



# OHIO BOBCATS

To put it kindly, Ohio doesn't have a storied football tradition. The Bobcats don't have any bowl victories on their resume. They haven't won the Mid-American Conference championship in 42 years.

But sixth-year coach Frank Solich and his staff have built the program to the point where it's ready to become a big winner on a steady basis. Actually, the Bobcats believe they've been on this precipice for a few years. They planned on a big season in 2008, but an unofficial count of 18 season-ending injuries and an official count of 33 turnovers relegated Ohio to a 4-8 season.

Last year the Bobcats still suffered a fistful of important injuries, but the defense tied Texas for the national lead in turnovers forced (37) and the special-teams returners combined for five touchdowns as Solich's crew pushed its way to the MAC championship game for the second time in four years.

This time around, Ohio boasts an intriguing mix of senior standouts and superior depth. If the Bobcats transform their mediocre running game into something average and don't suffer an absurd number of injuries or turnovers, then they'll be in the thick of the MAC East race until the end.

## ABOUT OHIO

**LOCATION** Athens, OH

**CONFERENCE** Mid-American (East)

**COLORS** Hunter Green & White

**HOME FIELD** Peden Stadium (24,000)

**WINS (LAST 5 YRS.)** 4-9-6-4-9

**FINAL RANK (LAST 5 YRS.)** 98-65-87-103-63

QUICK FACTS

## OFFENSE (STARTERS RETURNING 6)

### QUARTERBACKS

Ohio entered the 2009 season with two good, experienced senior quarterbacks. **Boo Jackson** (6-1, 202) and Theo Scott shared snaps in the season-opening loss at Connecticut, but the coaches decided Jackson earned the nod going forward. Then Jackson wrecked his throwing shoulder in Week 2 against North Texas—and the Bobcats suddenly didn't have a quarterback derby anymore.

The silver lining to all this? Jackson, who needed surgery, took his red-shirt year and returns for his final season in 2010. He was limited to individual drills during spring ball, but Jackson should be ready in all his dual-threat glory for the opener. If anyone has forgotten how Jackson performed in 2008, he set Ohio records for most total yards in a game (413) and a season (2,688). In his 14-game career, he has connected on 202-of-336 passes (60 percent) for 2,549 yards, 20 touchdowns and 12 interceptions.

"He had a phenomenal year creating things," said Ohio offensive coordinator Tim Albin. "He's very smart with the ball when he leaves the pocket."

While Jackson focused on his footwork and light throwing during Ohio's 15 spring practices, Iowa State transfer **Phil Bates** (6-2, 224), a junior, and sophomore **Tyler Tettleton** (5-11, 201) shared all of the snaps. While Jackson will start if he's healthy, Albin wouldn't be hurt if he needed to turn to Bates or Tettleton. Both are dual-threat guys similar to Jackson.

Ohio tried hard to recruit Bates out of Omaha (Neb.) North High School in 2007, but he headed Iowa State's way shortly after Gene Chizik got that job. Bates left Iowa State midway through the 2008 season after getting to throw just 24 passes, but he flashed his versatility by playing some wide receiver as a freshman. "He's very athletic—another level," Albin said. "He's got a little more juice with his running speed."

While Bates sat out his transfer year in 2009, Tettleton served as Scott's backup as a true freshman. His only lengthy playing time came in an upset loss to Kent State when Scott dealt with an illness that limited his snaps. Tettleton hit 7-of-15 passes that day for 111 yards and one interception. He also took five sacks.

### RUNNING BACKS

If Ohio's offense had an off-season mission, it was to shore up the running

game. The Bobcats finished 102nd out of 120 Football Bowl Subdivision teams in yards per game (102.0) and they rushed for just nine scores. Top rusher Chris Garrett (621 yards, 2 TDs) graduated, which leaves senior **Vince Davidson** (5-11, 191) as the leading returnee. Davidson carried 67 times for 260 yards (3.9 ypc) and one score last fall.

"Our No. 1 thing in spring was to be able to run the ball with more consistency," Albin said. "Vince will be our starter. He has good vision, and he's stronger than what you think. He's not a blazer, but he runs with nice pad level and has a little wiggle to him."

Red-shirt junior **Donte Harden** (5-11, 176) stacks up as the leading backup after rushing 61 times for 237 yards (3.9 ypc) and two TDs last year. "Donte might be a step faster than Vince, but he doesn't weigh as much," Albin said. "He's a hard runner. He throws his body into the piles."

If things break right for the Bobcats, they'll have a serious ringer to throw into the running back fray. When **Ken Ashley** (5-8, 230) came out of high school in 2007, the four-star recruit from Los Angeles signed with nearby USC. But when he couldn't make the cut academically, Ashley attended junior college powerhouse El Camino and delivered 693 yards and 13 touchdowns in just 100 carries last fall.

If Ashley pulls the grades—and in late spring the coaching staff was confident he could—he'll have two years of eligibility to make up for lost time at college football's highest level.

### RECEIVERS

Ohio lost a terrific receiver in Taylor Price, who went in the third round to the New England Patriots. But if there's one position where the Bobcats could afford to bid a game-breaker goodbye, it's here. Albin believes he has two more studs on the NFL track in seniors **Terrence McCrae** (6-4, 198) and **LaVon Brazill** (5-11, 188). "Those two guys are ballers," Albin said. "Players through and through."

Brazill snagged 53 passes for 702 yards and six TDs last year while McCrae added 35 catches for 545 yards and 9 TDs. Sophomore **Bakari Bussey** (6-2, 204) gives Ohio a third guy who runs the 40-yard dash in less than 4.5 seconds. "That's pro-scout timing," Albin said. "We feel good about those guys stretching the field."

The Bobcats also welcome back senior starter **Steven Goulet** (6-2, 200) and junior **Riley Dunlop** (6-2, 184). Goulet caught 21 passes for 230 yards and one TD in 2009, while Dunlop added 12 catches for 122 yards and two scores before missing the last half of the season with a shoulder injury.

As if that's not enough quality, Albin is excited about red-shirt freshman **Mario Dovell** (6-0, 187) and red-shirt junior **Jerry Gross** (6-0, 172). The latter was limited by a knee scope last year, but he's ready to be in the rotation.

Ohio retains its top two tight ends from last year—sophomore **Jordan Thompson** (6-4, 248) and senior **Nathan Caldwell** (6-5, 257). They combined for just nine catches in '09, but Albin plans to make them a bigger part of the attack in 2010.

"If you look at the stats, you might say they're just blockers," Albin said. "I don't view it like that."

### DEFENSIVE LINE

Ohio retains just three starters from 2009—only one of whom received any All-MAC acclaim—but Albin shares head coach Frank Solich's opinion that the Bobcats should be just fine on the offensive line. "We're billing them as the best O-line since we've been here," said Albin, who arrived in 2005. "Across the board, we have solid guys and really good depth. I hope they live up to the billing."

Right tackle **Joe Flading** (6-4, 289) enters the year with the best reputation. The red-shirt junior earned third-team All-MAC honors last season. Left tackle **A.J. Strum** (6-5, 290) shifts from left guard to replace another third-team All-MAC guy in the graduated Chris Rodgers. "Strum was a tackle who we moved inside to get our five best guys on the field," Albin said. "When he's locked in, he can be a road-grader. He has some athleticism to him."

Albin believes he has six guys who can handle the three spots between the tackles. Red-shirt sophomore **Eric Herman** (6-4, 300) started all but one game at right guard last year—and he battled through the final four games with torn ligaments in his ankle. Surgery on that ankle forced Herman to the sidelines for spring ball, but that allowed other guys to get valuable snaps.

Sophomore **Vince Carlotta** (6-4, 289), who shared time at left guard last fall before suffering a concussion and broken hand, earned the starting job there during the spring. Sophomore **James Davis** (6-2, 295) and junior **Kadre Pinder** (6-2, 301) enter the fall as backups who deserve snaps. Sophomore **Skyler Allen** (6-3, 277) takes over at center for the graduated David White.

In case you didn't notice, none of the eight guys listed above are seniors. "We're looking forward to working with these guys for the next two years," Albin said.

## KICKERS

Sophomore **Matt Weller** (6-0, 208) earned first-team All-MAC honors after a solid rookie year. He drilled 21-of-29 field goals, including 9-of-13 from 40 yards and beyond, with a long of 52 yards.

Weller converted just 32-of-36 extra points.

## THE STAFF

### HEAD COACH Frank Solich (Nebraska '66)



**RECORD AT SCHOOL** 32-31 (5 years)  
**CAREER RECORD** 90-50 (10 years)

### ASSISTANTS

Tim Albin (NW Oklahoma State '89) **OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR/RUNNING BACKS** • Gerry Gdowski (Nebraska '90) **CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR/QUARTERBACKS** • Jimmy Burrow (Nebraska '76) **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR/SAFETIES** • David Brown (Cal Poly '96) **DEFENSIVE BACKS** • Dwayne Dixon (Florida '85) **WIDE RECEIVERS** • Ross Els (Nebraska-Omaha '88) **SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR/LINEBACKERS** • Pete Germano (Ohio Wesleyan '82) **DEFENSIVE LINE** • Scott Isphording (Hanover '94) **TIGHT ENDS/RECRUITING COORDINATOR** • Keven Lightner (Nebraska '96) **OFFENSIVE LINE**

## DEFENSE

(STARTERS RETURNING 6)

### DEFENSIVE LINE

If you're looking for a weakness in Ohio's defense, don't waste time checking here. The Bobcats retain four senior starters and feel pretty darn good about their backups as well. Don't underestimate the importance of the latter half of that sentence.

"We basically stuck with four down linemen toward the end of last year," said defensive coordinator Jimmy Burrow. "That wore us down a little bit."

Senior defensive end **Dak Notestine** (6-3, 250) serves as the best proof of that. The former walk-on delivered four sacks and 2.5 tackles for loss in Ohio's first seven games, but he settled for 2.5 sacks and just 0.5 TFL during the Bobcats' last seven games.

"The first half of last year, he played at an All-MAC caliber," Burrow said. "It was just the number of reps he had to play. He can really run, and he's turning into the total package at defensive end. He does a good job on a tight end and also over a tackle."

Senior **Stafford Gatling** (6-4, 239), who posted two sacks and 5.5 TFL last season, handles the opposite end of the line. Like Notestine, he began his career as a linebacker and moved down to take advantage of his quickness. "He's even faster than Dak," Burrow said. "He's got great length in his arms and he's strong."

Junior **Curtis Meyers** (6-2, 257) serves as the top backup, but he should be viewed as something more. He was ticketed to start last fall before suffering a season-ending knee injury during two-a-days. Meyers posted two sacks in 2008 and scored a touchdown against Ohio State when he fell on a bad shotgun snap in the end zone. "He has a great motor," Burrow said. "There's a meanness to him that we like."

Red-shirt sophomore **Tremayne Scott** (6-4, 249) produced two sacks last year, including one in the MAC championship game against Central Michigan. He'll be in the rotation as well, while sophomore **Melvin Payne** (6-2, 232) is a converted middle linebacker who Ohio plans to put on the field in pass-rush situations.

Ohio welcomes back third-team All-MAC tackle **Ernie Hodge** (6-2, 292) and **Marcellis Williamson** (6-1, 340) as the anchors to its defense. Both are seniors. Hodge delivered 48 tackles and 5.5 TFL last year while Williamson notched 46 tackles, 6.5 TFL and 1.5 sacks. They're athletic specimens who, despite their heft, fulfill the Bobcats' speed-first philosophy.

"I had thoughts of Ernie as a linebacker about 60 pounds ago," Burrow said. "He's been our most consistent lineman for three years. Marcellis' motor is good enough that you'll see him making plays from sideline-to-sideline, which is particularly impressive for a 330-pounder."

Junior **Jeff King** (6-1, 269) and sophomore **Neal Huynh** (6-3, 279) aren't too far behind Hodge and Williamson and will receive ample snaps in line coach Pete Germano's rotation.

### LINEBACKERS

One of the best things about Solich's previous life at Nebraska (a life shared by

many of his assistants) is the fact Ohio has the contacts to sneak into the state and grab some terrific players.

That's how it worked with senior middle linebacker **Noah Keller** (6-1, 227), who led Nebraska's Kearney High School to a state title before making an immediate and lasting impact with the Bobcats. Keller enters his final year with a pair of second-team All-MAC seasons on his resume, including a 2009 campaign where he finished sixth in the nation in tackles (11.1 per game). He set a MAC championship-game record with 16 stops against Central Michigan and followed that performance with 17 tackles against Marshall in the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl.

"He's a heck of an athlete with speed," Burrow said. "He's very smart. He's the glue that holds the defense together. Noah's a true inside 'backer, but he plays in space, too."

Keller won't have his usual running mates in 2010 as first-team All-MAC weak-side linebacker Lee Renfro and usual strong-side starter Errik Ejike have graduated. Junior **Eric Benjamin** (5-11, 211), who posted 30 tackles while subbing in every game last year, takes over on the weak side. The former safety has the speed and consistency Burrow treasures.

When the Bobcats start in the 4-3, sophomore **Alphonso Lewis** (6-1, 206) gets first call at the Sam. Lewis (20 tackles in 2009) is yet another burner who's building up the strength to play linebacker. When the Bobcats start in the nickel, senior corner **Shannon Ballard** (5-11, 193) makes the start. Ballard returned a fumble 75 yards for a score against Marshall in the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl.

Ohio's top subs at linebacker are either guys who began their career at safety or guys who also can move up to play defensive end in a pass-rushing pinch. Senior **Chad Clemens** (5-11, 214) and sophomore **Jelani Woseley** (6-2, 208) are the outside backups, while junior **Jay Edwards** (6-0, 228) and sophomore **Brandon Weaver** (6-2, 215) are Keller's understudies in the middle. Weaver lettered as a true freshman, but he took a red-shirt last fall after suffering an injury in Week 2 against North Texas.

### DEFENSIVE BACKS

Let's have Burrow, Ohio's veteran defensive coordinator, be as blunt as possible for a moment: "We did lose two great corners. How good we'll be depends on how our corners come on. We're going to need them all."

On paper, the Bobcats have the potential to be just fine ... but many of their corners haven't been able to get on the field because of injury. One exception is senior **Julian Posey** (5-11, 187), the older brother of Ohio State receiver DeVier Posey. One of the Bobcats' best athletes flashed his big-play ability last year when he returned an interception 41 yards for a score against Northern Illinois and posted a 59-yard interception return against Kent State.

Junior **Kenny Jackson** (5-9, 168) and sophomore **Travis Carrie** (6-0, 203) are the leading candidates to start at the other corner, but both missed spring ball because of injuries. Carrie sat out last fall as well while Jackson returned an interception 69 yards for a score against North Texas in his limited time.

Junior college transfer **Omar Leftwich** (6-1, 190) took advantage of others' injuries to leap onto the two-deep during spring ball. And, of course, Ohio can put senior nickel back Shannon Ballard at corner if necessary. "He's one of our better 'press' guys," Burrow said. And don't count out red-shirt freshman **Xavier Hughes** (6-1, 159), a converted safety who picked off a bunch of passes during the spring.

Fortunately for Ohio, the safety spots appear to be more settled. Sophomore free safety **Gerald Moore** (6-1, 191) earned third-team All-MAC honors after picking off six passes—including two in the MAC East showdown with Temple—and making 68 tackles. "He's got the size and speed to get where he needs to be," Burrow said.

## 2010 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	Wofford	16	Akron
11	Toledo	23	@Miami (Ohio)
18	@Ohio State	30	Louisiana-Lafayette
25	@Marshall	Nov. 4	Buffalo
Oct. 2	@Eastern Michigan	16	@Temple
9	Bowling Green	26	@Kent State

Senior **Steven Jackson** (6-2, 198) entered last fall with high hopes after reaping third-team All-MAC honors in 2008. He posted 24 tackles and one interception in four games last year before taking a red-shirt year because of a groin problem. He was protected from spring ball, which gave senior **Donovan Fletcher** (6-0,

201) a chance to take the strong safety job from Jackson. Fletcher, who started two games and posted 42 tackles in 2009, is the brother of St. Louis Rams cornerback Bradley Fletcher.

Senior **Hilton Dawson III** (6-0, 207) and red-shirt freshman **Jeremy Green** (6-0, 180) are in the mix for playing time as well. The coaches had high hopes for Dawson last year before a knee injury truncated his season after one game.

## 2009 REVIEW

### RECORD

**OVERALL** 9-5 (.643)

**CONFERENCE** 7-1 (t-1st)

### RESULTS

Connecticut	L	16-23	0-1	Kent State	L	11-20	5-3
@North Texas	W	31-30 (OT)	1-1	@Ball State	W	20-17	6-3
Cal Poly	W	28-10	2-1	@Buffalo	W	27-24	7-3
@Tennessee	L	23-34	2-2	Northern Illinois	W	38-31	8-3
Bowling Green	W	44-37	3-2	Temple	W	35-17	9-3
@Akron	W	19-7	4-2	Central Michigan	L	10-20	9-4
Miami (Ohio)	W	28-7	5-2	Marshall*	L	17-21	9-5

\*(Little Caesars Pizza Bowl)

### STATISTICS

Rushing offense	112.0	102	Kickoff returns	20.7	84
Passing offense	198.1	82	Rushing defense	153.7	75
Total offense	310.1	106	Passing defense	194.7	30
Scoring offense	24.7	78	Total defense	348.5	45
Net punting	32.2	111	Scoring defense	21.2	28
Punt returns	10.1	47	Turnover margin	.93	7

Last column is ranking among FBS teams.

## PUNTERS

Matt Schulte had one year of eligibility to go, but Ohio sent him packing after an off-field incident in December as the Bobcats prepped for the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl.

Junior **Paul Hershey** (6-3, 190), listed as a wide receiver on the NCAA's official roster in 2009, handled the punting against Marshall and did all the punting during the spring.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bobcats lost first-team All-MAC kick returner Chris Garrett, whose 95-yard touchdown was the highlight of his 27.0 yards per return. But if conference rivals had their choice, they probably would have preferred senior punt returner LaVon Brazill to have been the one to graduate. Brazill, a second-team All-MAC pick, returned three punts for scores and averaged 13.5 yards each time he touched the ball.

Running back Donte Harden, who returned five kicks for 76 yards last fall, has the most experience on the roster and headed into the offseason as the team's most likely candidate.

## NEWCOMERS

As part of Ohio's plan to compete for another MAC title, the Bobcats signed four junior college transfers to supplement their already solid upperclassmen. Running back Ken Ashley could make the biggest impact, though cornerback Omar Leftwich has a chance after enrolling in time for spring practices.

## BLUE RIBBON ANALYSIS

Ohio has never won a bowl and hasn't claimed the MAC title since 1968. With several big-play artists in the passing game and return game—plus five terrific seniors in the defensive front seven—this could well be the year the Bobcats knock those negative streaks out of sight.

After giving Ohio State a huge fight two years ago, Ohio won't be able to sneak up on the Buckeyes when they visit on Sept. 18. There'll also be no strangers on the field when the Bobcats visit Little Caesars Pizza Bowl opponent Marshall on Sept. 25. Those games will give Ohio fans a true barometer on the team's potential.

*Lindsey Willbite*

