

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 26, 2008

## Finding The Right Mixture

### Tressel May Look To Past Teams In Building '08 Offensive Attack

By ADAM JARDY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Call Jim Tressel the puzzle-maker.

As the Ohio State head coach puts the pieces together for an offense that hopes to have firepower to put the Buckeyes back at the top of the national rankings, Tressel is drawing on some familiar inspiration.

Start with a liberal dose of Troy Smith at quarterback, fully confident at his position after more than a year's worth of starting experience. From there, add in the playmaking abilities of wideouts Anthony Gonzalez, Santonio Holmes and Ted Ginn Jr. and their ability to stretch opposing defenses.

A good passing game needs solid contributions from the rushing attack, so a formidable tailback such as Antonio Pittman rushing behind an offensive line that boasts players such as Nick Mangold, Rob Sims and T.J. Downing, among others, is also critical.

Add it all up, and it comes to some of the most explosive offensive attacks in OSU history – the Buckeye teams of 2005 and 2006. Those two teams averaged 422.3 and 384.5 yards, respectively, as Ohio State put together back-to-back Big Ten titles.

While those numbers do not match the offensive totals the Buckeyes put together in the mid-1990s when OSU led the conference in total offense three times during a four-year stretch (478.6 yards per game in 1995, 440.4 one year later and 497.6 yards in 1997), they are the blueprints Tressel said he is drawing from as he tries to assemble his 2008 offense.

In 2005, Smith ran an offense OSU offensive coordinator Jim Bollman described as the most spread-oriented the Buckeyes have run since Tressel took over in 2001. Smith was almost as likely to take off and run with the ball – either on a designed run or after the pocket broke down – as he was to put it in the air.

A year later, with Smith more mature as a passer and the coaching staff desiring to limit how



JOSH WINSLOW

**GETTING OFFENSIVE** – Ohio State welcomes back one of the most veteran rosters in college football for the 2008 season including nearly every top offensive performer from a year ago such as wide receiver Brian Hartline (9) and quarterback Todd Boeckman (17).

many hits he had to absorb, the attack was molded to allow the quarterback to utilize the team's myriad playmakers at wide receiver while also relying on a powerful ground attack to pick up big chunks of yardage.

This year, the challenge is to take the best of the 2005 and '06 seasons, blend them together and come up with an offensive attack capable of putting the Buckeyes over their national championship hump.

"I think probably we need to find that happy medium somewhere in between '05 and '06 to be who we are," Tressel said. "We have to find that right amount (of balance)."

While Ohio State had Pittman putting together back-to-back 1,000 yard seasons before declaring early for the NFL draft last spring, this year's Buckeye attack will feature a back who was Pittman's primary understudy in his final season – Chris "Beanie" Wells, who earned first-team All-Big Ten honors last season after rushing for 1,609 yards, the fourth-highest single-season yardage total in OSU history.

It is no surprise, then, that this year's Buckeye attack will feature liberal doses of Wells.

"If I were a defensive coach, I would like to see Beanie at a split back and not running downhill at me," Tressel said. "Every time he's not in the I (formation), I would be happy as a defensive coach."

"I don't want to make defensive coaches happy."

#### What It Could Look Like

For most people, the first thing that pops to mind when thinking of the 2005 and 2006 seasons is Smith using both his feet and his arm to leave would-be defenders – particularly those wearing maize and blue – grasping at thin air.

To be able to produce a blend of what those teams were capable of doing will seemingly require a lot out of quarterback Todd Boeckman, now entering his senior season. Although he passed for the fifth-highest single-season yardage total in OSU history in his first year as the starter under center last season, Boeckman is not renowned for his running abilities.

Not even the St. Henry, Ohio, native himself would tell you he is a mobile quarterback.

"I wouldn't say mobile," he said. "Nothing like ... no, no I wouldn't. If I have to pull it down, I'm going to do it, but I'd say I'm more of a dropback passer."

When forced to run, Boeckman did show an ability to evade the rush and pick up yards last season. He picked up 35 yards on one dash against Illinois and had a 21-yard scramble in the BCS National Championship Game against LSU. More Craig Krenzel than Smith, though, Boeckman is aware his future is in the pocket.

Those abilities seem to lend themselves to the strengths of three crucial components of the team's offense – Wells and wide receivers Brian Hartline and Brian Robiskie. All three put up big numbers during their first season as the team's unquestioned starters in 2007, and the experience they all bring to the table seems to indicate a team that will use a lot of two-wideout formations.

Robiskie finished the year with 55 catches for 935 yards and 11 touchdowns, and Hartline had 52 grabs for 694 yards and six touchdowns while emerging as a possession receiver capable of consistently moving the chains.

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COVER STORY: FINDING THE RIGHT MIXTURE

# Depth At Tailback Should Help Offense

Continued From Page 1

All three players would likely benefit more as individuals from a more basic offense, but to be like the teams from 2005 and 2006, the Buckeyes need to prove they can spread the field and get the ball to their playmakers in space.

Senior cornerback Malcolm Jenkins, who is tasked with stopping the offense on a daily basis, said that should not be a big problem.

"They can get in two backs and two tight ends and run it right at you or spread it out with four wide or five wide and spread the ball around," he said.

There are few doubts about the ability of Hartline, Robiskie and Wells to put up big numbers in 2008. But plenty of depth is required for a team to be able to spread the field and utilize four- and five-receiver sets.

To achieve those goals, the Buckeyes will attempt to utilize the talents of sophomore running back Brandon Saine in a much bigger way this season. OSU fans got a sneak peek at his abilities in the LSU game when Saine lined up at several different spots in order to find different ways to use his speed and playmaking abilities.

That idea will carry over into this season.

"What I like about him is he can do so many things," Tressel said. "He's a fine, fine receiver. Good words (to describe him) are wild card, utility infielder, jack-of-all-trades and master of a lot. We really have high expectations for what he can contribute."

Saine is one part of an offensive backfield that also figures to feature more options than its recent predecessors. Pittman and Smith were the leading ground gainers in 2005, while Pittman saw his carries split with Wells in 2006.

This season, the Buckeyes figure to have four tailbacks who can make plays and share the load. Wells will get the lion's share, obviously, but Saine figures to touch the ball frequently and senior Maurice Wells and redshirt freshman Dan Herron will be in the mix as well.

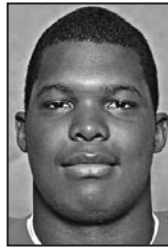
"You know how a long, tough season is – you never have enough ball carriers," Tressel said. "It's physical. We're asking Brandon to do so many different things that (Maurice) and Brandon have got to be contributors carrying the football. We think

## Offensive Players On The Spot

• **Todd Boeckman, quarterback** – With a year of experience under his belt, Boeckman needs to make the transition from rookie starter to grizzled veteran. Despite throwing for 2,379 yards and 25 TDs last season, not to mention leading the Buckeyes to the national championship game, Boeckman would probably be the first to tell you that he made way too many mistakes last season. Simply put, if OSU expects a third straight trip to the title game, those errors must be eliminated.

• **Bryant Browning, right tackle** – There aren't very many open spots on the offensive depth chart although most eyes are focused on Kirk Barton's vacated position on the right side of the line. Browning has pretty much flown under the radar since signing out of Cleveland Glenville a couple of years ago, but he has impressed the coaching staff with hard work that has trimmed some 50 pounds from his 6-5, 312-pound frame. Browning needs to continue that work ethic to hold off the charge of some talented freshmen breathing down his neck.

• **Antonio Henton, quarterback** – There is no doubt that Henton knows what's in store for him this fall. He knows that when all-everything prospect Terrelle Pryor sets foot on the practice field for the first time, the temptation on the part of the coaching staff will be to put him on the fast track toward early playing time. If he doesn't want to continue to run the scout team for the foreseeable future, Henton must play as close to perfect as is humanly possible



Bryant Browning

in this spring.

• **Ryan Lukens, fullback** – If Ohio State is serious about running the ball with authority this season – especially in short-yardage situations – it must get more production from the fullback. The Buckeyes are intent on shuffling several players into the position, but the starter is expected to be Lukens. We don't expect OSU to suddenly start handing off to the fullback, but the offense could get a boost with the 6-0, 238-pound converted linebacker in the lineup.

• **Ray Small, receiver** – It doesn't seem possible but Small is beginning his third season in scarlet and gray. Usually, players entering their third seasons have already built the foundation for their reputation and begin to enhance it. However, a reportedly poor attitude at times and a history of injuries are threatening to keep the 5-11, 180-pound speedster from fully realizing his vast potential.

• **Maurice Wells, tailback** – As the Buckeyes experiment with various backfield alignments, Wells must know that this spring is his last chance to make a statement. If he is going to get any kind of meaningful playing time at all during his senior season, the 5-10, 196-pounder must finally prove that he can slip a tackle once in a while. There is no doubt about the No. 1 player at the tailback position, but to hold off Brandon Saine and/or Boom Herron for the backup spot, Wells needs to have the spring of his career.

– Mark Rea

if we stay healthy we have four guys that can carry us."

Perhaps the biggest question, though, is whether Boeckman is the type of quarterback who would allow the Buckeyes to revert to their explosive capabilities from just a few years back.

Bollman said the first thing he thinks of when he looks back at the '05 and '06 seasons is quarterback mobility.

"You go back and there was a little bit more quarterback movement, a little bit more quarterback action and mobility – not necessarily running, but a little bit more threat of him running," he said. "Those are the kinds of things that stick in my mind the most."

However, Boeckman pointed out that the Buckeyes would be able to spread the field without forcing him – or any other quarterback, for that matter – to consistently make plays with his feet.

"I think that would be more shotgun-type, throwing the ball quick type of stuff and then maybe work in a few quarterback runs here and there," he said of a potential

compromise.

Should the Buckeyes go the dual-threat route, it appears the answer might be sophomore Antonio Henton or incoming freshman Terrelle Pryor. Both are mobile quarterbacks who could complement Boeckman's abilities by providing the Buckeyes a change of pace that would give opposing defenses another dimension for which they would have to prepare.

But to be able to have a dual-threat option at quarterback, either Henton or Pryor must prove capable of assuming that role on a consistent basis.

Asked how feasible it would be to pencil in a dual-threat quarterback option at OSU this fall, Bollman was coy on the subject.

"Well, you guys will just have to wait and see on that one," he said.

### The Displayed Growth

The fact that this year's team is even being mentioned in the same breath as some of the more explosive offenses in recent years is a testament to how far the offense has truly come in one year. Following the graduation of Smith and the early NFL departures of Ginn, Gonzalez and Pittman, the 2007 Buckeyes were forced to rely on players such as Boeckman to get the job done – long on tenure but short on actual game experience.

While there were no doubts about the mental abilities of a football team that was low on experience, there were questions about how the new players would perform once they took to the field as starters for the first time.

The script is different this year, however, as nine starters return, a fact in itself that makes the Buckeyes more dangerous.

"We were a little bit limited last year with youth," Tressel said. "I hope we're a little bit more experienced and can do more things."

There is no reason to disagree with that sentiment, at least based on the spring depth chart. Eight of the team's projected starters are seniors, and juniors Hartline and Beanie Wells both have a year of starting experi-

ence as well.

"Experience is key," Boeckman said. "I think with all that experience coming back, we can do a lot of things. As a whole, we're stepping up and keep getting better and things are going really well."

Senior offensive lineman Alex Boone, the lone player remaining who saw significant playing time during the last two years Smith was under center, said he feels this year's offense can be every bit as lethal as the team was during those years.

"I see this team being capable of doing anything it wants," he said. "We'll see what happens. The sky's the limit for us, and we know that."

Boone also said he feels this year's team has an intangible benefit the 2005 and 2006 teams both were lacking.

"I don't want to say this in a disrespectful way because I love all those guys, but it was more guys just playing for themselves and not playing for the offense," he said. "It happened to me too. Then all of a sudden you saw what happened and you lose games."

"I think that's different this year. I think everyone understands that we're here for each other, and it will be exciting."

The blueprint is there, and the pieces are certainly all on the table for the Buckeyes to have an explosive offense this season. Will it be enough to break the two-year streak of falling short in the national championship game?

It all comes down to the growth the team's offensive players can make as they go from jockeying for position to having a full year of experience under their belts. Following the team's jersey scrimmage April 12, Boeckman said he could already feel the benefits.

"Today I was more poised and confident in my ability to get the ball to my receivers, to put our offense in the right situations and to make the right reads," he said. "Having that year of experience gives me so much confidence, and it is a lift to me to know that I'm the guy out there that's going to lead this team."

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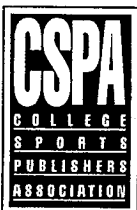
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**OPINION**

## Keeping Things Simple Best Serves OSU

Here is an open plea to Jim Tressel and his staff for the upcoming 2008 season: Please don't try to get fancy. Please don't get caught in the one-upmanship of today's intricate offensive and defensive schemes. With the kind of talent you possess on both sides of the ball, just stick to Ohio State tradition.

In other words, don't outthink yourselves. Play smash-mouth on offense and straight-up on defense. I guarantee those simple attacks are more than enough to win another outright Big Ten championship and third straight trip to the BCS title game.

If you think that I am proposing the Buckeyes run the ball down every opponent's throat, then you understand exactly what I'm saying. This team was tailor-made for good, old-fashioned trench warfare, and a team that is loaded with running back and offensive line talent ought to be allowed to do what it was put on this earth to do.

Please don't use this plea as an indictment of Todd Boeckman. I happen to believe the fifth-year senior is a pretty good quarterback. He is infinitely better than he was just a year ago, and I doubt that he will continue to make the same mistakes that plagued him down the stretch of the 2007 season.

The fact of the matter is that the Buckeyes don't really need Boeckman to showcase his arm this season. Every team has to throw the ball to keep opposing defenses honest, but in my opinion OSU is good enough to beat 11 of the 12 opponents on its schedule by simply running the ball effectively.

Yes, Beanie Wells is that good. If he stays healthy and can average around 25-30 carries per game, the 6-1, 237-pound junior would figure to rack up about 330 carries for the regular season. Taking his average yards per carry of 5.9 from last season, that would give Wells about 1,950 yards. As a point of reference, Eddie George set the school's all-time single-season record at 1,927 during his Heisman Trophy-winning year of 1995.

Maybe you think Wells can't take the pounding that would come with averaging more than 25 carries per game? You evidently weren't paying attention at the tail end of last season. Over the final five games on the Big Ten schedule, he averaged 27.2 carries culminating with a career-high 39 against Michigan. And that was with a bum ankle and broken bone in his wrist. Imagine what kind of havoc a healthy Wells can wreak.

The team's performance against the Wolverines last November could serve as a blueprint for how Ohio State could (or should) attack the bulk of its opponents on the 2008 schedule. In that contest, the Buckeyes ran the ball 59 times and threw only 13 passes. On defense, they stacked the line and played man coverage on Michigan star receivers Mario Manningham and Adrian Arrington.

The result? Wells rushed for 222 yards, more than any OSU running back in the long history of the series, and the Wolverines were held to 91 total yards, the first time they had failed to crack the century mark in total offense in a game since October 1962.

Most observers – including me – believed that 2007 performance by Michigan was one of the poorest in the recent history of the rivalry. The Wolverines knew that it was Lloyd Carr's final game as head coach, seniors such as Chad Henne, Mike Hart and Jake Long had never beaten Ohio State, and

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK with Mark Rea

still that team didn't appear to show up.

Upon further review, the game boiled down to the simple fact that the Buckeyes controlled the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball. In a nutshell, football is a simple game. If you control the line of scrimmage, you're probably going to win nine of every 10 games. Heck, the success ratio might even be as high as 99 out of 100.

The point is that Ohio State has offensive linemen who excel at run blocking. A projected starting line of Alex Boone, Steve Rehring, Jim Cordle, Ben Person and Bryant Browning averages better than 6-5 and just under 320 pounds. That doesn't even include potential backups such as J.B. Shugarts, Michael Brewster, Mike Adams and Connor Smith, road-graders who were seemingly born to run block.

With my bad back and rapidly advancing age, I think even I could get a couple of yards behind those guys. But if my name was Beanie Wells, I might be setting aside some time this summer to work up a draft of my Heisman speech.

#### Big Ten Weakness Hurts

Here is another observation as the Buckeyes go for an unprecedented third straight outright Big Ten title: The relative weakness of the conference is conspiring to keep OSU from winning the national championship.

This theory isn't exactly a new one. The last time Ohio State enjoyed a long run of league titles came during the six-year stretch between 1972 and '77. The Buckeyes either won or tied for the Big Ten title each season in that span but never won a national championship.

Why? For most of those years, Michigan was the only other consistent contender for the conference crown. In fact, only one Big Ten team finished among the country's top 25 teams during that six-year stretch – Michigan State, which wound up 12th in the AP poll and 18th in the UPI rankings in 1974.

There simply weren't enough difficult opponents on OSU's schedule throughout those years to keep the Buckeyes honed to a sharp point. As a result, they lost regular-season games they had no business losing not to mention three of four Rose Bowls between 1972-75.

In 2008, Ohio State is again projected to be the class of the Big Ten. It is consistently ranked among the top five teams in most preseason polls while no other conference school can be found in the top 10. You have to scroll down, usually around No. 13 or 14, to find such rivals as Illinois (which will be without conference player of the year Rashard Mendenhall) and Wisconsin (which will be looking for a new starting quarterback).

Michigan? Not even on the list. Rich Rodriguez is rebuilding that program to his liking, and rebuilding projects very seldom bear fruit in their initial seasons.

Certainly anything can happen. That's why they play on Saturday afternoons rather than simply give the victory to the

team that appears on paper to have more talent. But the reality of the situation is that Ohio State is so overloaded with talent that it should not break much of a sweat either before or after the Sept. 13 game at USC.

Every team needs to be steadily challenged throughout the season in order to retain its edge. The notion that simply moving the Big Ten schedule back a week to beyond Thanksgiving so that member teams will be better prepared for the post-season is ludicrous.

Ideally, a team would have a tester in September, October and November (and December if the Big Ten ever decides upon a conference championship game) to keep its focus for a potential national title game. OSU has accomplished the early-season portion of that equation by scheduling representative nonleague opponents from BCS conferences well into the next decade.

Now, if the Buckeyes could get some help from their Big Ten brethren.

#### Random Thoughts

- You can forgive Nick Siciliano if he looked a little tired this spring. Usually in charge of quality control for the offense – a glamorous description for a mostly inglorious job that includes breaking down practice film – Siciliano filled in as quarterback coach for the Buckeyes this spring while Joe Daniels continued his recovery from cancer surgery. Siciliano wasn't getting much sleep anyway. His wife gave birth Feb. 7 to quadruplets (two boys and two girls).

- I am resigned to the fact that Tiger Woods will ultimately break Jack Nicklaus' record of 18 major PGA championships. Tiger is only 32 and needs just six more majors to break the record. There is one area, however, where Tiger will never usurp Jack – course disposition. With the iron-willed Nicklaus, you could never tell if he was putting for eagle or double bogey. Meanwhile, the words that fly from Woods' lips after a rare poor shot make him a likely candidate for the most fined golfer on the PGA Tour.

- In the category of "Best Thing Since Sliced Bread," the website for Sports Illustrated is now offering a complete catalog of stories that have appeared in the venerable sports magazine since its inception in 1953. You can browse the entire archives at SI.com and come up with such gems as "Defense and Rex Make A King," the report written by legendary sportswriter Dan Jenkins from Ohio State's victory over USC in the 1969 Rose Bowl. Best of all, the entire archive is available free of charge.

- Nebraska had a sellout for its first spring game under new head coach Bo Pelini, and some area ticket brokers were offering \$10 game tickets for upwards of \$100 each. Elsewhere around the country, Florida had a crowd of 61,000 for its spring contest while just 33,624 showed up to watch national champion LSU's spring game. Meanwhile, Alabama welcomed 78,200 fans one year after setting the unofficial NCAA spring attendance record of 92,138. Of course, admission to the Tide's spring game is free.

- Not to get too far ahead of ourselves, but the BCS National Championship Game is set for Jan. 8, 2009, in Miami's Dolphin Stadium. In case you haven't looked that far ahead on the calendar, the game will be held on a Thursday night. The last time the BCS title game was held on a Thursday? The 2002 Rose Bowl when Miami (Fla.) took a 37-14 win over Nebraska.

## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE QUARTERBACKS

# Veteran Boeckman Ready To Lead Buckeyes

By ADAM JARDY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Much like on defense, Ohio State welcomes back a veritable excess of riches on the offensive side of the ball, and it all starts at the quarterback position.

The Buckeyes boast a first-team All-Big Ten signal caller (as judged by the media) in Todd Boeckman, a rare sixth-year senior. By all accounts, the soon-to-be 24-year-old St. Henry, Ohio, native is proving that he has learned plenty of lessons from his inaugural season under center in Columbus.

Although some of the individual statistics posted by Boeckman might indicate otherwise, there is still plenty of room for growth in the Ohio State passing attack.

Boeckman threw for the fifth-highest individual single-season yardage total in OSU history (2,379 yards), although the Buckeyes finished the season ninth in the Big Ten in passing yards per game at 196.7 yards per game through the air.

Teams lining up against the Scarlet and Gray next season can expect to see liberal doses of Chris "Beanie" Wells running straight at them, but OSU head coach Jim Tressel believes in a balanced offense capable of attacking opponents in multiple ways.

Naturally, that means the Buckeyes must not be afraid to throw the ball to be successful even with a player as talented as Wells in the backfield. That capability comes from the abilities of a confident quarterback under center.

"I just feel more like a leader and more capable of handling this offense," Boeckman said of his growth since last season. "I know pretty much everything that we're putting in now and how to handle myself out there. I just feel so much more comfortable on the field."

## Boeckman Clearly No. 1 Guy

Now the Buckeyes are hoping that growing level of comfort will translate into on-field success.

The challenge for Boeckman is to take the next step in his evolution. He has shown that he has the ability to be a dangerous quarterback; now he has to build on what he has already learned.

As the unquestioned starter, Boeckman is receiving the team's first-team reps this spring, unlike last season when they were split three ways between him, Antonio Henton and the since departed Robby Schoenhof.

"You had three guys getting one-third of the reps, and you're trying to rotate him with this guy and (wondering) can he get synched up with that guy?" Tressel said of last season. "Now, quite honestly, Todd Boeckman has to make sure that he and Brian Hartline and Brian Robiskie and Jake Ballard and whoever all he's going to throw it to, that those guys really grow. They have to understand,



JOSH WINSLOW

**BACK FOR MORE** – Last year at this time, Todd Boeckman (17) was trying to prove he had what it took to be the starting quarterback at Ohio State. Now, with a year of experience under his belt, the fifth-year senior has become one of the Buckeyes' leaders on offense.

"Here's what we're going to attack with, here's what we're going to do. If they do that, we do this," as opposed to just finding out if they can do that."

One major element that will help is the fact that the OSU coaches now have a full 13 games' worth of film to watch on Boeckman.

The senior said he has spent plenty of time watching himself play throughout the 2007 season and learning from his mistakes. That, coupled simply with the knowledge that can come only with in-game experience, has helped Boeckman progress as a quarterback.

"Once you know everything and where everybody is going to be at and you are used to reading the defenses and seeing the cover-

ages and where we're supposed to be at on the field, everything is slowing down," he said. "There were still some mental parts of the game where I wasn't getting rid of the ball quick enough.

"I was throwing interceptions and I can't have that. I just have to get my feet quicker and get them more in position where I'm able to throw the ball and do the right things."

His teammates and coaches have apparently taken notice. Offensive quality control coach Nick Siciliano, who is serving this spring as the quarterbacks coach on an interim basis for Joe Daniels as he recovers from illness, said he has seen Boeckman become even more of a leader on the team.

"He's approached the game a lot differently than he has in the past," Siciliano said. "I think he's doing a tremendous job trying to be a leader on this football team. He's got a lot more confidence. I think some confidence comes with a little bit of security. Anytime you're able to step in and play at Ohio State and do well, he's going to get a little bit more confidence."

According to tight ends coach John Peterson, Boeckman's evolution will allow the Buckeyes to become more experimental on offense.

Do not look for OSU to suddenly become a spread-option team with Boeckman running the show, however.

"I think anytime you have a quarterback

that has been around the system for a while and has gone from step 'A' progression to step 'B,' now he sees the second and third reads in a progression," Peterson said. "You hope he sees more things and is able to react to different situations. He's been able to do that this spring."

That has to be interpreted as good news for a quarterback who completed 191 of 299 passes (63.9 percent) and threw for 25 touchdowns – tied for third most in a single season in OSU history – against 14 interceptions.

Most important in Tressel's eyes is the fact that Boeckman led the conference in passing efficiency with a mark of 148.9. To the head coach, that is more important than the fact that Boeckman averaged 183.0 yards per game through the air – 10th in the Big Ten.

Despite his final totals, Boeckman has a veritable laundry list of things he wants to improve this time around.

"I'm working on everything," he said. "I want to get better at deep throws, middle throws, check-downs to the back, everything. Every part of my game I want to get better – decision-making, footwork, everything."

"One thing that I think is a big key right now is the check-downs. I very rarely threw those and I think that keeps a defense on its toes. If they keep backing off, they have to worry about the back coming out of the backfield."

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**OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE QUARTERBACKS**

Cutting down on his interceptions, six of which he threw during the final three games, also is on the docket. Asked which one throw he would want back from the 2007 season, the 6-4, 244-pound quarterback could not pick just one.

"I've got 14 I want back right now," he said. "I don't know if I could pick one throw. It's tough to pick one. Maybe in the Michigan game at the end of the first half where I threw that interception and put our defense in a bad situation. You can't make plays like that."

Boeckman's interception late in the half allowed Michigan to take over in Ohio State territory while trailing 7-3, but the Wolverines were unable to take advantage of the opportunity to change momentum with a score. On the whole, Boeckman threw for just 50 yards on 7-of-13 passing against the Wolverines on a cold, rainy day in Ann Arbor in a game in which OSU almost exclusively relied on its rushing attack and defense to salt away a 14-3 victory.

The key for improvement is continued work in practice – something Boeckman will receive plenty of as the unquestioned starter this time around.

"It just comes with repetition," he said. "You've just got to keep on practicing and practicing. When you're in the game you're not really going to think about that. You've got to have it down already."

**Battling For The Backup Spot**

Much like Boeckman is being counted on to take a big step forward during spring football headed into the 2008 season, similar pressures are being placed on Henton, but the sophomore's learning curve will take a different path.

As a redshirt freshman, Henton battled his way into the top backup position behind

Boeckman both before and after a midseason suspension that forced him to work his way back up from the scout team. In doing so, he unseated Schoenhoft as the No. 2 quarterback and essentially forced the former Elite 11 quarterback to transfer to Delaware following the 2007 season.

Henton's growth was so great, the coaching staff had put together a plan to take advantage of his skill set during the team's game against LSU in the national championship game. However, Henton never saw action against the Tigers because of the pace of the game.

To get to that point, Henton progressed as he read from a card in practice and executed what the scout team quarterback needed to execute. Now, he is being tasked with taking on a greater understanding of the offense as a whole.

The task has not been easy. "There's a lot more going on with what he has to learn," Tressel said. "At the point he was progressing last season, he was progressing from a limited standpoint in a limited part of the package."

"In the spring, everything gets thrown back at you rather than you focusing on little things that maybe we'll feature in the game."

Siciliano said Henton is putting in the necessary work to make those improvements.

"He's been in here studying extra and doing all those things you're supposed to do to be a good quarterback," he said. "He works his butt off in practice. He does what he's supposed to in the weight room. He's doing well in the classroom. He's really progressing nicely."

Boeckman said the same plays have been called this spring for both him and Henton. As a mobile quarterback who can make more

plays with his feet than a quarterback of Boeckman's stature, Henton forces opposing defenses to plan for him in a different way than they do for Boeckman regardless of what plays are being called.

"It definitely does change the defensive mind-set a little bit because with me in there, I'm not as much of a scrambler as Antonio is," Boeckman said. "Maybe they have to have somebody spying on him to keep him in the pocket because once he gets out there he can make plays with his legs."

In four games of action last season, Henton completed 3 of 6 passes for 57 yards and one touchdown and carried the ball nine times for 41 yards – an average of 4.6 yards per carry.

From a practice standpoint, the 6-1, 236-pound Henton is in a role somewhat similar to last season in that he is splitting reps with Joe Bauserman. Both are taking an equal number of snaps with the team's second-team offense.

Bauserman is a player who also made big gains during the team's preparations leading up to the bowl game. With Henton ascending to the second spot on the depth chart and Schoenhoft dispatched to the tight end position, Bauserman drew rave reviews from players and coaches alike as he directed the scout team.

"He was picking apart the defense last year running the scout team because he throws a great ball," Boeckman said. "He was struggling a little bit at first, but he's picking things up real fast and he's making plays out there."

With the extra time afforded to the Buckeyes during bowl preparations, Bauserman was able to spend time working with the OSU offense as well as on the scout team.

"It showed me there that there's competi-

tion between (Henton and Bauserman) to see who would be the next guy in the game," Tressel said.

As both Tressel and Boeckman have said, Bauserman showed some rust when he arrived in Columbus after sitting out the past three years while he suited up as a minor league pitcher for the Pittsburgh Pirates. His growth since then has been great enough that Tressel has told reporters he is fully confident that the 6-6, 222-pound Bauserman could successfully run the offense should Boeckman and Henton both suffer injuries.

While that remains to be seen, Henton and Bauserman find themselves essentially splitting reps and battling each other for playing time this spring.

"They need to have a spirited battle," Tressel said. "It's such a crucial time. In the season, all of a sudden now you are game-planning and you're settled in. Todd Boeckman's your quarterback, so you're going to get 10 percent of the reps. How well do you learn when you're standing?"

"If you're one of the other guys, you're down there running things off of cards so you're not learning anything. Their progress doesn't happen outside of April and August. Those are your two key months."

Progress could be further stemmed in August when the Buckeyes add another quarterback to the fold in the nation's No. 1 prospect, Terrelle Pryor of Jeannette, Pa.

The pending arrival of Pryor adds even more importance to this spring for both of the team's current backup quarterbacks, Tressel said.

"Reality is reality," he said. "Those guys go on Rivals.com and Scout and all that stuff and they know Terrelle's a good player. I think there are a lot of reasons that should be a spirited battle."

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OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE RUNNING BACKS

# Buckeyes Feature Many Types Of RBs

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Versatility is a buzzword for many position groups on head coach Jim Tressel's roster this spring, but perhaps none more so than the Ohio State running back troupe.

When the head coach's older brother, Dick, commences a meeting of the running backs, he presides over a group that includes a steady senior, a versatile sophomore, a rich-in-potential redshirt freshman and even a foursome of plucky walk-ons.

Oh, and there is a legitimate Heisman Trophy candidate, too.

Then there are the fullbacks, a group that varies in size from day to day as any one of four different current or former linebackers helps out along with a scholarship tight end and a trio of walk-ons.

Beyond the varied trades of the OSU running backs, there are also many talents.

Between Chris "Beanie" Wells' power, Maurice Wells' quickness, Brandon Saine's speed and Dan Herron's shiftiness, there seems to be a back for any need.

Each of the foursome will be asked to block and catch more passes this spring as the team attempts to become more versatile and less predictable on offense.

And when the game situation calls for a traditional I-formation, there is no telling who might be leading the way from the full-back spot.

## Beanie The Spectator

It is safe to say the coaching staff hopes for everything but live scrimmaging this spring as he recovers from ankle and wrist injuries.

The 6-1, 237-pound junior was cleared for everything but live scrimmaging this spring as he recovers from ankle and wrist injuries.

Although the ankle is in good shape, Wells' wrist remains in a cast that protects a surgically repaired bone. He can carry the ball but not pass block, meaning his presence in a game situation at practice limits the plays to which the quarterback might audible. The coaches also fear he could aggravate the injury if he were to catch himself while falling during a tackle.

The Akron Garfield product understandably is looking forward to seeing what he can do on the field at full strength after he estimated being 70 percent last season.

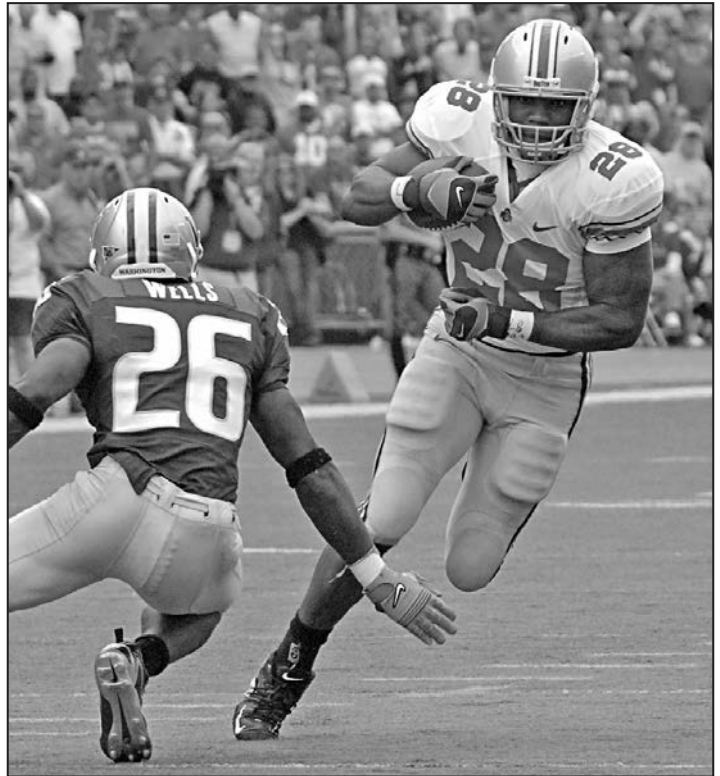
"That's something I'm really excited about, just getting the chance to get out there with no problems at all and to give it my all," he said.

Wells dubbed his 2007 campaign, during which he ran for 1,609 yards and 15 touchdowns, a valuable learning experience.

Above all, he said learning patience was important for him.

"That's the whole key in being a running back," he said. "If a running back has great patience, everything else is going to come into place."

Off the field, he did plenty of maturing as



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**SPRING IDLE** – OSU tailback Chris "Beanie" Wells (28) was ruled out of contact drills this spring after undergoing wrist surgery. The coaching staff hopes that an idle Wells in the spring will allow the Heisman Trophy candidate to remain healthy for the 12-game regular season.

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**OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE RUNNING BACKS**

well. After he left several early-season games before their completion because of flurries of the ankle injury, there were fans and reporters wondering aloud just how tough the youngster was.

Indeed, even Wells' head coach spoke openly to the press about the need for his star running back to be a warrior.

"I learned to deal with adversity," Wells said. "There was a lot going around in the media that Beanie wasn't this, Beanie wasn't that, and that's something I learned to deal with. You've got to roll with the punches and just keep on moving."

"I've grown tremendously mentally (since high school)," he said. "It's like night and day from the first time I came in here. It's incredible how much you learn in a couple of years."

Dick Tressel sees a more mature Wells but not a dramatically different one.

"I don't think it's like this unbelievable change," he said. "I think it's just Beanie Wells maturing and getting better at a solid, steady pace because of all the commitment he has to being the best he can be."

**Finding A Fullback**

At the start of spring practice, Jim Tressel called the situation at fullback very urgent. Most signs point to a multifaceted, perhaps atypical group of solutions.

That initial day the head coach mentioned no fewer than seven players with potential to see at least some time at fullback, and as time went on an eighth player joined the group.

That last player – Curtis Terry – could be the most intriguing of them all.

A linebacker by trade, Terry likely thought a year ago that his 2008 spring would be spent preparing for the NFL draft. However, an ankle injury just prior to the start of the 2007 campaign ended up sidelining him for the entirety of what would have been his senior year.

After receiving a redshirt, Terry returned as the odds-on favorite to win the vacant strongside linebacker spot this spring, but after about a week of spring practice he was pulling double duty.

He saw time at fullback during the jersey scrimmage at Ohio Stadium April 12 and even caught a pass.

The 6-1, 229-pounder's performance was enough to catch his head coach's eye.

"I like Curtis," Tressel said immediately afterward. "He's got a little bit of size and know-how. He knows what the defense is doing. He can play any one of the three linebacker positions. Those are usually the guys the fullback is assigned to block, so he knows what they're doing."

"We wanted him to work a lot at fullback these last two weeks so that he wouldn't have to start from scratch in (preseason) camp if it unfolds that we really need him to play it."

For his part, Terry seemed upbeat about the addition to his duties.

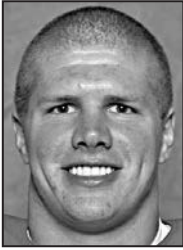
"Running with Beanie, we really need a good fullback so the coaches asked me to move over and told me to think about it," Terry said. "I'll do anything to help the team. I decided I would go. We had a conference. I went and talked to (linebackers coach Luke) Fickell and he assured me that if I went I would be able to play both, so that kind of helped me make my decision."

He was not even the first player from his initial position group to make the move to fullback.

Ryan Lukens, a senior walk-on entering his fifth year as a Buckeye, made the switch from linebacker in December as Ohio State

went through bowl preparations.

That meant the animal science major from Lebanon, Ohio, went from looking at another year behind All-America linebacker James Laurinaitis to spending his final season as a significant contributor on offense.



**Curt Lukens**

"I saw an opportunity, and Coach Tressel liked the idea," the 6-0, 238-pound Lukens said of the move.

He credited now-departed senior fullbacks Dionte Johnson, Tyler Whaley and Trevor Robinson with helping him make the switch, in particular learning the offensive formations.

"That was nice because I hadn't played offense in years," said Lukens, a Cincinnati Moeller product.

He has sounded like a man happy to be in his new offensive shoes.

"I'm not holding my breath to get carries. I'm just in there to hit some heads – stay square and hold the block for the big man back behind me," he said.

How many opportunities he gets to do that remains to be seen, however.

While Lukens is atop the fullback depth chart, Terry and several others have repped at the position as well including 6-2, 225-pound redshirt freshman walk-on Spencer Smith, 6-3, 234-pound junior linebacker Austin Spitler, 6-2, 251-pound fifth-year senior tight end Brandon Smith, junior walk-ons Tom Ingham (a 6-1, 243-pound defensive lineman) and J.D. Larson (a 6-4, 229-pound tight end) and 6-2, 220-pound early-enrolling freshman linebacker Andrew Sweat.

Of those players, only Spencer Smith – whose brother, Connor, is a sophomore offensive lineman on scholarship – is likely to be a full-time fullback this fall when Cleveland Glenview recruit Jermil Martin will arrive to throw his hat into the ring as well.

"I think it's something we have to assess once spring ball is over," Jim Tressel said. "We have to ask ourselves how we are going to attack that fullback position. Ryan Lukens has done some things. (Austin Spitler) has done some things. Curtis has done some things. Spencer Smith has done some things. We've got a freshman fullback coming in. Brandon Saine has been there some with he and Beanie in the backfield."

**Buckeyes 'Pony' Up**

Perhaps the most intriguing portion of that Tressel statement was of the combination of Saine and Wells in the backfield.

The so-called "pony" personnel grouping has been a hot topic of discussion this spring as Ohio State coaches work on ways to get multiple weapons on the field at the same time.

"There is enough talent in those tailbacks that with those pony types in the game, we can do our whole offense, so you'll see them split, you'll see them motion out of the backfield," Dick Tressel said. "I think that gives us a tremendous advantage to have that kind of talent that we can slide in and enjoy watching."

Pony sets can include any of the OSU tailbacks, but the catalyst is Saine, the multi-talented sophomore who was Ohio's Mr. Football and a two-time state champion in the 100 meters during his career at Piqua.

A 10.3-second man in the 100 as a high-schooler, Saine is now listed 6-1 and 217 pounds. He is stout enough that the coaches can line him up at fullback in the traditional I-formation and fast enough with good enough hands to allow them to line him up on the wing, in the slot or out wide.

"Brandon is going to make some jumps like Beanie did from freshman to sophomore year," the running backs coach said. "We

recognize what his talents are. He got hurt a little bit in the middle of last year. That slowed him a little bit. He'll make up that ground this spring."

Although it was just one play, Saine displayed some of that potential on a 22-yard scoring run in the April 12 jersey scrimmage when he jukeed defensive end Lawrence Wilson at the line of scrimmage and raced down the sideline for the touchdown, carrying Buckeye defenders with him across the goal line.

But Herron (5-10, 193) and Maurice Wells (5-10, 196) were not without their moments in the jersey scrimmage. On one particular play, Wells gave a couple of defenders the slip after catching a pass in the flat, while Herron showed a knack for finding cracks in the line and some nice cutback ability.

"We also have Danny (Herron) and Mo (Wells) so we can use some pony configurations this spring so we ought to be better at it, and Brandon will certainly be a piece to that puzzle because he can run with it when you throw it to him," Dick Tressel said. "He can run with it when you hand it to him, and he's a pretty big guy, too. He can block. He and Beanie both are pretty big guys. They can block."

Though he cautioned that he was not sure if it would be indicative of what is to come this season or just a product of spring tinkering with strategy, wide receiver Brian Hartline told reporters that the majority of the offense's time this spring was spent with the extra tailback in the game.

Lukens corroborated that when asked what the depth chart looked like at fullback.

"We're running a lot of pony right now, which is two running backs, so Brandon Saine is basically my competition right now," Lukens said. "It's personnel because they could have either a tight end almost playing fullback or they could have a running back in the fullback position, so I am going up against a whole lot more people than just the other fullbacks."

The head coach's take? "I'm not sure we know yet what the mix is going to be," Jim Tressel said.

**Backing Up Beanie**

Of course, those fullbacks will not be lining up in front of Beanie Wells every time.

When Saine is not at fullback (or in the slot, or out wide) he is a good bet to be dotting the "I" in the I-formation as the No. 2 tailback, and the coaching staff is counting on Maurice Wells and Herron as well.

Last season, Maurice Wells was the team's second-leading rusher as he gained 367 yards and scored three touchdowns on 103 carries. Saine toted the rock 60 times and totaled 267 yards with two touchdowns despite missing two games.

Meanwhile, Herron toiled on the scout team, but not in anonymity.

He was a scout-team player of the week, either for the offense or special teams, a total of five times.

To help groom him for a role with the varsity squad, the staff included Herron on the traveling squad for a few games, too.

"I think that he is pretty sharp when it comes to competition," Dick Tressel said. "He understood that you get X number of opportunities. Don't waste one quarter of it when you're not getting any."

"He understood that the offensive and the defensive guys had confidence in his ability so it was not one of those deals where you're not quite good enough for us to think about you. You're not in the right spot at the right time now."

Fans have seen the shifty Maurice Wells for the last couple of seasons – he'll enter 2008 with 737 rushing yards and 210 carries in his college career – but their next glimpse of Herron on the field in a Buckeye jersey will be the first.

Dick Tressel described Herron as an "explosive, burst kind of young man" who gets tough yards and said finding carries for all of the backs will be a challenge.

"I think that we have to be prepared to understand how we can get all these tailbacks involved," he said, mentioning the possibility of doing so with the return game.

"Let's get some of these guys back there to zoom with it. I'm excited about those pony situations where we can get some of those guys back there a couple at a time."

"The other thing is that kind of competition adds to the focus and the purpose in practice. It's not just about who's going to do better in a game. It's about who's doing better in practice. We know what their skills are. They want to make sure that they're on top of their game all the time."

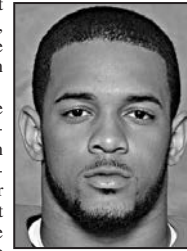
After the jersey scrimmage, Jim Tressel was upbeat about all of his tailbacks.

"(Boom is) a guy that I really think is going to contribute because you know how a long, tough season is: You never have enough ball carriers because it's physical," he said. "We're asking Brandon to do so many different things that Mo and Boom have got to be contributors carrying the football."

"A lot of years we didn't have two full guys that could carry it to the level we'd like them to carry it. Now we think if we stay healthy and all we've got four guys."

If the return of Maurice Wells and the emergence of Herron is bad news for anyone, it would be the host of walk-ons at the position – junior Joe Gantz (6-0, 199), sophomores Marcus Williams (5-10, 202) and K.C. Christian (5-11, 209), and redshirt freshman Bo DeLande (6-0, 184).

Gantz, Williams and Christian each logged carries in regular-season games last season as the staff looked to preserve Herron's redshirt. Williams finished fifth on the team in 2007 with 14 carries for 38 yards. Christian added 31 yards on five carries while Gantz contributed 3 yards on three carries.



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## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE WIDE RECEIVERS

# Brians Set To Head Wide Receiving Corps

By **JEFF SVOBODA**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Throughout the 2007 season and into the 2008 spring, people have described Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline as Ohio State's odd couple, two players who share a first name, a position, tremendous skill and completely different personalities.

But perhaps the analogy of the pairing of Robiskie's Felix Ungar and Hartline's Oscar Madison can extend even further, for the Ohio State wide receivers group in 2007 would make a good parallel to the script of "The Odd Couple" – two stars receiving top billing while the rest of the cast plays only a bit part.

While Robiskie and Hartline were excelling in 2007 – their combined 107 grabs, 1,629 yards and 17 scores compared favorably to the 110 catches for 1,515 yards and 17 touchdowns pulled in by first-round draft picks Ted Ginn Jr. and Anthony Gonzalez a year prior – the rest of the group was stuck in mediocrity.

Third target Ray Small was bothered by an ankle injury early in the season and never seemed to realize his reputed tremendous talent, finishing with just 24.3 yards receiving per game. No other wideout was able to average more than one catch or 10 yards per game.

Attempting to build that depth through the spring has been a mixed bag. Because of off-field indiscretions, Small was held back at times through the opening two weeks of camp before another ankle injury in the jersey scrimmage hindered him yet again.

Sophomores Dane Sanzenbacher, Taurian Washington, Devon Torrence and Grant Schwartz all drew praise from wideouts coach Darrell Hazell for their progress, but Washington and Torrence were limited because of injury during the middle days of the spring. In addition, freshman Jake Stoneburner also found himself in a noncontact yellow jersey during the second weekend of April because of an injury.

Still, when addressing the media midway through spring ball, Hazell was pleased with both his charges' progress as well as their role in the evolution of the offense.

"I think the thing that we try to do is we try to expand a little bit," Hazell said. "You're coming off of last year, championship game, and you say, 'OK, what direction do we need to take to be a little bit better?' We've kind of opened it up and said, 'OK, we can do this and do that,' and it's been really rewarding."

### Channeling Felix, Oscar

The verbal sparring between Felix and Oscar in "The Odd Couple" was one of the signatures of the concept, whether it was the movie version with Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon or the television show featuring Tony Randall and Jack Klugman, and it appears that Robiskie and Hartline have the same sort of relationship.

With Robiskie sidelined from scrimmaging during the spring as he recovers from an offseason knee scope, Hartline – the more talkative of the duo, who is blessed with not just speed and good hands but also the gift of gab – has been giving the senior the business during the spring.

"(I tell him) he's too big-time for the team and everything," Hartline said with a laugh. "Obviously I'm being sarcastic. I just stay on his back, try to get him practicing, but he's taking care of himself."

Hazell probably wouldn't mind having his No. 1 receiver from a season ago back on the field, but discretion is certainly the better part of valor in this case. Though Robiskie has been working his way back into drills as the knee has improved, there has been no reason to rush the 6-3, 199-pounder back, a fact to which Hazell is resigned.

"One of the things I wanted to work hard with him on during the spring season is his horizontal speed, working across the field and creating separation on some of those shallow routes," Hazell said. "(But) he's so into it mentally, which is hard for a lot of those guys that are not practicing. He's coaching out there."

The fact that Hazell had specific plans in mind for the Cleveland native and Chagrin Falls, Ohio, graduate must be scary to opposing defenses, which saw Robiskie catch 55 passes for 935 yards and 11 touchdowns in 2007 – all numbers that led the Buckeye team.

But with his spring derailed by the February knee surgery – to correct a minor problem that plagued him during the season, he said – Robiskie has turned mentor to Ohio State's group of younger receivers.

"We're in the position now where guys are looking at us more for advice, and we're trying to be there to help them out," he said.

A healthy Hartline has been able to lead by example, both in drills and in scrimmaging, including the April 12 jersey scrimmage in which he caught five passes and scored two impressive touchdowns.

"He wants to win every play he's in," head coach Jim Tressel said afterward. "He was a guy that when his group wasn't in the game, he was screaming and yelling instructions at the younger receivers."

In that scrimmage, Hartline showed both his speed – getting behind the defense for a 53-yard scoring catch – and his hands, diving to pull in a pass in the corner of the end zone for a 25-yard TD. The improvement of those attributes, which helped Hartline grab 52 balls for 694 yards and six touchdowns last season, has been high on the priorities list for Hazell this spring.

"We've been trying to work on vertical speed a little bit, continue to work on creating good separation underneath against linebackers and safeties," Hazell said. "I think that's where we can really create some mismatches."

### A Small Problem

Where Small fits into the equation is anyone's guess at this point. Last year's No. 3 wideout was handicapped at the start of the spring because of off-field issues and then rolled an ankle during the jersey scrimmage.

"He's been trying to work his way back into – I don't know what the right word is, good graces?" Tressel said after the jersey scrimmage during which Small's ankle was injured as he blocked on a running play early in the event. "But this was going to be his first chance to jump in there. He's doing fine football-wise and then he rolled his ankle."

Small finished the 2007 season third on the squad with 20 catches for 267 yards and two touchdowns while occasionally showing the blinding speed and physical ability that made the 5-11, 180-pounder a highly sought-after prospect out of Cleveland Glenville.

However, an undisclosed shortcoming off the field has had Small in the doghouse this spring. Hazell said that Small had done about three-quarters of the work as his fellow wideouts before his injury and confirmed that



**OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE WIDE RECEIVERS**

Small's number had changed from 4 to 82 as "a little reminder" of punishment before noting that his charge had taken the castigation in stride.

"He's worked hard," Hazell said. "We get him in the weight room when he's not practicing or out there running around, and he's done a good job."

On the field, the coaching staff will continue to try to get the most out of his abilities.

"It's a daily process," Hazell said. "You try to make baby steps every day, and hopefully he sees the big picture and down the road and keeps working hard at it and has no setbacks."

**Lots Of Young Talent**

The Buckeyes certainly need more out of their younger receivers than they received in 2007, and a return to the depth showcased in 2006 would be ideal.

Hartline served as the Buckeyes' fourth wideout that season, and his speed and ability to make catches in traffic made Ohio State's four wideout sets all the more effective. Senior Roy Hall finished fifth among the group in catches, and the big target snagged two touchdown catches including the first in the win over Michigan. Next up was Small, who made eight grabs.

Combined, Hartline, Hall and Small made 38 catches and pulled in five touchdowns.

Those numbers plummeted last season to a combined 19 catches and two touchdowns – both against Youngstown State – among OSU's Nos. 4 through 6 wideouts in Sanzenbacher, Torrence and Washington.

Despite the injury struggles, the talk among the wide receiver group has been just how far the younger prospects have developed through the offseason and the beginning of practice.

"I think we definitely have a lot of guys that are ready to take that next step, and we just have to go through this offseason and see what happens," Robiskie said.

Apparently leading that charge is Sanzenbacher. When Small's injury left him on the sidelines at the start of last season, Sanzenbacher stepped in to catch Ohio State's first touchdown of the season against YSU. The Toledo Central Catholic product finished fourth among the wideout group with 12 catches for 89 yards and a touchdown.

Never particularly noted for his physical skills and more for his precise knowledge of routes and ability to read defenses to get open, Sanzenbacher has continued along that track this spring.

"I think he's going to have a phenomenal year for us," Hazell said. "He's taken his game to another level. He's where he's supposed to be all the time in the passing game. He never makes any mistakes and he's extremely consistent catching the football."

Next on the receiving chart in 2007 was Torrence. His Ohio State career began as a defensive back, but the 6-1, 193-pounder was quickly shuffled into Hazell's position group. There, Torrence made four grabs for 31 yards with a long of 17.

Hazell hasn't had the full services of the Canton (Ohio) South product this spring for two reasons. First, the Buckeyes have had him playing a small percentage of time on the defensive side of the ball, and second, he suffered a hamstring injury that left his availability limited.

Hazell was left awed, though, by what he had seen from Torrence, who has spent time working as a slot wideout.

"He's been exceptional this spring," Hazell said. "Exceptional."

Washington also saw playing time last year and ended up with three catches for 46 yards and a 37-yard scoring catch and run against Youngstown State. The 6-2, 179-pounder possesses an interesting combination of height and speed, and Hazell said the Buckeyes need the

Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary's product to produce in 2008.

"He's done a good job day-by-day of making improvement," Hazell said. "He's got real soft hands. He catches it away from his body, but he's got really deceptive speed with the ball in his hands so he can make some plays for us."

Another player whose name largely was missing on the scoresheet last year but who has been drawing rave reviews is Grant Schwartz. The 6-0, 194-pound Dana Hills, Calif., native came to Ohio State as a safety but was switched to wideout during last year's fall camp.

Perhaps owing to his nature as a neophyte wideout, he did not catch a pass, but he did play on special teams in nine games and ended up with a tackle. Now a sophomore, Schwartz found himself running with Ohio State's No. 1 unit this spring thanks to the injuries.

"I would say the receiver that has really

opened my eyes, that's come so far, is Grant Schwartz," safety Kurt Coleman said. "He's slimmed down, he's running great routes and he's catching the ball and making plays."

The youngest Buckeye wideout, Stoneburner, impressed before a hamstring injury limited him as camp neared an end. The Dublin (Ohio) Coffman product enrolled in time for spring practice after graduating early from high school, and he impressed Hazell, though the wideouts coach said it's too early to tell if the 6-5, 230-pounder will be in the mix for playing time once August rolls around.

"I'm very pleased with where he is mentally," Hazell said. "He's studied it. He's still learning the system, but he's going to help himself so much by coming in early mentally when he comes back in the fall."

The injury bug has not stopped at scholarship performers.

Walk-on Garrett Hummel, a 5-11, 183-pound sophomore from Shelby, Ohio, was by all accounts having a tremendous spring before suffering ligament damage in his knee that will end his spring and possibly his season.

"He was one of the guys that was really jumping out every day," Robiskie said.

With the injuries limiting the squad as camp neared a close, walk-ons Ben Kacsandi (a 6-1, 209-pound senior), Kyle Ruhl (a 6-1, 164-pound senior) and Ryan Schuck (a 6-0, 204-pound junior) were seeing time with Ohio State's No. 2 unit. Sophomore Ricky Crawford (6-2, 215) of Lewis Center, Ohio, caught two passes in the jersey scrimmage, one of which was a leaping touchdown grab.

Senior walk-on Dan Potokar (6-0, 180) has not been with the team through spring practice as the Grove City, Ohio, native continues to fight cancer.

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## OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE OFFENSIVE LINE

## Injuries Hamper Spring For Offensive Linemen

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

This past January, Jim Bollman must have been sitting around the Woody Hayes Athletic Center licking his chops.

After all, the Ohio State offensive coordinator and line coach could look forward to a spring with the deepest lineup of big uglies he has had since his 2001 arrival at Ohio State.

With incoming freshman J.B. Shugarts already enrolled and classmate Mike Adams on the way in March, Bollman was looking at the potential to have a baker's dozen of healthy scholarship linemen with whom to work during spring ball.

That is an inordinately high number even for the regular season, when most of the two-deeps in the seven-season era of head coach Jim Tressel have included a walk-on or two, but for spring it is nearly unheard of because of the absence of both seniors who exhausted their eligibility the previous fall and freshmen not set to arrive until the summer.

Yes, even with another highly touted recruit – Michael Brewster – already set to be held out of contact for spring ball as he recovered from shoulder surgery, there was a veritable treasure trove of talent for Bollman to mold in the spring.

Then the injury bug bit – and with a vengeance.

First went Steve Rehiring, the incumbent No. 1 left guard who had shoulder surgery in February.

Next was Ben Person, the returning starter at right guard, who underwent foot surgery in March.

But even with both of his senior starting guards and a hotshot frosh stuck on the sidelines, Bollman still boasted plenty of talent, much of it experienced, at the dawn of spring drills.

Alas, the bad news was far from over.

In the first nine days of spring ball, Adams went down with a shoulder injury, sophomore Josh Kerr suffered a sprained ankle and senior Jon Skinner experienced a recurrence of a knee injury that had robbed him of all of the 2007 campaign.

Finally, the last health problem came when Shugarts suffered an undisclosed mishap around the midway point of spring.

Despite all that bad news, though, there



JOSH WINSLOW

**CENTER OF ATTENTION** – Several offensive linemen fell victim to injury during spring practice, but OSU center Jim Cordle (64) remained healthy and appeared to retain a stranglehold on his starting position for the fall. Here, he is shown providing protection for quarterback Antonio Henton (7) in the April 19 spring game.

was good work being turned in by the Buckeyes in the trenches.

#### Fill-Ins Faring Fine

With Rehiring and Person down and Kirk Barton working out for the NFL draft, just 40 percent of the 2007 starting front line has been available for spring ball in '08, but plenty of experience is available to fill in.

Sliding into Rehiring's usual spot between returning starters Alex Boone, the left tackle, and center Jim Cordle is fifth-year senior Kyle Mitchum. A four-star recruit from the class of 2004, Mitchum never has been able to break into the starting lineup since his arrival at Ohio State, partly because of an injury that kept him out of the first part of last season. This spring he is taking advantage of the extra reps available to him and making a bid for playing time in his final go-round.

At the other guard spot is Connor Smith, a sophomore who could be ready to bust out if necessary after spending his redshirt fresh-

man season of 2007 as Person's understudy.

Cordle, now with a full year of starting experience under his belt but working between two different guards than he did last year, endorsed the work done so far this spring by both Mitchum and Smith.

"They're definitely getting everything," he said. "It's kind of a blessing that they can get reps with the (first team) and get reps with me and if something happens to one of the guys in the fall they are ready to go. We've had a full spring to get fits together. The center and guard are always on a double-team somewhere, and you've got to get the feel down."

The 6-4, 321-pound Smith came into the program as a highly regarded prospect, but he likely will go back to the bench if Person is able to make a full recovery from his surgery.

His classmate Bryant Browning is in a different situation at right tackle, where he is attempting to win the right to replace

Barton.

Browning started the spring as the man to beat at right tackle, and thus far the 6-4, 312-pounder has done nothing to show he should not remain there when games start for real this fall.

"He was ready to go last year, but we had the line set," Cordle said. "He played a little bit but he's picked up where he left off."

Browning was not made available for interviews during spring practice, but Bollman was impressed with his progress as well.

"I see a little steady improvement every day," Bollman said. "Every single day he's getting a little bit better at one thing, then the next thing, which has been very pleasing to me. It's not a position for a guy generally to go from here to there all at once. It doesn't usually work that way, and as he continues to build his repertoire he's doing really good."

An added benefit to Browning's winning of the right tackle job would be that it would allow Bollman to keep Rehiring and Boone together on the left side rather than have to consider a move of Rehiring to right tackle. In February the coach stated the desire to be able to keep his behemoths together on the left side, and he reiterated that in April.

"Exactly – no question about it," he said. "(But) every year is a new year. It's not like someone can't be beaten out, but we do have a lot of guys getting a lot of experience at their positions so anything we can add to the mix to make us stronger is a good thing."

Despite Browning's strong spring performance, the return of Rehiring and Person could throw the battle back open this fall.

"You could prognosticate a lot of things, and I've told all those guys that," Bollman said. "They know there are a lot of things that could happen"

Both Person and Rehiring could be candidates for the right tackle job, depending on which five players perform best this fall.

"Whatever the team needs," Rehiring said of potentially playing tackle. "I can play every position."

"I don't know who's going to play right tackle," Person said. "It could be a lot of guys. We'll wait and see. I'm sure Coach Bollman has an idea, but he hasn't said anything to us about it."

Asked if he would be comfortable out there, Person said, "It's different. The thing I would miss most about playing guard is I like to pull. Our tackles don't like to pull a lot. I had an opportunity to pull a lot last season, and it's different but I think it would be good. Whatever is best for the team, I'll do."

Cordle sounded as if he was in Browning's corner.

"We'll see when we get Steve and Ben back," he said. "I guess we're going to see what they can do at right tackle, but I like what B.B. is doing and I like to keep those guys inside with me."

While the injuries could end up making the offensive line deeper when everyone returns to health this fall, they have not done much for the construction of anything more than a patchwork second group this spring.

With Adams, Shugarts, Kerr and Skinner all going down, only sophomore tackle Andrew Miller and redshirt freshman guard Evan Blankenship are scholarship players working with the second group for most of the spring.

Miller (6-6, 279) came to Ohio State as a tight end before a move to tackle midway through last season and is up from the 253 pounds at which he started last season. The 6-3, 290-pound Blankenship was hampered

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**OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE OFFENSIVE LINE**

by an injury last year after entering OSU as a product of Monaca (Pa.) Center Area.

Joining them is a mix of walk-ons, including junior center Andrew Moses (6-3, 280), sophomore guard/center Scott Sika (6-2, 280), sophomore guard Zach Slagle (6-1, 297) and senior tackle Doug Ebner (6-2, 271).

**Injured Starters Remain Upbeat**

Both Person and Rehring showed the quiet self-assuredness of veterans when discussing with the media the status of their injuries.

"I'm pretty confident," Person said of reclaiming his spot this summer. "I'm happy to see those guys getting better. I'm pretty confident, though. It's always a competition. If there are not guys pushing behind you or coming close to taking your spot, they did something wrong in recruiting. It's just kind of (the nature of) the beast of the program here. That's how it's supposed to be. I expect to come back and play, but sometimes it doesn't always work out that way."

In 2007, Person (6-3, 323) enjoyed a productive first season as a starter, but the end was likely not what he would have envisioned. The line did not fare particularly well against the star-studded defensive front of LSU in the BCS National Championship Game in January, and worse yet Person had the misfortune of becoming a fixture on highlight shows after Tiger Ricky Jean-Francois knocked him onto his backside while freeing himself to block a second-quarter Ohio State field-goal attempt.

As it turned out, the game in New Orleans was the third Person played with an injury in his right foot. The native of Xenia, Ohio, first hurt the appendage early in the Illinois game then suited up against Michigan with a carbon-fiber plate in his shoe.

After giving the injury, which Person said he thought was a torn tendon in the ball of his foot attached to a toe, some time to heal on its own, surgery was performed in March with a projected return to health in mid-June.

"It would have been great to have it done the week after the national championship game, but they didn't and that's just the way it works," Person said. "They didn't want to go in and cut it up right away. They wanted to see if it would heal on its own and it wasn't. That's the way it works. I'll be back for summer conditioning and camp so I'll be ready to go."

Meanwhile, Rehring, a fifth-year senior like Person, made light of his own plight by pointing out he was going through a fifth round of spring practices at Ohio State.

Many players max out at three, while red-shirted players who stick around for a fifth fall are privy to four springs.

Rehring graduated early from West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West in 2004 and enrolled in time for spring practice that same calendar year. The 6-7, 335-pounder took a medical redshirt in 2005, nailed down the starting left guard spot in '06 and is back for one last go-round in '08.

One might think that with the increase in players enrolling early, more Buckeyes would be in line for a fifth spring, but many of those who make the early jump from high school do the same thing when the NFL comes calling three years later. Defensive backs Donte Whitner and Ashton Youboty fit that description, while others such as running back Maurice Claret had flamed out before reaching a senior year.

"I deserve a La-Z-Boy or something," Rehring said with a smile.

The longest-tenured starting OSU lineman would prefer to be knocking heads with the rest of his mates this spring but could not because of shoulder surgery.

Though Person could remember vividly

when his injury occurred, there was no such moment for Rehring.

"It was a long period of time getting worse and worse and then I finally got it dinged up pretty good in the national championship game," he said. "I played through it in that game, came back, tried to rest it, iced it down and it just got worse and worse as I was lifting so we just decided to get it cleaned up."

When he spoke to reporters April 5, he said he was nine weeks into a 12-week recovery process. Had spring ball occurred just a bit later, he would have been able to take part physically.

"I wish I was out there competing, but the best thing for the fall was to get it done," he said.

Bollman sounds unconcerned.

"It's not great for Ben or Steve to be out this spring, but on the other hand they have a lot of experience and because of that I'd like to think they'll snap back a little bit quicker," the coach said. "The positive in the overall picture is getting a lot of younger guys more reps that they would not normally get. So that's been a productive thing so far."

**Business As Usual**

Meanwhile, Boone and Cordle continue to hone their games this spring.

Boone, a Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward product who was among the most ballyhooed Ohio State offensive line recruits in recent memory when he signed in February 2005, has started full time since 2006 but still feels he has plenty to learn.

"I don't think I'm even close to where I want to be," he said. "I have a lot to work on (in pass protection). Run-blocking-wise, I think you can always improve on that, but pass pro, I think I need to step my game up more. I'm figuring out some new stances. I'm doing some new things with my hand placement and how wide my set is and stuff like that."

Bollman had a similar take when asked to assess his pupil's career through its first three years.

"I think he's been very, very productive for us," Bollman said of the 6-8, 312-pounder. "He's been a really good run blocker, outstanding. If I had to rate one thing more than the other, he's had some huge assets for us as a run blocker, allowing us to do some things there we can't normally do. He's a good pass blocker, don't get me wrong, but that's an area I think he wants to continue to work on and improve."

As for Cordle, the junior from Lancaster, Ohio, seemed at ease this spring after spending a full year as the starting center.

He is taking a leadership role, one made more important with the revolving door of players on either side of him, and concentrating on blocking technique and other technical aspects of his game.

Cordle doesn't mind being able to snap with his preferred right hand, either, after recovering from a thumb injury that forced him to snap left-handed for part of last season.

"It's ready to go," the 6-4, 297-pounder said of the injury. "I still wear the cast so I can have some support but it's ready to go. I can snap with both hands."

And now he has a new skill, one he might not put on the shelf anytime soon because he can gain an advantage in double-team blocking and pulling if he can keep free the hand that is opposite the side on which the tight end lines up on a given play.

"It's kind of a blessing in disguise," he said.

**Frosh Names Still In Air**

Though all three were injured at one time

or another during spring ball, the names of the three highly regarded freshmen linemen who were on campus for the spring were on many lips in the halls of the Woody Hayes Athletics Center.

Tressel lamented the loss of live practice repetitions for Shugarts, Adams and Brewster, but Bollman and the veterans all agreed that spring was far from a lost experience for any of the freshmen because of the amount of time they were allowed to spend absorbing the playbook and Bollman's teachings.

"I think they're picking it up," Person said. "It's a lot to learn. There's so much more than a high school play. It's one of those deals where the play is called in the huddle and there are still many things that can happen. Right before the ball is snapped the defense shifts and you've got to know what to do."

"They're playing hard. That's the biggest thing. Some guys when they're trying to learn play a step slow and the biggest thing I try to tell them is play hard on the snap, even if you're doing it wrong."

Though he is not contributing physically, Person has tried to lend his four years of knowledge to the youngsters.

"I'm not practicing now so a few days a week after meetings I'll sit in the meeting room with those guys and they'll ask me questions because they don't always want to ask questions in front of the whole group just because it slows down the film process," he said. "Maybe it's easier for them to ask me a question than to ask Coach Bollman."

Though he was out from the beginning of spring, Brewster (6-5, 296) spent time picking the brains of many of the veterans, including Boone, Rehring and Cordle, the player many think he will succeed at the all-important center position someday.

Bollman said seeing the older guys help the younger ones was nothing new.

"People want to see if these guys are as

good as they're supposed to be, but ever since I've been here, as soon as the older guys see someone who might be good enough to help them they start helping the young man very quickly so it works very well," Bollman said. "They are not foolish."

Adams (6-8, 322) and Shugarts were able to take some advantage of the limited physical contact they were afforded. Both were getting tackle reps on the second team and making progress, though Bollman declined to guess how much either could help this fall.

"It's way too early for that," the coach said.

Still, they earned compliments from their teammates.

"He was competing," Person said of Adams one day after the freshman aggravated what Bollman thought was a shoulder problem unexpectedly lingering from high school. "He was out there trying to learn. He was only there for a few days of practice - three days in pads - but he was out there competing hard and playing fast."

Shugarts suffered an undisclosed injury a few days after the linemen spoke with reporters, but Cordle had been seeing improvement from the 6-8, 298-pound native of Klein, Texas.

"He's a big kid," Cordle said. "Once he learns how to play low, there's a lot of potential there."

Shugarts returned to practice during the final week of spring, while sources indicated that Brewster was nearing a clean bill of health.

The status of Adams, though, was unclear. Bollman declined to speculate on how long he might be sidelined or if his ailment could lead to a redshirt this fall.

Even without the freshmen, though, Bollman sees the potential to use two full lines this fall as long as most of the rest of the veterans make successful returns.

"Those guys could just add to the mix," he said.

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OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE TIGHT ENDS

# Tight Ends Want To Become Vertical Option

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With only four returning tight ends on the Ohio State football team, it would be easy to quip that their gatherings could be held in a phone booth.

Possibly, but that booth had better be a big one. After all, Jake Ballard, Rory Nicol, Brandon Smith and J.D. Larson average 6-4 and about 250 pounds.

"We have a little meeting room and those guys find comfort in that," OSU tight ends coach John Peterson said. "It's a nice little place for them to call home."

Ballard said the camaraderie is evident on and off the field.

"We're always competing but we're also cheering each other on," he said. "Everybody does as well as we can. We're a family. There are only four of us so we have to stay together and stay positive. Everyone's competing but it's not bad competition."

"Other guys usually don't look forward to film because there's so many of them. We go in there and joke around when we can, but then we get down to business when we have to. It's fun. It's learning for everybody."

Despite the group's numbers this spring, two things stand out – experience and lack of production. Ballard is the only junior among three seniors.

Nicol, Ballard and Smith combined to catch 32 balls for 263 yards and two touchdowns – both by Ballard. The 6-4, 229-pound walk-on Larson saw limited duty and did not have a reception. As recently as 2003, the Buckeyes went to tight ends Ben Hartssock and Ryan Hamby a total of 51 times for 480 yards

and five scores, but the numbers have dropped dramatically since.

It's a trend the current corps would like to see reversed.

"I think I averaged 4 yards a catch last year – something ridiculous like that," said the 6-5, 252-pound Nicol, who wasn't far off in his assessment of 16 catches for 84 yards (a 5.2 average). His longest catch was for 11 yards.

"I'd like to become more of a vertical threat," he added. "I'm sure Jake would, too. Jake was in the game – we rotated and it was the luck of the draw when plays were called – that he ended up catching balls down the field more so than I did."

"If you go back to my sophomore year, I was more of a vertical threat. I'd like to get back to that, being able to consume some of the middle of the field. But it's not on us. The plays have got to be called. We do our job well in practice and do what they ask us to do. If they call them, they call them and we've got to make the catches when they do."

The 6-6, 256-pound Ballard had 13 catches for 149 yards for an 11.5-yard average in 2007. His touchdowns went for 14 yards against Michigan State and 15 yards vs. Penn State. Both were tossed by first-year starting quarterback Todd Boeckman.

It's Boeckman's continuing development that has the tight ends dreaming of better days in the receiving department.

"The more Todd knows about the system, the better chance the tight ends have of getting the ball," Ballard said. "We have to run routes to perfection to give him excuses not to throw

us the ball. We all try our best. We all want to get the ball – we know it doesn't happen all the time – but we want to catch them when we do get a chance.

"If we're winning games and we're killing people running the ball, obviously you have to run the ball to win games. I'm not opposed to that but it's nice to catch balls once in a while."

There's a sense of frustration when talking to Ballard and Nicol, but they understand the role of the tight end in the Ohio State system is to be a blocker first and receiver second. It's a responsibility they don't take lightly. They are also cognizant of how each is graded on their blocking after every game and are constantly trying to outdo one another.

"They really want to learn more and be as knowledgeable (about the position) as possible," Peterson said. "They're competitive kids and want to be the best they can be. Every day they see each other and know what their strengths and weaknesses are."

They can take comfort that although their task is largely unheralded – unless there is a missed block or a dropped pass – others notice.

"I think everybody came up to me and said, 'I'm open here. I'm open here,' but those guys (tight ends) take it in stride," Boeckman said. "I know there are times I need to get them the ball. Sometimes I should have and did and sometimes I didn't."

"We've got great players in Rory, Jake, Brandon and J.D. Give them credit because they can make plays. It's tough being a tight

end. They're going against some of those big D-linemen. They've got to be big, they've got to be strong and they have to be fast on top of that because they have to run the routes. I have a lot of respect for them."

Nick Siciliano, who filled in as quarterbacks coach this spring as Joe Daniels recovered from cancer surgery, called the tight ends unsung heroes.

"They do the dirty work," Siciliano said. "They don't get a lot of glory and they come to work every day. They work their butts off."

Peterson said he is working with a unique group because of their experience. He doesn't have to show them pass routes, only make sure they refine them.

"There's a comfort zone you can get into when you have a veteran group and know the ins and outs and the things that make them tick. That's good and bad," Peterson said. "You also have to keep things interesting. It's a fun thing to have veteran guys. You don't have to worry about them. They prepare. They study; they help me. They coach other guys."

"They truly embody a team atmosphere in whatever they do. They do have a tremendous team attitude and they embrace that role whether being a great blocker at the point of attack on the edge or being able to run an efficient route."

He expects the tight ends to practice, play and act like the veterans they are.

"We've got so much leadership on this team that it's going to be a big help to us this season," Nicol said. "It's a little bit different at our position because we're older. We've got three seniors and Jake's a junior. In a sense we're always working on our position and our responsibilities."

Nicol and Ballard have been effective



Jake Ballard

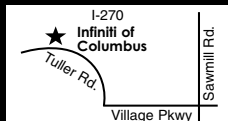


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**OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE TIGHT ENDS**

when the Buckeyes go to a two-tight end formation. If only one is on the field, the two will likely flip-flop assignments. Ballard reportedly got the most reps during the spring, but that was because Nicol was bothered by a strained hamstring.

Peterson has confidence in both.

"Jake has the tools to be a dominant blocker physically," the OSU assistant said. "He definitely has the hands and has developed into a very efficient route runner. He's a young talent that the sky's the limit. He's going to get better and better. Every day he practices he's going to get better. He's an all-around player that keeps growing mentally.

"(Rory) brings great experience and game toughness. He definitely brings a leadership role to that group. He's a smart player. He has very good hands and is an efficient route runner. He uses his leverage. A guy like him needs to be a smart blocker and you can be a very efficient blocker at his size if you're smart and have good technique."

Smith is on the outside looking in although he has been a viable third option in the past. The 6-2, 251-pounder has also seen duty in the spring at fullback.

"Brandon is versatile," Peterson said. "He's

an impact guy, bouncing between fullback and tight end with us. That fullback and H-back position on a lot of clubs is interchangeable. We're no different than that. We have Brandon Smith, who has been around a long time, getting reps at H-back - tight end to fullback."

While the Buckeyes are likely to use more spread offense this season, possibly featuring quarterbacks Antonio Henton or freshman Terrelle Pryor, Boeckman is still running the show. That should be good news if the tight ends expect to see more balls thrown their way.

"You've got a year under Todd's belt and you hope he sees more things and reacts to different situations. He's been able to do that this spring," Peterson said. "I'd say there are opportunities for us having a greater impact. The quarterback going from one read to multiple progressions is a big difference."

He would like to see the tight ends combine to grab 50 catches this season, and he'd get no argument from his players.

"Ideally, that's what we'd like to get," Ballard said. "If we had 30 last year, maybe 40 this year but we can't ask for too much. We'll see what happens."

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OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE KICKERS

# Ohio State's Kickers Look For Consistency

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The chatter in the offseason – if there is such a thing when Ohio State football is involved – was of the veteran-laden offensive and defensive units that could put the Buckeyes in position for a third straight appearance in the BCS National Championship Game.

Often overlooked in the equation is the experience among the kicking specialists. Take the placekickers, for example. OSU returns 2006 No. 1 kicker Aaron Pettrey and last season's starter, Ryan Pretorius. Combined, they have made 26 of 34 field goals and 103 of 107 extra points the past two seasons.

Add fifth-year senior punter A.J. Trapasso and the Buckeyes are as fortunate as any team in the country in the kicking department.

"There's more depth with the kickers and punters and even our long snapper, Jake McQuaide, got some experience early (last) season. It's a good situation and you have to take advantage of it," said Chad Rogosheske, a graduate assistant on head coach Jim Tressell's staff who works with kickers and punters.

Pretorius, who will celebrate his 29th birthday May 2, is the native South African former rugby professional who continued to hold the placekicking top spot this spring while Pettrey handled mostly kickoff duties.

However, that is subject to change as any kicker knows. A couple of misfires – 4 of 5 field-goal misses by Pretorius in 2007 were blocked – and job security is no longer guaranteed. It's a cruel fact but also a motivator.

"I never want to feel comfortable," the 5-9, 169-pound Pretorius admitted.

His wish will come true even though Pettrey acknowledged that the job is Pretorius' to lose. Pettrey (6-2, 199) won the starting position as a sophomore two years ago in part because of a 59-yard field goal in the spring kick scrimmage. He was successful on 8 of 11 field goals that season with a career-best 51-yarder coming against Indiana.

Meanwhile, Pretorius made only 1 of 2 of FG attempts and kicked off 19 times.

Pettrey suffered a torn groin muscle last fall and lost out to Pretorius, who converted 18 of 23 field goals with a best of 50 yards vs. Penn State. He also made all but one of 49 extra points and was a semifinalist for the Lou Groza Award as the nation's top college kicker. Pettrey returned in time to handle some kickoff duties late in the season.

"My confidence really dropped a lot getting hurt and losing the job, but I came back, had a great end of the season kicking off in the bowl practice and bowl game and got my confidence back up," Pettrey said. "This spring I've done pretty well and my confidence is pretty high."

Pretorius has never lacked self-assurance. "You just build on confidence and I'm extremely confident," he said. "You have to be as a kicker because it's more of a mental game than anything else."

He never questioned himself even when his kicks were blocked, including one against LSU that some have seen as a turning point in that game. Ohio State was in position to take a 13-10 lead, but the block helped set up a touchdown for the Tigers and they never looked back during a 38-24 victory.

Pretorius said he takes full responsibility for the miscues although there were times

when he struck the ball well and it still didn't make it past the line of scrimmage because of poor protection.

"You've just got to keep kicking and get as much height (on the ball) as you can," he said. "I'm working on getting the ball as high as I can. It's worked out in the spring. We've worked hard on our blocking and holds. We should be extremely solid this year."

Pettrey is not giving up on supplanting Pretorius on field goals and PATs, but for now he will concentrate on kickoffs.

"I'm trying to push Ryan as much as I can on field goals," Pettrey said. "I'd love to do them both and I'd like to do that as soon as I can. If I get caught behind him, though, I'm fine with it. I'm happy just being the kickoff guy, but of course I'd like to do both."

"I have another year. I'm trying to prepare the best I can so I can have a real good senior season (in 2009). But I feel like I'm still in the running for the job this year, too."

Of course, Pettrey must view his older teammate as the houseguest who just won't leave.

"I thought he'd be retired by now," Pettrey cracked.

Not yet. Pretorius could have left Ohio State after last season to pursue a spot in the NFL but chose to stay for his senior year primarily because he is still a youngster in terms of kicking a football instead of rugby or soccer balls.

"I need to get as much experience as I can," he said. "I want to be even better than last season."

The competition between the two kickers can only help the team, junior tight end Jake Ballard said.

"They're putting it through the uprights (this spring), which is what they need to do," he said. "It's real tight right now. We've got two experienced kickers that can get the job done. As long as they're competing they're going to get better. It's fine with me."

One area where experience is lacking is among the snappers. McQuaide, a 6-2, 219-pound sophomore, took a few snaps last season and is the leading candidate although sophomore walk-on Patrick Howe (6-2, 204) is also in the mix.

McQuaide said the spring drills have been

invaluable.

"They're really important, especially for me because I'm younger," he said. "You find out how good you really are against the talent out there, especially in terms of the speed and the strength of other guys."

Taking the snap from center when Pretorius kicks will be junior backup punter Jon Thoma. Trapasso is the holder for Pettrey.

Unlike the placekickers, there is no question that Trapasso will be the punter for the fourth consecutive year. The 6-0, 229-pounder had 53 punts for a career-best 41.5 yards per kick last season and has never had a kick blocked during his OSU career. In 2007, he put 21 inside the opponent's 20-yard line, forced 10 fair catches and had seven touchbacks. He was also a semifinalist for the Ray Guy Award as college's top punter.

"He has matured, physically as a player and his mental approach to the game and how he does things," Rogosheske said. "He's such a good athlete – he has learned that you just don't kick it as hard as you can. That's not effective punting. It's being able to control your body physically to be able to perform correct techniques and he's learning that. When he struggles is when he goes after it as hard as he can."

"If he's able to pull back and focus on himself and the correct technique and not just try to hit the ball as hard as he can he will be successful."

Trapasso watches a lot of film taken from ground level so he can study facets of punting such as his foot striking the ball and leg extension.

"In high school, I just tried to kick it as hard as I could and see where it went," he said. "Now, just talking to people that have done it before, the past punters who have been here, the great minds and people who have done it before, you pick up little tidbits here and there."

"You never want to lose any of that leg strength but you can't help but want more and want to be able to hit the ball and strike the ball better than you ever have."

Thoma, a 6-2, 201-pound former walk-on, will remain Trapasso's backup at punter. He got his first collegiate kick last season against Kent State.

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OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL DRAFT

# Gibson Taken First By Scarlet In Draft

By **MATTHEW HAGER**  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

An impressive spring helped make sophomore Thaddeus Gibson the first pick in the annual spring draft. However, it was some smart planning that helped the Scarlet squad beef up its defense and forced the Gray team to look for help.

At the annual draft for the spring game, head coach Jim Tressel divided up the seniors on the Scarlet and Gray teams and then allowed the groups to pick their teams from the remaining underclassmen. The Scarlet won the coin toss and the right to choose the first position. Alex Boone chose the "Leo" position – a hybrid of a defensive end and linebacker – and picked Gibson.

The group representing the Gray wanted all defensive ends to be picked together, but Tressel – the draft commissioner – allowed the split. Gray then chose the defensive ends as the next position and took Lawrence Wilson. That allowed Scarlet to select Cameron Heyward, giving that squad the two players it wanted the most.

"We came in and in two seconds we looked at the board and knew right away what we wanted to do," Boone said. "We knew right away that we were going to take Thad first. Then we wanted Cam, and that's all we knew."

Gibson's status has been rising during the spring, and Boone said he wanted the sophomore on his side.

"He's one of the best playmakers on this team right now," said Boone, who held up a scarlet No. 90 Gibson jersey after announcing his first pick. "He does a great job. He's strong, athletic and has a great spirit. We needed him. We knew if we had him the Gray would be done for."

The rules of the draft were the same as in previous years. One team selected a player from a specific position. The two teams then alternated selecting players from that position until all were taken, after which the other team opened up another position.

In addition to getting Gibson and Heyward, the Scarlet also opened the defensive tackle position and took Doug Worthington and Dexter Larimore. The Gray picked Todd Denlinger in between the Scarlet picks.

That left seven players on the defensive line for Scarlet – Gibson, Worthington, Nader Abdallah (a senior assigned by Tressel), Larimore, Chris Rietschlin (also assigned by Tressel), Heyward and Tom Ingham. The Gray had only five linemen – Solomon Thomas (taken after Gibson), Denlinger, Bryan Gray (assigned by Tressel), Wilson and Mark Johnson – and argued for another lineman via commissioner's decision or trade.

Neither happened, as the Scarlet argued that it really had only six linemen because Rietschlin would not play, according to defensive coordinator Jim Heacock.

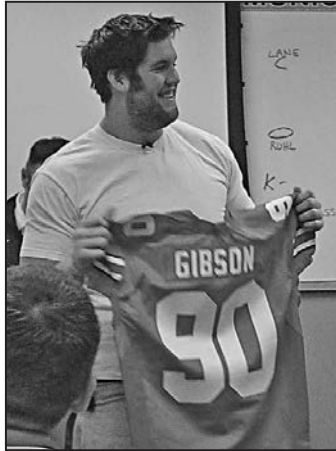
"We thought that when we picked all of these guys, Tressel would say, 'No. You can't take him,'" Boone said. "As you can see, we're loaded. It's going to be a lot of fun."

Scarlet linebacker James Laurinaitis agreed.

"I was surprised we got all of the D-linemen that we did," he said. "We have so many D-linemen up there (on the board). It's like stacking the deck."

Gray spokesman Malcolm Jenkins said he was comfortable with his team but would have liked to make a trade.

"We did need another D-lineman," he said. "We were looking for more depth when it



ADAM JARDY

**WE LIKE THAD – Ohio State senior offensive tackle Alex Boone flashes a wide smile as his Scarlet team selects defensive lineman Thaddeus Gibson as the No. 1 pick in the annual spring game draft. Gibson was chosen because of the playmaking skills he showed during the Buckeyes' spring practice drills.**

comes to inside guys, just to keep guys fresh."

Added a joking Marcus Freeman, "You can't complain now. This is set in stone. We thought our commissioner would try to divvy it up a little bit more, but he let it go this year."

Jenkins said the Gray's strength is in its secondary.

"Donald Washington was somebody they didn't have their eyes on," Jenkins said. "We've got Andre Amos, too. We've got a good secondary with Aaron Gant and Kurt Coleman. Our secondary is real strong."

Tressel assigned starting quarterback Todd Boeckman to the Scarlet prior to the draft. Scarlet later opened the quarterback position and took Antonio Henton, but Tressel intervened and announced that Boeckman would play the first half for the Scarlet, while Henton would play the second half. Henton would also start the game for the Gray and play the first quarter. Joe Bauserman, taken by the Gray after Scarlet's selection of Henton, was tabbed to play the final three quarters.

Prior to the draft, several players were announced to be out for the game. They included Mike Adams, Michael Brewster, Garrett Hummel, Josh Kerr, Ben Person, Steve Rehling, Jon Skinner, Chris "Beanie" Wells, Brian Robiskie, Jamario O'Neal, Robert Rose and Donnie Eveye.

As in past drafts, there was plenty of trash talk during and after the draft. Members of the Scarlet side thought they did a far better job picking players, while the Gray group remembered what happened in 2007 when Scarlet looked to have a better team before losing to the Gray.

"We drafted amazingly this year," Boone said. "We had them on their heels this year, as you can tell – they wanted to trade everybody at the end. I thought we did a good job."

Freeman admitted that the Scarlet looked better on paper, but he said he was in their position in 2007.

"I was part of the Scarlet team last year and we thought we had a superior team. Then we went out and lost," Freeman said. "We'll let them talk this year and we'll see what happens."

The draft had plenty of laughs and trash

## The Scarlet and Gray Draft: Pick By Pick

Here are the results of the 2008 Ohio State spring game draft, listed in the order in which positions were selected. Senior members of the team were previously allocated.

**"Leo" Position** – Thaddeus Gibson (Scarlet), Solomon Thomas (Gray).

**Defensive End** – Lawrence Wilson (G), Cameron Heyward (S), Mark Johnson (G), Tom Ingham (S).

**Wide Receiver** – Brian Hartline (S), Dane Sanzenbacher (G), Ray Small (S), Taurian Washington (G), Devon Torrence (S), Grant Schwartz (G), Jake Stoneburner (S), Ryan Shuck & Ricky Crawford (G – both assigned by Jim Tressel).

**Offensive Tackle** – Bryant Browning (G), J.B. Shugarts (S), Andy Miller (G).

**Center** – Jimmy Cordle (S), Andrew Moses (G), Scott Sika (S).

**Tight End** – Jake Ballard (G), Brandon Smith (S – assigned by John Peterson).

**Defensive Tackles** – Doug Worthington (S), Todd Denlinger (G), Dexter Larimore (S).

**Cornerbacks** – Donald Washington (G), Chimdi Chekwa (S), Andre Amos (G), James Scott (S).

**Offensive Guards** – Connor Smith (S), Zach Slagle (G), Evan Blankenship (S), Chris Malone (G).

**Safeties** – Kurt Coleman (G), Anderson Russell (S), Aaron Gant (G), Nate Oliver (S), Rocco Pentello (G), Eugene Clifford (S).

**Middle Linebacker** – Austin Spittler (S – will also play fullback), Etienne Sabino (G).

**Weakside Linebacker** – Ross Homan (G), Brian Rolle (S), Andrew Sweat (G).

**Strongside Linebacker** – Jermale Hines (S), Tyler Moeller (G).

**Tailback** – Brandon Saine (G), Dan Herron (S), Marcus Williams (G), K.C. Christian (S), Joe Gantz (G), Bo DeLande (S).

**Quarterback** – Antonio Henton (S), Joe Bauserman (G).

**Punter** – Jon Thoma (G), Ben Bartholomew (S).

**Long Snapper** – Jake McQuaide (S), Patrick Howe (G).

**Kicker** – Aaron Pettrey (G), Devin Barclay & Michael Mattimeo (S – both assigned by Tressel).

**Fullbacks** – Spencer Smith (G), Ryan Lukens (S – assigned by Tressel).

talk, but that was fine by Tressel. The head coach said he was hoping the draft would be fun for the players.

"What I liked was the enthusiasm," he said. "I like the fact that it's important to them. I also like the fact that there was depth into the draft. There were important decisions being made after the first pick. Even when they were through three quarters of the positions, guys were debating."

All the taunting did not bother the players either. They expected it.

"We've got a lot of guys that have been around each other for a long time," Laurinaitis said. "That's always good to happen when we get competitive. Malcolm is always going to be running his mouth, but we'll see on Saturday."

When told about Laurinaitis' remarks, Jenkins agreed.

"There'll be a lot of talking," he said. "A

lot of talking."

### Draft Digest

- Former Buckeye defensive end Vernon Gholston made an appearance near the end of the draft and asked which side had picked him. He wrote his name on the Gray depth chart, but Tressel joked that Gholston could play only one snap.

- The final player to be placed on a team was running back Chris Wells, who was assigned to the Gray by Tressel.

"We're going to get him a whistle and clipboard," Tressel said.

Jenkins joked that the addition of Wells was "worthless."

"Nobody wanted him because he's not playing," Jenkins said. "He's of no value. We've got enough cheerleaders. We don't need another one."

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OHIO STATE SPRING GAME

# Younger Buckeyes Shine In Scarlet Triumph

By MARK REA  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Springtime is often associated with youth, and so it was April 19 as a bevy of younger players got their spotlight moments when Ohio State played its annual spring football game.

An announced record crowd of 76,346 fans showed up at Ohio Stadium on a rainy afternoon to watch previously unheralded Buckeyes such as Dan Herron, Taurian Washington and Joe Bauserman showcase their talents during a 20-7 victory by the Scarlet over the Gray.

With starting tailback Chris "Beanie" Wells held out of contact drills all spring and several of the team's offensive linemen nursing various injuries, OSU displayed very little of what is supposed to be a potent running attack this fall. As a result, Herron finished the afternoon as the game's leading rusher with a modest 30 yards for the Scarlet.

Still, the redshirt freshman showed his elusiveness on several occasions, including a nifty 8-yard run in the first quarter. Herron also sent notice that he could get the tough yards inside as well, knifing over from the 1-yard line for a third-quarter touchdown.

Meanwhile, Washington and Bauserman were almost single-handedly keeping the Gray squad in the game.

Washington, a sophomore who caught three passes for 46 yards and a touchdown last season in limited action, collected four receptions for 71 yards and a touchdown in the spring contest. At the same time, Bauserman – the



JOSH WINSLOW

**TOUCHDOWN DIVE** – Scarlet tailback Dan Herron (1) dives through a big hole in the Gray defense to score a third-quarter touchdown during Ohio State's annual spring game. The Scarlet team won a 20-7 victory in the rain-dampened April 19 contest that was attended by a spring-record 76,346 fans.

redshirt freshman who delayed his college football career to play minor league baseball in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization – exhibited

a strong arm and completed 7 of 14 throws for 125 yards and the score to Washington.

The duo would have had even more impres-

sive numbers had another touchdown reception – this one for 62 yards early in the fourth quarter – not been wiped out by a holding penalty.

Other lesser-known Buckeyes taking their turn in the spring game spotlight included freshmen Jake Stoneburner, Etienne Sabino and J.B. Shugarts as well as walk-ons Marcus Williams, Ryan Schuck, K.C. Christian and Mike Mattimore.

It was a near-perfect ending to a productive spring practice session, according to OSU head coach Jim Tressel.

"One of the goals we had for the spring was to make sure we had some fun, and I thought they had some fun today," Tressel said. "We got some young guys out there today who hadn't had a chance to play in front of a big crowd and they got some opportunities.

"I thought it was a good, positive day. We had a good, positive 15 days of practice and good concentration by our guys and I think we took a needed step. For the most part, I thought it was a good spring."

With such an experienced team that returns nine starters on offense and defense as well as both kicking specialists, Tressel expressed his desire early in the spring to see some of his younger players make a depth chart push for fall playing time. He must have been pleased with the outcome of the spring game.

Stoneburner gathered in a 19-yard pass for his first reception as a Buckeye while Sabino was a top performer for the Gray defense, registering five tackles including one behind the line of scrimmage. Shugarts shook off the effects of a minor leg injury and performed well for the victorious Scarlet team, giving the

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**OHIO STATE SPRING GAME**

coaching staff one more player to consider for the open right tackle position.

Meanwhile, Williams was the leading rusher for the Gray with 20 yards on just three carries; his teammate Schuck gathered in two receptions for 41 yards; Christian broke off the long run of the afternoon with a 24-yard scamper for the Scarlet; and his teammate Mattimoe closed out the scoring with a 24-yard field goal in the final minute of the game.

Even with all of the good performances from the youngsters, it was still a pair of veterans who took center stage early. Quarterback Todd Boeckman and receiver Brian Hartline connected six times for 82 yards, accounting for nearly one-third of the Scarlet team's total yardage figure of 268.

Boeckman finished the day with 12 completions in 18 attempts for 145 yards, no touchdowns and a pair of interceptions. Half of those connections went to Hartline, who had a 48-yard catch in the first quarter to set up his team's first touchdown. The 6-2, 186-pound junior also had a stretch early in the second quarter when he snagged four receptions in the span of only six plays.

Another veteran, receiver Ray Small, fought off some nagging injuries and tallied five catches for 74 yards for the Scarlet team.

"I thought Todd played solid today," Tressel said. "He showed good command and good understanding, made big plays and really had a productive day."

Marring the otherwise good performance by Boeckman were a pair of sacks and two interceptions. The sacks were a result of a no-contact rule for Boeckman — he wore a black jersey and was ruled down whenever a defender got more than a hand on him.

As for the interceptions, both appeared to be unforced errors. Boeckman underthrew Hartline deep down the middle early in the game and safety Kurt Coleman made the pick. In the second period, Boeckman was gunning for Hartline again in traffic when linebacker Ross Homan made a diving interception.

According to Tressel, only one of the misuses was really his quarterback's fault.

"I thought Kurt Coleman made a great play (on the first one)," the OSU head coach said. "On the other interception, I thought maybe Todd tried to force it a little bit and Ross made the pick."

**Record-Setting Crowd**

While the attendance bested the Ohio State spring game record of 75,301 set just last year, the rainy conditions at kickoff prevented a run at the unofficial NCAA record of 92,138 set by Alabama in 2007.

Tressel and his coaching staff erred on the side of caution as well, keeping several starters sidelined. Among those watching the proceedings were Wells, wide receiver Brian Robiskie, offensive linemen Steve Rehling and Ben Person and defensive lineman Rob Rose.

Those absences as well as several others forced the respective squads to cobble together lineups and prevented the teams from clicking on all cylinders offensively. The squads combined for only 448 total yards, just 105 of it on the ground.

Nevertheless, the Scarlet took the game's opening possession and came out firing. Boeckman hooked up with Hartline for a 6-yard gain before Herron ran for 6 more yards and a first down. But on the third play of the drive, Boeckman's deep ball intended for Hartline was intercepted by Coleman at the Gray 22.

The first real scoring threat came later in the first period when the Gray crossed midfield for the first time. But on a fourth-and-3 play, sophomore tailback Brandon Saine was stopped for no gain and the Scarlet took over at its own 47-yard line.

It took Boeckman only four plays to get into the end zone from there. Herron rushed for 3 yards on first down before the OSU quarterback dropped in a 48-yard bomb to Hartline. Two plays later, Boeckman scored on a 1-yard sneak, and after Aaron Pettrey added the extra point, the Scarlet led a 7-0 lead with 1:37 left in the first quarter.

The Scarlet threatened again early in the second period by driving to the Gray 26, but Boeckman was intercepted by Homan, a turnover that eventually led to the Gray's lone score.

Bauserman entered the game for the first time and completed his initial three pass attempts — each of them to Washington. The first was a modest 6-yarder followed by an 8-yard gain. Those plays sandwiched a 6-yard run by Williams, and after the sophomore tailback broke off a 10-yard run, Bauserman and Washington hooked up again for a 51-yard touchdown. Ryan Pretorius added the extra point to tie the score at 7 with 2:49 left until halftime.

Boeckman was able to move the Scarlet team down the field in the final minutes of the half, connecting with Small twice for gains of 19 and 5 yards and with Stoneburner for a 19-yard gain, to set up a 48-yard field goal from Pettrey as time ran out.

That gave the Scarlet a 10-7 lead at halftime, and it built on that advantage in the second half.

Sophomore quarterback Antonio Henton switched his Gray jersey to Scarlet after intermission to relieve Boeckman, and he engineered a short 30-yard scoring drive late in the third period.

Trying to take advantage of good field position after a short punt, Henton scrambled for 2 yards on first down but was hauled down for a 5-yard loss on the next play, setting up a third-and-13 situation. But Henton found Small on a crossing pattern and the two connected for a 30-yard gain to the Gray 3-yard line.

Three plays later, Herron bolted over left guard for a 1-yard touchdown. Pettrey added the PAT, giving the Scarlet a 17-7 lead with 23 seconds left in the third period.

Henton appeared much more comfortable in a Scarlet jersey. He was 5 for 7 for 62 yards in the second half after going only 1 for 5 for 11 yards in the first half for the Gray.

The scoring culminated with just 41 seconds remaining in the game when Mattimoe fought off a roughing-the-kicker penalty to boot a 24-yard field goal to account for the final 20-7 score.

On defense, junior cornerback Andre Amos led all tacklers in the game with eight total stops for the Gray. Senior linebacker Marcus Freeman was next with seven while senior defensive back Nick Patterson and Sabino added five each.

Junior middle linebacker Austin Spittle led the Scarlet with five stops while sophomore cornerback Chimdi Chekwa and senior linebacker James Laurinaitis had four apiece.

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Heacock has said he wants a more consistent pass rush from his linemen, and he had to be pleased with their production during the spring game. Sophomore defensive tackle Dexter Larimore had a pair of sacks for the Scarlet squad while fellow interior lineman Nader Abdallah had one. Junior DT Todd Denlinger also had one for the Gray.

The other sacks in the contest belonged to Gray linebacker Tyler Moeller and his teammate defensive end Lawrence Wilson, who was experiencing his first "game" competition since suffering a broken leg in last season's opener against Youngstown State.

**Game Notes**

- The game consisted of four 11-minute quarters and was conducted under the NCAA's

**Spring Game Box Score**

**Scarlet 20, Gray 7**

April 19, 2008 — Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
Gray	0	7	0	0	7
Scarlet	7	3	7	3	20

**First Quarter**  
**SCARLET** — Boeckman, 1 yard run (Pettrey kick), 1:37; 4 plays, 53 yards, 1:48 TOP.

**Second Quarter**  
**GRAY** — T. Washington, 51 yard pass from Bauserman (Pretorius kick), 2:49; 5 plays, 81 yards, 2:11 TOP.  
**SCARLET** — Pettrey, 48 yard field goal, 0:00; 8 plays, 40 yards, 2:43 TOP.

**Third Quarter**  
**SCARLET** — Herron, 1 yard run (Pettrey kick), 0:23; 6 plays, 30 yards, 2:52 TOP.

**Fourth Quarter**  
**SCARLET** — Mattimoe, 24 yard field goal, 0:41; 6 plays, 20 yards, 3:25 TOP.  
**Att.** — 76,346.  
**Weather** — 64 degrees, light rain; wind, S 12 mph.

**Team Statistics**

	GRAY	SCARLET
<b>First Downs</b>	8	12
<b>Rushing</b>	4	3
<b>Passing</b>	3	8
<b>Penalty</b>	1	1
<b>Rushes-Yards</b>	21-44	24-61
<b>Passing Yards</b>	136	207
<b>Passes (Att.-Comp.-Int.)</b>	20-8-0	25-17-2
<b>Offensive Plays</b>	41	49
<b>Total Net Yards</b>	180	268
<b>Third Down Efficiency</b>	2-9	5-10
<b>Fourth Down Efficiency</b>	0-2	1-2
<b>Punts</b>	5-35.4	2-36.0
<b>Fumbles-Lost</b>	0-0	0-0
<b>Penalties</b>	9-79	6-44
<b>Time of Possession</b>	17:21	25:58

**Individual Statistics**

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** — **GRAY:** Williams 3-20; Bauserman 8-12; M. Wells 3-10; Henton 1-10; Gantz 1-0; Sanzenbacher 1(-4); Saine 4(-4). **SCARLET:** Herron 10-30; Christian 2-23; DeLande 6-21; Henton 3(-4); Boeckman 3(-9).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** — **GRAY:** Bauserman 7-14-0-125-1; Henton 1-5-0-11-0; Saine 0-1-0-0-0. **SCARLET:** Boeckman 12-18-2-145-0; Henton 5-7-0-62-0.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** — **GRAY:** T. Washington 4-71; Schuck 2-41; Kacsandi 1-13; Sanzenbacher 1-11. **SCARLET:** Hartline 6-82; Small 5-74; Nicol 2-17; Ruhl 2-9; Stoneburner 1-19; DeLande 1-6.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** — **GRAY:** Thoma 5-35.4-45. **SCARLET:** Trapasso 2-36.0-37.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** — **GRAY:** None. **SCARLET:** Small 2-4.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** — **GRAY:** M. Wells 2-50; Torrence 2-34. **SCARLET:** Small 2-44.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds)** — **GRAY:** None. **SCARLET:** None.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** — **GRAY:** Coleman 1-0; Homan 1-0. **SCARLET:** None.

**SACKS** — **GRAY:** Wilson 1-0-7; Moeller 1-0-5; Denlinger 1-0-3. **SCARLET:** Larimore 2-0-10; Abdallah 1-0-3.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** — **GRAY:** Denlinger 2-0-4; Wilson 1-0-7; Moeller 1-0-5; Sabino 1-0-1; Gray 0-5-1; Sweat 0-5-0. **SCARLET:** Larimore 2-0-10; Laurinaitis 1-0-4; Oliver 1-0-3; Abdallah 1-0-3; Rolle 0-5-2; Spittle 0-5-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Assst.-Tot.)** — **GRAY:** Amos 5-3-8; Freeman 2-5-7; Patterson 3-2-5; Sabino 2-3-5; Pentello 2-1-3; Moeller 2-1-3; Denlinger 2-1-3; Wilson 1-2-3; Gray 1-2-3; Sweat 1-1-2; Gant 1-1-2; Ingham 1-1-2; Homan 1-1-2; Johnson 1-0-1; Coleman 1-0-1; Thomas 1-0-1. **SCARLET:** Spittle 2-3-5; Chekwa 4-0-4; Laurinaitis 2-2-4; Lane 3-0-3; Larimore 2-1-3; Heyward 0-3-3; Oliver 2-0-2; Rolle 1-1-2; Abdallah 1-1-2; S. Smith 1-0-1; Russell 1-0-1; Clifford 1-0-1; Hines 1-0-1; Small 0-1-1; DeLande 0-1-1; Gibson 0-1-1.

revised clock rules, which include the game clock not stopping when a runner goes out of bounds except in the last two minutes of each half. Also, a 40-second play clock starts as soon as the whistle blows signaling the end of the previous play.

- Former Ohio State stars Cris Carter and Mike Tomczak were honorary head coaches for the contest. Carter, a future NFL Hall of Famer, was the honorary coach of the Gray, while Tomczak, who enjoyed a 16-year professional career with five different teams, led the victorious Scarlet squad.

- Several other former Buckeyes were in attendance including Mike Doss, Bobby Carpenter, Albert Dukes and Trever Robinson. Also in the crowd were such incoming freshmen as DeVier Posey, Willie Mobley, Nathan Williams, Nic DiLillo, Keith Wells and Terrelle Pryor.

- Before the game, the Buckeyes met with

several Ohio military personnel who have been wounded during the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among them was U.S. Army Lt. Col. Greg Gadsen, who lost both legs as the result of a bomb in Iraq in early 2007. Gadsen, who spoke about the importance of teamwork, became an emotional leader for the New York Giants during their Super Bowl championship run.

- The Buckeyes wore decals with the initials "DS" on their helmets in honor of Hilliard, Ohio, school crossing guard Dianna Sharp, who was killed April 10 trying to prevent a child from being hit by a dump truck in a crossing near Scioto Darby Elementary School.

- The football game was preceded by a 20-13 victory by the Ohio State men's lacrosse team over Denver. The announced crowd of 29,601 not only set a new school record for attendance but also broke the NCAA regular-season mark.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

# Spring Game Aftermath Nets Three Verbals

One year ago, the momentum held by the Ohio State recruiting class of 2008 kicked into another gear in the immediate aftermath of the spring game. In the span of three days, five-star out-of-state prospects J.B. Shugarts and Michael Brewster issued verbal commitments to the program, as did four-star in-state player Nathan Williams.

Both Shugarts and Brewster were on hand for the game, where they were surrounded by a small

yet talented group of soon-to-be seniors that included Andrew Sweat, Mike Adams, Jake Stoneburner and Josh Jenkins. When National Signing Day rolled around 10 months later, all of the aforementioned players minus Jenkins were signing on the dotted line to play for OSU head coach Jim Tressel.

After hosting such a talented group for the spring game in 2007 resulted in some big verbal commitments, the Buckeyes invited an even bigger group to the 2008 game held April 19. The goals were the same as last year, Tressel said.

"Hopefully we'll get the same type of thing," he told reporters following the spring game draft.

Those proved to be prophetic words, as the Buckeyes landed three new verbal commitments and found themselves closing in on several more as BSB went to press.

Before the OSU coaching staff could start dissecting the film from the spring game, they were welcoming commitment No. 9 in

Darrell Givens, a four-star cornerback from Indian Head (Md.) Lackey.

Givens, ranked the No. 9 cornerback in the country by Scout.com, committed while on campus.

"It just felt like the right place for me," he told BuckeyeSports.com, a member of the Scout network. "I just fell in love with Ohio State."

Givens was being recruited by several of the OSU coaches including Tressel, cornerbacks coach Taver Johnson, linebackers coach Luke Fickell and wide receivers coach Darrell Hazell, the latter of whom visited his school several times, he said.

As a junior, the 6-1, 178-pound Givens recorded 82 tackles, seven pass breakups, three interceptions, four forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries. A speedy athlete who has been timed at 4.5 seconds in the 40-yard dash, Givens returned both a kickoff and a punt for touchdowns as well.

For his efforts, he earned first-team all-state and all-county honors.

Although Givens boasts more than 40 offers, Ohio State was the first school to offer him a scholarship. He also held offers from the likes of Florida, Illinois, Penn State and Virginia Tech. Givens is friends with Jamie Wood, a safety from Pickerington (Ohio) Central who verbally committed to the Buckeyes in late February.

One day after the spring game, rumors began to circulate that at least one more player was going to commit to the Buckeyes.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK with Adam Jardy

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### OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Football players in the class of 2009 who have issued verbal commitments to play college football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	High School
C.J. Barnett	CB	6-1	180	Clayton (Ohio) Northmont
Dorian Bell	WR/LB	6-1	220	Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway
Chris Fields	WR	6-0	180	Painesville (Ohio) Harvey
Darrell Givens	CB	6-1	178	Indian Head (Md.) Lackey
Jordan Hall	RB	5-9	185	Jeannette, Pa.
Adam Homan	LB/FB	6-2	232	Coldwater, Ohio
Storm Klein	RB/LB	6-3	220	Newark (Ohio) Licking Valley
Jack Mewhort	OL/DL	6-6	285	Toledo (Ohio) St. John's
Johnny Simon	DT	6-3	250	Youngstown (Ohio) Cardinal Mooney
Jamie Wood	DB/WR	6-2	190	Pickerington (Ohio) Central
Jordan Whiting	LB	6-0	220	Louisville (Ky.) Trinity

Late in the evening of Sunday, April 20, it was confirmed that Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway linebacker Dorian Bell, who was in attendance for the spring game, was planning to announce his college choice the next day during a press conference.

When the announcement came around, Bell confirmed the speculation that had been ramping up for 48 hours. He would be a Buckeye.

As it turns out, he wanted to return home and talk things over with his family before making a final decision. Sunday evening, he reached a final conclusion and hatched a plan. When Fickell arrived at his school for a visit the next day, Bell had the linebackers coach place a call to Tressel.

Then, Bell delivered the good news and apparently caught the Buckeyes by surprise.

"They had no idea I was going to commit," he said. "There were a bunch of stories out there, but for some reason a lot of people like to twist your words up and make their own news out of it. Coach Fickell didn't even know I was committing until he got here."

The 6-1, 220-pounder with 4.54-second speed in the 40-yard dash listed several reasons he selected the Buckeyes.

"The coaches and the fans are great at Ohio State," he said. "There is not one thing about the place that I do not like, especially the players. I have known since I was a sophomore when I went there with Shayne (Hale) and Cameron (Saddler) and I just felt it."

With Bell's commitment, the Buckeyes now have verbal commitments from three of the top linebackers in the country. Bell is rated the No. 1 strongside linebacker in the country, while Jordan Whiting and Storm Klein are listed as the Nos. 3 and 7 middle linebackers, respectively.

"I want to compete for a starting job and help my team win a national championship," Bell said. "I watched the team and I think I can play with them. I think I can come in and compete for a starting position. I just have to work hard and show them."

Bell had narrowed his list to six schools, with the Buckeyes beating out Florida, Florida State, Michigan, North Carolina and Penn State for his services.

He is the second five-star prospect in the class, joining Youngstown (Ohio) Cardinal Mooney defensive tackle John Simon. No other team in the country has two five-star prospects verbally in the fold at this stage in the process.

### Hall Follows Bell And Joins Class Of 2009

As the Buckeyes went through their long recruitment of Jeannette, Pa., quarterback phenom Terrelle Pryor, they noticed speedy tailback prospect Jordan Hall making plays alongside Pryor and eventually decided to

offer him a scholarship.

Now the class of 2009 member often referred to as "Pryor's teammate" has joined Pryor as a Buckeye commitment.

Less than six hours after Bell made his decision public, word leaked out that Hall was doing the same.

Hall said he knew as of Sunday afternoon that he was going to commit to the Buckeyes — and it nearly happened weeks ago.

"I've been thinking about it since I went there for a junior day," Hall told BSB, referring to an event that took place Feb. 24. "Then the spring game just made it happen. I just felt like I was at home when I was there."

Hall took in the spring game and then spoke of wanting to have his parents see the school before he would commit. He returned home, talked to his mother and made a decision.

"I had to talk to my mom about it, and she said if that's what I wanted to do she was behind me," he said. "I told her that's what I wanted to do."

Although Hall decided where he was going on Sunday, April 20, he did not call Tressel until Monday. Tressel is now setting up a time for Hall to make a return trip with both parents in tow so they can see where their son will be headed off to college.

While on campus, Hall spent time with every OSU coach, he said, but he spent the most time with running backs coach Dick Tressel, his eventual position coach.

"They want me to be a regular running back," he said.


At 5-9, 185 pounds, Hall played several roles for the state champion Jayhawks last season. Out of the backfield, he rushed for 891 yards and 20 touchdowns. Out wide, he snagged 27 catches for 704 yards and nine more touchdowns. Counting contributions on defense and special teams, he totaled 32 touchdowns as a junior and earned first-team all-state honors.

Hall, Pryor and company arrived in Columbus the day before the spring game and watched the team practice on Friday. That evening, they went to Eddie George's Grille 27 restaurant near the OSU campus.

Following the spring game, both Pryor and Hall attended a picnic with many of the OSU players and their parents.

Although he credited Pryor for helping the OSU coaching staff discover him, Hall said his final decision was not made with his former — and future — teammate in mind.

"I'm not going there just because Terrelle went there," he said, adding that he spoke with Pryor on Sunday. "He was happy about it. He told me, 'Make sure you feel that it's right and don't commit and back out. It's a big decision.'"



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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Hall held offers from Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State and Pittsburgh in addition to OSU. With his commitment, the Buckeyes have 11 verbal members of their class of 2009, six of whom are four-star recruits.

Now, with the decision out of the way, the senior-to-be can focus on helping his team try to defend its state championship.

"I feel good," he said. "It's a big weight off of my shoulders. I can focus on my team and next year's football season."

### Plethora Of Prospects On Hand For Spring Game

Unlike last year, when the coaching staff invited only a small group of prospects to the spring game, a veritable who's-who list of the recruiting world could be seen walking the sidelines before kickoff.

Several verbal members of the class of 2009 were there including cornerback C.J. Barnett from Clayton (Ohio) Northmont, fullback Adam Homan from Coldwater, Ohio, offensive tackle Jack Mewhort from Toledo St. John's, Klein, Simon and Whiting.

Uncommitted prospects on hand included offensive lineman Terry Johnson from Trotwood (Ohio) Madison; tight end Stephen Plein from Fort Myers, Fla.; offensive guard Ryan Spiker from Dresden (Ohio) Tri-Valley; athlete Collin Bing from Augusta (Ga.) Glenn Hills; Cleveland Glenville offensive lineman Marcus Hall and defensive end Jonathan Newsome; and Givens, Hall and Bell.

Illinois verbal commitment Melvin Fellows, who still is considering Ohio State, was on hand as well. Fellows is a defensive end from Garfield Heights, Ohio.

A cluster of players from Florida made the trip in Miami Palmetto running back Jaamal Berry, Fort Lauderdale St. Thomas Aquinas wide receiver Duron Carter, Plantation safety Vladimir Emilien and athlete Brandon McGee, and Hallandale Beach quarterback Victor Marc. Berry received an OSU offer April 14, while Emilien, McGee and Carter all have offers as well.

Three members of the recruiting class of 2010 were on hand in Cincinnati Anderson offensive tackle Andrew Norwell, Eagle Lake (Fla.) Lake Region safety Marvin Robinson and Boardman, Ohio, tight end J.T. Moore.

Finally, several players set to join the Buckeyes this summer were there to see their future teammates. Pryor was there, as were Madison, Ohio, tight end Nic DiLillo; Beavercreek, Ohio, safety Zach Domicone; Eden Prairie, Minn., defensive end Willie Mobley; and Fort Washington (Md.) Friendly tailback/wide receiver Lamar Thomas.

Although he is not allowed to discuss specific prospects until they sign a national letter of intent, Jim Tressel discussed what he hoped the recruits on hand would see while on campus.

"You hope that they have a lot of electricity on the campus and when they walk by the baseball stadium it's full and they see the lacrosse excitement and they see the excitement of our fans," he said. "You just hope that they feel that energy."

### Illinois Verbal Remains On Fence, Delays Decision

Although he issued a verbal commitment to Illinois in December, the recruiting process continues for Fellows. A four-star prospect, Fellows is listed as the No. 10 defensive end prospect in the country by Scout and is a big target for the Buckeyes.

There's just the little issue of his verbal commitment to Illinois. But after a trip to the spring game that Fellows seemed to enjoy, the Buckeyes appear to be making up ground in the race to land the prospect.

## A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

### 15 Years Ago – 1993

Although many schools had backed off after Shelby, Ohio, offensive lineman Andy Dawson broke his leg just prior to the start of his final high school football season, Ohio State remained interested.

The Buckeyes offered him a scholarship and he gladly accepted before graduating early and enrolling at Ohio State in time to participate in spring practice.

"I like it here," he said. "It's a great place, but the practices are a lot harder. It's quite a change, but it's fun."

"It's fun to be around Big Daddy (Dan Wilkinson), Alan Kline and the other guys."

### 10 Years Ago – 1998

A few days after making an unofficial visit to Columbus, quarterback Craig Krenzle of Utica (Mich.) Ford opted to become a verbal member of Ohio State's class of 1999.

He said he was impressed by how much fun and learning appeared to be going on at the spring practice session he attended.

"It just seemed like they all wanted to

"It was amazing," he told BSB. "It's kind of crazy when there are 75,000 people coming to the spring game. It's like game day. It was real crazy. It's just a great place."

While he spent time talking to the glut of prospects on hand for the game, Fellows also got to know and exchange cell phone numbers with DeVier Posey, a member of the team's recruiting class of 2008.

Although he was impressed with the trip to Columbus, Fellows (6-5, 245) remains committed to Illinois – for now, at least.

"I'm tight with Illinois but I'm still open," he said. "I'll listen to the coaches and I'll listen to what everybody has to say and keep my eyes open."

"I feel the same way (as I always have). I like Ohio State."

When trying to make a final decision, Fellows said he will look at his overall comfort level with the school along with the coaching staff and the education he will receive.

The Fighting Illini were the first team to offer Fellows, who said he felt an OSU offer was held up because they simply hadn't seen his film yet.

"I think Illinois is a very great program," he said. "They're up and coming and they're building a good team right now, but I think Ohio State has a great team right now and they have a great chance of going to the national championship this year. It's close to home. I like the tradition they have. I'm an Ohio guy."

The plan has been for Fellows to make a final decision sooner rather than later, but that goal might be less and less realistic. For now, his top three schools remain Illinois, OSU and USC in that order.

"I would like to wrap it up, but I'm going to play that by ear," he said. "You never know what might happen. I want to commit before the season because I want to commit before my senior year, but you never know."

### Two Florida Prospects In Line To Join Class Of 2009

The Buckeyes have made great strides in recent weeks in their efforts to get Berry and Carter to come to OSU.

Berry received his long-awaited offer in mid-April but admitted he knew it was coming.

"Ohio State had just recently got my tape and they were on spring break at the time," he told BuckeyeSports.com. "Once they all saw my tape, they went ahead and offered me."

A 5-11, 190-pound tailback, Berry has been timed at 4.31 seconds in the 40-yard

dash. He said Jim Tressel told him the Buckeyes are hoping to land two tailbacks for this class and that they want him to be one of them.

As a junior, Berry carried the ball 140 times for 1,033 yards and 14 touchdowns.

"(Tressel) said they loved my tape and they should have offered me sooner, but that didn't bother me at all," Berry said. "He said I'm a great back and he can see me doing great things for them in the future."

Carter's case is a little bit different. The son of OSU great Cris Carter, the 6-3, 185-pound wide receiver is already well aware of the Buckeyes, but that did not stop him from being impressed with his trip to Columbus with his father, who was an honorary coach in the game.

"I really like all of the people I've met on this visit," he said. "My father and I went out and met everybody associated with the Ohio State program. I met the coaching staff and a lot of the players. I definitely liked the offense they ran in the spring game. This is a very cool place."

He said the Buckeyes are at the top of a five-school list that includes LSU, Florida, Michigan and Auburn.

A three-star prospect, Carter is ranked the No. 34 wide receiver in the country. As a junior, he caught 22 passes for 361 yards and eight touchdowns.

When he makes a decision, do not expect the younger Carter to blindly follow in his father's footsteps.

"The fact that my dad played here probably won't have an effect on my decision," he said. "It will be a family decision and we're all going to sit down and choose the school that's best for me. It won't be about relationships that are in the past. It will be about the future and which school is best for my future plans and goals."

Michigan Picks Up Fleet Verbal Commitment

Now, Michigan head coach Rich Rodriguez just has to figure out what to do with Fitzgerald Toussaint.

The Wolverines earned verbal commitment No. 5 April 18 when the Youngstown (Ohio) Liberty running back joined teammate Isaiah Bell in pledging to play for U-M. A 5-10, 185-pound prospect who also excels in track, Toussaint has been timed at 10.58 seconds in the 100-meter dash.

"They definitely like him as a tailback," Liberty head coach Jeff Whittaker told Scout. "He can catch, he can run, he has got speed. They believe that he has the right characteristics to fit that style of offense. I would say he is similar to the Noel Devine

very athletic."

The Buckeyes noticed and gave Morelli a scholarship offer as did programs such as Pittsburgh, Michigan, Penn State and West Virginia.

### One Year Ago – 2007

Ohio State's goal of landing at least four of the nation's top offensive linemen for the class of 2008 took a big step forward with the confirmed verbal commitment of Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater's Michael Brewster.

"They were surprised," Brewster told BSB of the OSU coaches' reaction upon his commitment. "They were real happy because they need depth at O-line real bad, but they told me that they can't just take average guys. They said they have to take the best there is. They were real excited about what's going on."

There was reason to believe more was coming when Klein, Texas, offensive lineman J.B. Shugarts scheduled a press conference for the afternoon after BSB went to press.

kid that Rich had down at West Virginia."

Toussaint is one of three Michigan commitments who have not yet been assigned a star rating by Scout. The headliner in the class is William Campbell, a five-star defensive tackle from Detroit Cass Tech.

### Five-Star Running Back Picks Notre Dame

Notre Dame has not yet amassed an impressive class of 2009 from a size standpoint, but the Fighting Irish landed a big prospect for the group on April 19.

That's when Cierre Wood, a five-star tailback prospect from Oxnard (Ca.) Santa Clara, issued a verbal commitment to head coach Charlie Weis. The decision came while the 6-0, 200-pound Wood was on an unofficial visit to South Bend.

As a junior, Wood carried the ball 178 times for 2,612 yards and caught seven passes for 191 yards. He scored 42 total touchdowns and averaged 14.7 yards per carry and 200.9 yards per game. He selected the Irish over UCLA.

On the same day Wood committed, Notre Dame also picked up a verbal commitment from Princeton (N.J.) The Hun School defensive end Tyler Stockton. A 6-1, 280-pound prospect, Stockton gives the Irish three verbal members of their class of 2009.



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