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“For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More”

April 3, 2010



SONNY BROCKWAY

DOWN AND OUT – Ohio State junior standout Evan Turner (21) can only sit and watch March 26 as members of the Tennessee men’s basketball team celebrate the Volunteers’ 76-73 victory in the Midwest Regional semifinals of the NCAA Tournament.

Season Over; Turner, Buford Weigh Options

By ADAM JARDY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Evan Turner has a decision to make for the second consecutive year.

Last year, the Ohio State guard opted to return to Columbus for his junior season despite being projected as a first-round NBA draft pick. The decision paid off as he put up one of the most prolific seasons in program history and led the Buckeyes to the Sweet 16 for the first time in his career.

The question now is whether Turner can again turn down the chance to fulfill a life-long dream.

In the immediate aftermath of his team’s loss March 26 to Tennessee, Turner was asked if he could give a figure on how likely he is to return for his senior season.

“I can’t give a percentage right now,” he said. “This (the loss) is just sticking in my head. I really don’t want to go out like that. I don’t even know.”

It was the last time Turner was made available to reporters. However, Columbus television station WBNS-10TV caught up with the junior in the hallway of the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis about an hour after the game and Turner again expressed his conflicted emotions.

“I don’t know what to think,” he said. “I don’t want to leave like this. That’s the hardest thing – leaving like this. I don’t know.”

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Remodeling, Not Rebuilding, On Tap

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A year after undertaking a significant rebuilding job, head coach Jim Tressel opens the 2010 spring football season at Ohio State with fewer holes to fill and high expectations that inevitably accompany the presence of a veteran squad.

Overall, 15 starters and 33 members of last season’s two-deep are expected back, but there is still plenty of work for Tressel and his staff to do during the 15 days of spring practice that begin April 1 and conclude April 24 with the annual spring game.

Ohio State has lost bigger stars (and more of them) after most of Tressel’s previous nine seasons, but the holes from 2009 still have the potential to be felt acutely without proper attention this spring and summer.

On the bright side for Tressel, his most prominent player returns, and Terrelle Pryor is coming off one of his most impressive performances on the biggest stage of his two-year career.

In the final game of his sophomore season,

Pryor completed 23 of 37 passes for 266 yards and two touchdowns while also picking up 72 yards on the ground against Oregon in the Rose Bowl. The performance began anew speculation that he will be a candidate for a plethora of postseason accolades in 2010.

“I’ve been going through all this since high school,” Pryor said of receiving intense media attention. “It’s always team first. I’m looking forward to playing with them and going undefeated and doing all those things.”

In a reversal from his first spring practice, Pryor is likely to find people more worried about his legs than his arm because of Feb. 10 arthroscopic surgery on his left knee.

Spring practice will be the first time he takes the field with the full squad since then, and fans figure to get their first look at him in the spring game. Between those dates, the OSU quarterback and his teammates along with the coaching staff will have plenty of other worries to address and questions to answer.

Defense Looking For Leaders

A no-name defense that was one of the best in the country last year will be without a handful of lunch-pail types many fans do not fully appreciate until they are gone.

Of the five starters lost on defense – safeties Anderson Russell and Kurt Coleman, defensive linemen Doug Worthington and Thaddeus Gibson and linebacker Austin Spittle – only Gibson would be considered a dynamic athlete. Each of the five was a longtime contributor, however, who cannot be replaced with the snapping of fingers.

Russell started for parts of four seasons, including 38 games, Coleman and Worthington were three-year starters, and Gibson manned the weakside defensive end position for most of two years. Combined, the foursome accounted for 122 starts.

Spittle logged only 10 starts – all last season – but he was a key special-teamer for three years

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OPINION

OSU Basketball Remains Winter Diversion

During one of our more pleasant exchanges, former Ohio State basketball coach Gary Williams and I were chatting one afternoon in his second-floor St. John Arena office.

"I don't understand the mentality around here," Williams said as he swiveled in his chair and looked out the window. "We have tradition, we have good facilities, we have the largest alumni base in the country. Why can't basketball be every bit as big as Ohio State football?"

It didn't take long to think of a reply. "When you look out that window, what do you see?" I asked.

"The football stadium," Williams answered.

"And what's the name of that street out there?"

"Woody Hayes Drive," the coach grunted.

"There's your answer," I said.

Williams wasn't satisfied with that response, of course, but it didn't really matter. He was a carpetbagger who only used the Ohio State job as a career stepping-stone to get where he really wanted to go. He left the Buckeyes in 1989 after only three seasons and returned to his alma mater Maryland where he's been ever since.

Fast-forward more than two decades from my conversation with Williams to one I had with an Ohio State basketball fan immediately following this year's NCAA Tournament loss to Tennessee.

He had watched the March 26 regional semifinal loss to the Volunteers at a Columbus-area restaurant and remarked about the mood of his fellow fans.

"This was as disappointing a loss as I can remember," he said. "We seemed to be so close to making the Final Four and then just got it ripped away. And these people – they don't even seem to care. I thought they were into the game, but when it was over they were like, 'Oh, well. Spring football starts next week.'

"Tennessee beat us in the Citrus Bowl in 1996 and people still talk about that game like it was yesterday. This one they won't even remember until next week. I just don't get that."

Such are the lives of passionate basketball fans – and coaches – in a town that lives and dies with its football team. Basketball? A polite little diversion to fill the time between bowl season and spring football.

Why is that? As I tried to explain to Williams so many years ago, it is the reason Woody Hayes Drive bisects the campus between St. John Arena and Ohio Stadium while Fred Taylor Drive is mostly a back alley leading to overflow parking areas.

Some blame the venue in which both the men and women play. Whether you choose to call it The Schott or Value City Arena, the cavernous multipurpose building is not very fan-friendly. It has a cold, antiseptic feel – the direct opposite of the comfortable quirkiness of St. John – plus the acoustics in the Schottenstein Center are horrible and the seating arrangement doesn't give the Buckeyes much of a home-court advantage.

Despite the fact the men were 17-1 at home and the women were 19-1 this season, apathy ruled among the fan base. The men averaged 14,181 in home attendance, the women a paltry 3,822 (an all-time program low since moving to VCA for the 1998-99 season).

Those attendance figures are borderline embarrassing for programs that have dominated the Big Ten in recent years – the men

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK with Mark Rea

just won their third conference title in five seasons and the women have won six league championships in a row – so there must be more to the equation than the home venue.

Sum it up with one word if you like: winning. Not single games or Big Ten championships, although those certainly have their importance. It's winning the big prize. It's winning national championships. While the Ohio State football team has won seven recognized national titles – and as many as 14 if you count various other poll selectors – the men's basketball team has won exactly one. The women's team? Zero.

If you want to walk among the royalty of your particular sport, you have to bring home the biggest trophy at least on occasion. The OSU football team has done that. The basketball teams have not.

More to the point, the basketball teams can't even seem to get themselves into position to bring home a national championship. The NCAA has been holding its men's basketball tournament since 1939 and Ohio State has made 10 trips to the Final Four. On five of those occasions, the Buckeyes have played for the title and they have come home with the trophy once.

As a comparison, Michigan State has earned a trip to this year's Final Four, the Spartans' sixth trip in the past 12 seasons.

On the women's side, the tournament has been held since 1982 and the Buckeyes have made exactly one trip to the Final Four. That came in 1993 when they lost an 84-82 heartbreaker to Texas Tech in the championship game.

As a comparison, Purdue has been to the Final Four three times since 1994 and brought home the championship in '99.

You may think I am being unfair to the Ohio State basketball programs. After all, Thad Matta has won 74.3 percent of his games in six seasons while Jim Foster has won 80.3 percent of his games in eight seasons. Add in their nine combined Big Ten championship rings and you have a pretty compelling argument why OSU basketball is every bit as successful as OSU football.

To be honest, criticism of Matta and/or Foster is incredibly unfair. But the bottom line in their profession continues to be Final Four appearances and national championships. Only when they start putting those accomplishments on their résumés can we begin to have a conversation about whether Ohio State basketball should be mentioned in the same sentence with Ohio State football.

Beginning Of The End?

When Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith announced March 16 that he was adding two years to Jim Tressel's contract, the news was met with a collective yawn.

Tressel has earned a litany of contract amendments and extensions during his nine seasons with the Buckeyes, and an extension in the wake of another Big Ten championship and subsequent Rose Bowl victory seemed like a no-brainer.

There was an interesting addendum to the extension, however, and it seemed to bring out the conspiracy theorists. Tressel

now has a clause that provides him with a job as university associate athletic director if he steps down as football coach on good terms before the contract ends.

Tressel, who makes about \$3.5 million per year if you add all of his incentives and contract additions such as shoe deals, etc., is now signed through the 2014 season and will be 62 years old when that deal ends. That is an age when many begin to think about early retirement, and the coach has often said he has no desire to follow the likes of Joe Paterno or Bobby Bowden and coach well into his golden years.

Still, I get no inkling that Tressel's interest in his profession is waning. He seems equal parts indefatigable and indestructible, showing up for 6 a.m. team workouts and fulfilling speaking engagements and university obligations well into the evening hours.

There is one more reason that I believe Tressel will want to coach at least until he is 65. His team has signed a contract to play a home-and-home series with Oklahoma in 2016 and '17, and I have a feeling he'll want to be around for those games.

Some Final Thoughts

- I got a couple of e-mails regarding the conduct of Ohio State sophomore point guard Samantha Prahalis in both the Big Ten and NCAA tournaments. In case you missed it, Prahalis was a chest-thumping firebrand in the conference tourney and a volcano of unbridled frustration in the NCAA loss to Mississippi State. First of all, she is only a sophomore and is still learning there is a time and a place to show emotion on the court. On the other hand, what's wrong with a little swagger? Foster would do well to show a little more of his on occasion.

- By the time you read this, Ohio State spring football practice will be upon us. What is the biggest position battle? In my humble opinion, it will be left tackle. If Mike Adams can live up to his potential and lock down that spot, the Buckeyes will have one of the most solid offensive lines in college football, and that would allow one of college football's most potentially electrifying players to relax and do his thing at quarterback.

- Just in case you didn't think there were enough bowl games, college football welcomes one more this coming season. Teams from the Big East and Big 12 will square off Dec. 30 in Yankee Stadium for an inaugural game aptly named the Pinstripe Bowl. Nothing says bowl season quite like New York City in late December.

- Florida head coach Urban Meyer's recent tirade against an Orlando Sentinel writer reminded me of a similar altercation I had with Williams in 1989. One major difference: After Meyer's outburst was caught on tape and posted to the Internet, the Florida coach had little choice but to offer an apology to writer Jeremy Fowler. Williams' public upbraiding of me was in the pre-YouTube days; therefore, no apology. I wonder if Meyer's tantrum hadn't been flashed all over cyberspace if he would have apologized to Fowler. Doubtful.

- One final note about Williams. He wanted to coach at a basketball school and he made the right choice in leaving Ohio State. During his 21 seasons at Maryland, he has a national championship and a .650 winning percentage. Over the same span, the Terrapins' football program has had a .472 winning percentage under four different head coaches.

COVER STORY: ST. LOUIS BLUES

Turner's Future Up In Air After NCAA Run

Continued From Page 1

Asked if that meant there was a chance he would return for his senior season, Turner replied, "Yeah, but I can't really make that decision right now. I don't know too much right now. Emotions are high and I don't want to make a decision off emotions. It just sucks to go out like this."

One good sign for Turner's return is the fact that he remained enrolled in spring courses, which began March 29.

That was only one deadline he faced, however. Turner has until April 12 to withdraw from Ohio State without having a negative effect on the team's Academic Progress Report rating. And college underclassmen have until 11:59 p.m. on April 25 to declare for the NBA draft. If a player does not hire an agent, he can test the waters and opt to return to school until June 14.

As Turner celebrated on the floor at Value City Arena after helping the Buckeyes earn a share of the conference title March 2, fans chanted "One more year!" as he accepted the trophy. He gestured to the crowd with one finger in the air and mouthed, "One more?" while grinning. After the game, he coyly said he was not sure what the fans were saying and was asking them to repeat themselves.

When he opted to return this season after averaging 17.3 points and 7.1 rebounds as a sophomore, Turner cited his desire to be remembered as a player who brought titles back to Columbus.

This season would have to be classified as at least partial success toward that

2009-10 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics																			
29-8 Overall (14-4 Big Ten)																			
Statistics through games of March 26																			
Player	G-GS	Min.	Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds			Pts.-Avg.						
										Off.	Def.	Total							
Evan Turner	31-31	1109	35.8	237-457	.519	20-55	.364	138-182	.758	62-222	284	9.2	86-3	185	136	28	54	632-20.4	
William Buford	37-37	1271	34.4	197-450	.438	49-128	.383	89-118	.754	52-157	209	5.6	81-1	116	65	10	41	532-14.4	
Jon Diebler	37-37	1375	37.2	148-338	.438	116-276	.420	69-79	.873	9-93	102	2.8	65-0	54	38	3	42	481-13.0	
David Lighty	37-37	1344	36.3	164-333	.492	44-115	.383	96-152	.632	53-115	168	4.5	90-1	110	85	20	58	468-12.6	
Walter Offutt	2-0	22	11.0	4-9	.444	2-5	.400	4-6	.667	1-2	3	1.5	3-0	2	0	1	1	14-7.0	
D. Lauderdale	36-34	903	25.1	99-128	.773	0-0	.000	35-86	.407	59-128	187	5.2	79-0	9	32	77	23	233-6.5	
Jeremie Simmons	33-0	403	12.2	51-114	.447	30-77	.390	24-34	.706	3-21	24	0.7	34-0	25	14	1	15	156-4.7	
P.J. Hill	27-6	329	12.2	25-56	.446	13-34	.382	24-28	.857	5-27	32	1.2	33-1	33	16	0	10	87-3.2	
Kyle Madsen	37-3	498	13.5	40-70	.571	0-0	.000	14-18	.778	30-38	68	1.8	63-1	6	22	9	13	94-2.5	
Nikola Kecman	15-0	70	4.7	12-25	.480	2-13	.154	3-5	.600	3-13	16	1.1	14-1	2	2	2	1	29-1.9	
Z. Sarikopoulos	14-0	84	6.0	6-11	.545	0-0	.000	1-5	.200	9-11	20	1.4	14-0	2	5	6	2	13-0.9	
Mark Titus	8-0	18	2.3	0-3	.000	0-3	.000	1-2	.500	0-1	1	0.1	1-0	1	0	0	0	1-0.1	
Eddie Days	4-0	7	1.8	0-2	.000	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1	0.3	0-0	0	0	0	1	0-0.0	
Danny Peters	11-0	18	1.6	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1	0.1	1-0	2	0	2	0	1	0-0.0
TEAM										51-67	118	3.3							
Ohio State	37	7450	983	1998	.492	276-708	.390	498-715	.697	337-897	1234	33.4	565	8	545	423	157	262	2740-74.1
Opponents	37	7450	826	2014	.410	245-727	.337	377-531	.710	374-800	1174	31.7	674	14	460	529	75	199	2274-61.5

goal. The Buckeyes captured a share of the Big Ten regular-season title and won three games in as many days to earn the league's tournament crown, but Turner said what he was really after was the national championship.

As early as late February, Turner was asked for his thoughts on heading to the NBA.

"It's all based on how we're going to do this year," he said. "If I don't get all I want to get out of college ... then I'm going to be back for another year."

During his tenure at Ohio State, Turner helped capture an NIT title as a freshman

and then led the Buckeyes back into the NCAA Tournament as a sophomore only to fall to Siena in a first-round overtime loss.

His final two shot attempts against the Volunteers came as he tried to knot the score in the final seconds, but neither three-pointer found the bottom of the net.

Junior guard Jon Diebler was asked if the way the season ended would make it more likely for Turner to return.

"I think so because he's a competitor and he hates losing," said Diebler, who is also Turner's roommate. "He knows how far we could have gotten this year. It leaves a bad taste in your mouth. Yeah, we got to the Sweet 16 but as a group we had higher expectations."

Senior guard P.J. Hill, who served as Turner's seldom-used backup this season, said he thinks Turner will return for another year.

"He said he's coming back, so that's what we're planning on - that's he coming

back," Hill said. "He's been saying that he's going to come back but he wants to focus on this season and deal with everything else next year, but he's going to be back. I plan on him being back."

Head coach Thad Matta said he will not talk Turner into returning, instead encouraging him to do what he thinks is best for him and his family.

"The challenge right now is he and I just sitting down and having a conversation of where his mind is and what exactly he wants to do," the OSU coach said. "I told him, 'You'd better hang on - there's going to be people coming at you.' They're like vultures out there right now."

"What he's given this program and the three years he's been here, it's truly amazing and I love the kid. And I'm going to do what's right for him and what he wants to do."

In the locker room after the game, his teammates said his play this season never reflected the fact that he was thinking about the chance to become a top NBA draft pick.

"I think that's why he's been so successful," Diebler said. "I think a lot of guys in his position have a tendency to talk about the next level and ... it can affect how they're

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COVER STORY: ST. LOUIS BLUES

playing right now. They can still be in the tournament and they're thinking about going to the NBA.

"Evan was not like that. His focus was on this basketball team the whole time."

From an individual standpoint, it would seem Turner does not have much left to prove. He was named a first-team Associated Press All-American on March 29, marking the 10th time a Buckeye has been so honored. Turner received all but one first-team vote from the 65-member panel that selects the team. He received AP honorable mention last season.

Additionally, he was named this year's player of the year in the Big Ten and the most outstanding player in the conference tournament. The Sporting News and the United States Basketball Writers Association each named him their national player of the year, and he remains a leading candidate for the Naismith College Player of the Year honor that was to be announced at the Final Four in Indianapolis.

Despite missing six games after suffering two fractured vertebrae in his back following a missed dunk Dec. 5 against Eastern Michigan, Turner finished the season averaging 20.4 points, 9.2 rebounds, 6.0 assists and 1.7 steals per game – all team highs.

NBADraft.net has Turner pegged as the No. 2 pick in this year's draft should both he and Kentucky freshman John Wall opt to leave school. Wall is listed as the top pick.

One of the league's all-time greats voiced his belief in Turner's skills translating well to the NBA.

"He's got it all," Basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson told BSB in St. Louis. "He can pass, he knows how to make plays, he sees the floor well, he can shoot from the inside, shoot from the outside and he's got 'it.' I think his best basketball is still ahead of him.

"He should be the college basketball player of the year and then he should be one of the top two or three picks in the NBA draft – no question about it. Anybody would love to have him. He's got a little bit of (Jason Kidd), he's got a little bit of (Tracy McGrady), he's got a little bit of myself, a little bit of everybody. He's got a great game."

Should Turner opt to return, the Buckeyes would be considered among the favorites for the 2010-11 national championship. OSU will lose just one player who saw action during every game this season in center Kyle Madsen and welcome in a top-rated recruiting class featuring power forward Jared Sullinger and small forward Deshaun Thomas, each rated among the top 10 prospects in the country by Scout.com.

It is a future that junior center Dallas Lauderdale said he will try to impress upon Turner before he makes a final decision.

"The only thing I'll say to him is, 'Let's go win it all.'" Lauderdale said. "If that's not motivating enough, then he's out of here."

Also expected to return is sophomore

guard William Buford, who finished second on the team in scoring with 14.4 points while adding 5.6 rebounds per game. The Toledo native has repeatedly told BSB that he plans to return for his junior season, a viewpoint he reiterated after the Tennessee loss.

"(Evan) knows I'm coming back," Buford said. "That's up to him if he wants to do that. It's his future (but) he knows I'm coming back."

Asked if he felt he would have people in his ear telling him to turn pro, Buford said, "Probably but I only listen to me. I've got my own mind. We've got a real good team coming in next year. I'm going to try to soak this up and go on to next year."

That Turner's decision remains up for debate is a tribute to his allegiance to the program.

"The hardest thing would be just leaving my teammates if I do decide to leave," he said. "You never want to leave people you care about and leave them out on an island. I feel like I'm going to leave the battle if I do."

In Memory Of ...

With the season now in the books, the Buckeyes have an interesting season upon which to reflect.

After being picked third in the Big Ten with all but one player returning from a season ago, Ohio State showed early signs of growing into an explosive squad with the potential to challenge for a conference championship.

Those hopes looked all but extinguished when Turner slipped off the rim after the missed dunk against Eastern Michigan. The Buckeyes went 3-3 during the next six games and looked little like the team that had knocked off two top-25 teams in the nonconference schedule in California and Florida State.

Turner returned Jan. 6 for a win against Indiana, but the Buckeyes lost their next game on the road at Minnesota to fall to 1-3 in conference play with a contest against a Purdue squad ranked sixth in the country looming three days later.

What happened next is fairly well known. Turner went off for a career-high 32 points as the Buckeyes scored the upset in West Lafayette, igniting a stretch that saw them emerge victorious in 12 of their final 13 Big Ten games.

Looking back on the season, Diebler said he was proud of the fact that the Buckeyes recovered from their rough start in conference play.

"Starting 1-3 in the Big Ten, we weren't feeling that great but we still knew we could be a very good basketball team," he said. "As the Big Ten wore on, we started beating some good basketball teams on the road and at home. We all realize that when we play how we're capable of, we're one of the better teams in the country. I think that's why we were so successful and doing a good job toward the end of the year."

Lauderdale said he felt this year's team was collectively greater than the sum of its parts, a feeling that was buoyed during OSU's run to the Big Ten tournament championship.

"We won those three games with everybody dead tired," he said. "We just pulled together and did something special. We were a true team. We are a true team. We will be a true team."

Added Matta after the loss to Tennessee: "They were never way up here (emotionally). They were never way down. They kept going and I think that's the hardest part as you look at them after this game. They're distraught because this isn't where they thought it was going to end."

After the team's success within the conference, the Buckeyes emerged as a legitimate candidate to bring home a national championship. Those feelings intensified throughout the opening weekend of the tournament when the two teams perceived to be OSU's top competition in the Midwest bracket – top-seeded Kansas and third-seeded Georgetown – failed to make it to the Sweet 16.

A victory against the Volunteers would have given the Buckeyes an Elite Eight appearance against a Michigan State team missing star point guard Kalin Lucas for the tournament to advance to the Final Four.

Nevertheless, Hill said he feels this team will be known more for the hardware it did bring home than the one trophy still out there.

"I think we'll be remembered for winning the Big Ten championship and the Big Ten tournament," he said. "I don't think people will look at the way we went out in the Sweet 16, even though we should have gone further. We're going to be known as winners."

"If you walk into The Schott, you're going to see those championship (banners) up there."

An Abrupt Farewell

Lauderdale's faraway stare better expressed what his words could not.

When the Ohio State locker room was opened 10 minutes following the team's loss to Tennessee, the junior center sat reclined in a chair in front of his locker. Back slouched and hands resting idly on his lap, Lauderdale looked a bit like Santa Claus minus the red outfit and bushy beard.

The scowl on his face, however, clearly suggested that any children attempting to sit on his lap – or reporters wanting to get too personal – would be best served to stay away.

"I can't put it into words," Lauderdale said. "I don't like to lose, period. Losing isn't fun. I can't really describe how I'm feeling right now."

It was a sentiment that was prevalent throughout the locker room as a team pegged for the Final Four suddenly had to explain how its season had come to an abrupt end.

"It's a bad feeling," Buford said. "We

just didn't get what we came here for. It's just a bad feeling."

Asked if the loss compared to any of the other 18 suffered during his Buckeye career, Buford answered, "Absolutely not. Our season is over with now. We've got to wait until next year and half of the team is going to be gone. You can't compare it to anything."

The Buckeyes stand to lose five members of this year's team due to graduation – scholarship players Jeremie Simmons, Madsen and Hill as well as walk-ons Danny Peters and Mark Titus.

For Simmons and Hill, the ending was especially bittersweet due to the roles they assumed this season. After starting a combined 33 games last season, each played significantly reduced roles as seniors.

Hill tied a career low with 27 appearances, the highlight of which was a career-high 18 points in relief of the injured Turner against Eastern Michigan. But as the season wore on, Hill struggled to get playing time and saw no more than one minute in any of the team's final 11 games.

Asked what he hopes he will be remembered for, Hill said, "Just my work ethic. I hope I showed that even though I didn't get a chance this year, I'm still going to make it to wherever I want to in life – to play overseas and then in the NBA. When I make it, people are going to say, 'He could have been a bigger part.'"

As for Simmons, he saw action in 33 games and averaged 4.7 points after putting up 6.8 as a junior.

"We had a great run but I wanted to win a national championship so it's disappointing losing like that," he said. "I'm really proud of my teammates."

Madsen emerged as the lone senior to have a consistent role on the team. After scoring a combined 49 points during his first two seasons, he totaled 94 points while averaging a career-high 13.5 minutes of action.

"I'm just really proud to be a part of this team," he said. "All these guys will be my friends forever. I don't want it to end like this, but I certainly am happy with the season."

Standing a few feet away from Madsen, Simmons and Peters, Diebler credited their presence in the locker room.

"I just feel bad right now for the seniors that we're losing," he said. "You don't see everything that they do because it doesn't show up in the stat book, but they really do so much for the basketball team. We're losing some great guys."

Lauderdale said it was that closeness that separated this OSU team from the two others he has been a part of during his career.

Matta said he had to be careful with how he addressed the team following the loss because "I don't know if I've ever been more proud of a basketball team. They had a belief about them that became contagious."

"I don't know if I've had too many teams that are this close in regards to just who they were and their work ethic. You just enjoyed being with them."

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Tennessee Halts Turner's Shot, OSU's Run

By ADAM JARDY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the second consecutive year, Ohio State's season ended with Evan Turner staring blankly at the basket following a missed shot.

Last year, it was his spinning jumper at the buzzer that failed to send the Buckeyes into a third overtime against Siena in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. This year, both of Turner's attempts to send OSU's showdown with Tennessee into overtime came up empty and the Buckeyes ended their season March 26 in St. Louis with a 76-73 loss in the Sweet 16.

After the Volunteers pushed their lead to three points with a pair of free throws from guard Bobby Maze with 12.9 seconds remaining, Ohio State called timeout and prepared for one final push.

Bringing the ball up the court, Turner found himself in the left corner with the clock winding under five seconds. His shot attempt was challenged by Tennessee forward Wayne Chism and it drew only the front of the iron.

The OSU junior guard then knifed into the lane and came up with the offensive rebound — his team-leading seventh board of the game. Seeing junior teammate Jon Diebler spotting up near the top of the circle, Turner opted not to risk the pass and instead dribbled to the same area himself.

As the clock ticked off its final second, Turner turned and fired one last time, but Tennessee guard J.P. Prince landed his outstretched left hand on the ball. Replays later showed that it was a clean block, but the result was Turner landing on his backside on the court at the Edward Jones Dome.

Seated upright with his legs spread out in front of him, Turner looked incredulously at the basket while the Volunteers celebrated their first trip to the Elite Eight in school history behind him. After a moment or two, the Buckeye All-American picked himself off the floor and headed immediately to the OSU locker room without a second glance.

Asked if he felt he was fouled on the final attempt, Turner said, "They didn't call it, so I guess it wasn't a foul. It happens. The shot didn't go in. A call could have gone both



SONNY BROCKWAY

PULLING HIS WEIGHT — Ohio State sophomore William Buford (44) scored 15 points during his team's 76-73 loss to Tennessee. Buford and junior standout Evan Turner combined for 46 of the Buckeyes' 73 points.

ways, but the call didn't happen ... so you can't really dwell on it anymore.

"It shouldn't have come down to that certain situation. We could have helped ourselves from putting ourselves in that predicament."

Diebler, who struggled with a 1-for-8 shooting performance in the game, said he was fine with Turner taking the final shot.

"You want the ball in the hands of your best player," he said. "He is the best player in the country. We will deal with having the ball in the best player's hands with 12 seconds left."

Less than a minute earlier, Turner had put the Buckeyes on top with a three-pointer that

made it a 73-72 OSU lead with 42 seconds left. The basket gave him 31 points for the game, 21 of which had come in the second half.

"He played great," junior center Dallas Lauderdale said. "He played an excellent game (but) we didn't have his back. This is a team game."

Tennessee answered on its ensuing possession when Brian Williams tipped in a Prince miss, making it 74-73 with 32 seconds remaining.

Turner drove to the basket and attempted a layup, but his shot banked off the glass and then the rim before falling out. Senior center Kyle Madsen came up with the offensive rebound, but his attempt to pass the ball out to Turner was stolen by Maze as head coach Thad Matta was trying to call for a timeout.

The Buckeyes immediately fouled Maze, setting the final sequence of events in motion.

"As I told these guys, it's tough because ... it's going to take time to understand exactly what this team accomplished throughout the course of the season," Matta said. "I couldn't be prouder of what they did."

In addition to Turner's performance, OSU got 15 points from sophomore guard William Buford. But they were the only two Buckeyes in double figures. After going 11 for 22 from three-point range in the first two games of the tournament, Diebler made only 1 of 7 long-range shots against the Vols and tied a season low with three points.

"I didn't help the team," he said. "My job is to make shots and I didn't make shots."

The Buckeyes led by as many as five points in the second half as they relied almost exclusively on Turner to carry the mail. He scored his team's first 14 points in the half, the last of which made it 56-51 in favor of his team with 10:00 remaining in the game.

Meanwhile, Tennessee countered with Chism, who had only four points in the first

Tennessee 76, Ohio State 73

March 26, 2010										
Edward Jones Dome; St. Louis, Mo.										
Tennessee (28-8)	Min.	M-A	M-A	Off-Def.	A	PF	Pts.			
Chism	35	9-16	3-4	5-6	1	1	22			
Williams	32	4-5	1-2	4-8	1	3	9			
Maze	19	4-9	2-2	2-1	2	1	10			
Prince	31	6-13	2-3	2-0	6	3	14			
Hopson	23	1-5	1-1	2-2	1	3	3			
Hall	4	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	0			
Goins	22	2-8	0-0	1-0	4	3	4			
Pearl	8	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	3	0			
Tatum	14	3-4	3-3	0-0	0	1	11			
Bone	12	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	3			
Totals	200	30-64	12-15	20-21	15	20	76			

Percentages: FG: 46.9%, FT: 80.0%, 3-point goals: 4-15 (Chism 1-3, Maze 0-2, Hopson 0-3, Goins 0-2, Tatum 2-3, Bone 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Chism, Prince, Pearl). **Turnovers:** 16 (Hopson 5, Chism 3, Prince 3, Williams 2, Maze, Pearl, TEAM). **Steals:** 6 (Prince 2, Maze, Goins, Pearl, Tatum).

Ohio State (29-8)	Min.	M-A	M-A	Off-Def.	A	PF	Pts.			
Lighty	26	4-8	0-2	2-1	5	3	9			
Buford	40	5-13	3-4	0-4	3	2	15			
Lauderdale	29	1-1	0-2	2-4	1	2	2			
Turner	40	10-23	9-9	4-3	5	4	31			
Diebler	40	1-8	0-0	0-0	0	2	3			
Simmons	14	3-4	0-0	0-0	0	2	9			
Madsen	11	1-1	2-2	2-1	0	1	4			
Totals	200	25-58	14-19	13-16	14	16	73			

Percentages: FG: 43.1%, FT: 73.7%, 3-point goals: 9-23 (Lighty 1-3, Buford 2-5, Turner 2-4, Diebler 1-7, Simmons 3-4). **Team rebounds:** 6. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Lighty, Turner, Madsen). **Turnovers:** 11 (Turner 6, Lighty 2, Lauderdale, Simmons, Madsen). **Steals:** 6 (Lighty 2, Buford 2, Turner, Diebler). **Halftime:** Ohio State 42, Tennessee 39. **Officials:** Kitts, Kersey, Daily. **A:** N/A.

half. He tallied 18 in the final 20 minutes and recorded a team-high five offensive rebounds as the Buckeyes had no answer for his play in the paint.

"I started to put the ball higher off the glass," Chism said of his second-half performance. "In the first half, I was putting it up soft and coming up short. I had to adjust the way I shot the ball in the second half, and I did a great job of finishing."

Volunteers head coach Bruce Pearl then interjected: "He sure did."

OSU played the majority of the first half without one of its key players. Junior forward David Lighty picked up his second foul at the 13:43 mark and immediately headed to the bench for the remainder of the half.

In his place stepped seldom-used reserve senior Jeremie Simmons, who had scored nine points in his previous seven appearances dating back to Valentine's Day. Lighty's absence forced the Buckeyes to abandon their 1-3-1 zone defense, and the Vols immediately attacked Simmons and got him into foul trouble as well.

Although the senior picked up his second foul at the 12:22 mark, he remained in the game in place of Lighty and ultimately provided a spark. Simmons hit three first-half three-pointers, the last of which gave Ohio State a 40-37 lead with 1:22 until the break.

Asked if he had considered putting Simmons into the game in the second half to try to again spark some offense, Matta replied, "I did. I just didn't go with it."

The Buckeyes opened the game on an 11-4 run, and after a Tennessee trey and a Buford basket it was a 13-7 OSU lead with 16:00 remaining. The sophomore had the hot hand early, scoring his team's first five points and nine of OSU's first 13. He finished the half with a team-high 12 points.

From there, the Volunteers settled down and put together a 10-0 run during their first lead since the first possession of the game.

A Simmons trey broke the streak and made it 17-16 in favor of the Vols with 11:39 to go. He would hit another at the 9:54 mark to give the Buckeyes a short-lived 19-18 lead that was

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

erased on Tennessee's ensuing possession by a trey from Chism.

OSU would then tie the game six times before a Buford three-pointer with 3:03 remaining made it 35-32 in favor of the Buckeyes. Tennessee would tie it at 37, but the Buckeyes got Simmons' third trey and a jumper from Turner to push their lead to five points with 22 seconds left.

Maze slashed to the basket and connected just before the buzzer to set the halftime score at 42-39.

The Vols used 10 players in the first half, each of whom saw at least four minutes of action. In contrast, the Buckeyes used seven players – a fact necessitated by Lighty's foul trouble.

There were 12 leads changes in the back-and-forth contest, and the game was tied on 12 occasions.

Was It Fatigue?

All season long, Matta defended his decision to use a short bench by saying his players were conditioned enough to handle going the distance on a near-nightly basis.

That lack of depth may have finally caught up with the Buckeyes against the Volunteers. Tennessee drove to the basket more effectively than any OSU opponent this season, and for that Pearl credited his team's deep bench.

"We talked about our team vs. their top six or seven guys," the Tennessee head coach said. "In the intensity of this game, I thought fatigue was a factor in the second half. We dominated the boards in the second half."

The Vols grabbed 24 of their 41 rebounds in the final stanza and scored 28 of their 50 points in the paint during that stretch as well. Ohio State finished with 29 rebounds for the game, only 14 of which came after intermission.

The Buckeyes struggled offensively as well. After shooting 55.6 percent (15 for 27) in the first half, OSU went 10 for 31 (32.3 percent) in the second. Tennessee, meanwhile, was 15 for 33 (45.5 percent) in the first half and 15 for 31 (48.4 percent) in the second.

Asked about the discrepancy in shooting between the halves for his team, Turner said, "Shots didn't fall."

The Buckeyes denied that weariness played a factor in their performance.

"Fatigue never crossed my mind," Matta said. "At one point I think we played 30 seconds and sat there for five minute (in timeouts) in the second half. I think that so many people with the fatigue issue ... the people that probably say that are overweight and eat bad food. These guys are conditioned to roll."

Matta was asked about his short bench one day before the game and said he figured most players in the country would prefer to play 40 minutes a game. That comment found its way to the Tennessee locker room and provided some bulletin board material once the message was changed a little by Pearl during a pregame film session.

"I don't remember exactly what Coach Matta said, but something around the lines that we wish we were at Ohio State playing 40 minutes," Prince said. "That's not true. As a team, we all get tired. We all need help. We knew that their six wouldn't be able to run with us the whole game because we had more depth."

"You could tell they were tired the second half. Their legs weren't all there and their shots didn't fall the same as in the first half when they were fresh."

Against the Vols, Turner, Diebler and Buford each went the distance. For the season, that trio and Lighty averaged at least 34.4 minutes per game. Diebler led the way in minutes played with 1,375 – an average of 37.2 per contest.

Eight Volunteers saw at least 12 minutes of

action against the Buckeyes with Chism earning a team-high 35 minutes of playing time.

"Sure, kids would like to play more minutes," Pearl said. "Of course they would. They want to be on the floor. They don't want to sit on the bench, so I've got to constantly sell the concept of playing nine or 10 guys. We all have five or six guys that are better than the other three or four (but) in order to develop talent and in order to develop your bench, you've got to play them (all)."

Flex Credit For Diebler

His performance against Tennessee notwithstanding, Diebler has come a long way from the freshman whose shooting struggles threatened to overwhelm him. As it turns out, that was not the only aspect of his game that needed lots of work upon his arrival in Columbus.

The Upper Sandusky, Ohio, star – who is the state's all-time leading high school scorer – found himself far behind his teammates from a flexibility standpoint upon his arrival in Columbus.

Asked where Diebler ranked among all the players he has worked with in his 20-plus years as a strength coach, associate strength and conditioning coach Dave Richardson replied, "One of the worst. A lot of athletes that we see come into college from high school have a lot of problems with what we call their hip mobility – their ability to stay in a stance, stay in a squat. It's not just muscular flexibility. It's about the joint mobility. We had to do some work with him."

Diebler has had to continually engage in extra stretching and workouts with both Richardson and athletic trainer Vince O'Brien.

"I always knew I wasn't flexible but I didn't know it played such an important role in basketball," Diebler said. "Think about it: Your hips are so bad you can only stay in a defensive stance for so long."

To improve in that category, the junior guard has engaged in extra stretching and has undergone frequent foam rolls – a foam pad that helps stretch the muscles in his hips.

"It's like anything else. Some people are naturally more fluid than others and some people are naturally more muscularly tight," Richardson said. "Some people are really flexible without training. Everybody is a little bit different but you have to find out what their weak spots are and get them better at it."

In Diebler's case, the weak spot was his flexibility. That in turn affected his ability to guard Division I basketball players.

During the 2007-08 season, Matta abandoned his patented man-to-man defense for a much-despised zone for the first time in his coaching career. Looking back, Diebler said he was the weak point at that end of the court.

"That's probably why we were playing zone," he said. "My defense was pretty bad. I'm not the most flexible person, so for me to stay in a stance for a long period of time was a struggle."

Throughout that season, Diebler also struggled to connect from the three-point range as well. He shot 28.9 percent (48 for 166) from behind the arc and lost his starting spot eight games into the season.

Diebler has since admitted to feeling plenty of stress that season, but Richardson said it never came across at the time.

"I'm sure it probably was on his mind," he said. "Now he'll tell you that it was, but he never really showed it. I think he just tried to find other ways to help the team win."

The Big Ten tournament showed proof of his progress. With the score tied at 66 in the final seconds March 12 against Michigan, it was Diebler who was matched up with U-M guard Manny Harris. One day later in a vic-

tory against Illinois, Diebler was charged with sticking with point guard Demetri McCamey as he attempted to come up with the game-winning shot in regulation.

To get to that point, Richardson said Diebler had to be able to get his body in position to play defense. Matta said it was a weakness in Diebler's game out of high school but added he had other strengths that helped offset his lack of flexibility.

"Jon couldn't move laterally," the OSU coach said. "But to his credit he's done a great job of working at it. Before every practice he goes over and does the exercises that we've given him. It's been amazing watching his lateral quickness – his hip flexors as they call them – get better."

Last summer, Richardson said he received a reminder of just how far Diebler has come.

"I watched a pickup game one day during the summer when he got switched off and was guarding Scoonie Penn," the OSU strength coach said. "As quick as Scoonie is, Jon stayed in front of him. He's come a long way."

Tournament Quotables

- Prince on if he was worried about being called for a foul on Turner's final shot: "I didn't really think about it. You've got to contest the shot. I knew he was going to flail. That's going to happen anytime at the end of the game. I had a clean block. I used my length and had to make a play."

- Buford on shooting with a defender in his face: "I'm not going to change my game for any team. I'm just going to try to play my game and if I feel that I can make the shot – which is every shot that I take – then I'm going to take it."

- Matta on being the favorite in the region after top seed Kansas was upset by Northern Iowa: "Everyone was picking Kansas to win and they're no longer in this thing. I think that's a wake-up call. The people that pick, they don't play. We have to be the ones that get the job done."

- Matta on Chism: "(He reminds me of Michigan State forward) Raymar Morgan. Maybe he steps out and shoots the three a little bit more. In some regards, Chism is like a Robbie Hummel (of Purdue) with his size and what he's capable of doing, driving the basketball and shooting from the outside. There's a post-up element to his game. Obviously he's a little more athletic than Robbie, but there are some comparisons to what they do stat-wise."

- Pearl on Turner: "Offensively, I think Turner is a better point guard than Michael Conley. Michael Conley was a great player as a freshman, but Turner as a junior playing the same position, I think he's harder to match up with."

- Matta's response: "I think that there's two ways to look at it. One would be from the standpoint of Evan does so many more things with his rebounding and his size. I think that's a huge advantage, but they are the complete antithesis of each other. I saw the last two minutes of our overtime game with Xavier the other night and I'll tell you this: Michael Conley was one hell of a point guard. He and Evan are completely different. You can't even draw a comparison."

- Chism, on the difference between this OSU team and the one he faced in 2007: "They're playing four guards and one center. Three years ago, they had the best center in the nation (in Greg Oden) and the best point guard (in Conley)."

- Matta on coaching: "Young coaches ask me all the time about how you get to the Ohio States of the world and I tell them I'm the luckiest guy in the world. I've coached at three programs and all three (were) in the Sweet 16. I've been in great situations."

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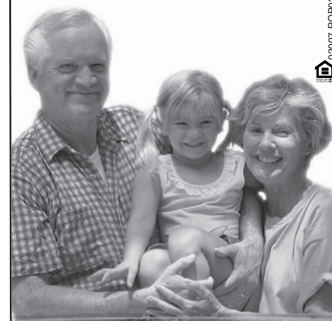
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really focused on me but my teammates hit shots."

Diebler Battles Illness

Whether Diebler would be healthy enough to suit up against the Gauchos in doubt leading up to the game. The junior guard was the latest Buckeye to come down with a virus that had struck the team at the tail end of the Big Ten tournament the week before.

"I haven't had the flu in I don't know how long," he said in the team's locker room. "I just caught it. It's going around the team."

Diebler said he had to leave OSU's practice one day before the UCSB game after only 15 minutes because he had to throw up.

The virus first struck when seniors Jeremie Simmons and P.J. Hill started to feel its effects. Classmate Kyle Madsen got sick on the team bus as the Buckeyes drove home from the Big Ten tournament in Indianapolis, and Madsen later said he lost eight pounds as a result of the illness.

Diebler was the team's most high-profile player to come down with the virus. The team leader in minutes played this season, he sat third on the team in scoring with 13.3 points per game following the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament. He also became the school's all-time most prolific three-point shooter during the conference tournament.

After getting sick March 16, Diebler said he had been able to keep down little solid food.

"I had a little bit," he said March 18. "It's weird because I feel so hungry because I haven't eaten much in the last couple of days and I've got to get some energy, but then again I'm nervous about eating something because I don't want to throw up again."

While sick, Diebler jokingly said he did not receive much sympathy from his roommate Turner.

"I had no clue what was going on," Turner said. "I thought it was his brother throwing up (because) his brother was upstairs. When I'm sick, I don't want a lot of people around me crowding. Then they told me to stay away from him."

Diebler's stamina was tested early on against Santa Barbara. There was no time-out whistled until more than seven minutes had passed at the start of the game.

"The biggest thing I've heard was, 'Man, you should stay sick more often,'" he said after hitting seven three-pointers against the Gauchos. "I'm like, 'No, that's OK.'"

"I knew the first four minutes were going to be the worst, and it ended up being about eight minutes so I was just dying. I was ready to foul somebody just to get a break."

Turner Struggles

For the first time this season, a healthy Turner experienced some tough going on the court.

After having shot 54.0 percent (217 for 402) from the field entering the NCAA Tournament, the OSU junior combined to go 10 for 32 (31.3 percent) in the first two rounds of the tournament. In addition, he dished out 14 assists but was pressured into 13 turnovers in the process.

Each team defended the Buckeye star differently, but there were a few similarities. The Gauchos doubled Turner up top before reverting to a zone down low if he was able to get through, while the Yellow Jackets stuck a man on him up and down the court for the majority of the game.

Asked what he could learn about how

the Gauchos defended him, Turner repeated his displeasure with the way the game was called.

"There's not too much you can learn besides on to the next one," he said. "I'm sure they'll call the game differently. I just think they let the game go. That was it. Honestly, I can't picture another game being called like that."

His nine points in the game marked his lowest output since an eight-point effort against Indiana on Jan. 6. That was his return game after missing six contests following the back injury he suffered Dec. 5.

After the game, Santa Barbara guard James Nunnally – one of the Gauchos who defended Turner – said he would not vote for the Buckeye for player of the year if he had a vote.

"He's probably the runner-up for national player of the year," Nunnally said. "(Kentucky freshman) John Wall gets my vote."

In watching tape of Turner, the Gauchos decided to try to force him to move the ball around instead of allowing him to dribble freely. That focus, combined with their zone defense, allowed UCSB to take Ohio State's top offensive threat out of the game.

"We knew if he got in the paint, he was going to kill us," said junior guard Justin Joyner, who also guarded Turner extensively. "We wanted to make sure we contested all his shots. We weren't really worried about his three-point shooting, but we knew if he got in the paint, it was all over."

Turner said he was not frustrated, but his counterparts on the other bench begged to differ.

"There were a couple of times when he'd push people's hands off or push us off him and we realized, 'OK, he's pretty frustrated right now,'" Joyner said. "It felt good, but at the same time we were down by 12."

The Yellow Jackets were not as successful as Turner was pressured into nine turnovers but still led all scorers with 24 points. He continued to score despite being constantly harassed by the Georgia Tech defenders, who were content to run up their foul totals while relying on a deep bench to provide enough fresh bodies to keep up the pursuit.

Early on, the strategy worked. Georgia Tech came out in a full-court

press that saw two defenders hounding Turner's every step as he attempted to bring the ball up the court. It was instrumental in keeping OSU off the scoreboard early.

"They just tried to really be physical with me," Turner said. "That was it."

The Rest Of The Story

Before the Buckeyes took on UC Santa Barbara, Matta met with Lauderdale in the hallway outside his hotel room and offered him some words of encouragement. As the center recalled, the message was along the lines of, "If you don't start playing better, I'm going to step on your neck."

One day later, Matta was asked about the exchange between the two. As it turns out, there was a little more to the story than Lauderdale had initially let on.

"I had been on him all week," the coach said. "When we broke film Thursday night, he left a scouting report in there, which kind of pushed me over the edge."

"And so I took it to his room and I basically said, 'I don't believe that your mind is ready to go if you can't carry 10 pieces of paper upstairs. Therefore, we'll find out tomorrow night at 9:30 whether you're ready to go or not.' And he was. To his credit, he did a good job responding."

When told that Matta had related the whole story, Lauderdale laughed.

"I didn't know if he wanted me to say anything," the junior center said. "If he says something, then OK."

Meet 'The Quads'

One day before his team's game against the Buckeyes, UCSB head coach Bob Williams drew a historical parallel when asked to describe them.

"They have a team that reminds you a little bit – because of their guard play – of 'the Triplets' at Arkansas, except this is 'the Quads' because they have four guards that play all the time," Williams said.

As the 1978 Razorbacks reached the Final Four, they did so thanks to the play of three similar guards – Sidney Moncrief, Marvin Delph and Ron Brewer. Each stood about 6-3.

Turner, Buford, Lighty and Diebler each range between 6-5 and 6-7 and entered the tournament averaging at least 33.9 minutes per game.

"These kids seem to play really with-in themselves and really well together," Williams said. "(I'm impressed with) how versatile those four guards are in terms of their ability to rebound and defend, but they all handle it, they all pass it and they all shoot it."

"I've got to think it's a coach's dream to coach (that team)."

Potent Quotables

- Williams on what it was like watching tape of Turner: "A little bit like going to a horror movie."

- Turner on what therapy he does for his back: "I just cold tub and that's pretty much it. I was fortunate enough with the spot I landed on that once it healed, I'll never know I hurt my back. At Iowa, this guy came up and told me he hurt his L4 and L5 (vertebrae) – I hurt my L2 and L3 – and he was telling me that he still wakes up after he had surgery seven years ago in a lot of pain. I'm definitely really lucky I didn't land on a higher part of my back. I'm blessed."

- Turner after being featured on one of six Sports Illustrated regional covers for March Madness: "I'm the type of kid (that believes) you make your own destiny (and) will yourself into the situation. I'm not worrying about the (SI cover) jinx but worrying about what my teammates and I have been doing, which is playing Ohio State basketball."

- Buford on if he feels he has become a more well-rounded player this season: "Absolutely. People will think what they want to think, but personally I think I have. People just think I can shoot and score, but I can also do a lot of different other things. Basically every game I guard one of the best scorers on the floor. I rebound and pass the ball and work on the rest of my game and hope everyone else can see that."

- Lauderdale on what was different for him against Georgia Tech: "I felt like I was having more fun. I caught myself smiling on the court."

- Lighty on Madsen's illness on the drive home after the Big Ten tournament: "When Kyle threw up, I was in the back. All I heard was it splattering all over the floor. It was quite nasty. The smell was horrible. He threw up like five times."

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COVER STORY: REMODELING, NOT REBUILDING, ON TAP

Defense Has Handful Of Holes To Fill

Continued From Page 1

before that. His one campaign in the starting lineup saw him play a key role in the Buckeyes' base defense as he was asked to stop the run, rush the passer and contend with opposing tight ends as the team's strongside linebacker.

One of three players voted captain by his teammates, Spittler finished with 38 tackles, including five for loss, and former teammate Brian Rolle agreed when a reporter suggested that Spittler's contributions were underrated.

"Most definitely. Most people don't mention his name, but I think Austin was a great player," said Rolle, a senior linebacker who returns for his second season as a starter.

"I tell Austin every time I see him he was probably one of the best leaders on our team and most people didn't hear about him. He may not have had the stats to prove it, but when he was on the field he was a guy who was a difference-maker. If you look at the Iowa game, he had a tackle for loss that took them out of field-goal range and they had to go for it on fourth down."

Rolle's specific example highlighted not only what Spittler could do for the defense but also the contributions of two of his fellow graduated seniors.

During the Nov. 14 contest that decided the Big Ten championship, Spittler threw Iowa running back Adam Robinson for a 6-yard loss on second down of the Hawkeyes' one offensive overtime possession. Worthington followed that with a 10-yard sack that knocked Iowa out of field-goal range and forced a desperation pass that Russell intercepted on fourth down.

Three plays later, the Buckeyes won on a 41-yard field goal by Devin Barclay, clinching a share of the Big Ten title and a bid to the Rose Bowl in the process.

"Things like that were overlooked by people who looked at our defense," Rolle said.

Rolle, who finished second on the team with 95 tackles last season, suggested the first player to get a shot at replacing Spittler will be Etienne Sabino, a junior from Florida

who lost a battle with Spittler for one of two open spots in the lineup last season.

That came as a surprise to some given the recruiting pedigrees of the pair. Spittler entered Ohio State as a three-star prospect in 2005 while Sabino was a five-star three years later, but teammates and team insiders alike indicate Sabino has grown noticeably as a player in the past year.

"Etienne always wants to be perfect, but he's doing a great job of just doing what he has to do and not taking everything so literally and just playing within himself," said Rolle, who compared the 6-3, 240-pounder to former OSU linebacker Bobby Carpenter. "A big, physical guy, a long guy, but he's going to be a great guy this year. He's very physical – most people don't know that – and he's a good kid."

"He's always in the film room, probably more than I am, but he wants to be perfect and it's kind of hard to teach him that you can't be perfect all the time. I look forward to playing next to him this year."

The other two linebacker spots feature returning starters in Rolle and classmate Ross Homan, leaving a bevy of talented youngsters to contend for backup spots in hopes of being able to contribute in part-time roles or as fill-ins should someone suffer an injury.

The group behind the starters includes sophomores Storm Klein and Jonathan Newsome, redshirt freshmen Dorian Bell and Jordan Whiting and senior walk-on Tony Jackson.

"That's actually great," said Rolle, who had to wait behind three-year starters James Laurinaitis and Marcus Freeman before earning his shot at a starting role last season.

"It's going to make us all the better. We've got guys that are coming in to push us to do better (and) that's going to be great for us. That means if we have guys go down, we're not going to miss a beat. Somebody else will jump in, so I give the coaches all the glory for going out and getting these four- and five-star linebackers to come in and challenge us for our jobs."

Also potentially in the mix is Andrew

Sweat, a junior whose status is unclear as he continues to recover from surgery to repair an ACL injury suffered midway through last season.

While the depth at linebacker is enviable, the defensive line will be missing five players from a group of nine who played significant minutes last season.

Gibson opted to skip his final year of college eligibility while Worthington, Todd Denlinger, Robert Rose and Lawrence Wilson all exhausted theirs. Even so, a solid corps returns.

The ringleader of the line figures to be senior Cameron Heyward, a starter since his freshman season who played both end and tackle last season and is likely to do so again.

"Cam is a huge, huge asset to us to come back," Homan said. "If he would have left for the NFL, I would have been all for his decision. But as soon as I talked to him and he said he was coming back, I was just all for that."

"From a linebacker standpoint, you love him because he was just destroying two guys in front of you and that makes it easier for you. Cam has the ability to take over a game himself."

First crack at backing up Heyward at defensive end on the strong side of the defense is expected to go to Keith Wells, a third-year player with three years of eligibility remaining. He took a redshirt in 2009 because of the wealth of experienced players in front of him on the depth chart.

At the other end spot, Gibson's heir apparent is junior Nathan Williams, a 6-3, 260-pounder with 5½ sacks and 12 tackles for loss while backing up Gibson the past two seasons. Junior Solomon Thomas, one of the stars of spring practice in 2009, and redshirt freshman Melvin Fellows will have something to say about who gets the most playing time at that spot as well.

Inside, senior Dexter Larimore returns for one more go-round while sophomores John Simon and Garrett Goebel and redshirt freshman Adam Bellamy compete for the other tackle spot.



JOSH WINSLOW

READY TO TAKE NEXT STEP? – Former five-star prospect Etienne Sabino (6) could be one of Ohio State's three starting linebackers in 2010.

In the secondary, cornerback is in the experienced hands of seniors Chimdi Chekwa and Devon Torrence, but fresh faces must be found at safety.

Senior Jermale Hines, who started seven games at safety and spent the whole season as the star in the team's nickel defense, looks like a given to take one of those positions while the other appears wide open as spring practice dawns.

Conventional wisdom has Orhian Johnson as the front-runner to start alongside Hines since the sophomore was the fourth man in the rotation behind Coleman, Russell and Hines last season, but there is no shortage of players hoping to horn in on the action.

That group includes junior Nate Oliver, sophomores Zach Dominic and C.J. Barnett and redshirt freshman Jamie Wood.

There are also two wild cards in the safety mix as seniors Aaron Gant and Tyler Moeller each hope to distance themselves from the health problems that robbed them of any playing time last year.

Gant suffers from arthritis related to a pair of knee surgeries performed last year, but he is hoping to be full-go. Meanwhile, Moeller continues to recover from the effects of a head injury suffered last August that prompted emergency brain surgery and wiped out his 2009 season. He has been cleared for all noncontact football activities for spring ball.

"Anderson and Kurt were starters for a long time, which means there was somebody backing them up for a long time also so there are guys who are ready to step in," Chekwa said. "We've got a senior in Aaron Gant who has been here for a while and he's going to be able to step in. Orhian Johnson is ready to step in. Jermale Hines has already been on the field and he's going to start at safety for us. We're expected to be good at safety."

At cornerback, the group battling for spots in line behind Chekwa and Torrence includes junior Donnie Evege, sophomore Travis Howard and redshirt freshmen Dominic Clarke and Corey Brown.

"Travis had shoulder problems all season (last year) and he finally got surgery on his shoulder, so he'll be back and ready to go and ready to play," Chekwa said. "The guys who redshirted, Clarke and Brown, are going to be able to show what they can do this spring."

Offensive Players On The Spot

• **Terrelle Pryor, quarterback** – Heading into his third season as the starter, Pryor is seeking to build upon a superlative Rose Bowl performance. There appears to be little question the 6-6, 233-pound junior has every athletic tool necessary to become a Heisman Trophy candidate. What we're looking for is leadership. Springtime is when leaders make themselves known to their teammates, and we're eager to see Pryor begin to do what Troy Smith did in 2006 – take the reins of the team and make it his own.

• **Mike Adams, left tackle** – This spring could be a now-or-never proposition for the 6-8, 300-pounder. Adams, who is now in his junior season, came to Ohio State two years ago as one of the most sought-after high school offensive linemen in the country. But a combination of injuries and other issues has conspired to limit him to only 11 game appearances in two seasons. He looked to be a trimmer version of himself during winter conditioning workouts, and that could help as he seeks to solidify what could be one of Ohio State's most talented offensive lines in recent years.

• **Jaamal Berry, tailback** – Berry is like the Christmas morning that never came. For much of the early part of 2009, OSU fans were told the 5-10, 200-pound speedster was the next great Buckeye running back. Unfortunately, a nagging hamstring injury bothered Berry throughout the season and he wound up redshirting. After wrist surgery caused him to miss several games during his senior



Mike Adams

season of high school, Berry needs this spring to prove his durability as well as showcase his much-talked-about acceleration and speed.

• **Taurian Washington, receiver** – Sometimes all anyone needs to succeed is a second chance, and Washington is eager to take advantage of his. After dropping a couple of passes in the season opener against Navy, the 6-1, 181-pounder fell so far down the depth chart that he contemplated a transfer. Then came Rose Bowl suspensions to Ray Small and Duron Carter, and suddenly Washington was starting against Oregon. He proved he was adept at downfield blocking and hopes to prove to the coaching staff that he can once again be reliable when it comes to catching the ball.

• **Jake Stoneburner, tight end** – Every year we hear the same thing: This is going to be the year the Buckeyes better utilize their tight ends in the passing game – and then it never happens. Last year, for example, OSU tight ends combined for only 15 receptions. If anyone can change that mentality, however, it could be Stoneburner. The 6-5, 245-pound sophomore had 168 career catches for 2,751 yards and 28 TDs at Dublin (Ohio) Coffman, meaning he knows how to stretch defenses. Will Pryor's mobility and improved offensive line play allow Stoneburner to become the threat he was in high school? We're eager to find out.

– Mark Rea

COVER STORY: REMODELING, NOT REBUILDING, ON TAP**Hoping For Rosy Carryover**

The defenses at Ohio State have been so good for so long, most fans seem to be taken for granted the quality of the next unit defensive coordinator Jim Heacock will craft.

Offense, on the other hand, is a seemingly never-ending source of hand-wringing for Buckeye fans from one corner of the state to the other.

That might not be the case after the performance Tressel's troops turned in during the 26-17 Rose Bowl victory, however. That 419-yard explosion has fans dreaming of a high-powered offense to go along with the traditionally tough defense.

With nine starters returning, those fans would seem to be justified in having high expectations, but the offense is not without its questions this spring.

Pryor's ability to throw effectively is predicated not just on his ability to read defenses and deliver the ball but also having time to do so.

Helping plug some holes in the protection and energize the running game late last season was the re-emergence of Jim Cordle, a senior who missed all or parts of five games. He returned in time to take part in four strong performances for the offensive line to close out the season.

While NFL scouts are not beating down Cordle's door – he joked with reporters that a 5.3-second 40-yard dash at the team's annual Pro Day was good for him – his calming influence on the offensive line late last season should not be discounted.

"He just was a hard worker on the field and off the field," said returning right guard Bryant Browning. "He studied a lot of film just so he would be able to tell the rest of us maybe something he picked up on the defense that really helped us in the game. His leadership and experience he was able to share with us as well."

Browning, a senior from Cleveland Glenville, figures to be a key cog of the offensive line this season, his second as a starter at guard and third in the starting lineup. He moved inside last year after spending the 2008 season at right tackle.

He is expected to reprise his role inside this season along with fellow holdovers Michael Brewster at center and Justin Boren at left guard. Many expect that interior trio to be one of the best in the Big Ten if not the nation, leaving all of the intrigue on offensive line this spring surrounding the tackles.

After replacing the injured Cordle at right tackle in week three last season, J.B. Shugarts started nine games as a sophomore. Though some growing pains were evident at times for him, he became a reliable part of the line and is expected to improve in 2010 as a junior.

His return to starting at right tackle is not guaranteed as April begins, however.

Marcus Hall came on strong as his freshman season progressed, and there are some who believe he could make a play for the starting right tackle spot if he continues to improve rapidly.

That could prompt a move to the left side for Shugarts, although there are already two viable candidates over there as well.

Big things have been expected of junior Mike Adams since he became the second player to commit to be a part of the Ohio State recruiting class of 2008, but he has yet to live up to the hype of being a five-star recruit.

Adams has battled shoulder and knee injuries along with a rap of lacking toughness, but team insiders report he has been among the most impressive workers during off-season workouts and winter conditioning. That has many Ohio State fans excited to

see what the 6-8, 300-pounder from Dublin, Ohio, can do when the pads are strapped back on.

"I feel Mike has always been a hard worker on the field and studying as well," Browning said. "He just needs to keep doing what he's doing and come into spring ball ready to fight and play hard and go from there."

The fourth man in the tackle battle is Andrew Miller, a senior who lacked the recruiting buzz of the other three but showed himself to be a formidable foe for defensive linemen during spring practice last year. He initially won the left tackle job in the fall only to be knocked out of the lineup by a nasty bout with the flu early in the season.

"I think it's going to be great competition," Browning said. "All the tackles are working hard for both tackle spots."

Also on offensive coordinator and line coach Jim Bollman's to-do list this spring is finding a backup for Brewster at center without Cordle and dependable former walk-on Andrew Moses, who also graduated.

Candidates for that role include redshirt freshmen Jack Mewhort and Corey Linsley along with senior walk-on Scott Sika. Fifth-year seniors Connor Smith and Josh Kerr, fourth-year junior Evan Blankenship and redshirt freshman Sam Longo will provide offensive line depth.

Should Pryor be afforded time to stand tall in the pocket, he will need targets to whom to throw. That group, like the young tackles, does not lack talent but struggled at times last year. Replacing longtime standouts Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline proved more difficult than expected, but there is optimism the growing pains are a thing of the past.

"Every year we've got the talent," said senior receiver Dane Sanzenbacher. "I don't think that is ever the problem, but there is always something new to find. I don't think even (wide receivers coach Darrell) Hazell or anyone in the room knows what the receiving corps is going to look like once we get to the fall, so we'll find out a lot during spring and through the summer."

Sanzenbacher finished second on the team with 36 catches for 570 yards last season and returns as a starter along with junior DeVier Posey.

That leaves Hazell in search of a third option at receiver out of a group of candidates consisting of seniors Taurian Washington and Grant Schwartz along with redshirt freshmen Chris Fields and James Jackson.

Posey led Ohio State with 60 catches for 828 yards as a sophomore but admitted a desire to grow and mature this season.

"I definitely want to improve every day, get stronger, bigger and faster," said the 6-2, 200-pounder. "Improve my off-the-field smarts as far as being in the film room and being a leader. Dane, Taurian and I are the older guys so we have to be the leaders now (and) I want to do what I can to help the team."

"Individual goals and personal agendas aren't really part of our plan this season. I feel like that will slow us down, but we're trying to get accomplished as a team. We're not trying to get into rankings but we know what we're capable of and we want to fulfill our potential."

Potential is a word thrown around relatively often during conversations about the tight ends at Ohio State in recent seasons, too – as in this is potentially the year Tressel and Bollman include the tight end as a significant part of the passing game.

Such is the case again this season when Jake Stoneburner returns to show the staff what he has learned about the position since being moved from wide receiver prior to the start of spring practice in 2009.

The Dublin, Ohio, native is listed at 6-5, 245, and is reputed to have the speed to leave linebackers in the dust to go along with the size to overpower defensive backs down the middle of the field.

He saw his minutes increase as the season went on last year, a development that would seem to be an indication of growing confidence in his ability as a blocker. With senior Jake Ballard having used up his eligibility, plenty of playing time is available for Stoneburner while fellow sophomores Nic DiLillo and Reid Fragel will hope to prove to the coaches they are worthy of minutes as well.

While total opportunities for tight ends to touch the ball have been limited in the recent past, such has never been the case for the running backs.

Divvying up carries for seniors Dan "Boom" Herron and Brandon Saine, sophomores Jordan Hall and Jermil Martin, redshirt freshman Jaamal Berry and true freshman Carlos Hyde figures to be difficult for position coach Dick Tressel, but that is among the best problems to have.

Program observers are particularly interested in seeing Berry. His first season in Columbus was mostly scuttled by hamstring problems, but what small samples observers saw of him when healthy or close to it left the impression Berry possesses a rare combination of shiftiness, vision and speed.

Spring practice observers will also be looking at two other offensive positions.

Incumbent backup quarterback Joe Bauserman, a junior, will be trying to keep his job away from up-and-coming redshirt freshman Ken Guiton. Bauserman appeared in six games last season and completed 6 of 19 attempts for 124 yards.

At fullback, sophomores Zach Boren and Adam Homan return after receiving on-the-job training last season. Boren was a major component of in the running game's improvement late in the campaign, but both still have plenty of room to grow.

No Ohio State football story can be complete without mention of special teams, the pet project of the head coach of the Buckeyes, and Jim Tressel figures to have some intrigue in the kicking game this spring as he surveys his options at kicker and punter.

Barclay, who kicked the game-winning field goal against Iowa, returns as a senior after closing the 2009 season as Ohio State's top placekicker, but sophomore Ben Buchanan and early-enrolling true freshman Drew Basil could have something to say about that as well.

Buchanan seems the heir apparent at punter after the graduation of Jon Thoma.

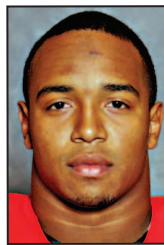
When the squad holds its annual kick scrimmage, there figures to be no shortage of candidates for the kick and punt return jobs, either, after the departures of Ray Small (graduated) and Lamaar Thomas (transfer to New Mexico). Among those on the roster this spring with previous return experience are Posey, Sanzenbacher, Saine and Herron.

Defensive Players On The Spot

• **Etienne Sabino, linebacker** – Projected as a player who would contend for a starting job early in his career, the 6-3, 240-pound junior has spent his first two seasons serving apprenticeships at two different linebacker positions. As a result, most of his experience has been on special teams. This spring, however, no one should be in Sabino's way as he seeks to lock down the strongside spot. Size, strength and speed are his calling cards, and all he needs to do is relax and allow the game to come to him rather than trying to force the issue.

• **Nathan Williams, defensive end** – With Thaddeus Gibson off to the NFL a year early, Williams takes over his position after starting in a part-time role for the past two seasons. The 6-3, 260-pound junior has made the most of his playing time so far, recording career numbers of 43 tackles, including 12 for loss and 5½ sacks, totals that should go up as Williams gets more chances to rush the opposing quarterback. Sometimes players have trouble going from backup to starter, and this spring will tell the tale on whether Williams can make the transition.

• **Orhian Johnson, safety** – Considered somewhat of a throw-in as a member of Ohio State's recruiting class in 2008, Johnson has steadily worked his way up the depth chart and will contend for one of the team's open safety positions. Many forget he was his high school team's defensive MVP before switching to quarterback, and the



Etienne Sabino

6-2, 203-pound sophomore will most likely get first crack at Kurt Coleman's vacated strong safety spot although free safety is not out of the question. Either way, it will be interesting this spring to watch Johnson and his combination of athletic ability and rangy coverage skills.

• **John Simon, defensive tackle** – Simon had a solid freshman season for the Buckeyes last year, playing in all 13 games and registering 16 tackles, including 3½ for loss and 1½ sacks. With the departures of Doug Worthington and Todd Denlinger, Simon is projected to take over one of the starting tackle spots. Based upon last year's performance, that wouldn't seem much of a leap. About all the 6-2, 270-pounder would appear to have to show to Jim Heacock this spring is improved technique and knowledge of the defensive playbook.

• **Ben Buchanan, punter** – For the second spring in a row, the Buckeyes will break in a new punter. Buchanan gets the nod this season, replacing Jon Thoma who averaged only 37.9 yards per kick but nearly negated the opposing teams' return game. During the regular season, OSU opposition returned only eight punts for an average of 2.7 yards per runback. Buchanan isn't exactly a novice, though. He averaged 42.8 yards on four attempts last season against Toledo when Thoma was sidelined with the flu.

– Mark Rea

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Both Basketball Teams Accomplished Much

As I have said many times before, one of the unfortunate things about the madness of March Madness is that a failure to meet expectations in the NCAA Tournament can minimize the accomplishments achieved by a college basketball team over the course of a lengthy regular season.

With so much emphasis on the postseason, there are probably some who think the Ohio State men's Big Ten championship season was not a success. And there are certainly many who will discount the play of the six-time conference champion women's team after another early departure from the Big Dance.

It's hard for me to be disappointed with the full body of work of the men's team. The Buckeyes should be lauded for winning both the regular-season and conference tournament crowns despite playing the early part of the Big Ten slate without star player Evan Turner.

Once the team got to the NCAA Tournament, anything was possible especially with the presence of the magical Turner. However, I couldn't help but think going into March Madness that the Buckeyes' thin six-man rotation, plus their particular lack of depth inside, could ultimately be a problem especially if they met up with a team with a strong inside presence.

That potential scenario was there in the second-round game with Georgia Tech, but the Buckeyes prevailed with a 75-66 victory over the Yellow Jackets. There was no such luck when Ohio State advanced to play Tennessee in the Sweet 16. The Vols' 6-9 Wayne Chism pounded away inside and scored 18 of his 22 points in the second half while 6-10 Brian Williams worked inside for a key tip-in with only 31 seconds left to help Tennessee to its 76-73 victory.

And while the Buckeyes – with William Buford, Jon Diebler and Turner each playing all 40 minutes – denied it, some of the Volunteers were insistent that the outmanned Buckeyes ran out of gas down the stretch.

"You could tell they were tired," said Tennessee's J.P. Prince. "Their legs weren't all there and their shots didn't fall the same as in the first half."

The Buckeyes shot a solid 55.6 percent from the floor in the first half against the Vols and 32.3 after the intermission – including 25.0 from beyond the arc.

As I watched an undermanned OSU team get outrebounded by a 41-29 margin that led to the Buckeyes getting outscored 50-22 in the paint, I couldn't help thinking what might have been had big men Kosta Koufos and B.J. Mullens not left the Ohio State program after just one year. (Let's face it, man-child Greg Oden was never going to last four years in college.)

While Dallas Lauderdale has come a long way since last season and Kyle Madsen really played well in the Big Ten tournament, they were not enough to consistently battle the stronger teams as the Buckeyes got deeper into the NCAA tourney.

If Lauderdale and Madsen had been part of a rotation with Koufos and Mullens, and that inside rotation were coupled with the plethora of guards the Buckeyes feature, Ohio State could truly have been a force to be reckoned with, especially in a tournament field that proved to be one of the most wide-open in recent memory.

Instead, the Buckeyes played with the

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

hand they were dealt this season, and I think they did pretty darned well with it. That is especially true when you consider the team's entire 2009-10 résumé rather than just the tournament. They put a lot of hardware in the Ohio State trophy case and certainly didn't embarrass themselves in the Big Dance, something that can't be said of quite a few other teams of national repute.

On the other hand, it's hard to be quite so positive about the Ohio State women.

There is no escaping the fact that with the exception of last season when they advanced to the Sweet 16 before falling to perennial power Stanford, the women's team has a recent trend of being bounced from the tournament well before its expected departure.

Based on the team's solid performance in the tourney last season and with two bona fide stars on the roster in Jantel Lavender and Samantha Prahalis – both with an added year of experience since last year's Big Dance – it wasn't unrealistic to expect a solid run in this year's NCAA tournament.

Instead, the Buckeyes were completely embarrassed in the second round by Mississippi State, the team OSU defeated to get to the Sweet 16 last season.

After repeated postseason failures, one has to ask if it's coincidence, bad luck or something wrong with the way head coach Jim Foster and his program do business. I don't have the answer.

I do know that next year will be pivotal for the program. It will be the final year Lavender and Prahalis will be together as college teammates, and such budding young stars as Tayler Hill will have another year of experience under their belts.

The Buckeyes will most likely be favorites to again dominate the Big Ten, but as mentioned previously college basketball teams are evaluated by how they do during March Madness, not how they do in their conference. Therefore, the OSU women will have a lot to prove and there will be a lot of pressure to make real noise in the postseason. Hopefully, they can remember the stinging feeling after falling to the Bulldogs and build on it.

Prahalis, in particular, needs to remember the NCAA loss. Her display of frustration at the end of the game was not a pretty one. Teams from across the conference and across the country will note that she can be rattled if jostled and will work to incite her emotions. Emotion can be one of the junior-to-be's greatest strengths if kept under control, and she needs to come back next season a much more mature leader.

Will next season be the breakout campaign for the Ohio State women's basketball program, or have the Buckeyes gone as far as they can under Foster?

Be Careful What You Wish For

As hard as it is to believe, I'm sure there were some who were disappointed when Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel's contract was recently extended for two years, now running through the 2014 season.

Despite an almost unprecedented run of

success for the Buckeyes since Tressel's arrival, there are those who still would like to see Ohio State make a coaching change.

I'll be the first to admit I have my quibbles with the way Tressel goes about his business. From a newspaper publisher's standpoint, I wish he would allow better access to the team for we ink-stained wretches – as well as microphone-toting electronic media members – who cover the team on a regular basis. And I certainly wish he would offer less vague or diplomatic answers to the pointed and sometimes not-so-pointed questions presented to him.

From a football standpoint, I wish he would bring in some coaching help on the offensive side of the football.

But all in all, it's awfully hard to complain about all the Big Ten championships, wins over Michigan, the national title and other championship game berths and the most recent Rose Bowl victory. And other than the notable exception of the Maurice Clarett affair, Tressel generally keeps his Buckeyes out of the headlines for things other than their gridiron exploits.

For those who despite all that wish for a change, I say, "Be careful what you wish for."

I'm sure there were plenty of Michigan fans who wanted Lloyd Carr gone. When they got their wish, they got Rich Rodriguez and the unmitigated disaster that has followed.

I'm sure there were plenty of Tennessee fans who wanted Phillip Fulmer gone. When they got their wish, they got Lane Kiffin, who after one tumultuous season took off to USC. Who knows what the future holds in Knoxville now under new head coach Derek Dooley?

Like Ohio State, Michigan and Tennessee are proud football programs whose fans take their teams very seriously. It's hard to believe there are some Buckeye fans who aren't satisfied with OSU's success and want to roll the dice with a new coach after what has happened at those two schools.

Once you make a change, you never know what's going to happen.

Despite being known for many years as

the "Graveyard of Coaches," Ohio State has had tremendous stability with its football coaches for the last half-century – only Woody Hayes, Earle Bruce, John Cooper and Tressel since 1951.

Look at traditional power and defending national champion Alabama on the other hand. The Crimson Tide have had eight coaches since legendary coach Paul "Bear" Bryant retired in 1982, one of whom never coached a game. (For you trivia buffs who want to try to name all of them, I will list them later.)

There have been plenty of ups and downs in that span, including Nick Saban leading the Tide to this most recent championship. Even that crown does not guarantee stability for Alabama with Saban's track record. The Tide job, which he took in 2007, was his fourth head coaching stop since 1995 – Michigan State, LSU and the NFL's Miami Dolphins being the others – and he has a reputation of bailing on jobs. Where will Alabama be if his wanderlust – or a bigger contract offer – strikes again?

And what about Notre Dame, one of the most storied college football programs of them all?

Brian Kelly recently became the Fighting Irish's eighth coach since Ara Parseghian resigned in 1974, including a hire who never coached a game like Alabama. Sure Lou Holtz led the Irish to a national championship in 1988 during a successful run, but there were also coaches such as Gerry Faust and Charlie Weiss along the way. You trivia buffs can try to fill in the rest of the Notre Dame coaching blanks and I will list the full roster shortly.

I strongly suggest to Buckeye fans they appreciate the stability and success of their favorite team.

Meanwhile, here is a list of the Alabama coaches since Bryant – Ray Perkins (1983-86), Bill Curry (1987-89), Gene Stallings (1990-96), Mike DuBose (1997-2000), Dennis Franchione (2001-02), Mike Price (did not coach), Mike Shula (2003-06) and Saban (2007-present). Price was caught up in a strip club scandal before he could lead the Crimson Tide into battle.

Notre Dame coaches since Parseghian are Dan Devine (1975-80), Faust (1981-85), Holtz (1986-96), Bob Davie (1997-2001), George O'Leary (did not coach), Tyrone Willingham (2002-04), Weiss (2005-09) and Kelly. O'Leary was caught up in a falsified résumé scandal before he could prowling the sidelines in South Bend.

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