

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

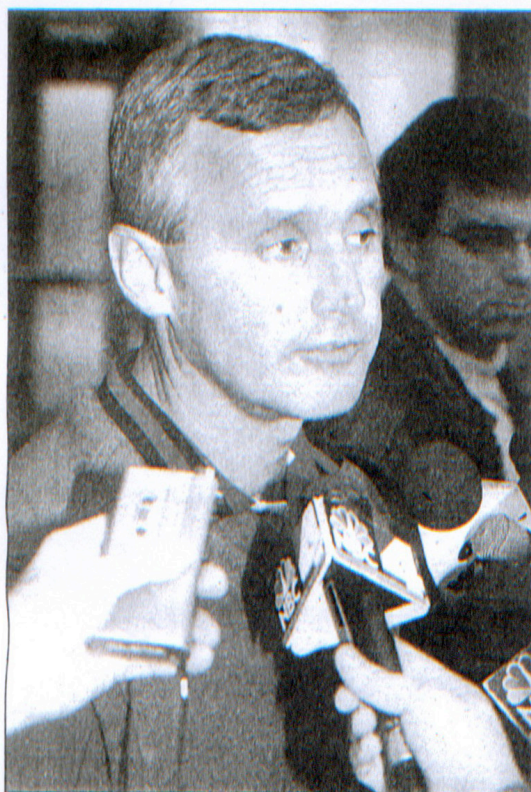
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Vol. 20, No. 24

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 31, 2001



STEVE HELWAGEN

SPRING HAS SPRUNG — New OSU football coach Jim Tressel is pictured answering questions during a March 23 press conference at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. Tressel will begin his first spring with the Buckeyes on March 31.

Tressel Readies For First Spring At OSU

New Coach Eager To Hit The Field

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After two months of recruiting trips, banquet speeches and early morning conditioning sessions, Jim Tressel will finally get a chance to do one of the things he likes to do best — coach football.

Tressel, the new sensation in Columbus as Ohio State's freshly minted head football coach, will open his first spring practice with the Buckeyes on March 31. That will mark one of 15 days of spring ball, culminating in the Scarlet and Gray Game set for April 28 at Columbus Crew Stadium.

The importance of this spring is not lost on Tressel, the longtime Youngstown State head coach who was tapped to replace the fired John Cooper in mid-January.

"A wise man told me once you can't win the national championship in spring practice, but you can lose it," Tressel said.

"If you don't make those steps of finding out who you are, building those relationships, learning those terminologies and systems, learning more about expectations, then we can't progress quickly enough by the fall to win the national championship."

It remains to be seen whether a national — or even Big Ten — championship will be in the cards for Tressel's first team.

But the new coach has enjoyed his first 10 weeks on the job at Ohio's flagship university.

BSB's Spring Football Preview

- Ohio State Insider: OSU defensive back Derek Ross facing jail term on traffic charges (Page 4)
- Eight OSU football players receive degrees (Page 5)
- Offensive coordinator Jim Bollman discusses the offense (Pages 8-9)
- Defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio excited about his group (Pages 10-11)
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"It's been a lot of fun," Tressel said. "I consider work fun. I consider meeting new people as fun. I consider getting to be back with old friends fun. I consider great challenges fun."

"I enjoy organizing and trying to put together a strategy. I think that's fun. Working with new kids and creating new relationships with young people is just a blast. The only thing we need is a few more hours in the day."

When asked to describe the magnitude of being OSU's head football coach, Tressel replied:

"Things are on a grander scope. But what's

Continued On Page 12

OSU's Surprise Season Has Abrupt Conclusion

By JEFF RAPP
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Even at the dawn of April, it was hard to define the season that was the 2000-01 campaign for the Ohio State men's basketball team.

Certainly the 20 wins, third-place showing in the Big Ten regular season and a third straight trip to the NCAA Tournament were reason enough to deem the season a success.

But then there was that tainted ending, upsets the Buckeyes suffered in both the quarterfinals of the Big Ten tournament and the first round of the NCAA tournament that left them one-and-done in both. The latter, a 77-68 overtime loss to little-known Big West champion Utah State in Greensboro, N.C., March 15, brought the season to an unceremonious

BASKETBALL COVERAGE:

- OSU-Utah State game coverage (Page 14)
- Johnson's career comes to an end with NCAA loss (Page 15)
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end at 20-11.

Some unfulfilled fans even compared the back-to-back losses to the foibles of the OSU football team under John Cooper and made sure to write their local sports

Continued On Page 13



STEVE HELWAGEN

HARD TO THE BASKET — Ohio State's Boban Savovic (21) drives to the hole against Utah State's Dmitri Jorsen during the Buckeyes' 77-68 loss March 15.

OSU SPRING FOOTBALL PREVIEW: THE OFFENSE

Bollman Will Use Spring To Teach, Not Scream

By MIKE WACHSMAN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State offensive coordinator Jim Bollman is a man of few words, but he has a lot to say about what the Buckeyes hope to accomplish this spring.

Gone are the days when coaches would try to get results by bellowing at players to go harder. Onlookers will now be treated to session after session of teaching — so much that OSU players should invest in an apple farm.

With everyone learning a new system and a new way of doing things, there simply won't be a lot of time to scold and chide.

"I'd rather teach them than do anything else," Bollman said. "I'm not someone who likes to run around the field hollering at kids. If I have to do that I will, but if I'm doing it too much I probably have the wrong kid in there."

Ohio State is at a crossroads offensively, especially with a coaching staff that has yet to steer the Buckeyes through actual game action and with the loss of some high-profile talent.

Gone are receivers Ken-Yon Rambo and Reggie Germany and tailback Derek Combs, and in their places are largely unproven players.

Which means not only will there be a lot of learning going on this spring at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center but also a new bounce in the step of previously unproven players.

"It will be a matter of testing the abilities of people to see what they can do," Bollman said. "You can take a look at film to see what people can do, but that's not always an indicator. People can improve. You can't always go based on what happened the previous year because there might be some pretty talented players that haven't had a chance."

"Everyone performs differently. Whatever it takes to make people better is what I'll do. Some guys have meticulous technique but need some zip in their step while other guys are great athletes but need work on their fundamentals."

Ohio State doesn't have a ton of depth in the backfield or on the offensive line, and those would seem to be two areas where Bollman will focus much of his attention this spring.

"It's hard to point out one aspect that we're more concerned with," he said. "We're all new to this team, so everything could take a little bit of time to come together."

Here is a position-by-position look at what Bollman will inherit this spring (all class designations are 2001 eligibility).

Quarterback

With two years under his belt, senior Steve Bellisari is likely the guy — at least heading into the spring. Whether he's standing tall at the end of drills remains to be seen.

Bellisari completed just over 52 percent of his passes, but late-season gaffes — many of his own doing — kept him from putting up better numbers. He tossed 13 touchdown passes and 12 interceptions but forced the ball far too often.

A lightning rod for criticism in his time as OSU quarterback, Bellisari will be under the spotlight as much as anyone this spring.

"Steve is definitely a competitor, a tough kid," Bollman said. "He's been through some battles before, and that has to count for something. I know he wants to win, and we want the same thing."

Should Bellisari falter, a trio of talented youngsters awaits.

Sophomores Craig Krenzler and Scott McMullen have both seen game action, though neither has thrown a meaningful pass yet. Redshirt freshman Rick McFadden spent last season learning as a redshirt but may have the most upside with his height (6-6) and rocket arm. Insiders claim he was an impressive talent last year during fall camp and that it may just be a matter of time before he pushes his way up the depth chart.

"Jim (Tressel) has a keen eye for quarterbacks, so you can bet he'll be watching all of those guys closely," Bollman said. "We have to get production out of that position, whoever plays there."

Running Back

Senior Jonathan Wells inherits the top spot after bouncing around between one and two with Combs last season.

A bruising, inside-the-tackles runner, Wells has been ticketed for stardom for some time but has shown only glimpses of greatness. A new system, however — one that takes advantage of running backs who can catch the football — may be just what the doctor ordered.

"What little I've seen of Jonathan has been impressive," Bollman said. "He keeps moving straight ahead and tries to overpower people. He's got a toughness you like as a coach."

Wells will have to fend off a charge from sophomore Sam Maldonado, who came into Ohio State last season as a top-five high school runner but found tough sledding as he battled injury. Now fully healthy, Maldonado hopes to show the speed and shiftness that made the Buckeyes interested in the first place.

This could also be a time of renewed hope and energy for senior fullback Jamar Martin, a bull of a blocker who carries the ball very little. Bollman said that the full-

back has been an important part of the offense under Tressel and that Martin may get ample opportunity to shine.

Redshirt freshman Brandon Joe would have been right in the mix but will miss the spring with a shoulder injury.

Junior Nate Stead and sophomore Jesse Kline, who have battled ineligibility and injuries, respectively, hope to see their fair share of action, too.

Whoever carries the ball will be expected to get the job done.

"I would never, ever say we can't run the ball," Bollman said. "I want us to be a sound running football team. You can't win if you can't run. That doesn't mean we won't or can't pass. We want to pass when we want to, not when we have to. But we will be based on a sound running philosophy."

Wide Receiver

This is where things could be a little dicey.



JEFF BREHM

SAM HE IS — Now a sophomore, tailback Sammy Maldonado will be one of the players trying to take time away from senior Jonathan Wells during spring practice.

Charting The OSU Offense

The Plus Side

• **Enthusiasm** — With a new regime in place, the players all appear to be ready to prove themselves again. Great attendance at 6 a.m. workouts proved that guys are buying into Jim Tressel's way of doing things, and the team should be much closer than it has been the past few seasons.

With everyone starting — in theory anyway — at square one, it's a chance for some unheralded players to possibly break through. That should make for a very spirited, competitive spring camp.

• **Carrying The Mail** — There shouldn't be much doubt that the Buckeyes will be a run-first squad this year, especially with Jonathan Wells and Sam Maldonado gaining valuable experience last season.

Fullbacks Jamar Martin, Nate Stead and Jesse Kline will add to the depth and may get to carry the ball some as well. Offensive coordinator Jim Bollman believes the running backs have a lot of diverse skills, and he wants to involve quite a few of them.

• **Darnell Sanders** — The burly tight end became Ohio State's most consistent pass catcher by the end of the season and should only get better. While not blessed with Rickey Dudley's speed, he does have great hands and rarely drops a pass thrown his way.

His blocking also has improved, so look for him to be a vital part of the Buckeyes' attack.

The Minus Side

• **Sporadic Signal-Calling** — A big-time program cannot have the fits and starts at quarterback the Buckeyes had last year with Steve Bellisari, especially if it expects to win.

Bellisari has made some strides in his two seasons under center, but he still doesn't read defenses as well as he might and he often has more faith in his arm than he should.

The problem is, those behind Bellisari have not been given enough real playing time to prove that they can get the job done. All three backups have talent, but none has performed under pressure. Until that happens, there will be doubts.

• **Lack Of Big Bodies** — Tressel is a religious man, so he'd better say a little prayer that none of his horses up front goes down with an injury. There just aren't that many linemen in camp, which means there will be a lot of reps for a lot of guys who are largely unproven.

LeCharles Bentley is the only player who can be remotely thought of as consistent, so he'll have to help the pups along.

If OSU stays healthy, this area could be a strength. If not, well, God only knows.

• **Did You Catch That?** — The receiving corps has just the opposite problem of the offensive line — a lot of players, but no one proven.

Drew Carter and Ricky Bryant have played before, but they're about it. That means it will be up to a lot of redshirt freshmen and some sophomores to go out and show what they can do. JUCO transfer Chris Vance could be a saving grace because he's seen real action, albeit at a lower level.

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OSU SPRING FOOTBALL PREVIEW: THE OFFENSE

While Rambo and Germany both had subpar seasons, they at least provided Bellisari the security blanket of experience. Now that's gone.

In their place step sophomores Drew Carter and Ricky Bryant, who have combined for 18 career catches. Both have talent, but their numbers aren't exactly confidence boosters.

A host of youngsters, including freshman John Hollins and sophomores Maurice Lee and Michael Jenkins, along with JUCO transfer Chris Vance, will be given a lot of reps.

It will definitely be a committee approach this spring, at least until or unless someone breaks from the pack.

"Someone has to step up and prove they can help us," Bollman said. "We know we have some talented kids, but no one has proven yet that they're the one. That's what we'll find out."

Tight End

Junior Darnell Sanders could find himself a very busy man this spring since he's the only proven set of hands the Buckeyes have.

He caught 29 passes last year, seven going for scores, and has the ability to turn into one of the top pass-catching tight ends in the Big Ten.

Sophomore Ben Hartssock is more of a blocker but was valuable in OSU's two-tight sets, and redshirt freshman Jason Caldwell, who is a hybrid of both players, was on the sidelines serving his redshirt season.

Senior Tim Cheatwood, if he doesn't move to defense, would also be a tremendous asset in stretching the field.

All should expect to see plenty of action, according to Bollman.

Offensive Line

The area Bollman will most closely watch is the trenches. He's entrusted with getting the five guys up front to function as a cohesive unit, and he at least has a good starting point with senior LeCharles Bentley.

Bentley had some ups and downs last year after moving inside to center, and

Players On The Spot

With a new coaching staff in place this spring, every member of the Ohio State football team is "on the spot."

However, BSB has zeroed in on several players who will truly be under the microscope when spring drills commence March 31.

• **All Ohio State quarterbacks, most notably Steve Bellisari** — You have to believe that Bellisari, despite his shortcomings, will head into the spring as the No. 1 signal caller. His experience gives him the edge, and he did show some signs of improvement last season. However, late in the season he forced the ball way too often, resulting in untimely turnovers. It should be interesting to see how (or if) Jim Tressel, a noted QBs guru, gets Bellisari to develop.

Should the veteran falter, there are arms in reserve. Craig Krenzler and Scott McMullen, again based on experience, may get the first looks, but redshirt freshman Rick McFadden was the talk of last year's fall camp. He's got the size (6-6) and arm to really do some things, and Tressel won't hesitate to make a move if McFadden or the other two are impressive.

though he seems to be the incumbent at that spot, he could be moved outside to tackle or guard.

The other "veteran" up front is sophomore tackle Adrien Clarke, who started nine games on the left side and gained confidence as the season went on. Sixth-year senior Tyson Walter, who missed last season with a hip injury, was listed at the top of the spring depth chart at right tackle, but how much he participates will depend on his health.

A plethora of sophomores will vie for the three open slots, including Alex Stepanovich, who will likely begin the spring at guard but could move to center if Bentley moves. Tackles Shane Olivea and Ivan Douglas and guard Bryce Bishop also will be factors.

OSU also will benefit from the return of senior guard Jim Massey, who missed last season with academic problems. Junior Scott Kuhnhein has been a versatile fill-in at a variety of spots and could make a push.

What To Look For

The Buckeyes will likely ease into spring drills, but the tempo will bump up very quickly as the coaches attempt to sort through plays and personnel in order to make the best decisions.

Bollman said the worst thing the Buckeyes can do is neglect their strengths, and much of the spring will be spent trying to figure just what those strengths are.

"We have to know everything about our team," Bollman said. "How does our line block? Is our quarterback better on the run or dropping back? Can our receivers stretch the field? We can't put boundaries on people and pigeonhole them as this particular kind of athlete."

He admitted that the experienced players probably have a leg up on the younger kids but was adamant in stating that if the veterans don't perform, they won't be in the starting lineup.

The playbook will be a diverse one, though Tressel is fond of saying that it's not plays that win games but players.

That's why changing offenses from season to season — or even game to game — isn't that difficult. Bollman saw it firsthand at Youngstown State and said the staff won't be afraid to experiment at Ohio State.

"Our offenses were very different from year to year," Bollman said. "If you took a look at that first championship team and

• **Any and all receivers** — With the loss of Ken-Yon Rambo, Reggie Germany, Chad Cacchio and Vanness Provitt, the Buckeyes return a group of receivers who have combined for a robust 18 career catches. To say this is an area of concern is like saying the Academy Awards show runs just a little long.

There's a lot of talent here, but none of it is proven. Drew Carter, Ricky Bryant and Michael Jenkins should lead the way, but several redshirts will finally get their day in the sun. John Hollins and Maurice Lee will have plenty of opportunities to shine, while junior college transfer Chris Vance may make an immediate impact.

The performance of Bellisari will be the determining factor in how well this group does, and vice versa.

• **The young offensive linemen** — With the departures of Tim Hopkins, Henry Fleming and Mike Gurr, it's time for youngsters Alex Stepanovich, Shane Olivea and Bryce Bishop to take center stage.

Stepanovich played quite a bit last year, and he could even move to center if the coaches feel LeCharles Bentley would be better suited outside at a tackle position. Olivea

got raves last season and Bishop seemed to develop as the season went on. Adrien Clarke will also be under the microscope, even after a season in the trenches at left tackle. But if his first campaign was any indication, he should come through the spring well.

• **Darnell Sanders' backups** — OSU's most reliable receiver looks to be an All-American in

the making in Sanders, but there's precious little depth behind him at tight end. Ben Hartssock is more of a blocker and Jason Caldwell was redshirted, so there are questions about them.

If Tim Cheatwood does indeed move to defense — and there's been talk to that effect — then Sanders will definitely be one exhausted puppy by the end of spring drills. That's why it is imperative for someone — anyone — to step up and take some of the pressure off Sanders.



Adrien Clarke

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Depth Chart

OSU Offense
Here is a look at the projected depth chart for the OSU offense heading into spring practice.

Pos.	No.	Player	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
SE	82	Drew Carter	6-4	187	So.
	12	Michael Jenkins	6-4	200	So.
	4	Chris Vance	6-2	180	Jr.
LT	63	Adrien Clarke*	6-4	325	So.
	53	Ivan Douglas	6-6	295	So.
LG	76	Alex Stepanovich	6-4	285	So.
	70	Scott Kuhnhein	6-4	285	Jr.
	50	Michael Stafford	6-4	280	Jr.
C	68	LeCharles Bentley*	6-2	290	Sr.
	66	Mike Jacobs	6-1	285	Sr.
RG	69	Jim Massey	6-5	290	Sr.
	78	Bryce Bishop	6-3	300	So.
RT	77	Tyson Walter®	6-5	300	Sr.
	71	Shane Olivea	6-4	330	So.
TE	89	Darnell Sanders*	6-6	265	Jr.
	88	Ben Hartssock	6-3	250	So.
QB	8	Steve Bellisari*	6-3	220	Sr.
	16	Craig Krenzler	6-4	215	So.
	15	Scott McMullen	6-3	195	So.
FB	39	Jamar Martin*	6-0	245	Sr.
	29	Jesse Kline	6-1	227	So.
TB	28	Jonathan Wells	6-1	230	Sr.
	5	Sam Maldonado	6-0	230	So.
FL	9	Ricky Bryant	6-0	175	So.
	84	John Hollins	6-2	180	Fr.
	86	Maurice Lee	5-9	170	So.
K	23	Josh Huston	6-1	185	Fr.

*Returning starter.

®Walter was a starter at left tackle from 1997-99.

OSU SPRING FOOTBALL PREVIEW: THE DEFENSE

OSU May Use Parts Of Other Teams' Defenses

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There is hardly an Ohio State football fan out there who can talk about the Buckeyes' lone loss in 1998 without shaking his head.

Top-ranked OSU, you may recall, was stunned by Michigan State as the MSU secondary came up big four straight times in the final moments of the game. That 28-24 loss denied the Buckeyes a shot at the national championship.

As irony would have it, Mark Dantonio, the coach of that Spartan secondary, is now the leader of the Ohio State defense.

He beat them, then he joined them.

A former defensive back at South Carolina and onetime assistant to Glen Mason at Kansas (more irony), Dantonio brings an aggressive posture to the Buckeye D, maybe even more so than that of his predecessor, Fred Pagac. But it's not like he plans to make a complete overhaul this spring.

"What we've tried to do is not just bring Michigan State's defense here but also incorporate a lot of things that Ohio State has done," said Dantonio, who turned 45 on March 9. "Ohio State has had some great defenses here and (retained defensive line coach) Jim Heacock has been a big part of that."

"Minnesota also has had a lot of great defenses in the last number of years and (new linebackers coach) Mark Snyder will have a lot of good input."

"(New defensive backs coach) Mel Tucker is from LSU, where he was under Coach (Nick) Saban, so he's used to running the same defense. So we have a good mix of things."

"We're trying to adapt and do what has been successful at those places."

To prepare for what will be a crucial development period for the Buckeyes as they enter the Jim Tressel era, Dantonio watched film — a lot of film. Dantonio said he will carry a very basic mental checklist with him when rating players in the 15 spring practice days, beginning March 31.

"Coach Tressel wants us to be sound and he believes like I do that how you play defense depends on how well you tackle, how you defeat blocks and do you have big-play capability," he said. "Regardless of what defense we run, what kind of schemes we have up there, those are the underlying things we have to have, and they need to be able to be physical. That will separate people this spring."

With that in mind, fundamentals will be stressed, possibly even more than in most springs.

The following is a position-by-position look at the Ohio State defense (class denotes 2001 eligibility).



SONNY BROCKWAY

BLINDSIDED — Ohio State junior defensive end Kenny Peterson (97) puts a hurt on Iowa quarterback Kyle McCann during an eventual Buckeye victory last season. Peterson is one of the ends new coordinator Mark Dantonio will be counting on this year.

Defensive Line

Dantonio plans to stay in a 4-3-4 alignment, which means the Buckeyes will be in search of three new starters along the front line this spring. Gone are defensive ends Brent Johnson and Rodney Bailey, and following them out the door a year early with sights set on the NFL draft was defensive tackle Ryan Pickett.

However, Dantonio insisted, "We're not empty there."

Interior lineman Mike Collins returns as one of only four seniors on the entire defense. He proved reliable last season and could be headed for big things in 2001.

"He's very athletic, strong, tough," Dantonio said. "When I watch the films on him I see him hold the point — he never gets knocked off the ball and he very rarely gets knocked off his feet."

"They were No. 9 in the nation against the run last year and Mike was a big part of that."

Expected to line up next to Collins as a first-teamer when drills begin is sophomore Tim Anderson, who had a breakout spring last year but was rewarded with just 18 total minutes of playing time in the fall. Suffice it to say he's hungry.

"Tim Anderson is another guy who's very competitive," Dantonio said. "He was a state champion heavyweight wrestler in high

school. He's 285 pounds, he'll fight you, he's going to compete. He'll go into spring as a starter there."

"But again you say, 'Where does Darrion Scott fit in?'"

That's a good question, considering Scott, a very promising sophomore, looks capable of playing anywhere along the line. The same could be true of classmate Fred Sturup, although he has not lived up to the promise put on him when he was a Florida prep star.

Likewise, athletic junior David Thompson needs to tap into his window of opportunity. He at least figures to be a useful backup inside.

As far as the clear-cut defensive ends, the coaches seem most excited about junior Kenny Peterson, who appears ready to take over.

"Kenny Peterson, in my mind, has been an excellent worker in our workouts," Dantonio said. "He's shown mental toughness, he's shown his ability to move around with burst, he's very athletic when you watch him on film, and he's been productive. We should be able to succeed with him."

Expected to be Peterson's bookend is Will Smith, who played in every game as a true freshman this year. Smith appears larger than his listed size of 6-3, 240, and he's determined to show he belongs.

"Again, an excellent athlete for his size, he played as a true freshman, and we expect him to be an excellent football player," Dantonio

Charting The OSU Defense

On The Plus Side

• **Experience At LB** — With the return of Joe Cooper for a fourth season of eligibility, the Buckeyes boast three returning starters who combined for 190 tackles last year. Cooper is coming off a season where he logged 80 stops and Matt Wilhelm appears ready to become a Butkus Award candidate inside.

Needing to pick it up is outside 'backer Courtland Bullard, although he should benefit from having promising youngster Robert Reynolds behind him. Last spring, there was tons of uncertainty with this group. This year, they have a chance to get on the same page — and provide a crutch for the defense.

• **Highly Athletic Secondary** — There are no seniors and no returning stars in the defensive backfield. What is there instead is a bevy of young, athletic talent. Among the candidates to emerge in the spring are redshirt freshmen Bam Childress and Harlen Jacobs, sophomores Richard McNutt and B.J. Barre, and junior Derek Ross, who could be the headliner of the group if he is indeed available to participate in the spring.

"I don't know how they play the ball, I have a little bit of an idea about their change of direction, but their speed and competitive attitude are terrific," defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio said of the young DBs.

• **Top-Notch Position Coaches** — Dantonio seems to be a perfect fit at Ohio State. He'll be patient with the players' development but also will insist on aggressive play much the way his predecessor, Fred Pagac, did.

Jim Heacock, one of the most respected coaches on the staff by the players, is back to coach the D-line. Newcomers Mark Snyder (linebackers) and Mel Tucker (defensive backs) are budding stars in the profession. Greg Bellisari will provide some continuity and a young shoulder to lean on as he returns as the defensive graduate assistant.

On The Minus Side

• **Who Are The Corners?** — With Ross dealing with legal problems, David Mitchell out of eligibility and Nate Clements awaiting the NFL draft after an early departure, OSU needs to find some capable cornerbacks, and soon. The coaches will have no choice but to throw the candidates to the fire to see who can hold up. However, virtually the same lack of experience at wide receiver could leave coaches wondering even after spring drills.

If a couple of players don't vault to the forefront, Dantonio may have to plan to scale back his pressing defense, something he desperately doesn't want to do.

• **Lack Of Depth Up Front** — Last year, Heacock praised seniors Brent Johnson and Rodney Bailey for setting a tone in the spring with hard play. This spring, those guys are gone, as is defensive tackle Ryan Pickett, who joined Clements out the early-exit door.

Kenny Peterson looks ready to take over an end spot but he isn't known for being the greatest practice player. Pushing him and projected starter Will Smith are Fred Sturup and Tim Cheatwood, who was moved from TE. The interior spots also are just two deep right now.

• **Tackling** — There's no question the OSU defenders get from A to B in impressive fashion. But you've got to finish the deal, and several of the young players who will be relied upon — and even a couple of veterans — have some proving to do in the tackling department.

"Physically, you've got to be able to tackle," Dantonio said. "On all the great football teams defensively, you've had great tacklers. The defensive tackle has to be able to play tackle to tackle, the linebacker has to be able to get up in space and make those plays, and then defensive backs need to be able to play and have to tackle. Otherwise, even if the defense is set and everything (else) is done correctly, you still don't get the guy on the ground."

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- Option 7: OSU Olympic Sports report (a look at OSU's non-revenue sports)
- Option 8: Commitment List (regular updates of OSU's verbal commitment list)

Calls can be made from rotary or touch-tone phones. Callers under age 18 must have their parent's permission. Hotline sponsored by Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 124510, Columbus, Ohio 43212; (614) 486-2202.

OSU SPRING FOOTBALL PREVIEW: THE DEFENSE

said. "He's another guy who works hard out there."

"In the limited reps you see from him playing in the games, you see some flashes. Coach Heacock feels very good about him."

Listed behind Peterson for now is Scott.

In need of a backup for Smith for the spring (now listed as walk-on Josh McDanel), the coaches are looking at senior Tim Cheatwood, who already has served as a safety, linebacker and tight end, at the position. If nothing else, Cheatwood could become a designated pass rusher.

In the fall, the Buckeyes will add four true freshman linemen to the fold: Simon Fraser, Marcus Green, Quinton Thomas and Andree Tyree.

Linebacker

Ohio State has one of the best linebacker traditions in the country, and Dantonio believes, with all three starters returning and lots of capable backups, that will continue.

"At linebacker, you've got to be able to make plays in space," said the coordinator. "You have also got to be able to be powerful enough to take on blockers."

"The numbers are there to be very competitive, but we have to find out where they fit."

Matt Wilhelm had a breakout sophomore season playing inside last year and he's sure to pick up where he left off.

"At the Mike, Matt Wilhelm made a lot of plays last year," Dantonio said. "He's big, he's athletic, he has power, he's active. Certainly he'll start the spring at that position. It looks like he can make the plays he needs to make."

The prospects are iffy behind Wilhelm. Junior Jack Tucker has yet to make an impact, redshirt freshman Jamal Muhammad is still learning the position and sophomore Fred Pagac Jr. is still nursing a leg injury that sidelined him much of last season.

At the Sam linebacker, two-year starter Courtland Bullard is back for his senior season, but he's no lock to hold down that job again. His production (46 tackles for the year, no sacks in the first half of the season) was disappointing considering his raw ability.

"He's got good speed and athletic ability," Dantonio said of Bullard. "He needs to be more consistent and has to make the plays in space."

Pushing Bullard will be Robert Reynolds, who played 64 minutes as a true frosh last

Players On The Spot

With a new coaching staff in place, virtually every member of the team is a "player on the spot" this spring. However, BSB has pulled out five noteworthy members of the defense who appear to be most under the microscope. They are listed in alphabetical order.

• **Courtland Bullard, OLB** — A senior whose athletic ability is unquestioned, Bullard still doesn't seem to play up to his potential, a fact even the new coaches have come to realize. It would behoove him to put together an outstanding spring if he wants to keep hold of his job at Sam linebacker.

• **Marco Cooper, LB** — After being touted as everything just short of the next Ray Lewis in high school, Cooper was a nonentity in his freshman season. He seemed most stunned by the lack of impact. There's still time for

Cooper to emerge and there could be a place (see above), but fans are going to be quick to label him a bust if he doesn't at least find a spot in the two-deep. Right now, he's a man without a position.

• **Donnie Nickey, FS** — Nickey seems to make this list every year and it isn't because of a lack of effort. Simply put, the jury is still out on whether he can be a playmaker in the OSU secondary. His guile and toughness won over former defensive backs coach Jon Tenuta, but the new regime wants to make sure he can wrap up opposing ball carriers with consistency.

• **Derek Ross, CB** — This was supposed to be Ross' time to shine. After overcoming a year's absence from the squad and showing flashes of brilliance last season, he was candidate No. 1 for Nate Clements' vacant spot at corner. Instead, a brush with the law could

leave him out of some or even all of spring drills, or worse. If Ross were to rejoin the team in the fall it would come with no guarantees. His hiatus could pave the way for youngster Harlen Jacobs.

• **Darrion Scott, DL** — Like Cooper, Scott is a highly talented player who needs to find a niche then excel there consistently in practice. The coaches believe he is capable of playing anywhere along the line, but an occasional good rep isn't going to get it done.



Darrion Scott

season. While Bullard has great speed and quickness, Reynolds can be overpowering at times. In fact, the previous regime often let him line up at the line of scrimmage last season.

"He'll certainly be competitive and be involved there," Dantonio said. "He's a young player. This should be a very big spring for him."

Sophomore Pat O'Neill is listed as the third-stringer at the Sam.

At the other outside spot, the Will, OSU will welcome senior Joe Cooper. A third-team All-American last year, Cooper applied for a fourth year of eligibility and got it, signaling his return to a prominent role in the defense.

"Joe is a very active football player, and I think he is a guy who can make plays in space," Dantonio said of Cooper, who was second on the team in tackles last season with 80.

Providing competition for Cooper will be junior Cie Grant and redshirt freshman Thomas Matthews. Both possess plenty of speed.

The LB who appears to be lost in the shuffle right now is sophomore Marco Cooper, who played minimally last year after being one of the most highly rated prep LBs.

Dantonio, who saw Cooper shine in the Detroit area, said the youngster could play any of the three positions.

OSU also is expected to add true freshman Redgie Arden to the linebacking corps in the fall — that is if he's not shifted to end.

Secondary

OSU appears to be in great need at cornerback, where starters David Mitchell and Nate Clements roamed a year ago. This spring, a lot of unfamiliar faces are going to receive a lot of coaching from unfamiliar coaches.

Dantonio said he'll judge the defensive backs, especially the corners, on three main points — deep ball coverage, tackling and change of direction.

"When I first came here, it was mentioned that we didn't have corners and we needed to find corners," Dantonio said. "I think there are some players here in the program who can play."

"There are six guys there who are pretty good athletes. I can tell you this: Based on my working with them, we didn't have six guys at Michigan State like that."

The group consists of juniors Derek Ross and Curtis Crosby, sophomore Richard McNutt, and redshirt freshmen Bobby Britton, Bam Childress and Harlen Jacobs.

Ross is the best of the bunch athletically, but his availability was very much up in the air as of press time due to a recent arrest for various driving offenses (see Ohio State Insider, page 4).

Ross and McNutt were the listed starters in the OSU spring practice media guide. Dantonio is excited by the size and speed of Jacobs and expects Childress to be a force in drills.

Depth Chart

OSU Defense

Here is a look at the projected depth chart for the OSU defense heading into spring practice.

Pos.	No.	Player	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
LE	97	Kenny Peterson	6-4	265	Jr.
	56	Darrion Scott	6-3	265	So.
DT	98	Mike Collins*	6-3	290	So.
	51	Fred Sturup	6-3	291	So.
DT	54	Tim Anderson	6-3	289	So.
	95	David Thompson	6-5	280	Jr.
RE	93	Will Smith	6-3	240	So.
	64	Josh McDanel	6-3	210	Fr.
BLB	58	Courtland Bullard*	6-3	227	So.
	44	Robert Reynolds	6-3	220	So.
	36	Pat O'Neill	6-3	230	So.
MLB	35	Matt Wilhelm*	6-4	245	Jr.
	46	Fred Pagac Jr.	6-1	225	So.
	52	Jamal Muhammad	5-11	235	Fr.
WLB	10	Joe Cooper*	6-0	225	So.
	6	Cie Grant	6-1	220	Jr.
CB	11	Richard McNutt	5-10	178	So.
	37	Harlen Jacobs	6-0	190	Fr.
	1	Bobby Britton	5-10	175	Fr.
FS	25	Donnie Nickey*	6-3	203	Jr.
	42	Rob Stover	6-0	185	Fr.
SS	2	Mike Doss*	5-11	197	Jr.
	26	Will Allen	6-1	175	So.
	9	Raheem Shabazz	6-0	198	So.
CB	7	Derek Ross	6-1	197	Jr.
	24	Curtis Crosby	5-11	180	Jr.
	14	Bam Childress	5-9	180	Fr.
P	21	B.J. Sander*	6-3	212	So.

*Returning starter.

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COVER STORY: TRESSEL'S FIRST SPRING

Tressel, Staff Ready To Begin Work On Gridiron

Continued From Page 1

important isn't any different. Our kids at Youngstown State were as important as these kids here. Our community and potential impact we could make on the Mahoning Valley is no less important than what we can make here. It's just bigger.

"When I looked into this job, I said to myself, 'Why am I interested? I'm at a wonderful place. I've been there 15 years. I know my players.' They are wonderful kids and we had a good group coming back.

"I really think the bottom line — after you put the ego part of it aside, just wanting to be the coach at Ohio State — was we had a chance to impact positively on a larger scale.

"Then, I think, too, was the thought of a new challenge and the energizing part of that. I'm sure that was part of it in leaving a situation that was extraordinary for all of us."

It will help, Tressel said, that the team he inherits — 60 scholarship players and 29 walk-ons are due to begin spring practice — seems eager to learn from OSU's new staff.

"I've spent a lot of time with the players," Tressel said. "I see and I sense a group of kids who are very anxious and willing to do what it takes to achieve. I haven't been disappointed at all with the work ethic, the willingness. In fact, I've been impressed with their willingness to work academically. I really feel good about these kids."

Spring Objectives

Tressel has definite ideas on what he wants to accomplish this spring.

"As we go into the spring, we want as coaches to get to know the strengths of our players so we'll know what to feature," he said. "I think you have to feature what your players do best.

"On the flip side, our players need to get to know our language. Football is the same at Youngstown State as it is at Ohio State, but it might have been called something different. It's the same play — we're going to block it the same way with the same rules — but we call it something different.

"While we're trying to learn a lot about them and they're trying to learn a lot about the system, I know they will be trying to learn a lot about what we expect, what are our expectations. That's what spring practice is for."

Like all schools, OSU is bound by NCAA rules on the number of contact days it can have during spring practice. The Buckeyes have scheduled a specialty unit scrimmage for April 18 and another full scrimmage for April 21, leading up to the public final scrimmage April 28.

"I certainly hope to see steady progress," Tressel said. "We have to somehow create situations and opportunities for experience to be gained, even though it will not be game experience. I think that is very important during spring practice.

"We have to have gamelike situations."

Staff Ready For Challenge

In addition to Tressel, six new assistant coaches also will be debuting as Buckeyes this spring. That group includes new coordinators Jim Bollman on offense and Mark Dantonio on defense.

"When I met with the university in the interview process and after getting the job, I assured them of one thing — we would hire good men who would follow the rules, care about the kids and work very, very hard," Tressel said.

"Then, when you start breaking it into more specific thoughts, I thought we should be really strong in Ohio. I want people that it's a little more special to be at Ohio State than some other people might feel, and we have a staff full of those. There is no one on our staff who has not coached in Ohio.

"I also assured them that we would hire people with excellent expertise in their position areas and with excellent expertise in the recruiting areas that we think we need to recruit well to be successful. I really feel good about how our staff ended up."

The staff jumped right into the winter conditioning program, assisting strength coach Dave Kennedy with that process. Then, as winter quarter wound down, they used some of their permitted hours to begin discussing schemes that will be used in the spring.

"We were allowed in the eight hours of out-of-season conditioning time each week to spend two of those hours on football," Tressel said. "We chose not to early because we had eight hours of physical work to do and we weren't ready to present things, either."

"The last couple of weeks, we spent about an hour each week out of our eight just with the general, 'Here's what we're going to call things generally.'"

The players returned to campus to begin spring quarter March 26. They can expect a quick refresher course on the schemes they'll be using this spring.

"With exams and spring break, it would be hard for them to remember everything we talked about," Tressel said. "We'll start from square one this week with the two hours we have and really give it to them with both barrels."

Tressel said OSU's defensive players will probably see fewer changes.

"Defensively, our guys Mark Dantonio and Mel Tucker have worked together on the same language defense (at Michigan State)," he said. "(Linebackers coach) Mark Snyder's defense at Minnesota was very similar and the defense they had here with (line coach) Jim Heacock at Ohio State was also very similar.

"Defensively, I don't think there were that many adjustments terminology-wise and I don't think there will be that many adjustments for the players, either. I think there will be a few more adjustments offensively, but I think that is normal anyway."

Much of Tressel's experience has been on the offensive side of the football. That is where he will continue to spend most of his time, tutoring OSU's quarterbacks.

"My task is to focus a good bit of my

OSU Spring Football Data

Here are some notables regarding OSU's spring practice.

• **Practice Dates (all practices 3:15 p.m. at Woody Hayes Athletic Center unless noted)** — March 31 (9 a.m.); April 3, 6, 7 (9 a.m.; first day in full pads), 9, 10, 12, 16, 18 (specialty unit scrimmage), 20, 21 (9 a.m.; scrimmage), 23, 24, 27, 28 (1:30 p.m.; Scarlet and Gray Game at Columbus Crew Stadium).

• **Injury Update** — Two OSU players, defensive tackle Heath Queen (neck) and linebacker Jason Ott (shoulder), have had their careers cut short due to injuries. Both players, however, will remain on scholarship. Others recovering from injuries who expect to participate include fullback Jesse Kline (back), linebacker Fred Pagac Jr. (ankle) and linebacker Jack Tucker (left clavicle). Tackle Tyson Walter (hip infection) also could see light duty. Fullback Brandon Joe (right shoulder) will be held out of contact drills.

• **Position Changes** — Tight end Tim Cheatwood will move back to defense to play at end or linebacker for his senior year. Walter, a starter at left tackle from 1997-99, is penciled in at right tackle.

• **Scarlet and Gray Game Ticket Data** — Tickets for the Scarlet and Gray Game will be \$5 each and will be available through TicketMaster outlets in Columbus. A sale date had not been announced as of press time, although those tickets were to go on sale in early April. Money generated from the ticket sale will cover the cost of renting Crew Stadium and allow fans to park for free at the Ohio Exposition Center lots.

• **Merchandise Sale, Autographs** — There will be a merchandise sale at Crew Stadium prior to the Scarlet and Gray Game. The sale will begin at 9 a.m. and will be held inside the plaza area at the southwest corner of the stadium. At the conclusion of the game, OSU players and coaches will be available for autographs and photographs on the east side of Crew Stadium.

• **Scarlet and Gray Game Broadcast Data** — The game will be televised live in Columbus by WBNS-TV (Ch. 10) and across the state by the Ohio News Network. The broadcast team will include Jeff Hogan, Dom Tiberi, Doug Lessells, Kirk Herbstreit and Ryan Miller. WBNS-AM (1460), with Paul Keels, Jim Lachey and Jim Karsatos calling the action, also will carry the game.

• **Important Fall Dates To Remember** — Big Ten Kickoff Luncheon, Aug. 1-2 at the Sheraton Towers in Chicago; Alumni Band Day, Sept. 8 against Akron; OSU Athletic Hall of Fame Day, Sept. 15 against San Diego State; Homecoming, Oct. 13 against Wisconsin.



Jesse Kline

attention on the overall team and be the devil's advocate in everything we do, outlining clearly the expectations," he said.

"I will then have more interaction with the offense, but not on a scheme standpoint. I have hired some guys on offense with tremendous backgrounds, some of whom have worked with me and understand my philosophies.

"I'm going to work directly with the quarterbacks in terms of general quarterback play. Joe Daniels will work hard with the receivers on general receiver play.

"When it comes down to scheme insertion and making sure that the quarterbacks and receivers and the rest of the offense are all reading off the same page, I'll be sitting in the back like a regular student because my experts have been sitting in the film room all day."

While Daniels will handle receivers and Bollman will double as the line coach, Bill Conley returns with the tight ends and Tim Spencer will be back with the running backs.

"Coach Bollman and Coach Daniels will probably have the most impact on the offense insertion," Tressel said. "I like the fact those two guys have extraordinary experiences. Then you add in the fact that Bill Conley and Tim Spencer know our players so well, I like the blend we have on offense."

OSU returns just two starters on the offensive line, a unit that must come together quickly and play effectively if the Buckeyes are to return to prominence with the football.

"I think we're thin on experience and we're thin on numbers," Tressel said. "But I kind of rest on the fact that the athleticism we saw out of the offensive line group was solid."

Likewise, OSU has no proven receiving threat, although there is a short list of potential replacements.

"As I listen to Bill Conley and Tim

Spencer, they feel confident that there are some young guys who can come through there," Tressel said. "As I watched them in the winter, I certainly thought there were some guys with some ability."

"Joe Daniels has had so much experience. I think he'll bring out the best in them."

But Tressel knows most people will be watching the quarterback position the closest. Two-year starter Steve Bellisari is preparing for his senior year, while sophomores Craig Krenzell and Scott McMullen and redshirt freshman Rick McFadden all vie for time as well.

"That's not easy," Tressel said when asked about juggling four quarterbacks. "I don't know much about the three guys who haven't played, other than what I've seen in the fitness workouts and I like their attitudes. Their competitiveness and work ethic is solid."

"Steve Bellisari was extraordinary during the fitness workouts. He is a head-of-the-pack kind of guy. The more I've watched him on film, he makes plays and he's made some mistakes."

"Our job is to get his fundamentals razor sharp. I think the fundamentals will help him to make more plays and fewer mistakes. I feel good about what I've seen, potentially, for him down the road."

"The more you're around him, you can't help but look into his eyes and see this guy is a winner."

Tressel is hoping that stability in the OSU program will help Bellisari succeed.

"He's had a lot of systemic changes," the coach said. "He went from one coordinator as a sophomore to another as a junior and now another one as a senior. But the thing I love about him, that's irrelevant to him. He just wants to win."

"I think you'll be pleased with Steve's ability to progress. Does that mean the other guys can't progress and compete with him? No, it doesn't mean that at all."

COVER STORY: MEN'S BASKETBALL

O'Brien Saw Season-Ending Effort Coming

Continued From Page 1

editor to call for coach Jim O'Brien's head.

More levelheaded followers of the program were left to sort out how to view a season that began with little expectation, built into a tale of we-foiled-'em sentiment and ended with an unforeseen thud.

Unforeseen, that is, except maybe in the Buckeye camp. O'Brien, for one, said he could see his team's fall from grace coming.

"This had been kind of building," he said. "I think we lost the kind of edge we had. Right before we played Northwestern (Feb. 24), I think something happened."

Of course, O'Brien was referring to the emotional high of OSU's 63-61 win over then-No. 3 Illinois on Feb. 22. In four games after that monster win, the Buckeyes never played a full 40 minutes.

"We went to Northwestern and we struggled," O'Brien said after the NCAA defeat. "Then we struggled against Penn State for the first 20 minutes. Then we struggled against Iowa (at the Big Ten tournament). We have not played well for three weeks."

"I don't know what happened, if we hit the wall or if we lost our edge, but this was a continuance of how we had been playing the last couple of weeks. It is unfortunate that it ends this way, but that's the way it goes this time of year."

Season Of Rarities

If nothing else, 2000-01 could be termed a season of rarities. After all, it started, in a sense, with a favorable ruling from the NCAA. That came down last April when center Ken Johnson was granted a fourth year of playing eligibility.

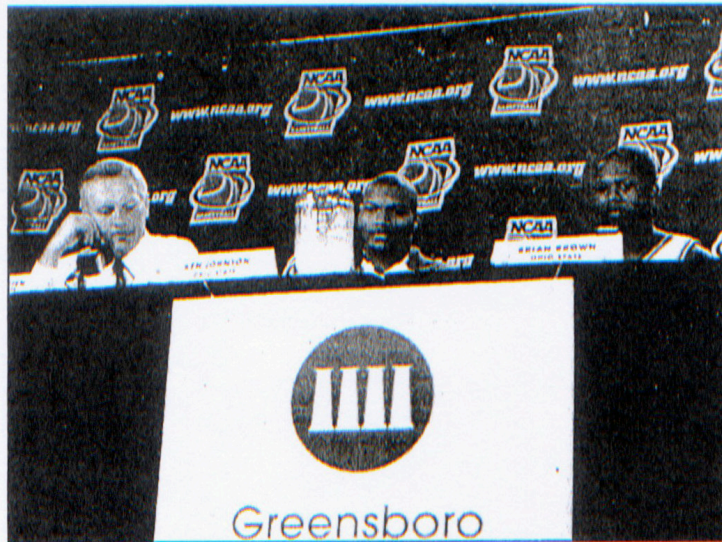
After an opener with Yale, of all teams, the season started to take shape in Alaska — just the second time the Buckeyes made that long trip, the other 19 years earlier. The Bucks returned home just 2-2 but got well by winning eight of their next nine, all of them at home.

But January was unkind as OSU emerged just 4-5, prompting many to predict their doom. The Buckeyes lost two conference home games in that stretch after losing two total the previous two seasons in Value City Arena.

But that only set up OSU's seven-game winning streak over the remainder of the Big Ten regular season, five of those W's coming on enemy hardwood. Included in that run was a 65-64 triumph at Purdue compliments of a putback basket by reserve Will Dudley just before the horn. OSU historians could recall only one other road win on a buzzer-beating basket in program history.

But maybe the oddest achievement was OSU's 93-87 win at Penn State March 3 after trailing by 20 points at halftime and by 18 points with about 11 minutes to play. That win locked down third place in the conference and, strangely enough, OSU's first appearance in the top 25 of a poll all season.

But the Buckeyes got more national recognition, it seemed, for their early exits from Chicago and Greensboro. The early-afternoon loss to Utah State on the first day of the Big Dance was only the



STEVE HELWAGEN

Q&A TIME — Ohio State men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien (left) and players Ken Johnson (middle) and Brian Brown talk to members of the media following the Buckeyes' 77-68 loss to Utah State March 15 in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

second first-round setback in OSU's 21 appearances in the NCAA Tournament and gave the media horde on hand a chance to write about the first "major upset" of the tourney.

"It hurts," said a somber Brian Brown, a junior guard who led the Buckeyes in scoring throughout the season. "We knew we hadn't been playing our best basketball coming in here but we were confident we could get the victory, even though we also knew it wasn't going to be easy."

Johnson, who wept openly in the locker room after the loss to Utah State, was able to find some perspective moments later.

"No one expected us to even be here, so that in and of itself is a tremendous thing," said the 6-11 center. "We just played hard and had a terrific season. Losing, this is really painful. But I hope everyone learns from it and next season everyone steps up and plays even harder."

Season Worthy Of Praise

Even with the sour ending, the Buckeyes surprised virtually everyone with their season. Nearly every pundit and preseason magazine ticketed OSU for the second division of the Big Ten and tabbed everyone from Wisconsin to Indiana to Iowa to Purdue to Michigan to Penn State to Minnesota to finish third behind obvious powers Michigan State and Illinois.

Instead it was the Buckeyes with an 11-5 mark in league play. MSU and UI shared the regular-season title at 13-3. OSU was the only team to beat both the Spartans and the Illini in the regular season, which greatly helped the cause.

Staying away from the injury bug also had something to do with OSU's surprise finish.

"I would say one thing they did was stay injury-free," Minnesota coach Dan Monson said. "You look across the league at the teams that wanted to be that next team after Michigan State and Illinois, who you knew coming in were going to be tough to beat — Purdue, Iowa, ourselves

— you go down the line and a lot of those teams had some injuries and some things go wrong."

OSU's league record, combined with a 9-4 mark in nonconference play, assured the Buckeyes of a third straight 20-win season. That has happened just one other time in program history, when the national championship squad of 1959-60 led by coach Fred Taylor and all-time greats Jerry Lucas and John Havlicek started a four-year run of 20 or more wins.

Johnson was named first-team All-Big Ten and repeated as the league's defensive player of the year. That seemed like a no-brainer after he led the conference in blocked shots for the third straight year and surpassed the Big Ten's all-time career record in that department.

Even with the loss of Scoonie Penn, George Reese and Michael Redd, OSU found an anchor point in Johnson, who finished the season with a career-best scoring average of 12.5 points per game and team highs in rebounds (7.3) and blocks (4.0).

Brown emerged from the shadows of Penn and Redd in putting up a team-high 14.5 points per game from the backcourt. He also led the team in assists and steals and was second to Johnson in rebounds. Sophomore Brent Darby shook off a shaky start to the season to rank third on the team with 9.6 points per game. Junior Boban Savovic enjoyed a full season of health and filled in all the cracks nicely.

That triumvirate of guards, along with the addition of sharpshooting transfer Sean Connolly, helped the Buckeyes lead the Big Ten in three-point percentage (38.1). That was up considerably from a mark of 31.8 a season ago. OSU also improved overall from the field with a team shooting percentage of 47.1, up from 45.6 in the Big Ten championship season of 1999-2000.

The Buckeyes also got it done on defense for the most part, holding teams to 40.3 percent shooting and just 63.6 points per game.

"I think we had a real successful year," Darby said. "I mean, we had some great wins. We did a lot of good things this year."

Carrying Over The Good

Now OSU's challenge is to try to get back to Big Ten contention status and the NCAA Tournament without the intimidating Johnson.

"This is real sad for Kenny because this was his last game, but we'll try to make this a learning experience for us," freshman power forward Zach Williams said after the loss to Utah State. "I didn't have any experience playing in this tournament, but a lot of people told me once you get here you don't ever not want to come back. Now I know how true that is."

Williams will be among four starters due back next season. (For a more in-depth look at next season, see story on page 18.)

As a returning captain, Brown will lead the team in off-season preparations, which will include summer pickup games, lifting and conditioning, and a seven-game playing tour in Europe.

"We know how hard we need to work to be a successful team," Brown said. "Guys like Scoonie set the tone before us and I'm going to do what I can to make sure guys know what we need to do. If we stay together and keep working at it, we'll be fine."

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Tight End Prospect Follows Through With Original Plan To Attend OSU

By JOHN REDD

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Nobody can honestly accuse Eric Moss of hastily deciding to accept a football scholarship from Ohio State.

Moss, a 6-5, 280-pound tight end prospect, went through the entire recruiting process twice and chose the Buckeyes both times.

Originally, as a superstar out of Belle (W.Va.) DuPont High School, Moss signed with the stellar Buckeye recruiting class of 1992. However, he failed to qualify under Proposition 48 guidelines and opted to spend a year at Fork Union Military Academy in Virginia rather than enroll at OSU and forgo a year of collegiate eligibility.

Attending the prep school nullified his earlier commitment to Ohio State and started the recruiting process all over again.

In his senior season at DuPont, Moss had 134 tackles at defensive end, caught seven passes as a tight end, and gained over 500 yards as a fullback.

Moss had continued success at Fork Union, concentrating mainly at tight end, where he had 28 catches and 10 touchdowns.

His high school exploits, coupled with his big season at Fork Union, caused Moss to be courted by Indiana and South Carolina before he decided that Ohio State was still the place for him.

"It wasn't a big decision because it's where I wanted to go last year," said Moss. "Ohio State was my pick out of high school. It's close to my home, has great football and great academics."

"I already knew most of the players. Korey Stringer and Jayson Gwinn showed me around this year and I felt real comfortable. I liked Columbus and am really impressed with the academic, athletic and football tradition."

Moss is in a growing fraternity of former Fork Union standouts who are attending Ohio State, notably running

back Eddie George and Buckeye basketball player Rickey Dudley.

He remembered meeting George last season when they were both visiting Ohio State and they discussed the military school.

"Last year when I visited Ohio State, Eddie was there at the same time and I talked to him about Fork Union," Moss said. "I never planned on going there myself. I thought it was funny they had to wear uniforms, but I got used to it."

Fork Union head coach John Schuman said Moss will keep up the strong tradition of George, Dudley and all Fork Union athletes when he gets to Ohio State.

"You have a standard to keep when you're from Fork Union. A lot of former Fork Union guys will keep tabs on you," said Schuman. "The minute you do something you shouldn't, you'll hear about it."

Moss said he will be happy if he can have the same success Dudley and George are enjoying at Ohio State.

"I want to continue in football at Ohio State as another great Fork Union athlete," said Moss. "There are some great ones there already. I just want to do my part to continue the tradition."

Schuman thinks the Buckeyes will realize a sizable commodity because of their persistence with Moss.

"It's amazing with his size and speed he played tight end. He's up there with the best of them," said the Fork Union coach. "He has the ability to treat big plays and has great speed off the line."

"He's also a good leader. Because of his size and the way he presents himself, everyone looks up to him. He's like a big papa bear."

To be successful as a Buckeye, Moss said he will have to get his speed on par with his catching and blocking ability.

"The things I do best are catching and blocking, but I need to improve my speed all-around," said Moss.

Looking at a guy who is as big as Moss, it is difficult to believe he can improve upon speed that has been timed

as quick as 4.8 in the 40-yard dash. But it is also hard to believe that he is just now growing into his body.

"It really didn't hurt me to come to Fork Union. I graduated from high school at age 17 and it's nice to get another year under my belt," said Moss. "I'm feeling more and more comfortable all the time."

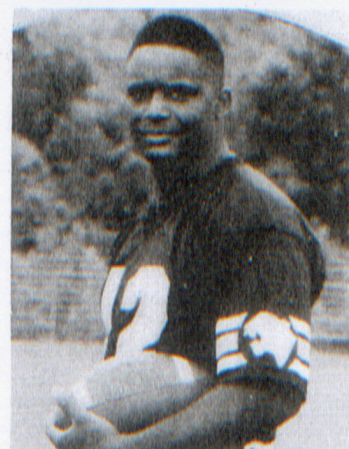
"I want to contribute as soon as I possibly can. I'm sure they want me to play tight end and I know they want me to come in ready to play. But if they want me to redshirt, that would be OK, too."

Schuman said although he would not be surprised if Moss was redshirted, the Buckeyes may be able to get some playing time out of him next year.

"I think they'll get something out of him as a tight end next year. It's really up to him because he just needs to improve his strength," said Schuman. "The guy is incredible."

According to Moss, the remainder of his stay at Fork Union will be concentrated on preparing for college and making himself as physically fit as possible.

"I'm going to lift weights, run and



Eric Moss

play basketball like I do every day," he said. "I'm pretty sure I'll come in to Ohio State in tiptop shape."

He will also concentrate on one more thing — getting an ACT or SAT score high enough to qualify him for eligibility next season.

"I took both tests again and I'm confident that I passed this time," Moss said. "People have asked me if I'm nervous about getting the scores back, but I'm not. I have a lot of confidence and I'm sure that I passed them both."

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THE MOSS FILE

NAME — Eric Moss

HIGH SCHOOL — Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy

POSITION — Tight end

HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-5, 280 pounds

BENCH PRESS — 390 pounds

40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.8 seconds

GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 2.90

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS — Awaiting results on ACT and SAT taken in early February

VITAL STATISTICS — Earned honorable mention All-American honors from *USA Today* and *Street & Smith's* as a high school senior. Played fullback, tight end and defensive end at Belle (Va.) DuPont. Caught 28 passes and scored seven touchdowns last fall at Fork Union. Also played some fullback. Signed with Ohio State in 1992 but failed to achieve Proposition 48 requirements.

COACH'S COMMENT — "When you look at a guy like Eric, you immediately figure he's going to be an interior lineman. But you look at the kind of production you can get from a guy like him at tight end and your mouth waters. I think I would liken him to a young Eric Green, the tight end for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Of course, he's not quite that good yet, but you can certainly see that the potential is there." — Fork Union Military Academy head coach John Schuman.

HOBBIES — Basketball, weightlifting

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Signed with Ohio State, choosing the Buckeyes over Indiana and South Carolina