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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 4, 2009



JOSH WINSLOW

THE NEXT STEP – Ohio State will address a number of issues when spring practice begins April 2, including the development of Terrelle Pryor (2) at the quarterback position. Pryor, who burst onto the scene last season as a freshman, will lead a team in search of replacements for a number of 2008 regulars.

Looking For Answers

Spring Practice Begins As Buckeyes Look To 2009

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Personnel changes and roster turnover are ways of life for college football coaches, yet Jim Tressel has seemingly found a way to mitigate those annual problems.

The Ohio State head coach begins his ninth spring with the Buckeyes and already has won five Big Ten championships including the last four in succession. That represents the conference's longest streak of titles since Michigan won five in row from 1988-92.

But if Tressel and his program have designs on their fifth straight crown, they will need to find answers to a plethora of question marks hovering over the Woody Hayes Athletic Center when spring drills kick off April 2.

Can Terrelle Pryor take the next step in his development at quarterback? Who takes over at tailback? What will be the offensive line rotation? Who fills the holes at linebacker, cornerback and punter?

"I don't think we'll be too much different from any other program," Tressel said in January during Fiesta Bowl preparations. "With the exception of last year when we had so many experienced players returning, you always go into spring with a lot of questions about your team."

"But that is also one of the reasons we always look forward to spring so much. It's when we get to work on fundamentals, take a more individual approach with the players and do a lot of teaching. Spring is also when some of those young guys begin to come into their own and that's exciting. You know your team has some questions and you look forward to seeing how they are addressed."

Fifteen regulars have departed the program, and that doesn't include quarterback Todd Boeckman, who started 17 games

during his career including the Fiesta Bowl against Texas. That number does, however, include the team's leading rusher, the leading scorer, a four-year punter, the top two receivers, a trio of veteran offensive linemen and three of the top eight tacklers from a year ago. Among that group were a trio of first-team All-Big Ten performers as well as the Thorpe Award and Lott Trophy winners.

In their stead is a nucleus of young talent culled from highly rated recruiting efforts over the past couple of seasons. According to Scout.com, the Buckeyes landed atop the national recruiting rankings this year and finished fourth last year. Those efforts have helped produce such high school standouts as Pryor, who burst onto the scene last year to start the final nine games of the regular season and produce an 8-1 record.

The 6-6, 235-pounder proved to be a lethal dual threat, throwing for 1,311 yards and 12 touchdowns while adding another 631 yards and six scores on the ground. His 1,942 yards of total offense was the 22nd-highest single-season figure in school history and the best ever by an OSU freshman.

For all of Pryor's lofty achievements, however, there were some gaffes. Most notable were the late fumble that led to a 13-6 defeat against Penn State and a particularly dismal 5-for-13, 66-yard passing line in the 24-21 loss to Texas in the Fiesta Bowl. Some of his stumbles can be attributed to inexperience while others can be traced directly to the bumps and bruises of his first season as a college player.

"Terrelle had a bad toe for most of the season, which was an annoyance for him," OSU quarterbacks coach Joe Daniels said. "Then he had a hand problem and then his wrist bothered him. It was a lot of little things that young players have to learn to work through. And he did."

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B.J. Mullens

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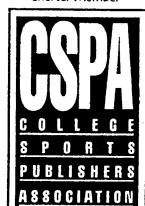
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OPINION

Ohio State Continues To Fall Short Nationally

Maybe I've just been kidding myself.

Whenever someone asks about the national perception of Ohio State athletics, I immediately go on the offensive. "There isn't any talent gap between Ohio State and other schools," I say with confidence. "There is just as much speed and just as many elite athletes at Ohio State as anywhere else."

In my heart of hearts, I'm beginning to come to the realization that the aforementioned statements simply aren't true. And it took a late-night loss in the NCAA tournament by the women's basketball team to bring me to my senses.

In a game that stretched way past midnight in the Eastern time zone, the Ohio State women gave a valiant effort March 28 before losing an 84-66 decision to Stanford. The loss ended a 29-6 season for the Buckeyes during which they achieved a fifth consecutive Big Ten championship and advancement to the NCAA's Sweet 16 for the first time in four years.

Unfortunately, the bar for success remains higher than that. In college basketball, the measuring stick is not conference titles. It is trips to the Final Four, and despite fielding the Big Ten player of the year, defensive player of the year and freshman of the year – not to mention having the conference coach of the year patrolling the sideline – Ohio State seemed to be no match for Stanford.

Perhaps most disconcerting was the way Cardinal head coach Tara VanDerveer employed a second-half strategy that should have looked familiar to OSU coach Jim Foster. VanDerveer instructed her players to pound the ball down low, and All-America center Jayne Appel sliced the Buckeyes to ribbons. Appel tallied game-high totals with 25 points and 11 rebounds while OSU star center Jantel Lavender spent much of the game in foul trouble and finished with 15 points and six boards.

To their credit, the Buckeyes made run after run at Stanford. After squandering an early 8-2 lead, they stayed close throughout much of the rest of the game and were still within four points at 66-62 at the 5:39 mark of the second half. But the Cardinal simply had too much firepower.

The most telling statistic: Stanford shot 50.8 percent from the field for the game. Ohio State allowed its previous 34 opponents to make only 36.1 percent for the season.

Since Foster took over the OSU women's team, he has compiled a 181-47 record, and that .794 winning percentage blows away every other head coach in program history. But his teams have achieved only two Sweet 16 appearances, no Elite Eights and no Final Fours in seven years. During his 11 seasons at Vanderbilt, Foster made eight trips to the Sweet 16, four to the Elite Eight and one to the Final Four.

Make no mistake. My point is not to dump on Foster or his program. He has a young nucleus of talent that seems ready to make a Final Four run – perhaps as soon as next year.

It is just that their rise and fall this season is simply the latest in an alarming trend among the major sports at Ohio State that began with the football team at the 2007 BCS National Championship Game.

That team, which sailed into the title game on the crest of a 19-game win streak, boasted seven consensus first-team All-Big Ten selections, the Heisman Trophy winner and a handful of first-round NFL draft choices. And yet the Buckeyes couldn't get it done. Not only didn't they get it done, they allowed themselves to absorb a mugging at the hands of a much hungrier Florida team.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK with Mark Rea

Before that game, Ohio State was reasserting itself as one of the pre-eminent forces in college athletics. Jim Tressel, Thad Matta and Foster were each hired to resurrect once-proud programs and each had accomplished that task. Tressel already had a national championship, Matta's team was on its way to the NCAA title game and Foster's program was working on a three-year record of 87-12.

As history has taught us, however, bringing those programs back to the brink of national prominence proved to be easier than earning victories on the biggest of stages.

You can certainly make an argument for each coach and each program that sustainable success throughout the years outweighs the fleeting gratification of a winner-take-all format that is the BCS and NCAA basketball tournaments. There is no denying that Tressel, Matta and Foster are each at or near the best winning percentages in Ohio State history in their sports. Likewise, the trio has 12 Big Ten regular-season championships between them in 20 combined seasons.

Yet winning "The Big One" still hangs out there like an elusive brass ring. Watching Ohio State teams continually grab for it and come up short produces an empty feeling.

It was 34 years between national championships in football. Next season will mark the 50th anniversary of Ohio State's lone national title in men's basketball. The women's team has never won the national crown.

National championships in fencing and women's pistol are to be commended, and the accomplishments of the athletes in those sports is not to be diminished in any way. But the cold, hard truth is that you must win a national title in one of the three major sports before you can consider yourself an elite program.

Anything less and you're kidding yourself.

New Interactive Tools

We have been telling you for years about our BuckeyeSports.com website where you can supplement your BSB print subscription. Now, we're branching out even more in cyberspace, embracing the newest information sites to keep you in touch 24/7 with BSB.

Staff writers Marcus Hartman, Jeff Svoboda and Adam Jardy have joined me on Twitter, the hot new social networking site, and you can get our thoughts on a variety of subjects – personal as well as professional – in real time during any part of the day or night.

If you are new to the electronic age, don't be afraid. Nothing could be easier than Twitter. You simply go to their website, sign up for free and find us by using the "Find People" button. Click it, type in any of our names and away you go.

Meanwhile, Marcus and I each have personal blogs where we offer our views on a wide range of topics including former Buckeyes in the pros and historical features with unique perspectives on how Ohio State football reached the prominence it enjoys today.

You can easily find Marcus' blog on the Internet at MarcusHartman.com and mine is located at MarkRea.wordpress.com. Best of all, both are just waiting for you to read out there in cyberspace and they are totally free.

Of course, the company flagships remain BSB print and BuckeyeSports.com. Since you're reading this, you already know about the in-depth coverage BSB print provides of Ohio State athletics. It is our weekly publication throughout football, basketball and recruiting seasons.

Meanwhile, we consider BuckeyeSports.com our daily newspaper with different content from BSB print. It also features our "Ask the Insiders" message board for premium subscribers, an ever-growing neighborhood where Buckeye fans meet to discuss – and sometimes argue about – their favorite teams.

With BSB print now on its biweekly schedule and spring football practice kicking off April 2, this is as good a time as there has ever been to log onto our website. You can even check it out for free on a 7-day trial basis.

And Finally

- I don't think there is much question that B.J. Mullens is not yet ready for the NBA. Nevertheless, that league loves its 7-footers and Mullens will likely go down in Ohio State lore as another first-round selection. Unless he elevates his game in the professional ranks, however, Mullens will be a one-and-done player again – one fat NBA contract and then his career will be done.

- Note to self: Go with your conviction. I had Michigan State pegged as a Final Four team until the Spartans dropped an 82-70 decision to Ohio State in the Big Ten tournament semifinals. After that, I decided to switch my pick and had MSU falling to Kansas in the Elite Eight. My apologies to Sparty and head coach Tom Izzo, who is making his fifth trip to the Final Four in the past 10 years.

- As the calendar turned toward April, NFL draft expert Mel Kiper Jr. didn't have much love for the Buckeyes. Kiper's latest mock draft has only two former OSU players being chosen in the first round – Malcolm Jenkins at No. 16 to San Diego and Chris "Beanie" Wells at No. 31 to Arizona. Kiper envisions three-time All-America linebacker James Laurinaitis as a second-round pick.

- Did it seem a little strange to you that New England bundled veteran linebacker Mike Vrabel in the Matt Cassel trade that netted only a second-round pick from Kansas City? Perhaps not so strange if you believe the draft scenario from Scouts Inc. that has the Patriots taking USC outside linebacker Clay Matthews Jr. with their first-round pick and then going after Laurinaitis with the second-round selection they got from the Chiefs.

- There have already been some national rumblings that even an undefeated season at Penn State might not result in a trip to the BCS title game. Why? Because the Nittany Lions will gorge themselves on a cupcake-filled nonconference schedule that features Akron, Syracuse, Temple and Division I-AA Eastern Illinois. That fab four combined for a robust 18-30 record last fall.

- Could Minnesota be headed for the same kind of ticklish quarterback situation faced by Ohio State last year? The Gophers began spring practice March 25 with highly rated youngster MarQueis Gray taking most of the reps. Incumbent starter (and team captain) Adam Weber is on the shelf after offseason shoulder surgery.

- Ohio State has two chances to play in Pasadena this season – the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1 and the BCS National Championship Game on Jan. 7. As unbelievable as it sounds to folks of my generation, the Buckeyes have played in Pasadena only once in the last 25 seasons.

COVER STORY: LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

Pryor's Offseason Work Could Pay Off In '09

Continued From Page 1

Since January, sources have indicated that Pryor has immersed himself in film study, buried his nose in the playbook and continued to work on his footwork and honing his throwing mechanics. The quarterback reportedly worked himself so hard over the winter that he suffered a minor foot injury that required a couple of days in a protective boot, but he should be at full-go when spring drills begin.

"Terrelle has a passion about this place," assistant QBs coach Nick Siciliano said. "He's got a passion about the guys he plays with and plays for. He takes everything to heart. He's really a compassionate person and he has a burning desire to make himself better."

Pryor will be operating with a totally new backfield this spring and a host of new receivers.

Dan "Boom" Herron is seen as the heir apparent to Chris "Beanie" Wells at tailback, and although the two have divergent body types and running styles, there are still comparisons that can be made.

Before Wells strung together back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons, he rushed for 576 yards and seven TDs as a freshman backup to Antonio Pittman. Last year as a freshman backup to Wells, Herron picked up 439 yards and scored six times. Herron started two games last season and turned in credible performances while Wells was out with a toe injury. The 5-11, 180-pounder totaled 51 yards on 11 carries at USC and followed with 94 yards on 20 carries against Troy.

"If the coaches think I'm good enough to be the starter, I'm going to work as hard as I can to prove them right," Herron told BSB.

His competition at the tailback spot will be a little thin this spring. Brandon Saine, who has been riddled with a variety of injuries during his first two seasons as a Buckeye, is the only other scholarship running back on the roster. The coaching staff is hopeful Saine can find a way to stay on

the field, especially if the Buckeyes are to continue to feature their running attack in the fall.

"I don't think there is any secret that we like to establish the run, and I think you need a couple of guys that the team believes in to make that happen," OSU running backs coach Dick Tressel said. "You just have to make sure you get them in there at positive times so they're with the good guys making good plays, and then their teammates believe in them and the kids believe in themselves."

While Herron is expected to get the lion's share of the tailback reps this spring, Tressel said he is hopeful Saine can get back on track.

"Our job is to make sure everybody understands how valuable all the guys are," he said. "Brandon just got hurt at bad times last year. He pulled a hamstring the second day of (fall) practice, so during the three weeks he was out, he wasn't missing just one practice a day, it was two practices a day. He missed so many practices it was hard to catch up."

"Then when he had a chance to get back in there and contribute, he twisted his ankle. It wasn't a big deal – just bad luck of the football draw for injuries when it comes to him. Fortunately, Brandon is a great kid and I don't think those things will have any carryover for this spring."

The faces will be different at the full-back position this spring as well. Gone are veterans Brandon Smith and Ryan Lukens, allowing redshirt freshman Jermil Martin to rise to the top of the depth chart with veteran walk-ons James Georgiades and Spencer Smith in reserve. The Buckeyes may also take a look at incoming freshman Adam Homan at fullback.

"It doesn't look very different than it did last (year) because everybody was gone," Dick Tressel said. "Last year at this time, we were wondering who we were going to fit into that spot. Obviously, it's going to be younger guys."

As with the running back positions, the

receiving corps will undergo a changing of the guard this spring. Gone are Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline, who accounted for nearly 40 percent of the receptions, 52 percent of the receiving yardage and more than 70 percent of the touchdown catches for the Buckeyes last season.

In their stead, however, is a nucleus of veterans such as senior Ray Small and junior Dane Sanzenbacher along with up-and-comers like sophomores DeVier Posey and Lumaar "Flash" Thomas. Each contributed to the team's pass-catching efforts last season, and they will be joined by veterans such as Taurian Washington and Grant Schwartz as well as redshirt freshman Jake Stoneburner, a 6-5, 230-pounder the coaching staff is eager to unleash on opposing defensive backs.

Another intimidating target could be the tight end tandem of senior Jake Ballard (6-6, 256) and redshirt freshman Nic DiLillo (6-5, 237). Ohio State hasn't thrown much to the tight ends in recent years, but Ballard and DiLillo know what to do when the football comes their way. Ballard has averaged 11.4 yards per catch during his OSU career while DiLillo had the same average on 86 receptions during his final two prep seasons.

The true test of how good the Buckeyes can be on offense, however, will rest on the shoulders of a revamped offensive line. Alex Boone, Ben Person and Steve Rehling have departed, taking their 89 combined starts with them. Even with all of that experience now gone, Ohio State expects to simply reload.

Jim Cordle returns for his senior season and could be trying out his third new position in as many seasons. After spending the 2007 season at center, the 6-4, 297-pounder moved to the left guard position early last year when Rehling was injured. This spring, Cordle will reportedly get an extensive look at right tackle as he competes with incumbent starter Bryant Browning.

Meanwhile, sophomore Michael Brewster – who took over at center when Cordle

moved to guard – may make a similar move and see some reps at a guard position this spring. The Buckeyes will also welcome junior guard Justin Boren, who sat out last season after his transfer from Michigan. Boren started the first eight games in 2007 at center for the Wolverines then started the final five games of that season at left guard.

The center position could wind up in a variety of different hands. Brewster, who started the final 10 games of the 2008 season and developed a rapport with Pryor, would appear to be the likely choice. But if the coaching staff is intent on getting him reps at guard, it could leave the door open for incoming freshman Jack Mewhort or even a return to the middle of the line by Cordle.

Perhaps the most intriguing battle in the spring will involve Boone's vacated left tackle spot. Second-year behemoths Mike Adams and J.B. Shugarts are reportedly going to square off against one another for that position. Adams will likely have the upper hand early as Shugarts rehabs from offseason shoulder surgery. But reports are that Shugarts should be ready for contact early in camp – perhaps as soon as the second week of drills.

All of the jockeying for springtime positions may be maddening to the casual observer, but it brings a smile to the face of longtime offensive coordinator and line coach Jim Bollman.

"I like it," he said. "You've got some guys back who have some experience, then you start plugging in new guys around them and maybe shift some guys around and see where different people are playing. It'll be good for them and good for us."

Spring practice will also be a time when such offensive line veterans as Andrew Moses, Josh Kerr, Connor Smith, Evan Blankenship and Andrew Miller can break out of the shadows and onto the depth chart.

"Those guys all have some more chances coming up this spring to show themselves and take a step up," Bollman said. "Then you add a group of new freshmen this fall, and it could be a pretty good mix of young and old."

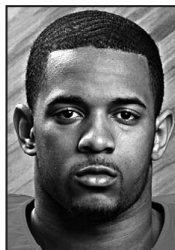
Offensive Players On The Spot

• **Terrelle Pryor, quarterback** – There is no doubt this is Pryor's team. The question is what he will be allowed to do with it. We certainly don't expect the talented sophomore to showcase all of his abilities this spring. After all, Jim Tressel already knows what he can do and there is absolutely no need to risk injury to Pryor. That noted, every eye will be trained on the young quarterback as he seeks to improve his throwing mechanics and become a more polished player at this level.

• **Dan Herron, tailback** – With Chris "Beanie" Wells headed to the NFL, Herron has a major leg up on the tailback competition this spring by virtue of his 439 yards and six TDs last season as a freshman. The only problem the guy they call "Boom" might have this spring is a desire to go too hard too quickly. We already know Herron can run the ball, and the OSU coaching staff knows that as well. Staying free of injury and building a rapport with a rebuilt offensive line will be the major focal points of his spring.

• **J.B. Shugarts and Mike Adams, left tackle** – Speaking of that rebuilt line, these guys are as good a place as any to shine the spotlight. By all accounts, Shugarts has rehabbed his surgically repaired shoulder to the point where he will be available for contact. That sets up an intriguing competition between a pair of talented 6-8, 300-pound youngsters. The battle becomes even more significant because left tackle is considered the most important position on the offensive line since it protects Pryor's blind side.

• **Jim Cordle, offensive lineman** – Notice that we don't



Dan Herron

list a particular OL position for Cordle? That's because the 6-4, 297-pound senior may find himself at any one of three different spots. There could be a battle with Bryant Browning at right tackle, competition with Michael Brewster at one of the guard slots or a return to center if neither Brewster nor freshman Jack Mewhort takes firm control of that position. And as if he didn't have enough on his plate, Cordle will also be called on to provide leadership for the revamped front.

• **Ray Small, receiver** – With Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline now gone, Small should move near the top of the list in terms of potential Pryor targets. He is going to have to prove that his head is totally into the game and his checkered 2008 season is behind him, though. The 5-11, 180-pound speedster needs to improve upon his receiving numbers (only 18 catches for 149 yards and no touchdowns) while retaining the special teams acumen that led to Small leading the Big Ten in punt return average by a wide margin last fall.

• **Brandon Saine, running back** – Every spring, there seems to be a guy whose time is now or never. Saine is that guy in 2009. The 6-1, 217-pound junior has not been able to shake a litany of injuries during his career so far, leaving only brief glimpses of the ability that made him Ohio's Mr. Football in 2006. If Saine can stay on the field this spring, he has only Herron and a host of walk-ons as his competition at tailback. Keep your fingers crossed for a player with career averages of 3.9 yards per carry, 13.2 yards per catch and 18.3 yards per punt return to stay healthy.

– Mark Rea

Another Streak Alive

While the Buckeyes will attempt to keep their string of Big Ten championships alive this fall, the Ohio State defense also has an enviable streak going. Since Jim Heacock took over as defensive coordinator before the 2005 season, OSU has finished no lower than sixth nationally in scoring defense.

Keeping that streak going could prove problematic in light of the huge shoes Heacock must try to fill. Most noteworthy among the losses are three-time All-America linebacker James Laurinaitis and Thorpe Award-winning cornerback Malcolm Jenkins. That duo combined for 79 career starts and produced 571 tackles, 14 sacks, 20 interceptions and a host of postseason accolades.

Additional losses on the defensive side of the ball include lineman Nader Abdallah, linebacker Marcus Freeman and cornerback Donald Washington.

"There is no doubt we'll be looking at some major holes to fill," said OSU co-defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Luke Fickell. "But you could say that almost every year. A couple of years ago, people were wondering how we could replace guys like A.J. Hawk and Bobby Carpenter and Anthony Schlegel. The answer was that others like James Laurinaitis and Marcus Freeman emerged."

COVER STORY: LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

"This spring, it will be someone else's turn to emerge."

The players with the best chance to break out of the formidable shadows cast by Laurinaitis, Jenkins, et al., will be those who can hit the ground running – literally.

"We're always looking for speed," Heacock said. "We're always looking for guys to rush the quarterback. We're always looking for guys who can cover, in particular with Donald coming out and Malcolm graduating. The secondary and the corners are critical. In this day and age in football, you have to be able to cover. You don't only need four defensive backs on the field, but you'll need five sometimes."

"We've got the majority of our defensive line back, but we lost two outstanding linebackers and we have to replenish that position. We're always looking for good players who can make plays, and that's what we'll be focusing on this spring."

Fortunately for Heacock, Fickell and the rest of the defensive coaching staff, the fruits of the program's recruiting labors have not been restricted to the offensive side of the ball. Bright futures are forecast for a number of youngsters including junior Devon Torrence and redshirt freshman Travis Howard, who are expected to contend for one of the vacant cornerback spots.

Torrence, who moved to defense from a receiver position last year, may have the upper hand as spring drills begin.

"Devon didn't get many reps last year because he was really just learning the system and learning the defense, so he was seen as kind of a raw talent," Heacock said. "He does have talent, though. There is no question he's got the ability. Hopefully he can get it going."

The wild card at the position could be senior Andre Amos, who has plenty of speed and the instincts to play the corner position. But he has suffered two knee injuries over the past 24 months and missed the entire 2008 season.

"Andre is a guy I've got a lot of hopes for," Heacock said. "He's a guy we thought was really coming on. He's a track guy, so he's got good speed, and he's got great range

and good ability. But he's been injured and was out all of last year."

"From a maturity standpoint and being a senior, he's a guy we've got to count on. We've got to throw him in the mix. You hope your seniors come through and say, 'It's time to go.'"

The other three defensive backfield positions should be set with junior Chimdi Chekwa back after starting nine games at corner last season and Kurt Coleman and Anderson Russell ready to begin their senior years at the safety spots. Coleman is the leading returning tackler on the squad having registered 78 stops last season. That ranked third overall behind Laurinaitis (130) and Freeman (84).

While three of the four starting positions appear set, there still should be ample opportunity this spring for players to make statements for why they should be on the defensive backfield depth chart. Senior Aaron Gant, who was listed as Russell's main backup at strong safety in 2008, returns along with sophomores Nate Oliver, Donnie Evege and Rocco Pentello. They will be contending for spring playing time with redshirt freshmen Zach Domicone, Orhian Johnson and Howard as well as true freshmen C.J. Barnett and Jamie Wood, who signed in February as members of Ohio State's No. 1-ranked recruiting class.

Heacock said there is no question there will be plenty of spring competition for secondary spots.

"Losing Malcolm, Donald and Shaun Lane meant we lost three corners out of the two-deep, so that opens up a lot of possibilities," the OSU assistant coach said. "The situation always arises that you need at least three cover corners in the game at one time, and when you look at it that way, the only true experienced one we have is Chimdi Chekwa. That makes things pretty wide open."

"It's going to be a learning experience – for the players and the coaches. We may have to be changing some guys around from safeties to corners, but we'll try to come out of it with the best four guys we can get on the field."

Taking over the middle linebacker spot

this season should be senior Austin Spitler, who backed up Laurinaitis for three years.

"He's waited for his opportunity and he's certainly going to get that opportunity," Heacock said of the 6-3, 234-pound Spitler. "He's a good, tough kid. He's been a backup for a long time, and I think he's anxious to get going."

Getting first crack at the outside spots will likely be sophomore Etienne Sabino and junior Ross Homan, who made six starts in 2008 and racked up 67 tackles, fourth-best total on the team.

Also in the linebacker rotation will hard-hitting junior Brian Rolle and tough-nosed sophomore Andrew Sweat. There is also scheduled to be an influx of new talent as incoming freshmen Storm Klein, Adam Homan and Zach Boren are listed at linebacker.

"We're going to be doing a lot of moving around in spring to figure out how we can get the best three, four, five guys in a situation to play," Fickell said. "We want to make sure we fit the best people in their best spots. How it all meshes together is going to be the big trick this year."

To the aforementioned linebackers and safeties, add the names of juniors Jermale Hines and Tyler Moeller. They manned Heacock's linebacker/safety hybrid position last season – known as the star – and combined to make 49 tackles, recover two fumbles and force another.

Up front, the Buckeyes may feature one of their most ferocious pass rushes in many years. Junior Thaddeus Gibson and sophomore Nathan Williams combined in '08 for seven sacks among their 43 overall stops, and they will be joined by a healthy Rob Rose, a senior who has 5½ career sacks despite an injury-plagued stay in Columbus.

That group could get even better with the return to health by senior Lawrence Wilson, who has missed most of the last two seasons with leg and knee injuries. Wilson is likely to miss spring drills but should be ready to go come fall.

"Lawrence is working out and he's getting better," Heacock said. "I think spring is iffy. I'm not sure if he'll be back. I would imagine he'll be running by then and doing

some things, but I don't know if (the medical staff will) clear him."

"I do know he's just working his butt off and he gives no indication of any problems. Of course, anytime you're coming off year-ending injuries back to back, you're going to have to work through that. But Lawrence is capable and ready to do that. I think he's anxious to get back out there and play ball."

In addition to splitting time at defensive end this spring with junior Cameron Heyward, Rose will also likely see playing time this spring at a tackle position, further solidifying the interior along with veterans Doug Worthington, Todd Denlinger and Dexter Larimore. Worthington led that trio last season, starting the final 10 games and totaling 34 tackles, including five for loss and 1½ sacks.

The coaching staff is also eager to get a look this spring at such young defensive line talent as sophomores Keith Wells and Solomon Thomas as well as redshirt freshmen Willie Mobley and Garrett Goebel. The 6-5, 280-pound Goebel is coming off a redshirt season during which he managed to turn some heads.

"Garrett's had a great offseason," Heacock said. "He had a great year last year. He was redshirting, but ask some of our offensive linemen about him. He gave them problems on the scout team."

In addition to personnel changes throughout the offense and defense, Ohio State will have to find suitable replacements in the kicking game. Kicker Ryan Pretorius was the team's leading scorer for two years in a row while punter A.J. Trapasso held down his job for four consecutive seasons.

The transition with field goals and PATs should be seamless with senior Aaron Pettrey finally getting a chance to handle those duties. He served as the Buckeyes' long-range kicker last season, handling kickoffs and booting field goals of 54 and 51 yards.

Trapasso's replacement could be senior Jon Thoma, a former walk-on whose three career attempts have netted an average of only 22.7 yards, or redshirt freshman Ben Buchanan, a strong-legged dual specialist. He had a career-long field goal of 54 yards while at Westerville (Ohio) Central and also averaged 41 yards per punt as a high school senior.

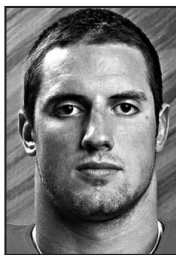
BSB staff writers Adam Jardy, Matthew Hager, Marcus Hartman and Jeff Svoboda contributed to this report.

Defensive Players On The Spot

• **Austin Spitler, middle linebacker** – The 6-3, 234-pounder has bided his time for the last three seasons behind James Laurinaitis and is now ready to showcase his talents. In addition to his value as a backup, Spitler was a special teams demon for the past several years and developed a hard-hitting mentality that should serve the Buckeyes well. Laurinaitis himself has repeatedly stated that Spitler will be a force at the middle linebacker spot. All the senior-to-be has to do this spring is go out and prove it.

• **Thaddeus Gibson, defensive end** – Gibson had a breakout year in 2008, thanks in part to a scheme that allowed him to finally unleash his 6-2, 240-pound scowl on opposing quarterbacks. As a result, he totaled five sacks among his nine tackles for loss and already has his sights set on doubling both numbers. He is bound to get plenty of competition this spring from Nathan Williams, another pass-rush specialist, but if Gibson can continue to build on the foundation he laid last year, the sky is truly the limit.

• **Andre Amos, Devon Torrence and Travis Howard, cornerbacks** – With Chimdi Chekwa pretty well set on one side, this trio will be vying for the other vacant corner slot. Amos is likely the most accomplished of the group, but he can't seem to stay healthy. He has had two knee injuries since the spring of 2007 and has played only eight games over the past two seasons. Meanwhile, Torrence has excellent cover instincts and Howard has speed to burn. This should be one of the most interesting battles of the entire spring.



Austin Spitler

• **Jermale Hines and Tyler Moeller, star** – As defensive coordinator Jim Heacock continues to tinker with different alignments, he will be paying special attention this spring to his so-called star position – the linebacker/safety hybrid the Buckeyes used more and more of last year. Hines started four times last season and totaled 31 tackles while Moeller logged a pair of starts and registered 18 stops. Heacock may even decide that both on the field at the same time would be a good idea. We'll stay tuned.

• **Rob Rose, defensive line** – As younger players have entered the program, Rose has become somewhat of a forgotten man. Part of that was due to surgeries on both shoulders following the 2007 campaign, but by all accounts, the 6-5, 285-pounder was back at full strength by the latter stages of last season. Rose had a big sack against Texas in the Fiesta Bowl and could provide the Buckeyes the kind of pass-rushing interior presence they haven't enjoyed since the days of Quinn Pitcock.

• **Jon Thoma, punter** – After serving a four-year apprenticeship behind A.J. Trapasso, Thoma finally finds himself atop the depth chart. The former walk-on doesn't have a whole lot of game experience – three career punts for a paltry 22.7-yard average – but has never really had a chance to prove himself. That won't be the case this spring. The only other scholarship punter on the roster is redshirt freshman Ben Buchanan, who will also spend time this spring concentrating on placements.

– Mark Rea



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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Mullens Opts To Leave Early; Turner Staying

Losing another freshman to the NBA is not ideal for Thad Matta, but in this case it is likely better than losing a sophomore.

With three players rumored to be mulling over the thought of leaving Ohio State for the NBA, it appears that the only defection the head coach will have to bear is that of B.J. Mullens, who has formally announced his plans to leave school.

For most programs, losing a third consecutive 7-foot freshman center in as many years would be a near-catastrophic event. In Matta's case, he is probably more pleased that junior-to-be Evan Turner looks set to return for his third year as a Buckeye.

In addition, freshman guard William Buford was rumored to be considering a leap to the NBA, but all signs point to him returning for another season in Columbus.

The Buckeyes can expect to return their primary starting lineup from the 2008-09 season with the addition of David Lighty, who began the season as a starter before a foot injury cut his season short.

Aside from Mullens, the roster figures to remain the same as well with no 2009 recruits signed for next year, meaning that Matta and his staff find themselves in the unusual position of being able to use the summer to build on a past season's success.

"The exciting thing for me is hopefully we've got a great group of guys coming back, and it'll be the first time in a long time we've gone into an offseason and can legitimately say, 'This is what we're going to do, this is how we're going to do it and we know what these guys can do,'" Matta said after the team's double-overtime loss to Siena in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Turner To Return

In the University of Dayton Arena locker room immediately following OSU's season-

ending loss, Turner was adamant about his plans for the future.

"My plan is to have a good offseason, gain 10 pounds, come back and win a Big Ten championship, a Big Ten tournament championship and an NCAA championship," he said. "My teammates and I didn't want to come here and just do four years for no reason. We wanted to come here and leave a legacy of winning. That's why you play the game."

Asked if that means he is returning for his junior year, Turner smiled and replied, "Of course. I love the scarlet and gray."

However, Turner's mother, Iris James, wanted to make sure her son had all the necessary information before making a final decision. While Turner was home in Chicago during OSU's spring break, she did so.

The result was Turner's deciding

not to waver from his public pledge to return.

"Evan said he is returning," she told BSB. "You can print that."

In addition, a source close to the situation told BSB that Turner has informed the OSU coaching staff that he plans on coming back.

On a team devoid of seniors, Turner finished the season as the team's go-to player in nearly every aspect of the game. He led the Buckeyes in scoring average (17.3 points), rebounding average (7.1), assists (131) and steals (58) while helping lead his team back to the NCAA Tournament after a one-year absence.

Standing in the cramped OSU locker room after the loss to Siena, Turner spoke of his future and said he would be returning for at least another year because he felt he had unfinished business to take care of. Turner said he would likely talk to his mother about the decision but added that he would have to make the best decision for himself.

"I always had a thought in my head that I would leave college with a Big Ten championship, an NCAA championship, stuff like that," Turner said one day prior to the game. "The pros, that's a lifestyle. It can grant you all your material hopes and dreams. I like college right now and I like my teammates. I like the prospects of coming back."

After the Siena game, Matta said he would speak with Turner about the player's future – as he does with all his team members considering the jump – and offer him the best advice he could.

"I think that Evan has a tremendous future, not only at Ohio State but someday (in the NBA)," he said. "When that comes there's areas he's got to keep growing at, but we've got to take a look at it for him. We always do what's best for our guys."

As of March 29, ESPN.com writer Chad Ford lists Turner as the potential No. 17 player in the upcoming NBA draft, and the ESPN.com site itself projects him as a pick in the area of the lottery to the middle of the first round.

Mullens To Leave

In a statement issued March 26, Mullens declared his intent to follow the path set before him by freshman centers Greg Oden and Kosta Koufos and said goodbye to his Buckeye teammates.

"After long consideration I have decided to enter my name in the 2009 NBA draft," Mullens said. "This was not an easy choice because I love The Ohio State University, but the many positive reasons for moving on outweigh the many good reasons for staying."

Although he finished the year averaging 8.8 points and 4.7 rebounds per game, Mullens struggled to achieve consistency throughout his lone season in Columbus. Unlike full-time starters Koufos and Oden, Mullens started just two games and earned the Big Ten's sixth man of the year award.

Despite his lack of steady play, Mullens' blend of size and raw potential has had him pegged as a lottery pick since before he ever set foot on Ohio State's campus. ESPN projects him as a lottery-to-mid-first-round pick, but Ford has him as the No. 21 player in the draft.

Matta expressed his regret at seeing another big man leave his program so quickly, and in doing so indicated that he too feels that Mullens could benefit from another year at the collegiate level.

"I am saddened to lose B.J.," Matta said. "I feel another year in school would have allowed him to develop into the player I know he can be and an additional season would have been beneficial to him both personally and monetarily in the long run."

COURT REPORT with Adam Jardy

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

2008-09 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

22-11 Overall (10-8 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of March 23

Player	G-GS	Min.	Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Off-Def.	Total-Avg.	PF-DQ	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
Evan Turner	33-33	1202	36.4	193-384	.503	11-25	.440	175-222	.788	56-178	234-7.1	97-2	131	117	27	58	572-17.3
William Buford	33-25	968	29.3	142-317	.448	43-119	.361	45-53	.849	29-93	122-3.7	49-0	35	39	12	28	372-11.3
Jon Diebler	33-33	1211	36.7	117-278	.421	96-231	.416	40-50	.800	10-108	118-3.6	43-0	82	53	10	34	370-11.2
B.J. Mullens	33-2	671	20.3	120-188	.638	0-1	.000	52-93	.559	55-99	154-4.7	68-1	9	51	37	16	292-8.8
Jeremie Simmons	33-25	741	22.5	71-190	.374	45-125	.360	36-47	.766	8-38	46-1.4	52-0	83	45	3	18	223-6.8
Dallas Lauderdale	33-31	708	21.5	61-85	.718	0-0	.000	33-72	.458	43-77	120-3.6	79-2	7	42	67	9	155-4.7
P.J. Hill	27-8	469	17.4	25-55	.455	14-33	.424	23-31	.742	8-37	45-1.7	46-0	51	39	4	10	87-3.2
David Lighty	7-7	230	32.9	24-51	.471	5-19	.263	15-28	.536	12-28	40-5.7	14-0	13	13	2	10	68-9.7
Kyle Madsen	29-1	224	7.7	11-28	.393	0-0	.000	9-13	.692	11-26	37-1.3	25-0	5	16	9	3	31-1.1
Walter Offutt	21-0	102	4.9	8-21	.381	0-7	.000	2-6	.333	0-11	11-0.5	11-0	4	7	3	3	18-0.9
Anthony Crater	10-0	131	13.1	3-15	.200	2-14	.143	4-4	1.000	0-8	8-0.8	13-0	19	9	1	4	12-1.2
Nikola Kecman	1-0	11	11.0	3-5	.600	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	1-4	5-5.0	3-0	0	0	0	0	6-6.0
Danny Peters	3-0	4	1.3	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	1	0	0	0	0-0.0
Mark Titus	2-0	2	1.0	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1-0.5	0-0	0	0	0	1	0-0.0
J.J. Grycko	1-0	1	1.0	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0-0.0
TEAM											33-50	83-2.5	1		8		
Ohio State	33	6675	778	1618	.481	216-576	.375	434-619	.701	266-758	1024-31.0	501-5	440	439	175	194	2206-66.8
Opponents	33	6675	739	1819	.406	257-738	.348	311-448	.694	392-667	1069-32.4	562-8	448	443	68	190	2046-62.0

"On the other hand, I am empathetic to the reasons why he has chosen to leave at such an early point in his career. I wish him nothing but the best and know he will always be a part of our basketball family at Ohio State."

After saying that the double-overtime loss to Siena in the NCAA Tournament would weigh into his decision, Mullens said he would consult his family and friends before making the best decision for the group.

"I'm going to pray on it, and hopefully God gives me an answer," he said in the locker room.

Matta, who has now lost five freshmen to the NBA in the last three seasons, has always supported his players' desire to play professionally even at the expense of his own program.

With his team in Dayton for the tournament along with Ohio State, Louisville head coach Rick Pitino weighed in on Mullens' situation and urged him to stick around for another year.

"I heard last night that B.J. Mullens was going to go pro," Pitino said. "(That would be the worst move the young man could ever make because he's going to be a terrific pro. But sitting on an NBA bench during the course of the season ... if you're an NBA coach, you're not worried about that 10th, 11th, 12th man in developing him, you're worried about winning and surviving as a coach.")

Despite his obvious need to improve his game and become a better player, Mullens now finds himself in a position to do so while being paid handsomely for it.

"I would like to thank The Ohio State University, its faculty and staff, along with Coach Matta for the opportunity to attend school and play basketball here," he said. "I would also like to thank all my Buckeye coaches and teammates for their guidance and friendship, not only this season but also in the time since 2004 when I first committed to play at OSU."

Mullens' departure does not mean that OSU will be devoid of a 7-footer next season. After sitting out the year to satisfy NCAA transfer rules, Zisis Sarikopoulos will be eligible for game action next year and will have three years of eligibility. He is listed at 7-0, 265 pounds in the 2008-09 media guide.

Buford Appears Set To Return

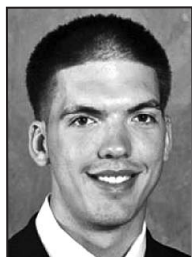
Although no public statement had been made as of press time, all signs point to a return for the Big Ten's freshman of the year in Buford.

The press release announcing Mullens' departure stated that Ohio State will return its entire starting lineup, a group that includes

Buford, who started 25 games. In addition, the guard himself said he plans to return.

The one knock on his game throughout most of his freshman campaign has been his defense — or, rather, the lack thereof. Because of that reputation for being a player who is all offense, Buford has set at least one lofty goal for next season.

He wants to be the Big Ten's defensive player of the year.



B.J. Mullens

"Or first-team all-defensive Big Ten," he said. "People are always doubting my defense, saying I don't have any defense, and I want to prove them wrong. I want to prove to myself that I can play defense on any level."

Buford said that he had no plans to even discuss the possibility of leaving after the season.

"Oh yeah, without a doubt," he said when asked if he will return for his sophomore year. "I haven't thought about leaving

and I don't plan on leaving. I like the people, the school. I feel that I need to elevate my game to a different level."

Doing so would include improving his game on the defensive end, and to do that Buford said he plans to spend the summer guarding the best players he can find on the court.

"When you can score 30 and don't give up 30, that's real good," he said. "That's an advantage. I want to score and be able to not let my opponent score."

With a deadly midrange jumper, Buford finished the year second on the team in scoring (11.3 per game) and connected on 44.8 percent of his shots. His 372 points were eighth best in OSU single-season history for freshmen, and his 43 three-pointers were good for third best in that category.

"I think he'll be a better player," Turner said of Buford. "He'll be more polished, more skilled in different aspects of the game as far as looking for his teammates, getting his teammates the ball a little more, being more than one-dimensional and being a better player."

Offutt Assumes Leadership Role

His impact on the stat sheet might have been minimal this season, but that did not stop freshman guard Walter Offutt from making his presence felt to his teammates.

As the Buckeyes went through their pre-game warmups throughout the season, one ritual tended to find its way onto television. Gathered in a circle near the foul line closest to their bench, the Buckeyes would join arms and crouch down low before swaying back and forth in unison.

After a second or two, one player would

detach himself from the group, run to the center of the circle and proceed to shout at his teammates in a final effort to fire them up.

Although no one player is specified for that role, the Buckeyes found their go-to guy down the stretch in Offutt.

In 21 games this season, Offutt saw an average of 4.9 minutes of action, averaged 0.9 points per game and once went five straight games without seeing a second's worth of game action. Despite that lack of playing time, Offutt displayed an ability to inspire his teammates that led to his ascent to the role of team leader.

"Walt? Have you ever talked to Walt?" Turner asked. "He's a pretty intense guy. Little things like watching basketball get him so motivated and riled up. If a rough play occurs, he gets really riled up."

"He's carried enough heart for all of us. He really embraced it. You can tell from the look on his face that he's ready to go to war. You look at him and you know you're going to get 110 percent from him."

Offutt said he could not remember exactly when he started being the guy in the middle but said it was early this season.

"My teammates pretty much want me in the middle so I can get the guys hyped up," he said. "I enjoy it."

His participation was not guaranteed from game to game but rather was determined by how Offutt felt each time heading into the ritual. He fulfilled his role against Siena, and the freshman has been compared to the team's elder statesman in the process.

"I guess they use me as an energizer to get everybody pumped up," he said. "I start yelling and I've got a lot of energy. They refer to me as a young David Lighty because David's got a lot of energy. They refer to me as his little brother. I have a lot of energy and my teammates feed from it."

Seated next to Offutt in the team's locker room at UD Arena one day prior to the team's game with Siena, junior center Kyle Madsen started laughing when he heard Offutt being asked about his role in the circle.

Asked why he was laughing, Madsen responded, "He's crazy."

Matta's 'Son' Speaks Out

The strategy of fabricating an opponent's comments is one of the oldest motivational tactics in the book, and Ohio State found itself on the wrong end of such a ploy as it prepared to face Siena.

In the hours before the Buckeyes and Saints matched up, around two dozen fliers appeared around Albany, N.Y., about a 10-minute drive from the Siena campus in nearby Loudonville. The fliers said that Matta's son, Colin, had been badmouthing the Siena program and printed his phone number, urging Saints fans to call him and give him a piece of their mind.

There's just one problem. Matta has no son. The whole scheme was concocted by a Siena fan named Paul, who told The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer that he created the hoax as a prank against a friend named Colin, an OSU fan who had been engaged in some trash-talking with Paul leading up to the game. The phone number listed belonged to Colin.

The response was impressive given that the fliers went up about three hours before tipoff, said Paul, who added that he has no problem with the Buckeye program.

"This was merely a prank that went better than I ever could have imagined," he wrote in an e-mail to the Plain Dealer.

The situation wound up earning notoriety by appearing on the popular sports website and blog Deadspin.com.

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Saints March Past Ohio State In Two OTs

By ADAM JARDY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Evan Turner's posture said it all.

Standing in the corner near the Ohio State bench, the leading scorer for the Buckeyes stared blankly across the court at University of Dayton Arena, hands on both of his hips. At the far corner, Siena's players were a fountain of green, leaping up and down in celebration.

It was finally over. No. 9 seed Siena had defeated No. 8 seed OSU, 74-72, in two overtimes. In the final seconds, Turner had the chance to send the game to a third extra session, but his dramatic shot rimmed out.

Siena went ahead for good on a three-pointer by Ronald Moore, whose jumper from near the top of the circle found nothing but net with 3.9 seconds remaining. Turner took the ball out and inbounded it to P.J. Hill, who quickly passed it back to him.

Flying up the left side of the court, Turner spun near the three-point line, took a step and let loose a jumper like he had so many other times this season.

It rolled around the rim and fell harmlessly to the floor as the Buckeyes' season came to an abrupt end.

"It felt good," he later said of the shot. "I was planning on driving to the basket. There was only one second left. I should've followed through a little bit more, but that happens. It went in and out and that's life."

The shot capped a game that was as ugly as it was chaotic. The two teams combined for 42 turnovers, and although the Saints (27-7) committed 22 of them, they out-rebounded the Buckeyes (22-11) by a 53-37 margin that was even more lopsided on the offensive glass at 23 to 9.

"It seems like they wanted it more," OSU guard Jon Diebler said. "That's been our deal the whole year, rebounding on the defensive end where teams are going to the glass hard. We knew they were going to. We just have to do a better job of that next year, and it's something we have to improve on."

With 17.9 seconds left on the clock, Turner again spun through the lane and laid the ball in, giving him a game-high 25 points and putting his team ahead, 72-71.

The problem was that he had left too much time on the clock, and Moore buried a wide-open three-pointer after faking a drive down the middle.

"It's disappointing to lose a double-overtime game," OSU head coach Thad Matta said. "I don't care if it's your home opener or the NCAA Tournament. There are so many plays you can go back and look and say, 'Had we done this, had we done that.'"

"I think as I get out of here and really sit down, I'm sure I'll get a bit pissed off."

After the Buckeyes opened up an 11-point second-half lead, the Saints crawled back into it and finally tied the game at 49-all with 2:57 remaining. The Buckeyes then pushed the lead back to four points on three separate occasions, but both teams had chances to win the game at the end.

"I just remember us having an 11-point lead and somehow they hit a couple shots and went on a 12-2 run or something like that," OSU center Dallas Lauderdale said. "That's where we lost it."

With OSU ahead 56-52 with 1:18 remaining, Siena pulled within one on a



SONNY BROCKWAY

THRILL AND AGONY – Ohio State ran the gamut of emotions during its NCAA Tournament game against Siena. Sophomore star Evan Turner (21, above) scored a game-high 25 points while Saints guard Ronald Moore (25, right) buried a three-pointer with 3.9 seconds left in regulation to send the game into overtime. Siena eventually outlasted the Buckeyes, 74-72, in double OT.

three-pointer from senior captain Kenny Hasbrouck.

Turner had a jumper fall short at the other end, and Hasbrouck then had a chance to pull his team ahead with 8.0 seconds remaining when he went to the line to shoot two free throws.

He missed the first but made the second to tie the score at 56, setting up Turner's first chance for game-winning heroics.

Turner spun through a host of defenders and drew contact, and his last-second shot rimmed out as he sprawled out on the floor and the teams went to overtime.

Again, OSU had a chance to win it at the end of the first overtime – and likely should have. With 9.9 seconds left on the clock, Hill hit two free throws to set the score at 65-62 but then he committed a mistake he later regretted.

Rather than foul his opponent and force him to shoot two free throws, he allowed Moore – who was 0 for 4 from three-point range to that point – to bury the game-tying three-pointer with 3.3 seconds left.

Diebler missed a three-pointer at the buzzer to set the stage for the second and final extra period.

"You learn from this," Hill said. "Next year I'll know as a point guard, even if Coach doesn't tell me, if we're up three and there's under 10 seconds, foul. Make them shoot two free throws and we'll box out and get the rebound."

All of Siena's starters finished in double digits, and two finished with double-doubles. Leading the way were post players



Ryan Rossiter (16 points, 15 rebounds) and Alex Franklin (10 and 13), while Edwin Ubiles added 20 points.

The Buckeyes' scoring was largely limited to Turner. Freshman William Buford added 11 points while playing with foul trouble for the majority of the game, and classmate B.J. Mullens added 10. Diebler suffered a lower leg injury early in the game and looked off for the remainder, finishing with six points on 2-for-11 shooting from three-point range.

"Indescribable," Lauderdale said of the loss. "This obviously isn't the way we wanted to end the season, but we have to give credit to Siena. They hit some big shots and they made the plays they needed to. The only thing we can do now is get better for next year."

As a team, OSU had no answers for a zone trap the Saints unleashed in the second half that helped them climb back into the game by forcing the Buckeyes to make difficult passes. In addition, it altered the pace of the game.

"They had Ubiles up top and he's pretty long and it was making it so we couldn't pass and it was shrinking the shot clock," Hill said. "Even when we would break it, we'd get to half court and there's only 20 seconds and now we're trying to run our offense. That means the shot clock was coming into play."

Turner was the last to leave the court at halftime and received a solitary fist bump from teammate Walter Offutt after his attempt at the final shot of the half resulted in a turnover and kept the score at 28-23 in favor of the Buckeyes.

The possession typified a sloppy first half that saw the teams combine for 23 turnovers with Siena leading the way at 12.

With the loss, OSU's NCAA Tournament record in overtime games fell to 2-7. It marked the first time the Buckeyes lost in the first round of the tournament since a 77-68 overtime loss to Utah State in 2001.

"It's March Madness," Turner said. "Crazy things are going to happen. I just wish they would've happened for us."

Siena 74, Ohio State 72 (2OT)

March 20, 2009 University of Dayton Arena – Dayton, Ohio											
Siena	Min.	M-A	FT	Rebs.	A	PF	Pts.				
(27-7)											
Rossiter	47	5-9	6-6	8-7	2	4	16				
Franklin	50	3-10	4-6	5-8	1	3	10				
Ubiles	46	6-17	6-8	3-1	3	3	20				
Moore	46	4-13	1-2	1-6	6	3	11				
Hasbrouck	44	4-16	3-6	2-7	1	4	12				
Duell	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Jackson	10	2-6	0-0	2-1	0	1	6				
Wignot	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Totals	250	24-72	20-28	23-30	13	18	74				

Percentages: FG: 33.3%, FT: 71.4%, **3-point goals:** 6-24 (Ubiles 2-4, Moore 2-6, Hasbrouck 1-9, Duell 0-1, Jackson 1-4). **Team rebounds:** 22 (Hasbrouck 8, Ubiles 5, Rossiter 3). **Turnovers:** 22 (Hasbrouck 8, Ubiles 5, Rossiter 3, Franklin 2, Jackson 2, Moore, TEAM). **Steals:** 9 (Ubiles 3, Moore 3, Hasbrouck 2, Rossiter).

Ohio State	Min.	M-A	FT	Rebs.	A	PF	Pts.				
(22-11)											
Turner	50	8-18	7-8	3-6	8	4	25				
Lauderdale	34	4-4	0-1	0-4	0	3	8				
Hill	40	1-5	6-6	1-7	4	4	9				
Diebler	49	2-12	0-0	1-5	2	2	6				
Buford	36	4-12	2-4	1-2	0	4	11				
Simmons	10	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	3				
Offutt	9	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	0				
Mullens	22	4-5	2-4	1-2	1	2	10				
Totals	250	24-60	17-23	9-28	15	21	72				

Percentages: FG: 40.0%, FT: 73.9%, **3-point goals:** 7-25 (Turner 2-2, Hill 1-4, Diebler 2-11, Buford 1-5, Simmons 1-3). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Turner 2, Lauderdale 2, Hill, Offutt, Mullens). **Turnovers:** 20 (Turner 5, Hill 5, Simmons 4, Offutt 2, Diebler, Buford, Mullens, TEAM). **Steals:** 5 (Turner 2, Offutt 2, Lauderdale). **Halftime:** Ohio State 28, Siena 23. **End of regulation:** Tied 56-56. **End of first overtime:** Tied 65-65. **Officials:** Kersey, Kitts, Spaulding. A: 12,596.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

NCAA Tournament Loss To Siena Wasn't Shocking

I was puzzled by the fact some people seemed surprised at the Ohio State basketball team's NCAA first-round loss to Siena.

I think there was a bit of Big Ten vs. "what-ever conference the Saints are in" snobbery going there for some. You know how it is. The Buckeyes are from the Big Ten so they must be better than Siena regardless of how good or bad the Saints or any other team from the dozens of "lesser" conferences out there may be. (By the way, Siena is in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference.)

The reality is that it was a game between the eighth and ninth seeds in the region, which would indicate that it should have been pretty competitive. There's a reason so many officials spend so much time and effort assembling competitive NCAA brackets, after all, and it doesn't get much more competitive than double overtime.

For a ninth seed to defeat a No. 8 isn't much of an upset.

To me, it came down to a team that started a senior, three juniors and a sophomore and played in two NCAA games last season defeating the Buckeyes, who started three sophomores, a freshman and a junior in only his second year at the Division I level. Of those five OSU starters, only two – Evan Turner and Jon Diebler – saw appreciable action last season.

Experience does matter when it gets to tournament crunch time.

After watching the Buckeyes fall to Siena, I came to the conclusion that the success or failure of Ohio State this season revolved as much around Diebler as it did Turner. Not that Diebler, the 6-6 sophomore from Upper Sandusky, Ohio, was responsible for the Buckeyes losing in Dayton. You win and lose as a team.

I'm just suggesting that you can pretty much count on Turner's outstanding production game in and game out. While Turner is good enough that he was given strong consideration as the Big Ten's Player of the Year, he is not good enough to carry the Buckeyes alone. Others need to step up each game.

Diebler is a shooter by trade, so by nature he is going to be streaky. Whether he is hot or cold can go a long way toward determining the fate of the Buckeyes.

Against Siena, he was just 2 of 12 from the field, including 2 of 11 from beyond the three-point arc. In a tight game such as the one against the Saints, one or two more three-pointers by Diebler could have advanced the Buckeyes into a round-two matchup against Louisville.

Interestingly, Diebler shot 45.4 percent from the field and an outstanding 44.1 from three-point range during Ohio State's 22 wins this season. In the team's 11 losses, he shot just 36.5 percent from the floor and 37.5 from long range.

Some notable struggles by Diebler during losses included 2-of-10 shooting with 1 of 7 from beyond the arc against West Virginia on Dec. 27 in OSU's first loss of the season; 2 of 8 and 1 of 6 against Michigan State on Jan. 6; 1 of 4 and 0 for 3 in 40 minutes of action against Wisconsin on Feb. 14, and 2 of 12 shooting and 2 of 10 from three-point range Feb. 28 against Purdue.

A definite exception to Diebler's struggles in losses came in a Feb. 18 contest in Evanston. With Turner struggling, Diebler carried the Buckeyes with 9-of-11 shooting (including 8 of 10 from downtown), good for 28 points during a 72-69 loss to Northwestern.

Take that strong performance out of the equation and Diebler averaged only 31.2 percent overall and 32.1 from beyond the arc in losing efforts.

As it stands now, Diebler is a fairly one-dimensional player on offense. Eighty-three

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

percent of his shots came from long range this year, and while he hit on 80 percent of his free throws, he drew only 50 shots from the line or less than two a game. That is mainly because he camps out along the arc. If Diebler and the team are going to rely primarily on his three-point shot, he will have to strive for more consistency next season.

He greatly improved his shooting average from three-point range from 28.8 his freshman year to 41.6 as a sophomore. While a similar jump from this year to next would be unlikely, continued improvement would help fuel the Buckeye offense for the 2009-10 season.

Marketable Star

One of our most avid readers, who by his own admission takes his Buckeye sports way too seriously, confided to me recently that he had a crush on OSU women's basketball player Samantha Prahalis. While he has never met Prahalis, his interest is typical of the type of attention the freshman flash has been drawing since joining the Buckeyes.

I believe Prahalis is proving to be the most marketable women's basketball player to arrive in Columbus since Katie Smith made the trip up Route 33 from Logan, Ohio, back in 1992 and immediately led the Buckeyes to the Final Four as a freshman.

For all of her basketball acumen back then, Smith was still just a small-town girl from Hocking County. Prahalis brings that big-city swagger and a reckless style of play that easily captures the fancy of even the most casual observer of Ohio State women's basketball.

Read the stories in such newspapers as BSB and The Columbus Dispatch, and listen to the radio and television announcers. Prahalis gets a disproportionate amount of mention relative to her contribution to the team – even though that contribution is substantial. She just commands attention. She even arrived in Columbus with a colorful and descriptive nickname – "Pistol Pete with a Ponytail."

If the PR people at Ohio State make an effort to market Prahalis, especially in combination with bona fide superstar Jantel Lavender who is back for another two seasons, they could really move the Ohio State women's basketball program forward by leaps and bounds in terms of interest and attendance.

I bring this up in light of what I consider disappointing attendance figures at Columbus' downtown Nationwide Arena for the Buckeyes' first two NCAA tournament games. There were 5,249 in attendance for the team's 77-63 victory over Sacred Heart in the opening round. With OSU advancing out of the first round for the first time in three seasons, and Prahalis lighting up the big stage with 23 points, seven assists and four rebounds, I figured there would be a big crowd on hand for the second-round action with Mississippi State. Instead, 4,824 fans – boisterous as they were – rolled around in the 19,500 seat venue.

NCAA officials were apparently pleased with the turnout, though.

"It's been very good," NCAA official Rick Nixon told the Dispatch of the Columbus attendance. "It was a good, solid crowd. The Nationwide Arena crew did a great job and the Ohio State staff has been on top of everything."

I would disagree with the notion that the Ohio State people were "on top of everything." I am not sure how hard they pushed the NCAA event in Columbus. I can only speak for Buckeye

Sports Bulletin, but there was very little contact between Ohio State and us concerning publicizing the event, and as one of the leading sources of OSU women's basketball news, we would certainly have been a logical outlet for such information. I don't remember much of a buzz from other outlets around town about the Buckeyes opening March Madness in their hometown, either.

Though 5,000 or so fans may seem fine around the country, this is a program that easily drew capacity crowds of over 13,000 to St. John Arena several times during the heyday of the Buckeyes' rivalry with Iowa in the 1980s and '90s, and as early as 1986 drew 10,184 for a game against USC and superstar Cheryl Miller.

At the height of the Smith era, the Buckeyes averaged 8,975 fans a game, and when they hosted Rutgers for NCAA action in St. John Arena in 1993, all 12,000 tickets available were sold in advance. Because the event was general admission only, the allotment was limited to under capacity to ease seating. Once those tickets were sold, the remaining 1,000-plus tickets were left unsold to prevent what one sports information official at the time called "a potential riot for people wanting to buy them on game day."

On several previous instances during that magical Final Four season, walk-up tickets sales had been so great that many fans were not seated until well into the first half. While the success that season fueled much of the attendance, so did the presence of Smith, who drew much of the town of Logan to each game as well as captured the fancy of so many other basketball fans.

Now, along comes Prahalis.

Times have changed and you can't just throw open the box office and expect people to show up in droves. There are far more sports on television – not to mention a professional hockey team in town – to compete for the sports entertainment dollar in these economically strained times.

Despite these conditions, Ohio State has something to sell with a reasonably priced product, a successful team and a player to capture the fancy of the public, a situation very similar to what it was with Smith's arrival back in 1992. But you have to market it.

Additionally, I am going to make a radical proposal to boost attendance and interest in the women's basketball team. Why not move the games back to St. John Arena?

With all due respect to Value City Arena, any true basketball fan – other than the big-money

dilberts with Schottenstein Center luxury suites or seat license premium ticket locations – prefers St. John Arena. If you've ever been to the old building when it is really rocking, as it used to when the OSU women played Iowa or the men took on Bobby Knight and Indiana, you know it is a more exciting and viewer-friendly place to watch the game. Also, the home team has a far bigger advantage than it does in the mausoleum they call Value City Arena.

It is apparently cheaper to stage a less-attended event in St. John Arena. The women's team averaged just 3,510 home attendance this past season, so I can't believe it is particularly economical to have them playing in the cavernous Schott.

If there is some sort of equality issue, I say be unequal and put the women in the nicer building. I know that Value City Arena is newer, bigger and has nicer amenities. But the Oakland Coliseum is newer and bigger than Wrigley Field or Fenway Park. Where would you rather watch a baseball game? And which of those venues are perpetual sellouts?

I say, "Return to it and they will come."

Tressel Prepares Spring Again

Now that basketball season is over for both OSU teams, it's time to turn thoughts to football. As has been the case since Jim Tressel's arrival in 2001 and for many years before that under John Cooper, the best way to get into the football groove is at the Buckeye Football Spring Kickoff luncheon.

This year's event is set for April 8 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

As is the usual format, Tressel and selected assistant coaches and players will talk about the team and spring practice. It is always informal, informative and fun. Also on the program this year are the two Buckeye representatives from the Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh Steelers – defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau and wide receiver Antonio Holmes.

Tickets are \$75 and available online at www.BuckeyeSpringKickoff.org. Proceeds will support the Tressel Family Fund for Cancer Research and the Earle & Jean Bruce Alzheimer's Research Fund.

Buckeyes To Cruise Again

If you had a chance to read the story on page 27 about this year's Buckeye Cruise for Cancer and the BSB prize winners who took the trip, you know this is no ordinary cruise and it was no ordinary prize package.

The Buckeye Cruise for Cancer will set sail for a third time Feb. 25, 2010. For information on the cruise, which benefits the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research, call (614) 792-6204.



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