

Buckeye Dan Wismar checks back in this morning to take a look around the world of Ohio State athletics with his recurring "Buckeye Leaves" piece.



OSU Basketball - Comings and Goings

Thad Matta's Ohio State basketball program has undergone such a flurry of activity since the Buckeyes won the NIT this spring, that it seems like even he might need a program when he looks down his bench in 2008-2009.

Matta has seen underclassmen from his '07-'08 roster leave via the NBA Draft, and by transfer, and he has added two JUCO players and another incoming transfer. He has lost an assistant coach, and hired an assistant coach. He has lost a seven-footer from Greece, and picked up a seven-footer from Greece. Even in recruiting, it has been give and get, as one prized recruit confirmed his commitment, and another reconsidered his. To the musical chairs...

In April, freshman forward [Eric Wallace announced he was leaving](#) the team, and it is now reported that [he will transfer to DePaul University](#). Wallace only got 72 minutes of playing time as a freshman, and scored a total of 27 points.

Then in May, the athletic department announced that [two junior college players](#) would be joining Matta's Buckeyes for the 2008-2009 season. From that release...

Jeremie Simmons, a 6-foot-2-inch sophomore guard from Mott Community College in Flint, Mich., and Nikola Kecman, a 6-9 freshman forward from Eastern Arizona College, signed NCAA National Letters of Intent to play for the Buckeyes starting with the 2008-09 season, Thad Matta, head coach of the Buckeyes, announced Wednesday.

"We are excited with the addition of another frontcourt and backcourt player," Matta said. "Nikola gives us size with the ability to step out on the perimeter and shoot the ball. Jeremie gives us another playmaker that also shoots well from behind the 3-point line. In addition, both players come from winning programs."

Simmons led his Mott CC team to two consecutive NJCCA championships, piling up a 70-5 record over two seasons. In his sophomore year at Mott, the playmaking guard led the championship team in points, with 21.3 per game, and finished second in assists and steals. He shot over 48% from the field and over 42% from 3-point range. Simmons will have two years of eligibility remaining at Ohio State. He'll likely compete for playing time at the shooting guard spot with Diebler and swingmen David Lighty, Evan Turner and freshman William Buford. He could also be in the mix at the point, along with incoming freshman Anthony Crater and returning senior P.J. Hill.

Nikola Kecman played one year at the JC level and was the second leading scorer on his team, averaging 13.4 points per game, shooting 56% from the field and 43.8% on threes. There is some question about the eligibility of Kecman, a Serbian, who may have to answer to the NCAA about his play in a European league before he is cleared to play at OSU. He would have three years of college eligibility for the Bucks. A 6'9" power forward who can shoot the outside shot, Kecman

would possibly be able to play right away, since the Buckeye frontcourt is fairly thin.

Coach Matta has also moved quickly to replace the frontcourt size he lost when last year's starting center [Kosta Koufos opted for the NBA Draft](#). Koufos played his high school ball in Canton, but is originally from Greece, and Matta has decided to try another Greek center, [bringing in Zisis Sarikopoulos](#) as a transfer from UAB. The 18-year old seven-footer won't help the Buckeyes in the upcoming season, but will have three seasons of eligibility after sitting out 2008-09, while still being able to practice and lift with the team. There he'll be able to battle with incoming freshman center B.J. Mullens, and senior center Kyle Madsen every day in practice. Mullens is the top-ranked high school center in the country, and should be able to help Sarikopoulos get ready for NCAA basketball.

Sarikopoulos led the Greek 18-and-under team to a second place finish in the European championships before entering college at only 17. He didn't play much (or [score or rebound](#) much) as a freshman at UAB, but the OSU coaches and strength and conditioning staff have over a year to work with him before he plays for the Buckeyes.

One face that has been on Thad Matta's bench since his days at Butler will be gone this season, as long-time assistant coach [John Groce has been named the head coach](#) at Ohio University. Groce went with Matta when he left Butler for the Xavier position in 2001, and came along to Columbus with him in 2004, where he has been at the head man's side for four seasons.

As much as Groce will be missed, his successor also has long term ties to Matta, and looks like a natural fit for the job. [Brandon Miller](#), who played for Matta at Butler, and worked in Matta's programs at Xavier

and Ohio State, has been named a full-time assistant coach.

With a [nationally ranked recruiting class](#) coming in this season, plus the two JUCO transfers, Matta has a full complement of 13 scholarship players in his program again. There are just two seniors on this year's roster, and Sarikopoulos will be joining the team for the '09-'10 season, so the 2009 recruiting class may be only one player, and for the moment there are no commitments. Matta has instead been [concentrating on 2010](#)

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He has already secured verbal commitments from Columbus center [Ja red Sullinger](#), the top-rated center in the country for 2010, and [DeShaun Thomas](#), the #2 ranked small forward in the nation, from Ft. Wayne, IN.

A third blue-chipper, guard [Trae Golden](#), had committed to OSU in October, 2007, but just recently announced that he had reopened his recruitment, saying he felt he had made his decision prematurely. *(No kidding, son...you're a 16-year old high school sophomore!)*□

Not long after Golden's announcement, and amid doubts about his recruitment, Thomas re-affirmed his decision to join the Buckeyes, saying he was 100% sure of his commitment. The pressure to stay at home and play for Indiana had been wearing on him, but the sanctions against Kelvin Sampson and the overall state of the IU program have influenced Thomas in Ohio State's direction.

So the turnover on the OSU roster has been especially severe this year. Matta has lost seniors Jamar Butler, Othello Hunter and Matt Terwilliger, plus freshmen Wallace and Koufos from the 2007 roster. Only six Buckeyes will return in 2008 who played for Matta in 2007; David Lighty, P.J. Hill, Evan Turner, Jon Diebler and Dallas Lauderdale.

Kyle Madsen, who sat out the 2006-07 season after transferring from Vanderbilt, played very little last year, but has two years of eligibility remaining.

This fall, Matta will welcome four true freshmen and the two JUCO transfers, in addition to breaking in a new assistant coach. That means there will be more scholarship players who have never before played a game for the Buckeyes than those who have. So give the guy a break if he yells for a program.

Loose Leaves

Rex Kern, quarterback of the Buckeyes from 1968-1970, was [inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame](#) Saturday in South Bend, Indiana. I have not seen anyone as adept at faking, bootlegging and overall sleight of hand with the football at the quarterback position in the 40 years since.

Bucknuts had a good look at Jim Tressel's [incoming freshmen Buckeyes](#) ...nice profiles and pictures of the kids, though this was before Terrelle Pryor joined the class.

Speaking of Bucknuts, the serious OSU fan will appreciate and enjoy Jeff Snook's book, ["Then Tress says to Troy..."](#) It's a collection of Buckeye football stories, from all eras, going back to Chic Harley, with quotes and personal remembrances from dozens

of players and coaches. It also comes with an audio CD with portions of the radio broadcast of the 1973 Ohio State-Michigan game. (Try explaining to your wife when she comes in and asks you what you're listening to, that it's a 35-year old college football game. Trust me...you get 'the look')

Snook has lots of Woody stories I had not heard before. Since it was before my time, I had not been aware how in Woody Hayes' first season, his basic offense had limited Vic Janowicz to nine pass completions, the year after after Janowicz had passed and run his way to the 1950 Heisman Trophy. The players resented the shackling of their star, and in the process, Woody became the punchline to the joke in Columbus; "Who's the only man ever to stop Vic Janowicz?"

And no, I'm not Jeff Snook's brother-in-law or anything, and I'm not commissioned. But there's a lot to like in this book, at least for the kinds of folks who read 'Buckeye Leaves'.