

## Previewing The 2007 Buckeyes: Linebackers

Written by {ga=furls}

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The Buckeyes should have one of the best linebacking corps in the nation this year, and Furls is borderline giddy in previewing the unit for us here this morning in the latest installment of his position by position look at the 2007 team. Led by James Laurinaitis (pictured), the unit is talented, deep, and experienced ... and should be the backbone of a potentially dominant Buckeye defense.



### Gone:

*John Kerr (part time starter)*

James Laurinaitis will get all the press. That is a given. He is a character that the media has grown attached to and as a result he will be the face of what promises to be a very good defense. Whether it is just or not, his reputation will soar or crash based on what this defense does, and he has to be considered an early favorite for just about every defensive award. Hell, I think some in the media may try to find a way to write him in for the Thorpe Award (best DB) or the O'Brien Award (best QB).

James Laurinaitis is good, that much is obvious, but I am not sure that he is THAT good. He benefited quite a bit from the stellar play of Quinn Pitcock and David Patterson in front of him. A good pair of DTs will go a long way towards vaulting a linebacker into the realm of demigods. It will be interesting to see, as the DTs will almost certainly take a step back, how Laurinaitis' play will be affected. Will he still be free to get to the ball and will he still have the same nose for the ball that seemed to characterize his first full year as a starter? I am not sure.

Marcus Freeman spent most of last year playing in the shadow of James Laurinaitis, and I look for that trend to continue. Early word out of Columbus is that Marcus Freeman is poised to have an exceptional season. It appears that he is now healthy and 100% recovered from a knee injury that sidelined him for the 2005 season. He went in to have his knee scoped and contracted a staph infection (apparently he thought this would be a good way to get noticed by the Browns). It was pretty clear last year that he was not 100% early on, but by the end of the season, his play had clearly improved.

On the other side of the line it looks like a pitched battle between Ross Homan, Larry Grant, and Curtis Terry. The early favorite, following last season, had to have been Ross Homan, but Larry Grant played exceptionally in Spring Practice and in the Spring Game, and may have actually played his way into the starting roll at the "Sam." Homan and Terry should be able to provide much needed quality depth to a unit that promises to be one of the most talented groups in the nation from 1-6.

Austin Spitler has emerged as the early favorite for the backup role on the inside, behind James Laurinaitis. Spitler was not widely recruited out of high school. He received multiple offers, but Ohio State was the only "Big Boy" after him. Spitler is exceptionally strong and plays with a lot heart. He is a step or two slower than Laurinaitis, but comparing him to an All American is probably unfair.

This unit was very green last year and as such did not receive a very long leash or do a lot of gambling. Now that they have had a year to play together and get familiar with the system, I expect to see a lot more aggressive play calling for this group. I would not be surprised to see them get the same kind of play making latitude that the Buckeyes gave Hawk, Carpenter, and Schlegel this year.

### **Star: James Laurinaitis**

Now that Paul Posludfoudy (or however the hell you spell it) is out of Happy Valley, it appears as though James Laurinaitis will replace him as media darling. Why not, the "Little Animal" moniker is just too good to pass on. Laurinaitis is the face of the defense, and he will have to earn it this year. Last year, he did a great job anchoring the center of the defense behind to very good tackles. This year the team will rely on him, more than it ever has before, to hold down the fort in the middle of the defense.

## **Rising Star: Larry Grant**

I am calling my shot now, Larry Grant will be the most improved player on this team. I still think he will be the third best linebacker on the roster (behind Laurinaitis and Freeman), but this is the year that we will see Grant's running back-speed translate into big plays on the defensive edge.

## **Star of the Future: Ross Homan**

This is tough, I want to say Austin Spitler, but I just don't think he will get the necessary reps (playing behind Laurinaitis) to really make a name for himself, so I am going to have to go with the obvious call, Ross Homan. Homan was pretty good last year, earning a lot of reps at the expense of John Kerr's play time. One would expect that his play has grown in the last year, I guess we will have to wait and see. Should, Laurinaitis get hurt, keep your eyes on Spitler.

## **Watch out for... Blitzing**

The Buckeyes did not send the backers very much last year, preferring instead to blitz from the corners a lot. I

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think that we can expect to see much more aggressive play from Ohio State's LBs this year.