for the majority of the second half, recording one tackle and a pass breakup.

It was likely déjà vu for Proctor, who started last season against Notre Dame at strong safety/bandit before being pulled for Ransom, who went on to start the rest of the season at the position.

Although Proctor and Hartford both saw time in Knowles' rotation, Carter did not record a snap against Indiana and was seemingly a healthy scratch as he was not listed as unavailable or questionable on Ohio State's availability report. The former Syracuse player had assumed first-team reps at the position throughout fall camp, and he

brings a wealth of experience to the roster, having started 28 games for the Orange in his three seasons with the program.

Proctor finished the game with four tackles, his TFL and a pass breakup, while Hartford was credited with a stop and a breakup of his own.

Even though Proctor was replaced with Hartford, based on Knowles' decision-making in the season opener, the three-man competition at adjuster seems to remain wide open, but it will likely spill into the

next couple of weeks before a clear starter can be identified.

Fielding Perfect In Ohio State Debut

The Buckeyes entered the season with questions looming at the kicker position. Presumed starter Jayden Fielding had yet to attempt a field goal at Ohio State and missed a 40-yard attempt in the spring game. The sophomore helped quash any concerns for the time being, however, connecting on each of his three kicks from 40, 22 and 22 yards, respectively. He also made his two extra-point attempts in the first and third quarters.

Fielding, who beat out former USC kicker Parker Lewis for the job after separating from the junior during fall camp, also handled kickoff duties for the Buckeyes against Indiana, averaging 64.7 yards per kick with three touchbacks. Last year, the League City, Texas, native kicked off 105 times for Ohio State during his freshman season with a 61.8-yard average, along with 46 touchbacks and three out-of-bounds kicks.

Fielding put forth a perfect start in his placekicking career, but Day hesitated to test his range in a crucial moment during the beginning of the second period. With the Buckeyes facing fourth-and-2 at the Hoosiers' 29-yard line, Day opted to leave the offense on the field – and Fielding on the sidelines – a decision that would lead to McCord's lone interception of the day, an errant throw intended for tight end Cade Stover.

"I think it was on the 29-yard line," Day said. "I felt like that was probably on the outer edge of (Fielding's) field-goal range. I felt like at that point, that was the right spot to go for it. It was fourth-and-2. I was disappointed that we didn't convert on that. I was disappointed that we didn't convert the third-down first. But I was ready to go for it on fourth-down, based on where the ball was. If it was another 10 yards in, then we probably would've kicked the field goal."

Fielding has shown he is capable of being a long-range kicker in his career, having previously connected on a 50-yard field goal during his senior high school season in 2021 while playing at IMG Academy.

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Opener A Struggle Before Buckeyes Down IU

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State entered its annual victory over Indiana as a 30-point favorite, so the fact the third-ranked Buckeyes won 23-3 in the season opener in Bloomington, Ind., on Sept. 2 likely left the players, coaches and fans with mixed emotions.

The Buckeyes led only 10-3 at the half and didn't put the game away until Miyan Williams' second rushing touchdown, a 3-yarder, made it 20-3 late in the third. Jayden Fielding made all three of his field goals, including a 22-yarder in the fourth quarter for the final margin.

Junior Kyle McCord, who won the starting job over redshirt freshman Devin Brown, was 20 for 33 for 239 yards and an interception. Brown played one series in the first half and the final drive for the Buckeyes. He was 1 for 3 for minus-2 yards.

"I'm glad we got the win, but we have a lot to work on," head coach Ryan Day said. "You don't need to be playing your best football the first game, but you need to grow from it."

Ohio State has won 29 straight against the Hoosiers since a 27-all tie in 1990. Indiana's last victory was a 41-7 win in Bloomington in 1988.



SONNY BROCKWAY

BACK TO FORM — After suffering through injuries last season, junior running back TreVeyon Henderson is healthy this year, and he reeled off 12 runs for 47 yards in the 23-3 win at Indiana.

Tight First Half

Indiana started the opening drive from its 25-yard line and faced a third-and-6, but the drive died when linebacker Steele Chambers stopped running back Josh Henderson 3 yards short after a catch.

The crowd of 50,050 at Memorial Sta-

dium on an 86-degree afternoon was just settling in when the Buckeyes then went 80 yards in 11 plays and 5:34 to take a 7-0 lead on their first series of the season after the defensive stop.

Following a 56-yard punt by James Ev-

ans and an 8-yard return by Emeka Egbuka, the Buckeyes went to work from their 20-yard line. TreVeyon Henderson lost 2 yards on a run, and Marvin Harrison Jr. made a catch for 9 yards before Henderson ripped off a 19-yard run. Later in the drive, Ohio State had a fourth-and-2 from the Indiana 34-yard line when McCord went to tight end Gee Scott Jr. for 10 yards. Chip Trayanum rushed for 17 before Williams had a 7-yard score, and Fielding added the extra point at the 7:16 mark.

McCord finished the drive 3 for 4 for 28 yards, including the fourth-down con-

version, and added 8 more yards on the ground.

Early in the second quarter, the Buckeyes were denied on their second fourth-down try when, from the Indiana 29-yard and needing 2 yards, McCord's pass across the middle was intercepted at the 22-yard line by Phillip Dunnam and returned 11 yards.

The energized Hoosiers marched down the field with wide receiver Cam Camper gaining 24 yards on a catch and, two plays later, running back Christian Turner running for 11 yards to the OSU 27 for a first down. Indiana came to the line on fourth-and-7 from the 24 but called timeout, and Chris Freeman kicked a 42-yard field goal that bounced in off the right upright to make it 7-3 with 6:15 left in the half.

Brown made his first appearance in the fourth series with 6:09 remaining in the first half. After two Williams runs for 9 yards, Brown rolled right and was caught for a 3-yard loss, forcing a 55-yard punt by Jesse Mirco that was returned 29 yards by Jaylin Lucas to the Indiana 42.

The Hoosiers ate up the clock and went for it on fourth-and-4 from the Ohio State 39, but safety Josh Proctor broke up a pass with 38 seconds left.

On the Buckeyes' first play of the next drive, a sideline pass to Harrison was incomplete. He landed on his shoulder and left the game for three plays, and Indiana defensive back Jamari Sharpe was called for taunting, placing the ball on the Indiana 46.

Tight end Cade Stover made a catch for 24 yards, but three incompletions followed, and Fielding made a 40-yard field goal with three seconds to go for a 10-3 halftime lead.

Ohio State had 172 total yards (94

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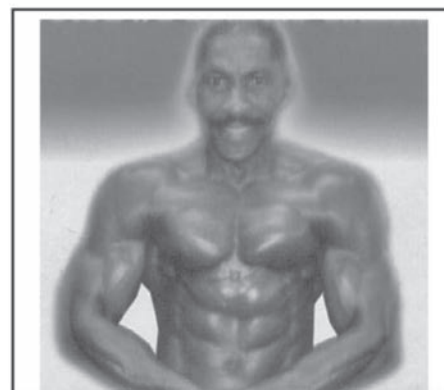
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OHIO STATE VS. INDIANA



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WHERE'S THE BALL? — Ohio State junior wide receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. (pictured) and Emeka Egbuka combined for only five receptions and 34 yards on just 10 targets in the 23-3 win at Indiana.

passing, 78 rushing) in the first half to 88 (27 passing, 61 rushing) for the Hoosiers. McCord was 10 of 17 for 94 yards and the pick.

Sluggish Second Half

The Buckeyes went three-and-out to start the third quarter with McCord at the helm, and a 22-yard punt return by Lucas

put the ball on the IU 34, but the Hoosiers punted it back.

A pass-interference call on a third-down pass to Harrison bailed out the Buckeyes and gave them a first down at the Indiana 48. On the next play, Julian Fleming had a 27-yard reception to the 21. Henderson then gained 2 yards and Stover hauled in a 9-yarder.

After an incompletoion to Harrison, Henderson went up the middle for 6 yards to the 4, and a quarterback keeper on third-and-4 gained nothing. Fielding then made a field goal from 22 yards out for a 13-3 lead at 6:42 in the third quarter.

After an Indiana three-and-out followed by a 60-yard punt, the Buckeyes drove 88 yards in six plays and 3:24, capped by Williams' 3-yard score to make it 20-3 with 1:51 left in the quarter.

The big play was a 49-yard catch-and-run by Stover to the 24. McCord then connected with Harrison for a touchdown, but it was nullified because Harrison stepped out of bounds before returning for the catch. Trayanum, who earlier in the drive had a 14-yard run, had rushes of 12 and 9 yards before Williams' score.

A 12-yard catch for Trayanum and a 15-yard reception for freshman Carnell Tate, the first of his career, paved the way for a 22-yard field goal for Fielding with 4:26 to play after the Buckeyes squandered a first-and-goal from the 5, with McCord previously finding Williams for 12 yards on fourth-and-9.

Brown took the snaps for the last Ohio State possession with 1:44 left. After an in-

completion, he got his first career completion, a 2-yard loss to Dallan Hayden, before another incomplete pass. Indiana got the ball back after a punt with 50 seconds to go at its own 32 and ran for 4 yards to end the game.

Trayanum rushed for 57 yards on eight carries to lead the Buckeyes, Henderson had 47 yards on 12 totes and Williams added 25 yards and his two scores on seven carries for the Buckeyes.

Stover led the Buckeyes with 98 yards on five catches – the yardage total a career high – and Fleming made a team-high six grabs for 58 yards. All-America receiver candidate Harrison had 18 yards on two receptions.

Indiana quarterback Brendan Sorsby was 8 for 16 for 58 yards, and Tayven Jackson finished 1 for 5 for 24 yards, both without a touchdown or interception.

Notes

Ohio State outgained Indiana 380 (237 passing, 143 rushing) to 153 (82 passing, 71 rushing) and had 23 first downs to 10 for the Hoosiers. ... Ohio State was just 2 of 12 on third down but 2 of 3 on fourth. ... The Buckeyes had six tackles for loss for 17 yards; Indiana had five for 13 yards. ... Sonny Styles had 1½ tackles for loss (3 yards) for the Buckeyes. ... Chambers led the Buckeyes with six tackles (four solo). Indiana linebacker Aaron Casey had 11 (nine solo) plus a tackle for loss for 2 yards.

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Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on what the team can learn from the win: "That's the journey. That's the part I like. Going back now and figuring out, OK, where are we at? What did we anticipate? What you can't do is take a bunch of chances and be reckless and all of a sudden put yourself at risk of losing a game. You can't do that. (We) probably could have been a little bit more aggressive at times today, but the number one goal is to get the win and then move forward. There's going to have to be times (when) we're going to have to be more aggressive, for sure."

Day on handling play-calling duties alongside offensive coordinator/wide receivers coach Brian Hartline: "There was a lot of great feedback from Brian between the series. There was a lot of dead (time), there were some injuries, and so then we got these timeouts. ... But during those times, we're constantly having conversations. (Offensive line coach) Justin Frye is very much involved, and the guys upstairs. It was a team effort and a good start. But as we start to get into some of the games in the next couple of weeks, we'll start to figure out how it's all going to work out moving forward. But like I said before, we've got to do what's best to win. Brian's doing a great job."

Ohio State junior quarterback Kyle McCord on how this start felt different from his first start as a freshman: "I think more control, for sure. Better understanding, just obviously being in the system going into my third year now and understanding what defenses are trying to do and what we're trying to do on offense, and just having a deeper understanding of the whole game."

Ohio State junior running back TreVeyon Henderson on McCord's start: "Kyle was great, man. His first time, his first real start, he was just so calm. He didn't let the pressure get to him or anything. When adversity hit, he didn't panic or anything. He kept us all relaxed. He's a great leader."

Henderson on playing in intense heat on the field: "We trained for it. Coach Mick (Marotti), just going through the offseason workouts in the summer and just fall camp, they've been preparing us for moments like this, so I feel like it didn't really affect us that much. But we definitely felt it."

McCord on Ohio State's running backs: "The running backs, that's one of



SONNY BROCKWAY

COMMON OPPONENTS — Ohio State's 23-3 win over Indiana on Sept. 2 was the fifth meeting between the Buckeyes and Hoosiers with both Ryan Day (left) and Tom Allen (right) at the helm, with Day holding a 5-0 edge over his coaching counterpart.

our deepest rooms. Really, in my opinion, there are five guys that could go. I think they all did a really good job, and that's the thing. The moment (Henderson) gets tired, you put in Miyan. Miyan gets tired, you put in Chip, whatever it is. That way we always have some fresh legs back there, and those guys ran hard today. They did a really good job I think in all three phases: running the ball, catching the ball and pass protection."

Indiana head coach Tom Allen on limiting Ohio State wide receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka: "I was really concerned about that matchup, without a question. We know for a fact those receivers are special, so just to be able to keep those guys in check was very critical."

Ohio State sixth-year safety Josh Proctor on being named a starter: "I just wanted to honestly keep my head down and work. I didn't know if I was going to be a starter, but I wanted to work like a starter. It was work, watching film, meeting with coaches, staying in the playbook and all of that. I just wanted to be prepared if I got the chance next time."

Proctor on Ohio State's defensive goals: "Our goal is to dominate every time we come out here. Just dominate. And we don't want any points allowed, we don't want a lot of yards allowed. That's what we want to come out and play like."

Ohio State junior cornerback Denzel Burke on sophomore cornerback Davison Igbinosun: "That's my dog. He's a great addition to the unit. I'm really excited to have him on the field, and he was making plays out there, and that's just the start to the season. I'm really excited."

Ohio State junior defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau on senior defensive tackle Jaden McKenzie's big tackle for loss: "Oh, man, I saw it. I saw the suplex. I was just hoping they didn't flag him. But I was right there celebrating with him. I was right there because we were trying to get to the quarterback. They were running a lot today but the moments we got there and seeing one of my brothers make the sack, it was just a lot of joy."

Tuimoloau on coming away with a win in a defensive battle: "A win is a win, and our number one goal was coming here and beating Indiana, and we did just that."

Indiana senior linebacker Aaron Casey, who had a game-high 11 tackles, on playing Ohio State closer than usual: "It really means a lot just knowing how much work we put in over the summer and over fall camp. To be able to do better than we have in previous years, it just means that we're working hard."

Deep Freshman Class Ready To Make Impact

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ryan Day and his Ohio State program continued to excel on the recruiting trail in 2023, securing the fourth-best class in the nation headlined by a highly-touted five-star prospect in wideout Brandon Inniss as well as 19 other four-star prospects.

The Buckeyes' talented crop of first-years once again starts at wide receiver, where they signed three wideouts in the top 10 at their position – Inniss, Noah Rogers and Carnell Tate – all of whom are expected to make an impact this season.

Day and his staff also made a concerted effort to haul in a number of in-state prospects, selecting eight players from Ohio, highlighted by the top two players in the state – safety Malik Hartford from West Chester Lakota West and Findlay offensive lineman Luke Montgomery.

Five freshmen made their Buckeye debuts during Ohio State's season-opening victory over Indiana, with two recording at least one statistic during the contest.

After witnessing their respective debuts, BSB assessed the impact each of the 21 scholarship freshmen will make on this year's roster using a "Playing Time Possibility" scale that grades each first-year on a scale of 1-10, with a one likely to redshirt or not see the field at all, a five expected to receive limited playing time and a 10 expected to start at some point this season.

Players are listed in alphabetical order by last name.

SAF Jayden Bonsu (6-1, 205), Hillside (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep – Bonsu has a steep hill to climb, finding himself behind fellow-freshman safety Hartford on the depth chart to start the season. He was also a late enrollee, joining the program in June. These two realities will make it difficult for the four-star prospect to see much action on the field in his first season, but he could emerge

as a key piece in defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' secondary later in his career due to his versatility and raw athleticism. **PTP: 2**

LB Nigel Glover (6-3, 210), Clayton (Ohio) Northmont – Glover is one the newest Buckeyes on the roster, having transferred to Ohio State from Northwestern on Aug. 1. The four-star defender – who was ranked the 10th-best prospect in Ohio – practiced with the team throughout fall camp, but it is likely still too early for him to make much of an impact this season. All signs are pointing toward Glover redshirting, but he may get some sporadic playing time on special teams. **PTP: 2**

SAF Malik Hartford (6-2, 194), West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West – Entering the program as an early enrollee and Ohio State's fourth-best recruit in the class, Hartford immediately made his presence felt, turning heads in practice with his unique speed and physicality. The four-star safety has bulked up, too, adding 19 pounds of muscle since arriving on campus. These qualities not only allowed him to shed his black stripe in April – the third-fastest freshman to do so – but have put him in contention for a starting role at adjuster/free safety. That was apparent in Ohio State's season opener against Indiana, where Hartford replaced Josh Proctor as the team's starting free safety/adjuster in the second half, logging one tackle and a pass breakup. **PTP: 9**

SAF Cedrick Hawkins (5-11, 182), Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa – Just like Hartford and Bonsu, Hawkins comes to Ohio State as a four-star safety. But he lacks the physical intangibles that his first-year teammates possess, checking in at just 5-11 and 182 pounds. Despite the smaller stature, the Florida native still plays big, recording 117 tackles as a junior in 2021. Hawkins also has blazing speed, having run sprints and long jump on his high school's track and field team. These attributes make him an intriguing young prospect, but it may be hard for him to find playing time this season in a talented position group. **PTP: 3**

WR Brandon Inniss (6-0, 207), Hollywood (Fla.) American Heritage – Inniss has spent just four months with the program, but he already placed his stamp on Ohio State's talented wide receiver room. The five-star wideout and No. 35 overall player in the class has earned high praise in the locker room, with coaches and teammates alike clamoring over his competitiveness and ability to quickly grasp the system. Inniss shed his black stripe after practice on Aug. 21 and although he did not see action against Indiana, expect the young wideout to make an impact later in the season. **PTP: 8**

QB Lincoln Kienholz (6-2, 200), Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs – Kienholz came to Columbus this summer following an illustrious high school career where he excelled in football, baseball and basketball. Now solely focusing on the gridiron, the South Dakota native has impressed Day and his staff throughout fall camp with his already-strong knowledge of the scheme. Kienholz will likely stay on the sidelines this season, entering the season at the bottom of the quarterback depth chart, but he can still gain value during his freshman campaign by



SONNY BROCKWAY

JUMBO ADDITION – Ohio State freshman offensive tackle Luke Montgomery made his first appearance for the Buckeyes in their 23-3 win over Indiana on Sept. 2, taking the field as an extra offensive lineman in jumbo packages.

leaning on the tutelage of graduate Tristan Gebbia, junior Kyle McCord and even redshirt freshman Devin Brown. **PTP: 1**

CB Jermaine Mathews Jr. (5-11, 182), Cincinnati Winton Woods – The No. 1 overall prospect in Ohio for this year's class and the reigning Ohio Division II Defensive Player of the Year, Mathews brings another element of versatility and speed to the Buckeyes' deep secondary room. At just 182 pounds, however, the four-star player will need to add muscle before he can make a significant impact on the team. With veterans Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and Davison Igbinosun set to assume the majority of the snaps at cornerback this season and Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner waiting in the wings, Mathews may have to wait until next year to earn significant playing time. He did make his Ohio State debut against Indiana, however, appearing on special teams. **PTP: 4**

DT Kayden McDonald (6-2, 319), Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett – Like Mathews, McDonald is part of a veteran group of defensive tackles who will mostly rely on the talent and experience of returning starters Mike Hall Jr., Ty Hamilton and Tyleik Williams. But considering Knowles' plan to rotate players on defense throughout the season to maintain freshness, don't rule out McDonald from seeing some live game action during his freshman campaign. At North Gwinnett – the same high school Hancock attended – the four-star tackle was a pure run-stuffer, collecting 40 tackles for loss during his senior season along with 13 sacks and two fumble recoveries. McDon-

ald's talent and size are already there, but time will tell if he is given a spot in the defensive line rotation this season. **PTP: 4**

DE Joshua Mickens (6-5, 236), Indianapolis Lawrence Central – At 6-5, 236 pounds, Mickens fits the mold of an elusive defensive end, and he certainly showed that in high school. Finishing his senior season as the top-rated prospect in Indiana, the four-star racked up 74 tackles, 20½ tackles for loss and 6½ sacks – a stellar stat line that allowed him to be named the top defensive lineman in the state by the Indiana Football Coaches Association. Mickens finds himself toward the bottom of the defensive end depth chart entering the season, however, and he will have to wait his turn behind returning starters J.T. Tuimolou and Jack Sawyer, along with surging upstarts Kenyatta Jackson and Caden Curry. **PTP: 2**

OT Luke Montgomery (6-4, 302), Findlay, Ohio – Montgomery nearly stole the starting right tackle role from senior Josh Fryar this summer, which would have made him just the third true freshman offensive lineman to start the opening game for Ohio State, Orlando Pace and Michael Jordan being the others. Nonetheless, Day still sees an avenue for the four-star Ohio native to see the field this season, stating on Aug. 31 that he and his staff "plan on playing him this season." That was the case in the opener against Indiana, when Montgomery checked in as an extra offensive lineman on jumbo packages. **PTP: 7**

DL Jason Moore (6-6, 295), Ft. Washington (Md.) DeMatha Catholic – Moore came into Columbus as the nation's 67th-

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best prospect, but he has yet to make much noise in a crowded defensive line room this summer. The four-star defender is a freakish athlete, however, standing an intimidating 6-6, making him the Buckeyes' tallest defensive line commit since Cincinnati Moeller's Sam Hubbard (6-6, 225) in 2014. Don't expect Moore to make much of an impact this season, but his raw physical intangibles will make it hard for Day and his staff to keep him on the sidelines beyond this season. **PTP: 2**

OL Joshua Padilla (6-3, 293), Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne – Padilla spent most of his time at Wayne anchoring the right tackle position, but he has moved around at Ohio State while working mostly with the backups during fall camp. The three-star lineman's versatility can prove to be a positive for the Buckeyes' offensive line this season if they are hit by the injury bug, but it is unlikely that he will emerge as a contributor this year. If he can put on weight, however, look for him to ascend toward Ohio State's two-deep in 2024 and beyond. **PTP: 2**

LB Arvell Reese (6-3, 235), Cleveland Glenville – The latest member of the Glenville pipeline, Reese has earned reps at different positions during fall camp. At Ohio State's Aug. 11 practice, the four-star – who is currently listed as a linebacker – was seen practicing with defensive line coach Larry Johnson and his end unit. This was not a new occurrence for him. He had lined up as both an edge rusher and linebacker during his high school career. Reese's defensive versatility has intrigued both Knowles and Day this summer, prompting both leaders to proclaim that he has "earned" an opportunity to play as a freshman. That moment presented itself against Indiana where he made his collegiate debut on special teams. **PTP: 6**

WR Bryson Rodgers (6-2, 185), Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch – Rodgers might not be the most talked about of the first-year Buckeye wideouts, but he still enters the season with a wealth of potential. The four-star's numbers dipped in his senior season – hauling in just 21 catches for 270 receiving yards and five touchdowns – but he carries the physical intangibles of a dominant wideout. Although Rodgers already has the speed of a collegiate receiver, he still needs to fill out and add muscle if he wants to emerge on the same level as Inniss, Tate and other young standouts. **PTP: 2**

WR Noah Rogers (6-2, 201), Raleigh (N.C.) Rolesville – Coming in as the nation's eighth-best wide receiver in the class, many would assume that Rogers would be one of the most talked about prospects on the team. Instead, with the ascension of Inniss and Tate, the Rolesville product has been a bit overlooked to start his Ohio State career. Despite most of the attention going to his five-star teammates, Rogers still possesses elite talent at the wide receiver position. He was seen making a number of highlight-reel catches during fall practices made public to the media and performed well enough in camp to lose his black stripe after Ohio State's scrimmage on Aug. 19. Rogers, who averaged 20.5 yards per catch in high school, might be held back this season only by the incomparable talent in the Buckeyes' wide receiver room, but he will surely make his presence felt at some point for the Scarlet and Gray, if not this year. **PTP: 5**

OL Austin Siereveld (6-5, 317), Liberty Township (Ohio) Lakota East – Siereveld was one of three first-year offensive linemen to enroll in January, and he has since made a positive impression on the program, shedding his black stripe on Aug. 23. He played tackle in high school, but he was seen working at guard during fall practices made available to the media – a change that he will likely stick with as his Buckeye career progresses. With Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones set to reclaim their roles at left and right guard, respectively, and veteran an Enokk Vimahi also returning, Siereveld faces an uphill climb to see the field. **PTP: 3**

CB Calvin Simpson-Hunt (6-1, 195), Waxahachie, Texas – Like fellow first-year Matthews, Simpson-Hunt has elevated the cornerback room with his raw speed and strength. The former high school track star, who ran a 100-meter time of 10.67 seconds his junior year, also excelled on the gridiron at Waxahachie as an all-around athlete, earning a Texas District 11-6A first-team selection. Simpson-Hunt is low on the cornerback depth chart this fall, but look for him to be used frequently on special teams, where he thrived in high school. **PTP: 3**

DL Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 294), Dublin (Ohio) Coffman – Smith, the son of former Buckeye All-American defensive lineman Will Smith, hasn't generated much buzz in camp, but he entered the program as a highly-touted prospect. He was the seventh-best player to come out of Ohio in the class after recording 47 tackles, 14 tackles for loss and five sacks. Smith is unlikely to get into Johnson's defensive line rotation this season, but he will instead use this time to gain more reps at defensive tackle, a position he is expected to assume in the future. **PTP: 1**

WR Carnell Tate (6-2, 191), Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy – One of the top prospects in the class, Tate is one of the more polished first-year wideouts in the Day era. Like Inniss, he has been commended by teammates and coaches throughout fall camp for his veteran-like talent and approach, with Marvin Harrison Jr. going as far as to say that his teammate could emerge as "one of the best receivers to ever come through Ohio State." With his already elite route-running and pass-catching skills, expect Tate to quickly emerge as a key contributor in an already-deep wide receiver room. He has already appeared in the stat sheets, securing one catch for 15 yards during the fourth quarter of Ohio State's win over the Hoosiers. **PTP: 9**

TE Jelani Thurman (6-6, 258), Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes – Thurman turned heads as an early enrollee in the spring with his speed and intimidating stature, allowing him to lose his black stripe on April 7. His talent continued to flash in the summer, but he is unlikely to earn much action in a veteran-laden tight end room. Returning senior and team captain Cade Stover has a stranglehold on the position, with Gee Scott Jr. and Joe Royer falling close behind. Day said on Aug. 31 that Thurman is still "learning to put it all together," and he has the perfect opportunity to do so while sitting behind a group of experienced teammates. Thurman did see the field against Indiana, however, making his Ohio State debut on special teams. **PTP: 4**

OL Miles Walker (6-5, 295), Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School – Another



SONNY BROCKWAY

STARTING STRONG – Ohio State freshman wide receiver Carnell Tate (17) made his debut in Ohio State's 23-3 win over Indiana, hauling in his first career reception for 15 yards.

spring enrollee, Walker came into the program as one of the top-rated linemen in the northeast. As a senior at Greenwich (Conn.) Brunswick School, he took home first-team Northeast Prep Football Conference All-League honors and was named NEPSAC Class A 2022 Lineman of the Year, all while spearheading an offensive line that relin-

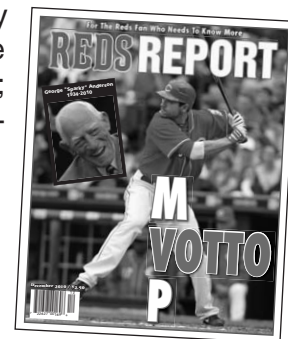
quished just eight sacks in over 200 pass attempts. Walker has committed to improving his strength, gaining 35 pounds over his high school career and then another 10 at Ohio State, so there is no denying his work ethic. Despite the efforts, Walker was stationed on the third-team offensive line at times during fall camp. **PTP: 1**

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YSU Penguins Continuing Rise Under Phillips

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Youngstown State's last national championship at the Football Championship Series level was won under a familiar face, with former Ohio State head coach and former Youngstown State president Jim Tressel leading the Penguins to a quartet of titles in 1991, 1993-94 and 1997, the latter just four years before Tressel would take over in Columbus.

In the years since Tressel left, however, Youngstown State has struggled to return to that level. The Penguins have made just two appearances in the FCS playoffs since 2000, Tressel's last season, with a 49-24 semifinal loss to Appalachian State in 2006 under Jon Heacock – brother of former Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Heacock – and a 28-14 loss to James Madison in the 2016 national championship game under Bo Pelini.

Since that last playoff appearance in 2016, the Penguins have gone a combined 27-35, bottoming out at 1-6 in 2020 under first-year head coach Doug Phillips. But a challenging first season did not deter Phillips, who has improved his win totals in every successive season, finishing 3-7 in 2021 before posting a 7-4 record last season. This was the first winning campaign for Youngstown State since 2017.

Despite a winning record and a fourth-place finish in the Missouri Valley Conference, the Penguins came up just short of a playoff appearance, dropping ranked games to North Dakota State and North Dakota – both of whom made the playoff – and suffering a late-season loss at Missouri State that popped the team's playoff bubble.

It's a disappointment that stuck with the team throughout the offseason and carried through to the season opener against Valparaiso on Aug. 31, a 52-10 win for the Penguins on their home turf to begin the campaign.

"We said it pregame," Phillips said after the win. "This season started with Nov. 20 (of last year) when we sat in that room and found out that we didn't make the playoffs."

It was a dominant win for Youngstown State, which accumulated 471 yards of offense and allowed just 195 total yards to Valparaiso while forcing three turnovers. It continued a strong stretch of play dating back to last season for the Penguins, but an easy win is not something that Phillips believes helps his team.

"You've got to learn from these," he said. "I want to see a struggle. I want to see, can our kids react to things that might not be going right? You've got to learn about your team. How do you do that when everything's just going as planned? These early games, to just go out and everything's going well, that's not going to teach you anything about your team."

If it's a struggle Phillips wants, then he has some appropriate plans for Sept. 9. Ohio State hosts Youngstown State for a noon kickoff from Ohio Stadium, just the fourth time the Buckeyes have played an FCS opponent since the turn of the century. Those previous contests have included

a pair of wins over Youngstown State (38-6 on Sept. 1, 2007, and 43-0 on Aug. 30, 2008) and a 76-0 shellacking of Florida A&M on Sept. 21, 2013.

Youngstown State took care of business to begin the season and did not get caught looking ahead, but it's clear – at least listening to the players – that at least some of the team was taking a peek ahead on the schedule. Asked after the game if he was ready to play Ohio State, junior wide receiver C.J. Charleston said, "Oh, right now."

"I'm ready. Next week is a big one. We can't get complacent. We've just got to come out and play YSU football."

That brand of Youngstown State football features a heavy emphasis on running the ball. It makes sense with a talented group of running backs – the room rushed for 302 yards and averaged 7.4 yards per attempt in the opener – and a veteran offensive line, with four returning starters in left guard David Metzler, center Aidan Parker, right guard Ryan Johnson and right tackle Jaison Williams. The lone newcomer is left tackle Desmeal Leigh, a redshirt freshman.

The running backs are hoping to be back at full strength against Ohio State, as the presumed starter entering the season, senior Dra Rushton, missed the opener with a lower-leg injury. He is helping the Penguins replace Jaleel McLaughlin, who spent the last three seasons at Youngstown State (after two seasons at Notre Dame College in South Euclid, Ohio) and became the NCAA's all-time leading rusher with 8,161 yards. He was announced as a member of the Denver Broncos' active roster on Aug. 29 after going undrafted earlier this year.

In lieu of Rushton and McLaughlin, the Penguins trotted out senior Tyshon King, who had an efficient 111 yards and two touchdowns on just 11 carries. The team also had contributions from redshirt freshmen Da'Shaun Whatley (five carries, 59 yards, one TD) and Cephus Harris III (seven carries, 57 yards), but Phillips expects Rushton to be back soon.

"He's been healthy and he's close," Phillips said. "When you're going into a game, I need him. This is a long season. I need you healthy and I need you ready to go. That was a call after warmups. But he's close. He wanted to go, but sometimes we've got to make good decisions for our young men and know that it's going to be a long season, and we need a healthy Dra."

At quarterback, the Penguins will start senior Mitch Davidson, who played in all 11 games last season and started the final seven contests of the season for Youngstown State. In those seven starts, he had a 5-2 record with 1,494 passing yards, 10 touchdowns and just one interception while completing 58.8 percent (110 of 187) of his passes.

In addition to a veteran offensive line, Davidson will be assisted by a talented group of receivers. The Penguins return several contributors, including senior Bryce Oliver (59 catches, 821 yards, 10 TDs), junior Latrell Fordham (18 catches, 165 yards, one TD) and sophomore Max

Get To Know ... Youngstown State

- **2023 Record:** 1-0.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation - Spread; Defensive Formation - 4-3; Starters Returning - Offense 9, Defense 6.
- **Head Coach:** Doug Phillips, 4th year at Youngstown State, 12-17.
- **Series History:** 3rd meeting, Ohio State leads 2-0-0.
- **School Facts:** Location - Youngstown, Ohio; Enrollment - 11,298; Nickname - Penguins; Colors - Red, White; Conference - Missouri Valley; Stadium - Stambaugh Stadium (Surface, AstroTurf; Capacity - 20,630).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Tyshon King	11	111	10.1	2
Da'Shaun Whatley	5	59	11.8	1
Cephus Harris	7	57	8.1	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Mitch Davidson	11-19	57.9	130	1-0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Bryce Oliver	5	65	13.0	0
CJ Charleston	4	47	11.8	1
Latrell Fordham	2	24	12.0	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game — 52.0
Rushing Yards Per Game — 302.0
Passing Yards Per Game — 169.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game — 471.0

2023 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	VALPARAISO	W, 52-10
Sept. 9	at Ohio State	12 p.m.
Sept. 16	ROBERT MORRIS	2 p.m.
Sept. 30	at Northern Iowa	2 p.m.
Oct. 7	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	6 p.m.
Oct. 14	at South Dakota	2 p.m.
Oct. 21	ILLINOIS STATE	2 p.m.
Oct. 28	MISSOURI STATE	2 p.m.
Nov. 4	at Indiana State	1 p.m.
Nov. 11	SOUTH DAKOTA STATE	12 p.m.
Nov. 18	at Murray State	2 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Alex Howard	8	1	9	3.0-10	2.0-9
Greg Benton Jr.	5	1	6	1.0-11	1.0-11
Devin Johnson	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Tyion Jones	4	0	4	0-0	0-0
Chris Fitzgerald	1	2	3	0-0	0-0
Anthony Johnson	0	3	3	0-0	0-0
Deamontae Diggs	2	1	3	1.0-11	1.0-11

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed — 10.0
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed — 40.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed — 155.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed — 195.0

Tomczak (26 catches, 430 yards, two TDs), the nephew of former Ohio State quarterback Mike Tomczak, who is on YSU's staff as an advisor to Phillips.

A boost to the room will be provided by Charleston, who missed all of last season after suffering an injury in fall camp. He previously accounted for 28 receptions for 364 yards from 2019-21, but in his return against Valparaiso, he caught four passes for 47 yards, including his first career touchdown.

"When I scored today, I almost shed tears," he said. "There were times last year that I didn't think I was going to be able to play football again. I was messed up mentally, and today it just brought my happiness back. I'm just thankful to be out there with my guys."

Moving to the defensive side of the ball, Youngstown State returns three starters on the defensive line in junior tackles Anthony Johnson and Chris Fitzgerald, as well as junior defensive end Dylan Wudke. The trio combined for 85 tackles (21 for loss) with eight sacks last season, while junior end Andres Lehrmann – who had 4½ tackles for loss last season – is also stepping in as a starter.

Behind the group is a trio of experienced linebackers, with junior Alex Howard manning the middle of the field, senior Greg Benton Jr. at weakside and junior D'Marco Augustin on the strongside. They combined for 111 tackles (11 for loss) last season, and Phillips said expectation remains high for the Penguins' front seven.

"The defensive line and linebackers, they do a great job," he said. "We knew last year. The expectation is even higher of these guys. It's an expectation that we've got to be able to stop the run, and when you can stop the run, you've got to take

away what they're going to do next, and that's going to be double moves and getting the ball downfield. We need to get pressure on the quarterback."

There's a familiar face in the secondary for Ohio State. Safety Marcus Hooker – younger brother of former Buckeye safety Malik Hooker – is entering his second season at Youngstown State after four seasons in Columbus. He started five games last year, finishing with 23 tackles and a pair of interceptions. He will be joined in the secondary by junior safety Tyjon Jones, and the cornerbacks for the Penguins include junior Amarian Robinson as well as junior returning starter Jordan Trowers.

Along with the \$800,000 being paid to Youngstown State by Ohio State to play this game, another benefit for the FCS program is that it allows an opportunity not only for the team to be seen on a larger stage but for the team to experience growth early in the season. That started with the Week 1 win over Valparaiso, and as the Penguins continue pushing toward a playoff berth for the first time since 2016, they're hoping to come out of their match-up with Ohio State as a better and more experienced team.

"We have 11 guaranteed games, and it starts this week," Phillips said prior to the opener. "There's no do-overs. You hope that the plan you put together is successful, and if there's mistakes in the plan, we'll find out and get hit in the face, and we'll adjust. We'll adapt, and we'll come out better the next week."

"That's what's been in our talks in our meetings. Everyone thinks it's X's and O's, but I think there's a bigger picture. I think that the bigger picture is the growth, and it is the step that I'm hoping we take this year."



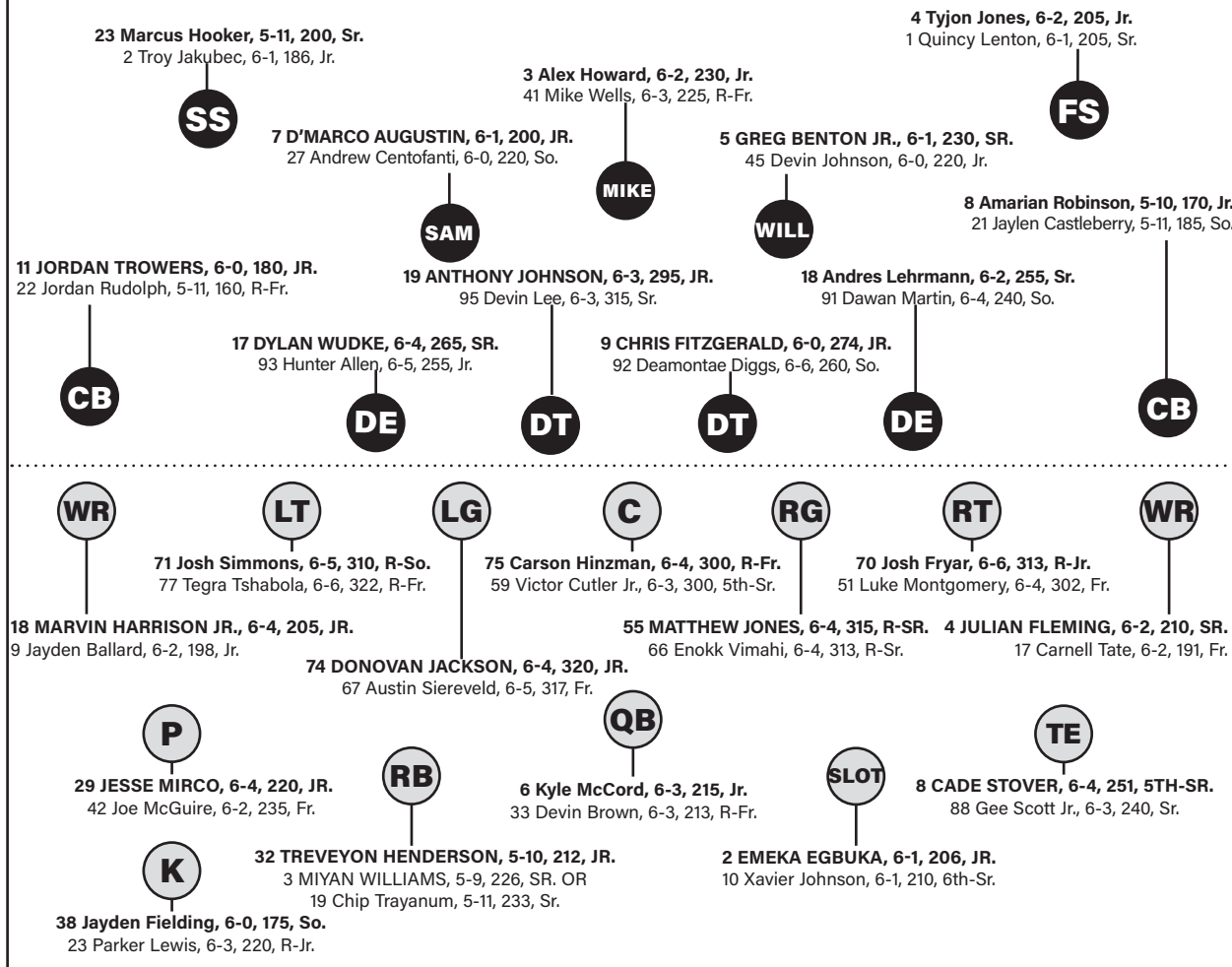
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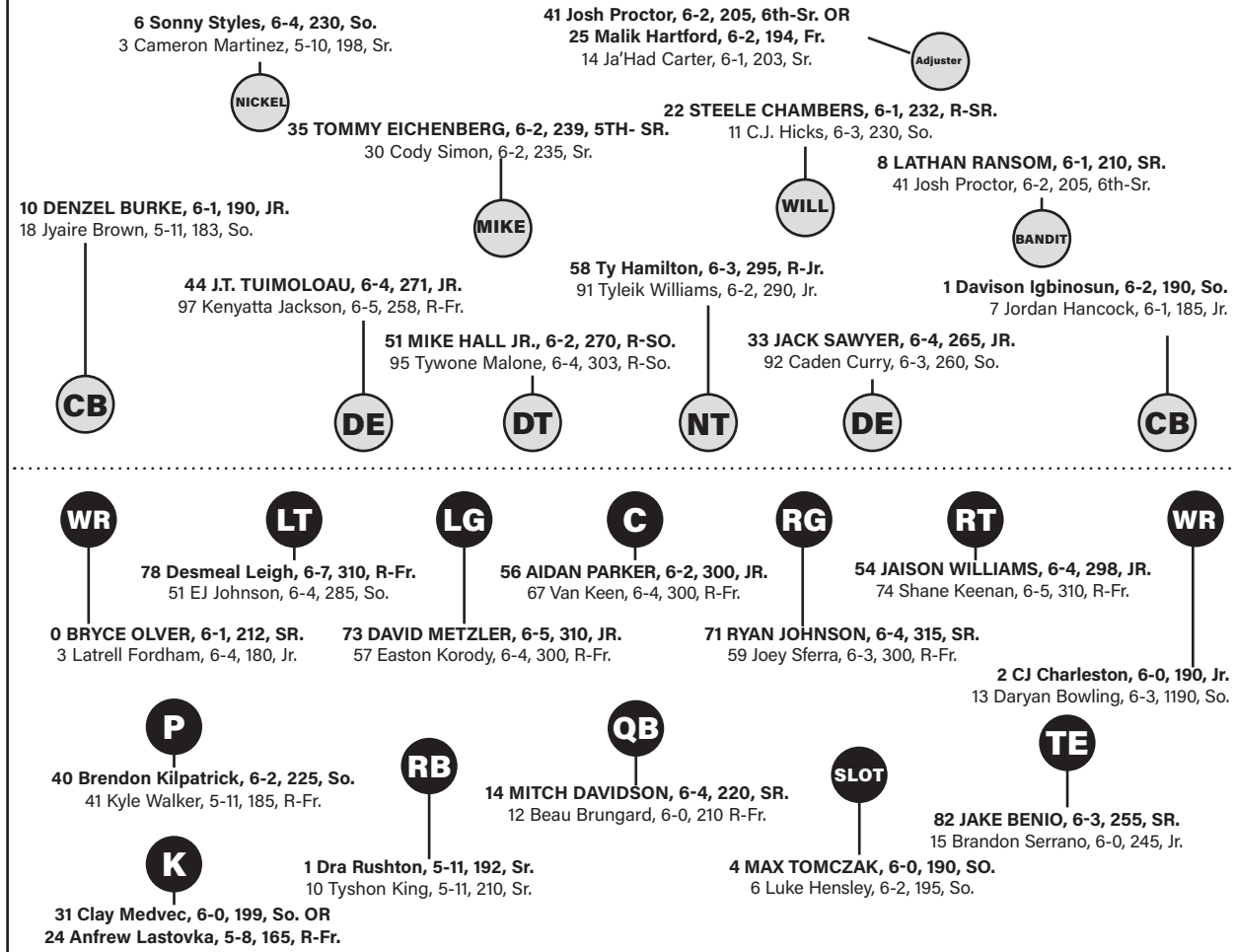
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WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN YOUNGSTOWN STATE HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. YOUNGSTOWN STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes gained a hard-earned 143 yards on a 4.6 average in the 23-3 season-opening win at Indiana on Sept. 2. With a retooled line and inexperience at quarterback, some blips could be expected in the running game. But the offense was "clunky," according to coach Ryan Day, and the best that can be said of the backs is there are a lot of good ones. Not that there's anything wrong with that, though a change in the starting lineup might be warranted. Chip Trayanum, the former linebacker, was most impressive with 57 yards on eight runs (7.1 per carry) while starter TreVeyon Henderson had 47 yards on 12 rushes (3.9). Miyan Williams gained only 25 yards through seven totes (3.6), but he scored from the 7 and the 3 where yards are hard to come by. Youngstown State opened with a 52-10 win vs. Valparaiso on Aug. 31. The Penguins allowed 40 rushing yards on 26 attempts (1.5), for what it's worth. YSU returns eight of its top nine tacklers. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

YOUNGSTOWN STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Penguins love to run the ball. They pounded Valpo for 302 yards on 41 carries. The gaudy 7.4 average was aided by 111 yards (10.1 average) for Tyshon King, including a 62-yard touchdown. Da'Shaun Whatley had an even better average (11.8) when he ran for a 54-yard TD among his 59 yards on five rushes. Ohio State limited the Hoosiers to 71 yards (2.2) with a long of just 11 yards. The Buckeyes should win the trenches easily. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. YOUNGSTOWN STATE PASS DEFENSE

It's a good bet, especially since it's legal in Ohio now, that Marvin Harrison Jr. will be featured early and often and the Penguins will pay. The potential high first-round pick in the 2024 NFL draft had two – yes, two – catches for a mere 18 yards against Indiana, although he did have a 24-yard TD overturned because he stepped off then back onto the field illegally. Of note, Harrison was targeted six times, tying Julian Fleming (six catches for 58 yards) for the team high. Tight end Cade Stover had a 49-yard catch and finished with five for 98 yards. Kyle McCord won the quarterback battle with Devin Brown and played nearly the whole game, going 20 for 33 for 239 yards and an interception in a tepid performance. Valparaiso completed 17 of 30 for 155 yards vs. YSU, but the Penguins don't have the secondary to stop Harrison and Co., nor the pressure to rattle the QB. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

YOUNGSTOWN STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Senior quarterback Mitch Davidson was 11 of 19 for 130 yards with a 17-yard TD pass and a 1-yard scoring run in the opener. In five of his seven starts last season he threw for more than 200 yards. His favorite target against Valpo was Bryce Oliver (65 yards, five catches) while C.J. Charleston had a touchdown among four catches for 47 yards. The offensive line returns four of five starters so that should provide a bit of confidence that Davidson won't spend most of the game on his back. Indiana managed only 82 yards as their two quarterbacks combined to complete 9 of 21 attempts. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Penguins blocked a punt and returned it for a touchdown for the first time since 2007. They also recovered a muffed punt. Jayden Fielding made all three field-goal attempts for the Buckeyes but Jaylin Lucas of Indiana returned two punts for 51 yards and three kickoffs for 38. OSU punter Jesse Mirco averaged 45.8 on four boots; Brendon Kilpatrick of Youngstown State averaged 42.3 on three punts. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INTANGIBLES

Youngstown State will have two extra days of rest, and that could prove to be vital when these teams renew their heated rivalry. OK, who's kidding who? The Buckeyes were unimpressive against Indiana but should have no problem against the Penguins. But it's not about beating Youngstown State. It's building toward the Sept. 23 showdown at Notre Dame so OSU can be sharper and more lethal than what was presented in the opener. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

The pressure to improve should be enough to carry the Buckeyes to an easy win. How big the margin is will be determined by OSU. A blowout was predicted against Indiana, and that didn't pan out. There's some hesitancy in making the same mistake twice. **OHIO STATE 45, YOUNGSTOWN STATE 7**

Former Buckeyes Share Preferred Style Of QB Play

By **PATRICK ENGELS**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

To begin the regular season, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and his program are relying on two quarterbacks – junior Kyle McCord and redshirt freshman Devin Brown – to lead the offense, a move that has rarely been made in Buckeyes' history, and never in Day's five-year tenure. Although both signal callers are slated to make a significant impact this season, they each offer a unique set of skills that separates one from the other.

McCord, who started Ohio State's season opener against Indiana and completed 20 of 33 passes for 239 yards, brings a more traditional approach to the position, mostly picking apart opposing defenses from inside the pocket. The younger Brown – who was used sparingly and went just 1 of 3 for minus-2 yards – resembles more of a modern-day thrower, where he often looks to buy some time with his legs and operate from outside the tackle box.

"Everybody has different skill sets," Brown said during fall camp. "Not everybody is the same quarterback. I would say I'm a little bit more athletic than Kyle, but at the end of the day, we've both got strong arms, we both can make plays, and he's going to be able to make plays with his legs too, so it is what it is."

The dual-threat approach has been widely adopted by both college football and the National Football League, with athletic passers such as Patrick Mahomes, Josh Allen and Lamar Jackson all making plays through the air and with their legs, but the verdict is still out regarding which style of play has historically given opposing defenses the most headaches.

Before McCord and Brown took the field against Indiana, Buckeye Sports Bulletin caught up with a pair of former Buckeyes – linebacker Jim Laughlin and fullback Vaughn Broadnax – to offer some perspective on an age-old question in football: Is a pure pocket-passer or dual-threat quarterback harder to defend?

The search for an answer started with Laughlin, an eight-year NFL linebacker from 1980-1987 and co-captain of Ohio State's 1979 football team. He helped guide the Buckeyes to an 11-1 record and Rose Bowl appearance that same year while posting 77 tackles, nine tackles for loss and two pass breakups – not to mention blocking two kicks – and said he believes the edge goes to the more mobile passer, as it presents a new set of challenges for defenses.

"It's a pain in the butt," Laughlin said. "I mean, you have everybody covered, and you do a great job, and then all of a sudden he slips out and starts running to his right. You really don't want them running to their right. We used to always try and get them running to their left, for a right-handed quarterback."

"Those guys that run around, they drive defensive coordinators crazy. You can have great schemes and everything, and then they bust a play and break out, and all of a sudden, (they gain) 40-50 yards. Or you have them third-and-12, and they bust out, to pick up 15 yards. It's frustrating."

Ohio State has struggled with those types of quarterbacks in recent seasons, with To-



SONNY BROCKWAY

DIFFERENT STYLES – Ohio State quarterbacks Kyle McCord (left) and Devin Brown (right) offer differing attributes as quarterbacks, with McCord operating more as a pure pocket passer while Brown is considered the more athletic of the pair.

ledo's Dequan Finn and Maryland's Taulia Tagovailoa both needling the defense last year through the air and on the ground. They combined for 446 passing yards, 82 rushing yards and six combined touchdowns, and those fits led to some reflection from the coaching staff.

"I don't think we did a great job (against Finn)," defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said after the win over Toledo. "That starts with me. I think it was not at the level that we want our defense to be – Silver Bullet caliber, it wasn't there."

Laughlin, the former first-team All-Big Ten defender, could not recall a time at Ohio State when he was particularly beaten by a more mobile quarterback, adding that when he played – at least at the college level – that dual-threat quarterbacks weren't as prevalent.

But he did point back to a few moments during his NFL career when a more shifty passer particularly gave him fits – that quarterback being Pro Football Hall of Famer and four-time Super Bowl champion Joe Montana with the San Francisco 49ers.

"Montana, he could (run)," Laughlin said. "You never wanted him going to his right because he would kill you. Montana would drive me nuts. You'd have him third-and-15 and he'd hit a corner route and the guy would take a quick two steps and go out of bounds. The corners were all over him. (Former NFL defensive coordinator) Fritz Shurmur won a Super Bowl with the Green Bay Packers, and that's what he always said: 'Don't let him get out of the pocket to the right.'"

Montana was followed in short order by fellow 49er and Pro Football Hall of Famer Steve Young, who helped usher in a new era of dual-threat quarterbacks in the NFL. While Laughlin never had the pleasure – or displeasure, depending on the perspective – of facing off against Young, it was made clear by his coaches that Young was not a player

to be tested.

"Jerry Glanville was a smart defensive coordinator (in Atlanta during Laughlin's time with the team). He did not want to play against Steve Young, because Montana couldn't run like Young could. Nobody could. He'd always say, 'Don't hurt Montana, I don't want to go against Steve Young.' There's a smart guy telling you what he did in the '80s."

Broadnax, who served as the Buckeyes' fullback from 1980-1983 under head coach Earle Bruce and rushed for 1,079 yards and 14 touchdowns, offered his unique perspective from the offensive side. Like Laughlin, the former Ohio State rusher indicated that he prefers more of a dual-threat quarterback rather than the standard thrower, as it can add another element to the offense that can stifle the game plans of opposing defenses.

"My preference would be to have a quarterback that can pass and run," Broadnax said. "It opens so much up for your offense. If you're doing play-action and the quarterback never runs the ball, you're not going to worry about the quarterback or the fake. They're going, 'OK, well the quarterback is not going to keep the ball, so we're going to focus on running back.'"

"Or if it's a half-fake, where you can still see the ball, we're going to drop back in pass and cover the receivers. If there's a threat of that quarterback running or having that skill to run, it adds an extra dimension to the offense, and it's always going to be a problem for the defense."

While Broadnax and Laughlin are in agreement on this debate, the fullback added that this true dual-threat philosophy has not been implemented by Day and his staff since he assumed head coaching duties for Ohio State in 2019.

The Buckeyes received some running production out of quarterback Justin Fields, who logged 867 rushing yards from 2019-20. However, under C.J. Stroud, the threat of a

quarterback run was almost entirely taken out of the game plan, and it's a missed aspect of his game that he wishes he had capitalized on more during his career.

"I'll be honest, I told (NFL teams) like I'll tell you all. I didn't (run) a lot in college, and I feel like I should have," Stroud said in March. "It's something I do regret. I feel like I could have done it a lot more. But I think when you turn on the film and you really watch what I do, and you really look at film game-to-game, I have used my athleticism – not only just in the Georgia game where I did it a lot – (but) I've done it in every other game. I've had tough third-down runs. I've had tough fourth-down runs."

"But there were times I didn't run the ball when maybe I should have. I feel like that's something that I learned, and that's what football is about."

As Stroud alluded to, he did make an effort to scramble in his last collegiate game against Georgia in the College Football Playoff, but the two-time Heisman Trophy finalist logged just 136 rushing yards in his three seasons at Ohio State, with 48 of those yards coming on his first career carry, a touchdown run against Michigan State in 2020.

Whether he is looking at this season's signal callers or toward the future, Broadnax said Day and his program must increase the mobility of his starting quarterbacks if they want to keep up with the ever-evolving nature of college football.

"It's been my impression, over the last four years, that Ryan Day really prefers his quarterbacks not to run," Broadnax said. "I (first) look at Dwayne Haskins, in the first couple years on the field, he ran the ball. But it appeared that maybe he was coached not to run and stand in the pocket to deliver to the receivers, more so than looking for an escape route."

"I saw that with Justin Fields, because, in my view, Justin took a lot of sacks that he shouldn't have. And he has the mobility and speed and quickness that sacks shouldn't have been rarely a stat that his offensive line should have compiled. And then when we look at C.J. Stroud, his first touchdown, I believe, was a long run against Michigan State. Watching his high school film, he wasn't afraid to run."

While Brown likely offers more athletic upside at quarterback for Ohio State, that is not to say that McCord can't hold his own, and he certainly is not opposed to tucking the ball and running when needed while also providing a more stable offering as a pocket passer. At the end of the day, the Buckeyes would likely find success with either signal caller for the entire season, but it will come down to whichever quarterback can offer the best of both worlds for Ohio State.

"I just think that Ryan coaches his quarterbacks to exhaust all their options while in the pocket," Broadnax said. "But in this day and age, when you have defensive ends that run a 4.50 (40-yard dash), you have to have an athletic quarterback. Now, he can be a pocket quarterback, but he has to have the ability to escape and extend plays. And the quarterback that does that best, he should be your starting quarterback, whoever that is."

“Violent” Hartford Making Push At Free Safety

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Freshman safety Malik Hartford announced his commitment to Ohio State in April of last year, but it was a few months later in his senior season at West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West when he offered a sense of what the Buckeyes might get once he arrived on campus.

Always known as a physical safety, Hartford – with Lakota West holding onto a 16-13 lead over Cincinnati St. Xavier with just 20 seconds remaining in the season opener on Aug. 19, 2022 – delivered a vicious hit on St. Xavier wide receiver Andrew Weber, who caught a pass across the middle of the field before being leveled by Hartford. A flag was thrown and Hartford was ejected for the remainder of the contest, though the Ohio High School Athletic Association later ruled that the hit was not targeting.

Lakota West held on to win the game, and video of Hartford's hit went viral, with millions – including Ohio State head coach Ryan Day – seeing him lay down the hammer.

“We saw a guy who flashed on film and really was physical on film,” Day said on Aug. 29. “I remember some of the highlights he had coming out of high school, just a really fast, violent player. Then when he got here, we quickly learned that there was more to him than just that. He has a very mature approach. He sees it. He's got very good instincts.”

Those instincts have allowed Hartford to come in and make an immediate impact at Ohio State. He was an early enrollee in the program and lost his black stripe on April 7, just the third freshman at the time – following wide receiver Carnell Tate and tight end Jelani Thurman – to become an “official” member of the team.

“Malik has come in and worked,” Ohio State safeties coach Perry Eliano said in April. “You see the talent that you saw when he was at Lakota West. He's extremely smart and has a high football IQ. He's a very, very humble young man that has come in and shown flashes of what he can be. He's still learning the game of football on the collegiate level, but I'll tell you what, I've been pleased with what I've seen.”

But when looking back at the spring to now, not only has Hartford continued to learn, but he's put himself in contention to be a major contributor for Ohio State's defense. While safeties Lathan Ransom and Sonny Styles are slotted in as starters at the bandit/strong safety and nickel, respectively, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said on Aug. 29 that the team had yet to make a decision at adjuster/free safety, with Hartford in contention along with senior Ja'Had Carter and sixth-year senior Josh Proctor.

“Who's going to get it? We've still got a couple of days of practice left,” Knowles said. “Let's go out and see what you're made of. Go out and get the position.”

Despite missing most of the spring with an injury, Carter made a case over the last few months to be a starter in Ohio State's secondary, arriving in Columbus this offseason after three seasons and 28 starts at Syracuse. While Proctor has never exactly been able to put it all together with the Buckeyes, there



SONNY BROCKWAY

HARD-HITTING SAFETY — Ohio State freshman safety Malik Hartford has made a push to potentially start this season for the Buckeyes at adjuster/free safety, seeing significant time on the field against Indiana in the season-opening win.

was also an argument for him at one of the starting safety spots considering his veteran status on the team, as well as reports of a positive offseason.

“Josh has great closing speed, and we know that he will be a factor in terms of run support and getting to the ball,” Knowles said. “He kind of brings a different element with the way he comes high-low, inside-out. And then Ja'Had, he's played a lot of football. He's coachable, he's smart and he has experience.”

The defensive coordinator indicated that all three would see the field against Indiana, and that was partially the case as Proctor got the start at free safety before Hartford replaced him in the second half, but Carter did not play against the Hoosiers.

But the fact that Hartford – who just arrived on campus in January and is competing with a pair of seniors with eight combined seasons of college football under their belts – is in contention for a starting job is a testament to his work ethic since arriving in Columbus.

“He's smart. He's got football intelligence,” Knowles said. “I had a guy at Oklahoma State, Kolby Harvell-Peel, who played for me as a freshman. These are guys that are rare. They come in, they just have an understanding of the game and they find a way to get around the ball. It jumps out at you.”

While Hartford's vicious hits at Lakota West made headlines, he was also a highly-touted prospect due to his instincts, speed and playmaking ability. In his final two high school seasons, Hartford had 101 tackles, four interceptions, five pass breakups, a sack and six blocked kicks, flying all around the field for the Firebirds.

“From day one when we went into his house in recruiting, we knew he was always talented,” Eliano said. “I think what he's done with our nutrition, our strength staff as far as the gains he was able to put on throughout the summer, that's been nothing short of

amazing.”

Listed at 6-2 and 175 pounds during the recruiting process, Hartford has since bulked up to over 190 pounds and has seemingly maintained the speed that made him a force in the high school ranks. Those dramatic physical changes will not only help Hartford on the field, but it also helped settle an offseason bet between Day and Knowles.

“We had a little friendly wager between Knowles and I,” Day said. “I said, ‘By the time August camp hits, (Hartford)'s going to be over 190 (pounds).’ Knowles jumped on the bet, and I won. He came in at 192. So from January to August, he really got after it in the weight room, and he deserves the opportunity to play. He's done everything he's been asked to do.”

“He still is a freshman, so we'll be smart early on in this game (against Indiana). But I'm really excited about his future.”

The common thread among those who have been alongside Hartford is that the freshman displays an unusual amount of maturity for someone entering his first season

in the program. This quality – not to mention his inherent playmaking ability – has allowed him to get up to speed and become a valued member of the room.

“He's really mature,” Ransom said. “I think he came in here, handled himself really well, always asks a lot of questions, is really smart. I think that's what really separates him so early. I'm excited. He learned really quickly and makes a lot of plays on the ball, so I can't wait to see what he does.”

“I'm not surprised because he came in the spring and you already saw glimpses of it in the spring, so for him to just continue to advance and learn and make plays, man – he's a sponge. He soaks up all that knowledge that we're getting taught in the room, so I'm not surprised at all.”

Ransom added that Hartford already has an equivalent knowledge of the defense as some of the older guys in the room, so he would feel just as comfortable playing alongside Hartford as he would any of the other veteran safeties on the roster.

“He's really confident in what he does, flies around and makes a lot of plays on the ball,” Ransom said. “I'd be excited to play against Malik or play against all the other dudes. I mean, Malik, (Proctor), Ja'Had, all those dudes make a lot of plays – Cam (Martinez) – so honestly, whoever's next to me – Sonny – I'm comfortable with them in the game.”

Knowles did caution, though, that a position like safety is one that can come with plenty of scrutiny, as a misstep in coverage can – and often will – lead to opposing offenses scoring. Ohio State saw this plenty last season, with Proctor benched after allowing a big gain against Notre Dame in the opener. Ransom and Tanner McCalister also saw their share of busts, allowing a wide open 76-yard passing touchdown in the College Football Playoff.

But Ohio State's focus throughout this offseason has been on limiting those explosive plays, and Knowles said that Hartford is on a path to limit those freshman follies should he see the field in an extended fashion.

“Of course, you worry about freshman mistakes, and back there (in the secondary), a mistake is costly,” Knowles said. “So it's our job to judge his progress. He's on that path. He's on that path, and we've just got to keep fine-tuning it.”

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FOOTBALL (1-0)

Sept. 2 at Indiana, W 23-3; **9** YOUNGSTOWN STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

Oct. 7 MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

WOMEN'S FIELD HOCKEY (4-0)

Aug. 25 Lehigh, W 5-2; **27** Lafayette W 4-1.

Sept. 1 NEW HAMPSHIRE, W

4-1; **3** BUCKNELL, W, 2-1; **4** UC DAVIS, 2 p.m.; **8** Louisville, 6 p.m.; **10** STANFORD, 2 p.m.; **15** MICHIGAN, 4 p.m.; **17** Michigan State, noon **22** NORTHWESTERN, 1 p.m.; **24** OHIO, 1 p.m.; **29** Iowa, 4 p.m.

Oct. 1 Indiana, noon; **6** Penn State, 5 p.m.; **8** Kent State 1 p.m.; **13** RUTGERS 3 p.m.; **15** MARYLAND, 1 p.m.; **22** BELLARMINE, 1 p.m.

Nov. 2 Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **3** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **5** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich.

MEN'S SOCCER (0-2-1)

Aug. 24 CAL STATE NORTHRIDGE, T 1-1; **27** UC DAVIS, L 2-1.

Sept. 1 at IU Classic in Bloomington, Ind., vs. Seton Hall, L 1-0. **4** WASHINGTON, 7 p.m.; **9** Butler, 7 p.m.; **15** PENN STATE, 7 p.m.; **19** KENTUCKY, 7 p.m.; **24** Northwestern, 2 p.m.; **29** Rutgers, 7 p.m.

Oct. 3 XAVIER 7 p.m.; **6** MICHIGAN, 7 p.m.; **10** Louisville, 7 p.m.; **15** Indiana, noon; **20** WISCONSIN, 7 p.m.; **24** Michigan State, 7 p.m.; **29** MARYLAND, 1 p.m.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (2-2-1)

Aug. 17 MIAMI (OHIO), W 3-0; **20** BUFFALO, L 2-1; **24** Memphis, L 6-1; **27** Montana, T 2-2; **31** OAKLAND, W 6-0.

Sept. 7 OHIO, 7 p.m.; **10** AUBURN, noon; **17** Michigan State, 1 p.m.; **21** NEBRASKA, 6 p.m.; **24** Maryland, 1 p.m.; **28** INDIANA, 7 p.m.

Oct. 1 ILLINOIS, noon; **8** Penn State, 1 p.m.; **12** Minnesota, 7 p.m.; **15** Wisconsin, 2 p.m.; **19** RUTGERS, 6 p.m.; **22** MICHIGAN, 1 p.m.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (3-2)

Aug. 25 at NKU Tournament in Highland Heights, Ky., vs. Northern Kentucky, W 3-0; **26** at NKU Tournament in Highland Heights, Ky., vs. Bowling Green, W 3-2; **27** at NKU Tournament in Highland Heights, Ky., vs. East Tennessee State, W 3-0.

Sept. 1 SPORTS IMPORTS CLASSIC VS. GEORGIA TECH, L 3-1; **2** SPORTS IMPORTS CLASSIC VS. GEORGIA TECH, L 3-1; **8** Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in Stanford, Calif., vs. Stanford, 10 p.m.; **9** Big Ten/Pac 12 Challenge in Stanford, Calif., vs. Oregon, 7:30 p.m. **14** Texas, 8 p.m.; **15** Baylor, 8 p.m.; **22** Nebraska, 9 p.m.; **24** Iowa, 3 p.m.; **27** WISCONSIN, 8 p.m.

Oct. 1 MARYLAND, noon; **6** Rutgers, 7 p.m.; **7** Penn State, 6:30 p.m.; **13** ILLINOIS, 7 p.m.; **15** PURDUE, 1 p.m.; **18** Wisconsin, 8 p.m.; **21** Indiana, 8 p.m.; **25** Northwestern, 6 p.m.; **29** Michigan, 2 p.m.

Nov. 3 MINNESOTA, 6:30 p.m.; **4** INDIANA, 7 p.m.; **8** MICHIGAN STATE, 7 p.m.; **12** Maryland, 1 p.m.; **15** Illinois, 9 p.m.; **18** Minnesota, 8 p.m.; **24** PENN STATE, 7 p.m.; **25** RUTGERS, 7 p.m.

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Houston Has No Problem Making Stroud Starter

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

C.J. Stroud felt “blessed” upon learning he was named the starting quarterback for the Houston Texans for the Sept. 10 opener at Baltimore. But some might think a better word is “cursed,” because he is taking snaps for one of the NFL’s most woe-be-gone franchises.

Stroud, the No. 2 pick in the 2023 NFL draft out of Ohio State, will be the Texans’ fourth Week 1 starter in as many seasons following Davis Mills (2022), Tyrod Taylor (2021) and Deshaun Watson (2020).

Houston was 11-38-1 and failed to reach the playoffs the past three seasons, paving the way for Stroud to become the face, and hopefully arm, for a new era. He beat out the three-year veteran Mills, who went 5-19-1 as a starter.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that being drafted so high usually means a player is going to a bad team and will take his lumps early in his career.

Think of the late Dwayne Haskins (Washington) and Justin Fields (Chicago), Stroud’s immediate predecessors at Ohio State. Fields started the third game of his pro career in 2021 and was named the permanent starter after the fourth, but the Bears struggled. Haskins became a starter in Week 9 of his rookie season but could not hold the position.

Still, Stroud is ready to seize the opportunity given to him by first-year coach DeMeco Ryans following the Texans’ final preseason game vs. the New Orleans Saints on Aug. 27.

“C.J. will be our Week 1 starter in Baltimore,” Ryans said. “It’s been, over the course of the entire process of OTAs (organized team activities), training camp, preseason games – just seeing the complete product and knowing C.J.’s desire to continue to get better.

“I thought he did a really good job. (He) continued to progress, had a good week (Aug. 19) vs. Miami, and to come back out this week, the ball placement again was very nice.”

The pronouncement seemed a foregone conclusion as Stroud showed progress throughout the preseason, but he ended up getting the nod later than two of his rookie contemporaries. The No. 1 pick, Bryce Young from Alabama, was given the job early by the Carolina Panthers, and No. 4 pick Anthony Richardson (Florida) had also been named a starter for the Indianapolis Colts well before Stroud. Stroud was unconcerned, though, about what others were doing or thinking heading into his final preseason game.

“(I’m not) tripping. I just do what’s on my plate. I’m not worried about anybody else’s plate. I’ve got to focus on what we’ve got going on in this locker room and just getting better every day,” he said. “It’s not about any of that stuff. It’s about competing every day and just getting better. That’s not my job (to name a starter). My job is to go out there and play. I’ve got the fun stuff to do.”

Ryans said it was a methodical process that resulted in eventually naming Stroud

the team’s starter for this season.

“We’ve seen a complete product (this preseason) and C.J.’s desire to continue to get better,” he said. “We’re not where we need to be as a team overall. We all have to continue to get better, and it’s just having the mind-set to do that, and C.J., along with all our other guys, knows we have to get better in that regard.”



CJ Stroud

When Stroud addressed the media for the first time after officially winning the job, his opening words following the game against New Orleans mirrored nearly every one of his press conferences at Ohio State.

“First and foremost, I just want all glory and praise to my lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Just having that opportunity, man, it’s a blessing to be able to play this game. Especially in the league, especially at the Superdome. It was definitely a blessing,” Stroud said. “Something that I think I worked for and definitely earned. But at the same time, nothing else really changes. I’m still going to work like the way I’m working even more now.

“I’m blessed enough to be able to be a starter so young in this league, which isn’t the easiest thing to do. But I know my coaches have trust and faith in me, and I’m going to go out there and try to do my best.”

Building on Buckeye Days

Stroud threw for 8,123 yards with 85 touchdowns and 12 interceptions in two seasons as a starter for the Buckeyes after spending the 2020 season as Fields’ backup. Stroud was fourth in Heisman Trophy voting in 2021 and third last season.

Confidence has always been his strong suit, and that characteristic helped Stroud take control of the huddle and win over the veterans looking for leadership.

“He earned it,” running back Dameon Pierce told Houston TV station KPRC of Stroud starting. “He came in to work since day one. He did his job. He lived up to all the hype. He’s a great kid off the field and even a better player on it. He’s a great leader, and I’m excited for him.”

Being praised by an older player is special for Stroud.

“Honestly, I think it means a little more. Something about football, I think everything kind of happens naturally. Like either you’re going to play (well), or you’re not,” he said. “Whatever is going to happen happens. But locker rooms, those are where bonds and brotherhood and things that really mean something to me happen.

“I just came in and was myself and think guys gravitated towards me, and I got to hang out with a lot of dudes off the field in the locker room and do some things that were awesome group bonding, and I definitely think that’s what makes football special.

“You’ve got so many dudes from different walks of life to come together to play this amazing sport, all of us in the locker room and sharing the same name. That’s special, man, because it’s hard to do. I don’t

think there is any other profession that does that at our scale and has to trust on seeing other guys do their jobs.”

Stroud’s pro career got off to a rocky start when he threw an interception on his second pass against the New England Patriots on Aug. 10, but his totals for his three starts were 11 completions in 20 attempts for 89 yards, the one pick and a touchdown against New Orleans.

“Each day, he is just growing,” wide receiver Nico Collins said. “We are all doing it step-by-step. We are all growing as an offense, as a unit, and as a team. We just feel that energy. We are there for each other and can’t wait for the season.”

Stroud was 2 for 4 for 13 yards in the 20-9 loss to the Patriots. In his second game against the Miami Dolphins, a 28-3 defeat, he went 7 for 12 for 60 yards. His best play was a bootleg right play to former Buckeye receiver Noah Brown for 14 yards.

“With the passes that C.J. made, you see the accuracy that you saw in college,” Ryans said. “You saw C.J. just playing comfortable, and it was exciting to see him just playing loose, making the throws that we’ve all seen him make in practice. You saw him just being himself and being comfortable, and that’s what he can do.”

In the preseason finale, won 17-13 by the Texans, Stroud was 2 for 4 for 16 yards. His lone score of the preseason was a 3-yard toss to Collins on a crossing route.

“It was really cool to connect with Nico,” Stroud said. “Actually, we got that right after practice. It was (two days before the game), like three, four times. Just getting it down, and for it to pay off and for us to get a touchdown off it, it was definitely cool to see the hard work pay off. It was a blessing and hopefully the first of many.”

The Athletic’s Ted Nguyen wrote that Stroud’s preseason got off to a rocky start, but he was able to recover ahead of being named the starter.

“The Texans rookie’s first preseason game was a bit of a disaster against the Patriots,” Nguyen said. “He looked overwhelmed by the pressure and threw an ugly interception, but since then, he’s turned things around. Against the Dolphins and Saints, he made quick decisions and showed off his accuracy, one of his best traits. Stroud didn’t cut his teeth (in college) on creating second-reaction plays like Richardson or Young. He had an outlier game against Georgia when he did dazzle outside of the pocket, but it remains to be seen how functional he is if he’s forced to create in the NFL.

“Thankfully for him, he’ll have one of the better offensive lines protecting him anchored by blue-chip left tackle Laremy Tunsil. He has a group of young, unproven targets, but one or more of his receivers – like Tank Dell – could break out. Offensive coordinator Bobby Slowik learned from Kyle Shanahan, but it will be his first season ever calling plays, so he’s a question as well.”

Not Alone

Stroud, Richardson and Young will become the 27th, 28th and 29th rookies since 2008 to start Week 1, according to

the NFL.

None started Week 1 last season, ending a streak of 14 straight years. The most to start was five in 2012, with Robert Griffin III (Washington), Andrew Luck (Indianapolis), Ryan Tannehill (Miami), Brandon Weeden (Cleveland) and Russell Wilson (Seattle) all getting the call.

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott won the most games as a rookie, earning 13 victories in 2016. The worst record came in 2017 when the Browns started DeShone Kizer in Week 1. He went 0-15.

Former NFL safety and current ESPN analyst Louis Riddick saw enough from Stroud in the preseason to defend him against critics who, after his first game, had already declared the Texans made a mistake at the draft.

“When the New England Patriots got after him pretty good, there was conversation about ‘Well, maybe this guy wasn’t as good as people said. Now you see why Bryce Young was drafted No. 1 overall.’ Man are you kidding me? It’s one game in the preseason,” Riddick said on NFL Live. “What he’s showing you right now is how he is built individually and then collectively how it all comes together. Protection and chemistry gets better, his comfort, confidence in his footwork and delivery starts to stack and build.”

Riddick expects the Ravens to be a far greater challenge to open the season, however, than what Stroud saw in the preseason.

“You’re going to have to start over again, and there’s going to be different looks,” Riddick said. “There’s going to be things you haven’t seen, some lumps. You’re going to throw some picks and miss some throws.

“Let’s just slow down and let him shine because he is definitely going to shine. I couldn’t be happier with the way things are going for Ryans and Houston.”

As Stroud goes through the expected ups and downs of a rookie, he has an ally in shared experiences with edge rusher Will Anderson, the Texans’ No. 3 pick from Alabama.

“It makes both of our jobs really easy,” Anderson said. “We lean on each other a lot. When I’m having a bad day, he picks me up. If he’s having a bad day, I pick him up. We always tell each other we’ve been playing football for a long time, it’s just at another level with greater competition, it’s what we do. And I think the coaches do a really good job of making sure that we’re prepared and that we know what to do.”

Texans executive vice president and general manager Nick Caserio is excited to see what the future brings for Stroud.

“I think, C.J., the big thing with him, he’s put his head down and worked from the day he walked in the building,” Caserio said Aug. 30. “Every player that’s here earns their opportunity with their performance. I think he’s certainly emblematic of that from start to where we are now, understanding still now it’s 17 games to go here and each week is hopefully going to get a little bit better.”

Ex-WR Turns Career Into Sausage Success

Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be offering a variety of historical pieces this fall, including a look back at the 1998 Ohio State football team, one of the better teams in school history, upon that team's 25th anniversary. The following is the first installment in our 2023 historical series.

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Even the most ardent Ohio State football fans might be forgiven if they have never heard of the wide receiver his teammates referred to as "Little Billy" Ezzo. After all, his one and only career reception – albeit good for 55 yards and a touchdown – came 50 years ago during the 1973 season opener against Minnesota.

But even if Little Billy's exploits on the football field have faded from memory, chances are pretty good that OSU fans, as well as those from hundreds of other schools throughout the Midwest, have enjoyed the fruits of Ezzo's labors since he left campus in the mid-1970s.

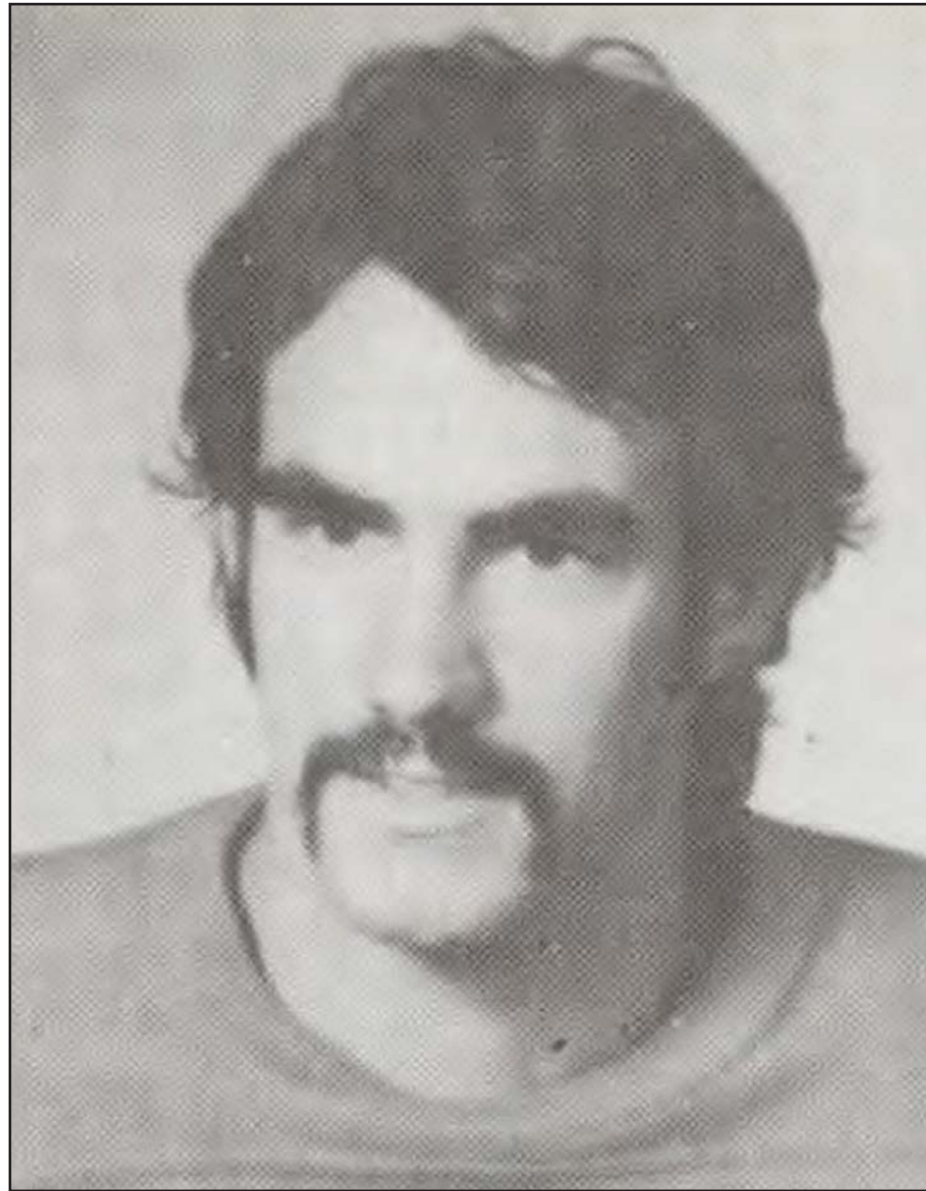
Along with his brother, Ezzo founded a Columbus-based sausage company that sells pepperoni to numerous independently owned pizza restaurants throughout the Midwest. So, if you have ever sampled the wares at Pizza Cottage in Buckeye Lake, Kingy's Pizza Pub in Canal Winchester or any of the Massey's Pizza locations throughout Ohio, you have likely enjoyed a product from the Ezzo Sausage Co.

That company, founded in 1978 by Ezzo and his brother, Scott, is an extension of the family business started by their grandfather who had immigrated to central New York during the early 1900s. According to Bill, however, the sustained success of the company is likely due in no small measure to the fact he once was part of the Ohio State football program.

"I don't want to say I got special treatment or anything like that," he said, "but just being part of Buckeye Nation carries a pretty impressive amount of weight. It opened up doors for us."

Those doors might never have opened had Woody Hayes been working under today's NCAA rules limiting available scholarships to 85. Before 1973, when the NCAA imposed a limit of 105 scholarships, football coaches could offer as many grants-in-aid as their schools could afford. It was a practice Hayes had used more than once to simply keep prospects from playing against the Buckeyes at other schools.

For example, more than 30 talented high school players from around the nation were



HOW THE SAUSAGE IS MADE — Former Ohio State wide receiver Bill Ezzo took an unusual path following his playing career with the Buckeyes in the mid-1970s, founding the Columbus-based Ezzo Sausage Co. with his brother, Scott.

tendered scholarships by the Buckeyes during the 1971 recruiting season, including such future first-team All-Americans as defensive end Van Ness Decree, defensive tackle Pete Cusick, center Steve Myers and offensive tackle Kurt Schumacher.

But while the class was heavy on offensive halfbacks, it was decidedly light on true wide receivers until Hayes checked in on Ezzo, who had grown up in the tiny village of Canastota in central New York. Despite a population that has fluctuated between 4,500 and 5,000 since the 1950s, Canastota is home to the

International Boxing Hall of Fame as well as the birthplace of world welterweight champions Billy Backus (1970-71) and his uncle Carmen Basilio (1955-56). Basilio also became world middleweight champion in 1957 after a famous split-decision victory over reigning champion Sugar Ray Robinson.

In addition to its boxing roots, Canastota boasted an excellent high school football team throughout much of the middle part of the 20th century, serving as perennial championship contenders in the old Tri-Valley League from the 1950s through the 1970s. The Red Raiders were coached in those days by Bob "Berghie" Borgognoni, who served the program for nearly three decades and for whom the school's football stadium is named.

Still, New York wasn't exactly fertile recruiting ground for Ohio State in those days. Since former assistant Larry Catuzzi had practically begged Hayes to sign running back John Brockington out of Jefferson High School in Brooklyn in 1966, the Buckeyes had signed only one other New York prospect – Brockington's high school teammate Earl Belgrave, an offensive tackle whose OSU career amounted to just four games of mop-up duty behind two-time consensus All-Ameri-

can John Hicks.

But with the help of then-Ohio State track coach Robert Epskamp, Hayes learned of a New York prospect with sprinter's speed. Always eager to improve his team in the areas of speed and quickness, Hayes made the trek to Canastota and almost immediately wished he hadn't. When introduced to the mop-topped Ezzo, the legendary coach likely thought he was the victim of some practical joke.

"He probably thought I was the team manager or the ball boy," remembered Ezzo, who stood just 5-7 and weighed about 150 pounds. "My size certainly wasn't going to intimidate anyone."

After the initial shock wore off, and Hayes watched Ezzo perform a few sprint drills, the diminutive prospect was on his way to Columbus to play football as well as run track.

Ezzo was a star on the OSU track team, winning three varsity letters beginning in 1972. And while his football career amounted to only 13 games stretched over three seasons as a backup receiver, he still managed to leave an indelible mark – both on his teammates and the record book.

"Of course I remember 'Little Billy' Ezzo," two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin said. "He was always the fastest guy on our team."

Former quarterback Cornelius Greene went even further.

"Billy Ezzo might have been the fastest man in the world if they had a 10-yard race," Greene said. "He had the quickest takeoff I have ever seen. We connected all the time in practice, but Billy wasn't a starter, and we were so far ahead of the other teams in the second half that Woody never threw the ball in the fourth quarter. But, man, you talk about fast ... and what a great teammate Billy Ezzo was."

The 1973 season set the gold standard for Ohio State football as the Buckeyes bludgeoned opponents with a potent offense while stifling them with a smothering defense. While Griffin and Greene were leading the team to 413 points (an average of 37.5 per game), the defense allowed only 64 points all season. Only 43 of those came during the 10-game regular season.

As a result, most games were well in hand by halftime. Still, there were a handful of times for backup players to showcase their talents, and Ezzo's time came during a 56-7 victory against Minnesota in the 1973 season opener.

The Buckeyes had battered the Golden Gophers with a punishing running attack, piling up 383 yards and five touchdowns on the ground. Adding insult to injury, OSU had also gotten scores on a 93-yard kickoff return from Griffin and a 78-yard punt return from Neal Colzie.

With just 2:31 remaining in the game and the Buckeyes holding a 49-7 advantage, Hayes emptied his bench.

Greene had thrown for only 10 yards during the game, going 1 for 3 with an interception, and each of the 22 plays the Ohio State offense had run during the second half to that point had been rushes. But for some reason, Hayes figured he had little to lose and decided to see what his reserves could do with the passing game.

Backup quarterback Greg Hare took his first snap of the game and threw a quick out

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

in the left flat that halfback Tim Holycross turned into a 9-yard reception. Then on second-and-1 from the 45-yard line, Hare faked a pitch and saw Ezzo streaking down the left sideline. The QB led his receiver perfectly, Ezzo caught the ball at about the 20-yard line, and he sailed untouched into the end zone for a 55-yard touchdown.

Despite the fact he appeared in 13 games during his three-year OSU career, the catch in the 1973 opener against Minnesota would be the only reception in scarlet and gray for Ezzo. But it was the longest reception recorded by a Buckeye receiver during the entire 1973 season, and Ezzo's average of 55 yards per catch served as the best for any Ohio State player in a season opener until Michael Wiley broke that mark in 1996 with two catches (each for touchdowns) for 111 yards (a 55.5-yard average) during a 70-7 win against Rice.

Even though he had only that one catch, Ezzo earned three varsity letters as well as three Big Ten championship rings with the Buckeyes. He was also a member of the team that put a 42-21 whupping on No. 7 USC at the 1974 Rose Bowl, one of three trips he made to Pasadena with the Buckeyes.

Going Into Business

Dominic Ezzo (pronounced EE-zo) immigrated to the United States from Europe in 1906, landing with countless others at Ellis Island to begin life in the New World. Dominic didn't stray very far from his landing spot, traveling north along the Hudson River until reaching Canastota where he found work as an onion farmer.

He later opened a neighborhood grocery store where he sold a variety of produce as well as fresh sausage, veal and steaks. The small enterprise continued to grow, and Dominic's sons Sam and John (Bill's father) branched out with their own sausage factory in the small town of North Vernon in southern Indiana. Despite having a rather small population of only about 4,000, North Vernon was perfectly located between the Midwestern hub cities of Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Louisville, Ky.

While Bill was at Ohio State, the North Vernon facility was destroyed by fire, and John sent his oldest son Scott to search for a new home for Ezzo Sausage. While visiting his brother in Columbus, Scott discovered a small meat locker that could be converted into a production facility to make fresh sausage. Upon his graduation from OSU, Bill joined the company as a salesman with local grocery stores and pizzerias becoming his main focus.

"As I said, Ohio State football helped open the doors," he said. "Woody always told us that preparation and hard work seem to turn into good luck somehow, but I probably couldn't have done it anywhere else."

He added that his family's particular brand

of pepperoni helped set them apart from more well-known competitors. Ezzo's pepperoni is called "cupping" pepperoni. It goes flat onto the pizza, but "cups" in the oven to prevent the sausage grease from mixing with the oil from the cheese. It also browns on the edge during the baking process to give the pizza an extra bit of crunch.

As new orders continued to come in, the Ezzo brothers expanded their operation to include fermentation ovens and large drying rooms. In 2001, the business expanded again, this time into a second building dedicated to slicing the growing product line. For the next decade and a half, Ezzo Sausage ran at full capacity, unable to take on any new customers, before another expansion project began.

A building on the west side of Columbus, one that had already been approved by the USDA, was purchased and became home for the company's pepperoni and Italian meats production.

An initial account with Domino's Pizza gave the company its start in the pizza industry, but as Domino's grew in size, the small family business couldn't keep up with demand and switched its focus to smaller, independent restaurants in Columbus and the surrounding area.

Bill now lives in the Boca Raton, Fla, area for most of the year, and he bought out his brother Scott in the early 2000s. Still, Ezzo Sausage remains very much a family business. Bill remains the company owner and president, and his sons Darren and Jonathan are national sales and regional sales managers, respectively.

"Basically, I travel around the country eating pizza for a living," Darren said with a smile.

Darren and Jon began their business careers as children, folding and labeling boxes in the family factory. Their father would give the pair \$20 for their labors but would later inspect each box.

"For every label that was crooked, he'd take a dime away from us," Darren said. "That was his way of teaching us to work. You could put together 200 boxes, but it doesn't make any difference if the labels are on crooked. It was a lesson. He was a funny guy like that. That's how we were raised. It was about quality."

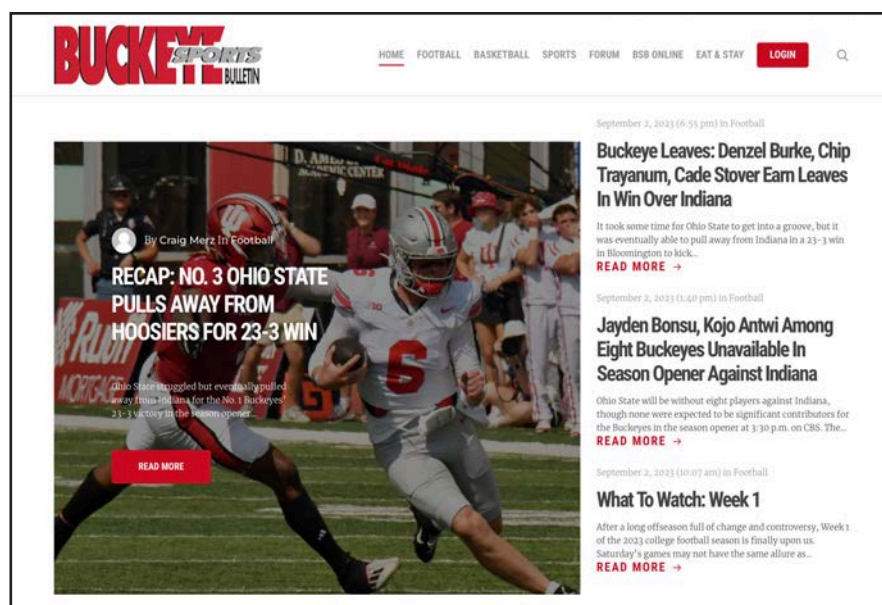
It is an attention to detail their father still follows. Although he spends most of his time in Florida, Bill continues to manage the company to the tiniest detail.

"He can tell you if a machine is breaking down because the electric bill is higher," Darren said. "He'll tell us to check the grinder to see if the bearings are down."

Again, Bill gives most of the credit to his old coach.

"It goes back to Woody teaching all the guys on the team how to be winners," he said. "Fortunately, I listened to him."

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St. Clair Off To Hot Start In Junior Season

Bellefontaine, Ohio, quarterback Tavien St. Clair (6-4, 210) committed to Ohio State back in June and has only continued to see his stock rise, already jumping from a three-star prospect before his verbal pledge to now sitting as a four-star recruit, as well as a top-150 prospect and eighth-ranked quarterback in the class.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

St. Clair has continued to show that he is deserving of his ranking since the high school football season began, posting an impressive pair of performances to begin his junior season with the Chieftains. In the team's season-opening, 46-19 win over Sidney on Aug. 18, St. Clair finished 28 of 36 passing for 314 yards and five touchdowns, breaking the school's single-game touchdowns record in the process.

"It felt good," St. Clair said. "Going 1-0 is always the main goal. To get the win was really important for us. With that being said, we have to get better. There's some areas we can improve on, for sure, because our ultimate goal is to win the state championship. At the end of the day, a good performance by our team, but there are some things we can improve on."

St. Clair followed it up the next week by finishing 23 of 27 passing for 346 yards, three scores and an interception, though Bellefontaine suffered a 28-25 loss to Coldwater. But those are the types of moments – the high of the opener and the low of the Week 2 loss – that St. Clair will have to contend with, especially as pressure continues to ramp up as an Ohio State commit.

"It's definitely a different feeling," he said after the win over Sidney. "There's kids that want you to wave to them during the game. After I'm done here I'm sure kids want me to sign their footballs and things like that. More comes with it, but at the same time, it's a challenge that if you take on, it's going to benefit you, for sure, because you have to be on your game every game or people will say things. But at the end of the day, it is what it is."

"As always, it's a blessing. Some people from the outside think it's a lot of pressure, but this is what I've wanted for



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAVIEN ST. CLAIR

BIG-TIME RECRUIT – Bellefontaine, Ohio, four-star quarterback Tavien St. Clair (center) is off to an impressive start in his junior prep season after committing to the Buckeyes in June.

a long time. All eyes on me is OK with me, and I think it just helps you to be a better person. You've got to do the right thing at all times, so that's just the main thing."

As his junior season rolls on, St. Clair – who said he plans to visit every Ohio State home game this season – said the biggest thing he's worked on with quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis has been "taking over the game."

"Being the man out there at all times," St. Clair said. "Eyes are going to be on me from now on for the rest of my life. It feels a little bit different when that type of pressure is on you, but at the same time, he's a great mentor. I go to him every day. More things will be coming from him, for sure."

He was the second commitment in Ohio State's 2025 recruiting class, but after the decommitment in July of Atlanta Douglass four-star safety Jontae Gilbert (6-1, 175), St. Clair is the only committed

prospect for the Buckeyes in the class.

This gives him a chance to build the class up, and he already has a few targets in mind, including Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190); Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290); Washington, Okla., four-star tight end Nate Roberts (6-4, 235), who recently decommitted from Notre Dame; and Calhoun, Ga., four-star tight end Emarie Winston (6-2, 235) on offense.

He's also looking to recruit some defensive targets, including Houston North Shore five-star cornerback Devin Sanchez (6-2, 170) and Clayton (Ohio) Northmont five-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-2, 185).

"I'm going to start reaching out to more lineman, too, to get this class built," St. Clair added.

Four-Star SAF Patterson Commits To Hurricanes

Ohio State's options continue to dwindle at safety, after Hollywood (Fla.) Cham-inade-Madonna Prep-four-star safety Zaquan Patterson (6-0, 185) announced his pledge to Miami (Fla.) on Aug. 26.

Patterson is the No. 77 overall prospect and third-ranked safety in 2024, and he chose the Hurricanes over Florida State and Ohio State.

"It was definitely a hectic week for me," Patterson told 247Sports. "I was a little stressed towards the beginning of the week, but towards the end I really asked myself what I wanted in a school and where I wanted to be, and the only time I felt OK was when I said I was going to Miami. That's when I made the decision."

Patterson did indicate, however, that he is not fully shutting down his recruitment despite his pledge to the Hurricanes. Asked about other games he might check out this season, one stuck out: Ohio State at Michigan.

Patterson's commitment is technically not settled, but it still seems unlikely that the Buckeyes would make a push, especially since the Seminoles were considered his other top school along with Miami. This leaves a limited board for Ohio State, which has just one commitment from West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep four-star Jaylen McClain (6-0, 185).

The Buckeyes do not currently have an offer out to an uncommitted safety in the class, though they could circle back to Centerville, Ohio, three-star Reggie Powers (6-1, 195), who is committed to Michigan State, or Irvington, N.J., three-star

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

OSU Football 2024 Commitments

Players in the class of 2024 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Deontae Armstrong	OL	6-6	280	★★★★	Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward
Devontae Armstrong	OL	6-5	297	★★★★	Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward
Mylan Graham	WR	6-1	170	★★★★★	New Haven, Ind.
Eddrick Houston	DL	6-3	265	★★★★★	Buford, Ga.,
Max LeBlanc	TE	6-4	222	★★★★	Chattanooga (Tenn.) Baylor School
Miles Lockhart	CB	5-10	185	★★★★	Chandler (Ariz.) Basha
Jordan Lyle	RB	6-0	180	★★★★	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas
Jaylen McClain	SAF	6-0	185	★★★★	West Orange (N.J.) Seton Hall Prep
Jeremiah McClellan	WR	6-0	190	★★★★	St. Louis Christian Brothers College
Ian Moore	OL	6-5	295	★★★★	New Palestine, Ind.
Marc Nave Jr.	OL	6-5	315	★★★	Toledo Central Catholic
Air Noland	QB	6-3	195	★★★★★	Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes
Payton Pierce	LB	6-1	225	★★★★	Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy
James Peoples	RB	5-10	192	★★★★	San Antonio Veterans Memorial
Aaron Scott	CB	6-2	190	★★★★	Springfield, Ohio
Justin Scott	DT	6-4	310	★★★★★	Chicago St. Ignatius
Jeremiah Smith	WR	6-3	198	★★★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep
Garrett Stover	LB	6-0	195	★★★★	Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut
Bryce West	CB	5-11	177	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville
Sam Williams-Dixon	RB	5-11	203	★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North
Damarion Witten	TE	6-4	215	★★★★	Cleveland Glenville

Vaboue Toure (6-0, 195), who is committed to Penn State. They could also look at in-state options who do not have offers, such as Cincinnati LaSalle four-star Koy Beasley (5-10, 170), who is committed to Purdue.

Four-Star DL McKinley Heads To Texas A&M

Ohio State also lost out on a prospect

in the trenches, when Lafayette (La.) Aca-diana four-star defensive lineman Dominick McKinley (6-6, 280) announced his commitment to Texas A&M on Sept. 1.

McKinley is the No. 38 overall prospect and seventh-ranked defensive lineman in 2024, as well as the top-ranked prospect out of Louisiana. He committed to the Aggies over Ohio State, Oklahoma and Texas.

OSU Football 2025 Commitment

Player(s) in the class of 2025 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Tavien St. Clair	QB	6-4	210	★★★★	Bellefontaine, Ohio

OSU Football 2026 Commitment

Player(s) in the class of 2026 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Chris Henry Jr.	WR	6-5	185	★★★★	Cincinnati Withrow

"(I liked) how they make it like a family," McKinley told 247Sports. "They have great relationships with players and with the other coaches. I was comfortable there. The relationship with the coaches and people around, them and players."

McKinley's loss hurts Ohio State, but the Buckeyes are in better shape on the defensive line following the summer commitments of five-star defensive linemen Justin Scott (6-4, 310) of Chicago St. Ignatius and Eddrick Houston (6-3, 265) of Buford, Ga. Ohio State also continues to pursue Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star defensive end Booker Pickett Jr. (6-3, 205) and Towson (Md.) Concordia Prep four-star defensive end Ernest Willor Jr. (6-4, 250).

Five-Star OL Baker Nearing Final Decision

Ohio State could soon learn whether one of the program's top remaining targets in 2024 will join the class. Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star offensive tackle

Brandon Baker (6-5, 285) told 247Sports that he could make a decision as soon as September.

"I'm leaning towards making my decision in the next couple of months," he said. "It could be as soon as late September or October, but I don't have anything set right now. I have my official visit to Nebraska for Sept. 16, and that will likely be my final visit. After that trip, I'll sit down and evaluate all my options, try and get down to a final five and then go from there."

Baker is the No. 21 overall prospect and top-ranked tackle in the class, and Nebraska and Texas are among the other programs making a significant push.

"It's tough right now," he said. "I have a couple of schools that are starting to stand out a little more from the pack but not enough to feel good about making a decision anytime soon. There are things I like about all the schools on my list, and

Continued On Page 32

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Buckeyes, Bulldogs Battling In 2024 Class

Continued From Page 31

I'm just trying to figure things out and see where I think I can fit in the best. It's all about relationships with me and where I can get developed the best."

Baker said he feels like a much more mature player in his senior season, and he has a better idea of what he's doing since the game has started to slow down.

"My technique is so much better, my feet are better and I can recognize the different looks you get from a defense now," he said. "I feel like I'm definitely stronger as well and more physical as a player. I'm trying to be more of a leader as well and help our team win a state and national championship this season."

Ohio State continues to recruit Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287), but the Buckeyes have not been viewed as a favorite in his recruitment since the spring, so Baker exists as the most realistic target left on the line.

They're hoping Baker joins a group that already has four commitments, including New Palestine, Ind., four-star Ian

Moore (6-5, 295); Devontae (6-5, 297) and Deontae (6-6, 280) Armstrong from Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward; and Toledo Central Catholic three-star Marc Nave (6-5, 315), though Baker is the only one out of that group who is guaranteed to be a tackle at the college level.

OSU Battling With UGA For Top Spot In 2024

With the new college football season beginning, there's no better time to check in on how Ohio State – and a handful of other teams – are doing in the 2024 recruiting rankings.

As of Sept. 3, Georgia held the top spot in the country, according to the 247Sports team composite rankings, with 313.22 points and 26 commitments, with an average player rating of .9353. While Ohio State ranks second in the total score, with 302.23 points, the Buckeyes have fewer commitments – just 22 – with a slightly higher .9385 average player rating, the best in the country.

The top five is rounded out by Florida (283.33, 22 commits), Alabama (277.84, 19 commits) and Texas A&M (275.01, 21

commits). Two other Big Ten teams find themselves in the top 10, including No. 8 Michigan (265.59, 27 commits) and No. 10 Penn State (263.64, 24 commits), though the Wolverines' 27 commitments include 10 three-star prospects, the most among any program in the top 15 of the rankings.

Other rankings within the Big Ten include No. 23 Nebraska (226.72, 24 commits), No. 24 Wisconsin (225.57, 21 commits), No. 28 Purdue (216.15, 21 commits), No. 29 Iowa (209.69, 20 commits), No. 30 Minnesota (208.73, 23 commits), No. 34 Rutgers (204.71, 23 commits), No. 43 Illinois (192.30, 18 commits), No. 44 Maryland (192.19, 19 commits), No. 53 Michigan State (176.45, 12 commits), No. 60 Indiana (159.08, 17 commits) and No. 73 Northwestern (115.90, nine commits).

Ohio State Sends Out Two Offers

Ohio State sent out two new offers to a pair of 2025 prospects since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, with the recipients being Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola four-star linebacker Elijah Me-

lendez (6-2, 223) and Cleveland Heights, Ohio, three-star defensive lineman Brandon Caesar (6-4, 250).

Melendez is the No. 251 overall prospect and No. 28 linebacker in the class, and he holds additional offers from Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC, among others.

He is one of 16 talented linebackers who have been offered by Ohio State in 2025, with the top targets right now being Vero Beach, Fla., four-star Tarvos Alford (6-2, 210) – no relation to running backs coach Tony Alford – and San Juan Capistrano (Calif.) Hills three-star Weston Port (6-1, 215).

Caesar checks in as only the No. 411 overall prospect and No. 39 defensive lineman in his class, but he holds offers from Alabama, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Penn State, Tennessee and USC, among others. He primarily lines up at defensive tackle for Cleveland Heights, and he told 247Sports that he will attempt to visit Ohio State this season.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago — 1988

Troy Parker didn't need anyone to tell him who had his best interests at heart.

After rushing for a career-high 237 yards for Portsmouth (Ohio) High School in the 1988 season opener against Washington Court House, Parker treated the members of his offensive line to lunch.

If Parker ran the whole year like he did in the Trojans' opening game of the season, there would be a lot more free lunches in store for the Portsmouth offensive line. Likewise, there would be a lot more interest shown in the 5-11, 205-pound tailback.

Parker was leaning toward Ohio State's Big Ten rival Michigan State as the place where he would ply his trade in college. But if the Buckeyes increased their interest in him a little bit, he might have been persuaded to take a closer look at Columbus.

"I've been looking at Michigan State quite a bit," Parker said. "They must have sent me 15 or 16 letters about the university so far. And since Lorenzo White graduated last year, I figured they might be looking for a good tailback.

"But I would also be interested in Ohio State. I would be very interested in them. But so far, I haven't heard much from them. I'm hoping to hear more from them now that the new coaching staff has settled in."

30 Years Ago — 1993

Approximately 25 high school football recruits were firsthand witnesses to Ohio State's 34-7 season-opening victory over Rice in Ohio Stadium on Sept. 4. Ohio State recruiting coordinator Larry Petroff said the high turnout was a good start to the coaches' efforts to lure talent to games.

"At this time of year, the best thing we can do is get kids in here to get exposure and see the setting," he said.

Petroff said the most effective tool in the process of selling the program was Ohio Stadium, itself, better known as the 'Shoe. Not many bright-eyed 17-year-olds who dream of playing big-time football can yawn at 90,000 fans and the tradition the 'Shoe represents.

"The positive enthusiasm of the crowd is very important," said Petroff, who held the same post at Pittsburgh for three years before coming over to Columbus ahead of the 1993 season. "We want these kids to experience the total atmosphere."

25 Years Ago — 1998

Pahokee, Fla., linebacker Eric Moore (6-4, 225) was listed as the state's No. 1 prospect overall and the nation's seventh-best linebacker by SuperPrep.

The previous year he had 148 tackles with 23 tackles for loss and 10 sacks. He had the ability, as his numbers reflected,

to drop into coverage or to crush quarterbacks on the blitz.

An additional 15 to 20 pounds would help him become a true impact player at the college level, most scouts said. If he took it even higher, he could be a devastating defensive end in the college ranks.

"There is a 50/50 chance I will leave the state," said Moore, who liked OSU, Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, North Carolina, Syracuse and Tennessee. Moore, who benched 315 pounds, held a 2.5 GPA and scored a 14 on the ACT.

20 Years Ago — 2003

Being just the sixth night game in the history of Ohio Stadium, the Aug. 30 matchup between Ohio State and Washington provided those present in the stadium with a rare treat.

Among those onlookers were a number of top in-state prospects and one quite notable out-of-state prepster. The non-Ohioan was Jeff Byers, one of the nation's top offensive line prospects and a native of Loveland, Colo. He held a slew of offers, including ones from OSU, Colorado, Michigan, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Oklahoma and Texas, among others.

Byers (6-4, 280) ran a 4.8 40-yard dash and held a bench press max of 385 pounds and a squat max of 515 pounds. He also looked to be in good shape academically with a 3.9 GPA.

15 Years Ago — 2008

Although he had offered up a verbal commitment to OSU during the commitment parade that was the month of June, the status of Louisville (Ky.) Male four-star cornerback Justin Green (5-11, 182) seemed anything but certain.

He told reporters in August that he was still hoping for a Clemson offer, adding that he would take an official visit there if the opportunity presented itself.

After taking in OSU's home opener against Youngstown State on Aug. 30, that sentiment remained largely the same – and the OSU coaches were aware of the situation.

"I said I would take a visit there just to see what things are like, but I'm solid with my commitment (to OSU)," he said. "I talked to one of the coaches about it. They said it's fine. They want me to take visits and stuff because they know it's a tough decision for me."

10 Years Ago — 2013

With help from cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs, a long-time prep head coach in the Cincinnati area, Ohio State had put a major emphasis on gaining footholds in southwestern Ohio on the recruiting trail.

The Buckeyes had been very successful in doing so – four-star outside linebacker Sam Hubbard (6-6, 221) of Cincinnati Moeller was committed in OSU's 2014 class – but the

staff wanted to keep the momentum going in future recruiting classes.

So they turned their attention to another linebacker in that area in Cincinnati St. Xavier product Justin Hilliard (6-2, 210), a four-star prospect rated by Scout as the No. 6 outside linebacker in the 2015 class. He visited Ohio State's opener against Buffalo on Aug. 31 and came away very impressed by the experience.

"I wanted to see what a game was like at Ohio State," Hilliard said. "They are one of the schools I needed more information on, and it was a visit I could make happen since the schedules allowed for it. The other schools around here that have offered me I know pretty well, but Ohio State is one that I'm still learning about."

Five Years Ago — 2018

Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange five-star defensive end Zach Harrison remained uncommitted as he considered Michigan, Ohio State and Penn State among his three finalists.

Harrison (6-5½, 243) was the 247Sports composite's No. 4 overall prospect, No. 3 weak-side defensive end and No. 1 player in Ohio. From the outskirts of Columbus in Lewis Center, Harrison had plenty of attention as the Buckeyes' top target – regardless of class – in their own backyard.

After he postponed a previously planned decision, originally set for his birthday on Aug. 14, BSB caught up with Harrison after his high school team's season opener Aug. 24. Harrison had no new decision date in mind as he continued to weigh the three among his finalists.

"It's just that I like all the schools," Harrison told BSB. "It's different things about each school. But through this, I call all the coaches, all the players and I'm picking the best of the best."

One Year Ago — 2022

Ohio State couldn't have picked a better game to roll out the red carpet. Upwards of 60 recruits in the 2023 class and beyond were in attendance on Sept. 3 to watch the Buckeyes pull out a 21-10 victory over visiting Notre Dame in front of 106,594 fans at Ohio Stadium.

The atmosphere was one of the better ones in recent memory on Ohio State's home turf, and that was apparent to those watching on the sidelines.

"The environment was electric," Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star wide receiver and Ohio State commit Brandon Inniss said. "Every third down I felt like my eardrums popped. The highlights of the game were the environment and how everyone treats me like family even though I'm not there yet."

ASK AN ANALYST

with Bill Kurelic of 247Sports

Who has impressed you so far during this high school football season?

"Well, we've only had two weekends, so I've been to two games. (The weekend of Aug. 25) I saw the Ohio State commitments of Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star offensive linemen Deontae (6-6, 280) and Devontae (6-5, 288) Armstrong on TV. They were on The GEICO ESPN High School Football Kickoff, and they were very impressive. The first weekend I actually saw 2025 Toledo Whitmer four-star offensive tackle Carter Lowe (6-5, 290), who Ohio State has offered a scholarship, and he's certainly an outstanding prospect.

"And then (also the weekend of Aug. 25), I was at the Cleveland Glenville game and saw two Ohio State commitments: four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177) – who is without a doubt one of the top defensive backs in the country – and then four-star tight end Damarion Witten (6-4, 215). He is outstanding too. So those are the guys that I've seen so far this season."

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star offensive tackle Brandon Baker (6-5, 285) has said he could be coming close to a decision. How do you view Ohio State's chances of landing him?

"Well, Brandon's pretty unpredictable. I don't think anybody has a real solid feel for where he's going. I think it will be one of several schools: Ohio State, Texas, Oregon I think is in there, and Nebraska is in there. And I wouldn't totally rule out him adding another school before he actually makes his announcement. I think Ohio State is right in here and has a legitimate chance to land him, but I wouldn't go out on a limb right now to predict where he's going. But I think Ohio State is a legitimate

contender for him. They're working hard still. He's certainly a top-of-the-board type guy, and (offensive line coach) Justin Frye is doing a good job, no doubt."

Staying with the offensive line, where do things stand between Ohio State and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (6-5, 287)?

"I think that one's a long way off. He's only taken one official visit, that being Alabama, and he's going to take at least five, if not six or seven, official visits. Ohio State will be one of them. He'll be here in Columbus for the Oct. 7 Maryland game. South Carolina and Florida are going to be two others. It's hard to say on him as well, because he's going to go through the process of all his official visits. I think Ohio State is a very legitimate possibility for him. But I think South Carolina and Florida and Alabama are, too."

Ohio State recently offered Cleveland Heights three-star defensive lineman Brandon Caesar (6-4, 250), a 2025 prospect, and you've since put in a pick for the Buckeyes to land him. What is their relationship like, and what do you make of him as a prospect?

"I'll see him play (on Sept. 1) in person. I've only seen him in camps, that type of thing. So I haven't seen him actually in a game in person, and that will happen. I was impressed with him when I saw him at camps.

"As far as why, just talking to him, talking to his family, I think he really likes Ohio State a lot. One of his family members told me that Ohio State would be an ideal place for him to be, but he is going to evaluate, look at other schools. Tennessee is one of them, and Kentucky

is another that I know he likes. He'll do his evaluations, but I just like where Ohio State stands with him and his family right now."

Who else is standing out to you as far as in-state prospects in 2025?

"I think they're in good shape with just about all, if not all, the top kids in Ohio that they've offered a scholarship to. You go down the list, and I've already mentioned Carter Lowe, who's one of the top players in Ohio. Four-star tight end Luka Gilbert (6-8, 233) from West Chester Lakota West, he's an outstanding prospect that I think Ohio State is in pretty good shape with at this point. Cleveland Shaker Heights four-star cornerback Trey McNutt (6-0, 180) is an Ohio State legacy. I mentioned the two kids out of Cleveland Heights that I'll be seeing on (Sept. 1), those being Caesar and four-star running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 190).

"Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph four-star running back Bo Jackson (6-1, 190), I certainly like where Ohio State stands with him. He's a kid that Ohio State offered a scholarship to pretty early in the process. Clayton Northmont five-star cornerback Dorian Brew (6-2, 185), he's arguably the top player in Ohio for 2025. I think Ohio State and Notre Dame would be at the top of his list right now. Cincinnati Winton Woods four-star linebacker Justin Hill (6-4, 215) is another outstanding prospect that I think Ohio State is in pretty good standing with.

"Really, I think Ohio State is one of the leaders, if not the leader, for every one of those kids that they offered in Ohio at this point."

"I'm going to try to get to an Ohio State game, but my team comes first," he said. "Coach (Larry) Johnson asked me if I wanted to come out for a game. I might get to a few college games, but my season comes first."

Ohio State is hoping to find success at Cleveland Heights in the 2025 recruiting class, as it is also the home of four-star running back Marquise Davis (6-0, 190), whom the Buckeyes have been heavily recruiting. Davis is off to a strong start in his junior season, rushing for 337 yards and four touchdowns in a 34-31 victory over Hudson, Ohio, on Sept. 1.

He told 247Sports that he plans to commit during his senior season after taking official visits and that he plans to visit for Youngstown State on Sept. 9.

Recruits Have OSU Behind Alabama In Brand Recognition

According to a report from 247Sports, a survey of 1,000 recruits asking them to rank college football programs on brand strength resulted in Ohio State being the second-most recognized brand in college football behind Alabama.

Other top programs that were recognized included No. 3 Georgia, No. 4 Oklahoma and No. 5 Clemson, which – and this is likely no coincidence – are some of the programs that finish on top of the recruiting rankings every cycle.

Despite having won the last two Big Ten championships, Michigan checked in as only the No. 16 most-recognizable brand in college football, behind No. 13 Penn State within the Big Ten. No. 22 Michigan State and No. 24 Maryland were the only other conference teams in the top 25, though future Big Ten additions – including No. 9 Oregon, No. 19

USC and No. 20 UCLA – were also in the rankings.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Ohio State's home opener against Youngstown State will not be quite the spectacle that last year's opener against Notre Dame was, but a handful of recruits still plan to be in attendance. A few prospects are expected, including Nave and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 198) in 2024 as well as Davis and St. Clair in 2025. The Buckeyes are also expected to welcome Avon Lake, Ohio, offensive tackle Maxwell Riley (6-5, 263), a 2026 prospect.

- Indianapolis Ben Davis four-star cornerback Mark Zackery IV (6-0, 164) is expected to visit Ohio State for the team's home contest against Maryland on Oct. 7.

- Ohio State was included among the top 12 schools for Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star defensive lineman Trent Wilson (6-3, 270), a 2025 prospect, along with Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Penn State, Rutgers, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

- Vero Beach, Fla., offensive tackle Micah Smith (6-6, 295), a 2026 prospect, told Eleven Warriors that he plans to visit Ohio State's home contest against Penn State on Oct. 21.

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

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Michigan's Harbaugh Calls For Revenue Sharing

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh is serving a self-imposed three-game suspension to begin the season, but that has not stopped him from speaking his mind about the state of college athletics. The Wolverines' leader spent the first six minutes of his Aug. 28 press conference advocating for student-athlete revenue sharing, urging the NCAA to grant players a fair allotment of the money generated by the sport.

BIG TEN NOTES Patrick Engels

"What I don't understand is how the NCAA, television networks, conferences, universities and coaches can continue to pull in millions, in some cases billions, of dollars in revenue off the efforts of college student-athletes across the country without providing enough opportunity to share the ever-increasing revenues," he said. "When a student-athlete calls it a game, corporate-types call it a business. When a student-athlete calls it a business, corporate-types call it a game.

"We all should be about diversity, equity and inclusion," he continued. "I'm calling for a system that is fair, equitable and benefits all involved. Don't exclude the student-athletes from the profits. In my opinion, you can't say you're about diversity, equity and inclusion if you aren't willing to include the student-athletes in revenue sharing."

Harbaugh's comments come after Oregon and Washington were unanimously admitted into the Big Ten as the league's 17th and 18th member schools on Aug. 4 – effective Aug. 2, 2024 – a historic decision that was driven by the two universities' inability to agree on the Pac-12's streaming-centric media rights deal from Apple.

The Pac-12's agreement with Apple would have granted Oregon and Washington a base payout of approximately \$20 million, which was roughly half of the allotted payout from the Big Ten's new media rights deal, a lucrative \$7 billion contract with CBS, FOX and NBC set to launch this season, with each fully-vested member school expected to receive around \$60 million annually in media rights payouts.

With the student-athletes receiving zero share of the revenue from these contracts, Harbaugh insisted the NCAA must undergo significant change to better compensate its players.

"We have to try to make it work, we have to try to make it better and right now," he said. "The current status quo is unacceptable and won't survive. In my opinion, we capitalize on the talent, we should pay the talent for their contributions to the bottom line."

Nebraska TE Gilbert Arrested For Burglary

Nebraska tight end Arik Gilbert was arrested for felony burglary on Aug. 29 after stealing over \$1,600 worth of merchandise from a liquor and vape store in Lincoln, Neb.



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA ATHLETICS

RECORD-BREAKING – A crowd of 92,003 fans flooded into Nebraska's Memorial Stadium on Aug. 30, not to watch a football game, but to watch Nebraska's women's volleyball team, breaking the record for the largest-ever attended women's sporting event.

Gilbert, a former five-star prospect who transferred to the Huskers after spending his first three collegiate seasons in the SEC at LSU (2020) and Georgia (2021-22), was waiting on an NCAA ruling to determine if he was eligible to play this season at the time of his arrest.

According to surveillance video obtained by multiple news outlets, Gilbert used a cement block to break into SJ's Liquor and Vape around 2 a.m. on Aug. 29. He then proceeded to kick open the front door inside the building and steal \$1,672.07 worth of items, including vape products, cigars and lighters. After placing the items in a bag, Gilbert was confronted by three dispatched Lincoln police officers as he approached the exit, where he was subsequently brought to the ground and placed in handcuffs outside of the store.

Following his arrest, Gilbert was taken to the Lancaster County Department of Corrections, where he appeared in court for his arraignment later that afternoon. He was then charged with burglary, a class 2A felony that holds a penalty of up to 20 years in prison. Gilbert has since been bonded out of jail and is set to return to court on Sept. 27.

"Obviously, (I'm) really disappointed, really sad for him," Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule said. "When we took Arik, we knew we had a really good group of people that were going to help him through some of the issues he's dealing with in his life. I've been really proud of the job he had done in the

spring and summer. To be honest, during camp, he's had some struggles. He's been working to overcome them. We have a great group of people here trying to help him and then, obviously, last night happens."

Prior to his time at Nebraska, Gilbert experienced an up-and-down start to his career in the SEC. He earned a spot on the All-SEC freshman team in his lone season with the Tigers in 2020 after catching 35 passes for 368 yards and two touchdowns. Gilbert sat out the entire 2021 season with Georgia due to personal reasons, and returned to the Bulldogs' roster last year, appearing in three games with two receptions.

Nebraska VB Sets Attendance Record

An announced crowd of 92,003 packed into Nebraska football's Memorial Stadium on Aug. 30 to witness the school's five-time NCAA champion women's volleyball team defeat Omaha 3-0, setting a record for the largest-ever attendance for a women's sporting event.

The university broke the record previously set on April 22, 2022, at Barcelona's Spotify Camp Nou, which had 91,648 fans gather to watch a UEFA Champions League semifinal match between FC Barcelona and Wolfsburg.

The Huskers' historic matchup with Omaha was part of an organized event called "Volleyball Day in Nebraska," which the university and state planned for several

BIG 2023 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
East Division						
Ohio State	1	0	1.000	1	0	1.000
Rutgers	1	0	1.000	1	0	1.000
Maryland	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Michigan	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Michigan State	0	0	1.000	1	0	1.000
Penn State	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Indiana	0	1	0.000	0	1	0.000
West Division						
Minnesota	1	0	1.000	1	0	1.000
Illinois	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Iowa	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Wisconsin	0	0	0.000	1	0	1.000
Purdue	0	0	0.000	0	1	0.000
Nebraska	0	1	0.000	0	1	0.000
Northwestern	0	1	0.000	0	1	0.000

Aug. 31 Game
Minnesota 13, Nebraska 10

Sept. 1 Game
Michigan State 31, Central Michigan 7

Sept. 2 Games
Iowa 24, Utah State 14
Fresno State 39, Purdue 35
Michigan 30, East Carolina 3
Wisconsin 38, Buffalo 17
Maryland 38, Towson 6
Ohio State 23, Indiana 3
Illinois 30, Toledo 28
Penn State 38, West Virginia 15

Sept. 3 Game
Rutgers 24, Northwestern 7

Sept. 8 Games
Indiana State at Indiana, 7 or 8 p.m.
Illinois at Kansas, 8 p.m.

Sept. 9 Games
Youngstown State at **Ohio State**, noon
Delaware at Penn State, noon
Nebraska at Colorado, noon
Purdue at Virginia Tech, noon
Iowa at Iowa State, 2:30 p.m.
UNLV at Michigan, 3:30 p.m.
Richmond at Michigan State, 3:30 p.m.
UTEP at Northwestern, 3:30 p.m.
Charlotte at Maryland, 7:30 p.m.
Eastern Michigan at Minnesota, 7:30 p.m.
Temple at Rutgers, 7:30 p.m.
Wisconsin at Washington State, 7:30 p.m.

months.

"It was incredible," Nebraska middle blocker Andi Jackson said after the match. "I don't have enough words to describe it. We were walking out of the tunnel after the second set, and we heard on the speaker we had just broken the world record. Everyone was trying to stay locked in, but we were also so excited. I can't describe how grateful I am to be a part of it."

"I was thinking this morning, there are only three things that shut down the University of Nebraska," Huskers coach John Cook told the crowd after the record was announced. "One: snowstorms. Two: COVID-19. And three: Nebraska volleyball in the stadium. So students, you're welcome.

... One of our players, she said tonight, 'The impossible is possible.' So thank you very much. There's no place like Nebraska."

The Nebraska women's volleyball team, which came into the match as the fourth-ranked team in the American Volleyball Coaches Association Poll, holds an NCAA-record 306 consecutive home sell-outs at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The program was also part of the previous largest crowd to witness an NCAA women's volleyball match, when 18,755 fans packed into Columbus' Nationwide Arena on Dec. 18, 2021, for the Huskers' national championship match with Wisconsin.

PSU OL Tengwall Medically Retires

Penn State sophomore offensive lineman Landon Tengwall – who was in line to start at left guard for the Nittany Lions this season – announced he is medically retiring from football on Aug. 30. Tengwall started the first five games for the program at left guard last season before suffering an undisclosed season-ending injury in October.

"It is with a heavy heart that I am announcing my retirement from football," Tengwall said. "Unfortunately, I have sustained an injury that will not allow me to safely continue to play the game I love and that has given me so much. I want to thank my family, my friends, Coach (James) Franklin, Coach (Phil) Trautwein, my teammates and all the Penn State coaches and staff. They have all provided invaluable support through this difficult time."

"We're going to be as supportive as we possibly can," Franklin said on Aug. 30.

"This is a hard thing, as you can imagine. He's been playing football his entire life. I would ask the Penn State community and the media to be as respectful of their process as possible."

According to Franklin, the Annapolis, Md., native entered preseason camp with "bumps and bruises," but it is unclear if his decision to retire is attributed to last year's injury.

Tengwall, a four-star prospect out of Olney (Md.) Good Counsel, arrived as the Nittany Lions' top-rated prospect for the class of 2021. He was tabbed as the nation's 54th-best player and seventh-best offensive tackle, while also claiming Adidas and Under Armour High School All-American honors.

With the absence of Tengwall, Penn State will likely look to junior J.B. Nelson and redshirt freshman Olaivavega Ioane to assume the majority of snaps at left guard. The two offensive linemen appeared in four games each for the Nittany Lions last season.

Big Ten Unveils New Availability Report Policy

The Big Ten announced on Aug. 25 that all 14 teams must submit gameday availability reports no later than two hours before scheduled kickoff times for the 2023 football season, making it the only Power Five conference to institute such a policy.

The information will be handed into the conference office and distributed on both the Big Ten's official website and Twitter page. Violators of this new guideline will face disciplinary action under the Big Ten Sportsmanship Policy,

"The well-being of our students, coaches, and staff as well as the integrity of our competitions are of paramount importance," said Big Ten Commissioner Tony Petitti. "Enhanced transparency through availability reporting and partnering with U.S. Integrity strengthens our efforts to protect those who participate in our games as well as the integrity of the games themselves. I'm grateful for the collaboration of our schools, coaches, and administrators."

The mandatory policy comes as an ongoing effort by the NCAA to prevent student-athletes and staff from engaging in sports betting. In addition to the availability reports, the Big Ten also announced a partnership with the sports wagering monitoring company U.S. Integrity (USI), which will actively observe and report any form of unusual betting patterns to the league's office throughout the football season via its proprietary dashboard. USI also formed a similar partnership with the Big 12 on Aug. 23.

The recent commitment to limiting student-athlete sports betting comes after an August investigation found 15 former and current members of Iowa and Iowa State's athletic programs guilty of making wagers on games in which they played or coached. The list included Jirehl Brock, last season's leading rusher at Iowa State, and Iowa junior wide receiver Jack Johnson, who were both charged with tampering with records and concealing their identity in electronic wagering activities.

Michigan MBB Adds Argentinian Big Man

Michigan head coach Juwan Howard bol-

stered his team's frontcourt on Aug. 26, securing the services of Argentinian forward/center Lee Aaliya.

The 6-9 Aaliya became one of the more highly-touted international prospects this summer after he was made eligible by the NCAA in early August, and he garnered interest from more than 50 Division I programs. Aside from the Wolverines, he also considered Miami (Fla.), Providence, UConn and others.

Aaliya experienced a rapid ascension up the prospect rankings after a strong performance in the FIBA U19 World Cup held earlier this summer. In seven games played for Argentina, he averaged 17.1 points, 9.0 rebounds and 2.1 blocks, a stat line that placed him on the all-tournament team. Aaliya's efforts allowed him to earn a spot on Argentina's senior national team in the FIBA Olympic pre-qualifying tournament.

Now, the Argentinian big man will enter a Wolverines' frontcourt that is looking to rebound from the departure of three-time All-Big Ten selection Hunter Dickinson, who transferred to Kansas on May 4. Aaliya is expected to play behind projected starters Olivier Nkamhoua – a Tennessee graduate transfer – and sophomore forward Tarris Reed Jr. – who averaged just 3.4 points and 3.9 rebounds in 34 appearances with Michigan last season.

Aaliya is one of just two incoming freshmen for Michigan, joining Dayton Chaminate-Julienne four-star combo guard George Washington III (6-2, 170), who signed with the Wolverines after decommitting from Ohio State last year.

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Ohio State's Culture, Staff Attracted White

Ottawa (Ohio) Glandorf three-star small forward Colin White (6-6, 180) offered some insight after his decision to pledge to Ohio State, citing his strong relationship with the Buckeye coaching staff and the tight-knit culture he observed within the program as reasons behind his Aug. 13 commitment in a recent podcast appearance.

COURT REPORT Patrick Engels

Appearing as a guest on the "Views From the Schott" podcast hosted by Tim Miller, White explained that he was drawn to the program because of head coach Chris Holtmann and his staff's ability to relate to and express full confidence in their players. These qualities, according to the senior, have allowed Ohio State to establish a strong culture built on trust, something that was especially appealing for White.

"I wanted to have a good coaching staff, first and foremost, and I think Ohio State, with Coach Holtmann, (associate head coach) Jake Diebler, (assistant coach) Mike Netti, all the guys there, they're awesome," White said. "So I really wanted a good relationship with the coaches and a coaching staff that really believes in me and the way I play.

"And I also like the players. I'm close with some of the players on Ohio State's team. They're great guys, and they just told me, 'Hey, this is a brotherhood. We have our alumni camp every year where all these alumni come back and play against us. It's a true brotherhood, and you have to really believe that.' So those are two big things, team chemistry and the coaching staff are some of the main

things I was looking for."

The northwest Ohioan, who listed Thad Matta's Butler as his second choice in his recruitment, said he has already felt the support of the program since committing, receiving congratulatory text messages from notable former Buckeyes such as Aaron Craft, Jared Sullinger and Kyle Young. He also expressed that playing for his in-state team was a unique opportunity that ultimately separated Ohio State from opposing schools.

"Ohio State's close to home," White said. "It obviously played a part in me coming to Ohio State, being an Ohio kid. It's just more special to an Ohio kid to play at Ohio State. As a kid, you want to play at Ohio State, you want to be a Buckeye. You love the football, you love the basketball, and you just want to be a Buckeye. Dreams come true, so it's pretty awesome."

Key Cleared For Full Basketball Activities

Ohio State senior center Zed Key will return to the court as a full participant this offseason, as he was cleared for all basketball-related activities on Aug. 29, according to a report from CBS Sports' Jon Rothstein.

Key's clearance comes six months after he underwent season-ending surgery to repair his sprained left shoulder in late February, an injury that hindered him throughout the majority of his junior year. He first aggravated his shoulder in the team's Nov. 30, 2022, matchup against Duke, but the pain did not impede his production until early in the Jan. 5 game with Purdue, where Key's shoulder "went out," leading to his injury being diagnosed as a sprain after the game.

The reaggravation forced him to sport a brace around his shoulder starting in mid-January, which he would wear until he was shut down for the season on Feb. 22.

"We wanted him to get back to campus

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2024 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
John Mobley Jr.	G	6-0	150	★★★★	Mt. Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy
Colin White	SF	6-6	180	★★★	Ottawa (Ohio) Glandorf

so the medical team could fully evaluate him," Holtmann said at the time. "I think they didn't feel comfortable clearing him considering some of his continued issues with his shoulder. We had always intended for him to have surgery. This just moved up the surgery."

Despite the injury-shortened campaign, Key was still able to produce in his third year for the Scarlet and Gray, posting a career-high 10.8 points and 7.5 rebounds per game along with a career-best 24 blocks and 14 steals. He managed to be even more efficient before his shoulder sprain, where he recorded 13.4 points and 8.4 rebounds per contest on 63.5 shooting percentage through the first 13 games of the season.

Now fully cleared, Key will look to reclaim his role as the Buckeyes' starting center, a position he will have to share with sophomore Felix Okpara. Okpara started the last nine games at center for Ohio State, averaging 5.8 points, 4.4 rebounds and 2.0 blocks per contest during that span.

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Five-Star Center Plans Visit To Ohio State

Raleigh (N.C.) Word Of God Christian Academy five-star center Jayden Quaintance (6-9, 230) has scheduled an official visit to Ohio State for the weekend of Sept. 9, according to The Columbus Dispatch.

Ohio State, which extended an offer to the big man on May 25, will be the first stop on Quaintance's recruiting trail this fall. He also plans to see Missouri on Sept. 21, Cincinnati on Oct. 13 and Kentucky on Oct. 20, according to 247Sports. The 16-year-old senior, who reclassified to 2024 from 2025 this summer, is tabbed as the nation's 11th-best prospect and top-rated player in North Carolina, as well as the third-ranked center.

Quaintance's ties to the Buckeye State are deep. He grew up in northeast Ohio while his father, Haminn, played basketball at Kent State from 2006-08. According to the former Golden Flashes forward, Ohio State is a "serious contender" to land his five-star son, who holds offers from Alabama, Baylor, Cincinnati, Kansas and Kentucky, among others.

"It obviously helps that he would be close to his family, but it's not the end-all, be-all," Haminn Quaintance told the Dispatch. "They're going to have to recruit him as hard as all the other schools, and they're going to have to fit. It's going to have to be a fit. I couldn't put him in a bad situation based on the location. We

showed that we definitely don't care about location when we went to Arizona.

"We did a Zoom (call) with (Ohio State)," he continued. "We saw their system. They have draft picks every year with Coach Holtmann. It's not just about being in Ohio, it's about basketball and what they have to offer, and Ohio State has a lot to offer from the basketball side."

OSU Still Eyeing 2024 Prospects

Ohio State has secured just two pledges for the class of 2024 in Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy four-star combo guard John Mobley Jr. (6-0, 150) and White, and they are still in reach to land a pair of highly-touted four-star prospects.

On Aug. 26, Sammamish (Wash.) East-side Catholic four-star power forward Jacob Cofie (6-9, 225) placed the Buckeyes on his narrowed list of top preferred schools. Cofie, who also included USC, Virginia and Washington as his finalists, is ranked as the nation's 88th-best prospect, the 16th-best power forward and the top overall player in Washington.

The three-star forward was offered by Holtmann and his staff last October and he is planning a visit to Ohio State on Sept. 16, according to On3.

"Ohio State has been in contact with me for a long time," Cofie said. "I talk to Coach (Diebler) very often. He always checks up on me, supports me by coming to my games and gives me pointers on things to improve and work on. Coach Holtmann was very transparent with me, (saying), 'Young hardworking players have a shot to play if they deliver.' It's a great program overall with a good reputation."

The Buckeyes are also still in consideration to land Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep four-star center Aiden Sherrell (6-10, 215), who listed Ohio State as one of his top five schools on July 22 along with Alabama, Michigan State, Oklahoma and Texas. He planned to announce his commitment on Aug. 13 but delayed the decision until a later date to be determined. Sherrell is ranked the 36th-best prospect in his class, as well as the nation's sixth-best center and sixth overall player in California.

The center excelled on the AAU circuit this summer, turning heads at the Peach Jam from July 3-9 while playing alongside Mobley with Vegas Elite. In eight games played, Sherrell netted 14.5 points per game on 62.2 percent shooting, along with a team-high 46 rebounds. He was offered by Ohio State last September and took an official visit to the university in June.

"They let their young guys play and they develop guys very well," Sherrell told On3 after his June visit. "I could see myself playing there."



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Expectations Remain High With Sheldon's Return

Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon had a decision to make last season. After being hyped up early in the year as a potential WNBA prospect, a leg injury that kept her out for the majority of the season quieted that discussion down. But with another year of eligibility still in her pocket, a return to Columbus for a fifth season would help her put another strong campaign on film for potential scouts at the next level.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Playing in the WNBA is an eventual goal for Sheldon, as it is for most players who come to a school like Ohio State, but her decision to return for a fifth and final season ultimately came down not to her professional prospects, but to help take the Buckeyes to the next level coming off the program's run to the Elite Eight last season.

"The group we had last year, besides (Taylor Mikesell), the whole group's coming back," she said in July. "So I knew we were going to have a really good shot at it this year, too, so I wanted to be a part of that, and then we have a lot of good newcomers."

"Then for me, it was about getting healthy, too, and being at my best, which – last year I had a lot of injuries to deal with. But I just knew the group we had, the girls we had, the chemistry. We're just building off it and getting better at it every day, and I wanted to be part of that for this year."

Sheldon did seriously consider her options, holding off on a decision until after Ohio State's loss to Virginia Tech in the Elite Eight. But she never got to the point – as Mikesell did before ultimately returning to the Buckeyes for a fifth season last year – where she received feedback from those in the WNBA.

"Before I made any contact with anybody, I wanted to make that decision," Sheldon said. "And I didn't really want to make it until the end of the season. So I kind of pushed that back. Once the tournament was over I just started thinking about that and like I said, thinking about the group we had, I wanted to be a part of it one more year."

The loss of Mikesell will be a significant one for Ohio State, but the Buckeyes have done plenty to try to replace her contributions. The program brought in a trio of transfers in guards Celeste Taylor (Duke) and Kennedy Cambridge (Kentucky) and forward Taiyier Parks (Michigan State), with Taylor expected to step in at shooting guard for Mikesell.

Taylor is not the shooter that Mikesell was, knocking down just 39.4 percent of her shots (and 32.1 percent from deep) last season compared to 43.0 percent (and 41.4 percent from deep) for Mikesell, but she makes up for it with her defensive acumen, named ACC Defensive Player of the Year last season and averaging 2.2 steals per game.

Parks is also expected to step in as a sig-

nificant contributor, while Cambridge will provide depth at guard. The trio arrived at Ohio State only this summer, but Sheldon said they are already feeling the confidence that is carrying over for the team from last season.

"I think the newcomers are starting to feel it too, which is awesome that it's happening this quickly," Sheldon said. "With the style we play and the personalities we have, I think it's really easy to jell with us and get involved right away and feel kind of in sync with how we play, so I'm excited."

"I think we've got a really good group who is only going to continue to get better. And it hasn't been a problem yet. They're fitting in just right and the confidence is only going to grow as we continue to learn our offense, learn our defense and everybody gets a little more confidence in what we're doing. I think it's going to end up being really good for us."

Of course, the biggest boost for the Buckeyes will be those returning players who have already spent time in the program. That group includes the likes of forwards Cotie McMahon, Rebeka Mikulasikova and Eboni Walker, as well as guards Taylor Therry and Rikki Harris, all part of why Sheldon is back for another season.

And with those players all back and Sheldon returning to help Ohio State get back to the Elite Eight and potentially advance to the Final Four for the first time since 1993, she said the team continues to have high expectations.

"I think in the summer, it's about us holding each other accountable," she said. "That's something we're really good at. Even in practice, we get on each other and make sure everybody's going as hard as they can every day, so I think making each other accountable is going to be our first goal, and we do that pretty well. Then once we get into preseason and Big Ten play, we want to win as many games as we can, and then we've got big goals at the end of the season towards the tournament, too. We'll take it game-by-game once we get started."

"The expectations are going to stay the same," she said. "We still want to play fast and play together, and we definitely have high expectations for next year and goals to absolutely get even further."

2024 PG Target Cambridge Transfers To Montverde

Jaloni Cambridge, the top-ranked point guard and third-ranked overall prospect in 2024, as well as the younger sister of Ohio State guard Kennedy Cambridge, announced she is transferring to Montverde Academy in Montverde, Fla.

The younger Cambridge (5-6) has been recruited by Ohio State, and she included the school among her top seven finalists in June along with Baylor, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Louisville and South Carolina. She previously played for Ensworth High School in Nashville, Tenn., where she was named Tennessee's Gatorade Player of the Year last season after averaging 26.9 points, 7.6 rebounds, 4.3 steals and 3.8 assists.

"(Montverde) is a great school," Cambridge told The Tennessean. "I played for a great program under (Ensworth coach

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2024 who have issued a verbal commitment to play basketball at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School/Previous Team
Seini Hicks	F	6-0		Cincinnati Purcell Marian
Ella Hobbs	F	6-4	★★★★	Concord (N.C.) J.M. Robinson
Elsa Lemmilla	C	6-6		Espoo (Finland) Tapiolan Honka
Ava Watson	G	5-7	★★★★	Buford, Ga.

Mary Cowles). She coached my sisters (Jordyn and Kennedy). It's family there.

"It wasn't an easy decision, but it was the best decision for me. I have goals for wanting to play on an even bigger stage. Goals to play a national schedule. Montverde was the right choice for me so I can fulfill my dreams."

While Ohio State's recruiting class in 2024 is large as it is, with Cincinnati Purcell Marian guard Seini Hicks (5-11), Concord (N.C.) Jay M. Robinson forward Ella Hobbs (6-4), Espoo, Finland, center Elsa Lemmilla (6-6) and Buford, Ga., guard Ava Watson (5-8) all committed to the Buckeyes, they would certainly make an exception for one of the top-ranked players in the class, not to mention the younger sister of a current player.

Despite moving to Florida, Cambridge said she does not anticipate the new school will change her thinking when it comes to her recruitment.

"I don't think (the transfer will affect recruiting)," she said. "I have the top seven. No matter what school I'm at, those coaches will come see me, and they know I know that."

New Teams Added To 2023-24 Non-Con Schedule

Ohio State has yet to announce the full nonconference schedule, but several games have been indirectly revealed by other schools announcing their nonconference schedules.

Boston College's nonconference schedule has the school listed as playing at Ohio State on Nov. 16, completing the other half of a home-and-home series between the schools. The Buckeyes visited the Eagles last season, taking home an 82-64 win. ESPN's scheduling database also indicates that Ohio State will host Ohio University on Dec. 5. The Buckeyes traveled to Athens, Ohio, last season, picking up an 86-56 win over the Bobcats.

A scheduling update from Belmont University, which plays in the Missouri Valley Conference, has the Bruins traveling to Ohio State on Dec. 22. It will be a reunion of sorts, as Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff's daughter Kilyn is a guard entering her third season with the program. She started 26 games last season, averaging 9.4 points, 4.7 rebounds and 0.9 assists on 43.3 percent shooting.

These join previously announced nonconference matchups against USC in Las Vegas on Nov. 6, the Baha Mars Pink Flamingo Championship (vs. East Carolina on Nov. 20; vs. Oklahoma State on Nov. 22) and at Tennessee on Dec. 3.

NCAA Creating Official Women's Invite Tournament

The Women's National Invitational Tour-

namment (WNIT) has been independently operated since 1998, but the NCAA will soon provide another sponsored postseason tournament for women's basketball, with the organization set to begin the Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament this season.

The new NCAA-sponsored women's NIT will feature 32 teams that did not make the cut for the 68-team NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament, with a selection committee, host sites and a selection process to be determined at a later date. Since 1998, the WNIT featured a 64-team field in which teams bid to host games and paid for the majority of their own travel.

"Women's basketball is at an all-time high with records being set for national championship and Final Four viewership, and the tournament (this year) was the most viewed since 2009," said Jamie Boggs, chair of the Division I Women's Basketball Oversight Committee. "This tournament will create an additional NCAA-funded postseason opportunity for women's basketball, and it comes at a time when we are seeing tremendous growth in popularity for women's basketball."

Despite the NCAA's announcement, the WNIT plans to continue operations with 48 teams this season, meaning that 148 teams will have a chance to participate in postseason play, though only 100 of those teams will play in NCAA-sponsored competitions.

Ohio State had two previous appearances in the WNIT, winning the event in 2000-01 with wins over Western Kentucky, James Madison and New Mexico, and going one-and-done in 2018-19 with a loss to Morehead State.

Costner Transfers To Eastern Kentucky

Eastern Kentucky announced on Aug. 23 that the program had added former Ohio State guard Kaitlyn Costner to the team's roster.

Costner appeared in 26 games over the last two seasons at Ohio State, totaling eight points on 4-of-16 shooting in 126 minutes on the court. She signed with the Buckeyes in 2021 out of Osceola (Ind.) Elkhart Central.

"We're extremely excited to add Kaitlyn to our roster," Eastern Kentucky head coach Greg Todd said. "She's a very talented guard who had two years of experience with such a good program in Ohio State. I believe Kaitlyn is up for the challenge as we continue our pursuit towards championships in March."

Costner is the third of Ohio State's off-season guard transfers to find a new team, with Hevynne Bristow landing at James Madison and Mya Perry transferring to Florida Atlantic.

On The Contrary, The Sky Is Not Falling For OSU

In all my years living in Columbus and following Ohio State, I have learned many things – one is that fans’ expectations are usually higher than their grasp on reality. Don’t believe me? Just peruse the comments on social media that were put up shortly after Ohio State completed its 23-3 victory over Indiana on Sept. 2.



You would have thought the Buckeyes had lost at home to a Group of Five team, as Purdue did. Or that it needed a last-second field goal at home to beat a Mid-American Conference team, as Illinois did. Or that it lost at home to a team that won one game – *one game* – a year ago, as TCU did in a loss to Colorado.

Expectations heading into every season are that Ohio State will look perfect every game, do everything right out of the gate, contend for a Big Ten title and be in the mix for the College Football Playoff. That expectation seemed to follow the Buckeyes into this season, even though reality says this is an entirely different team from last year’s group that was a missed field goal away from knocking defending national champion Georgia out of a chance to repeat.

When things change, expectations need to change. But that isn’t often the case with Ohio State fans – and, most likely, fans of other blue-blood programs, too.

Here is reality: Ohio State won its season opener, beating the Hoosiers for the 29th straight time despite playing not nearly its best game.

The expectation, however, was that the Buckeyes would hit the ground running, look just as they did last year and make the scoreboard operator work overtime. The expectation is that Kyle McCord is every bit as good as C.J. Stroud – who wasn’t as good early in his first season as the starter as he would ultimately become, if you recall – and that the offense should take zero steps back.

The expectation is also that losing Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones and Luke Wypler wouldn’t make any difference, because Ohio State has an assembly line of offensive linemen waiting in the wings. The reality is that none of this is so.

It was pretty comical to read through some of assessments – OSU might as well just throw in the towel now because the season is over. McCord is the worst starter since Joe Bauserman. Marvin Harrison Jr. should sit out the rest of the year if this is how it’s going to be.

Here’s another reality: First games are always dicey. Heck, most of the early non-conference games are dicey, at least when you’re inexperienced at crucial spots. Remember 2014? Braxton Miller got hurt, and a completely untested kid named J.T. Barrett was forced to take over, much earlier than the coaching staff wanted or expected him to. The Buckeyes looked OK in

an opening win over Navy then lost the next week to Virginia Tech. But then? That team improved incrementally through the season and ended up winning the national championship.

Don’t believe for a second that I’m saying that will happen for this team. What I am saying is that anyone who believes that the team it saw against Indiana is the team it will see against Michigan – or Notre Dame on Sept. 23 – is almost certainly mistaken. Teams evolve. Most improve. Some don’t, but most of those are because they don’t have top-line players.

Ohio State has top-line players, so even if the quarterback isn’t quite top-line, he could be more than good enough. Oh, that’s another expectation – that McCord is the latest in a string of standouts who will find himself in New York City at the Heisman Trophy ceremony in December. Don’t be fooled into playing the comparison game.

Just because Dwayne Haskins and Justin Fields and Stroud were all fantastic, don’t assume that McCord is at that level. Or that he even has to be. If the pieces around you are good enough, you don’t have to be great. And save for the offensive line, the pieces around McCord are good enough. From his own perspective, McCord thought it was an up-and-down performance.

“I thought it was all right,” McCord said. “I thought there were some good plays, some bad plays. I want to look at the film and see where I can improve.”

He’s not wrong, though many in Buckeye Nation will have a hard time believing that. McCord finished with a QBR of 78.1, which was among the top 30 for the weekend. While not quite the standard of Stroud or Fields or Haskins, it’s more than acceptable for someone breaking in as a full-time starter. And it’s better than his *actual* first start against Akron in 2021, when he posted a 69.8 QBR.

Imagine how much better his QBR number against Indiana could have been had Harrison not carelessly stepped out of bounds on a sure touchdown or had Emeke Egbuka and Julian Fleming been able to complete catches of very nice throws in the end zone.

Now, he did have some real gaffes – the interception in the second quarter was a no-no, throwing back across his body to the middle of the field. You simply cannot do that. And misreading a nice block from Chip Trayanum on a designed quarterback run that should have been a touchdown was groan-inducing. It’s pretty obvious that McCord isn’t at his best running the football. He also didn’t really go downfield much – not sure whether that was by design or if he was just trying to make fewer mistakes and taking the check downs.

On the plus side, he seemed to get more comfortable as the game progressed, and his third-quarter throw over the middle to Cade Stover was perfect and allowed the tight end to ramble for a generous chunk of yardage. His ball placement was much better in the second half in general.

You can bet Ryan Day will have his noise-canceling headphones on this week, preferring to focus on preparation for the next opponent. He called the game he need-

ed to call, but it wasn’t the one fans wanted or expected him to call. That’s why the fans are playing Madden and Day is on the sidelines.

“We know what we need to do in order to win down the stretch – play great defense and run the football,” Day said after the victory. “But you’ve got to get that first win, and anytime you’re dealing with a new quarterback, first game on the road, it’s good to get that one.”

Day knows that while the victory was good, there is enough to work on going forward to keep practice lively.

“You’d like to have more than 23 points,” Day said. “But the number one goal was to get a win today. I’m glad we got the win. Now we’ve got to get better.”

Yes, that means McCord, too. The expectation from some seems to be that there’s no way that can happen. The reality is, it’s more likely it will.

Defense Gets Nasty

At no point was there worry that Indiana would get back into the game and hang around, as has happened a couple of times in recent years.

Aside from return man Jaylin Lucas, the Hoosiers are devoid of playmakers. The fact that Ohio State dominated – Indiana averaged 2.8 yards per play – shouldn’t have been surprising as the Buckeyes are bigger, stronger and faster.

Pessimists will harp about the lack of sacks – failing to note that Indiana ran an option attack for much of the first half and threw the ball only 21 times for the game. OSU’s defensive line was very active, notably J.T. Tuimolou and Mike Hall Jr.

It was surprising to see that Tuimolou finished with just four tackles because he was in the IU backfield quite a bit, and even more surprising that Hall finished with only one tackle. He was able to push Indiana lineman backward at will and mess up more than a few plays, so even if he wasn’t officially the guy who made the stop, he influenced things a great deal.

Most noticeable was the improved play of the secondary. Denzel Burke looked much closer to his freshman form, batting down passes and sticking close to Indiana receivers, and veteran Josh Proctor was a presence early, with a couple of big hits.

Sonny Styles looks to have many of the same qualities as his OSU alum dad, Lorenzo, who played linebacker with an attitude under John Cooper. Styles showed versatility, playing out in space and showing solid cover skills while also proving he can take on the run game. He looks like a big-time star in the making.

What was curious is why touted recruit C.J. Hicks once again got only table scraps. There is a belief among OSU fans that the coaching staff plays veterans over more talented youngsters. That may or may not be true, but it gives the appearance of such at linebacker.

Now, there’s no way that Tommy Eichenberg or Steele Chambers isn’t starting, but by most accounts from spring and fall camp, Hicks looked to be right there with them in his abilities. Yet he never rotates in, appearing only on special teams.

Look, it’s not my job to tell a coach whom to play. They see guys all the time and know who can get it done. But when even other players mention a kid and that kid isn’t on the field? Something seems just a little off.

Random Thoughts

- In the days leading up to the opener, Day made it sound like the plan was to play McCord and Devin Brown close to an equal amount of reps. But that wasn’t close to happening. Brown got a cursory series early and then wasn’t seen again until it was time to close out the game. While I am not one who ever bought the “insider talk” that Brown had the upper hand but Day started McCord to appease McCord’s dad, it is a bad look to give only a handful of snaps to someone whom you portrayed as squarely in the battle. If you have decided on McCord going forward, that’s fine. Just say that.

- The offensive line is a problem, one that if not fixed soon will be Ohio State’s undoing. Neither Josh Simmons nor Josh Fryar played particularly well, and the run blocking by OSU as a whole was pretty bad – evidenced by an inability to pick up first downs on a number of occasions on third-and-short. The ground game averaged 4.6 yards, which isn’t bad, but it’s imperative to convert those third-and-shorts so that drives can continue.

Trayanum looked like the best back on the roster, bursting through holes and seeming to enjoy contact. TreVeyon Henderson had a few nifty runs but didn’t “wow” the way I had hoped, and it appears that Miyan Williams will be the Buckeyes’ 2023 version of Pete Johnson, stealing touchdowns near the goal line.

- Though touchdowns are always better than field goals, it was nice to see Jayden Fielding connect on all three of his field goals. Maybe not quite as important as quarterback, kicker is still an important position on the team. Reliability at that spot means that a coach won’t always have to go for it on fourth down from the opposing 30-yard line.

- Though it’s still early, the change to the clock rules have not excited me. For those unaware, there has been a tweak to the rule that stopped the clock after first downs. In an effort to even further “NFL-ize” college football, the powers-that-be have decided that keeping the clock running after first downs, except for the final two minutes of the second and fourth quarters, is a good idea. It will, in theory, speed up the game and cut down on the number of plays, thereby leading to more player safety.

Only that goes out the window with the expanded CFP, when more teams will play even more games. UCLA’s Chip Kelly was interviewed at halftime of his team’s game with Coastal Carolina and gave a priceless response: “This new rule, it’s crazy. We had four possessions in the first half. This game goes fast. Hope you guys are selling a lot of commercials!”

Taking away two to three possessions per game will take some getting used to and may not, in the end, be better for the product.

The Finer Points Of Offense Missing In Opener

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I don't know exactly what the word "clunky" means, but I think I know it when I see it, and I saw it in Bloomington, Ind., on Sept. 2. Ohio State coach Ryan Day used the word after season-opening wins against Notre Dame last year and Indiana to kick off the 2023 season – games that had somewhat similar scores of 21-10 and 23-3, respectively. But last year's opener was against Notre Dame and this time around it was against a lowly Indiana team. This one was clunkier.

As anyone who saw the IU game knows, most of the clunk was on offense.

In the end, the Buckeyes mustered 380 yards on offense but converted that into only a pair of Miyan Williams touchdown runs and three Jayden Fielding field goals. After an off-season of hearing anyone who knew anything singing the praises of the dynamic duo of Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, Buckeye fans are still trying to figure out exactly where the two were in the game against the Hoosiers. Egbuka had nearly as many yards on punt returns (14) as he did on receptions (16), and the two preseason All-Americans combined for only five receptions for 34 yards, a total that would have been a poor day at the office for either of them alone based on past performances.

New quarterback Kyle McCord seemed more fixated on presumed No. 3 receiver Julian Fleming and tight end Cade Stover coming out of the gate. I don't have the benefit of "watching the film," as coaches have been saying since the invention of the camera to avoid answering questions after a game. Maybe Tom Allen and his Hoosiers made the decision to cut off Harrison and Egbuka and force McCord to beat IU with the other receivers. In that case McCord was making a wise decision by looking to secondary receivers. Fortunately, Fleming and Stover combined for 11 receptions of 156 yards to help save Ohio State's bacon.

But as the going gets rougher later in the season, the Buckeyes are going to have to use their best weapons, and those are Harrison and Egbuka. Fortunately, the going gets easier in the next couple of weeks, giving McCord and Ryan Day/Brian Hartline time to work out the kinks before the trip to Notre Dame on Sept. 23.

Did anyone besides me find it odd that after all the hubbub about a quarterback battle and assurances that McCord and Devin Brown were both going to see action in Bloomington (they didn't lie about Brown seeing action) that McCord played virtually the whole game against the Hoosiers? The game may not have been in doubt, but IU remained within easy striking distance until late in the third quarter and really, with a few funny bounces of the football, beyond even that.

If McCord and Brown were that tightly bunched, you would have thought that Day/Hartline might have brought Brown in to try to put some distance between the Buckeyes and the Hoosiers. It kind of makes you wonder if the whole "quarterback battle" was just a psychological ploy to keep the two engaged and battling or a smokescreen to mislead future opponents and annoy fans and media members. Did the staff know they were going with McCord all along?

In the end, McCord seemed to get stronger as the game went on and threw one of his best passes of the afternoon when he hit Harrison for an apparent 24-yard touchdown in the third quarter, a score negated when it was determined that Harrison had left the field of play and came back in before the catch. The Buck-

eyes eventually scored a touchdown on the drive, so the non-catch had no impact on the outcome of the game. However, a catch there would have bulked up the stat lines of both McCord and Harrison and maybe lessened the hand-wringing of Buckeye fans.

Harrison and Egbuka are going to get their yards, and McCord is going to get better. For me the *real* hand-wringing should be over the offensive line and the run game.

The big guys up front did not allow a sack, but I found the running game, while showing flashes, inconsistent. TreVeyon Henderson had some good runs, but I kept waiting for him to break a big one. Instead, he ended up with a long of 19 and an average of just 3.9 yards on 12 carries. I recalled that during his breakout freshman campaign in 2021 he needed help from the offensive line and was not at his best when he had to fight for his own yards. He could have used a little more help against the Hoosiers.

The big questions on the team coming in were the quarterback and the offensive line and after one game, I would say I am more concerned with the line. In addition to Henderson averaging 3.9 yards a carry, Miyan Williams averaged 3.6. Last season, when both were banged up, Williams still averaged 6.4 yards and Henderson 5.3. In 2021 they averaged 7.2 and 6.8 yards, respectively. I am looking for numbers more like those from the Buckeyes' top two rushers. That would open things up for Harrison and Egbuka.

Against IU, Chip Trayanum was the big gainer and the big winner racking up 57 yards on eight carries for a 7.1-yard average. It is going to be hard to keep him out of the rotation if he keeps running like that.

Again, big holes by the guys up front make for big gains.

Aside from the quarterbacks and the offensive line, the big thing Buckeye fans were watching was how the defense looked in year two of the Jim Knowles regime. The stop troops passed their first test with flying colors, allowing Indiana just 153 yards and three points.

The thing that struck me was that there was no real standout on the defense.

Steele Chambers led the way for the Buckeyes with a modest six tackles, but there were eight others with four or more stops. There was only one sack and no interceptions. It seemed to simply be a case of good team defense. There are plenty of players who have the potential to have big statistical games going forward, but the fact that the defense turned in such a solid performance without anyone stuffing the stat sheet seems promising.

Quick Hitters

- In my traditional look at the tight ends, it is hard to complain about the game Stover turned in, grabbing five passes for 98 yards with a long of 49, keying Ohio State's second touchdown drive. I especially like the way Stover racks up the yards after catch, tacking on an extra 68 against the Hoosiers. And don't forget that fellow tight end Gee Scott Jr., converted a fourth-and-2 with a 10-yard reception on Ohio State's first touchdown drive.

- While McCord's negated completion to Harrison was a beauty, I believe his best pass of the game was came when he dopped a 12-yard pass into the hands of Williams to convert

a fourth-and-9 in the fourth quarter and set up Ohio State's final points of the afternoon, a 22-yard field goal by Fielding. McCord demonstrated the type of touch on the pass that predecessor C.J. Stroud was famous for.

- I thought Fielding had a solid debut, nailing all three of his field-goal attempts. The distances were only 40, 22 and 22 yards, but the kicks were all strong and right on the money.

- For comparison purposes, here's what Stroud's numbers looked like in his debut in 2021, also a Big Ten opener on the road, this time against Minnesota.

Stroud was 13 of 22 for 294 yards and four touchdowns against an interception. McCord finished his debut 20 of 33 for 239 yards, no scores and an interception. Stroud had the edge in yardage, while McCord had a slight edge in percentage, 60.6 percent to 59.1. The big difference between the two performances was Stroud's four TD passes in the 45-31 victory over the Gophers.

- Let me make this note short, sweet and to the point. Has Ohio State ever gotten a favorable targeting call?

Summer Grads

Speaking of Scott, he was one of a handful of football players to graduate at Ohio State's recent summer commencement.

"It is a cool achievement," Scott said. "Nobody can ever take that away from me. Regardless of what happens, I am an Ohio State graduate."

Other football players to graduate included Lloyd McFarquhar, Josh Proctor, Mitch Rossi and Noah Ruggles.

Rex Touts Randy

I can't help but admit that you become a little bit of a wide-eyed Buckeye fan when Rex Kern calls the office, which he does from time to time. Now I am not going to delude myself into thinking he was calling for me. He generally is looking for managing editor Mark Rea and takes me as a poor man's replacement when Mark is not around.

When Rex calls, he generally has a purpose, and his most recent call was no different. He was stumping for his former teammate Randy Gradishar to be named to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Gradishar is up for selection as a senior finalist for the class of 2024.

Rex didn't have to convince me. I have been an advocate for Gradishar's admittance ever since I realized he wasn't *already* in the HOF when I stumbled across a fascinating website called the Hall of Very Good, as compiled by the Professional Football Researchers Association.

Kern and Gradishar never actually played together at Ohio State. Gradishar arrived in Columbus in 1970, when freshmen were still ineligible to play, just as they had been when Kern and the eventual Super Sophs arrived in 1967. But the two certainly faced each other in practice in 1970 when the Sophs were seniors.

Kern recalled that Gradishar was just terrorizing the varsity offense in preseason camp that year, and Woody Hayes was furious. Finally, Hayes designed a play where three different players came at Gradishar from three different angles to try to negate him.

"So, what happened?" I asked.

"He made the tackle, of course."

"That sounds like what you guys did to the

varsity when you were freshmen in 1967," I reminded him, referring to his legendary freshman class.

"I guess you're right," he admitted.

"What goes around comes around," I said.

As for Gradishar's credentials as a pro, during his 10-year career with the Denver Broncos, he was first-team All-Pro twice, second-team three times and made the Pro Bowl seven times. He was the heart and soul of the famed Orange Crush defense and was named the NFL Defensive Player of the Year in 1978.

"If you ask me to name the five best linebackers I played against or had a chance to cover in my broadcasting career, Randy Gradishar would be on that list," Merlin Olsen, a Hall of Famer himself, once said. "There is no question about his credentials. Randy Gradishar belongs in the Hall of Fame."

Building BSB Together

I wanted to thank the many, many BSB subscribers who have been electing to pay full price for their subscriptions, despite receiving money-saving offers over the summer. All of us at Buckeye Sports Bulletin are appreciative of the support we have been getting as we try to buck the trend of declining newspaper readership while, like all businesses and individuals alike, battling the crippling effects of inflation.

I am so encouraged by the support we have been receiving that I have set a goal of actually *increasing* BSB circulation by 10 percent this football season. We can't do that without your help.

I will continue to suggest ways that you can help in this ambitious campaign.

Now is a great time to send four free trial issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin to any Buckeye fans that you know who are not enjoying the paper already. Send your names and addresses to BSB at subscriptions@buckeyesports.com, mail them to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212, or give us a call at (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862. Remember, if you have already sent us a name, there is no reason to send it again. We will reach out to those people on our own.

And to add some real new blood to the circulation list, consider sending a gift to your children or grandchildren. We are offering a special price of \$29.95 on subscriptions for readers under the age of 35 for one, two or three years – a \$90 discount over the regular rate for up to \$270 savings. Many of those potential readers may have never read a newspaper. Use the same addresses as above.

Thanks again and stay with us as we build Buckeye Sports Bulletin together.

One Price Stays The Same

By now you have figured out that we have implemented our inflation-mandated price increase, following multiple price increases in the cost of both printing and mailing in the past year.

However, one price that we did not increase is the cost to upgrade your subscription to first-class mail through football season or recruiting in February. That price will remain at \$29 or \$39 respectively. We will absorb the cost increase as we try to offer more consistent mailing service in a declining postal delivery environment. Again, use the previously listed addresses for credit card orders or to send checks by mail.

Give us a call if you have any questions.

Reds

SEPTEMBER LINEUP!



SEPTEMBER 1-3



FRIDAY // 1:10

FRIDAY // 6:40

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Staffmark**

• **City Connect Fridays**
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.

• **Military Appreciation Days, presented by CareSource**
Visit reds.com/Military for details

SATURDAY // 6:40

• **Reds Tote Bag, presented by Jeff Wyler Automotive Family**
(To fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last.)

SUNDAY // 12:10

• **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**
Visit reds.com/Family for details

• **Reds City Connect Hunter Greene Poster, presented by Toyota**
(To fans in attendance, while supplies last.)

• **Sesame Street Ticket Package**
(Elmo bobblehead only available through theme ticket package, while supplies last)



SEPTEMBER 4-6



MONDAY // 4:10

TUESDAY // 6:40

• **3-2-1 Tuesdays*, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light**
(At all Tuesday Reds home games, fans can purchase \$3 Buds and Bud Lights, \$2 hot dogs, and \$1 ice cream cups)
*Limit 2 items per transaction

• **Senior Days**
Visit reds.com/Senior for details

WEDNESDAY // 6:40

• **Bark in the Park, presented by Kroger, Good 'n' Fun, and DreamBone**
Ticket packages available for dogs and their owners with pet activities, samples and more!



SEPTEMBER 8-10



presented by
Jelly Belly and Kroger Sweet Spot

FRIDAY // 6:40

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show, presented by Rozzi Fireworks**

• **City Connect Fridays**
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.

SATURDAY // 6:40

• **Nick Lodolo Bobblehead, presented by Every Watch Has a Story**
(To fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last)

• **Ohio Lottery Post-Game Concert featuring Lady A, presented by Dunkin'**
Free to all fans with game ticket! Upgrade to field passes at reds.com/Concerts

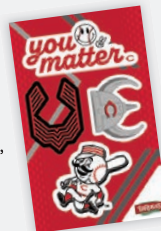


SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**
Visit reds.com/Family for details

• **Kids Sticker Sheet, presented by LaRosa's**
(To kids 14 and younger as part of Family Sundays, while supplies last.)

FAMILY SUNDAYS



SEPTEMBER 18-20



presented by **NABISCO**

MONDAY // 6:40

TUESDAY // 6:40

• **3-2-1 Tuesdays*, presented by Budweiser and Bud Light**
(At all Tuesday Reds home games, fans can purchase \$3 Buds and Bud Lights, \$2 hot dogs, and \$1 ice cream cups)
*Limit 2 items per transaction

WEDNESDAY // 12:35

• **Business Day Specials**
Enjoy afternoon baseball and \$10 in concession credits for only \$20!

• **Senior Days**
Visit reds.com/Senior for details



SEPTEMBER 22-24

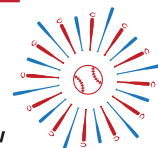


presented by
Kroger Zero Hunger Zero Waste

FRIDAY // 6:40

• **Fireworks Friday Post-Game Show**

• **City Connect Fridays**
The Reds will wear their Nike City Connect uniforms for all Friday home games.



SATURDAY // 6:40

• **Reds Team Photo, presented by Homemade Brand Ice Cream**
(To fans in attendance as part of Super Saturdays, while supplies last.)

SUNDAY // 1:40

• **Family Sundays, presented by Klosterman Bakery**
Visit reds.com/family for details

• **Kids Sticker Sheet, presented by Chick-fil-A**
(To kids 14 and younger as part of Family Sundays, while supplies last.)

• **Fan Appreciation Day**
Lucky fans will win prizes throughout the game! Postcard entries accepted.

FAMILY SUNDAYS



(513) 381-REDS (7337)



reds.Com/Tickets

*Some restrictions apply. Schedule and promotions subject to change.