

## Building A Better Schedule

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}  
Sunday, August 05 2007 7:00 PM -

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Holed up for the last couple weeks helping me out with the &quot;Greatest Moments In Cleveland Sports&quot; bracket, we unleash Jesse back on the free world today with another quality piece of journalism. Jesse has some issues with the Buckeyes 2007 schedule, and gives him dream scenario on how the 2007 schedule, and future schedules, would look.



Another season of Ohio State football is almost underway, and uncertainty abounds. Will Beanie Wells conquer his ball-security issues and carry an offense stripped of its big guns from last year? Will the starting quarterback be upperclassman Todd Boeckman, or either one of underclassmen Antonio Henton and Robbie Schoenhof? Will Jim Tressel keep the wide-open spread attack from 2005 and '06, or will it be back to good old-fashioned &quot;Tressel Ball&quot;, featuring liberal doses of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-and-20 draw play and the punt? Will Ohio State send Chad Henne and Mike Hart out with a donut in the win column in The Game? There are more questions surrounding the '07 Bucks than there are teeth in the mouth of the average SEC fan.

One thing *is* unimpeachably certain, and it's this: Ohio State's 2007 schedule is a travesty. The road game at Washington is the exception—a trip to the West Coast to play traditionally one of the better Pac Ten programs can't really be considered a gimme, even though the Huskies have been less-than-stellar for the past few years. The first-week match-up with Youngstown State is somewhat justifiable on the grounds of JT throwing a bone to the school that made him famous (besides, Michigan plays I-AA Appalachian State the same week). But Akron, and

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Kent State, in addition to Youngstown? This isn't Ohio State's schedule- it's Cleveland State's, if it had a football program. And that just isn't good enough.

Up until 1992 the Buckeyes hadn't played an in-state opponent since the early 1930's. Now, in 2007, three of OSU's four non-conference games are against Ohio schools. Ohio State has nothing to gain by these games, and everything to lose. Eventually, the Buckeyes *will* lose one of these games- they've been severely tested on a few occasions, most notably by Cincinnati in 2002 and by Bowling Green in '03- and that will be a disaster for the program.

Basically, a good portion of OSU's non-conference schedule is devoted to what are in essence welfare payments to undercapitalized Mid-America Conference programs. It shouldn't be this way. In 1975, Woody Hayes's last undefeated regular season, Ohio State's three non-conference opponents were Penn State (then a powerful Eastern independent), North Carolina, and UCLA. Now, *that's* a schedule to take home to your mama. And it's the kind of schedule the Bucks should have, year-in, year-out.

Here are a set of (suggested) parameters that make for such a schedule:

### ***One Marquee Team***

It's the game that fans have circled on calendars that won't be made for five years. Except for Michigan on the third Saturday in November, no game in Buckeye football is looked forward to with the eagerness reserved for the early-season battle of intersectional heavyweights. See [Oklahoma in 1977](#) ; [Notre Dame in 1995](#) ; Texas in 2005. Playing this kind of game can be hazardous to your national title chances, but it isn't necessarily a deal-breaker, as it's early in the season and if you must lose in college football, it's best to lose as early as possible. And the experience and memory of a game like this can supersede winning or losing in the memory. Would you trade the loss to Texas at the 'Shoe for a plain-Jane drubbing of Akron or Ohio U.? As a fan, I'm not so certain I would.

***Preferred opponent- West Virginia:*** Hard to believe, but the Buckeyes and the Mountaineers have played just twice in the modern era of football- in 1987, when Earle Bruce's last team thwarted Major Harris and Co. 24-3 in Columbus, and in 1998's first week, when the top-ranked Bucks cooled the ardor of a rollicking Morgantown crowd with a 34-17 Saturday Night beat-down. I'm kind of breaking my own rule here- West V is hardly a "marquee" program on the order of the Oklahoma's or USC's- but both teams are in the national elite and probably will be for a while, and the level of message-board smack between Bucks and 'Neers partisans is pegging the meter. It's long past overdue for these two unfriendly neighbors to get it on.

## ***One Pac 10 Team***

This is less a new innovation than the formalization of a long-standing if sporadic tradition. Since Earle Bruce took over in 1979, Ohio State has played at least one regular-season game against every Pac 10 school except Cal, and in September, the Buckeyes will travel to Seattle for their sixth in-season match-up with the University of Washington since 1986. Playing the Pac 10 makes sense- it provides good competition, extra exposure in large, distant markets like Seattle, Los Angeles, and greater Phoenix (and a chance for Buckeye backers in those cities to see their team live and up-close), and a shot at bragging rights against the Big 10's *doppelganger* conference.

The caveat here is that an annual game against the Pac 10 brings the possibility of a re-match in the Rose Bowl, and that can become a very dicey proposition for the team that won in the fall. Case in point: January 1, 1976, when undefeated and #1-ranked Ohio State rolled into the Rose Bowl to face a UCLA team the Bucks had squashed 41-20 early in the season. Wingback Brian Baschnagel [admitted](#) the Buckeyes respected UCLA

less before the Rose Bowl than they had before the September game, and it affected the pre-game approach accordingly. The Bruins rolled up 366 yards in the second half on January 1 and dominated the Buckeyes, 23-10, burying Woody Hayes's final National Championship shot.

Speaking of UCLA...

***Preferred opponent- UCLA:*** Ohio State is 4-4-1 against UCLA, so the next meeting will be a scales-tipper in the all-time series. There's a colorful history between the two schools. In 1975, Ohio State humiliated UCLA in September and was humiliated in turn by the Bruins in January, and the teams played to a grim 10-10 tie in Columbus the following year. A dramatic

[come-from-behind victory](#)

over UCLA in Los Angeles set the stage for Earle Bruce's undefeated first season in 1979. In 2001, Jim Tressel's defense was brilliant against the Bruins in Pasadena, but Steve Bellisari went 5-for-23 and the kicking game was horrific in a bruising,

[13-6 UCLA win](#)

. And there is always going to be a bit of unfinished

business between the schools: in 1954, OSU and UCLA finished the season undefeated and ranked one-two in both polls, UCLA leading the UP poll, the Buckeyes in the AP. But the old Pacific Coast Conference had a rule prohibiting teams from playing in the Rose Bowl in consecutive years, and thus UCLA had to sit home on January 1, 1955 and watch Ohio State cruise to a rainy, 20-7 victory over USC, a team the Bruins had throttled 34-0.

Aside from the history, it's a trip to La-La Land, and a chance to play in the shadows of the San Gabriel's in the most prestigious stadium in America against the school with the prettiest coeds and home uniforms in college football. A loss notwithstanding, how can you go wrong?

### ***One Mediocre BCS Team***

In some cases, they're basketball schools, where football season unofficially ends at midnight on October 15. In other cases they're the second or third school in a state, existing permanently in

someone else's shadow. They have their moments- Mississippi State at times during the Jackie Sherrill era, North Carolina under Mack Brown; even Duke had a couple of good years under Steve Spurrier and Fred Goldsmith- but they tend to hang out in the middle-to-lower reaches of their conferences, unable to sustain success over the long haul.

They're good for beefing up the record against BCS opponents, and they're also a way of taking the temperature of the program. When it's in good shape, these games are a walk-over. When it isn't, they aren't.

***Preferred opponent- Kentucky:*** It's only about a three-hour drive from Lexington to Columbus, but it might as well be the length of the Trans-Siberian Railway as far as football is concerned. Ohio State and Kentucky haven't met since the opening week of the 1935 season, when the Bucks topped the Wildcats 19-6. The Buckeyes have lost seven straight games to SEC schools dating back to 1988. A long-overdue re-match with UK might be just what Ohio State needs to finally get healthy against that

oh-so troublesome conference. Recent Music City Bowl victory and Andre Woodson aside, Kentucky is still, well, Kentucky.

So my 2007 Buckeye schedule would look like this:

**Sept. 1- West Virginia**

Sept. 8- at UCLA

**Sept. 15- Kentucky**

**Sept. 22- Northwestern**

Sept. 29- at Minnesota

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**Oct. 6- at Purdue**

**Oct. 13- Iowa**

**Oct. 20- Michigan State**

**Oct. 27- at Indiana**

**Nov. 3- Wisconsin**

**Nov. 10- Illinois**

**Nov. 17- at Michigan**

And what about the fourth non-conference game? Well, there isn't one. Penn State has been booted out of the Big Ten and is now in the Big East, reunited with old Lambert Cup lodge brothers like Syracuse, Rutgers, and Pitt. Back down to its namesake ten schools, the Big Ten plays a nine-game, unbalanced conference schedule, just like the Pac Ten. This *is* a dream scenario, after all.