

Five Burning Questions

Written by {ga=furls}
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The Buckeyes annual spring game is today, and with that Buckeyes Insider Mike Furlan checks in. With the annual NFL exodus and graduations, there are questions up and down the Buckeyes roster and as a result no one can really pinpoint how good or even average this team will be. Furls chimes in with his five burning questions, the answers to which, in his opinion, will determine whether or not the Buckeyes will compete for a BCS Bowl for the fifth time in six years or whether they will compete for anything at all.



Well, if you are looking for a home remedy for an "acquired" ailment (possibly involving a swab and penicillin) you are probably looking in the wrong place. This might be more applicable: [Clap](#). Now if you don't actually have a "burn," you might be more interested in knowing how your Buckeyes are going to fair next year. With the annual NFL exodus and graduations, there are questions up and down the Buckeyes roster and as a result no one can really pinpoint how good or even average this team will be.

The spring game is by no means an indication of this team's potential, but it can really indicate who has had a good spring in practice. This can give you a leg up on your guesses at Ohio State's two deep going into the season and moving forward. So without further ado, here are my five burning questions, the answers to which, in my opinion, will determine whether or not the Buckeyes will compete for a BCS Bowl for the fifth time in six years or whether they will compete for anything at all.

How do you replace a Heisman Trophy winner? With a grey shirt freshman of course. Yep you read that right, Ohio State actually has a guy that was "grey-shirted," although the 23 year old Boeckman could potentially collect social security before the season ends, this alone does not guarantee him the job. What does give him the leg up is that he already has four years in the program and two years of eligibility left.

Boeckman is a lot different than Smith. At 6'5" 230 pounds, Boeckman is more of a pocket passer but I am not completely sold on his arm. In spring scrimmages thus far he has primarily thrown to running backs and tight ends and has not looked particularly good throwing down the field. I would have to say that he is the front-runner for the job right now, not only because of his seniority but because of Rob Schoenhof's play this spring.

Schoenhof has not looked impressive at all this spring. Schoenhof threw three interceptions in the last jersey scrimmage (in just eighteen attempts). To make matters worse, two of those three picks came on horrific throws that not only lacked accuracy, but they also lacked the requisite common sense that Jim Tressel demands out of the position. Going into spring practice, I thought that Schoenhof could potentially win the job from Boeckman this year, but I have serious doubts now.

Neither Boeckman nor Schoenhof has looked particularly impressive this spring, and that has led many Buckeyes fans to call for Antonio Henton to get a shot. Henton has probably looked

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better than the other two, but I am not so sure if that is a product of his play or the absolutely horrid play of the other two. In the end, I am not sure if Henton is the second coming of Troy Smith as many, including Henton himself, are claiming.

Who in the hell is going to play DT this year? Patterson, gone. Pitcock, gone. Penton, gone. Well, that means all three of Ohio State's most game experienced DTs are gone. Who is going to step up and play? In typical Jim Tressel style, I expect it to be done by committee at the beginning of the season. The front-runners for the starting slots are going to be Denlinger and Worthington, but I expect to see a lot of Dex Larimore and Nader Abdallah early on as Tressel looks for the best combination inside.

There was rampant speculation early on that Robert Rose may move to "three-technique", but that seems to have subsided. Ohio State is very deep at DE and it would make sense in the absence of players to move a guy to fill the void, but I am not convinced that Ohio State has an absence of talent at DT nor that Rose, at 6'5" would be able to get his pad level low enough to play with the leverage of an effective tackle.

I have been very high on Larimore since Ohio State recruited him, and I am calling my shot right now, Larimore will take over the starting job next year. Every word uttered about Larimore since spring practice began scream the same thing, this kid is an animal. The offensive linemen have been telling coach Tressel that Larimore is a "load", and he is already drawing comparisons to Tim Anderson.

How do you replace a first and second round picks at WR? You don't and you can't. Robiskie and Harline are not slouches by any extent of the imagination and Ray Small should be more than able to pick up the slack in the return game, but you just cannot replace the game experience, speed, athleticism, and leadership of two three-year starters at WR.

Ohio State is far from weak at this position going into 2007, but it will not be the position of strength for them that it was in 2006. Through all of last year, I repeatedly pointed out that Ohio State's biggest on the field advantage was at WR. By playing spread, Ohio State was able to bring five good WRs onto the field where opposing teams can generally only field 3 good DBs. Simple math tells you that stuff should be open down the field and Smith had the arm and smarts to get that done. This year Ohio State will not have the personnel to create or take advantage of these mismatches. I guess it is back to "Tressel Ball";

So who will be on the field when the Buckeyes do go 4 and 5 wide? Right now it looks like Albert Dukes and Devon Lyons, but both of these players have underachieved since arriving on campus, so nothing is guaranteed, as a matter of fact, both players lost their spots on the depth chart to Robiskie, Hartline, and Small last year. Could it happen again next year? Your guess is as good as mine, but their play in the spring game could be indicative of things to come.

Will the Defense be good enough to make up for the losses on offense? Short answer, I think so. I expect that Ohio State will pressure every team they see this year with four consistently. Vernon Gholston is an animal (this was established last year), but what was lost is

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that Jay Richardson was probably the third or fourth best DE on the team. I am not sure that there are any DEs in the Big Ten (now that Spencer is gone) that have the physical tools that Robert Rose and Lawrence Wilson have.

Wilson is reputed to run sub 4.6 forty at 6'6" and nearly 275 lbs, and Wilson has the length to get free from the big tackles he will see (Jake Long et al). Rose has proven to be basically unblockable in trash time last year, while Ohio State was rushing four. He amassed four sacks in these situations and played himself out of a red-shirt. At 6'5"; 265, Rose is not as big or fast as Wilson, but he is every bit as quick.

The secondary will get healthier and deeper with the return of Anderson Russell and the emergence and further development of some of last year's youngsters. Guys like Coleman, Washington, and Gant are actively competing for starting roles in the secondary, and if Eugene Clifford is 1/3rd as good as advertised, he will be difficult to keep off the field as well. There is talent everywhere, and the secondary, one of last year's vulnerabilities appears to be as deep as any in the country. A deep, talented secondary coupled with nasty DEs means trouble for teams looking to throw the ball.

Last year's Bronko Nagurski Award winner, James Laurinaitis, will lead what will hopefully be an improved linebacking corps. The real drama here is going to be, who will start on the outside, opposite of Marcus Freeman? My money is on Curtis Terry, but you could see Ross Homan move over to the other side as well. Larry Grant has one more year of eligibility left, and could emerge as well, but I think at this point he is on the outside looking in, although he is listed #1 on the two deep.

Can Ohio State's RBs carry the load? I am not so sure on this one. With one NFL draft declaration, Ohio State's depth at this position vanished. Chris Wells will obviously carry the load, but will he be able to do it on every play and will his pass protection improve enough to make him an asset in both passing and running situations? Even more disconcerting, Maurice Wells is now second on the depth chart.

You may remember that Wells was intending to transfer to the SEC or ACC, but Pittman's declaration and his sudden movement up the depth chart certainly halted that. At this point, I think we know what Maurice Wells is, he is a faster version of Lydell Ross. He has some speed, but does not really have the vision to avoid tackles or the strength to break them. If Wells is injured, Ohio State does not have a proven commodity behind him.

The Buckeyes do have a couple of very promising young backs coming in this year, Brandon Saine and Devon Torrence, but neither of them have any experience at this level. The second [Brandon Saine](#) suits up for Ohio State he will be the fastest player in Buckeye history (including Ginn), but track speed and playing speed are two different things and it remains to be seen how Saine's track speed will translate to football (remember [Erik Haw](#)?).

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In the end, the Spring game is not really an indicator of future success per se, but it can tell you a lot about perceived weaknesses and the true depth chart. It is no secret that Jim Tressel gives the advantage to upperclassmen in his early two deeps, so they generally do not mean much, but you can glean some information from the Spring Game, if you are paying attention.