

HE12 An inside look at Clemson Football





No. 3 Ohio State vs. No. 2 Clemson **Fiesta Bowl** Dec. 31, 7 p.m. **ESPN**

A look at Clemson players

DESHAUN WATSON, 6-3, 215, Junior, Quarterback

The Heisman Trophy runner-up has completed 67 percent of his passes for 3,914 yards and 37 touchdowns. He also is the Tigers' second-



leading rusher with 526 yards and 6 TDs.

MIKE WILLIAMS, 6-3, 225, Junior, Wide Receiver

Williams combines size and speed. He has 84 catches for 1,171 yards and 10 touchdowns this season. He was firstteam All-ACC.



CARLOS WATKINS, 6-3, 305, Senior, **Defensive Tackle**

Watkins is the leader of a big, strong defensive line for Clemson. The Tigers led the ACC in scoring defense (18.4). He had 10 tackles for losses and 8.5 sacks.



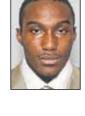
BEN BOULWARE, 6-0, 235, Senior, Linebacker

Boulware was Co-Defensive Player of the Year in the ACC and was second-team All-American. He has 114 tackles, 9 tackles



CORBIN TANKERSLEY, 6-1, 200, Senior, **Defensive Back**

Tankersley was firstteam All-ÁCC and a first-team All-American. He has 55 tackles, 6 tackles for losses and 3 interceptions.



ARTAVIS SCOTT, 5-10, 190, Junior

Scott was selected second-team All-ACC. His 71 catches for 592 yards ranks second among Clemson's receivers. He has five touchdown catches this season.



RECENT CLEMSON **BOWL HISTORY**

Bv The Associated Press Record: 20-19

Jan. 11, 2016 College Football Championship — Alabama 45, Clemson 40

Dec. 31, 2015 Orange Bowl — Clemson 37, Oklahoma 17

Dec. 29, 2014 Russell Athletic Bowl -Clemson 40. Oklahoma 6 Jan. 3, 2014 Orange Bowl — Clemson 40,

Ohio St. 35 Dec. 31, 2012 Chick-fil-A Bowl —

Clemson 25, LSU 24 Jan. 4, 2012 Orange Bowl — West Virginia 70, Clemson 33 Dec. 31, 2010 Meineke Bowl — South

Florida 31, Clemson 26 Dec. 27, 2009 Music City Bowl -Clemson 21, Kentucky 13

Jan. 1, 2009 Gator Bowl — Nebraska 26, Clemson 21 Dec. 31, 2007 Chick-fil-A Bowl — Auburn

23, Clemson 20, OT Dec. 29, 2006 Music City Bowl —

Kentucky 28, Clemson 20 Dec. 27, 2005 Champs Sports Bowl — Clemson 19, Colorado 10 Jan. 2, 2004 Peach Bowl — Clemson 27, Tennessee 14

Dec. 23, 2002 Tangerine Bowl — Texas Tech 55, Clemson 15 Dec. 31, 2001 Humantitarian Bowl —

Clemson 49, Louisiana Tech 24 Jan. 1, 2001 Gator Bowl — Virginia Tech 41, Clemson 20

Dec. 30, 1999 Peach Bowl — Mississippi St. 17, Clemson 7

Jan. 2, 1998 Peach Bowl — Auburn 21,

Clemson 17

Watson believes he should have won Heisman

Clemson QB finished runner-up, third last two seasons

The Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson believes he is the best player in the country no matter what the Heisman Trophy voters say.

Watson finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting to Louisville QB Lamar Jackson. Jackson's rise also meant Watson did not repeat even as first team All-Atlantic Coast Conference quarterback.

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney agrees with Watson that he should have won the Heisman Trophy.

Swinney said Heisman voters likely were numbed by Watson's amazing play over three years.

The quarterback is excited that his chief goal in college — winning the national championship — is still out there.

The Tigers (12-1, No. 2 CFP) play Ohio State in the Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 31 in the semifinals of the College Football Playoff.

Watson, his coach and his teammates think the voters for the Heisman and the all-conference teams got it wrong when it comes to the Clemons QB. "I'm the best player in the country. That's

how I think. That's how I feel. People have their own way of voting," Watson said Monday as Clemson wraps up its first week of practice before playing Ohio State.

Watson finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting this year, one spot better than 2015. But Jackson won the award, and knocked Watson out of first-team Atlantic Coast Conference quarterback as — two disappointing blows to a driven competitor like Watson.

Though his losses weren't caused as much by a slide in his own play as Jackson's



AP photo

Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson (4) looks to pass during the first half of the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game against Virginia

remarkable season.

Watson's 2016 stats are similar to his 2015 numbers in almost every category. He has thrown two more interceptions in two fewer games, but he also has thrown just four fewer passes so far this year than in 2015 for the Tigers (12-1, No. 2 CFP)

Swinney said the Heisman Trophy has been watered down as voters get swayed by the player who suddenly bursts on the scene and misses out on players like Watson, who are consistently good over a

"I think Deshaun is so good, people are numb to it," Swinney said.

Both Watson and Swinney say they aren't knocking Jackson's talent and they understand how he won. But unlike Jackson, who only has the Citrus Bowl against LSU left before his season ends, Watson hopes to be play two more games and achieve the ultimate goal he had when arriving Clemson from Gainesville, Georgia.

"You could put the national championship trophy and the Heisman, he wouldn't think twice about which one to

pick, Swinney said

The championship is what Watson would talk about when he used his key to unlock Clemson's indoor practice facility late at night and throw balls to rehabilitating receiver Mike Williams during the offseason.

"He knows he is the best player in the country. He doesn't need a trophy to say that," Williams said.

And while the voters might have rejected Watson, the people who know football will validate his talent when he enters the NFL draft, Clemson co-offensive coordinator Jeff Scott said.

"As soon as this season is over, the scouts, GMs, head coaches and offensive coordinators will start speaking with Deshaun and he is going to go straight back to the top," Scott said.

Swinney said Watson showed his leadership by taking full advantage of the experience of being a two time Heisman Trophy finalist without letting the third place finish in 2015 and the second place finish in 2016 get to him.

"I'm sure he's disappointed. But he hasn't expressed that at all," Swinney said.
Watson said he is proud of his career no

matter how the next game (or two) turns out. He wore this year's ACC championship hat to during interviews on Monday and is aware of how he took a Clemson team on the cusp of being a national contender to join Alabama as the only back-to-back playoff teams. The Tigers also won two straight ACC titles for the first time in 28 seasons.

Watson has the same cool demeanor responding to questions about what his college career will mean without a national title as he has had about not winning the Heisman. But his quiet words point out how much a fourth loss of his college career T've already experienced not getting it

— felt how big that was," Watson said.

Clemson, Williams glad to be back

By Jim Naveau jnaveau@civitasmedia.com

Clemson's season has been about a second chance, something its standout receiver Mike Williams knows a lot

about. The Tigers are in the College Football Playoff for the second season in a row. A year ago they lost 45-40 to Alabama in the national championship

But they played that game without Williams, whose season ended in the 2015 season opener when he suffered a season-ending neck injury on a freak play.

The 6-2, 225-pound Williams caught 84 passes for 1,171 yards and 10 touchdowns this season for the Tigers (12-1). He is expected to be one of the first receivers taken in the NFL draft.

After catching 57 passes for 1,030 yards in 2014, he was expected to be a big part of Clemson's offense last season. Eleven plays into the opener against Wofford changed all that, though.

As he grabbed a 4-yard

touchdown throw from quarterback Deshaun Watson, he was shoved from behind, and his head hit on the goal post as he fell to the ground. It was a scary moment, made

even scarier when Williams said whole body felt numb.

The diagnosis was that he had a fractured vertebra in his neck. He had to wear a neck brace for several months, and it wasn't until two months after the injury that he was allowed to do some light running and dumbbell curls.

He returned to the field in spring practice and has been better than ever this season.

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney calls him the "most complete" receiver he has had in his nine seasons as the Tigers coach.

"He's 225 pounds and can run and change direction. He's a load. He's going to be a great, great, great pro," Swinney said at a press conference before the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game.

"I don't have to see anybody else out there. This guy there is none better. I've made my living coaching wideouts



Williams (7) is stopped by Virginia Tech cornerback **Adonis** Alexander (36) during the ACC championship game. Williams has had a big season after missing last season with a neck injury.

Clemson wide

receiver Mike

AP photo

forever, and there ain't none better. His size, his length, his toughness, his IQ, his speed and explosiveness is just rare," he said.

"He would have left (for the NFL) last year if he had not gotten hurt. I don't have any doubt about that," Swinney said at Clemson's bowl media day press conference.

Williams is one of four seniors for Clemson who announced last summer this

would be their last season and that they would leave for the NFL with one year of eligibility remaining. In addition to Watson and

Williams, running back Wayne Gallman and receiver Artavis Scott said they were not coming back in 2017. In a rare move, Swinney

allowed the four underclassmen to be honored along with the seniors at Clemson's Senior Day.

ACC STANDINGS Atlantic Division

ACC Overall W L Clemson 11 1 Louisville 3 Florida State 3 NC State 6 6 3 Wake Forest 6 6 Boston College 6 6 6 Syracuse 6 **Coastal Division** 2 3 Virginia Tech Miami 5 5 5 8 4 8 N. Carolina Pittsburgh 8 Georgia Tech 4 4 8 4 4 8 Duke

Virginia

CLEMSON SCHEDULE

Sept. 3 — at Auburn, 19-13 Sept. 10 — Troy, 30-24 Sept. 17 — at S. Carolina St., 59-0 Sept. 22 — Georgia Tech, 26-7 Oct. 1 — Louisville, 42-36 Oct. 7 — Boston College, 56-10 Oct. 15 - N.C. State, 24-17 Oct. 29 — Florida State, 37-34 Nov. 5 — Syracuse 54-0 Nov. 12 — Pittsburgh, 42-43 Nov. 19 — Wake Forest, 35-13 Nov. 26 — S. Carolina, 56-7 Dec. 3 — Virginia Tech, 42-35 Dec. 31 — Ohio State, Playoff semifinal, 7 p.m.

2016 CLEMSON LEADERS

Passing Deshaun Watson......3914 Nick Schuessler 328 Rushing Wayne Gallman 1002 Deshaun Watson...... 526 Tavien Feaster209 C.J. Fuller......205 Receiving Mike Williams1171 Jordan Leggett...... 637 Deon Cain......621 Artavis Scott592 Ray-Ray McCloud 443 Punts Andy Teasdall 37.7 Field goals Greg Huegel 13/17

Tackles Ben Boulware.....113 Kendall Joseph.....107 Van Smith.....105 Dexter Lawrence75 Carlos Watkins......66 Sacks Carlos Watkins......8.5 Ben Boulware..... 4 Kendall Joseph............ 3.5 Christian Wilkins 3.5 Interceptions Jadar Johnson 5 Cordrea Tankersley 3 Tanner Muse1 Mark Fields.....1 **Punt Returns**

Ray-Ray McCloud 176

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5 J. C. C. An inside look at Ohio State Football





No. 3 Ohio State vs. No. 2 Clemson Fiesta Bowl Dec. 31, 7 p.m. **ESPN**

Recruiting Update

Six recruits who verbally committed to Ohio State's 2017 class won high school state championships in three

They are offensive lineman Wyatt Davis (Belleflower, Calif., John Bosco), cornerback Shaun Wade (Jacksonville Trinity Christian), wide receiver Trevon **Grimes** (Fort Lauderdale St. Thomas Aquinas), quarterback Tate Martell (Las Vegas Bishop Gorman), wide receiver Tyjon Lindsey (Las Vegas Bishop Gorman) and defensive lineman Haskell Garrett (Las Vegas Bishop

Martell also won the Gatorade National Player of the Year Award, which recognizes athletic and academic success. The 4-star quarterback threw for 41 touchdowns with only one interception and rushed for 21 TDs Former Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George presented the award to him. Martell plans to enroll at Ohio State in

Brendon White (Olentangy Liberty) has graduated early from high school and will begin classes in January at OSU. He has already practiced with Ohio State.

Five-star safety **Jeffrey Okudah** (South Grand Prairie, Tex.), who lists Ohio State in his final three schools, will announce his commitment on Jan. 7. His other finalists are Oklahoma and Florida

Say What?

"I expected 2,000 yards and 20 touchdowns."

-Ohio State running back Mike Weber on his goals for



Buckeye Brain Busters

- 1. What year did Clemson win the national championship?
- 2. How many passes did Clemson's Sammy Watkins catch against OSU in the 2014 Orange Bowl?
- 3. Who caught Braxton Miller's final completion at Ohio State?
 - 4. What is Urban Meyer's new grandson's name?
 - 5. Who is Ohio State's career interceptions leader?
 - 6. How many TDs did Clemson's William Perry score in the NFL?
- 7. Where did Clemson coach Dabo Swinney play college football?
- 8. What year did Clemson first admit women students?
- 9. What is the most points Ohio State has scored in a bowl game?
- 10. What is the fewest points Ohio State has scored in a bowl game?

Answers: 1. 1981; 2. Sixteen; 3. Devin Smith; 4. Troy Xavier Dennis; 5. Mike Sensibaugh (22); 6. Three; 7. Alabama; 8. 1955; 9. 47 in 1982 Holiday Bowl; 10. 0 in 1921 Rose Bowl.



Don Speck | The Lima News

"Playoff bound." The sign says it all as Ohio State fans celebrate the Buckeyes' 30-27 double-overtime win over Michigan on Nov. 26 in Ohio Stadium.

< QUARTERBACKS



Ohio State's J.T. Barrett has had some critics, but his value cannot be overstated.

In tough games, the junior quarterback (2,428 yards passing and 24 touchdowns and 847 yards rushing with nine touchdowns) has carried OSU's offense, as he did against Michigan when he rushed the ball 30 times.

Clemson's Deshaun Watson (3,914 yards passing, 37 TDs) completed 67 percent of his passes but was intercepted 15 times. He was second in the Heisman Trophy voting. Clemson averaged 40.2 points and 505 yards of offense.

Advantage: Clemson



< RUNNING BACKS Redshirt freshman Mike Weber (1,072

yards, 9 TDs) has been very good but comes up short of Ezekiel Elliott territory. But so would most people. With OSU in a win-or-go-home situation, it will be interesting to see if Curtis Samuel gets the ball more than he did in the first 12 games.

Wayne Gallman's 1,002 yards and 15 touchdowns lead Clemson's ground game. Watson had 526 yards rushing.

Advantage: Ohio State



< RECEIVERS Ohio State has

to be hoping its receivers learned a

few new tricks or added a gear since the Michigan game. Noah Brown's 30 catches leads the wide receivers. He has caught only two touchdown passes

in his last nine games. H-back Samuel is the deep threat with 65 catches for 822 yards.

Mike Williams, a first-team All-ACC wide receiver, is Watson's favorite target with 84 catches for 1,171 yards and 10 touchdowns. Wide receivers Artavis Scott (71 catches) and Ray-Ray McCloud (45 catches) and tight end Jordan Leggett (38 catches) are also threats.

Advantage: Clemson



< OFFENSIVE LINEMEN OSU center Pat

Elflein and guard Billy Price both were first-team All-Americans and first-team All-Big Ten. Left tackle Jamarco Jones was second-team All-Big Ten. The biggest concern has been right tackle, where Isaiah Prince has been vulnerable to a good pass rush.

Clemson guard Tyrone Crowder and center Jay Guillermo were first-team All-ACC. The Tigers' offensive line has allowed only 15 sacks.

Advantage: Clemson



< DEFENSIVE LINE Getting enough pressure on Watson to cause him to turn

a key for OSU. Defensive end Tyquan Lewis (7.5 sacks) was the Big Ten Defensive Lineman of the Year.

Clemson ranks second nationally with 46 sacks. Defensive end Carlos Watkins (8.5 sacks) was second-team All-American. The other defensive end, Christian Wilkins, has 12 tackles for losses.

Advantage: Clemson



OSU's Raekwon McMillan was a second-team All-American, and Jerome Baker had a breakout

season. Clemson's Ben Boulware (113 tackles) was also a second-team All-American. Kendall Joseph has 107 tackles.

Advantage: Ohio State



< DEFENSIVE

OSU safety Malik Hooker's six interceptions, three

of them for touchdowns, made him a first-team All-American in his first season as a starter. Cornerbacks Gareon Conley and Marshon Lattimore also appear to have the NFL in their futures. Cornerback Cordrea

Tankersley (5 interceptions) and safety Jadar Johnson (3 interceptions) both were firstteam All-ACC for Clemson. Tankersley was a first-team All-American.

Advantage: Ohio State



< SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Tyler Durbin missed more kicks (two) against

Michigan than he had missed the rest of the season (one). OSU hopes his confidence is intact.

Clemson kicker Greg Huegel is 13 of 17 on field goals, and punter Andy Tesdall averages 37.7 yards per punt.

Advantage: Ohio State

Passing

Four teams a good fit for playoff

What's the perfect number of teams for the College Football Playoff? Is it the current four teams?



Jim Naveau Columnist

Should it expand to eight? Or even grow to 16 sometime in the future? Ohio State, Clemson,

Alabama and

Washington

certainly have no trouble with it being four teams. But many other

people do. The core of the argument for expansion is that there are more than four

deserving teams every year. For now, the commissioners of four of the Power Five conferences are in favor of keeping it at four teams. The commissioners of the Big Ten, Pac 12, Big 12 and SEC want to keep things the same. The ACC is the only league currently in favor of expansion.

It might be good for the college game to hesitate when it comes to expanding its postseason, though.

NFL television ratings have taken a significant dive. Too many games on television and too much parity seem to have diluted fans' desire for the product.

On the other hand, the interest level in college football has remained steady. This year's Ohio State-Michigan game was the highest rated noon kickoff game ever.

Maybe the fact that the college regular season means something every week is a good thing. Maybe making it hard to get to the playoff helps keep the interest level high.

Let's be honest, though, once the television networks and college football figure out how to make a lot more money with an expanded playoff, they will throw their weight behind it.

If that ever happens, there could be one beneficial effect. It could mean the end of league championship games and divisions in leagues.

That would be one way to address concerns about seasons becoming too long. But there would have to be some way to make up for the lost revenue.

BIG TEN STANDINGS

East	Div	ision				
	Bi	g Ten	Ov	erall		
	W	L	W	L		
Penn State	8	1	11	2		
Ohio State	8	1	11	1		
Michigan	6	2	10	2		
Indiana	4	5	6	6		
Maryland	3	6	6	6		
Michigan State	1	8	3	9		
Rutgers	0	9	2	10		
West Division						
Wisconsin	7	2	10	3		
Nebraska	6	3	9			
lowa	6	3	8	4		
Minnesota	5	4	8	4		
Northwestern	5	4	6	6 9		
Illinois	2	7	3	9		
Purdue	1	8	3	9		

OSU SCHEDULE

Sept. 10 — Tulsa, 48-3 Oct. 1 — Rutgers, 58-0 Oct. 8 — Indiana, 38-17 Oct. 22 — at Penn State, 21-24 Oct. 29 — Northwestern, 24-20 Nov. 5 — Nebraska, 62-3 Nov. 19 — at Michigan State, 17-16

Sept. 3 — Bowling Green, 77-10 Sept. 17 — at Oklahoma, 45-24 Oct. 15 — at Wisconsin, 30-23 (OT)

Nov. 12 — at Maryland, 62-3

Nov. 26 — Michigan, 30-27 Dec. 31 — Clemson, Playoff semifinal, 7 p.m.

2016 OSU LEADERS

Tackles

J.T. Barrett2428	
Joe Burrow226	
Rushing	
Mike Weber 1093	
J.T Barrett 846	
Curtis Samuel 704	
Demario McCall 270	
Receiving	
Curtis Samuel822	
Noah Brown385	
Dontre Wilson352	
Marcus Baugh269	
K.J. Hill254	
Punts	
Cameron Johnston 46.2	
Field goals	
Tyler Durbin17/20	

Raekwon McMillan...... 87 Jerome Baker......79 Malik Hooker..... 67 Chris Worley60 Damon Webb.....53 Sacks Tyquan Lewis7.5 Nick Bosa 6 Jerome Baker 3.5 Sam Hubbard......3 Interceptions Malik Hooker Marshon Lattimore 4 Gareon Conley 3 Jerome Baker..... **Punt Returns** Dontre Wilson.....107

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CrimsonTide

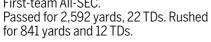
No. 4 Washington vs. No. 1 Alabama **Peach Bowl** Dec. 31, 3 p.m. **ESPN**

An inside look at Alabama Football

A look at Alabama players

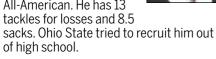
JALEN HURTS, 6-2, 209, Freshman, Quarterback

The true freshman became a starter in the second game of the season for the No. 1-ranked Crimson Tide. First-team All-SEC.



JONATHAN ALLEN, 6-3, 291, Senior, **Defensive Lineman**

After choosing to return to school instead of going into the NFL draft, Allen became a consensus All-American. He has 13 tackles for losses and 8.5



CAM ROBINSON, 6-6, 310, Junior, **Offensive Tackle**

Robinson has started every game since he walked onto campus three years ago. Alabama has had a 100-yard rusher in 70 percent of those game. Consensus All-American this season.



ADARIUS STEWART, 6-1, 204, Junior, Wide **Receiver.** Stewart has 52 catches for 852 yards and 8 touchdowns this season. He had three TD catches in two games. First-team All-SEC.



MINKAH FITZPATRICK, 6-1, 203, Sophomore, **Defensive Back**

Five interceptions, including three against Arkansas. Fitzpatrick has 56 tackles and 1 sack. First-team All-American.



REUBEN FOSTER, 6-1, 228, Senior, Linebacker

Foster is one of the leaders of Alabama's 12 tackles for losses and 4 sacks. First-team All-American.



RECENT ALABAMA BOWL HISTORY

By The Associated Press Record: 37-24-3

Jan. 11, 2016 College Football Championship — Alabama 45, Clemson 40

Dec. 31, 2015 Cotton Bowl — Alabama 38, Michigan St. 0 Jan. 1, 2015 Sugar Bowl — Ohio St. 42,

Alabama 35 Jan. 2, 2014 Sugar Bowl — Oklahoma 45,

Alabama 31

Jan. 7, 2013 BCS Championship — Alabama 42, Notre Dame 14

Jan. 9, 2012 BCS Championship — Alabama 21, LSU 0 Jan. 1, 2011 Capital One Bowl — Alabama

49, Michgigan St. 7 Jan. 7, 2010 BCS Championship —

Alabama 37, Texas 21 Jan. 2, 2009 Sugar Bowl — Utah 31, Alabama 17

Dec. 30, 2007 Independence Bowl — Alabama 30, Colorado 24 Dec. 28, 2006 Independence Bowl -

Oklahoma St. 34, Alabama 31 Jan. 2, 2006 Cotton Bowl — Alabama 13, Texas Tech 10 Dec. 31, 2004 Music City Bowl —

Minnesota 20, Alabama 16 Dec. 27, 2001 Independence Bowl — Alabama 14, Iowa St. 13

Jan. 1, 2000 Orange Bowl — Michigan 35, Alabama 34, OT

Dec. 29, 1998 Music City Bowl — Virginia Tech 38, Alabama 7

Huskies could be toughest test for Tide's defense

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — Alabama's stingy defense will face perhaps its toughest test against

Jake Browning and Washington.
The top-ranked Crimson Tide, fresh from facing teams with pedestrian passing games, will play the Huskies Dec. 31 in the Peach Bowl in Atlanta's Georgia Dome. That's where Alabama (13-0) just dispatched Florida 54-16 in the Southeastern Conference championship

The defending national champs are trying to go wire-to-wire No. 1 and become the first NCAA team to go 15-0. Alabama has made each of the first three College Football Playoffs and won 25 straight

"There was a lot of talk out there about the playoffs and not much talk about the SEC championship game, which was a little concerning to me as a coach," Tide coach Nick Saban said Sunday on ESPN's selection show. "I was really proud of the maturity that our players showed of competing in that game and wanting to win that championship.

"The next step is what do we create as a legacy for this team in terms of how they do in the playoffs.'

The Huskies (12-1) rose from a No. 14 preseason AP ranking to earn a national

"This is not at all a surprise to me," Saban said on a teleconference, speaking of his respect for Petersen.

They routed Colorado 41-10 for the Pac-12 championship. Washington won a share of the 1991 title under Saban's mentor and college coach, the late Don James.

"I think it's awesome," third-year Washington coach Chris Petersen said. "I think it's awesome for the school. I think it's awesome for Seattle and I think it's awesome for our guys. There are a lot of guys in there that have been here for a while — not a lot of them — but



Alabama defensive lineman Jonathan Allen (93) sacks Florida quarterback Austin Appleby (12) during the Southeastern Conference championship game on Dec. 3 in Atlanta.

there are some and their commitment and persistence and focus, I think it's spectacular."

He joked that he feels like he knows Saban well because he's on TV so often, but said this will be the biggest challenge the Washington players and coaches have

"I think everybody knows about Alabama and it's not just one year, it's every year, how dominant they are," Petersen said. "We'll prepare hard and fortunately the Seahawks are here in town. Maybe they'll scrimmage us to get us ready for those guys. I don't know.'

The Huskies rank fourth nationally in scoring offense, averaging 44.5 points per game. Browning is the nation's fifth-rated passer, and his 42 touchdowns are one shy of Jared Goff's Pac-12 record.

Alabama leads the nation in total, scoring and rushing defense. But the Tide hasn't faced a Top 25 scoring offense since Week 2 against Western Kentucky, which ranks second. The Tide won 38-10 and held Tennessee's No. 26 scoring offense to 10 points as well.

Florida ranks 84th in passing offense and Auburn, which faced Alabama in the regular-season finale, stands 112th.

Saban downplayed any benefit of having been through the playoff preparations and atmosphere twice before. The Tide lost to eventual champion Ohio State two years ago and last season beat Michigan State and Clemson.

"I do know that we did it better one year than we did it the other," Saban said. Here are some things to know about the Peach Bowl matchup:

CLASHING STYLES: Browning has passed for 3,280 yards and been intercepted just seven times. Alabama's passing game, led by freshman Jalen Hurts, has sputtered at times but Hurts is a dangerous runner.

HEISMAN HOPEFULS: The different styles of these teams is illustrated by their respective candidates to be Heisman Trophy finalists, Browning and Alabama defensive end Jonathan Allen. Allen has recorded 8.5 sacks while returning two fumbles for a touchdown.

QBS ON REBOUND: Browning and Alabama's Hurts have both been huge playmakers for their offenses, but neither posted big numbers in their league championship games. Browning was just 9 for 24 for 118 yards with two touchdown passes. The freshman Hurts was 11 of 20 for 138 yards with a touchdown and was mostly a nonfactor as a runner.

SARKISIAN VS. HUSKIES: Former Washington and USC head coach Steve Sarkisian is facing one of his former teams. The Alabama offensive analyst coached the Huskies from 2009-13, so was involved in recruiting some of the veterans. "He'll have the same role in this game he's had in every other game," Saban said.

Alabama freshman QB starts fast

The Associated Press

Alabama's Jalen Hurts defying his age with playoff run It's easy to appraise Jalen yards, the touchdowns and the

But perhaps the most notable number is his age, 18. Top-ranked Alabama's freshman quarterback has shown poise beyond his years under the pressure of leading the Crimson Tide to a Southeastern Conference title and playoff berth.

Alabama's offensive leader is just a teenager from Texas who hadn't let a team to a championship since he was an 8-year-old on the East Houston Aggies. He hasn't often looked like an 18-year-old on the field.

"I'm a firm believer in age being nothing but a number," Hurts said. "And I feel like if you step up to any situation and you're able to play your game, be confident, have the poise you need to have, you'll be all right."

Hurts is trying to become only the second true freshman quarterback to lead a major college team to a national title. Oklahoma's Jamelle Holloway replaced an injured Troy Aikman in 1985 and led the Sooners to eight straight wins.

So far, Hurts is a perfect 12-0 as a starter since claiming the job after the opener and has been named SEC offensive player of the year. His journey to a College Football Playoff semifinal matchup with No. 4 Washington on Dec. 31 hasn't been all paved in crimson glory, but more a season-long rubber band-like grind of snapping

back from negative plays, like a fumble that Mississippi returned for a touchdown. Big plays often follow the bad ones.

Hurts has gotten better later in games, including in the second half of the Iron Bow against Auburn and the SEC championship game against Florida.

"That's unusual because freshmen are rookies," Alabama offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin said after the SEC championship game in Atlanta. "What do they do? They usually screw up in the fourth quarter. He's special."

Of course, Hurts has also had few games that were still undecided in the fourth quarter.

He has of course benefited from a supporting cast full of NFL talent and the nation's best defense, much like 'Bama predecessors including Jake Coker, AJ McCarron and Greg McElroy — each of whom led the Tide to national titles.

Hurts arrived in Tuscaloosa in time to play Clemson's Deshaun Watson for the scout team leading up to the national championship game last season. He has been able to escape some of the grind of being quarterback of a national title contender since coach Nick Saban doesn't allow freshmen to talk to reporters during the regular season. So the SEC championship postgame scrum looked like a full-out blitz, with Hurts surrounded by reporters and TV cameras scrambling for his first public comments as 'Bama's starter.

He handled it with aplomb and didn't bite when asked to evaluate his season.



"As a team, I think we've done a great job," Hurts said, repeating himself when asked a second time.

Being the quarterback of an active dynasty in a state where college football reigns supreme could overwhelm any player, freshman or senior.

"He's handled it extremely well," said McElroy, an SEC Network analyst who helped lead the Tide to the 2009 national title. "Has he been perfect? No. Is there a lot of room for improvement? Absolutely. But given the pressure and the circumstance of playing quarterback at Alabama — as soon as you're named the starter you immediately become one of the most heavily scrutinized people in the entire state."

Hurts, the son of a high school coach, has put up big numbers along the way, already running for more yards in a season than any other Tide quarterback.

He has rushed for 841 yards and 12 touchdowns, keeping the offense going even when the passing game isn't clicking. He has also completed 65.3 percent of his passes for 2,592 yards and 22 touchdowns with nine interceptions.

Hurts has been a better finisher than starter. He has passed for 14 touchdowns and been intercepted just twice in

quarterback Jalen Hurts (2) breaks loose on a run past LSU linebacker Duke Riley (40) in the second half of a game earlier this season. The 18-year-old became the Crimson Tide's starter in the second game of the season. AP photo

Alabama freshman

the second half of games, when he's also produced many of his biggest plays. That includes a 21-yard fourth-quarter touchdown run in a 10-0 win at LSU in a game that was otherwise dominated by the defenses.

"I think people were on him a little bit after the LSU game and I just told him, 'Man, Jalen, you just went into Tiger Stadium at night in an Alabama-LSU game and won and really made the one significant play on offense,' Kiffin said. "He's a special player." Hurts credits his father

and prep coach, Averion, for helping him be ready to handle the challenges and successes at Alabama. Hurts also absorbed lessons by watching his older brother Averion Jr. — a quarterback at Texas Southern - learn the hard way. "All the butt-chewings he

got, I learned from those," he said. "Life is all about learning."

Then he went on to play for another demanding coach in Saban, who has regularly held one-on-one Sunday film sessions with his quarterback. Hurts said not even Saban's

coming from his father. "There ain't nothing like getting a butt-chewing from your blood," he said.

chewing-outs can match those





HUSKIES

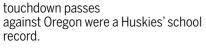
No. 4 Washington vs. No. 1 Alabama **Peach Bowl** Dec. 31, 3 p.m. **ESPN**

An inside look at Washington Football

A look at Washington players

JAKE BROWNING, 6-2, 209, Sophomore, Quarterback Browning, the Pac-12

Offensive Player of the Year, threw for 3,280 yards and 42 touchdowns. His six touchdown passes record.





Baker was first-team All-Pac 12 and a firstteam All-American. He had 65 total tackles, two interceptions and two sacks for the Huskies this season.



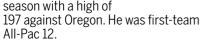
JOHN ROSS, 5-11, 190. **Wide Receiver**

Ross was Browning's No. 1 target with 76 catches for 1,122 yards and 17 touchdowns. He was first-team All-Pac 12 and had three touchdown catches in a game twice.



MYLES GASKIN, 5-10, 195, Sophomore, **Running Back**

Gaskin has rushed for 1,339 yards after gaining 1,302 yards as a freshman. He has six 100-yard games this season with a high of



ELIJAH QUALLS, 6-1, 321,

Defensive Lineman Qualls has been the run stopper on the interior of Washington's defensive line this season. He has 32 tackles, 5 tackles for losses and 3 sacks. He was first-team All-Pac 12.



SIDNEY JONES, 6-0, 181, Junior. **Defensive Back**

Jones has been firstteam All-Pac 12 two years in a row. He also was a second-team All-American this season. He has 37 tackles and three interceptions.



RECENT WASHINGTON **BOWL HISTORY**

By The Associated Press Record: 17-17-1

Dec. 26, 2015 Heart of Dallas Bowl — Washington 44, Southern Miss. 31 Jan. 2, 2015 Cactus Bowl — Oklahoma St. 30, Washington 22

Dec. 27, 2013 Fight Hunger Bowl — Washington 31, BYU 16

Dec. 22, 1012 MAACO Bowl — Boise St. 28, Washington 26 Dec. 29, 2011 Alamo Bowl — Baylor 67,

Washington 56 Dec. 30, 2010 Holiday Bowl -Washington 19, Nebraska 7

Dec. 31, 2002 Sun Bowl — Purdue 34, Washington 24 Dec. 28, 2001 Holiday Bowl — Texas 47,

Washington 43 Jan. 1, 2001 Rose Bowl — Washington 34,

Purdue 24 Dec. 29, 1999 Holiday Bowl — Kansas St. 24, Washington 20

Dec. 25, 1998 Oahu Bowl — Air Force 45, Washington 25

Dec. 25, 1997 Aloha Bowl — Washington 51, Michigan St. 23

Dec. 30, 1996 Holiday Bowl — Colorado 33, Washington 21

Dec. 29, 1995 Sun Bowl — Iowa 38, Washington 18

Keeping talent at home key for Huskies

Defensive back Budda Baker a key recruit

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — It's too simple of an equation to say that Budda Baker was the cause and Washington being the Pac-12 champion and one of the four teams in the College Football Playoff.

But it's not too far of a stretch to believe that the most impactful recruit landed by Chris Petersen since he arrived at Washington came in February 2014. That's when Baker decided to stay home with the Huskies rather than follow the lengthy parade of premier recruits from the state of Washington who decided to go out of state.

"We were very urgent. We knew he was a big time football player that could really change the direction of this program and that was job No. 1 when we first took this job was to make sure we kept a homegrown talent in Budda Baker here at the University of Washington," Washington defensive backs coach Jimmy Lake said. "It was an intense battle and we're obviously happy that we got

There are numerous pieces that Washington has woven together to create a roster that this year is 12-1.

Some were holdovers from the previous coaching regime, who have developed into stars later in their careers, like linebacker Keishawn Bierria and wide receiver John Ross. Others were recruits from out-of-state that Petersen and his staff convinced to make

Washington their home, like quarterback Jake Browning. But ultimately, for

Washington to be successful, it must be keeping the top in-state recruits at home. And beginning with Baker, it has.

"I always heard it every day by friends, family, even random people that 'You're a hometown guy, you can put this program back on top,' and all that type of stuff," Baker said. "It hit because like they said I have a lot of family here, I had a chance to go to a great school."

Since Baker's commitment in 2014, the Huskies have had a pipeline of in-state talent staying home, including running back Myles Gaskin, wide receiver Chico McClatcher, left tackle Trey Adams, safety Taylor Rapp and offensive lineman Kaleb McGary. It's not a huge list, and while California will always be the hotbed for Washington's recruits, getting the top kids from the state is influential in what the Huskies are trying to build.

"I didn't know where I wanted to go. I thought if I stayed here I would always being going home and doing chores and stuff," Gaskin said. "My mom and dad kept it real. They said, 'You are going to Washington.' At the time I didn't understand why but I'm very thankful for them.'

When many of the current Huskies were first making impressions about college football, Washington was a struggling program. The 2008 season where Washington went 0-12 was the clear



Washington defensive back Budda Baker (32) intercepts a pass intended for Washington State wide receiver John Thompson, right, in the second half of a game between the two in-state rivals earlier this season.

bottom, but even under Steve Sarkisian there was a plateau reached — "7-win Sark" became the nickname — with little indication the Huskies would rise much beyond that mark.

Additionally, the group watched a number of top recruits from the state -Jonathan Stewart, Jake Heaps, David DeCastro, all the way up to Myles Jack — take the route out of the state rather than remain at home.

Which all leads back to why landing Baker was so important.

"It's huge for that year and

the years following, all the in-state talent that hey it is cool to stay at home and play for the hometown (Huskies), Lake said. "Now hopefully those young guys are seeing where we're at now and seeing the following that he has here and now when his career is over at Washington he's going to be a legend here. He's already made a ton of plays and hopefully we do some bigger things this year and next year and he'll be a legend here for a long time to come if he keeps doing what he's doing, and those other guys are seeing that."

Browning adds confidence to his resume

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — It was so out of character it became the defining moment of his time at Washington. Maybe that's because the most exuberance Jake Browning had ever shown before was a fist pump and a smile.

Then came "The Point." As the sophomore quarterback glided into the end zone for a touchdown early in Washington's blowout of Oregon, Browning quickly pointed in the direction of an opponent. It was a different side of Browning, one that is filled with selfconfidence and a little cockiness.

Underneath an exterior that seems to be a plug-in of how Washington coach Chris Petersen is wired, Browning has a feisty competitiveness that emerges only on occasion.

'You see him in the hall, you go like this," Washington offensive lineman Trey Adams said, mimicking Browning's point. Coach Pete hates that. That was awesome. I love that play.'

Thanks to Browning's evolution, Washington exceeded the preseason expectations of being a program on the rise and reached the College Football Playoff, where it will face top-ranked Alabama in the Peach Bowl on New Year's Eve. Browning has developed into one of the top quarterbacks in the country as just a sophomore and every so often — like the play against Oregon — his self-assuredness has emerged.

"I probably appreciate him more because he has a calmer demeanor than I do," Petersen said. "I think it's easier when you're a player. You can just let it go out there. When you're on the sideline it just gets bottled up and you just try and bite your tongue as best as you can. I think the thing is we're both really competitive and sometimes, he's awesome, but I try and do the best I can and not be too competitive over-coaching him because he gets it."

Browning was named the Pac-12 offensive player of the year in a vote of

coaches after throwing for 3,280 yards and 42 touchdowns. He led Washington to its first conference championship since 2000 and barely missed out on a trip to New York for the Heisman Trophy ceremony. Browning's sixth-place finish in the Heisman voting was still the second best in Washington history behind only defensive lineman Steve Emtman who finished fourth in 1991.

Browning is still an unassuming figure on a national stage. He was an unplanned player of the year because of an unexpected jump from the end of his freshman season to now, and he's on the verge of setting Pac-12 records for the most touchdown passes in a season. Browning's potential sophomore slump instead became a

sophomore showcase. It was improvement his coaches hoped to see after throwing him into starting as a

true freshman. But this?

"His accuracy in the red zone has been at a high level throughout the year. He's really improved there. His decision making when he has extended the play has improved, not forcing a couple of balls where he did his freshman year," Washington offensive coordinator Jonathan Smith said. "We're putting a lot on his plate in recognition in coverage and changing plays.'

It's the combo of Smith and Petersen that have come to understand Browning's personality. They had a good feel of how Browning would respond to the college game through years of recruiting Browning first at Boise State and then, Washington.

'You don't really know what you're going to get, but I think with him with as long as we recruited him and as much as he was around us we had a pretty good idea that he was going to be like he is," Petersen said. "And then you just wait to see how winning and losing affects guys. Do they change?

Browning's numbers this season are also the result of those around him. The return of John Ross can't be overstated,



Washington quarterback Jake Browning hands off to running back Lavon Coleman during a a game against Washington State earlier this season. Browning has thrown for 42 touchdowns

giving Washington an athletic speedster they desperately lacked a season ago. That was never more evident than the Pac-12 title game victory over Colorado when pass Browning intended to throw away instead became a spectacular TD catch for Ross.

The combo of Myles Gaskin and Lavon Coleman have been productive on the ground; Dante Pettis and Chico McClatcher have made significant jumps as receivers; and Washington's coaches no longer have limitations on the playbook.

Browning sums up his season like this: Getting rid of negative plays. Plays that might have been interceptions as a freshman have been incompletions or sacks. Browning knows those negative plays can't return if Washington is to have a chance against Alabama.

"I don't think we're a team that's going to come out and throw the ball every play, or come out and run the ball every play. We stay balanced and do our thing," Browning said. "They're good, but you can't let a good team get you away from what got you



Landers proves he's worth the gamble

By Jim Naveau

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COLUMBUS – The phone calls just kept coming.

As Huber Heights
Wayne went deeper
in to the state football
playoffs in 2014, every
coach who had competed against
the Warriors seemed to get on the
phone and tell Ohio State's coaches
they should look at defensive lineman
Robert Landers.

Landers wasn't a highly recruited player and was rated a 3-star prospect by the scouting services. At 6-foot, 1-inch and 285 pounds, he didn't fit the profile of a defensive lineman at the highest level of college football.

Too short, the experts said. There might be some issues with grades, others whispered.

But, either on his own or because of those calls from high school coaches, OSU co-defensive coordinator Luke Fickell decided to take a look at Landers. He liked what he saw and told coach Urban Meyer the Buckeyes should offer him a scholarship.

Landers had already committed to West Virginia, the only high-profile school to offer him a scholarship. But a few days after getting the OSU offer, he changed course and committed to the Buckeyes.

The coach most responsible for getting him to Ohio State, though, was defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

"Coach Johnson really made me gravitate towards him just from the simple fact that he's a real guy. When we first met we didn't talk football at all. We talked about me, we talked about him. We didn't talk football at all my whole recruiting process," Landers said.

"One thing that really got me was he was consistent. He stayed true to who he was. He's a God-fearing man, he doesn't cuss, he doesn't drink. You don't really find too many college coaches who will not cuss you out. The fact that he is true to who he is and he sticks to his morals. He's not going to yell at you, but he hits you with the 'I'm not mad, I'm just disappointed.' That hurts way more."

After redshirting last season, Landers has played a bigger role than expected this fall after starting defensive lineman Tracy Sprinkle was lost for the season in the opener against Bowling Green. As part of the rotation on the defensive line he has played in every game and has 7.5 tackles for losses, fourth on the team behind Tyquan Lewis, Jerome Baker and Jalyn Holmes.

"Going into this season my expectations for myself were to contribute to the team the best that I can and somehow become a factor to make the game easier for the team as a whole. I didn't really expect to have the season that I've had, but I'm blessed to have it and I try to take full advantage of it," Landers said.

Landers, whose brother Trey is a freshman on the University of Dayton's men's basketball team, said he likes being viewed as an underdog or as an unconventional player for a defensive lineman.

"It plays to my advantage at times. Being the underdog, in my opinion, is probably the best position to be in because people do kind of overlook you. I've felt that at times when I've been overlooked it's allowed me to focus onto my skill set and produce to my best ability," he said.

While coaches have stopped saying Landers is too short, he says he still hears it from opposing players. "They'll say, 'You're a little too

"They'll say, 'You're a little too short,' or 'You might want to go back to the sidelines, little dude.' I just smile at them and think, 'I got you, we'll see how this goes,' "he said.

Reach Jim Naveau at The Lima News at 567-242-0414 or on Twitter at @Lima_Naveau.

Big expectations, big payoff



Don Speck | The Lima News

Ohio State's Raekwon McMillian (5), Vonn Bell (center) and Joshua Perry converge to take down Maryland's Brandon Ross during a 2015 game against Maryland at Ohio Stadium in Columbus.

Coaches pleased with McMillan's work on, off the field

By Jim Naveau

jnaveau@civitasmedia.com

COLUMBUS – Before Raekwon McMillan ever played a game at Ohio State, he knew there were big expectations for him.

He arrived in 2014 as a 5-star recruit who was ranked as the top middle linebacker in the country. Sight unseen, many people expected him to displace senior Curtis Grant – also a 5-star recruit — as OSU's starter at middle linebacker.

At the Buckeyes' preseason media day in 2014, he compared the pressure he'd felt of starting as a freshman in high school with those expectations.

"It's magnified here, but I'm used to coming in my freshman year with a lot of expectations," McMillan said. "It's either you break under pressure or you make diamonds with it."

After backing up Grant in 2014, McMillan has started and led Ohio State in tackles the last two seasons, a performance that is far from broken. He has 87 tackles, 5 tackles for losses and 1.5 sacks this year, and he had 119 tackles, 4 tackles for losses and 1.5 sacks last season.

But some people still question if Ohio State has gotten diamonds from him.

Earlier this season, McMillan acknowledged the questions when he told a group of reporters "If I asked y'all, I'm playing the worst season in the world."

His coaches are quick to contradict any negativity about McMillan's performance. As the middle linebacker he has responsibilities that don't show up in his statistics, they say.

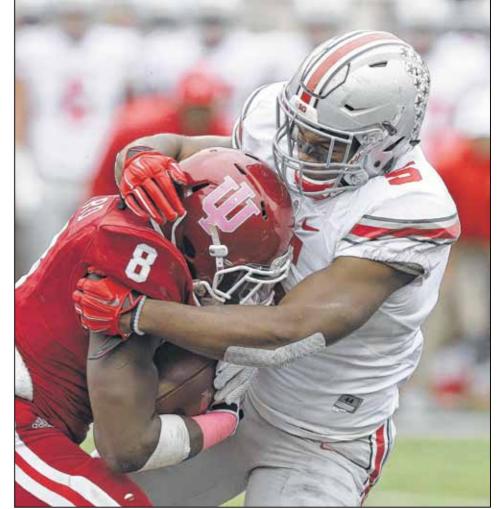
"His reputation here is solid as gold. He's exceeded every expectation. I've had very few like that. From day one when he walked on campus, he was a grown man," OSU coach Urban Meyer said.

Co-defensive coordinator Luke Fickell says McMillan, a two-time second-team All-American, compares favorably with former OSU linebacker James Laurinaitis, a three-time consensus All-American.

"His body of work is unbelievable. James was a three-time All-American, he won this award, he won that award and maybe Raekwon hasn't won those awards. But in my mind, the body of work of what he's done in that locker room to build that culture to what we have is second to none." Fieldall said

we have is second to none," Fickell said.
"Maybe the people outside don't see
everything because statistically he doesn't
have the stats or the sacks or those kinds of
things, not make the flash plays like Ryan
Shazier or that Darron Lee made. But the
reality is, I haven't coached many guys that
mean more to that unit, to that group, to this
team," he said.

McMillan enrolled early and began working out at Ohio State in January 2014.



AP photo

Ohio State linebacker Raekwon McMillan (5) tackles Indiana running back Jordan Howard during a 2015 game in Memorial Stadium in Bloomington, Ind.

Something that happened very early in his career convinced Fickell that McMillan was far from ordinary.

"I think it was his third day here. It was minus-17 degrees, they closed school, which they don't normally do, and someone didn't pick him up for a 6 a.m. workout. He hustled over, walked, jogged, whatever it was. Got here late. Well, he had dawn patrol (punishment) the next day because he was late for a workout," Fickell said.

"We were on the road recruiting. I remember saying, 'Hey, why do you have dawn patrol?' He said, 'I was late.' Simple as that. 'I was late.' He didn't make an excuse, he didn't blame somebody else, he owned everything that happened. Not to mention he walked when it was minus-17 degrees.

"It was one of those things where you step back and say, 'Wow. We've got something special. I don't know if he can play yet, but we got something special in a kid,' "he said. Several mock drafts have McMillan as a second-round choice if he chooses to enter the NFL draft after his junior season.

If he is down to his last game or two at Ohio State, McMillan is happy with his career so far with one exception.

"I would have hoped to be a first-team All-American," he said. "I was a team captain, Fiesta Bowl champion, Sugar Bowl champion, national champion, Big Ten champion. There's not a lot more I can do but finish out this season great and see where we can go from there," he said..

"I always wanted to be a first-team All-American, but everything doesn't always work out the way you want it to. Hopefully, since I'm not a first-team All-American, I can be a national champion."

Reach Jim Naveau at The Lima News at 567-242-0414 or on Twitter at @Lima_Naveau.





Ohio State's Curtis Samuel (4) carries the ball against Indiana earlier this season in Ohio Stadium. The junior H-back has been a big-play threat in both the run game and the passing game for the Buckeyes.

Samuel key for OSU's success

By Jim Naveau jnaveau@civitasmedia.com

COLUMBUS - It took Ohio State two years to figure out where it

wanted Curtis Samuel to be.
If it hadn't, it wouldn't be where it is today.

Without a big season from Samuel, Ohio State probably would not be in the College Football Playoff, preparing to play Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl.

The junior H-back has become the most explosive player in OSU's offense. At times this season it felt like he was the Buckeyes' only explosive player.

As a freshman, the 5-foot, 11-inch, 197-pound Samuel was used mostly as a running back. Last year, he played receiver more than running back with Ezekiel Elliott rarely leaving the field.

This year as an H-back, a hybrid of running back and wide receiver, he has 704 yards rushing and averages nearly 8 yards a carry and has more than twice as many catches as any other Buckeye with 65 of them for 822 yards.



Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett feels some pressure from Northwestern's Alex Miller as he looks for a

Perfecting the pass

Receivers, protection are concerns for OSU

By Jim Naveau

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COLUMBUS - Urban Meyer admitted he was repeating himself when he said Ohio State needed to improve its passing game after this season is over.

He said the same thing before this season. It's still true, so he's still

Quarterback J.T. Barrett has thrown for 2,428 yards and 24 touchdowns, with only five interceptions.

There have been only four Ohio State quarterbacks throw for more yards than that in a season – Joe Germaine (3,330) in 1998, Bob Hoying (3,269) in 1995, Barrett himself (2,834) in 2014 and Troy Smith (2,542) in 2006.

It has been 42 years since a fulltime starting quarterback at Ohio State had as few as five interceptions.

So, despite a few critics, Barrett does not appear a major contributor to whatever problems exist.

He wasn't near the top of Meyer's list when he talked about the things that needed to improve in the Buckeyes' passing game.

"I thought we would be better throwing the ball. Whether it be protection, whether it be separation by wide receivers, it's not just one thing," Meyer said. "We will get there.

Ideally, No. 3 OSU would get there by its College Football Player semifinal match-up against No. 2 Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl.

'We have to change that. In the offseason we're going to become a good throwing team and expand on it. We're good now, efficiency wise, but we're going to really start expanding that and work hard at it," Meyer said.

Interestingly, Ohio State has used the pass more this season than in 2015. This season, it has passed on 40 percent of its offensive plays versus 36 percent a year ago. And it has averaged more passing yards per game this year, 221 versus 188, than a year ago.

But finding consistency from the receivers and the type of passes OSU uses might be where OSU needs to

H-back Curtis Samuel (65 catches, 822 yards, 7 touchdowns) has more than twice as many catches as the next receiver, Noah Brown (30 catches, 385 yards, 7 touchdowns).

No wide receiver other than Brown had more than 17 catches. Brown

Fickell balances new job with championship drive

By Jim Naveau

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COLUMBUS - After spending nearly half his life at Ohio State, achieving one of his biggest athletic dreams there and meeting his wife and some of his best friends there, you would be correct if you think Luke Fickell has some strong feelings about his upcoming separation from OSU when he takes over as the University of Cincinnati's football

If you think he is going to let any sentimentality show as he juggles his roles as OSU's co-defensive coordinator and the Bearcats' next coach, though, you would be wrong. "I can't reflect. That's not me.

It'd be really difficult to even think about it," Fickell said. "That's why you've got to keep going, try not to think about it, keep going and now worry about the number of days. It is what it is. It's a part of me that will never leave," he said.

Fickell grew up in Columbus and played football and baseball



Don Speck | The Lima News Luke Fickell isn't leaving Ohio, but he is leaving Ohio State to become head coach of the University of Cincinnati's football team.

and wrestled at DeSales High School. Along with being a Division I football recruit, he was a three-time undefeated state champion in wrestling.

He spent five years at OSU as a player, the last four as a starter on teams that won 41 of 50 games but saw three chances at national championships slip away because of losses to Michigan.

After an injury ended his dream of playing in the NFL, he returned to Ohio State in 1999 as a graduate assistant.

He spent two years as an assistant at Akron, returned to Ohio State in 2002 and has been there ever since, including being interim coach in 2011 when Jim Tressel was forced to resign after failing to inform his bosses and the NCAA of violations he was aware of.

Five Ohio State players starting quarterback Terrelle Pryor, running back Dan Herron, receiver DeVier Posey, offensive tackle Mike Adams and backup defensive lineman Solomon Thomas — were handed fivegame suspensions.

Pryor left school rather than serve the suspension, and Herron and Posey later had another game added to their penalties.

Ohio State started the season

OHIO STATE BOWL HISTORY

6-3, but lost its last four games, including a Gator Bowl trip that many people would secondguess after Urban Meyer's first OSU team was banned from the

postseason in 2012 by the NCAA. Fickell said he learned a lot from his previous year as a head coach. And he starts his next iob in a much better situation with a much better feeling than in 2011.

"People ask that question, 'What's the difference?' There's an incredible amount of difference because last Saturday going down there, having the ability to be introduced, to have a press conference, was an unbelievable time. It was obviously nervewracking; it's something new, but my family was so excited for the opportunity," he said.

"In 2011 it was a very, troubled, tough time. We're all human, and we're going to feel those things. It was tough. We didn't even have a press conference in 2011 until at least two and a half weeks after. Why? We wanted a lot of things to die down, wanted to make sure we were prepared. It just never, ever, ever had the same feeling."

Asked how much he has grown as a football coach in the five seasons since his one year in charge at Ohio State, Fickell said, "I couldn't even tell you how much. I can pull up my iPad, and I made 25 to 30 mistakes every single day. I tried to document them.

"But the reality is I learned how to fall and get back up and keep going forward. That's the name of the game, whether it's life, whether it's football," he said.

One thing that will be different is that Fickell says he will say the word "Michigan" if he ever talks about Ohio State's biggest rival.

"It's not the same thing. Do I have the same feelings? Yes. It never will change. Just so we know. But the name might change just because I don't want to put a different emphasis on it, we'll have our own things we need to do," he said.

Reach Jim Naveau at The Lima News at 567-242-0414 or on Twitter at @ Lima_Naveau.

By The Associated Press

Record: 23-24

Jan. 1, 2016 Fiesta Bowl — Ohio St. 44, Notre Dame 28 Jan. 12, 2015 College Football Championship — Ohio St. 42,

Oregon 20 Jan. 1, 2015 Sugar Bowl — Ohio St.

42, Alabama 35 Jan. 3, 2014 Orange Bowl — Clemson 40, Ohio St. 35

Jan. 2, 2012 Gator Bowl — Florida 24, Ohio St. 17

Jan. 4, 2011 Sugar Bowl — Ohio St. 31, Arkansas 26 Jan. 1, 2010 Rose Bowl — Ohio St.

26, Oregon 17 Jan. 5, 2009 Fiesta Bowl — Texas 24, Ohio St. 21

Jan. 7, 2008 BCS National Championship — LSU 38, Ohio St. 24

Jan. 8, 2007 BCS National Championship — Florida 41, Ohio St. 14 Jan. 2, 2006 Fiesta Bowl — Ohio St. 34, Notre Dame 20

Dec. 29, 2004 Alamo Bowl — Ohio St. 33, Oklahoma St. 7 Jan. 2, 2004 Fiesta Bowl — Ohio St. 35, Kansas St. 28 Jan. 3, 2003 Fiesta Bowl — Ohio

St. 31, Miami 24, 20T Jan. 1, 2002 Outback Bowl -South Carolina 31, Ohio St. 28

Jan. 1, 2001 Outback Bowl -South Carolina 24, Ohio St. 7 Jan. 1, 1999 Sugar Bowl — Ohio St. 24, Texas A&M 14

Jan. 1, 1998 Sugar Bowl — Florida St. 31, Ohio St. 14 Jan. 1, 1997 Rose Bowl — Ohio St. 20, Arizona St. 17 Jan. 1, 1996 Citrus Bowl —

Tennessee 20, Ohio St. 14 Jan. 2, 1995 Citrus Bowl -Alabama 24, Ohio St. 17

Dec. 30, 1993 Holiday Bowl — Ohio St. 28, BYU 21 Jan. 1, 1993 Citrus Bowl — Georgia 21, Ohio St. 14

Jan. 1, 1992 Hall of Fame Bowl — Syracuse 24, Ohio St. 17 Jan. 1, 1990 Hall of Fame Bowl — Auburn 31, Ohio St. 14

Dec. 27, 1990 Liberty Bowl — Air Force 23, Ohio St. 11 Jan. 1, 1987 Cotton Bowl — Ohio St. 28, Texas A&M 12

Dec. 28, 1985 Citrus Bowl — Ohio St. 10, BYU 7

Jan. 1, 1985 Rose Bowl — Southern Cal 20, Ohio St. 17 Jan. 2, 1984 Fiesta Bowl — Ohio St. 28, Pittsburgh 23

Dec. 17, 1982 Holiday Bowl — Ohio St. 47, BYU 17 Dec. 30, 1981 Liberty Bowl — Ohio

St. 31, Navy 28

Dec. 26, 1980 Fiesta Bowl — Penn St. 31, Ohio St. 19 Jan. 1, 1980 Rose Bowl —

Southern Cal 17, Ohio St. 16 Dec. 29, 1978 Gator Bowl -Clemson 17, Ohio St. 15 Jan. 2, 1978 Sugar Bowl – Alabama 35, Ohio St. 6

Jan. 1, 1977 Orange Bowl — Ohio

St. 27, Colorado 10

Jan. 1, 1976 Rose Bowl — UCLA 23, Ohio St. 17

Jan. 1, 1975 Rose Bowl — Southern Cal 18, Ohio St. 17

Jan. 1, 1974 Rose Bowl — Ohio St. 42, Southern Cal 21 Jan. 1, 1973 Rose Bowl — Southern

Cal 42, Ohio St. 17 Jan. 1, 1971 Rose Bowl — Stanford 27, Ohio St. 17

Jan. 1, 1969 Rose Bowl — Ohio St. 27, Southern Cal 16

Jan. 1, 1958 Rose Bowl — Ohio St. 10, Oregon 7

Jan. 1, 1955 Rose Bowl — Ohio St. 20, Southern Cal 7 Jan. 2, 1950 Rose Bowl — Ohio St.

17, California 14 Jan. 1, 1921 Rose Bowl — California 28, Ohio St. 0



Noah Brown (80) leads Ohio State's wide receivers with 30 catches this season. Finding consistency and a go-to receiver to complement H-back Curtis Samuel has been a season-long search for OSU.

Ohio State takes the field for the start of the Ohio State-Nebraska game on Nov. 5.

Pass

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had six games of two or fewer catches and has only two touchdown catches in his last nine games after catching four of them against Oklahoma in what was viewed then as his breakout game.

OSU's wide receivers have caught only 39 percent of the passes Barrett has completed this season. Ten years ago in 2006, even in the era of Tressel Ball, with receivers like Ted Ginn Jr., Anthony Gonzalez, Brian Hartline and Brian Robiskie, wide receivers made 72 percent of the catches.

Young wide receivers like K.J. Hill, Parris Campbell and Terry McLaurin have had some good moments but none of them have been consistent. Older players such as James Clark and Johnnie Dixon have added little to the passing game, and the often-injured Dontre Wilson has lost time to injuries again.

When asked about the drop in Brown's production since the Oklahoma game, Meyer said, "We have to target him a little bit more. He has to separate a little bit better. And we have to protect the quarterback better. It's not one thing, or we would fix the one thing."

Offensive coordinator Ed Warinner said Brown's big game in a 45-24 win over Oklahoma increased the attention defenses are giving him.

"Very seldom does he get straight, no-help, man-to-man coverage. I think Noah is capable of having a big game at any time. It just depends on the defense and how they play and who it is they try to stop," Warinner said.

Clemson is second in the country with 46 sacks and has two first-team All-ACC defensive backs, so improving the passing game could be a challenge for OSU.

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Photos by Don Speck | The Lima News

Samuel

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Late in the season, he added punt returner to his resume after Dontre Wilson struggled in that role.

Samuel had Ohio State's longest pass reception in six games. His 79-yard touchdown catch against Bowling Green, his 75-yard touchdown catch against Nebraska and his 74-yard touchdown run at Penn State are the three longest scoring plays of the season for OSU's offense.

Offensive lineman Billy Price called Samuel "a freak" earlier this season and said he constantly does incredible things in practice.

Offensive coordinator Ed Warinner says Samuel's freakish talent jumped off the screen at him when he first saw videos of him when he was a 4-star recruit at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn.

"He was so electric in his high school recruiting videos. He came in early and went through spring practice and in every Saturday scrimmage, he would have a 50-plus yard run. There aren't many people who can run through Ohio State's defense with that kind of speed and nobody can catch them," Warinner said.

"There was no question he was an elite, explosive guy who could be a big playmaker for us in the run game and the pass game," he said.

Maybe the only question about Samuel's breakout season is why he didn't touch the ball more. He is averaging 7.6 rushes per game and 5.4 catches a game.

averaging 7.6 rushes per game and 5.4 catches a game. If Samuel himself has asked that question, it has not been in public.

"I'm not a coach, I don't demand touches," he said. "I just go out there and make plays and hopefully the coaches see when I am out there that I am doing a great job and want to put the ball in my hands more."

Samuel's game-winning 15-yard touchdown run against Michigan and his arms-extended celebration are destined to be legendary at Ohio State. But the play he made just before it might have saved the game and OSU's season.

On third-and-nine at the 24-yard line in the second overtime, quarterback J.T. Barrett threw a screen pass to the right side to Samuel, which appeared to be headed nowhere.

Samuel reversed field and started left, then he turned right and bumped into offensive tackle Jamarco Jones. At one point he was nearly 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage, which would have put the Buckeyes out of field goal range with Michigan up 27-24.

But Samuel turned left again and managed to turn the play into an eight-yard gain, setting up Barrett's one-yard run that left Jim Harbaugh bitterly disappointed.

"I've watched it a couple of times. I can't explain the play, I don't know what happened, I don't know what I was thinking. I just knew I had to make a play and do something for the team," Samuel said.

"I noticed when I crossed back to try to go the other way that mostly all the skill guys (for Michigan) were on the right side of the field so to the left it was probably the D-linemen and a couple of linebackers," he said.

Samuel was named first-team All-American by The Associated Press and The Sporting News.

Like most players in December, he claims not to have thought much about entering the NFL draft early.

"Next year, I don't know. I have not thought about it. I don't know what I am going to do. I am just focused on this team and playing Clemson," he said.

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