

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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## Offense Out To Step It Up This Spring

*Buckeyes Seek Balance, More Production In '03*

By STEVE HELWAGEN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

There are some who believe that Ohio State won college football's national championship last year in spite of its offense.

Factoring out the eight or 10 clutch offensive plays that helped define OSU's 14-0 march to the national title, the Buckeyes were just average — maybe even below average — offensively. Consider the following:

- During the regular season, OSU ranked a distant eighth in the Big Ten in total yardage at 372.0 per game.

- Through the first seven games, the Buckeyes were among the nation's leaders in scoring at 38.0 points per game.

But they hit a brick wall, for the most part, in the second half of the year, when they averaged just 20.6 points per contest in the final six Big Ten games and the Fiesta Bowl victory over Miami (Fla.).

- In those final seven games, the Buckeyes scored more than two offensive touchdowns just twice — against Minnesota, in a 34-3 rout, and against Miami, in a double-overtime game that ended up 31-24 after the teams were knotted at 17 at the end of regulation.

Remarkably, Ohio State returns all 11 starters on



TERRY GILLIAM

**SNEAK PEEK** — Ohio State head football coach Jim Tressel (center) was joined by wide receiver Michael Jenkins, offensive lineman Alex Stepanovich and other players April 2 at a local restaurant to preview spring football practice.

offense from that championship squad.

Beginning with spring practice, the Buckeyes are in search of balance, more consistency and, frankly, more production out of the offense.

"We have a huge job because, as happy as we were to win a national championship, we want to do a little more to show we were a bigger part of it," said senior

tight end Ben Hartsock.

"I know, offensively, we've taken it as a huge challenge that we're going to be relied upon as the anchor for this team. Everybody knows last year we had an

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## Foster Has Instant Impact

*Women Enjoy 22 Wins, NCAA In His First Year*

By MIKE WACHSMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Jim Foster was hired at Ohio State, one of his initial statements was that he wanted the Buckeyes playing in March.

Far removed from its role of powerhouse, the Buckeyes had gone to the NCAA Tournament just once in the previous six seasons and ended the 2001-02 season with a 14-15 record, so Foster's words seemed like just that — words.

He saw something amid the rubble, however, and felt he could win and win quickly. Many were skeptical, but when the Buckeyes finished 22-10 after making the NCAA field, that skepticism turned to optimism.

The coach, a veteran of the postseason after long stints at St. Joseph's and Vanderbilt, gave the young Buckeyes a ton of on-the-job training and a return to the fundamentals that had



Jim Foster

been missing for most of the last half-decade.

When he walked in, Foster saw raw materials. When he followed his team off the floor following its NCAA Tournament loss at Louisiana Tech, he saw a nearly finished product.

"We improved immensely," he said. "It didn't end necessarily the way we wanted it to, but we got a taste of the postseason. My hope and belief is that that will spur them on to work hard in the off-season and come back ready to work. We proved ourselves to some extent, but this was just a first step."

OSU failed to place a single player on the first unit of the All-Big Ten team — some of that could be attributed to the Buckeyes' being devoid of true stars — but could beat teams a variety of ways.

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- Tailback Maurice Clarett seeks quieter second year at Ohio State (Pages 8-9)

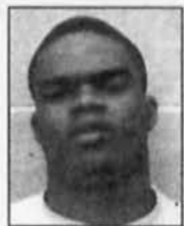
- Plenty of talent waiting in wings at wide receiver (Page 11)

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Antonio Pittman

## COVER STORY: THE OSU OFFENSE

## Offense Out To Become More Explosive

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amazing strength on defense.

"This year, we want to go out and put a lot of points on the board."

With tailback Maurice Claret (1,237 yards), now a sophomore, leading the way, Ohio State was a respectable rushing team in 2002. The Buckeyes ranked fifth in the Big Ten at 194.9 yards per game during the regular season.

Of course, OSU's rushing numbers should look good: Out of 909 offensive plays all season, OSU ran the ball 629 times (69.1 percent).

At quarterback, senior Craig Krenzel returns for his second season as the starter. Last year, he succeeded in minimizing mistakes and making big plays when the Buckeyes positively had to convert.

Now, it sounds like OSU coach Jim Tressel is serious about taking the next step and leaning on the passing game a little more in 2003.

"We need to be a better throwing football team," Tressel said. "We became a more efficient team throwing than we had been. Now, we need to be a more explosive football team."

"We have some weapons with Michael Jenkins and Chris Gamble coming back."

Tressel hinted that Krenzel, known for his strong decision-making, may be given more freedom to make calls at the line of scrimmage.

"When you have a guy coming back at center like Alex Stepanovich and a guy like Craig under center, you know they can make so many decisions between them," the coach said. "They have a chance to make more good decisions on the field than by us standing on the sideline."

"Still, even with that reality, we can still only do what all 11 guys in the lineup at that moment can do. But with Craig and Alex coming back as decision makers, we have a chance to progress."

One interested party in this whole debate is Jenkins, a senior split end who passed up a chance to leave for the NFL a year early to come back and try to win another national title.

He knows accentuating the passing game would be a departure for Tressel, who shares game planning and play calling for the offense with coordinator Jim Bollman.

"I know this might take us away from what he likes to do, which is controlling the clock with the running game," Jenkins said. "But we think it is important."

Stepanovich, a senior who returns for his second season as the starter at center, admitted that the offense lacked consistency in 2002.

"At times, we didn't play our best," he said. "We know we need to step it up. Our defense was that good. They found ways to stop the other team's offense."

"We need to force defenses to change to our game plan. Defenses tried to do a lot of things to confuse us. They threw a lot of different formations and blitzes at us."

"We have talked about being a more explosive team. The things we have done in the power game start with the guys up front. We need good protection to give our weapons a chance to produce."



STEVE HELWAGEN

**GETTING IT GOING** — Ohio State offensive coordinator Jim Bollman (right) speaks to lineman Ryan Cook during the first spring football practice session April 3.

For Bollman and the rest of the offensive staff, they know what the returning starters can do. They will use this spring to see what many of the young players on that side of the ball are capable of.

"We have some good young receivers with a lot of potential," Bollman said. "Spring will be an important time for them. We want our fullbacks to block better and all three of our tailbacks to become more complete players."

#### Inside The Numbers

At face value, the biggest key for the offense may be keeping the talented Claret healthy.

He missed all of three games and large parts of two others last season due to injury. In the parts of those five games when Claret was not available, OSU averaged 4.3 yards per play. But with a healthy Claret at their disposal, the Buckeyes were nearly 2 yards better at 6.2 yards per snap.

The passing numbers also bear some inspection. Yes, OSU was second in the Big Ten and fifth nationally in passing efficiency. But that statistic takes into account completion percentage and average gain per pass. The Buckeyes averaged only 20 pass attempts per game.

Plus, it penalizes teams for interceptions. Krenzel threw only seven interceptions.

Except for a few big plays sprinkled in, OSU just didn't get much oomph out of its passing game, which averaged just 173.2 yards per game — OSU's lowest per-game average since 1992 (163.5).

In his pre-spring address to the media, Tressel went on a dissertation on how he has digested some of OSU's offensive numbers from last season.

"We know we've got to keep getting better at everything we do," he said.

"We always evaluate ourselves against some measurable things."

"This past year, we had the second-best scoring average (29.3 points per game) we've had in the last five years. Only the 1998 team (36.7) was higher. That's where we would like to get."

"From a rushing standpoint, we had five games where we rushed for over 200 yards. We know every game we rush for over 200 yards it will be hard to beat us. Over the last 12 years, we've won 96 percent of our games when we've rushed for 200 yards."

"We had the best passing efficiency we've had in the last five years. We want to continue to improve on that."

"A red flag for us was the fact we had the poorest third down efficiency (35.8 percent) we've had in the last five years. We know that's something we need to get better at."

"We had the fewest turnovers (17) we've had in the last five years. And that was with a 14-game season. Most years, we've played 12 games."

"We evaluate every little thing we do — all of those areas. We know, for instance, we better be a better third-down team if we want the offense to contribute like we think it can."

Hartscock shared some benchmarks the OSU offense would like to reach on a weekly basis in 2003.

"We still have our goals of scoring 24 points and getting 4 yards on first down," he said. "But we've also talked about some other goals — 200 yards rushing, 250 yards receiving and 40 points. If you go out and put those kind of numbers up every week, you're going to be hard to beat."

#### Improving The Passing Game

With five returning starters in front of him on the line, Krenzel is eager to test drive this new OSU offense and see if the passing game can step forward.

"We'd like to have a little more offensive balance," he said. "We think that will help us put more points on the board. I think that starts with myself making good decisions and putting the ball where it needs to go."

"The offensive line will need to do their job up front and the receivers will have to run good routes. I think it's going to be fun. There are some guys on that list who can make big plays for us."

The quarterback said he is hoping to keep his completion percentage high and his interception total low even with an increase in pass attempts.

"Our pass efficiency last year was higher than it's been in the last five or six years," Krenzel said. "At the same time, we would like to open it up and throw it down the field a little more. That will be up to us to prove we can do that consistently."

"I'm not sure of the exact numbers, but over the last six or seven games of last season, we may have hit 60 to 70 percent of our long balls, which is abnormally high. That's something we're going to try and duplicate this spring and carry it over to the fall."

According to Tressel, opposing defenses regularly put Jenkins under double coverage. If that continues, OSU's other receivers will have to step up.

"The one long play we hit (in the Fiesta Bowl) to Chris Gamble, Mike was doubled up," Tressel said. "I think there was some confusion and Chris was able to run by them and make the play. We want to do more of that."

"Drew Carter is a player who can play the receiving positions. Roy Hall and Santonio Holmes will be given an opportunity to see if they can make some plays."

Jenkins said he also is eager to see what develops this spring with the offense.

"We know the offensive line will do a good job with their protections and the running backs know their stuff," he said. "We know we need more consistency in the passing game. We have to convert more third downs."

"We know the running game will be there. We have a great offensive line and Craig does a great job with his calls at the line. I think the passing game got better and better by the end of the year."

"I just think the receivers have a lot of confidence and Craig has a lot of confidence in us so he can just throw it up there and know we can get it."

At the same time, Hartscock said the tight ends and backs — who combined to catch just 52 passes last year — also would like to get a piece of the action.

"The tight ends and the running backs weren't a big part of the passing game last year," Hartscock said. "Maybe we'll have to switch that up this year. The offense is a constant evolution."

But Krenzel said the most important thing will be for the offense as a whole to sustain more possessions and take some of the onus off the defense, which lost five key starters, to win games this fall.

"It's up to us offensively this spring," he said. "We have everybody back and now it's up to us offensively to get it to where it's almost perfect. We're going out every day to get better."

## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE QUARTERBACKS

# Krenzel's Decorated, But Still Same Guy

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As Craig Krenzel stepped out on the Ohio State practice field to open spring festivities April 3, it was exactly three months after he had held up the offensive player of the game trophy and wallowed in the specter of the national championship.

A lot was different; some things were the same.

Krenzel still had on his familiar No. 16, still was listed as the team's No. 1 quarterback and still was as prepared as usual. But he walked out onto the grass outside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center a worldly senior — and a decorated one at that.

In March he accepted the Socrates Award from The Sporting News that hailed him as the most qualified student-athlete in the country. He also granted interviews to national publications and radio stations and received a rousing ovation at various on-campus rallies.

Sure there was the usual sweat and toil of off-season conditioning, but Krenzel has had a hard time going in public without being mobbed by well-wishers. A year ago at this time only fans of the Buckeyes and a few from around the Big Ten even knew who Krenzel was. Now he's a household name, the co-MVP and quarterback of the best team in the country.

Despite the newfound fame, Krenzel is back to the gridiron to work on his game and help lead the Buckeyes as they pursue another special season.

"Craig is a great guy," said center Alex Stepanovich, Krenzel's roommate and classmate. "People talk about how smart he is, but I think the great thing about him is that maybe things around him have changed but he stayed the same guy. He stayed Craig and he stayed with what made Craig who he is."

"He's the same guy he was before anyone knew he could do what he did."

Added wide receiver Mike Jenkins, "He'll be the same old guy — cool, calm and collected. That's just the way he is."

To Krenzel, the whirlwind that followed the season only rushed him from then to now instead of allowing him time to get too enamored with himself.

"It kind of went fast," he said. "It seemed like just yesterday that we played. For those of us who have been here for a while, it seems like we're getting old."

## The Man in Control

A surefire team captain come fall, Krenzel (6-4, 225) is using the spring to set the tone for the younger players with his daily focus and constant pursuit of improvement. He reported to camp for his fifth and final year in scarlet and gray in peak shape and has designs on elevating his game.

"Personally, I just want to get more consistent, more fluid in my mechanics, and just relax a little bit and be more comfortable," he said. "I also want to improve my decision-making and my reads."

"I completed about 60 percent of my passes even with a 33 percent outing in the national championship game, but it's something that I'd like to improve upon

because I think it's something that we're going to need to improve on as a team. We'd like to have more balance this season."

Krenzel is coming off a junior campaign in which he was among the most efficient passers in the nation. He completed 148 of 249 passes (59.4 percent) including 12 touchdowns and just seven interceptions.

Last year, as OSU established a potent running game and dominant defense, his instructions were simple: Stay within yourself, don't force a play, keep the chains moving, make good decisions when called upon.

It was so simple, however, that opposing teams caught on quickly. They loaded up against the run with safeties tight to the line, paid particular attention to Jenkins on obvious passing downs and all but dared OSU to go over the top of the defense or run it without handing it off to the deep back.

This came to a head in the Fiesta Bowl with Miami (Fla.) as Krenzel completed just 7 of 21 passes. Yet he managed 17.5 yards per completion and was the top option on the ground with a game-high 81 yards and two touchdowns.

The OSU coaches would rather not see Krenzel — or any of the quarterbacks, for that matter — absorb the punishment he did at times in 2002 and believe they have more reason than ever to advance the passing game.

Not only do they feel the QBs can get into more of a rhythm this season through more work on the passing game, but it doesn't hurt that 12 of the 13 Buckeyes who caught passes last season are back.

"It's going to be fun," Krenzel said of the tinkering with the passing game. "There are some guys on that list that can go out and make big plays for us. It's going to be up to myself to distribute the ball to them and put it where it needs to be."

Position coach Joe Daniels has said he believes Krenzel can become a more consistent and dangerous throwing quarterback, and head coach Jim Tressel stressed the importance of expanding the offense at the break of spring.

How committed are the Buckeyes to allowing Krenzel to look downfield more for open receivers? He recently underwent Lasik surgery on his naturally weak right eye so that he could play without contacts this season. Because of the procedure, Krenzel is practicing with a visor to protect his eyes.

## Underlying Forces

While Krenzel is the undeniable top dog at quarterback, the Buckeyes are blessed with a bevy of reserves who look capable of doing the job.

At the top of the list, of course, is senior Scott McMullen (6-3, 215), who was nothing short of outstanding in his very limited backup role last season. McMullen appeared in five games in the championship season of 2002 and connected on 25 of 31 pass attempts for 315 yards and two touchdowns.

"Scott McMullen reminds me all the time he hit like 86 percent of his passes," Tressel said. "He did very, very well. There are going to be some things to watch."

While McMullen is likely to remain the



STEVE HELWAGEN

**GUNNING FOR NO. 2** — With senior Craig Krenzel locked in as the top quarterback, redshirt freshman Justin Zwick (2) will be one of the players vying to be the primary backup.

lasted backup with a good spring, the coaches will be eager to look at the two youngsters who are knocking on the door: Justin Zwick (6-4, 210) and Troy Smith (6-1, 205). Both were redshirted last year but were praised by the coaches for their work on the scout team and their attentiveness

in the film room.

"That's a real talented and real ready group of guys right there, especially with Craig leading the way," Jenkins said of the quarterbacks. "He's established himself now. But everybody's also looking forward to what the young guys, Troy and Zwick back there, are going to do with a little bit more action behind center."

Zwick came in the more ballyhooed recruit and is listed third on the depth chart in the spring prospectus. But the spring appears to be just as big an opportunity for the highly athletic Smith, who drew raves from Tressel during last year's preseason camp. Also looking to raise eyebrows will be returning walk-on quarterbacks Jim Otis and Matt Trombitas.

What may make the difference is who begins to show they have a firmer grasp of the passing schemes. But more than anything, the QBs — and the entire offense — simply need to take advantage of all the reps that will come from 15 April practices.

"Evolving doesn't always mean everything is going to get harder," Stepanovich said. "Sometimes it's simplifying things. Sometimes it's getting better at what we do."

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL PROFILE

## Clarett Hoping For Healthier, Happier Days

By STEVE HELWAGEN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

There are many sides to Maurice Clarett, as Ohio State football fans found out last year.

Clarett, when healthy, is among the best running backs in the country. That was proved when he racked up six 100-yard games in his first seven appearances as a Buckeye last year as a freshman.

But the words "when healthy" are also imperative in discussing Clarett, who has missed games due to injury in four of his last five seasons, dating to his Ohio high school days at Austintown Fitch and Warren Harding.

Of course, there is the brash side of Clarett, whose comments have taken on a life of their own. The topics have ranged from his relationships with his teammates to leaving for the NFL after his first or second year and on to how he felt the school betrayed him when his friend was killed on the eve of the Fiesta Bowl.

The saga of the injuries and those comments made life more than interesting for Clarett a year ago (see timeline, page 9).

But there also is the Clarett who many believe is one of the nation's top college players. In fact, Collegefootballnews.com has already installed him, along with N.C. State quarterback Philip Rivers, as one of two favorites to win the 2003 Heisman Trophy.

As OSU opened spring football April 3, the 6-0, 230-pound Clarett was wearing a blue jersey. That left him out of contact drills as he continues to nurse a shoulder injury that hampered him over the last half of OSU's national championship season.

Speaking with friend and former Buckeye Kirk Herbstreit on WBNS-AM earlier this winter, Clarett said he is ready to make some new impressions.

"I'm anxious to get back out there," he said. "Off the field, I know I need to learn how to treat people a whole lot nicer. Last year, I was 18 years old. I was kind of thrown into the fire. I wasn't used to everything."

"I wasn't used to everybody being as crazy about football. I wasn't used to people worshipping you just because you can play football. It was a learning experience my first year."

This spring, the Buckeyes are taking things one step at a time with their star tailback.

"Maurice's shoulder strength is not back where it was before the injury," OSU coach Jim Tressel said. "He could bench 400 pounds in August. He's at 340 right now. He isn't at the strength level yet to allow contact."

Running backs coach Tim Spencer said he expects Clarett to return to full-go status by the end of the spring, if not sooner.

"We want to work him in slowly," Spencer said. "He probably won't have much contact for the first week or so. But I think by the last two-thirds of the spring he should be business as usual."

Spencer discussed how he would like to see Clarett take more precautions and, in effect, save himself over the course of a grueling season.



STEVE HELWAGEN

**WHAT'S IN STORE THIS YEAR** — With his credentials firmly established after his freshman-year performance, running back Maurice Clarett begins the spring as a legitimate Heisman Trophy candidate.

"I'd like to see him make a few people miss," Spencer said. "I'd like to see him not take as much of a beating. Of course, he did deliver a bit of it. But, ultimately, we would like him to be as healthy for as many games as possible."

It was clear the Buckeyes were a different team without Clarett — and not for the better. In the times OSU played without Clarett, the offense gained almost 2 fewer yards per snap on average than it did when he was available.

"He has that type of spark," said OSU split end Michael Jenkins. "It's a rare commodity. We enjoy it when he's on the field. He likes to compete and win. He has that special thing that only comes around once in a while."

#### A Passion To Succeed

Clarett graduated early from Warren Harding in December 2001 then enrolled at OSU at the start of winter quarter. That allowed him to participate in spring football a year ago and make a bid at the starting job.

"He thought by getting in early, he would be further along," Tressel said. "He probably didn't think we would start a freshman if he got here in August."

"His passion to achieve is extraordinary. He gave up the relaxing last six months of his senior year because he had some goals in mind. He wanted to give himself every advantage."

He earned that job and the rest was history as he set new OSU freshman records for rushing yards (1,237) and touchdowns (18).

"Everybody in America knew he was a great running back," Tressel said. "He was the national player of the year as a senior in high school, so it was no secret."

"He has a great feel for the game of

football. As we watched him practice, we knew he could be good."

OSU offensive coordinator Jim Bollman, a veteran collegiate and former NFL assistant coach, said Clarett would qualify as special.

"There are not very many guys as gifted as he is in all phases of the game," Bollman said. "Usually, anybody who plays tailback for Ohio State is a pretty good ball carrier. But he also has pass receiving ability and he picks up blitzes and pass blocks. He does all the different things."

Quarterback Craig Krenzel, who had a pretty good vantage point for most of Clarett's best work, shared why he thinks the back is unique.

"The thing about Maurice is he is just so patient and his vision is so great," Krenzel said. "He very rarely misses a hole."

"Physically, he is one of the best backs in the country. His vision and patience set him aside from any back I've seen."

Clarett said he feels he has already won many games before they even start by outworking his opponents and also by studying video of the defenses he will face.

"I look at the energy of the team and how aggressive they play," he said. "I look at how they play in the first quarter to how they play in the third or fourth quarter."

"Throughout the game, you're going to run into all of them. I just feel that the more I know about that team, the game slows down for me."

#### Creating A Stir

As Tressel met the media to open spring practice, he was asked about Clarett's penchant for finding controversy away from the playing field.

"In the times I have had a chance to sit down with Maurice, I think he's been the first one to admit that a lot of things happened in a short time for such a young guy," the coach said.

"I don't think he would say, 'That's a cop-out for the errors I've made.' But I think he would say, 'I know I've got to get better at everything I do on and off the field.'"

Through every bump in the road, Tressel said he has worked hard to keep a good relationship with Clarett.

"I try to have a personal relationship with all of the guys," Tressel said. "Some of the guys get the attention they need by going to their position coach or to the strength coach or to their academic advisor."

"I've always been comfortable with Maurice stopping by my office. He tells me how he's feeling. At the same time, I try and share how I'm feeling about things. He has always been very open to that. I have felt good about my relationship with him."

Krenzel said it is not all bad for the

team to have at least one guy who will stir up the pot from time to time.

"He's a very emotional person," Krenzel said. "I think he'll be the same as a sophomore and as a junior. It's great for us as a team. We can feed off that and the defense can feed off his emotion and the things he does on the field."

Clarett caught a decent amount of flak for the way he was portrayed in ESPN The Magazine last fall. In the article, he was quoted as saying he would consider leaving OSU early. He was pictured on the field at Ohio Stadium, tossing a game jersey away.

"I think after that article a lot of people had their own stereotypes about me," Clarett told Herbstreit. "I think I was judged off of that. It's my job now to clean up my image and show people I'm not the person they saw in the magazine."

Yet, Clarett is refreshingly honest when he says, "I don't regret anything I've ever said."

#### Going Forward

Clarett said he learned a valuable lesson last year in terms of his strength and conditioning.

"During the season, I kind of slacked off on lifting," Clarett said. "I think it kind of went to my head and I thought I could just play football. At the end of the season, Coach Spencer got me back in there lifting weights after practice."

"Injuries are a part of football. When you get dressed and put your helmet and pants on every day, there's a chance we can get injured. It's part of the game you just have to accept."

Tressel believes Clarett when he says he will take precautions to avoid the injury bug.

"His mind-set is very determined," the coach said. "He is disappointed about some of the time he missed from an injury standpoint. I think his focus is preparing himself so some of those things don't occur again."

Clarett said the Buckeyes have worked hard since the Fiesta Bowl in an effort to successfully defend their national title.

"The coaches have put more of an emphasis on hard work and how much pressure we'll be under next year," he said. "We know the bull's-eye on our back will be bigger."

"People are starting to accept that role that we're the No. 1 team and we're the team to beat. We have a lot of great young players who will help us build that dynasty."

Last fall, Clarett was on course to be invited to New York City as a Heisman Trophy finalist before the shoulder injury curtailed his season.

Spencer would like to see Clarett follow in the footsteps of another of his prized pupils, Eddie George, and win that coveted honor. But it is not something either of them spends much time worrying about.

"We are not even concerned about those things," Spencer said. "Those things take care of themselves if you're doing the right things, working hard and giving great effort. Of course, your team also has to do pretty well, too."

"We don't even discuss things like that. He knows he just needs to get better every day."

## The Maurice Clarett Timeline

The following is a look at a timeline of events chronicling tailback Maurice Clarett's involvement with Ohio State over the last two-plus years.

• **Jan. 21, 2001** — Just three days after Youngstown State head coach Jim Tressel is named the new OSU coach, Clarett, then a junior at Warren (Ohio) Harding High school, commits to the Buckeyes.

• **Nov. 17, 2001** — Clarett plays his final game for Warren Harding, getting 187 yards and scoring twice in a 40-33 loss to Cleveland St. Ignatius in the Division I regional finals.

He wraps up his prep career with 4,675 yards and 65 touchdowns, including 2,194 yards and 38 TDs as a senior.

• **Nov. 28, 2001** — Clarett outpunts future OSU teammate Justin Zwick to win the Ohio Mr. Football award presented by The Associated Press.

• **Dec. 26, 2001** — Clarett is named USA Today's national offensive player of the year.

• **Jan. 5, 2002** — Clarett misses the U.S. Army All-American Bowl due to a hamstring injury suffered in practice leading up to the game.

• **Jan. 7, 2002** — Clarett enrolls at Ohio State.

• **Feb. 6, 2002** — Speaking at OSU's national signing day press conference, Clarett says he has not been well-received by several of his new teammates, most notably tailback heir apparent Lydell Ross.

"You know how it is," he said. "Certain people don't like certain people. It's not personal on my side."

• **Feb. 13, 2002** — Clarett undergoes arthroscopic surgery on his thumb to correct a high school injury.

• **April 3, 2002** — Clarett has the thumb wrapped, but he participates in the first day of spring drills at OSU.

• **Aug. 19, 2002** — Five days before the season opener with Texas Tech, Clarett is named as the first freshman to start an opening game at tailback for the Buckeyes since 1943.

But he is in no mood to celebrate.

"We are not going in confident because we have not been having a good week of practice," he said. "It would be a sad story if everybody gets embarrassed."

• **Aug. 24, 2002** — Clarett carries 21 times for 175 yards and three touchdowns, including spectacular runs of 59 and 45 yards, as the Buckeyes crush Texas Tech 45-21 in the Pigskin Classic.

Afterward, Clarett joins senior Kenny Peterson in carrying the Pigskin Classic trophy off the field.

• **Sept. 7, 2002** — Clarett is disappointed after fumbling and tallying just 64 yards and two touchdowns in a 51-17 rout of Kent State.

"We won, that's all I've got to say," Clarett said.

• **Sept. 14, 2002** — Clarett comes within striking distance of OSU's freshman single-game rushing record with 230 yards and two touchdowns on 31 carries in a 25-7 win over Washington State.

His yardage total is 9 yards shy of Archie Griffin's freshman single-game mark and stands as the school's sixth-highest ever.

In the days leading up to the game, Clarett told ESPN.com, "I'm playing for the guy who works 9 to 5 every day so he can pay \$50 to watch us play. I want him to get his money's worth."

But the happiness surrounding this performance subsides when it is learned that Clarett suffered a torn meniscus in his right knee when falling awkwardly on a carry early in the game.

• **Sept. 17, 2002** — Clarett undergoes arthroscopic surgery to fix the injury to the meniscus, which is cartilage in the knee. Tressel terms him "questionable" for that week's game at Cincinnati.

• **Sept. 21, 2002** — Clarett misses the game at



Photos by JEFF BREHM

**BIG DAY** — OSU's Maurice Clarett (13) blistered Washington State for 230 yards in his third college game.

Cincinnati and, despite 130 yards from Ross, OSU struggles to a 23-19 win.

• **Sept. 28, 2002** — Clarett returns to action and gets 104 yards and three touchdowns on 21 carries in a 45-17 pasting of Indiana. But his surgical incision requires stitches at halftime after spitting in the first half.

• **Oct. 5, 2002** — Clarett endures a trying trip to Northwestern. First, he reveals he is not too keen on flying to Chicago but ultimately makes the trip just fine.

Then he finishes with 140 yards and two touchdowns on 29 carries in a 27-16 win over the Wildcats. But he is the center of controversy after fumbling three times and engaging running backs coach Tim Spencer in a shouting match on the sidelines.

"Maurice and I, obviously, are OK," Spencer said. "We talk, Maurice has a chance to do something really great here. My job is to help him see that and I think he will."

• **Oct. 12, 2002** — Clarett enjoys his fifth 100-yard game with 132 yards and two touchdowns on 18 carries in OSU's 50-7 rout of San Jose State.

• **Oct. 16, 2002** — The Oct. 28 edition of ESPN The Magazine hits newsstands with a picture of Clarett and a caption that reads "One & Done" on the cover.

In the article, Clarett tells reporter Gene Wojciechowski he thought about petitioning the NFL to enter the draft after his freshman year.

"Do I think about it?" Clarett said. "It's got to go through your head, man."

Clarett also is pictured at Ohio Stadium tossing his scarlet game jersey away.

• **Oct. 19, 2002** — The Buckeyes sidestep disaster with a 19-14 win at Wisconsin. Clarett leads the way with 133 yards on 30 carries. It is his sixth 100-yard game, breaking the old OSU freshman record of five 100-yard games set by Robert Smith in 1990.

Late in the game, though, Clarett appears to suffer a shoulder injury.

• **Oct. 22, 2002** — Clarett tapes an interview with ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit saying he will not challenge the NFL's rules on draft eligibility.

"It's a given," he said. "Everybody knows that. I'll let the world know I'm coming back for a couple of more years."

• **Oct. 26, 2002** — Just six plays into the game with Penn State, Clarett goes down with a "stinger" injury to the shoulder. The injury causes the shoulder and his left arm to go numb.

Clarett has four carries for 39 yards, just enough to become just the second freshman in OSU history to reach the 1,000-yard mark. The Buckeyes rally for a pivotal 13-7 win over PSU.

• **Nov. 2, 2002** — An evaluation the day before the Minnesota game finds that Clarett's shoulder has not recovered enough for him to play. So he misses his second game of the year, and the Buckeyes roll, 34-3, to improve to 10-0.

• **Nov. 5, 2002** — Clarett is back to full-go in practice, only to reinjure the shoulder.

• **Nov. 9, 2002** — Clarett gamely makes it to the second half at Purdue before suffering another stinger and heading to the sidelines. He carries 14 times for 52 yards. OSU rallies without him to take a 10-6 win over the Boilermakers.

• **Nov. 16, 2002** — For the third time, Clarett is held out of a game as the Buckeyes head to Illinois. OSU ekes out a 23-16 overtime win over the Illini.

"I almost put him in at one point," Tressel admits later.

After the game, Clarett vows to be in action for the season finale against Michigan as the Buckeyes play for a spot in the Fiesta Bowl.

"If I get hit on the third play or the 60th play, I don't care," he said. "I know I'll have four weeks to rest it before the bowl game. It's all or nothing now."

• **Nov. 23, 2002** — Clarett and the Buckeyes cement their place in OSU lore with a dramatic 14-9 win over Michigan to

wrap up a 13-0 regular season, win a piece of the Big Ten title and earn a spot in the national championship game at the Fiesta Bowl.

Clarett carries 20 times for 119 yards, including a 2-yard touchdown. Plus, he catches a 26-yard pass down the left sideline to set up Maurice Hall's game-winning TD run with 4:55 left. Clarett had suggested the pass play to Tressel earlier in the game.

"We felt like we could make that play," Clarett said. After missing all or part of the last four games, Clarett was not about to miss this one.

"I told the seniors I was going to give them my all," Clarett said.

With 1,190 yards on the year, Clarett breaks Smith's OSU freshman rushing record of 1,126 yards.

• **Dec. 6, 2002** — At the team's postseason awards banquet, Clarett receives the most outstanding offensive back award and top offensive newcomer award.

He also is named the Big Ten freshman of the year by league coaches and a first-team All-Big Ten pick by the media.

Clarett also is the national freshman of the year, according to The Sporting News, and is named to the freshman All-American squad by the Football Writers Association of America.

• **Dec. 21, 2002** — Juan Bell, 23, a friend from Clarett's childhood in Youngstown, is shot to death in their hometown.

• **Dec. 26, 2002** — Clarett accompanies the Buckeyes on their trip to Phoenix for the Fiesta Bowl.

• **Dec. 30, 2002** — Clarett tells reporters he is unhappy because he was unable to go home for Bell's funeral.

"I'm kind of messed up because they jerked me, kind of," Clarett said of OSU officials who could not facilitate his return home to Ohio. "I'm not supposed to be here."

• **Dec. 31, 2002** — The controversy rages on at the Fiesta Bowl media day at Sun Devil Stadium. Clarett alleges that OSU officials failed to respond to his request to return home.

"Of course they're going to make themselves look better than me," Clarett said. "They're going to make me look stupid like I did something to put myself in this position."

OSU athletic director Andy Geiger says the school's hands were tied: The school could not apply for NCAA Special Assistance Fund money because Clarett's financial aid form had not been filed.

• **Jan. 3, 2003** — Once again, Clarett puts controversy aside and delivers the goods on game night as the Buckeyes claim their first national championship in 34 years at the Fiesta Bowl.

The stout Miami (Fla.) defense limits him to 47 yards on 23 carries. But he scores two of OSU's touchdowns, including the game winner in OSU's 31-24 double-overtime victory, and also strips Miami defensive back Sean Taylor of the ball after an interception.

"Maurice Clarett is a tremendous competitor," Tressel said. "He cares a lot about the team and he gives a tremendous effort."

Following the dramatic win, Clarett experienced mixed emotions: "I just want to go home," he said.

• **April 3, 2003** — Clarett dons a blue jersey, making him limited for activity due to the shoulder, at the start of spring practice.



**NAIL-BITER** — Maurice Clarett looks up at the scoreboard before scoring the game-winning touchdown in the Fiesta Bowl.

— Compiled by Steve Helwagen

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## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE RUNNING BACKS

# It Ain't Just Clarett In The Backfield

By MIKE WACHSMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

They always say you can't have too many running backs, and the Ohio State backfield is a perfect example of that.

Even with the stellar Maurice Clarett expected to be 100 percent by the beginning of the 2003 season, there is definitely a need for some depth behind him.

Clarett missed all or part of six games with a variety of injuries but still set OSU freshman records with 1,237 yards and 16 touchdowns. He showed that when healthy he's the best back on the OSU roster.

But therein lies the rub. He wasn't healthy often enough to truly be counted on, so OSU had to lean on juniors Lydell Ross and Maurice Hall to shoulder more of the load.

Clarett (see feature, pages 8-9) will likely be sidelined for a good portion of spring practice, so the onus is once again on that duo.

That's not a problem for running backs coach Tim Spencer, who wants to use the spring as a chance to solidify things in the backfield.

"We have to find ways to utilize all their talents," Spencer said. "Maurice had a good year but I think those guys

have to be ready because we had like six games where Maurice played a quarter or less and they had to step up."

Ross had 619 yards and scored six times, while Hall added 370 yards and made four trips to the end zone.

Each had his moments, but neither did enough to unseat Clarett. They likely won't do that this season, either, but both are apparently ready to take as many reps as needed during the spring.

"This is a spring where my young guys are older and it's time for them to limit their mistakes," Spencer said. "We have some new things we're working on like route running, running a little lower and staying physical, things like that. It's time to work on things we can improve on and they've said they're enthusiastic about it."

Ross (6-0, 210) is more of a shifty, between the tackles runner, while Hall (5-10, 200) likes to outrun opponents to the outside. Each has a place in the offense and Spencer said both are valuable.

"There may be only one football, and that means there will be some guys who are a little unhappy," Spencer said. "But we need Lydell and Maurice to help us. They're both talented and they both work hard, and they've shown that when called on they can produce."



JEFF BREHM

**HELL BE USED** — Maurice Hall (No. 28, scoring the winning touchdown last season against Illinois) should see plenty of action once again in 2003.

Spencer said spring also is a time for some unsung players to possibly make a name for themselves, so you can bet walk-ons such as Michael DeMaria and Roshawn Parker will give it their all this spring.

"We have some guys who probably aren't going to get a lot of reps in the fall, so this is kind of a fun time for them," Spencer said. "They get a chance to do some work, but they treat it seriously."

#### Full Of Promise

The fullback position still needs to be solidified as neither junior Branden Joe nor sophomore Brandon Schnittker has been spectacular.

Each missed time last season but appears healthy this spring, so they have plenty of chances to impress the coaches — if they do what's needed.

"One guy needs to get more physical and one guy needs to learn the plays a little bit more," Spencer said. "We have to try to find a third guy who can get in there and play because it's a demanding position. We'll maybe use a tight end in there on short yardage or in certain situations."

Joe (6-0, 245) started six games a year ago, while Schnittker (6-1, 250) started one. Walk-on John Adams should get some work here.

Each gained 1 yard on one carry a year ago, and based on the way OSU utilizes

its fullback, there probably won't be many more carries in store this season.

But that doesn't mean there isn't a need for each to excel.

"We kind of look at the fullback as another lineman, so they need to be sound with their blocking technique," Spencer said. "Neither guy has played a lot, so this is their chance to really get some good, solid reps under the belt. They need to put their best foot forward."

#### Practice Makes Perfect

Spencer said it would be easy for the veteran guys to cruise through the spring since fall is when you make your mark, but he doesn't see that happening.

And with good reason. "What you do here is a direct correlation to how you'll perform during games," Spencer said. "You have to give effort and show desire and show that you want to play. I think I have good guys and guys that are willing to do all those things."

While fundamentals will be the hallmark of the sessions, there will be quite a bit of the offense on display this spring.

"We'll throw as much at them as they can possibly handle," Spencer said. "We pretty much will work on what we need to improve on, but we're also trying to perfect the things we're good at now. So we'll work on our outside runs and we'll try to be more physical inside at the same time. We're going to try to get a lot done."

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## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE WIDE RECEIVERS

## Finding Threats Other Than Jenkins A Priority

By ERIC LOUGHRY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The strategy opposing defenses deploy against the Ohio State offense during the 2003 season will be familiar. The Buckeyes saw it all last season.

"What we saw as (last) year went, the game plan was to get as many people in the box and still double Mike Jenkins," OSU coach Jim Tressel said. "Watch all the film, that's what everybody did."

Jenkins wasn't exactly shut down, of course, pulling in 61 receptions for 1,076 yards and six touchdowns. But with more expected of the offense, finding different ways to free Jenkins up and developing other threats to make defenses pay when he isn't are objectives heading into the upcoming season.

"We've got to be good about making sure that we can come up with different places for Mike Jenkins to be where it's harder to perhaps double him," Tressel said. "And we've got to make sure that the guys in the other slots can make people pay when they're getting oned-up."

"I think you'll see that Drew Carter will be playing some of the other receiver positions other than the X (split end) position, which kind of had him line up there behind Michael.

"I think you'll see Roy Hall and Santonio Holmes given opportunities to come in and see if they can make plays. Obviously, Chris Gamble will be a part of the offensive scheme and anytime he's in there, he's explosive in his own right."

**Open Mike Night**

Jenkins made hefty strides in a steady ascent up the OSU record book last season. With a reception in 26-consecutive games, the 6-5, 215-pound Jenkins now has 110 career receptions for 2,064 yards. Both totals rank sixth all-time at Ohio State.

With another big year, Jenkins has a good shot at breaking the yardage mark (2,855) and an outside shot of besting the receptions mark (191), both held by David Boston.

"I like to progress each year," said Jenkins, a native of Tampa, Fla. "My (sophomore) year I had 49, 50-something odd catches (49) and that went up. So hopefully I can increase. And that's all you can look for, to get better with each season."

As Tressel alluded to, Jenkins is expecting double coverage. But there are answers for that.

"Teams are still going to try and double, but the coaches are coming up with ways to kind of move me around a little bit, putting me in the slot, putting me in motion and things like that," Jenkins



DARRELL DAWSON

**THANKS FOR STAYING** — The NFL spurned, wide receiver Michael Jenkins will instead set his sights on assaulting the OSU record book. With another strong season, he could approach David Boston's school record for receiving yardage.

said. "And our other receivers, they can make plays, too."

**Chris Is Not A Gamble**

Gamble (6-2, 180) was second on the team last season with 31 receptions. He is a threat whenever on the field but came to be known more for his exploits as a two-way starter late in the season.

Whether any other receivers come into their own this season could go a long way in determining how Gamble's playing time is divided up.

Gamble remains more comfortable in the offense and expects to spend more time working with the defense in the spring, which he sees as a bonus for the other wideouts.

"Me playing DB is probably going to help guys like Drew (Carter) and Bam (Childress) and Santonio Holmes get some playing time and let them get a feel for the game," Gamble said.

**How Do You Drew?**

Carter missed the 2001 season with ankle and knee injuries but rebounded to catch 10 passes for 147 yards in a backup role last year.

Heading into his senior campaign, the 6-4, 200-pound speedster is set on showing what his teammates and coaches have been waiting to see.

"I know it's time for me to step up," Carter said. "The coaches have really instilled that. They tell me I have the ability. But I just have to step up and I have to have the belief that I'm able to do it every day I come out here and dominate."

"That's my main goal, just to come out here and show that I'm able to do everything."

Along with Jenkins, Carter spent the winter running track to work on his speed. He was one of OSU's returning players to work out at the pro timing day held at OSU March 14 and reportedly ran in the mid-4.2 range.

"Drew has a lot of talent," Jenkins said. "He's probably one of the most talented guys on our team. He's one of the fastest. I think he'll step

in and do a good job this year.

"His confidence will grow as he gets a chance to play more and more."

Besides working on his speed, Carter also spent a lot of time this off-season studying film so he can understand the game to a fuller extent.

"I come out here and just try to show the coaches that I'm capable of being on the field and I'm ready," Carter said. "I think it's more studying film, more (time) in the team room just studying and getting to know the defense and the coverages."

"I think that's the main thing I have to work on this spring."

Carter and quarterback Craig Krenzel have not hooked up many times in games, but the two have connected countless times since coming to Columbus coming up through the ranks. The two were roommates at one point.

"Craig and I, we've been together since our freshman year, so we really have a bond together," Carter said. "And I think I'm able to show what I can do."

**Waiting In The Wings**

Carter isn't the only OSU receiver waiting to seize the moment.

Junior flanker Bam Childress (5-10, 185), maybe the shiftiest and most elusive of the receiving corps, had four receptions last season.

Flanker Santonio Holmes (5-11, 170) and split end Roy Hall (6-3, 228) are both looking to show what they can do after being redshirted last season.

"Those guys are real hungry right now to get out there and show what they can do," Jenkins said. "Everybody wants to get on the field. They've been working hard in the off-season. They're learning their plays and I think they'll have a good spring."

Senior Maurice Lee (5-10, 180) and juniors Angelo Chattams (5-11, 185) and John Hollins (6-2, 205) also are in the fold this spring.

Chattams is back on the squad after missing most of last season due to legal concerns (see Ohio State Insider, pages 4-5).

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OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE TIGHT ENDS

# Hartsock Earnestly Learning The Complete Game

By ERIC LOUGHRY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the record, Ben Hartsock had 17 receptions last season, a total that was hardly traffic-stopping, though it was the third-highest reception total for OSU.

Hartsock (6-4, 264) couldn't tell you how many grabs he had last season, though. So he won't speculate on whether he'll have more or less this coming season.

"I don't know how many I caught last year," he said. "I didn't catch very many, but we still won and I'm happy with that."

"I'm not concerned with numbers. I'm not real concerned with stats. I just have to take on a role as a senior that if it's needed for me to make more catches and make more plays, then I need to be able to do that."

Just how many more balls are thrown toward the tight ends might just be up to them, Hartsock said.

"Whenever we're asked to run a route or whenever we're trying out a play or a new route for the tight end, it's kind of up to that personnel," Hartsock said. "If you aren't able to run that route successfully the first couple of days, the coaches will get nervous with it and they'll throw it out."

"So it's really a challenge to us to make sure that we become a part of the

offense."

Hartsock has challenged himself to get a firmer grasp of the offense before his final season. Watching film in the winter, he realized that knowing the responsibilities of all the linemen, as center Alex Stepanovich does, would enable him to raise his game.

"I think I'm really trying to just gain more perspective on the whole offense as a unit," he said. "Making sure that I understand not just my assignment and how I need to do it, but the concept of the play."

"Because when you really get an understanding and know what's going on over on the opposite tackle, you can really understand flow. And once you understand where you need to be in the concept and in that scheme a little bit better, you don't have to do so much thinking."

### The Mentor

Another one of Hartsock's primary objectives in the spring is to



STEVE HELWAGEN

**ONUS IS ON THEM** — Ben Hartsock (88) said if he and the other OSU tight ends want the ball passed to them, they have to make sure they do everything right, beginning with running the correct routes.

help mentor those behind him on the depth chart.

"He is the leader of the tight ends," OSU tight ends coach Bill Conley said. "He has the experience. He's a super intelligent kid, he's a great student, just a real solid individual."

"He's like a coach on the field."

That's a hat Hartsock doesn't mind wearing.

"I guess my role with those guys is I just really try to coach them up," Hartsock said. "With as much experience, as long as I've been here, I just try to be a coach to them."

"And they have questions. This is a chance right now when you don't have the pressure of a game on Saturday where you have to be worried about that kind of stuff. You can really break down and try some different things with your techniques and maybe develop a new style or new technique that can really benefit you."

### Full Cast

Besides Hartsock, Conley also has sophomore Ryan Hamby (6-5, 240) back in the fold. The Cincinnati Moeller product hauled in just two passes last season but, as the No. 2 tight end, started five games in a two-tight end formation and played extensively throughout the season.

Continued On Page 41



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## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE OFFENSIVE LINE

# O-Linemen Pushing Each Other To Perform

By STEVE HELWAGEN  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State's offensive line — an Achilles' heel most of the last several years — legitimized itself somewhat during the team's national championship run last year.

But even with five seniors returning in the starting lineup, there is plenty of room for improvement up front, according to OSU head coach Jim Tressel.

"I think it is good that we have guys pushing each other," Tressel said. "I don't think I'm ready to sit here and say we have a dominant offensive line returning. I think we would be kidding ourselves to say that."

"Can we have better numbers and some talent there? Yes, but we have a lot of work to get there."

For the first time in recent memory, the Buckeyes will have enough scholarship linemen in spring football to field two full lines. That is the case even without two-year starting right tackle Shane Olivea, out after undergoing shoulder surgery this winter.

"We've had some injuries and some unusual things happen in the past, like Ivan Douglas and the (blood) clots," Tressel said. "We have not had the numbers situation we'd like it to be."

"But I applaud (offensive coordinator/line coach) Jim Bollman and Bill Conley with our tight ends. They're not concerned with what they've had. They've said, 'Here's the guys we've got and we've just got to make them the best they can be.'"

While the OSU offense did not set many records during the team's landmark 14-0 season, it was still adequate enough to bring home the championship hardware.

"It felt pretty good to be out there last

year," said senior Alex Stepanovich, who enjoyed a fine first season as the starter at center. "You never want to let your teammates down, so you work hard on preparation. The guys next to me gave some great effort as well. I was happy to be a part of what happened."

Bollman is banking on a more consistent effort by the line, both in opening lanes for the running backs and in keeping quarterback Craig Krenzler upright.

"We want to be a balanced offense and that starts with the play up front," he said.

## Center Of Attention

Stepanovich could be OSU's top returning lineman. He was named the team's offensive lineman of the week in seven games last season.

He is listed at 6-4, 310 pounds but told reporters at the start of spring drills that he had dropped some weight.

"I have lost 30 pounds," Stepanovich said. "I weigh 295 right now. Coach Tressel talks about perfecting everything and that is what I've tried to do. I'm comfortable. I think I move as well at 295 as I did when I played at 315 or more. I feel good."

"A lot of guys up front have changed their diet. That just keeps us healthier without sacrificing strength. A lot of guys have worked hard this winter. It's all about trying to stay healthy over a long season."

OSU is touting Stepanovich as an All-American candidate as well as potential Rimington Award winner as the nation's top center. But, just as he did a year ago, Stepanovich also may see some time at guard when Nick Mangold (6-4, 280), now a sophomore, enters the lineup at center.

"You always have personal goals you want to achieve," Stepanovich said. "But sometimes you have to sacrifice yourself for the team because that is the most



STEVE HELWAGEN

**POSITIONAL BATTLE** — Both have experience. Both have started. What remains to be seen is whether Rob Sims (left) or Ivan Douglas will be the primary left tackle this season.

important thing. I think when the team succeeds, you see that you're able to achieve more of your personal goals anyway."

Stepanovich said he was eager to experiment this spring.

"I am sure this spring I will move over and play some at guard. The more versatile we are the better. Last year, I played some there when Adrien (Clarke) and Mike (Stafford) were injured. I'm sure there may be times when they bring Nick in and I go over to guard."

## Plenty Of Bodies

While Olivea figures to return to his usual right tackle spot this fall, there could be a strong battle at left tackle.

Senior Ivan Douglas (6-8, 305) is listed

as the starter. But sophomore Rob Sims (6-4, 305) also is in the running after starting five games — including the Fiesta Bowl — last year.

"We were able to play a couple of our young guys like Rob Sims and Nick Mangold last year, and we feel real good about how they played," Bollman said. "But we need them to get more reps."

With Olivea out, Douglas and Sims will rep almost exclusively with the first team. Senior walk-on Mike Kne (6-4, 300) is listed as Olivea's backup and also could get a strong look.

"This is a chance, too, to get Mike Kne some more experience," Bollman said. "He played well in our Jumbo package last year and this spring could really help him."

Sophomore Ryan Cook (6-7, 305) and redshirt freshman Doug Datish (6-5, 290) also are in the running at tackle.

Seniors Clarke (6-5, 355) and Bryce Bishop (6-3, 312) are penciled in as the starters at left and right guard, respectively. Clarke has started 30 of the team's 38 games over the last three years, while Bishop has two full years (26 games) of starting experience.

Sophomores Adam Olds (6-4, 290) and Andrew Tyree (6-3, 280) and redshirt freshman R.J. Coleman (6-5, 290) are listed as backups at guard.

Olds missed most of last year due to injury. Tyree spent part of last season working at fullback. Coleman is a converted tight end who impressed the coaches with his improved strength during the winter program.

"We also want to take long looks at (redshirts) R.J. Coleman and Doug Datish," Bollman said. "Those are two pretty good football players and we need to see where they best fit in."

One more scholarship player, redshirt freshman T.J. Downing (6-5, 280), will be limited this spring as he continues to recover from injuries suffered when he slipped on an icy sidewalk this winter.

Walk-ons John Conroy (6-3, 275), Ben Nash (6-3, 275) and Steve Winner (6-6, 270) also are in camp this spring.

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## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL

## First Spring Practice Goes According To Plan

Each year, we try to bring you some of the flavor from OSU's spring football practice.

But this year, practice will be open to the media only at selected times on selected days. For instance, only the last half hour of the first practice, held April 3, was open. Subsequent practices on April 4-5 were closed.

But we will do our best to bring you the sights and sounds — as much as we see and hear — of spring ball.

## April 3

There's a certain amount of truth to the notion that Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel controls just about everything surrounding the Buckeyes football program.

So it came as no surprise that the weather — which may be beyond even Tressel's control, but we're still checking on that — was about as perfect and controlled as could be as OSU opened spring practice.

The Buckeyes took to the field under bright sunshine and seemed ready to go, though quite a few players admitted to being tired after a little lull between the end of winter conditioning and drills.

"We were real fortunate with the weather," Tressel smiled. "To have a 70-some degree day after the winter we've had, that made it exciting."

OSU tight end Ben Hartsoc echoed those thoughts, saying there's a lot of monotony working out in the weight room and on the indoor turf field.

"It was great to get out there. The air at the Woody Hayes (facility) gets a little stagnant after a while," he chuckled. "We all understand that this is the first step on a long road, but it's a road we went down last year."

"We probably put the season behind us after returning from the White House trip. We had all been kind of high from that, but now we realize what's ahead of us."

The spotlight will be on a defense that lost some vital components, including its strength up the middle.

Gone are defensive tackle Kenny Peterson, middle linebacker Matt Wilhelm and safeties Mike Doss and Donnie Nickey. In their places are a bevy of new faces and guys itching to take the field on upcoming fall Saturdays.

"We have a lot of young guys who are trying to fit in and figure out where they're supposed to go," Tressel said. "It's kind of fun to see that again."

Just like the season, spring football is a time for rebirth. Veterans get back to the grind, content with their lot but not with their performance, while younger players attempt to find their way amid a sea of talent. Seeing how different players respond is part of the fun.

"The guys are really anxious," Tressel said. "They're all on so many different levels, which is the way many teams are. You have guys like Craig Krenzel who has one year left and wants to prove that he's an extraordinary leader, and there's a Jay Richardson who redshirted last year and wants to prove he can step up and help the guys on Saturdays. It's fun to watch the guys grow."

Here are a few notables following OSU's opening day of spring drills, when the Buckeyes practiced in helmets, jerseys and shorts.

• Tressel discussed whether he'll

## SPRING DIARY

with  
Mike Wachsman

hold out some star players, a la Wisconsin coach Barry Alvarez: "We'll find out by the spring game if we have any stars. We'll see once the game comes around how we'll divide things. Safety is a big issue but not at the expense of becoming a better team."

• Krenzel looked steady under center, though the wind kicked up and messed with his passes on occasion. He had a couple of nice completions on deep outs near the sideline as practice wound down.

• The linebackers were moving all around, playing outside and inside, something Tressel said is very important. With the departure of Wilhelm and Cie Grant, starting jobs are up for grabs.

"Mark Snyder has those guys learning a lot of different things," Tressel said. "We need them to be versatile."

Notable in the linebacker group was sophomore Thomas Matthews, a converted safety.

• Punter B.J. Sander provided the goof of the day when he dropped a perfect pass while running a route.

"He's a better punter than receiver. The ball kind of turned him upside down and he flopped like a brook trout on the bank," Tressel said.

• OSU's receiving corps seems to be as deep and talented as any in the nation. Michael Jenkins is back as the go-to guy, with Chris Gamble still in the mix — though he said he'll be playing a bit more on defense this year.

Add Drew Carter, Roy Hall, Santonio Holmes, Bam Childress and Angelo Chattams to the fray — not to mention incoming freshmen Devin Jordan, Tony Gonzalez and Dareus Hiley (the last two are listed as dual-purpose threats) — and it appears that Ohio State has both barrels full.

But Tressel doesn't want to proclaim the Buckeyes the second coming of San Diego's Air Coryell just yet.

"It's a little premature to talk about a couple of guys who have been redshirted as us being loaded," Tressel said. "I like what I've seen from Santonio Holmes and Roy Hall, and we have some guys coming in who are very skillful. But you have to see them do it a little bit more in real life before I'm ready to say we're loaded."

• In team action, redshirt freshman Troy Smith threw a strike to tight end Jason Caldwell on a slant. Caldwell then turned upfield and showed good speed in outracing much of the defense.

• Also, backup quarterback Scott McMullen overthrew a pass in the flat for tight end Redgie Arden. Lurking linebacker Jason Bond made the easy pick and returned it for what would have been a likely touchdown.

• Incoming freshmen Donte Whitner and Ashton Youboty both enjoyed their first full practice as Buckeyes after enrolling winter quarter. Likewise, Air Force transfer Anthony Schlegel, a middle linebacker, saw his first action after enrolling at the start of spring quarter.



STEVE HELWAGEN

**THE NEW GUYS** — As Maurice Claret did this time last year, cornerbacks Ashton Youboty (26) and Donte Whitner are practicing for Ohio State before their high school classmates even graduate.

Whitner was spotted running stride for stride with a receiver during the team drills.

## April 4-5 And Beyond

Rain forced the Buckeyes inside April 4. The bad weather had passed through a day later, though, allowing the team to practice outside.

Looking ahead, OSU had 3:15 p.m. practices scheduled for April 8, 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23 and 25.

Plus there will be a scrimmage April 12 at Ohio Stadium. That is closed to the public.

The public is invited to attend the special teams scrimmage, set for 3:15 p.m. April 18 at Ohio Stadium. ESPN's "College Game Day" will tape portions of that practice for use in the weeks ahead.

Spring drills will end April 26 with the Scarlet and Gray Game at Ohio Stadium. Tickets are \$5 each for that game, set for a 1:30 p.m. start.

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## COVER STORY: WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



PETER BICK/AFTER IMAGE PHOTO

**STRONG SOPHOMORE** — The play of Ohio State guard Caity Matter, who scored a team-high 15.4 points per game, was one reason the Buckeyes found success this season.

## Wins Over AZ, UVA Got Ball Rolling

Continued From Page 1

They could get physical or they could play up-tempo, and there was no definitive way to stop them. There was enough offense from all corners that they became a tough match-up for just about everyone.

But what really set them apart from the pack was their eye-popping 56.4 points allowed, a figure that ranked fifth nationally and kept OSU in just about every game.

"Defense can bail you out of some situations," Foster said. "By the end of the year the kids really wanted to play defense. If you aren't hitting on offense, you can still have something to fall back on. If you can make it tough for the other team and take them out of a rhythm, you've got a chance.

"The games we didn't play well were cases of us not playing sound defensive basketball."

**Early Bumps In The Road**

The Buckeyes got off to a fairly inauspicious start, opening at just 3-2 with road losses to Villanova and Wisconsin-Green Bay.

But confidence was buoyed a short time later as OSU posted back-to-back convincing wins over ranked foes Arizona and Virginia at home, and it was off to the races at that point.

"What that did was give us a good measure of what we were good at and what we needed to work on," Foster said of the early portion of the schedule. "It showed us that there is another level we had to aspire to, and we weren't there yet. That was when we weren't a very good halfcourt team. It takes time to learn something like that when you haven't been used to playing that way."

OSU opened Big Ten play with a convincing win over Northwestern before beginning the new year by facing its most potent opponent to date — Texas.

The Longhorns, who went on to make the Final Four, watched OSU get out to a big lead and hang on for a four-point win. Not coincidentally, that also was the game where freshman guard Kim Wilburn made her presence felt for really the first time, handing out nine assists and nabbing five steals against a quick Texas squad.

She would go on to be OSU's stabilizing force down the stretch, no small accomplishment when one realizes she was just finishing high school less than a year ago.

"I think when it really started clicking for us is when Kim started understanding what we wanted from her," Foster said. "She has a very good understanding of things, but she's young and hasn't experienced everything yet. There were times where she had that deer in the headlights look, but there were also times where she took over and made sound decisions and put us in position to make plays.

"You like to see that progress during a season because so often you go as your point guard goes. I think she has a

chance to be something special before she finishes here."

**Rallying From Adversity**

OSU put together a fairly solid league campaign, rebounding nicely from a bad loss at Indiana Jan. 12 after blowing an eight-point lead with eight minutes left.

The Buckeyes failed to win on the road in league play during the month of February, but Foster could see the dark cloud lifting even as the losses continued.

"It finally sunk in that you have to have the right attitude on the road," Foster said. "We were a very poor road team early, but as we gained experience it got better. The way we played at Purdue (a five-point loss) and Michigan State (a one-point loss) late in the year and the way we played at the Big Ten tournament was very encouraging. Those are things we can build on."

An arm injury to center LaToya Turner suffered against Minnesota Feb. 6 could have been a harbinger of things to come, but the Buckeyes stayed tough and closed out the year with home wins against Purdue and Michigan — both featuring a recovered Turner. The 6-4 junior did a lot to give OSU's interior defense a shot in the arm.

That put the Buckeyes into fourth place in the Big Ten, their highest finish since doing the same in 1999 — which was also the last time the Buckeyes made the NCAA Tournament.

OSU then reeled off wins over Michigan State and conference regular-season champion Penn State in the Big Ten tournament in Indianapolis. A heart-breaking two-point loss to Purdue followed in the championship game, but the Buckeyes seemed to be peaking at the right time.

"We had a lot of confidence by the end of the year," Foster said. "Confident teams are successful teams. If you believe you can win from the minute you walk out on the court, you can win."

Much of the genesis of the Buckeyes' ascent can be traced to their late summer trip to Europe, where they went 5-0 and got their first experience with Foster's philosophies.

"Europe was an outstanding experience for us," Foster said. "Rather than starting the season not familiar with each other and worrying about things when practice opened, we had a chance to work on things in game settings. There's no way to put a value on that trip."

It didn't hurt that the Buckeyes were willing subjects when the coaches wanted to shake things up and take them out of their comfort zones.

"We wanted to get them to work on things they weren't comfortable with," Foster said. "The worst thing you can be in basketball is one-dimensional. We wanted our post players to be able to hit the foul-line jumper, to handle the ball, to drive to the basket from outside the paint. All those things.

"We wanted our guards to rebound and post up. Basketball is about creating mismatches and finding the easiest ways to score. We did that much better at the end of the season."

**IN AN UPCOMING EDITION** — BSB will look ahead to next season, when Foster will have three returning starters — Turner, Wilburn and guard Caity Matter.



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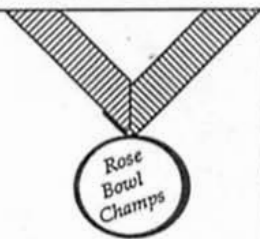


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## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE TIGHT ENDS

## A Bigger, Stronger Version Of Hamby

Continued From Page 12

"As a freshman, that's a big responsibility for him," Hartssock said. "So the coaches have a lot of confidence in him and he's going out and working as hard to push me. Just like when Darnell Sanders was a starter, I tried to push him as hard as I could because that's how you make each other better."

Hamby is still listed at the same weight as he was at the end of last season but clearly has added some muscle to his frame in the off-season.

"Ryan's gained some weight and some strength," Conley said. "He's one of those guys who was kind of our second tight end last year. Again, he has to keep improving, keep getting more physical and getting better running his routes."

Also a redshirt freshman last season, Redgie Arden (6-4,

240) returns. He had four receptions last season, including three for 36 yards against Indiana. He also garnered a start, stepping into the double-tight end formation at Illinois.

Both Arden and Stan White, who came to OSU last year as a highly regarded linebacker but was switched over to tight end in the fall, will take on double duty a la Chris Gamble and work out on both sides of the ball in the spring, each also getting a look at linebacker.

"Right now, Redgie and Stan are both guys that potentially may end up on either side of the ball," Conley said.

Jason Caldwell (6-5, 265) played sparingly in six games last season after missing the 2001 campaign because of shoulder surgery following spring practice that year. Sophomore walk-on David Andrews (5-11, 245) also has struggled with injuries.

"Unfortunately, they've been hurt a little bit and hopefully they can get back in this spring and show us what they can do physically," Conley said.

## RECRUITING PROFILE

## Harris Faced Tough Teams At Oak Hill

Continued From Page 20

go as freshmen. They've already been through a lot of the things they'll see at the college level. I think in that respect that Ivan will step up and play well at that next level."

• **Player's Perspective:** Harris said the chance to better prepare himself for the Big Ten is exactly what attracted him to Oak Hill.

"Oak Hill Academy was the No. 1 school in the nation. They play against top competition, so I decided to go there and play against the best, make my game better," he said.

Harris got some public flak for leaving rival Springfield North to attend South then moving again. But he's always stayed true to Ohio State and trying to improve himself. That's why he took advice from O'Brien and his father, Mike, last summer.

"All the coaches and my parents have always told me to just play physical," he said. "I went out to the ABCD camp and I just played physical. I started (playing well) and scoring and rebounding. I had a great time there in New Jersey."

Harris said he is open to playing either forward spot for the Buckeyes.

"I can play both the four (power forward) and the small forward. I think I can play both positions," he said. "I'm a versatile player. I can play outside or in. I'll go wherever Coach O'Brien needs me to go."

Harris committed to Ohio State soon after his sophomore season, feeling there was no reason to stretch out the process.

When asked why he chose OSU, he said, "It's the coaching staff. O'Brien's a great coach. Plus it's closer to home and I really didn't want to go far away from home. I just wanted to stay close and stay with my parents so I could go home."

"But I love the coaching staff and the players on the team."

• **What Lies Ahead:** Another busy summer is in store for Harris, who said he will enroll for summer quarter at Ohio State in June to get used to the campus and begin working out with the team. He also hopes to play in the Worthington Summer League, if that league can stay afloat.

Harris was scheduled to play with a touring team overseas, but that plan has been canceled because of war in the Middle East. That will allow him even more time to train in OSU strength and conditioning coach Anthony Glass' off-season program.

"It sounds pretty intense," Harris said. "They said they go out and run three miles and come back and lift. We don't do all that at Oak Hill. I think Ohio State will really prepare me."

However, even if Harris can add some bulk, he still knows his key to success is to play at a high energy level.

"It does make a difference but it's still about hustle and smarts," he said. "There are people more physical than me but I do OK when I stay active. You really don't have to be physical all the time. Endurance is big, though. If you have endurance you can run all day."

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Careful With Broad Brush

This letter is in response to Tom Gilbeaut's letter entitled "Smart to Dumb" (BSB Letters, March 29). Mr. Gilbeaut defends coach Jim O'Brien from the critics who are upset with O'Brien's recruiting policies. In addition, Gilbeaut mentions former Ohio State basketball players during the Randy Ayers era who were recruited from Ohio simply because of location, rather than their playing ability.

One name mentioned was "the immortal Doug Etzler," as Gilbeaut put it. Has he forgotten that Doug holds Ohio State's record for most points scored in a single game since he played in 1995?

Has Gilbeaut forgotten that Doug Etzler made more three-point field goals in a single season than any other OSU player until Scoonie Penn broke his record in 1999? Does Mr. Gilbeaut realize that Doug Etzler was an Academic All-Big Ten student-athlete?

All of these accomplishments despite the fact that many of the players on the team during Doug Etzler's playing days were being kicked off due to unlawful actions. Quite the contrary to Mr. Gilbeaut's statement, I believe that Doug Etzler "stepped up to the line" quite nicely after one point guard was kicked off the team and another transferred to Kentucky because of Ohio State recruitment violations.

Even today Doug Etzler is a role model for the hundreds of students he has taught in the classroom. In addition, Doug Etzler is one of the finest basketball coaches and mentors of youth that northwest Ohio has ever seen.

Doug Etzler is a solid citizen who gave 110 percent for Ohio State all four years of his college career. He most

assuredly is the definition of a true "student-athlete."

Julie Lundin  
Lima, Ohio

## Credit To O'Brien

I am not a basketball fan. Very simply, I don't particularly like the game, never have. Nevertheless, I do get semi-interested at tournament time. Blessed with a non-Florida stretch of rotten weather, I watched the magnificent performance of O'Brien's outmanned, obviously (even to me!) less talented Buckeyes, fighting their way to the championship game of the Big Ten tournament.

Their gritty, gutsy performance can be favorably compared to the football team's drive to a national championship, even though they came up short. They certainly made me proud to be a Buckeye. How any fan could possibly be critical of Coach O'Brien after the Bucks' performance in the Big Ten tournament is beyond me.

Just as an aside, every year we are treated to an annual diatribe from Mike Wachman about the "meaningless" bowl games in football. How about the meaningless NIT?

I mean, the basketball gurus have picked the 64 (65 if you count the play-in game) "best" college basketball teams for the NCAA Tournament to decide a national champion.

Why then the NIT? Tradition? More than bowls? Or is it maybe that Mike is a "basketball guy" — which is certainly OK, but cut us "football guys" some slack, will you? Bowls are football's NIT.

Pete Lively  
St. Augustine, Fla.

## Pain, Gloom, Misery Gone

First, I wish to praise you on the super quality and in-depth coverage of BSB.

My main concern for writing you are the crybabies that criticize the football program and this past recruiting class. I am 66 years young and can speak somewhat on OSU football history.

I grew up with OSU football on our table, right next to the bread and butter. I (and many others) have just lived through what I like to call "13 years of the road to perdition."

Now we are blessed with Andy Geiger and Jim Tressel, two people that have put OSU football right back where Woody had it, No. 1 in all of college football. Pain, gloom and misery are gone.

Chic Ulrich  
Kent, Ohio

## A Hollow Victory

While the biggest question left in the rubble of the men's basketball season is who tossed in the towel sooner, the coaching staff or selected players, the "Bass Bucket" was a great story, albeit with the timing falling short.

In the Hollywood-inspired ending many anticipate in sports, Charles Bass would have clinched an NCAA tourney spot for the Buckeyes with his clunky free throw. Of course, the club would then have notched a couple of unexpected wins before finally dropping a nail-biter vs. a highly rated club.

The reality was the unlikely heroics led to two all-too-typical blowout losses and questions on how the coaching staff can handle adversity during a rocky year.

Next season will be the third chapter in Coach O'Brien's book — the first being the rise from the ashes in the Scoonie Penn and Michael Redd years, the second being the dip into the second division of a weak Big Ten.

And it will soon be chronicled if the coaching staff has the courage and energy to tackle a task that can't be penned by the Saturday heroics of a player like Charles Bass.

Richard Coreno  
Berea, Ohio

## Keys To Success

Ohio State did play some good basketball in the Big Ten tournament with upset wins over Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan State before losing to a better Illinois team. Zach Williams' bad behavior hurts himself and the team. He needs to straighten up or get off the team.

Once gain, better recruiting and a stronger team discipline will only bring the Buckeyes basketball back to success.

Don Spronk  
Cincinnati

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## THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

## OSU Offense: Are We Talkin' 'Bout An Evolution?

This issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin features a spring look at the Ohio State football team's offense. With all 11 starters back, it would seem to be the less interesting side of the ball from a fan standpoint, with the position battles shaping up primarily on defense.

As I think about it, I can't help but remember the old good news, bad news gag. You know: "The good news is all 11 starters on offense are back. The bad news is all 11 starters on offense are back."

After all, the offense was hardly the team's strength during last year's national championship run, especially down the stretch when it became more and more predictable and less and less productive. Still, the Buckeyes won and that's the bottom line.

I can't help but think about something a fan told me over the winter. I was suggesting that Jim Tressel, who is much more involved with the offense than the defense, should bring in a creative offensive coordinator and let him run the show.

This fan, who was familiar with Tressel from his days at Youngstown State, disagreed. He maintained that Tressel was a master at utilizing what he had and last year the coach knew he had a stout defense and a strong punter, so he designed the offense to make few mistakes and let the Buckeyes play a game of field position.

If that was the strategy, it worked. The offense, this observer claimed, would evolve (and theoretically open up) as the Buckeyes' personnel evolved.

Well it's time to evolve. It is doubtful that the OSU defense, minus five outstanding starters and leaders, will be as dominant as it was last season. And it looks like the weapons are there on offense.

I don't think anyone, even Tressel, could have realized how good a quarterback Craig Krenzel would prove to be. He may not be a passer in the mold of a Joe Germaine, but when you surround him with the type of playmakers he is blessed with and couple that with his confidence, smarts, toughness and flair for the game, you have a national championship-caliber quarterback. Hopefully, Krenzel will be given more of a chance to produce this year.

He has a star running back at his disposal in Maurice Clarett. Clarett is backed by Lydell Ross and Maurice Hall, who would be starting at virtually any school in the country. Krenzel has a star receiver in Michael Jenkins, a player who — like Krenzel and Clarett — has a knack for making the big play.

Jenkins is complemented by two-way star Chris Gamble. Hopefully, several from a bevy of other receivers will step up to spell Gamble so that he can concentrate more on cornerback, where the Buckeyes have less options.

Tight end Ben Hartssock should be one of the best in the Big Ten, if not the nation, in his senior year. I really like something Hartssock said at the start of spring practice.

"Whenever we're asked to run a route or whenever we're trying out a play or a new route for the tight end, it's kind of up to that personnel," he said. "If you aren't able to run that route successfully the first couple of days, the coaches will get nervous and they'll throw it out."

I thought this showed real savvy on the part of Hartssock, the kind of savvy championship teams have.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH  
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

It's real easy for the tight ends or the fans to say throw more to the tight ends (who caught a combined 23 passes last season). But if it doesn't appear that the tight ends can execute those passing plays, it's doubtful that a coach with five national championships under his belt is going to call that number.

You get the impression, however, that Hartssock — who had 17 catches and two touchdowns last season — is going to try to make sure the coaches think he is a viable option.

With so many players capable of gobbling up chunks of yardage, it looks like — play-calling willing — the success of the Ohio State offense will come down to the offensive line, as the success of an offense so often does.

Will the line be the ultimate good-news, bad-news scenario on this offense? After all, the starters are all back, but they weren't moving people around as much as I would have liked late last season and the Buckeyes gave up 18 of their 32 sacks in the second half of the season.

I think the offensive line will be better.

With Rob Sims and Nick Mangold having seen extensive action as freshmen last season, there is much more experience this time around. That will make for more competition in practice, which makes everyone better. The increased depth will keep the big guys from having to pull ironman duty, and the coaches will be much more willing to make a move if a lineman is tired or struggling.

One thing I would like to see is the Buckeyes use the fullback a little more. Brandon Joe and Brandon Schnittker carried the ball a combined two times last year. Schnittker added two receptions, including his big catch in the Michigan game on a pass which apparently was not being thrown to him.

Fullback has always been primarily a blocking position at Ohio State, but if you take the fullback out of the ball-handling picture that much, it is almost like the defense is playing 11 on 10. It would be nice to at least keep the opposing defenses honest.

Perhaps the combined 2 yards that Joe and Schnittker gained on their two carries points back to Hartssock's comment. If the coaches don't think you can produce, they won't call your number.

Still, I'd like to see the duo get a little bit more of a chance before writing them off.

**Leaner And Meaner**

I have long felt that Ohio State may have overemphasized bulk on the offensive line at the expense of speed and, perhaps, conditioning. Way too many times, the Buckeyes seemed to feature huge offensive linemen who looked, well, flabby.

When you consider that OSU seemed to have a penchant for wearing down late in games during the previous regime, it made you wonder if some of the big guys would have been better served if they were carrying around a little less excess baggage.

With that thought in mind, I took notice of some quotes from center Alex Stepanovich elsewhere in this issue.

Stepanovich, who is listed at 6-4, 310 in the spring prospectus, said that he's

dropped 30 pounds, down to 295. That math makes you wonder about some of the weights of assorted other linemen through the years who, while listed above 300, still looked much larger than their roster weights.

"I think I move as well at 295 as I did when I played at 315 or more," Stepanovich said. "I feel good."

"A lot of guys up front have changed their diet. That just keeps us healthier without sacrificing strength. A lot of guys have worked hard this winter. It's all about trying to stay healthy over a long season."

Couple Stepanovich's comments about the line with the fact that the Buckeye brain trust has moved redshirt freshman R.J. Coleman (6-5, 265) from tight end to a

down line position and OSU's lone offensive line recruit this February, Kirk Barton (6-6, 275), was also a tight end in high school and you see a pattern developing.

Only time will tell if a leaner, quicker offensive line is a more effective — and successful — one.

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