

New Faces

Written by {ga=furls}

Sunday, April 20 2008 7:00 PM -

The surprise return of Malcolm Jenkins, James Laurinaitis, Alex Boone, and Marcus Freeman has left fewer vacancies for new faces than Jim Tressel and the Buckeyes have experienced in years past. This year the scarlet and gray will return 18 of 22 starters, more than anyone expected. That means that there are essentially only three starting spots open, with a lot of talented players competing for them. In his latest, Furls looks at the three starting spots up for grabs for the Bucks, and the players competing for them.



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I am not sure that much was really decided during spring practice. Buckeyes fans saw that their 2008 team is very deep and that the depth charts at most positions appear strong as far as three deep in some positions. Right now there appear to be some front runners but nothing is carved in stone yet.

Here are the early front runners to replace last year's lost starters.

Right Tackle: With the departure of everyone's favorite interview/sound bite, Kirk Barton, the Buckeyes were left with a gaping hole at right tackle, that is of course

until the spring game this past weekend. Bryant Browning essentially cemented his starting spot in next year's offensive line. Browning looked good and efficient and did a terrific job shutting down Cameron Heyward.

Right Defensive End/Leo LB: Vernon Gholston took his 14 sacks and departed for the NFL draft, where he will likely be a top five selection. In his wake, he created one of the most interesting story lines of the 2008 Buckeyes. Lawrence Wilson, fresh off his broken leg, is the obvious choice to pick up Gholston's newly vacated end slot, but what are the Buckeyes going to do on the other side? Wilson, at 6'5" 270 pounds is your prototypical NFL style space-eating DE. He has plenty of quickness and will get to the passer, but it is pretty clear that one of the key points for the Buckeyes this year is to get smaller and faster on the outside. Cue Thaddeus Gibson.

Gibson had a phenomenal spring and has bulked up to 250 pounds from his 205 pound playing weight at Euclid High. This creates one hell of a conundrum for the Ohio State coaching staff. Cameron Heyward clearly played well enough last year as a true freshman to maintain his starting spot, but again, he is the style of player that the Buckeyes seem to be trying to get away from. The only way I can see Heyward solidifying his position is if Lawrence Wilson proves fast enough to drop into coverage in zone schemes, allowing Wilson to become the "Leo." If not, get used to the new look Gibson complete with a new number (90). Now what will the Buckeyes do with Robert Rose?

Sam LB: Right now the only sure things about the LB corps is that James Laurinitis and Marcus Freeman will retain their spots, and it is the deepest spot on the roster, so much so that Curtis Terry is now a fullback. Larry Grant did a pretty good job at the "Sam" position, but he was not irreplaceable. Right now, the battle for the position appears to be at least a couple of players deep. Tyler Moeller is reconverting (back from safety) and looked impressive this spring. I think right now, he has to be considered a frontrunner for the position (particularly considering the Buckeyes current emphasis on speed over size), but his footing is anything but solid.

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Etienne Sabino looked very impressive this spring, but it appears as though he is being groomed to take over either at MLB or WLB. Andrew Sweat appears to be the heir apparent at SLB, but I doubt that he will seriously compete for the starting position this year. One more thing has become evident this spring, the backlog at the LB position is not going to get much better in the near future.